

**MEDIATING POSTCOLONIALITY IN EDUCATION:
MIS/REPRESENTATIONS OF MUSLIM GIRLS USING TECHNOLOGY**

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ABSTRACT

In this doctoral research, I explore how social systems and postcolonial cultural norms impact the process and outcome of digital media production created by girls who belong to ethnoracial minority groups living in low-income communities. The study was conducted as a Feminist Ethnography and feminist intervention in a Toronto school over three years, with a focus on Muslim girls in 2011-2012. The purpose of this research is to respond to both the ongoing marginalization of Muslim girls in Canadian schools and to examine how digital media production can be used to bridge ongoing divides between schools and communities in low-income urban and multicultural areas of Canada. Using digital media production to explore student experiences, I identify three topics for analysis that complicate the notion of student “voice.” In this work, I address how sociocultural structures inform the process of digital media production for racialized girls, exploring what kind of meaning can be derived from student-made media and considering how the videos and photos made by Muslim girls are framed within and informed by existing social structures, social expectations, and by the intentions and interests of adults. In addition, I also examine how student concerns over being seen and/or issues related to surveillance impact what they produce (or rather, end up *not* producing at all). Throughout this dissertation, I also consider how student engagement with different forms of new media and technology allow for varied behaviours and interests to be performed, offering a wider view into their lives. I conclude with a discussion of silence, addressing the importance of what was left absent in the process of making digital media with Muslim girls, and explore how these omissions relate to larger postcolonial power relations, to technology, and to media education for racialized girls in under-resourced schools and communities.

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Chapter 1

Introduction: Muslim Girls, Digital Media and the School-Community Divide

Background to the Study

Understanding how race, culture, socioeconomic status, and religion interact and affect young people in school is no easy feat. Those living and learning in multicultural, under-resourced areas of Canada face a variety of factors that affect their ability to participate and succeed in school. Students in these communities experience social, cultural and economic challenges that affect their education, including: impoverished living conditions, poor nutrition, lack of safety, inaccessible health care, misunderstood languages and cultural practices, and negative portrayals about these already marginalized communities that sometimes inform what is known about them and the development of individual identities (Bunar, 2011; Dei, 1997; Dei & James, 2002; Dei & Rummens, 2010; hooks, 1994; Toronto District School Board [TDSB], 2008, 2010; Smyth & Toohey, 2009; Warren, 2005). When such basic needs are not being met it is difficult to understand the complexity of factors that relate to creating positive and effective learning environments for these students. To additionally complicate matters, research has documented that teachers and administrators in low-income schools are typically *not* from the low-income and multicultural neighborhoods they serve, and that they sometimes struggle to understand the lives of their economically and culturally diverse students (Agbo, 2007; Dinero, 2004; Dippo & James, 2010; James, 2004; TDSB, 2008; Warren, 2005; Wells, 2010). Problems arising from sociocultural differences between teachers and students can be seen in various settings. For example, non-native teachers working in Aboriginal communities expressed their lack of understanding of local people, traditions, learning and communication styles, and general interests of Aboriginal students (Agbo, 2007; Dinero, 2004). In another example, teacher-

candidates in urban education discussed difficulties understanding student behaviour and attribute some of these challenges to a lack of “common life experiences” relating to the racial discrimination, poverty and violence experienced by students living in low-income communities (James, 2004, p. 16). Combinations of cultural and socioeconomic challenges plaguing low-income rural and urban areas impact student engagement and achievement, as what is happening in the community cannot be separated from how students behave and perform in school (Agbo, 2007; Bunar, 2011; Diplo & James, 2010; James, 2004; Epstein, 1995; Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez, 1992; Sanders, 2003; TDSB, 2008; Warren, 2005; Warren, Hong, Rubin, & Uy, 2009).

In this opening chapter, I first address the school-community divide in more detail, as my interest in conducting this research began with the aim of responding to the problem of school structures and staff not aligning with the needs of the local community. To describe the problem of the school-community divide further, I outline some of the primary concerns in education for racial and cultural minorities in low-income areas and offer an overview of literature focused on this aspect of educational research. I then discuss Muslim girls, a group who I will argue are racialized¹ and marginalized² based on homogenizing notions about their oppression, and based on a lack of understanding about their cultures and home-lives by people outside their

¹ Reports published by the Toronto District School Board (TDSB, 2010, 2011) indicate that a significant proportion of students who do not complete the needed high school requirements in Toronto are primarily from Aboriginal, Black, Hispanic, Portuguese, and Middle Eastern communities. Students who fall into these and other racial, cultural or ethnic minority groups are described as “racialized groups,” defined by the TDSB (2010) as “a group of people who may experience social inequities on the basis of their perceived common racial background, colour and/or ethnicity, and who may be subjected to differential treatment in the society and its institutions” (p. 3). These reports also identify these students as among those with families in the lowest income levels and who live in areas of the city considered disadvantaged based on widespread poverty, crime and other challenging socioeconomic factors in those areas.

² I define ‘marginalization’ as follows: to be marginalized is to be pushed to the periphery, to be made insignificant, to hold marginal significance, importance or power, and to live in a state of oppression (Oxford Dictionaries Online).

geographic, religious and/or cultural communities. I provide an argument for why Muslim girls are the focus of this study, and introduce digital media production as one means of engaging these students in programs that can lead to interesting and unexpected insight into how they are portrayed and perceived through the digital media they make. I will discuss how digital media production has the potential to expose researchers and educators to distinctly student perspectives, and also how student-produced media is influenced by social and school structures, exploring what it means to draw on this type of work to inform “the school” about the community. In the final pages of this introduction, I include my guiding research questions and a brief commentary on feminist research, which is fundamental to how this project was designed. First, I situate this work within a discussion about the school-community divide, and also address how the voices of marginalized students are considered in this area of study.

Understanding students within the school-community divide.

