

**Indigenous girls and sexual exploitation in a rural B.C. town:**

**A Photovoice study**

by

Johanne Saraceno

B.A. Sociology, York University, 1995

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of the Requirements for the Degree of

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University of Victoria

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## **Supervisory Committee**

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### **Supervisory Committee**

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

Dr. Sibylle Artz (School of Child and Youth Care)  
**Department Member**

Dr. Budd Hall (Department of Public Administration)  
**Outside Member**

## **Abstract**

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Dr. Sandrina de Finney, School of Child and Youth Care

**Supervisor**

Dr. Sibylle Artz, School of Child and Youth Care

**Department Member**

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**Outside Member**

This Photovoice study engaged Indigenous girls, aged fifteen, in a participatory study to explore their knowledge of commercial sexual exploitation. Through photos, writing, and discussion four major themes emerged: i. all the participant-researchers had directly experienced and witnessed various incidences of sexual exploitation; ii. the sexual exploitation of Indigenous girls is pervasive and normalized; iii. racialization impacts on life as an Indigenous girl, and finally; iv. friendly and accessible services are critical to preventing and intervening in sexual exploitation but are inadequate. Overall the findings that emerged from the girls' photos and stories indicate that in view of historic conditions and ongoing racialization and sexualization Indigenous girls are very vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Broad-level change is needed in order to eventually eradicate the sexual exploitation of Indigenous girls. In the meantime, there is the continued need for immediate, community support for girls in regard to sexual exploitation. More research engaging Indigenous girls directly in knowledge creation is needed.

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I especially want to acknowledge and thank the participant-researchers who so enthusiastically engaged with this research project and shared a glimpse into their worlds.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this thesis to the girls who gave of their time and shared so much more; and to the many girls I have known and worked with through the years who have allowed me the honour of walking alongside them for a few steps of their journey.

## **Introduction**

The issue of commercial sexual exploitation has been of concern in the province of British Columbia for the past few years (ADM, 2000; McCreary Youth Foundation, 2003; PAWRS, 2002; UNYA 2002). Specifically, in the rural Vancouver Island community which was the setting for this study, front-line workers from various agencies and members of various levels of community government have come together to try to address this issue. Nevertheless, it is clear that the policy makers and community service providers in the central Vancouver Island region have been limited in their effectiveness to address the issue of child sexual exploitation (CSE). Perhaps by including more of the insider perspective of those most at risk of sexual exploitation, some of the disparities between existing knowledge and ongoing need can be mitigated. Specifically absent from initiatives and research related to CSE are the voices of Indigenous girls, one of the groups most at risk for CSE. The impetus for this research was to engage girls directly in research that would provide them an opportunity to describe the issues relating to sexual exploitation as they see and experience them.

I wanted to explore this issue with girls who have been labeled ‘at risk’ or could be seen as ‘at risk’ of being sexually exploited according to an ecological framework (due to school challenges, family poverty and alcoholism, involvement with the justice system, previous abuse, and experiences with foster care). I chose not to engage girls being actively commercially sexually exploited as they are more vulnerable and ethically I did not feel I could engage them fully anonymously (given the size of this community) or with their full, voluntary consent due to substance use issues and their active use of my agency’s services. It would have been interesting to conduct this research with girls or

women who have exited the sex trade but I did not have the means to access this population. In this study, Indigenous girls in a rural B.C. community engaged using Photovoice and discussion to explore and highlight their knowledge of sexual exploitation.

## **Background**

As a Child and Youth Counsellor working in a sexual abuse intervention programme for the past decade I have provided direct support to both girls who are being sexually exploited as well as to community service workers and educators struggling to support girls who they identified as either at risk of or as being sexually exploited. Through a funding initiative with the McCreary Youth Foundation and Alberni Community and Women's Services (formerly Port Alberni Women's Resources Society) I was able to spearhead a community initiative, marked by a needs assessment and community forum in 2004 and 2005, to begin to raise awareness about the issue of sexual exploitation in our community. These endeavours positioned youth front and centre in terms of recognising the value of their contribution and creating opportunities to hear from them.

Unfortunately the contractor hired to work on the needs assessment put an inordinate amount of time and energy into a survey she wanted administered through the schools. The School Board refused to allow this due to the contentious nature of some of the questions. The agency consultants on this needs assessment, myself and the Executive Director, attempted to encourage and educate the contractor as to other potentially more effective methods for engaging youth, and so she ultimately held a focus group in an attempt to respond to our agency's standpoint that hearing from vulnerable youth in

addition to interviewing service providers and educators was imperative to building our understanding of this problem in our community. Overall, the needs assessment succeeded in engaging very few youth and so this thesis attempts to further elaborate on the youth perspective of this problem.

### **Importance of this study**

My intention in using Photovoice to engage Indigenous girls in sharing their knowledge of commercial sexual exploitation was to contribute to the literature on the sexual exploitation of youth by underlining young Indigenous women's direct knowledge about sexual exploitation in their lives. This will contribute to the literature on how Child and Youth Care practitioners work to enhance competency and support resistance to mainstream, oppressive systems and discourses for girls, in particular for Indigenous girls who are racialized and marginalized like the participant-researchers in this study.

Among the existing literature on CSE most has occurred in urban centres or abroad (UNYA, 2002; Estes & Weiner, 2001; Save the children, 2000). This study contributes to the limited research from communities in rural B.C. Some studies of other social issues have occurred recently with Nuu-chah-nulth Nations in and around the Alberni Valley (August, 2006; Castleden, H., Garvin, T., & Huu-ay-aht First Nation, 2008) but not with a specific focus on girls or on sexual exploitation. Therefore this research contributes to the limited research in Indigenous communities in rural British Columbia.

With regard to the research on girls and girls' studies in general there is a significant paucity of literature highlighting or advancing the voices of Indigenous girls, particularly Indigenous girls living in rural settings. Further, few studies focused on girls

utilize participatory methods such as those used in this study to ensure that girls are directly involved in shaping research, policy, and practice related to commercial sexual exploitation.

Finally, this study adds to the current literature in assisting those of us in the academic and professional Child and Youth Care field to better grasp the complexity of the issue of sexual exploitation from the perspective of girls who are among those most at risk.

### **Overview of the document**

Chapter One provides a literature review of commercial sexual exploitation, girls' studies, and risk and resilience. Commercial sexual exploitation is broadly defined as the exchange of something whether money, drugs, a place to stay, etc. for sexual acts.

Chapter Two details the theoretical framework and philosophy which guided the methodology and research design. I provide an in depth description of the modified Photovoice methodology, and the methods of data collection, and analysis. I also describe the process and content of the research sessions. This chapter will conclude with a summary of the strengths and limitations of the research methodology.

In Chapter Three reports the major themes that surfaced through the discussion as well as the photos of the participant-researchers. Their photos and words are integrated throughout the chapter to substantiate the findings. The main findings of this study are that all the participant-researchers had directly experienced and witnessed various incidences of sexual exploitation, that the sexual exploitation of Indigenous girls is pervasive and normalized, that racialization impacts on life as an Indigenous girl, and finally, that friendly and accessible services are critical to preventing and intervening in

sexual exploitation but are inadequate. Overall the findings of this study are consistent with the existing research on sexual exploitation.

Chapter Four highlights the implications deriving from what the participant-researchers said and showed through their images. Critical shifts are needed in the areas of policy and legislation in regards to the health and autonomy of Indigenous communities, the justice system, and the training and education of those in positions of authority. In addition, work with men and boys, community and school-based prevention, and safe youth housing are significant elements in eradicating the sexual exploitation of Indigenous girls.

This study provided a safe and fun forum for Indigenous girls to come together and explore this issue and its significance for their health and safety. The participant-researchers helped shape the research process and contributed valuable knowledge that contributes a better understanding of the perspectives and experiences of Indigenous girls in regard to sexual exploitation.

### **A Note on Language**

I use the term Indigenous throughout this paper as an umbrella term which includes First Nations, Inuit, Innu, status and non-status Indians, Métis and which also has a political intention in that it contains all peoples with a shared colonial history that crosses contemporary political borders. As so well articulated by Chow ( 2007):

In adhering to decolonizing practice, I am predisposed to using the term ‘Indigenous’ to refer to the original peoples of Turtle Island. Although this is a generalized term, I use it to represent Indigenous groups who share a similar political consciousness and histories of colonization (p. xix).

My use of the term Indigenous is by no means intended to erase or ignore the diversity that exists among the participant-researchers but rather to keep the text clear and coherent. I use the term “Native” only when I am representing or referencing the voices of the participant-researchers. In order to preserve the integrity of citations I will maintain whatever terminology is used therein; for example, Aboriginal, Indigenous, or Native.

## **Chapter One: A Literature Review**

### **What do we already know about commercial sexual exploitation?**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter I present the literature relevant to this study. The literature referenced includes articles and books located by searching the terms ‘commercial sexual exploitation’, ‘child prostitution’, ‘sexual exploitation’ and ‘human trafficking’ plus ‘girls’ or ‘Aboriginal girls’, or ‘Indigenous girls’ plus ‘Canada’ and ‘British Columbia’ in multiple databases and also, from my own collection of documents presenting community-based research on commercial sexual exploitation.

The commercial sexual exploitation of youth is broadly understood to be the exchange of sexual acts for money, drugs, shelter, etc. (UNYA, 2002; PAWRS, 2005). There have been many different perspectives on child and youth trading sex and this literature review traces the evolution of this problem from one defined as ‘juvenile prostitution’ where the youth were criminalized to the current working definition of commercial sexual exploitation. The research participants defined this term even more broadly, which will be explored in Chapter three: Findings. I conclude this section with a review of existing theory and practice recommendations for victims of commercial sexual exploitation.

I provide a brief review of current research on girls in the context of modern society. I also review the current literature on risk and resilience because its theoretical framework informs my work as a child and youth counselor in the community. I interweave this literature with discourses of youth development as these literatures informed the analysis of the research findings.

## **Overview of the Issue of Commercial Sexual Exploitation**

Throughout the past several years the issue of the commercial sexual exploitation of youth has become a priority at the level of the British Columbia provincial government (ADM, 2000) which invested some funds towards increasing awareness of this problem in British Columbia due to initial research by the McCreary Centre Society in 1997 and 2001 with street-involved youth throughout British Columbia (McCreary Youth Foundation, 2003). Beginning in 2003, the British Columbia Ministry for Children and Family Development funded the McCreary Youth Foundation to “work with local and community based services providing the prevention of and support of sexually exploited children and youth” (McCreary Youth Foundation, 2003, p. 1). An Assistant Deputy Ministers’ (ADM) committee, with appointees from various ministries, was struck to allocate and manage funding to various grass-roots, community-based projects to tackle the problematic dynamics relating to commercial child sexual exploitation.

The provincial initiatives in British Columbia followed on a broader Canadian movement to raise awareness and to better support children involved in trading or selling sexual acts to meet their basic needs. As Bittle (2002) describes, the beginning of this movement to view children selling or trading sex as ‘victims’ rather than ‘criminals’ began following the Badgley Report in 1984. The report had a significant impact and laid the foundation for reframing how society views and responds to children in the sex trade. The report identified that “although the age of consent is fourteen, prostitution involving fourteen to seventeen year olds is a form of sexual abuse” (p. 325). Their recommendations included an expansion of criminal and social services.

Again following on the recommendations of the Badgley Commission, in 1997 the province of Alberta struck the Forsyth Committee to further examine the issue of the sexual exploitation of youth (Bittle, 2002). Throughout the nineties others also began to examine this problem in their communities (Burnaby, 1998; Ives, 2001; Kingsley & Mark, 2000; Task Force on Children Involved in Prostitution, 1997).

Through the various task forces and regional committees what has become clear is that the scope of child commercial sexual exploitation is broad. The exploitation of children in the sex trade industry exists across North American borders and is not just a problem in 'developing' or 'exotic' locales (Aebi, 2001). With Vancouver located as a popular tourist destination and border town, it is a prominent site of sex tourism with men coming here from around the world with the express purpose of sexually exploiting children (UNYA, 2002; Estes & Weiner, 2001).

In rural communities like the setting for this research, child commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) tends to be more hidden (Blackstock, Clarke, Cullen, D'Hondt, & Formsma, 2004; PAWRS, 2005). In more rural communities the sexual exploitation of youth "is not widely acknowledged or accepted" (Sethi, 2009, p. 59). Rather than occurring on the streets, out in the open, sex is often traded through 'trick pads' and 'flop houses' (Kingsley & Mark, 2000, p. 20). Often parties or other sites youth frequent are the context for solicitation (UNYA, 2002). As the ADM (2000) report noted, in many small communities the trade is completely invisible, known only to well-informed professionals and/or those directly involved such as the youth and their customers. Our local Needs Assessment (PAWRS, 2005) reiterated, "It's not visible. You might see the

kids hanging outside the video store beside the bar ... could just be hanging out or waiting for a trick. They just look like kids hanging out.” (p. 5).

The average age of entry into commercial sexual exploitation varies slightly in the research but the range is not significant. Aebi (2001) reported that “Statistics Canada cites 20% of Aboriginal children in Canada as exploited through the sex trade with an average age of ‘entering the sex trade’ of 13 years” (p. 4). All studies identify ages twelve to fourteen as the average age of entry into the sex trade while noting that it is younger for Indigenous children (Downe, 2005; Kingsley & Mark, 2000; UNYA, 2002). Sethi (2007) and Aebi (2001) identify Indigenous children as young as seven and eight have been reported among sexually exploited youth.

- The rate of sexual exploitation of Indigenous youth is high. According to Vancouver’s Urban Native Youth Association’s community-based research project on commercial sexual exploitation with Indigenous youth, “approximately sixty percent of sexually exploited youth in Vancouver are Aboriginal” (UNYA, 2002, p. 6). As Aleem (2009) reinforces, among this population, Indigenous girls remain the most vulnerable to sexual exploitation: “up to 75% of victims of sex crimes in Aboriginal communities are female and under 18 years of age” (p. 5).

### **Commercial Sexual Exploitation: Shifting the Blame**

Throughout the literature the element of choice with regard to sexually exploited youth is discussed as a contentious issue. When considering the commercial sexual exploitation of children or youth under the age of nineteen, it is clear that the term ‘prostitution’ is not fitting. Young girls and boys who find themselves selling their bodies or having their bodies exploited in order to meet basic needs – food, shelter, etc. – are

being abused. In the province of British Columbia, children selling or trading sex has been recognised as a child protection issue (ADM, 2000).

Following from the recommendations from the Badgley Report, January 1988 marked the first federal legislation “to criminalize the sexual procurement of youth” (Bittle, 2002, p. 325). Nevertheless, this legislation was rarely enacted. Sikka (2009) contends that judges are not able to easily enact legislation without a precedent. Yet, despite the fact that the legislation was under utilized, at the level of public opinion, “it became clear that youth prostitutes were no longer deemed to be criminals but rather victims of sexual exploitation (Bittle, p. 326).

As the issue of children selling sex began to emerge into public awareness and child abuse advocates, feminists, and experiential survivors began to raise awareness and voice the numerous circumstances that predicate children selling sexual acts, a conscious decision to adopt the term ‘child sexual exploitation’ in lieu of ‘child prostitution’ was taken:

The Media Awareness Initiative about Sexually Exploited Youth or MAISEY developed with the goal to “change the language used to describe youth, some as young as 13 years of age, who end up trading sex for basic necessities such as food or shelter.” The initiative has had a positive impact with media outlets getting the language right (Goodwin, 2007, p. 42).

This language shift named the abuse and made the power over characteristics of the relationship explicit. The change was political and intended to shift how the public constructed this problem (Kalergis, 2009) similar to the human trafficking movement

(Sikka, 2009). Rather than putting the blame on the children or youth for doing something illegal as was once typical, this alternate lens for looking at the problem allowed the focus to shift to the adults as criminal and the children and youth as victims in need of support.

### **Discourse from the front line**

In this section I present the discussion from literature that identifies factors that make girls vulnerable to commercial sexual exploitation and the various dynamics that contribute to girls' involvement.

MacInnes (1998), a retired police officer who worked for many years as head of the Calgary Police Vice Unit, writes of his accumulated expertise after many years of professional interactions with young girls who were being sexually exploited. His testimonials support that girls end up in these situations out of desperation. He cites three primary reasons that girls end up selling sex: real or perceived fears (i.e. abuse at home), a deep need for belonging, and issues in regards to self esteem.

Throughout the literature, the common discourse purports that for sexually exploited children and youth, it is not necessarily a question of 'free choice' but rather the result of circumstances which frequently include a need to meet basic resources because their home environment was unsafe (Kingsley & Mark, 2000; UNYA, 2002; McCreary, 2003; Estes & Wiener, 2001; Kalergis, 2009, MacInnes, 1998). A high number of sexually exploited youth have experienced childhood sexual abuse, other violence in the family, growing up in care, racialization and racial discrimination, and feelings of low self worth (Coy, 2009; Kalergis, 2009; Kingsley & Mark, 2000; UNYA, 2002; Estes & Wiener, 2001; Aebi, 2001, MacInnes, 1998). Adult prostitutes in a broad study frequently

reported having been sexually abused and exploited in their homes as children (Brannigan & VanBrunschoot, 1997). Both Coy (2008, 2009b) and Kalergis (2009) emphasize the high rates of co-relation between selling sex and growing up in the foster care system. They derive links between an absence of belonging and a sense of “failed development of the relational self” (Coy, 2008, p. 1415) which makes girls psychologically vulnerable. Thus the gendered constructions about girls and relationships, namely the push to preserve relationships at all costs to the authentic self (Brown & Gilligan, 1992) is an additional underlying factor that renders girls vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Hay (2003) enumerates several “predisposing societal factors” that contribute to the commercial sexual exploitation of girls:

- The feminization of poverty and gender inequality.
- High [rates of] youth unemployment.
- Racism and discrimination aimed at Indigenous youth.
- Economic or social marginalization.
- Consumerism.
- Organized crime networks.
- Computer use and related technological advances (p. 119).

In particular with regards to Indigenous girls and women there is an acknowledged awareness that dynamics of abuse and exploitation often begin in early childhood and continue throughout and are related to the legacy of residential schools and other colonial disruptions to Indigenous communities (Aleem, 2009; Downe, 2005; Sethi, 2007). “Girls suffering perpetual violence and abuse have no choice but to leave their communities in search for a safer place” (Sethi, p. 61). Homeless or street-involved youth

then become vulnerable to sexual exploitation due to the requirement of meeting their basic needs (Justice Institute of BC, 2002, Tyler & Johnson, 2007)).

Tyler and Johnson (1997) report that girls who are sexually exploited often perceive their actions as deriving from their own choice. This could be because they are acting with a sense of agency from within whatever circumstances they find themselves (Ungar, 2004). In addition various systems reinforce that this responsibility lies with the youth. As illustrated in Kalergis (2009), “Everyone says you made a choice to do this. The pimp tells them. Their families told them. Cops have told them.” (p.318). MacInnes (1998) discusses how judges, and others whose job it is to help the girls, like social workers and health nurses, often “believe that young girls seek out dangerous liaisons” and that the pimp is there to look out for her and keep her safe. He emphasizes that this maintains girls’ isolation and victimisation.

If it is a ‘choice’, it is one made from a restricted range of options and a context of being victimized and sexualised. Girls’ vulnerability and basic needs for food, shelter, or belonging require them to make this ‘choice’ (ADM, 2000; Coy, 2008; Coy, 2009b; Kalergis, 2009; Pearce, 2009; Tyler & Johnson, 2006; UNYA, 2002). As highlighted by Tyler and Johnson’s (2006) study, “very few youth want to trade sex, but some do so because they are desperate and lack alternatives” (p. 208). In their study with homeless youth, Tyler and Johnson found that many participants often believed they were responsible for their decisions yet often shared stories that described coercion, manipulation, or pressure, either directly from the recipient of the sexual ‘favour’ or indirectly from a “boyfriend, friend, or ‘pimp’” (p. 209). This dynamic wherein girls perceive they are giving consent yet are unaware of the power differential between them

and the exploiter and how they are being manipulated or coerced is described consistently throughout the literature (Coy, 2009; Kalergis, 2009; MacInnes, 1998; Pearce, 2009; Kingsley & Mark, 2000; Sethi, 2007; UNYA, 2002). Sethi (2007) highlights that “although girls consent to being sexually exploited, they do it as they have no choice or means to help them in their loneliness, marginalization, and lack of support system” (p. 63). Coy (2008) problematizes this discourse by bringing attention to the voices of young women:

My professional experience of supporting young women and recent literature on the sexual exploitation of young women (Pearce *et al.*, 2003) suggest, however, that this denies not only the complex ways in which some young women exercise their own agency, but also neglects the role of peer introduction and association. The exploration of how the women perceive selling sex as exercising a capacity to act is at the crux of the women’s narratives (p. 1414).

Thus, although the literature identifies the implicit adult / child power differential as creating an automatic inequity in a relationship and thus positions the child as vulnerable and acted upon, we must also consider that they are acting with agency, resisting in order to preserve their dignity (Wade, 2007) or, accessing a sense of personal power from within the context of their circumstances (Coy, 2008; Ungar, 2002).

### **Discourse from the academic community**

Razack (1998) presents the contrasting arguments about prostitution from within feminist discourses. She problematizes the view of prostitution advanced by mainstream

contemporary feminists who see it as “a story of women’s agency and resistance to patriarchy” and points out that with this lens the “only axis of domination considered is gender” (p. 347). Razack emphasizes that race, class, and gender all interact to create circumstances for many women, who represent the majority of sex trade workers, which limit the extent of choices available. She queries whether it can be considered consent when it reinforces the hegemonic scripts of masculine dominance. Lynn (2005) reiterates that “the prostitution exchange in and of itself is intrinsically violent ... it is bought rape”.

If we consider the historical oppression and ongoing postcolonial reality for Indigenous women (Downe, 2005) who are disproportionately overrepresented among sex trade workers in Canada (Sikka, 2009), we know that these women are constrained in their ability to enact agency in their own lives by systemic barriers and thus, it is not a simple matter to say that selling sex is a free choice even when it comes to adult women (Anderson, 2000; Razack, 1998). Indigenous girls and women are racialized, sexualized and criminalized (Sikka, 2009).

Razack suggests that to “move beyond the framework of choice [we must] focus on the hierarchical relations between bodies and the production of hegemonic masculinities” (p. 355). Shared responsibility must be acknowledged wherein there is an honest evaluation of the implicit power ‘over’ privilege inherent in the various social constructions: gender, racialization, class, and a recognition that the sex trade exists not as a necessary economic service for men’s incontrollable sexual needs but as a symbol that continues to manifest the vulnerability of women in a male dominated society. As Coy (2009a) identifies, the “sexualisation [of girls] results in negative outcomes for girls

and young women in terms of a lack of diminished educational achievement, as well as normalising abusive practices towards children” (p. 373). Media, family systems, and cultural practices play a role in reinforcing the value of girl as a sexual object and of masculinity as bound up in sexual dominance (Aapola, Gonick, & Harris, 2005).

Bittle (2002, 2006), Aleem (2009), and Sikka (2009) discuss the issue of the sexual exploitation of girls in Canada from the legal and legislative context. There has been a shift in Canada over the past twenty years from categorizing children trading or selling sex as ‘prostitutes’ to viewing them as victims of abuse and exploitation. Sikka and Aleem criticize the movement to address issues of human trafficking in Canada in its failure to include the domestic trafficking of Indigenous girls and women. Sikka identifies the disparity between the over-representation of Indigenous girls and women visible in the sex trade in Canada as compared to the media and federally produced public education and training materials to address human trafficking (p. 1). Aleem voices concern that the focus of ‘trafficking’ work has been on international dynamics and whereas regarding Indigenous girls it is reframed as “prostitution and sex work” (p. 51). Bittle (2002, 2006) traces the history of the movement to position ‘child prostitutes’ as victims rather than villains and some of the implications this has had.

Aebi, (2001), Aleem (2009), Blackstock, Clarke, Cullen, d’Hondt, and Formsmma (2004) as well as Kingsley and Mark (2000) all discuss the implications of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and make explicit Canada’s responsibility as defined through the CRC:

Article 34 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by  
Canada in 1991, requires the government to protect the child from all

forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse including any unlawful sexual activity; the exploitative use of children in sexual prostitution or other unlawful practices; and the exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials (Blackstock, Clarke, Cullen, d'Hondt, & Formsma, 2004)

Aleem (2009) highlights Canada's further obligation to address the commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth following the ratification of the *Optional Protocol on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography* signed in 2005.

### **Current Definitions of Sexual Exploitation**

Having outlined the development of the discourse of child commercial sexual exploitation it is now possible to explore some of the current working definitions for this issue. UNYA (2002) defines commercial sexual exploitation as “the sexual exploitation of a person for money or anything of value including, but not limited to food, a place to stay, cigarettes, clothes, transportation, or alcohol and drugs” (p. 2 ).

Estes and Weiner (2001) present a chart with a broad range of categories that define the commercial sexual exploitation of children. This chart describes a range of abuses committed against children and youth which fall under this umbrella term. These include: sexual molestation by a family member or an adult in a position of authority, involvement in pornography, internet harassment, and “pimp controlled juvenile prostitution” (p. 7).

Sikka (2009) details the sections of the *Criminal Code* of Canada that pertain to the sexual exploitation of children and youth.

Section 151 identifies “sexual interference” which makes it as “a criminal offence to touch someone under the age of sixteen for a sexual purpose unless the person is less than two years older than the child. Section 152 also makes an “invitation” to such touching a criminal offence. Section 153 specifically refers to “young persons” between the ages of sixteen and eighteen, and makes it illegal to touch them for a sexual purpose or counsel them to touch others for a sexual purpose if the person doing the counseling is in a position of “trust or authority” over the young person (p. 17).

Sikka goes on to note that “for the purposes of criminal law, such activity is automatically deemed exploitative because of the power differential between children and adults” (p. 17).

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) notes that commercial sexual exploitation of children is a violation of human rights and label it a form of child slavery. The ILO makes a clear distinction that the sexual exploitation of minors (youth under eighteen years of age) is not just a problem of ‘child labour’ but also one of violence.<sup>1</sup>

### **Men Who Exploit**

What is clear in the literature is that the majority of those who sexually exploit girls are men (Coy, 2009; Madsen, 1999; Kalergis, 2009; MacInnes, 1998). Some girls and women may bring peers into the sex trade (Sethi, 2007; Coy, 2008; Kingsley & Mark, 2000, Being Aware Taking Care, 1999) but typically they are acting as ‘recruiters’ under the control of a man themselves (MacInnes, 1998; Kingsley & Mark, 2000).

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from: <http://www.ilo.org/ipec/areas/CSEC/lang--en/index.htm>

Typically men who control girls in the commercial sex trade are called pimps, recruiters, or exploiters (Being Aware Taking Care, 1999; MacInnes, 1998). Perpetrators, regardless of gender, are skillful at exerting a high level of control. They might use psychological or physical tactics to coerce girls into trading sex (Madsen, 1999; Kingsley & Mark, 2000; MacInnes, 1998; UNYA, 2000). Pimps or recruiters typically use seduction, isolation, coercion or overt violence to draw young girls into the sex trade (MacInnes, 1998; Kingsley & Mark, 2000, UNYA, 2000; Madsen, 1999).

MacInnes (1998) notes that exploiters are typically men who themselves grew up in authoritarian and often violent homes. Exploiters often would have had “domineering, unloving fathers who demanded unquestioning obedience and treated women as objects to be used and controlled” (p. 105) MacInnes gives a profile of men who are driven by the desire for money and status and are skillful at deceit (pp.109-110).

McNinch (2005) discusses the trial and media coverage surrounding the sexual assault of a young Saulteaux girl in Saskatchewan by three white men. He asserts that these dynamics of sexual exploitation in this case reinforce a construction of white settler masculinity that “ties the past to the present in the unconscious exercising of *les droits de seigneur*, exerting their rights as masters of the “Dominion” of Canada” (p. 98). He emphasizes how the actions of the white men as well as the responses from the judge, defense attorney, and media all further normalize and entrench the violence of the white men and blaming of the victim, constraining her in an ‘othered’ identity of “dirty, squaw” (p. 94). McNinch outlines how masculinity is constructed “up against “others” (against women, against homosexuals, against First Peoples)” (p. 101). Razack (2000, 1998) also

identifies the reinforcement and legitimation of white male dominance that is achieved through the sexual exploitation of Indigenous women.

In Indigenous communities many men who exploit girls were themselves once victims of abuse, whether through residential schools or at home, with violence and abuse resulting from the fragmentation of family and culture (Sethi, 2007; Downe, 2005; Aebi, 2001; Wade, 1995). As Sethi points out, “Loss of cultural identity coupled with social and economic marginalization fuels violence and sexual assault” (p. 62). Often these men were themselves victimized and then constrained by social constructions of masculinity that impeded their ability to access help or to heal from the abuse (MacInnes, 1998). Aleem (2009) identifies that the sexual exploitation of Indigenous girls can be family based, with girls being sexually exploited and initiated into prostitution by their relatives: “this is frequently poverty driven and intergenerational resulting from the residual impact of colonisation and residential schools” (p. 9). The ADM (2000) report also noted that the “majority of youth were reported to become involved through family, community or lifestyle and intergenerational involvement” (p. 1.4).

