ARTivism:
GENDER AND ARTISTIC EXPRESSION AT AWAC

By

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Abstract

This thesis explores the power dynamics inherent in discussions about legitimate knowledge and gender expectations. Through eight sessions of art and eleven interviews, it exposes oppressive systems and compares the intersections of race, class, sex, and sexuality. My interdisciplinary approach expands from the work of local contemporary artist and researcher Zandra Dahne Harding. Building upon her thesis, and including influences from feminist theorists such as Rich, hooks, and Butler, and minority activists like Tuhiwai Smith and Feinberg, I situate voices emerging from marginalized populations as equally relevant and poignant, using the case study of seventeen residents of AWAC Homeless Shelter. Art is a means of expression for those whose experiences are muted by socioeconomic disadvantage, differential access to education, and non-normative gender identities. This thesis shares an example of how oppressed people can use and personalize participation in the visual arts to subvert elements of prevailing power structures, like those related to education, criminal corrections, and gender hierarchies. Art sessions and interviews conducted with feminist and indigenous frameworks, called "artivism" helped participants involved with a street-level shelter in Northern British Columbia communicate some aspects of their diverse truths of subordination.

Keywords: arts-based research, art as activism, homelessness, homeless people, gender, transgender, two-spirit, autoethnography, artivism, femininity

Contents

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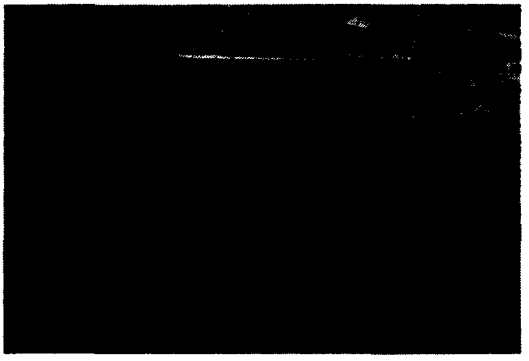


Chapter 1: Introduction

"When the power of love overcomes the love of power, the world will know peace."–Jimi Hendrix

The crux of this research hinges on the power disparity in academic epistemology, where a person is considered an expert only if credentialed by other experts. Artistic activism, or artivism, can help explain, disentangle, and equalize these dynamics between the artist and amateur, between the educated and the uneducated, and between the researcher and the subject. My intent is to disclose where power dynamics affect the act of researching as well as the reception of the research. I will address themes such as: sexism, racism, classism, ableism, and heterosexism. These intersecting forms of oppression affect the participants' ability to express themselves and to be heard when doing so.

This project engages people marginalized by those aforementioned elements of our culture that invalidate the experiences and expertise of people with less formal education credentials in a quest to access some of their power through creation of art. The study population could be called homeless Canadian women by some authorities. Interaction with this research, however, indicates that the participant group is more precisely: houseless females in the North. They are just one such group that is denied access to expression, by those in society who turn a blind eye, which is one of the many ways to maintain the status quo. For women in our patriarchal culture, access to social and financial capital, or power, is more difficult because of gendered expectations, like reservation and modesty, that many in our society uphold (Doniger 2005; Douglas 1995; Estes 1995). As children, our power isn't as cultivated and celebrated in mainstream publications as it is for males (Okin 2000; Shiva 1989; Transken 2007). For female children in low-income families, the

disadvantage of sexism is intensified by their experiences of classism. Many participants in this research have been affected by multi-generational homelessness and unlicensed employment. Their socioeconomic status has undoubtedly impacted their access to expression. For example by not having the money to buy what they want and in many cases, need (Interviews with Andrea, Jessica, Heather); by limitations on their options for work (Mate, 2008); by social restrictions on what they can say and who they can talk to about work; and by the access to the lexicon of decision-makers, e.g. limited vocabulary (Golden, 1992), limited access to cultural studies education (hooks, 1994), limited bureaucratic assistance (Baines, 2003). By adulthood, their condition of homelessness has eroded their autonomy (Chen, et al, 2011). Yet despite social conditioning, through repeated implicit and explicit negligence, to stay skeptical and sometimes silent, these participants agreed to share their stories for this research project.

Purpose

Social justice activist Sandra Lee Bartky warns us that "current imbalances will persist until the maldistribution of every social good, including the means of interpretation and communication, is ended; then every woman who wishes to can speak for herself" (Bartky, 1990, p. 9). The purpose of this project is to carve out spaces in academia where untraditional voices can be amplified. The participants and I sought emancipatory conversation, knowledge, and education by making spaces, in art sessions, canvasses, interviews, and this thesis for marginalized people to communicate their experiences.

Carving these spaces for empowerment is critical to the discipline of Gender Studies, because so much of the theory emerging from this branch of the academy has reified wealthy women's power while simultaneously ostracizing women of colour, females embodying various degrees of femininity, and other individuals with low social and economic capital (Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004; Law, 2009).

In an tactical effort to create a unified voice of women, presumably more formidable in combatting patriarchy, these further marginalized populations have had their stories assimilated by accounts of the female empowerment movement's hegemonic population: straight, white, upper class women (hooks, 2000). For example, white women excluded women of colour from early women's suffrage marches and gender variant people have been excluded from most human rights policy initiatives to date (hooks, 2000; Hill Collins, 2000; Davis, 1990). This homogenization of women's stories was intended to bring a clear message of feminine virtues to the mainstream but limited visibility for generations of females whose experiences did not align with that campaign (Hill Collins, p.221, 2000).

Now with more bilateral communication, we can begin to mend the damage of degrees of erasure by encouraging, listening to and collecting the previously muted voices. Mainstream Canadians must relearn the diversity of lived experiences that have occurred on this land (Valenti, 2007). Adrienne Rich's iconic call to action is as relevant as it ever was in this time of widening racial wealth disparity (Brodie and Bakker, 2008). Generations of privileged classes distancing themselves from the experiences of the most marginalized, many of whom are now homeless, has made it alarming for privileged outsiders to witness the lives and hear the stories of those

people they ignored or avoided (Rich, 1979). It is disquieting to many to encounter wealth inequality, and it is especially uncomfortable to see people who have suffered these disadvantages. Whether a privileged individual feels personally culpable for the disparity, they are adverse to the discomfort of awareness (Spade, 2011, p. 149). So often, even if there is a will to rectify any of the injustices, it is as emotionally difficult to bear witness to them as it is to obtain the opportunity to engage in such intimate conversations with (Chen, 2011, p. 207). Furthermore, when people are consistently ostracized or persecuted, they frequently opt out of encounters with people they perceive as the neglectful parties (Davis, 1990; hooks, 2000).

Those in positions of political power who have the ability to enact policy and budgetary changes that improve equality continue to disregard the experiences of marginalized populations, because to do so might mean sharing or dividing their power. Homeless people are rarely given the respect of being listened to, the first step towards power (Bishop, 1994; Blanton, 2009). The next step would be to translate their stories into language politicians, and that is still a long way from enacting effective policy reforms. bell hooks, the famed black feminist who, like me, struggles to find a balance between inclusive colloquialism and formal diction, insists, "The political importance of literacy is still understressed in feminist movement today even though printed material has practically become the sole medium for expression of theory" (hooks, 2000, p. 109).

Zandra Dahne Harding was the Master's student behind the first round of this arts-based research project conducted at the shelter for homeless females in Prince George, British Columbia known as AWAC (2010). She recognized art as a way to

overcome the communication barriers associated with marginality. She hypothesized and concluded that via art, participants could connect with feminist theory, avoiding inaccessible academic jargon and broadening its potential to include more voices. Participants used alternative means of communication to convey their stories and began to combat the overarching oppressions that separated them from an audience that could effect change in society and/or social policy. Accessing power to define themselves, the participants begin to disassemble and disempower the hegemony's essential expectations of femininity and epistemology.

Through interviews with residents and employees of AWAC, Harding showed that the participants who engaged in her arts-based research session benefitted in terms of "increased affect", "emotional balance", and even "reduced instances of substance abuse" (Harding, 2010). Because the first round of art workshops at AWAC conducted by Harding was so transformative according to participants and observers alike, the shelter's Executive Director, Marianne Sorensen welcomed the continuation of creative expression programming, in the form of art sessions conducted by Si Transken's graduate students.

Engaging in art is one way for humans to process stress (McNiff, 2004). Many postmodern academics have been fighting for the acceptance of art as a legitimate form of communication and, therefore, an aspect of the creation and collection of human knowledge. Mallika Sarabhai, a speaker at the 2009 TED Conference explained the evolution in this way: "we have treated arts as the cherry on the cake; it needs to be the yeast" (Sarabhai, 2009).

Art has a way of transcending boundaries of language, and therefore, it can be a powerful tool for those deprived of comprehensive linguistic skills. A group of people undereducated in language arts, homeless women in Canada, could therefore benefit from art as a means of communication.

Currently, conversation is abundant amongst certain groups, but in mainstream media and public policy debates, they seem to be missing perspectives from the topics themselves. For example, an avid CBC radio listener would have heard terribly disparate messages between January 11th and 12th, 2010. On Ana Maria Tremonti's show, *The Current*, she featured a documentary about survival sex trade and the men who purchase those services. The content was predominately about the lack of information and prevalence of disinformation surrounding prostitutes and their clients, homeless women, and sexual relations in general. Though it is the opinion of the author that this could be mitigated with feminist consciousness raising, e.g. Women's Studies education, the following day's show featured a discussion about the collapse of feminist education. From Tremonti's perspective (and those of her guests), the feminist agenda had been achieved and no further education was necessary (Tremonti, 2010). This snapshot of Canadian media indicates gaps in mainstream media that critically influences in millions of Canadians potentially misrepresentative ways.

Hybrid author/artist/activist June Jordan writes, "There is difference and there is power and who holds the power determines the meaning of the difference" (Walker, 1995, p. 66). This study is the second of four graduate research projects at AWAC. It has been written with intent to influence, however minutely, the balance

power dynamics, to empower the powerless and de-center the powerful. In doing so, we (myself and all of my companion researchers at AWAC) have tried, by sharing the power afforded us through systematic social privileges, to deconstruct a situation of power-over and work towards power-with (Mullaly, 2007). In *Becoming an Ally*, Anne Bishop explains that, "Oppression is an inevitable result of 'power-over.' In order to end it, our challenge is to discover how we can restore the skills, methods, and culture of 'power-with'" (Bishop, 1994, p. 31).

As researchers, we wield the power to shape value paradigms at every stage of our research (Wilson, 2005). Our attentiveness, as graduate students and teachers in the personal domestic space, albeit stark and public, of people without access to those communication privileges, to balancing power dynamics between the researcher and the researched was paramount. I can only speak to my own sense of discomfort with my privilege and responsibility to share it. Because I was born into and maintained a position of privilege through no merit of my own, it was difficult to separate my biases. As a white researcher from a university, I am already in a place to unintentionally misrepresent my "research subjects"., simply because my experiences have differed from theirs in many social aspects. I will avoid this term subjects for the duration of this report. This distinction between collaborative participants and subordinate subjects helped me to frame my relationship with the artists. Linda Tuhiwai Smith elaborates on why research should be conducted with such sensitivity:

> Research is inextricably linked to imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, 'research', is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary. When mentioned in many indigenous contexts, it stirs up silence,

> it conjures bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 1).

But it is not enough to conduct the research ethically. It is also true that the creation of text is an exercise of power (Wolf, 1992, p. 11). Try as I might to subvert the system that forces students to write their own words to prove their work, I had to abandon (for now) the dream of a collaborative thesis. Instead, I have incorporated as many of the words and canvasses of the artists as possible, because the purpose was always to make room for the voices of these marginalized "women". I will also avoid the gender-specific term women when referencing the participants, because while all of them were female-assigned at birth, not all identify as women (Interviews with Denys and Tara).

Another point of interest is the vocabulary employed in this report. As academics, we sometimes speak and write in a language that "ordinary people don't understand" (Green, 2007, p. 83). C. Wright Mills admonished academics to write like "mere journalists" so that their information could actually be utilized for social change (1959). I echo Anne Bishop's sentiment:

> In the beginning, I had hoped that this book could be written using only words which are part of everyday conversation... This did not prove possible. Too many of the concepts do not have precise everyday words. I also had to make some political choices when deciding what word to use (Bishop, 1994, p. 3).

I have learned from wise teachers not to "confuse understanding with a larger vocabulary... Continual intellectual study results in vanity and the false satisfaction of an undigested knowledge" (Yukteswar, as quoted by Yogananda, 1946, p. 131). I have attempted to "avoid technical jargon, though the desire to impress professional audiences sometimes got the better of me" (Bartky, 1990, p. 5). It was also important

as a liaison between the artistic and academic elements of the project, to use a format that could mediate between disconnected milieus. Though the content of this document is written for academic audiences, it has been shared with all available participants. Furthermore, other more accessible presentations of the research, such as gallery exhibits of the artwork, have invited broader audiences into conversations about this project.

I write with precise diction not to be pedantic, but to be quotable for grant applications and other funding sources, which became another key part of this research. Rigorous theoretical, scientific, and political language had to be employed in the "paper report for the white men", as a participant Tara called my thesis. Grant-writing is a process that often uses privileged information, credentials, and education to request funding. It is becoming increasingly important for shelters like AWAC to seek grants outside of their governmental funding, and documents like this can be a means to that end. "Women-serving agencies have reported ... that they are busier than ever as a direct result of cuts to income assistance, legal aid, disability benefits, employment standards, health rights, health education, and jobs" (BC Women Centres, 2003). It is no different at AWAC, where public funding has been slashed and programming suffered. Since culture mediates between the personal and political (Mullaly, 2002, p.96), I was tasked with translating the personal stories of these individuals in to language that could be cited to assist in the political reforms that the participants need. If I can just facilitate the communication, I feel that policy changes are possible.

Researcher Positionality

The nature of anti-oppressive research requires I state my context and intentions at the start throughout my research reflect on the influences my position has on the interpretation of the work. Therefore, I abashedly admit that I am from lower middle class white suburbs. My patriarchs are soldiers and matriarchs inclined to Southern hospitality, but I'm deluded by no idyllic image of Americana. I moved to Canada in adulthood for the freedoms that the United States did not offer me. This greatly influences my perspective.

I asked the participants of this research, whom I will also call narrators or artists, to practice autoethnography, predominantly through art, and so I must also participate. While I will incorporate my autoethnographic art into this thesis, I also believe in using autobiographical narratives to create a more comprehensive understanding. Therefore, I will depict, with both images and words, my relationship with feminism, how I came to co-own this research, and other self-conscious intersections with the topic in question. Some key points are my identity as a postmodernist researcher who is particularly critical of gender, a novice artist, and an unwitting colonizer. I will expose my situation to illuminate my perspectives and biases not only in this introduction but also throughout my thesis as a way to honour, demonstrate, and model feminist methodology's value of transparency, divulging of the researcher's biases in conducting, analyzing, and disseminating their research.

Nevertheless, I tenaciously challenge feminist theory. I regularly engage in what feminist Susan Leigh Star calls "a method of strategic heresy", questioning and redefining our discipline of choice a means to strengthen it and bring it into a new

era (as cited in Reinharz, 1992). While I will argue that feminism is not a method but a perspective, her words maintain resonance, because I, like all the participants in this research, regularly affront the hegemony, what many of them would call "the Man". Regularly in the sessions, though I never intentionally prompted the conversation, we discussed the nature of the forces that instilled and maintains dominant norms that in most ways disadvantage the residents of AWAC and in many ways advantage the guests from graduate school that attended art sessions there. The women of second-wave feminism were, and Star's case still are, engaged in a deliberate, collective, interrogatory discourse with the dominant cultural paradigms, and that feminist mission motivates our mutual use of the term "the Man" (Carty, 1993; Douglas, 1995; Frye, 1983).

Despite my feminist identity, my artistic talents had not been nurtured prior to my being involved with this thesis project. I had participated in art class at school, scrapbooking, and crafts, with little emotional or psychological involvement. These activities entertained me, but did not stimulate my creative expression in any liberating way.

I have, however, been surrounded by many talented artists showing me the cathartic experience that is art-making. My sibling, now a fine arts and humanities student, has persistently turned to art as a means to cope with zir bipolar disorder and depression. Zir societally-induced mental health predominately originates from zir gender presentation, which ranges from androgynous to masculine on a female body. I use the gender-neutral pronouns, ze instead of s/he and zir for him/her out of respect for fluidity of gender identity. It is my opinion (and that of many other

scholars, including my sibling) that if our society would embrace a fluidity of gender, many psychological obstacles could be prevented (Spade, 2011; Clare, 2009; Butler, 2004; Feinberg, 1996).

Zir sketchbooks depict gruesome images. These call into question the harm that some of zir thoughts and feelings might have caused had they lingered in zir mind instead of being excised onto paper. Other friends and mentors have shared similar stories of the emotional release that creating art unlocks, all describing art with imagery of divinity, supernaturalism, or transcendentalism to varying degrees. So, as I accepted the invitation to do research with "artivists", I had heard how transformative and emancipatory art could be, but I had never experienced it firsthand.

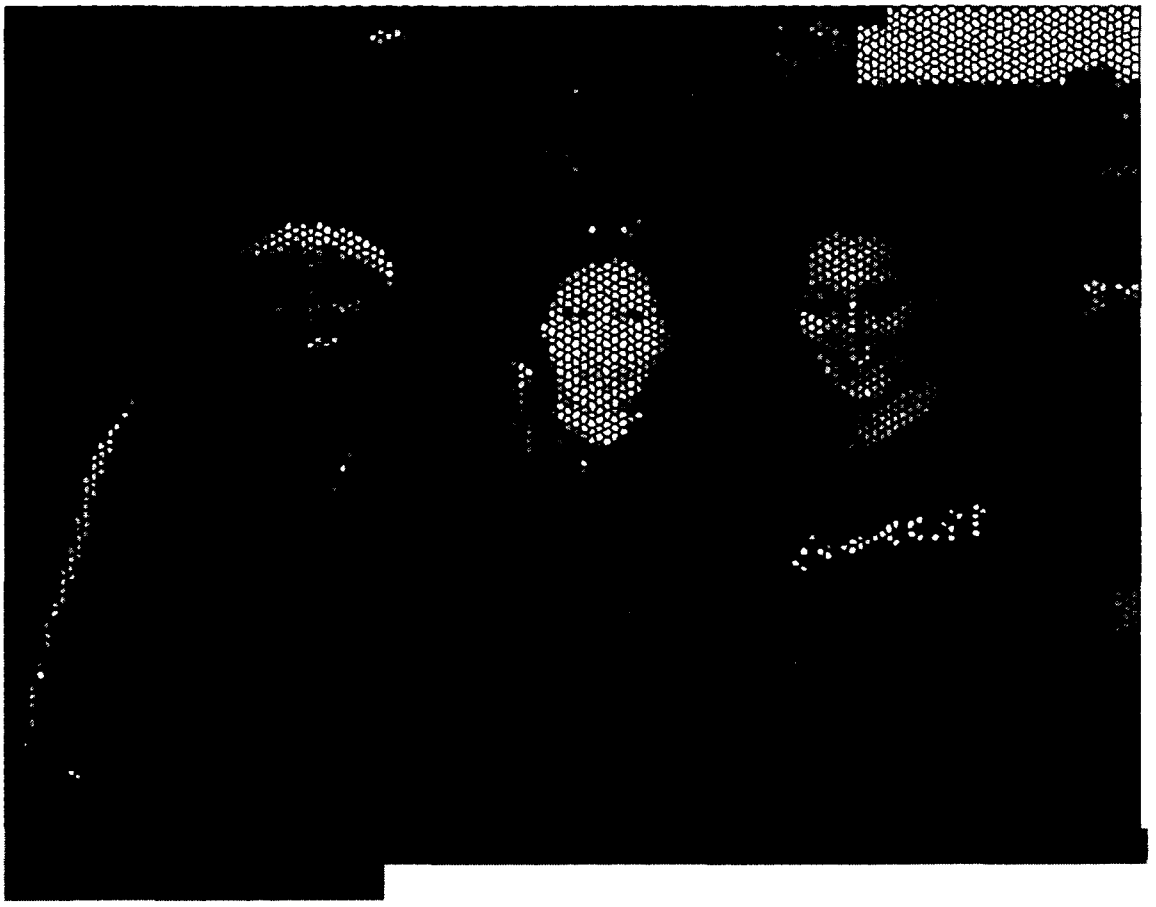
The same could be said for my relationship with indigenous communities. I am a quarter Tiawa Native American, a tribe within the Hasinai confederation. That being said, I have un/fortunately suffered and enjoyed minimal influence from my father's mother's Native American culture, neither the hardship of being a visible minority nor the richness of indigenous traditions, rituals, and gatherings. My father did not learn until his late twenties that Native American was even part of his heritage, because his family sought to protect him from the stigma that he could have endured growing up with known or declared Native American heritage in the Southwestern United States. While my dad gleaned some cultural values derived from the tribe and, in turn, taught them to my sister and me, they were rarely explained within the context of our tribal customs. Perhaps this assists in my

understanding of the silencing subordination created when colonial culture assimilates indigenous culture.