Defining ‘school’ and ‘community’. In the work that follows, I consider ‘school’ to encompass not only the activities that occur within the school building, but also the system of schooling, including its institutions, policies and practices, and their resulting impacts on students, parents and community members. The term school also refers to the ways the organization of the school day influences how community members structure their lives, and also refers to the power and other relational dynamics that exist between teachers, parents and students (Bunar, 2011). A school, on this view, is already embedded within a larger community that affects it and its students and staff. School can be understood as a community with its own cultures and social norms. Bunar (2011) describes schools as “constituted by a set of dynamic, politically and administratively created agents scattered well beyond the boundaries of a

geographically defined community” (p. 152). The school is not limited to the geographic region it is in because of the dynamics that impact the school which also reach outside the area.

Understanding school in this broader social context, I also define the term ‘community’. Bunar (2011) suggests that communities are groups influenced by power dynamics that extend well beyond geographic boundaries. “Relational dynamics” (Bunar, 2011) between people, policies and institutions are related to social and economic configurations within cities and are influenced by the discourse used to describe certain regions by teachers, parents, students, and popular media. For some, communities are defined as groups who share a common sense of belonging³ (Furman, 1998; hooks, 2009; Osterman, 2000) without homogenous ideals or functions. Social theorist Floya Anthias (2002) suggests that commonalities shift and change between various contexts, supporting the notion that ‘belonging’ is both unfixed and intangible, and that community is a dynamic term. Drawing on these notions of community and belonging, I refer to communities as a way to reflect the dynamic web of interrelations across and within geographic space, discourse, popular culture and new media, society, institutions, policies, economics, etc., binding people together in some way, at a particular point in time or place. With these definitions of school and community in mind, I turn to the literature on school-community engagement and identify how students fit into this discussion.

Locating students within the school-community literature. In the school-community literature, community and the meaning of school-community partnerships are addressed in different ways. Communities are discussed in the context of how members align with each other,

³ The term ‘belonging’ draws on bell hooks (2009) *Belonging: A Culture of Place*. hooks discusses the importance of place and of creating “a world where all people can live fully and well, where everyone can belong” (p. 5). Belonging draws attention to connections with land, race, class and history, regionalism and identity, memory, and the ways our own sense of attachment and commitment to place and people are formed individually and/or communally. Among minority and immigrant groups, particularly those of people with strong ties to their countries of origin, the relationship between place and community is undeniably important. For hooks, finding a sense of belonging means having a deep and positive connection with a place, resulting in balanced, egalitarian, honest, respectful relationships within it.

and aim to improve school-community relations by examining how school-community partnerships can be built with existing community groups (e.g. businesses, universities, support organizations) (Sanders, 2003), how parents can be engaged in schools through meaningful work (Warren, 2005; Warren et al., 2009), and how students can serve as mediators for overlapping spheres of influence between schools, communities and families (Epstein, 1995). These examples suggest that a better bridge between parents and the school, and/or the community and the school, will create partnerships that lead to improved student engagement and achievement. Other approaches to bridging the school-community divide involve increased development of inclusive curriculum and pedagogy that reflects and accommodates diverse sociocultural student needs (Agbo, 2007; Dinero, 2004; James, 2004; Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005; Moll et al., 1992; Smyth & Toohey, 2009; Zine, 2001b, Wells, 2010). However, there are ongoing challenges to making these efforts a reality.

One of the troubling aspects of school-community relations documented in cases from Europe (Bunar, 2011), USA (Dinero, 2004; Epstein, 1995; Sanders, 2003; Warren, 2005) and Canada (Agbo, 2007; Dippo & James, 2010; James, 2004) indicates that students in low-income and geographically marginalized areas struggle in school due to experiences of discrimination based on racial and cultural differences as well as poor socioeconomic living conditions. Discrimination occurs when students are penalized for not participating in school because of physical and psychological stressors that are not apparent to or understood by teachers and staff, resulting from larger issues of poverty and violent crime in the community (Bunar, 2011; James, 2004). Students are marginalized as a result of poor media representations of the region and its members contributing to non-community members' perceptions of people in the area (James, 2004; Richardson, 2008), influencing the way teachers perceive and treat students (Dippo &

James, 2010; James, 2004), and the way students perceive themselves (Bunar, 2011). In relation to the representation of racialized women/girls in media, speaking about black women Patricia Hill Collins (2000) says, “Schools, the news media, and government agencies constitute important sites for reproducing [these] controlling images” (p. 85). Hill Collins refers to the stereotypical and limited representation of black women as related to ongoing racial oppression and contributing to cultural norms and divisions among black communities as well as between black and other (often more powerful) groups. In this case, mis/representation⁴ and limited portrayals of black women influence how they behave, how they are expected to behave (in comparison to white women), and consequently at times contributes also to feelings of inadequacy or inferiority related to a failure to replicate those models or an inability to relate to them (Hill Collins, 2000). In the multicultural urban school, students can be stigmatized based on negative perceptions of the school and community by public news media in the way outlined by Hill Collins regarding black women, but also including (and affecting) generalized perceptions of multicultural (e.g. black, brown, “mixed” and other visible minority groups) low-income communities and its inhabitants (James, 2004; Richardson, 2008). As a result, Bunar notes: “Perhaps the most far-reaching effect is the tendency among young people to internalize the stigma and make it part of their own identity, as a way of understanding themselves, of valuing their relationships, and of assessing their opportunities” (p. 144). Student perceptions of themselves, within their schools and communities, may be closely related to stigmatization from within and outside the community, and this can influence what they believe they are capable of

⁴ I use the term ‘mis/represented’ with a forward slash between “mis” and “represent” to capture the nuances of representation as a term, where no form of it is really “wrong” because representation is always a transformation through replication. The original meaning of anyone or anything will never be “entirely” or “authentically” captured in a representation of it. The use in this way draws attention to the duality of representation of something meant to, but equally unable to capture ‘authenticity’ in the subject (see Baudrillard, 1994, 2001; Benjamin, 1968; McLuhan, 1964), without taking away the power of the visual form (Mirzoeff, 1998).

achieving and how much they engage in school (Bunar, 2011). The school and community are then deeply intertwined: student engagement is closely tied to larger structural issues surrounding local communities, like media representations, common narratives about certain groups of people, and public perceptions of people living in disenfranchised regions.