### **Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Health**

Girls’ involvement in commercial sexual exploitation can be a detriment to cognitive, psychological, emotional, and physical health and undermines healthy sexual development (Kalergis, 2008; Kingsley & Mark, 2000; MacInnes, 1998; UNYA, 2002). Blackstock, Clarke, Cullen, d’Hondt, and Formsma (2004) tell us that “the emotional, physical, spiritual and cognitive impacts of sexual exploitation can not be overstated” (p. 187).

Existing literature highlights that the conditions in which sexually exploited girls live perpetuate ongoing violence against them and control over them wherein they may be drugged, beaten, and forced not to use condoms (Aebi, 2001; Aleem, 2009; Kingsley & Mark, 2000; MacInnes, 1998; UNYA, 2002). Furthermore, for Indigenous girls there is a high risk of murder or violence (Aebi, 2001; Aleem, 2009; Blackstock, Clarke, Cullen, d'Hondt, & Formsma, 2004; Kingsley & Mark, 2000; Sethi, 2007; UNYA, 2002). Sexual exploitation has high negative health consequences on girls. Aebi (2001) states that the average "life expectancy for a child who is sexually exploited is about seven years from the point of entry into the sex trade" (p. 4). This is perceived as being related to a number of factors including, addiction, continued exposure to violence, poor nutrition, low self esteem, and exposure to diseases such as HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis through unprotected sex (Blackstock, Clarke, Cullen, d'Hondt, & Formsma, 2004; Downe, 2005; Kingsley & Mark, 2000).

### **Intervening in Commercial Sexual Exploitation: Existing Practices and Recommendations**

Recommendations for intervening and preventing the commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) of children are consistent throughout the literature. It is recognised that as well as intervening with criminal law, the broader social conditions that perpetuate CSE must be mitigated. These include the victimization of girls, poverty, and the racialization of Indigenous people (Blackstock, Clarke, Cullen, d'Hondt, & Formsma, 2004).

In 1997 the Forsyth Report made several recommendations regarding intervention and prevention; these included: "collaborative case management, more charges under the

Criminal Code, a media campaign to raise awareness, and improved prevention and intervention techniques” (Bittle, 2006, p. 200).

The Government of Alberta responded to sexual exploitation in 1999 with the Pchp legislation. This child protection legislation empowered police and social workers to detain children against their will if they were deemed to be at risk and refused to “cease their involvement in prostitution” (Bittle, 2006, p. 201). Bittle (2006) noted that this “represents a new regime of governance and control of youth prostitution” (p. 202). Aebi (2001) noted that “the majority of child rights advocates do not support non-voluntary programs” (p. 3) and pointed out that the Alberta programme was assessed to be ineffective due to a lack of long term services for sexually exploited youth. This kind of approach has been described by Bittle (2002 & 2006) as a neo-liberal approach because it devolves responsibility for the problem onto local agencies and the individual.

In 2000, following Alberta’s lead, the B.C. Ministry of Children and Family Development initiated a working group to assess the secure care model. The group recommended adopting such a model and although the legislation was passed in July 2000, “it was never enacted” (Bittle, 2006). Since that time, in British Columbia, the Assistant Deputy Minister’s Committee oversaw the funding of various local community initiatives, through an external non-governmental agency, The McCreary Youth Foundation, to further investigate and intervene in the problem of sexually exploited youth.

There are three levels at which commercial sexual exploitation must be addressed. These are: intervention, follow-up or after care, and prevention. Sexually exploited girls need to be able to access spaces which they feel are safe (from authorities and pimps or

boyfriends) (UNYA, 2002) and stable (MacInnes, 1998) and when they need to and are able to. Late night or twenty-four hour drop-in spaces where youth can be safe and also choose to access various supports or services are identified as important in the literature (Kingsley & Mark, 2000; UNYA, 2002). There is also clear agreement in the literature on the need for emergency youth shelter not affiliated with child protection authorities (Kingsley & Mark, 2000; MacInnes, 1998; UNYA, 2002). These kinds of resources provide the potential for vulnerable girls to access programmes and services that could ultimately support them in exiting the sex trade. Some of the recommended supports are life skills workshops, sexual and general health education, counselling, and services like laundry facilities, telephone and internet access, needle exchanges, and free personal health items (Justice Institute of BC, 2002).

MacInnes (1998) details two priorities for an intervention plan with sexually exploited youth, “first the difficult removal of the child from the street, and second, the healing and restoration of the child to family, society, and to a viable future” (p. 136). He does not advocate for mandatory confinement but rather for skilled ‘exit counselors’ to gradually build a relationship with street-involved girls on their own terms. Several researchers, front line staff, and experiential youth argue for a supportive relationship with, for example an outreach worker, someone a girl can build a relationship with on her own terms; girls need to build a relationship over time and on their own terms and to feel respected (Kingsley & Mark, 2000; MacInnes, 1998).

The key importance of an interdisciplinary approach is highlighted throughout the literature (ADM, 2000; Being Aware, Taking Care, 1999; Kalergis, 2008; Kingsley & Mark, 2000; Sethi, 2007; UNYA, 2002). The role of outreach worker, someone who can

build a relationship over time and possibly bring their own experiential stories, is identified as crucial to effective interventions (Kalergis, 2008; MacInnes, 1998; PAWRS, 2004). An effective intervention team should also include a police officer, a therapist, a family or community member (close friend or extended family), a medical professional, and a lawyer (Being Aware, Taking Care, 1999; City of Burnaby, 1998; Kalergis, 2008; MacInnes, 1998; PAWRS, 2004).

Specifically, Indigenous studies highlight additional elements needed to support youth in getting out of sexual exploitation and to prevent youth from being sexually exploited (Blackstock, Clarke, Cullen, d'Hondt, & Formsma, 2004; Kingsley & Mark, 2000, McCreary Youth Foundation, 2003; Sethi, 2007; UNYA, 2002). These studies stress the importance of youth involvement and youth consultation in creating appropriate services for intervention and prevention and in the ongoing evaluation of those services. Further, the literature with a specific focus on Indigenous girls also emphasizes the need for opportunities to connect with traditions from their culture (UNYA, 2002; Kingsley & Mark, 2000) in the context of broader societal efforts to recognize and honour Indigenous knowledge and to acknowledge the diversity that exists among Indigenous communities. Additionally, researchers underline the critical importance of supporting Indigenous girls in positive development: “funding and services should be directed towards prevention programs like educating and mobilizing young Indigenous girls” (Sethi, 2007, p. 66). Blackstock, Clarke, Cullen, d'Hondt, and Formsma (2004) also identify language preservation as a key aspect to positive self regard in Indigenous girls.

## Girls' Studies

Given that girls and their knowledge, experience, and voices are the central focus of this research project the literature in the following section offers a glimpse of what the current, existing research tells us about girls in contemporary society.

The field of girls' studies, with increasing research on girls throughout the past two decades, encompasses multiple discourses on girls' development and identity formation in the context of modern society (Aapola, Gonick, & Harris, 2005; Bettis & Adams, 2005; Hoskins & Artz, 2004; Hernandez & Rehman, 2002; Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995). It is important to note that girlhood is a Euro-western construction situated in adolescence, itself a historical construction with constantly changing characteristics (Bettis & Adams, 2005; Lesko, 1996). The current field of girls' studies emphasizes that there is no one theory or experience that can represent all girls and that the "analytical frameworks for interpreting girls' lives are complicated by the intersections of constraint, autonomy, and selective freedoms that they embody" (Harris, 2004, p. xvii). As discussed in Aapola, Gonick and Harris (2005), dominant narratives of girlhood continue to create "marginalized others whose lives, bodies, relationships, and selves do not conform" to these dominant images (p. 3). Girls' lives intersect with systemic, institutional, and cultural constraints which limit their ability to access or mobilize their own agency.

In the current feminist literature, writers and researchers have tried to conceptualise girls as active agents, moving beyond the 'girls as victims' analysis that initially surfaced in the 1990's. Most of the early research with girls in the 1990's drew primarily on the voices and experiences of white, privileged girls (Brown & Gilligan,

1992; Pipher, 1994). These studies drew important attention to differences in girls' and boys' development and showed that girls experience what the researchers describe as a crisis of authenticity at adolescence. Brown and Gilligan provided evidence that the adolescent girls in their studies believed they must choose only one of two options; either honour their authentic selves and continue to express themselves verbally and physically in ways that do not necessarily fit with the expected (white, middle class, Euro-western) feminine norms and be rejected as acceptable females or or subsume self and voice to be accepted according to the socially accepted criteria of girlhood and thereby preserve relationships and social standing (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). Banister & Jakubec (2004) echo the work of Brown and Gilligan and discuss how girls subordinate their authentic voice to enhance social status and how this can compromise their health. Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan (1995) complicate this analysis by highlighting differences in the development of minority girls who resist white, mainstream constraints and choose to speak out and be true to themselves at the risk of alienating others.

The field of girl studies currently includes a diverse representation of what it means to be a girl in the context of the modern society with multiple truths and voices through different studies with girls from many different racial, ethnic, class, and geographic constellations (Lee & de Finney, 2004; Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995). Girls today are exposed to a multiplicity of constructions and models for being female from which to choose. As discussed by Bettis and Adams (2005), girlhood or femininity is “a highly contested construct that is resisted, appropriated, and assumed in different ways by different girls” (p. 9). Nevertheless, the field of girls' studies continues to ignore the experiences of some groups of girls (de Finney, 2007; Ward & Benjamin, 2004). For

example, Indigenous girls remain underrepresented in girls' studies literature which is a gap that this research attempts to address.

Girls' development occurs within a broader context of globalization which has implications in terms of economic possibilities and potential for self or identity construction (Aapola, Gonick, & Harris, 2005, p. 6). One recent mainstream discourse is that of "girl power" which promotes the idea to girls that they can be "feisty, ambitious, motivated, and independent" (Aapola, Gonick, & Harris, 2005, p. 26). This has put the focus of 'being a girl' on cultural and social aspects promoted through marketing (Harris, 2004). As interest in girls grew so did marketing to girls "in the form of girls' programs, sports, websites, toys, pop idols, etc." (Ward & Benjamin, 2004, p. 21). This discourse masks the structural inequities based on gender, class, and race that many girls face and, like the psychological research on girls from the early 1990's (Pipher, 1994) situates the problem within the individual. De Finney (2007) cites Fine (2004) who ponders how girls "survive and flourish in a world of greater choices and opportunities, but fewer structures of support" (p. xvii). In today's society girls face multiple pressures and yet, resources and funding for important intervention services have deteriorated over the past decade through funding reductions at both the provincial and federal levels in Canada where governments have further undermined the health of girls and women by dismantling specific ministries and departments, such as the previous, B.C. Ministry of Women's Equality, which existed to ensure that education and services in regard to specific women's issues were in place.

An alternate narrative of girls found in recent popular culture is that of the sexually liberated, party girl. This image has been promoted throughout the media where

there are many examples of how “young women have license now to be badly behaved (drunk, disorderly, and undressed on any number of TV programs...)” (McRobbie, 2004, p. 9). I specifically note this popular trend as I see it as directly relating to girls’ vulnerability to sexual exploitation. These images are being aggressively marketed to girls, normalizing the objectification of girls’ bodies, in order to sell various products reinforcing, whether inadvertently or intentionally male entitlement to women’s bodies. As Aapola, Gonick, and Harris (2005) highlight, “media images of women tend to reify dominant cultural standards of beauty rather than support the diversification of images of femininity” (p. 134). The media is a dominant force in the definition, objectification, and oppression of girls (Coy, 2009a; Katz, 2006).

What is clear from the research with girls so far is that girls’ experiences are diverse and there are powerful forces in media and marketing working to undermine the value of diversity of experience. More research highlighting girls’ voices and knowledge is needed to inform policy and practice decision-making. The intention of opting for a participatory methodology for this research study was to ensure the girls who participated could take ownership of the process and share their knowledge and experiences however was most comfortable for them and to whatever extent they chose.

### **Risk, Resiliency, and Resistance**

Discourses of risk and risk factors surfaced frequently in the literature on the commercial sexual exploitation of youth (Coy, 2008; Kingsley & Mark, 2000; MacInnes, 1998; Pearce, 2009; UNYA, 2002). Because so much of the literature about commercial sexual exploitation pertains to vulnerable, marginalised, or homeless youth the discussion of risk and resilience is relevant.

### **Risk, ‘at risk’, and risk factors**

Mainstream discourses of risk tend to ignore the “social conditions that place adolescents at risk and locate the risk within the adolescents themselves” (Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 2005, p. 21). Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan suggest that this “relieves society of responsibility for addressing inequities of race, class, and gender that create conditions of risk” (p. 21). The Justice Institute of BC (2002) notes that “‘determinants of risk’ are strongly associated with the commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth... Various combinations of these determinants explain most cases of exploitation of children” (p. 19).

Ungar (2001, 2004a) contrasts two discourses of risk, an ecological view and a constructionist perspective. With the ecological perspective resilience is viewed as “health despite adversity” and to some extent health outcomes are pre-determined: “risk factors are seen to impact cumulatively, protective factors are thought to predispose youth to a normal developmental path” (p. 78). Ungar (2004b) presents a mainstream definition of risk factors as the “personal and environmental factors that have been studied as barriers to health and well-being” (p. 38). According to Ungar, health and risk factors are constructed, context specific, and varied across populations. Most studies looking at ‘at risk’ youth assume certain behaviours are maladaptive, while more conventional behaviours are adaptive. This perspective fails to consider the functionality of the behaviour and whether the behaviour, even if deemed ‘negative’ or ‘anti-social’ meets the needs (status, acceptance, survival) of the youth (Ungar, 2004b).

A lot of the literature that identifies ‘protective’ and ‘risk’ factors is value-based. This is not necessarily made explicit by the proponents of this popular approach to

assessing the needs, gaps, and strengths of children, youth, and communities to enhance their resilience. Ungar, drawing on postmodern thinking, points out that the mainstream definitions of health are value-based and privileges a perspective where health is defined within each population. Local definitions of health may or may not fit with mainstream, ecological views. Some of the mainstream discourses on ‘risk’ assume an ideal set of conventions that all youth should strive to attain, such as the list of forty developmental assets compiled by the Search Institute (Scales & Leffert, 2004). This precludes the potential for individuals to define their own concepts of what health is according to their own lived contexts (Ungar, 2004b ).

### **Resilience**

There exists a wide range of literature on enhancing resilience in vulnerable youth. The mainstream resiliency literature identifies protective factors that act to counter exposure to risk factors (Scales & Leffert, 2004). Among some of the recognised factors that enhance resilience, are key elements of positive youth development: caring relationships with family and other trusted adults, safe and supportive school environments, the promotion of healthy attitudes about risky behaviours, and opportunities for involvement in their community (May, 2006). Ungar (2004b) defines resilience from a constructionist perspective as each individual’s own definition of self as healthy and an ability to negotiate for resources amidst adversity.

According to Richman and Fraser (2001), “resilience is thought to emerge in the dynamic interaction between individual characteristics and environmental resources” (p. 5). Rutter (2001) states that “the phenomenon of resilience requires attention to a range of possible psychological outcomes and not to an unusually positive outcome or to

supernormal functioning” (p. 13). Everall, Altrows and Paulson (2006) define resilience as a “dynamic process that evolves over time” and an “adaptive process whereby the individual willingly makes use of internal and external resources to overcome adversity or threats to development” (pp. 461- 462).

Ungar (2004) complicates the mainstream discourse through his constructionist approach to resilience that “reflects a postmodern interpretation ... and defines resilience as the outcome from negotiations between individuals and their environments for the resources to define themselves as healthy amidst conditions collectively viewed as adverse” (p. 342). Loughead (2005) draws on Ungar’s work stating that “the rationale for adopting a constructionist discourse of resilience is to remain open to the varying meanings of resilience [and to]... deepen our understanding of the construct, and help foster diversity in the way we approach research with different youth” (p. 15).<sup>2</sup> The key point here is that there is no one right approach or method that will fit for working with all ‘at risk’ youth or sexually exploited girls.

### **Resistance**

According to Flaskas and Humphreys (1993), resistance shows up in everyday practices as people act to “negate particular definitions of subjectivity” (p. 39). People resist dominant narratives by creating their own unique stories about themselves and their experiences. Responses, defined by Wade (1995) as acts of resistance to imposed power or to preserve dignity may involve obvious actions of assertiveness or self-advocacy but may be much more subtle and even deemed ‘negative behaviours’ in the mainstream, normative health context (Ungar, 2004). Whether deemed ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ these

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<sup>2</sup> Having worked for more than a decade with marginalised youth and families, I have often witnessed strength or functioning which is outside the mainstream’s definitions of ‘healthy’. Therefore, it is Ungar’s definition of resilience that I have adopted as part of my framework for approaching the research.

responses can be affirmed as stemming from inner strength and as healthy in their motivation to preserve the authentic self (Wade, 1995).

Ungar (2004a) discusses how, typically, behaviours of resistance to dominant cultural norms are viewed as contributing to vulnerability or risk factors, when in fact these practices could be reinterpreted as examples of strength through resistance. He states that: “problem behaviours help some individuals experience themselves as resilient” (p. 357). Does resilience necessarily equate with mainstream, white, middle class, notions of success? Ungar (2001) also states that “this need to attend to the localized constructions of health in marginalised youth populations is necessary if we are to understand how children (and adults) maintain self-constructions as resilient” (p. 139). Resilience also exists in environments and circumstances that do not necessarily match mainstream constructions of health and success.

Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan (1995) identify girls’ resistance as “a process in which girls consciously or unconsciously resist psychological and relational disconnection that can impede development and threaten their psychological health” (p. 18). They noted that the minority girls in their longitudinal study did not silence themselves, and in going against the conventional, expected behaviours developed a stronger self identity. According to Prilleltensky’s (2003) model of community psychology liberation is the “process of resisting oppressive forces and striving toward psychological and political well-being” (p. 195). A process of engaging as a group and having critical dialogue about community issues can facilitate awareness and collective action; awareness of shared experience lends to psychological and political well-being. Wade (2007) references bell hooks (1990) who “argued that it is important to locate

resistance on the margins and *in* the experience of despair because marginalized people are widely represented as submissive by writers who would reduce their complex responses to a single, apolitical dimension – individual pain” (p. 6). This is important and relevant when considering the issue of the commercial sexual exploitation of Indigenous girls.

### **Summary**

The commercial sexual exploitation of girls, the exchange of sex for money, drugs, acceptance, shelter, etc., is a serious issue that negatively impacts the health of girls. Indigenous girls are especially vulnerable to sexual exploitation. From the outside, it is easy to want to step in and rescue these girls from ugly, unhappy realities. However, in presuming we can rescue these girls we are in fact re-oppressing them, stripping them of agency, and perpetrating victimization on them. The literature speaks strongly to the fact that girls are not choosing sexual exploitation freely, various circumstances create a context where that choice becomes one of very few viable options. Despite this, as ethical practitioners and researchers the best work we can do is to honour and validate sexually exploited girls where they are at and listen and be present as they share their own unique story – each story will contain examples of daily acts of resistance and the preservation of dignity. Through the development of mutual respect and listening to their unique stories, sexually exploited girls can be supported, when they are ready, to access help in the areas they identify. A responsive, holistic, community approach, with ongoing supports over time is recommended in the literature as the most effective for intervening with girls who have been sexually exploited.

## **Chapter Two: Methodology**

This chapter details the theoretical framework and research design for this study and the rationale for using Photovoice as a methodology. My initial research design consisted of an iterative participatory research process with Photovoice (Foster-Fishman, 2005; Goodhart et al., 2006; Moffit & Vollman, 2004; Wang, Yi, Tao, & Caravano, 1998) positioned as the primary medium for gathering data. The original design was modified in response to the preferences of participant-researchers so that discussion groups and individual interviews supplemented the Photovoice data.

### **Research Principles**

The theoretical framework underpinning this study is diverse and drew on many principles from various bodies of literature to guide and shape the research. Participatory action research (PAR), participatory research, specifically Photovoice, feminist theory and research with girls, ethical research with Indigenous people, and considerations for youth involvement all contributed valuable information in the elaboration of this study.

Participatory action research (PAR) is a methodological framework “wherein local community members become active agents in analyzing and redressing the effects of oppression and violence within the community” (Williams & Lykes, 2003). As articulated by Fine et al. (2004) PAR offers a specific lens through which to view research and methodology: “Knowledge is rooted in social relations and ... knowledge is produced in collaboration and in action” (p. 95). Therefore data collection becomes knowledge production which is an “important site in the struggle for social justice” (Moosa-Mitha, 2005). Postcolonial and transnational feminist theories (de Finney, 2007; Lee & de Finney, 2004; Harris, 2004; Hernanadez & Rehman, 2002; Olesen, 2003)

contribute to research by emphasizing the importance of relationships and intersections of race, class, and gender with full awareness of the inherent power dynamics and the explicit intention of disrupting dominant texts or constructions (Weis and Fine, 2004; Olesen, 2003).

Participatory research has benefits for the participants in that it provides opportunities for them to share in the power to shape how the issue being researched is defined, as well as to acquire tools for reflection and action (Foster-Fishman, Nowell, Deacon, Nievar, & McCann, 2005). As identified by Hall (1992), participatory research is based on the “epistemological assumption that knowledge is constructed socially and therefore ... approaches which allow for social or collective analysis of life experiences are most appropriate” (p. 20). Participatory, community-based research promotes the honouring of existing knowledge and the sharing in knowledge creation rather than knowledge extraction typically seen in more traditional research methodologies (Castleden, Garvin & Huu-ay-aht, 2008; Rutman, Hubberstey, Barlow, & Brown, 2005). Hills and Mullett (2005) define community-based action research as a “collaborative, participatory, and action oriented research methodology that performs research with rather than on, to or about people” (p.280). Photovoice was selected as a participatory methodology that has demonstrated effectiveness in engaging youth, girls, and Indigenous groups.

Although this study’s methodology was informed by PAR principles, the action element leading to change at a broader community level was not a part of this study. The participant-researchers directed the extent of this research process and said they were not interested in taking on the additional work required for PAR. The girls were

uncomfortable with what that could require of them in terms of time and speaking in public. In order to honour the girls' location as co-researchers, I respected their decision not to develop the action aspect of the research.

### **Engaging Girls in Creative Research: A Theoretical Framework**

My approach to the research was responsive, participatory, creative, and action-oriented in order to engage girls in a meaningful way with the research topic. In working with 'at risk' girls, building on relationship and giving them ownership of the process are important in helping achieve a sense of ownership and where their knowledge and voices can be accurately represented. Existing literature has emphasized the benefit to girls of having a forum where their voices, opinions, and experiences can be highlighted (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Lee & de Finney, 2004; Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995). The research design was intended to respect and uphold the principles of feminist research as well as those of ethical research with Indigenous peoples. My rationale for choosing a participatory approach to the research was to engage and train girls as co-researchers and to facilitate the augmentation of their capacity and sense of agency through their involvement in this project. The girls involved in the research were positioned as participant-researchers. This term is intended to recognize their active role in the research and the role they played in directing and shaping the research process, as well as attempts to equalize power in the research relationships.

The following section details the background literature on the many different theoretical considerations that underpinned the methodology. As the participant researchers were all Indigenous girls I identify below the important considerations in regard to research with girls, research with Indigenous people, and research with youth. I

also highlight some of the key points of participatory and participatory action research as these were central to how the research took shape.

### **Research with girls**

This research was informed by principles of feminist research. Feminist research values individual voice and honours women's diverse experiences. Voice, differentiation of experience, and the value of relationships are a few elements highlighted through feminist research with girls (Aapola, Gonick, & Harris, 2005; Banks, 2005; Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Coy, 2009a; DeFinney, 2007; Grote, 2006; Harris, 2004; Hernandez & Rehman, 2002; Hoskins & Artz, 2004; Pipher, 1994; Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995). The issue of voice is a central one in feminist research (Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995; Brown & Gillian, 1992). Various methodologies have emerged to try to highlight each individual's unique voice and knowledge (Olesen, 2003).

The research of Brown and Gilligan (1992) and Taylor, Gilligan, Sullivan (1995), for instance, has highlighted the importance of taking girls seriously, of listening to their stories, and of drawing out their voices. From the perspective of honouring voice, it is important to listen to each girls' "I" (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). The issue of voice is a central one in feminist research (Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995; Brown & Gillian, 1992). Bridging openness and curiosity with being fully present allows a deeper listening to the individual and diverse constructions of each girl's experience of the world.

Research with girls, from a decolonizing, feminist perspective must also show linkages between individual experiences and social forces. Lee and DeFinney (2004) stress that such research should "provide space and alternative language to connect broader historical, economic, political, and socio-cultural processes to personal

narratives” (p. 111). This was the intention of this research endeavour. Several discussion and reflection exercises were incorporated in the research sessions with the intention of creating opportunities for the research-participants to make these linkages.

### **Research with Indigenous Peoples**

As the participant-researchers were all of Indigenous descent, it was of central importance that ethical principles and existing recommendations of research with Indigenous people informed and guided this study.

Research, in the context of colonial and modernist history is something that has been “done to” Indigenous people (Bennett, 2004; Castellano, 1986; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). As discussed by Kovach (2005), gaining control of the research process “has been pivotal for Indigenous peoples in decolonization...[and] participatory research has been an ally. The critical, collective, and, participatory principles of participatory research have made it a popular methodology for many Indigenous projects” (p. 23).

The research methodology integrated core principles of ethical research with Indigenous people. There are several elements identified as critical to ethical research with Indigenous people. Consultation with key players in the community such as elders, traditional authorities, and exiting community experts is imperative to the design of any ethical research project intending to study Indigenous individuals or community (CIHR, 2007). Before undertaking this study I had several conversations over a period of more than a year with various key point people in the local Nuu-chah-nulth Nations to elicit thoughts and feedback on the concept and focus of the research to ensure I had support before proceeding. In keeping with the recommendations of numerous protocols and Indigenous writing on ethical research with Indigenous people (Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal

Council, 2008; Tuhiwai Smith, 2000; University of Victoria, 2003), prior to moving forward with the recruitment phase, I met in person and via telephone with various key informants in the Nuu-chah-nulth community to invite feedback on my research proposal. A respected Elder, a community development coordinator, a program manager, and a school-based support worker were among those I consulted in the local First Nations communities. All of these Indigenous community members spoke of their concerns with regards to girls and sexual predators. A couple of these key informants also spoke of their knowledge of ongoing, hidden sexual exploitation within local Indigenous communities. Each one identified their support of research with girls to strengthen their voices and engage them in community issues that affect them.

Researchers must acknowledge the power imbalance inherent in the ‘researcher’ / ‘researched’ relationship especially given how much this power imbalance has been exploited in past research “on” Indigenous communities. Protecting community ownership of the knowledge and data shared is also critical (Bennett, 2007; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999).

Ensuring that consent is informed and participation is voluntary is a key principle of ethical research involving Indigenous people. CIHR (2007) guidelines state:

the researcher will need the free, prior and informed consent of the individual participants. “Free” implies that consent is voluntary, without coercion, intimidation or manipulation. “Prior” implies that consent has been sought sufficiently in advance of any authorization or commencement of activities and respects time requirements of Aboriginal consultation /consensus processes. “Informed” suggests that the

information provided includes [a] complete disclosure of the risks and benefits (p. 20).

I undertook efforts to ensure that participants were fully informed of the details of the project and clearly understood the parameters and expectations of their participation. Transparency of the research is imperative and also means ensuring participants have opportunities to contribute to and modify the research design throughout the process (Bennett, 2004).

Taking the time to build relationships and for participants to feel comfortable so that the research is meaningful is another important guiding principle for ethical research with Indigenous people. One final principle that was at the forefront for me in designing and undertaking the research was ensuring that the benefits to participants exceeded any potential risks. Researchers should be “mindful not to re-colonize participants in the process” (Bennett, p. 20). The above principles are consistently advanced in the guidelines at the regional and international levels by both academic and local Indigenous governments (CIHR, 2007; Nuu-chah-nulth Tribal Council, 2008; Tuhiwai Smith, 2000; University of Victoria, 2003).

### **Research with youth**

Because the girls who participated in the research are young, I made sure to consider the ethical recommendations for working with younger populations. Youth, as a group have less power in society and therefore require special consideration in regards to participation in research (Leadbeater, Riecken, Benoit, Banister, Brunk, & Glass, 2006). A developmental perspective can be helpful to assess whether youth are competent to consent (Yuile, Pepler, Craig, & Connolly, 2006). Transportation to and from the

sessions was provided as needed; this is identified in the literature as an important aspect of reducing barriers to participation for experiential youth and marginalised groups (Powelson, 2008; Reutter, Stewart, Raine, Williamson, Letourneau, & McFall, 2005).

