Researchers Experience Multiple Embodiments in a Cross-Cultural, Intergenerational Event to Support Girls Challenging Gender-Based Violence

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Abstract
Many challenges exist to conducting participatory research and consultation with young people, especially with those considered vulnerable or at risk. Beyond respecting the safety and wellbeing of young research participants, researchers must be aware of barriers to youth engagement and be attuned to the many forms of youth resistance. As young people are seeking more control over their lives, traditional knowledge hierarchies between adults and youth are shifting. In July 2018, an event entitled Circles Within Circles brought together Indigenous and non-Indigenous girls and young women from South Africa, Canada, Russia, Sweden, and Kenya to learn from each other's participatory art-making and create a network for challenging gender-based violence (GBV). This article provides insight into the often-invisible experience of the "supporting cast" in events like Circles Within Circles. The co-authors are doctoral and postdoctoral researchers who contributed to organization and acted as facilitators, notetakers, and participants. The co-authors conduct participatory analyses of journal entries they wrote throughout the event, and jointly reflect on the activities and their feelings about their roles. Reflecting, for example, on gut feelings about young participants' use of voice and silence during adult-led activities, the co-authors discuss their reading of girls' demonstrations of resistance. This embodied knowledge, further cultivated by attuning to shared experience, is explored in this collaborative auto-ethnography. Examining the complexities of this cross-cultural and intergenerational event, the co-authors contend that when supporting girls and young people subverting dominant narratives of GBV, researchers' embodied reflexivity is crucial for positively contributing to girl-led change.

Keywords
Collaborative auto-ethnography; Consulting young people; Embodied reflexivity; Empowerment; Friction; Gender-based violence; Resistance, Youth voice

Introduction
Between July 8–11, 2018, an event titled "Circles Within Circles: Transnational Perspectives on Youth-Led Approaches to Addressing Gender-Based Violence" brought together Indigenous and non-Indigenous girls and young people from Canada, Kenya, South Africa, Russia, and Sweden to learn from each other's participatory art-based research and create a network for challenging gender-based violence (GBV). Adult researchers, NGO representatives, and policy makers also attended

to listen and leverage messages of younger participants (Mitchell, 2017). Presentations on prior research were complemented by arts-based workshops, stakeholder sessions, and an international exhibition of art produced from research with girls and young people. The intent of these activities was to share knowledge gained through the previous research process and did not constitute a new research activity. Circles Within Circles (CWC) was an event that took place as part of an umbrella study, *Networks for Change and Wellbeing: Girl-led "From the Ground Up" Policy-making to Address Sexual Violence in Canada and South Africa*, led by Drs. Claudia Mitchell and Relebohile Moletsane. CWC was a think tank occasion and not a research event; the youth participants were at the center of the dialogue and were recruited through Mitchell and Moletsane's network based on their ongoing work addressing GBV in communities in Canada and South Africa. The project examines "which approaches, mechanisms, and structures would make it possible for young people, as knowers and actors, especially those who are the most marginalized, to influence social policy and social change related to sexual violence" (Mitchell & Moletsane, 2018, p. 14). The CWC event, like the project more broadly, focused on learning from girls and young women in communities that are subject to exceptionally high rates of GBV (Networks for Change, 2017). In Canada, this included self-identified young Indigenous[1] girls and young women, including those who identify as transgender, Two-Spirit, or gender non-conforming. In South Africa, this included "girls and young women of a range of sexualities who belong to two of the official government designated groups, Black and Coloured (mixed race), and who live in rural areas" (Networks for Change, 2017). This paper's co-authors are doctoral and postdoctoral researchers who contributed to organizing the CWC event in different ways and acted as facilitators, notetakers and participants during the event. All are members of the Department of Integrated Studies in Education at McGill University and share a doctoral/postdoctoral supervisor.

This paper will examine the complexities of cross-cultural and intergenerational events—particularly on sensitive subjects such as GBV—and their value in empowering girls, young people, and other stakeholders to subvert dominant narratives of GBV. It provides insight into the often-invisible experience of the "supporting cast" of graduate students and administrators who simultaneously organize, observe, document, and participate in events like Circles Within Circles. We hope that analyzing these perspectives will democratize speaking back to GBV and build evidence about how to work collaboratively to amplify marginalized voices. By conducting participatory analysis of the journal entries we wrote throughout the event and jointly reflecting on the activities and our feelings and roles, we create a collaborative auto-ethnography (Chang et al., 2013) that explores commonalities and differences across shared experience, reflecting on the role of the event in the professional development of the co-authors as emerging scholars and identifying the major lessons learned through the collaborative analysis of our experiences. While girls' art and civic engagement holds enormous potential to subvert dominant narratives of GBV, adult reflexivity—including affective and embodied forms—is crucial for positively contributing to girl-led change.