Research focused on school reform from the standpoint of student-centered engagement indicates that understanding students requires student voice (Angus, 2006; Smyth, 2006). In the student engagement literature, education scholars suggest that creating a more accountable system within which students have the chance to succeed “will have to be one that includes the lives, experiences, cultures, family backgrounds, aspirations, and hopes of young people themselves” (Smyth, 2006, p. 288). In line with understanding culturally and economically diverse communities, writing from the USA, Moll, Amanti, Neff and Gonzalez (1992) approached their work using what they call “funds of knowledge”. ‘Funds of knowledge’ is a conceptual device used to examine communities from a dynamic and individuated perspective, in which the many spheres of influence impacting an individual’s life are accounted for. For example, the ‘funds of knowledge’ at play for a student working at home on the Internet with her/his parent might include networks of friends, family and commercial industries (e.g. software programs) (Gonzalez et al., 2005, p. 44). The influence of these networks cannot be simply related back to culture alone – instead, each individual setting might differ from another and so in order for teachers to understand their students, individual attention to their complex sociocultural home and community lives must be considered (Gonzalez et al., 2005; Moll et al. 1992). In their research, Moll et al., (1992) had teachers visit students’ homes as ethnographers, learning from and with families about “strategic knowledge and related activities essential in household functioning, development and well-being” (p. 139). ‘Funds of knowledge’ attempts to

capture a changing idea of community and culture by focusing on and documenting the lived realities of community members and of students in their own homes.

Marshall and Toohey (2010) have drawn on the concept of ‘funds of knowledge’ to explore multilingual and multimodal education for ethnoracial minority children in schools. In one example, Marshall and Toohey (2010) worked with teachers to have students gather family stories in their home language, translate and portray those stories through multimodal media (and in multiple languages). Students not only digitally recorded family members’ stories about cultural and historic experiences, but also (re)interpreted those stories into illustrated books and translated them again into their home language (for those family members who did not speak or read English). Marshall and Toohey (2010) emphasize the importance of how this project offered insight into student perceptions of their family histories and discuss the possibilities for reframing learning around those narratives and their sociohistorical and political contexts. The authors suggest, “children often participate in social worlds that differ from those of their parents” (Marshall & Toohey, 2010, p. 223) and discuss how accessing their home lives and perspectives on home and history can contribute to a more complete picture of who these students are. It is precisely this purview into the lives of Muslim girls outside of school, and how those community and cultural realities impact them in school, which I aim to better understand. In their work on girls and education in the UK, Osler and Vincent (2003) argue “the voices of young people from marginalized groups...have sometimes challenged the assumptions of education professionals concerning those groups” (p. 13). The social worlds of children and young people need to be accounted for in order for schools and teachers to build better relationships between schools and the communities they serve, which can lead to more equitable

and inclusive curriculum and practices that better reflect students' lives (Marshall & Toohey, 2010; Smyth & Toohey, 2009).

In the following section, I present the particular case of the Toronto District School Board [TDSB] and more information about why Muslim girls are the focus of this study. The TDSB governs a number of schools continuing to face precisely the types of problems I have described so far regarding marginalized and racialized students and a problematic divide between schools and local communities in under-resourced areas. While there are a multitude of racial and cultural minorities in these schools, I focus on Muslim girls because of the complex gender, racial and religious discrimination they encounter.

Focus of the Study

Demographics: Racialization in Toronto schools.

In this section, I narrow the discussion of school-community issues to the local context of this study, Toronto, Canada's largest city with a population of roughly 6 million in the Greater Toronto Area and 2.5 million in Metropolitan Toronto (City of Toronto, n.d.). The city is home to a number of inner-city and inner suburban⁵ schools facing a generalized "decline in the health of the school environment," including "deteriorating relationships between the schools, students, parents and communities" (TDSB, 2008, p. 5). In response to this problem, a Task Force was organized by the TDSB (2010) to examine the achievement gap between students who do and do not succeed in school. The draft (TDSB, 2010) and final report (TDSB, 2011) indicate that

⁵ The term "inner suburban" is borrowed from the paper "The urbanization of the suburbs: Implications for schools & communities," by Diplo, D. & James, C. (2010). The term is used to describe schools whose location is outside the inner-city but not yet in the suburbs, and who are facing "inner-city" problems such as poverty, racism and low academic achievement rates.

racialized students make up a significant proportion of the lowest achieving students in the city.⁶ Race and/or ethnicity, culture, and socioeconomic status are closely related to school achievement and the demographic make-up of a community cannot be ignored when developing curriculum, theory or policy in the area of urban education.

In response to the above (and other) concerns, the TDSB has identified the need for renewal and rebuilding of relationships between students and teachers, the school and community. This includes addressing and understanding cultural, racial, gender and other demographic differences related to student learning and the need for students to have greater access to extracurricular activities as a means to improve engagement (TDSB, 2008, 2010, 2011). The TDSB identifies a lack of access to technology as correlated with low achievement for students in under-resourced schools (TDSB, 2010, 2011), supporting the use of digital media production with students in this project as a way to intervene in this inequitable shortcoming for students in certain regions. I discuss the use of digital media as a way to create opportunities for students to represent their lives and share that work with school and community members in more detail in Chapter 2. In the following section, I outline why I have chosen Muslim girls as the focus of this study.

Muslim girls and discrimination: Statement of the problem.

