

See Me. Hear Me. Talk to Me.  
Exploring the Transformative Potential of  
Participatory Video with Street Involved Youth

M.A. Project Report Presented

by

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### **Dedication**

The motivation to quit my job, move across the country and conduct targeted graduate research in participatory video was inspired by youth in British Columbia. The projects we produced together were created before we learned the language of participatory video. We worked for months out of dusty, borrowed back rooms; we scoured inner city parks for interviews; we waded through brush to back-road party places, where discarded, stained mattresses and broken bottles held stories only the youth knew. The courage, leadership, dedication and resilience the youth showed during these earlier video projects pushed me to learn new ways of listening, asking and exploring. I would not be here without them and the experiences we shared together.

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## **The Project's Relationship to Theoretical/Professional/Artistic Practice**

From locally produced initiatives (Cheatham & Shen, 2003; Jiing, 2002), to the international success of *Photovoice* (Wang, 1999; Wang & Burris, 1994; and Wang, Yung & Feng, 1996), empowerment projects developed within a Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology have employed a variety of media to gather qualitative research from marginalized populations, specifically youth, across health and education disciplines (see note 1). For the majority of these research projects, the inclusion of media technology "...enhances the group's sense of identity, aids to clarify and communicate their issues, and affords an opportunity to learn new skills and work together" (Voakes, 2001, p. 70). In this sense, PAR projects that use media as a research tool are expected to be "transformative" and ground their approaches in Paulo Freire's critical education pedagogy first outlined in Freire's book, Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970). PAR projects build from Freire's Marxist definition of *praxis*, specifically the central role action and reflection play in the liberation of knowledge and the reclamation of understanding from the perspective of marginalized communities. For Freire, action and reflection re-create knowledge by inviting a type of dialogue that melds theory and practice because it gives individuals the opportunity to share and critically assess a variety of ideas with the aim to create direct, social change in the lives and communities of both the participants and facilitators (p. 55-56). Through an engaged process of posing problems and generating community driven solutions, participants gain self-confidence, which raises their consciousness as human beings. Freire's work highlights this possibility of transformation or "conscientization" within the individual participants that holds the promise for lasting social change.

### **The Project's Contribution to Theoretical/Professional/Artistic Practice**

Very few interdisciplinary participatory video research projects have critically assessed *how* an individual first engages and then continues Freire's "conscientization" or the transformative process toward civic agency, and the role participatory video plays in this process. *See Me. Hear Me. Talk To Me.* is a participatory video research project that aimed to break new ground in professional participatory video practice by focusing on the individual transformative processes of a small group of at-risk, street involved youth engaged in a participatory action research (PAR) video project. This participatory video research project aimed to gain a small, but specific insight into the transformative processes of at-risk, street involved youth by exploring their experiences and personal perspectives before, during and after the project. In doing so, it intended to add to the current, but very limited research in participatory video projects with street involved youth in order to encourage further interdisciplinary study, as well as the development of some preliminary reference tools to help governments, non-profits and other interested organizations critically engage street involved youth today.

I focused this project around the following three questions:

1. To what extent does the participation of street involved youth in a participatory video research project provide the impetus for their individual development of Freirean "conscientization", or the start of their transformative process?
2. Did the involvement of the street involved youth in the participatory video research project broaden their personal perspectives?



3. What are the implications for using similar participatory video projects with street involved youth beyond the small group involved in this research project?

### **Significance of the Study**

This proposed research project is unique for two interrelated reasons. First, it returns participatory video research to its root in Freirean “conscientization”. “Conscientization refers to the process in which men, not as recipients, but as knowing subjects, achieve a deepening awareness both of the sociocultural reality which shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality” (1970, p. 27). Second, in returning participatory video research to its root in the development of Freirean “conscientization”, this video research project begins to engineer connections between the pioneering participatory research in the health and education disciplines (see note 2), with current communications and sociological research into the primary role reflexivity, or the internal conversation, plays in modulating the relationship between self and society (Archer, 2003, p. 9). This second point is unique for participatory video research projects, which typically focus research ‘outward’ in an attempt to empower participants to enact change in their communities through environmental (specific) projects; sociotherapeutic (interpersonal) projects; or integrative (community building) projects (Litwin, 1984, p. 136). Instead, *See Me. Hear Me. Talk To Me.* turns the participatory video research ‘inward’, and explores the primary role reflexivity, or the internal conversation plays in the development of individual agency within at-risk, street involved youth. As Margaret S. Archer remarks, “...to explain how agency reproduces and transforms structures, we will not comprehend these processes unless we examine their internal conversations...the

private lives of social subjects are indispensable to the very existence and working of society” (2003, p. 52).

### **Looking In, Looking Out: Social Action and Agency**

Archer’s work is important for this research project because it highlights how we, as individuals, “make our lives” with and through the private deliberations that occur when confronted with choice or change. These private conversations are practiced, and produce a form of self-knowledge through first questioning and then clarifying the situation; and second, through deliberating and then designing a course of action. In doing so, the outcomes of these internal conversations have a direct effect on individual agency. The ‘answers’ we tell ourselves about ourselves, those around us and our community change as we do. It is a process that holds the potential to both, enable or constrain civic engagement. “We can modify ourselves reflexively and we can also modify the world as a consequence of our internal deliberations about it...” (Archer, 2003, p. 105). The *private praxis* that occurs through these internal conversations is an “accomplishment, not a discovery”, because it continually shifts as we do, adjusting to the social positioning, cultural influences and relationships built and dismantled between our subjective responses to the lived-world and those we share it with: “Who we are is a matter of what we care about most and the commitments we make accordingly...” (Archer, 2003, p. 120).

While the internal conversations may be a type of “accomplishment” first deliberated and then agreed upon by the individual as interlocutor, it is a highly fallible product, an outcome of subjective deliberations and reflexive considerations. It is, like any human project, an interpretative creation of our private life and the meaning we make

and re-make there; “Not only can we get things wrong, including ourselves (our commitments, staying power and so forth) but also we cannot know anything at all except under particular descriptions” (2003, p. 116). These “particular descriptions” are pulled from past experiences, interactions and commitments broken and renewed from the past and offered in the present. As such, internal conversations and their potential outcomes are not singular meditations formed and re-formed by the lone subject; they are mediated mosaics of sorts, the creation of a collage pasted with the worn, but cherished pieces of our specific cultural and social experiences.

Focusing this participatory video research project on creating a space for at-risk, street involved youth to begin to investigate their internal conversations presses into the past, as much as it enables the possibility for future social and civic action. It is a way of re-imagining the story we make of our lives through the images and experiences shared between screen and skin; “For the truth of the life-world is that the way of things is the way of ourselves with them” (O’Neill, 1974, p. 10). Turning inward to listen, share and debate ourselves – however limited, inconsistent or misplaced – holds the potential to recreate community through conversation.

### **The Street Speaks and So Do I: Why At-Risk and Street Involved Youth?**

Street involved youth are the focus of this participatory video project because they are especially vulnerable to the *politics of mutism* within social, political and cultural institutions, which relegate them as silent observers to the forces shaping their lives, perpetuate their at-risk state and further marginalize their civic development (O’Neill, 1994, p. 46; Lee, 2001, p. 88). For street involved youth, the links between the internal conversation, individual agency and social structure is distorted, or as Archer states,

fractured. This “fractured reflexivity precludes the monitoring of either self or society, and hence the monitored relationship between them” (p. 298). This disconnect makes it difficult for individuals to pinpoint concerns or enact a plan to meet their goals (p. 302). However, as Archer explains, modes of reflexivity can be altered, which opens the potential for participatory video projects to fuel a transformation in the “fractured reflexivity” within individual street involved youth, because in situations where thoughts are challenged and exchanged a new social reality begins to take shape (Habermas, 1984).

How the “fractured reflexivity” Archer examines can be shifted among street involved youth involved within a participatory video project demands both a theoretical and perceptual positioning of the body as a “...schema of our world, or the source of a vertical or human space in which we project our feelings, moods and values...” (O’Neill, 1982, p. 80). As such, this participatory video research project underwrites its methodological explorations within a phenomenology of perception (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception and expression works in conjunction with this research project because it offers a conceptual framework that begins to dismantle the traditional cultural construction of at-risk, street involved youth, and provides a multilayered *literacy of experience* that supplements traditional discursive modes of understanding and knowledge production with the embodied, subjective accounts of the youth participating in the project. In doing so, it presents the opportunity for the youth involved in this participatory research project to explore their own embodied spaces, which may help to “...reconfigure the role of bodily experience in the development of knowledge” (Alcoff, 2000, p. 56) as well as unpack traditional adult-

centred approaches to knowledge production around the child/youth from that of a “human becoming” toward one of a “human being” (Lee, 2001; General Assembly of the UN, 1989).

Phenomenological frameworks focused on perception, development and the lived experience, specifically as they relate to perceptions of the child, childhood and the body owe a great deal to Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s book, The Phenomenology of Perception (1962). He applies phenomenology to the carnal body as a way to describe lived experience as an embodied space – an ever-shifting fluid environment that does not separate the mind from body, but positions human existence in an ambiguous space somewhere between the world and consciousness. “The world is not what I think, but what I live thought. I am open to the world, I have no doubt that I am in communication with it, but I do not possess it; it is inexhaustible” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. xvi-xvii). This approach moves beyond the singular reliance on traditional discursive practices, because “...meaning is not outside culture and history, but meaning is produced through the embodied actions of consciousness in the world” (Alcoff, 2000, p. 49).

Framing a participatory video research project with at-risk, street involved youth within a phenomenology of perception aims to offer participants an opportunity to explore the “ambiguity” of their own perceptual experiences, tracing the way they understand themselves and their community in a way that is neither-nor, but a “living cohesion in which I belong to myself, while belonging to the world” (O’Neill, 1989, p. 40). A phenomenology of perception also offers a fluid space to explore, debate, create and rebuild lived experiences in order to: first, “...understand both our ability to know the world and that our knowledge of it is forever incomplete, caught as it is inside, carried

out within the temporal flux and incapable of achieving a final or complete reduction...(Alcoff, 2000, p. 49); and second, begin to build a "...dialectic between personal and public life...and the struggle between the "organization of authority and the delinquencies of love's body" (O'Neill, 1982, p. 86).

For at-risk, street involved youth who may have had limited opportunities for personal expression with themselves, through technology and among their wider community, communicating their lived experiences through the *praxis*-based process of this participatory video research project may help to provide "gradual clarification and rectification" (Moran & Mooney, 2002, p. 425).

It is critical for the further development of professional, participatory video practice to begin to understand the dynamic way participants in these projects, specifically at-risk, street involved youth revisit, exchange, abandon or embrace their individual, private lives and the internal conversations held there. "We cannot account for any outcome unless we understand the agent's project in relation to the social context. And we cannot understand her project without entering into her reflexive deliberations about her personal concerns in conjunctions with the objective social context that she confronts," (Archer, 2003, p. 131). However, engaging in this dialogic endeavour is made more difficult when an individual's ability to be reflexive is suspended or impeded.

For Archer, individuals whose powers of reflexivity have been suspended continue to engage in internal conversations, but the agential outcomes of these conversations do not offer any guidance into the way these individuals choose to practice life-projects or interact with the life-world (Archer, 2003, p. 301). Fractured reflexives are unable to diagnose their situations, identify their own interests or design projects to

fulfill their goals (however misguided or misinformed); instead, their internal conversations “go round in inconclusive circles, which increase the subjects’ disorientation...” (Archer, 2003, p. 303). Archer argues the inability to create active outcomes through their internal conversations leads fractured reflexives to “forfeit control over his or her own life” (p. 301). However, it is important to note that this fractured reflexivity, like any other part of the body has the potential to heal, change and grow. For at-risk, street involved youth involved in this participatory video research project, the creative experience is as corporeal as it is cognitive. “Perception is a creative receptivity rather than a passive capacity to receive impressions” (Merleau-Ponty, as cited in Vasseleu, 1998, p. 24). The at-risk, street involved youth exploring a “corporeally based correspondence” (p. 24) with and around each other during this participatory video research project hold the possibility to begin to heal themselves and re-activate their subjective experiences through their embodied, internal conversations. Turning the camera ‘inward’ and listening to the voices found there clears a space for Freirean “conscientization” within creative action.