In order to bridge divides between our white, suburban lives and our ethnic, nomadic ancestry, we were enrolled in an extracurricular organization known as the Indian Princesses. Each father-daughter duo was assigned a "tribe" (named after an actual band) with whom to commune around the bonfire, play war-games, share wampum, and pretend we were princesses through other "Indian" activities. While the endeavors were enacted through a White lens (driving to a pre-determined campsite on bi-monthly weekends), the values were indigenous in nature (community time focused around plants and animals). Intersections of theories about *cultural authenticity, mis/representation, and intentions for appropriation* have emerged throughout my life and will continue to play a key role in this research and my frame of questioning, while interpreting both art and verbal explanations. In Indian Princess pow-wows, we learned how to listen to Mother Earth, tell stories, cherish our brothers and sisters (the fellow animals in this planet), and generally, how to be considerate.

Indigenous epistemology, namely intuition and interconnectedness, is the foundation much of my research's purpose, methodology, and analysis. Academics have given names to theories on native ways of knowing for the use of the Western scholastic canon. While this assimilation is counter-intuitive and even innately oppressive, it does bolster this research with "legitimate", reference-worthy vocabulary to explain to my fellow colonialists other types of civilization and education (Brown & Strega, 2005, p.25-26). These concepts of collective truths,

interconnectivity, and relational responsibility had been taught to me by my father and to him by his native mother. Neither of us were aware that they were indeed indigenous ideologies, because they conflict with the dominant culture of independent, linear thought. Because the themes of Native American and First Nations epistemology and ontology, complement and supplement contemporary Western curricula, they have a justifiable place in mainstream education and only need validation in the form of accreditation from the dominant culture, i.e. publication, to be more legitimized and further incorporated into policy debates.



I have mined my own experiences and drawn upon my own consciousness to relate to the participants of this research. Many cultures have a commonly honoured greeting about empathy: *In lak'ech ala k'in* (Mayan), *namaste* (Sanskrit), *mitakuye oyasin* (Lakota Sioux) . Each of these greetings means to acknowledge the similarities in each other: greetings to another myself, the light in me honours the light in you, we are all relations. Though we represent a diversity of experiences of marginalization, we can experience a common sense of exclusion. Sandra Lee Bartky united herself with all people who feel any form of oppression in saying, "I do not claim in their entirety the state of consciousness that are herein examined. But I do not disclaim them either" (Bartky, 1990, p. 10). I have learned through this project not to dwell in remorse but instead to understand that in working to free the most oppressed I am freeing myself from the ways in which I am oppressed (Spade, 2011).

Rebecca Walker, estranged daughter of feminist author, Alice Walker, wrote what could be our art session group's mission statement:

> "honour the complexity and contradiction in their lives by adding their experiences to the feminist dialogue...these voices are important, because if feminism is to continue to be radical and alive, it must avoid reordering the world in terms of any polarity, be it female/male, good/evil, or that easy allegation of false consciousness which can so quickly and silently negate another's agency: evolved/unconscious." (Walker, 1995, p. xxxv)

My task as researcher was/is to notice, acknowledge, and be reflexive about my biases and values, and then attempt to identify the places where they influence the research. This transparency does not offer immunity from misrepresentation but is an important step nonetheless. Reflection and analysis of one's own thoughts and feelings are considered not only an important part of anti-oppressive research but

also an indication of interpretivism's ability to be as rigorous in its methods as positivism, and thus an equally legitimate means by which to generate knowledge" (Strega, 2005, p. 207). I was called by my own interpretation of anti-oppressive research ethics to explore my experiences and to allow other individuals their own introspection about the influences we brought to this research.

Wanting to interact with the artists without intervening in their autonomy, I enter/ed into a familiar but foreign setting. In the words of avant garde Simone de Beauvior, "If a theory convinced me, it did not remain external to me; it changed my relation to the world, and colored my experience. In short, I had a solid faculty of assimilation and a well developed critical sense; and philosophy was for me a living *reality*" (de Beauvoir, 1949, p. 161). I couldn't help but be changed by the research, and of course, having developed this research projected, I couldn't help but influence it as well.

Terminology

It would be false to claim success in purging my writing of every bit of race and class privilege, especially as I require defining some of my terms . I'm particularly liberal with "/"s for multiple choices and "-"s for hybrid and feminized words. After I've introduced a word that I feel worthy of induction into the English language, I likely won't "quote" it again. Similarly, if I feel a word should be excised from or is often used maladaptively in the English language, I will "quote" it to challenge readers to question its assumptions. This section serves only as an introduction to terms that will be explained further in the ensuing pages.

Previously, I used the gender-neutral pronouns, ze and zir, instead of s/he and his/her respectively. I use these words because our language should include pronouns when a person's gender is unknown, ambiguous, or androgynous. I also use them to indicate that I find use of the binary gender structure to be indefensible ; it has been apparent for generations that gender is more fluid than our social structures, like language, indicate (Feinberg, 1996). I also use gender-neutral pronouns to help readers become more accustomed to them and to show respect for those who are genderqueer, gender variant, or gender-deviant.

Gender-based analysis (GBA) is employed in private and public businesses as a way to ensure advances towards gender equality (Brodie and Bakker, 2008). It is increasingly used to monitor transphobia, or fears or hatred of people who transgress sex/gender social norms.

The employees at An Association Advocating for Women and Children (AWAC), in Prince George, the study site for this project, are not governed by policies, such as GBA. Technically, it temporarily houses and feeds anywhere from 5 to 150 biologically female adults at 644 George Street, Prince George, British Columbia. This primary research location will be further detailed in Chapter 4. This location's name has little to do with its purpose, as there are no children at the shelter (though many clients are mothers). It is also erroneously titled because, though it exclusively houses females-assigned-at-birth (Spade, 2011, p.3), many of the people living there do not identify as women. Furthermore, although I did not explicitly ask about the name of AWAC during interviews, I got the sense that many women did not know that AWAC stood for anything in particular.

The majority of residents during the time period of this project (2009-2012) are Indigenous/First Nations/Indian/Native. I will use all of these terms interchangeably, acknowledging that the umbrella label, Indigenous does not do justice to the cultural diversity therein, nor does it reflect post-colonial influences.

Many sociologists consider members of indigenous groups aggregately marginalized by their sex, race, and class (Hill Collins, 2000; Ahmed, 2012; Baines, 2003; hooks, 2000). When I use the term, marginalized, I use the definition offered in *Research as Resistance*, "referring to the context in which those who routinely experience inequality, injustice, and exploitation live their lives" (Brown & Strega, 2005, p. 7). Its authors also warn of the "discomfort that those on the margins feel about adopting traditional research processes" (Brown & Strega, 2005, p. 7). It is important to note that even those people who appear to belong to the mainstream may have experienced marginalization by the various unattainable standards of beauty, wealth, and perfection that inexplicably define the social norm. In opposition to the marginalized category, I use the neologism kyriarchy as defined by Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza as a consolidation of all those kyr-"masters" that arch-"govern" (Schussler Fiorenza, 2001). I use it when the intersections between patriarchy, capitalism, and imperialism become too entangled to extricate a primary perpetrator. It is what Tara and some of the other participants and observers have referred to as "the Man" or "the Machine".

Chapter 2, Part 1 discusses critical theory, which includes post-modern, post-structural, and post-positive intellectual movements. It must be clarified that structural social work/ers, professionals I cite often, are a part of critical theory, not

structural theory. Social work can often be seen as contradictory to working for equality, and instead reinforcing the kyriarchy. However, I, like some others, am drawn to the field in the hopes of using it as an avenue to social change (Mullaly, 1997; Murphy, 1999; Smith, 2006). Structural social work is post-structural in that it recognizes institutional social structures as tools of the powerful that must be re-appropriated to level the inequality.

My overall research approach includes perceiving traditional social roles, science, and expertise with deep skepticism. The majority of my critique will be reserved for my role as a researcher, with particular attention to imbalances related to power and privilege, both in academia and applied social work. I hope to clarify that the kyriarcy infiltrates social boundaries of all kinds, disempowering subordinated individuals from multiple angles. I also hope to make the case that the impossible standards promoted by the kyriarchy diminish self-esteem. The existence of the kyriarchy means that groups as diverse as women of colour, artists, transgender people, and every other "imperfect" person who defies conventional terms of normalcy and/or success share a common exclusion. Beyond recognizing our shared "inferiority", I propose that we work together to promote equality through diversity.

In this collaborative research project, participants and researchers cultivated an inclusive community centered around visual art. The collection of students, social workers, and homeless women (to use their most obvious but least representative labels) gathered for the enjoyment of uninhibited expression. Furthermore, we shared information with each other in ways that affirmed individual experiences,

united us in common understanding, and even invited other people to question their assumptions and join in our collective empowerment.

Chapter II: Literature Review

This thesis embodies many intersecting forms of domination and resistance. To understand the implications of the research within, it is necessary to explain the layers of institutional oppression. The cultural institutions, like education, gender, and capitalism, that dictate our society's normative behaviour make rules about knowledge and communication with an explicitly gendered lens. It is my hope that in describing the power dynamics in the lives of the collaborators, it will be clear how our process was empowering.

Part 1. Power in Numbers: Quantitative versus Qualitative

"There is no 'the truth', 'a truth' – truth is not one thing or even a system. It is an increasing complexity." (Adrienne Rich, 1979, p. 187)

Positivism

There is a prolific and ongoing critique of Western knowledge – sometimes called critical theory – that is questioning what we know, how we know it, and what effect it has on those we know it about. It might seem audacious that there was once a time when the entire scientific community sought absolute, positive answers, but emerging from the era of Western thought known as the Dark Ages took a new level of rationality (Foucault, 1984). The Enlightenment produced scientific experimentation and introduced the Western world to empiricism, the epistemology focused on clarity, replicability, reliability, and validity (Gartell & Gartrell, 2002).

When a single source of Truth is determined the Right Way, the "knower" is given license to dictate the way of the "unknowing" in their "best interest". Positivism assumes the existence of a rational subject that can rationalize truth and distinguish it from falsehood by the application of Reason. "Inherent in this method is the belief

in a universal truth applicable to all people and cultures" (Dockery, 2000, p. 98). The search for finite scientific answers deemed multitudes of paths to knowledge inadequate. Other inferior approaches might yield information (anecdotal evidence, personal experience, stories, and traditions), but this information will not be seen as reliable as that discovered by "science" (Brown & Strega, 2005, p. 205).

Other incarnations of these positivist principles are quantitative research and determinism. Centuries later, these values have the unfortunate side effect of imbuing the scientist with dominion over information. While quantitative data has its benefits, it can be dangerous not to include the context using qualitative visual or verbal narratives. Privileged people benefit from normalizing and centering their experiences, often claiming them as the only Truth (Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004). This bestows intellectual esteem when they have proven allegiance to expertise, the status quo, and the state as an illusory neutral (Kymlicka, 2001). Research cannot determine the Truth, only a specific segment of truth.

Enlightenment thought results in epistemological assumptions that influence dichotomous structures and encourage binary thinking (Brown & Strega, 2005, p. 44). According to this perspective, the positivist methodologies that some North American public schools center, as evidenced by prevalence standardized tests and limited class time devoted to free-thinking, is hierarchical with the teacher at the front of the classroom as holder of knowledge to impart upon his students (hooks, 1994; Postman, 1969). Underscoring the patriarchal tone, it is called the Socratic Method, after Socrates, a man of mean who sought ineffable Truth with little mind to his privilege.

Women, in particular, have been insulted and debased by traditional educational philosophy, because they have often been discouraged from pursuing and denied acknowledgement for their contributions to science (Bartky, 1990, p. 6). The rise of positivist, empiricist science throughout colonialism reinforced the pattern of subjugation based on determinism (Bailey, 2000, p. 290). The centering of male privilege and therefore, the marginalization of females, has influenced the socioeconomic status of women. When women's ways of knowing are less acclaimed than mens, it leaves women behind in the classroom and in the workplace (Belenky, et al, 1986; Haug, 1992; Ahmed, 2012). Unfortunately, another remnant of positivist patriarchy is the feminization of poverty, and a resulting 90% of Canadian welfare recipients are women (Valenti, 2006). With women's ways of know deemed illegitimate, the financial and social rewards for contributing to education and commerce are more difficult to acquire.

These under-appreciated, and therefore, subjugated women have been forced to require social services by the hegemony, who has accepted female , low-income, and people of colour's inferiority. In a subjective reality, however, superiority and inferiority are relative and subject to opinion rather than being deemed fact. "Social science positivists take the view that information about social reality is objective and can be "discovered" through the same means by which "facts" about the natural world are determined" (Brown & Strega, 2005, p. 8).

Positivism's domination over the production of knowledge collected in our Western scholastic canon, coupled with reactionary questions about the potentially exploitative nature of research catalyzed a public critique of the established research

paradigm in the 1950-1970s (Brown & Strega, 2005, p. 22). Since then, critical social scientists challenge "the value orientation" of Enlightenment epistemology, but still generally understand that there are realities to uncover. Where they differ from positivists is in believing that reality is shaped or constructed by social, political, cultural, and other forces and are therefore contextual and subjective. "Facts are not neutral, and therefore require an interpretation from a value or ideological position" (Brown & Strega, 2005, p. 207).

Postpositivism

Postmodernism is critical of universal theories revered by the Enlightenment thinkers and the various philosophies that seek and purport a singular Truth. According to postmodernism, facts, absolutes, and Truth disappear in the light of cultural variance and historical precedence (Lyotard, 1979; Sands, 2000; Mullaly, 2002). Even today, critical social scientists dwell in the realm of less academically accepted fields along with postpositivists, poststructuralists, and postmodernists (Mullaly, 2007). They critique positivist epistemologists not because they seek reality rather than presumption or supposition, but because it only promotes one reality. Facts themselves may be neutral, but the moment they are perceived by a sentient being, the interpretation eliminates their neutrality. Therefore, there are as many facts as conscious observers, and therefore, there are infinite realities (Strega, 2005, p. 207). Postpositivists consequently believe subjective analysis and qualitative research to be necessary forms of knowledge acquisition, which positivists classify as irrational, illegitimate, biased, and opinionated (Neuman & Kreugger, 2003).

Postpositivists, regard objectivity as a valid stance amongst many, and thus further evidence for their position, because existence, for them, proves validity.

"Post-ists" of different kinds explore the benefit of quantitative methodologies for investigating social phenomena and human behaviour and "whether the methods applied to natural sciences can or should be applied to these areas" (Strega, 2005, p. 205). Some critical scholars revisit old methods or studies and challenge the results by offering new interpretations and including more qualitative data. The following explains the perspective of some contemporary postmodern academics:

> The emotional texture of experience is what interests me – the consequences of the facts in the lives of actual persons. When I want to evoke the emotional texture of a human experience for an audience, I find the canons of social science aren't very productive (Banks, 1998, pp. 11-12).

Famed philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, defined subjectivism as: "on the one hand, the freedom of the individual subject to choose what he will be, and, on the other, man's inability to transcend human subjectivity" (Sartre, 1945, p. 24). Acknowledgement of emotions and intuitions unleashes a greater level of understanding for the researcher than can be established only by subjective data, language, and structures (Van Manen, 1997).

"Post-ist" researchers like myself seek expansion of the search for truths, not an abandonment of rationality (Picart, 2002, p. 258). Qualitative research examines social realities through "the systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through direct, detailed observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds" (Neuman and Kreuger, 2003, p. 78). The rigid divides between art and

science, subjectivity and objectivity, qualitative and quantitative research may continue to dissolve as scholars and intellectuals continue to realize that researchers conducting narrative, poetic, musical, performative, dance, and visual forms of inquiry employ rigorous methods of data collection, analysis, interpretation, and representation (Leavy, 2008).

Because "facts don't always tell the truth, or a truth worth knowing about", innumerable methodologies have branched out of critical theory, such as grounded theory, hermeneutics, phenomenology, social constructivism, case study, narrative analysis, auto/ethnography, and institutional ethnography (Banks, 1998, p. 11). Feminist theory particularly utilizes the subjective qualities and concepts of postmodernism, because "women have been insulted and debased by traditional philosophy" (Bartky, 1990, p. 6). Men have historically defined their experiences, positions, and perspectives as normal and legitimate while "othering" the experiences of women and other disenfranchised groups (de Beauvoir, 1968).

Postpositivism's critique of binary categories encourages the movement of women from the periphery to the center. This awareness of women's position in patriarchal society makes it possible for marginalized people to understand how different ideologies can distort actions and reactions of the oppressions and oppressors (Collins, 1997). Multiply-marginalized feminist bell hooks understands diversity as necessity for progress: "We could also see that our different experiences often meant that we had different needs, that there was no one strategy or formula for the development of political consciousness" (hooks, 2000, p. 59). To redefine or

even to perfect objectivity will not displace the dichotomous configuration that relegates women and social sciences to subordination (Heckman, 1990).

Another population whose realities cannot be completely discovered by traditional Western methods, Indigenous people can re-experience colonization through the act of quantitative research and objective knowledge if it is done in a disrespectful manner. Indigenous epistemology, unlike most Western, quantitative research that seeks to record it, is "fluid, non-linear, and relational" (Brown & Strega, 2005, p. 2). Though researchers collect their data within limited time and personal parameters, Indigenous knowledge is teleological, experiential, and derived from teachings transmitted from generation to generation by storytelling, nuance, and wisdom from storyteller (King, 2003). Unless explicitly asked by the Indigenous people to use a Western approach to research, the act of conducting that kind of research can be invalidating and therefore, inappropriate. The person responsible for the storytelling can dishonour the story by presenting it objectively. As the story passes through the listener, and as they become the storyteller, that objective distance cannot be maintained. Not only are the spirit and language lost in this assimilation of knowledge, but it is further distorted by syntax. Where traditional language emphasizes verbs, quantitative research tracks nouns, which become variables and subjects (Cajete, 1999). Western investigations often completely discount the sacred understandings bestowed through dreams, visions, and intuition (Castellano, 2000). Non-aboriginal researchers have traditionally forgotten "how impressionable and vulnerable we are in the face of a story", a value that First Nations people treasure as their most powerful tool (Adichie, 1999). As more

respectful, egalitarian relationships are formed, more advanced research is conducted with layers of checks and balances for fair community relations.

Yet, it seems that for accreditation within academia, we must employ and prioritize European epistemology. Even within emerging disciplines like Gender Studies and Indigenous Studies, the final document is written in colonial English with grammar and national standards selecting those deemed worthy of publication by the institution. The documents that do not align with existing rules, more indicative of the author/researcher's privilege to get a Western education than wisdom, are left in the shadows without publication credit. How, then, does one reconcile the goals related to respectful knowledge collection within the academy and the desire to engage in bountiful knowledge dissemination beyond the academy? An emerging proposal for feminist research is "using a variety of methods in order to generate multifaceted information" (Klein, 1986, p. 16). The French word, *bricoleur,* describes a person who makes use of the tools available to complete a task, and bricolage is the derivative theory of discursive insight through salvage of every hint of information (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Kincheloe, 2001). As a method, bricolage allows the researcher to collect and include every bit of insight on the research topic to shed light on the question at hand.

Because humans assess themselves and their surroundings as we encounter stimuli, so too the researcher should be vigilant and avoid discounting information as irrelevant. Postmodernist Herbert Marcuse insinuates that recognition of the contradictions and fallacies of the current system allows room for opportunities previously deemed inordinate, "We allow ourselves the liberty of 'insanity' – the

ability to define the irrational character of the established rationality" (Marcuse, 1964, p. 88). . Rather than "dividing into competing camps and promoting alternative scientific theories, so that envy and antagonism get in the way of creativity and cumulation" (Homer-Dixon, 1992, p. 197), we can confess the diversity of human experience and use many available means to "assess the chaos" (Transken, 2005, p. 15).