Muslim girls are one of many student groups who fall into the category of racialized students in Toronto schools. Building on the claims of racial and socioeconomic discrimination

⁶ The 2010 TDSB Achievement Gap Draft Report indicates that 25% of lowest achieving students are racialized. This figure has been removed from the final report, Opportunity Gap Action Plan (TDSB, 2011). No specifics about the percentage of racialized students among the highest achieving students in the TDSB are listed in either document as a point of comparison. Nevertheless, in both reports the TDSB maintains that this proportion of low-achieving, racialized students is “significant”. While 71% of the students across the TDSB are self-identified racialized groups (South Asian 24%, East Asian 15%, Black 12%, Middle Eastern 5%, Southeast Asian 4%, Latin American 2%, Aboriginal 0.3%) the distribution of these communities is closely tied to socioeconomic region, with white students (29%) being clustered in the high socioeconomic areas of Toronto, primarily north-central and south-west (TDSB, 2013). This suggests that racialization and poverty may also be closely tied to educational success.

as a dividing factor between schools and the communities served, as introduced in this chapter, I am interested in exploring the roles of gender and religious discrimination for Muslim girls because of the complex and compounded nature of public and perceived assumptions about “them” as a “group”.⁷ I present here an overview of the many ways racialized girls, and specifically Muslim girls, face discrimination.

Muslim girls, and in particular those in under-resourced communities and those whose religious practice is publically visible by wearing the veil, may face a multitude of forms of discrimination.⁸ To begin with, class and racial discrimination are apparent in mainstream media about Toronto’s low-income communities (Richardson, 2008; Saul & James, 2006) and, these representations of the community impact the general public’s perception about people who live within this region (Dei & James, 2002; Dippo & James, 2010). Gender divisions are still prevalent in schools in various ways (Clegg, 2001; Fenwick, 2004; Jenson, de Castell & Bryson, 2003; Osler & Vincent, 2003; Pomerantz & Raby, 2011) and in particular, girls are under-represented in science and especially technology classrooms (Anderson, Lankshear, Timms & Courtney, 2008; Hill, Corbett, & Rose, 2010; Jenson, de Castell & Bryson, 2003). Schools in impoverished areas are technologically ill-equipped compared to more affluent schools in general, mirroring in local settings the global “digital divide” of greater technological knowledge for the rich over the poor (Warschauer, 2003), and also between those with access to technological training to support the use of technological tools and those without it (Hargittai,

⁷ I am uncomfortably aware of the homogenizing influence of using the term ‘Muslim girls’ to describe a group for whom I cannot say that being Muslim is their own primary marker of identity. I will discuss the multitude of factors that impact the lives of Muslim girls in Chapter 2, and discuss a complex conceptual approach to understanding the experiences of women of colour through Postcolonial Feminist Theory in Chapter 3.

⁸ Complexities related to the discussion of veiling are addressed throughout this dissertation, and in detail in Chapter 2 where I address ideological and religious debates about the place of the veil in Islam and the various effects it may have on Muslim girls and women in North America and in North American schools.

2002). Finally, gender and religious discrimination are often conflated in and out of school by presumptions that veiled Muslim girls, in particular, are a homogeneous group who are ignorant and oppressed (Haw, 1998; Kassam, 2007; MacDonald, 2006; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2008; Rezai-Rashti, 1994; Ruby, 2005; Zine, 2000, 2001a, 2006). The focus on Islam in this research is in part because of the current climate of Islamophobia in public discourse, including in media, to add to the other forms of oppression racialized girls in low-income communities already face.

To further explain the circumstance of Muslim girls in this current climate of Islamophobia, I present an overview the ongoing oppressive structures impacting Muslims and related to Islamic practice noted as important in the experiences of Muslim people living in Western society (Caida & McDonald, 2008; Khan, 2005; Rahnema, 2006). This problem has been documented in reference to representations of Islam in literature, film and photography (Graham-Brown, 2003; Hoodfar, 1993; Macdonald, 2006; Said, 1997, 1998), in news (Caidi & MacDonald, 2008; Hoodfar, 1993) and politics (especially post-September 11, 2001) (Caida & McDonald, 2008; Moghissi, 2004), and typically highlight extremist acts of terrorism perpetuating the myth that all Muslims are primitive, violent and criminal. Meanwhile, Muslim women – particularly those who cover their hair and/or face – are presented as oppressed (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Ahmed, 1982; Hoodfar, 1993; Macdonald, 2006; Moghissi, 2003; Yegenoglu, 1998). Related to these generalized negative public portrayals of Islam, veiled Muslim girls have shared stories about teachers who assume they cannot speak English and place them in remedial English classes without appropriate testing (Rezai-Rashti, 1994; Zine, 2000); of bus drivers and members of the public “eyeing” Muslim girls in ways that make them feel uncomfortable (Zine, 2006); of the public, peers and teachers making discriminatory remarks towards them and/or demonstrating erroneous and often ignorant knowledge about the religion and cultural practices

(Haw, 1998, 2009; Rezai-Rashti, 1994; Zine, 2006); and, of having to negotiate internalized feelings of ostracism in the school and community (Haw, 1998; Kassam, 2007).

Despite the complexity of marginalizing experiences these students face, Muslim girls are often described within the limited frame of their gendered, sartorial religious marker, the *hijab*.⁹ Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2008), education scholars writing on Muslim girls, show how discourses of those veiled in school and in media reinscribe essentialist and reductive notions of culture and ethnicity, and fail to explore how racism, sexism and other factors converge in the life experiences of veiled Muslim women. In line with Martino and Rezai-Rashti, there is a growing critique recognizing how public perceptions of the veil are focused on it as an indication of oppression, and in particular with inadequate consideration for cultural, socioeconomic or individual difference across those who wear it (Bakht, 2008; MacDonald, 2006; Mc Andrew, 2006; Rezai-Rashti, 1994; Ruby, 2005; Zine, 2000, 2001a, 2006).