Ethical guidelines through the university are also important determinants in whether researchers can deem youth competent to consent (Leadbeater, Riecken, Benoit, Banister, Brunk, & Glass, 2006). Researchers should make every effort to clearly outline the terms and conditions of the research project so that youth can give their free and informed consent. It is also important to explain to youth the purpose of asking them to sign a consent form “to protect them as participants and give them more power in the research relationship” (Marshall & Shepard, 2006, p.144).

In conducting research with youth, as in practice, it is important to always be mindful of the power differential and to treat youth with respect by using “language and tone that [is] accepting, non-judgemental, and non-patronizing” (Jannsson, Mitic, Hulten, & Dhami, 2006, 9. 66). As researchers it is also fundamental to consider the safety of participants at all times and to take all steps necessary to mitigate any risk of harm (Jannsson, Mitic, Hulten, & Dhami, 2006).

Confidentiality is imperative in a small community. Every effort was made to protect the confidentiality of participants including a discussion and contract with group participants to ensure that they were clearly aware of and in accordance with the importance of confidentiality for their participation in this project. Participants were advised that their participation in the research was anonymous, meaning that I would not reveal or disclose to anyone that they were participants and would not attribute their thoughts, words, or photos to them by name in writing up the data.

As Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan (1995) make clear, often girls have a lot to say but feel that no one asks or listens to them. Therefore, there is the potential for strong benefits to girls when they are involved in research which honours and features their voices, experiences, and perspectives. Participatory action research has been recommended for research with girls because it involves them in shaping the process, creates opportunities for them to learn, and ultimately empowers them to examine and problem-solve various social issues that impact them. Miskovic and Hoop (2006) view participation in the research process as benefiting youth by “raising awareness of social issues and prompt[ing] them to take action in their communities” (p. 285).

Coming from a position of awareness of the issues of constraint and authority for both girls and Indigenous people, a participatory method was chosen for the specific benefits of equalizing power and allowing direct construction of the data by participants. Photovoice was chosen because of its demonstrated effectiveness as a participatory research methodology for engaging youth, marginalised groups, and Indigenous communities.

### **Methodology**

The following section details how the research design and methodology actualized the guiding principles presented above. Photovoice methodology was flexible enough to allow for either participatory research or participatory action research according to the participant-researchers’ preferences.

#### **Photovoice**

The Photovoice methodology is evidenced by a significant body of literature (Castleden, Garvin, & Huu-ay-aht First Nation, 2008; Foster-Fishman, Nowell, Deacon,

Nievar, & McCann, 2005; Goodhart et al., 2006; Moffit & Vollman, 2004; Vaughn, Rojas-Guyler, & Howell, 2008; Wang, Yi, Tao, & Caravano, 1998; Wilson, N., Dasho, S., Martin, A. C., Wallerstein, N., Wang, C. C., & Minkler, M., 2007) to be a successful tool of participatory research.

Photovoice seemed a good fit to explore the issue of commercial sexual exploitation with the young women involved in this project. One reason I chose this methodology is that my dozen years of clinical practice with victimized youth, almost half of whom have been Indigenous, adolescent girls has illustrated to me that many girls express themselves more easily with the aid of a creative medium. I have specifically heard from many adolescent girls that they really like taking photographs.

Although there are many methods of photo documentation I specifically chose Photovoice due to its positioning in the literature as a methodology that is “based on participation, empowerment, and self-documentation [and] is a culturally appropriate method for conducting rural and remote health research” (Moffitt & Vollman, 2004, p. 189). Whereas other methodologies incorporate the use of cameras (i.e. Photo elicitation), they are not necessarily informed by feminist theory and principles of PAR like Photovoice is.

Foster-Fishman, Nowell, Deacon, Z, Nievar, and McCann (2005) describe Wang and Burris’ (1994) initial Photovoice design as “an innovative participatory research method that incorporates the process of documentary photography with the practice of empowerment education (Freire, 1970)” (p. 277). Caroline Wang pioneered this methodology to “put cameras in the hands of individuals often excluded from decision-making processes in order to capture their voices and visions” (Foster-Fishman, Nowell,

Deacon, Nievar, & McCann, 2005, p. 277). The opportunity for participants to also be researchers by looking through the lens of the camera and then thinking and talking about their photos provides a “means of catalyzing personal and community change” (Wang, Yi, Tao, & Carovano, 1998, p. 75). This methodology has been used in community-based research projects with groups of marginalised women and youth in North America and abroad (Foster-Fishman, Nowell, Deacon, Nievar, & McCann, 2005; Jurkowski, 2008; Vaughn, Rojas-Guyler, & Howell, 2008; Castleden, Garvin, & Huu-ay-aht First Nation, 2008; Williams & Lykes, 2003, Wang, Yi, Tao, & Caravano, 1998).

Wang, Yi, Tao, and Caravano (1998) detail the methodology for photovoice. Some key steps include: “Conceptualizing the problem, conducting photovoice training, taking the pictures, contextualizing or storytelling during group discussion, codifying issues, themes”(p. 80), and then presenting the photos and stories in print media and to policy-makers. Photovoice incorporates reflection and action to empower participants (Vaughn, Rojas-Guyler, & Howell, 2008). Moffit and Vollman (2004) state that “the theoretical underpinnings of the photovoice technique lie in empowerment education, feminist theory, and documentary photography” (p. 191). Molloy (2007) highlights how “Photovoice validates participants’ experiences and allows participants and facilitators to share power.” (p. 45).

Wilson et al. (2007) assert that Photovoice is “a way to engage youth in social change as they take photos capturing strengths and issues in their environment and use these as the basis of critical dialogue and collective action plans” (p. 241). To me these were key elements to have at the forefront of any research design with youth, in particular girls and Indigenous youth.

Moffit and Vollman (2004) highlight many studies that advance the benefits of Photovoice as a participatory method that has been successful at promoting opportunities to engage Indigenous people in research in ways that are meaningful, culturally-responsive, and honour Indigenous ways of knowing. Castleden, Garvin, and Huu-ay-aht First Nation (2007) describe how they modified Wang's approach to Photovoice to fit with the needs of the community and respect Indigenous protocols (p. 1401).

The following section details how the research design and methodology actualized the theoretical framework presented above.

### **Research Design**

The study involved twelve weekly meetings with the research-participants. Each session involved group discussion. The research-participants took photos that reflected their perspectives on the problem of sexual exploitation in the community. This section outlines how the participatory research process unfolded, including the process of outreach and recruitment of participant-researchers, informed consent, confidentiality, and a brief description of the participant-researchers.

#### **Outreach and recruitment**

The issue of commercial sexual exploitation has been at the forefront as a concern in the community for the past few years. Initially, as discussed above, I engaged in a process of community consultation, building on pre-existing relationships with other service providers in the community, connecting in particular with those who are part of the community network of people working to address the commercial sexual exploitation of youth. Following on an extensive process of community consultation detailed above, in the recruitment phase I initially sent out a letter (Appendix A) with copies of the

research poster (Appendix B) inviting service providers at their various sites of employment to share the information with any girls they thought might be interested and who fit the criteria.

Two weeks later I followed up the letters with a phone call. Some of the key contacts who referred girls to the research project were the youth drug and alcohol counsellor, two youth support workers, a child and youth counsellor, a youth probation worker, and the facilitators of a youth drop-in group. Initially more than a dozen girls indicated interest and were put in contact with me. Of those initial referrals I screened out some girls as inappropriate because they were too young. Many girls self-selected out perhaps finding just the orientation to the research too daunting, perhaps for other reasons. I did not have an opportunity to inquire into the reasons why the girls who did not participate chose to not be involved.

### **Informed consent**

Once the initial responses to my posters began to come in I responded by attempting to make phone contact with each girl. When I successfully reached each girl I arranged a meeting at her convenience of time and location in order to discuss with her the full details of the research study and to review the Participant Consent Form to ensure informed consent. In this meeting I discussed the parameters of the research process and presented the Participant Consent Form (Appendix C). I made every effort to interpret the ethics jargon in everyday language they could grasp easily and repeatedly stated that their participation was voluntary and that they could choose to discontinue involvement at any time. I explicated the parameters of confidentiality should they choose to become involved with the research. The girls were informed that they would receive an

honorarium of a hundred dollars to be given at completion of the research or sooner and adjusted to the equivalent of their participation, should they choose to withdraw.

### **Participant-researchers<sup>3</sup>**

Six girls in total followed through with completion of the paperwork required to participate in the research. All of the girls were Indigenous – three identified as Nuu-chah-nulth, one as Inuit, and one as Plains Cree. One girl (Steph, 16) was expected and never came. One girl (Jackie, 16) stopped attending after the third week because of family commitments. The third participant (Sonia, 14) only attended twice and then moved away. Another girl (Jen, 15) wanted to participate in the research but could not attend the group sessions due to her schedule and therefore contributed to the data through an individual interview. Two girls (Ella, 15 and Beth, 15) were the participant-researchers who sustained full participation throughout the research process.

Each girl engaged with the research but Beth did so on a much deeper level. She viewed the research process as an opportunity to broaden her knowledge and skills and to share important insights she had. Beth was very serious about her involvement and took on the role of task master when she felt we were getting bogged down in a particular discussion or with side talk and that it was time to move on. Ella valued the time to share her experiences but was not overly interested in the ‘research’ aspect. My impression is that for her it was difficult to see the applications of this research project in her day to day life. Nevertheless, she continued to attend even after abandoning school midway through the first semester. Ella would often throw out comments intended to lighten the mood or shift the energy if she felt the discussion was getting too serious.

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<sup>3</sup> Please note that pseudonyms have been used to protect the anonymity of the participant-researchers.

## **Confidentiality**

Photovoice methods raise complex issues around confidentiality, as co-researchers are exploring their worlds with cameras. I specifically discussed the need to secure the consent of anyone they might photograph for the purpose of the research and we reviewed the Image Release for research subjects form (Appendix D) more than once as a group.

In writing up my findings I have made every effort to protect the identity of the girls to ensure anonymity while at the same time representing their voices. I did this by sharing their words and thoughts directly but not associating any names with the statements. In writing up my findings and analysis I did not divulge any potentially identifying details about any of the participants. The participant-researchers were very sensitive to the issues of anonymity and were careful to not take any photos with potentially identifying details.

## **Analysis of the Data**

### **Introduction**

The data consists of the photos taken by participant-researchers, transcribed audio recordings of the twelve group sessions, and field notes. A photo montage compiled by the girls to showcase the photos they took is available as an appendix to this document.

There are two levels of data analysis. The photo analysis done by the participant-researchers including the photos taken during the process is integrated throughout Chapter Three where I summarize the major themes that emerged from the stories of the participant-researchers. In Chapter Four I incorporate a broader analysis of the issue of sexual exploitation and discuss the implications of the themes identified by the

participant-researchers in terms of child and youth care practice and future research on the sexual exploitation of girls.

### **Audio recordings**

My analysis involved multiple rounds of listening to the audio tapes of the research sessions. After transcribing all of the audio tapes, I listened to them again while reading through the transcripts to pick up on details I had missed, to clarify places where the dialogue was less audible, and to flag significant points of discussion. I also went back to the participant-researchers for clarification and validation throughout the transcription process. This was followed by multiple readings of the transcriptions in which I sorted through and grouped themes and identified the most significant of the girls' narratives.

### **Photovoice data**

Of all the photos taken, the participants each selected two or three photos to analyse. The Photovoice methodology provides a structured framework for reflection and meaning making. Wilson et al. (2007) outline a series of questions to assist participants to “represent their world with their own photographs, which they then analyze to surface their meaning” (p. 242). An acronym, “SHOWeD” had been developed to refer to the questions used for analysis:

What do you See here?

What's really Happening here?

How does this relate to Our lives?

Why does this problem or asset exist?

What can we Do about it? (Wang, Yi, Tao, & Caravano, 1998; Wilson et al., 2007, p. 242; Moffitt & Vollman, 2004, p. 193).

In our case we used a modified set of questions using the acronym “PHOTO” from Pies and Parthasarathy (2008):

Describe your picture.

What’s happening in your picture?

Why did you take a picture of this?

What does this picture tell us about life in your community?

How does this picture provide opportunities to improve life in your community?”

(p. 7).

### **Data Reliability and Validity**

With a feminist, community-based, participatory approach to the research there are no set equations for measuring reliability as there would be in a quantitative study. Nevertheless, minimizing researcher bias and clearly representing the views and knowledge of participant-researchers are of central concern within the ethical framework of this community-based research project. “Anti-oppressive research is not so much concerned with the ability of our research instruments to “measure” accurately; rather, our concerns relate to whether we adhered to our research principles” (Potts & Brown, 2005, p. 277). Central to these principles are to advance the voices of participants as accurately as possible and to support participants in taking greater ownership of their knowledge and of possibilities for change in their community.

Feminist and participatory action research ethics acknowledge that the researcher who writes up the findings remains in a position of power and the problem of

legitimation is that researchers invariably reproduce their own views and opinions in their analysis of data collected from research subjects. (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Reflexivity is a process of reflection whereby the researcher examines personal values and biases as well as considers how the structure of the research process and the types of questions ask influence the responses and data gathered. “Reflexivity is advocated as a strategy for situating knowledges” (de Jong, 2009, p. 389). Reflexivity is highly regarded among the literature for feminist and participatory action research as a tool by which “to interrogate power, privilege, and multiple hierarchies” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Throughout the weeks of meeting with participant-researchers I consistently brought my interpretations of things they had said back to them for their feedback and confirmation. “Reliability, validity, and trustworthiness must be established through ongoing verification strategies and participant checking” (de Finney, 2008, p. 124). I incorporated a model of process consent which “involves assessing ongoing consent throughout the research project to provide more protection and freedom of choice for participants” (Marshall & Shepard, 2006, p. 145). Seeking participant feedback to heighten ownership is highlighted as well among the literature on ethical research with Indigenous people (Castellano, 2004).

Reflexion is an integral part of a feminist or critical research process (Lee & de Finney, 2004; Williams & Lykes, 2003). In listening to myself interact with the girls on the tapes I was able to gain insight into places where I was not hearing them. It provided me an opportunity to consider whether the format was working for the participant-researchers, to critically review my performance and to strive to listen more deeply in the subsequent sessions. It also helped me to identify the places my privilege – white, adult, middle class woman – obscured or created tension in the research relationship. For

example, I had to critically reflect on taken for granted norms of privacy for adolescent girls when Beth spoke of sharing, not only her bedroom, but her bed with her two little brothers. I had to process the biases that arose for me with regard to Ella quitting school. It became clear, even as I got to know them better over time, that as much as I can empathize with the girls and offer them support, I can not fully understand their experiences.

Photovoice allowed the participant-researchers to reflect back as well through the review and selection of the photos they took and the written or spoken descriptions of the various photos for the final document.

### **Overview of the Research Process**

The research included twelve weekly research sessions. In addition to the discussions the girls photographed and analysed images that captured many of the issues that surfaced in our discussions. The research sessions lasted for approximately two hours although some lasted longer at the request of the participant-researchers. Each week some time was spent on a “check-in” and rapport-building exercises to allow for time to build relationships. Although we were a small research team and the girls were very open with their sharing I made time each week to verify their consent to audio record our research sessions.

I used empathic listening to validate the unique experiences each participant-researcher verbalised. I paid attention to non-verbal cues from the girls and dropped certain exercises when it was obvious to me the girls were not engaging. I was clear on my boundaries as a researcher and team facilitator yet there were moments when I had to draw on my counselling skills. A few times data collection was put on hold as the girls

needed emotional debriefing and support after sharing personal stories of events that had occurred in the preceding week that may or may not be related to the issues we were discussing.

Although I drew on pre-existing Photovoice studies to determine the format for each research session, I limited the structured components of each meeting and invited input in order to allow for the girls to decide to some extent the flow of the research sessions. One example of how I tried to stay grounded in feminist and participatory research principles is that I would take time each week to share information in regards to what activities I had planned and the rationale for those, and then provide the participant-researchers with an opportunity to suggest changes, modifications or deletions.

During the first eight sessions we explored a wide-range of content including discussions in regards to commercial sexual exploitation, critical analysis of images, workshops on the basics of photography, an introduction to Photovoice, and research ethics.

As stated earlier, I hoped Photovoice would engage participants, empower them to take ownership of the research process, enhance their sense of agency in their lives, augment their knowledge of the issue of commercial sexual exploitation, and provide them an accessible medium for sharing their knowledge. As I will detail below, a modified Photovoice process is what emerged. I conceptualise the methodological process in three stages: *Relationship and knowledge building*, *Thinking and talking about risks, strengths, and images*, and *Photo analysis*. Each stage corresponds to a different part of the participatory girl-centred research process: pre-photo-taking, preparing for and taking photos, and analysing the photos and coalescing them into a finished product

that highlighted the key issues regarding sexual exploitation using a format that is meaningful for the participant-researchers.

In keeping with a participatory and feminist approach to the research, reflexivity was incorporated throughout the research process. I consistently reviewed the audio tapes of the research sessions, listening to what I said, how I facilitated, when I succeeded in engaging the participant-researchers well, and when I did not. I listened for the places where my privilege as a white, adult eclipsed my deep hearing or understanding of their stories. This allowed me to be more aware in my interactions with the girls each week and to seek clarification in what I was hearing from the participant-researchers. We spent some time each week discussing and planning details like snacks or which activities to incorporate the following week. I repeatedly invited the participant-researchers to question or express disagreement with any exercise or activity I put forward. I reminded them that they had the right to withdraw at any time.

### **Relationship and Knowledge-Building**

#### **Week one**

Building rapport was a focus of our first research session. I introduced some exercises that gave the four participant-researchers in attendance the opportunity to share stories about themselves at their discretion. An interviewing activity called “Who Am I?” (Appendix E) is one example of an exercise that provided an opportunity for the girls to get to know one another and also to practice interviewing skills. Some of the questions included, “What is your race or ethnicity? Where are you from? What is it like to be a girl?” This activity was selected because it also provided an introduction to concepts of thinking critically and nudged the participant-researchers to make linkages between their

own lives, those of their peers, and broader social issues. The theoretical underpinnings of participatory action research, feminist, and anti-oppressive research value the politicizing of research participants alongside knowledge creation (de Finney, 2007; Kovach, 2005). As stated by Gaventa and Cornwall (2001) one key element of “participatory action research sees research as a process of reflection, learning, and development of critical consciousness.”

I reviewed the Participant Consent and Image Release Consent (Appendix F) forms with the group. I explained to them why I would be audio recording. We also reviewed the parameters of informed consent and confidentiality during their involvement with the research study. In addition, the group compiled a group agreement to ensure that all participants felt as comfortable as possible engaging and sharing.

I gave each participant a duo tang and the girls took some time to decorate the covers in their own unique way. The duo-tang provided a medium for the girls to collect information and journaling pages for the duration of the research project.

I introduced the topic of commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) with a brainstorming exercise. I shared a definition to help focus their understanding of the concept of CSE: “an exchange of sexual activity for alcohol, drugs, food, shelter, cigarettes, gifts, money, safety, or approval (PAWRS, 2005). The participant-researchers then brainstormed about where they have seen commercial sexual exploitation. The highlights of this activity are shared in the next chapter.

## **Week two**

During our second week, where four girls were present, we continued to build relationship as a group with different group building activities. In addition, a guest

speaker came in to provide a short workshop on the artistic elements of photography. As a group we also gathered around the computer to view an example of a similar youth Photovoice project from the youth participants at the Southeast Youth Academy in Baltimore<sup>4</sup>. This activity facilitated knowledge-building and situated the research within a larger context of community-based youth research.

We engaged in an exercise called Graffiti Wall (Appendix G) to review the discussion on commercial sexual exploitation and highlight the girls' collective knowledge. I prompted the participant-researchers with questions like "What do you know about sexual exploitation? What are the places where you think it happens? Who is most at risk of being sexually exploited?" and they spoke their thoughts and then wrote their ideas in chalk on the blackboard. This exercise really energized the group as the girls built off of one another's ideas. Again, as discussed above, this exercise was intended to draw out their existing knowledge while also providing a format for them to make connections between their own lived experiences, those of their peers, and broader social issues.

### **Week three**

This week there were three girls who attended. There was a continued focus on knowledge building in regards to research. With the aide of a series of handouts we discussed the basic principles of research and then looked at an explanation of Action Research (Appendix H). We looked at a handout from the Action Research curriculum (Berg & Owens, 2001) which grounds participant-researchers in some basic research methods: observation, surveys, pilesorting, and rating / ranking (Appendix I). We also

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<sup>4</sup> Retrieved from: <http://www.jhsph.edu/hao/cah/youthphotovoice/gallery.html>

reviewed a resource that specifically outlined the role and characteristics of Visual Documentation (Appendix J). This was a lot of information for the participant-researchers. I tried to make it relevant by drawing on current, local issues that were of interest to them to demonstrate the useful applications for research.

### **Thinking and Talking About Risks, Strengths, and Images**

#### **Week four**

The goal of this session was to prepare the girls further for photo-taking and photo analysis. I engaged the three participant-researchers in attendance in a critical examination of a selection of images using the handout: Looking Critically at Images (Appendix K). We analysed each image according to a specific set of questions to prompt examination of different photos in a systematic way. Initially I suggested this as a journaling exercise but the girls opted for a group discussion instead. In keeping with my commitment to a responsive, participant-directed process, I adapted the exercise and facilitated a discussion using the questions as a guide.

The girls voiced many questions and some uncertainty about the photo-taking part of the research and requested a trial run. Therefore, in this fourth week we went out as a group with a disposable camera looking to capture images that fit with issues the participant-researchers had identified in our activities regarding commercial sexual exploitation in previous weeks. We walked around the area outside of our meeting space and the girls photographed aspects of buildings, an empty bottle of alcohol lying in an empty lot where a bar had recently been torn down. This was an opportunity for them to become more comfortable looking through the camera.

**Week five**

The fifth week I introduced an exercise called Community Relationships (Appendix L). I shared with the girls the rationale for this exercise which is that much of the literature on sexual exploitation and youth and ‘risk’ identifies different factors that can make it more or less likely that a girl will be sexually exploited (Pearce, 2009). The Community Relationships exercise provided a forum for rich discussion through which the girls related various stories to expand on their lived experience in the community. They identified community relationships and fit them into either the positive or negative column or both. This offered us further opportunities to extricate the factors that contribute to the vulnerability of girls in regards to sexual exploitation. The points the girls identified in this exercise, as well as a photo of the activity on the white board, can be found in the Findings chapter of this study.

I brought in the developed photos from the previous week and we did a practice round of analysis. This trial round enabled the girls to expand their comfort with the Photovoice method. We selected a few photos and examined them using the acronym PHOTO (Pies and Parthasarathy, 2008) with its five questions:

- i. Describe your **p**icture.
- ii. What’s **h**appening in your picture?
- iii. Why did **y**ou take a picture of this?
- iv. What does this picture **t**ell us about life in your community?
- v. How does this picture provide **o**pportunities to improve life in your community?”

Again, in keeping with the principles of feminist and participatory action research, this exercise provided an opportunity for the participants to begin to think critically about the images they had captured and to create linkages with their earlier discussion. I asked the girls questions such as, “What kinds of pictures could show what you have shared, for example, how guys take advantage of girls when they get drunk?” or “How does this image connect to the experiences you have shared about how you are treated as a Native girl?” These questions were intended to draw out the expertise of the participant-researchers in their lives and acknowledge their potential to be agents of change in their community.

In response to some of the participant-researcher’s questions the week before, I brought in another example of a photo research project, *Through the Eyes of Children* (Victoria Homeless Project). The rationale was to support them in their research endeavour by indicating to them that they are not working in isolation, and that they are a part of a bigger research movement in which youth in many communities have become involved in order to highlight the issues as they see them.

### **Week six**

I incorporated an exercise (Appendix M) from the Empowered Voices curriculum (Berg & Owens, 2000) that invited the three participant-researchers who were present to consider various ‘risk’ and ‘protective’ factors in their lives. I included this exercise because I saw it as valuable in providing a framework to prompt the girls to think critically about the various aspects of their lives. This exercise invited the participant-researchers to reflect critically on the various levels at which risk and protective factors interact (individual, peer, family, school, and community) in their lives and how this

relates to sexual exploitation. The participant-researchers identified differences between the aspects of risk where they have choice in their lives (ie. smoking cigarettes) and the levels at which they have none (ie. family violence, poverty). In reviewing a scenario the participant-researchers engaged critically and dialogued about a variety of risk and protective factors beyond the information given in the text and reflected on what each of them would do if they found themselves in the situation of the girl in the scenario.

In preparation for photo-taking we reviewed the ethics and the Image Release for research subjects form (Appendix D) and as a group we brainstormed a script for the participant-researchers should they need to ask people to sign it. At the end of this week's research session each participant-researcher took her camera home along with copies of the Image Release for research subjects form, a script (Appendix N), a chart for tracking the number, date and details of each photo, and the five modified Photovoice questions from Pies and Parthasarathy (2008).

### **Week seven**

We reviewed the elements of Action Research through an interactive exercise (Appendix O). This activity provided the two girls in attendance with an opportunity to make meaningful linkages with the activities they were undertaking. It also provided an opportunity to explore whether the participant-researchers had any interest in continuing on with the project and creating an action. I facilitated this discussion carefully using open questions and repeating that it was their research project and therefore their choice. Mindful of my implicit authority, I did not want them to feel obligated. We brainstormed some possible actions but the girls were uncertain and no conclusion was reached.

We also evaluated how the photo-taking was progressing. This provided the girls an opportunity to identify any barriers or challenges to this aspect of the process and as a result of this conversation I took the girls out twice in the following week to facilitate their photo-taking by providing transportation to locations they identified. With transportation and some moral support both girls acquired several photos and Beth filled her camera completely. Both girls handed back their cameras in time for me to develop them before our next meeting.

### **Photo Analysis**

#### **Week eight**

I presented the developed photos to the two participant-researchers who were present. The girls spent some time looking through the photos to select those most significant to them and that they might want to write about or discuss. I introduced a structured reflective journaling exercise to facilitate reflection and writing and to help the participant-researchers prepare for the following week's photo analysis.

With regard to informed consent, I reminded the participant-researchers that it was their decision whether or not to share what they wrote. I asked the girls whether they wanted to share their journals or parts of things they had written in their journals with me to include in the thesis data and they refused.

In reviewing the photos and the discussion from the week before regarding an action stage of the research, the participant-researchers determined that they would like to make a video montage of their photos set to music with relevant lyrics. The participants chose to do this because they were familiar with the software and it felt manageable to

them. Also, they had a popular song in mind that they were excited about because they thought it fit well with the theme of sexual exploitation.

### **Weeks nine and ten**

The two participant-researchers in attendance chose to provide predominantly verbal rather than written analyses of their photos and we spent two research sessions analysing their selected photos. We allotted some discussion time to review the process and discuss what the girls had found most helpful, what they liked, and what they would change for next time.

### **Weeks eleven and twelve**

The final step in the process consisted of the 'action' phase of the research, determined by the two girls who remained involved. Using Moviemaker, the participant-researchers worked intently to create a video montage, set to music, illustrating the themes of commercial sexual exploitation through their photos and other images. We all collaborated to select the photos they wanted to use and to determine the best order. They selected a popular song which, for them, had a message about the sexual exploitation of women. We then set the photos with time lapses to coordinate with the music and lyrics.

We discussed with whom and how the girls would like to share their montage. They wanted to post it onto Facebook but this would have undermined their anonymous participation. We arranged with a local community development project to post it on their website.

## **Strengths and Limitations of the Research**

### **Strengths**

#### **Direct data from participant-researchers**

One of the strongest points of this methodology is that it allows for the inclusion in the reporting of raw data from the participant-researchers. This research project provided an opportunity for the girls who participated to determine the level of depth at which they wanted to share their knowledge through the inclusion of photos and captions that convey their views. The photos and the participant-researchers' oral or written comments about these allow for their perspectives on the research question to stand alone.

#### **Responsive and adaptable**

Another strength of this methodology is that it was shaped by those who engaged with it. Existing Photovoice research and literature guided the research design however; the participant-researchers shaped how the research unfolded.

The girls were able to take ownership of the process. As the weeks went on the participant-researchers took an increasing lead in identifying key issues they were seeing in their lives that either related to sexual exploitation or made it difficult for them to engage with the research. The girls had no hesitation in letting me know that they would rather discuss than write. They took the initiative in making food requests for the following week and in identifying start and end times to our research sessions. The weekly meetings held value for them because they requested to continue meeting. The participant-researchers also took ownership of the space in which we were meeting. They would help set up and clean up each week without my asking them to do so.