There is no universal human nature, only human behaviour, and that has always changed throughout history, so it must be understood as culturally specific and sociologically based (Meadows, 2007; Allen, 1990; Feinberg, 1996). Any culture, therefore, that is not adequately represented, should actively seek inclusion in the anthropological record. "We push the edges of academic acceptability not because we want to be accepted within the academy but in order to transform it." (Brown & Strega, 2005, p. 2) Researchers must be held accountable to use the methodologies that most support their study population's interests. In this particular study, qualitative research through formal and informal individual interviews, group sessions, written surveys, and analysis of visual art allowed participants the opportunity to express themselves in many ways that they had been restricted by other more quantitative researchers. This document does not serve to remedy the incomplete nature of their story collection in the past, but the art sessions, conversations, and exhibitions began to broaden the options, not only for participants, but also academics who could begin to see the importance of process over product.

Part 2. Power of Art: Arts Based Research

"We have art in order not to die of the truth." Friedrich Nietszche

Anthropological evidence from as far back as 35,000 BCE has confirmed that humans have been creating art since prehistoric times. Art has been used as a form of communication and recreation, but art as a form of therapy and a tool of self-development is a much more recent phenomenon, which is gradually becoming accepted as a means of self-expression and self-exploration." (Barber, 2002, p. 10) Art crosses boundaries that impede other forms of expression (Zolberg & Cherbo 1997; Leavy 2008; Chicago 1996; Cropley 2003; McNiff 2004). Art prevails and affects change when other methods don't. Thomas Merton said, "Art enables us to find ourselves and lose ourselves at the same time", which is precisely what this research hopes to document. The art created through this project benefited the individual participants as well as the observers of the process and products.

Specifically, mainstream art has been used throughout history to interpret, explain, and disclose violence (Sarabhai, TED). Pablo Picasso said, "Art is just another way of keeping a diary". Since the meanings ascribed to gender are bound to the struggle for power, and language for these conversations is often determined by the powerful, the powerless frequently use alternative forms of expression, often symbols, which are particularly suited to visual art (Hogan, 2001, p. 22). Art destabilizes the meanings of those symbols and opens the witness to supplementary perspectives not only about the topics depicted but their overarching comprehension that there can be multiple meanings.

Often intentionally marginalized populations, especially women, have been denied participation. "Historically, women have either been excluded from the

process of creating the definitions of what is considered art or allowed to participate only if we accept and work within existing mainstream designations. If women have no real role as women in the process of defining art, then we are essentially prevented from helping to shape cultural symbols" (Chicago, 1996, p. 72). Women infrequently belong to the esteemed "Art" community (Muscio, 2002, p. 201). "Women artists are required to explain our presence, to defend our identity, to speak for our multitudes, and men are not" (p. 203). The Guerilla Girls, a grassroots feminist art collective, discovered that "less than 5 percent of the artists in the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art are women, but 85 percent of the nudes are female" (Douglas, 1995, p. 61). Women in art are often objects, not subjects. The male gaze is considered the only legitimate perspective, while females are predominately disregarded.

Unfortunately, women's experiences have also been less valued in the written word. More than 70% of the global illiterates are women (Sycamore, 2004). Shockingly, many at AWAC are also illiterate or limited in their reading and writing skills. [Figure 2.1 depicts a list of musical artists that Jessica wrote for her peers, as they shouted out their choices, because she was the most capable in the room. Note that the lightning symbol in AC/DC made it into the list where many of the other artists' names were missing words.] Jessica, though full of worthy experiences and analyses of the origins and consequences of social injustices, even as the most capable writer in the room, could not publish her own research and expect to have it validated by the academy, because the way she writes would be considered incorrect and inadequate. She, like many women lacking access to education, in her

case because of socioeconomic hardships, have had their experiences differentially invalidated, due to the format of their contributions of knowledge (Ismael, 2006).

Males have authored most of the world's publications. Though it is interesting to note that women are cited almost ten times as often, calling into question quality versus quantity (Hakanson, 2005). This has affected culture in that authentic accounts by women, of women have been erased from public knowledge.

> Writing or literacy, in a very traditional sense of the word, has been used to determine the breaks between the past and the present, the beginning of history and the development of theory. Writing has been viewed as the mark of a superior civilization and other societies have been judged, by this view, to be incapable of thinking critically and objectively, or having distance from ideas and emotions (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 28-29).

When women speak, it is deemed by some to be gossip, chatting, even bitching, while men's conversations are discourse or conferencing and more highly regarded (Davis, 1990). Likewise, while working men are skilled artisans, women's creative expressions are often categorized and belittled as crafts. This denotes a lack of higher purpose on the part of women. As evidenced by frequency of display in artistic venues such as museums and price of acquisition, men's creations are seen as unique; women's are ordinary (Valenti, 2007). This is not because males' work has always or ever been better than females' but rather because since recorded history, patriarchy in the form of masculine nepotism has reigned in the global North (Feinberg, 2010). Jan Avgikos "suggests that the question of when something is and is not art is a threadbare polemic that has been tossed around for most of the century, and that it reflects not only deeply rooted ideological biases whereby 'art' and 'activism' are set in hegemonic opposition but a fundamental crisis concerning art's identity and function within the social order" (Felshin, 1995, p. 85).

When women's art is noticed outside of the home, it is automatically activism regardless of intent. Individual women's creations have been interpreted as the voice of all women in the same way that Native artwork has sometimes been perceived as universally applicable to all indigenous people (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). Artivists (artist-activists) produce unique and provocative pieces tochallenge hegemony. The second-wave feminist movement was highly motivated by artivists who reflected the sensibility of the movement. The artivists of the 1980s attacked the art world's elitism, market-based power structure, valuelessnes, consumption, and "demand for nonconfrontational, aesthetically pleasing product" (Felshin, 1995, p. 89). In the 90s, queer art made its break into mainstream consciousness (Ades and Klainberg, 2006). At each of these junctures, art was the medium for transgression of social norms. The diversity of the outsiders' images combined with the symbolism that insiders could relate to was powerful in cultivating understanding. As humans, we are emotional beings, and recognizing common emotional vulnerability can be transformative (Murphy, 1999, p. 47).

These artistic movements of previous decades not only found common ground with oppressors with the oppressed, but it also allowed the marginalized to find each other. People could relate to a stranger's story on canvas and realize that they were not alone. The therapeutic benefits of collective engagement in creative expression, whether working on one community piece or working on separate pieces in the same space, cannot be overstated. While white North American academic culture until recently has not respected art's community-building potential (perhaps because it undermines commercial interests) matriarchal societies have used art for

personal catharsis, record keeping, and interaction between allies and adversaries alike (Muscio, 2002, p. 199).

We too can reclaim art-making sessions as occasions for consciousness-raising about social justice, cultural studies, and feminism. Dot Tuer defined art as a cultural production if it is "anchored in a process of reciprocity, in which a space is created for dialogue and exchange rather than one limited to explication and appropriation" (Felshin, 1995, p. 209). In the research at AWAC, participants who may not have known each others' names worked toward a common goal to produce art, which is representative of a shared goal among many of the participants to alleviate social injustice. The key was that they were first-hand "experiencers" of injustices and capable of telling their stories.

> While a picture of a homeless person (for example) may provoke, move, inspire, enrage, engage, etc., such an image is homelessness interpreted; as such, it offers a fixed, limited understanding of the condition of homelessness. The homeless person, merely the subject of the photograph, has been effectively left out of the conversation (Andrea Wolper in Felshin, 1995, p. 255).

We who attended the art sessions sought to eliminate this egregious travesty. Artivist Andrea Felshin writes, "Making art may or may not be the best way of addressing the problems of shelter residents, but for many it may be the only method available, one that allows them to make contact without having to be outgoing, to speak English or read or write well, to reveal anything they want kept private" (Felshin, 1995, p. 210). Art can give participants more control than most other methods of research, because they can maintain agency over what stories to convey and how their stories are shared.

Away for the participants to overcome material obstacles to their effective communication was to create collage art. The artists used all of the tools and supplies at their disposal to create an image that depicted an element of their experiences. "Collage combines our everyday reality – bits of photographs, newspaper, found objects from everyday life – with paint or ink, thus merging the illusionary with the actual, art with society, aesthetics with every day/every night life" (Diaz, 2002, p. 148). They juxtaposed images and words, modernity and traditions, childhood wonder and adult responsibility. The toys, jewelry, natural elements, paints, discarded material, and other trinkets were joined together on the canvas and on masks to convey multiplicity of identities. Art has always served many purposes and as such is capable of existing between two or more worlds or in an ambiguous state, like those who inhabit both genders or some other gender entirely (Zolberg and Cherbo, 1997, p. 129). From a feminist perspective, collage is useful for visually representing a range of social issues, and it can evolve as the artist and their surroundings evolve (Leavy, 2008, p. 226). Layers of new understandings develop on canvas in the same ways that they're pasted onto our consciousness, hiding what has come before, but building upon itself. By collecting some of the symbols and recreating some of their stories on the canvas, artists were able to explore and express some layers of their identities.

Part 3. The Power to Express: Systemic Marginality

"Being a girl is so powerful that the powers that be had to train everyone how not to be a girl."
Eve Ensler

The participant population in this study has been so marginalized by the "Matrix of Domination" thatPatricia Hill Collins explains as intersections of oppressions on the basis of race, sex, class, health, religion, and education, that they have nearly been rendered invisible behind the web of stereotyping. Marginalized people are alienated from expression of their experiences and truths because of their situation at the socially accepted and structurally reinforced hierarchy. (Collins, 2005; hooks, 2000; Allen, 1990; Belenky et al., 1986; Brown & Strega, 2005). Each of the socioeconomic attributes listed above intersects and interrelates to increase the magnitude of oppression that an individual experiences, and so, multiplies the obstacles one must confront both to speak and to be heard. The ensuing paragraphs will explain how racism, sexism, and classism affect the health and educational opportunities afforded to the people most disempowered by social stratification, a group to which this research's sample population belongs.

Many social science scholars ardently support the disclosure and dissolution of the boundaries that alienate certain populations from communicating their experiences. Structural social worker, Bob Mullaly, pronounces,

> It is crucial to have an understanding of the nature of oppression, its causes and sources, its production and reproduction, its dynamics, its effects on the oppressed, including internalization, and the social functions it carries out in the interests of the dominant groups (i.e. the oppressors) in society (Mullaly, 1997, p. 138).

Emancipation from oppression alludes to the equal dignity that all people deserve and the right to be treated with respect regardless of any social identity

markers (Dworkin, 1977). Equality, then, does not mean social or cultural homogeneity, but acknowledgement of equivalent humanity.

This important distinction discourages exclusion on the basis of cultural differences and reinforces the standpoint theory [to be further explored in the Methodology chapter] of multiple perspectives. The inclusion of multiple experiences necessitates a broadening of terminology advocated for by Sandra Lee Bartky, Anne Bishop, and Laura Brown (Bartky, 1990, p. 6; Bishop, p. iv; Brown, p. 48). Plurality as an academic theory and core value can encompass infinite multiplicities, to include multiple types of violence, multiple oppressions, and multiple poverties, for instance, poverty of space, of time, of connections, and of information, not just financial poverty (Ahmed, 2012).

In fact, this thesis argues that stereotyping may be the root of the problem contributing to social stratification. If people did not believe that poor and marginalized people in some ways deserve their lesser social standing, freedom of speech, and quality of life, they would not accept or participate in a society that upholds such disparity. Society tends to stigmatize and criminalize the homeless without any other insight to their characters (Blanton, 2009). We should not homogenize homeless people. As Western culture has increasingly incorporated superficial judgment into its standards of wealth, health, and success, the structures have reflected more generalization. Bartky highlights that "oppression is institutionalized and systematic... rendering the oppressed incapable of understanding the nature of those agencies responsible for their subjugation" (1990, p. 23). The social landscape becomes ever more disorienting when government

agencies are linked with professional forms of organization, and both are "interpenetrated by relations of discourse, including the institutional discourses that are systematically developed to provide categories", which further distance individuals from the discourse (Smith, 2006, p.225).

This progression from interpersonal communication to interruption of expression by public and private business interests can be tracked through the history of women's crisis management in British Columbia,Canada. Women continue to suffer from the "feminization of poverty" despite many declarations by political leaders of commitment to prioritizing women's services (Sands, 2001, p. 116). The most startling deficiencies in North American social structures are those that are negligent of women's housing, health, and children's assistance.

The story of homelessness for most of the women who reside at AWAC begins with the plight of their ancestors who were colonized by Europeans in the 1800s. Throughout Canadian history, First Nations people have repeatedly been victimized by this invasion (Brodie & Bakker, 2008). From the early years that people were relocated to reserves in western Canada, one hundred to two hundred years ago, Canadian government administrators and statesmen, as well as the national press, promoted a cluster of negative images of Aboriginal women, and those in power used them to explain conditions of poverty and ill-health on reserves (Carter, 1996, p. 31). "Indian Affairs" officials explained away reserve failures by citing Aboriginal women's indifferent motherhood, idle gossip, lazy housekeeping, and disagreeable temperament for infant mortality, the spread of tuberculosis, and starvation (Carter, 1996, p. 33). Missionaries inculcated notions of female

subservience among their male parishioners, and the autonomy of native women was severely reduced in the mission settlements (Cooper, 1996, p. 89). All of this was deliberate neglect and persecution on behalf of the settlers to hasten extinction (Finkel, 1995; Martens, 1988; Carter, 1996). "Elizabethan poor law" had been instituted as a socio-economic safety net for the white colonialists in every province even before they formed the Dominion of Canada in 1867 (Guest, 1980, p. 9). Indigenous females, needless to say, were not protected in any colonial policies.

Not only indigenous women, but all women were systematically oppressed and had been for three to four millennia give or take an empire (Feinberg, 1996; Kimmel, 2000; Davis, 1990; Angier, 1999; Brown & Strega, 2005). The dominant discourse in the nineteenth century, biological determinism, purported that social and economic difference between human groups (e.g. races, classes, and sexes) derived from inherited (and likely deserved) maladies (Hogan, 2001, p. 24). Women at the time were often incarcerated in penal institutions for hysteria, domestic physical and sexual abuse was legal, and just beginning to be heard arguing that the rights of slaves in the abolitionist movement might have merit in a new craze called feminism (Carty, 1993; Muscio, 2002). This re-victimization by institutions and retrenching of distrust only further ostracizes marginalized populations. It is a repeated model that the dissenting or minority cultures are imprisoned: Aboriginals in Australia, Muslims or tribals in India, Blacks in the US (Sarabhai, 2009). Social injustice abounds when it is mistakenly justified by natural and supernatural rationalizations.

Arguably the most grotesque annihilation of human rights occurred during the late 19th century and continued into the 20th century (Brown & Strega, 2005). The Canadian Indian residential school system's governance . forced assimilation that sought to "civilize the savages", to eradicate native languages, and to replace their beliefs with Christianity (Lawrence, 2004; Martens, 1980; Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004). Children and youth were taken out of the reserves and away from their families to be trained in Eurocentric culture at boarding schools. Often times, these isolated institutions were violent, and students were subjected to severe human rights violations (Ismael, 2006). Physical, emotional, and sexual abuses continued until the closure of the schools in the 1960s. Residential schools resulted in "profound violence" that still affect descendants, who so exalt interconnectivity, into the third and fourth generations of kin (Lawrence, 2004, p. 110). The incidence of residential schools has caused post traumatic stress disorder in the form of hypervigilance, inability to cope, emotional extremes, and social and occupational impairment that destabilized family structures and have affected the grandchildren of the residential school students (Cooper, 1996).

The residual trauma of these residential schools and colonialism will only continue as long as colonial systems dominate sociopolitical structures affecting the descendants of the original trauma. To fight the systems in place, awareness of alternatives must be proliferated to a greater and more compelling extent than the oppressive narrative (Estes, 1995). Growing awareness of cultural relativity, human agency, and feminist theory, has allowed women to form consciousness-raising groups to share their dissatisfactions and connect them to the existing counter-

cultural ideologies (i.e. "the personal is political") (Brodie & Bakker, 2008; hooks, 2000). The transition house movement of the 1980s sought to repair some of the damage exposed by these cultural feminists (Baines, et al., 1991, p. 223-5). This advocacy campaign moved thousands women out of institutions and into more humane homes. During this awakening, "co-operating and sharing ideas and knowledge among women from shelters operating under different auspices have further facilitated knowledge about abuse and the ways in which women have coped with violence" (Baines, et al., 1991, p. 223). By listening and responding to the struggles of nurturing women denied nurturance by their society, transition house staff learned and taught others not to condemn the women who repeatedly risk their health and happiness in the vicious cycles kept in motion by the patriarchy (Baines, et al., 1991, p. 224; Ahmed, 2012).

Through this expansion of awareness, feminist, human rights, and postmodern literature and activism raised enough momentum that government leaders were compelled to respond. For example, Ed Broadbent, leader of the New Democratic Party (NDP) proposed and unanimously passed a resolution in the House of Commons to eliminate child poverty by 2000 (Ismael, 2006). Countless other promises have been made to women and minorities by politicians on the eve of their (re)elections. Legislators often pontificate about their plans for maternal health and equal opportunity one month only to cut funding in associated programs the next (Reid, 2007, p. 38).

A decade later, we still have issues with broken funding promises to marginalized populations.In March of 2010, Toronto hosted the G20 Summit, a

gathering of the world's twenty most prominent political leaders, to discuss Child and Maternal Health. Prime Minister Stephen Harper, the figurehead of the event, never mentioned the heinous statistics about infant and mother mortality under his governance. The 2009 infant mortality rate on Canadian reserves equalled those of some underdeveloped nations (OECD, 2012). His obvious lack of awareness about or compassion for First Nations struggles is further elucidated by his erroneous comment that year that Canada has "never experienced colonialism" (Prince George Citizen, Oct 2, 2009, p. 5). Unfortunately this disconnect is not a rare experience for Canadian politicians; history is prologue.

At the start of the new millennium, activists compared notes and concluded that none of the goals for social services had been met. Even popular media pronounced disappointment; in September 2001 Maclean's Magazine published, "Here we are in 2001... and child poverty in Canada is worse, not better". The rest of the indicators of social health are equally tragically degrading despite promises of improvement. In the last decade, British Columbia has seen budget cuts across the board, in senior, youth, homeless, maternal, and First Nations services (NW Environment Watch, 2010). The politicians announce that they don't have enough money to fund social services while simultaneously selling off the resources, like natural gas, ferry transportation, ancient rainforests, and pristine watersheds that could generate income (STCL, 2010). The results are undeniable; poverty has risen 3% since 2000 (Ivanova, 2011). British Columbia has had the highest poverty rate in Canada for 13 consecutive years (Stats Can, 2011).

The Harper government recently requested a 40-year anniversary review by the Policy Research Fund on the Status of Women Canada (SWC, 2010), which was instituted to complete a GBA for government officials (Brodie & Bakker, 2008). The results did not satisfy their search for accolades about their administration, so the evaluation was cancelled and the committee disbanded. Or so the Harper government thought. Janine Brodie and Isabella Bakker decided to publish the important findings anyway and disclosed glaring inadequacies.

In 2006, Conservatives had the words "equality" and "advocacy" removed from the objectives in Status of Women Canada (SWC) and excluded organizations that advocate for women from receiving department grants. The Honourable Beverley Oda, Minister of Canadian Heritage, confidently informed the House of Commons that "this government does fundamentally believe that all women are equal" (Ad-Hoc, 2009, p. 329), explaining why Stephen Harper's Conservative government's two-billion dollar excision of services had been achieved largely at the expense of Canada's equality-seeking groups (Brodie & Bakker, 2008). The public did not share that sentiment. thoughtful people who followed the series of service cuts found that "that dollars and cents reckoning doesn't measure the costs of not providing the service" (Globe and Mail, Nov 21, 2009). When it costs 100 times as much to incarcerate someone than it does to subsidize their basic necessities or to provide childcare as opposed to taking custody of the child, it does not make sense for fiscal conservatives to ignore preventative social services (Law, 2009).

Likewise, independent of human compassion, a financially responsible government would promote gender equality in the workplace. Pay equity is protected

by the Canadian Human Rights Act, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms equality provisions, and a number of international human rights conventions that Canada has signed (Ad-Hoc, 2009, p. 333). The all-party standing committee on the SWC has on several occasions recommended that government pursue proactive legislation to follow these mandates that have yet to succeed, but in the last ten years policy, legal, and financial reforms have actually worsened the pay gap between males and females (Brodie & Bakker, 2008; Ad-Hoc, 2009).

