



Re-Presenting Youth

**a visual exploration of
young people's experiences
in urban renewal efforts**

**By
Monica Wiest**

A thesis presented to
the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS
in
THE DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Winnipeg, Manitoba
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**Re-Presenting Youth: A Visual Exploration of Young People's
Experiences in Urban Renewal Efforts**

BY

Monica Wiest

**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University of
Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the degree
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MASTER OF ARTS**

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ABSTRACT

While youth studies, reflexive ethnography, applied anthropology and visual anthropology are accepted and integrated into much academic work, these issues are often considered tributaries off the mainstream anthropological approach. This thesis is an effort to bring these topical, theoretical and methodological concerns to a higher plane of contemplation. Through participant photostories, I attempt to provide a space in which a small group of young people speak their voice and portray their images of a neighbourhood undergoing urban renewal efforts, a process undertaken by *Winnipeg Habitat for Humanity*. It is reflexively written, based on the premise that researchers need to critically explore the poetics and politics of both ethnographic research and discourse.

The focus on young people results from the recognition of their marginalization in much of the anthropological literature, characterized by the exclusion of their voices and their portrayal as a universal category of people. Although this is changing, very few studies in the past have addressed young people as cultural agents, engaged with society. I argue against youth homogeneity, unity, or universality and inquire into the role of Western institutions in the construction of 'youth' experience. This is followed by an exploration of how to cultivate willing youth involvement in community efforts and how the collective 'we', youths and adults, can engage with each other as actors in social processes. Finally, I discuss ways in which organizations, such as Habitat for Humanity, can better involve youth in local initiatives. An effort is made to contribute to Habitat's understanding of and insight into their role in community renewal, more specifically from youth perspectives.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people, groups, and organizations made this thesis a reality. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge those who made this experience special, and importantly, evolve.

First, I would like to thank the past Executive Director of Winnipeg Habitat for Humanity, Mary Williams, for allowing this opportunity to happen. Her enthusiastic endorsement of my research and her assistance in my networking made doing research for Habitat for Humanity a pleasure. I truly appreciate her flexibility, her openness, and the autonomy that I was provided. I owe Brent Gillen much gratitude for permitting me to participate in his community fix-up projects. His efforts to include me as much as possible, his candour, and his efforts to make each project work do not go unnoticed. I thank the board of Winnipeg Habitat for Humanity, as well as various sub-committees, for allowing me the privilege to observe and participate in meetings.

Thank you Camilo for throwing me to the wolves and apologizing afterwards. Your commitment to the LET youth members and flexibility to adapt your program to fit my project is appreciated and not taken for granted. I also thank you for passing on some members' comments about me and my project-- while not used formally in the text, the information was useful and insightful.

I feel very honoured to have had such a talented group of individuals on my committee. To my advisor, Skip Koolage, I am grateful for your guidance, faith that I would finish -- and do it well -- and granting me autonomy to do so in my way. I value our fun e-mails and knowing that I could approach you with any concern or academic dilemma. To Janice Ristock and Rae Bridgman, I am indebted to you for your sound advice, feedback, and intellectual integrity and skills. I feel very lucky that as a committee you brought different yet complementary interests to the table. You have all inspired me in your separate ways -- because of you, I close this project with only more doors to open.

I gratefully acknowledge the funding I received through the Thomas Shay Scholarship, which validated my research and afforded me focussed time in which to work on my thesis. I would also like to thank all my professors at the University of Manitoba whose guidance and encouragement prepared me for this project. Roxie Wilde and Lynne Dalman also deserve a special mention for their smiles and special abilities to organize the world.

I owe much to my friends and family:

Fellow MA student, Doug Watson, who bravely collaborated with me on various Habitat for Humanity adventures and made this whole experience less lonely. Our meetings over coffee were not only enjoyable, but a needed kick in the butt, hopefully for both of us.

My father, Ray Wiest. You gracefully balanced your role of father and professor, providing me with both emotional and academic support. Like my dad, my mom, Shirley Wiest, was always there to listen to my frustrated and anxious moments, wipe my tears, and encourage me to keep going.

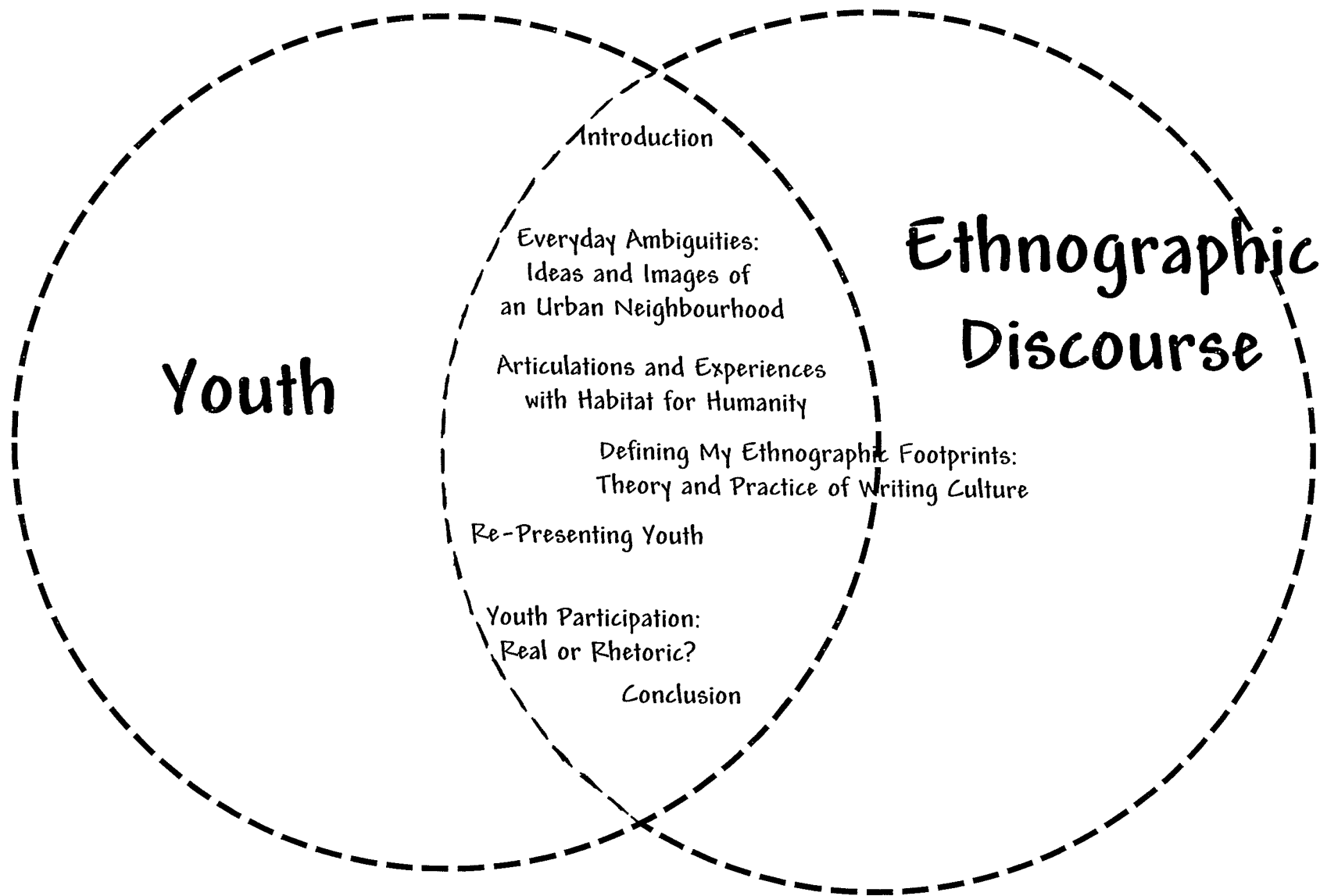
Angie. Because of your empathy, love and generosity, genuine interest, desire to learn, and analytical mind, I thank you for far more than simply your help in the slogging through ideas.

My husband, Stephen. Without your unequivocal faith in my ability, and your support, love, and sense of fun, the road to completion would have been far less enjoyable and certainly a rockier and longer one. I can only aspire to you as you travel a similar road.

Finally, the participants and their families. Without any more delay, I do not know how to thank enough those who are at the core of my experience and this thesis. I learned much about you, from you, and about life, more than you can imagine. I only hope that this project serves you in a way that is desirable for you. This work is dedicated to you.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

America is now home to thickening ranks of juvenile “super-predators”—radically impulsive, brutally remorseless youngsters, including ever more pre-teenage boys, who murder, assault, rape, rob, burglarize, deal deadly drugs, join gun-toting gangs and create serious communal disorders. They do not fear the stigma of arrest, the pains of imprisonment or the pangs of conscience (John J. DiIulio, Jr., William Bennet, and John P. Waters, 1996).

Warning. This thesis is about inner-city teens. Does that mean you will be reading stories of drug addiction, crime, prostitution, gangs, devastation and hopelessness? Admittedly, these are themes touched upon, referred to, and talked about by the young people who agreed to participate in this project. Yet this thesis is not about a ‘problem’ group of teens, nor does it necessarily focus on the stereotypical problems teens may have. What it does, or at least attempts to do, is to provide a space in which a small group of young people speak their voice and portray their images of a neighbourhood undergoing urban renewal efforts. You will be introduced to young people who come from diverse backgrounds, the majority being the children of Habitat for Humanity homeowners. Although this circumstance statistically designates them among ‘the urban poor’ and from working class ‘families in need’, their presentation of their lives and attitudes does not necessarily categorize them as such. Without ignoring the diversity of individual personalities and mitigating conditions and circumstances, such as class, ethnicity, gender and geography, this study is an attempt to amplify the narratives of the lives of everyday teens living or volunteering in William Whyte, an ‘inner-city’ neighbourhood in the North End of Winnipeg, MB., Canada.

With all the problems that teenagers, especially inner-city teens, are presumed to have and cause, why do I focus on the regular, the everyday lives of teens? Firstly, without undermining the experience of teens living in difficult, if not desperate situations, or denying the existence of 'deviant' or 'risky' adolescents, the categorization of all young people as such is a problem in itself. I attempt to problematize conceptions of youth by looking at the 'average urban kid' by listening to what they have to say about their experiences and their surroundings. I argue against youth homogeneity, unity, or universality. With the growing focus on youth as a societal force, it becomes important to understand how youth have come to be understood by dominant culture and how they understand themselves. Secondly, my focus on young people results from the recognition of their marginalization in much of the anthropological literature, characterized by the exclusion of their voices and their portrayal as a universal category of people. Although this is changing, very few studies in the past have addressed young people as cultural agents, engaged with society. I only hint at a larger question to consider, as do Vered Amit-Talai and Helena Wulff (1995) when they ask, "do young people create or learn culture?"

While youth studies, reflexive ethnography, applied anthropology and visual anthropology are accepted and integrated into much academic work, these issues are often considered tributaries off the mainstream anthropological approach. This thesis, a result of an applied research project in which the process and product are analysed, is an attempt to bring these topical, theoretical and methodological concerns to a higher plane of contemplation. It is reflexively written, based on the premise that researchers need to

critically explore the poetics and politics of both ethnographic research and discourse.

The Context of this Thesis

Habitat for Humanity is a non-profit ecumenical Christian housing ministry whose mission is to build decent, affordable homes for low-income families. By undertaking the challenge of *The Habitat Inner City Millennium Project* (2000) and the *Ed Schreyer Work Project* (2001), Winnipeg Habitat for Humanity (Habitat) sought to revitalize a small area in the North End of Winnipeg. Targeting their building efforts in the William Whyte neighbourhood, Habitat aimed to strengthen surrounding areas as well. Over the course of two years, Habitat built 14 new homes in that area, assisted in the renovations of over a dozen existing homes, and it has plans for more in the near future. Because this long term approach of neighbourhood renewal is unique to Habitat, the board requested a documentation of the process in order to be able to better assess the short and long term effectiveness of this kind of approach. While there were many potential avenues for documentation, my involvement was prompted when Habitat expressed the desire for an intentional involvement of youth in the revitalization process. Through the application of a photography project, this project focuses upon how youth perceive their neighbourhood, Habitat's renewal project, and how young people are involved in the project itself. My intention is not to analyse the revitalization process in itself, which would constitute another thesis. Rather, it is an attempt to convey what the teenagers, who are differentially connected to this neighbourhood, have to say or visualize about this space during part of the renewal process.

The practical contributions of this thesis are guided by my obligations to Habitat for Humanity (a report to the board), the participants involved in the research project (an honest presentation of their voices), and thesis requirements for the MA degree. As discussed with the executive director of Habitat, an effort will be made to contribute to Habitat's understanding of and insight into their role in community renewal, more specifically from youth perspectives. While front line youth workers and organizations already working with young people may not find anything revolutionary here, the larger goal is to expand the anthropological literature on youth, challenge contemporary understandings of young people, promote dialogue between youths and adults, as well as facilitate additional understanding of a renewal process of a neighbourhood. This understanding will hopefully inspire future renewal projects that will acknowledge and deal with difference, and importantly, build communities.

A Deconstructed Reading Process

As portrayed in the table of contents, version two, my interpretation of the intersecting and overlapping ideas and experiences arise from the study and reflections of and about youth and ethnographic discourse. As such, the organization of material, that is, each chapter in this thesis is distinct without being considered a bounded set of ideas. In an attempt to match form to its content, the order of chapters strays somewhat from a typical ethnography; nonetheless, I encourage the reader to start where they feel they need to begin their journey. I begin with *Everyday Ambiguities: Ideas and Images of an Urban Neighbourhood* and *Articulations and Experiences with Habitat for Humanity*,

which are spaces to put youth voices first, before my academic interpretations of my research or their realities. In these chapters, teenagers, through their images and words, express their ideas about the William Whyte neighbourhood, their attitudes about Habitat for Humanity's urban renewal project, and their reflections about being a young person in this context. In these chapters, I hope to contribute to the amplification of an 'other' group of silenced voices that are integral in a representative exploration of the diverse human landscape.

Just as history, science and empiricism have shaped our ideas about youth, women, or the 'other', they have also guided the politics and poetics of research and writing about such people's lives. In *Defining My Ethnographic Footprints*, I outline the methodology employed, the logistics behind the presentation of youth voices, and my reflections of the execution and communication of research.

The final chapters, *Re-Presenting Young People* and *Youth Participation: Real or Rhetoric?*, follow with a theoretical analysis of the category 'youth' and an exploration of how to cultivate willing involvement in community efforts. *Re-Presenting Youth* includes a review of anthropological literature on youth, conceptualizations and presentations of youth, and the role of Western philosophy, knowledge and institutional discourse in shaping our notions of young people. In *Youth Participation*, I explore how the collective 'we' (youths and adults) can engage with each other as actors in social processes. Finally, I discuss ways in which organizations, such as Habitat for Humanity, can better involve youth in local initiatives, which, I hope, will serve to provide Habitat for Humanity with insight for future renewal ventures. On a different front, I hope that

this thesis serves the function of what Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1990) calls the court jester, “that small, sometimes mocking, sometimes ironic voice from the sidelines” that transforms anthropology into a “difficult” discipline.

Chapter Two

EVERYDAY AMBIGUITIES IDEAS AND IMAGES OF AN URBAN NEIGHBOURHOOD

This chapter is a space in which I attempt to communicate the representations, words and images of participants who agreed to be involved in this project. The attempt to convey a small sample of young people's experiences and understandings is presupposed by a desire to scratch the surface of understandings about and of young people – understandings that are sealed by a socially constructed coating – and to encounter young people who are cultural agents (as opposed to objects of adult control). Admittedly, getting at this aspect of living and being is difficult to assess with such a small sample, and I do not aspire to make broad generalizations about inner-city teenagers or 'youth culture'. In fact, I would suggest that seeking to discover 'youth culture' only serves to perpetuate the notion of a homogenous, universal group of people. My intent is to convey the plurality of voices, ideas, and perceptions of teenagers, as they relate to William Whyte, an urban Winnipeg neighbourhood undergoing renewal efforts. In this chapter, I explore how participants perceive this neighbourhood and their experiences in it.

Methodology¹

In the attempt to adequately and respectfully re-present youth voices and to facilitate the sharing of information with participants, I employed participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and visual stories as my research methodologies. The visual

¹See *Defining My Ethnographic Footprints* for a more detailed discussion of methodology.

stories are a result of photographic journeys taken by participants, intended to engage youth with the William Whyte neighbourhood and to serve as a source of interpretation of an urban renewal process. Photography is used as a means to connect with research participants, to enhance rapport, and to encourage them to reflect on and comment on their own representations of their, or in the case of non-residents, an 'other', neighbourhood. Because photography is employed in my project as an analytic tool and to promote participant involvement, I first consider some of the strengths and limitations of visual anthropology.

Visual media, such as photography, film, and video, have the ability to document events and conditions, and portray feelings, yet it is important to recognize that they are cultural products in themselves and do not inherently expand our powers of observation (Marcus Banks and Howard Morphy, 1997; Faye Ginsburg, 1995:258). Like ethnographic discourse, visual anthropology is guided by Western philosophical premises; the way in which one considers and proceeds with employing concepts of visual anthropology is intricately related to how one creates written text; the politics and poetics of establishing one's presence in the text and representing participants and their experiences are also relevant to visual anthropology.

My choice to use a visual project as a research analytic tool relates to two separate but interconnected purposes. The first reason is an attempt to research a group of people in a meaningful way, a way in which participants have a voice in the research process, where they have an opportunity to relate to and become involved in the research process, and are not simply 'studied'. "Photography is a means of recording a way of seeing,

feeling and relating to the world and also an analysis of how the world is/was seen, felt and understood” by the participants (Morphy et. al,1997:13). Through sharing the meanings behind their photographic images, participants have an opportunity to reflect upon their lives and, through our conversations, have the freedom to openly respond to my interpretation of their pictures.

Secondly, employing a visual method also facilitates the ethnographic description and analysis aspects of this research project. John Collier and Malcolm Collier suggest, “the camera, however automatic, is a tool that is highly sensitive to the attitudes of its operator. Like the tape recorder, it documents mechanically but does not by its mechanics necessarily limit the sensitivity of the human observer; it is a tool of both extreme selectivity and no selectivity at all” (1986:9). Like Collier et. al.(1986) maintain, Bateson and Mead assumed that ‘culture’ was reflected visually, and aspects of a particular world – a way of being – could be sensed through photography, in a way that it was impossible to convey through the written word alone (Morphy et. al, 1997:10). Nevertheless, they differed in their conceptions of what photography could contribute; Bateson used photography and film as a means of exploration, through which process and understanding of culture might develop, while Mead used them in a more positivistic sense as a means of recording data for subsequent analysis which could be subject to reanalysis (1997:11).

Because photographs could be considered precise records of material reality, photography, or any visual medium, is especially useful in documenting the subtle and drastic material changes in the neighbourhood. Like the written text, which is a selection

of meanings and connections of the chosen subject, a text enhanced by visual analysis will never fully illustrate the whole context (Leslie Devereaux, 1995:59). The 'answers' a researcher understands through visual analysis, just as with direct observation techniques, are susceptible to bias and personal projection (Ibid). Despite this limitation, photographs can be used as a form of analysis, rather than solely as illustrations. Elizabeth Edwards suggests that by juxtaposing images and subject matter, photographs can go beyond "this-is-how-it-is/was" by forming a narrative of the 'real' and the expressive—allowing for the exploration of lived experiences and analysis of processes on a wider scale (1997:59). For example, visual images of the inner city indicate the material culture, conditions, habits of people's lives, and its relation to the rest of the city, which allude to wider issues pointed out by participants in this study: poverty, social supports, commitment, despair, and hope².

Through the participatory nature of a photographic journey, this project strives to problematize the construction of the 'ethnographic subject' as well as encourage alternative strategies to engage in research and with participants. By turning the potential limitations of visual anthropology into an asset, I take advantage of the subjectivity inherent in observation by having the participants photograph their own symbols.

²Visual anthropology also has the potential to foster more participatory methods and styles of representation, which ultimately opens new spaces for discourse and, hopefully, dialogue. For example, collaborative approaches in ethnographic film-making have opened discursive spaces and encouraged the development of indigenous media (Ginsburg, 1995:262), which has the capacity to counter canonic representations through self-conscious expressions of political and cultural identity (David MacDougall, 1997: 284). MacDougall asserts that for indigenous people, the visual media can serve as an instrument of political action, cultural reintegration and revival, or as a corrective to stereotyping, misrepresentation and denigration (1997:284).

Participants have the opportunity to reflect upon what is meaningful to them—their ways of seeing and feeling—and thus are turned into involved observers of their own social phenomena.

One should be sensitive, though, to the danger of exploitation and damage to participants depending upon the particular social and political circumstances. This danger should prompt researchers who use this methodology to heighten their awareness of the larger context of their research, and employ stringent methods of maintaining confidentiality and privacy. The extent of security, such as destroying the negatives/photographs, locking them up in secure place, or incorporating them as text, is a serious consideration that will vary according to each particular situation. In this study, I returned the negatives and pictures to participants before I looked at them myself. I then asked permission from the photographer to keep a copy of selected photographs and to use their images as text.

The People Involved

The main participants of my project include eight members -- seven Aboriginal males and one Caucasian female -- of a pre-employment youth program called Learn Educate Train (LET) Youth (aged 16-21), seven Habitat for Humanity homeowner youth (aged 10-15), and two local kids who, because they had a relationship with Habitat, I refer to as Habitat youth. This amorphous 'group' breathed six males and three females. Among the males, three of them identified with being Aboriginal, and one as Ukranian / Metis; the remaining two appeared Caucasian, and their ethnic identity was not discussed.

The females defined themselves as Ukranian, Black, and Aboriginal. I also met with four male non-resident youth (aged 15-16) who volunteered at fundraising events for Habitat for Humanity. Their ethnicity was not discussed and they appeared Caucasian. I involved these individuals in a photography project and had the opportunity to either talk to or interview most of them about their pictures. My comments in this chapter are based on these interactions and my involvement in Habitat activities, which included observing and acting on several committees for Habitat for Humanity, photographing and building during the *Habitat for Humanity-Ed Schreyer Work Project*, and participating in several other Habitat activities that related to the William Whyte neighbourhood. My intentions were to cultivate relationships with my participants and to understand the context within which I was working, such as Habitat as an organization and the William Whyte area.

To begin, I provided each person with disposable cameras. After I returned their pictures to them, we would sit down, eat cookies, and talk about their photographs. With six people this was very productive – as we perused through the photographs, I was able to converse with them about their attitudes and experiences in the neighbourhood and Habitat's renewal project. This naturally led to more in-depth discussion about youth involvement. Despite agreeing to participate, not all participants were interested creating their own visual story of the way I had anticipated or hoped, which may indicate to a lack of interest in the way I had outlined the project. I do not present all participants' photographic images of the neighbourhood, I am able to communicate most of their ideas and perceptions about neighbourhood and youth involvement due to successful interviews. Additionally, because I was unable to individually interview the LET Youth

members due to the group's premature dissolution, their stories are filtered through my interpretation more so than with other participants. I attempt to balance participant voices as much as possible, but it is important to note that I rely more heavily on several Habitat Youth to represent what others have to say about particular issues. This is a result of having had good rapport and in-depth interviews with these individuals, which because of little background noise, were fortunately mostly decipherable.

"If you were to tell a story about your life in your neighbourhood and about your neighbourhood but you could not talk, what pictures would you take instead?" I explained to participants that they could take pictures of whatever they found meaningful in their neighbourhood and lives. They could take pictures of 'stuff' they liked, disliked, found beautiful, ugly, important, everyday, or interesting, including people, their school, their cat or their home. The nature of participants' images are based on my guidance, although the communication of the visual image indicates what is meaningful and apparent to them in their daily lives. For example, I asked one teenager why he took a picture of a particular boarded-up house and he replied "'cause I don't like it. It's ugly and makes the neighbourhood look bad." The non-resident boys wanted to show the different aspects of William Whyte, while a LET Youth member chose to highlight the contrast between new Habitat homes and neighbouring boarded up houses. Most of the Habitat youth took pictures of the building process of their homes and, at the time, were not overly interested in the neighbourhood itself. Participants had their own reasons for taking part in my project – some felt it was a nice opportunity to reflect on their area and home, some enjoyed being interviewed and the opportunity to be heard, and others liked

the creative aspects of doing photography.

I present participants' representations and interpretations according to non-resident youth, LET Youth and Habitat youth. These categories are based on the participants' relationship to William Whyte as well as their different social, economic, and political circumstances and experiences. These categories are constructed in order to potentially identify 'variables' that shape the life conditions and experiences, yet they overlap in much of the discussion, just as participants' ideas and experiences overlap.

A Visual Journey

I begin with the visual stories as represented by the participants. To respect anonymity and confidentiality, I do not include any pictures of participants themselves, or of any person close-up. In addition, participants chose pseudonyms for themselves, although I chose the pseudonyms for LET Youth members and non-resident youth, due to lost contact with them. The exploration starts with four non-resident youth's pictures. They, like me, entered the neighbourhood with little background knowledge of the North End in which their only articulation with the William Whyte was through the public discourse and local media. Entering the neighbourhood through their eyes addresses some of the stereotypical images of the North End, yet their insightful interpretations go beyond stereotypes into a consideration of the positive, challenging and ambiguous aspects of living in William Whyte. After being accompanied by an adult during December, 2000, they acknowledged that as they explored the neighbourhood, they expanded their own understanding of the North End. The following are their own

categories and representations:

COMMUNITY SPIRIT

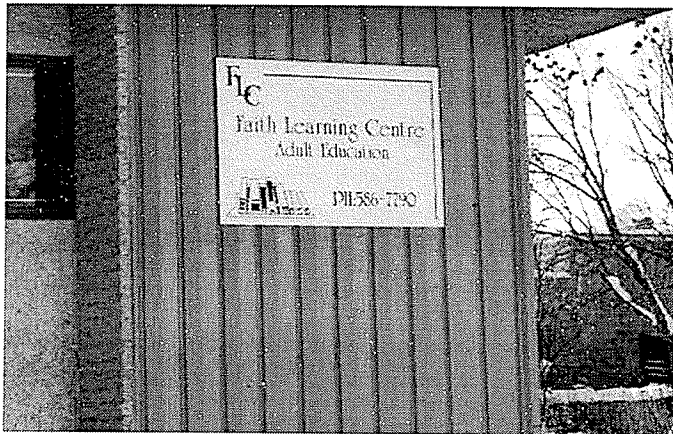


Pritchard Place: "a place where children are invited"

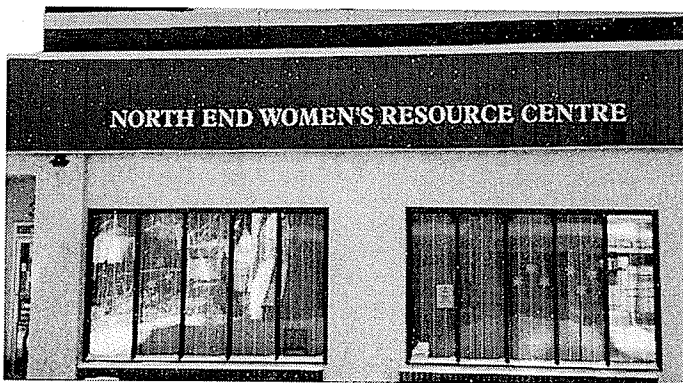


William Whyte Christmas Tree

COMMUNITY SPIRIT: RESOURCES



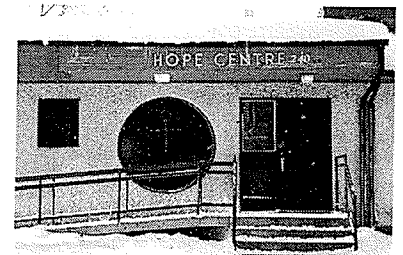
Boys and Girls Clubs Inc.



North End Women's Resource Centre

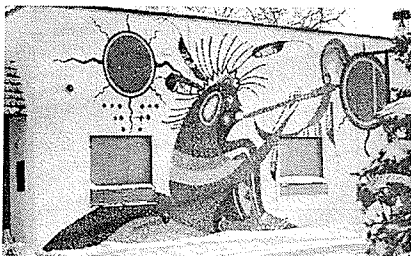


Andrews Street
Family Learning Centre

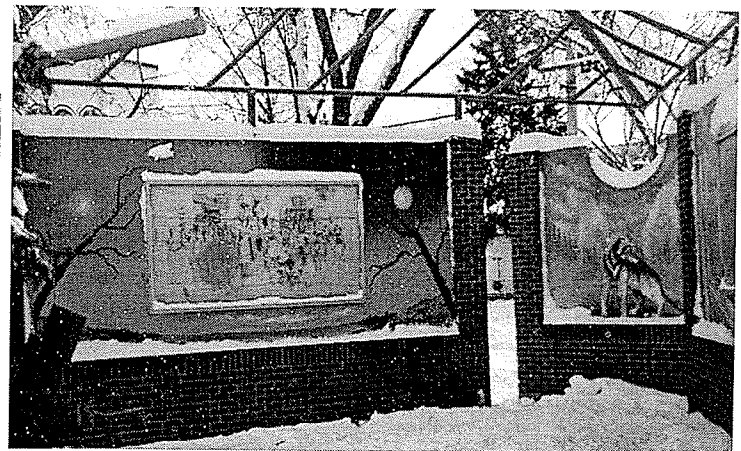


Hope Centre

Aboriginal art, or “nice graffiti”, represented community spirit, hope, and aboriginal religion.