This methodology honoured each individual and was adaptable to any individual needs identified by the participant-researchers. I modified many activities to emphasize oral discussions in order to accommodate the stated preferences of the participant-researchers. Whether this is about Indigenous culture and oral tradition or about popular youth culture is not necessarily evident. Discussion is a valid form of honouring Indigenous ways of being and of sharing Indigenous ways of knowing (Anderson, 2000; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). While I wanted to honour that part of the girls that has roots in oral tradition, I did not want to essentialize the girls and assume it was because they are Indigenous that they made this request. I wanted to complicate and problematize the notion that it is because they are Indigenous that they wanted to talk it out instead of write. They are also teen-aged girls. I would have honoured this request from any participant-researcher regardless of age, gender, and race or ethnicity. Pies and Parthasarathy recognised in their research with community members using Photovoice that “not everyone is comfortable with writing ... there should be ample opportunities to show photos in small groups and simply tell the stories that go with them” (p. 7).

What was important was a methodology that allowed for the preferences of the participant-researchers to dictate the format. The research design was flexible and responsive to participants’ economic and socio-cultural contexts. In many economically disadvantaged Indigenous families and single-parent families, older siblings are often expected to provide extra care to younger siblings. This was the case for Ella one week. She did not want to miss the research session and so had to bring her two year-old brother. We created an area along-side our discussion area in which he could play and that week we worked at a pace that allowed us to accommodate his needs.

### **Engaging and validating**

This methodology allowed for the inclusion of youth-friendly, fun exercises that also helped build relationship. Incorporating activities such as Graffiti Wall (Appendix G) facilitated my ability to assist the girls in articulating the knowledge that they have in a way that is fun and engaging for them. The point of this exercise is to highlight their knowledge in a youth-friendly way and to make it public, if only within a relatively private space. The Graffiti Wall exercise offers a visual and concrete medium for translating what the girls already know. Their knowledge remained visible on this chalkboard wall for the duration of the research project, honouring them and the few others who accessed that space at other times in the week, with their insight about their lives, their communities, and sexual exploitation. The participant-researchers stated that this approach was fun and interesting considering it is research. They expressed appreciation for these opportunities to talk about their lives and their perspectives. The relational dynamics that developed through the research process were comfortable, open, and respectful.

Engaged research with girls provides opportunities for them to build skills, gain a sense of agency, become more involved with their communities, and share their opinions and experiences. As discussed by Anderson (2004) and Hernandez, Almeida, and Dolan DelVecchio (2005), practice with Indigenous children, youth, and families who are survivors of abuse must be linked to the socio-historic context and to the stories of others. “Storytelling can help us transform our individual and collective experiences to create a new world...” (Anderson, 2004, p.126). More research opportunities to engage Indigenous girls in ways that are meaningful to them would be beneficial.

## **Limitations**

### **Level of involvement**

One challenge of this methodology was finding balance between providing structure and leadership, conducting an ethical research project, and giving the participant-researchers freedom to just use the time as they would like – to sit and talk about all aspects of their lives.

Shallwani and Mohammed (2007) modified the “Ladder of Youth Involvement” in order to develop a guideline for community-based researchers to identify different levels of power sharing through the research process. In regards to Shallwani and Mohammed’s (2007) conceptualisation of the “Ladder of Participation” (Appendix P), I would locate us at the level of “consultation” moving towards “deciding together”. The participant-researchers’ level of involvement was not as high as I would have liked. I reflected at length on how to facilitate movement up the ladder and as to why the participant-researchers were not stepping in to take charge or claim more ownership. I suspect that, as Indigenous girls, the participant-researchers have had many experiences of being silenced in the school system and in their families. I wondered if, to some extent, the girls’ personalities and lack of self confidence in using their voices – due to limited opportunities to do so as girls and as Indigenous girls – was a factor.

At times I saw that if I were to sit back and leave the girls to drive the project themselves it would not move forward. I had to pull from diverse resources and be versatile in regards to my responses and expectations for what we would achieve each week. I had to take more of a lead role than I had initially and ideally envisioned. As the weeks progressed, the participant-researchers became more invested in the research and

alternately, of their own initiative, took on the role of redirecting tangential conversation when it had led us too far astray from the tasks at hand.

From my perspective, one limitation of this responsive, flexible, and youth-friendly methodology is that it was difficult to sustain a formal research environment. This is also a strength of the research process in terms of the benefits for participants and one of the reasons it was chosen. It nevertheless presented challenges regarding gathering the necessary data and prolonged the time needed to achieve this. Transitions would sometimes involve a significant amount of negotiation which would take time. The girls were interested and engaged with critical thinking and discussion in regards to sexual exploitation and the various intersecting issues of concern, but less interested in the methodological aspects of the project. One participant-researcher was a lot more invested on average than the others, but even her level of engagement varied depending on what was happening in her life (home, school) that week. At times I had to draw upon my many years of experience in youth work to engage the girls. The research process went more slowly and I did not gather enormous amounts of data but the dialogue was richer and the project of benefit to all.

### **Small sample**

Another limitation of this research study was in the restricted numbers of participant-researchers. The difficulty connecting with and following up with girls who had initially indicated some interest in the project, reflects to some extent a limitation of the methodology, but I think it also reflects a systemic barrier in regards to hearing from marginalised populations. I made many attempts to follow-up with the girls that had been referred. Unfortunately, given that many of these young women are located on the

margins of the mainstream system I experienced many difficulties in trying to reach them due to their irregular school attendance, substance use issues, and in two cases, absence of a telephone. This is representative of the risks and barriers often present for girls at risk of commercial sexual exploitation (Kalergis, 2009). Half of the girls who initially indicated an interest never became involved in the research project. After the initial difficulty in following through with interested girls and the withdrawal of girls who had attended some initial research sessions, it was not difficult to maintain participation. The girls who did engage with the research sustained their participation throughout.

This approach to research, a Photovoice project requesting a commitment of several weeks, may have been a factor in the restricted number of participants (Castleden, Garvin, & Huu-ay-aht, 2008). This research methodology, as compared to, for example, filling out a survey, or a one-time focus group, could feel like too much of a commitment for adolescent girls in this age range, possibly even more so for marginalised girls who are in transition with housing or school or who are struggling with family or substance use issues. Furthermore, with this being a small community, conflicts among or between initially interested participants created another, unanticipated barrier to involvement with the research.

Therefore, another limitation of this study is that it provides only a restricted glimpse into how some Indigenous girls in a rural town perceive sexual exploitation. Participation was limited and several girls' perspectives on sexual exploitation in the Alberni Valley are missing: white girls, girls from the South Asian and other racialized communities, and girls with physical and / or mental challenges. Boys' experiences of sexual exploitation are also absent from this analysis.

### **Lack of confidence with methods**

Castleden, Garvin, and Huu-ay-aht (2008) note that participants may struggle to translate social issues into images. This resonates as one of the challenges that emerged in this study. Both girls said they were excited about the prospect of taking photos and yet, it seems they were both either shy or self-conscious and in the end I took the girls around and helped them capture the scenes and images that had surfaced in our discussions.

The participant-researchers struggled to think of images that would capture the different issues they had identified. This was different from what I had initially envisioned with the girls going out independently and capturing images that reflected their lives or the issues from our discussions, and then I would develop the photos and then we would discuss them – just like in the Photovoice literature. Williams and Lykes (2003) describe their confusion when many of the Mayan women involved in their photovoice project did not take photos. They discovered this happened for a number of reasons for example: they forgot how to work the cameras, they did not have permission from their husbands, or they were afraid of being seen by their neighbours (p.290).

The participant-researchers required a higher level of involvement from me to assist them in getting the images than I had initially anticipated. I theorise possible reasons for the girls' reluctance or hesitation to begin taking photos. I wonder if perhaps it reflects a devaluing of self and thoughts that no one would be interested in seeing their view or that it is uninteresting or unimportant. I wonder if on some level they are afraid to show what they see and know. Or is it that the girls are afraid of being seen bearing

witness to their worlds? The girls expressed uncertainty and nervousness through body language but never directly expressed any issues in regards to the photo-taking.

## **Reflections of the Researcher**

### **Location**

As a white woman conducting this participatory research process with Indigenous girls I was aware of tensions for myself given the socio-historic context of the exploitation of Indigenous knowledge (Kovach, 2005; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999) by anthropologists, scientists, government agents and others. These girls have a lot to say and have the right to have their voices heard and the fact that I am white cannot impede that from happening. As discussed above, I drew on reflexivity throughout the research project. The task for me, as I listened to them in the research sessions and reviewed the tapes of these conversations, was to listen in – teasing apart the layers in their stories – for different possibilities: What could they mean here? What is the bigger picture / context? What am I missing? What am I not understanding? What codes do they have as youth? As girls? As Indigenous girls? How are their experiences similar and or different from mine? From one another? From other girls represented in the literature? Where do my values show up in the conversation? Where do I perform discrimination, as a white, educated, adult woman, researcher, and counsellor with a need to lead the process, and an investment in its successful completion? In reviewing the tapes I catch examples of times where I missed something, misunderstood, or overlooked an opportunity to inquire further. Ultimately I wanted to honour them, their stories, convey respect and encourage them to express their thoughts and reflect on the possibilities that exist for them.

### **Practitioner-researcher**

There are benefits to the practitioner-researcher role. In their study Banister and Daly (2006) noted that the practitioner-researcher “provided access to the culture of the adolescent participants, directed the focus of the group towards productive discussion of health issues, and increased opportunities to offer the participants information” (p. 168).

I do have a history of relationship with these girls as they have attended my agency’s youth drop-in programme of which I am one of two main facilitators, although I was not facilitating the group throughout the research process. The drop-in context is semi-structured with little opportunity to build any depth of relationship with each youth. Many youth come mainly to have a space to socialize with one another in a safe and supported environment. Given my known position as a youth counsellor among service providers, educators, and many youth in the community, I made every effort to make explicit that this research relationship was separate and distinct from my professional role. I included some language in the Participant Consent Form to detail the parameters of the relationship and my role through the research process. I also reminded the girls, when I felt they needed some extra support throughout the time we were meeting, of different support people they could access in the community.

Nevertheless, despite our pre-existing relationship, in the early weeks the girls were hesitant in terms of their interactions with me and with one another. There was uncertainty each week about what was being asked of them. Each girl seemed to open up and take more risks with each conversation.

**Outsider status**

Given that I have worked for many years with Indigenous youth and families I have endeavoured to become an attuned and competent cross-cultural practitioner. I have a high level of sensitivity to my value-based thinking and beliefs and worked to be mindful to minimize bias as much as possible. There were many times I felt my Outsider status acutely. I will share two examples to illustrate this. Once Beth shared that she had had a bad day because the night before her little brother had “hushed” in her bed. Through the rest of her story I was able to conclude that her brother had peed the bed that she shared with him and another brother. I was unfamiliar with this local Nuu-chah-nulth colloquialism. In addition, I struggled with my own thoughts and feelings upon hearing that this fifteen year-old girl shares her bed with her two little brothers. I was challenged to reflect on notions of ‘the right to privacy’ and the popular and normalized Euro-western cultural construction of the ‘specialness’ of a teenaged girl’s bedroom central to a girl’s identity in adolescence.

When she and Ella discuss the use of the pejorative expression “chugs” and what it feels like to be called that by a friend or relative compared to a white person I feel discomfort and pain. For them the term is so normalized in that they have heard it with so much frequency that it probably benefits them to talk about it with humour and to use it amongst their peer groups. However, for myself as a conscious outsider, I feel torn hearing them discuss the use of this harmful and hurtful word among those they care about.

## Summary

The feminist, participatory, action research principles that underpinned this study provided a framework that positioned the girls who became involved in the research as experts with valuable insights into shaping the process. Because the participant-researchers were Indigenous girls, the principles of ethical research with Indigenous people also underpinned this study. Using a modified Photovoice methodology the participant-researchers spent several weeks learning about research and taking photos, discussing commercial sexual exploitation, reflecting on their lives and community, and sharing their knowledge, while also shaping the rhythm and content of each research session. There were rich discussions and opportunities for the participant-researchers to discuss a broad range of issues in their lives as they related to sexual exploitation. There were some challenges in getting the photos. It was not a straight-forward, easy process for the participant-researchers who needed support and encouragement. Photovoice is successful at engaging and giving voice to participant-researchers but could limit who will participate due to the high level of involvement required and the time constraints.

## **Chapter Three: Findings and Discussion**

### **The Girls' Worlds: Sexual Exploitation through the Eyes of**

#### **Indigenous Girls in the Alberni Valley**

##### **Overview**

In this chapter I will present the data that emerged in the research sessions and make the links to existing knowledge where relevant. Throughout the research sessions the participant-researchers shared information about how they view the issue of sexual exploitation and their other experiences as Indigenous girls in their community. Whereas the primary intention of this research study was to explore with the girls the issue of commercial sexual exploitation, the girls used the research sessions to unpack various aspects of their day to day lives. For instance, experiences of racism surfaced in almost every discussion and became a key theme. As well, although my initial thematic focus was the issue of commercial sexual exploitation, in our sessions, the girls discussed sexual exploitation far more broadly.

From the discussions in the research sessions, the photos, and the narratives of the participant-researchers I have grouped the main themes that emerged into four key categories:

- i. All of the participant-researchers had directly experienced and witnessed sexual exploitation.
- ii. The sexual exploitation of Indigenous girls in the Alberni Valley is pervasive and normalised.
- iii. Racialization impacts on life as an Indigenous girl in the Alberni Valley and increases vulnerability to sexual exploitation.

iv. Friendly and accessible supports and resources are key to prevent sexual exploitation but these are inadequate.

I will present each of these themes in turn and discuss how the knowledge and experience of these participant-researchers and their views of the problem of sexual exploitation relate to the existing research and literature on this issue.

Throughout this chapter the direct photo analysis of the photos of the participant-researchers is integrated into my summaries of the themes and the quotes from the research-participants. The images reflect key issues that the girls identified as relating to the discussions around the main issue of the sexual exploitation of girls that we had each week. Each photo is accompanied either by a summary written by the girls or by excerpts from the discussion that reflect their voices and thoughts.

### **Terminology**

As I listened to the participant-researchers each week, I noted that they used a number of terms in very particular ways. Therefore, before I present my findings, I provide a brief overview of the terminology used by the participant-researchers. The participant-researchers used the term “Native” most commonly in talking about themselves, their families, and their peers. They also used “Native” to differentiate between themselves and white people. In an initial relationship building exercise the girls identified their status and membership by sharing their family’s home community and identifying as a member of a specific nation within the Nuuchahnulth First Nations, or as Inuit or Cree. Otherwise, in conversation throughout the research sessions the term “Native” was the term used more naturally. In observing the interactions between the girls and in listening to their stories, it appeared that this umbrella term allowed for

solidarity across different bands, Nations, and geographic locations. Interestingly, with regards to anything school-based, the girls used the term “First Nations” (for example, “First Nations’ Tutorial” or “First Nations’ Counsellors”) as that is the language used at school and attached to specific classes and support programmes. The girls also spoke of pejorative, racialized terms like “chug”. They clearly stated that when white people call them this it is racism and hurts nevertheless, they might hear or use this term themselves within their peer group.

### **The Sexual Exploitation of Indigenous Girls in the Alberni Valley**

The girls defined sexual exploitation broadly to include inappropriate verbal comments, sexual advances when a girl is intoxicated, sexual harassment, and date rape. Their understanding and defining of sexual exploitation is rooted in the multiple experiences that they have either directly experienced or was known to happen to someone close to them (sister, friend, cousin). One of the primary findings of this study is that all of the participant-researchers had experienced some form of sexual exploitation. Throughout this chapter the images and voices of the participant-researchers convey their knowledge of sexual exploitation. The findings of this study which present the accumulated knowledge of participant-researchers are consistent with other studies looking at girls and sexual exploitation. In particular, two of the findings: the participant-researchers had experienced and witnessed a wide range of behaviours and dynamics that they defined as sexual exploitation and the sexual exploitation of Indigenous girls in the Alberni Valley is pervasive and normalised are highlighted through the images and words of the following sections.

The following photo captured the results of an exercise, “Graffiti Wall”, which we did early on in the research process. The comments following this photo reflect Ella’s attempt to articulate their cumulative knowledge.



**Figure 1 Graffiti Wall**

And we wrote about exploitation and some of the things that they say is um, ‘statutory rape’, ‘girls have rights’ ... ‘Lots of guys’ll try to get sex by using bribes.’ ‘Not safe’. ‘Trapped’. ‘Boys get used too.’ ... [We took this photo] Because it says stuff all in colour and ... people [need to] know about it. Because people ... most people ... they don’t really think about this kind of stuff. People don’t learn about these kinds of things ... like people aren’t educated with um, sexual exploitation ... all this information and stuff... what it does to you.

## **Sites of Sexual Exploitation**

The participant-researchers identified three main places where they see sexual exploitation happening: on the street, at parties, and on the internet. They describe the dynamics of sexual exploitation and the types of behaviours they have witnessed or experienced in regards to this.

### **On the street**

In terms of public spaces, there were three central locations identified by the girls as places where they have seen or experienced sexual exploitation. A particular street corner in a specific area of town was identified by the girls and discussed more than once as a place where sexual exploitation happens. As Jen stated,

*“Definitely. You can see it. It’s kinda obvious... Well, when I’m walking ... I see a girl just sitting on a corner and then a car stops and she runs to it. Come on. Obvious!”*

### **At parties**

Parties were the most frequently talked about site of sexual exploitation by the girls involved in this research. Participants identified a strong relationship between alcohol consumption and sexual exploitation. According to the participant-researchers, at parties, guys get alcohol for girls and then expect something back. Often friends of friends, who can be much older, show up at parties and try to “get with” girls who are really drunk... Jen noted that,

*Not so obvious is girls, when they get drunk, guys take advantage of them. And once they get drunk or high they get taken advantage of more and then once they get addicted it just pulls them in more and more and more.*

Ella shared a common scenario that could lead to sexual exploitation:

[If you are] “*drinking with your friends and their friends bring friends and then they may be older and then they like get drunk and then they take advantage of them [girls]*”.

This tail end of Ella’s account reflects many discussions in which the girls talked about how friends of friends show up at parties and take advantage of girls when they are drunk.

The following photo is of a common site where local Native teens “party”.

Beneath the photo, Beth described what this image represents for her.



**Figure 2 Party**

*This picture shows a picnic table in a park where many teens drink, in the morning bottles are left on the tables. In this scenario young girls may party with older friends, or friends of friends may show up and take advantage of a highly intoxicated girl. This poses as a risk for them with*

*things like rape, abduction, s.t.d's are a possibility, pregnancy can occur. When teens party often there is a "boot legger", this person is enabling this risk not just for girls, just teens in general. We can reduce this or stop this by encouraging to not drink and maybe teach a girl to defend herself, take care of herself to go out and trust her to do the right decision. The main message I'd like to send is a girl needs to take care of herself and know the limits.*

The girls often discussed drinking and partying as risk situations for sexual exploitation. Nevertheless, the participant-researchers state that their own guy friends (who according to them are often many years older) would never exploit them and attribute the risk to these out-of-town or older friends of friends who might show up at a party. I found myself wondering, as it came up and later, upon reviewing the transcripts of the research sessions, whether that could possibly be true given what I know about statistics of date rape or acquaintance rape. Are these girls more vulnerable because they believe that? Is their group of friends different?

Participant-researchers described dynamics of hanging out with friends on the weekend and the guys would go and get the 'boot' and then they would meet up again. This automatically sets up a dynamic of risk of commercial sexual exploitation wherein, if the girls want to drink to be part of the group they are dependent on the guys to get them alcohol. These young men could use this power and then demand sexual favours in return. Although the girls grasp the kinds of situations that put girls at risk for sexual exploitation, again, there seemed to be a disconnect between this knowledge and their lives in that the girls continue to put themselves in these situations of risk.

## On the internet

The internet is central in day to day social networking for these girls and was also another identified site of sexual exploitation. The girls shared numerous stories of experiences online where unknown males were sexually inappropriate with them. The girls were able to identify when situations crossed appropriate boundaries, and demonstrated basic knowledge of keeping themselves safe online by using tools such as “blocking” or ignoring.

One experience that all of the participant-researchers had in common was that of being online and agreeing to chat with a male they do not know who then asks them if they will “go on cam” or “cyber”. These terms mean to show one’s body through a webcam and to have simulated or cyber sex. Beth described an online encounter she had with someone that crossed the line into inappropriate behaviour and led her to learn about the term ‘cybering’ where individuals simulate sex through the use of webcams.

*I learnt it from some guy who was like, “Wanna cyber?” ... and I was like, “What’s that?” and he was like, “Uh, don’t joke around.” And then he started going and I was like, “Ew.” And it was gross ... So I blocked him. There’ll be a lot of guys who’ll say, “Got cam?”*

Here is another example of online harassment accompanied by threats that Beth experienced:

*This one guy was like telling me to go on cam and like ... show him stuff. And I was like “Um, no”. And he said, “Ah, if you don’t um, I’m gonna hack into your computer”. And I was like, “No you’re not”. And he kept saying this... “Just go on cam for me.”*

Ella echoed similar online experiences. *“Well, people randomly tag me on MSN. It’s so weird. And whenever I accept them they usually want to go on webcam right away but I don’t do it. It’s so gross and disgusting”.*

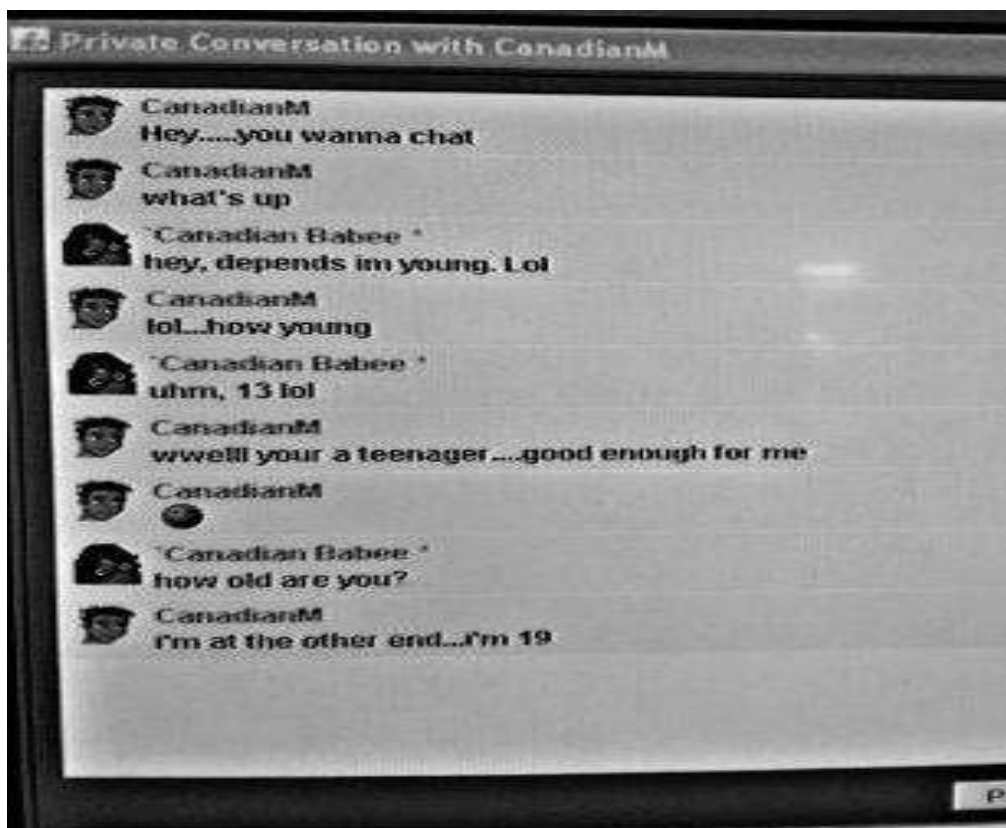
The participant-researchers shared their awareness of the vulnerability of younger girls online. Here Ella shares her concern for her younger sister in regards to online predators. She is aware that older men pose as younger kids to lure girls online: *“Club Penguin there’s dirty old guys who went on it. Yeah, my sister’s like twelve and she’ll believe anything. Like if they say it’s a girl and she’s thirteen she’ll be like, “o.k.””*. Beth shared an example of a time she was online with her niece, who is younger than her and was thirteen at the time, who was ‘chatting’ with a man in his late twenties.

*And uh, I don’t know, all of a sudden he’s like lowering the cam on his like penis and then she’s like “Ew!” she covers it. And I was just like, “Ew! Remove him or whatever.” And she was like, “No.” She like, I don’t know... she was looking at the camera and whatnot and she was just like giggling and stuff.*

Beth proposed an experiment in order to get a screen shot that she could not get at home. Beth wanted to log in to a chat site that she frequents to illustrate how older guys are sexually inappropriate and approach girls, even in the ‘teen chat’ room. Beth had already attempted this at home but her screen shots did not turn out. I expressed my hesitation about undertaking this kind of experiment and briefly reviewed various factors of online safety with the girls. The girls expressed their intention to try this again later at home and at that point I decided that I could better protect their safety if I was involved and monitored their interactions. This way it would be a computer from my office if

anyone tried to capture the IP address. We had a brief discussion to establish some terms with which I felt comfortable. These included an agreement to use a pseudonym, to not divulge any personal details, and to keep the exchange brief. I was able to observe their vulnerability vis-à-vis these online interactions. Even though we were doing an experiment and the girls were aware of risks and safety issues involved in internet use and noted that older guys who want to chat with younger girls is “gross and creepy” the girls, themselves only fifteen, do not identify or consider themselves at risk of such duping by online predators in the same way that they identify the risk for younger siblings and cousins. At the same time I observed the girls’ natural inclination to want to respond and engage when someone starts asking questions. Ella became all flustered and would ask, “What should I say?” I reminded her not to share any information that would identify where she lives or who she is. For ‘ASL’ (age, sex, location) we put thirteen and restricted location details to B.C., Canada. We had a made up username and we ended each interaction as soon as we ascertained that the men were willing to chat with a thirteen year-old girl.

The participant-researchers collaborated through the exercise described above for the image of this screen shot below that would capture and reflect some of these internet experiences.



**Figure 3 Online exploitation**

Here Ella described the significance of this image from her perspective:

*O.k. it's a picture about how like ... dirty old men... want to chat. O.k. well we were on the internet and we became this 'Canadian Babe' and we were chatting and we chatted to all these people... These random guys and they were being all pervs and we would tell them our age and they would be all that's fine. We can prove that there is people out there on the internet that wanna cam and do stuff with little girls and that are perverts...*

Beth described the potential risk for girls who are not careful online and how web cams in particular can be tools of exploitation.

*Girls shouldn't trust ...because when you go on web cam they can record it. When you're on a web cam you don't know what they're doing on the other side and if you send them a picture you don't know what they can do with the picture once it's theirs.*

The following photo and comment depict Beth's awareness of the potential for risk and longer term consequences for girls who are tricked, manipulated, or flattered into sending naked or sexually provocative images of themselves via the internet.



**Figure 4 The Internet**

*[If you post something on the] Internet ... it's there forever... and if you put in somebody's name there'll be photos and it could give a bad impression. So if you post a photo of yourself having fun drinking and doing some ah sexual thing on cam it's gonna be there forever.*

What emerged in this study of the participant-researchers' knowledge of the sites of sexual exploitation is consistent with other research (Kingsley & Mark, 2000; UNYA, 2002; PAWRS, 2005; Sethi, 2007). Sethi (2007) identifies the primary "recruitment sites" identified in her study: "boyfriends, internet, schools, bars, and hitchhiking" (p. 60). It is noteworthy that the participant-researchers in this study identified each of those as sites where either they themselves or friends have experienced sexual exploitation. One area that differs is that the girls also identified 'parties' as a significant site of sexual exploitation.

### **The Sexual Exploitation of Girls**

Here I show how current literature on the sexual exploitation of girls relates to the points raised by the participant-researchers of this study. The girls chose to define the issues we were discussing as sexual exploitation and did not restrict themselves to the specific problem of commercial sexual exploitation. As stated above, all of the girls had directly experienced and witnessed sexual exploitation in some form. Through their photos and stories, they defined sexual exploitation to include a range of behaviours and dynamics including inappropriate verbal comments, attempted sexual touching, and date rape. Through their stories, photos, and reflections about various aspects of their lives and their experiences in the community the pervasive and normalised nature of the sexual exploitation of Indigenous girls became evident.

What does the literature tell us about the sexual exploitation of girls in Canada? Sexual exploitation in its broadest sense is a pervasive issue that affects the health and safety of girls and women (Randall & Haskell, 1995). The following statistics illustrate the extent of the sexual exploitation of girls in Canada.

- Approximately one in four girls will be sexually abused before the age of sixteen<sup>5</sup>.
- Young women aged sixteen to twenty-five are most at risk of alcohol-facilitated sexual assault (Randall & Haskell, 1995). Teen girls, like adult women, are most at risk of sexual assault by someone they know and likely trust (Randall & Haskell, 1995).
- In 2002, girls represented 79% of the victims of family-related sexual assaults reported to a large subset of Canadian police departments. Rates of sexual offences are highest against girls between the ages of 11 and 14, with the highest rate at age 13. (Aleem, 2009).