Positionality

The first question we asked ourselves when writing this paper together was, "Why is it important to look at the experiences of the 'supporting cast'—facilitators, organizers, and participants—in youth-led events such as Circles

Within Circles?" Members of this supporting cast are often the first audience in such work, yet our observations frequently go untold. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) see researchers as evaluation specialists and therefore suggest that, through reflexivity, they may better visualize the impact that their own behaviors, attitudes, and values can have on others. Reflexivity is a process that involves a critical self-reflection on one's motivations, biases, values, and influences on research process and relationships. It occurs within what Boler and Zembylas (2003) refer to as a "pedagogy of discomfort" that is intentionally counterhegemonic by asking how the researcher's actions may reinforce hegemonic structures at cognitive and emotional levels. Similarly, Mitchell, de Lange, and Moletsane (2017) build on Bell and Aggleton's (2016) work on interpretive and ethnographic approaches to monitoring and evaluating participatory research by focusing on researcher reflexivity as a way to better guide the outcome of their work. However, Mitchell, de Lange, and Moletsane state that, due to a variety of constraints related to disseminating the research, the voice of researchers and their reflections on lessons learned from participatory visual research is often missing from the body of literature.

While this event was not a form of data collection, we posit that it remains important to consider the impact of our positionality on the event and its participants. We felt that in order to democratize "speaking back" to GBV, it was essential that we analyze our positions as stakeholders in this youth-led event by exploring our positionality—by recounting our preconceptions, feelings of insecurity, and expectations—in the hope of building evidence on how to work more collaboratively with youth and amplify their often marginalized voices. Here we share our personal and intimate stories, part of our journeys on how we came to be part of this event, and the themes that emerged from reflexive practice during and after the event.

We refer to ourselves as the "supporting cast" because of our nebulous roles in relation to the CWC event, in which we were involved in (but not leading) organizational and decision-making processes. Once the event began, we participated but the focus was appropriately on the younger participants. Throughout the lead up and during the event, we helped out with the operation and administration of the event in various ways, and greatly benefitted from the ability to participate and witness the work of the younger participants. Here we consider several questions: How did our involvement influence the event at large, how did it influence the other participants (particularly the girls and young women from South Africa and First Nations and Métis communities in Canada), and how were we influenced by our participation in the event? Before examining these questions, we first provide a brief introduction of each of the co-authors, each with a different social location and relation to this work, but all of whom identify as outsiders (Minkler, 2004) in relation to the girl and young women participants' communities.

Pamela has long been interested in how girls and young women from marginalized communities are challenging normative perceptions and social inequality through art and narrative. As a Canadian of European ancestry and former clinical nurse, her interests are in the area of human rights-based approaches to institutional accountability in decolonizing health care education. Acknowledging that anti-Indigenous discrimination exists in health systems, her doctoral research investigates how participatory digital storytelling can inform decolonizing approaches to cultural safety in allied health professional development. For CWC, she contributed to organizing the event, and acted as a notetaker and participant during group

sessions at the event. She has an MA in Media Studies, and is currently a course lecturer and Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education at McGill University.

Catherine is a Canadian of settler European ancestry, committed to using critical feminist research to support transformative education that challenges the perpetuation of misogynistic, racist, homophobic, and colonial violence. She uses participatory qualitative research to examine the relationship between education and gender-based violence, has conducted research in North America and Sub-Saharan Africa, and has worked as an education advisor and consultant for government and non-government organizations. During CWC, she acted as a facilitator of a story-based activity, notetaker during group presentations of their community-based research initiatives, and a participant during the remaining sessions. She is currently a postdoctoral research fellow in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education at McGill University.

Haleh is a first-generation Canadian, originally from Iran. Her professional interests as a learning specialist focus on providing effective strategies to improve academic and learning outcomes for young adults. As a researcher, her focus is on the practicality of youth-led, grassroots policy-making in order to bring new learning to marginalized individuals, communities, and societies. These perspectives are informed by her interest and research background in the impact of educational and health policies on the sexual health and well-being of girls and young women. During CWC, she acted as a notetaker and facilitator in some events and a participant in other events. She has a B.Eng. (Software Engineering), an MA (Educational Technology) and is currently a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education at McGill University.