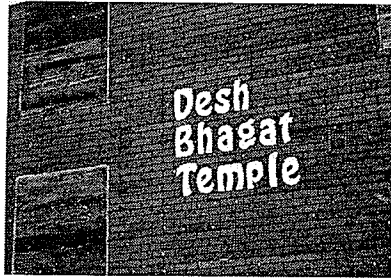


‘Nice Graffiti’
community spirit, aboriginal religion



“Aboriginal Art” and Religion

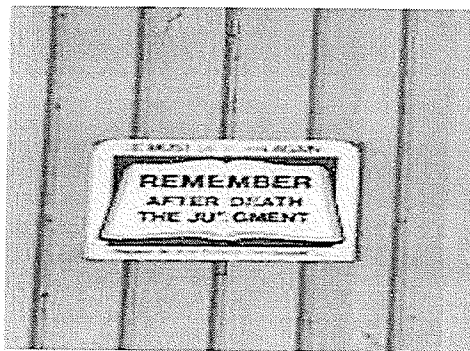
Nonetheless, as portrayed in following pictures, Bond feels that this art symbolizes 'being shut out by natives', and the pushing of the older European community out. A 'shutting out' on both sides is demonstrated by the boarded up, and fenced in, churches and temples.



"Shutting out" the old community

HOPE

*Nice Homes, Churches,
Activity, & Spirit*



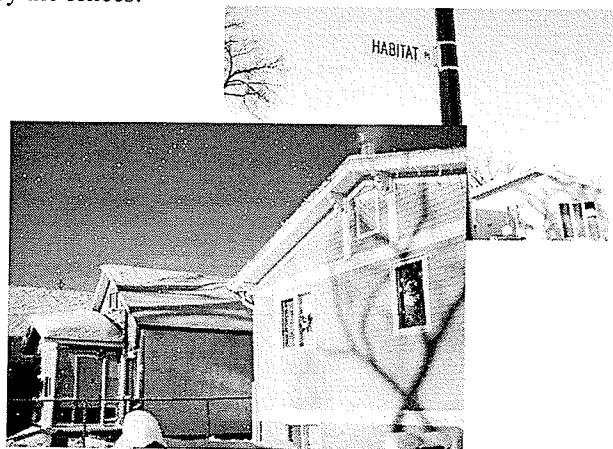
REMEMBER: AFTER DEATH THE JUDGMENT. The numerous churches and temples are a sign of hope, although some of them are "outdated."



Church: sign of hope but "it's a war zone", symbolized by the fences.



"Aboriginal Religion", Well-taken care of home



Habitat for Humanity

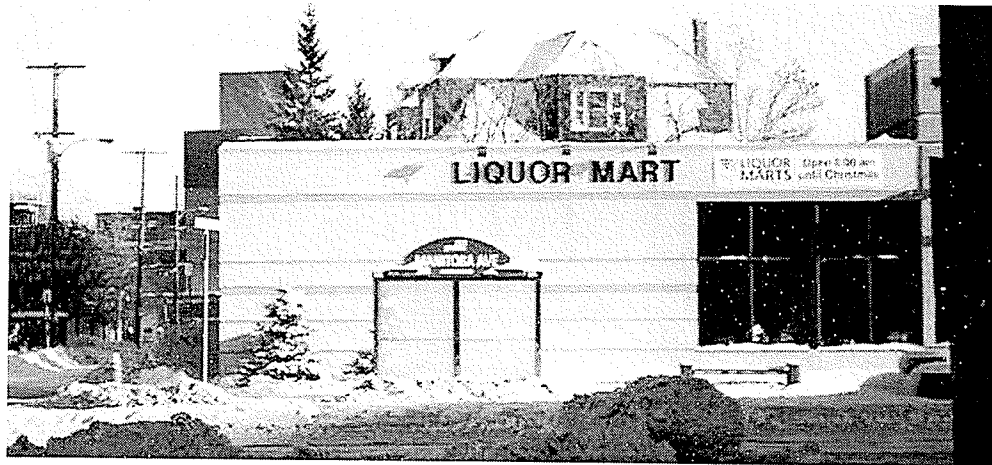


Smile Food Store: Activity and Action



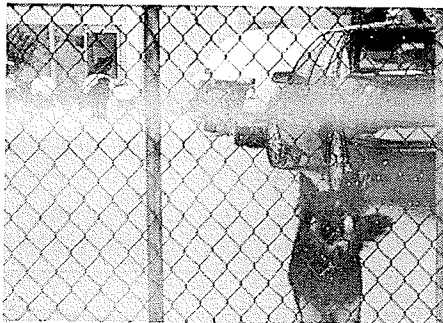
Neechi Foods: Activity and Spirit

STEREOTYPE



Liquor Mart: "And here's your stereotypical image of the North End"

LIFESTYLE



"War Zone": bars and chains. "This picture also shows that rich people also live in the area" indicated by the cars, dog, and fence.



This shopping cart symbolizes the lifestyle in the area: where people are poor, they have no car, and need a cart to carry things around.

DECLINE

inactivity, war zone, garbage, boarded-up houses



Ordered Vacant, Insanitary: "decline"



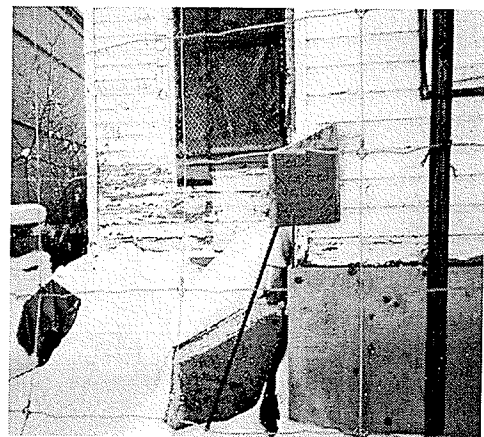
Boarded-up, abandoned house



Garbage



Clifford's: "abandoned, boarded-up, inactivity"



Please do not feed the dog: "Keep out!"

CONTRAST



GRAFFITI AND GANGS: *"no immunity"*



"It's futile to maintain a graffiti free wall. This wall was obviously repainted several times"



In their attempt to portray “all the different aspects of the neighbourhood”, these four teenagers took many pictures of graffiti, nice houses, boarded up houses and all the support services available. They notice “there are tons of churches, support services and community help places” relative to



Money Mart: “exploitation”

their middle/upper class neighbourhood of River Heights. They feel the predominance of churches, services and organizations indicate community spirit and support, but it also reflects need and the extent of problems in the neighbourhood. They all acknowledge that the North End of Winnipeg’s reputation is not reality although they still think it is “pretty bad.” Two of them commented that they did not see as many drunks and ‘passed out’ people as they had expected to see, but all four of them said that they did not anticipate seeing as many boarded-up houses as there were. When I asked if they could live in the area, James responded, “I think it’s what you’re used to and what you know. If that’s all I knew, then probably.”

When I asked them if spending time in the neighbourhood allowed them to reflect on their own neighbourhood, Bond said “yeh, like coming home down Wellington Crescent, the houses were so big and mansion-like!” The minimal presence of ‘social services’ in their area also made them think that their neighbourhood does not have as many obvious social problems, such as unemployment, gangs, drug abuse and prostitution.

Their interpretation of their photographs is double sided. On one hand, they lay

blame to the gangs for all the ugliness – they said that if people cleaned up their homes, then the gangs would not spray as much, although, a brand new wall might be tempting to tag. They feel that a beautification of the neighbourhood would solve some of the problems. They see hope, symbolized by the new Habitat houses, community support services and art around the neighbourhood. James pointed out a painted wall where he thought children had been invited to paint, signifying a sense of community in the neighbourhood. On the other hand, he also pointed out a Money Mart which represents the way that he sees people taking advantage of others—in a space where people should help each other out, they exploit each other.

These participants feel that the predominance of the native art/graffiti³ symbolizes the “shutting out” of the other ethnic groups, manifested in the shutting down and boarding-up of many temples and churches. They feel Aboriginals are taking over the neighbourhood and are trying to show their power through graffiti/art. James pointed out that he did not blame them because of the persecution they have experienced all these years. Nonetheless, they feel that the area is mostly Aboriginal in population and is trying to send a message out the other groups. “Can they live together?” I asked. “Yeah” Bond said (and the others agreed), “it takes talking, taking care of the place, getting together, and all that”. Explaining these attitudes is complex but could be tied dichotomic portrayals and understandings by media / public discourse of Aboriginal people as angry, hopeless / helpless yet ‘proud noble warriors’, some Canadians’ sense of guilt over its

³They initially used these terms interchangeably. After I asked the non-residents what they felt was the difference between graffiti and art, they decided that, in the larger community’s eyes, art had good intentions and graffiti did not.

history, along with the mistaken understanding that the North End is populated by predominately Aboriginals (see Ruth Teichroeb, 1994).

The photographic and verbal representations of Habitat youth and LET Youth members traverses along many of the same interpretations as those of the non-resident participants'. Nonetheless, the sense of engagement and life experience—"it's my neighbourhood", and an acceptance of ambiguous realities together with an "it's not as bad as people say it is" attitude brings a different dynamic and tone to the discussion.

How would you describe your neighbourhood?

A friend reminded me about my surprise about the tone of the LET Youth members' pictures. Because their 'talk' about their neighbourhood was so negative and hopeless, it is very notable that they took pictures of nice buildings, nice houses, and businesses in their area. The broader rationale for their choice of imagery is unclear: maybe they were expressing a voice they could not, or did not want to, articulate verbally or in a group setting, or maybe they took notice that their neighbourhood was not all bad. Whatever the reason, the discrepancy between what they said and their visual images demonstrates the way in which photography can add another dimension to and/or amplify shared information.

Based on the pictures taken by Habitat Youth and LET Youth participants, several distinct themes emerge. Asking "**How would you describe your neighbourhood?**" prompted the categories of Decline, Fear, Contrast, and Hope. These categories are my words to participant constructions, which are based on their identified themes and

representations. As I outline the major themes, I attempt to maintain the use of individual terms and expressions to better convey the lived experiences and meanings attached to participants' images.

This conversation with three Habitat youths, directs us to several of the commonly identified themes:

Monica: if you were to take pictures of the neighbourhood, what kinds of things would you take pictures of? Like you took pictures of the house, but what kinds of things do you guys see when you spend time around the neighbourhood?

Tincan: garbage...graffiti

Stoney: I don't know, dilapidated houses, parks and stuff.

(Silence)

M: 'cause everyone has different eyes, and they see different things with their eyes

T: kids running around

M: is that a good thing, bad thing?

T: sometimes bad

M: how come?

T: [indecipherable: talks about kids breaking things, doing bad things]

M: right o.k....in my mind, I know what bad is, but what is bad in your mind?

T: [indecipherable: "...throwing stuff into boarded-up windows..."]

M: o.k. What does graffiti mean to you?

T: [indecipherable: gangs]

M: what are some good things about it?

Tincan: my friends

M: yeah? Is that what makes a good place?

Pokey: yeah.

Decline

"Dilapidated Houses" which included boarded-up and condemned houses: every single participant identified dilapidated houses, condemned or boarded-up houses as sign of decline to William Whyte space.



"I took a picture of this boarded up house 'cause I don't like it. It's ugly and makes the neighbourhood look bad...because it's empty, and people graffiti it, or put it on fire. It looks empty and unlivd in."—Dynamite Duggin

"Graffiti"



Explaining to participants, "imagine you can't speak—what would you want to say through your pictures?", this is what one LET Youth member 'said':

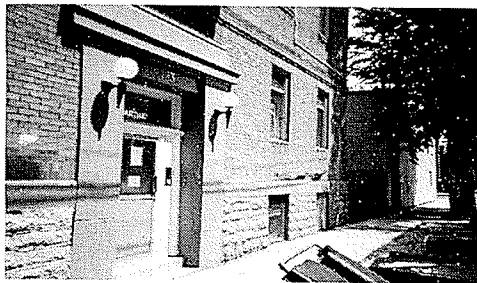


"I'd throw a rock through someone's window and they'll come out yelling...I'll take a picture of my angry neighbourhood"—Mac (LET Youth member)

Almost every participant identified graffiti as part of their 'description of the neighbourhood' as well as expressing a distaste for it. Even though not one person liked graffiti, some accepted it as part of the neighbourhood, and five people pointed out that they thought it could be transformed into a positive thing, something in which they could participate. For example, some of them talked about, or if I mentioned it, they expressed interest in an organization that attempts to transform graffiti into an art form as a tool for youth entertainment, education, and healing.

"Despair"

Mac: "Why would anyone wish to move into the neighbourhood? There's so much underground stuff happening—people from rich areas like Tuxedo, don't really understand."



"A dangerous dump" with needles everywhere, hookers, and in disrepair—Crys



The Merchant Hotel: described as a drunk tank by LET Youth members—photographer unknown

The (in)famous merchant hotel: it was

referred to by many LET Youth as a drunk tank and was a concern for Habitat in terms of building across the street. Despite its reputation, many residents did not seem to find it a major problem, although admittedly, they were "used to it."

"Arson"

Monica: so do you hear about the arson around here anymore?

Billy Bob: no, arson has really calmed down.

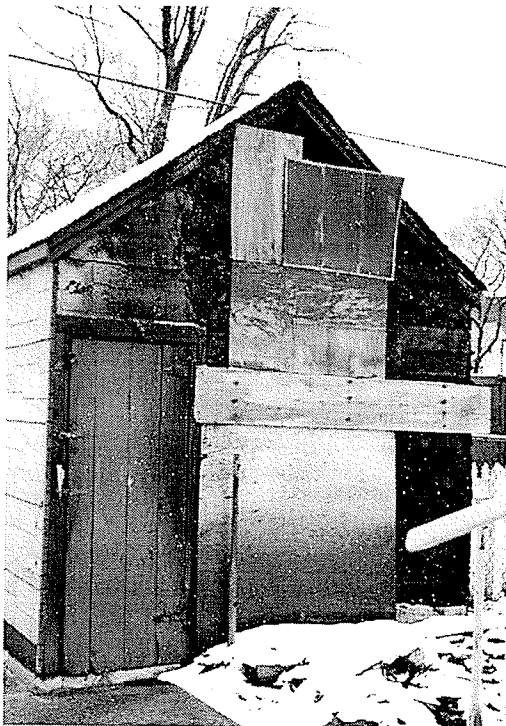
M: has it? Why, do you think?

BB: I don't know, maybe it's arsoned out.

M: I don't understand. I met one guy who was one of the guys doing the arsons and I asked him 'why', like I tried not to be judgmental...he said "peer pressure, man" and then he said it was his way of cleaning up the neighbourhood. To get rid of the dilapidated houses. And you know, I can't judge that, that's his opinion/

BB: That does make sense, 'cause if it burns down, then the city has to smash the whole house down. Like an empty lot is better than a crappy old house.

Billy Bob is speaking hypothetically, but several participants identified with that logic, although they stated they would never participate in such actions. In fact, arson was also considered as a negative impact to the area because it caused damage to people's property and made the area look bad, both in terms of its physical appearance and reputation.



"Someone set bubba's garage on fire"—Orion

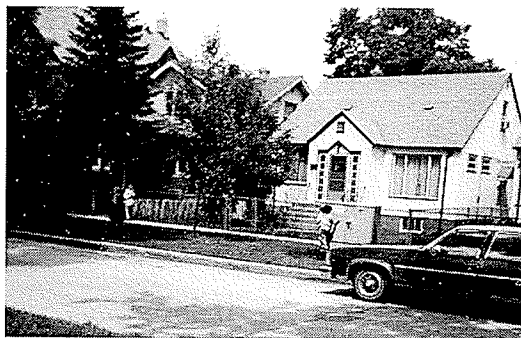


"This is where I made that anti-arson commercial"—Orion

“kids running around”: five participants talked negatively about “kids running around wild.” To them, it is, not a sign of life, but of negligence.

Fear

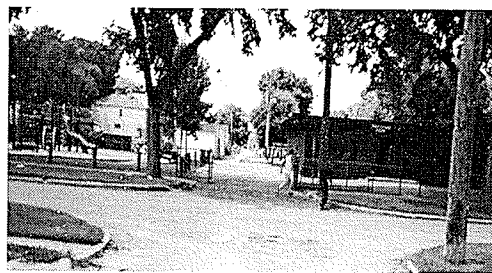
safety, gangs, divisions



“You know why I took this picture? Because of that kid playing on the mailbox. She shouldn’t be doing that, they’re all over the place doing that kind of thing.”



“There was a white van going around the neighbourhood kidnapping kids. This isn’t the same van, but I had to pass it every day and it reminds me of the kidnapping van.”—Dynamite Duggin



“See those red bandanas? Those are [gang] members.”—Crys

“Gangs”

The reality of omnipresent gang activity was discussed by all participants. Dynamite Duggin initially did not want to take pictures of the William Whyte area,



According to several participants, this picture shows two rival gangs, divided by geography and to some extent race—Monica (photographer unknown)

only eight blocks from his home at the time, for fear of being beaten up or mugged by gangs. While not all participants personally experienced gang encounters, several Habitat Youth were ill at ease about moving because of the threat of being beaten up or “jacked” (mugged) by gang members.

Monica: How you would describe your new neighbourhood?

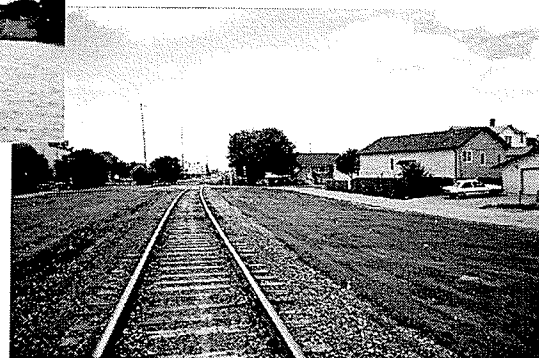
Dynamite Duggin: gangs, graffiti, and my bike got stolen. [Talk about threat of being followed, beaten up by gang members]

M: So what is your experience with gangs? Would you say that you feel unsafe?

DD: yah, fear.

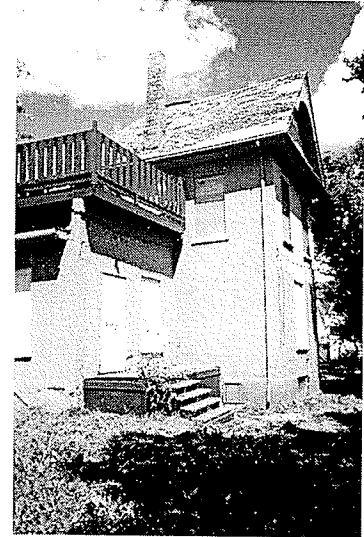
Divisions:

Several different LET Youth members took these pictures. Although I do not have their rationale for taking these pictures, to me, they represent the geographical divisions—referred to by most participants—bordered by the Salter Street bridge, the railway tracks, and the Red River, and that separate the North End from the South, determine gang territory and friends, and comfort zone.



Crys took these pictures to show a Habitat home under construction, which is looking out to a run-down place across the back lane and a boarded-up house next door. Her comment stems from her recognition that “cosmetic change” is not “real” change.

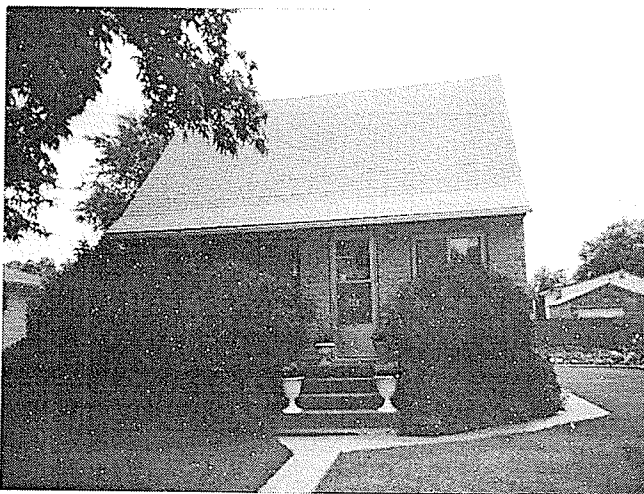
CONTRAST



“There’s no sense!”—Crys

HOPE

Ownership & Belonging, Reality (vs Reputation),
Community Spirit, and People

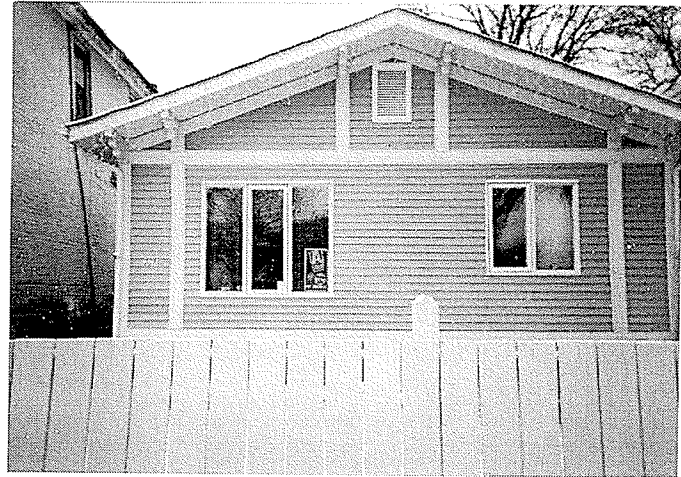


Several LET Youth members took a picture of this house, in addition to numerous others.

Nice, taken care of homes and neighbourhood, not as bad as its reputation: Even though I joked to participants about how the adult in me likes flowers and clean yards, these LET Youth members also appreciated a well-kept yard.



Crys took this picture to show that “not all natives live in slum houses.”



Habitat Home: Well-taken care of home—LET Youth member



Urban Green Team: a sign of community effort—Crys



“This is a nice street”—M&M

Reputation vs Reality: most participants, despite their negative comments regarding the neighbourhood,

expressed annoyance and resentment towards the media and the South End in general for perpetuating a reputation that didn’t match their reality. Notice Billy Bob’s surprise at my favourable impression of his neighbourhood when I asked “what other words would you use to describe this neighbourhood?”

Belle: it's pretty nice.

M: what makes it nice?

B: like people are friendly and stuff...the people I met before.

M: I grew up in the south end...I went to [high school], so it was pretty mixed area, but I never really knew this area. And then I came here and did a little survey and I was so impressed/

Billy Bob: of what?!

M: well, I'd walk up to someone's door, "Hi I'm asking some questions for Habitat, you know, how do you feel about the homes going up in the area...a couple doors down, I went in and talked to her for like half an hour"

BB: that could have been [neighbour]. She talks to people a long time.

M: A lot of people were like that. You know, she was really happy you guys were moving in...A lot of people talk about the North End, you read in the newspaper, it seems there's sort of a stigma about it.

BB: yeah, everything's bad about the North End (sounds sarcastic).

M: yeah, but do you think it really is what the media says it is?

BB: it's not that bad.

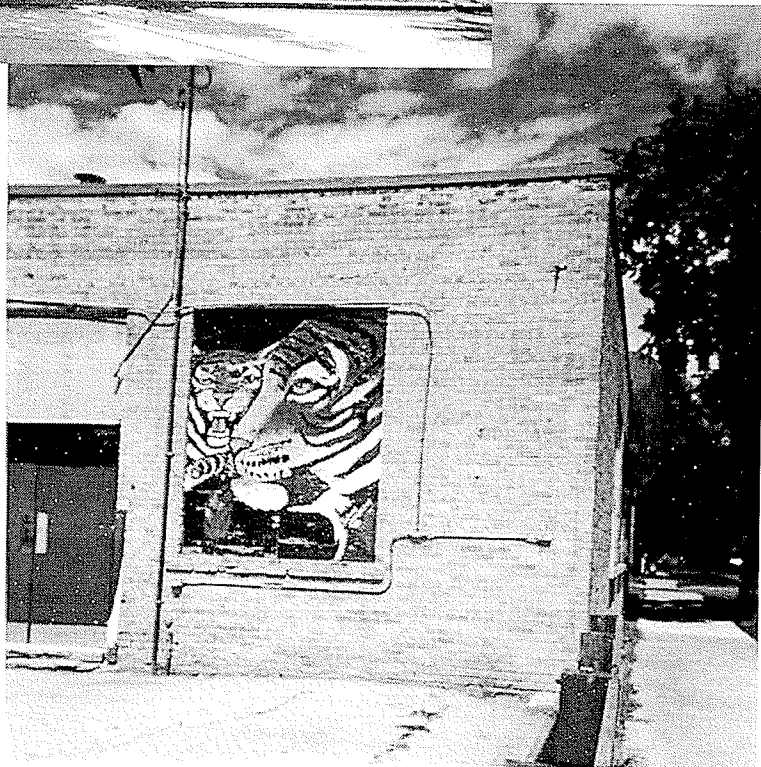
B: I think it used to be worse before, it's not that bad now.

BB: yeah can you imagine if people here had it, and they go to a nice neighbourhood and dump their garbage like they [the rich people] do here?
(Laughter)

This comment pertains to two ideas. Firstly, in many participants' eyes the reality is not as bad as its reputation. It also refers to the presumed common occurrence of non-residents dumping their garbage in the 'Free zones'. When one resident told me about this occurrence, I did not realize the extent of this phenomenon. This practice was mentioned or confirmed by almost every participant, their parent(s), and several locals resident to whom I talked. In fact, a non-resident participant embarrassingly admitted that his own parents dumped their garbage in the North End instead of going to the dump. Not only does this practice contribute to the accumulated garbage and increases risk of arson, but significantly, non-residents who engage in this activity are fostering the very reality which they themselves fear and condemn.

“murals”, community spirit and renewal

At least five participants refer to the murals as a source of identity for the neighbourhood. They point out that murals that are generally not touched by ‘taggers’ (those who do graffiti) or gang insignia. The overwhelming interest in murals, as well as their positive impact on the area, would suggest that this would be a potential area to mobilize youth interest, which would be meaningful, relate to the larger neighbourhood ‘community’, and thus, have a renewal effect.



“This was done by local kids; people don’t tag it now.”—Crys

One boy took pictures only of the murals in the neighbourhood, as well as the artist of many of the murals, because he thinks they were very beautiful and unique to the neighbourhood. His father, who was present during the interview, also points out that murals will not be tagged.



“This is the artist; he’s famous in the area!”—M&M

People

“Casey, when you look at this picture, what do you think?”



This is a picture of Casey's former area, but it is indicative what is important in everyday life in ones' living space. Asking what she will miss about the area that she is leaving for a Habitat home, Casey responds:

Casey: um, I don't know, It's a nice place to live, a lot of nice friends that I'll miss.

M: what else will you miss about this area?

C: I don't know, just the friends and people.

M: so it's the people that make a place for you?

C: yeah.

Condensed Survey Report of Residents Attitudes about the Neighbourhood

Interviews completed by Doug Watson and Monica Wiest for Habitat for Humanity (11/00)

The following demonstrates the overlapping as well as the unique concerns of adults and teenagers.

Based on conversations with fourteen homeowners, it seems that many residents have put much effort into making the area safer and cleaner. For example, one woman spent every night for months walking at night with her dog writing down license plates to get rid of drug dealers and johns. A group of neighbours campaigned successfully to establish a park for kids (they themselves have no kids), and to have condemned homes on corner demolished. There seems to be much collaboration among many people on the block, evidenced by above examples and the way in which they spoke about each other in our conversations.

When asked about living on this block, a few residents mentioned that the block has improved considerably from two years ago, due to police presence and neighbourhood efforts. The demolition of several condemned houses contributed to a quieter and cleaner neighbourhood. Prostitutes, 'johns', 'sniffers', 'drunks' and the Merchant hotel were identified as problems in the neighbourhood as well as a general concern for the condition of rental houses and welfare tenants (due to high turn-over and lack of commitment to neighbourhood). Interestingly, not one person said they were immediately affected by the presence of hotel, yet recognized that it might be a problem for other residents. One person mentioned that residents from other neighbourhoods dumped their garbage in North End back lanes, which contributed to incidences of garbage fires. Accordingly, the police were identified as generally supportive in terms of visibility, response time, and dealing with passed out people in back yards. Gangs, and associated teenagers, were also identified as problem but several residents stated that this problem has gotten better in the last few years, and especially since the Manitoba Warriors have gone to jail.

All fourteen adult respondents claimed they felt safe in neighbourhood, but at least five respondents stated "but I'm used to it." Some residents felt unsafe walking at night or feared theft. The block where they lived was described as "quiet" and a good place for kids to play.

All the homeowners, as well as a man who just sold his house, claimed they watched out for 'events' on the street, such as vandalism, excessive partying, prostitute comings and goings, etc. Although they each had a few stories to tell, they told it with a sense of humour and were the first to say they loved living where they were. Most people informed us that they knew at least one or two neighbours and at very least, their kids played with other kids on the block. One person said that the presence of school (and thus kids) across street contributed to incidences of vandalism and litter, which was not necessarily the doing of kids who live on that particular block.