MacInnes (1998) reports that “the average age of females entering prostitution in North America is thirteen and a half years old” (p. 113). Other studies situate the average age of recruitment between twelve and fourteen years of age, and all note that for Indigenous girls the average age is approximately two years younger than for non-Indigenous girls (Kingsley & Mark, 2000; Sethi, 2007; UNYA, 2000). More critical research with Indigenous girls is needed to supplement existing literature on girls’ development in order to determine what makes girls more vulnerable at this age.

### **The Sexual Exploitation of Indigenous Girls**

When it comes to the rates of sexual assault and violence against Indigenous girls and women in Canada, they are disproportionately high compared to incidences against non-Indigenous girls and women (Aleem, 2009; Downe, 2005; Sethi, 2009). The following statistics illustrate the extent of this over-representation:

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<sup>5</sup> Retrieved from: [http://www.womanabuseprevention.com/html/sexual\\_assault.html](http://www.womanabuseprevention.com/html/sexual_assault.html)

- Up to 75% of victims of sex crimes in Aboriginal communities are female and under 18 years of age. 50% of those are under 14, and almost 25% of those are younger than 7 years of age (Aleem, 2009, p.5).
- According to a 1999 survey, teenage girls were more likely to report being sexually assaulted than women in any other age category (Aleem, 2009, p. 5).
- Seventy-five percent of Aboriginal girls under the age of eighteen have been sexually abused (Lane, Bopp, and Bopp (2003) in Downe, 2005, p. 8).
- Seventy-five percent of Aboriginal victims of sex crimes are girls under eighteen, fifty percent are under fourteen, and seven percent are under seven (Hylton (2001) in Downe, p. 8).

These numbers, which of course are representative only of reported incidents, suggest that the sexual exploitation of Indigenous girls occurs at a rate at least three times as high as for non-Indigenous girls in Canada.

Sikka (2009) summarizes several factors that lead to the over-representation of Indigenous girls in the sex trade. These include “poverty, physical and sexual abuse, homelessness, over-representation in the judicial system, racism, and low self esteem” (p.10-11). I will further discuss these various intersections with the sexual exploitation of Indigenous girls in Chapter Four: Analysis.

### **Sexual Exploitation and the Age of Consent**

Given that the initial research topic was commercial sexual exploitation, we had more than one discussion about the legal age of consent. The participant-researchers shared their opinions, not always consistent on this issue. One week the girls raised this discussion themselves as someone had had a similar discussion in class that day. “*Do you*

*know the sexual consent age? We had a debate in class today.*” Most of the participant-researchers stated that they thought the legal age of consent was a good thing. The participant-researchers expressed their belief that when guys are significantly older than the girl, they are only after one thing (sex) and are going after younger girls because they cannot “get with” anyone their own age. *“Older guys date younger girls because no one else will date them and they’re immature”*. Since moving to the Alberni Valley about a year ago, Ella, aged fifteen, has had boyfriends who have ranged in age from nineteen to twenty-three. She did not think it was sexual exploitation that last year, at fourteen, her boyfriend was a man in his twenties. She shared her opinion that, despite her friends’ assertions that older guys only “want to get with” younger girls because they cannot get someone their own age, age alone should not be a factor in determining what is a legal relationship. *“I think it’s not fair that they should get punished for loving somebody. But, if they did something wrong then that’s when the girl should charge him”*.

All of the girls expressed some contradiction in their thinking about the legal age of consent at some point in the research sessions – for example, verbally agreeing with it but then later talking about ongoing flirting with a nineteen year-old boy.

### **What Puts Girls at Risk of Sexual Exploitation?**

In the discussions about sexual exploitation as well as in response to an activity during week five meant to elicit reflection regarding risk and protective factors, the participant-researchers identified a number of factors that relate to the risk of sexual exploitation and their lives in general.

### Socially-sanctioned commercial sexual exploitation

This photo reflects Beth's attempt to articulate the relationship described by the participant-researchers between alcohol and sexual exploitation.



**Figure 5** The 'strip club'

*Jaguars - um, there's this ahhh it's like a strip club and there's a liquor store sign like right above it and it's got lights too... And the Jaguars sign that says 'Girls Girls' ... Like the Liquor Store and the strip club... It's gross and disgusting because girls are just getting shown to guys.*

The girls talked about the local strip club, featured prominently in the uptown landscape, and discussed how they see the employed position of “stripper” as another form of sexual exploitation. Ella expressed that she sees a link between this site and the prevalence of the sexual exploitation of girls:

*The Liquor Store and the 'Girls, Girls' [sign] thing is like [influences] some teens girls, like girls will go to a party and then there's like friends of friends, right? And then they could get talking up with a girl while she's like really, really drunk and then he could take her somewhere.*

Beth attempted to articulate an understanding of the broader systemic nature of the sexual exploitation of women:

*Like the girls like get drunk sometimes I guess and they're in the strip club and they're like exposing themselves and like they're into ... the guys needs. It just kind of seems weird because woman have been known to always be like, um "not as big as men" and they're just "at the men's feet" and they're doing it to their [men's] need ... Basically, well, I guess some of them just go in there for money".*

Her two comments "women not as big as men" and "at men's feet" describe the inferior positioning of women which she has seen growing up as a girl.

### **Alcohol and Addiction**

Alcohol was identified by all participant-researchers as a major risk factor in their lives. All the girls who were involved with the research identified alcohol as something that puts girls at risk.

*"Girls get drunk and guys take advantage of them."*

*"When you [girl] get under the influence they'll expect something from you".*

All of the participant-researchers made comments similar to these at some point throughout the research sessions and the interview.

Addiction was identified by the participant-researchers as another element that contributes to girls' vulnerability to sexual exploitation.

Jen spoke of her sister's history of sexual abuse and ensuing addiction as having led to her sexual exploitation: *"All this is very hard for her because she got sexually abused when she was younger so she turns to alcohol and drugs and then that starts the other part of it [commercial sexual exploitation]. It's a circle."* She elaborated on how she saw addiction and men selling drugs as being responsible for her sister getting lured into commercial sexual exploitation. She shared many stories of men that had exploited her sister. Here she described the relationship between addiction and exploitation:

*And there was a guy who supported her drug habit as long as she stayed with him. That was kind of a bad thing. He gave my sister drugs for free like here, just try it. She got addicted to that for a long time and she had to pay for it somehow and sex was the only way.*

### **Substance Use and Lack of Safety at Home**

All of the participant researchers also spoke of adults drinking at home on a regular basis and of the impact of alcohol consumption at home. It often means there is no money for other things like food, fees for school trips, and extra-curricular activities. They identified that it sometimes leads to fighting among adults, or in the case of one participant-researcher, between herself and her mother, and often it results in a lack of supervision or guidance. For example, Ella told the group that, *"I was trying to wake up my sister to tell her to go to school. I told her I would tell mom if she didn't get up. She said, 'Mom was out drinking last night she won't care!'"*

Beth has a brother of legal drinking age who still lives at home. She described her house as a party house for him and his friends even on school nights. She shared various stories about responding to sexually inappropriate behaviour from her brother's drunk and stoned friends and even uncles because her parents are either out drinking or home but drunk.

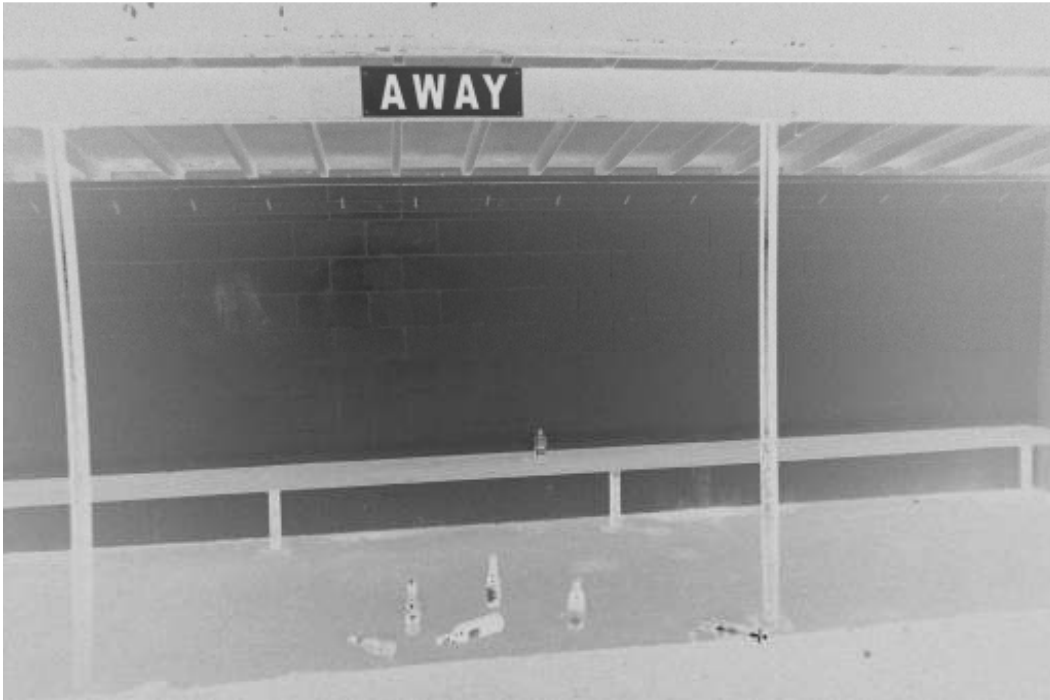
*My brother's friend - he's like nineteen or something... It's so weird... He came into the bathroom and like I was in there. I felt like I had to get out of there fast. When he was telling me to close the door I was like... "this is going to be... not - good". I like ran downstairs when he did that... I don't think he remembers ...*

### **Teen drinking**

While talking about the prevalence of alcohol use in their life worlds, Beth and Ella more specifically identified “*teen drinking*” as a major risk factor, both generally for youth and with regards to the sexual exploitation of girls. Both girls spoke of other girls who had introduced them to drinking. Ella spoke about it in the context of sharing why she does not think that a particular agency is a safe or positive space for youth, “*cause they [friends] brought me there and they started me to drink and stuff*”. The other “stuff” she is referring to here is marijuana which she assured me (without my asking) she tried but does not use. She sees “*The Centre*” (as it is referred to by the girls) as a place where there is too much bad influence. Others in the group concurred that they would not go there to hang out and one noted that, “*There's too much bullying and fighting and drinking around there... smoking pot and selling drugs there...*”. The participant-researchers also spoke about their own struggles with drinking. According to them,

having parents at home who drink and allow it makes it difficult to stop. Ella acknowledged that she knew there were times when she had made “bad choices” because of drinking.

Beth selected the following image to represent some aspects of the problem of teen drinking that had been discussed.



**Figure 6** The dugout

*Um, [this is a picture of] the dugout and the baseball field or whatever. And the ‘Away’ sign. There’s bottles and stuff ... It’s where people go to drink... girls get drunk... could get raped or ... Friends of friends end up at parties with younger girls... older guys end up being there that the girls don’t know... The ‘Away’ sign it’s just like a symbol because with drinking ... sometimes people like drink to like numb the pain or like numb something, like feelings because some people drink to try to make the pain go away.*

Although not explicitly stated by the participant-researchers, this issue of drinking to “ease the pain” identifies another risk factor for girls who were previously sexually abused or who may be experiencing violence at home. If drinking to escape pain is a normalised response for dealing with past or ongoing trauma it further illustrates the relationship between drinking and sexual exploitation.

### **Bootlegging**

The girls spoke more than once of how easy it is for youth to access alcohol: *“Like people that get older people to get alcohol... bootleggers. It’s really easy!”* One participant described how the “bootlegging dynamic” sets girls up to be sexually exploited. Typically, hanging out with friends on the weekend the guys would go to get their “boot” [illegal alcohol sales] and then they would meet up with the girls again. *“When you get under the influence they’ll expect something from you.”* The power imbalance in such a dynamic places girls who want to drink with their peers at further risk of sexual exploitation.

### **Hitchhiking**

Hitchhiking was identified by the participant-researchers as a potentially dangerous activity. The participant-researchers discussed various friends they had known who had accepted rides from men (usually coming back from visiting family on the West Coast). One participant- researcher commented, *“my dad told me never to hitch hike cause this guy, he’s old he goes to Tofino way and to Nanaimo. He’s always out really early in the morning picking up hitch hikers.”*

The girls stated that often the men had offered to buy alcohol and that something had happened that led their friends to then feel uncomfortable. They even spoke of a friend they believe was sexually assaulted once when hitch hiking.

*They were hitchhiking from Tofino to Port to come see everybody. And then Paula comes to my door really, really drunk and saying, "Yeah, this guy's buying me booze. He picked us up on the highway and he just bought me booze and I'm really scared of him too. And I'm just gonna stay here". And then she left her best friend out in the vehicle with him. And she was like really, really, really drunk, like she probably won't even remember. And this guy, he starts knocking on my door and I'm home alone and Paula is upstairs but she's really drunk and saying, "Don't answer it, don't answer it." And I'm like, "I'm scared, where did you get this guy?" And he had a big van, blue one. And she's like, "Andrea's in there and I'm just gonna leave her there". And like, I wouldn't leave any of my best friends there. That guy was knocking on my door and yelling and then he went away for at least like maybe 10, 20 minutes. And then we're like, "O.k. He's gone finally. I wonder where she brang him?" And then I guess, after 10, 20 minutes he dropped her off and then Andrea is on my lawn naked".*

All of the girls concurred that this was a very upsetting event and they all said they would never hitchhike because they know of too many bad things that have happened to friends.

### **Walking alone or at night**

The girls spoke more than once about not feeling safe walking at night. All of the girls discussed having been approached or followed by men, usually in a vehicle. The girls identified this as another risk factor early on in the research sessions. Ella commented on how she feels when walking at night or alone: *“bad stuff... Like I think I think of the negative before the positive like when I’m walking by myself when I’m drunk or when I’m by myself when its dark”*.

Sonia shared a story of a time her and a friend were walking at night:

*When me and A [another friend] were being followed by this guy we ran to a house and they wouldn’t open up... The porch lights were on and everything but they didn’t open up... After we hid in this yard.*

She added that when her friend got to their friend’s house they told her mom about this and they phoned the police.

Beth shared a story of walking alone when she was in grade seven and being approached by a man in a car.

*This guy he like, pulled over and asked if I wanted a ride. I didn’t do anything. I was kinda scared but I didn’t want to say anything. He’s like, “Do you want a ride? I’m going down to the bowling alley and whatnot...” and I was like, “Uh, no”. And then, I don’t know, they [the police] found him and he said he was trying to be a nice person and whatnot and said he’s sorry he scared me.*

She added that she did not know whether she believed that was true.

Near the end of the research project, Beth was approached by an older white man and asked “Are you working?” while waiting alone on a busy street outside of the drop-in space she attends after school one day a week. She was confused at first but then understood. She laughed with discomfort and embarrassment in telling the story. This occurred in front of a place she had identified as a safe space in the community.

### **Lack of adult guidance or support**

Amidst our discussions of risk and protective factors and the “My Community” activity the girls shared that they see not having adults around or having adults there who are not sober or not pushing them to go to school as something that can put youth at risk for sexual exploitation. These girls expect more guidance and support from the adults in their lives than what they typically receive. Ella, who shared her struggle with drinking, also stated that she has not had much guidance with regard to going to school. She recounted that her mom had told her it was her choice whether or not she gets up and goes to school. She also recounted an exchange with a “*half-Native*” teacher who let her and another First Nations friend off the hook for skipping class: “*And then she [the teacher] said to us, ‘It’s o.k. for you guys occasionally but for them it’s not... Since you guys are different and separated in ways’*”. Ella expressed strongly her belief that it was wrong for an adult to give this preferential treatment. She stated that she also felt she was being told that she was not good enough to be held up to the same standard as the white kids. “*At my old school there was no separation of whites and Natives. There were only like three of us Natives and all my friends were white.*” This experience had a significant impact on her. Over the next few weeks, I saw that it bothered her so much that she never returned to that class.

With regards to the internet, one participant-researcher identified that if adults do not set limits for kids and are not watching them or making rules for when they go online, then kids could be more at risk. She spoke of having rules for using the internet at home and how her parents positioned the computer in their bedroom in order to be able to supervise her when she's online.

Not having anyone to talk to or knowing who to go to if a girl has a problem is another factor the participant-researchers identified that can put a girl more at risk for being sexually exploited. Without positive role models or support people a girl is at greater risk for sexual exploitation.



**Figure 7** Who you gonna call?

*Teenagers don't feel they can talk to somebody if they're going through something ... sometimes you might talk to somebody – like a friend and then they might go and tell other people so then it makes it harder... being able to call and talk to a stranger that doesn't know you is easier. I*

*think it's good that they have those [crisis lines]... cause what if... like my sister she doesn't like talking to us. And she needs to talk to somebody and she might be willing to call them. She can phone and they don't have to give out their name or anything. I think it's pretty cool.*

## **Poverty**

Beth identified poverty as another element that could put a girl at risk of sexual exploitation is poverty: “...if there was drinking [in a family or at home] they would kind of lose money and then they would have to make money. Sometimes you have to resort to prostitution or something like that...”. She sees a dynamic wherein if a girl’s family had no money she might feel obligated to trade sex for money or her family might push her into it to get money.

Living in poverty was a common factor among the participant-researchers. In Beth’s family income is seasonal (her father is a fisherman) or for the others, government subsidised. Ella revealed her perception that living in poverty is the norm among her peers. In response to Beth’s comment, “Someone said my family’s on welfare and we’re not.” She replied, “Well, I am. You have to admit that most Natives are.”

Beth described a world of chaos at home. Although she never spoke badly about her mother or father, other than to share a couple of times that she wished she had a different last name because of her dad’s reputation as a drinker, she frequently spoke of lack of money for things like the rent and food, sharing a bed with her two little brothers (five and six) and being constantly picked on by her oldest brother. She spoke about negative or risk experiences she has had with extended family as well, for example when her family lived for a time with her aunt:

*My auntie used to drink. She used to get drunk for days and days. She'd always have me like go to the um, liquor thing and put in her card and her PIN number and stuff... that was... It was weird but she was drunk and I didn't want to get her angry so I did it. We lived with her for half a year. ... I feel like she saw it as an advantage for her to just to get drunk. But, she's sober now. She goes to counselling and that's how she found out why she was drinking – because of residential school.*

Ella shared that her house is often a temporary “shelter” for her friends but these stays always broke down quickly because of the fighting between her and her mother.

### **High school**

The high school was identified as a site of potential risk. Participant-researchers spoke about how different it is in transitioning from middle school to secondary school. The girls spoke of things that influence other kids in a negative way and could put girls more at risk of sexual exploitation.

*“I think it's... Like at ADSS they see other kids I guess and they want to try it. And they get into it like, they start smoking”.*

*“Yeah, like today there's this one guy. He like came up to me and asked me if I wanted to buy ecstasy.”*

This echoed many similar comments I have heard over almost a decade of practice in this community. Not only youth, students of that high school, have made such comments. Through my professional work in the community, I have heard not only from youth but also from various adults connected to the high school who are trying to mobilize in regards to issues that they see as related to sexual exploitation. The principal

and the head of the Parent Advisory Committee, among others, have identified things like bootleggers and drug dealers with mattresses in their backyards just down the street from the high school, older boys (young men) loitering outside the high school at lunch and after school, and a sense that the grade nine girls in particular are targeted. The particular vulnerability of grade nine girls was also noted in the Community Needs Assessment which examined the problem of commercial sexual exploitation in the Alberni Valley (PAWRS, 2005).

Young teenaged girls are vulnerable because they have not been effectively protected by the state from sexual exploitation. Until May 2008, the age of consent in Canada had been fourteen years old for more than one hundred years. This permitted adult men to prey upon fourteen year old girls without concern of criminal reprimand (Aebi, 2001). Even with the implementation of section 212(4) of the Criminal Code in 1988, which criminalized the sexual procurement of youth, police and the courts were still disinclined to intervene without the cooperation of the victim (Bittle, 2006).

The risks for sexual exploitation from the perspective of the participant-researchers were clearly communicated through the many photos and narratives they shared. Alcohol consumption and addiction in the family, lack of adult guidance and support, hitchhiking, walking alone, and poverty were all identified by the girls as elements that potentially intersect with sexual exploitation.

### **Racialization and Sexual Exploitation**

The third significant finding of the study is that racialization significantly impacts the life of Indigenous girls in the Alberni Valley and increases their vulnerability to sexual exploitation. This emerged as, throughout the research sessions, the girls

recounted their experiences as Native girls. Racism is a strong force that permeates the multiple sites of their daily lives. In the Alberni Valley systemic discrimination against Indigenous people continues to be an issue that manifests in various ways – segregated learning environments, limited opportunities, discrimination and harassment by community members, and police harassment are some of the ones identified by the girls in the research sessions. It was evident through the extent and frequency of the stories the participant-researchers shared that racism and experiences of being racialized manifests in their lives in ways that causes them to question themselves and to feel badly about themselves. Their experiences as racialized and marginalised girls create additional risk and potential vulnerability to sexual exploitation. As a societally-entrenched system of discrimination, racism has such a significant impact that I have chosen to present it in its own section.

### **In the Media**

Early on in the research sessions the girls discussed the stereotypical representations of “Indians” in old movies and the lack of representation of Indigenous people on television today. The girls spoke of the stereotypes in old movies which represented all Indigenous people as the same and typically positioned them as the “bad guys”. As exemplified here by Beth:

*Do you know the Indians in movies like Indians and cowboys they're on horses and stuff were all based on the Plains people? I find that interesting.”*

*“Yeah, but not all of it,”* responded Ella who is of Plains Cree origin.

*“Not all of it... it’s not like they did everything the Plains people did... The people - the Native people - from the old videos they weren’t really Native. It was Mexicans and people like that because they would try to get Indians to play but they were saying why would they play like the Indians... [they] were being portrayed as the ‘bad’ guys or whatever...”*

This led to a shift in the direction of the conversation to current media.

*“You hardly see natives on T.V. Except Adam Beach.”*

The girls also identified that there are no Native women on television or in the movies with the exception of the Aboriginal Peoples’ Television Network (APTN). The girls said that they think APTN is good but that *“there should not just be Natives on one channel”*. The participant-researchers disclosed that they cannot view this channel as their families cannot afford cable.

This invisibility of self in the media, in public constructions of ‘normal’ can have a devastating impact on Indigenous girls developing selves. There is an erasure of self that occurs when one cannot find oneself or one’s existence validated in public constructions. As stated in Kivel (1999) “whiteness is constructed as the norm against which nondominant groups are defined as “other” (p. 350). This leaves minority girls to “craft identities according to acceptable and unacceptable measures of ‘difference’” (de Finney, 2007, p. 2). The girls themselves noted that the paucity of Indigenous women in the media leaves them without any role models with whom they can identify.

## At School

The girls frequently spoke of racism at school and in the classroom recounting experiences with other students as well as with various teachers. Beth recounted an experience she had had in the hallway at school:

*I've dealt with racism but ... I like diversity ... Some people don't... like me and my friends were walking to class and we were telling, like just jokingly, these white people to like get to class and they were calling us chugs and [saying] that we don't have a future and we got mad.*

Ella is a relative newcomer to the Alberni Valley having moved here from Alberta in the fall of 2007. She described her perception of racial dynamics upon her arrival in Port Alberni and her experience at the local high school:

*“When I first went to school last year there were so many Indians, man. Like I didn't even talk to Indians and I was scared of them.”*

She described how at her Catholic school in Alberta she was one of only a few natives and everyone hung out together, regardless of ethnicity. Ella shared that she had noticed when she arrived in Port Alberni that the white kids all hung out together and the Native kids all hung out together in segregated social groups. She realised that she had to pick one or the other, white kids or Native kids. Ultimately, she felt like she had to go with the Native kids basically because of her skin colour.

The girls also spoke about their experiences of racism in the classroom and feeling more comfortable when in a classroom setting with Indigenous peers. There are some classes that have a specific First Nations stream and the girls discussed the pros and cons of this, as well as the desire for the option of more First Nations only classes.

Specifically, here the girls identify how First Nations only classrooms feel safer and more comfortable. Beth commented, *“I think they should get more First Nations classes for like Math and Science. Because I think people would go to class more. And then if you’re the only Native person in your class it’s like really weird”*. Ella added, *“Yeah, sometimes white people are like really racist to you and they kind of exclude the Natives”*

The following discussion in a later session contradicts the above statements to some extent, illustrating that participant-researchers struggle between feeling safe in the specific First Nations classes and a perception that it is wrong for the First Nations students to be segregated in most of the portables:

*Yeah, it’s like, it’s kind of harsh being in the First Nations class. The FNT [First Nations Tutorial] room is kind of like where I was... and then Socials, Ms. T’s social studies First Nations class is like that and then the alternate class...*

Ella rejoined, *“they’re all like portables and most of them are – well not most of them ... they’re [all] Native [students].”*

The girls also discussed the less than ideal situation of being either the only or one of a few “native” students in a mainstream class. Ella recounted that she had walked in late to class the previous day because she had been out on a field trip with another class. As her and the friend she walked in with (the only two Indigenous girls in the class) went to sit down *“some white girl said, out loud, “Oh yeah! Typical.”*

To return to a story referenced earlier in the section on lack of adult guidance, Ella also shared a story about an incident at school where her and a friend skipped. She was indignant at this special privilege she was offered:

*Instead of going to class, we went to go have lunch. And then we like told her [the teacher] that we went to go have lunch. And she's like, she's like... and she closes the door so her classroom doesn't hear her, because it was all white people I guess, and then she's like, "If two of those girls came up to me and told me what you just told me I would have gave them [detention] ...It's o.k. for you guys occasionally but for them it's not." And she said, "Do you know why we're doing this?" And then all I said was, "Because we're brown!"*

In this excerpt above her construction of this dynamic as one of racial discrimination is evident. She did not feel that this teacher was trying to be an ally. She felt degraded and she chose not to return to that class.

While recounting the incident that had taken place at school that day she repeated a few times that that particular teacher was “*half-Native*” to which both she and the other participant-researcher said more than once, “*but she looks white*”, indicating their positioning of her as among the privileged white faces. This example demonstrates that although they cannot explicitly name privilege they have awareness of how this teacher’s skin colour has made her life different from their own and makes her unable to understand their experiences as “brown girls”. These girls have developed awareness that whiteness carries privilege, eases experience, and creates different sets of standards for them among their white ‘peers’.

In another conversation the girls identified the difficulty inherent in both of the options: all Native or fully integrated classes. In this exchange Beth begins, “I have no friends in Math.” Ella responded, *“I hate that – I want them to get like a Native Science and a Native Math [Beth, in background chants, “Native Science, Native Math.”] and then I think it would be good!”* Beth then stated, *“Um, but like what if they just like put all the Natives together in class and it wasn’t their choice. That’d be harsh! That’d be all segregation”*.

At different times the girls also spoke of incidences of racism by teachers. For example Ella shared, *“Mr. \_ [teacher] is racist ... won’t call on me even if I have my hand up.”* Overall, the comments about experiences of racialization by their teachers and their peers negatively impacted on their comfort level at school and contributed to their inclination not to attend.

### **On the Street**

Racialization intersects with being a girl to create even more risk by marking them as physically “other”. As discussed in the previous section, all of the girls reported having been followed or approached at least once by unknown men. As well as feeling vulnerable because of their gender, these girls reported that their race has often made their friends (male and female) targets of random violence.

The girls described a few incidents of random violence perpetrated on native youth by older, adult, white men. One story the participant-researchers shared was of a friend who had been randomly physically assaulted by “two white guys” when she was walking down the street. The girls reported that it was because she was native. This participant-researcher feels it has affected her, *“Like I think I think of the negative before*

*the positive like when I'm walking by myself when I'm drunk or when I'm by myself when it's dark."*

Ella shared a story about an incident in which she and some friends were walking home from the Fall Fair and a group of white guys approached them as they were cutting through a sports field and started picking a fight. This group of young men began physically assaulting one of the boys.

*"He was getting beat up by like a bunch of white boys and then he like was carrying a bat then after that... We were walking and these guys were like following us and they circled the block and they were screaming and yelling at us."*

Three of the participant-researchers were friends with the same girl who had been randomly physically assaulted by older white guys on the street a few months prior. The girls all stated that now they are more fearful when walking around because they are brown.