In this regard, limited discussions about the ethnoracial, socioeconomic background and other factors related to students' lives calls for research to inquire further about how or if "Muslim girls" are being represented as a homogenous "them," and to consider if their experiences can be cohesively categorized under the umbrella of Islam. Moghissi (2003) suggests "immigrants of Islamic cultural backgrounds are entirely conceptualized and their history, culture, and way of life are understood with reference to Islam and Islam alone" (p. 116). In work exploring the experiences of Muslim girls in Western schools, certain scholars do refer to the racial or cultural background of Muslim students (see Haw, 1998, 2009; Noor, 2007; Zine, 2001a, 2006) and in some cases acknowledge the importance of racial, cultural, economic and

⁹ *Hijab* is an Arabic word meaning to conceal or cover and is used to describe the head covering or scarf worn by some Muslim girls and women. Variations to this and other sartorial practices (such as long overcoats leaving only the hands exposed) are based on class, geographic region and related sociocultural and political traditions and expectations.

other differences within the Islamic community (see Haw, 1998, 2009; Wing & Smith, 2005; Zine, 2006). As an example, Zine (2001a) addresses the intersection of race, gender and religion for Muslim young people in Canadian schools, discussing the multiple layers of discrimination they face as black or brown Muslim boys and girls. In this example, understanding the place of religion in these diverse ethnoracial and sociocultural spaces remains the focus of Zine's work. Understanding the sub-communities that form around religion for these students in schools is unquestionably important. And yet, to bridge school-community divides requires some additional means of communicating that information to the school in a fluid and ongoing way. The research I have conducted here contributes to this complex conversation by questioning common mis/representations and mis/perceptions of Muslim girls, who are visible through the practice of veiling, and often treated in the discriminatory ways described in this chapter because of this visible religious practice. Additionally, my work explores one potential way to integrate a better understanding of these community members in the school through an important and valuable educational process, digital media production. In this research, I have attempted to engage students in the creative and expressive practice of making digital media, inviting them to share aspects of their lives that are relevant to their identities and experiences in a way that does not assume Islam is the centre point for that discussion (though it certainly could be).

To further explain why it is important to understand these complex and nuanced relationships that relate to students school and community lives, and the various markers of identity that may relate to experiences of discrimination and identities for young people, I briefly refer to research studies that address the complexity of individual, religious, ethnoracial, gender, and other factors. For example, Dei (1997) discusses African-Canadian students experiencing differential and disenfranchising treatment from teachers who impose their own assumptions and

stereotypes about black culture on students. Dei provides examples of teachers indirectly pushing black students into remedial classes without adequate cause to do so. In this way, the research findings from Dei (1997) and Dei and James (2002) on the experiences of black students in Toronto closely match the experiences of Muslim girls, documented by Zine (2000, 2001a, 2006), Zine, Taylor and Davis (2007), Noor (2007), and Haw (1998, 2009). When the experiences of discrimination outlined in these studies about black students and Muslim students (with varied ethnoracial backgrounds) are so closely aligned, how can race or religion be identified as a cause? In another example of work exploring the conflation of factors related to student experiences, Collet (2007) conducted interviews with Somali Muslim adults who graduated from Toronto public schools. From this work, Collet describes how Islam is inseparable from Somali nationhood for these students, who refer to the religion as setting the cultural and behavioural rules and regulations for Somali people. Collet's work suggests that it may be insufficient to discuss religion without addressing other factors such as nationhood and cultural practices, and he leaves the relationship between religion, culture and gender to be further explored.

Drawing on an example from outside of Toronto, I turn to a study conducted by Cynthia Joseph (2009), an education scholar whose work focuses on postcolonial studies and culture, identity and equity in education. Joseph's study of Malay-Muslim, Indian and Chinese female students inquired about their conceptions of "success" and "failure" in Malaysia. Joseph contends that multiple identities are at play in determining student perceptions and behaviours. In addition to the intersections of race, culture, gender and class, she identifies aspects of globalization and modernity that are in negotiation with traditional values for students from different ethnoracial backgrounds. For example, 16 year old Indo-Malaysian Muslim girls who

were interviewed in Joseph's study talk about pursuing academic and professional paths to make them valuable on the global job market before getting married or having children, pushing against traditions that would normally have them married at a younger age. The identities and experiences of these girls involve a range of important factors that play with and against each other, leading towards negotiations of traditional values, such as marriage, in a contemporary society where education and careers are also important for many women. Joseph's study indicates that it is important to understand student perceptions and to attempt to deconstruct how, where and/or if students are negotiating variables from both within school and outside of it, influencing their life choices towards a particular goal or interest. How then can the factors (e.g. race, religion, class, gender, sexuality, etc.) framing student experiences in and out of school be identified, and, in what ways can their intersection be interrogated? I now introduce digital media production as one means of exploring the complex realities of Muslim girls in under-resourced schools.

Bing-Canar and Zerkel (1998), Goldman, Booker and McDermott (2008), and Stern (2008), as examples, identify digital media production as a way to engage students in work that can respond to social injustice by participating in the construction of their own representation, while others argue for digital media production and online participation as ways to counter dominant master-narratives (Curwood & Gibbons, 2010) and as important to the development of youth identity, civic and educational engagement (Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins, Purushtoma, Weigel, Clinton & Robinson, 2009; Kafai, Peppler & Chapman, 2009). Involving marginalized young people in the process of digital media production has therefore become a well-established means of giving students tools and opportunity to speak for and about their own lives and interests. Throughout this dissertation, I consider how the diversity of factors relevant to the lives of

Muslim girls in Toronto can be better understood through the process of making digital media about topics that interest them, and further this field of research with a discussion about digital media production with young people in the context of problematic social structures, namely postcoloniality. Postcolonialism describes a complex system of sociocultural relations related to the recent history of colonialism, which I describe in detail in Chapter 3. Importantly, throughout a discussion of what students produced and their process of production, I also address how meaning is attributed to their digital media work from the standpoint of media viewers/users. In this way, I offer nuanced and complex examples of how Muslim girls, and arguably other racialized and minoritized communities are perceived and portrayed in, and sometimes omitted from, digital media and technology. In this exploration, I have maintained a focus on girls by applying Postcolonial Feminist Theory (Mohanty, 2003; Narayan, 1997) as a framework and designing a feminist research study, which I introduce in the following section.