### **Definition of Terms**

Many definitions shift as society does:

A word has no intrinsic connection with the thing it denotes. A tree might just as well have been called a shree, or a bree. Convention sees to it that when we use the word “tree,” everyone knows what we are talking about. But life and language are far from simple. A signified is a mental concept, but it may not be a universal concept. It, too, can be as arbitrary as the sign... Signifieds may differ from one language to another. The French have a word for dog, *chien*, but there is no proper concept for “pet”. What is more, the ideas in the mind tend to shift and break out of their frames as time goes on. The signified slices up and organizes the world its own particular way, and that way can change. There is no fixed, immutable dictionary definition the concept must retain through all eternity in order to be regarded as the correct signified for a given signifier. “Property” for example, once carried the sense of ownership of property, hence conferring a message of

respectability. Later, all traces of the primary meaning fell away. Language, said Saussure, has “no positive terms,” but which he meant it contains no freestanding works with a unique, permanent reference (Campbell, 2001, p. 267).

While not exhaustive or extensive, this list includes the definitions of words I use frequently throughout this report.

### **Street Involved Youth**

The term street involved youth in this research project refers to street involved youth in Hamilton, Ontario that could be living on the streets, have recently left the streets, are relatively homeless, at risk of becoming homeless or are involved in activities with youth who frequent the streets. In all cases, the definition of street involved youth for this research project refers to youth who frequent the streets in order to find a sense of community and identity in Hamilton, Ontario.

### **At-Risk Youth**

This is a term use to define youth who may be vulnerable to social, sexual, emotional, financial, personal or developmental exploitation. At-risk youth include youth who may or may not be involved in criminal activities, living at home or on the streets. They could be students or out-of-school.

### **Gang-Affiliated Youth**

This is a term used to define youth who may have been involved, are currently involved or aspire to be involved with organized groups engaged in criminal activity. These organized groups may be loosely affiliated, or maintain strong bonds of loyalty and contact.



### **Participatory Video Project**

This is a term used to explain the ongoing development of video production as a tool for lasting social change. These projects invite participants to create their own video stories in order to inform, share, advocate and express relevant issues or themes to each other and their wider community. It is a process that turns media technology toward the eyes and experiences of vulnerable populations, and gives people the opportunity to record, reflect and critique personal and community issues in a creative way.

Definitions were developed through the on-going research of participatory researchers across disciplines (Leadbeater, Banister, Benoit, Jansson, Marshall, and Riecken, 2006; White, S., 2002).

### **Care Ethics**

This is a term I borrow from leading research in human geography, specifically the work completed by Victoria Lawson and her colleagues at the University of Washington (Lawson, 2007). In this case, care ethics focuses on the tangible ways communities can enhance mutuality and well-being, and the role professional practice plays in these developments. For Lawson and others, care ethics “begins with a social ontology of connection...[where] all social relationships are contextual, partial, attentive, responsive and responsible” (Lawson, 2007).

### **Description of the Project**

#### **Background**

*See Me. Hear Me. Talk to Me.* aimed to develop a critical participatory video project and accompanying research paper in partnership with a small group of 7 to 10 street involved and gang-affiliated youth. The youth came from a variety of ethnic

backgrounds and neighbourhoods in Hamilton, Ontario, and they ranged between the ages of 19 to 23. All participants were young men. They were part of RE-create, an open art studio for street involved youth in Hamilton, Ontario, and/or were involved with the employment/ambassador programs offered by a national social service agency in the city, which cannot be named due to confidentiality agreements. The youth involved in this project were either on probation, and/or currently involved in the criminal justice system. They were either defined as at-risk for future involvement in criminal or gang-related activities, and/or street involved due to their connection to the street community.

These youth formed the core of the project's participant sample because of their involvement in programs and/or projects that aim to build transferable life and work skills through asset building and community engagement. I have also worked with youth from RE-create on unrelated video, photography and art projects since 2006. Due to this experience, we developed a relationship built on trust and communication – a key component of successful PAR projects that rely on a “shared life” (Park et al., 1993, p. 18) and a solid community foundation.

### **Development**

The participatory video research project's development started in March, 2008 when information meetings were held between myself, RE-create's Artistic Director, and youth workers as well as the Director of the unnamed social service agency. These meetings gave everyone an opportunity to explore participatory methodology, set up a schedule for the production and answer any questions about the process, research or production. The video project was introduced to the youth at the beginning of May, 2008 and production started one week later. The youth were asked to commit to the project in a

flexible capacity, in order to accommodate their vulnerable, often-unstable life situations, and any unexpected challenges that may arise in their lives.

Once the youth participants formally consented to their involvement, we held group meetings to discuss how they wanted to produce the project, which was themed around the concept, “My City. My Life.” This statement was chosen in consultation with RE-create’s Board of Directors and the unnamed social service agency as a way to encourage reflection among participants. After three two-hour pre-production meetings, the youth decided to work together on a short 3-5 minute video that would aim to debunk traditional stereotypes. As one youth said, “A lot of people see us as thugs, like we’re going flip you, kill you and take your money. But it’s not like that. We’ve got so much more going on.” The video would give each youth the opportunity to share their experiences growing up in neighbourhoods across the city, both on-camera and through their rhymes or raps. They would videotape, edit and compose music for the video, which would be shown in their presentations to school-aged children in the city. Working with the production team, the youth would gather footage of Hamilton, and specific locations in the neighbourhoods that held importance to them. Some ideas included filming at a local basketball court, around their home, under bridges and near their old elementary schools.

Each youth was also provided with two 800 ISO/flash disposable cameras to take photographs of their city when we were not working on the video. They were encouraged to explore their neighbourhoods as they experience them today. The disposable camera was another tool they could use to document themselves and those around them and they would use the photos in the video as well. As one youth said when asked what made him

nervous about the videotaping and photographing the process: “Saying the right thing, you know? Representing who I am to the fullest. Not at all just trying to put out there, in a sense, a front.” The disposable cameras gave the youth another way to represent themselves beyond words, in action.

### **Production Team**

I acted as the facilitator who trained participants in basic journalism, camera operating, editing, post-production and distribution skills, while overseeing the continued movement of the project through its various stages. RE-create’s Artistic Director, Betty Brouwer also facilitated the creative process with the youth, encouraging them to gather ‘behind the scenes’ footage and photos as we moved through the production process. She is also a trained counselor, and supported the youth through the experience. The role of the facilitator is a key component, because it transforms the traditional view of “expert” into that of “guide” for participants and the community. A professional videographer was also part of the research team and worked with the youth participants to train them in basic pre-production, production and post-production skills. He also accompanied the youth on all shoots and excursions during video production. A youth worker from the unnamed social service agency also accompanied the production team on all shoots. He encouraged the youth to plan their individual segments in team meetings outside of the scheduled production times.

### **Support For the Process**

Very little has been written about the ethical concerns surrounding research involving vulnerable youth populations (Leadbeater, Banister, Benoit, Jansson, Marshall & Riecken, 2006, p. x). As outlined by Celia Fisher and Jessica Masty (2006, p. 23),

youth participants may feel doubly stigmatized during their involvement in a publicly available video project by both the street involved and wider community. Also, sensitive or emotional subject matter may expose participants to personal challenges or experiences. In order to address these issues, this project worked with a number of professionally trained counselors who offered support to youth; implemented an ongoing, confidential evaluation process to gauge youth reaction to and interaction with the video's subject matter as well as their involvement in the production; allowed youth to leave the project at any time during its production for any reason; and adhered to strict confidentiality agreements with any information shared between the youth and the research team. All youth were to receive copies of both the video and research project upon completion. They were also given the opportunity to review and comment on the research project, in order to ensure that the information provided is an accurate portrayal of their personal experiences and reflections.

Participants were asked to complete a series of ongoing individual and group evaluations before, during and after the project. These evaluations attempted to give the youth an opportunity to explore their own connection to and interaction with themselves, each other and the wider community; build a depth of qualitative data; and chart the course of the video portion of the project as it moves through its various production stages. The transformative potential of participatory video projects is fuelled by *praxis* and the continual self and group evaluations helped facilitate the reflection process. Youth were encouraged to evaluate their experiences individually through photography, rap, rhymes, creative writing, and interviews. They were also asked to evaluate the production process as a group during by-weekly meetings.

### **From Theory to Action: A Participatory Methodology**

Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology translates research into action. It is a conversation – a means of critical communication that aims to give participants the opportunity to explore and re-create their private and public spaces (Freire, in Park et al., 1993, p. x). For at-risk or street involved youth, this type of research aims to elicit understanding through direct action, and has been applied in various youth participation/empowerment projects within the health and education disciplines (Minkler, & Wallerstein, 2003). This participatory video research project aimed to bridge this disciplinary divide, because the health and education of at-risk youth does not stop at the clinic or the classroom; instead, it is intricately linked to participants' ability to critically express and share civic literacy/understanding with themselves, each other and their wider community through current media technology. In this context, participatory methodology is a vehicle to create, share and collect a *literacy of experience* that we can all engage.

PAR methodology gives researchers the opportunity to blur the connection between the researcher and the researched, and develop a symbiotic relationship between partners based on mutual collaboration fuelled by trust, communication and inquiry (Minkler, & Wallerstein, 2003, p. 5). PAR develops research where "...the silenced are not just incidental to the curiosity of the researcher but are the masters of inquiry into the underlying causes of the events in their world. In this context research becomes a means of moving them beyond silence into a quest to proclaim the world" (Freire, in Park et al., 1993, p. x).

Youth-directed participatory video research projects are a unique and original area to employ this methodology, because alternative media projects, as a technology of critical communication, can invite and motivate a range of experiences, understandings and perspectives in a broader debate. As a form of both “recovery and discovery” (Park et al., 1993, p. 18) PAR methodology within this project used media tools and skills to meet a key component of PAR – that “all people have the capacity to think and work together for a better life; and current and future knowledge, skills, and resources are to be shared in equitable ways that deliberately support fair distributions and structures” (Smith, Willms & Johnson, 1997, p. 177).

In Voices of Change: Participatory Research in the United States and Canada, Budd Hall remarks that PAR “is about the right to speak.... It is the process which supports the voices from the margins in speaking, analyzing, building alliances, and taking action” (1993, p. xvii). As such, the transformative potential of participatory video projects with at-risk, street involved youth is a collaborative endeavour created, designed and directed by the voices of the youth and supported by the project’s facilitators. Due to the fluid, interactive nature of participatory methodology, there is no “step-by-step” guide or manual that can be used to conduct or gather research (Park et al., 1993, p. 2), instead, it is, as was stated previously, a means to build a *literacy of experience*, unique to each participant and project, but relevant to communities beyond. PAR is a “negotiable” process that “must suggest rather than demand a possible context...which can be amended in interaction with participants” (Brydon-Miller, 1993, p. 127).

How youth design and develop this type of media project and assess its transformative potential, hinges on the way the methodology is incorporated within the

project's overall creation and production. With this type of methodology, participants identify the research question, evaluate their challenges and successes, and empower each other to question and recreate the project within a series of continuous evaluations (Springett, 2001, p. 269). Participants also work together to develop the types of research methods used to gather and analyze data (Park et al., 1993, p. 11).