The Conservative government has served the racially marginalized populations no better. Grave public concern that First Nations people, especially those living on reserves, have high infant mortality rates, suicide among teens at six times national average, and secondary school drop-out rate at 80 percent (MacDonald, 1995, p. 380). Shocking rates of child separation from the biological parents that are experienced by Native families does not originate in the degradation of values, but the disparity in value systems between Native and Western cultures. Again, this is not to say that Indigenous people individually or collectively devalue health or education but that the colonialists, who became public policy makers, did not support the success of Indigenous communities when they were assimilated. Had settlers not stolen control of Native society, it cannot be presumed that they would follow such a negative trajectory but instead have continued their timeless tradition of prosperity and community (MacDonald, 1995, p. 387).

Children in this system have also been saddled with insurmountable obstacles. With the onus of self-rehabilitation for the entire family on the mother, and

with women so unsupported by public assistance, children suffer (MacDonald, 1995, p. 258). UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre states,

> The fact remains that the children of the poor simply do not have the same opportunities as the children of the non-poor. Whether measured by physical and mental development, health and survival rates, educational achievement or job prospects, incomes or life expectancies, those who spend their childhood in poverty of income and expectation are at a marked and measurable disadvantage (June 2000, *A League Table of Child Poverty in Rich Nations*, cited in Ismael, 2007, p. 6, 9).

We must avoid omission of the relationship of poverty to child injury. Domestic instability sets the foundation for emotional, mental, and therefore, physical weakness (Trocme, et al., 2001). Those psychologically oppressed in childhood and throughout their lives "become their own oppressors" (Bartky, 1990, p. 22). Feminist medical doctor Natalie Angier asserts that "The brain of a prepubertal girl is primed to absorb the definitions of womanness, of what counts and what doesn't, of what power is and how she can get it or how she will never get it" (Angier, 1999, p. 222). Finally, the internalization of ubiquitous intimations of inferiority can silence multiply oppressed people with no hope of acquiring power.

AWAC's Context

In Prince George, there are many shelters that the interested public can plainly view, but their success is undermined by policies that are less apparent. In every case, their budgets have been decreased through neoliberal policies that encourage privatization of social services. In an interview with AWAC's Executive Director Margaret Sorensen, I learned that AWAC functioned on a budget slashed by $50,000 in 2010. Another local shelter, Elizabeth Fry, helped 4500 women and children in 2009, with substantial private donations, because public funding had

been reduced (pgefry.bc.ca). Relying on individuals and private companies is structurally unreliable, unsustainable, and unadvisable on the basis of their influence distorting the mission of the organization and negatively affecting those who rely upon its services (Spade, 2011). AWAC and E Frye are two shelters that simply cannot imagine a more austere budget than the one already trimmed by years of federal and provincial financial cuts.

The inhabitants of AWAC experience racism, sexism, and classism through ongoing colonialism, which leaves them muted or silenced in a variety of ways. Their stories have been devalued by more normative assertions of the Truth in private and public spaces. If their experiences diverge from those that have been accepted by researchers and authorities, then they are categorized as untruths (Brown & Strega, 2005, p. 206). Furthermore, the justice system itself has negated women's experiences through "centuries of exclusion of women speaking in the public arena even when they are in desperate physical need and when the context is specifically designated as a 'public hearing' with the assumption of a citizen's right to be heard there" (Hoff, 1990, p. 199). Through childhood neglect, educational disparity, domestic abuse, and governmental indifference and outright malice, marginalized people have been told their voices are unimportant and uninformed. Suggesting only one "'Truth' is a denial of the intrinsic potential of individuals to develop and grow as the authors of their own being and universe" (Brian Murphy, 1999, p. 59).

Since "imposed silence about any area of our lives is a tool for separation and powerlessness", it is our responsibility as advocates for equanimity to identify this censorship and make space for including the narratives that had previously been

muted (Lorde, 1980, p. 9). We can disinvest in the industry of creating singular Truth claims. Adrienne Rich says, "There is no 'the truth;' 'a truth' is not one thing or even a system. It is an increasing complexity" (1979, p. 187). We begin to restore autonomy when we acknowledge the abundance of truths relative to the context of individual lives. Each of the residents and participants that came through our art sessions had stories to share, but many that I spoke with lamented that not enough opportunities for that sharing are available to them. Respecting their truths and allowing for their validity was a central goal of this project.

Part 4. Power in Ambivalence and Ambiguity: Gender Defiance

"Queer like some sort of fluidity and limitlessness at once. Queer like a freedom too strange to be conquered." Brandon Whit

Until the 15th century, a majority of the world's population lived in communal, matriarchal societies. Most of those societies had fluid sex roles and understood gender as a collection of characteristics in infinite arrangements (Lorber, 1995; Feinberg, 1996; Butler, 2004; Ahmed, 2004). Transgender activist Leslie Feinbeg writes, "If all of human history were shrunk to the scale of one year, over 360 days of historical time belong to cooperative, matrilineal societies" (Feinberg, 1996, p. 18). In Native communities, many of these ideals have carried on, and others have been mutated by the atrocities of colonial assimilation.

Before contact, transgender people, who were revered in Indigenous communities as two-spirits capable of integrating the mysteries of the masculine spirit and the feminine spirit, had special responsibilities like naming babies,

performing ceremonies, and ritual healing (Feinberg, 1996; Kimmel, 2000; Burns, 1975). But when settler people interacted with their Indigenous societies, transgender people received some of the worst treatment, because no such category existed in imperial European culture.

Evidence of transgender people in First Nations was written about by Westermarck, an explorer in 1917, who wrote about their residing in "nearly every part of the continent" (Feinberg, 1996, p. 22). Some First Nations people have carried the rite of two-spirits, prevailing through the colonial torture into the suffering of this day, because "For two-spirited women, teachings about women's roles were not enough" (Lawrence, 2004, p. 165). In the Crow community, which is still vibrant today, the *bade'* (Crow word for transgender people) are just now re-emerging after they were jailed, shaven, and forced to wear cis-clothes in the late 1890s. The *Klamath* of the Pacific Northwest were prohibited from performing healing ceremonies, because the white government deemed them satanic. Because most two-spirits were shamans, they were then legally slaughtered "as in all probability among all other North American tribes", said ethnographer Leslie Spier in 1930 (Feinberg, 1996). The Lakota call male to female transgenders *winkte*, and the *winkte* bestow secret power names to all the members of the tribe. In the 1920s and 1930s, missionaries and government authorities forced them into their assigned sex roles, and all either conformed or hung themselves (Williams, 1986, p. 112). Also in this region, the Cocopa had *warhameh*, Chumash transgenders were called *joya*, and Maricopa deified the two-spirited humans as *kwiraxame* (People's Record, 2012).

Randy Burns noted that the History Project of Gay American Indians "has documented these alternative gender roles in over 135 North American tribes" (Burns, 1975, p. 1). They resided in every region of the continent, among every type of native culture, from the small bands of hunters in Alaska to the populous, hierarchical city-states in Florida" (Roscoe, 1988, p. 5). One of the many reasons natives were called savages was for their transsexual, bisexual acceptance (Feinberg, 1996, p. 22). Gender discrimination in Canada's Indian Act that forced women out of their communities (Lawrence, 2004, p. 111). A never-ending barrage of hateful words jettisoned from 16th century Alvar Nunez Cabeza de Vaca to 17th century Vasco Nunez de Balboa to18th century Joseph Francois Lafitau.

> Sinful, heinous, perverted, nefarious, abominable, unnatural, disgusting, lewd' – the language used by the colonizers to describe the acceptance of sex/gender diversity, of same-sex love, most accurately described the viewer, not the viewed. And these sensational reports about Two-Spirit people were used to further 'justify' genocide, the theft of Native land and resources, and destruction of their cultures and religions (Feinberg, 1996, p. 22).

The Northwest tribes, such as the Nishga, Haida, and Tsimshian, who had maintained their matri-lineage longer than those in the Northeast, were more accepting of ambiguous sex roles (Cooper, 1996, p. 92). With women taking precedence and participating in what colonists considered traditional male roles, like hunting, canoeing, and ceremonies, white people were suspicious (Cooper, 1996, p. 94). Hudson Bay Company records reveal evidence of white males confiscating valuable goods from indigenous women to "disabuse them of power" (Cooper, 1996, p. 96). Residential schools further forced "generations of kidnapped children to abandon their ways, but many two-spirit children escaped rather than conform." (Feinberg, 1996, p. 26). This discrimination continued through until the 21st century.

For Canadian First Nations, two-spirit culture has been all but forgotten. Contemporary rituals specifically designate male and female attire, language, and roles (Kimmel & Holler, 2011). In an interview with participant Andrea, she indicated her understanding was that most Carrier people have no knowledge of the history of gender nonconforming people within their communities . Well-intentioned academics, social justice activists, and queer social workers have reintroduced the word "two-spirit". But the identity falls into the realm of the "other", even in the minds of those who could embrace it as their own, because of its context as a "white word" (People's Record, 2012). Among Indigenous people, who are often disadvantaged in their access to formal education as well as access to other forms of social capital, the polarizing of the genders maintains severe reinforcement.

In Fall 2000, UN Security Council passed Resolution 1325 for "critical examination of existing gender roles, as well as an assessment of all proposed policies and programs in terms of their differential impact on men and women" (Green, 2007, p. 82). Now, science is beginning to understand that there is a "far greater range of differences among males and among females than there is between males and females" (Kimmel, 2008, p. 33). But contemporary society still relies on these antiquated distinctions. As Natalie Angier explains, "We want to explain ourselves to ourselves... to distinguish male from female, competitor from cooperator, domesticated from feral. We are incorrigible categorizers" (Angier, 1999, p.195). Frigga Haug, an activist for gender equity says, "For reasons of emotional survival, we have become accustomed to seeing ourselves in the terms laid down for us, and from a position marked out for us by society" (Haug, 1987, p. 65).

For women, especially those marginalized as a result of their skin colour or economic class, that position is hardly expansive. In many instances, marginalized women break free from the oppressions of the labels and expectations placed upon them completely, living instead by their own self-concept (Wilson, 2005, p. 337). Because the other social constructs of what it is to be Native or homeless or drug-dependent or sex workers do not describe them, it could be easier for multiply-marginalized females to let go of society's formulation of gender. Yearning for self-determination, these people classified by countless external assumptions find power in casting aside all the ostensibly obvious labels.

Other women, however, encountering difficulties achieving benchmarks of other social and economic standards, emphasize their femininity, as an aspect of culture that they can succeed at embodying. If they are unable to join the mainstream in other ways, at least they can attain esteem from men for being super feminine. Then, they are able to reject conventional women's judgments as pure jealousy and not internalize their shrewdness (Haug, 1987, p. 224).

The most common understanding is that "what natural means is subject to cultural definition." (Angier, 1999, p. 223). When asked about their knowledge of Native transgender history, all of the interviewees skewed their faces in similar expressions of confusion and sometimes even a hint of repugnance. None of these AWAC residents were aware, before our sessions, of an Indigenous vocabulary or history for gender variance or defiance. The one collaborator, a young Aboriginal lesbian named Denys, who had heard of two-spirits responded, "that's a healer, right?", but she lacked its relation to sex/gender. To me, this indicates clear

examples of both the effectiveness of massacre on oral history and the culture of internalized oppression. This is the direct result of what this thesis has referred to as "silencing". Chrystos, a two-spirit poet from the Menominee nation explains,

> The concept of two-spiritedness is a rather rough translation into English of that idea. I think the English language is rigid, and the thought patterns that form it are rigid, so that gender also becomes rigid. The whole concept of gender is more fluid in traditional life (Feinberg, 1998, p. 27).

It is important to note that at the times when laws were being re/written, wealthy males were trying to consolidate their patriarchal rule, so they were explicitly concerned about making distinctions between women and men, and eliminating any blurring or bridging of those categories (Feinberg, 1998, p. 50). In the domestic sphere, biological females are drawn by society as much as biology to the role of caretaker and nurturer (Belenky, et al, 1986, p. 77; Angier, 1999, p. 399). This obviously benefited the security and autonomy of males, especially those with race and class privilege, who were allowed more independence outside of the home and often also monopoly of the family finances. This critical time in history, policies were written in the best interests of those who made them, but we now have a chance to influence the rewriting those paradigms in the interests of a broader base of people.

Chapter III: Methodologies

"No one oppression can be ended without all ending, and this can only happen when we succeed in replacing the assumptions of competition, hierarchy, and separation with cooperation, an understanding that each being has value beyond measure, and the knowledge that we cannot harm anyone or anything wiout harming ourselves." Anne Bishop

As a researcher concerned with social justice, questions of representation arise: How to capture the complexities inherent in involving multiple subjects, who will benefit from the research, and the concept of authority be overcome or will this

be another example of domination? Implications of the answers manifest in not only methodological choices but broader identification of "resistance or allegiance to the hegemony of Eurocentric thought and research traditions – the master's tools" (Strega, 2005, p. 199l; Lorde, 1982). This research is explicitly anti-oppressive, as defined by the feminist and anti-racist researchers that have come before me.

Therefore, I align myself with the rule that "Feminism is a perspective, not a research method. Feminists use a multiplicity of research methods" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 240). As a queer theorist, I take issue with the feminist research methodology label, opting instead for equalist. I agree with Judith Butler that "feminism is a mess", but I acknowledge that we would not be publishing women's feelings and experiences with any kind of scientific credibility if it weren't for the work of feminist researchers (Butler, 2004, p. 175). Multiple political theories responded to the globally suppressing character of patriarchal society: liberal, Marxist, neo-Marxist, radical, reform, socialist, et cetera. Although all hold differing sets of beliefs about the origin sexism and essence of femininity, I contend that they can all be integrated as allies of feminism as they critique the limitations of patriarchy, when only males' experiences are recognized.

My interest is in speaking to lived experience. My dissatisfaction with the Enlightenment accounts of knowing subjects as "disembodied spectators who hover over the Cartesian landscape" has led me and other feminist theorists to consider participants as embodied subjects situated in identifiable contexts (Bailey, 2000, p. 284). Because experience originates in people's being and action, "only the experiencer can speak of her or his experience" (Smith, 2006, p. 224). As idealist

Brian Murphy understands it, "Experience is a function of awareness, not external reality. The anaesthetized patient does not experience the scalpel; the dead do not grieve" (Murphy, 1999, p. 56).

This methodology diverges from more traditional ones, because "in institutional settings, people are active in producing the general out of the particular" (Smith, 2006, p. 225). Justice-directed research develops in a way that reflects race, class, and gender as a dynamic and conditional experience (Baines, 2003, p. 46). "It is grassroots in the sense of considering as 'legitimate' what we have to say about our own lives and the lives of others, and how the conditions of those lives might be transformed" (Brown & Strega, 2005, p. 7). It is only feminist in the sense that feminine perspectives had not been considered in recent generations the great minds of academia.

Likewise, the multi-cultural approach is not intent on disproportionately examining minority populations, but claims victory when those perspectives are examined at all. Linda Tuhiwai Smith proclaims that the term research is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism.

> Research is one of the ways in which the underlying code of imperialism and colonialism is both regulated and realized. It is regulated through the formal rules of individual scholarly disciplines and scientific paradigms, and the institutions that support them (including the state) (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 7-8).

As researchers, we must be aware of our history and cautious not to repeat its patterns. Respect for diversity happens when an authority figure, in this case the researcher, recognizes their location and considers the implications of their power.

The first objective of anti-oppressive research is to question ontology and epistemology (Brown & Strega, 2005, p. 3). Every sentient being has formulated

their own answers to universal questions, and those answers are the key to interpreting responses to more localized questions. Racism, classism, and sexism exist because they work to divide the work in a way that allows certain groups to enjoy tremendous power and profit while protecting the illusion that developmental disparity is natural. "This perspective ignores the fact that they have not been allowed to develop and have actually had their development distorted" (Perelberg & Miller, p. 261).

> It is a short step from accepting hierarchy as natural to assuming that exploitation is just... All oppressions are interdependent, they all come from the same world-view, and none can be solved in isolation. We can either perpetuate a society based on competition, where some win and some lose, or we can work toward a society based on cooperation, where winning and losing become irrelevant (Bishop, 1994, p. 10-11).

In the case of my research, I have to ask, "Am I creating space or taking space?" (Brown & Strega, 2005, p. 26). Throughout this research, I have been careful to let conversations develop organically and not direct their outcome. It has also been the paramount goal throughout all iterations of this research project at AWAC to present to have the marginalized voices heard over the privileged ones.

Next, my job as an anti-oppressive researcher is to avoid manipulating or streamlining those diverse voices. I have to be conscious of treating the participants as collaborators instead of subjects (Reid, 2007, p. 83). Whether or not it is possible to share voice/authority/authorship with informants is debatable, because the final report will apprehensively belong to me (Brown & Strega, 2005, p. 85). "Power is the ability not just to tell the story of someone but to make it the definitive story of that person" (Adichie, 2009). As the author, I have to acknowledge the origin of the ideas. Isabel Yrigoyei warns, "Taking someone else's oppression is nothing to feel proud of.

We should never speak for that which we have not felt" (Isabel Yrigoyei as cited in hooks, 2000, p. 59).

Indigenous epistemology is particularly antipathetic to Western knowledge, so it was all the more important to acknowledge the profound impact it would have on interpretation of information. A growing international community of scholars and researchers is debating indigenous research, indigenous research protocols, and indigenous methodologies.

> Its members position themselves quite clearly as indigenous researchers who are informed academically by critical and often feminist approaches to research, and who are grounded politically in specific indigenous contexts and histories, struggles and ideals (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 4).

White researcher, Natalie Angier, acknowledges the transformation of research dialogue due to inclusion of non-western perspectives: "The more the currency of value is intelligence and ideas, the more we need to assuage and engage and befriend" (Angier, 1999, p. 333). For this research in particular, I needed to know that, "The Lakota believe a people cannot be vanquished unless the spirit of woman is broken" (Muscio, 2002, p. 146). Had I not understood this, I could not have fully grasped the potential of vital matrilineal ancestry of my participants, a few of whom were Lakota (Field Notes, Oct 25). Stories of women's power were not only prolific in the plains of the Lakota but further North in Carrier traditions as well (Finkel, 1995).

Because collaborative research requires intersubjectivity, I also had to explain some of my background to the participants. We did our best to nurture an authentic dialogue between all participants as equally knowing individuals, all cooperating to attain high levels of openness and transparency (Kirby, et al, 2006, p. 39; Denzin

and Giardina, 2009; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 137). I continue to turn to Brown and Strega for methodological advice, "Deconstructionist practices associated with postmodernism and poststructuralism have forced a reconsideration of 'subject', 'object', and 'author' in research" (Brown & Strega, 2005, p. 7).

This meant that our ethnographic study included my own autoethnography, an informal narrative therapy. I created art alongside my collaborators, and together we discovered ourselves and each other in deeper ways than possible in ordinary contexts, for example, passing on the street. We explored different types of autoethnographic art: analytical, which is a cataloging of components within a topic, (Atkinson, 2006; Anderson, 2006) and evocative, which more abstractly conveys the feelings and sensations around a topic (Denzin, 2006; Ellis and Bochner, 2006) and both (Best, 2006). Heewon Chang writes in *Autoethnography as a Method* that "This war between objectivity and subjectivity is likely to continue, shaping the discourse of autoethnography" (Chang, 2008, p. 46).

In response to issues with objectivity, power relations between researcher and researched, ownership of results, and ethics of data collection and reporting, participatory research developed as a self-consciously value-driven alternative (Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 1999, p. 32). Participatory research can combine research, education, and action to dispel advantages of researcher. Participatory researchers see "no contradiction between goals of collective empowerment and deepening of social knowledge" (Hall, 1992, p. 28). Collaboration alleviates the need to discern the "Truth", and instead accepts all experiences as legitimate within their context (Kirby, et al, 2006, p. 37).

Hopefully, the evidence found in thesis will invite researchers and readers to rely less on abstract impersonal writings and "touch readers' lives by informing their experiences" (Nash, 2004, p. 28). Subjective approaches encourage readers "to compare and contrast themselves with others in the cultural texts they read and study, in turn discovering new dimensions of their own lives" (Chang, 2008, p. 34). In doing so, it challenges all parties to relate to one another and find common goals to work towards together.

Chapter IV. Methods

"It's all related in the sense that within the span of every minute, a woman dies in some fucked up way, based on her belief that she's powerless." (Muscio, 2002, p. 154)

Networking and Preparation

As has already been described, the sample population at AWAC has collectively experienced every –ism: sexism, racism, classism, imperialism, ageism, etc. They are simultaneously static and transient trapped in a social matrix and battered by a whirlwind of mental health issues, addiction, emotional trauma, political drama, etc. Needless to say, they were a challenging choice of research contributors, because their experiences and diverse oppressions could not be isolated but analyzed in whole. But, as Amy Tan, a marginalized artist herself, so directly stated, "creativity is mandatory when faced with imminent death." (Tan, TED talk). These AWAC residents were ready to show their stories in unconventional ways.