Milka is originally from Kenya and currently lives in Canada as an international student. Her background is in anthropology, and she has long been interested in exploring how patriarchal systems work to uphold and perpetuate gender inequalities in society, especially for girls and women living in poor resource settings. Adapting a community-based participatory visual approach and a critical feminist framework, she has participated in extensive research in sub-Saharan Africa that aims to address gender-based violence in social systems. During CWC, she served as a facilitator for a Photovoice Hands Activity and the Story Lab. She is currently a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Integrated Studies in Education at McGill University.

Hani was born and raised in Iran, and currently lives in Canada as an international student. Being concerned about sociocultural relations and inequalities in societies, he entered a social science research field to have a better understanding of the social life and receive his bachelor's degree. After graduation, the patriarchal, gendered, and traditional culture of his country led him to choose one of the most critical subfields of social science, Women Studies, to continue his education in the Master of Arts program. With this academic background and with six years of work experience as a lecturer in a university in his country, he travelled to Canada in his early thirties to start a Ph.D. program in Educational Studies. His focus in his Ph.D. thesis project is on addressing sexual and gender-based violence by using innovative learning environments, like serious games. He believes in bridging the traditional gap between theory, method, and action by using participatory research in social and educational sciences. During CWC, he contributed to documenting the sessions, co-facilitating the participatory visual method (cellphilming^2) workshop, and providing tech-related services.

Conceptual Framework

The history of Western researchers using Indigenous knowledges for Western gain has not been fully reconciled (Assembly of First Nations, 2009), but is well documented to frequently be exploitative with devastating results for Indigenous communities being "researched" (Smith, 2012). This includes what Tuck (2009) refers to as "damage-centered research" that focuses on narratives of harm and injury, reinforcing pathologizing approaches "in which the oppression singularly defines a community" (p. 413). International activist efforts to protect Indigenous knowledges have resulted in a crucial movement from research on to research with, for, and by Indigenous Peoples. In 1998, the National Steering Committee of the First Nations and Inuit Regional Longitudinal Health Survey proposed a set of guidelines for research involving Indigenous Peoples, which states that Indigenous Peoples should retain ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP) of the research information (First Nations Centre, 2007). The OCAP principles are mandated to protect Indigenous knowledges and to ensure that the research benefits Indigenous Peoples. The question of how and why a non-Indigenous researcher engages in research related to Indigenous Peoples is an essential ethical inquiry that must be considered at every phase of the research (see Aveling, 2013), including knowledge sharing events such as CWC. We work within educational systems that have historically neglected Indigenous Peoples and continue to sustain structural inequities (Currie et al., 2012; Lavoie & Forget, 2011; Vukic et al., 2012). It is important in critical and Indigenous methodologies for the researcher to locate herself in relation to the research (e.g., Mosselson, 2010; Smith et al., 2019), and to critically examine the value of her presence in the research process. Inspired by feminist approaches to self-study that draw upon critical autoethnography (Holman Jones, 2016) and feminist reflexive epistemologies of positioning (Hesse-Biber, 2007), we situate ourselves in this work as non-Indigenous researchers of White settler origins and non-White nonresident /international student status. The following expands upon the main concepts of embodied reflexivity and friction that we used to frame our reflections on this work.

Embodied Reflexivity

Beyond the five most recognized of the senses (sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch), there are many other ways we perceive information. Emotions, sometimes regarded as a "sixth sense," are apprehended as instinctive or intuitive feelings (Rouby et al., 2016). Reflection can also be intuitive. However, reflexivity requires intention. Through the body, numerous senses gather information about the environment continuously, and yet there is no scientific consensus on what constitutes a sense. More interesting discord yet is on the blurred boundaries between stimulus and response. And since we are constantly receiving stimuli from our environment, embodied reflexivity suggests that the "space in-between" stimulus and response may be cultivated through a reflexive attunement with the body. Embodied reflexivity conjures a relationship to theory and method, though here it will be theorized as a way of knowing. It is defined as "a process based predominantly on feeling the body" (Pagis, 2009, p. 266) and does not derive from any one specific sensory organ but develops diffusely in the body and mind. In her study of embodied self-reflexivity, Michal Pagis (2009) observed practitioners of meditation and yoga, practices grounded in self-awareness, in order to better understand the interaction between what she calls "discursive and embodied modes of reflexivity." Pagis notes that most studies of the