Humanizing the Neighbourhood

Several participants communicate contrasting representations between how their neighbourhood looks and what it is like to them in terms of their experiences and the people they know. This, then, prompted me to ask participants "how do you feel about living in this neighbourhood?" By humanizing the neighbourhood, that is, by talking about everyday life, likes and dislikes, fears, pleasures, and personal encounters, a static representation can be transformed into living breathing space highlighting the personal experiences and embodied knowledge of participants. In this section I refer to Habitat homeowners already living in the area as well as several LET Youth members.

"It's MY neighbourhood"

Billy Bob: I don't like that house...

Monica: No, why not?

Mother: why did you take pictures of the muggs house!? (muggs refers to muggers)

BB: I don't know (laughs).

Mother: it's a boarded up crappy house and this is the lot they almost dragged him into...the muggers. This is right next door to us – it's boarded up.

M: do the boards fascinate you?

BB: (laughs) yeah, they do! I can't remember now...



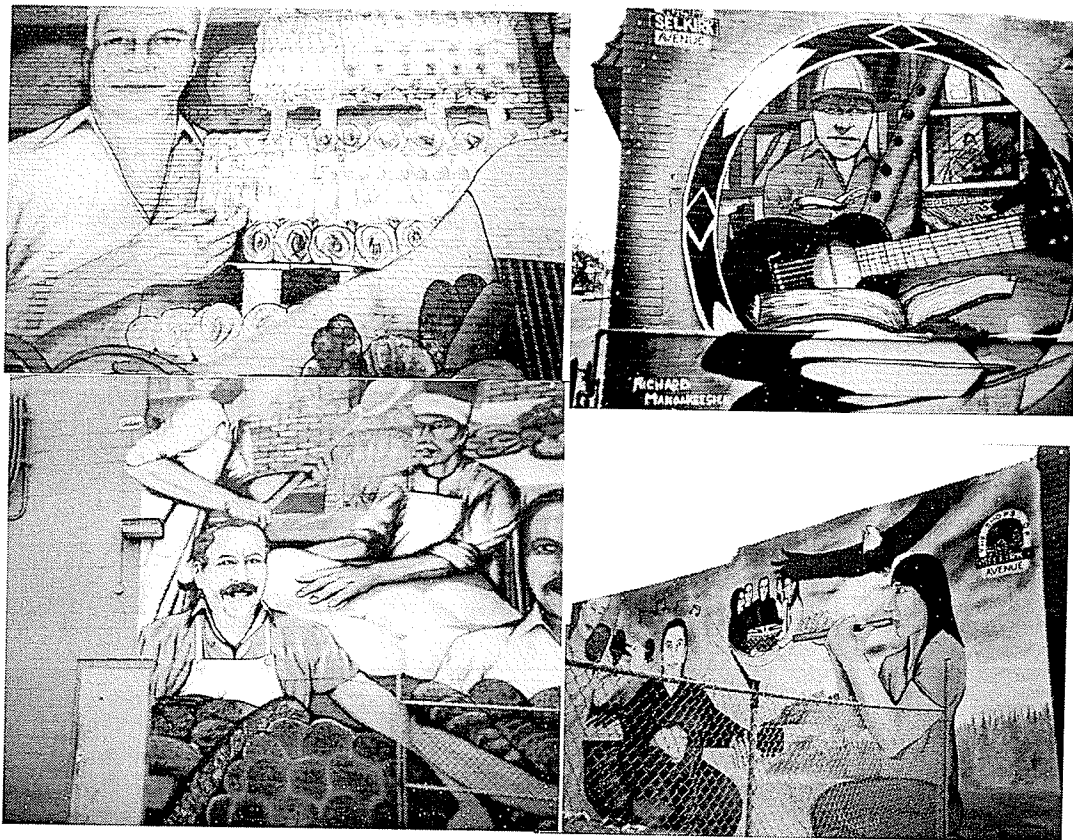
"I don't like that house"—Billy Bob

"it's a boarded up crappy house...this is right next door to us"—Billy Bob's mother

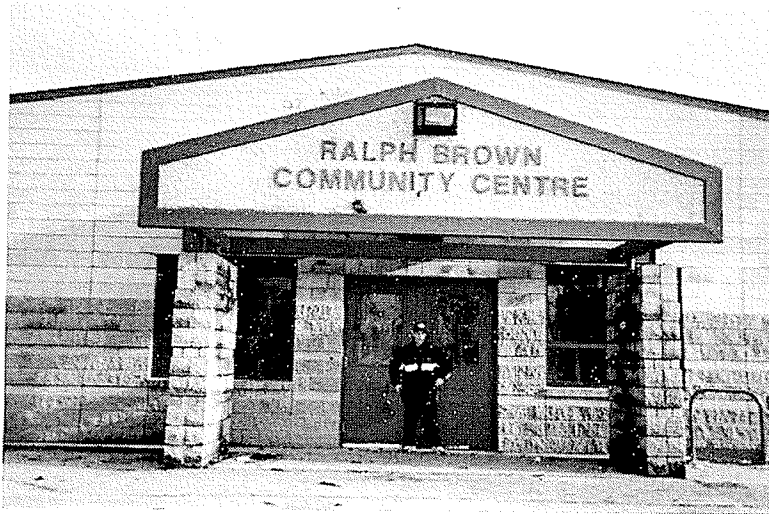
M: do you like tagging?
 BB: No, I don't tag!
 M: I didn't mean the action, but when you see it, is just sort of a neutral/
 BB: yeah, cause it's all over the place.
 M: so it doesn't mean it's a bad neighbourhood?
 BB: no, it's my neighbourhood...
 Mother: but when you see tagging, what does it tell you about the neighbourhood?
 BB: well, when I walk around and look at the houses, I don't think it's a good neighbourhood to be in.
 M: but the tagging is fine?
 BB: yeah whatever. It's all over the place.
 Mother: that's true, it is everywhere.
 BB: like it's not like I live in a rich classy neighbourhood and all, 'be bu buu bea'
 Mother: I remember when Billy Bob, I have a friend who lives on [street], it was the first time he saw someone in the city who had a nice house and after that, remember, you used to pick out the good neighbourhoods and the bad neighbourhoods, just by the houses that you saw?
 M: so what makes a bad neighbourhood then?
 BB: Dilapidated houses. And like whatever. Like no one takes care of their houses or anything. You can sort of tell it's a bad neighbourhood.
 M: so would you say this is a good neighbourhood, or a bad neighbourhood, based on the houses?
 BB: ummm? I haven't met many people here, but the people that I've met are nice, where I live on (street in North End), most people aren't nice people.
 M: but the houses are o.k.?
 BB: no, the houses are crap.
 M: o.k. I was just wondering 'cause/
 BB: the houses aren't very good. The North End isn't a nice neighbourhood.
 M: why would you say that?
 BB: 'cause there's a lot of gang activity here.
 M: but do you still feel like it's your neighbourhood?
 BB : yeah, yeah..I do feel comfortable here, I feel comfortable walking around, but I don't go walking around after dark, that's just really dopey.
 Mother: anymore.
 M: what do you mean anymore?
 Mother: ever since he got mugged.
 BB: Yeah, like I don't really care, whatever [that he can't really walk around after dark].
 Mother: But, the other day he was telling how this [habitat home] feels like home, this great big empty building, that has no furniture, feels like home. Where we go to sleep is the house.

This conversation highlights several points. It demonstrates Billy Bob's sense of identify and engagement with neighbourhood as well as the ambiguities of living in it. He contradicts himself in terms of his own definition of a 'good or bad' neighbourhood by first saying that houses indicate a good or bad neighbourhood. When asked about his own neighbourhood, he reserves judgment because he doesn't know the people. So even though Billy Bob determines his neighbourhood is 'bad' based on the houses, ultimately, he acknowledges that it is the people that define the nature of a space.

As discussed earlier, a sense of ownership, identity and pride is inspired by the colourful and ubiquitous murals in the area. They also indicate the history and diversity thriving in the area. M&M's and Orion's pictures are among the many photos of murals taken by the participants.



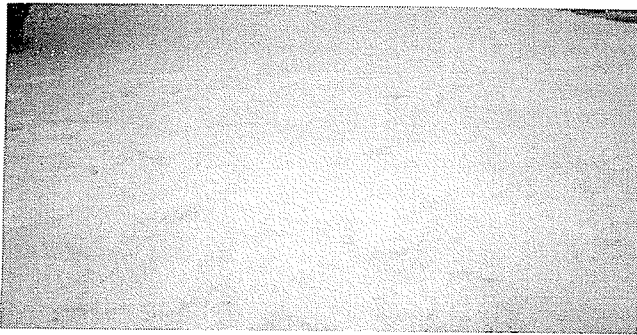
This sense of ownership, identity, and pride is not only inspired by what people see, but also by where they hang out, eat, play soccer—what they do in the area.



“This is the community club where I hang out”—Dynamite Duggin



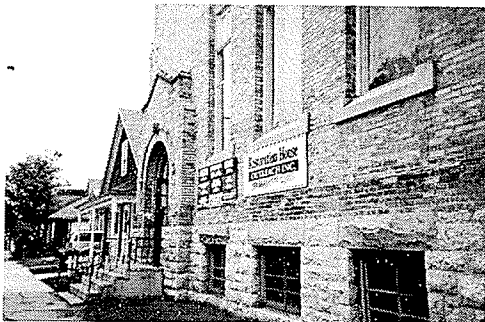
“...but I don’t like the graffiti”—DD



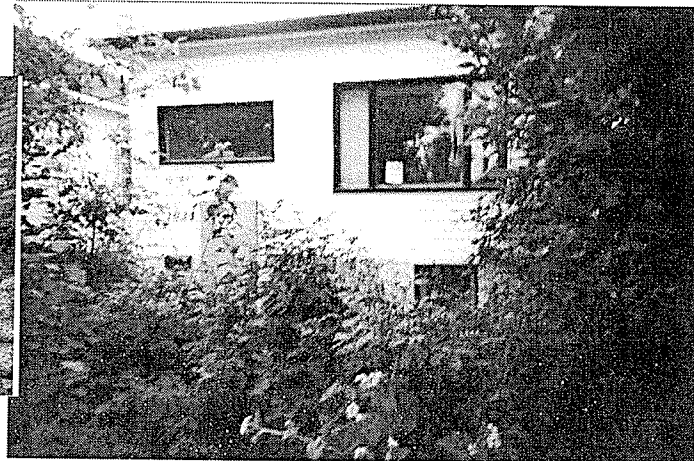
“I used to shovel my neighbours’ walks to earn money. I don’t know if I’ll be able to do that [at my new home]”—DD



**Challenge your Child:
THE ENGLISH UKRAINIAN
BILINGUAL PROGRAM
IS AVAILABLE HERE**



“I go to Sunday school here”—M&M



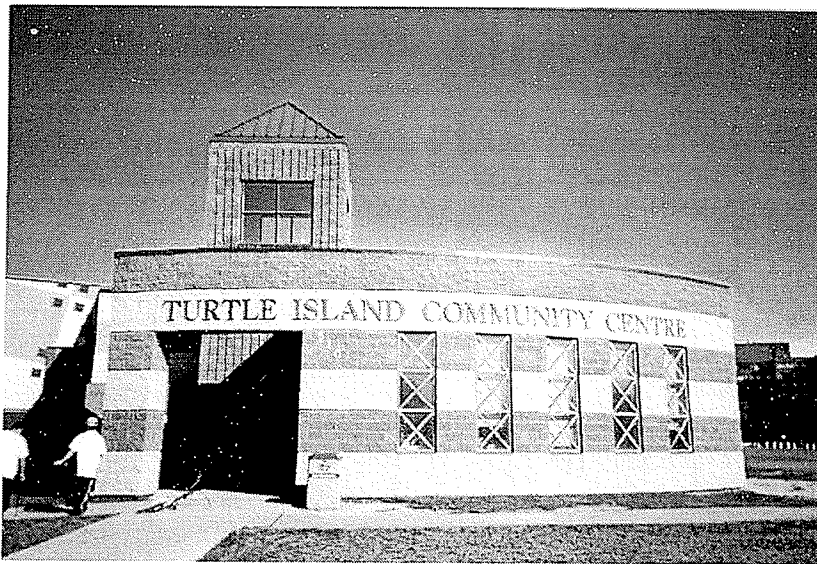
“We used to live here. The landlord let the pipes burst and didn’t wanna fix anything. Now it’s condemned.”—Penelope (and Steve)



"This is my favourite car...
I love old classic cars"—M&M



Winnipeg Boys and Girls Clubs—Rotty took this picture and was a participant in many of its programs.



Turtle Island Community Centre: several LET Youth members took a picture of this place; a place to hang out?



"My favourite restaurant, they have the best roast beef sandwiches. And you can get ice-cream for a buck"—Orion

New House, but New Home?

For Habitat youth participants, their feelings about their upcoming move included ambivalence, neutrality, apprehension, fear, and hope. For some, the idea of owning their own home was a great opportunity, regardless of the area. The opportunity to paint, never mind having their own room was also an appealing aspect of moving (three 14 year-old males told me they wanted to paint their rooms black). For two individuals, the threat of being beaten up as a result of their move overshadowed the prospect of owning a new home. Several times, parents did not fully relate to the fear and risk of being beaten up. In one instance, one participant, in going through the pictures, revealed much of his insecurity to his mother about moving and his experiences of being chased by older teenagers.

For another family who already lived in the area, their new home represented “a fresh start.” Although the following is a mother’s words, I include them to speak in the silences of her children. I spoke with the mother a couple times on the phone and she told me snippets of conversation that she overheard from her children at home; her words reflect some of the ideas that her children presumably expressed to each other. It also demonstrates the significance of the move to the family as a whole.

Mother: we had nothing...I mean we survived from one social assistance cheque to another and it was never enough. And now we’re off social assistance and I have a job. They can now have things that they want. We don’t have to worry about where we’re going to live from one month to another.

Monica: so this house must be pretty special to you guys....will it change your life in any way, do you think?

Mother: we all had to work together to get to this point. We were at the point I was ready to give up because I wanted to stay at home because they wanted me home. I wanted to give them a home. We’ve really worked together as a family. I’m trying to do my best to give, have a job, to work

for this house and home [indecipherable].

M: so did you all work together and help your mum?

(Nods)

Monica: are you happy with the area?

Mother: yeah, the neighbourhood is nice, we don't have a crappy landlord, there's good people. It's a fresh start for us.

M: yeah, you guys don't have to worry about water dripping on your head anymore [an event which their last landlord responded by telling them to move their beds].

Billy Bob, who was thrilled to have been able to work on his own house, although he was an exception, expressed a sense of ownership and comfort with his new home:

BB: this house feels like home, like it's not a very nice neighbourhood, but it feels like home.

M: right, so it doesn't matter if it's a nice neighbourhood or not. What makes it home to you?

BB: um, well I appreciate the fact, what's the date? I've been here [in the area] for almost 15 years.

M: so if you decided to ever move out, would you stay in this area?

BB: I wouldn't if I were rich or something. If I had a lot of money, I'd go live in a nice neighbourhood...but I think I'll just kick my mom out of this house, you know, it's my house (laughs).

M: how would you describe your new home?

BB: clean...I feel very comfortable.

Dealing with Risk

The issue of individual safety arose in almost every conversation with Habitat participants. Five participants, three males and two females, said they felt unsafe in the area although experience with or fear of gangs do not intersect with all participants. Five males said they felt safe, two of whom were 10 years old had limited time alone 'on the street'. One 16 year old felt safe because he was "big and strong and it would take six people to gang up on me." Two acknowledged the existence of risk in their neighbourhood, and they felt 'sorta' safe. Accepting the reality of risk, many participants took precautions, by avoiding people on the street or not walking around at night. The

Let Youth members, like the Habitat youth, talked about similar risks, such as gang activity, getting jacked, drunks, hookers and cruising cars, people shooting up and leaving their needles on the street on other's backyards, but only two expressed that they felt unsafe at night.

The following conversations highlight how some youth interpretations of their reality and how they negotiate their space and identity in this context:

Monica: do you feel safe?

Tincan: I don't feel safe.

M: how come you don't feel safe?

T: I got into fights and got jacked, people stealing stuff off of me, my hats.

M: jacked? What do you call that, got jacked? That's new vocabulary for me...Stoney, do you feel safe?

Stoney: yeah, I feel safe. I don't get worry about getting jacked.

M: why do you think that is?

S: I don't know. Sometimes people walk up to me and ask who are you down with, like what gang are you with and I say no one...and they say, so why are you wearing the colours you're wearing and I say these are the colours I feel like wearing. Sometimes they try to fight me...but like when I tell people I'm 14, which I am, they try to find out who I'm down with....I'll wear whatever colours I want.

Mother: when they walk around, people think they're bad but they're not.

M: how come you don't what to join a gang?

S: I don't want to get messed up in [indecipherable].

M: that's pretty tough to hold your own, you know, be yourself....I admire that.

Mother: we want to get a neighbourhood watch going in our new area....[indecipherable: talks about getting community foot patrol started in the area].

M: are gangs a worry for you T?

T: sometimes.

M: do people approach you?

T: some kids, they come up to me, and say "who you down with" and all that, but they're just wannabees.

M: so, when do they start recruiting?

T: at school, they approach me, but they're just wannabees...

S: about thirteen, fourteen.

In this case, Tincan is twelve and Stoney is fourteen. They are Aboriginal, and said when

asked, that being Aboriginal was not necessarily an added pressure to join a particular gang, but their background served to reinforce people's – both youth and adult – assumptions regarding their membership. Belle feels she has to deal with a similar reality, in part, because she is black, which is associated with a different gang with different territory. She is also from the 'other side of the tracks', and thus, unknown to people in William Whyte. To deal with risk in her former neighbourhood, Belle avoids wearing 'labels', which diminishes the bait for "getting jacked". On the other hand, Billy Bob does not seem to worry very much about gangs, which may partly be due to the fact that he goes to a school in an area with a minimal gang presence.

Monica: um, you've lived in the other neighbourhood for 14 years. So walking around here, what words would you use to describe/

Belle: probably different, 'cause where I grew up with my friends and everything, they, like, know the gangs and people. It's [William Whyte] just bad.

M: so what makes this neighbourhood worse?

B: um probably, where I live now, I know the gangs or whatever so I felt safer. And now, it's like, there's a lot people I don't know and they look at you on the news [because of the media for Habitat].

M: so you feel a little bit vulnerable.

B: yeah, like I'm gonna come down here and other kids ask me, "who you down with" like gangs and stuff.

M: oh. So people associate you with another gang?

B: yeah.

M: (To Billy Bob) like, do you pay attention to this gang stuff?

Billy Bob: no. I don't know any gang codes or anything.

M: so if you wore red, would it matter? (BB: no) do you wear red?

BB: I'm wearing red right now!

M: yeah, you are! So it's not an everyday worry for you?

BB: no.

B: like it's just at my school, where they tell you what to wear, and like/

M: who, the principal, or the kids?

B: the kids in the school.

M: so do you feel it's in your face?

B: um, just a little.

M: do you feel safe around this neighbourhood?

B: I think I find it safer in my old neighbourhood because of my friends and everything.

M: right, right. So is it a matter of getting to know people?

B: yeah.

As alluded to in the above dialogues, race and ethnicity, being Black or Aboriginal, play a large role in one's articulation with gangs and other groups -- it can define one's allegiances, one's friends, and whether one is a target for recruitment or aggression. According to Belle and her brother, gangs tend to be along territorial lines (for example, North End, South End) and racial lines, for example, along Aboriginal, Black/mixed, Filipino, and a combination of 'races'. Many of the cliques are based along racial or ethnic lines. Belle tells me "it's not safe anymore at school...I've got lots of friends who are Asian and that sometimes gets me in trouble." Belle's brother says he's friendly to everyone, and he doesn't care about what colour someone is. He acknowledges, though, that those divisions do exist for some people. A Ukrainian participant frequently talks about her feelings of estrangement at her school where the majority of students are of a different ethnicity. She feels that they do not branch out beyond their 'own kind' and are very cliquey. Considering that many new immigrants in Winnipeg live in the North End -- who must seek a space in an diverse, yet historically culturally distinct neighbourhood -- it would be productive to explore the dynamics of race, ethnicity and identity/peer groups in order to further understanding of young people's experiences in this regard as well as to target racism, bullying, and gangs.

Gender realities intersect with security and gang experiences. Despite a lack of shared information with my participants in this regard, it is clear that both male and females fear being beaten up and according to participants, males and females are involved in beating up and stealing from others. It would be interesting to explore how risk is gendered, as well as to what extent males and females deal with risk differently. What are the variables and pressures, such as race, ethnicity, size, sexuality, personality,

friends, cliques, family, and support groups, and how do they intersect with gender and risk?

For participants of both genders, the concern for one's safety seems to be tied to knowing people. Billy Bob, Belle, Casey, and Dynamite Duggin all conveyed that they would feel safer if they knew the people in the area. As will be discussed, this in itself is may be a reason to incorporate youth involvement, not as an isolated venture, but as part and parcel of larger community efforts.

Monica: so what other words would you use to describe your neighbourhood, besides home and comfortable?

Billy Bob: umm, I don't know (silence). It's not a really crappy neighbourhood, but it's not good. Like, there's sorta bad people. [indecipherable: relates a story of people he knows who were beaten up badly, after getting mugged].

M: and you got mugged last week.

BB: yeah

M: but you say you weren't scared.

BB: No, I wasn't scared.

M: just annoyed, or what?

BB: yeah! I lost 50 cents!!! (Banter)

M: so is it that you don't feel safe?

BB: No, I feel safe.

M: is there a risk/

BB: yeah, but we avoid people we see.

M: so you know what to look out for, certain people, or people period?

BB: just people period.

M: unless you know them.

BB: which I don't.

M: over time you'll know them?

BB: Well, I lived on [street in same area] for over 10 years, and all I know is [one friend].

M: yeah, 'cause you're a miserable sort (laughs). Do you think owning your house will make a difference to you, in terms of getting to know people?

BB: I'm already starting to get know people...a lot of people I see walking around are little kids (sounds like he's complaining). Like on [street], I don't really go outside, unless I'm going somewhere. I think that's the way it is with a lot of people, because of gangs or whatever.

Billy Bob seems to accept the risk that exists as part and parcel of living in the area, but this conversation also alludes to the idea that he would feel more at ease if he knew more people. The importance of people is also mentioned by other participants when I asked “Are there good things about this neighbourhood, things you like? Anything you’d keep the same?” Tincan responded “friends”, and M&M said “good, nice people. Casey is much more explicit in reference to her safety:

M: do you feel like you’ll be safe in that area?

Casey: yeah [sort of], a little bit.

M: Do you feel it’s any different than [former area]?

C: it’s a little bit different, you know, the people look rougher and that, but not too bad.

M: so for the most part, it’s a matter of getting to know the people [this comment is not as leading as it appears: it was made in the context of her constant mention of people being central to her life and home].

C: yeah.

M would that make you feel safer?

C: yeah (sounds definite).

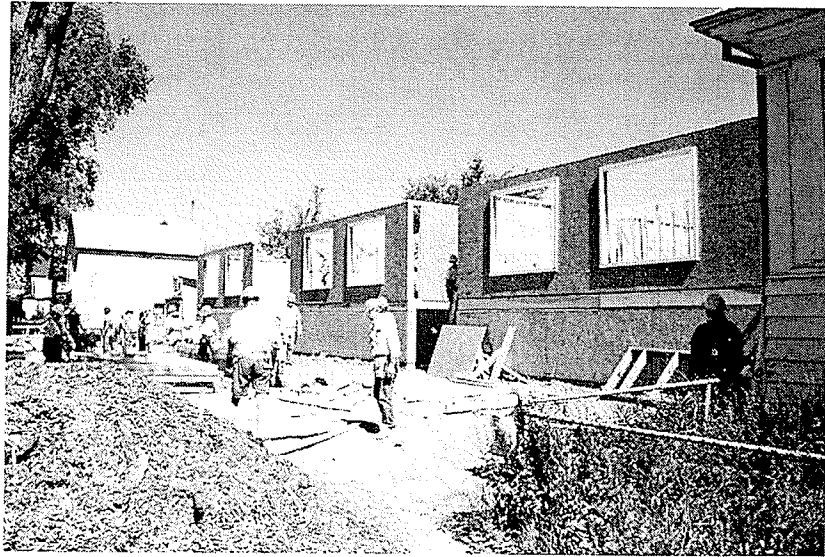
Like with any other group of people, to get an idea of how young people engage with life, it is important to take note of the variable life conditions and situations of young people, and the realities, attitudes and perceptions that are inspired by those life conditions. This chapter seeks to provide a sense for the reader a small sample of young people’s attitudes and portrayals of an urban neighbourhood, with differentially articulated circumstances. Through photographic journeys, the participants of this study have presented their images and words of the William Whyte neighbourhood, generating the themes of hope and renewal, decline and despair, and fear and a sense of belonging. The communication of their images and conversations expands our insights into the varying experiences of young people as they intersect with an organizational renewal project.

Chapter Three

ARTICULATIONS AND EXPERIENCES WITH HABITAT FOR HUMANITY

In this chapter, I discuss participants' ideas and experiences relating to Habitat for Humanity. I explore what they think about Habitat's Revitalization Project as well as how they define urban

renewal. I also attempt to convey participants' attitudes regarding their involvement, or lack thereof, in this renewal process and get a sense of the



Habitat for Humanity-Ed Schreyer Work Project, 2001-Monica

extent of control they feel they have in their lives, particularly in this context.

This picture symbolizes attitudes of "what's the use" versus hope. The boarded-up house points to the challenges in making the neighbourhood better, while the new Habitat home symbolizes a sense of hope to some participants. Yet it is the contrast between the two houses that brings on a sense of doubt for some participants that things will improve-Monica (photographer: Bond)



Habitat and Concepts of Renewal: “What’s the use” vs Hope

Ideas about Habitat for Humanity are intricately tied with participants’ concepts about renewal, partly because of the connection that I made between the two or a participant’s involvement with Habitat. When I first talked about Habitat’s project to LET Youth members, they did not know anything about Habitat in terms of its status as a non-profit organization versus a business or its approach to building homes. In fact, these participants were extremely skeptical about the whole idea of rejuvenating their neighbourhood and, as highlighted in the images of the neighbourhood, felt “what’s the use?” When asked how they felt about Habitat’s project, Mac said, “building homes isn’t the answer [to renewal]. What about substance abusers, unreliable workers? What about people who are on welfare? They can’t buy a home. Organizations should work together...Organizations and businesses should find out what people think before they begin the project.” Many members were concerned that the community had not been consulted, and were not aware that William Whyte residents had approached Habitat for Humanity. Another person echoed the idea that the community involvement is integral to renewal, reflecting, “well, it depends how much they involve the people who live in the area – a lot of non-profits go down because they don’t ask the people...for community renewal, change has to come from within.”

Several Habitat youth expressed ambivalence about Habitat’s project. While almost all said, “it’s a good idea”, participants were unsure whether it would make a long-term difference. I asked Belle and Billy Bob, “once you see all these houses going up, do you see this area improving?” Belle responded, “yeah, it’s improving” while Billy Bob

feels, "It seems all the same. Like where I am now, nothing is really awful, it's all the same." Alternatively, Casey feels that specifically Habitat will make a difference:

Monica: what would be some other words you would use [to describe the area], based on your impressions after hanging around the area for a week or two?

Casey: um, Habitat say that they're going to be changing the area, building new homes and that, I think they can make a difference.

M: how will they make a difference?

C: um, because of all the nice people in the area, and like, how the way they're going to tear down those, what do you call them, vacant houses.

Dynamite Duggin said that Habitat's efforts would probably help "because if people kept their houses nice, others wouldn't graffiti or burn them down." Nonetheless, when I asked "will the project make a difference?", he remarked that people might dirty them up again. This attitude of hope tempered with doubt was conveyed by every single Habitat youth that I interviewed. The non-resident youth felt quite differently: they took pictures of Habitat homes because they feel that Habitat is a source and symbol of hope to them and the neighbourhood. Nevertheless, they, like Crys and many other participants, saw the contradiction and contrast between the new habitat home and a neighbouring boarded up home.

Habitat parents all felt quite positive Habitat's project would make a difference. M&M's father, as did many others, noted that "owning a home is a step up...it helps to feel more committed to the area." The difference between parent and youth attitudes could be attributed to several factors. First, owning a home may have a heightened significance for the parents as they have emotionally and physically worked towards this goal for a long time and most chose to live in the area. Secondly, to become a Habitat

homeowner, especially for the 2000 and 2001 builds, Habitat placed much emphasis on being a good neighbour—new homeowners were encouraged to be committed to their new home and the surrounding area. Thirdly, the parents had significantly many more opportunities to become engaged in the whole process than did their children. This engagement, as M&M's father pointed out, serves to foster a sense of commitment, although in this case, parental engagement does not automatically translate into youth commitment or engagement. If those seeking renewal strive to encompass the whole 'community', as will be discussed, meaningfully engaging youth in the process becomes integral to any renewal process. This is especially important when a significant number of the defined problems of the area, such as arson, graffiti, gangs are considered by residents, and I venture to say, the media and general population, to be a result of youth activity.