### **Limitations of Study**

While this participatory video research project may hold emancipatory potential, the participatory methodology is not without its challenges. As Jane Springett explains, community-based participatory research faces numerous challenges. In particular, the open nature of the methodology means the project is tied directly to the participants, whose involvement is often negotiated by power relations and resources (2001, p. 274); the larger the project, the greater reliance on traditional methods of execution, which often reinforce a 'teacher-student' relationship that narrows the gap for full, active participant involvement (2001, p. 274); high turn-over in participants and facilitators (specifically for projects that involve a volunteer base of street involved community members) means the project's continued development is precarious (2001, p.276); and the project faces a constant threat of "expertism" or "reinforcing academic hegemony" if the relationship between the facilitator and participants is not continuously re-defined as a partnership (2001, p. 277).

The challenges outlined by Springett are pulled from a variety of PAR projects conducted within community health studies (Minkler, & Wallerstein, 2003). However, they are not specific to health or education. The fluidity of the methodology and its outcomes allows recommendations, challenges and successes to be shared across



disciplines. Final project evaluations and research updates on method, form and execution helped to guide the development and implementation of this participatory video research project (see note 3) especially in engaging with the organizational and inter-group dynamic challenges that arose very early into the project (see The Project's Outcomes).

In addition to the challenges inherent within the PAR methodology, this project is limited in other ways. The small sample size of the youth involved, blending a variety of perspectives among facilitators, and integrating the specific approaches of the youth participants themselves (based on their life experiences working with others, as well as those in positions of authority or privilege), all work to limit this study, especially as it relates to the three guiding research questions. However, the limitations of this study also serve as a platform for further research into the development of participatory video projects within social services and other related agencies. The outcome of this research project aims to add a small, but significant contribution to the current, but very limited research in participatory video projects with at-risk, street involved youth in order to encourage further interdisciplinary study, as well as the development of some preliminary reference tools to help governments, non-profits and other interested organizations implement and explore these types of participatory media projects in the future.

“Participatory research provides the means for people to regain their ability to think for themselves and to innovate, as well as to remember their history and to revive their culture for the re-creation of the authentic life” (Park et al., 1993, p. 17). It is *their* “ability to think for themselves” that drove the creation and production of this

participatory video research project, despite the overall limits and challenges of the project.

### **Data Collection**

This participatory video research project relied on one-on-one interviews with the youth, as well as interviews with both the Artistic Director of RE-create and the Director of the unnamed social service agency. My field notes, which were taken during and after the recorded and non-recorded portions of the production, offered context to the research, as well as helped to structure follow-up questions and analysis as we moved through the various stages of the video project. The interviews and field notes were based on a phenomenological approach (Seidman, 1998), which attempts to reveal and document life experiences through reflection. It is not meant to test a hypothesis, but return the method of analysis and exploration back to the youth participants. The interview questions (see Appendix 1) attempted to gather insight into the participatory process from everyone involved in order to better understand the project's transformative potential.

I transcribed all of the interviews in a text-based format that allowed me to batch repeating themes into overall groups. These themes helped me explore the participants' experiences in specific cases as they related to my overall research questions. Analyzing the data followed this format:

STEP 1	Collect Data Through Interviews Mark Relevant Text in Transcripts Identify Repeating Ideas
STEP 2	Organize and Group Ideas – Create Themes

STEP 3	Group Related Themes Into Theoretical Concepts
STEP 4	Create Profiles (unable to complete due to confidentiality agreements)
STEP 5	Discuss Findings and Implications

Figure 1: Method of Data Analysis

Note: Adapted from the works of Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Merriam, 2001.

### Learning Objectives of the Project

A critical approach to participatory video projects assumes a critical perspective on traditional power relations and differentials – this type of project must not only be attached to theory, but also reflect and test it. It is in the active *methods* of production and creative, critical conversation among the participants where this research project develops, crystallizes and is eventually disseminated in an effort to build an individualized, dynamic *literacy of experience* within and among participants, and the wider community. “The private life of the mind was not a passive matter of ‘looking inward’ to see what we found there, but an active process in which we continuously *converse* with ourselves, precisely in order to define what we do believe, do desire and do intend to do. In other words, it is the personal power that enables us to be the authors of our own projects” (Archer, 2003, p. 34). For sociologist Robert Bellah, the integration of private and public life, or in his words, “the politics of community, the politics of interest, and the politics of the nation” are crucial, because it is in this integration where “a new context of wider possibilities for accommodation and innovation” can be found (1985, p. 218). It is my purpose that this participatory video research project would offer a

preliminary space to explore the benefits, challenges and constraints that surround the transformative potential of participatory video as a relatively new tool for at-risk, street involved youth to challenge, question and investigate their own fractured reflexivity. The “wider possibilities” for this interdisciplinary critical participatory video project and accompanying research paper aim to not only initiate further interdisciplinary research between communication/media, sociology, health and education disciplines, but to also offer professionals, government organizations, non-profit groups and schools an applied point of initial reference and some preliminary tools to help them explore similar projects for at-risk youth today.

### **The Project’s Outcomes**

*“The second they told we [sic] were going to get the opportunity, it, ah, blew my mind. I was like, ‘alright’, you know? Yah.” – Youth Participant*

The development of this participatory video research project moved through the pre-production and production phases during the first three weeks in May, 2008. The youth agreed on a theme for the video, began to plan their individual segments, and completed an initial introduction to the video, as a way to test the camera and editing equipment, as well as learn how to work together, with the facilitators and their wider community. They went out on location twice during this time to gather footage, share their experiences on-camera and begin to edit the video. They also created an initial ‘beat’ or soundtrack for the video, which they planned to use as a bridge to link the individual segments together.

During a post-production session to build the video’s soundtrack, as well as edit the introduction to the video, management from the unnamed social service agency raised

concerns about the way the youth chose to represent themselves through their physical appearance, the content of the raps and rhymes, as well as the samples they chose to integrate into the soundtrack. Management called an impromptu meeting immediately. Only the Director of the unnamed social service agency and myself were allowed to attend. At that meeting, the Director raised concerns around the modes of representation; maintaining confidentiality and privacy; data ownership; accountability; and transparency. In particular, management was concerned that the way youth chose to represent themselves in the video would reflect badly on the agency and the agency would lose its funding. The agency's Director also stated that in order to protect the privacy of the youth, the participants would not be allowed to have copies of the final video or the music they created during the course of the research project. These concerns led management to cancel the project at the end of May. Management declined numerous requests for an open meeting among all partners to discuss these challenges and develop solutions from everyone. Only the Director of the unnamed social service agency and myself were allowed to meet. Eventually, I was allowed one final meeting with the youth at the agency, which took place on June 18, 2008. During this time, I was allowed one-on-one meetings with all of the youth participants. The meetings allowed me the opportunity to provide the youth with individualized work and school references based on the skills and abilities they demonstrated during the short time they worked on the video, but it also gave me some dedicated time to explore their reaction to the agency's decision to stop the project, their perspectives on the video project and their plans for future opportunities in this field. For participatory research, the development of lasting, stable relationships among all partners, along with open, honest and transparent discussions

about challenges that arise are key principles in fostering accountable projects, among a variety of collaborative research facilitators and partners (Leadbeater et al., 2006, p. 5-7).

While my original research planned to interview the youth before, during and after the video project, I was only able to complete interviews before the video was started and after the video was cancelled. However, I triangulated this limited qualitative research with in-depth conversations with the youth and my detailed field notes to gain further insight into these experiences based on their perspectives, in their voices. In particular, I was able to highlight five key, re-occurring themes from the youth, which may add a significant, yet small series of insights into the *private praxis* of the participants as they moved through this research project. The theoretical constructs are abstract concepts that organize groups of themes by fitting them into a theoretical framework (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). These constructs can be grouped as follows:

- the need to represent self to self and others
- the need to show others stories of survival, community and neighbourhood
- the need to overcome adversity through video technology
- the need to seize the video as a “once-in-a-lifetime opportunity”
- the need to use this opportunity to learn video and music production skills as a way to create a lasting technological memory of their life experiences.

In all cases, interacting with the video technology during the course of this participatory video project was the singular tool they focused on to help them build capacity and agency during and after the research project. Exploring these themes may offer some insight into my research’s guiding questions, and help frame some preliminary recommendations for future research in this area.

### **(Re) Present Me.**

Re-presenting themselves, their communities, neighbourhoods, and experiences through the production of the video and the music were re-occurring themes among the youth participants. Sharing themselves with others, through action, music and words were strong motivators for all of the youth. In order to offer the youth an authentic space to share their individual thoughts and ideas, I have included portions of their interviews below. Sharing their voices in this way reflects Freire's commitment to "conscientization" as he explains: "I cannot think for others or without others, nor can others think for me. Even if the people's thinking is superstitious or naïve, it is only as they rethink their assumptions in action that they can change. Producing and acting upon their own ideas – not consuming those of others – must continue that process" (1993, p. 89). In the interviews transcribed below, 'I' stands for Interviewer; 'Y' stands for Youth.

I: And what do you think about the end result? Are you going to show it to your friends, or family?

Y: You see, that kind of got me stoked you know? Like, you know, I can pull out a DVD and say, you know, 'I made this. Every little bit, you know?' I recorded it, I did the sound edit, I did the check, you know, everything. Everything, everything about that, I did it. It's me.

I: What makes you nervous about the process?

Y: Saying the right thing, you know? Representing who I am to the fullest. Not at all just trying to put out there, in a sense, a front.

I: Okay. So, what made you want to be a part of the video project?

Y: Well, ah, I don't know. I like to present myself, you know what I mean? I like to present myself, I like to rap. I like to write rhymes, I like to get them out there, especially on the screen, you know?

I: So, what do you want to do with your copy of the video once it is all done?

Y: Well, I haven't quite figured it out yet, though, what I want to do. But, really, I just want to be able to say what I want to say, whatever I got to say, I'm just going to say it, do what I got to do. Do me. You know?

I: So, can you tell me why you wanted to volunteer for this video project?

Y: I kinda wanted to do this video project, to put the word out to people doing bad things, doing violence and stuff, you know, killing people. I lost a couple of friends over the past three years, back to back. You know, I just want to do something positive, you know?

I: So going back to the video, what do you think will or has been the easiest or best part of making the video?

Y: Well. Ah, probably when we're in the park, when we're in the park. Well, the neighbourhood has changed after the years, you know? Little kids can come to the park now, you know? They can...parents used to be scared to go, you know? But that would probably be the best segment to put together, you know? To see how my neighbourhood, my community, has changed over the years. Yah, I don't know. It's up and down, it's up and down.

I: So, can you tell me why you thought it would be a good idea to volunteer for the video project?

Y: I don't know, I was involved, I got involved in this video project because it was something that I wanted to do for a long time, you know? It's something that I'm down for, you know? Like, I go home and I'll write in my book and I'll just starting rhyming. It's just something I like to do.

I: So, what....have you given it any thought as to what you want your segment to be about, or what you want to share?

Y: No, I haven't given it any thought yet. It's probably just one of those things just be me. Just me, rhyming. Just giving out a shoutout to all me peop-all my homeboys that died and stuff.