self have relied on discursive ways of knowing, and in our work we too relied on journaling and conversation to make sense of our gut feelings that at first we struggled to define and labelled vaguely as "feeling uncomfortable." In practices of embodied self-reflexivity, the intent is to increase awareness of bodily sensations. Social psychologist Mark Snyder (1974) introduced the concept of self-monitoring, which he described as, "self-observation and self-control guided by situational cues to social appropriateness" (p. 526). Pagis (2009) situates self-monitoring as a process within embodied reflexivity, writing, "The findings illustrate how bodily sensations are used as indexes to psychological states, emotions, and past experiences, while constant awareness of embodied responses is used as a tool for self-monitoring" (p. 265). This relationship between self-awareness and self-monitoring was helpful to keep in mind as we discussed our experiences of multiple embodiments throughout CWC, as we were at times distressingly self-aware of our tentative positions at CWC as the "supporting cast" of researchers, facilitators, notetakers, and participants.

Friction

As applied to youth, the most common if disparate usages of the term "empowerment" express the following characteristics: personal growth, relationships, education (e.g. Luttrell et al., 2009), politics (e.g. Bacqué & Biewener, 2013; Boluijt & de Graaf, 2010), transformation, and emancipation (e.g. Richez et al., 2012). In this article, we unpack the political aspect of empowerment in relation to friction. Given that young people are increasingly voicing their desire for more control over their lives, political will and transformative action can be inferred, if not observed, "on the ground" in youth movements. And while education includes common actions of learning and skill-building, it also relates to awareness-raising, or what Freirian scholars of critical pedagogy (see Freire, 1993 & 2005) refer to as "consciousness-raising" (Breton, 2008; Mohajer & Earnest, 2009; Wang, 2006; Wong, 2008). Indeed, the empowerment of youth, in all its manifestations, is shifting traditional knowledge hierarchies in a most stirring way by "speaking truth to power" (Martínez et al., 2017). Exploring this "from the ground up" process lends youth access to power (Gaventa, 2006; Longwe, 1991; Mohajer & Earnest, 2010; Travis & Bowman, 2012), provoking the need for careful reflexivity among adult facilitators on the extent to which their engagement with young people may be advancing and/or impeding that empowerment.

There is a leitmotif across all our journal entries that can be uncomfortably summarized as a clash of contradictions between event preconceptions and perceived turn of events. To make sense of this reflexive discomfort, we liken it to Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's notion of friction. Tsing (2005) describes friction as "the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference" (p. 4). Discernibly, researchers in the field of youth studies are aware of the frictions involved in conducting empirical research related to marginalized young people. Beyond respecting the safety and well-being of young research participants, researchers must be aware of the barriers to youth engagement, as well as be attuned to the many forms of youth resistance. One such form of resistance appears in silence, which Clair (2013) has theorized in fluidity as "expressive," "a sacred way of being," "oppressive," and "a way of resistance" (see also Solnit, 2017). Others have also commented on the "messiness" of research between diverse (socially, culturally, politically, economically) researchers and participants. Mosselson (2010), for example, writes about the interaction between researcher and participant as an

encounter that may shift identities, though producing fortuitous findings when the researcher is self-reflexive. Recognizing the role of subjectivity in the research process is also an opportunity to cultivate an ethical perspective. Positionality is an apposite framework for negotiating subjectivity, as it allows for the inclusion of such information as personal details and emotional responses. As participants who engaged with multiple sides of the CWC event (working on the organization/facilitation as well as taking part in the workshops), we are guided by these understandings of friction, believing that attending to the "messiness" of unsettling perceptions of self and others may improve the reflexive process and quality of the initiative.

Methodology

We used a methodology of collaborative autoethnography to conduct participatory analyses of the journal entries we wrote throughout CWC. Collaborative autoethnography adapts a team research model where a group of individuals (two or more people) conduct research by turning interrogative tools toward themselves using self-study (Chang et al., 2013). John Loughran (2007), a scholar of self-study in teacher education, argues that, "professional learning is characterised by the role the individual takes in initiating and directing their own growth and development as opposed to being 'trained' to perform particular tasks" (p. xiii). We sought to strengthen what we learned during our involvement in the CWC event through a process of individual and collaborative reflection. IRB approval was not required, as our own self-study forms the primary data source.