Research Questions

I have approached my research questions from a feminist standpoint, exploring how to make the voices of participating girls more present while still accounting for the complicated structures relating to power and representation that are necessarily a part of the research process (Ansell, 2001; Lather, 2001). I discuss feminist perspectives on research, including the importance of examining the power structures embedded in research and in the position of the researcher in Chapter 3. Here, I briefly explain how I came to my research questions.

In addition to the challenges Muslim girls face in school, as documented by the literature outlined in this introductory chapter, my interest in exploring the lives of Muslim girls has also been in part due to my position as a Muslim woman of mixed ethnoracial heritage raised in Canada. From my own experiences during elementary and high school, I also faced a range of

often-erroneous assumptions made about my culture, interests, home-life, religion, and intellectual/professional abilities. In the school where I worked as a research assistant for several years, prior to making it also the focus of my doctoral study, I observed there a number of veiled Muslim girls who demonstrated a range of interests and opinions, beyond their shared Islamic practice, and very much outside of the public and academic discourse I had encountered about “them” as disenfranchised and marginalized youth. The following questions were then designed to inquire about how Muslim girls represent themselves, their school and community through digital media. My research questions are:

- 1) How do Muslim girls portray school, community, and themselves through media they produce?
- 2) Based on students’ media productions, how does religion, race, culture (including media, technology and popular culture), class, sexuality and/or gender - and which/whose religion, race and/or culture - impact students' perceptions of themselves, communities and schools?

I address these questions throughout this dissertation in the following ways. In Chapter 2, the literature review, I provide a more in-depth explanation of two important areas of work that have informed this study. First, I offer an overview of the controversial discussion regarding women, Islam and the veil. The purpose of this overview is not to make the veil the centre of discussion in this research, but rather to set the complex stage relating to both how Muslim girls are often portrayed and to present at the outset the many factors related to this sometimes oversimplified aspect of Islamic practice for girls and women. Although this is not an Islamic study, I see this as a necessary starting point because of the embodied and visible nature of wearing *hijab* and what this means in the context of visual digital media research. Second, I provide an introduction to research in the field of digital media and learning, to highlight why I have designed this study using new media and technologies to better understand the lives of Muslim

girls. In Chapter 3, I discuss the theoretical and methodological approaches applied to this research. I focus on Postcolonial Feminist Theory (Mohanty, 2003; Narayan, 1997) and address the larger conversation about how visible minority women are re/presented in the context of global power relations circulating in a postcolonial social system. I also offer an outline of the methodological approach in Chapter 3, Feminist Ethnography (Visweswaran, 1994), employed in the design and data collection of this work. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are analytical chapters based on the data collected throughout this study. In these chapters, I discuss three provocative and complex ideas that I have identified from the data collected and based on my extensive period of study in one school. Specifically, in Chapter 4 I discuss how the lives of Muslim girls and their racialized peers can be, in some cases, misrepresented in the media they make based on the sociocultural influences surrounding the process of production. Chapter 5 is focused on issues of insecurity in terms of how insecurity affects media production for girls in relation to both privacy/safety in online environments and insecurity related to body image and media. In Chapter 6 I provide a discussion about how the technological tools in use during this study impacted what was made and what could be “seen” about the lives of the participating girls, drawing on Actor-Network Theory (Latour, 2005) to emphasize how technology can also mediate behaviour. I conclude this dissertation in Chapter 7 with a discussion of silence, exploring absence in terms of what kind of work students’ produced and how these omissions (related also to Islam) reflect the sociocultural context of the school environment. I now turn to Chapter 2, the literature review.

Chapter 2

Literature Review: Muslim Girls and the Power of Media

The focus of this chapter is to explore how digital media production can respond to the limitations of some current concerns pertaining to the school-community divide, and in particular for Muslim girls. Specifically, I address common public discourse about Muslim girls and the practice of veiling, and also explore how digital media can contribute to alternative depictions of them, made by them in some cases. Although the veil is not the analytical focus of this dissertation, I engage in a detailed discussion about arguments for and against the choice for women to veil because Muslim girls are often subjected to discrimination and mis/understandings as a result of these larger sociocultural discussions (Ruby, 2005; Wing & Smith, 2006) and recently also as a result of legislatures attempting to restrict what they can and cannot wear in certain parts of Canada (Lynch, 2013; Siddiqui, 2013). The purpose of this discussion about the veil is to explore how Muslim girls are racialized based on their religious sartorial practice of veiling, and also to complicate the discussion about veiling as it relates to oppression. I address this issue in detail to set the foundation for a broadened representation of Muslim girls in school, in widely circulating public discourse and in media throughout the work presented here. Following a discussion about arguments for and against the veil, I address digital media and the ways it can be used to respond to problematic portrayals of Muslim girls. I also review the many well-documented benefits to digital media literacy in education for marginalized young people. I conclude the literature review with a brief discussion about the problematic of representation in/through media and in efforts to represent disenfranchised communities. First, I begin with a discussion about the Muslim veil and how it relates to the experiences of girls and women pursuing education in Western contexts.

Public Positions on Muslim Girls and Women

A discussion about Muslim women and the veil.

There are very polarized and public discussions about the Islamic veil: support for it, criticism of it, and complex conversations about the sociocultural, political and historical conditions related to the practice of wearing *hijab* in Western schools and society (Ahmed, 2011; Mc Andrew, 2006; Wing & Smith, 2006). Throughout the discussion of these prevailing viewpoints in this chapter, I consider what is missing from this discourse, including the need to consider the experiences of Muslim girls and women as more than a question of choosing to wear the veil or not. Although my work was not explicitly focused on the issue of veiling, I argue that it is important to consider the meaning and importance of the practice as it relates to Muslim girls, including how they might be perceived for veiling because it is literally an embodied practice. This is especially important as this study is focused on digital video production that makes the practice of veiling explicit to the viewer. Building on a foundational understanding about this topic, I investigate alternative ways of framing narratives about Muslim girls throughout this dissertation to shift the conversation from an obvious and public preoccupation with the veil to more comprehensive approaches to understanding the lives of people within this community. To begin, I offer an overview of the complicated debate about the practice of veiling in Islam.