To “do me”, to represent “who I am to the fullest” and share the outcome with others points to Archer’s work and how we, as individuals, “make our lives” with and through the private deliberations that occur when confronted with choice or change. These private conversations carry a mixture of forethought and spontaneity, and produce a form of self-knowledge through first questioning and then clarifying the situation; and second, through deliberating and then designing a course of action. As illustrated in the interviews with the youth, they first analyze the situation and design a course of action for further involvement. While most of the youth had not planned their individual segment within the video by the first set of interviews, they had thought about who and



what they wanted to honour (i.e. friends who had been murdered; their past experiences in the city; themselves; and their music) and in doing so demonstrated a *private praxis* that at once reflected and then acted and later adjusted to the social positioning, cultural influences and relationships built and dismantled between their subjective responses to the lived-world and those they share it with: “Who we are is a matter of what we care about most and the commitments we make accordingly...” (Archer, 2003, p. 120).

The process of personal assessment, analysis and action is further illustrated in the almost unilateral declaration of the “once-in-a-lifetime opportunity” the youth labeled the participatory video research project. Not only were the youth engaged to learn the related video and music production skills, along with the industry-standard video production equipment, they did so with the goal to create a shared technological memory of their life experiences and perspectives.

### **Remember Me.**

I: So, can you tell me why you wanted to be a part of this video project?

Y: Ah, I would say the experience most off. Just the experience – the experience to do these types of things, it’s a once in a lifetime opportunity. And, ah, by not being a part of it, I think that the experience is, the experience is, again, what I would miss out on the most. Ah, you know, life is a one-time thing, you know? And it’s the memories and what you leave behind is mostly what I wanted to do...

I: So, have you thought about what you want to do, what you want to focus on for your segment?

Y: Well. I would like to go to my neighbourhood, and a few of my friends would like to join too. And just playing basketball at (*omitted for confidentiality*) Park, I grew up there. That’s my neighbourhood. I’ve had a pretty rough go in that neighbourhood and I want to get the message out there that, ah, I don’t know, that, ah, life’s not good everywhere.

I: But you can make a change?

Y: Oh, yeah. You can make a change.

I: So going back to the video, what do you think will or has been the easiest or best part of making the video?

Y: Well. Ah, probably when we’re in the park, when we’re in the park. Well, the neighbourhood has changed after the years, you know? Little kids can come to the park now, you know? They can...parents used to be scared to go, you know? But that would

probably be the best segment to put together, you know? To see how my neighbourhood, my community, has changed over the years. Yah, I don't know. It's up and down, it's up and down.

It is in the relationship to and interaction with the video technology, each other and the wider community, and the opportunity to begin to share their experiences in a way they both found valuable and meaningful that began to crystallize Freire's pedagogy – the self-aware, liberating process discovered in communication and implemented in action. It is a creative-cognitive process that the youth were actively exploring at these early stages in the video's production. As one youth told me, when I found him holding the video's hand-held microphone closely, and staring at it intently, "I just want to hold it. It's all I've ever wanted to do. I want to hold it close so I can say what I need to say."

### **Project Cancelled**

Management's decision to cancel the project half way through the production phase of this research project pointed to larger ethical issues that surround the development of participatory video research projects. In particular, the decision raised the following new research questions:

1. How do participatory video facilitators stay true to the collaborative methodology and a critical pedagogy, when the organization supporting the project does not approve and/or restricts the way participants are choosing to express themselves and share their voices?
2. How can I assess the transformative potential of participatory video projects in this case study when they are bounded by rules that do not match the ethical approaches of the participatory methodology?

A number of authors have advanced principles for participatory research. Drawing on over a decade of experience, Barbara Israel and her colleagues have identified nine key principles of this type research that support successful research partnerships (Israel B., Schulz, A., Parker, E. and Becker, A., 1998). These principles include:

- recognize community as a unit of identity
- build on strengths and resources within the community
- facilitate collaborative, equitable involvement of all partners in all phases of the research
- integrate knowledge and intervention for mutual benefit of all partners
- promote a co-learning and empowering process that attends to social inequalities
- involve a cyclical and iterative process
- address themes and issues from both positive and ecological perspectives
- disseminate findings and knowledge gained to all partners
- involve long-term commitment by all partners.

These principles are based on a collaborative model where participants, partners and facilitators are co-researchers and creative producers within the project. Together, they share, disseminate and critique how the project develops across all stages. This includes retaining copies of all creative parts of the project and final product. Leading participatory researchers with at-risk youth have outlined ethical guidelines to ensure the ongoing, critical development of relationships as voices and perspectives are shared among everyone involved within the project (Leadbeater, Banister, Benoit, Jansson, Marshall, and Riecken, 2006). These ethical guidelines inform this particular research

project, and work to ensure that the youth who volunteered their time and talent are supported in a number of ways, which protect their privacy and confidentiality, reduce any potential harm, and provide a respectful, accountable, honest and open space for them to share their voices through video production. As noted previously, this participatory methodology encouraged the youth to design and develop the research project, as well as the project's facilitators and supporting agencies to create a collaborative environment where the youth could express themselves, and develop transferable life and work skills. Building inter-group dynamics that support a shared space for participatory action, engagement and empowerment is a complex endeavour linked to the development of strong ethical guidelines and support (Lawson, 2007; Lang, 2004; Leadbeater et al., 2006). It is based on building relationships of trust and responsibility between everyone involved.

### **Living Research, Learning Objectives**

While the decision to cancel the video portion of the project dramatically changed the projected outcome of this research, it broadened my research approach and expanded my learning objectives. Specifically, this decision shifted my unilateral focus on the transformative potential of individual youth participants to that of the host organization(s) and the outstanding power differentials, ethical issues and related historic, social and civic frameworks that impede and impact the transformative possibility of these types of projects with at-risk and street involved youth. While Freire's call for individual transformation or "conscientization" informs the development of this and other related research (see note 4), it is, as reflected in this project, a tenuous goal that is as much a

part of the ability of participants to engage with the project, as it is constrained and molded by the organizational, group and funding structures that surround it.

### **Power as Control, Power as Possibility**

A critical approach to youth-driven participatory video projects blurs the connection between the researcher and the researched, and aims to develop a symbiotic relationship between partners based on mutual collaboration fuelled by trust, communication and inquiry (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003, p. 5). Youth empowerment projects with a critical approach not only aim to offer a space for youth to find and share their unique voices and perspectives, as well as build their civic literacy/engagement; they also offer an opportunity for youth to critically explore the power relations and domination that structure their community, which often lead to and reinforce their own disparity and marginalization (Jennings, et al., 2006, p. 31-55). In effect, these types of projects pull the private lives of those involved into a very public context – a context that aims to give all participants the opportunity to build on each other's experiences, challenge traditional power relations and empower social justice through civic engagement. While much of the research has expounded the benefits of empowerment opportunities for marginalized communities (see note 5), a critical approach specifically questions the role traditional power relations play in the dissemination, interaction and creation of knowledge within society, while also "...helping practitioners to develop a critical and self-critical understanding of their situation – which is to say, an understanding of the way both particular people and particular settings are shaped and re-shaped discursively, culturally, socially and historically" (Kemmis, 2001, p. 92). The following section outlines how my initial learning objectives were expanded to included

key critical theorists, educators and research, in order to help create a multi-dimensional, theoretical frame for the further development of this research, as well as provide initial recommendations for future research.

As noted previously, *See Me. Hear Me. Talk to Me.* was designed and interpreted based on the development of critical education pedagogy spurred by Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970). It is grounded in Freire's Marxist definition of *praxis*, specifically the central role action and reflection play in the liberation of knowledge and the reclamation of understanding from the perspective of marginalized communities. Freire's work is a substantial influence on the project's critical theoretical perspective because it continues to influence current youth empowerment action research projects (see note 6). However, it is also important to integrate the theoretical work of Michel Foucault within the development of this project's theoretical foundation. Critical theory, like PAR methodology, does not fit comfortably in one disciplinary mode or framework (Kemmis, 2001, p. 92); it is, in the truest sense, a historical, dialogic project – through action and reflection, this theory is built from the ideas of a number of critical thinkers as they continue to add their varied perspectives to this ongoing conversation.

Societal power and its interaction with and influence upon the creation and dissemination of knowledge are key components of this project's learning objectives. This project is attached to the understanding that "power is a paradoxical, systemic phenomenon that permeates human functioning and interactions at multiple levels...." (Jennings et al., 2006, p. 54), and it draws upon the earlier work on domination and power differentials explored by Foucault's nuanced studies on power's inter-relationship with knowledge. While poststructuralist and postmodernist thought have an uneasy

relationship with critical theory, specifically as it is articulated by the theorists from the Frankfurt School, it is important to refresh critical approaches with the work of Foucault as a means to flesh out key power relationships found in youth empowerment participatory video projects. As Calhoun (1995) states, theorists must, "...develop systematic ways of understanding the world that are true to that world as the object of experience and action as well as of observation, that recognize the place of other subjects in that world, and that are rigorous yet recognize their own embeddedness in history" (p. 4). It is my hope that drawing on the inter-related components of a range of critical, social and phenomenological theories will add depth to this project's theoretical foundation, because, as Calhoun explains, this research is more than a school of thought – it is "an interpenetrating body of work which demands and produces critique..." (1995, p. 35) across social, cultural, political and historical domains.

In Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977 (1980), Foucault outlines two of his key claims – that current scientific discourse is a form of social control over the actions and body of an individual, and that power is constantly being reinvented and reconfigured in the various interactions among social institutions. These claims form a key portion of this research project's critical approach. Applied to at-risk or street involved youth and their connection to and interaction with a variety of social forces and institutions – from social workers to teachers to law enforcement and parents – Foucault's work highlights how concepts of civic literacy, engagement and empowerment may simply transcribe new forms of power differentials between and among at-risk youth and their interactions with these various institutions. His concepts, however, also highlight the "continual flux" (Eisler, 2004, p. 185) of these power

relationships, which is “neither a two-fold force to be administered from the top down, nor... explicitly in social institutions, such as medicine or education, or in rules or laws” (Eisler, 2004, p. 185). Instead, power is a fluid, complex relationship that is as much about *possibility* as it is about control.

In *Power and Knowledge*, John Gaventa and Andrea Cornwall (2001) draw the links between Foucault’s work on the “micro-processes” of power and its links to knowledge creation and dissemination. In particular, they point to the connection between Foucault’s argument that power operates through a multitude of modes and may actually frame “the boundaries of possibility that govern action” (p. 72), which, through the development of participatory research initiatives, may actually work to build and re-establish new power relationships, through discourses and action. For Gaventa and Cornwall, this connection is crucial because “if power is the capacity to act upon boundaries that affect one’s life, to broaden those boundaries does not always mean to de-limit those of others. In this sense power, may have a synergistic element....” – an element that is tied directly to the foundation of critical theory and its action-oriented attempt to critique dominant ideology in an effort to develop alternative social and political relationships (Held, 1980, p. 16).

How the youth involved in this research project were able to “broaden their boundaries” both within and beyond the scope of the project was at once expanded and constrained – it is an outcome of control through creativity. As noted previously, management were supportive of the creative technological space the participatory video offered the youth, but were concerned that they could not direct youth to represent themselves in ways that would support the agency’s overall mandate and funding



directives. During my final meeting with the youth, every participant expressed anger, frustration and apathy toward the cancellation of their project. They told me management never told them why the video project was cancelled. One youth remarked, “It is so ridiculous what happened. They’ve just acted as if nothing has happened. But it has. Something big has happened and I just want the change to finish what we all started.” This comment reflects another one of the themes of this research – the need to overcome adversity through video technology. While the majority of the youth focused their efforts on their personal life experiences during the video’s production, they shifted their individual interaction with and connection to the video project after its cancellation. All of the youth expressed an interest to volunteer their time to work on a new video and music production beyond the organizational mandate of the unnamed social service agency during my final meeting with them. For the youth, producing a video beyond the mandate of the unnamed social service agency would give them an opportunity to fulfill their plans, while critically assessing their relationship with adults and others in positions of power. As one youth said during the final meeting:

This isn’t the first time this has happened. I don’t get excited or enthusiastic anymore, because these things just end and I’m used to it. When all the other guys were mad about it, I just stayed cool because it didn’t surprise me. But then I think of Kanye (*Kanye West*) and he says that people told him he couldn’t rap, but he sold out the venue (*at a concert in Toronto*). He said, ‘don’t anyone tell you that you can’t do something, because you can’. I want to be like Kanye. I want to finish this.