Our self-study began during the CWC event, when all five co-authors met during the event to discuss the objective of the journal entries and the focus of our study. The initial objective of our collaborative journaling was to document and analyze the effectiveness of the arts-based participatory intergenerational learning in addressing GBV in communities. We agreed to adapt a personal journaling method to observe, record, and analyze the events at CWC, and reflect on any feelings that arose about our roles as researchers, facilitators and participants. We adapted the concurrent model of journaling (Chang et al., 2013) where we journaled using a stream of consciousness approach (writing continuously and minimizing edits) each day during the CWC event. After the event, we took one week for each author to review their journals, extend entries with new reflections and recollections as we looked back, and clean up the journal entries to tell a more cohesive narrative.

Our next step was to identify and review themes within our individual journals. We met as a group to reflect upon the themes we identified, reading aloud selected excerpts from our journals to illustrate the themes. As we discussed each individual's selected excerpts and themes, we explored the similarities and differences of our experiences. By talking through our initial analysis we gained a sense of reassurance and relief that no matter how varying our perspectives, we shared a common "friction" in experiencing multiple embodiments with respect to our roles. Attuning to shared experiences allowed us to identify "situational cues" (Snyder, 1974) generated by young participants during the adult-facilitated workshops. Through our discussion of the initial themes, we established a set of group themes that would guide our subsequent analysis, and then each returned to our own journal entries to code them with those themes and select excerpts that related to those themes, which we again analyzed collaboratively and subsequently refined in the writing of this text.

Thematic Analysis

As we expected, our participation in CWC was inspiring and transformational, as we witnessed girl activists from around the world sharing their knowledge and learning from each other as they honed their advocacy skills and their critical gaze. More unexpected, but ultimately as beneficial in developing other forms of knowing, was the sensations of rupture we experienced in relation to our own identities as researchers and facilitators, particularly when working with Indigenous girls. The following unpacks these experiences through our collaborative analysis that identified the pivotal themes of discomfort, resistance, and letting girls lead.

Discomfort

Within each of our journals, there was an evident inconsistency in the degree of our sense of belonging at CWC as, uncomfortably, our positionalities vacillated. Within the colonial context and with respect to the original territories of the Indigenous Peoples, we were mindful of our outsider status as adult settlers and nonresidents. We felt that we could relate to many of the GBV issues raised throughout the CWC event but were self-conscious engaging in dialogues among Indigenous girls and young women around GBV, wanting to avoid taking up space. Milka, a researcher from Kenya who currently lives in Canada, referred to herself as a "foreigner" at the event, even though Kenyan participants were represented in the CWC art exhibition. She pointed out the following:

> Discussion that revolved around sexual violence and GBV within the Indigenous communities made me feel uncomfortable to make my voice heard. I felt that being a foreigner and new to most of the historical dispositions of the other participants—particularly the Indigenous girls from Canada—that their experiences were more valid than my own.

The sensation of being an outsider related to our status as non-Indigenous people, as well as other factors such as our gender and age, that caused us to question the validity of our voices in the space. While Hani felt his outsider status as one of the few men in attendance may have been the most visible, Haleh, an Iranian-Canadian researcher, also keenly felt her outsider status, expressing the following concerns:

> I was worried that I would say or do something that would be unintentionally disrespectful to their cultures and beliefs. All I knew about Indigenous communities was what I had learned from the literature and I knew it was not enough. I tried to justify myself remembering my own experience when I immigrated to Canada 20 years ago. People were sometimes unintentionally insulting my culture and my values. However, I was never insulted by their comments. Instead, I would feel for them that all they knew was their own culture. I would try to educate them *sometimes,* but I never felt insulted.

Haleh's observation strains to connect her life experiences to those of the Indigenous girl participants, pointing to the internal struggle we each felt in trying to connect with the participants while simultaneously learning from them and respecting the colonized contexts of Indigenous communities. Part of the discomfort emerged from the privilege of witnessing the girls' participation, without being clear how our own work contributed. Catherine shared, "I feel so privileged to be here that I'm concerned I am unable to give back in a way that responds to what I am getting from the event." This concern would sometimes turn unconstructive when we would become overly self-consciousness about our positionality: Who did we think we were to be doing this work? This thinking, leading us to become hypervigilant to negative social cues, was counterproductive to

cultivating reflexive embodied empathy. Sitting with the discomfort that prickled through our journals, we tried to convince ourselves that if we are capable of making the smallest difference in the context of GBV, either at the event or as a result of our participation in it, then the privilege of our participation was warranted. Through the many conversations we had with each other during and after the event, we were able to see how our experiences were united through this one element of friction (feeling like an undeserving outsider) that we all shared.