### **By the Police**

The girls also shared experiences of racial profiling by the police. They expressed that the police treat them differently because they are "*Native*". According to the participant-researchers the Native kids drink in the woods in town while the white kids go out to the edge of town and drink at pit parties and, from the girls' perspectives, because of this the police bother the Native kids more because they are in town. Beth, who does not drink, recounted a time that she was out with some friends who were drinking: "*The police were like coming so we hid in the bush and it was kind of scary because I was*

*worried that I might get like, ah pounded and whatnot and my mom would think that I was drinking.”*

The girls told how the police will come into the woods with dogs and chase them if they are drinking. Sonia, obviously upset, stated, *“like the dogs when they let them off...we have friends that got like scarred.”* Sonia is advancing the concern that the liberal use of police dogs has resulted in physical scars for some of her friends.

### **Online**

The girls shared many examples of experiencing racism in online social networking forums. Beth described how sometimes she will be chatting online in the virtual world she frequents (Habbo) and someone will make a derogatory comment about “Natives” or someone of another race. She said she feels offended when that happens and that sometimes she will just log off, while other times she will respond and say, *“Well, actually, I’m Native”*.

She shared another story about how mad she felt when a boy from her school was recounting on Facebook or Bebo the details of a fight that had happened at school and wrote pejoratively about the “Native” kid who had been involved.

These many examples illustrate how the girls confront different iterations of racism and associated discrimination and violence in their daily lives.

### **Racism and Sexual Exploitation**

The participant-researchers indicated their awareness of the intersection of racism with the problem of commercial sexual exploitation. Ella, Beth, and Sonia all spoke of friends who had been harassed by older, white men. Beth recounted an incident in her class that had left her feeling frustrated:

*Like, this kid in my class said he saw a girl, a **Native** [emphasis hers] girl, on the street he said, he just like totally said “**Native** girl” and he said that she was like um, on the corner and prostituting I guess. Like why’d he have to say “Native”?*

She spoke of this again in another research session. *“It just felt weird when he said that it was like a ‘native girl’ ... just like mainly saying that only natives do that”*. Here again Beth identified her awareness of the racialized constructions of Indigenous people by whites.

Beth recounted another story of how she had been approached and asked, *“Are you working?”* by an *“old, white guy”* while waiting for the youth drop-in (a safe space) she attends regularly to open after school one afternoon.

Racialization and the girls’ identities as young “Native” women shape their experiences at school and in the community. This is consistent with existing research on Indigenous women’s health and violence in Canada. Historically, in Canada, following early first contact, European men who moved to Canada to profit from the exploitation of natural resources such as fur would often buy or take a woman from an Indigenous community. As discussed by Anderson (2000) Native women have long been seen by the colonial man as tied to the land and thus, as another conquest to be won. This marked the beginning of the sexual exploitation of Indigenous women and girls in Canada which continues today.

Although Indigenous women have mobilized and gained rights over the past two hundred years they are too often still degraded and treated as property. In fact Lynn (2005) states that Canadian Indigenous women “form part of a highly organized sex

economy that exploits millions of indigenous women globally” (Lynn, 2005). Discourses of Native womanhood which constructed Native women as dirty, lazy, and sexually deviant (Downe, 2005; Maracle, 1996; Razack, 1998; Razack, 2000) continue to be a part of the dominant cultural narratives that perpetuate the sense of entitlement of white men to enact the colonial agenda through domination of brown bodies (Tzintzun, 2002).

All of the above examples strongly illustrate the connections between racialization, incidences of racism, and the girls’ further vulnerability of Indigenous girls to sexual exploitation. From the undermining of the police as authorities to be trusted, to the pervasive everyday put downs at school, online, and in the community the participant-researchers were clear that they are constructed as ‘brown girls’. This unfortunately makes them the frequent targets of those who have accepted some unspoken rule in Canadian society, that it is o.k. to exploit brown bodies.

#### **Participant-Researchers’ Assessments of Existing Supports and Resources**

In addition to the various elements the participant-researchers view as associated with or putting girls at risk of sexual exploitation and the pervasiveness of racialization, there are many supports and resources that they draw on for support. In the following section I will highlight the resources that the girls identified throughout our research sessions. In the following section I highlight the themes that emerged as the girls identified resources and existing supports in the community. The participant-researchers expressed that these are important in supporting their resilience but are inadequate and that more are needed to support girls to not be sexually exploited.

**Harm Reduction**

Although the girls knew a lot about the dynamics of sexual exploitation they were less certain about how to stop it or prevent girls from being sexually exploited. One idea Beth shared was to “*reduce this or stop this by encouraging [girls] to not drink and maybe teach a girl to defend herself, take care of herself to go out and trust her to do the right decision*”.

**Peer education**

The participant-researchers identified the value and importance of girls learning from their peers about their rights and about sexual exploitation. “*Teens need to learn about it from other teens. They need more information. Girls need to know that everybody has rights. They have rights*”.

**Safe Youth Spaces**

Safe spaces where youth can hang out, like YRP, a drop-in group for street-involved youth, were also identified as important in preventing situations where girls can be sexually exploited. It was important to the participant-researchers that groups like this also provide “*a safe ride home*”.

**BFF’s (best friends forever)**

Friends held a place of significant importance for the participant-researchers. Through many different stories Ella conveyed the critical importance of BFF’s (best friends forever). Conversations about best friends were frequently woven into our discussions. According to the participant-researchers BFF’s are the single most important element in their lives, above school and home. Ella recounted many times, “*I would never leave my BFF behind.*”

Friends are a resource and whenever there are problems at home or something scary happens it is their friends they will talk to first. What this means for girls is that if their friends are knowledgeable and connected to resourceful and trustworthy adults then they may be better protected from dynamics of sexual exploitation or be better able to access help when needed. This also speaks to the importance of girls having accurate information about sexual exploitation, as they are each others' biggest support network.

### **Family**

The girls identified the importance of adults leading by example. Risk factors for girls are reinforced by significant adults (ie. parents) engaging in those same behaviours. They also spoke about the critical role of adults who will listen and not judge.

Regardless of the problems or issues in their family homes, these girls are fiercely loyal and devoted to their families. As much as one can identify risk factors in their home situations, I would argue that there was also evidence of family as resource. Perhaps because of 'traditional Indigenous values' or because of resistance to the White world, the messages I heard repeatedly from the participant-researchers were that families stick together and that family members are not rejected or cut out when abusing substances or for stealing from the family. These girls characterized their relationships with their mothers as very open. Beth stated once, "*I can tell my mom anything.*" While Ella said more than once, "*Me and my mom talk about everything*".

All participant-researchers demonstrated a strong sense of connection to their families evidenced through the many anecdotes they shared with me about life at home and their different family members. Extended family members were key supports as well for most of the girls: Ella speaks with pride about her older sister / auntie who is in

university. Jen spoke about looking forward to visiting relatives in Washington State.

Beth plays floor hockey with her auntie and looks forward to going up the coast to stay with her grandmother on reserve every summer.

Ella has returned to live with her mom after several years spent in the care of her maternal grandmother. Her mother has been making efforts to live a more sober lifestyle but, Ella often has the responsibility of caring for her little, two-year old brother as her mother struggles with some alcohol-related health issues. Although conflict with her mom dominates their relationship, this girl spoke passionately of a strong feeling that they can get through anything together.

### **Online communities**

From the prevalence in conversations it became clear that the internet is a primary social tool for these girls. It is a medium for accessing relational resources; the girls are often connecting through MSN (Microsoft online chat software) with relatives or friends in far off locations. It was not directly identified by any of the girls as a resource however, for Bella who does not spend time with friends outside of school because she does not want to drink alcohol, it is central to her social life. Bella takes school and her potential seriously which, she said, makes her different from most of her peers and family members. For her, the opportunity to connect with other teens throughout North America outweighs the risks online. She maintained that she is aware of internet safety issues. She takes her safety seriously and believes she is able to assert her boundaries online as well as in person.

## School

One teacher in particular, Ms. M., holds a significant place in these girls' lives as a positive force at the high school. They stated that her classroom feels safe and comfortable: *"I think Miss M's class is positive, that's my favourite class... And she listens. And she doesn't judge you"*. They expressed that she not only discusses real issues with them like racism, sexism, homophobia, but also that she is willing to listen without judgement and is understanding when it comes to deadlines for assignments.

The following photo was important to the participant-researchers to include because it is a space that buffers them from discrimination, violence, and the risks of sexual exploitation.



**Figure 8 Ms. M's classroom**

*"On the outside it looks um, not safe or something, but on the inside it's like totally different. She's got like so many [someone interjects "good things"] like positive posters and she's always like encouraging ... And*

*there's no sexism or racism or homophobia in her classroom. So, it makes it like a better place to be because you won't be prone to getting racist remarks and stuff and... it's just... good in there. I've been in her class last year and this year and it's just a safe place to hang out."*

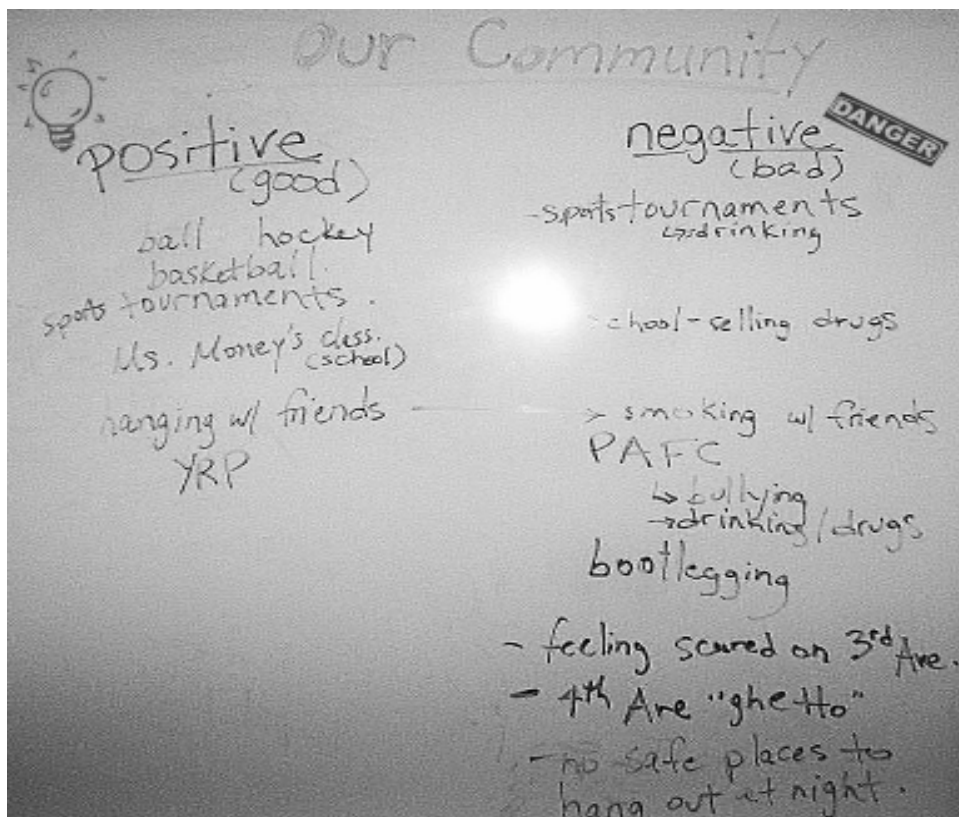
In addition, the girls identified the First Nations educational support team as a resource at school. The girls see Ms. M and other supportive First Nations staff as key to keeping Indigenous kids connected with school and an otherwise unsupportive or unwelcoming environment. These supports make a difference in whether or not the girls get to school and how they feel about being there when they attend. The girls spoke about interacting on an almost daily basis with at least one of the various support people they identified in their school and indicated that members of the First Nations support team are approachable and trustworthy.

The ability to identify and access support people in an otherwise stressful or hostile environment is a key resource to counter the situations and dynamics that may put these girls at risk for sexual exploitation. As identified in de Finney's (2008) study of Indigenous girls' health, girls' sense of having "good teachers" reinforces a positive cultural identity rooted in community, which in turn offers a healthy support network in the face of the manipulative and coercive psychological approaches of sexual predators and recruiters.

### **The community**

The following photo provides a visual summary of a discussion in which participant-researchers identified that there is a lack of activities and supports for youth in the community, which they see as a gap that more adults in the community should be

addressing. They think that if there were more activities, safe spaces, and people to go to for help, girls might not drink so much and might not be as vulnerable to sexual exploitation.



**Figure 9 Our Community**

*There's more negatives than positives, I think [in our community]. It's not very good for teens, I guess... adults like they should be building stuff for the teens because the teens and whatnot and the children are gonna be like older and they're gonna be the future. So they should be doing a lot of stuff, like get us involved and that kind of thing.*

The participant-researchers, through all of their comments and images, identified a range of supports and resources that they saw as helpful for girls, Indigenous girls in particular, in the community. Nevertheless, the girls also conveyed a sense of feeling let

down by adults overall because they have expectations of being cared for and supported, which were not met.

### **Authentic voice, knowledge, and agency**

The girls' stories indicated to me that their sense of being able to take care of themselves and knowing what they would do in certain uncomfortable or inappropriate situations did not always match the actual lived experiences they shared. For example, Beth's assertion that girls have rights and should learn self-defence to protect themselves stands in contradiction to her perceptions of her own experience. After sharing the story of the inappropriate advances of her older brother's friend she added that she would not tell her brother or anyone because: *"he's nice. It's just the alcohol in him impairing his judgement"*.

According to Brown and Gilligan (1992), girls experience a psychological crisis at this age in which they have to choose between authentic voice and acceptance or the preservation of connection with others. Further research by Taylor, Gilligan and Sullivan (2005) problematizes this conceptualisation and notes that for some racialized minority girls, maintaining authentic voice is imperative and the consequence is loss of relationship or labels of behavioural problems. For example, according to their research racialized minority girls are more likely to speak up against unfairness or to voice an opinion of disagreement and often, for this, they may be penalized by teachers or ostracized by peers. This concept of distinct paths of development for girls has been further problematized by discussions challenging dominant developmental narratives and calling for race, class, gender, and sexuality (Downe, 2005; de Finney, 2008; Lee & de Finney, 2004) to be factored into the erasures which shape both the oppression and the

development of Indigenous girls in Canada. Specifically, with regards to Indigenous girls, Downe (2005) invokes the concept of lived history to explicate the ongoing intergenerational silencing of their voices and erasure of self and to develop more awareness of the distinct developmental trajectories of Indigenous girls in the context of a society where they are devalued and sexualized. I return to my initial observation that these girls live with conflicting knowledges, desires, and authorities which means that they do not always make decisions that will keep them 'safest' in the moment.

### **Relationship and Engagement**

One outcome of this research project is that the girls built relationships with one another and with me, which provided another potential source of support and connection in their lives. Evidence that the girls valued these connections can be seen in their repeated statements that they wanted to keep meeting with me. During several research sessions, as we moved into the photo analysis and putting it all together phases, I brought up that we had long surpassed the initial agreed upon number of sessions. Both girls said on more than one occasion that they liked that it gave them something to do.

It may be significant that the two girls who stayed engaged throughout the duration of the study also attended the youth drop-in space once a week, which I co-facilitated. I theorise that their prior knowledge of me as a respectful, reliable, supportive adult possibly facilitated their ability to stay engaged with the research study despite other circumstances in their lives. Their engagement with me in this research process has definitely taken our relationship to another level and although I have not been co-facilitating the drop-in group while in the midst of research with them, I will be eventually resuming that position and it will require some re-negotiation of boundaries. I

will always make a point to stay engaged with each one of them and I will honour their request to continue meeting as long as they are inclined to do so. Since the conclusion of the research Ella has moved back to Alberta but I have continued to sustain a relationship with Beth and Jen who seek out my support from time to time.

### **Summary**

This chapter summarized the data from the research sessions with the girls, highlighting their voices and visions through a Photovoice process. The discussions, journal entries, and photo images produced by the girls are poignant and clearly reflect the perspectives of the participant-researchers. The main findings that emerged from the photos and stories of the participant researchers can be grouped into four major themes:

i. All of the girls had directly experienced and witnessed various forms of sexual exploitation. Through various stories and their photos the participant-researchers identified parties, the internet, and the street as the three main sites where they have experienced or witnessed sexual exploitation. The girls identified that older boys and men use alcohol, manipulation, physical force, money, or tricks in efforts to sexually exploit Indigenous girls.

ii. The sexual exploitation of Indigenous girls is pervasive and normalised. The participant-researchers described incidents of sexual exploitation experienced by themselves or by female Native friends and relatives. There were a number of elements that the girls named as increasing the risk of sexual exploitation; some of these included alcohol and teen drinking, addiction, poverty, walking alone, and hitchhiking.

iii. Another significant finding of this study is that racialization significantly impacts life as an Indigenous girl. The girls clearly expressed that they experience their

worlds as racialized “other” and noted a lack of representation, as Native girls, in the media, a lack of role models, a racist school environment, and fear of violence on the street. Racialization interacts with their status as girls and increases their vulnerability to sexual exploitation.

iv. Friendly and accessible supports and resources are important to preventing sexual exploitation but are inadequate. The participant-researchers identified various resources in the community which they thought could protect a girl from sexual exploitation or help her if she had been sexually exploited. Some of the key supports they pinpointed were friends and family, safe spaces for youth to hang out, adults who are trustworthy, reliable, and accessible. The girls spoke strongly of the benefits of the First Nations support team at school.

The research sessions afforded a rich opportunity to gain insight into the world of these Indigenous teen girls in Port Alberni, providing them a forum to share the experiences most important to them. The findings of this study are consistent with and add to other recent research exploring the sexual exploitation of Indigenous youth that has been done with experiential survivors of the sex trade and with service providers (ADM, 2000; Kingsley & Mark, 2000; PAWRS, 2005; UNYA, 2002).

## **Chapter Four: Analysis**

### **Eradicating the Sexual Exploitation of Indigenous Girls**

#### **Overview**

This chapter discusses implications and recommendations deriving from the themes presented in the previous chapter. Throughout the chapter I bring the discussion back to the issue of commercial sexual exploitation and make linkages between the knowledge generated by the participant-researchers and the existing research. In the previous chapter, I identified the following themes: all of the girls had directly experienced and witnessed various forms of sexual exploitation; the sexual exploitation of Indigenous girls is pervasive and normalised; racialization significantly impacts life as an Indigenous girl; and friendly and accessible supports and resources are important to preventing sexual exploitation but are inadequate. I also present an historic overview that explores the connection between colonial practices and the ongoing sexualization and racialization of Indigenous girls. As well I show that the criminalisation of Indigenous girls in Canadian society connects to sexual exploitation and has implications for intervention.

I end this chapter by considering the implications of these findings for policy and practice and broader social change. Ultimately, broad and radical changes are needed at the level of policy, education, and the justice system before social transformation that facilitates the eradication of the commercial sexual exploitation of Indigenous girls can be achieved. In doing this, I make recommendations regarding the types of services, supports, and interventions that are needed both at the level of community and at the level of policy when racialization is recognized as a huge barrier to eradicating the sexual

exploitation of Indigenous girls. Finally, I highlight recommendations for practice and future research and identify key areas at the macro or policy level that must shift for movement towards the eradication of the sexual exploitation of Indigenous girls.

### **Linking Key Findings to Research**

#### **i. All of the participant-researchers had directly experienced and witnessed sexual exploitation.**

This finding, that all of the girls involved with the research project had directly experienced and witnessed multiple incidents of sexual exploitation in a myriad of forms, is profound and echoes what other research and statistics have told us about the frequency of victimization of Indigenous girls. As presented in the previous chapter, statistics indicate that approximately 75% of Indigenous girls in Canada have been sexually abused. The participant-researchers' many stories and images clearly detail the many, varied forms in which they have encountered sexual exploitation.

#### **ii. The sexual exploitation of Indigenous girls is pervasive and normalised.**

The findings resonate with much of the existing literature and substantiate concerns that Indigenous girls are among the most vulnerable to sexual exploitation in Canada and in British Columbia. Many historical and contemporary factors contribute to this dynamic which situates the findings of this study in a broader socio-historic context. The following sections will discuss the ongoing impact of racialization and colonialism on the health and safety of Indigenous girls and women.

#### **iii. Racialization significantly impacts life as an Indigenous girl.**

Identity formation is ongoing and dynamic. It is shaped through daily interactions and experiences in the social world. As illustrated in the previous chapter, the girls shared

many stories and experiences that provided an opportunity to understand how they construct identity and to witness how they are shaped by their experiences as well as how they shaped the data that emerged. The participant-researchers face multiple sites of discrimination in their lives: their status as ‘Native’, their status as girls, and their status of living in poverty.

As presented in the previous chapter, the girls’ disclosures of racialized discrimination were woven through every single research session strongly evidencing the impact of racism in their day to day lives as well as illustrating how the girls see their social positioning in the context of the broader community. These findings emphasize the need to understand the role that context and place play in shaping Indigenous girls’ experiences of sexual exploitation. As Razack (2005) states in her discussion of spatial theory, “Canada is a settler society with a history of genocide and colonization” (p. 89) and therefore it is important to consider how “place and landscape are not inert but actively participate in the identity formation of the individual” (p. 88). For these participant-researchers the experience of being ‘othered’ is reinforced daily through their experiences and interactions with white peers, in a white, mainstream school setting and community, and in media that renders them invisible. Gaganakis (2006) tells us:

There is a voluminous body of literature which questions the view that culture and identity are fixed and static constructs and that these are acquired mostly in the early developmental years. Culture and identity are instead generally considered to be continuously negotiated and reconstructed as a result of varying places, social processes, socio-historical periods and local contexts. (p. 362)

As racialized girls, the participant-researchers are limited by how others see them and by a lack of possibilities to see themselves beyond stereotypical representations. As Lesko (1996) states, “another avenue for establishing the inferiority of subordinated peoples is the construction of psychological knowledges that portray the colonized as inferior” (p. 465). These negative psychological constructions manifest in local contexts through racial slurs and stereotypes such as “chug”, “dirty Indian”, and “lazy, welfare recipients”. These examples shared by research-participants resonate with Anderson’s (2000) claim that “Native girls begin to hear racial slurs from a young age, often before they even understand the terms themselves” (p.105).

As discussed in Banks (2005) and her research with Black girls, racialized girls are often essentialized as “their identity is homogenized by stereotyped ideas and dialogues about their race, class, and gender” (p. 179). This resonates with the experiences described by the girls and in the literature regarding the experiences of Indigenous girls and women in Canada. Downe (2005) emphasizes that Indigenous girls live the collective narratives of more than one hundred years of violence and discrimination. Sikka (2009) stresses that, “with colonization, white settlers uprooted traditional spiritual and intellectual values accorded to Indigenous women and replaced them with notions of inferiority, hierarchy, and the paradigm of women as property” (p. 7). This study highlights how these historic events continue to undermine the safety and positive self regard of Indigenous girls today.

The participant-researchers face multiple erasures; as racialized, gendered, sexualized, and classed subjects, they do not see their realities reflected in the dominant narratives to which they are exposed in their daily lives (de Finney, 2007; Hernandez &

Rehman, 2002; Jiwani, Steenbergen, Mitchell, 2006). The girls involved with this study expressed that they do not see themselves, as Native females, represented socially. When their worlds are represented they are usually positioned against a white, middle-class normalised backdrop which then constitutes them as marginalised others. Even within mainstream literature which exists to train service providers such as teachers, social workers, mental health counselors, “erasures of racialized minority girls occur in dominant psychosocial representations of ‘youth’ and ‘girlhood’ that essentialize race, age, and gender” (de Finney, 2007, p. 57). Jiwani, Steenbergen, & Mitchell (2006) also identify that constructions of girlhood “include hegemonic femininities articulated through preferences which are race, class, ability, and sexuality-based” (p. xiii). As Spears (2003) articulated,

I grew up within an ideology that said I did not exist, because Native people did not exist, except as mascots or objects of desire. Through this process of symbolic annihilation, I ceased to exist as a Native person within my own mind (p. 83).

The stories and experiences shared by the participant-researchers of this study align with existing literature to indicate that a better understanding of the diversity and uniqueness of Indigenous girls’ experiences is needed. In order to support Indigenous girls to avoid or exit circumstances of sexual exploitation, educators and community support people must be able to acknowledge the biases and limitations they may be imposing on Indigenous girls with whom they are working.

## **Racialized and sexualized violence: Colonialism and the sexual exploitation of Indigenous girls**

The objectification, racialization, and sexualization of Indigenous women along with economic disempowerment have rendered Indigenous girls among the most vulnerable to sexual exploitation in Canada (Justice for Girls, 2004). Sethi (2007) emphasizes that it is critical to look at the linkages between systemic racism and the sexual exploitation of Indigenous girls. As discussed in the previous chapter, the girls articulated some awareness of the relationship between racialization and sexual exploitation. Throughout the research sessions, it became clear that their status as racialized girls inevitably intersected with their thinking about sexual exploitation. Indigenous women and girls have been systemically devalued and sexualized and their bodies abused and degraded deliberately for more than almost a century and a half (Downe, 2005). Indigenous girls continue to be the most frequent victims of sexualized violence and are the most at risk for sexual exploitation (Downe, 2005; Kingsley & Mark, 2000; Sethi, 2007; Sikka, 2009).

The findings of this study emphasize the link between colonial constructions of Indigenous women and girls and sexual exploitation. The experiences recounted by the participant-researchers conveyed feelings of being diminished, ignored, embarrassed, unseen, and vulnerable to inappropriate sexual attention from men, anytime, anywhere. As Downe (2005) states Indigenous girls “are connected through a pervasive colonial ideology that sees these young women as exploitable and dispensable” (p. 3). Discourses of Native womanhood which construct Indigenous women as dirty and lazy and as sexual property continue to reinforce colonial power relations and position Native women as

easy sexual objects for white man's pleasure and dominance (Anderson, 2000; Maracle, 1996; McNinch, 2008; Razack, 1998; Sikka, 2009). Historically, a Western dichotomy of virgin-whore was imposed upon Native women's identity through the princess-squaw imagery (Anderson, 2000; Razack, 2000). Razack (2000) and Maracle (1996) identify how various systems perpetuate the stereotypes of Indigenous women as "rapeable". Anderson recounts stories from Native women elders from throughout Canada who tell of their own encounters as children and youth with white men and sexualized violence (pp.108-110). Anderson (2000) introduces the concept of the "Triangle of Oppression" (p. 111) developed by the Doris Marshall Institute, a model for conceptualising the link between these colonial discourses and the sexual exploitation of Native women. This model, which reflects an ecological approach to health and resilience (Ungar, 2004b), positions "dominant ideas, assumptions, and values: "EASY SQUAW"<sup>6</sup>" at the top of the triangle, "individual behaviour (name calling, sexual abuse)" down at the right point of the triangle, and "structures, systems (courts, healthcare system)" at the left point of the triangle. Underneath the base of the triangle is the "impact on Native women's lives (low self worth, violence, sexual abuse)" (Anderson, 2000, p. 111).

The extent to which Indigenous girls and women are vulnerable to sexual violence is evidenced by two tragedies impacting British Columbia communities: The Picton murders<sup>7</sup> and the Highway of Tears<sup>8</sup>, a stretch of Highway in Northern British Columbia (Aleem, 2009). In both cases, large numbers of Indigenous women, many of whom worked in the sex trade industry, have disappeared (Aleem, 2009; Sethi, 2007). Despite

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<sup>6</sup> Capitalization is the author's not mine.

<sup>7</sup> Retrieved November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2009 from: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/pickton/>

<sup>8</sup> Retrieved November 6<sup>th</sup>, 2009 from: <http://www.highwayoftears.ca/>

these tragedies, until recent years, these cases of missing women suffered from a substantial lack of attention and resources from government, media, and the authorities (Aleem, 2009). This further reinforces the social invisibility of Indigenous girls and women as well as a denial of their vulnerability as a group. Through their stories and photos, the participant-researchers shared not only a number of experiences of sexual exploitation that had occurred; but also conveyed their awareness of the possibility that they could, at anytime, be sexually victimized.

As the literature spanning the last decade illustrates (Aleem, 2009; McNinch, 2008; Razack, 1998; Razack, 2000) the colonial constructions of Indigenous females as “dirty, criminal, and sexually available” (Sikka, 2009, p. 8) is ongoing. This is the legacy of Indigenous women’s identity that the participant-researchers have been exposed to growing up as evidenced by Beth’s comments about women being, metaphorically, “at men’s feet” and the many examples of the times the girls had been approached by unknown white men. Indigenous girls in Canada today need support to transcend these images and to resist the internalization of these restrictive, oppressive colonial discourses of Native womanhood.

### **The criminalization of Indigenous Girls**

Underlying colonial constructions of Indigenous girlhood and womanhood lead to the sustained viewpoint that Indigenous girls are somehow responsible for their circumstances (McNinch, 2008; Razack, 2000). As discussed in Chapter One, the public perspective and social responses to the sexual exploitation of young girls have shifted somewhat over the past two decades. While the human trafficking movement has drawn attention to foreign women as ‘victims’, this definition does not extend to the

circumstances in which Indigenous girls and women find themselves being sexually exploited.