Prince George, British Columbia is called the Northern Capital of BC in most of the advertising. The city sits on traditional Lheidli T'enneh territory. Their name, in

Carrier, means "the people of the confluence of the two rivers." This location has long been a destination, first when it was the intersection of the Nechako and Fraser Rivers and more so when it became the intersection of Highway 97 North-South and Highway 16 East-West. Situated 700 kilometres north of Vancouver, a nine-hour car ride or twelve hour bus trip, Prince George is "The Gateway to the North" according to the city sign. Our small town, 318 square kilometres, but the largest urban centre for hours in all directions, ushers one million people annually through its international freeways, mostly tourists and supplies from the contiguous United States to Alaska.

The section of Highway 16 that goes through Prince George has also been called the Highway of Tears. The reports of missing and murdered First Nations and Native American women who were last seen around Hwy 16 are staggering. News outlets from CBS to Globe and Mail to the Huffington Post have reported numbers ranging from 18 to over 100 women (CBS, 2012; Hume, 2010; Territo & Kirkham, 2010). Authorities can only estimate the extent of the situation, because similarities between the incidents, having occurred over the past few decades, have only recently been investigated with reference to each other. Under increasing public scrutiny, the fact that over half the missing and murdered women are Aboriginal has been critiqued as a symptom of systematic racism (Territo & Kirkham, 2010, p. 68). With many of the women considered to have "high-risk lifestyles", the tragedies occurring at this intersection of the two highways seems to be attributed by the RCMP to personal instead of societal ails (CBC, 23 November 2012). Many believe that the murdered and missing women of British Columbia have not been given enough investigation, because of their socioeconomic status.

The heavy traffic traffic flow along these highways also accounts for a sizeable portion of Prince George's gross domestic product (GDP), but forestry and other resource extraction accounts for a substantial percentage of the economy (NW Environment Watch, 2010). This form of commerce causesa boom-bust cycle, where institutions make large sums of money for extremely few people and, though briefly decreasing unemployment and increasing GDP, inevitably destabilizes the foundations of the town (Baines, et al, 1991; Collier 1993, Ismael 2006). This pattern has recurred time and again and generally undermines marginalized people, such as Aboriginals and women, because able-bodied working men, wealthier people, and other forms of business leave the region when resource extraction becomes cost prohibitive, leaving behind depleted human, financial, and environmental resources (Mullaly, 2002).

Prince George's population, approximately 72000, is comprised of 10% (much higher than the provincial average of 4%) of which is urban Aboriginal, including Carrier, Gixsan, Gitanyow, Beaver, Blueberry, Wet'suwet'en, and Sekani (StatsCan). As a convergence point of these diverse cultures and as an industrial hub, Prince George has a feeling of transience. The high rate of homelessness, prostitution, and gang-related crime could therefore easily be linked to the unstable economy (CBS Nov 2012). In November of 2010, MacLean's ranked Prince George the most dangerous city in Canada, but it failed to report that nearly all victims were Aboriginal women or drug dealers (MacLean's, 20010, http://www2.macleans.ca/tag/most-dangerous-cities/).

When I finally got to Prince George, my confidence faded. Through street encounters with potential subjects as well as readings on indigenous, homeless, and drug-addled perspectives on research, I was realizing that my youth, innocence, and privilege would inadvertently hinder my relationships with each of the participants. This is not to say that I haven't struggled with White guilt because of the privileges conferred upon me instead of people from other backgrounds and participated in charity endeavors on account of it. However, I had never worked so intimately and honestly with impoverished people to negotiate egalitarian terms of our dynamic. I did not believe it was fair even to ask for participation in this research from the residents at AWAC who were so generous with their time. It seemed disingenuous to presume that they owed me forgiveness to relieve the guilt I feel for being a part of the academy instead of being in their position; I did not deserve the emotional relief, because I was still benefiting from my socioeconomic status every day.

As a devout reader, I chose books to answer my questions and calm my concerns. The selections that interested me had encouraging introductions like, "This book will provide support to all who are questioning and problematizing what it means to do research, and most especially to those engaged in the project of centering subjugated knowledge(s)" (Brown & Strega, 2005, p. 8). Also interesting to me was, "for citizens who are struggling to confront the structures that oppress them and others and reduce their humanity and dignity" (Murphy, 1999, p. 4). I sought authors who understood the guilt of the oppressor and offered solutions instead of assuaging affirmation.

Research Ethics Approval

The UNBC Ethics Review Board took every foreseeable precaution that this presumably vulnerable population would not be manipulated or maligned directly by me or indirectly by the research. Consistent with the previous research done in this setting and manner, an information and consent document was composed in plain language in order to map and expalin every step of the research process outlined (see: Appendix A). This double-sided paper was "provided to all participants with the understanding that only one needed to be signed and attendance after the initial session could be equated with consent unless otherwise indicated" (Harding, 2010, p. 52). Some participants agreed verbally but were reluctant to sign any documents produced by social workers, government agents, and the like. Such actors are often perceived as untrustworthy by victimized people. We had to consistently express our earnest interest in their stories and did so by listening intently.

Other ethical considerations were about the freedom to govern their own art and research. Participants were able to withdraw from any portion of the project at any time and still continue to attend the sessions. Confidentiality and anonymity was protected according to the wishes of each artist, all of whom are given pseudonyms in this report.

To recruit the participants, we used strategic sampling by posting ethical, applicable recruitment signs around the shelter. The residents were invited on a drop-in basis, with no obligation to stay for the duration of the sessions. We attempted to include everyone who wanted to attend, as long as no one threatened the physical or emotional safety of the other artists. There was no limitation

regardless of whether a participant was under the influence of prescribed or illegal substances that altered their state of mind. Prohibiting those people would not only have reduced our study population, but it would have diminished our rapport, because it would have aligned us with the authorities who limit their options instead of upholding our intentions to broaden their options. Art supplies were not offered to participants who appeared to be under the influence of substances, but were not taken away if they found their way to the supply containers and used them with any degree of carefulness. Because shelter policy bans use of drugs on the premises but does return any property to the residents without question. With two to several former or current staff or volunteers in the art sessions at any given time, we were alert but not wary of the participants who seemed, with glassy eyes, unsteady gait, or slurred speech, to be under the influence of alcohol, methadone, or some other substance.

To establish enough trust to perform the research took months of preparation on my part and years of foundational work by Dahne Harding's. During that time, I volunteered at the shelter cooking and serving dinners to get to know the residents and their routines. Most importantly, they got to know me. Not only did I help out at AWAC, but I live downtown in what some people call "the 'hood". I saw the women at work regularly, standing on corners, sometimes wearing far fewer clothes than the below-freezing temperatures warranted, and waiting for or talking to men who had pulled their cars over to solicit the women. Also, it can be surmised through repeated unsolicited interactions that their drug dealer lived in the apartment above mine. I mention this not to muddy the ethical waters but to represent how complicated the

intersections of social science can be. These were not just research subjects; they were my neighbors and, although we are from different backgrounds, part of my community. Moreover, they usually knew each other or of each other from various contexts and overlapping relationships.

When it was getting closer to the beginning of our study, purchasing supplies was also complicated. To encourage all levels of artist to join in, we supplied paints, markers, crayons, pastels stickers, magazines, alphabet letters, stamps, wrapping and tissue paper, even toys and costume jewelry. We had to be diligent to avoid harmful sharps. Though no one ever made attempt to physically harm anyone else in the room, we recognized the triggering potential of the art sessions as well as the vulnerability of the artists, and we did our best to set them up for success (Harding, 2010). We attempted to include just enough materials to foster sharing without competition.

The logistics behind purchasing, transporting, and storing such a variety of materials were challenging. The funding for supplies came largely from Harding and Transken's previous research. They had been purchased out of the kindness of their pocketbooks and were replenished with donations of the same graciousness, supplemented by frequent requests at community events and in classrooms for scrap craft supplies. None of the funding was from the government, university, or shelter. This was a burden but also liberating because no funders' gazes or agendas had to be responded to. We simply wanted to foster a welcoming, nurturing environment for artists, and later, for community members at the exhibition of the art work.

Refreshments were my responsibility, and one that I took seriously. As a "health nut", so deemed by the women, I wished to provide them with wholesome options. I quickly learned that junk food was a door-buster, and fresh, healthy produce went untouched. Further research taught me that this pattern is as much a part of the social situation as any other habit of the residents. The ability to choose their food was a "proxy for power" not only because living at the shelter they didn't have much choice, but also because in the outside world, they are faced with a barrage of images of slender women whose figures they might not be able to attain (Angier, 2000, p. 224). Aboriginal people in general are at an extremely high risk of inadequate nutrition for its cheapness and carbohydrate comfort (Thatcher, 2001, p. 104). The former regrettably affected my choices when the reality of my student budget met their disinterest bordering on disdain for the more expensive, healthier options.

Sessions

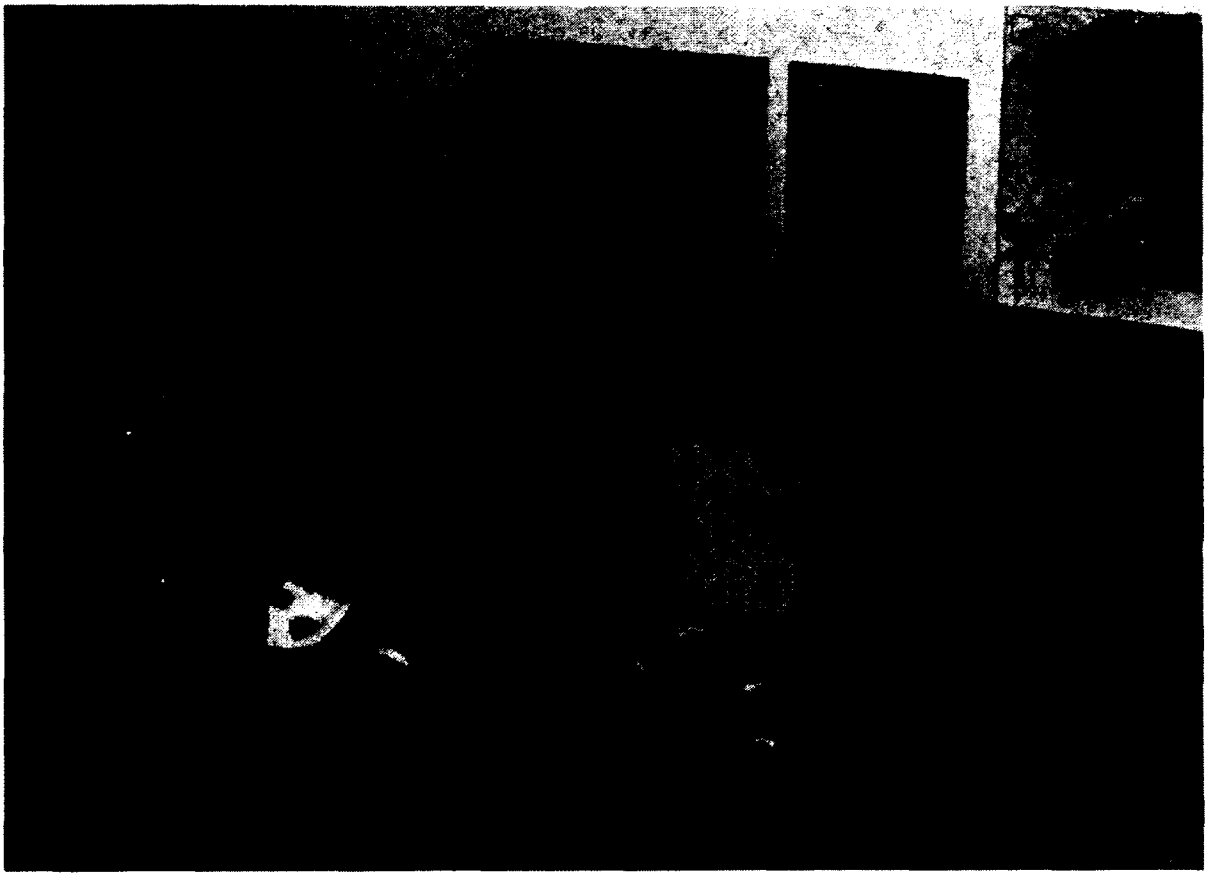
The location was essential to ensuring successful recruitment. Because most of the AWAC residents travel by foot, it had to be near home. Choosing the activity room that they knew so well ensured both their emotional safety as well as attendance. There was little room for forgetfulness or travel delays when we ran through the shelter making noise and inviting everyone to the room next door. It was also ideal, because it was adjacent to but secluded from the rest of the shelter. With two doors, one could come in without going out in the snow but could also leave without disturbingsleeping residents inside.

The particular day and time of the sessions, Sunday at 1:00, was also negotiated according to the needs of the participants. We maintained the consistency with the prior year's sessions and scheduled Sunday afternoons, because, as it is traditionally a family day, many of the women feel particularly lonely or unsettled on Sundays. The time was chosen with respect to the residents' patterns of staying up late and sleeping in the next day. Despite the 1:00 to 3:00 pm time slot, the most common excuse we received for non-attendance was the desire to sleep. Many arrived in their pajamas, which added to their comfort and the intimate feeling of the sessions.

I drove the supplies and Dr. Si Transken to the sessions to arrive a half an hour early to set up and remind participants that it was art day. Transken was originally invited as a participant/observer during the first round of research for the emotional support that her years of mediation, social work, and women's issues training would provide. After it was deduced that the sessions would not trigger arguments as was presumed but instead would mitigate disagreements, she was kept on as a stable resource and enthusiastic co-facilitator. While the primary researchers would change every year, Transken was a familiar and friendly face. Many of the participants returned again and again because they so valued her witty character. Transken has now been involved in a decade of art work at AWAC, continuing relationships from the four iterations of UNBC graduate research projects and expanding these sessions to other marginalized Indigenous women's settings. Her networking with these women has gone from professional to personal as their story-telling and community-building has developed.

To continue to create that sense of development, we modeled our sessions after this passage by Shaun McNiff, We always begin in an empty space that we fill with people and images. The place is transformed and ensouled as soon as the images arrive and as we relate to them with empathy and imagination. Guided by the values of deeply felt experience, we establish a community of creation through the most basic actions of working together and reflecting on one another's expressions (Shaun McNiff, 2004, p. 17).

At AWAC, Transken and I felt much the same. As organizers, we opened the windows to let the light in and fumes out. We lined up the canvases as they were made to celebrate our creativity and productivity (Harding, 2010). The creative process of art can promote emotional well-being in absolutely anyone who is willing to try (Barber, 2002; Leavy, 2008; McNiff, 2004). Willingness, however, does not make rifling through painful memories any easier. At the art table, Christine said, "It is hard to think about my life" (Field Notes, Nov 11). Everyone nodded empathetically.



The solidarity was perhaps the most rewarding part of our community art space. Interactions on that intimate level helped us all understand that many of our individual problems were common despite demographic differences (Green, p. 82). Artivist (though she might not yet have been introduced to the label), bell hooks, wrote, "Like revolutionaries working to change the lot of colonized people globally, it is necessary for feminist activists to stress that the ability to see and describe one's own reality is a significant step in the long process of self-recovery, but it is only a beginning." (hooks, 2000, p. 26).

The people working with paint and glue in that room had encountered a lifetime of silencing that would not be easily rooted out. "Homelessness is an

attitude, not a lifestyle" (Blanton, 2009). As eager as they were to communicate and create, they were weary of the research and our intentions. We had to keep reminding them that the process was as much for them as it was for my degree. We had to subdue aggression stemming from insecurity and transform it into engagement (Angier, 1999, p. 265). Through that engagement, we all learned the value in sharing your experience.

While most of us created art pieces, the work was not structured in such a way that everyone toiled without end. On the contrary, as much socialization happened as art-making. We playfully moved about the room from the snack table to the art supplies, washing brushes and touching people's canvases (with permission). Attendees were free to come and go as they pleased. Some only came for treats, while others who said they only wanted food ended up staying to watch and visit. Often, the designated ending time went unnoticed, because we were too engaged in our art and conversation. When we did collectively decide to wind down and clean up, everyone helped.

Interviews

Each of the women was individually approached and asked for an interview. Most of them agreed to one but postponed indefinitely. Consent does not happen once; it is revisited at every moment of disclosure (Healy, 2010). The eleven half-hour to forty-five minute interviews that I conducted over the course of eleven months were difficult to schedule. Because I did not want to coerce them, I had to rely on our relationships to earn their time. Norman Denzin, a prominent figure in anti-oppressive research has outlined that a successful qualitative interview

"announces its own politics, interrogates the realities, resists all dichotomies..." (Denzin, 2003, 74-75).

The interviews were conducted in a public space with a very loose outline of only four questions. The conversations developed organically around these core topics of:

1) how it felt to make art

2) what it's like to live at AWAC

3) how much they felt they were being heard, and

4) what their femininity, or lack thereof, means for them.

When deciding what questions to ask, we had not held the sessions and could not guess what themes would arise. My goal was to leave them as much room to express themselves as possible without making the blank canvas too daunting. I wanted to know if the process of making art was cathartic, stressful, inspiring, enlightening, or any of the other emotions that it elicits from me. Dahne Harding's research had focused on this question, and I was interested in confirming or denying if similar emotional outcomes occurred in the sample population two years later.

The question about life at AWAC was obvious, because it was their common factor and it was likely that they all experienced that reality in different ways. I wanted to engage them on the aspects of their housing situation that they thought were the most impactful on their lives, and no more specific question would give them the freedom to discuss anything from poverty to houselessness to diet to privacy, and whatever else I could not foresee having never lived in a shelter.

The intention of the content and order of the third question was to check in with them not only about their ability to communicate in general, but also the communication dynamics within our interview. The question sought a qualitative interpretation of the ratio of their expression to the listener's understanding in conversations. Which conversations they prioritized analyzing was just as telling, since some talked about their families' neglect, some referenced unmet requests they had made of AWAC staff, and some referred to their social workers and other government authorities. All eleven interviewees agreed that they had not been adequately listened to and would like to be better understood.

The final question was my personal favorite, because it revealed so much about their gender identities. By the time we had come that far in the interview, we had established a rapport that allowed for more depth of questioning, because we had often already touched on gender and femininity several times by then. The choice of the word femininity instead of womanhood was intentional, because we talked about individual traits and characteristics instead of the essential or holistic woman. During the interviews, discussions included whether the participant felt feminine, liked being female, felt like they were perceived as feminine, and liked being called a woman.

Before beginning each interview, the interviewee and I revisited the ethics information and consent sheet to reaffirm their intent. Throughout the interview, I was careful to maintain a soft, empathetic tone, natural pace and language, and active listening. I facilitated their communication without any form of coercion and found that it was a broader line to walk than most expect. Our touchstone: Does this

enhance your power or diminish it? Notes were taken during the interview, debriefed with the participant, and signed for validation. No recording device was used due to the vulnerability of the population and their distrust of authority. A final question was asked about whether there was anything else they would like to say or clarify. The inconsistent domestic status of the participants was reflected in how the interviews were conducted. However, the semi-structured questions, targeted selection, and flexibility to pursue whatever emerged made the results cogent and coherent.

Artist Dynamics

During the gatherings, the artists interacted kindly with one another, helping each other find the right colour, sharing glue, and touring new recruits through the bins of crafting trinkets and tchotkes. But living with strangers with little privacy, quiet, or hope does have its tensions. Author of *Cunt*, Inga Muscio says, "Women choose to be catty, cruel, prejudiced, competitive or jealous of each other partly because we grow up learning that negative behavior towards women is perfectly acceptable, and partly because it is a difficult task to see ourselves in our perceptions." (Muscio, 2002, p. 129) The complex relationships that had developed over their years of proximity emerged in alliances and enemies. bell hooks writes, "Even though they are from the same ethnic group, they must work to develop Sisterhood" (hooks, 2000, p. 59). It is impossible to know how many artists avoided our sessions because of other artists. Those that did venture into the artists' collective of our sessions were mostly amicable to each other, and they were also generous to the guests we brought into their space.