Not wanting to take the meaning of 'renewal' for granted, I wanted to gain a better understanding of how participants defined renewal. M&M thought that cleaning up the city-owned lots and play spaces, and planting flowers and gardens would help improve the area. Other participants' ideas of renewal related to, but also went beyond, the general beautification of the area. For instance, many habitat youth talked about getting rid of boarded-up houses for the purpose of reducing other problems, which seem to relate to their safety. Asking Tincan what was most important to him in the neighbourhood, one of his responses included "being safe." While safety is not explicit in the following conversations, both Casey and Billy Bob allude to it in their rationales for getting rid of condemned houses.

M: so in your mind are there ways to make things better? You talked about the social, people getting to know each other/

C: yeah, also to get rid of the condemned houses, but that's about it.

M: right...What's so bad about condemned houses?

C: 'cause that's where all the gang members go, their hideouts.

Billy Bob and Belle also related housing conditions to other problems:

Monica: what would be an improvement to you?

Billy Bob: I don't know.

Belle: nicer houses, getting rid of the empty spaces

BB: I'd get rid of the dilapidated houses. 'Cause the house right next door to me, no one lives there and it keeps getting broken into.

M: for what? What are they breaking into?

BB: oh, all the garbage inside. Seriously, it is garbage.

M: They break in to leave their garbage?

BB: no no, the guy that moved out and he used to live with his mommy, I think, and he (laughs), and he left all this garbage...all this gold junk!

[More description] But obviously if someone's going to leave their house, they'd take everything of value with them!

M: you'd think so. Do you think it could be a fire hazard?

BB: Yeah it is, 'cause his garage burnt down. I watched it burn!

After I had spent some time with the LET Youth group, I asked them to write down their ideas about "what does urban renewal mean to you?" Their essays also provide insight in their characterizations of the area and some the problems they see . I have recorded their essays exactly as they wrote them:

Mac: Urban Renewal is my opinion is the surrounding neighbourhood which is made up of communities. Urban renewal is taking charge of our community, cleaning up our streets. Taking the prostitutes, the johns, the drug dealers, the crime, gangs, the arsonists, all the trouble makers, and make a change for the little generations to come. Clean up the community, fixing houses, making it safer for children and senior citizens so nobody has to look over their shoulders scared. It's the community that raises children not only one person. So let's take charge and take back which is rightfully ours, not the johns, drug dealers, gangs, and troublemakers. We (community) need to take a stand and fight back. The children are the ones who will see what we do and we must set an example. In return the children may see what we are trying to do and try to clean up as well. The land belongs to the children not us.

Crys: I think that means that we should rebuild some of the houses and repaint the homes with graffiti and gangs' tags. I believe that the community should help out with rebuilding. We should have more cops around to deal with gangs, prostitutes, johns, etc. I think that renewal is cleaning the streets of gangs, drugs, and whores, so that our kids can be safe.

Don: Urban renewal is a clean up of a community. Fixing up buildings and the community homes. The community people should help out other people and business owners should clean their own buildings and should try to keep the area around them clean. [Local] business should clean up the community with the people because the parents do not want their children running around with glass on the ground and gang members in the community.

Steve: Cleaning up the 'hood and making old houses newer so that the area that the house is in makes that area newer and nicer. The people who should clean are the people who live in the area because it is the people who live in a specific area should be responsible for their own mess and their own area. If the area is messy it makes other people who walk by think that the people don't want to clean up or they just don't care about the area they live in.

Penelope: making old buildings to new again, or empty spaces and things. Who: youth and community. Why: to make it look better and safer for all. When: right now. What: urban renewal. How: community all come together and talk, and then make a plan.

The concept of community responsibility is presented very forcefully by all the LET Youth participants, an idea that was not talked about by all the Habitat youth. This may be due to the idea that the LET Youth members were answering my question as part of their LET Youth program requirements; on a less cynical note, their being in that program indicated that they were at least willing to reflect on their own personal capacity for responsibility. Furthermore, they all lived in the area and were slightly older with more life responsibilities, such as paying rent, raising children, finishing high school, and finding jobs. As a group, LET Youth members brainstormed solutions to some of the

problems they had identified. Their solutions included clean-up street parties, neighbourhood barbeque's, posters, petitions, community meetings, foot patrols, anti-prostitution vans, slide shows, and landlord laws. Earlier in the week, I had introduced Edward de Bono's 'six hats' as a template to think about potential solutions¹. After the group brainstorming session, I asked them to choose one solution and to put on the various hats which would involve looking at the solution in different lights. The following two essays convey the importance attributed to community effort as well as demonstrate a desire to intersect with people in the area:

Mac: The problem about **street parties** in the community. I think people will take advantage of just the party and never mind the speech about cleaning up the community. People can talk the talk, but can they walk the walk?

The good fact about the street party is you get the chance to meet your community. People who you probably haven't even met before. You get to hear the voices of other community members or the fact of how the community is looking and turning out. Maybe with the other community members a solution will be the outcome to the problem of everybody's dying community. The problem with how we can deal with the block party is you get the community to bring their own grubbage [food] and share with the community. Then that way, everybody can taste each others food and interact with each other, which will make for a closer relationship with each other. To break the ice.

Penelope: Community meetings is a good way of getting people of the community together, because meetings will make them realize what's happening in their neighbourhood today. Also it's not good because people will think it's boring and what's the point of all us people going if nothing is going to happen. The easy way to do it at meetings is have people doing Pictionary and sing songs about the community. Explore the neighbourhood and see what's going on. What we would talk about is what we are going to do with the neighbourhood and who's going to help

¹The hats include: white as neutral, objective thinking; red as emotion, intuition; black as 'why will something **not** work'; yellow as 'why **will** something work'; green for off the wall, creative; and blue as the organizer, which hat do I need to wear?

out and how long will this take. Why wouldn't it work? Because some people may feel like the neighbourhood isn't going to change by meetings. So they get lazy and don't bother. Youth and older people can help. The way we would get people to the meeting is set up posters.

When I asked participants if they saw the neighbourhood getting better or worse, opinions were double-sided. About half of all the participants felt the area has gotten worse in terms of drugs, prostitution ("they get kicked off one street and move to another"), and gang activity. On the other hand, the other hand others felt more optimistic: Billy Bob and Dynamite Duggin talked about it "not being as bad as it used to be" in terms of arson and graffiti. Dynamite Duggin said, "graffiti isn't cool anymore, not as many people do it." Orion, who accompanies her father on his foot patrol at night and helps record the stolen cars at the local police station, feels hopeful but places much value on "what used to be."

For example, when I toured the area with her, she would wistfully explain what her 'bubba' neighbour would tell her: "this used to be a hospital," and "this used to be a fish market."



'This used a be hospital'—Orion

Orion communicated a respect, and longing for what used to be. This picture is symbolic of my personally guided historical journey with Orion.

On our walk together, Crystal also seemed impressed at many of the “cool old” buildings and reflected upon how nice the neighbourhood used to be.



“Cool old building”–Crys

Condensed Survey Report of Residents Attitudes about Renewal

Interviews completed by Doug Watson and Monica Wiest for Habitat for Humanity (11/00)

How do residents feel about Habitat for Humanity building four new homes on their block? Across the board, respondents thought it was a good or great idea, for their kids or the rejuvenation/stability of the block in general. The young children whom we asked said “sure, but not that empty lot, there” because that’s where they play. One respondent qualified that s/he would not want a large extended family living in one home, nor an irresponsible homeowner. S/he would like to see a Native family that already lives in the area (respondent is not Aboriginal) and one that is committed to the neighbourhood (this individual felt that Aboriginals are discriminated against—and discriminating against others and each other—and would hope for a positive opportunity to come their way). When asked if they would recommend living here to a new family, the general response was very positive. On the other hand, about half, while they said “yes, it’s a nice neighbourhood”, they also felt that the families should know what to expect, or already be ‘used to’ some of its potential problems. Circumstances that should change or possible solutions to make things better target identified problems, like getting rid of ‘hookers’ and ‘johns’, gangs, closing the Merchant hotel (although some didn’t see hotel as problem at all, including those that lived either directly across the street or shared its back-lane), and putting in place more fields and parks for kids to play in. Homeowners suggested that building new houses, establishing the block with (employed) homeowners with a commitment to neighbourhood would improve the situation. If houses remain rented, make landlords responsible. When asked what they would keep the same, one person responded “the quietness” and another said they would like to remain in their residence.

Habitat for Humanity and Youth Involvement

In their proposal for the Inner-City Millennium project 2000, Habitat stated a goal of “active and intentional youth involvement.” The Executive Director explained to me that she anticipated ad hoc involvement the first year (2000), but that Habitat would work towards a more organized involvement for following year’s build, the Ed Schreyer Work Project, 2001. Based on my observations and discussions with participants, youth involvement remained at ad hoc level although Habitat attempted to encompass three ‘categories’ of young people: Habitat youth, non-resident youth, and local youth. Because the building site was restricted to individuals over the age of sixteen, Habitat youth participants did not have the opportunity to be actively involved in this area of the project. Nonetheless, several youth contributed their sweat equity beforehand, valued at fifty percent of an adult’s sweat equity, by volunteering at Habitat fund-raising events. In addition, they, along with the rest of the neighbourhood were invited to attend the Habitat Children’s Festival that occurred during the Ed Schreyer Work Project. Throughout the summer of 2001, non-resident youth, who were typically approached through their church or school, volunteered to participate in fund-raising events as well as community fix-up projects. A group of teenagers from a church volunteered to be leaders in the Habitat Children’s Festival, and one school class agreed to paint *Restoration House*, which is a local church-run drop-in centre. Several other church or school groups from other cities, including from the United States, participated in Community Fix-up projects. In terms of local youth involvement, the list is not as extensive. Three local organizations focussing on pre-employment skills participated in Community Fix-up projects, in which

participation usually petered out mid-way through the project. Indeed, it becomes clear that non-resident youth were much more effectively involved than Habitat youth or local youth.

Regardless of the nature or range of involvement, it is important to explore how the youth feel about being involved or not. In this regard, I had the opportunity to talk to Habitat youth and a non-resident high school class about their feelings. Admittedly, I found this aspect of the interviews the most 'disappointing' as I anticipated hearing definite opinions from the participants. While I wanted to get participants to consciously think about their potential to participate, I tried hard to avoid imposing *my* expectations regarding their participation.

Willing, Able, and Involved?

While non-resident youth were involved in supervising the children at the Habitat Children's Festival and in Community Fix-up projects after the build, no Habitat youth with whom I spoke were approached to get involved such activities. A few local youth from youth programs were involved in community-fix-up projects, but the majority of volunteer youth groups stemmed from 'suburban' churches and schools or American church groups. I spoke with Habitat youth and one non-resident school group.

The seven Habitat youth with whom I spoke were concerned with their new home, and the forthcoming changes to their lives. They initially seemed very indifferent to Habitat's renewal efforts, and not one of them knew that Habitat was trying to get youth involved in the process. Aware that people under the age of sixteen were not allowed to

work on the construction sites, they believed that working on their home was the only outlet for their involvement. At first, Stoney, Tincan, and Pokey, Casey, and Belle indicated it didn't matter whether they got to work on their homes, yet, later, they all expressed it would have been nice to have had an opportunity to contribute in some way. One exception was made to the building rule: Billy Bob, age fourteen, who had pleaded with the volunteer coordinator to be allowed to work on his house, expressed that he felt involved and attached to his house BECAUSE he was allowed to participate in the build. The following conversations demonstrate some of the attitudes towards Habitat youth experiences during the build.

Monica: part of the reason why I'm doing this is because Habitat wanted 'active youth involvement'...how do you feel about that?

Billy Bob: Active youth involvement?

M: do you know what I mean by that?

BB: no.

M: Habitat wanted to get like people your age involved in the whole neighbourhood revival process. So, I guess through the Community Fix-up project, playground fix up. How do you feel about how they got you involved?

BB: in terms of getting me involved, they did great 'cause they let me work on the house.

M: do you think they got active youth involvement in general?

BB: the only other thing to do was the children's festival and I didn't really want to go to a stupid children's festival. I wanted to build my house.

Most of the others felt that being able to work on their homes after the build was good enough for them. For Casey and Belle, hanging around and attending the children's festival helped them feel part of the process.

Monica: I just wanna know what you feel is important. Did you feel like you were involved in the whole process that Habitat was doing?

Casey: yeah.

M: how so?

C: um, because of them building a new home and that and because of all the different things happening, I guess. Like the kids fair and that. That was nice.

M: what did that do for you?

C: I got to know some of the other homeowners kids and that...and that they were nice people.

M: did you meet any other kids from the neighbourhood?

C: a few, yeah.

M: I noticed that there were a lot of younger kids there.

C: yeah, well, that didn't matter for me, cause here [her current neighbourhood] there are a lot of younger kids too.

M: yeah, and you're great with kids. So that wasn't/

C: no, not at all.

M: o.k. what I've noticed is that there are a lot of homeowners kids around thirteen, fourteen, fifteen. So they were kinda old for the children's festival, but they were too young to be on the building site.

C: yeah.

M: do you think there are ways that you would have wanted to be involved that you weren't?

C: um, [silence] not, not really, no.

I asked Billy Bob and Belle what they enjoyed about the week:

Billy Bob: the blitz build was fun!

Monica: What was fun about it? [silence]....no really, think about it...you got to meet lots of people, eat lots of food, build your own house. Is that what made it fun for you?

BB: yes.

M: Was it fun for you?

Belle: yep...meeting people, and I walked around with friends.

M: now, you went to the children's festival for half a day?

B: yeah.

M: What did you think about that?

B: it was fun...having to meet other people, other homeowners kids.

Stoney, Tincan and Pokey had also wanted to take part in the activities put on by an art/graffiti organization at the Children's festival, but they were unsure as to when and where to go to participate. Lack of awareness of the festival and the nature of activities also impeded involvement; in fact, several Habitat families were not aware of the festival

and consequently, their children did not take part until later in the week. Not all the Habitat youth wanted to take part though, as Billy Bob made very clear. He felt the children's festival was definitely not for him – "Children's Festival! I think that says it all!" Nonetheless, considering it was practically the only form of involvement for youth during the blitz build, it would have been reasonable to have incorporated more activities for mid-teenagers, as well as ensuring better circulation of information regarding its existence and nature of activities.

Most Habitat youth were between the ages thirteen and fifteen (those that I did not interview were under ten and over seventeen). Although initially they said they would not change anything about Habitat, and they also expressed that they did not really know what to do – they felt right in the middle as they were too young to legally work on their houses and several of them felt that they were too old for the Children's Festival. After I probed a little more, Stoney, Casey, Belle, and M&M all expressed interest in having the opportunity to work on their house – even for just a day or evening. Belle, like Casey, appreciated the opportunity to meet other people at the children's festival but seemed to feel a bit at a loss in terms of how she could have gotten involved. While Billy Bob felt he would like to get involved in building things ("like I could work on a porch or something"), Belle expressed that she wasn't very good at "lifting and stuff" which limited her involvement during the blitz build. Later in the conversation, she expresses a different opinion:

Belle: I would have liked to have spent one day painting, at least I could have said I did something. But now I can because my mom let me...she wasn't supposed to but she needed help and she was supposed to go to work and I didn't want her to get all tired out, and I did it, I did [painted]

the whole basement by myself.

Monica: and technically she wasn't supposed to let you?

B: no, they were supposed to finish but we did. I did a lot of stuff, like I helped the guy on Monday with the door and everything.

M: so, like even one day of involvement/

B: I think they [adults] think that most of the kids my age are too young and they're not really responsible, but to me, I don't know if it's just me, but I feel I'm responsible and I can do stuff like that.

A group of twenty-nine grade twelve students were directly and intentionally involved in the Habitat process. They were first asked for their input in terms of what they wanted to do, as well as what they felt they could do, within the scope of the Community-Fix up project. Their ideas were not followed through for a variety of logistical reasons, but also due to a general concern of the Habitat board that teenagers would not do an adequate job on the fix-up projects without more supervision than what was available. Ultimately, these students were assigned to paint *Restoration House*. On rainy days, they worked at the Habitat Re-store. Everybody but two students claimed they enjoyed working on the church, although they were disappointed that they had not been able to work on their own planned projects. This is a representation of what students wrote about their experience:

I think for the most part what I was doing was worthwhile and enjoyable. I liked painting the Restoration Houses and raking/weeding made such a big difference that I could actually see. I felt I accomplished something.

I had lots of fun doing the project, it was cool to see how much better their church looked once we were done and I knew the teens would appreciate it.

I found that participating in their project was fun and rewarding and in the end to know that I helped to repaint the church and make some difference in that particular neighbourhood.

I did not think the project was worthwhile and enjoyable. We had to paint on top of a very steep, hot, old roof with no safety ropes or nothing. I think that it was very dangerous for the students who were up there. There was a very high risk of falling while painting up on top of the roof.

I enjoyed being out in the community. I enjoy being able to say that I helped to make the church look so much more beautiful. This was worthwhile because it made us work hard to help the community. The one thing I would say that wasn't worthwhile was the work we did at Habitat Re-store. It wasn't doing something good for the community.

I enjoyed thoroughly working on this project. It made me feel that I was helping the less fortunate, that I was being useful and making a difference in someone's life. This experience gave me and my peers an opportunity to develop many new skills that will come in handy in the near future.

I believe that my involvement was worthwhile but I would have enjoyed doing the individual projects we had planned even more.

I found my participation in this project worthwhile and enjoyable. First of all because I'm an immigrant, and when I came here for the first time, Winnipeg was very friendly and supportive to our family. During this project, I had a chance to say "thank you" to all the Winnipeggers for their help. It was my way of showing my gratitude by helping those who needed my help.

When asked "Do you feel that young people should be involved in strategies to improve neighbourhoods? What realistically can they contribute?", students justified youth involvement because of young people's energy and enthusiasm, and opportunity for skill acquisition. The following written excerpts demonstrate different aspects of getting young people involved and the skills that they feel they can bring to the table :

I feel that young people are energetic (most) and would love to look at what they have done when they are older. They can contribute time and effort (sometimes more than older people).

I think young people are highly underestimated all the time. We have a lot of skills that can be put to good use. Even when we don't acquire the right skills we are quick to learn them. I feel that more young people should get involved in such strategies to improve communities. In a realistic mind

set, young people can do anything they set their minds to. People don't realize, but we can contribute so much.

Youth are not all lazy, they work just as hard as adults do. Realistically they can contribute fresh ideas, motivation and the energy to work hard. They can set a good example in their community as well as help out too.

It brings a positive outlook to teenagers and it helps teenagers get involved in the community.

I think kids should get involved. It's their own choice whether or not they decide to do so, but they can contribute a good feeling through a community.

I feel that young people should be involved in strategies to improve neighbourhoods because many are very creative and have unique ideas that adults either overlook or don't think can be done. We can realistically contribute ideas, labour and recruit other young people to be involved in community projects. Many youth are more optimistic to get involved in a project if they know other young people are and if they know it is a worthwhile cause.

I think that every student should be involved in helping out the community. It shows that you care and that you will help out people in the good and bad times. Students can help by planning the events, and organizing the sponsors. Others can help out by actually working on the job site, while others can supervise.

I strongly believe that young people should be involved in strategies to improve the community because we are all a part of the community, if we don't help out then who will? We as teenagers can accomplish anything. It is all volunteering, but it is a fun experience.

...Young people, old people, middle-aged people, all should be involved as possible in community fix-ups, no matter what community it is.

Young people should start getting involved with neighbourhood projects because it would keep them out of trouble. There would be quite a bit of work being done. Instead of teenagers protecting the neighbourhood, they could fix it up.

I think young people would be the best for this kind of work due to their vigour and enthusiasm. Unfortunately, I think it will be hard to get students that will want to commit to a long period of time. I think you

should invite a bunch of kids out to help for one day, and they will be able to see for themselves they enjoy it. You should also stress how good volunteer experience of this nature looks on a job resume.

I tried to find out how the Habitat youth participants felt about youth involvement in general and how they could see themselves participating in making the neighbourhood a better place. Asking if Dynamite Duggin felt his involvement as a young person was important, he said “I don’t know. I guess...I have to get something out of it if I’m going to spend my time.” After grappling with many participants’ non-committal attitudes about their involvement, Dynamite Duggin’s comment hammers the point that the school group also alludes to; their involvement has to be meaningful to them and, to a large extent, needs to be on their terms and to address their definitions of renewal. While this seems to be a basic concept when planning adult-based activities, such efforts need to be extended to explore young people’s ideas of how to go about rejuvenating their urban space.

Every single participant felt that teenagers should be involved in community efforts, although many of them had difficulties articulating exactly why. In the following dialogue, Casey feels that involvement breeds more involvement:

Monica: do you think it’s important to get youth involved, or do you think adults should do it all? ...Do you think that teenager are important to make a neighbourhood better?

Casey: yeah, get youth involved too, yeah.

M: why do you think that’s important?

C: um, because then maybe some other kids will get involved too.

M: sort of like a spiral effect?

C: yeah.

Mobilization is a difficult process though, and as Billy Bob’s response indicates, it seems to stem from a sense of alienation and lack of confidence. Based on the words and the

tone of Billy Bob's voice in the following conversation, it struck me that his confidence was boosted incredibly from his volunteer experience.

Monica: why do you think you, as a teenager, should get involved? What would you tell adults?

Billy Bob: well, I don't know. Before I got involved with Habitat I wouldn't have even considered it.

M: why not?

BB: it didn't really matter, I guess.

M: to you or to adults?

BB: to me.

M: did you think that you would be a benefit to them in any way?

BB: not really.

M: do you see yourself now as being a benefit?

BB : yeah (brightens up), I really enjoyed doing the stuff that I did, for the most part.

M: and that in itself brought lots of fun to the build?

BB: yeah, it wasn't like I was ignoring work or anything

M: (To Belle) you? Do you think young people should get involved in things?

Belle: yeah (why?) Um....I think it's a good thing for them.

Orion, who is twelve, is already very active by going to neighbourhood meetings and accompanying her father on his foot patrol. She feels that young people can make a difference, but she says "we need an army...we can't do it alone. We also need adults to believe in us and help us." She claims that part of the reason why kids hesitate getting involved is because "people don't believe we can do things because adults say we can't."

The participants were asked to give advice to Habitat if they were to do a similar event in the future. Dynamite Duggin, expressed "they [adults] should come up with ideas and then let me have a say in it. I'm not good at thinking of ideas, but I can think about them when people tell me some [ideas]". He later expressed that he would rather be the boss, "cause I'm better at telling people what to do." M&M feels that kids should have input in community plans and thought that having Habitat (for example) talk to

schools and local youth organizations would help recruit young people. He suggested 'fixing up stuff', planting gardens and making murals would be activities he would like to do.

Asking, "what do you see yourself or others your age doing to help make their neighbourhood a better place?", Casey and Orion seemed to emphasize the routine acts that kids could do, such as "shovelling bubba's walk in the winter", yet both participants also thought that during big projects, kids should be allowed to help out on the building site, under supervision.

Many of the solutions that they themselves presented, such as picking up garbage, painting fences, and repainting walls, were accompanied by "what's the use" attitudes—"a blank wall is a tagging wall." One area that received a significant amount of interest is the idea of graffiti as a form of renewal. As pointed out earlier, murals are seen as a form of beauty, identity and pride in the area, and go untouched by vandals. While graffiti—the word and the form—leaves a bad taste in many people's mouths, Stoney, Tincan, M&M, Billy Bob and Belle think it can be transformed into a positive circumstance that would be meaningful to them and their friends.

Monica: what if for example, a bunch a kids got together and said "we wanna improve the neighbourhood, but we wanna do graffiti." I imagine in an adult's mind, they'd go "grrr", not swear words, tagging!

Belle: but graffiti could be a nice thing, like a picture of something.

M: do you think that could bring people together?

Billy Bob: yeah, like I've seen nice graffiti. Have you ever seen graffiti gallery?

M: yeah, yeah...

BB: like that graffiti's nice!

M: do you like that?

B: yep.

M: do you think that would get some kids together that might not

otherwise want to get involved?

B: yeah.

M: the thing is, I come up with these 'adult' ideas like, painting fences, getting rid of graffiti or cleaning garbage. Like, that's my idea of making the neighbourhood nicer. But, that's why I'm asking you.

BB: Well, cleaning up garbage, that's nice, but it's gonna end up on the ground again.

M: Right. Do you think there's another way to target that?

BB: not really, I mean...you can't have cops walking up all day picking up litter.

Non-committal attitudes about their involvement and responsibility to get involved reflect several intersecting circumstances: firstly, involvement was not important to all of them. Secondly, participants did not necessarily feel engaged with the neighbourhood, which begs the question: who is responsible for their engagement? Thirdly, the lack of opportunity to meaningfully get involved may have downplayed or hindered potential interest. Furthermore, there may have been several other extenuating circumstances that curbed the young people's desire, or prevented them to be present in the first place. Because Habitat relies upon media exposure to promote its agenda and potential interest, the strong media presence during the blitz build may have been one of those factors.

“Home is supposed to be a safe haven” –Belle

In fact, Habitat youth experienced a very high profile arrival into their new area due to the role of the media (a result of Habitat's quest for media exposure). Participant response to their media experience arose spontaneously in my last interview, so I did not have the opportunity to discuss this issue with all the Habitat participants. Nonetheless, I highlight what Billy Bob and Belle have to say as it had a significant negative impact on

their experience during the build. Furthermore, I found out later that the impact of the media on other's lives was also very real: two brothers, whom I did not interview, took off for the week because they were concerned that gang members would find out where they lived, Belle's brother, who later admitted to wanting to avoid the media, disappeared for four days without a phone call, and two other boys avoided 'hanging around' the site because of the media presence.

As the week of the building blitz progressed, I had noticed the media frenzy and considered its effect on the families and surrounding neighbours. When I casually asked Billy Bob, while we were taking a break from painting, if his friends knew he was moving, he said he had told only one friend about his new home—shrugging, “it just never came up.” His response, or lack thereof, prompted me to revisit the issue in a later interview with Belle and Billy Bob. I discovered that they found the media ‘annoying’ and ‘embarrassing’. They did not want everyone to know they have a Habitat home, not only for privacy reasons, but due to Habitat's explicit mandate to help “families in need”:

Billy Bob: (Indecipherable: talking about kids coming into the house)

Monica: well, you know, your house is super high profile. How does that/

BB: yeah.

M: how does that, does that bother you a bit?

B: yeah (laughs/sighs). It makes me feel like we have no privacy...like everyone knows where we are (indecipherable).

M: yeah, I know two of your friends know, 'cause you brought them around, but/

B: yeah, but everybody knows.

M: is it something you would have preferred to have kept secret?

B: yeah.

M: why is that?

B: um, 'cause I guess this is something I want to keep to myself and tell only the people I want to know.

M: and you didn't tell your friends?

BB: no.

M: 'cause it just didn't come up?

BB: right, there was no reason to tell them.

M: they knew you were moving, right?

Both: yeah.

M: I was thinking about this, and you know, Habitat, they say they're helping "families in need", and you know, you guys are working really hard and I sometimes wonder how it makes you feel to be so exposed?

B: yeah.

BB: no, yeah, we're not really 'in need' of more, I mean, we were just fine in my old house, it's just gonna be nicer.

B: yeah.

M: so does that bother you with all that media stuff and then what Habitat says about/

B: people are saying 'poor' and (indecipherable).

BB: yeah!

M: is that part of the reason why you didn't tell people?

B: yeah, 'cause people jump to conclusions, things like, you need a house,

BB: yeah.

M: I guess I started thinking about this when [Belle's brother] disappeared [Banter]. I was thinking about that and thought if I were in your situation I wouldn't want everyone to know where I lived.

B: yeah, and especially when you have trouble with people, like my brother.

The following conversation with Belle further highlights the role of family and social class in terms of her experience with Habitat:

Belle: You're supposed to feel safe, and I don't feel safe anymore 'cause everybody knows where you live, and they don't even know you, and ask to come into the house to look around. And now we have lots of our stuff there and it's weird.

Monica: So people don't even introduce themselves/

B: no, they just... "Can we come look in your house?" or they drive in our driveway and just sit and stare and everything.

M: and you feel that's partly because of the media?

B: Yeah. To me, every single day...I mean, I can understand the first day and the last day, but the whole week there? I was only there 2 days 'cause I had to wait for my brother for a phone call from him and everything, but I didn't like the media.

M: uh hmm, yeah. I'd be curious to talk to you in September to see if kids sort of say anything to you, if they support it, or if they make fun of you, 'cause obviously your whole life is an open book right now.

B: I think that they're probably gonna think that I, my mom, couldn't get

help on her own...that we're like poor, 'cause that is the whole thing. Like, when my school was still on and I told some people, um, they tried to say you were poor and you couldn't get your own house. I know I'm not rich and I'm not poor. I'm probably like in the middle.

M: right...well even if you were poor, like it's not a reflection of you, it's just your life circumstances. But people don't look at it that way.