McNinch (2008), in his critical examination of the trial of the adult men who sexually assaulted a twelve year-old Saulteaux girl in Saskatchewan in 2001, critiques a justice system in which white men are inherently entitled, while First Nations' girls are devalued as sexual objects. The following paragraph highlights how these discourses become enacted both implicitly and explicitly through the justice system, and as such sustain the broader social exploitation of Indigenous girls and women by white men.

The defence gazed down on the 12-year—old girl and saw only one role for her, the Indian squaw or slut—a role substantiated because of questionable semen found on her underpants and allegations of family sexual abuse. Melissa compromised herself by “wearing makeup,” looking and saying she was older than she was, accepting and drinking the beer offered to her... Under such blame the victim scrutiny, she is made into a precociously promiscuous deviant. The men are left with their “natural” and hence understandable sexual appetite, their “horniness,” their masculinity; their white privilege (p. 94).

Because of historical constructions discussed above, despite Indigenous girls' over-representation in Canada among the victims of physical and sexual gender-based crimes, they have been largely ignored in the public discourse of human trafficking movements (Aleem, 2009; Sikka, 2009). Indigenous women continue to be criminalized for their actions; they do not fit the construction of victim that has been negotiated and sustained by the media and government education and training materials (Sikka, 2009).

Young Indigenous girls, who grow up in homes with little supervision and few resources, especially if they have had placements in the foster care system, are likely to be criminalized at a very young age (Justice for Girls, 2004; Sikka, 2009).

### **Status on the margins – Reframing deviance as resistance**

Economic disadvantage and distress heighten vulnerability to sexual exploitation; many girls are initiated into commercial sexual exploitation through their families (Kingsley & Mark, 2000; Sikka, 2009). In my professional experience, in the context of a decade of living and working on the West Coast of Vancouver Island, British Columbia, I have noted that many of the most marginalised Indigenous families live in a rural town context and have been disconnected from their reserves or home communities for more than one generation. Town-based, off-reserve Indigenous families seem to live in more extreme conditions of poverty than many families on reserve. Furthermore, they lack access to many of the formal and informal supports available to those living on reserve. Some of these families share a culture wherein the markers of success of mainstream culture are rejected or devalued (school completion, full-time employment) due to a lack of relevance and historical associations with trauma. Off reserve families experience a stronger sense of cultural fragmentation without exposure to the positive aspects of Indigenous culture and society (Lalonde, 2003) which are perhaps more in evidence for many families living on reserve. The values of rejecting the mainstream world are entrenched in practices that aim to keep Indigenous identity distinct. Gross (2003) introduced the concept of family perseverance as resistance: rather than being indicative of dysfunction, this can be viewed as an ingenious push against assimilation. Nevertheless, these practices of resistance (natural time: seasonal labour, priority of

events/ engagements leading to irregular school attendance, alcohol consumption, theft) can make Indigenous girls more vulnerable to criminalisation by mainstream authorities who read behaviour according to a legal code based in Euro-western constructions rather than according to a critical analysis of socio-economic and racialized contexts.

### **Discourses of Resistance**

For the participant-researchers, everyday experiences are filtered through a layer of racialization - “because we are brown”. Because of the reflections of themselves advanced through the gazes, comments, and actions of white others, these girls face imposed limitations on who they can be, yet each girl resists those limiting stereotypes of “native girls” in her own way – for example, church, school, and community-involvement in youth-related issues. One girl’s resistance is perhaps trickier to see (school refusal, alcohol consumption, and partying) but as Gross (2003) advances ‘choosing poverty’ is a form of resistance to assimilation. Ella is living a lifestyle – skipping school, drinking excessively, dating older guys – which can be viewed as ‘high risk’ or can also be reframed as one of resistance to the dominant western narrative of ‘success’ or ‘progress’. We can theorise that Ella is engaging in her own form of resistance to the judgement and discrimination she experiences in her day to day life. She is not invested in succeeding in school because the world in which she has to function and in which she wants status is one in which white, western education has very little importance. Many of her peers who represent the adolescent Indigenous girl population in the Alberni valley do not attend school and have parents who drink and who supply them with alcohol. In many Indigenous families, the negative legacy of residential schools has created very negative associations with the schooling process. These

families' responses can be framed as systemic resistance to colonialism and to accepting success on the white man's terms. Nevertheless, as evidenced by the stories of the participant-researchers, in homes where Indigenous families are living in resistance to the dominant norms, individual girls continue to be positioned in inferiority to others and endure sexual exploitation.

### **Looking at the Triangle of Oppression from a constructionist perspective**

Ungar (2002, 2004a, 2004b) reframes how health is defined. He proposes a model that accounts for multiple constructions of health in which health is defined by individuals differently according to what enables them to preserve status and have power. Within the context of the systemic inequities described in this study and the fact that Indigenous girls and women are among the most disenfranchised in the world (Lynn, 2005), it is important to consider their own definitions of health, well-being, belonging, and agency, and how they enact those - whether or not their choices look like positive ones from a mainstream perspective of health. For example, de Finney (2008), in a study on smoking and Indigenous girls, determined that Indigenous girls sometimes smoke to gain social status and acceptance by peers or family members who use tobacco as a response to cope with past trauma. In the mainstream, smoking is defined as a health risk but in more localised definitions of health it may be perceived to enhance status by creating social connections for girls who feel isolated.

In applying this framework of individualized constructions of health, the debates around sexual exploitation get tricky; some advance the view that selling sex is liberating (for example, if a girl or woman was sexually abused now at least she can reclaim ownership of her body by deciding when to share it and by receiving compensation). I

really struggle with this conceptualisation of the sex trade because, whereas I am sure some women work in a setting that is safe and clean and have equal shares in the earnings, most sexually exploited girls and women are still under the control of men, are often substance-addicted, and work in environments that leave them susceptible to violence, sexually transmitted infections, and other potential health problems (Kingsley & Mark, 2000; MacInnes, 1998; Sethi, 2007). The earlier discussion about the role of the systemic objectification of Indigenous girls in limiting their individual choices and opportunities further problematizes this neo-liberal notion of individualized “choice”. Given the study findings, it is contentious to think that girls are truly ‘choosing’ to trade their bodies from a place of agency.

Furthermore, the findings point to the need to further theorize ‘choice’ as it relates to the agency of Indigenous girls in regard to sexual exploitation. In looking at the Triangle of Oppression from a constructionist perspective, it can be helpful to consider the three points of the triangle, but perhaps another layer of the triangle is needed, one that could be transposed on top – differentiated with a different colour or font – to indicate the ways in which Indigenous women resist in each category. The base of the triangle could interrogate how Indigenous girls and women sustain their own definitions of health (i.e. connecting with a friend, connecting with the health van) and enact agency in their everyday lives. Health and resilience should not be about achieving Euro-Western mainstream, middle-class notions of wellness or success. As noted by August (2006), resilience is present in many small daily acts of surviving and perhaps even thriving (August, 2006).

By positing counter theories, counter stories, counter narratives, and counter thoughts to those existing constructions of Indigenous victimhood, of powerlessness, and of negative stereotyping, we can perhaps facilitate the expansion of identities and experiences some Indigenous girls see as available to them. The girls who participated in this research spoke of feeling devalued as ‘brown girls’. They also shared their experiences of feeling ignored, stereotyped, and discriminated against. The participant-researchers and other Indigenous girls would benefit from more opportunities to hear and share about how their “at risk” lifestyle is full of choices, decisions, and actions promoting health, belonging, dignity, and survival, then it would perhaps open the possibility to Indigenous girls that they can be strong, that there is nothing wrong with them, and that they have the right to dignity and respect regardless of their lifestyle or economic and social circumstances. A greater valuing of self could support a greater valuing of First Nations communities. “We have to be strong enough to say ‘Maybe there is something that I could contribute to the recovery of the Nuu-chah-nulth nation,’ to recover from various things that we are suffering from” (Keitlah, 1995, p. 13). It is recognized amidst the literature addressing Indigenous healing that personal or individual healing is intricately linked to the recovery and healing of the community or Nation (Anderson, 2000; August, 2006; Laenui, 2000).

### **Implications and Recommendations for Ending the Sexual Exploitation of Indigenous Girls: Shifting Ideology and Policy**

The research findings clearly point to systemically entrenched norms which facilitate the high risks of sexual exploitation for Indigenous girls. As discussed above, the racialization, sexualization, and criminalization of Indigenous girls and women dates

back to early colonial practices and policies. In order to move towards addressing this issue which is a significant one for the health and safety of Indigenous girls and women, Canada should begin endeavours to shift these deeply embedded racialized stereotypes. As a first step towards doing so, Canada should ratify the Convention on the Rights of Indigenous People. This is a symbolic gesture if nothing else to indicate a commitment towards the restoration of quality of life in Indigenous communities. As Aleem (2009) writes, if Canada were to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Indigenous People, it would further clarify the degree to which the various levels of government should be held accountable for the health and safety of Indigenous girls. “Indigenous children are suffering today because colonization has robbed us of the capacity for building healthy communities, and modern-day economic and social policies exacerbate this problem” (Anderson, 2003). As defined by Blackstock (2003) “colonization is a complex systemic process that involves the subjugation of groups of people or nations through policies that create dependency on a dominant culture or nation” (p.332). The nation of Canada and its federal government must move more aggressively to reverse these policies and address systemic issues like safe and affordable housing, gendered inequity, and poverty among other things, and in a consistent and systemic way. Girls and women are left vulnerable when there are inadequate opportunities for them to earn a decent living wage or to have access to safe and affordable housing. As the girls identified in this study, poverty, a lack of safety at home, the fact of being ‘brown girls’ all create risk and vulnerability for girls to be sexually exploited.

Chandler and Lalonde (2004), in their studies on cultural continuity and suicide in Indigenous communities, noted that communities that are proactively addressing issues of

social health and land and resource negotiations with the government have few to no youth suicides. Resolving outstanding issues of land sedition, and supporting Indigenous communities to develop new, more effective, and responsive models of government and economic viability for their communities is also of paramount importance to promoting the overall health of Indigenous girls. The solution to many social problems faced by Indigenous youth is to engage them with their communities “in efforts to recover from the effects of colonization and in the movement of the Indigenous community toward self-determination and culturally appropriate institutions of self-governance” (Leslie & Storey, 2000, p. 4).

True decolonization is more than simply placing Indigenous people into the positions held by colonizers. Decolonization includes the re-evaluation of the political, social, economic, and judicial structures themselves and the development, if appropriate, of new structures that can hold and house the values and aspirations of the colonized people (Laenui, 2000, p.155).

Indigenous children and youth will gain strength and self confidence growing up in witnessing cultural, social, and economic prosperity in their communities. These elements: strength, self confidence, and cultural connections are identified in the literature (Kingsley & Mark, 2000; McCreary Youth Foundation, 2003; UNYA, 2002) as factors that counter vulnerability to sexual exploitation.

### **Increased awareness and opportunities for education**

Based on the findings of this study, I recommend more advocacy and awareness work with those in positions of power or authority in our society (politicians, judges, police, educators, youth workers, and community service providers) which incorporates

training and education about colonialism and white privilege. Of critical importance, is that this type of education and training be ongoing and enhance awareness of how existing institutional and social frameworks have entrenched white privilege and continue to shape the self concept and social contexts of Indigenous girls. This was evidenced by the girls' stories recounting their experiences in the school system and also in dealing with the police. Educational opportunities would enhance the awareness and effectiveness of individuals in positions of authority who work in capacities wherein they provide some kind of intervention, support, or are responsible for distribution of funds that impact the health and safety of Indigenous girls.

As long as structural inequities and negative stereotyping through racialization continue to be reinforced in media, education, and government institutions marginalised Indigenous families will continue to define their health in resistance to mainstream definitions.

### **Implications regarding the criminalization of Indigenous girls**

Of critical importance in transforming the conditions that contribute to Indigenous girls' vulnerability to sexual exploitation is the further elaboration of models of restorative justice. Rather than reinforcing a culture of removal, isolation, institutionalisation, and criminalisation, restorative justice is a more constructive model in that it keeps girls connected and in their community. With historic constructions that criminalize and devalue Indigenous girls and women, a shift to restorative justice could contribute in a positive way to reducing Indigenous girls' vulnerability to sexual exploitation. Indigenous girls frequently go to juvenile detention for breaches of probation. This is defeating and not constructive especially since youth in general are not

supported with adequate resources through the probation process. Ideally, some reforms are needed at the level of the criminal justice system to better protect Indigenous girls and all Indigenous people from criminalization. Particularly helpful would be some method for youth advocates to lobby the court for a non-criminal intervention, for example when it comes to ‘breaches of probation’. Often these breaches are symptomatic of much deeper issues in the lives of Indigenous girls; they may reflect a lack of support and connection in these girls’ lives in that they do not have a caring and responsible adult to remind or support them to get to their probation meetings. Alternatives to criminalizing Indigenous girls are very relevant to reducing the numbers of Indigenous girls being sexually exploited in Canada.

### **Implications for health and education**

In order to move towards the eradication of the sexual exploitation of girls major structural changes are needed across multiple systems. The ADM (2000) report noted that informants called for a multi-dimensional approach to prevention, with youth involvement, public-private partnerships, and recognition of community-wide responsibility. Special task forces have had some success in drawing attention and directing funding to the issue of sexual exploitation in the past (ADM, 2000; Badgley Committee, 1984; City of Burnaby, 1998) therefore; I recommend the creation and maintenance of special departments or task forces within government ministries to ensure that attention and focus remain on this issue which has serious, negative health consequences for Indigenous girls and women. Most importantly, funding to organizations providing direct interventions to girls from homes where there has been

violence, addiction, or neglect is critical to preventing further social alienation that increases girls' risk to sexual exploitation.

Furthermore, in order to achieve a shift in consciousness in regard to social attitudes that tolerate the sexual exploitation of Indigenous women, I strongly recommend that specific intervention and education initiatives are developed for boys and men.

### **Masculinity studies: humanizing boys and men**

As presented in the previous chapter, the participant-researchers identified men and older boys as the perpetrator of sexual exploitation. The accounts of their various experiences convey their knowledge that any male, whether a stranger or a relative, whether white or Indigenous, could potentially sexually exploit a girl. It is acknowledged in the literature (Katz, 2006; Kivel, 1999) that broad systemic shifts in how women's value is socially constructed and how men are socialized are needed to end sexualized violence against girls and women. Men in various roles as fathers, teachers, and community leaders to name a few, have opportunities to point out to boys and young men the absence of strong, positive female characters in television and film and to dialogue about the sexualized representations of girls and women (Kivel, 1999). This sort of education is particularly important given that positive representations of Indigenous girls and women are scarce in mainstream media.

It is also critical that boys and young men understand the impact of colonial policies on Indigenous girls and women. As noted by one research participant, the legacy of residential school continues to impact Indigenous families and put girls at risk. The literature tells us that many men who sexually exploit have themselves typically been either victims or witnesses of abuse in childhood or have internalized a code of male

power achieved through the control of or dominance over others (Katz, 2006; Kivel, 1999; MacInnes, 1998; Schwartz & DeKeseredy, 2008). MacInnes (1998) describes men who were themselves abused by excessively controlling parents in homes where girls and women were devalued. In Indigenous communities, these are men who were victims of the many abuses of colonialism (residential school and the undermining of childrearing and community support networks) and who did not have opportunities to heal or even have permission to talk about it. These men must still be held accountable to their communities for their actions but the main thing practitioners and even more importantly policy makers must take from this is the critical importance of prevention, early intervention, more supports for boys who disclose abuse, and resources for healing the scars of colonialism at a community level. Further to that boys must begin to hear and see explicit examples of other boys sharing their own stories of victimization and getting help to encourage them to come forward and disrupt the dynamic of abuse if they are being victimized.

White history is plagued with war and violence – a history of dominating others. In order for change to occur, this history must be acknowledged and examined for its ongoing role in contemporary patriarchal thinking and behaviour (Kivel, 1999). In addition to this and perhaps even more importantly, is the need to create disruptions in the stereotypical constructions of masculinity. Katz (2006) notes that men's acknowledgement of how they are constrained in their development as people, given the context of a societal male-dominated hierarchy, is critical to raising caring, empathic men. Gender and sexuality studies must go further in making transparent the categories that construct masculine identity in order to build on images and concepts of gender that

allow for multiple constructions of a male self to be legitimated and expanded in popular culture.

Furthermore, in Indigenous communities and in terms of Indigenous Peoples racialized constructions of Indigenous men as violent, drunks, lazy, etc. must be undermined and replaced with more diverse representations. Negative stereotypes could be replaced with images of Indigenous men who take on supportive, caring, or leadership roles in their communities; those who work to help and support the healing of their brothers and sisters, their children, and grandchildren. There are many such men in every community and they are true warriors bringing hope for a future without violence, rape, and self harm. Ultimately, healthier men mean healthier, safer women and girls and so this is a critical aspect of eradicating the sexual exploitation of Indigenous girls.

#### **Ending the Sexual Exploitation of Indigenous Girls: What Can Communities Do?**

The extensive structural changes noted above constitute an aspirational pathway for sexual exploitation advocates. In the interim, it is critical that governments prioritize funding for prevention and early intervention as well as for nationalized public health education. Having discussed a range of long-term shifts required at the macro level to eliminate the sexual exploitation of girls, the following section details smaller scale, more immediate interventions.

#### **iv. Friendly and accessible supports and resources are important to prevent sexual exploitation but are inadequate.**

The final theme that emerged from the findings speaks to the need for better developed community supports to prevent sexual exploitation or to help girls who have been sexually exploited. Strategies proposed by respondents included prevention and peer

education programs at both the school and community levels, as well as a range of youth services and community activities that address the underlying factors that place youth at risk of sexual exploitation.

### **School-based prevention**

In moving from the macro to the micro level, I recommend that child abuse prevention education and family care interventions need to occur at much earlier ages and with greater consistency if we wish to empower girls with the knowledge and skills that will enable them to identify and resist predators and exploiters. A greater investment in public education and in school-based prevention to educate children from a very young age about abuse will equip girls with information and strategies to respond to abuse. Public schools are a logical site for child abuse prevention programmes to reach the most children. In addition, education and supports for families through agencies, media, and medical or health systems can enhance children's learning and reduce within family incidences of abuse that often precede experiences of commercial sexual exploitation.

Most quality child abuse prevention programmes also include workshops for parents and caregivers (day care workers, teachers) so that they are accessing in advance the information that will be presented to their children. This allows adults of the community to pose any questions and express discomfort with any part of the programme while also providing an opportunity to increase the participants' awareness levels about child abuse and family violence and identify where support and resources can be accessed.

**Media**

Since television is such a pervasive technology, it could also be used as a constructive learning tool. I envision brief commercials airing role-plays of a child courageously going to tell an adult about a situation of abuse. This would be a great resource and could potentially influence victimized children to feel empowered, more so than the existing dramatic commercials of children cowering and appearing powerless. More visible, public materials that reflect accurate information about abuse and existing resources could support victims of child abuse to come forward. Based on my many years of experience as a child abuse prevention educator, interactive workshops where role-plays are used often provide a catalyst for children to tell someone (often children disclose to the visiting educators immediately following a workshop, while other times children tell soon after and go to an adult in their life they already know and trust). These children might otherwise not tell for a long time if at all. Children must be encouraged to talk to more than one adult until they get help and the abuse stops. Teaching children from a young age to trust in and access help from multiple, different adults while also teaching them that they have the right to assert their boundaries and how to do so, can enhance resilience and potentially make it more difficult for a predator to isolate them.

With the increasing popularity of internet technologies many websites have been created that aim to increase girls' awareness of issues such as online sexual exploitation, date rape, and commercial sexual exploitation through fun and interactive activities.

**Healing intergenerational trauma**

While key elements need to shift on a broader social level in order to eradicate commercial sexual exploitation, there are interventions at the individual-level which are

needed now to support girls. MacInnes (1998) proposes a model of intervention which could work with Indigenous girls – it is holistic, community oriented, and involves the family. These aspects are considered important to Indigenous individual and community healing (Anderson, 2000; Fournier & Crey, 1997; Hart, 2002; Ross, 1993).

Given the intergenerational trauma in Indigenous communities (Blackstock, 2003; Downe, 2005; Wade, 1995), supported education opportunities in areas like child abuse prevention are critical to disrupting the normalization of violence and to providing alternatives. As stated by Hernandez, Almeida, and Dolan-Del Vecchio (2005):

highlighting the history locates the family's [or individual's] troubles within a collective social and political lineage and helps them to recognize their intrafamilial struggle to assert positive human interactions is part of a larger communal struggle to regain wholeness and security" (p. 106).

Each individual and community could be engaged through community-based research like Photovoice to ensure that programmes and services are adapted to each community's unique socio-cultural composition, historic circumstances, and contemporary status.

### **Intervening in sexual exploitation**

In supporting girls who have been sexually exploited, engaging extended family and community members in the healing process will make it more effective. The healing and recovery of girls who have been sexually exploited will most likely require interventions to help heal their bodies, minds, spirits, and psyches. In addition, girls who have been sexually exploited may need support to rebuild a positive core sense of self and various life skills to enable them to function as healthy individuals in society and

amidst families struggling with intergenerational trauma (Kingsley & Mark, 2000; MacInnes, 1998; UNYA, 2002). For Indigenous girls, the reinforcement of connection to community, traditions, and ceremonies can strengthen the sense that they have a community of belonging beyond the immediate family or others who have harmed them. As noted by Brendtro, Brokenleg and Van Bockern (1990), “the presence of a strong sense of belonging makes young people more receptive to guidance” (p. 38). An ability to experience belonging in a supportive context is key to creating a sense that she is not alone and also does not need to return to a ‘family’ on the street.

Many family treatment centres and other holistic healing centres serving First Nations communities throughout British Columbia integrate healing with some awareness of intergenerational grief and trauma due to colonial history and such things as the “60’s scoop” (Fournier & Crey, 1997) and residential schools (Wade, 1995). Duran and Duran (1995) advocate for practitioners to develop their awareness of the worldview and beliefs of Indigenous clients including a solid understanding of and respect for the values, beliefs, and philosophies of First Nations communities. More resources to support holistic treatment centres to ensure opportunities for the continued growth and healing is critical for Indigenous girls after exiting the sex trade.

### **Best Practice**

This section discusses current models and the recommended best practices for helping girls who are being commercially sexually exploited. As discussed by the girls in this study, girls need someone to talk to. The literature strongly emphasizes the benefit of a connection to a supportive, trustworthy adult to support recovery or healing (Kingsley & Mark, 2000; MacInnes, 1998; Pearce, 2009). The girls identified the value of a safe

drop-in space, the need for telephone crisis lines, and adults who listen, are consistent, and do not judge them.

Secure Care is the model that was adopted by the Alberta government to address girls being commercially sexually exploited. This model was almost adopted in British Columbia as well. Some recovered experiential survivors of sexual exploitation advocate for this kind of model (Kalergis, 2009). However, other research suggests that even better than mandatory confinement would be a model in which outreach workers were positioned at emergency shelters and other key places to access these girls on their own terms and support them to exit when they are ready (Aebi, 2001; MacInnes, 1998; UNYA, 2002). Secure Care is an ineffective model because girls are detained against their free choice and this can sometimes reinforce allegiance to the exploiter (MacInnes, 1998) it also does not provide adequate long term follow-up care (Aebi, 2001). Whereas, girls who develop a trusting relationship over time with a supportive worker and decide for themselves to seek a placement in a treatment centre, will undoubtedly follow through on their recovery with much more success.

More resources for training to increase awareness of sexual exploitation and skills for intervening for all those who work with children and youth whether as teachers, coaches, youth workers, or mental health therapists would be beneficial in reducing the risk of sexual exploitation and would increase the potential for support. Community-police partnerships, and funding and training for staff at community agencies and recreational facilities are needed to support the most vulnerable girls who are being sexually exploited.

British Columbia rejected the Secure Care model and has, through the recommendations of the Assistant Deputy Minister's Committee (ADM, 2000), endeavoured to enact better responses through the child protection system. Nevertheless, there continue to be gaps in the services and supports, which could reduce the sexual exploitation of Indigenous girls, available to children and youth. In Canada, as a signatory of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and in British Columbia, through the Child and Family Service Act, it is clear that the state is responsible for the well-being of children. To this end, more funding and community supports are needed in addition to prevention education and interventions and supports for families, to ensure that Indigenous girls, and all girls, are protected from sexual exploitation.

### **Safe emergency housing for youth**

Research tells us that there is a strong relationship between youth "in care" and sexual exploitation. What we heard in our Community Needs Assessment (PAWRS, 2005) from other community professionals and educators was echoed by the girls in the project who indirectly identified the need for safe emergency youth shelter through their many stories of friends staying with them, or of 'temporarily' living at friends' houses. Ella spoke a number of times throughout the research process about various friends staying with her because their homes were not safe.

Girls need to be able to access safe emergency shelter that does not require them to go through the child protection system. Through the years of my practice of individual counselling with victims of sexual abuse and exploitation, girls living in group homes have repeatedly said that they do not feel connected, or cared for; the consequence of that

is an attitude that the rules imposed on them in these care settings are not to be respected. For many youth in a group home setting curfew is a joke because the underlying belief that “I am cared for” is lacking. With a feeling of acceptance and belonging and opportunities to express disagreement, girls are likely to invest more in rules meant to protect them (Brendtro, Brokenleg, & VanBockern, 1990). I would theorise based on my professional experience that girls in homes with more engaged and respectful foster parents do better at taking care of themselves and engage in less behaviours with the potential for self harm taking. This is an area to be further developed because the connection between sexual exploitation and foster care is high (ADM, 2000; Coy, 2009; Tyler & Johnson, 2006; UNYA, 2002).

A safe place for girls to go as needed, without having to feel concerned about having a ‘file’ or a series of conditions placed upon them could play a key role in diminishing reliance on street-involved men for access to resources. Vigilance and strict monitoring of adult ‘visitors’ would be a critical aspect of such a shelter. Pimps prey on youth at these types of sites and previously victimized and rejected or alienated girls make ideal targets for recruiters (ADM, 2000; Kingsley & Mark, 2000; MacInnes, 2002; Madsen, 1999; Unya, 2002). Ideally, workers would be trained to be aware of the various issues contributing to the vulnerability of girls to sexual exploitation and engage with the girls in an honest and direct way about the various relationships they have outside of the shelter throughout their stay.

### **Summary**

The sexual exploitation of Indigenous girls is no small issue in Canada. It is a significant health risk impacting on the lives of Indigenous girls and women. In order to eventually eradicate the sexual exploitation of Indigenous girls and women, broad changes are needed at the level of ideology, legislation, the justice system, and the restoration of Indigenous economic autonomy and cultural strength. In addition, immediate supports and interventions that are accessible and founded in relationships of trust are key to helping girls who have been sexually exploited. In addition safe emergency housing and holistic community programmes would be beneficial to both preventing and intervening in the sexual exploitation of Indigenous girls.

## Conclusion

In view of the findings, the thing that stands out most is that, for Indigenous girls, racialization underpins their day to day experiences and makes them extremely vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Undertaking research on this topic proved difficult at times. I held a deep respect for the resilience I witnessed in the participant-researchers yet hearing their stories elicited a sense of despair in me. It is indisputable that Canadian society has relegated Indigenous girls to an inferior status where sexual exploitation and criminalization follow on the heels of removal from homes rife with addiction and violence, the markers of ongoing intergenerational trauma in Indigenous communities. On the one hand more and more coverage in the media has brought the extreme vulnerability of Indigenous girls and women to sexualized violence into the public awareness. On the other hand, men on our streets, the police, and our justice system continue to reinforce an out-dated belief system that advances the notion that somehow Indigenous girls want, choose, or deserve to be sexually exploited; this is simply not true.

Engaging in the deep and personal way that I did with the participant-researchers and with the literature, writing this text triggered feelings of powerlessness in me about my own practice as a counselor working with sexually abused and sexually exploited youth because I began to question the possibility of this problem ever changing for Indigenous girls. This research and the knowledge reflected in the girls' photos and narratives came to life for me as I saw what they saw reflected in the community, all around me, everyday. At times the deeply entrenched systemic elements noted throughout my analysis have stirred a sense of despair and have left me wondering if anything can really be done to adequately address and resolve this problem. One of the

strongest recommendations emerging from the data is that change is needed at a macro level. In order to eventually eradicate the sexual exploitation of Indigenous girls, shifts are needed in regard to Euro-Western thinking which privileges a certain value system, notions of the individual and of success that automatically position alternative values and norms as inferior.