There were only two altercations that required an artist to leave of her own accord. The first time, a wooden bird that she was trying to affix to her canvas broke. She was frustrated and transferred her disappointment into rage at the person across the table from her. She called her a name related to her seedy occupation, and walked out. The words cunt, bitch, and whore "convey negative meanings about women, specifically, all happen to have once had totally positive associations about women, specifically" (Muscio, 2002, p. 6). But the AWAC patrons have never been told this, and they use the words against each other as the patriarchy would have them do, dividing allegiances and crippling their collective vitality for resurgence.

The next time, it was a regular who wanted to sleep instead of do art that day, and at one point burst in and left as quickly after yelling that we were too loud. After that happened, we had a conversation about how difficult it is to get with roommates. They indicated that they did their best to respect each others' boundaries. Jessica said, "If you bring in someone who's, like, trouble, and hitting people or just, like yelling all the time, they can scare the other people here, and they [the other sheltered women] might go back to a bad place because at least they know what it's like versus living with a stranger you're scared of [pauses and shrugs] or pissed at" (Interview on May 22, 2010). It's in everyone's best interests to get along, and most of the time, art making helped with that goal.

Many of the participants knew each other not only as roommates but also as family members. Due to the cyclical nature of poverty, several of the artists were in similar situations of houselessness. Although comments were inevitably made within the first session together, cluing us in to the family dynamic in the room, the family

members, Jason and Natalie, Whitney and Christine, and Georgie and Sara, did not spend much time interacting with one another, choosing different parts of the room and only communicating if it was a part of the group discussion.

Artist (signed consent) *not real name	Sessions Attended in 2009	Interview Completed	Artwork Produced	Most Common Theme	Incomplete Artwork	Observed Relationships
Tara	Oct 11, 18, 25 Nov 1, 8, 15, 22, 29	Oct 11, 2009	Seashells, Sugar and Spice, My Tree, Determined	femininity		Sociable
Monica	Oct 11, 18, 25 Nov 1, 22, 29	Jan 10, 2010	Native Pride, 2 untitled	outsider pride	5	Complicated relationship with Jessica
Jessica	Oct 11, 18, 25 Nov 1, 8, 15	May 22, 2010	Liars, Night	invisibility	1	Complicated relationship with Monica
Maeby	Oct 11, 18 Nov 1, 8, 15	Nov 1, 2009	Blue Bird, #22, untitled	love	3	Considers herself everyone's mom
Madeline	Oct 11, 18, 25 Nov 22, 29	Nov 22, 2009	Hands, Sex n Drugs, untitled	prostitution		
Denys	Nov 1, 8, 15, 22, 29	Nov 8, 2009	Forest, Anarchy Star, 3 untitled	invisibility		Independent
Cheryl	Oct 18, 25 Nov 1, 8, 15,	Oct 25, 2009	Whirlpool, 3 untitled	health	1	Reserved
Deborah	Oct 18, 25 Nov 1, 15, 22	Nov 15, 2009	Red, Masks	health		Andrea's best friend
Whitney	Oct 18, 25 Nov 1, 8, 15, 22, 29	Oct 18, 2009	Native, 2 untitled	outsider pride		Christine's daughter
Natalie	Oct 18, 25 Nov 1, 8, 15, 22	Nov 29, 2009	Me and My Old Man, 5 untitled	femininity		Jason's sibling
Christine	Oct 18, 25 Nov 1, 29	Jan 17, 2010	Native	prostitution	2	Whitney's mom
Jason	Oct 18, 25 Nov 22		Footprints, untitled	invisibility		Natalie's sibling
Sara	Oct 18, 25 Nov 22, 29		Look Deep, 1 untitled	invisibility	1	Georgie's grandma
Jennifer	Oct 18, 25 Nov 1, 29		3 untitled	health		
Georgie	Oct 18, 25		1 untitled	n/a		Sara's granddaughter
Andrea	Oct 25		My Grandpa, 2	love	2	Deborah's best

	Nov 15, 22		untitled			friend
Louise	Oct 11, 18, 25 Nov 1, 8, 15, 22, 29		5 untitled	n/a		Graduate student
Fran	Oct 25 Nov 1, 22		My Life, 2 untitled	n/a		Graduate student
Kim	Nov 1		Happy Sun	n/a	1	Graduate student

This table can clarify for readers the parameters of this research project, but it does not accurately highlight the nuances of our interactions. For example, I included the date of attendance if a participant came to the room for more than a moment, regardless of whether they stayed for the whole session or painted anything. Because they were an element of the experience at the session, their attendance was noted. It was also difficult to determine if a piece was finished, in progress, or abandoned. The artist was not always available to ask, so we kept every piece, even if it only had one stroke of paint, until a year after the sessions. A complete interview is just as difficult to navigate, but I deferred to the participants to tell me when they were finished, after telling them in the introductions and consent section of the interview that I hoped for about an hour of conversation. In addition to the participants listed in this table, approximately 10-15 other AWAC residents gathered with us for between half a minute and fifteen minutes, doing their own art or remarking on other people's. Their contributions are not detailed here, because they did not consent to participating in the research. We still welcomed them to do with with us.

Thematic Analysis

The notes and quotes from the interview were read, compiled, re-read, analyzed, read again, and thematically coded for the most abundant subjects. They

were then compared to my field notes to reorganize the predominance of issues based upon what the entire art collective discussed during the sessions.

The final results are dependable, because the quotes and tone have both been confirmed with their sources. At the end of the interviews, I showed the notes I took to the interviewee, and they signed the data. After each session, I asked permission of the artists who had said the quotes that I had written down if I could use them in the report I was writing. They are also reliable in that they coincide with the literature review research presented herein. I expected, based on my previous research, for topics such as health and love to emerge. The diversity of personalities and perspectives in the room was not by any means exhaustive, but it did provide a sense of the importance of subjectivity and qualitative methodologies.

The results are limited in their generalizeability, because this research acknowledges the multiple truths that are contextualized in the experiences of the subjective participant. I can, nevertheless, attest to my generalist approach that "considers problem-solving on many levels, across a spectrum of conceptual and practical approaches, and pursues any avenue that may be productive" (Collier, 1993. P.35). Though these findings are not representative of every demographic marker belonging to these participants, bricolage allowed me to use any relevant information that emerged in interactions between myself and the participants. Their stories and artwork are theirs to share, and the best venue for that was directly at our art sessions and at the exhibitions where the artists were there to answer questions and be reflexive with the work.

Chapter Five – Outcomes

"Feminism inspires hope, and hope is a very unruly emotion." – Gloria Steinem (Walker, 1995, xix)

Themes

Only in the lull after the sessions could I begin to discern the common themes of the conversations. The setting was so busy and involved that I couldn't/wouldn't let myself leave it for long enough to analyze it at the time. I took notes as I could without doing a disservice to the relationship-building. Meticulously after we left but before I went home, I wrote in my journal to explore my personal thoughts, and then converted them into scholastic language to catalogue the themes and opinion collected through verbal and visual data. The following categories were the most frequent for both types of data collection, words and images, but other themes are woven throughout the data, a reminder of the complexity of their experiences. I also dialogued extensively with the other facilitators and participants, and we continually, mindfully debrief, because we still share a community, and our stories still intermingle. This iterative process of reflection and feedback on the experiences of art sessions at AWAC has allowed future iterations of the research to be more respectful and sustainable, emotionally and materially.

Health

The immensely entangled attributes of health have physical, mental, and spiritual consequences with hereditary, poverty, occupational, addiction, nutrition, hygiene, and countless other variables were discussed at length in our sessions. When an illness encroaches in one zone of the person, it is likely to affect others "like dominoes" (Interview with Whitney, Oct 8, 2009). This is evidenced in the close quarters of AWAC, where the background noise is a cacophony of coughing,

wheezing, and vomiting. It would be impossible to deduce the origin of the ailments that travel through the shelter, but many structural social workers agree that it's not the specific disease but the overwhelming life of dis-ease that disenfranchised people experience (Mullaly, 2002; Mate, 2008). About this perspective, Brian Murphy wrote:

> Health depends on the satisfaction of needs, 'real' and perceived... In this sense, health and material and physical security can be seen as a subjective and relative state as much as an objective, normative state, with the understanding that beyond a certain threshold of constant or temporary hazard, the distinction becomes largely academic (Murphy, 1999, pp. 15-16).

The root of the ill health, regardless of where it arises, is wariness from stressful living situations and "anticipation of the possibility of attack, of affront or insult, of disparagement, ridicule, or the hurting blindness of others" (Bartky, 1990, p. 18). The effects of hunger, lack of privacy, and general uncertainty further amplify their ill health. "If we proceed from the assumption that women lead oppressed lives and that they have to experience their own oppression day by day, it will follow that their personalities will bear the traces of their lives" (Haug, 1992, p. 11). People who experience repeated debasement may pass that negativity on (Mate, 2008, p. 16).

We must be cautious, however, not to label the individual as a victim of their circumstances or as an unhealthy person due to the multiple injustices that have been inflicted upon them. To do so would only further incapacitate their healing. "Just as a woman could be constructed as a battered woman type of person although she had not suffered physical abuse, she could be constructed as a not-battered type of person even though she had been physically assaulted" (Loseke, 1992, p. 89).

Social workers and other people who work within the services systems often label their clients without acknowledging the complexities and opportunities for creating various outcomes from various events that may or may not have been disclosed. Marginalized people are regularly compartmentalized into the category of their primary source of marginalization, e.g. homeless or abused, and their other characteristics are either ignored or attributed to that root.

> Clients who criticized workers' interventions, rules, or interpretations, clients presenting themselves as angry and defiant, clients who were constructed as strong and independent women lost worker support and organizational assistance. [This example], in theory and practice, was not a place for strong and independent women, it was not a place for all women needing housing, it was not a place for all victimized women. This was a shelter for the 'battered woman (Loseke, 1992, p. 145).

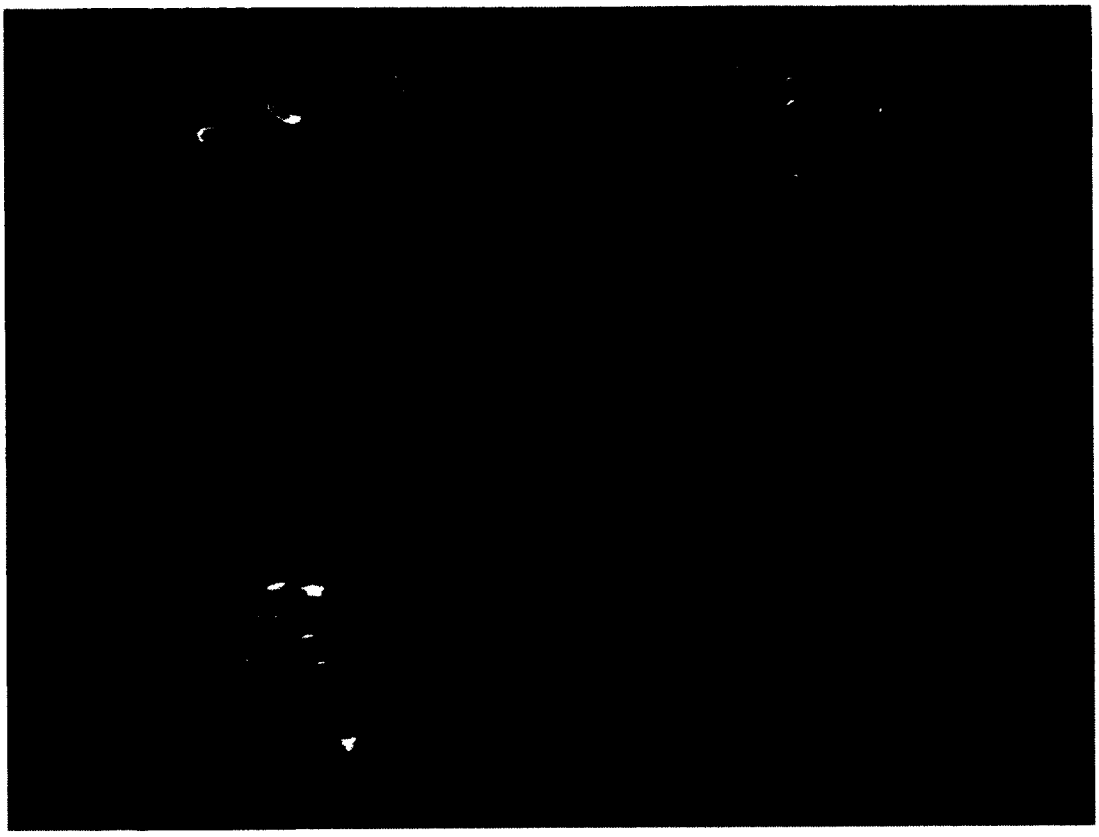
According to popular gender expectations, "mentally healthy" women in our society are passive and dependent. Some of the mental health cases are simply intersections of classism and racism combined with the sexism of gender roles. When already marginalized females are also gender defiant just by being assertive and self-reliant, when the very nature of their marginalization trained them to be so, their coping is turned against them and defined mental illness, often to be medicated away. I do not say this to contest the existence of mental illness, but to suggest that to the extent its nature is socially determined, social factors might prevent or ameliorate the powerlessness of the condition.

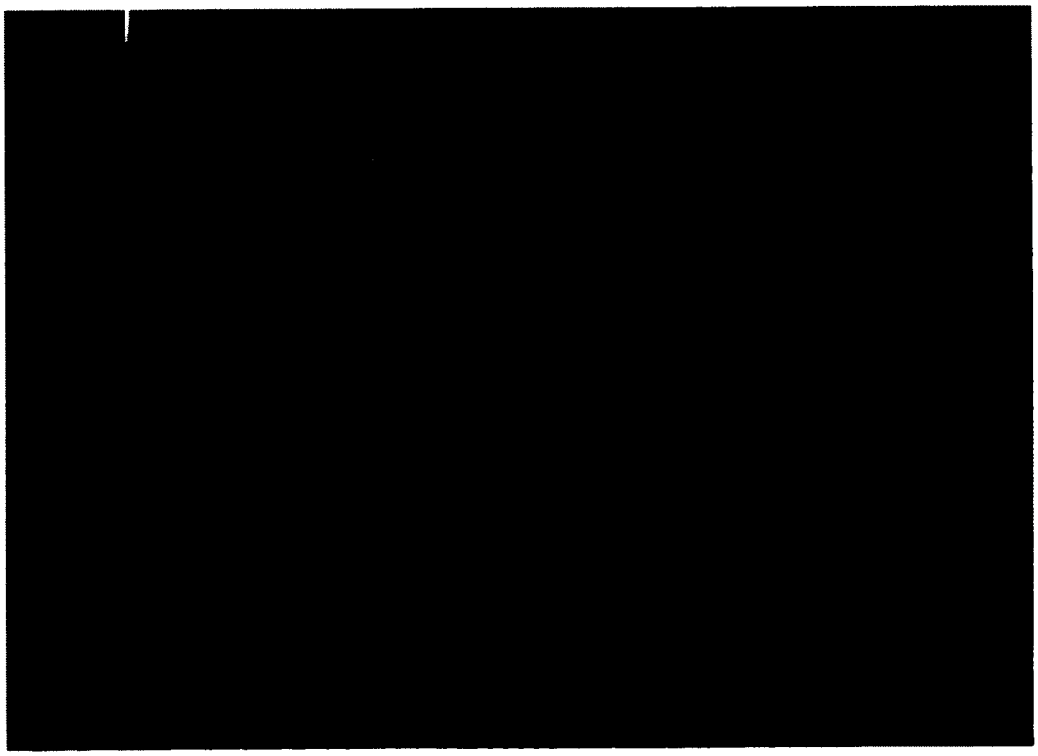
Like the woman who returns to the abusive man, the addict returns to the drug. It serves those in power to rule a population of people who are traumatized and distracted dealing with alcoholism, drug addictions, peer competition, post traumatic stress disorder, and constant distress (Asein, 1993; Bishop, 1994; Haug,

1992; Mate, 2008; Muscio, 2002, p. 278). "Exploited and oppressed groups of women are usually encouraged by those in power to feel that their situation is hopeless, that they can do nothing to break the pattern of domination." (hooks, 2000, p. 27-8)

Many of the canvases took on depictions of highs, binges, and addiction lifestyles. Darlene painted a canvas black "like the night" and then splattered primary colours in thick globs. Finally, standing over her canvas, she swirled the colours together clockwise to symbolize the passing of time and the blending of all boundaries. She said it's like the saying, "Everything is connected" (Field Notes, 1 Nov 2009). Her addiction was spiritual, whereas others were sexual. She called it a Whirlpool.

Madeline composed a mixed-media art piece with masks on a canvas and the eyes behind the open sockets scratched out or overflowing with dollar bills. In the centre of her image are the words SEX N DRUGS. Natalie called her canvas "Me and My Old Man". She said during the third session that she worked on it that it was about the cycle of love and abuse that she endures, and the drinking that drives it. Having been abused by her father, brothers, boyfriends, and male clients, she "do[es]n't expect much" from any men in her life (Field Notes, 22 Nov 2009).





Love

The women at AWAC struggle with loneliness as a result of all these problems (Interview with Cheryl, Oct 25, 2009). Their isolation leaves them wanting for love: romantic, familial, friendly, and self-given. Interpersonal relationships are complicated for every individual, and homeless women are no different. Because only one of the participants had the security of consistent walls to put up their art, most of the pieces were intended as gifts for loved ones. They didn't necessarily know when they would be able to give those presents, because oftentimes the intended recipient lived far away or was in the care of the courts. But participants were talking about their family members the vast majority of the time around the art tables.

Families of marginalized people are often impacted by social condemnation of their living conditions. Social expectations of quality of life and cultural differences can distort perceptions of their parental abilities (Ismael, 2006).. Social workers have the power to determine *parens patriae*, necessity of state intervention, and the "definition of harm as 'physical injury' and 'emotional disability' contained in recent provincial legislation" (Swift, 1995, p. 240). The privileged are allowed to decide where governmental intervention is greater than family autonomy. Aboriginal children get removed 4.5 times as often as children of Western European origin; 75% adopted native children go to non-native homes (Martens, 1988). Children of oppressed peoples are appropriated overtly and covertly by the oppressors in an

effort to reinforce hierarchy and ensure future hegemony, which creates internalized oppression (Bishop, 1994, p. 69-70).

Often the mothers at AWAC were full of guilt for their perceived personal failures to their families. Much of the art was created to give as presents to family members, some with walls to hang them on. They carried the shame of being bad at the sacred rite of mothering without understanding that it was not to be compiled in the same category of failure to keep a home or judged a fault of character. Shari Thurer explains how problems in motherhood are society problems and affect everyone who was ever a child. "I cannot recall ever treating a mother who did not harbor shameful secrets about how her feelings or behaviors damaged her children." (Thurer, 1994, p. 56) But in the context of the mothers who live at AWAC, the shame is compounded in the vortex of poverty, sexual, and addict shame. The black canvas with a vortex of primary colors was painted by Cheryl to depict this undercurrent. Because she was told she is different in countless ways, she thinks her experience of maternal failure is somehow different and more justifiably horrid.