B: No, they judge you too much. Like how you dress, how you look, where you come from...Like I don't like the media too, but I didn't go and take off! ... 'Cause to me it wasn't about the media, it was about representing your family.

Belle, like many other Habitat participants, considers her Habitat experience a family experience. Because Habitat encouraged the parents to get involved, it would make sense to incorporate the Habitat family, however its composition, to mobilize one aspect of youth participation.

Local versus Resident Youth

Near the end of my research, the extent to which Habitat relied upon non-resident youth to volunteer for Habitat projects became apparent. One element determining such involvement stemmed from the initiative of these particular groups themselves – a church would have a history with Habitat for Humanity, or a school or school group would be looking for a community help project in which to participate. The community fix-up project coordinator informed me that the three local groups which participated in a project either dissolved or lapsed due to a lack of motivation and/or skill base. As such, it appears to me that the opportunities for Habitat to involve local youth and youth groups were both perceived and experienced, by both Habitat and local youth, to be limited and unsuccessful while Habitat viewed the non-resident experience as productive. Nonetheless, the predominance of non-resident youth volunteers also could also set a tone

of paternalism – ‘helping the needy’. Due to the perceived difference in terms of geography and class and the resentment that seemed to absorb many North End participants, it is important to know what the participants, both Habitat and non-resident youth, felt about local vs non-resident youth participation.

“Change has to come from within” – LET Youth Member

The attitude that real change, as opposed to cosmetic change, must come from the people that live in an area was articulated or alluded to by every local participant that I interviewed. Orion and Belle felt that there should be more of an emphasis on promoting local youth involvement; they both explained that local youth should be more involved than non-residents because local kids are the ones who need to feel connected to the area. Belle added that this connection is very important if people want youth to make it a better place. Based on her negative experiences with “rich kids” at a summer camp (in which several girls hung out with her until they found out she lived in the ‘inner-city’), Belle fears that non-resident kids will not be able to identify with the North End, and as a consequence, there will be no connection to the area and the impact will be short-lived. Correspondingly, every LET Youth member stressed that any efforts for renewal must include the voices of the community; outside efforts, to the exclusion of the local, would lead to cosmetic change but would not change the nature of the neighbourhood itself.

M&M had a slightly different take on local versus non-resident involvement. He felt that participation should be balanced, and said that non-resident kids “can learn how we do things so they can do things for their area too.” Feeling like the North End has lots

to offer, M&M voiced that non-resident kids will then see the North End, "for what it is."

The attitudes of people that come into a community affect the tone in terms of how the work is received and sustained by local efforts; in Habitat's case, the nature of the Community Fix-up projects and the efforts of local and non-resident volunteers prompted a local neighbourhood organization to initiate a similar project for the following year. It is useful then, to look at how the non-resident youth perceived their experience in an area previously unknown to them, and to understand how they feel they contributed, as well as what they brought into their own lives as young people. Asking the school group about what they felt they learned from working in another area of the city, ten students noticed houses in disrepair and the poverty of the area, while sixteen students out of 29 individuals commented that they learned that the stereotype of the North End was not accurate. They recognized that people are people, despite their living conditions. Interpretations of their experience vary, but the majority of participants' comments highlight the importance of getting youth involved in order to enhance understanding, blur social barriers and alleviate 'the fear of the other'. Here are some samples of what they wrote:

I felt I got to know the North End part of the city better. I came to understand that the North End of the city is not very bad at all. I realize now that it was just a very big stereotype. People would come up to you and talk to you with a very nice and enjoyable attitude.

There were some benefits about working in a different part of the city, because you feel good about helping someone less fortunate than you are. I didn't know that part of the city was that ugly or run down. There were a lot of homes that looked like they needed some work done.

The area I live in is very different from the are where we were working. Throughout my life I always thought that the North end was filled with

crime and bad people, but now I look at the area very differently. The North End, like many communities, is filled with friendly people, it would show more if the area was cleaned up.

I learned that there is a lot of history with this area. I found out that this area isn't as bad as it seems, you always hear bad stories about the North End, but when I was there it was quiet. The neighbourhood was beautiful...an area with a lot of trees. The people were always friendly. I learned that the church we worked on was the first Ukrainian church in Winnipeg. There was this one elderly gentleman, he always talked with us when we walked by his house...No one had given up hope in their neighbourhood. For that matter why would they? Only a few houses needed work. It was like any other neighbourhood, only it was very busy.

One of the benefits of working in a different area was breaking free from the isolation of our own neighbourhood and observing what is happening in neighbourhoods other than our own. I have come to understand that just because a neighbourhood has a negative reputation there are still people living there and you must respect their situations.

I personally never go into that end of town if I don't have to. All my life I have grown up thinking that downtown was a scary place! By doing this fix-up project I got to see some smiles on the faces of some of the members of the community, especially the elders.

After having worked in this part of the city, I have gotten a very different and more profound insight of what really goes on in this community. I learned that this neighbourhood was not as horrible and barbarian as the media and other people portray it. Sure there are bad things, but most of the people of this area are nice human beings who are willing to work hard to live a good life.

I thought there was a lot of benefit for us to be in a different area, because most of us don't know those areas and it gave us good insight in what is in that area and what goes on. Well, I have found out that it is not that good of an area to have a family in or even just to live by yourself.

We helped a community in need. I have learned that this part of the city is inhabited by mostly poor people that can not afford to keep their homes well maintained.

Working in this part of the city served as an eye opener to how conditions and living environments are not the same everywhere. But people basic desires and needs are the same everywhere.

The attitudes of the participants suggests that a balance of non-resident and local youth involvement would be a healthy way to proceed with any large community efforts. While the emphasis should be on local initiative, inviting non-resident volunteers may also effectively minimize perceived differences that become omnipresent if not confronted.

“Age is just a number” – Belle

Making this comment while we were talking about how teenagers could contribute to the renewal process, Belle demonstrates the ambiguities of being a young person in today’s society. Pressures to consume commercially, have sex, experiment with drugs and alcohol, and work after school jobs heighten both the need to be responsible as well as the opportunities for recklessness and abandon. This, along with what appears to be an ever-increasing elongation of youthhood, caused by delayed reproductive and productive responsibilities and extended education, sets a very layered groundwork in which to experience, feel and perceive teenage life. It is in this set of circumstances that I ask, how do young people feel about themselves? To what extent do young people feel they have a sense of control over their lives? This is a very difficult question to answer, and one that I do not pretend to answer sufficiently well. Firstly, it is difficult to extract the ‘youth sense of command’ from 21 people and their experiences in such a short time frame and scope. Furthermore, ‘culture’, social and political conditions, personal circumstances, personality and perceptions intertwine to shape one’s sense of agency.

Despite the small sample and scope, my participants would feed me tidbits of

information regarding how they felt they intersected with the rest of the world as a young person. For example, when I told the LET Youth group that I was interested in hearing what they had to say, they brought up the issue of voice. Members in the group disagreed about the power of their voices. About half of them felt hopeless, with one person saying “who will listen to us (as teenagers)?” and another expressed, “What does our voice matter if no one listens?” As a response, Rotty said “Yeah, but nine voices becomes one loud voice.” Despite their skepticism about being heard, as the summer progressed, they started coming up with ideas: “Monica, what if we did this collage thing and then you got the media out to talk to us?” and “Maybe we could do a little presentation for Habitat, y’ think?” It was exciting to see them motivated and excited about the opportunity to speak out loud. Yet, when I later asked one guy in the group if he felt part of the efforts to improve his neighbourhood, he replied “no, there’s so much to do, and I’m only a teenager. Who’d listen to me?” Belle, after explaining to me some of her concerns about her Habitat experience, echoed this sentiment. Asking her if she would feel comfortable to talking to someone at Habitat about her concerns, she responded, “who would listen to me, I’m only fifteen.”

Red, a non-resident participant, who is the only teenager volunteer at an inner-city community daycare / drop-in centre confides:

I don’t tell most people, parents, that I’m under eighteen. I’m lucky I look older for my age. Most parents freak out because they’re so concerned with the stereotypes and they forget that maybe a fifteen or sixteen year old is responsible and has something to offer. I’ve been turned down for lots of volunteer positions because I’m not 18 and people think that sixteen year-olds are wild, lazy, irresponsible.

Asking “do you feel the stereotype is the norm?”, Red responded that there are many individuals that just do what they have to get by, and “they do things just because their parents do or because they have to.” Nonetheless, he points out that there are a lot of kids out there that want to get involved and want to change things. Echoing Orion, he states, “it’s the stereotype that prevents people from getting involved because they’re not allowed to by adults.”

Many participants noticed that more attention is being given to teenagers, yet several of them feel the attention is rhetoric and not based on a true desire to listen to young people. One LET Youth member gave an example, commenting, “like Axworthy and the Youth War Project, where they got all these lads taking pictures, shaking hands with us, and then after the cameras were gone, nobody listened. It’s all for show.”

Similarly, Red has conflicting experiences regarding his participation in adult-based committees:

I’m on one committee, where they don’t listen to me. I’m basically nobody...they have me because they need a youth representative to fill the void. I’m on another committee where they know me, they know I’m involved in the organization and they respect me, I have a voice. But, generally, if you’re a kid, you don’t really have a say, even though some people do have their token youth rep, it doesn’t always mean anything. Adults don’t take teenagers seriously. Even when they, or before they can prove themselves, adults typically will write us off.

As Red, Orion and others point out, there exists a will to get involved in larger social efforts, although conversations with participants make apparent the multi-faceted challenges in getting young people involved in group initiatives. Like with adults, we need to recognize the eagerness and ability of young people to engage with the world as it

is with its particular exigencies – some are hoping to make it a better place, while others are simply carving out a space for themselves.

This ethnographic information is accompanied by an examination of power on several levels, in terms of the construction of this project, the ‘poetics’ of interpretation, and the politics of ethnographic discourse. This is followed by an analysis of contemporary notions of youth, and consequently, how youth articulate and are involved in larger organizational and / or local initiatives.

Chapter Four

DEFINING MY ETHNOGRAPHIC FOOTPRINTS: THEORY AND PRACTICE OF WRITING CULTURE

Fundamental to the implementation of research is a discussion of knowledge and practice in terms of doing, and writing about, ethnographic research. A theoretical discussion of the poetics and politics of writing culture (a phrase coined by James Clifford and George Marcus, 1986) serves to critique assumptions of truth, authority and objectivity in ethnographic writing. Through my participation in Habitat for Humanity's inner-city renewal process, I explored my own approach to the practice and theory of applied ethnographic research and writing with the intent of generating research that effectively amplifies the voices and participation of the 'researched'. Contextualized by relevant history of Habitat for Humanity, a descriptive, and reflexive analysis of the research process, I hope to be able define my own footprints to better understand how my research design, life circumstances and conditions guided the interpretation and analysis of shared information. In doing so, I discuss the strengths, challenges and limitations of my study not only as an exercise of reflexive writing, but in order to promote openness and transparency in the ethnographic discourse.

After the opportunity of studying anthropological, epidemiological, and sociological research methods, the emphasis that anthropologists place on qualitative methods to 'collect data' becomes evident. The most frequently employed method, participant observation, is a qualitative research method once unique to anthropology, whose deceptively simple term indicates that all one needs to approach an understanding of culture is to participate in the activities one observes. This, of course, is not as

straightforward as is implied, as it requires forethought into which activities should involve the researcher's participation, how and when to participate appropriately, and what kind of information can / should be documented and interpreted from such experiences. The product of participant observation is an ethnography – a description and analysis of a group of people in regards to the complex meanings systems used to organize a group's behaviour, people's understandings of themselves and others, and how they make sense of the world in which they live (James Spradley, 1980:5). As Malinowski stated, the goal of ethnography is "to grasp the native's point of view, *his* relation to life, to realize *his* vision of his world" (cited in Spradley, 1980:3, italics original). Many researchers have now broadened this goal to also grasp *her* point of view, and also have become increasingly sensitized to the limitations of truth and objectivity and the politics of presentation and representation of people involved in research. Yet, while the expectations, poetics and politics of ethnography have been reevaluated and reworked, qualitative research, including participant observation, is still considered a 'valid' and 'reliable' source of information for anthropologists, as well as to a growing number of other social scientists across the disciplines.

Doing anthropological research is frequently synonymous with a visitation, and more recently, requires an invitation to the field. In thinking of my methodological approach and actual methods that I intended to employ in my research project, I found myself confounding ideas surrounding the research process with conceptions about the writing up of research. While considering the practice and theory of ethnographic research and writing, I came to an understanding that a discussion of one process is

inherently entangled with the other. Ultimately guiding the nature of 'data collection', interpretation, analysis, and the presentation and representation of people's lives in the written ethnography is one's approach to science, truth, and objectivity. My participation primarily involved an exploration of youth attitudes of an inner-city neighbourhood and their involvement in community renewal through a photography project. This practical experience (significantly, through the writing process) accented many of the dilemmas inherent in the highly-esteemed 'fieldwork' aspect of ethnographic research as well as the strengths and limitations of my own research project. Contemplating the merits of reflexivity, autobiography, and perceptions about research participants serves to prompt a dialogue about how researchers might contend with the provocative dilemmas of authority, objectivity, and truth in the execution and writing of research. While I spent much time negotiating this project (who, what, why, how, and when), in this chapter, I focus on the 'groundcover', the shaded implications, and the muted meanings experienced in the research process.

Researchers from varying perspectives (feminists, poststructuralists, postmodernists, to name a few), have challenged positivist presumptions of truth, empiricism and ethnographic authority. In a discussion of the shift of ideology in how anthropologists go about representing and 'writing culture', Clifford writes:

Ethnographers are more and more like the Cree hunter who (the story goes) came to Montreal to testify in court concerning the fate of his hunting lands in the new James Bay hydroelectric scheme. He would describe his way of life. But when administered the oath he hesitated: "I'm not sure I can tell the truth...I can only tell what I know" (1986: 8).

The words of this Cree hunter prompt me to question scientific authority as well as the detached description that often accompanies it. Horace Miner's parodic article "Body Ritual among the Nacirema" (first published in 1956), reinforces the extent to which the language and style used in ethnographic accounts of 'the other' transform every day acts into truly exotic and ritualized events (Renato Rosaldo, 1989: 50). Unfortunately, as Rosaldo points out, Miner's "scathing critique of ethnographic discourse" was interpreted as a joke and the point was missed (1989: 52). Miner's commentary relates to the rhetoric of writing, yet the incorporation of a reflexive and personally narrated ethnography before and during the writing process problematizes the perception of an authoritative ethnographic discourse. In doing and writing up research, we can only tell what we know, and it then seems logical (and fair) to also indicate *how* we know what we know or how we think we have come to know what we know.

Discussing 'how we know' means interpreting the knowledge that is shared between the actors in research, which is bound to the fleeting and concrete circumstances of people's lives, emotions and understandings. As such, personal narratives, or autobiography of fieldwork highlight "lived interactions, participatory experience and embodied knowledge" (Judith Okely, 1992: 3). Personal narratives are productive techniques in ethnographic writing "especially to people interested in countering the tendency toward alienation and dehumanisation in much conventional ethnographic description" (Mary Louise Pratt, 1986:33). While Clifford has criticised autobiographical attempts as "hyper self-conscious and self-absorbed"(1986:15), autobiography serves to position the anthropologist in terms of her / his prejudices and

assumptions. Working within this framework also forces the ethnographer to (self-consciously) be “critical and reflexive about the encounter and its possible power relations” (Okely, 1992: 4). Reflexivity, alongside a recognition that ‘objective truth’ is impervious to any form of ‘rigorous’ methodology, has helped to reposition anthropology in relation to the people it studies; it, at least, attempts to minimise the voice of authority by incorporating the voices of the people involved in the research. As Clifford points out, anthropology can no longer monophonically speak with automatic authority for others (1986:9). Firstly, with growing awareness and resistance, ‘others’ are less likely to permit this kind of relationship, and secondly, such attempts are increasingly critiqued within , and outside, the discipline.

The choice of terms such as ‘objects’ of study, ‘subjects’, ‘participants’, or ‘people’ reflects the framework within which a researcher operates. Bound to a framework are perceptions about individuals and the role they play in ethnographic research. These perceptions affect the nature of methodology and the way in which researchers relate to individuals involved in a study. According to Shulamit Reinharz, “using the unconventional terms such as ‘participant’ instead of ‘subject’ is a signal that the researcher is operating in a feminist framework that includes the power to name or rename” (1992: 22). ‘Participant’ also suggests a dynamic of interaction rather than abstraction of knowledge between the researcher and participant.

This dynamic becomes apparent in the methodology chosen—in this case, participant observation, which can include, among other methods, informal conversations, social activities, and interviews. These various qualitative methods are a source of

knowledge that is shared and (inter)related between the researcher and participants; this knowledge promotes a better understanding of the relationship between people's actions versus people's discourse of their actions, which symbolises much about social dynamics, power relationships, and ideology. All communication is interactional, rather than abstracted, in which the discourse is a product of the communication between researcher and participants (James Holstein and Jaber Gubrium, 1995: 2). The *process* in which meaning is produced (the how), is treated as counterpart to the meanings that are produced (the what) (1995: 4).

Conventional approaches to social research tend to rely more heavily on the 'what' of lived experience and consider it unreliable data if there exists too much variability. In contrast, Reinharz provides an example of a researcher doing a feminist interview study of housewives in which there existed much variability. Rather than indicating 'poor-quality' data, variability can reflect the variable and non-replicable experiences of reality (Reinharz, 1992: 19). While researchers should disclose variability rather than hide it (Ibid), they must also attempt to interpret the circumstances – narratives, non-verbal communication, life events – of the social encounter to illuminate the variable produced meanings, and why or how such variability exists.

Referring to the conventional concern with consistency, that is, attaining valid and reliable information in an interview (this can be extended to qualitative research methods, in general), Holstein et al. argue that "treating interviewing as a social encounter leads us rather quickly to the possibility that the interview is not merely a neutral conduit or source of distortion but rather the productive site of reportable knowledge itself" (Holstein et. al.,

1995:3). To assess the success of research results based on reliability (the extent to which answers can be reproduced) and validity (the extent to which the 'correct' answer is achieved) different criteria must apply when the research experiences are viewed as dynamic and intersubjective (1995:9). Reliability, then, concerns itself with the circumstances of construction – the interaction of individuals, locale, mood, gender, age – and the linkages of meanings. Critically reflecting on these circumstances and their meanings relates to the validity of one's research.

Validity of results lies in the ability to convey experiential realities that are understandable to those involved in the research (Janice Ristock and Joan Penell, 1996:50, Holstein et. al., 1995:9). In other words, the ability to generalize information does not ensure validity; rather the research process must have integrity and remain accountable to research participants (Ristock et. al., 1996:50). I attempted to assume accountability by trying to remain flexible during the research process, verifying or clarifying what participants said to me during or after the interview / writing process, and by inquiring into their feelings about the project in general. The intent of the verification process relates to a desire to promote a sne

I employ these alternative criteria to assess the reliability and validity of my own research project. In doing so, I hope that I may provide an adequately reflexive account of the meaning construction process and an interpretation of it that makes sense to those who shared their knowledge with me, as well as to the interested reader. To enhance this research process for all involved, along with its analysis, I incorporate a photography project as part of my methodology.

Beyond the Rhetoric of Doing Research

Regardless of the extent of one's theoretical insights into research and analysis, a realistic and substantial plan is essential, if not pivotal, to the success of one's project. In my case, this project evolved from a focus on one particular group of young people to encompassing a broader range of youth and youth groups. Often, well-intentioned, carefully laid-out research plans do not progress as planned, simply due to time limitations, group dissolution, lack of coordination with others, and all of our varied life situations. Although I was unable to achieve all that I had initially planned, I achieved my ultimate goal of producing an ethnography of youth perspectives of a neighbourhood undergoing urban renewal efforts. I employed participant observation by taking part in a pre-employment youth program, observing and acting on several committees with Habitat for Humanity, swinging hammers and pounding nails during the Habitat for Humanity-Ed Schreyer Work Project, and participating in several other Habitat for Humanity activities that related to the William Whyte neighbourhood. Based on the relationships I built with young people and their families during these events, I involved most of them in a photography project and performed semi-structured interviews.

Intersecting with Habitat for Humanity

In a presentation to a group of applied anthropologists, the Executive Director (ED) of Winnipeg Habitat for Humanity expressed the need for documentation of Habitat for Humanity's renewal efforts in Winnipeg's inner city. As a result of successes, mistakes, and limitations in previous projects, she vocalized a need to assess current

efforts in order to improve upon and advocate future endeavours. My involvement was prompted when the Habitat expressed the desire for *intentional* active involvement of youth in the revitalization process. I approached the ED with my interest in youth and we subsequently discussed how we both could achieve our goals—hers, to document changing attitudes and behaviours of youth over time, and mine, to examine societal attitudes about youth and how that translates into their involvement in organizational activities. Before and during my research, I became familiar with the goals of Winnipeg Habitat for Humanity, in part, through their mission statement:

Habitat for Humanity is an ecumenical Christian housing ministry dedicated to building decent, affordable homes with low-income families. Modest homes are constructed or renovated using donated materials and volunteer labour. Home buyers are selected on the basis of housing condition, financial status and willingness to build more homes. Financial support for local projects comes from individuals, churches, businesses, civic groups and private foundations. Ten per cent of dollars raised locally is used to sponsor housing projects in third world countries (WHFH, 1993:6).

Expanding upon their mission to build decent, affordable homes with low-income families, Winnipeg Habitat for Humanity undertook the challenge of “The Habitat Inner City Millennium Project” during the summer of 2000. This launched their long-term commitment to revitalize the William Whyte area, a neighbourhood in the North End of Winnipeg. Beyond building new homes in empty lots, Habitat had a vision to assist in the renovations of existing residents’ homes in order to strengthen the neighbourhood and surrounding areas. During a one week period in July 2000, Habitat volunteers built four houses on Manitoba Street. The following year, the Ed Schreyer Work Project yielded a 10 house blitz build in July 2001, a community fix-up project that extended into October

2001, and increased collaboration with local residents, organizations and businesses.

The first group of participants who agreed to take part in my research were members of a pre-employment program called Learn Educate Train (LET) Youth. These youth were all William Whyte residents who were relatively transient within the area. They had no direct involvement with Habitat or its renewal project. In fact, they had preconceived notions of Habitat for Humanity – for example, they assumed that Habitat was a business which did not collaborate with local residents. I suggested that they should talk to an official representative of Habitat to find out its background, goals and practices; accordingly, they invited the ED to ‘get the real goods.’ The following are excerpts of a taped conversation in which the ED of Winnipeg Habitat spoke to eight LET Youth participants. I keep the information in the ED’s words to better convey the background and intentions of Habitat as well as to demonstrate the nature of communication with this group. While I have omitted several comments and questions asked by the youth, I have kept those that I felt best represented the concerns regarding Habitat that they expressed:

I have found that there are some real misconceptions about what Habitat for Humanity is all about. That may be because Habitat gets a lot of publicity. The bigger picture is that Habitat builds in 60 countries throughout the world. In September, we'll have built 100,000 houses throughout the world. Those are pretty big numbers, but each Habitat affiliate is local and run by a local board of volunteer directors, and each Habitat affiliate has to raise its own money. It is its own entity but it adheres to international guidelines...so we all follow the same guidelines but each affiliate is autonomous and independent. Some affiliates have built lots and lots of houses. In Jacksonville, Florida, which is the biggest affiliate, this year (2000), they're building 200 houses. And they average about 150 a year. And then there are other affiliates that are really really small and build a house every 3 years or so. In Canada, Winnipeg is the biggest affiliate [as] we've built the most houses in Canada of all the affiliates.

Habitat is based on a Christian philosophy but is very inclusive of all cultures and all people. Our homeowners who are accepted into partnership come from a very wide cultural and religious background. There is no requirement that Habitat homeowner

families be Christian. In Winnipeg, we have homeowners that are Vietnamese, El Salvadorian, Guatemalan, First Nation, French Canadian. The criteria, though, for Habitat home ownership is that the families that we select into partnership need to be living below the low income cut as set by Stats Canada...the families who we partner with are families who would not get a mortgage if they went to the bank...the families need to be prepared to contribute 500 hours as sweat equity towards the construction of their own home (or in the case of single parent families, 350 hours). That's instead of a financial down payment; they contribute their work, talent and their energy. Families who we select also need to have demonstrated a responsible attitude towards their own home and also respect for their neighbours. So we partner with families who have a solid pattern in their lives overall.

Homeowners in our program cannot be receiving social assistance, at all. The reason is that, first of all, we are not like government. There is no similarity between what we do and government housing programs. If we select your family into partnership with us, you will own your own home. Down the road, you can sell your home, you can do whatever you want with it. We don't EVER do home rentals. Number two, there's no kind of subsidy involved, but the mortgage payments are designed to be affordable. So we figure out what your family's income is. For example, we have a family of 5 in a 5 bedroom home. The monthly mortgage payments are \$400. That \$400 covers the mortgage payments, and the taxes and the insurance, and the family pays the water, gas. So the monthly mortgage payments are a lot lower than you'd pay if you were renting.

Question: "How low is the low income cutoff?"

There isn't a bottom line in terms of how low your income needs to be. But you need to be able to pay off the cost of the house. Like if it's \$50,000 within a max of 30 years, you figure out how low your mortgage would be. You need to be able to pay at least \$350 a month, plus the cost of utilities. Let me correct myself. We have a couple of houses that are less than that because sometimes people donate houses to us. We give them an income tax receipt, and then we fix the houses. So we get a house donated to us, and then we fix it, we can make it available to the homeowner for \$15,000 or so. Their monthly mortgage payments are \$200. We've got one like that, and one coming like that. So that makes it affordable for a single mother with one child, for example.

A lot of the savings in a Habitat house comes about because most of the work is done by volunteers. We still pay for a lot of the materials, but a huge difference is that you're not paying for labour. We have one paid construction supervisor, but 95 percent of the people building the house are volunteers... The houses that we build, we have to build according to Manitoba Building Codes... We have to sometimes pay for the plumbers or the electricians or the heating installers, but we don't pay for the other things so we are able to keep the costs lower. Sometimes we get land donated to us, so that's not an additional expense. We are able to make housing and home ownership far more affordable than if we were a typical business. We are not a business; we are non-profit.

In a nutshell that's who we are and what we do... We keep on building; we just did 4 houses on Manitoba Street this year [2000]. But we are hoping to do 10 next year [2001] in this area [and] we are working on getting the property. And I have several messages on my desk right now of people who are offering houses to us right now.

Question: Did you talk to the people before you started building?

We were asked by (I won't name them) a whole bunch of neighbourhoods if we would come and build houses in their neighbourhood. Initially we were asked by neighbourhoods in other parts of the city...I talked to the people in the neighbourhood and some of the people who are organizing things and we went through a process of deciding where we thought the biggest need was for us to be active and involved...We encountered some people at a conference who live on Manitoba Avenue and we had been thinking about doing some work in the North End, partially because we were aware of some of the problems with the arson and some of the problems with the fact that the housing in the North End in many cases has been totally allowed to deteriorate; in some cases houses shouldn't be standing and there are people living in some of those houses. The people in the North End should be given the opportunity, if they want to, to own their own houses. And because there are more houses in need of attention and more vacant lots in the North End than there are in many other areas. So these folks that we met with on Manitoba Avenue asked if we would come and meet with them in the neighbourhood and...I brought some board members with me and we had a tour of Manitoba Avenue... The people we talked to really encouraged us to come and build some houses in this neighbourhood.

I've been with Habitat seven years. So I've been involved in a number of projects. And in inner-city areas, what I've discovered is that you can't go in and build just one house, you can't go in and build a brand new house and then leave it at that, because the surrounding houses in many cases are also in need of attention and upgrading. So the approach we are trying, which is like totally, totally, totally new for us (we haven't done this before) is where we are building a new house we are also contacting the neighbours, asking if the neighbours need help with their houses. For example, in one case on the first block of Manitoba Avenue, we removed a rotting fence and built a new fence and fixed the front and so forth, and did some painting around the garage door for an elderly lady who is in her eighties and can't see very well. She paid for the materials but there was no charge to her at all for the labour because we provided all the free labour...so it becomes affordable for people who have low incomes who are already living in the neighbourhood.

Comment: So it's like if you give a little you get a little kind of thing?

Yeah that's right, it is. We have some requests right now also that are kind of what we are beyond what we are prepared to do but the main thing that is going on is that some of the government programs and the Neighbourhoods Alive Program also want to focus on the blocks where we are building our new houses. So there's going to be hopefully a number of different things going on. We'll build new houses, we'll help people with some basic cosmetic stuff, but there should be a meeting coming up very soon with government representatives [from various organizations]. We will be calling the meeting and helping people fill out the application forms for funding which will deal with things like inadequate wiring or plumbing or some of the major kinds of repairs that people need. The idea is that all of us kind of working together will have a much bigger impact than if we are working separately. The approach that we are taking in this neighbourhood is just the beginning, we hope to expand our approach as it unfolds, and it's kind of open-ended. We are learning as we go, because we haven't tried this approach before. [Previously], we've focussed on new house construction and we haven't worked on the basis of working with the people who already live in their houses, own their houses and need them upgraded. I'm sure we'll make mistakes but if you don't try something new then you don't learn.