To veil or not to veil: a discussion on the question of choice.

The sartorial choices of Muslim women, such as wearing hijab, make them undeniably visible as Islamic followers (Canadian Council for Muslim Women [CCMW], n.d.; Ruitenberg, 2008). Their religious practice is connected to their bodies and as such is a visible marker for

outsiders to possibly mis/understand Islam and the cultural traditions sometimes associated with it. It has been noted that long-standing negative portrayals of veiled Muslim women as oppressed fuel the liberatory desire to “free” the helpless subject, while Muslim women become the object of public fetish with the desire to “unveil” her and see the hidden body (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2008; Mernissi, 2003; Yegenoglu, 1998; Zine, 2006; Zine et al., 2007). And, as mentioned, there is a large body of research addressing Muslim women and girls in Western contexts and also discussing the issue of the veil and the relevance of it to their identity, sense of belonging, position in society and their own religious cultures (see Ali, 2005; Haw, 1998, 2009; Kassam, 2007; Keaton, 2005; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2008; Ruitenberg, 2008; Zine, 2000, 2001a, 2006). Understanding the arguments for and against the veil is important because the debate structures not only Muslim women’s actual choices (or lack thereof) but also social constructs and prejudices that have direct impact on their (our) lives.

Historically, discourse about veiling as a symbol of oppression has existed in Western literary texts, trade and travel reports (Graham-Brown, 2003; Hoodfar, 1993) and has allowed for an Orientalist perspective of “Othering” Muslim girls/women that continues into the 21st century (Hoodfar, 1993; Martino et al, 2008; Ruitenberg, 2008; Said, 1998; Yegenoglu, 1998; Zine et al, 2007). In many cases, 19th and 20th century literature describes the oppression of veiled women in the east while omitting any discussion of equally oppressive patriarchal¹⁰ influences on women in the West (Hoodfar, 1993; Said, 1998). Representations of this kind, portraying mainly the oppression of Muslim women, have now also found their way into mainstream media. In her work on the representation of Muslim women in media, MacDonald (2006) discusses how images of a veiled Muslim woman’s body “eclipse Muslim women’s own diversity of voice and

¹⁰ ‘Patriarchy’ refers to families, communities and/or societies socially organized around the father or male authority figure. In patriarchal social structures, social norms, rules and regulations are oftentimes created with the underlying intention of maintaining men in positions of power (Johnson, 2005).

self-definition” (p. 7). MacDonald suggests that understanding the variations across “social, political, and economic positioning of Muslim women” is lost within a generalized “fixation” on the veil (p. 7). In society as in schools, women and girls wearing *hijab*, *niqab*¹¹ or other forms of religious attire face common problems (like teenage disputes with parents) and find these issues sewn (literally) onto the fabric of their sartorial choices when non-Muslim community members (including teachers) sometimes assume that these conflicts reflect oppressive ‘traditional values’ in opposition to the Western system (Rezai-Rashti, 1994). It is important to consider how public perception of the veil, how a belief that the veil is a symbol of oppression, leads to more oppression for Muslim girls for whom assumptions about their subjugation can be additionally silencing. This point does not overlook the reality of oppression that may be related to the practice of veiling, but highlights a need to better understand the practice for particular Islamic communities and individuals with an important focus on other factors that also influence and inform the lives of Muslim girls and women. Experiences such as students being sent to remedial classes without appropriate testing (Zine, 2006) and students’ experiences of “normal” conflict such as sibling rivalry being misconstrued into reflections of Islamic oppression (Rezai-Rashti, 1994; Zine, 2001a) are described by students directly related to wearing the veil. Their sociocultural reality in school and the community is framed by how they are perceived by others as well as by how they perceive themselves.¹²

Let me clarify the nature of this two-sided debate about the veil. On one side, the discussion entails the veil as a representation of sexist, patriarchal structures (Wing & Smith,

¹¹ *Niqab* refers to the face covering worn by some Muslim women, sometimes leaving only a slit to see through open for the eyes, sometimes with no slit at all.

¹² Muslim girls who do not wear the veil are largely omitted from research on this topic, though it would be an interesting line of inquiry to explore how they too are impacted by Islamophobia. In this regard, I also note the conflation of the terms “Arab” and “Islam” in public discourse, a common occurrence suggesting that students who are racialized as Arabic may also face assumed though erroneously-placed forms of Islamophobia (and vice versa). Arabphobia can be misconstrued as Islamophobia and the relationship between the two can certainly be further explored.

2006). On the other side, research also documents that for many women and girls veiling is an act of resistance against Islamophobia and against the hyper-sexualization and objectification of women in Western culture and media (Ali, 2005; Ruby, 2005; Wing & Smith, 2006). For others, choosing to wear some form of scarf, cover or veil demonstrates publically their belief in Islam and devotion to the Islamic community and God (Ali, 2005, Bakht, 2008; Hoodfar, 1993; Kassam, 2007; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2008; Ruby, 2005; Wing & Smith, 2006; Zine, 2006). Wing and Smith (2006) provide a lengthy overview of arguments in favor of and against the veil. For example, discussing one side of the argument they address compliance with family values as one reason why some women are in favor of wearing *hijab*, as one of the subjects puts it (15 year old girl): “it’s a choice that I make...so that I no longer experience bestial and disrespectful looks towards me!” (p. 764). In this case, “choice” is undermined by the dangers of a social structure where not wearing the veil allows women to be degraded by other members of the community. Wing and Smith indicate: “The headscarf can thus provide a form of protection for females who wear it because they can come and go without being an object of harassment by Muslim men” (p. 763). Referring to data from focus group discussions with Canadian women who wear *hijab*, women’s studies scholar Tabassum Ruby (2005) states: “For the wearers of the headscarves in this study, the *hijab* is a tool that confers power and...helps many of them to take control of their bodies...for Di’ba, putting a barrier between herself and potential viewers is not due to Islamic restrictions; rather, she wants to create a space that is free from the male gaze” (p. 61). These examples share the larger problem of women making decisions from within patriarchal social structures. While avoiding male harassment might be used as an argument for why women should be allowed to veil, it is also a clear example of gender-based discrimination embedded in both Muslim and non-Muslim communities, where the sexual harassment of women has been