Other canvases were made with more celebratory images that were reminiscent of their loved ones. Sometimes the participants would spend whole sessions looking for one trinket, as in the case of Jennifer who would not stop looking through the bins of craft supplies for a bicycle, even when I told her I had not seen one, because that was her daughter's favorite thing to do (Field Notes Nov 1, 2009). Others would rummage through the bins looking for inspiration until they stumbled upon a stamp that reminded them of a grandson or found their son's basketball number. Of the many canvases and masks that were made of family

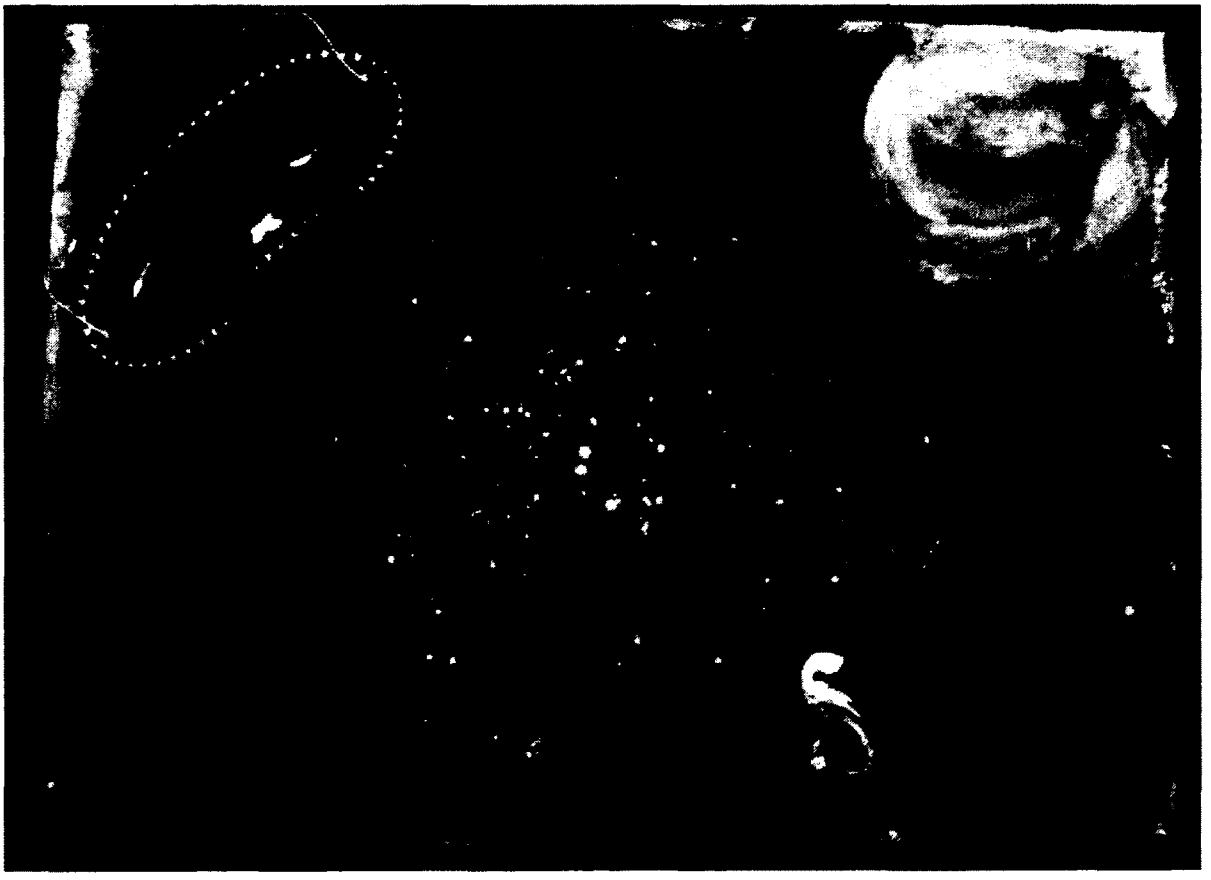
members, I can only be sure that two got to their intended recipient, because he came to AWAC to pick up his mom for lunch. It was a joy to see her give him the art she had made for him, because she was slightly timid but nonetheless proud (Nov 29, 2009).

Invisibility

So they learn to hide from the judgment from themselves and from others. The false invisibility also derives from the absence of audience. For whatever reason, disgust, abhorrence, disinterest, guilt, or otherwise, people in the social center ignore those on the outside.

Over the centuries these themes hardened until silence became a virtue particularly recommended to women (Muscio, 2002, p. 105). "Silence is the unlocked door through which intruders enter and pillage the sacred temple of womankind" (Muscio, 2002, p. 159). Jessica's art always focused around silence, invisibility, and being a "lady of the night". She felt like the fundamental aspect of her character was "coming out at dark" (Interview with Jessica, May 22, 2010). The piece below went through several incarnations over the course of the sessions; she never missed one, and even when she had migraines she would come visit and snack before going back to bed. It began with a black background indicating the aforementioned separation from "regular day people", and then a pink moon was added to symbolize the women who come out at night. She gaily threw glitter around, some of it settling onto the canvas, to represent snow. Then she wrote "liar" (which I spelled for her), added an "s" the next week, then smudged it and was pleased when it morphed into

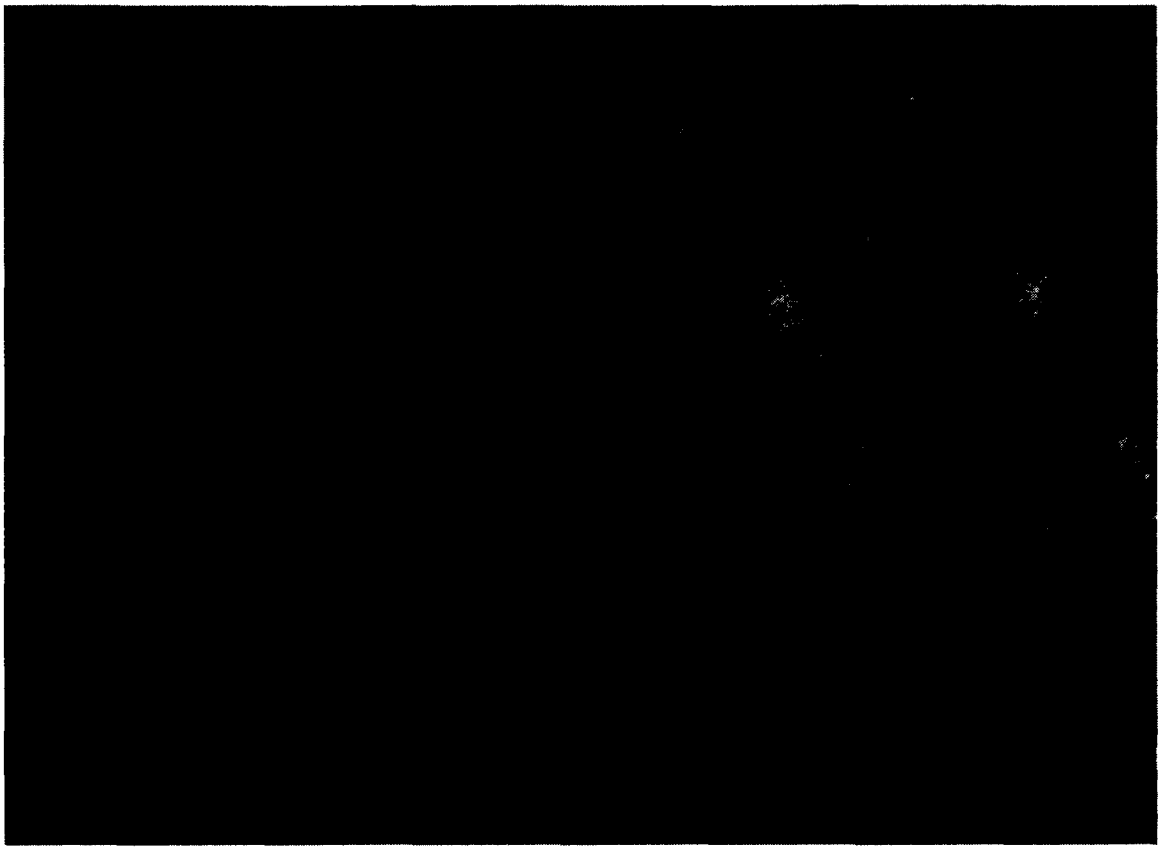
"wars". The next time we met, she found the mask to show how no one could see her true face and put red paint in the eyes to show how demonized she feels.



"Maybe I'm mean since no one's listening anyway" (Interview with Jessica, May 22, 2010). This statement of powerlessness indicates a dispute against the status quo but it also shows surrender to it. The women sometimes choose "shutting down for fear of further alienation" (Perelberg and Miller, 1990, p. 48).

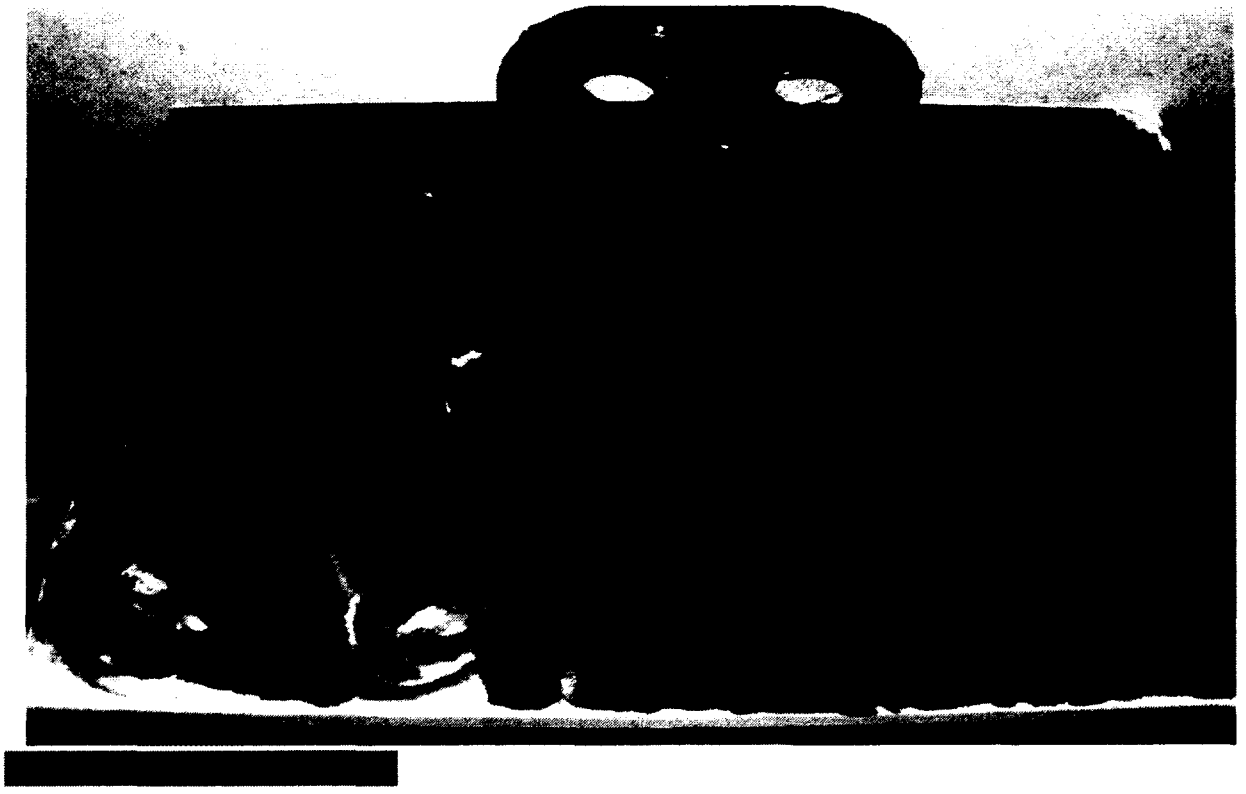
The art produced at AWAC frequently expressed defiance of the artists' outsider status. They embraced the images that "make normal people squirm" (Interview with Denys). They used plastic piles of dog poo, miniature coffins, and taboo words like drugs. If they were going to be forced to the margins, they were

going to exhibit like they meant to be going that way all along. Maybe they were, since many of them had been in that role their whole lives.



Denys, a wiry but tough and proud lesbian, put an anarchy star, a symbol she designed herself, in all of her images. She used fierce brushstrokes when depicting the pummeling that life has dealt her. She painted a teepee both to give reverence to her native heritage and also to mock people who think First Nations still live in teepees. "If I'm deviant, at least I look good doin' it" (Interview with Denys, Nov 8. 2009). Gender deviant was a phrase that I had offered when she lacked words for

her "butchness". We both laughed because we knew who offers that ignorant opinion.



Prostitution

Roughly half of the participants from AWAC work nights on the street. Though it pains me that they are forced to sell time with their bodies for money, it's critical to ensure that their spirits are not also sold. Having agency over their thoughts and feelings was a key part of identity. The first time I heard reference to the types of sex work that some of the participants engaged in was a drug dealer calling another resident who works in sex trade, a "whore" (Field Notes, Oct 11, 2009). Staff, other residents, and driving around Prince George at night gave me unsolicited tips on which participants "work on the streets" (Interview with Maeby, Nov 1, 2009). Maeby said the difference between a drug dealer and a whore is that a drug dealer has

control of their situation. When I asked her how a prostitute loses control, she laughed at me and shook her head.

When I interviewed Madeleine, she never referred to sex trade directly by any name that I recognized, but she said that she knew that the "other girls got [her] back" and that she was in control of "everything" she does (Interview with Madeleine, Nov 22, 2009). Having seen her enter a room with an offensive stance, announcing authority or instigating fights by taking a whole bag of snacks, I knew that this was a position she liked to assume (Field Notes October 25, 2009). I had also seen her stomp out of a room, attempting to slam a pneumatic door behind her, after becoming frustrated and embarrassed by not being able to make the image on the canvas look the way she wanted it to.

Feminists ought to support the decriminalization of prostitution even though the ideal of society without prostitutes is upheld (Bartky, 1990; Valenti, 2007; Muscio, 2002). The street-level prostitutes of AWAC are pariahs even among the ostracized. The drug dealing women criticize the prostitutes for having no skills, while the prostitutes know that enduring what they do is a skill in and of itself. Most use drugs to escape the reality of their occupation regardless of what it is. I align with Inga Muscio, recognizing the creativity of prostitution, "If I were a truly resourceful and courageous individual, I would've learned how to be a Whore for subsistence while I wrote this book" (Muscio, 2002, p. 77). The resourcefulness goes beyond the advantages for sex trade workers in a sex-positive society.

> Our cultural ignorance and intolerance of Whores keeps Whores from realizing the full potential of Whoredom. It likewise robs women and men of Teachers who can help us understand women's sexual power... People were free to visit the temples of Whores, and did so to learn, to love, to open up

> physically, to heal... It would be so wonderful to visit a Sacred Whore temple (Muscio, 2002, p. 79).

The measure of respect prostitutes receive is in direct proportion to the flow of respect for all women (Muscio, 2002; Haug, 1999). While sexuality is a constant, perception fluctuates according to the group in power. Former sex worker turned sex counselor, Carol Queen has written, "In our collective extraordinary experience we prostitutes have healed even those who do not honor us. Were the attack on us over, we could begin to heal the whole world" (Queen, 1997, p. 204-5). Rape is not about men raping women; it's about the powerful raping the powerless (Territo & Kirkham, 2010; Clare, 2011). Egalitarian sex translates to an egalitarian society, and one cannot happen without the other.

Femininity

I am compelled to expose, in this autoethnographic feminist report, that this is the issue closest to my heart. While I disagree of the assumption that all females, the true demographic of AWAC, are women, I understand that the lives that these women have led have oftentimes forced them towards embodying the feminine in terms of sexuality, motherhood, and dependency. Nonetheless, the cutthroat nature of their lives often found them in competitive, aggressive, and independent circumstances consistent with masculine characteristics. The theoretical analyses of their negotiations between femininity and masculinity are not luxuries they have the means to explore in the vocabularies employed by academics, but they do recognize the society-imposed gender roles and often explored them through their artwork.

Tara created a mask that she called "Sugar and Spice", because these are the things that supposedly every girl is made of. She painted it with a background of black, again because of the invisibility and silence that a woman is required to uphold. She put ribbons on its scalp and sparkles to show the niceties that women are supposed to exhibit vocally and visually. Interestingly, she put "XY", the male sex chromosomes, to indicate that this is a mask that can be worn by anyone, femininity being its own characteristic (Interview with Tara, Oct 11, 2009).

Alternatively, many of the women linked femininity directly to motherhood. Their complicated relationships with their mothers were their tangible source of knowledge about intergenerational oppression (Mate, 2008). Very few of the women

were without children of their own, having been working in the sex trade for years, even decades, and/or having debts, paid sexually, to the men in their lives that were arguably more capable of supporting them. Most of the women's children had been taken away by the government and kept in foster care or sent to family members. This situation felt like an unforgivable failure to them, which they often tried to make up for with subsequent pregnancies. Some of them treasured their grandchildren as a way to atone for the presence and presents they could not offer their children.

Maeby was one of these grandmothers. As a hardened drug-dealer, she looks down on sex trade workers, perhaps because she's been down that road before. She often jokes about being the "man of the house" who will "stomp on anyone who hurts someone [she] love[s]". She has at least five children, and at least a dozen grandchildren, but she creates most of her artwork for one grandson, who is three years old. She uses all the blues and the "boy" stencils, "none of this girly stuff", throwing the flowers out of their boxes (Field Notes Nov 8, 2009). She later ends up affixing blue roses to the corners of a nearly finished canvas. When she finds a giant silver spoon, she dances around the room with glee, swinging it around in the air, "Only the best for my boy!". At first, I think it's a reference to rich people eating from silver spoons, but I soon realize from the abundant laughter and gestures of the other artists that she's referring to a spoon used for heating drugs. This is "the authenticity of... people who cannot declare themselves to be anything other than what they are" (Mate, 2008, p. 22). She assumed that he would end up in the same circumstances of those that came before her and those after, but in her maternal compassion still wanted him to have the best of that world.

Outsider Pride

One issue, above all, was represented most often in the art. Invariably, individual homelessness was directly linked in their minds to cultural homelessness, the loss of their native homelands. "The Aboriginal struggle is not only for the resources, protections, and respect they deserve as human beings... it is also a struggle to recover their separateness as nations and their right to their homelands..." (Bishop, 1994, p. 63).

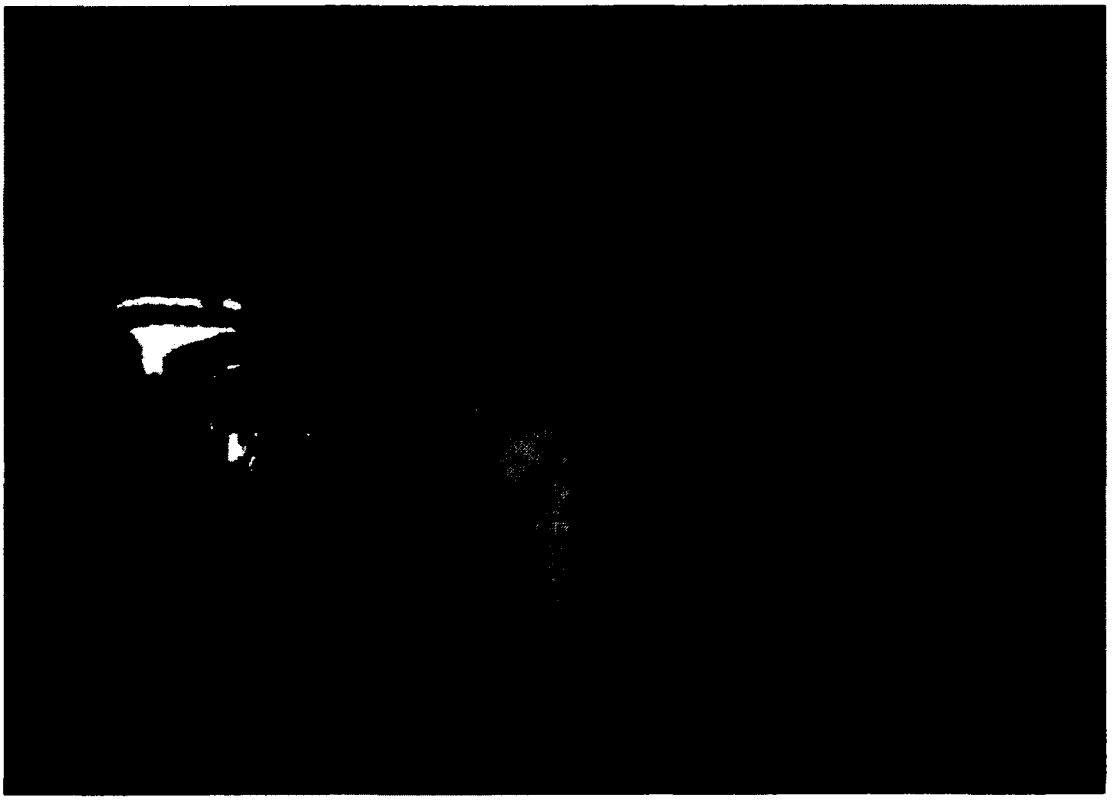
We spent some time before a few of the sessions, at the beginning and when there were a number of new artists, talking about how this was their research, how inadvertently it would become a "fact" that would make them representative of their demographic, whatever that's worth. "Gaining control of the research process has been pivotal for Indigenous peoples in decolonization" (Brown & Strega, 2005, p. 23). Maybe some of that conversation trickled through into their depictions of clan animals, native styles and colours, wildlife and cultural icons.

Again, the lines of thought intersect, with these topics of nativeness, subordination, prostitution, and pride all interconnecting. "The Lakota believe a people cannot be vanquished unless the spirit of a woman is broken" (Muscio, 2002, p. 146). Since rape perpetually accompanies war, literally planting the seed of the invader in the body of the conquered people, they consistently experience colonization in the act of prostitution, as well. By saving the dignity of their culture, they were reclaiming their own.