One of the girl groups expressed during an activity that, "the translation of resilience in Indigenous terms means resistance and creating a positive self-identity." The girls shared their lived experiences of oppression, which critical pedagogy scholars Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) call "a first step on the road to justice" (p. 58), but refused to fit within a damage-centered research narrative (Tuck, 2009), expressing their resistance through traditional song, dance, and ways of knowing learned from elders in their communities. The most humbling of their courageous acts was the role they played in challenging and reshaping others' mindsets about their ability and potential to shift the centrality of our own perspectives. Pamela shared the following:

> I witnessed many interactions in which Indigenous girls challenged others in the room—especially non-Indigenous women—to think more critically about the issues affecting their lives. Reflecting on these interactions brought to mind this phrase attributed to Anaïs Nin, "We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are." And I thought about how the work of deconstructing my thoughts and experiences as a non-Indigenous woman is always going to be complicated to a significant extent: I can't seem to get out of my own way. In trying to see things from the margin—and in some ways I may be marginalized—I find myself gazing from the center of my experience. It's like my subjectivity or my social awareness is framed by my blind spots. The girls at CWC helped me to reframe my perceptions of the work taking place by courageously and creatively highlighting the blind spots of researchers and event organizers, myself included.

Observing the leadership roles that the girls and young women took at CWC reinforces the idea of working with youth as "knowers and actors" who are abundantly capable of effecting change in their lives and communities around GBV (Mitchell & Moletsane, 2018). Haleh observed that the participants were not satisfied by just raising their voices, but sought to move actively forward to change the status quo:

> The other dominant voice was participants' sense of agency... From the Russian activist who had to flee her country as a result of the "propaganda" against her, to the Indigenous youth from British Columbia who felt a responsibility to educate the next generation about GBV, their messages were the same: they are doing whatever they can to bring about change.

Witnessing the girl's sense of agency led us to revisit questions about our own commitments to decolonization. If girls who experienced GBV were going against all the odds to change the narratives of GBV in order to protect not just themselves but other girls and young women, this compelled a sense of responsibility to use our voices to leverage theirs, as we felt the urgency in their explicit calls for us—the adult stakeholders present—to do so.

Resistance

The underlying power dynamics within this cross-cultural, intergenerational event were perhaps most evident when the girls demonstrated resistance to a violent, patriarchal, and colonizing status quo, which they did in multiple ways. Critical

understanding, or critical consciousness, is integrated in reality, yet leads to critical action (Freire, 2005). In coming together, the participants shared the critical discourses they had developed in their own groups with each other, joining in a globalized discourse of resistance to GBV. The discourses of resistance shared from Indigenous groups pointedly highlighted the intersectionality (Collins, 2015) of their experiences that have placed women and girls in their communities at a heightened risk of GBV. Yet the critical discourses actively challenged the pathologizing approaches often used by settlers to describe violence in Indigenous communities, pointing instead to the causes of GBV as rooted in acts and systems of racism and colonization that are ongoing. The act of translating terms such as "resilience" into concepts that resonate more powerfully with Indigenous communities—including resistance—is in itself an act of decolonization, by adopting discourses commonly used in settler spaces but reshaping them in a way that holds more meaning for their communities (Tuck & Yang, 2014). From our vested positions as organizers and facilitators, this was exciting to behold. Yet there were also more unexpected forms of resistance that emerged, as the girls challenged the expectations imposed by the event's organizers.

Throughout our journals, several of us documented feeling taken aback to see girls and young women enacting practices of resistance within and even against the event and its organizers, including ourselves. For example, Haleh describes a young person's decision not to participate in a video-making activity:

> One girl in our group did not want to participate. She hid her face behind a paper. She didn't want to be filmed. Everyone was respectful of her wishes, but I think no one was sure what her message was. Was she resisting the event or the workshop? Did she just not liked to be filmed? Could it have been that she is thinking this is just another intervention where researchers come and do their data collection and then leave? Was she tired? Other participants seemed just as confused as me... I was thinking in my head comparing her with when I was a teenager. I [would] have given in to peer pressure and adult pressure. I never understood why she was resisting to be filmed but I could certainly see that she was taking a stand and did not give up until she felt comfortable participating in other ways.

Similarly, Catherine describes an activity she helped facilitate that did not go as planned, "as some of the younger participants were obviously 'checked out' of the activity. One of them fell asleep during the activity and two others sat at a table in the back and did not participate." Our initial gut reaction was to read this disengagement as boredom or disinterest, a first impression that was perhaps most to do with our egos as facilitators. As we talked through these moments afterward in relation to our gut feelings about strategic modes of resistance, we began to re-read these cues as another form of participation.