The connections between modes of representation as perceived by adults, children and youth is a historically complex, powerful set of shifting relationships. Returning to research in child socialization may help to better understand the enduring social and

historical constraints around participatory video projects developed for and with youth today.

### **Censoring the Child: A Call for Citizenship**

In Today's Children: Creating A Future for a Generation in Crisis David Hamburg asks, "How is it that 'the child' functions as a metaphor for our development, progress and well-being, while simultaneously standing as a metaphor for the failure of society, for the inhumanity, poverty, and ignorance that stunts the lives of so many children?" (1992, p. xi). While Hamburg posed the question as a means to frame his exploration of child development in North America during the late-20<sup>th</sup> century, his observation can also lend itself to an analysis of the representation of youth within social institutions – from the media, to schools and government institutions – and how these forms of representation link to the transformative potential of participatory video projects with at-risk, street involved youth.

In an effort to broaden Hamburg's observation about the dual nature of children/youth today, current sociological studies have argued that at-risk youth are especially vulnerable to the *politics of mutism* within social, political and cultural institutions, which relegate them as silent observers to the forces shaping their lives, perpetuate their at-risk state and further marginalize their civic development (O'Neill, 1994, p. 46; Lee, 2001, p. 88). These sociological studies grew from earlier work around child socialization and the concept of childhood within sociology discourses in the late 1970s (Dreitzel, 1973). Spurred by Phillipe Ariès' Centuries of Childhood, child sociologists, psychologists and educators, such as Hans Peter Dreitzel, Alfred Schütz, David M. Rafky, Chris Jenks and John O'Neill, conceived of alternate approaches to

socialization, and explored the constructed concept of childhood through sociological and phenomenological lenses. Specifically, they argued ideas and interactions with and around the concept of the child must be seen “as an interaction process which involves the child as an active partner, rather than as a process of unilateral manipulation of the child” (Dreitzel, 1973, p. 5). For these researchers, the historical “unilateral manipulation of the child” led to “a gloss over the social experience of childhood” (Jenks, 1982, p. 12) that was constructed for adults, by adults. For Jenks and many others, then, “...what is said about children and childhood is not really about children and childhood at all” (p. 13). For these researchers and theorists, socialization “can only be understood if seen as a complex interaction process governed by a reciprocity of needs, demands, and perspectives” (Jenks, 1982, p. 6). This view ushered in the idea of the child as ‘human being’ instead of ‘human becoming’ (Lee, 2001) – a concept that would eventually form the foundation for a number of child/youth empowerment projects that attempted to ‘give voice’ to the world’s children and youth.

The United Nation’s Convention on the Rights of the Child (General Assembly of the UN, 1989) attempted to reclaim children’s voices by offering a global space for children to speak about their experiences and injustices, while offering solutions (Lee, 2001, p. 91). It was a first-step in the international recognition of children as competent, engaged citizens, however, the sweeping, global generalizations led to many ambiguities in the way the convention would actually empower children to speak and be listened to (Lee, 2001, p. 93). While the intricacies of the convention are not the focus of this research, it is important to note that the UN convention was a key political endeavour that

influenced how youth empowerment projects in a variety of disciplines frame their research studies (see note 7).

In two comprehensive explorations on the sociology of childhood, Nick Lee expands the muted nature of the childhood experience from a historical-political context. For Lee (2001), the way children and childhood have been viewed as “dependent becomings of the developmental state” (p. 88) has silenced them in favour of the adult experience, which “knows best” and treats children’s voices as incapable of articulating understanding in any meaningful way. Lee argues that this traditional, dominant view carelessly assumes that adults will always act in the best interests of the most vulnerable. In Childhood and Society: Growing up in an Age of Uncertainty Lee remarks, “Silent dependency is a trap. How can you defend yourself against those who are supposed to protect you if part of the ‘protection’ they offer is to speak to the world on your behalf?” (2001, p. 90-91).

How Lee’s argument relates to this research project and its overall outcome is developed further in current critical education and media literacy theory, which argues that the term “empowerment” and accompanying adult-driven theories, projects and research that attempt to ‘give voice’ to marginalized children or youth are often little more than overused slogans, bounded by traditional power relations/discourses and defined in generalizations instead of specifics (McLaren & Giarelli, 1995). Empowerment is, in itself, a continuum of development, “modest and limited” and dependent on the framework of each specific project (1995, p.306-307) – a key critique as I explore the shifting learning outcomes of this particular participatory video research project.

While the idea of empowerment through *praxis* can, at first, seem like a straightforward concept to incorporate into participatory video projects, the pragmatic applications can prove challenging. In this case, I had shared two proposals with the unnamed social service agency during our preliminary information meetings. In these documents, which also included supporting material from community, academic and research partners, I explained that all participants would receive copies of the final video and any other related creative materials they produced during the course of the project. Returning creative products to their producers is a guiding principle of participatory action research projects. Participants are, in this instance, co-producers within the creative process. While it was agreed that the project's facilitators and the supporting agencies aimed to maintain an ethical, accountable and respectful environment for the youth, the way these concepts were constructed within and around the project were perceived and acted upon very differently among the various partners, co-facilitators and youth. Finding ethical and compatible approaches to creative products produced during these types of participatory projects is an enduring challenge with no clear set of solutions (Leadbeater et al, 2006, p. 19-20).

While a PAR and empowerment literature (see note 8) highlight the emancipatory potential of the participatory approach, it is cautioned that there are limits to both the practice and its theoretical underpinnings – it is not a social or political “magic bullet” (McLaren, 1995, p. 301). There is a real lack of theoretical research on “emancipation” and “empowerment” as it is used within critical research and practice and Colin Lankshear reminds researchers that both terms are elliptical concepts, bounded by power and situated as a “matter of degree”. In particular, he states that all empowerment projects

demand, “the basis of a theory of power grounded in discursive processes of meaning-making; and a self-conscious recognition of the responsibility...not merely to profess empowerment as an ideal, but to spell out what this entails theoretically and practically, and to ensure the research design is equal and up to the task” (p. 307).

Critically assessing these types of participatory video projects demands an interdisciplinary approach that incorporates literature from critical theory, child socialization, phenomenology and participatory research literature, because, together, these bodies of literature offer an opportunity to encourage a broad, continuous and critical evaluations of participatory video projects as they continue to be developed, implemented and assessed among both youth participants and management within organizations. These frameworks create a multi-dimensional relationship between the body, self and society in a way that works through and with media technology. It is an ongoing, creative-cognitive process that writes itself within the voices shared on and off camera, pressed between screen and skin.

The transformative potential of participatory video projects is a reciprocal process between the internal capacity to create a conversation for greater civic action (Archer, 2003) and the organizational, social and funding structures that work around, between and within the participatory video project as it develops. The unnamed social service agency’s decision to cancel this participatory video research project points to the need for the development of future research projects around Freire’s “conscientization” as it is explored today within, around and between *both* participants and organizations involved in these shared projects. If, as Merleau-Ponty states, “I borrow myself from others; I create others from my own thoughts” (1968, p. 159), the internal, transformative potential

of participatory video research projects may, in fact, be found in the organizational structure, as much as it is found within the youth participants.

## **Recommendations**

### **Review of the Participatory Video Research Project**

The development of targeted participatory video research projects with at-risk and street involved youth continues to make small and slow in-roads within academic, participatory research and practice. Due to this gap in the research, I aimed to design and develop a participatory video research project that worked to break new ground in professional participatory video practice by focusing on the individual transformative processes of a small group of at-risk, street involved youth engaged in a participatory action research (PAR) video project. This participatory video research project aimed to gain a small, but specific insight into the transformative processes of at-risk, street involved youth by exploring their experiences and personal perspectives before, during and after the project. In doing so, it intended to add to the current, but very limited research in participatory video projects with street involved youth in order to encourage further interdisciplinary study, as well as the development of some preliminary reference tools to help governments, non-profits and other interested organizations critically engage street involved youth today.

I focused this project around the following three questions:

1. To what extent does the participation of street involved youth in a participatory video research project provide the impetus for their individual development of Freirean “conscientization”, or the start of their transformative process?

2. Did the involvement of the street involved youth in the participatory video research project broaden their personal perspectives?
3. What are the implications for using similar participatory video projects with street involved youth beyond the small group involved in this research project?

The limited qualitative research I gathered through two sets of interviews with the youth, triangulated with in-depth conversations with the participants and my detailed field notes helped to gain further insight into these experiences based on their perspectives, in their voices. In particular, I was able to highlight five key, re-occurring themes from the youth, which helped to add a significant, yet small series of insights into the *private praxis* of the participants as they moved through the production of this participatory video research project. These themes helped illustrate the impetus for the participants' individual development of Freirean "conscientization" and the ability of the project to broaden their personal perspectives. While this insight is crucial for further academic research into the transformative potential of participatory video with at-risk and street involved youth, it was the decision to cancel the project itself that raised a number of new, critical research questions around the further development of participatory video. These new questions point to the numerous ethical implications of this type of work, as it aims to engage the *private praxis* of participants within organizational structures. Building responsive and accountable projects in a community setting invites multiple definitions, perspectives and responses to participatory approaches. As revealed in this project, enabling participants an open space to share their voices can serve to highlight the many, differing ways researchers, facilitators and community partners listen to those



voices, and the historical, social and civic limits that control Freire's "conscientization" within this creative process.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

I group the recommendations for future research into two areas:

1. The recommendations shared by the youth involved in this research project
2. My recommendations

#### **Recommendations by Youth**

In the final meeting with the youth, I asked each participant to share their insight about the development of the video project and what they would like to see changed or done differently in the future. While it was challenging for them to share recommendations beyond the experiences of this project, below is a list of their shared recommendations:

1. It is the responsibility of the partner organization and/or agency to honour their commitment to the participatory process, regardless of projected outcomes of the project. As one youth said, "if they agreed to it, they've gotta stay true to their word. We did."
2. All youth should be involved in all meetings with everyone at every stage of the project's development. Most of the youth in this research project still did not understand why the project had been cancelled and almost all said they had not been given the opportunity to ask questions about the decision.
3. Everyone involved in the project should ask questions if they do not understand the process. Many of the youth said they felt management and

staff at the unnamed social service agency “didn’t understand what we wanted to say and how we wanted to say it.”

4. More participatory video projects should be made available in social service programs, but they need to be supported by everyone involved. All of the youth agreed that this “once-in-a-lifetime opportunity” not only encouraged them to arrive on time, it inspired them to continue to write and create their raps, as well as understand how to work with other people on a shared goal. One youth said, “A lot of the guys want to continue to do this. This is one of the best things that have happened to us in these situations. Even though the way it ended sucked, I’m still stoked to continue.”

### **My Recommendations**

The experience of this participatory video research project initially turned ‘inward’ and asked participants to assess their own individual responses to and interactions with the video process and technology. However, the unexpected cancellation of the project by management of the unnamed social service agency created an expanded space for an exploration of agency that is at once ‘internal’ and ‘external’. For all partners involved in this process, the ability to assess the situation, question the implications and design methods of action were bolted to the shared ability to express themselves in a safe and supported space. Working around the constraints and limits of management’s decision raised the following ethical questions for me:

1. How do participatory video facilitators stay true to the collaborative methodology and a critical pedagogy, when the organization supporting the

project does not approve and/or restricts the way participants are choosing to express themselves and share their voices?