It has to be “MEE”: Meaningful, Empowering, and Engaging

With this background knowledge of Habitat, I proceeded with the design of my research project, which was developed with an understanding that my research, the process and/or results, must be meaningful for all parties involved, which included Habitat for Humanity, the participants in the project, myself and academia. I employed the principles of participatory research and empowerment which presupposes the exploration and validity of local knowledge and human agency (Katy Gardner and David Lewis, 1996:115). Because of the notion that young people are passive objects of adult control, and are portrayed as such in much anthropological literature, the acknowledgement of human agency is particularly significant in this context. Despite the small scale project, I hoped to ‘empower’ my participants by having their voices heard through their involvement in an applied visual anthropology project. Extending beyond the ‘extraction of knowledge’ and into a realm of seeing and listening for difference and variability among the young people, I sought to explore their life conditions, experiences, ideas, and intentions.

In the hopes of familiarizing myself with the people, organizations, and circumstances in the William Whyte neighbourhood, I performed a neighbourhood survey for Habitat with a fellow M.A. student. Spending this time in William Whyte made me feel more comfortable in the area as I gained a better understanding of general attitudes towards Habitat, and about the William Whyte area. I would often see familiar faces as the year progressed which encouraged a feeling of ownership and responsibility towards my own project.

In the summer of 2000, I presented the idea of a visual documentation project to the coordinator the LET Youth program, who agreed to let me take part if the group agreed to participate. After explaining Habitat's renewal project in the area, and my research and motives to the group, all eight male and female participants (aged 17-21) agreed to take pictures of the neighbourhood with disposable cameras that I provided. They all agreed to meet with me to discuss their pictures and attitudes about the neighbourhood.

I highlight my initial plan for several reasons. Firstly, while seasoned researchers may incorporate a contingency plan as part of the original design, it may be useful to the novice to consider the potential factors that influence and/or 'mutate' one's research design, such as time, power relations, life conditions, personal dynamics, and extent of control over process. Secondly, drawing attention to my original plan promotes a more careful consideration of the degree of control I had over the research process and encourages an exploration of how such factors affected both the research and the writing processes. Thirdly, a review of my plan initiates a process of critical reflection of the research into which I insert my presence. Lastly, I hope to demonstrate the necessity of flexibility and the need to incorporate relationship building as a major aspect of one's research design.

I had planned to meet regularly with the LET Youth group until December 2000, when the program ended. During this time, I had arranged for three to four 'photo sessions' in which I would supply the cameras; the first, just prior to the Habitat for Humanity's building blitz in late July, 2000, and then follow-up sessions in September

and October. I had wanted to meet with LET Youth members to talk about taking the pictures, first as a group, and then individually. I was interested in what meanings the images in the pictures have for the participants: what they tell about their neighbourhood, as well as participants' experiences and attitudes about where they live¹. In order to explore attitudes towards youth and young people's attitudes of Habitat's projects, I also expected to pursue other contacts during my research project, such as non-resident youth who would be volunteering in the neighbourhood, and neighbourhood residents.

Through my involvement with the LET youth program, I met with eight older youth (aged 17-21) in the summer of 2000. I met with them once to twice a week for a month and a half during their scheduled program time. We went on a photographic journey twice; while most of the group went off in small groups on their own, one participant invited me to join her. As we toured the neighbourhood, she proudly shared with me all her 'naughty' insights about the area. After the first photo session, the pictures were developed and each individual was provided with their pictures as well as the negatives. They all agreed I could keep copies for my research. When they received their first set of pictures, they were very excited and talkative about the meanings they ascribed to the pictures. Everyone was looking at their pictures at once, swapping them, laughing, and describing why they took this picture or that one. In this context, I was able

¹In the final stage of the project, I had planned for the making of a collage of their photos which would have been displayed at a local venue. I felt this stage was important to encourage a sense of tangibility and commitment to the project as well as to provide the participants with an opportunity for reflection and a feeling of accomplishment. This did not occur due 'separate' groups of participants, their lack of connection, time restrictions, and my own restrictions intended to halt an ever-broadening scope of the project.

to see everybody's pictures, overhear conversations, and talk briefly with most participants about their images. Afterwards, one person, who was a self-proclaimed pessimist, said to me, "I was surprised how I got into this...I was thinking about why I wanted to take certain pictures and the angles and all that." At this point, this statement and the group's excitement about the project assured me of the relevance of my research.

To my dismay, the original LET Youth dissolved in August 2000 while I was on holidays, so I could not quickly engage in any interviews. The lack of continuity with this group is a loss to this study. It was a unique group for my research—older youth, residents of the area, 'youth at risk' having trouble finishing school, getting a job, with relatively complicated life circumstances and histories. Their perceptions and insights about the neighbourhood would not only have expressed another voice, but would have also been extremely valuable in terms of understanding the challenges in getting 'inner-city' youth involved in building community.

I attempted to engage the subsequent LET youth group of five individuals in the same process, but quickly realized that it did not have the same meaning for this group. Although they agreed to take part in the photography project, and I was able to interview them as a group and connect with them during other LET youth activities, this interaction fell short of my research expectations. A shorter program time frame, lack of connection with the neighbourhood (all but two participants lived elsewhere in the city), and a smaller group prompted me to expand my participant base in other ways.

I decided to contact the families selected for Habitat ownership for the upcoming Ed Schreyer Work Project, 2001, who had children over the age of twelve. I ultimately

involved seven 'Habitat' youth, from six out of ten new homeowners families as well as two local youth. All of the participants lived in Winnipeg's North End, although only one family lived in William Whyte proper prior to their move. One family's teenager declined due to a busy schedule, and two other teens were unreachable. The remaining two families' children were very young. I explicitly communicated that while involvement depended on parental permission, the final decision to participate lay with their children; it was completely voluntary and certainly not a condition of being a Habitat homeowner.

These participants ages ranged from 13-16. Four participants aged ten and eleven were involved due to their own interest and initiative. These individuals were an asset to my research in terms of information and enjoyment levels as they were extremely enthusiastic and open about their ideas. It was also interesting to see how their experiences and perceptions of the neighbourhood differed from the older youth as they related to safety issues, gangs, peer pressure, and dealing with adult attitudes towards teenagers.

Part of my search for 'participant observation' and 'rapport building' activities and participants was strategic: because I wanted to hear from non-resident youth who volunteered for Habitat, I contacted the various individuals and church groups that had been involved. From that search, I interviewed four non-resident youth who had volunteered through their church youth group. Other activities were ad hoc, depending on Habitat developments. For example, I took part in several initiatives of the community fix-up projects, which were part of Habitat's inner-city renewal plan. As a result, I had the opportunity to paint a church with a high school class from a North End suburban area

in Winnipeg. On another occasion while I was resting in the shade after painting the second story of a house in William Whyte, the owner's child overheard me talking about my project and eagerly announced, "I can take pictures!" After explaining the project to him and his parents, he took three rolls of film and freely explained his perceptions of his neighbourhood and youth involvement. I also befriended one resident youth, or she befriended me, who is intimately involved with her family in the neighbourhood. She invited me to accompany her on her photographic journey and now I meet her periodically for lunch, walks, and talks. Upon my invitation, she prepared a mural and essay, which shared her many thoughts about her neighbourhood, youth, and life in general.

My involvement with these individuals was based on visiting their homes, participating in building their new homes, hanging out with them at the Habitat for Humanity Children's Festival, hanging around the neighbourhood, watching them eat cookies I had baked, and finally, interviewing them. I phoned some people periodically to see how they were doing with their pictures and to see if they needed more cameras. I met those families who were more recently accepted as Habitat homeowners, just before the 2001 build. During the Ed Schreyer Work Project in July 2001, I worked on four families' homes, took pictures of the progress, spent one day as 'supervisor' at the children's festival and attended several house dedications.

Because of my youth project, the ED invited me to be on the planning committee for the Habitat for Humanity Children's festival that was to take place during the building blitz in 2001. I eventually actively participated on this committee although I was initially

hesitant for fear of affecting the outcome of Habitat's engagement with youth. As I became more comfortable with the group and sometimes more frustrated with the adherence to stereotypical notions of adolescents, I became more vocal. Cognizant of shaping my own research, I nonetheless intervened on several occasions, which affected final decisions. I decided that my interference would not radically influence the overall renewal project, but it might allow a few more individuals to take part in a relationship-building process.

My participation did affect one decision. For instance, I influenced the decision to include a wider age range in the festival. The children's festival was intended to provide an opportunity for homeowner children to meet other children in the area. Initially, the children's festival was to include children ages five to twelve. Yet when I considered that twelve of the twenty-nine children from Habitat families were over the age of twelve, who might also be responsible for looking after their siblings while their parents were building their homes, I felt that the exclusion of this age group was inappropriate. When I brought this up, noting that especially homeowner youth between ages thirteen to fifteen would have nothing to do as they would not be allowed on the building sites either, there was a general concern that if this age group was allowed on the festival site, there would be big groups hanging out, causing trouble. Ultimately, it was agreed that anyone under 16 could come: if there were any 'troublemakers', no matter their age, they would be asked to leave. We then proceeded to brainstorm some activities that teens would also enjoy. Due to several factors such as a lack of communication about the festival and realization of suitable activities – and possibly the title itself – the children's festival did

not have a notable ‘teenager’ attendance. While I made a conscious decision in this instance to shape my own research, there are many other circumstances and ‘variables’ that influenced my research and patterned the relationship with participants.

“Hey! When are you picking up the pictures?” – Dynamite Duggin

The relevance of a project to its stakeholders – in this case, young people and Habitat for Humanity – has a ramifications for the success of a project, both in the doing and the writing up of research. Relevance to stakeholders affects how participants respond to or support a project, and shapes the nature of relationships the researcher has with participants; it could also affect how participants relate to each other.

If the topic and interaction is meaningful, participants are more likely to be more thoughtful about their answers. While not all the young participants felt engaged with the photography project, which in itself indicates the diversity of youth and their interests, the general tone towards my research was enthusiastic. When I asked if they enjoyed this project, three people indicated they were not interested in taking pictures of the neighbourhood, although they appreciated being able to record the building of their home. M&M, who was already living in the area expressed with a laugh, “I felt like a tourist!”; in this role, he felt that he was able to appreciate all the beautiful murals that he had not looked at closely at before. The majority of the participants commented that this project allowed them, and sometimes forced them, to reflect on their new neighbourhood and see it, if not different eyes, with more observant eyes. For example, Casey talked about taking pictures of her old neighbourhood:

Monica: did you enjoy this project?

Casey: yeah.

M: like, how did it affect you?

C: um, I don't know...like...I don't how to explain it...It felt nice to take pictures to remember 'cause it was a really nice area, well it IS a really nice area, I guess you could say. I'll miss it, I'll miss it a lot.

M: so it was a good time to reflect on the area?

C: yeah (sounds certain)²

Participants expressed their support for the overall premise of my research. When I asked a non-resident participant if this project was worthwhile, he responded "For sure. If people really listen to you, anything that can change the stereotypes [about young people] is useful." Participants seemed to appreciate the attempt by an adult to listen to them. Explaining that I just wanted to know what 'you guys think', a LET Youth member said "And that's great. You're not coming in here saying, 'here, do it my way, you're doing it all wrong.'" M&M verbalized that by taking pictures and talking to me – by acknowledging the beauty of the neighbourhood and having an adult listener – he was making the neighbourhood better. Orion sent me a Christmas card that read: "I want to thank you for taking time out of your very busy schedule to listen to my thoughts, ideas and opinions. I really enjoyed our little voyage around the neighbourhood and I look forward to getting together again once I finish my story." In general, participants felt that if more adults listened "like you do," they would feel more involved and more inclined to get involved. These comments also reinforce the idea that many young people are willing and able to intersect with society as a whole; more than only wanting to talk amongst themselves, they want and need to be heard and to take ownership in projects.

² 'yeah', is a common response by participants. Tone implied very different meanings and emotions. I indicate my interpretation of their meaning in brackets.

The fact that this research was requested by Habitat, the other stakeholder, and to some extent shaped by its needs, attests to its relevance. Several Habitat board and committee members expressed their interest in reading my report, some commenting that “youth are an important group to consider in building community”. In this context, it became apparent to try to address and understand the ‘conditions’ of my research and the different audiences. As a result, I will have two versions for distribution: one, in the form of a thesis, and two, as a condensed report for Habitat and the families. The thesis will be made available to Habitat if requested.

How the project was received is tied to perceptions of my relationship to Habitat. Because I introduced myself as ‘doing research for Habitat’, many of the participants initially understood that I represented Habitat. This had two polar effects: the Habitat youth would initially exclaim “yeah, I’m really excited about moving” or “Habitat’s project is great” while LET Youth members went on the attack. Not knowing what Habitat was about, they assumed I was “gonna build in the neighbourhood without talking to the community.” Once I made clear that I was not ‘working for’ Habitat but wanting to hear their opinion about its renewal efforts, everyone – resident and Habitat youth – was much more open with me. Yet because homeowner participants were all extremely grateful to Habitat, my association with Habitat was definitely an asset when dealing with these individuals, including parents, as it provided a meaningful context in which I could enter the scene and serve to establish a foundation of trust and rapport.

While family context did not play a role with non-resident and LET youth participants, my articulation with Habitat family contexts is an important element of my

research. Interviews would often first involve a family visit or a phone conversation with a parent. At first, parents would often take part in the interview itself. Sometimes they eased the interaction by filling in the silences, although they often created the silences too. On the negative side, they interrupted, took over the conversation, or answered for their child. In fact, when I commented to one guy that I recognized that adults do not always listen to young people's opinions, he said "Yeah mom, you just came in and took over the conversation."

Initially, I wanted to interview participants 'in isolation' to hear what they 'really' thought. Recognizing that Habitat youth were individuals, yet connected to the family context, I assumed a flexible approach to family involvement. I embraced parental involvement when they took the initiative, but I did not necessarily invite it. As I got to know the families, chaperoned interviews became increasingly minimal. If parents remained in the interview, they would sometimes help me draw out responses by rephrasing a question, or prompting them with "remember when we talked about _____ and you said _____?" The Habitat families with whom I dealt seemed quite close; as such, parental involvement furthered my rapport with their children and provided me better insight into the circumstances of their lives, their attitudes about Habitat, the neighbourhood, and my project. Family participation also helped me understand what the move meant to the family as a whole, and the conflicting emotions that the youth communicated about moving into a new and complex neighbourhood.

The dynamics of gender, class, ethnicity, and age articulate with and negotiate one's life circumstances. These aspects of identity and experience also shape the

interactions between the researcher and the participants. As such, it is important to note one's own trigger 'factors' and to remain critically reflexive in terms of how one's own attitudes shape interactions. How do the realities and understandings of 'the other' affect the design and communication of research, the day-to-day activities of doing research, as well as the writing up of the research? In order to confront the problems of dehumanization and alienation underlying conventional research, in the next section I critically explore the lived meanings and dynamics of my participatory experience of doing research and to highlight *how* I came to interpret shared knowledge.

Different ages encompass different life circumstances, ranging maturity levels, 'talk' and jargon. Scarily, there was little difference in grammar structure – after hearing my interviews, I probably said 'whatever', 'n' stuff 'y' know' and 'like', as much as they did! Such differences can emphasize the power effects of age, and complicate talking with young people; I attempted to address potential problems in various ways. Firstly, I acknowledged the gaps and overlap between adult and teenagers understanding. For example, I communicated my recognition that adults may have certain notions of 'improvement' that might differ from young peoples', and contextualized my asking about 'their perspective'. In this case, acknowledging and normalizing difference served to facilitate transparent interaction, ease potential or real tensions of power asymmetry, and at times, deepen mutual understandings. In fact, age was often more of an issue for the parents themselves than for their children. For example, one mother, who thought I was just over 20 years old, was shocked when she found out my age. She did not want Billy Bob to find out, as she felt it would intimidate her shy son who, she had noticed,

had opened up to me. Importantly, his discovery of my 'advanced' age was uneventful and did not seem to affect our relationship.

Secondly, to minimize perceptions or experiences of power imbalance, I chose to incorporate a non-threatening interview strategy. Susan Yeandle, using a feminist approach to interviewing, looks for ways to put people at ease, beginning with, for example, demographic information. This functions "as an ice-breaker", enabling participants to relax and talk about themselves. She writes, "all the questions asked invited respondents to disclose information that was very well known to them, thus putting them at their ease, and convincing them that the interview had relevance to them as individuals" (cited in Reinharz, 1992:25). Whenever I had an interview, I made 'small-talk'. I would ask about their school, the building stage of the home, what their friends think about their moving, and referred to what I remembered about them personally. As Reinharz suggests, drawing out the individual facilitates the identification of themes, and later, a personal interpretation of themes in terms of their experience (1995:21).

Undertaking a more egalitarian research method encouraged me to contemplate a style of interview that relates to, but goes beyond comfort level. For example, a question/answer set-up is useful in cases where specific information is needed. If the respondent is allowed to preview the questions beforehand, it may also provide a sense of security to the respondent. Nonetheless, it can also perpetuate the power dynamic in which the interviewer is afforded more control over the interaction, by limiting the integration of the interviewee and his/her interpretation during the interview. As such, I

focussed on a fluid interaction, with the aim of blurring the distinction between interviewer and interviewee. Achieving a fluid conversation requires both members to be interacting and dialoguing, rather than trapped in a ping-pong of question/response. My goal for a 'natural' conversation was an attempt to minimise the potential imbalance of power between myself and the participant. Despite such efforts, I was able to achieve most effectively with only those with whom I had had more time to build rapport.

While I was interviewing residents for Habitat, I repeatedly heard negative statements about 'snobby rich people' in the South, as opposed to the 'real hard-working people' in the North End. These feelings were echoed by over half of my participants. Acknowledging this resentment, I considered class differences, real or perceived, between myself and the participants as a methodological issue in terms of how I approached participants. While I did not assume that the participants would prejudge me because I came from the 'South end', I nonetheless wanted to neutralize the stereotypes as much as possible so that they could know ME as a person and to minimize potential social barriers in order to find more common ground. Because I was dealing with 'families in need', I was hesitant to drive up in my 'Shiny Uppity Vehicle' (SUV). Material items, language, and education are significant social class symbols. In this regard, until I had met participants at least once, I avoided parking directly in front of their homes or meeting place. I cannot be sure how participants first perceived me; nonetheless, we seemed to enjoy each others' company and most were open with me. In fact, at least four participants and I were able to talk about our respective social backgrounds candidly, which I hope prompted us all to reflect upon the existence of class stereotypes, and how

they are perpetuated.

Education also plays an important role in terms of the perceptions of social class and status. With the exception of non-resident youth, and one Habitat youth who had gone to mini-university, none of the participants or their parents have had any experience or intersection with the world of academia. In the case of LET youth members, some members at the age of 20 were struggling – for various reasons – to achieve their High School Diploma. Not wanting to intimidate or annoy participants or their families, nor mislead or blur the circumstances of my research, I referred to my research as a university or school project and a report for Habitat for Humanity. As such, families were provided with numbers at the University and for Habitat's ED, who was a person they dealt with regularly and all admired. I explained what I would do with shared information, and repeatedly asked if they had any further questions or concerns; while questions were rare, some parents ensured they would be able to see my report when it was done. I also asked participants if I could phone them later to ensure that what I wrote was accurate. The minimal interest of the participants in taking part in the draft writing process or even reading the final report possibly demonstrated disinterest in my research, an irrelevance or isolation from university culture/academia, or a doubt that it would achieve anything for them. When their lack of interest became apparent, the latter issue became a concern to me: did they really understand what I was going to do with their responses? When I said that I would like to have their feedback on my report, did their "sure, whatever" laissez-faire attitude indicate a lack of ownership and 'full participation', and an opportunity for misappropriation? To minimize potential

misappropriation and to demonstrate a sense of research accountability, I promised each family a copy of the Habitat report and if they wanted, a copy of my thesis.

Like gender and class, ethnicity and 'race' articulate with life circumstances and conditions to negotiate identity and experience. Participants identified themselves as Ukranian, Metis, First Nation, Polish, Filipino, and 'Black'. Not wanting to impose a racial or ethnic identity upon participants and due to the scope of my project, I did not emphasize an exploration of 'race' or ethnicity and experience. As such, I overlooked how to contextualize such questions. Although I was careful to listen for any allusions to 'race' or ethnic identity experience, my passive approach to this realm may reflect the limited discussion of participants' attitudes and experiences in this regard. In retrospect, I feel I could have better initiated a discussion in this area by inquiring, for example, "having worked with a lot of people of different backgrounds, they tell me that sometimes they feel because they're (Black, Aboriginal, Polish, Filipino, etc.), people make assumptions about them. Do you feel this way?" "What kinds of experiences have you had in this way?" "How do you feel about the ethnic diversity in this neighbourhood?" "What experiences have you had in this/your neighbourhood in this regard?" These questions might have given deeper insight into how ethnic identity and appearance articulate with the participants' lives in a diverse neighbourhood. I acknowledge the minimal exploration regarding this realm of identity in order to encourage the reader to note and inquire into the silences. In addition, an exploration of race and ethnicity in terms of the interactions, or lack of, between residents, would be very relevant to future studies in the William Whyte area, due to its changing ethnic profile.

(En)gendered behaviour, expectations and awakening sexuality, regardless of sexual preference, may have affected how participants related to me. Considering that participants were predominantly male, this aspect of interaction should be explored. While I did not notice any particular 'stresses' in terms of dealing with either gender, I cannot assume that it was not an issue for participants. Including the LET youth groups, I primarily dealt with nineteen males and six females. Although it would be interesting to examine the gender imbalance in the LET youth group, the gender imbalance found in my research project is neither an oversight or intentional: it is purely a result of group and family profiles.

I tended to have longer conversations with the females, which suggests that, in general, they may have felt more comfortable with me than most male participants, or maybe they just had more to say! Interestingly, except for my interview with the non-resident youth who were aged fifteen to seventeen, all but one of the Habitat male participants' parent(s) were home during the interview. This may have been coincidental, it may have been because we were of the opposite sex, because of their age (ten to fifteen), or simply because I was an unknown older person³. Conversely, although a parent was home for the first meeting with my female participants, all subsequent interviews with them were 'un-chaperoned'. While the manifestations of gender dynamics will vary according to the situation, it is important to reflect upon how each reality shaped shared information. In this case, for example, it would be important to

³ In conjunction to my being female, my age might have had an ambiguous effect on participants, being neither an older female adult nor a teenager.

consider, then, the impact of parental involvement, or lack of it, and whether the male and female felt more or less at ease with my being female.

I had an especially difficult interview with one family. This interview is important because it demonstrates the articulation between several determining factors of one's research. Although differences in terms of class, ethnicity, and age existed in some form in every interaction, they radiated their impact more strongly in this interview. I related well with the parents, but I did not have the opportunity to establish a relationship with their three boys, aged ten to fourteen. I had visited their home to explain the project and to provide the cameras and the next time I saw them was to interview them. Having their mother present, with whom they are obviously very close, seemed to improve the situation; she was very open with me and attempted to help me draw out her children.

This family is of aboriginal background, had been on social assistance, and had had many awful landlords from the "rich parts of town". The boys and their mother also talked about how many adults treat the boys with suspicion. In addition to a lack of time to build rapport, my potentially representing all of these symbols of asymmetrical power relationships may have deterred open communication with them. On the other hand, a problem with the interview may have been my research focus – while they were happy about their new home, they didn't seem overly concerned with the whole Habitat for Humanity project itself or my photography project. When I hit a topic of interest to them, they started talking much more freely. At one point, I was able to explore some of their experiences as Aboriginal teenagers, their resistance to becoming gang members, and people's assumptions, young and old, about Aboriginal youth being in gangs.

Lessons Learned

I finished the actual interviews and the whole research process with an impression that participants and I, for the most part, shared understandings and positive interactions. Nonetheless, there are challenges and limitations to this project, as well as many lessons learned that relate to the content, direction and quality of my research.

The first challenge or limitation to my project ultimately transformed itself into a strength. While the incomplete interaction with the LET youth groups was frustrating and disappointing, it, by default, extended the time-line and scope of my research. This encouraged me to expand my participant base, and have time to build rapport with Habitat families. I was able better understand Habitat as an organization, and ultimately, participate more closely in the ongoings of Habitat and the 2001 build. This, in effect, enhanced my ability to reach my proposed research goals. In effect, the dissolution of LET youth prompted me to rethink my goals and to better examine how to best achieve them. I experienced that life is not predictable, organizations are not necessarily stable, and I realized that one must be flexible while keeping perspective of the relevant goals of one's project.

Another challenge was the limitless opportunities to get involved. Reminding myself that I was 'only' doing a MA in terms of time and scope, I declined several potentially interesting and useful events. For example, with the increased activity of the community fix-up program, it would have been easy to remain occupied all summer and fall with its activities. As such, I found it important to prioritize which events and interactions were the most beneficial to established participants and the research itself.

The quality of the research, or the extent to which I can include 'real' youth voices, relates to me not taping all interactions. Because I aimed to have informal, candid conversations, I felt awkward interrupting the conversation to ask to tape the conversation for the first couple of interviews. By the end of my project when I had more rapport and confidence, I felt much more at ease asking participants, telling them that my memory is not always as reliable as I would like, and that "I want to remember exactly what you say, so I don't write the wrong information." Not one person declined. Often they would laugh about my memory and nod that the tape recorder was o.k. Not taping all conversations propelled me to note my impressions right away, while taping a conversation provided a false sense of security. Fortunately, I often recorded my impressions on tape after a taped session, as screaming siblings, TVs, fans, and background noise in general were significant factors in poor tape quality.

If I were to design a participatory action project, I would consider the following the limitations and challenges discussed above. The following suggestions are specific to the design of my project and are distinct yet interconnected to any recommendations for youth participation and action. I would:

- incorporate rapport building as a significant portion of the project, rather than perceived as a token period, which is followed by the 'real' research.
- consider the developed relationships with participants as a basis for group activities. The researcher could act as 'collaborator', assisting in the implementation of ideas generated by participants.
- act as support and 'glue' to a group in order to facilitate youth action that is relevant to youth.
- acknowledge time and 'life' complications as significant factors in terms of nature of project.
- explore youth meanings and desired activities regarding community action and

minimize the imposition of adult constructions of what youth realities should be. For example, graffiti may be a way to engage youth, therefore consider how it could be applied productively.

- attempt to listen to both youth and surrounding community concerns. For example, in thinking about concerns about youth vandalism, it would be productive to address how youth can be part of the solution and how adults can also positively acknowledge youth contributions.

Utilizing research as empowerment requires “thinking consciously about power relations, cultural context, and social action” (Ristock et. al., 1996:2). This chapter is an autobiographical account of a methodological attempt to illuminate the power dynamics of doing this kind of research as well as those buried behind the interpretation of information. I focus on circumstances that I perceive to affect my interpretation of the results. In doing so, I hope to promote my own awareness of the complexities of doing research. Yet, as Helen Callaway (1992) asks, can autobiography become anthropology? In considering whether or not this chapter is anthropology – or at least has anthropological contributions – I hope that the discussion inspires a consideration of the merits of reflexivity. In looking at how I intentionally and unintentionally shaped the research, my relationship with the participants, and the larger circumstances in which the interviews were performed, the ‘data’ and the analyses are hopefully, as a result, more transparent.

Anthropologists are increasingly compelled to be more reflexive and accountable in their social analyses. Incorporating strategies such as personal narratives and reflexivity in ethnographic research and writing is a response to a growing concern with conventional approaches to authority, objectivity, truth, and power. This epistemological shift away from an observation and positivist methodology problematizes anthropological

research, but in productive ways. By repositioning the social actor to an intersubjective relationship, questioning the asymmetrical manifestation of power between researcher and participants, and offering a 'truer' reflection of the variability that exists in people's lives, anthropological research can only become more equitable and communicative in the presentation and representation of the people's realities it studies and writes up.

Chapter Five

RE-PRESENTING YOUTH

Images of and ideas about hormonally-driven teenagers abound in terms of their increasingly indifferent yet violent nature, risky behaviours, their flock-like peer-focus, and material-oriented motivations. For inner-city teens, we hear about high drop-out, crime, and pregnancy rates, accompanied with low self-esteem, single-headed households, and poverty. Despite – or maybe because – of the ubiquity of concerns about ‘youth today’, one is hard pressed to find youth research that represents youth as heterogeneous, dynamic people with cultural agency. Rather, youth are depicted in health and social sciences as in transition, problematic, unreliable and incapable of making serious decisions – how could they with all those hormones coursing through their veins? In fact,

Teenagers are physiologically nuts. Their brains do not work right. We know this from recent brain research. Like computers with most of the wires yanked out, the brains of teenagers are a jumble of unconnected neurons that impair their ability to organize multiple tasks and grasp ideas.

One of the last lumps of the teenagers brain to mature – the prefrontal cortex – is in charge of making sound judgments and deciphering ambiguous information. In adults [it] moderates unruly emotions like rage, fear and demonic elation that bang around inside the brain’s limbic system. The prefrontal cortex in teenagers is a plopped blob just behind the forehead, its switch basically in the off position at the precise stage of teenaged development when the limbic system is storming into overdrive.