At the end, we learned that the Indigenous girls in one group had been encouraged by their (adult Indigenous) group leader not to participate when they felt uncomfortable as a means of exercising their consent, and that they did not need to tell anybody that this is what they were doing. This practice recognized that, although it had been stipulated that all activities were voluntary, for a young person in a foreign space surrounded by adults and young people they did not know, leaving an activity or stating a disinclination to participate was not always a comfortable or viable option. Furthermore, they actively resisted the expectation, described by Tuck and Yang (2014) and bell hooks (1990), that people of color will hand over narratives to settler colonizers and researchers who expect their

stories of pain. As Haleh speculates in her reflection, the ability of the girls to refuse to participate is a reflection of their agency and empowerment through the decolonizing practices they have learned, as many young people would likely have felt compelled to perform what is expected of them by adults and their peers. Pamela's journal notes that this agency reflects the rallying call, "Goodbye to the obedient, submissive woman!" from the young women in the Girls Leading Change project—a project consisting of 14 young women, all teacher education undergraduate students from rural areas in South Africa seeking to address GBV and safety on campus using girl-led initiatives. The embodied resistance communicated by the girls "checking out" of the event's activities illustrates that the girls' expressions of empowerment not only enabled them to resist expectations of obedience from men and boys within the contexts of violence, but also the expectations of feminist non-Indigenous organizers and activists, who expected them to behave and engage in certain ways to meet objectives that are not always understood or agreed upon by the girls themselves.

During the event, we had many discussions about the female body and the male gaze, and we recognize the gaze is conditioned by power and culture, or as Christian Metz (1982) coined, the "scopic regime." In discussing our journals, we asked ourselves, "might we have some work to do to decondition our gaze?" Was our gaze upon the girls committing a kind of gender essentialism that expected female docility to us even as we encouraged their resistance to others? Perhaps in our initial gaze we only saw the girls' strength and ability to shape dialogue in their communities as mentors and leaders, inadvertently pathologizing these communities as spaces that require their resistance, as opposed to the spaces we were creating that we subconsciously expected to be only empowering. A further uncomfortable, and ultimately unanswerable, question, is whether we would have expected resistance more from boys, associating it with masculinity and thus feeling surprised when it was expressed by the mostly girl participants. Despite introducing ourselves as settlers/non-Indigenous people, recognizing our presence on traditional Indigenous lands, and feeling a sense of discomfort over the distance between ourselves and the participants, we had still identified ourselves as "on the girls' side," thus it was startling to feel the wall constructed between us. Linda Finlay (2005) writes about what she calls "reflexive embodied empathy," which she describes as a process of "tun[ing] into another's bodily way of being through using their own embodied reactions" (p. 271). She asserts that this empathic practice fosters the relationship between researchers and participants by increasing understanding of self and Other. We noticed in our concern that sometimes our bodies called us to move, to speak more with hand gestures or to stand up and walk around the table, to see if this might break the silence. When we tuned in to these moments of resistance through embodied reflexivity (e.g. sitting with the discomfort of participants' silence), we were better able to reconceptualize our notion of resistance and change our method of engagement by seeking to reconsider what was taking place and listen for how it may be reinterpreted.

Letting Girls Lead

What does "girl-led" mean in the context of an intergenerational event addressing sexual violence? The event planning was carefully and consciously tailored to bring together the experiences of girls and women of different generations, cultures, and even nationalities to help girls broaden their understandings of GBV

across time and space. Our journal entries describe girl-leadership happening in the event workshops; in the performance of the songs, dances and drumming by the Indigenous girl groups; and cross-culturally, for example, during a bonfire when a group of Indigenous girls from Canada spontaneously led the bonfire songs and were quickly joined by the girls from Sweden and Russia. There were also many activities that were more adult-led. For example, while most girls led the creation of their exhibitions, which either exposed or challenged GBV in their communities, not all the girls had the opportunity to lead the presentation of their exhibitions but were rather represented by adults who may not have lived similar experiences. In some instances, this was because participants from Ethiopia and South Africa had been denied the opportunity to participate in the event after their visas to Canada were denied, as described by Hani, who had worked with the group of young people in Ethiopia on several occasions:

> Although I tried to say a few words on behalf of the Ethiopian team at the Speaking Back exhibition, I was bothered that it was not their voices being heard. I feel like it was very unfortunate in this event, which aimed to give voice especially to marginalized communities, that the Ethiopian team who were an integral part of this network were not heard.