2. How can we begin to assess the transformative potential of participatory video projects when projects are bounded by rules that do not match the ethical approaches of the participatory methodology?

The development of Care Ethics (Lawson, 2007; Lang 2004) within geography may add some transferable insight into the future development of academic research into the possibilities and limitations of participatory video as a method of “conscientization” (Freire, 1970). For many researchers within human geography, care ethics “moves us beyond critique and toward the construction of new forms of relationships, institutions, and action that enhance mutuality and well-being” (Lawson, 2007, p. 1). For these geographers, similar to researchers within participatory media practices, care ethics shifts modes of understanding away from justice and toward specific sites and social relationships that produce the need and content for care. Relationships are structured to enhance mutuality and well being, and focus on the interdependence of shared interactions the bind all participants at the individual, personal, professional, organizational and political levels. Participatory video, as a shared technology, pushes these linkages further because it relies on applied skills and theoretical understandings of its approach, design and implementation. It is, therefore, crucial that participatory video research teams and their supporting partners are reminded about the appropriate technological and theoretical background and application throughout the course of the project. As participatory projects expand and contract along with the participants, organizations and communities they work within, it is of utmost importance that all

partners continually discuss, challenge and explore the methodology and its implications together. Further research into the threads that interweave the conceptualization, production and dissemination of participatory video projects may assist in the development of shared, standardized ethical guidelines for these types of projects in the future.

## Conclusion

In Merleau-Ponty's unfinished work, The Visible and The Invisible (1968), the author puts forward a concept of the body as internal and external – a reversible hinge that bends with and around the life experiences that are both created and acted upon in every moment. His construction of the body as an agent capable of being both the subject and object of all relations (Vasseleu, 1998, p. 27) works to highlight the interwoven threads of the life-world shared among the body, self and society. We are all participants in and the producers of the experiences we create and share. While this participatory video research project initially turned 'inward' to focus on the transformative process within its at-risk, street involved participants, it became clear in the project's eventual cancellation that the creation of the shared spaces necessary to facilitate participatory video projects is a *hinge* in itself – a reversible, reflexive construction where all partners inscribe their internal *and* external conversations. How participants, facilitators, community organizations and researchers learn to navigate these embodied conversations through and with video technology demands further research into ethical approaches and participatory engagement across multiple spaces and consciousnesses. It is here, in these recommendations for future research, where I believe Freire's process of "conscientization" will be found to be a transformative, embodied and dynamic process

for all partners.

### **Post-Script**

There have been numerous developments with the youth involved in this participatory video project since this project report was completed in August, 2008. In order to stay true to the ethical approaches developed within participatory research methodology, and build lasting relationships with community partners and youth participants, I continued to have meetings with the management of the unnamed social service agency after the project was cancelled, as well as the youth. I invited the youth participants to develop a video project through a separate initiative called the Photovoice Hamilton Youth Project, which I co-facilitate with the Community Centre for Media Arts and Social Planning and Research Council in Hamilton.

The Photovoice Hamilton Youth Project aims to develop a multimedia approach to participatory media, beyond traditional Photovoice methodology, in order to give street involved and otherwise at-risk youth an opportunity to share their perspectives on issues to the wider community. Youth use disposable cameras and video to share their experiences in order to encourage policy change at the municipal level. After a month of text messages, emails and impromptu meetings on city sidewalks, I encouraged four youth to come and produce a music video about their experiences in Hamilton. The project and its theme were chosen by the youth, and we have been meeting with them since mid-August, 2008. Currently, they have composed their lyrics and recorded their tracks. They will start production on the accompanying video in September, 2008. Their music video will be shown along with the photographs from other local youth at a free community event hosted by a local theatre on November 20, 2008. The youth are

contemplating performing their music live at the show.

Through open, honest and transparent conversations, dedicated resources and a commitment to long-term relationship building among all partners, this participatory video research project continues to develop among and with its participants. We are all producers of the experiences we create and share. The unnamed social service agency involved in the initial stages of the project's development has been completely supportive of the youth and their involvement in the Photovoice Hamilton Youth Project. The project gave the agency a space to explore participatory media from a distance, without fear of losing their funding or being directly responsible for the project's outcome. In particular, one of the youth workers continues to request more information about participatory research and participatory video. He plans to incorporate a collaborative, participatory approach with the gang-affiliated youth he works with in the future.

While this participatory video research project initially turned 'inward' to focus on the transformative process within its at-risk, street involved participants, it became clear in the project's eventual cancellation that the creation of the shared spaces necessary to facilitate participatory video projects is Merleau-Ponty's *hinge* in itself – a reversible, reflexive construction where all partners inscribe their internal *and* external conversations. As noted previously, how participants, facilitators, community organizations and researchers learn to navigate these embodied conversations through and with video technology demands further research into ethical approaches and participatory engagement across multiple spaces and consciousnesses. The present development of this particular participatory video research project illustrates just how the transformative, embodied and dynamic processes of participatory video are truly a

community endeavour that lives and breathes among us all.

### Notes

1. See Minkler, & Wallerstein, 2003; Cargo, M., Grams, G.D., Ottoson, J. M., Ward, P., & Green, L.W., 2003; Cheatham, A., & Shen, E., 2003; Chinman, M. J., & Linney, J.A., 1998; Ginwright, S., & James, T., 2002; Hilfinger Messias, D.K., Fore, E.M., McLoughlin, K., & Parra-Medina, D., 2005; Jennings, L.B., Parra-Medina, D.M., Hilfinger Messias, D.K., & McLoughlin, K., 2006; Kim, S., Crutchfield, C., Williams, C., & Hepler, N., 1998; Royce, S., 2004; Royce, S., Jennings, L. B., & McLaughlin, K., 2004; Wallerstein, N., Sanchez-Merki, V., & Verlade, L., 2005
2. See above.
3. See Brydon-Miller, M., 1993, p. 125-143; Comstock, & Fox, 1993, p.103-124; Maguire, 1993, p. 157-176
4. See Minkler, & Wallerstein, 2003; Cargo, M., Grams, G.D., Ottoson, J. M., Ward, P., & Green, L.W., 2003; Cheatham, A., & Shen, E., 2003; Chinman, M. J., & Linney, J.A., 1998; Ginwright, S., & James, T., 2002; Hilfinger Messias, D.K., Fore, E.M., McLoughlin, K., & Parra-Medina, D., 2005; Jennings, L.B., Parra-Medina, D.M., Hilfinger Messias, D.K., & McLoughlin, K., 2006; Kim, S., Crutchfield, C., Williams, C., & Hepler, N., 1998; Royce, S., 2004; Royce, S., Jennings, L. B., & McLaughlin, K., 2004; Wallerstein, N., Sanchez-Merki, V., & Verlade, L., 2005
5. See Cargo, Grams, Ottoson, Ward & Green, 2003; Jennings, et al., 2006; Jones & Meleis, 1993; Kim, Crutchfield, Williams & Hepler 1998; Lansdown, 2001; Messias, Fore, McLoughlin & Parra-Medina, 2005; Pinderhughes, 1995; Royce, 2004; Royce, Jennings & McLaughlin, 2004; Wallerstein, 1992; Wallerstein & Bernstein, 1988; Wallerstein, Sanchez-Merki & Verlade, 2005
6. See Blitzer Golombek, 2006; Cargo, Grams, Ottoson, Ward & Green, 2003; Checkoway, Richards-Schuster, Abdullah, Aragon, Facio, Figueroa, et al., 2003; Ginwright & James, 2002; Hilfinger Messias, Fore, McLoughlin & Parra-Medina, 2005; Jans, 2004; Jennings, Parra-Medina, Hilfinger Messias & McLoughlin, 2006; Kim, Crutchfield, Williams & Hepler, 1998; Nygreen, Kwon & Sánchez, 2006; O'Donoghue, Kirshner & McLaughlin, 2002; Royce, 2004; Wallerstein, Sanchez-Merki & Verlade, 2005; and Youniss & McLellan, 1997
7. See Checkoway, Richards-Schuster, Abdullah, Aragon, Facio, Figueroa, et al., 2003; Jans, 2004; and Skivenes & Strandbu, 2006
8. See Cargo, Grams, Ottoson, Ward & Green, 2003; Chinman & Linney, 1998; Jennings, et al., 2006; Jones & Meleis, 1993; Kim, Crutchfield, Williams & Hepler 1998; Lansdown, 2001; Messias, Fore, McLoughlin & Parra-Medina, 2005; Pinderhughes, 1995; Royce, 2004; Royce, Jennings & McLaughlin, 2004;



Wallerstein, 1992; Wallerstein & Bernstein, 1988; Wallerstein, Sanchez-Merki & Verlade, 2005; Zimmerman, 2000; Zimmerman, 1995; and Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988

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## Appendices

### **Appendix 1 Interview Questions**

#### **Interview 1: Before the Project Begins**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Part of that research study includes three voluntary face-to-face interviews with the researcher. All of your responses will be recorded and kept confidential. You will remain anonymous and can stop the interview at any time for any reason. Before you give your consent to be a volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

You are being asked to give your honest responses to the follow questions. These questions will help the researcher better understand your experience before the video research project begins.

1. Why did you decide to volunteer for this video research project?
2. Have you started to plan what your video will be about? If so, what are some of your ideas? If not, what will you do to prepare to make the video?
3. What do you think will be the best part about making your own video?
4. What do you think will be the hardest part about making your own video?
5. What do you hope to understand about yourself by making your own video?

#### **Interview 2: During the Project**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Part of that research study includes three voluntary face-to-face interviews with the researcher. All of your responses will be recorded and kept confidential. You will remain anonymous and can stop the interview at any time for any reason. Before you give your consent to be a volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

You are being asked to give your honest responses to the follow questions. These questions will help the researcher better understand your experience during the video research project.

1. Tell me a bit about your video so far.
2. Has making your own video been a different experience than you first expected? If so, how? If not, what did you expect before you started the video?
3. What has been the hardest part of the project so far? Why?
4. What have you enjoyed most about the project so far? Why?
5. What have you learned so far making the video?
6. What are your plans for the video now?
7. Do you still think it is important to participate in this project? Why or why not?

### **Interview 3: After the Project**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Part of that research study includes three voluntary face-to-face interviews with the researcher. All of your responses will be recorded and kept confidential. You will remain anonymous and can stop the interview at any time for any reason. Before you give your consent to be a volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

You are being asked to give your honest responses to the follow questions. These questions will help the researcher better understand your experience after you complete your video.

1. Tell me a bit about your video. How did you transform your ideas into a video?
2. Why did you choose to make a video about that topic?
3. Does your video reflect the ideas you had before you started the project? What did or didn't change?
4. What do you understand about yourself after making this video?
5. What was the best part of making your own video? Why?
6. What was the hardest part of making your own video? Why?
7. What would you change about the project now that it's finished?
8. What did you learn while making the video?
9. What do you think about making a video? Was it worth your time and effort?  
Would you do it again?

## Appendix 2

### Ryerson University Consent Agreement

#### **See Me. Hear Me. Talk To Me.: A Participatory Video Research Project**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to be a volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

**Investigators:** Sarah Glen, MA student, Department of Graduate Studies:  
Communication and Culture Program  
John O'Neill, Distinguished Research Professor of Sociology, Supervisor, York University

**Purpose of the Study:** This study will give you an opportunity to learn how to make a video about a topic that you want the rest of the city to know about. The video theme is, "My City. My Life." By making the video together, we want to learn what you thought about the experience. We want to learn what you liked and what you didn't like about making the video. Did making the video change your ideas about yourself? If so, how? If not, why? Approximately 10 participants will be involved in this study. You have been asked to voluntarily participate in this project because of your involvement either with RE-create, an open art studio or the [unnamed social service agency], both located in Hamilton, Ontario.