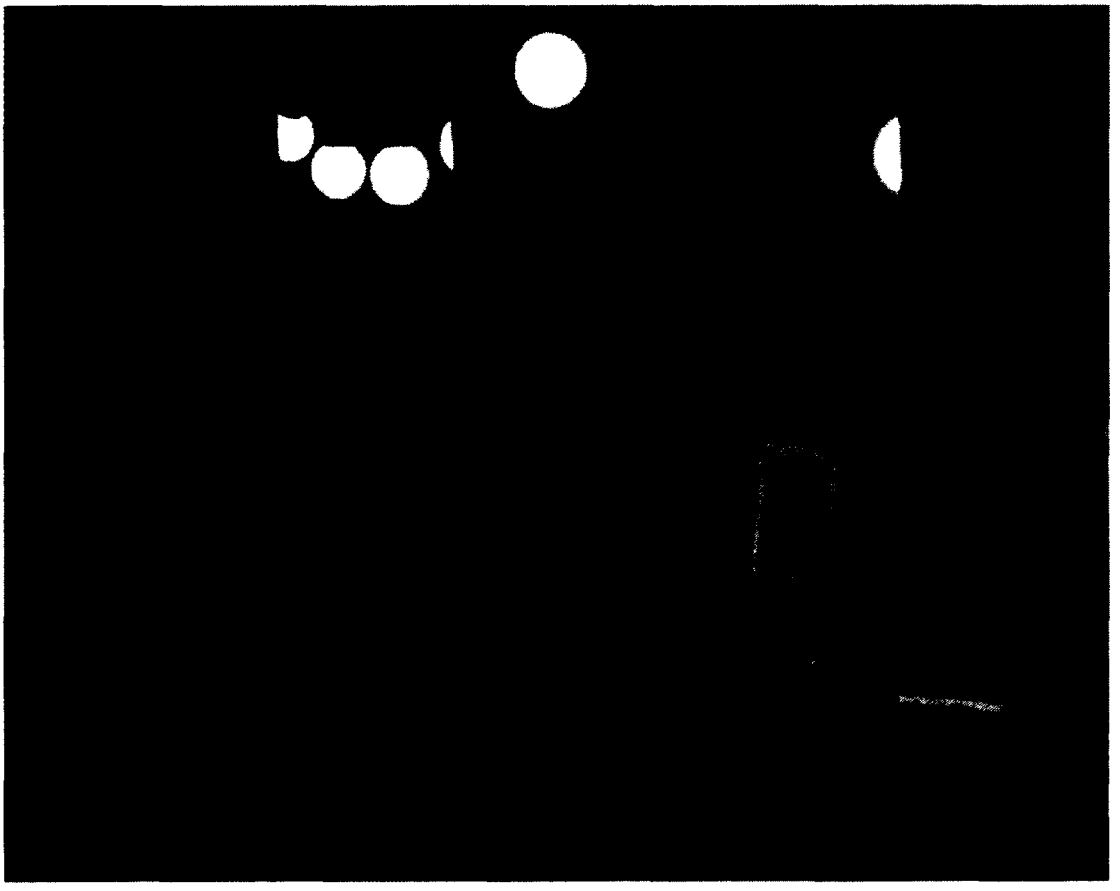
Sometimes that occurred through humour. During the fifth session, the Native artist who created the middle mask on the next page, told a joke to our group.

A: Why does an Indian wear a feather?
Me: Why?
A: Because he fuck 'em one squaw. Why did the chief wear a headdress?
Me: Why?
A: Because he fuck 'em all squaw.

I don't know why the joke was funny, but such unbridled laughter abounded. I still don't know whether they meant the word "squaw" the way colonialists did or in the original, reverential way. I do know that she used two feathers in her mask, entitled "Native Pride," and adorned it with gold eye shadow, which is the colour she wears when she's working [as a street-level sex trade worker] (Interview with Monica, 10 Jan 2010).



In Jason's case, the experience of othering was dual in nature, due to both zir Native heritage and androgynous gender. Ze used mixed media to show the different elements of zirself, like the masculine of wood, which was actually a cinnamon stick, and feminine of glitter. This untitled image depicts a "gender-free" person in zir house (Field Notes November 22, 2009).



Lessons

It was and continues to be my highest objective to use whatever authority, benefits, and power that derive from my privileged positions to further promote the causes of subordinated peoples by rejecting the implication that those roles reify oppression (Mihesuah and Wilson, 2004, p. 14). This has proven difficult, in that some in power do not like the inference that they're abusing their power by my purporting that my unconventional methods are ethically driven. It has also been immensely rewarding to witness that these systems of oppression are not immutable but respond precisely to the actions of every individual player. I have reinforced, in this evidently insignificant thesis, that it is possible and optimal to align factual reporting and storytelling, science and art (Banks, 1998, pp. 11-12).
It is when these activities are done by, for, and about the powerless populations that they become assertions of power.

There are self-serving reasons that the hegemony only accepts certain privileged sources of Truth. If everyone were acknowledged as the experts of their own experiences, the dominant group would have to accept their abuse of power. "The dominant cultural messages invariably legitimize such political effects on individuals as conformity and oppression, and the dominant culture must be demystified and exposed for individuals to see the need for structural or political change." (Mullaly, 2002, p.96). Every research project that follows anti-oppressive practices opens space for alternative understandings and weakens the myth of a universal truth.

When we move away from the struggle for power, we decrease struggle in general. Natalie Angier explains, "Aggression is what you resort to when you don't have genuine power" (Angier, p. 264). The angst and disputes that arise at AWAC and in other communities of marginalized people emerge from an absence of options. We can easily give them options for other modes of communication. Aggression can be hostile and seek to wound, but it can also be creative and seek to engage.

This research has reaffirmed numerous tasks that deserve prioritization. Changes need to be made on the microcosm at AWAC as well as in the macrocosm of the greater Canadian-American culture. The timeline is obvious; start working now and stop only when equality is standard.

For people working at AWAC, the budget, especially in times of austerity, is a daily concern that forces rationing of the basic necessities and complete elimination of "luxuries". However, we have learned that healing is not a luxury and would actually benefit the budget. Art programming reduces stress and strife while advancing overall wellbeing and solidarity.

Yet the daily tasks of maintaining with cooking and cleaning in this 24-hour facility take precedence over progressing beyond the status quo. It takes extra strength and patience in an already strained workday to negotiate with funders to attest the necessity of programming greater than basic survival. Frigga Haug writes of structural misogyny that, "The programmers experience a series of conflicts which arise from the fact that the forces of production are developing ... without their input, though they have conscious commitment... So instead of conflicting with the system,

they conserve their strength for the actual work with clients" (Haug, 1992, p. 125). Therefore, no policy change is enacted, because it risks the "real work being done, because it is so exhaustive. AWAC's employees should not have to make this decision. Moreover, we must offer the appropriate financial and psychological support for frontline workers to engage in this fight.

Working within "the belly of the beast" depicts helping service users through a sharing of information and an understanding that solutions come through a mutual dialectic. The goal set out by Bob Mullaly is "to demystify social work activities, techniques, and practices, social workers must not be possessive of them but must make them broadly available to people at large as a part of their jobs" (Mullaly, 2007, p. 318). The beast must listen.

Changes need to happen on a macro-level within governmental social services, education, and public opinion. The difficulty is that each of these revolutions needs to happen simultaneously for any to make a difference. We should not continue working in oppressive restrictions as a means to an end. Structural social workers could improve by understanding that "Structural inequality is a somewhat abstract, technical bourgeois and polite term that covers up its violent outcomes. We should call it what it is – socially sanctioned structural violence" (Mullaly, 2007, p.276). We must decide as a society that we will no longer be party to this devastation.

One way to enact governmental change is to put pressure on the individual politicians whose reputations and elections are contingent on the public's

satisfaction with their policies. We have to let them know through whatever means necessary that their budget-slashing harms their constituents.

> "This is a personal social science, a moral ethnography that reads repression and pain biographically, existentially. It knows that behind every act of institutional repression lurks a flesh and blood human being who can be held accountable, at a deep, moral level, for his or her actions." (Denzin, 2003, p. 142)

The social services that have been proven effective need to be reinstated (Green, 2007, p. 83). All shelters should have programming that aids in the residents' ability to eventually move on to more self-fulfilling lives. Consistent with the 1970 request by the Royal Commission, "We recommend that the provinces and territories, in cooperation with municipalities and voluntary associations, provide a network of hostels for transient girls and women where counseling services on job opportunities and training facilities are made available" (Royal Commission, 1970). As has been delineated, one of the cheapest and most effective forms of counseling is creative expression, because it is self-directed and immediate. "Present conditions only make it a more urgent task than ever to create a human race that has the conservation and the peace of the world and the free development of individual capacities at the top of its agenda" (Haug, 1992, p. 94).

In the education sector, the government must correct its past destruction. Rather than closing fourteen rural schools, predominately attended by First Nations, which was done in the Prince George area in 2010 (sd57.bc.ca), we have to give everyone equal learning opportunities. While this sounds cliché, it is not being honoured on a local, provincial or federal level. "The more the oppressor group can separate and distinguish itself from the oppressed group, the greater its capacity to

create and carry out policy, reserve resources, and build and ideology of oppression." (Bishop, 1994, p. 71) Everyone needs access to the same information, and the internet could greatly facilitate this shift. "Education is a systematic endeavour towards human learning. The generic aim of education ought to be the actualization of individual persons, and persons-in-society, as possibilities as process." (Murphy, 1999, p. 84)

If we acknowledged every person as capable of achieving independence and contributing new ideas to our collective conscious, the outcome would be a more magnificent society than we have ever experienced. "What we have learned can be unlearned. The question is, can it be unlearned in time, before the rich and powerful own the entire world and destroy it, before the depth of our 'oppression training' makes us passively stand by and watch, or even assist in the destruction." (Bishop, 1994, p. 122) We must be an egalitarian society to save our planet and its people from demise, and it can be done through a leveling of the opportunities in all arenas.

Limitations

The limitations of the research are many, because the sample group is so small and their experiences and contributions so specific to their individual stories. The consequences of such a limitation are debatable, because some readers may deduce that the sample is too small to be applicable to other groups. Because I have stated that importance of subjectivity and reflexivity with the participants, and because relationship building was a core principle of our research, in my opinion, the specific sample does not detract from the importance of this project.

As an anti-oppressive researcher, I must admit my advantage in this project. It is only I, not the other participants who gain an embossed paper and letters amended to my name upon completion of this document. We all benefited from the process, but I definitely obtain more social collateral than the others.

Of course, I must also admit my researcher bias, which is impossible to bracket despite my greatest efforts at judiciousness. It is difficult to facilitate and still be receptive, and in the art sessions, I was relieved to have Dr. Transken be able to take on one of these roles that that I could be more effective at the other. Our strong working relationship greatly impacted our success. I would suggest all social programming to have at least as many facilitators.

I know also that I was eager to help in any way that I could. "Idealistic ideas about community collaboration and active participation need to be tempered with realistic assessments of a community's resources and capabilities, even if there is enthusiasm and goodwill" (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 140). Going into the project as well as throughout, I was aware that I am only one person enacting in a system of institutionalized oppression. I kept a smile on my face without getting my hopes too high. The outcomes, nevertheless, exceeded my expectations.

The selection of participants could be considered a disadvantage, though I consider it practical. Only those who wanted to participate did, and perhaps it would have been interesting to ask why other residents chose not to participate. Even those who participated in the feminist methodology would not necessarily identify that as their intention. "The majority of women who have benefited in any way from feminist-generated social reforms do not want to be seen as advocated of feminism"

(hooks, 2000, p. 23). The strategic sampling gave us enough collaborators to have a clear purview of the situation, and feminist researchers are careful not to generalize past what they directly witness.

A note about the names used in this report: Of course, the names were changed to protect the identities of the participants, and all identifying characteristics were omitted with no changes that would significantly affect the image being assembled for the readers. Though it irks me the names are more English than First Nations in etymology, they reflect the reality of the residents. None of the participants that I encountered had "authentic" names, which stems back to colonialism and the residential schools. This is not my mistake in nomenclature, but another systemic one.

Suggestions

Art sessions at AWAC have continued since those that I facilitated in October and November of 2010. In the future, I would encourage future facilitators of the art sessions to focus of sustainability of arts programming at AWAC. I cannot stress enough the importance of community-building in the effective facilitation of art sessions. Because of the emotional nature of art, artists must trust each other to produce art as a group. Given the close quarters and limited resources at AWAC, it is highly unrealistic to hope for space and materials for residents to be able to explore art-making in solitude. Therefore, a trusting community, where neither feelings or artwork will be frequently or irreparably hurt is ideal.

Furthermore, the residents of AWAC, or any shelter, should have access to art materials with more freedom than the art sessions that we conducted allowed. At the

end of every two-hour, weekly session, the art supplies were taken out of their hands. Had they felt inspired later in the day or week, they did not have the freedom to add to their canvas or start a new one. Because art-making is teleological, the artists should have the agency to come back to their work at any time.

Finally, artists should not have to subject their work to the benefit of a research project just to participate in art-making. It is unjust that a series of graduate students have received credit for the art programming that should always be available to anyone who wants to participate. It is unfair that financial support for this work comes predominately from UNBC's graduate supervisor, Si Transken. There is more than enough evidence now that AWAC's residents enjoy and benefit from art sessions. The government should fund arts programming at all shelters to foster community, promote expression, increase self-esteem, and encourage healthy activities. Ideally, there would be a place at AWAC where residents could go at any time to make art freely.

I bear witness to the positive influence of the art sessions on marginalized communities and especially to Si Transken's methods of facilitating those sessions. The relationships she has made with marginalized communities of women and Indigenous people through the art sessions, would not be as robust and authentic if she were not so accommodating, enthusiastic, and truthful in the way that she engages. Prince George and surrounding communities greatly benefit from her work and dissemination of art accessibility.

Exhibition

It was necessary to get the art produced during our sessions exhibited in a way that would honour the artists and challenge the audience. It was presented at the Bridges Conference and twice at the UNBC Arts Council Night, but the pinnacle of the tour was the Homelessness Awareness Week Exhibition at ArtSpace. The venue was downtown in a legitimate gallery, where the artists would have easy access and the politicians, academics, funders, and other community members knew well. Even students of the class for whom I was teaching assistant were given a day out of the classroom and invited to the exhibition. We advertised on the radio, through university and activist listservs, and using posters put around town in public spaces, shops, and shelters.

On our opening night, over one hundred people attended to see the art. Food was served, and a celebratory cake was cut. We had poetry recitations and speeches about the issues encountered in the artists' lives. There was a wall where people could publicly display their responses to the art, and it was powerful to see the interactions between the varieties of guests. There were also surveys where visitors could privately offer feedback on their experience of the exhibition. Over the month that the art remained on the walls at Artspace, hundreds of people saw the display and interacted with the work. Most of the responses indicated a powerful change of heart and mind regarding the capabilities of homeless people. Nearly all of them said "thank you" for that awareness. Expanding this awareness is necessary for any profound policy change that could positively affect the artists' lives.

Since the exhibition, AWAC's funding has been slashed yet again by $50,000 (Employee interview, Feb 18, 2011). This has forced the termination of one employee per shift, making it even more impossible to do any programming beyond daily maintenance of cleaning and cooking. The decay of the conditions at the shelter does not end there. The RCMP have been more stringent in patrolling the downtown for prostitution and drug use, which in practice often looks like the harassment of First Nations people. They, in response, have begun to leave the downtown area, where their services are located, and hide out in the dangerous private residences where these very activities originate. The situation may have been a part of what led to the murder of two of the participants of this research, faces who are lost in the statistics of aboriginal missing women.

The only way to rectify this negligence is to address the source of the pain. Both the powerful and the powerless must be educated in the multiplicity and intersectionality of the sexist, racist, and classist injustices. "There will be no mass-based feminist movement as long as feminist ideas are understood only by a well-educated few" (hooks, 2000, p. 113). The vicious cycle of authorities not understanding social injustice leads to lack of funding for the underprivileged to learn to understand their part in it. We need to address both of these educations simultaneously to overcome the cyclical ignorance. Both sides, and every individual in between, need to fully embrace their right to truth. "Knowledge is possible because we have consciousness; that is, because we are conscious – aware of ourselves as distinct from anything 'out there'" (Murphy, p. 55). Everyone is entitled

to their experiences as truths, and this is the goal of social justice activists, researchers, and educators.

We must maintain hope in the possibility of this future. Norman Denzin writes, "Hope, as a form of pedagogy, confronts and interrogates cynicism, the belief that change is not possible or is too costly. Hope works from rage to love" (Denzin, 2003, p. 229). Kojiro Tomita says that "art is a tryst, for in the joy of it maker and beholder meet". If this is true, the affairs nurtured by this project and those like it are the miscegenation that will unite our communities. The outcome of such engagement could catalyze advancement for social justice through more egalitarian epistemology by, for, and about cultural diversity and inclusion. I hope for freedom of expression and respectful communication between all artivists.

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Appendix A: Consent Form and Information Sheet Signed by Participants

Located at Association Advocating for Women and Children, 144 George Street, Prince George, BC
Reeanna Bradley, MA Candidate, Gender Studies

I understand that Reeanna Elizabeth Bradley, who is a UNBC student, is conducting art sessions and oral interviews as part of her studies leading to a Masters of Arts in Gender Studies. The purpose of the interview is to collect information to show actual lived experiences of the women who access AWAC, as they are told through art and voice.

I understand that I was chosen as a participant in this study because I have self identified as a marginalized woman. I will be interviewed by the student based on a series of open-ended questions guided by conversational style, which is academically called feminist methodology, and by my participation in the art sessions, which will produce both my physical artwork as well as photographs of the process. Material created in the interview and art sessions will be used as primary data for a thesis project.

1. This consent is given on the understanding that Reeanna Elizabeth Bradley will guarantee that my identity is protected and my confidentiality maintained, both directly and indirectly, and that this information will be used solely for the purpose of this research project. I do this freely, and understand that I may stop the interview or my participation in the art sessions at any point and can withdraw from the research process at any time.

2. I understand and agree that the information I have given to Reeanna Elizabeth Bradley in our interview(s) on the following date(s), _____ will be treated in the following manner:

    (a) hand written notes and/or tape recording will be taken during our discussion
    (b) this data will be stored securely by Reeanna Elizabeth Bradley, only in a secure location in her private residence or in a locker in the Teaching and Learning Center at UNBC.
    (c) the data will be used only by Reeanna Elizabeth Bradley, and only for her thesis project; Dr. Si Transken will also have access to the material for supervisory purposes.
    (d) the data will either be turned in to Dr. Si Transken to be shredded at the end of this project, or will be returned to me before July 2011.

3. I understand that if I have any comments or concerns I can contact Dr. Si Transken at 960-6643, or the Vice President Research, UNBC at 960-5820.

4. A copy of this agreement will be retained by all parties to the research.

NAME: _____ SIGNED: _____
DATE: _____ RESEARCHER: _____ SIGNED: _____

Information Sheet
Thesis Project for Reeanna Bradley

ART SESSIONS

- Art sessions will be held once a week (Sunday 1-3pm) in the activity room at AWAC. Anyone is welcome and you may leave at any time.
- You may create any project you like and/or you may bring your own to the session.
- This is a research project, but you do not have to share your work or your stories if you do not want to.
- You may participate in the interview process regarding art you made. However, this is not required for you to make art.
- Confidentiality is impossible to maintain due to the group format, however, care will be taken to respect anonymity outside of the working group.
- **Consent forms need only be signed at the first session attended. Completion of survey questions or contribution of story directly to a researcher will constitute consent at all sessions thereafter.**

What Happens in an Art Session?

- ***Introduction of researcher and project***
- **Hand out consent forms to newcomers**
- **Presentation regarding project of the day/invitation to work freely with materials provided**
- **Closing discussion about work produced**
- **Completion of questionnaires verbally or in writing; recording of stories for those who would like through tape recording, video, or photographs.**
- **Invitation to return the following week**

DATA

- **Will consist of photographs and stories told by the participants of the art group. You can withdraw work, stories, or actual participation at anytime.**

EXHIBITION OF WORK

Any participant who is interested may participate in an exhibition of work during homelessness Awareness Week, October 2009. If you are interested in participating, you may leave your name with the Outreach Worker at AWAC, or let the researcher know directly. Reminders will be posted at AWAC in September.

Photographs of art and recordings of stories will be taken only with permission of the artist. All photos and stories will be returned to the artists by July 2011.