Researchers tell us teenaged brains are bad at interpreting facial expressions, bad at decoding tones of voice. Researchers tell us teenaged brains get squirts of chemical pleasure from neurotransmitters when their owner encounters new experiences, especially those accompanied by the thrill of danger. Researchers say the teenaged brain, instead of looking like an adult’s after puberty, in fact looks more like a child’s. Thus, the neuroscientists say, don’t expect teenagers to behave as rational human beings. Or even be likable (Michael Valpy, 2001).

This is an excerpt of a commentary that targets the institutional inconsistencies between medical knowledge about youth and their treatment in the law. Basing his argument on the medically defined risky-crazy-irrational adolescent, Valpy condemns the inadequate child support laws, which treat teenagers as autonomous individuals. Despite his good intentions and apparent sarcasm, this article serves to set the stage for the premise of this thesis. It illustrates the capacity and power of institutional discourse to create and universalize social categories and shape societal perceptions and realities of these categories, in this case, young people. Institutional discourse such as that of medicine and law serve to create ambiguities within our perceptions, which to some extent, polarize societal expectations of youth. Regardless of these ambiguities, the accepted discourse about adolescent nature has created an ahistorical, naturally-occurring and universal category of people, based on biology and age criteria.

In this chapter I take a critical look at adolescence as a social construction, the ontological assumptions lurking behind youth constructions and realities, as well as how young people been portrayed in anthropological literature. An evaluation and deconstruction of “adolescent” has both practical and theoretical justifications. Practically speaking, conceptions of the nature of adolescents contribute to decisions about how young people will be schooled, normalized, protected and punished. Theoretically, we need to examine the ‘regimes of truth’ – the assumptions guiding knowledge, policies and practices to uncover the ‘social truth of being’ (Michael Taussig, 1987: xiii) and to foster a more just representation and interpretation of young people.

Because the terms *adolescent*, *teenager*, *youth*, and *young person* are used

somewhat interchangeably in this chapter, it is useful to clarify these terms. *Adolescent*, *teenager*, *youth*, and *young person* are all used in this text to refer to *the life stage between childhood and adulthood*. Even so, each term has its own meaning and connotation. *Adolescent* is used primarily in the biomedical (and some anthropological literature) and implies the biological primacy in defining adolescent experience and behaviour. *Youth* and *young people* are considered in much of the social sciences literature as a social category, fulfilling a social life stage. According to Alice Schlegel and Herbert Barry, this phase of life corresponds to the time frame of adolescence but extends beyond a concern with biological developments to encompass a discussion of social responsibilities (1991:10). I also use the popular term *teenager*, which specifically refers to individuals aged 13-19, and importantly, is a term which many of my participants used to refer to their own age group. On the Internet, typing 'adolescent' leads one to psychiatric and medical-research sites that deal with resolving behavioural and health issues of this age group. On the other hand, type in 'youth' and a whole world of opportunity awaits young people, many of the opportunities being youth-driven organizations. For this reason, I limit my use of the term *adolescent* to refer to the biological category.

Allison James and Alan Prout (1997) point out that anthropological and sociological literature on youth has not been marked by *absence*, but rather *silence*. This corresponds with the idea that while young people have been included in anthropological studies, they have generally been depicted as objects of adult activities who are in a *passive* stage of transition from childhood to adulthood (Helena Wulff, 1995).

Adolescence was first 'discovered' in 1900 by Stanley Hall who stated, "there is really no clue by which we can thread our way through all the mazes of culture and the distractions of modern life save by knowing the true nature and needs of childhood and adolescence...Other oracles may grow dim, but this one will never fail" (cited in Lesko, 1996:139)¹. Anthropological depictions of young people have since been formed by traditional psychological 'development' theory (which until recently dominated the study of childhood) and socialization theory. Theories of development – such as Erik Erikson's influential eight stages of development – perceived adolescence as an objective, biological and universal fact. Based on Western expectations of productive and reproductive behaviour, they were ethnocentric in nature in their assumption that all individuals aspired to achieve autonomy and individualism, indicating one's arrival to maturity. Moreover, ideas about adolescent development tended to overlook or silence the realities of females, people from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, and stigmatized difference as deviant (Jill Taylor, 1994; James and Prout, 1997). Socialization theory, which imported development models, portrays naturally-occurring and universal children as blank slates that learn, and therefore, reproduce culture from their role-modelling adults (James and Prout, 1997). Social anthropologists of the culture and personality discipline strayed from this view in their supposition that childhood was culturally constructed. In fact, both Margaret Mead (1928) and Ruth Benedict (1935) attempted to counter the homogenizing effects of the traditional theories by investigating

¹The fact that it was 'discovered' should encourage a reflection on the changing social, economic, scientific circumstances which prompted its creation / discovery in the first place.

cross-cultural differences in young people's behaviour. Yet while they viewed childhood and adolescence as varied and specific to cultural context, children were nonetheless considered as objects of adult control, socialized in the traditional sense (James and Prout, 1997: 17).

During the 1930s -1980s, 'youth culture' moved away from the family domain and its emphasis on child-rearing practices, focussing instead on issues such as delinquency, subcultures, and pop culture. The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University encouraged sociologists to look at young people's role in society. Notable studies examined the power relationships in young people's lives, the extent of control youth have over their situations and the ways in which they reproduce and/or resist society. Also of interest was the process of identity formation as well as its negotiation (see Brake 1980; Cohen 1972; Willis, 1997). Despite the Birmingham Studies' recognition of youth, the various experiences of those who were non-white and non-male were yet again overlooked.

Contrary to Amit-Talai and Wulff's criticism that "most major studies on youth culture have been about urban, Western male youth" (1995:2), there have been attempts made to broaden understandings about 'adolescence'. Since the 1980s, the Harvard Adolescent Project produced four volumes and numerous articles on non-Western youth, such as Richard Condon's *Inuit Youth* (1987) Victoria Burbank's *Aboriginal Adolescent: Maidenhood in an Australian Community* (1988) (also see Davis and Davis, 1989; Hollos and Leis, 1989; Shaw, 1994). With its mandate to look at "what it means to be an adolescent" (Condon, 1987), the Harvard Project series, **Adolescents in a Changing**

World, acknowledged the existence of an ethnocentric veil that is/was muting cross-cultural differences in adolescent experience as well as the impact of changing social and material conditions on the classification and experience of young people.

Condon's ethnography of Inuit youth deserves mention here as it addresses the shifting understandings and portrayals of teenagers in anthropological literature. The exploration of the subtle intricacies of Inuit life – gender, peer and intergenerational relationships, language, and expressive behaviour – alongside the more obvious dimensions of climate, culture change, geopolitics, and economics, results in a well-rounded presentation of teenage life in an Inuit society. Although bound somewhat to the traditional development and socialization models, Condon approaches the construction of teenage identity as an interactive or intersubjective process in which children and teenagers learn their culture through adults, and renegotiate it with their peers in the context of a changing world. In this sense, he portrays youth as active participants in their own culture, contributing to the perpetuation and change of Inuit knowledge and practices. Condon acknowledges that despite a universal physiological basis of puberty, not all cultures treat this life stage in the same way; some do not pay much attention to this phase of life, while others attribute much ritual or meaning to it. Accordingly, “to state the universality of this life stages serves only to naively mask the social and cultural embellishments that determine the manner in which the physiological changes find expression” (1987:132). Noticing the cultural embellishments allows for a realization of diversity inherent in human experience. Yet, in this view, context is an ‘add on’ and the ontological foundation for a biological imperative remains undisputed.

More recently, there have been critical analyses of how youth are conceptualized. Among them, Amit-Talai and Wulff (1995) published a collection of ethnographic studies on young people in various contexts, ranging from Canada, Britain, Netherlands, Nepal, Algeria and the Solomon Islands. Considering young people as active cultural agents, the discussion of issues of globalization, creolization, and identity formation and assertion in the context of young people's lives enhance literature about youth, not only with better understanding of life experiences but also regarding the concept of culture. James and Prout (1997) also published a useful collection of articles that strive for a reconceptualization and re-presentation of the diverse landscape of youth experiences. These authors point out that despite shifts in understanding of adolescence, conceptualizations of socialization and development are deeply embedded in social institutions and reinforced and reproduced by discursive practices. As such, a dismantling of the tenacious assumptions about youth social reality, subjectivity, and relationships to social institutions and practices is necessary in the construction of an alternative framework to effectively study youth.

Western philosophy informs the tenacious assumptions about youth. Relying heavily upon the positivist and 'objective' biological explanations of culture, Western philosophy constitutes knowledge about supposedly natural and universal categories. This interpretation of reality has not only presumed the authority of empiricism but has also socially constructed the identities of particular groups of people. Like the concept 'woman', adolescents have been subjected to the philosophy of biological determinism. The creation of natural and inevitable human behaviour is rooted in the belief that

biology is primary, that hormonal changes unilaterally cause behavioural ones (Nancy Lesko, 1996: 151). Such biological explanations/predictions of behaviour served to justify the gendered division of labour and the subordination of (naturally abnormal) women; because of their fluctuating hormonal systems, women were presumably subject to hysteria, irrationality and weakness, rendering them untrustworthy in positions of responsibility (Ibid). While many people acknowledge the limitations of this kind of rationalization, the extent to which this knowledge is accepted about youth as hormonally driven rarely goes undisputed.

Instead of looking at the interplay between biology and culture – which sparks the debate between the cultural relativist versus the universalist – I examine the power interplay between scientific discourse and cultural beings. The question is not whether adolescence *exists*, but rather how it is *interpreted* and *understood*. While acknowledging the biological explanations of physiological and developmental transformations, it is productive to concern ourselves with how *adolescence* is shaped and regulated by biomedical hegemony, and how contemporary Western ideals and perceptions of adolescents are superimposed onto other cultures' understandings and experiences. In this sense, we are talking about power, knowledge and discourse and the governance of behaviour. Drawing from Foucault, to understand power, we need to examine how effects of truth are produced within discourses that, in themselves, are neither true nor false (Foucault, 2000). To explore the power dynamics of 'truth', it is imperative to take into account the interface of 'history', 'science', 'politics', 'economics' that reflect wider social ideologies, and ultimately shape knowledge, construct reality, and regulate

'normality'.² In *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, Foucault demonstrates how repressive practices relating to sexuality yielded the medicalization and pedagogization of sexuality (1978). For young people, this ensured a focussed surveillance and regulation through an interface of educational, family, legal and biomedical domains.

In her historical and social analysis of the moral imperative of public health, Deborah Lupton (1997) presents a critical analysis of the role of public health and health promotion as an instrument of state (and popular) control. She examines the developments, motivations and justifications of public health discourse and practice and its articulation with and reinforcement by other social institutions. Rather than accepting medical practices as 'scientific' and thus, value-free, Lupton states that biomedicine and public health should be considered as a "symbolic system of beliefs and a site for the reproduction of power relations, the construction of subjectivity and of human embodiment" (1997:4). Through her exploration of the history of public health and health promotion, risk, the role of media and advertising, and finally the way in which subjectivity and bodily practices are negotiated, Lupton demonstrates the ways in which medical practices create and sustain its moral imperative. In the construction of definitions of 'health', public health policies and practice places judgment on those groups or individuals who do not adhere to or practice the advice of health promotional efforts; for instance, working class people, are often classified as irrationally participating

²Harry Hendrick's (1997) "Constructions and Reconstructions of British Childhood: An Interpretative Survey, 1800 to the Present" demonstrates that 'childhood' is not a static experience. In doing so, he links contemporary understandings and conceptions of childhood with religious, economic, political, and social transformations in Britain since the 1800's.

in risky behaviour. As opposed to the oppressed 'other', who would thus need further supervision and regulation, those "empowered" by public health discourse are those whom accept and practice its messages (Lupton, 1997). Notions of blame, risky behaviour, irrationality, and the 'other', are extremely relevant in the analysis of the category 'Youth'. Young people form an 'other' risky group, blamed for many incidences of violence, drunk driving, unplanned pregnancies. Of course, statistics are never misleading, therefore, it can be assumed that such immoral behaviour is normative and increased supervision and regulation is now necessary to control and enlighten youth.

Robert Hill and Dennis Fortenberry's (1992) proposal that adolescence should be considered a culture-bound syndrome not only speaks to the ethnocentricity of the term, but highlights the persuasive powers of medical discourse in shaping our perceptions and understandings of behaviour. In accordance with proposed classification criteria, the symbols and meaning of the classification "adolescence" would only be understood and be relevant within the context of Western society, as would be its etiology; its diagnosis relies on culture-specific technology and ideology (biomedicine) and its successful treatment is accomplished only by participants in that culture (formal education, incarceration has proven to be very effective). The authors maintain that the creation of adolescence as a pathological condition – encountered in epidemic proportions! – is reflected in phrases such as 'high risk youth' which are used to describe excess rates of pregnancy, suicide, sexually transmitted diseases, substance use. As a result, adolescence is transformed into a risk factor and thus a disease (1992:78).

Hill and Fortenberry argue that the creation of this classification has its roots in

the evolution of adolescent psychiatry and adolescent medicine (1992:76). As a result, the medicalization of adolescence has had the effect seeing it as a condition that needs treatment, control and prevention (1992:78). Through a study of contemporary perceptions of adolescents, the authors claim that the negative characterization of adolescents in social science and medical research is mirrored in the American stereotypes of adolescents (Ibid). Furthermore, they state that “the creation of an age-based pathological condition contributes to a masking of factors that contribute to threats to health in a highly differentiated complex society” (1992:78). In effect, this classification massifies the young people’s behaviour into one ‘risky’ experience and thus undermines in any other significant differences that affect one’s reality.

While I have my misgivings about using “culture-bound syndrome” as a basis for classification, the point that the authors make in doing so emphasizes the power the medical community has had in the creation of adolescence as a pathological condition ³.

³The term “culture-bound” syndrome initially arose to provide a psychiatric category for the deviant behaviour of the ‘other’, for ‘atypical’ behaviour that did not fit into the psychiatric categories created by Western practitioners. Labels such as *latah*, *koro*, *amok*, *voodoo death*, and *susto*, evoked the usage of similar designations such as “exotic psychoses”, and “ethnic psychoses” (see Simons and Hughes, 1985). The classification of such disorders as culture-bound has stimulated the universalism versus cultural relativism debate among anthropologists, ethnopsychiatrists, and psychologists, as well as a critique of the role of biomedical premises (which mirror Western philosophy), in formalizing the usage of this construct. The term “culture-bound” evokes a sense of ambivalence in terms of its capability to adequately represent the relationship between culture and illness in all human populations. Its strength lies in its potential to recognize the diversity of illness expressions that are intrinsic to all humans and in assuming the importance of understanding the intricacies of people’s lives; the symbolic and cognitive expressions of illness, the interpersonal relationships, and the rules and norms governing appropriate behaviour in a specific context. Alternatively, the usage of this concept also produces a fragmentation and stagnation of groups of people and behaviours based upon fallacious boundaries.

These diagnostic classifications reveal and reinforce perceptions about certain groups – forthcoming generations could determine ‘baby boomer’ to be a life-stage disease category too. As social scientists begin to look increasingly inward at homemade culture-bound syndromes, an understanding can be gained of how imposing a label serves to medicalize what previously may not have been considered a pathological entity. It becomes important then, to examine the politics involved in the imposition of label to understand how and why such classifications are created.

The effects of discourse, knowledge and institutional hegemony are significant in understanding how youth have been conceptualized. On the other side of the integrated socio-cultural coin, an exploration of the conception of culture serves to gain insight into its articulation of youth ‘culture’ as well as a basis for a reconceptualization of young people. To better understand the poetics and politics of youth identity and reality, we can draw from shifting understandings about the categorical identity of ‘woman’ or the ‘other’; contrary to traditional representations, these identities vary in their form and character and “are subject to different interpretive frames between and within cultures and historical epochs” (James, 1995: 45). In other words, identities are fluid and constructed, as opposed to bounded, static and inevitable.

The critique of culture as an autonomous, bounded, static entity is not new. Nonetheless, this kind of whitewashing in cultural analyses continues, concealing differences in space, time, and circumstance, and ultimately ignoring the multitude practices of the creation of culture and the various agents of its construction (Virginia Caputo, 1995: 19). Fabian (1983) also contends that “culture” historically has been used

as part of the description of and distancing from others (cited in Lesko, 1996:154). Thus by circumscribing and homogenizing a group of people, “youth culture” is categorically separate and distinct from “adult culture”.

Post-modernist, post-colonialist, post-structuralist, feminist, and Marxist theories have contributed significantly in generating new insight into the differential life experiences that are shaped by the overlappings of gender, social and economic class, ethnicity, and age. Accordingly, various scholars have criticized notions of a bounded, homogenous, and stable culture or community in regards to understanding the role of young people in cultural production (Gaetz, 1992; Lesko, 1996; Caputo, 1995, Amit-Talai and Wulff, 1995). They recognize that a dynamic concept of culture is essential to meaningfully reconsider the dialectic of youth and culture. “The issue here is how the concept artificially aggregates a group of persons based on age and leads to the playing down of significant differences between young people in terms of their life experiences and in terms of needs” (Gaetz, 1992:94). These authors claim that young individuals, regardless of their gender, class, or ethnicity are massified into a categorical identity and prescribed behavioural and experiential roles. In the quest to understanding culture, there exists a tendency to treat these ‘variables’ (if I may use such a dry term to refer to lively reality), alongside politics, economics, and culture as autonomous components. According to this kind of treatment of culture, it follows that biology can be extracted from the social experience to explain human behaviour. Consequently, many studies on adolescence have presupposed the primacy of age as a component for analysis, disregarding the sum effect of other components that also determine life experience,

learned behaviour, values and beliefs. Particularly in industrialized societies in which there exists marked experiential differentiation based on social status, gender, ethnicity, and age, it seems fallacious to attempt to decontextualize integral parts of the whole and amass people based on one single component.

Without denying a role of biology in the development of human beings – in fact, many progressive youth organizations acknowledge the development needs of adolescents in the planning and implementation of activities – a biological imperative needs to be questioned in terms of its ability to explain and determine experience and the potential of young people as participants of society.

Chapter Six

YOUTH PARTICIPATION: REAL OR RHETORIC?

How does talk about biology, power, institutional discourse and knowledge relate to urban renewal, youth participation initiatives, and youths' experiences? As discussed, contemporary discourse and knowledge about youth, such as a perception of teenagers as tomorrow's citizens, affects how people perceive themselves and others, and informs how they relate to and engage with each other. Consequently, such knowledge influences the manner in which youth are involved in organizational initiatives. For example, it was the 'knowledge' that teenagers would hang out in groups and cause trouble that caused committee members to feel hesitant to allow teenagers to participate in the Habitat Children's Festival. What if society looked at youth differently; instead of a problem, or victims who require services, they are considered "competent citizens capable of meaningful participation in society" (Janet Finn and Barry Checkoway, 1998:335)?

Understanding young people as resources requires their re-situation in contemporary discourse and action. A way to begin this process is, as Michael Gray (2001) suggests, to view young people not as 'the future' but as current members of the community with a right and responsibility to participate NOW. These responsibilities of citizenship, consequently necessitates their participation. Accordingly, it has been suggested that promoting youth participation and engagement is essential to creating a more equitable and balanced society by incorporating the talents and resources of all citizens. Hancock (1994) states:

Active participation of youth is essential to re-energizing and sustaining the civic spirit of communities. Through skill development in the areas of collaboration and leadership, and the application of these capacities to meaningful roles in community, youth can play a fundamental role in addressing the social issues that are destined to impact their lives and those of future generations (cited in Finn et. al., 1998:336).

Although many organizations and initiatives prescribe to such goals and have sought for youth participation, or, in the case of Habitat for Humanity, “active youth involvement”, an explicit intent does not mirror the actual measures to achieve this goal. As noted by several participants in this project, ‘participation’ is often token or justifies the use of young people as “slave” or “gophers” in which they are assigned uninviting activities (like picking up garbage, for example).

Participation can take many forms, and varies in its goals. Checkoway distinguishes among five types of participation relating to youth involvement:

“youth action” and “citizen action” in which people take initiative and organize themselves for social change; “youth development” which promotes the positive development of young people rather than only overcoming their deficits; “neighbourhood development” through which people implement programs of their own at the neighbourhood level; and “neighbourhood-based youth initiatives” which emphasize youth participation and neighbourhood development in the same single program (1998:788).

Neighbourhood based forms of participation overlap in their goal to develop the community, with the latter form promoting youth and neighbourhood development simultaneously. Albeit exceptions to the rule, most neighbourhood development organizations show interest in involving youth but do little to truly involve youth in the planning or implementation stages (1998:779). Neighbourhood-based youth initiatives fare better in terms of youth involvement, promoting youth involvement by cultivating

technical and critical thinking skills to enhance employment opportunities and social development. Once again though, even though youth are the supposed beneficiaries of such services, it is questionable to what extent the 'participants' of the program are part of the decision-making process (1998: 782).

Despite these limitations, youth development and neighbourhood development organizations are potential venues for involvement, although Checkoway stresses that is important to recognize their different goals and develop what is unique to each (1998:790). Several youth development agencies and neighbourhood development organizations have successfully integrated youth participation and neighbourhood development in the same program. "They are not typical, but do show that the neighbourhood is a vehicle for addressing some of the issues facing youth, and that young people can participate in decisions about programs for which they are the beneficiaries" (Ibid). Some organizations engage with youth, encouraging young people to be providers of services to their peers. Other agencies involve young people in the planning and implementation of the programs, in which they sit on a board or committee. This kind of participation, though, as pointed out by Red (one of the non-resident participants), does not consistently equate to a youth voice being heard.

In his presentation made for *Mobilizing Neighbourhoods for Change*, Gray (2001) echoes many of the sentiments expressed by Checkoway, commenting that children and teenagers are perceived as partial citizens. Informed by Robert Hart (1997), Gray employs a ladder to indicate possible forms of participation and to discuss the ways in which young people have traditionally been and alternatively could be involved. The

lowest ladder rung, *manipulation*, might involve asking children and youth to produce art, for example, without their input of knowledge. Next, *decoration* entails using youth to promote a cause, again without their understanding, and *tokenism*, which does not afford youth a true voice in planning process. These rungs are followed by *assigned but informed*, in which youth are mobilized for activities but without their involvement in the planning stages. *Consulted and informed*, and *adult-initiated, shared decisions with youth*, where youth are involved in entire process, should be a starting point for local efforts and revitalizing neighbourhoods to promote a sense of ownership. Lastly, the “forbidden zone” involves *child-initiated and directed activities* and *child-initiated, shared decisions with adults*.

Together with my observations and feedback provided from participants and the Community Fix-up Coordinator, Gray’s and Checkoway’s criteria can be applied to assess the extent to which Habitat succeeded in attaining their goal to include youth as “non-traditional volunteers” (Community Fix-Up Report, 2001). Although young persons were involved in various aspects of the Habitat for Humanity-Ed Schreyer Project, 2001, youth participation appeared to be, for the most part, ad hoc. Participation occupied several rungs, from *decoration* and *tokenism* (for example, children’s parades), to *assigned but informed* and *consulted and informed* (Community Fix-Up Projects). Significantly, I am aware of at least two instances of *youth-initiated-shared decisions with adults* projects, which were a result of non-resident youth group outreach to Habitat; in one case, a group of teenagers initiated, planned and implemented a fix-up project, in collaboration with the Community Fix-up coordinator. While Habitat should be credited

with attempting to be holistic in their approach to building community, in terms of youth participation, there nonetheless, exists a void on two levels: one, in terms of empowering *local* youth; and two, in the incorporation of youth voices in the planning and implementation stages.

The Community Fix-up coordinator is aware of the local void, and expressed disappointment with the overall success to involve local youth. He described situations in which volunteers would not show up as planned, attendance would dribble away, or the work would need to be touched up by adults. This, understandably, provokes a response of 'why bother—we are not a youth agency', and is a deterrent in furthering future efforts for youth participation. Before writing off youth participation, it is important to look at the possible explanations for the lack of overall success; in doing so, we need to look at the articulations of elements affecting involvement, such as Habitat's approach, young people and their life circumstances, conditions, and motivations, and prevailing attitudes in the larger society. Looking at why non-resident participation was deemed more successful than local youth participation permits a commentary of these articulations. In terms on non-resident versus local recruitment, Habitat aspired to broaden suburban youths understandings of the inner-city, as well as encourage mutual understandings among young people (personal communication with ED, 2000). For this reason, alongside the fact that Habitat has established relationships with particular groups that happened to be 'non-resident', non-resident youths were better mobilized. It is also possible that local youths may not identify with Habitat's model of involvement, which may operates with a different set of expectations and goals than their own. Alternatives

for some inner-city youth, such as LET Youth members, may be few. This may be due to a lack of social supports or self-esteem to initiate involvement. In addition, opportunities to get involved may not relate to young people's concerns or motivations (Shirley Brice Heath and Milbrey McLaughlin, 1993:214). Furthermore, the layered notions of 'inner-city' and 'adolescent' may have proven to be a negative factor in pursuing local youth participation. More generally speaking, the extent to which youths feel a sense of ownership to activities needs to be assessed before assuming that teenagers are not capable or inclined to adopt responsibilities. Certainly, affording young people a voice before the activities are planned, and hearing their ideas during the planning stages would potentially inspire a more productive response in general.

In the context of the 2001 Habitat build, the range of participatory forms demonstrates the Habitat's willingness and flexibility to incorporate and reach out to various organizations and youth action initiatives. While the majority of projects seemed to be *assigned and informed*, the openness to accept and help implement youth ideas is a welcome sign that Habitat could achieve their youth goal, pending a better outlined strategy of recruitment and true participation.

On the other hand, this range points to the non-strategic efforts to foster youth participation. The lack of strategic effort to mobilize active youth participation is, I would venture to say, partially a result of divergent visions on the board in terms of the ultimate goal and impact of Habitat. Consequently, Winnipeg Habitat, as an affiliate organization, needs to assess whether they strive to build low-income houses for individual families or, through an expansion of these measures, promote neighbourhood renewal. If they

continue to place the emphasis on the latter, then young people, being part of the neighbourhood, should be active participants. Habitat, not being a youth-oriented organization, might best achieve youth participation by proceeding in a manner they have already proven relatively successful, that is, by branching out to already existing youth initiatives and organizations. Nonetheless, such efforts should be better focussed on the area of activity. They need to go beyond the ad hoc level to effectively encourage young people to become part and parcel of the larger planning process rather than as pasted on as an after-thought.

Where do we go from here? Lessons for the Future

It is easy enough to say, 'make youth part of the planning process'. Yet how does one get youth on board, and once on board, how do their voices REALLY get heard? Before attempting to begin a large project, it is useful to have principles to guide implementation.

Community Partnership with Youth Incorporated, an American organization, is well known for its research and promotion of youth involvement in the community. They adhere to the following guiding principles:

Youth are a resource and capable of making a positive difference in community; youth from all backgrounds and all walks of life can do authentic leadership/partnership roles with adults; involvement of youth in community as decision-makers has a positive impact on the community, the young people and others involved with the young people; involvement with young people needs to be grounded in the developmental needs of young people (www.cpyinc.org).

Gray's principles to promote youth capacity building are fun and meaningful.