**Description of Your Involvement:** You will be asked to be part of a production team and help produce a video about a topic that interests you. You will be shown how to make a video and will be part of a larger team that helps make the video together. You can choose what part of the video you want to be involved with (for example, camera operator, editor, interviewer/interviewee, researcher, graphic designer or production assistant). You will be asked to complete 3 evaluations while making the video. These evaluations can be an art project, photography, creative writing, music, or an interview. You can choose the type of evaluation you want to do. Everyone who participates will be asked to complete a confidential interview with the researcher. These evaluations should express your experience so far making the video. You will also be asked to be a part of production meetings that will take place during the week. The time and place of all production meetings will be decided the first time everyone meets.

The video will start at the end of April, 2008 and end on June 30, 2008. During that time, you can choose how long and what parts of the video you want to help out with. You will be asked to attend the regularly scheduled production meetings, which will last one hour every two weeks.

**What is Experimental in this Study:** None of the procedures or interviews used in this study is experimental in nature. The only experimental aspect of this study is the gathering of information for the purpose of analysis.

**Risks or Discomforts:** The topic you choose for the video may be sensitive and you may feel emotional discomfort over the situation, the people you meet while making the video or other members of the project's team. Learning how to use camera and editing equipment can also seem overwhelming. You may feel anxiety about the equipment and learning how to use it. It may be difficult to get to every production meeting.

To help you, we are working with Betty Brouwer and counselors at RE-create. These people are here to listen to you and talk with you if you feel any emotional discomfort during the study. You will also be working with a production team that will walk you through every stage of the production and you will never be left alone to figure out how to use equipment or what to do next. You can also stop making the video at any time, either to take a break during a shoot, or to pull out of the project completely. We want to make sure that you can participate in the video. We will give you bus tickets and provide meals during production shoots. We will also reimburse you for your child care costs if you need additional care for your children during your participation in the study.

**Benefits of the Study:** We cannot guarantee that you will receive any benefits from participating in this study. But, we do believe that making the video will give you the opportunity to use professional media equipment to help you talk about a topic that interests you in a way that other community members will listen. You will learn hands-on media production skills like camera operating, editing, interviewing and researching. Everyone involved in the project gets a DVD copy of the video, and we will provide work and school references to all participants involved with the project. By telling us what you think about the project, you are helping other people understand your experience. This could lead to other projects and more people learning about the topic that interests you.

**Confidentiality:** Any and all information you provide off-camera and in the evaluations will be kept confidential. All video used to record information will only be available to the primary researcher, and information provided during the study will be transcribed with all names and/or identifying information removed. All video footage will be kept electronically on a secure, password-protected computer accessible by the primary researcher only. Hard copies of the evaluations and related videotapes will be kept in a secure location in a password-protected locker accessible by the primary researcher only. The hard and electronic versions of the video footage and evaluations will be kept for two years, and then they will be destroyed.

You can keep your copy of the video. You will be able to review and edit the video as part of our involvement. You can also review your evaluations and/or interviews any time during the project. The information will be included in a research paper, which you can review to make sure it is accurate.

As a participant in this study, you are also asked to take part in production meetings with other participants. At these meetings, other participants will know your identity and you will also hear and see what other participants have to say. While we promise to maintain your confidentiality, we cannot make this promise on behalf of all participants. We will request confidentiality from all participants at the beginning of all production meetings.

**Incentives to Participate:** You will not be paid to participate in this study. We will provide you with bus tickets, meals and any social service referrals you require during the course of the production. We will also provide work and school references to all participants upon request, and we will reimburse any child care costs related to your participation in the video.

**Voluntary Nature of Participation:** Participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time. In doing so, you will also withdraw your data from the study. If you wish to withdraw, there will be no negative consequences and your relationships with RE-create, [unnamed social service agency] and Ryerson University will remain intact. At any particular point in the study, you may also refuse to answer any particular question or refuse to participate in any activity requested during the study.

**Questions about the Study:** If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact:

Sarah Glen, Researcher  
289.237.1111

If you have questions regarding your rights as a human subject and participant in this study, you may contact the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board for information.

Research Ethics Board  
c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation  
Ryerson University  
350 Victoria Street  
Toronto, ON M5B 2K3  
416.979.5042

### **Agreement:**

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You have been given a copy of this agreement.

You have been told that by signing this consent agreement you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



Appendix 3

To: Sarah Glen  
Communication and Culture  
Re: REB 2007-186: See Me. Hear Me. Talk to Me.: Assessing the Transformative Potential of a  
Critical Participatory Video Project Produced by Street Involved Youth  
Date: October 22, 2007

Dear Sarah Glen,

The review of your protocol REB File REB 2007-186 is now complete. The project has been approved for a one year period. Please note that before proceeding with your project, compliance with other required University approvals/certifications, institutional requirements, or governmental authorizations may be required.

This approval may be extended after one year upon request. Please be advised that if the project is not renewed, approval will expire and no more research involving humans may take place. If this is a funded project, access to research funds may also be affected.

Please note that REB approval policies require that you adhere strictly to the protocol as last reviewed by the REB and that any modifications must be approved by the Board before they can be implemented. Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication from the Principal Investigator as to how, in the view of the Principal Investigator, these events affect the continuation of the protocol.

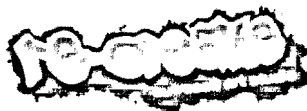
Finally, if research subjects are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and approvals of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research.

Please quote your REB file number (REB 2007-186) on future correspondence.

Congratulations and best of luck in conducting your research.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nancy Walton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline.

Nancy Walton, Ph.D.  
Chair, Research Ethics Board



Betty J. Broersma Brouwer, Artistic Director  
 1 Young Street Suite 502, 1 Hamilton, ON L8M 1T8  
 905-524-1238 | [www.re-create.org/sympatico.ca](http://www.re-create.org/sympatico.ca)

September 24, 2007

To whom it may concern,

RE: Sarah Glen Master's Participatory Video Research Project

This letter strongly endorses the draft proposal, See Me. Hear Me. Talk to Me. Assessing the Transformative potential of a Critical Video Project Produced by Street Involved Youth, as drafted by Sarah Glen for her Master's participatory video research project in partnership with RE-create Outreach Art Studio.

At RE-create, we have had the good fortune of having Sarah be an advocate and volunteer with RE-create since 2006. RE-create has worked with Sarah in the past on other projects. In these projects we have found Sarah to always demonstrate the highest level of professionalism, to be conscientious and ethical in her work practice and in her interaction with the street involved youth. RE-create and the street involved youth who access RE-create have only benefited from her past involvement.

It is to that end that RE-create Outreach Art Studio is delighted to partner with Sarah Glen on this project. RE-create will aid in the recruitment of 4-6 youth for this project and be involved in any way that is needed to ensure that the youth feel comfortable and to assist Sarah in any way necessary for the completion of this ground breaking research project. Several youth have been involved in other multimedia projects in which Sarah has also been involved and so have already established a relationship with her. This past experience makes youth more comfortable participating in this research project. Sarah's proposed research project meets all of RE-create's ethical and administrative guidelines. We look forward to being able to work closely with Sarah on this project in the spring of 2008.

As RE-create Outreach Art Studio's Artistic Director, I whole heartedly endorse this project and look forward to once again having the pleasure of working alongside such a gifted and compassionate woman. If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact me via email or by phone at the contacts listed below.

Kind regards,

Betty J. Broersma Brouwer  
 Artistic Director

RE-create Outreach Art Studio  
 E: [re-create@sympatico.ca](mailto:re-create@sympatico.ca)  
 T: 905-524-1238

Created in collaboration with the RE-create Outreach Art Studio where street involved youth have begun to RE-create their lives. Their voices are heard and their community through the creative arts when joining a studio RE-create.

## Appendix 4

### Ethical Guidelines

The following excerpted articles come from the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* and inform this participatory video research project. They have been included for additional reference.

#### D1. General Conditions

##### Article 2.4

Researchers shall provide, to prospective subjects or authorized third parties, full and frank disclosure of all information relevant to free and informed consent. Throughout the process of free and informed consent, the researcher must ensure that prospective subjects are given adequate opportunities to discuss and contemplate their participation. Subject to the exception in Article 2.1(c), at the commencement of the process of free and informed consent, researchers or their qualified designated representatives shall provide prospective subjects with the following:

1. Information that the individual is being invited to participate in a research project;
2. A comprehensible statement of the research purpose, the identity of the researcher, the expected duration and nature of participation, and a description of research procedures;
3. A comprehensible description of reasonably foreseeable harms and benefits that may arise from research participation, as well as the likely consequences of non-action, particularly in research related to treatment, or where invasive methodologies are involved, or where there is a potential for physical or psychological harm;
4. An assurance that prospective subjects are free not to participate, have the right to withdraw at any time without prejudice to pre-existing entitlements, and will be given continuing and meaningful opportunities for deciding whether or not to continue to participate; and
5. The possibility of commercialization of research findings, and the presence of any apparent or actual or potential conflict of interest on the part of researchers, their institutions or sponsors.

Under the normal process of obtaining written consent, the prospective subject should be given a copy of the consent form and any relevant written information. The consent of the

participants shall not be conditional upon, or include any statement to the effect that, by consenting, subjects waive any legal rights.

Article 2.4 indicates the requirement to give prospective subjects the information they need to give free and informed consent on whether to be involved in the research project. In a research team, the principal researcher is ultimately responsible for the actions of those acting with delegated authority.

Research subjects, whether inside or outside Canada, may have cultural values different from those of the researcher. Thus, as Articles 2.4(a-c) indicate, researchers must clearly explain the nature and goals of the research and other essential information, in a manner appropriate for the prospective subjects' cultural settings. With some cross-cultural research projects, it may not be possible to offer an adequate translation of the researcher's understanding to prospective subjects. REBs should proceed cautiously in such cases and require stringent protection for the interests of subjects, such as appointing an individual to act in an independent advocacy role. On the other hand, REBs should not assume an unnecessarily protective role that suggests that those who do not share the culture of the researchers, particularly those in foreign countries, are incapable of making rational decisions in their own interest.

Articles 2.2 and 2.4(d) help to ensure that a prospective subject's choice to participate is voluntary. Pre-existing entitlements to care, education and other services shall not be prejudiced by the decision on whether to participate. Accordingly, a physician should ensure that continued clinical care is not linked to research participation, and teachers should not recruit prospective subjects from their classes, or students under their supervision, without REB approval. Nothing in this section should be interpreted as meaning that normal classroom assessments of course work require REB approval. Article 2.4(d) also requires that researchers specifically ascertain continuing consent from subjects on the basis of new information.

#### E. Competence

Competence refers to the ability of prospective subjects to give informed consent in accord with their own fundamental values. It involves the ability to understand the information presented, to appreciate the potential consequences of a decision, and to provide free and informed consent. This ability may vary according to the choice being made, the circumstances surrounding the decision, or the time in question. Competence to participate in research, then, is not an all-or-nothing condition. It does not require prospective subjects to have the capacity to make every kind of decision. It requires that they be competent to make an informed decision about participation in particular research. Competence is neither a global condition nor a static one; it may be temporary or permanent.

The law on competence varies between jurisdictions. Researchers must comply with all applicable legislative requirements.

Ethical considerations around research involving those who are not competent to give a free and informed consent on their own behalf must seek to balance (1) the vulnerability that arises from their incompetence with (2) the injustice that would arise from their exclusion from the benefits of research.