What does this research mean for me as a Child and Youth Care (CYC) practitioner? What does it mean for CYC practitioners and other helping professionals? This thesis clearly points to the need for radical social transformation in order to restore dignity to Indigenous communities and create hope for Indigenous girls. As conveyed through the images and voices of the girls, Indigenous girls are looking to their community for more support to be safe, healthy, and valued. Those who work directly with or indirectly support Indigenous girls and youth must begin to reflect on and evaluate white privilege and Euro-Western bias at many levels: social and family structures, the justice system, curriculum and expectations in terms of school, what is inherently valued and linked to bigger mainstream notions of 'success'. Expecting Indigenous girls to conform and perform according to standards set by Euro-Western values and norms is the continued re-enactment of colonial erasure of identity and culture. Because school is positioned as all-important to the well-being of children in Euro-Western society, failure at school can lead to a sense of failure as a person. If Indigenous youth see that older friends and relatives are walking out of school and finding social and economic status in other areas (child care, working at the fish plant, seasonal fishing, crime) then these alternatives can be seen as more viable than completing school. I draw on the age-segregated, Euro-Western school system as a

detailed example of just one area that impacts on the socio-emotional health of Indigenous girls and where re-evaluations of the values and beliefs that underpin the curriculum and the learning models would be of benefit to Indigenous girls.

Although small interventions alone may not be adequate to effectively resolve this problem, as Child and Youth Care practitioners, we have a unique opportunity, in working with Indigenous girls, to genuinely engage with them and honour and acknowledge their unique talents, ideas, spirit, and potential and reflect this seeing back to them. In so many other contexts the focus is on Indigenous girls' behaviour or appearance. Through authentic relationship wherein we celebrate the strengths and beauty of each Indigenous girl with whom we work is one small move towards countering the systemically enmeshed negative imagery and attitudes about Indigenous girls. We can support Indigenous girls through opportunities to ensure that caregivers, teachers, and other significant adults in girls' lives hear about or witness those special talents or qualities. Engaged, participatory research such as this study provides an excellent forum for girls to break free of their comfort zone or their labelled 'category' and have their strengths and wisdom validated.

Furthermore, in our role as CYC practitioners, with relationship as a base, we can effect change through interactions with all of the individuals and families with whom we work. We can advocate for the need to dismantle sexist attitude and pervasive racialization. Through relationship we can challenge our clients and colleagues to reflect on the biases that contribute to and stem from the larger systemic elements that create marginalized groups and put Indigenous girls at such high risk of sexualized violence.

Yes, we need the justice system to respond more seriously to offenders to more adequately punish and shame men who exploit girls and children; yet, it is important to look beyond immediate circumstances and envision a world in which girls are no longer exploited. In order to do this social education in empathy and nurturing as well as opportunities for healing are required with boys and men. Again, as Child and Youth Care practitioners and researchers there are many opportunities to engage in sensitizing and educating the boys and men with whom we work. The more we can engage men and boys in dialogue and reflection, the more difficult it will be for them to ignore the problem or rationalize their exploitive behaviour.

Child and Youth Care (CYC) workers, through the variety of roles that we play, can fill gaps that exist right now in supporting girls who are being sexually exploited. We can enact interventions based in a trusting relationship, and which honour the pace and place of each girl and her values and priorities. Advocacy within government systems whether child protection, the courts and probation, or school is also needed to support Indigenous girls in areas of their life where they face challenges or barriers. Having someone to trust is noted in the literature as a benefit to girls who are being sexually exploited. Girls will benefit and believe in themselves when they feel supported by having someone back them up instead of shaming them for their behaviour or for making bad choices.

Finally, as CYC practitioners and academics, we also have the capacity to engage the community in dialogue and to deliver workshops to increase the awareness of other service providers, educators, police, and all community members. Most importantly we

need to engage Indigenous girls in these community forums to ensure they are being seen, heard, and taken seriously.

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## Appendix

### Appendix A

#### *Girls' experiences of strength and safety: a Photovoice project*

Hello, my name is Johanne Saraceno and I will soon be undertaking research locally for the purpose of completing the requirements for my Masters of Arts in Child and Youth Care through the University of Victoria. This letter is intended to introduce my research project and invite referrals for participants.

I have worked as a Counselor with youth in this community for more than 7 years at Alberni Community and Womens' Services Society, formerly the Port Alberni Women's Resources Society. The area of specialization of my practice is sexual abuse, sexual abuse prevention, and sexual health. Over the past few years I have undertaken a number of initiatives with other community members and service providers to increase awareness in regards to the issue of the commercial sexual exploitation of youth. My thesis *Girls experiences of strength and safety: a Photovoice project* is meant to bridge my academic learning with my community work.

I am interested in supporting young women to share their voices and critically examine social issues that are important to them. This research project will use Photovoice methodology and will position youth as co-researchers or research-participants. Some of the outcomes of participation in this project are that research-participants will acquire basic knowledge and skills for research including investigation, critical reflection, and ethical considerations. Youth will also acquire an understanding of the issue of sexual exploitation and have an opportunity to identify and problem solve around the various social issues related to the issue of commercial sexual exploitation. This will equip them with more knowledge and confidence to identify and respond to potential situations of sexual exploitation and augment their capacity to keep themselves safe.

The Photovoice methodology invites participants to photograph images of significance *to them* in relation to a specific set of questions being investigated. Participants then generate a brief text to clarify the meaning of the images.

I will be selecting up to eight girls to participate in this project.

Please pass along the attached poster to any girls you work with who fit the following criteria:

- Adolescent girls, between the ages of 15 and 17 (inclusive);

- Designated as 'at risk' (either in terms of their relationship to school or in terms of their family life)
- Street-involved (do not always have a stable residence, engage in risk-taking behaviours such as drinking, sexual activity, drug use, petty crime)
- Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal
- Willing to participate in discussion and activities related to the topic of sexual exploitation.
- Likely to benefit from an opportunity for skills building in critical thinking, peer relationships, photography, reflection, and writing.

Please note, I am attaching several copies of a poster that can be posted or passed directly to girls you deem suitable candidates for this project. Please contact me or ask the girls to contact me directly to let me know they are interested.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

If you have any questions or require further information please do not hesitate to call me at 724-7111 ext. 225. You can also contact my supervisors, Dr. Sandrina DeFinney and Dr. Sibylle Artz at the University of Victoria, School of Child and Youth Care, (250) 721-6472.

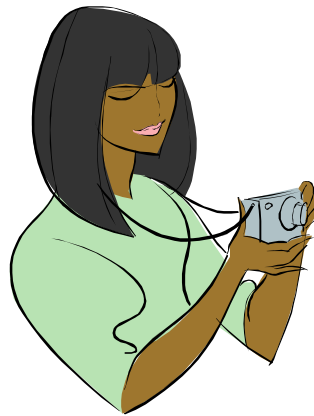
Sincerely,

Johanne Saraceno

**Appendix B****WANTED!**

**Girls 15 to 17  
To participate in a community research  
project.**

Would you like to meet and talk with other girls?  
Do you like to ask questions?  
Do you like taking pictures and sharing your thoughts?  
Want to learn some new skills?



This community research project is called:  
*Girls' experiences with sexual exploitation: A Photovoice project.*  
We will meet once a week for 8 weeks, talk, take photos, and talk some more!

**An opportunity to have your voice heard!!!**

**Food and Honoraria will be provided.**

If you have any questions or want to sign up please  
call me:

Johanne Saraceno @ 724-7111 ext. 225

## Appendix C



University of Victoria | School of Child and Youth Care

## *Participant Consent Form*

---

### **Girls' experiences with sexual exploitation: A Photovoice project.**

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *Girls' experiences with sexual exploitation: A Photovoice project* that is being conducted by Johanne Saraceno.

Johanne Saraceno is a Graduate Student in the School of Child and Youth Care at the University of Victoria. You may contact me if you have further questions by phone at 724-7111 ext. 225 or by email at [jsaracen@uvic.ca](mailto:jsaracen@uvic.ca).

As a Graduate student, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a degree in *Masters of Child and Youth Care*. It is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Sibylle Artz and Dr. Sandrina deFinney. You may contact my supervisors at 250-721-6472 and 250-721-6372.

This research is being hosted by Alberni Community and Women's Services Society (ACAWS).

#### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this study is to involve a group of young women to explore the issue of sexual exploitation in their lives and their community using the Photovoice methodology.

Commercial sexual exploitation is a serious issue in BC communities and, in Port Alberni in particular, recent research showed that it occurs within a broader socio-cultural context of the sexualization of girls and women and a social welfare system that does not allow for basic material and safety needs to be adequately met. Existing research also shows that girls who have been previously neglected or abused are more likely to be sexually exploited. Other issues related to a girl being vulnerable to sexual exploitation are low self-esteem, family violence, exposure to drugs and alcohol, and lack of supervision.

Photovoice is a method where participants use cameras to take photos they then discuss to share how they see the issue being investigated. Photovoice positions participants as co-researchers and as experts on their own lives and communities.

#### **Importance of this Research**

Research of this type is important because sharing your experiences will give the people who work with girls and those in government who make decisions about community programmes and services a better understanding of what girls might need or why they think or act in certain ways. It is also an opportunity for the girls who participate to gain a better understanding of the issue as well as gain skills to take care of themselves, share information with friends, and learn to investigate problems that concern them.

**Participants Selection**

You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a girl between the ages of 15 and 17 who was referred by a teacher or community worker.

**What is involved**

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research, your participation will include participating in eight two-hour group sessions at ACAWS group space on Third Avenue in Port Alberni. Over that period of 8 weeks you will be asked to take photos related to the research question, discuss and write up your interpretations of a few selected photos and, if you choose, further participate in a final presentation to community members and decision makers.

**Inconvenience**

Participation in this study may cause some inconvenience to you, including time away from family and other activities to attend two-hour group meetings for eight weeks in a row. During the eight weeks that our group will meet you will have to keep track of and then return the camera. If you choose to participate you will also have to take pictures and use up one roll of film in a span of less than two weeks. Of those photos you will select three to contribute to the research project. You will then do some reflection, journaling, photo analysis, and writing to share the meaning of the photos you select to share. If you choose to participate then I would like the experience to be a positive and enjoyable one for you. If you run into any problems or there is anything you need from me throughout the project please let me know. I can help with transportation if needed.

**Risks**

There are some potential risks to you by participating in this research and they include possible emotional or psychological stress. To prevent or to deal with these risks the following steps will be taken: I am available for debriefing following the group sessions and throughout the week. I will make referrals to assist you to access support should any emotional strain or stress arise throughout participation in this research project. I will follow up with you, checking in to see how you are doing. I will remind you about your right to withdraw from the research and discuss a plan if you wish to continue involvement in the research.

**Benefits**

The potential benefits of your participation in this research are listed below.

You will benefit by having an opportunity to develop research, photography, and critical thinking tools and to apply them in examining social issues that relate to commercial sexual exploitation. You will also benefit from an opportunity to engage in this unique process of relationship building, reflection, photography, and discussion with a group of girls your age.

Your involvement in this research will benefit society because you and the group of participant-researchers will share your voices and expertise with service providers, and

decision makers. You will potentially gain skills and knowledge that will help you improve your health and safety and contribute to society.

Your involvement will also benefit the state of knowledge and research in the areas of Photovoice, sexual exploitation, and girls' experiences.

### **Compensation**

As a way to compensate you for any inconvenience related to your participation, you will be given an honorarium of 100\$ in gift cards and a second disposable camera to enjoy. If you agree to participate in this study, this form of compensation to you must not be coercive. It is unethical for me to provide undue compensation or inducements to research participants. If you would not participate if the compensation was not offered, then you should decline.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. Also if you decide to participate you can choose to not answer any question at any time if you feel uncomfortable. If you decide to withdraw I will not judge you or think differently of you at all. If you do withdraw from the study your data will be omitted to the best of my ability. I will not include any of your photos or any written texts. However, comments that you share in the group discussions will be difficult to withdraw. A partial honorarium will be given to compensate for time invested up to the time you decide to leave the project, if that should happen.

### **Researcher's Relationship with Participants**

It is possible that I, the researcher, could have a prior relationship with potential participants as past clients. To help prevent this relationship from influencing your decision to participate, the following steps to prevent coercion have been taken: no current or recent (within the past six months) clients will be invited to participate. If you have ever been a client in the past, nothing that was discussed or shared in that setting will be brought into the group or this research project. I will not acknowledge our prior relationship as counselor-client, if one existed, in the research setting as that would breach our prior Confidentiality agreement and violate ethical protocols. Also, whether or not you choose to participate fully or partially in this research will not affect your ability to access any future counseling services through myself or my agency. If you choose to begin the project and then leave I will still have my door open to you, in my role as counselor, if at any time in the future you needed or wanted to access that support.

### **On-going Consent**

To make sure that you continue to consent to participate in this research, I will remind you weekly of the commitment being asked of you and also that your participation is voluntary and that you have the right to withdraw at any time. If you decide to participate it is fully within your rights not to answer any question you do not want to answer. If ever you choose to withdraw it will not affect how I think about you or behave towards you.

**Anonymity**

In terms of protecting your anonymity as a participant in this research I will not share your name with anyone outside of the research project. Within the project anonymity is limited as we will meet as a group. No one's name will be attached to any part of the final research data presentation.

**Confidentiality**

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected by Confidentiality is imperative in a small community. Every effort will be made to protect the confidentiality of participants including a discussion and contract with group participants to ensure that they are clearly aware of and in accordance with the rights and limitations of confidentiality for their participation in this project.

With Photovoice methods the issues around confidentiality are complex as co-researchers are exploring their worlds with cameras. Special discussions and clear consent forms will assist in setting parameters with participant-researchers to ensure that the identities of their family, friends, and community members are protected.

Correspondence and data related to this research project will be stored in a locked file cabinet which can only be accessed by myself.

**Dissemination of Results**

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the form of a presentation, which will include the girls' photos and analyses as well as my own meta-analysis. It will be in the form of a PowerPoint presentation and manuscript that I will share as part of the requirements for successful completion of my Masters in Child and Youth Care.

**Disposal of Data**

Data from this study will be disposed of once the criteria for Masters completion have been met. Photos and notes will be shredded and electronic data will be erased. At that time any rough notes and other materials related to the group process will also be shredded and then disposed of.

**Contacts**

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include myself, Johanne Saraceno at 250-724-7111 and my supervisors, Sibylle Artz at 250-721-6472 and Sandrina de Finney at 250-721-6372. In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or [ethics@uvic.ca](mailto:ethics@uvic.ca)).

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

---

*Name of Participant*

---

*Signature*

---

*Date*

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

## Appendix D

### Image Release Form for subjects of photos taken by research participants

*Girls' experiences of strength and safety: A Photovoice project.*

I give my permission to \_\_\_\_\_ (name of research participant)  
to:

1. Photograph my likeness for use in the *Girls' experiences of strength and safety: A Photovoice project* research project.

I give my permission to the *Girls' experiences of strength and safety: A Photovoice project* (University of Victoria), and all persons authorized by or claiming through or under it to:

1. Make copies of my image in photographs for the sole purposes of the research project; and,
2. Publish, exhibit, and otherwise use my image, photographs, and any copies so made, or any part therefore, and,

I understand that the photographs will become property of the Project and the research participant should the participant wish to retain copies.

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name (print)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address** \_\_\_\_\_ **Postal code:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

This information has been collected, and will be used and maintained, in accordance with the policies and procedures of the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Victoria. Should you have any questions about the above, please contact investigator Johanne Saraceno: 724-7111. You may also contact the research Supervisors, Dr. Sibylle Artz: 250-721-6472 and Dr. Sandrina DeFinney: 250-721-6372.

## Appendix E

### Who Am I?

#### I am...

1. What is the first thing people notice about you?
2. What is your race or ethnicity?
3. What would you like for people to understand about you?
4. Where are you from?
5. What do you believe in?
6. What is your full name?
7. Who are your ancestors?
8. What languages do you speak?
9. What do you like to do?
10. What is your name?
11. What is it like being a girl?
12. What do you like to eat?
13. How do you feel about yourself?
14. Where do you live?
15. What are you?
16. What type of music do you listen to?
17. What do they call you?
18. What do you like to wear?
19. What do you like best about being a girl?
20. What do you like most about yourself?
21. What do you like to be called?
22. What is something no one seems to understand about you?
23. What is the one thing you would like to change about yourself?
24. What is an important tradition in your family?
25. What would you like for people to remember most about you.

From: Berg, J. M. & Owens, D. C. (2000). *Empowered voices: A participatory action research curriculum for girls*. Hartford, CT: The Institute for Community Research.

## Appendix F

### Image Release Form

*Girls' experiences of strength and safety: A Photovoice project*

I hereby agree that Johanne Saraceno and the *Girls' experiences of strength and safety: A Photovoice project* (University of Victoria), and all persons authorized by or claiming through or under it, shall be entitled to:

3. Tape record and/or videotape my likeness during interviews, discussion groups and workshops;
4. Make copies of the tape and/or video recordings made;
5. Publish, play, transfer and otherwise use the recordings and any copies so made, or any part therefore, and,
6. Use my name or a code name chosen by me, and use my likeness, for the purposes of promotion and dissemination of research findings recordings and any copies so made.

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name (print)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone number** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address** \_\_\_\_\_ **Postal code:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Witnessed by (print)** \_\_\_\_\_ **Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

This information has been collected, and will be used and maintained, in accordance with the policies and procedures of the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Victoria. Should you have any questions about the above, please contact investigator: Johanne Saraceno: 724-7111. You may also contact the research Supervisors, Dr. Sibylle Artz: 250-721-6472 and Dr. Sandrina DeFinney: 250-721-6372.

## Appendix G

### Graffiti Wall

Purpose: To have individuals in the group begin to think about their research topic in relation to themselves through a small arts activity.

Materials: Chalkboard, multi-coloured chalk.

Instructions:

1. Once the group has chosen a topic to research write on flip chart / chalkboard:  
“<TOPIC> is important to me because...”
2. Tell everyone to take a few minutes to think about this. If it helps they may want to write their ideas in their Journals.
3. Each participant takes up the coloured chalk to graffiti their various ideas on the chalkboard.

From: Berg, J. M. & Owens, D. C. (2000). *Empowered voices: A participatory action research curriculum for girls*. Hartford, CT: The Institute for Community Research.

## Appendix H

### What is Action Research?

#### RESEARCH - Finding Out

##### How do I find out about a topic or issue I care about?

1. Look up information.

What do others say or know about the issue?

2. Ask questions in my own words to kids my age who have important things to say.

What are the Research Methods (ways I can ask questions)?

Pilesorting

Rating/Ranking

Survey

Observation

#### ACTION - Doing Something

##### What can I do with what I learn about the issue?

1. Share it with those affected by it.

Who suffers or gains from this issue?

Me?

My Peers?

My Family?

My School?

My Community?

2. Share it with those who can do something about it.

Who can change the issue to make it better?

Me?

My Peers?

My Family?

My School?

My Community?

From: Berg, J. M. & Owens, D. C. (2000). *Empowered voices: A participatory action research curriculum for girls*. Hartford, CT: The Institute for Community Research.

## Appendix I

### The Quick Guide to Action Research Methods

#### The Quick Guide to Action Research Methods

##### **What is Observation?**

...A research method

...You must use all of your senses:

What do you see?

What do you hear?

What do you smell?

How does the situation make you feel?

##### **What is Survey?**

...A research method

...You ask someone questions:

Knowledge: What do they know about the issue?

Attitudes: What do they think about the issue?

Behavior: What have they done about the issue?

Demographics: What can they tell us about themselves?

##### **What is Pilesorting?**

...A research method

...You ask someone to classify things:

What goes with what?

How do these relate to one another?

##### **What is Rating/Ranking?**

...A research method

...You ask someone to put things in order:

Put in order of importance.

Which comes first?

What happens next?

From: Berg, J. M. & Owens, D. C. (2000). *Empowered voices: A participatory action research curriculum for girls*. Hartford, CT: The Institute for Community Research.

## Appendix J

### VISUAL DOCUMENTATION

Visual documentation is one method that can be used to gather information about a subject. This technique can help you to look closely at your surroundings in different ways and to observe things critically and systemically.

Visual documentation offers a way to analyze communities from many different perspectives. Its accuracy and detail allows researchers to identify and objectively make judgments on the subject being studied.

There are two types of visual information: still pictures (photos) and moving pictures (video). A still picture freezes a moment in time in order to gather data while a moving picture adds context and depth of understanding to the information being collected.

While different interpretations can be made by different people, visual documentation provides a very precise and detailed record from which you can draw meaning. We must be careful when dealing with visual data however, because while the visual image offers a permanent record of fact, it offers it only from a particular perspective. It is possible to leave out crucial details which lead the researcher to an entirely different conclusion than if the image had been created differently.

You can think about visual documentation as having three different purposes:

- **To collect and present data.** For example, you could take a picture of each of the school buildings in your town. This would show people the approximate age, condition, and architecture of each of the school buildings.
- **To describe context.** You could also take pictures of the surroundings of the schools to describe the types of neighbourhoods in which schools are located and the things such as stores, businesses, or playgrounds that are located nearby.
- **To convey messages.** You could also take pictures of graffiti, cigarette butts, and litter on the school property if you wanted to convey a negative message about the school. If you wanted to convey a positive message you could take pictures of flowers in front of the school or of students laughing and socializing in front of the school.

From: Sydlo, S.J., Schensul, J.J., Owens, D.C., Brase, M.K., Wiley, K.N., Berg, M.J.,

Baez, E. & Schensul D. *Participatory Action Research Curriculum for Empowering Youth*. Hartford, CT: The Institute for Community Research.

## Appendix K

### Looking critically at images

*An introductory exercise to prepare for taking and analyzing powerful images.*

What do you see in the pictures?

What things stand out to you?

What feelings do you get from the images?

Is there a theme or a message being conveyed?

How does using photography limit the ability to convey this message?

From: Sydlo, S.J., Schensul, J.J., Owens, D.C., Brase, M.K., Wiley, K.N., Berg, M.J.,  
Baez, E. & Schensul D. *Participatory Action Research Curriculum for Empowering  
Youth*. Hartford, CT: The Institute for Community Research.

## Appendix L

### Community Relationships

Purpose: To name negative and positive aspects of the community.

Materials: White Board, Dry Erase Markers

Preparation: On the white board write Our Community and make two columns labelled “Positive” and “Negative”.

Instructions:

1. Have participants list things they view as positive and negative in their communities.

List these on the flip chart.

2. Ask why things are listed as positive or negative.

3. Ask when it is possible for something positive to become negative and vice versa.

8. What are the things that are similar (that we all see) and what things do we see that are different?

9. What are the main things, the most important things we'd like to change from negative (bad) to positive (good) in our communities?

Adapted from: Berg, J. M. & Owens, D. C. (2000). *Empowered voices: A participatory action research curriculum for girls*. Hartford, CT: The Institute for Community Research.

## **Appendix M**

### **Risk and Protective Factors**

Purpose: Participants will be introduced to risk and protective factors and will be able to determine what the risk and protective factors are in a given situation.

Materials: Risk and Protections Game Dilemmas Handout, Flip chart, markers.

Instructions:

1. Read out the dilemma in each scenario to the group.
2. Instruct the group to determine the Risk and Protective Factors for the presented dilemma.
3. On a flip chart write all the Risk and Protective Factors named by the group.

### **Risk and Protections Game Dilemmas**

#### **Dilemma A**

Your mom is having a hard time paying bills and buying food. You do not have all of the supplies you need for school and your mom says she does not have the money right now.

Your teacher says you will have to stay after school if you come one more day without a pencil.

The next day you are on the playground and someone leaves their backpack on the bench.

No one is looking and you peek inside.

There is a whole pack of pencils inside the backpack.

1. What are the possible Risks in this situation?
2. What are the possible Protections?

#### **Dilemma B**

The shortcut to school takes you by a classmate who is always teasing and trying to fight you.

If you take the long way you will be late for school.

You will have to stay after school if you are late one more day.

1. What are the possible Risks in this situation?
2. What are the possible Protections?

Adapted from: Berg, J. M. & Owens, D. C. (2000). *Empowered voices: A participatory action research curriculum for girls*. Hartford, CT: The Institute for Community Research.

## Appendix N

### **Script for obtaining consent to take a photo that may have identifying information (to accompany the *Image Release for Subjects of Photos*).**

Hi. My name is \_\_\_\_ and I am involved in a research project with Johanne Saraceno and the University of Victoria called *Girls experiences of strength and safety: A Photovoice project*.

The data collection for this project involves taking photos of images that are significant to us. The photos will be used for the purpose of group discussion and Johanne Saraceno's thesis.

I would like to take a photo that may identify you and want to know if you are comfortable with this. It is entirely your choice and if you need time to think about this I can return later [state when]. If you agree to me taking this photograph, I need you to complete and sign this form: *Image Release for Subjects of Photos* [show the appropriate form at this time].

Thank-you for your time and consideration.

## Appendix O

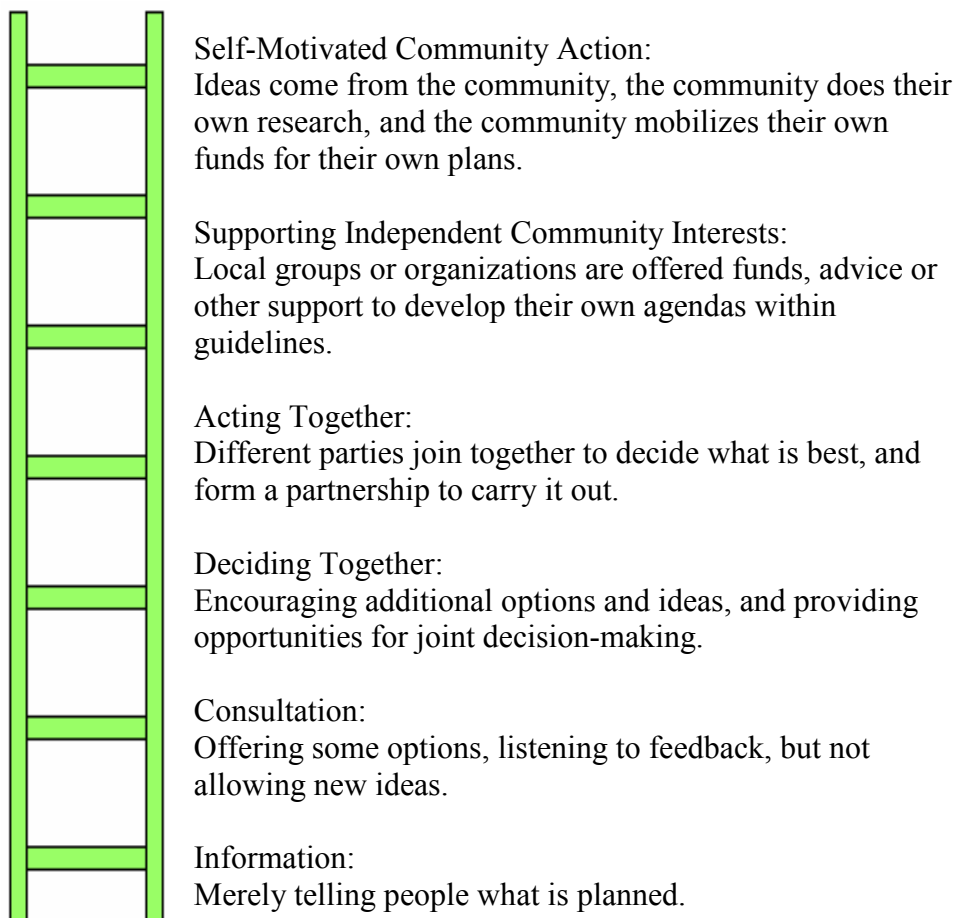
### Action Research Is...

- Figuring out the PROBLEM together. People experience things differently and may see the problem in different ways. What are the different issues connected to this problem? How does this problem affect me or other people in my life?
- Getting more INFORMATION about the problem as a GROUP. When everyone looks at things from their unique perspective and shares their thoughts we can get a better, more accurate picture. Several different people gathering data means a broader representation of ideas.
- PUTTING the information TOGETHER and “judging it” to see if it makes sense. Thinking about and then talking about the collection of ideas the group has developed is followed by the group working together to identify the main similarities and differences and creating themes among all the different ideas.
- Deciding WHERE you want to MAKE A DIFFERENCE and where you will be able to make a difference (for example, with individuals like friends, in your family, in your school, in the healthcare or other systems, etc.). With what you now know how could you pass along that knowledge to others? Could you make a poster that shows what you have learned? What about an article for the paper? An internet blog? A class presentation? A spot on the local TV channel? There are many different ways we can share our thoughts with others to try to make a difference.
- USING the information TO MAKE SOMETHING BETTER. Working as a group can make our voices stronger and louder than one person alone.
- EVALUATING it together to see what the next steps are.

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## Appendix P

### Ladder of Participation<sup>3</sup>



<sup>3</sup> Adapted from Wilcox, D. (1994). *The Guide to Effective Participation*, Partnership Books: Brighton. Available online at <http://www.partnerships.org.uk/guide/index.htm>. In: Shallwani, S., & Mohammed, S. (2007). *Community-based participatory research: A training manual for community-based researchers*. Retrieved from: <http://individual.utoronto.ca/sadaf/resources/cbpr2007.pdf>