Using the metaphor of a tool box, Gray suggests a tool box for youth participation would

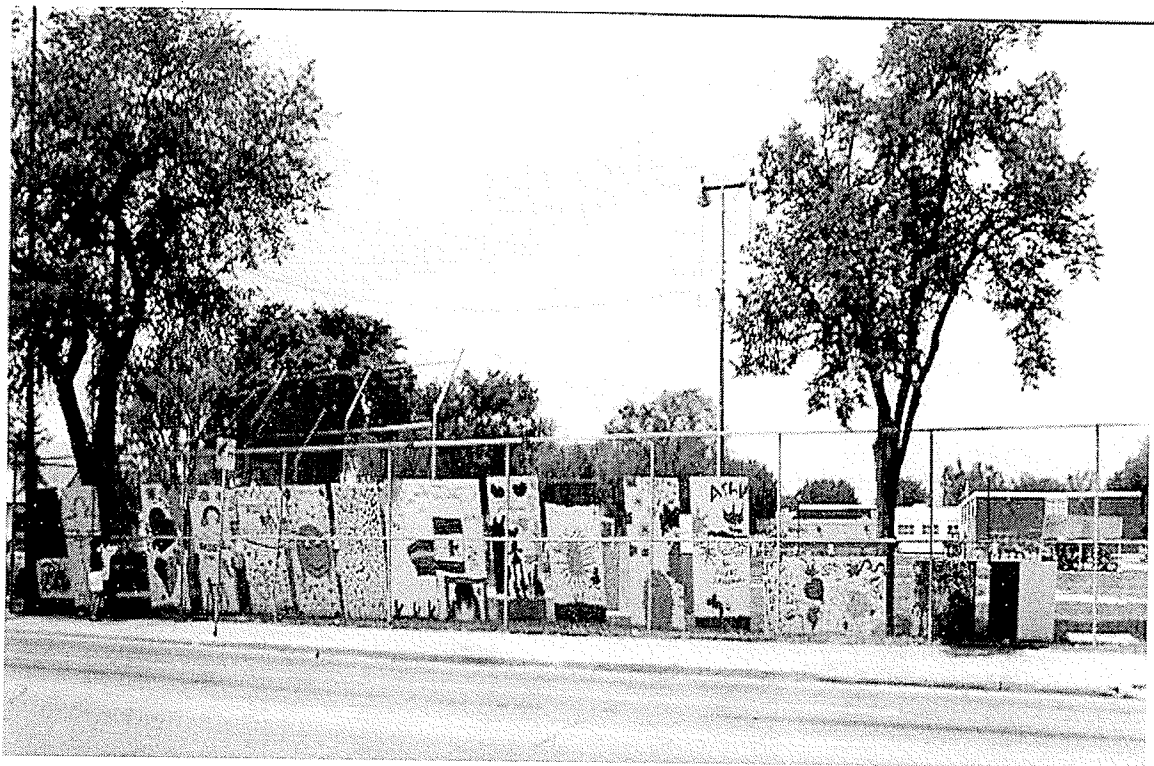
require: *a jar of nuts and bolts* to symbolize the diversity inherent among young people; *a hammer and nail* which encourages brainstorming and non-judgement on ‘crazy ideas’ that could ultimately be made realistic; *a brake puller for bicycle brakes*, because it is a weird tool in itself that inspires the inner-child play experience; *a level*, which is used to maintain balance of one’s own political ideology; *safety goggles* represent one’s duty of care when working with youth – a responsible worker understands limits and responsibilities to protect the rights of all those involved; and *a tape measure* symbolizes the need to measure a project’s success through young people’s eyes. Ask ‘did it work’ in fun ways, like through a journal, “freaky focus groups”, pizza indication (what would the topping be?), and number scales.¹

Attracting and maintaining youth involvement demands that the participants and the goals should be specific to the area of activity, and defined by those to be involved. Rajeev Patel points out that “the degree to which a community is able to influence, plan and transform its environment is a measure of its ability to control itself. Predominant graffiti, for example, is often a response to a lack of this kind of autonomy; “a consideration of this action supports an interpretation in which the artists are disenfranchised from their environment and feel a need to shape it, and to achieve recognition for it” (1997:99). This could be one explanation why murals painted by local artists and youths have been so successful in reducing tagging.

Participants commented that projects must be meaningful for them, which may

¹Based on “The Amazing Technicolor Toolbox”, a presentation delivered for *Mobilizing Neighbourhoods for Change*, Winnipeg, MB., June 14, 2001.

require planner to think and act outside of traditional notions of improvement. It also means listening to the meanings kids ascribe to their experience and surroundings. If their symbols and experiences are productively acknowledged, it becomes possible to engage youth as part of the larger picture, rather than a separate entity unto their own. For example, during the summer of 2001, Graffiti Gallery, a local organization that was also involved in the Habitat Children's Festival, collaborated with the city to involve youth by having them paint plywood sheets that would be used for inner-city homes needing boarding-up. Albeit beautifying condemned homes is a temporary measure of improvement, it is a sign of hope and future action, it is a way in which to bring youth ownership to community clean up efforts and ultimately, to prevent arson, tagging, and



Painted plywood sheets intended for boarded-up houses: I took this picture to show the potentially transformative power of 'graffiti' through an artfully-inspired youth population—Monica

other forms of vandalism. In fact, this was one of the few activities that attracted teenagers to the Habitat Children's Festival – it was unfortunate that many teenagers did not know about it.

Referring to young peoples' meanings and experiences, need not necessarily isolate 'adult' activities from 'youth' focussed activities. In fact, Checkoway (1998) notices that effective adult-youth collaboration promotes communication, understanding, and continuity in initiatives. Keeping this in mind, organizers need to recognize their target group to effectively mobilize; they need to understand and recognize different youths' relationship to their family, other institutions, groups, and peers. Although this approach is potentially divisive and prone to stereotyping categories, abilities, and interests, it is essential to understand that not everyone in an area experiences the same motivations or goals. This inclusion of difference in the understanding of adolescence and a move away from a solely social-problem perspective is crucial for creation and delivery of appropriate community programs and initiatives (Taylor, 1994:44). Embracing a social model that acknowledges young people live in a realm of responsibility and have potential to contribute, not only shifts young and adult understandings about teenagers, but also lends to a re-evaluation of one's self as a teenager in society. It is important to note that valuing autonomy and this kind of agency espouses a set of culturally specific goals, which may not be universally relevant or desirable. This will obviously not happen overnight or be embraced by every individual. In the local context, here are some tips to get the process going, tips that are from participants and other teenagers themselves.

- Allow for turnover. This means you may have long-term plans, but have mini-themes within the larger plan.

- Make it short, and have an end result.
- Mix up the opportunities to volunteer: ongoing and one day shots
- Acknowledge that volunteering is not cool for many teenagers – peer pressure may hinder involvement, but do not assume that all teenagers restrict themselves because of this pressure.
- Accept that groups of friends may work, and providing the option or the opportunity to bring friends may be a good way to attract youth.
- Negotiate convenient times to meet. Like adults, teens are busy. Weekends may be better for some, while others may prefer to meet after school or dinner. Some participants thought during school would be a great idea too! Make it a learning experience!
- Try to make it appealing; make it relevant, meaningful, fun, accessible. Food is often a great incentive.

In a situation such as Habitat's, it would also be productive to have a board member who act as a coordinator of youth participation. For the sake of continuity, this person might be an adult who envisions youth as competent citizens, and who would collaborate and share the responsibilities of representation, recruitment, planning and implementation with young people themselves.

As experienced by Habitat, there are real limitations to getting youth involved, especially in a climate of marginalization, gang activity, poverty, and other 'urban' problems. These limitations may have less to do with the event of adolescence per se, than the perceptions about this life stage, including the lived knowledge that youth need to be served rather than empowered. This happens when young people themselves "accept adultist notions of adult control over neighbourhood development" or when they and the larger society undermine youths' ability to plan their own programs (Checkoway, 1998:790). As Checkoway notes:

even the most accomplished attempts at youth participation in neighbourhood development still confront an adultist society whose neighbourhood problems are caused by forces which originate in the larger society. Neighbourhood problems often result from decisions that are beyond local control, and the consequences flow from that process. To alter the consequences, it would be necessary to alter the process (1998:792).

In other words, conceiving of youth as resources, or engaged citizens, needs to be addressed not only at the individual and local level, but in terms of larger social policies and practices that inform our knowledge and expectations about this age group. Finn et. al. stress “it is time to take the capacity of young people seriously and challenge the limits of our helping paradigms in the process...young people are competent community builders. It is time we say it publicly” (1988:344). And now it is time we act upon it publicly.

Chapter Seven

CONCLUSION

It is not enough to study the cultural or social aspects of adolescents, allowing the biological processes to stand as real truths outside of social processes. We must examine the ontological assertions regarding adolescence (Lesko, 1996:144).

Being classified as a young person, a teenager, or an adolescent, like any loaded social category, entails a negotiation of oneself in a world that is increasingly seeking to recognize and give voice to young people, yet at the same time, through its social institutions, has created and universalized adolescence in a global, but culturally diverse world. By acknowledging the assumptions of Western philosophy that canonize biomedical explanations of teenager behaviour, a 'denaturalization' of adolescence is possible. A reconceptualization of youth potentially steers to an exploration of the 'lived body' in interaction with the world, which Leder (1990) explains is "the embodied self that lives and breathes, perceives and acts, speaks and reasons" (cited in Lesko, 1996:152). Furthermore, by investigating the politics of interpretation and representation of 'fact'—"not the being of truth, but the social truth of being" (Taussig, 1987:xiii) around adolescence will not only denaturalize the category 'adolescent', but will set the stage for further understanding of cross-cultural experiences, in which local understandings and experiences of young people must be acknowledged and explored.

This thesis is an exploration of these philosophical assumptions, not only to problematize understandings of adolescence, but also to gain insight into how Western ontology guides anthropologists in terms of doing and writing about ethnographic research. The exercise of reflecting upon the practice and theory of ethnographic

discourse serves as a campaign for transparent and accountable research and bilateral interactions between researchers and people involved in or affected by the research.

Interestingly, reflecting on my conscious attempts to neutralize my perceived power, I would often forget that participants also have power. Whether or not they agreed to participate, told the 'truth', manipulated their status of presumed vulnerability, etc. are all potential forms of expressions of power. In retrospect, by attempting to 'minimize' my power, I was striving to promote a positive participant response towards me, one in which participants would not feel uncomfortable, pressured or taken advantage of, rather than simply yielding power. I would argue then, as does Foucault, that power, rather than being absolute or oppressive, is relational and productive. In this regard, if researchers do not acknowledge the power that participants have in relation to ourselves and the project, we will only perpetuate the notion of the passive subject and undermine the intention for equitable research.

In addition to advocating a more equitable research process and product, I hope that this project, through the presentation of participant voices, demystifies the varied understandings and experiences of teens intersecting with William Whyte and Habitat for Humanity. Like Niobe Way, I want to go beyond understandings of the inner-city as "dangerous and depressing"(1998:8) by conveying, albeit on a small-scale, participants' mode of being, their challenges, their joys and fears, and expectations and desires. My interpretation of their ideas and experiences, be it through their voice or images, both challenge and adhere to the stereotypical images of adolescents and the inner-city; their portrayals and attitudes about William Whyte are, often at the same time, pessimistic but

hopeful, accepting of the status quo while desiring of change, and resentful yet proud. They accept the graffiti, but they do not like it; they fear the gangs, but resent their space being stigmatized as a “bad area”; they enjoyed being listened to and being involved, but they often did not know what to say or how to get involved.

Revisiting my interviews and reflecting on the numerous telephone chats I had with several participants reminded me that this was very rewarding experience, not only because it was stimulating and fun to get to know them and some of their families, but because many participants wanted me to know them too – they wanted to tell me things, show me their collections, and have me over to their new house. Their stories and images inspired me, depressed me, broadened my thinking about teens and inner-city, and challenged my goals for this thesis. Especially during the exploration of their attitudes about involvement with Habitat for Humanity, where it initially appeared as if they did not care one way or another; at times, I contemplated whether the stereotype was not so inaccurate after all. Yet in a climate where a higher proportion of services exist to target multiple social and personal problems, schools experience high turnover, and people live in fear of gang activity, one must consider to what extent such realities impede or promote young people to become engaged with larger social efforts. Accordingly, with the arrival of new immigrants to the North End, a growing Aboriginal population, and a context of a historically culturally distinct neighbourhood, an expansion of how race and ethnicity intersect with identity and experience is a topic that would build upon this thesis.

Just as one would expect with adults, there is a range of inclination and

motivation based on personality, family and other group attitudes, and other life situations and circumstances. Some participants, like Orion and M&M, feel motivated to get involved, whereas I sense several others feel somewhat paralysed by their not knowing how to contribute. Reflecting on the relative success of getting non-resident youths involved compared with local youths, the social supports nurturing or impeding participation need to be evaluated, alongside the relevance and significance of activities to local youths and the structure of activities in terms of decision-making, time, scope, and 'who's doing it'.

Contemporary adolescent theories, focussing primarily on white, middle-class adolescents, are not adequate to understand the issues, goals, and challenges of all teenagers. I hope that the communication of participants' variable experiences paves a path in which future researchers acknowledge the rich landscape of experience and attempt to understand the lived realities of young people cross-culturally. Being of restricted scope, I realize that many relevant issues, such as gender and ethnicity, are addressed superficially. For example, participants expressed that their ethnicity was a factor, although not a determining one, in their relationship/identification with a group of friends or particular gang. We also need to consider how gender, ethnicity, and class articulate with the negotiation of identity, life goals and expectations.

This thesis could easily be criticized for dismissing the social problems that teenagers cause as well as the desperate conditions under which many teenagers strive. Undeniably, some young people are perpetrators and victims of violence, they vandalize property, drive too fast, have unprotected sex, experiment with drugs and alcohol, party

irresponsibly and loudly and such. In response to irresponsible and denigrative events, several communities have recently considered putting curfew on teenagers under the age of 16. While vandalism of property and 'disturbing the peace' are obviously transgressions, such coercive reactions manifest the effects of biologically-inspired massification of people based on a single criterion: age. Using the same scientific rationale, should we put a curfew on men because their biological drives put women at risk? Implementing a model of social coercion has its flaws in that it ultimately will not produce the results for which it strives, that is, control over behaviour. Instead, one might embrace a strategy of social transformation, one in which young people become part of the solution rather than phantoms of a problem.

The above example demonstrates how contemporary discourse serves to marginalize and stigmatize young people, and envisions them as partial or 'future' citizens. An alternative framework of youth envisions young people not as passive cultural objects but as cultural agents who have identity, capabilities, and responsibilities. In today's world of increased access to material acquisitions and technology, shifts in power relations, social conditions, and globalization processes, changes in 'established' cultural traditions and ideology are only amplified. It is easy to objectify youth as a problem – the reason for negative shifts in morality, loss of tradition, crime rates, and generally responsible for the loss of culture. An alternative paradigm would interpret people, across age, space, and time, as having the ability to reshape, reinvent, and reproduce knowledge and practice as they engage with the world (see Buff, 1998; Shaw, 1994; James, 1995 and Liechty, 1995).

Like all research, this thesis has its limitations of scope. Other topics of particular anthropological interest, among others, might include cross-cultural explorations of youth constructions and experiences (see Amit-Talai et. al., 1995), and the role of globalization and growing concern with children's and adolescent's rights (see Boyden, 1997; Glauser, 1997). This topic is especially important when we consider the applicability and cross-culturally appropriateness of international laws. There is a need to listen to young people's voices whether we are talking about participation, identity, rights, experience, or statistical representation. While children and youth do not always make decisions that are best for them, there needs to be a true consultation of young people in the initiatives and drafting of policies that will affect their lives. Ethnographic research and/or participatory research will hopefully provide a venue for young people's input and a better understanding of the intricacies that shape their lives, thus, enhancing the ability to involve young people in initiatives, as well as in the making of fair and enlightened policies.

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Application for Ethics Review
Department of Anthropology, University of Manitoba

Ethics Statement
Student: Monica Wiest (6129726)
Advisor: Dr. William Koolage
Project: Proposal for M.A. Thesis Research

Department of Anthropology Ethics Guidelines

Background

By undertaking the challenge of “The Habitat Inner City Millennium Project”, Habitat for Humanity is seeking to revitalize a small area in the North End of Winnipeg. Targeting their building efforts on Manitoba Street, from Main to McPhillips, Habitat for Humanity (HH) is aiming to strengthen surrounding areas as well. HH will be assisting in terms of the funding and building of several new homes as well as in the renovations of numerous current residents. Over the course of several years, HH will build 10 new homes and assist in the renovations of about 30 existing homes. This long term approach of neighbourhood renewal is unique to HH and such, it has requested a documentation of the process in order to be able to better assess the short and long term effectiveness of this kind of approach. While there are many potential avenues for documentation, my involvement was prompted when HH expressed the desire for an intentional involvement of youth in the revitalization process. Through an applied anthropological approach, this project focuses upon how youth perceive their neighbourhood, HH’s renewal project, how they are affected emotionally and behaviourally, and how young people are involved in the project itself. The main participants of my research will include youth (aged 15-19 years old) who are already participating in the Learn Education Train (LET) Youth Program in the William Whyte neighbourhood. They will voluntarily partake in a visual documentation project, which will involve a discussion of their personal perspectives about the photographs that they have taken. The final result of this project will involve the creation of a mural or collage that will be displayed to the larger community. This will hopefully not only sustain incentive and commitment to this research project but also further connect youth to the revitalization process itself. Importantly, the visual

documentation is employed as a means for meaningful research and interaction with participants. The photographs will be used as a form of analysis, and not necessarily as illustrations. As such, photographs will not constitute a major component of the written project.

Rights of the Individual

My research proposal stems from an invitation by Habitat for Humanity to document the renewal process that they are attempting to facilitate. The LET Youth program coordinator has endorsed my visual documentation idea and is eager to begin the process. Currently, the main contact for HH is the executive director, with whom I have agreed to provide regular reports (via e-mail) of my activities. The coordinator of the LET Youth program is my other significant contact. These individuals have interests in serving the residents in the William Whyte neighbourhood and the LET youth participants, respectively. In this regard, they might be considered the 'gatekeepers' to my research.

The coordinator of the LET youth program and I have discussed the way in which I should proceed with my project. A verbal explanation of the project will be presented at the first meeting and any questions will be addressed verbally. A consent form will be presented and signed by myself and participants. The consent form will explain the nature and expectations required of the project. Furthermore, the form will explain that participants have the right to refuse to answer any unwanted questions and can withdraw their participation from the project at any time without any disadvantage to themselves. This study may involve tape-recorded interviews; nonetheless, permission will be requested and any refusals to be tape-recorded will be respected. In addition to photo sessions, informal discussions, and focussed interviews, interaction with participants will be achieved on an informal basis throughout the course of the LET youth program. Participants will be informed that all information collected will remain confidential. Participants will also receive duplicate copies of all the photographs they have taken.

Informed Consent

The LET Youth program coordinator has been presented with the following: the nature and the expectations of the study; the right to inquire about the research; the option to decline any unwanted questions; and the option to withdraw from the study. After a verbal discussion with youth participants, a subsequent consent form that states the above information will be signed by the participants and myself. Participants will be assured that information acquired during focussed interviews or casual conversation/ observation will be confidential and included in the report only if relevant to the purpose and expectations of the project. The youth coordinator will be provided with Dr. William Koolage's and my phone number to ensure participants' ability to contact us with their concerns.

Participants will be informed that the cameras and film will be carefully safeguarded to ensure confidentiality, privacy, and safety. All developed photographs will be shown to the individuals who took them. If there are any photos with which individuals feel put at risk (for any reason), I will destroy these photographs and negatives. Furthermore, if they are any photographs that I feel compromise 'third party' individuals, they will either be destroyed or removed from the collection that will be ultimately used as a collage. I will ask for permission from the appropriate individual if I wish to include a particular photograph in the final written project.

I have informed a high profile resident who organizes the local Foot Patrol service of my potential plans. I will also request that the Executive Director of HH assists me in informing the volunteers who are building on Manitoba Street of my activities.

Deception

No essential information will be consciously withheld from participants nor will they be intentionally misled about procedures and purposes of this research project.

Risk and Benefit

The benefits of this project to the participants outweigh the potential risks.

Firstly, Habitat for Humanity and the LET Youth program supervisor and coordinator have endorsed this project, for their own reasons. Habitat for Humanity would benefit from the knowledge gained about youth perspectives about the renewal process, as well as having visual documentation of the material changes in the neighbourhood. LET youth benefits in terms of realizing a project that works towards their goal of promoting responsibility and cultivating a sense of pride in its youth participants. Most significantly, the participants of LET youth (and this research project) have agreed—with much enthusiasm—to participate in this project. They recognize that it will be an opportunity to express their views to the public (they do express doubt as to who will listen, but they are willing to try). I hope that beyond the immediate benefits of visual documentation exercise, the knowledge gained will contribute to a new and constructive understanding of youth and youth experiences. Despite these benefits, there exist several foreseeable risks to participants and non-participants of this project that I will attempt to minimize.

The William Whyte neighbourhood has a reputation for arson, theft, and gang activity. Consequently, any physical risks that might occur due the open nature of photo sessions will be minimized by travelling in pairs or small groups, primarily during the day. I will also collect the cameras after the end of each photo session. If we venture out at night, the local Foot Patrol service has offered to accompany us (either in uniform or not, depending on our preference) to ensure the safety of the youth participants and myself. I will also discuss with the LET youth coordinator ways in which we can further maximize physical safety.

Psychologically, reflecting upon one's neighbourhood and life could be a painful or positive process, depending upon the individual's personal history, circumstances and discoveries. The group coordinator and I will attempt to make the experience constructive for all through group discussions and feedback sessions, personal support (I have experience in crisis counselling—while my role is not as a counsellor, I am capable in dealing with situations of distress), individual interviews, and a final project that will involve personal input.

Humane and proprietary risks may affect individuals whose selves or material

surroundings are photographed. Before proceeding, the group coordinator and I will discuss issues of privacy and respect for other people's property, as well as establish some guidelines in taking photographs. As mentioned above, any images that I or participants feel might compromise somebody's integrity or safety will be destroyed or removed from the final photograph selection for the collage. Any individual that continuously violates these guidelines will not be allowed to continue in this project.

Personal and cultural risks arise with the potential for exploitation of images, or the appropriation of images. I will, under no circumstances, use these images to capitalize on the (real or imagined) problems of the neighbourhood. While I will be using visual images to analyse and (minimally) illustrate my findings, the neighbourhood youth are the creators and 'selectors' of these images. The collection of these images are a group effort of its surroundings, which will remain in the area, and, unless otherwise requested by the participants, will not be presented in another arena. The images / collage will not be appropriated as my or another person's work. Lastly, I will request permission from the appropriate person if I wish to include any photographs in written thesis.

Privacy

Any identifying information on a person's physical and mental condition, personal circumstances and social relationships shared with me will not be revealed. Attitudes and perspectives about Habitat for Humanity, the neighbourhood, and individual life experience are relevant to include in the written report. Any personally identifying information (such as habits, eccentricities) will not be revealed in my report, nor documented in my notes and transcripts. Any personal experiences that are not relevant to this project will not be included in the thesis. All taped interviews will be erased after transcription and pseudonyms will replace real names in the written report. Notes will be kept in a secure place; I will bring only fresh sheets of paper—rather than a notebook—to meetings and interviews to minimize accidental viewing by others.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

It will be explicitly stated to participants that all information will be kept confidential. No personal names or titles will be divulged; pseudonyms will be used in notes and final report. Because there is only one 'coordinator' of this particular LET youth program, any potentially damaging information (such as attitudes towards program participants, etc.) to any individuals will be excluded from the report. Furthermore, because I hope to ultimately have contact with many youth program coordinators, I will use the title 'coordinator' for numerous people, thus reducing the ability to identify a particular individual. While it is often difficult to judge if information may be damaging at the time of observation, a group discussion, or an interview, if deemed so during note-taking, such information will not be written down.

The questions that I plan to ask do not encompass any sensitive or identifying information (see attached). Nonetheless, I anticipate hearing sensitive and personal information; I will not include this information in the final thesis, unless it is extremely relevant to the topic and does not compromise the privacy of an individual. In the final product, I plan to present the information in terms of general cultural themes and ideas and do not anticipate presenting any detailed case studies. This, I hope will preserve confidentiality and anonymity of participants.

Research on Captive and Dependent Populations

Those participants of this project that are involved in the LET youth program could be considered a dependent population in that they are funded to participate in this program. Nonetheless, the group dynamics are such that the coordinator and participants negotiate which activities they wish to do. Both the coordinator and the youth group have all expressed interest in this project. While I did speak first with the coordinator about this project, I spoke independently with the youths to minimize the potential influence of the coordinator. It is important to note that the particular individuals involved in this group are very questioning and assertive about their views—my impression is that they wouldn't allow themselves to be forced into much!

I also plan to speak with other youth involved in Habitat for Humanity's efforts. Their participation in this project is completely voluntarily and is not imposed by Habitat for Humanity or any other organization.

Research on Children

The participants of this project are aged 15–19. If a minor, I will seek consent of a guardian. It may be possible that some minors live independently without an official guardian; in that case, I will seek consent from Child Family Services. In addition, I have obtained the consent of the LET youth program coordinator (if a minor, participation in this program requires consent from a guardian).

I have stressed to the coordinator that, in terms of my own expectations, the youth's participation must be voluntary. He expressed that if the project is initially accepted by the group, he would expect them to continue with the project in consideration of the mandate of the program (preparing youth for employment, cultivating a sense of responsibility and pride). Significantly, his concerns are for the youth in his program and not necessarily for the success of my research project. As such, he is aware that he may discontinue this project if he feels individuals are compromised in any way. While the coordinator will expect a commitment to the project, any group discussions or individual interviews will be explicitly voluntary.

Library and Archival Research

I do not foresee the necessity of archival research. Library research will be necessary in the discussion of the methodological and theoretical issues.

Acquisition and Use of Cultural Properties

This project does not involve the acquisition of cultural properties. It involves the use of *images* of cultural properties in terms of the display—in the form of a collage—of publicly viewed spaces and activities. The collage will be displayed locally and will not be presented elsewhere unless otherwise requested by its creators. Furthermore, any

images that potentially cause harm or embarrassment to individuals or groups will not be exhibited.

Research on Other Cultures, Countries and Ethnic Groups

I could consider myself doing research on two ‘cultures’ different from my own; ‘youth’ and ‘urban poor’ cultures. Despite such categorizations, the participants in the LET youth program have lived in Winnipeg for the majority of their lives and demonstrate functioning within a similar cultural framework to my own. Through group discussions, they have demonstrated similar concepts of privacy and confidentiality to mine. They also demonstrate an understanding (through their questions and comments) of the purpose of this project, and can identify its stakeholders (myself as a student, Habitat for Humanity, and themselves as LET youth participants).

Field Research Project Proposal for M.A. Thesis

Re-Presenting Youth

An exploration of young people's experiences in urban renewal efforts: a visual documentation project

Consent to be Interviewed

I, _____, agree to participate in the above titled practice project. The purpose of the project is to better understand youth perspectives in the context of a neighbourhood renewal project. Relevant information will be presented to Habitat for Humanity as feedback for their "Habitat Inner City Millennium Project".

The study is being conducted by Monica Wiest, a Masters student in Anthropology at the University of Manitoba. The study has been approved by the Ethics Review Committee of the Anthropology Department.

I understand that my participation involves participating in a series of photo documentation sessions, and the making of a collage. It will also involve sharing my ideas with Monica through group discussions and individual interviews. Monica will ask me questions about my ideas about my neighbourhood, how I perceive neighbourhood renewal (especially about Habitat for Humanity's efforts) and how I feel I should be involved.

The interviews will occur at a time and place convenient to me and Monica, such as the [LET Youth] Centre. This will be negotiated between me and Monica. My participation is voluntary and I may withdraw from the study at any time by simply telling Monica or [Group Leader]. If I feel tired and wish to stop the interview or prefer to continue at a different time, that is fine. I may also refuse to answer any questions. I can receive answers to my questions about the study at any time.

The interview will be tape recorded to allow Monica to listen carefully to me. Names mentioned on the tapes will be replaced by pretend names (pseudonyms) so that the typed information will be confidential. The audio tape will be erased after it has been transcribed. I have been assured that all information will be combined and compressed to preserve my and other's identity. If I am not comfortable with being tape-recorded, I can decline this aspect of the interview.

I understand that Monica can be called at [phone number] if I have further questions about the study. Monica's advisor is William Koolage. He can be reached at [phone number], Department of Anthropology, University of Manitoba.

Again, I understand that I am free not to answer any particular question and that I can withdraw my participation and interview from the project at any time without any disadvantage to myself.

I agree to participate in this project.

Your signature _____ Date _____

Guardian's signature _____ Date _____
(if under the age of 18)

Student's signature _____ Date _____

BROAD INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Note: this is not a formal questionnaire. It is a guide that I will use during informal conversations and formal interviews with participants. Many of these questions are broad and will serve as stepping boards for other questions relating specifically to these issues (the questions' wording will be modified according to the participant). While I may share personal information for the purposes of gaining rapport with individuals, sensitive or identifying information will not be included in the final thesis.

General Themes encompass youth's ideas about: **1) Feelings about neighbourhood; 2) Habitat for Humanity and the Renewal Process**

Neighbourhood

1. How do you feel about living in this neighbourhood?
2. How would you describe your neighbourhood?
3. Do you feel safe? What makes you feel safe / unsafe?
4. Why do you live in this neighbourhood? (For those living independently)
5. (How) Do you see this neighbourhood getting better / worse?
6. When you think of living here in 3 years from now when the project has formally finished, what do you expect to see or change?
7. Do you expect to be living here in 3 years? Why will you stay / leave?

Photo sessions

8. How did you decide which pictures you wanted to take?
9. How do you feel about taking pictures of your neighbourhood?
10. What do these images mean to you?
11. What kinds of things did you notice?
12. Did you see things you hadn't seen before?
13. When you look at your pictures, do you see things differently than you did when taking them?

Habitat for Humanity

1. What does 'neighbourhood renewal' mean to you? What could be some solutions to deal with _____ (for example, ideas about clean-up, gangs, prostitution, substance abuse, arson, poverty / welfare, landlords, etc.)
2. How do you feel about Habitat for Humanity's project?
3. How do you feel about being involved as a young person?*
4. What did you like about working with Habitat for Humanity? Didn't like?*
5. Do you think it will have an effect in the neighbourhood and the people living in it? Why or why not? What will change?
6. Would you have done anything differently? What?
7. Do you think your involvement as a young person is important? How or Why?
8. Do you feel involved in this renewal process? How so?
9. Do you think young people were effectively involved (e.g., numbers, activities, input, autonomy) in this process?*
10. How would you have wanted to have been involved?
11. Habitat for Humanity has future plans to involve youth What would you like to see? How would you like to be involved?
12. How should / could youth contribute to the renewal process?

* Questions for those directly involved in with Habitat for Humanity activities (building, clean-up, etc.)