As indicated in the Ethics Framework of this Policy, the principle of respect for human dignity entails high ethical obligations to the vulnerable populations. Such obligations often translate into special procedures to promote and protect their interests and dignity. The articles that follow detail the special procedures for research involving individuals with diminished decision making capacity.

#### Article 2.5

Subject to applicable legal requirements, individuals who are not legally competent shall only be asked to become research subjects when:

1. The research question can only be addressed using individuals within the identified group(s); and
2. Free and informed consent will be sought from their authorized representative(s); and
3. The research does not expose them to more than minimal risk without the potential for direct benefits for them.

Article 2.5(a) expresses the general requirement to restrict research involving incompetent subjects to questions that cannot be addressed with competent subjects. It also expresses the general moral preference for involving competent rather than incompetent research subjects, and the need to avoid selecting prospective subjects merely because of convenience. Article 2.5(b) provides a means of protecting their interests and dignity through the free and informed consent of authorized representatives (see also Articles 2.6 and 2.7), who are acting in the interests of the potential subjects and are not influenced by conflict of interest. Article 2.5(c) restricts the extent to which their authorized representatives can consent on their behalf.

Sound ethical reasoning and the subject-centred perspective require attention to context. In this instance, the notion of harm applied to children should be understood differently from harm in adults. Harm induced in children may have longer-term consequences to their growth and development. Furthermore, harms and benefits for children with chronic disabilities and terminal illnesses require special consideration. Every researcher working with child subjects must consider the possibility of the children suffering pain, anxiety or injury, and must develop and implement suitable precautions and ameliorating measures. Cumulative physical, moral, psychological and social consequences (relevant to pain, anxiety and injury) should be reviewed by REBs when assessing the probability, magnitude and character of any harmful impact the research may have on the child.

#### Article 2.6

For research involving incompetent individuals, the REB shall ensure that, as a minimum, the following conditions are met:

1. The researcher shall show how the free and informed consent will be sought from the authorized third party, and how the subjects' best interests will be protected.
2. The authorized third party may not be the researcher or any other member of the research team.
3. The continued free and informed consent of an appropriately authorized third party will be required to continue the participation of a legally incompetent subject in research, so long as the subject remains incompetent.
4. When a subject who was entered into a research project through third-party authorization becomes competent during the project, his or her informed consent shall be sought as a condition of continuing participation.

Article 2.6 outlines other safeguards to protect the dignity, interests and integrity of those who lack competence to give their free and informed consent to participation in research. The article details various considerations relevant to the use of third-party authorization. Beyond the legal requirements for obtaining free and informed consent from authorized third parties, family members and friends may provide information about the interests and previous wishes of prospective subjects. In some cases, the REB will have to determine from whom the free and informed consent should be sought.

#### Article 2.7

Where free and informed consent has been obtained from an authorized third party, and in those circumstances where the legally incompetent individual understands the nature and consequences of the research, the researcher shall seek to ascertain the wishes of the individual concerning participation. The potential subject's dissent will preclude his or her participation.

Many individuals who are not legally competent are still able to express their wishes in a meaningful way, even if such expression may not fulfill the requirements for free and informed consent. Prospective subjects may thus be capable of verbally or physically assenting to, or dissenting from, participation in research. Those who may be capable of assent or dissent include: (a) those whose competence is in the process of development, such as children whose capacity for judgment and self-direction is maturing; (b) those who once were capable of making an informed decision about informed consent, but whose competence is now considerably, but not completely, diminished, such as individuals with early Alzheimer's disease; and (c) those whose competence remains only partially developed, such as those suffering from permanent cognitive impairment.

#### A. Accessing Private Information: Personal Interviews

### Article 3.1

Subject to the exceptions in Article 1.1(c), researchers who intend to interview a human subject to secure identifiable personal information shall secure REB approval for the interview procedure used and shall ensure the free and informed consent of the interviewee as required in Article 2.4. As indicated in Article 1.1, REB approval is not required for access to publicly available information or materials, including archival documents and records of public interviews or performances.

Article 3.1 requires REB approval for collection of information through personal interviews, which may be described as including such means as face-to-face, telephone or other electronic encounters, or individualized questionnaires, that the researcher uses to gather materials for such purposes as a biographical study or other research involving specific personalities. To assist the review of such activities, REBs may wish to encourage faculties and departments that use individual interviews extensively to develop standard interview procedures based on Article 2.3 and Article 3.1, as well as on the requirements of their professional organizations, if they so wish. Prior approval of such interview procedures may greatly simplify further review of similar protocols, though the dangers of attempting to enforce a single interview procedure on the varied circumstances within a complex institution are evident.

The task of the REB is to ensure that individuals who are approached for interviews are given the information required by this Policy in order to be able to give free and informed consent. It is clear that individuals have the right to refuse to be interviewed, if they so wish.

Nothing in this article should be interpreted to mean that REBs should engage in prior censorship of research concerning those in the public arena or in artistic and literary life (see Article 1.1(c)).

### B. Accessing Private Information: Surveys, Questionnaires and the Collection of Data

#### Article 3.2

Subject to Article 3.1 above, researchers shall secure REB approval for obtaining identifiable personal information about subjects. Approval for such research shall include such considerations as:

1. The type of data to be collected;
2. The purpose for the which the data will be used;
3. Limits on the use, disclosure and retention of the data;
4. Appropriate safeguards for security and confidentiality;

5. Any modes of observation (e.g., photographs or videos) or access to information (e.g., sound recordings) in the research that allow identification of particular subjects;
6. Any anticipated secondary uses of identifiable data from the research;
7. Any anticipated linkage of data gathered in the research with other data about subjects, whether those data are contained in public or personal records; and
8. Provisions for confidentiality of data resulting from the research.

Article 3.2 requires researchers to secure REB review before commencing research involving identifiable personal information collected from subjects by such means as interviews, questionnaires, observation, access to private files or records, etc.

Researchers should ensure that the data obtained are stored with all the precautions appropriate to the sensitivity of the data. Data released should not contain names, initials or other identifying information. While it may be important to preserve certain types of identifiers (e.g., region of residence), these should be masked as much as possible using a standardized protocol before the data are released for research purposes. However, legitimate circumstances may exist where such information is critical for the research project. Accordingly, information that identifies individuals or groups should be kept in different databases with unique identifiers. Researchers should take reasonable measures to ensure against inadvertent identification of individuals or groups, and must address this issue to the satisfaction of the REB.

Article 3.2 states that subjects have a right to know who will have access to identifying information, and to know about the nature of that information. In particular, the researcher should inform the subject if the information will be provided to the government, government agencies, personnel from an agency that monitors the research, the research sponsor (e.g., a pharmaceutical company), the REB or a regulatory agency. This would also include situations in which mandatory reporting is required, such as under laws requiring reporting of child abuse, infectious diseases or homicidal intent. The REB and the researcher should be sensitive to the interests of those who might suffer from stigmatization. For example, when records of prisoners, employees, students or others are used for research purposes, the researcher should not provide authorities with results that could identify individuals, unless the prior written consent of the subjects is obtained. Researchers may, however, provide to administrative bodies for policy decision making purposes, aggregated data that cannot be linked to individuals.

Article 3.2 refers not only to the secondary uses of information in research, but also for other purposes, such as the subsequent use of research videos for educational purposes. It is essential that subsequent uses of data be specified in sufficient detail that prospective subjects may give free and informed consent; it is inappropriate to seek blanket permission for "research in general." Article 3.2(g) is important because information that



may on its own be seen as innocuous by the subject may take on a completely different meaning if linked to other data (see Article 3.6).

### C. Secondary Use of Data

Secondary use of data refers to the use in research of data contained in records collected for a purpose other than the research itself. Common examples are patient or school records or biological specimens, originally produced for therapeutic or educational purposes, but now proposed for use in research. This issue becomes of concern only when data can be linked to individuals, and becomes critical when the possibility exists that individuals can be identified in the published reports.

### Article 3.3

If identifying information is involved, REB approval shall be sought for secondary uses of data. Researchers may gain access to identifying information if they have demonstrated to the satisfaction of the REB that:

1. Identifying information is essential to the research;
2. They will take appropriate measures to protect the privacy of the individuals, to ensure the confidentiality of the data, and to minimize harms to subjects; and
3. Individuals to whom the data refer have not objected to secondary use.

Databases can vary greatly in the degree to which personal information is identifiable. A proportionate approach should be applied by the REB to evaluate the sensitivity of the information in the database and to modulate its requirements accordingly. If it is impossible to identify individuals whose records exist within a database, then researchers should be allowed access to that database. The REB must carefully appraise the possibility of identification, in particular with regard to the extent of the harm or stigma that might be attached to identification. The REB and the researcher should also be aware of legal provisions that affect the database(s) to be used in the research.

REBs and researchers should also be sensitive to the context in which the database was created, such as a confidential relationship, as well as to the expectations of the groups or individuals at the time of the collection of the data with regard to its use, retention and disclosure. When it is unclear as to whether information is to be regarded as personal, researchers should consult their REBs. Confidential information collected in this manner should normally not be transmitted to authorities, unless required by law, the courts or similar legally constituted bodies.

### Article 3.4

The REB may also require that a researcher's access to secondary use of data involving identifying information be dependent on:

1. The informed consent of those who contributed data or of authorized third parties; or
2. An appropriate strategy for informing the subjects; or
3. Consultation with representatives of those who contributed data.

Article 3.4 is based on the concept of a proportionate approach to ethical assessment of research. Under it, the REB should focus on projects above minimal risk, or modulate requirements and protection proportionate to the magnitude and probability of harms, including the likelihood that published data can be linked to individuals. In highly sensitive situations, such as when identifiable data will be published or other instances when there is a significant risk of breach of confidentiality, Article 3.4(a) indicates that such deliberations and balancing may lead the REB to seek consent to use the stored data from those who made the contribution.

It may be impossible, difficult or economically unfeasible to contact all subjects in a study group to obtain informed consent. This can occur when the group is large or its members are deceased, geographically dispersed or difficult to track. In such cases, Article 3.4(b) requires that the researcher propose an appropriate strategy for informing the relevant parties or, in accord with Article 3.4(c), that there be consultation with representative members of the affected group (e.g., in an AIDS study, contacting one or a number of AIDS advocacy groups), or that there be some way to sample the opinions of a subset of individuals in the group.

### Article 3.5

Researchers who wish to contact individuals to whom data refer shall seek the authorization of the REB prior to contact.

In certain cases, the research goal may only be achieved by follow-up contact and interviews with persons. It is evident that individuals or groups might be sensitive if they discover that research was conducted on their data without their knowledge; others may not want any further contact. This potential harm underlines the importance for researchers to make all efforts to allow subjects the right to consent that their data and private information be part of a study.

### Research Involving Those Who Are Incompetent to Consent for Themselves

Although ethical duties to vulnerable populations preclude the exploitation of those who are incompetent to consent for themselves for research purposes, there is nonetheless an obligation to conduct research involving such people because it is unjust to exclude them from the benefits that can be expected from research (see Section 2).

### Article 5.3

Subject to the provisions in Articles 2.6 to 2.8, those who are not competent to consent for themselves shall not be automatically excluded from research that is potentially beneficial to them as individuals, or to the group that they represent.

Article 5.3 expresses the need for research that involves those who, though not competent to consent for themselves, are unique individuals who command all the respect, justice and inclusiveness that are accorded to competent individuals. The behaviour, psychology, biology and diseases of infants and children who are incompetent because of immaturity often differ markedly from those of adults; also, incompetence is often caused by disease, which cannot be studied only in those without the disease. However, the ethical imperative for research as expressed in Article 5.3 must be interpreted in the context of the safeguards expressed in Articles 2.6 to 2.8.