For those who were able to participate at the event, most girl-led initiatives occurred during large- and small-group spaces, often unplanned and arising initially as a result of peer or intergenerational collaboration, or even disagreement within a group. In her journal, for example, Milka noted the intergenerational mentorship described within one of the Indigenous communities in Canada, and taking place at the CWC event itself. She also recorded group tensions in an activity where her group was creating a cellphilm that conveyed the racialized forms of GBV and sexual violence that Indigenous girls and young women experience in their everyday school life. Tension arose seemingly due to the generational gap that existed between the Indigenous participants within the group. Milka and another group member who was also not Indigenous attempted to mediate between the two generations of Indigenous women, and ultimately the group came up with a message that spoke to the lived experiences across both generations. An excerpt from Catherine's journal documents the leadership tensions that her group experienced, also during the cellphilm workshop:

> We had another very intense moment when the activists from South Africa, Russia, and Canada (British Columbia) couldn't decide on whether to share headlines reflecting graphic violence against women. The activists from South Africa and Canada felt that it was important to reflect the reality of what was occurring, but for the activist from Russia this was traumatizing. She felt it was damaging and disrespectful to the women who were killed and to their families, by focusing on the violence against them and that appearing as the whole story, while obscuring their own work and experiences. Like reducing them to the violence that was carried out against them.

She goes on to describe how, like Milka, she worked to facilitate a consensus within her group so they could produce a cellphilm that reflected the multiple perspectives within the group. In these instances, the participants pushed back against time, pressure, and event agendas to attend to complex discord arising across generational, cultural, and individual experiences of GBV. The knowledge sharing process was improved by leaning into the "messiness" of the process, and we as adults and facilitators walked a delicate tightrope of inviting this messiness and encouraging the participants to address it, while coaching participants through the activity so that they would not lose

the time-bound opportunity to share this knowledge with the larger group.

Conclusion

Circles Within Circles was a powerful event that validated the empowering effect of cross-cultural, intergenerational collaboration. It also raised insecurities among those of us who, as emerging scholars, struggled with how to negotiate our roles and positionalities in relation to communities we were working with but with whom we were outsiders. Our participation formed a substantive part of our academic training, as we learned how to create safe participatory environments for cross-cultural and Indigenous girls and young people to engage in activism. While we anticipated this training may come as a result of seeing how an event of this scale was planned, or understanding effective approaches to facilitation, the most valuable training related to learning how to sit with discomfort and how to recognize and respond to situational cues with embodied reflexivity that is attuned to our bodily reactions. Our contributions at the event felt minimal compared to the significance of what we gained from it, yet focusing on the profound sensations of discomfort and gratitude is part of what keeps the girls' voices with us, infiltrating our reflections on the event as well as our research in other spaces. The translation of these sensations from discomfort to self-awareness became particularly profound not during the event or even during the period of journaling and self-reflection, but as we collectively talked through our reflections to theorize and then understand the experiences, identifying the strategic significance of the situational cues that caused us discomfort and figuring out together what we had done wrong, what we had done right, and how to move forward. This points to the critical importance of community and shared experience not only when learning how to magnify resistance to structural and systemic forms of violence, but also when coming to understand your role in the process even, and perhaps especially, when you are not and should not be at the center of the activism.

What facilitated our exploration of these multiple embodiments was bringing a kind of "relational ethics" (Clandinin et al., 2018) to our work together. Through the process of collaborative autoethnography and participatory analyses of our journal entries—especially when we encountered difficult learning, sensed as "friction"—we found it helpful to cultivate self-kindness and a sense that we are all in this together (Neff & Dahm, 2015). As we talked through our analysis together after the event, we all reflected on the almost therapeutic benefit of discussing our discomfort together, and identified that even greater benefit may have been derived from also doing so in advance and during CWC. This practice of embodied reflexivity, in relation to the cross-cultural and intergenerational event that was CWC, impacted us not only as researchers but also as individuals in our relationship to citizen engagement—thus we believe it is a crucial practice for positively contributing to girl-led change.

Notes

[1] We use the term Indigenous to refer to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit; as well as status or non-status, beneficiary or non-beneficiary Indigenous Peoples. Status or non-status, beneficiary or non-beneficiary refers to the legal status of an Indigenous person, which affords certain rights and benefits under Canada's Indian Act. This terminology is reflective of how Indigenous communities are referring to themselves globally, as well as international organizations like the United Nations (i.e., UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples).

[2] A cellphilm is a short film made with a cellphone or tablet (see MacEntee et al., 2016).

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