normalized. I will return to the idea of women making decisions about what they do based on an awareness of who might be watching them and how they might be seen in Chapter 5. I contend at this point, however, that decisions like the ones noted here, to veil or not veil in response to how you are being viewed, are influenced by a patriarchal structure that ultimately limits choice rather than affording it.

This side of the argument, supporting the veil in order to protect women from unwanted male attention, suggests that by covering the female body it becomes invisible, removed of sexual marking, or at least less alluring to the (wild, unrestrained) sexual interests of men. And at the same time, it is the distinct marking of the veil, which in practice is entirely gendered that can also serve to mystify and make more alluring the very sexuality it tries to hide (Mernissi, 2003; Yegenoglu, 1998). By covering the body, headscarves and loose clothing can also exoticize and eroticize Muslim women further by increasing interest to see what lies underneath them (Mernissi, 2003), a kind of ‘colonial fantasy’ that emerged alongside narratives about the Orient and “other” world in the late 20th century (Yegenoglu, 1998). What is the role of the veil when presented as a barrier to sexual attention? If its purpose is to deflect sexual desire outside of marriage, which has been pathologized by the moralist standards of the religion, women’s bodies are then the object of “devious” sexual interest and behaviour, and *the responsibility of controlling those interests, desires and behaviours falls on women* (Mernissi, 2003; Wing & Smith, 2006; Yegenoglu, 1998). Furthermore, this discussion is consumed within a hetero-normative discourse completely void of even the possibility of same-sex interests, which would render the very sexually-based purpose of the veil, which is primarily to dissuade the attention of men, moot.

There are also alternative pictures of Islam that do not support veiling and that are often omitted from the wider public discussions about how Islam is practiced. The Ismaili Muslim community in Canada, for example, does not require any form of veiling as a general practice for women.¹³ Furthermore, there are also individual Muslims or Muslim families from various sects of Islam who chose to interpret the religion based on their own social and gender politics. For example, one student at the school where I conducted this research was from a community generally understood to uphold female veiling as a necessary part of Islamic practice, however she informed me that her mother does not veil and insists that her daughter (my informant) remove her veil for school photographs. In this case, it is important to think beyond repressive extremes and remember that there is a diverse range of practices across Islamic communities and that class, race, gender, nationhood and being from different generations alters the meaning and application of religious practice (Rahnema, 2006).

Today, there are indeed references to the veil as a positive symbol of solidarity and community for women, in which gender discrimination is not the focus of the argument. In my experiences with Muslim peers and students who wear the veil, particularly in Diasporic Islamic communities in Canada, many Muslim women today are approaching the choice to veil with awareness of its gendered, social implications. For some women (and girls), their liberation as women is tied more closely to their religious devotion than to Western notions of individual identities and freedom – for them, it is more important to show solidarity with their religion than it is to “free” their bodies of “oppressive” Islamic coverings (Ruby, 2006), and such an important decision should be theirs. In Leila Ahmed’s (2011) book, *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil’s*

¹³ I refer to the Ismaili community based on my personal experience with family members who are Ismaili. Importantly, I also mention that some more fundamental Islamic groups do not consider Ismaili’s to be Muslim. Ismaili’s also have a history of persecution within the Islamic world. The Ismaili community is an example of sectoral divisions within Islam that include complicated relationships regarding how religious doctrine is interpreted and practiced.

Resurgence, From the Middle East to America, she describes how women's perspectives on the veil changed in America post 9/11, arguing that it was a time when many women chose to wear the veil for the first time in solidarity with the global Muslim community, as a way to challenge prejudice against Muslims, and as a show of devotion to their faith. In a research paper exploring Muslim women who dress their online avatars in Second Life with "*e-hijabs*," Tadros (2011) discusses how the women interviewed (online in the world of Second Life) use the *hijab* to signify to the expansive community there that they are Islamic followers. Such perspectives on the veil suggest that there are both oppressive realities about this particular practice and potentially non-oppressive iterations of how and why women veil.

Despite a growing body of work in support of the veil and complicating its social, cultural and political role, ultimately, there are strong arguments for the practice of veiling as fundamentally sexist. Although the concept of "modesty" on which veiling is based (with reference to passages from the Qur'an)¹⁴ is not necessarily sexist, the way that this practice has developed over time predominantly holds on to patriarchal structures imposing social responsibility on women to control the behaviours of both women and men through women's bodies and dress. In this regard, it is not necessarily the act of veiling itself that is sexist but the broader sociocultural context around wearing the veil that is and can be especially problematic.

¹⁴ For example, one commonly cited verse in relation to the issue of veiling states that both men and women should "lower their gaze and guard their modesty" (Qur'an 24:30,31). The verse pertaining to women is more detailed, suggesting of women: "...they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear...they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers..." (Qur'an 24:31) (Yusuf Ali, 1997). In many cultures, this scripture along with other verses of the Qur'an are used as the reason behind the practices of more extreme forms of veiling for women, while little or no restrictions have been created for men in most Islamic societies (Wing & Smith, 2006). And in fact, within these verses, the regulations for women are much more explicit than they are for men, suggesting that women should be "modest" except in the presence of a very specific list of male family members. It may be the case then that patriarchal structures have permeated religious doctrine in the name of maintaining male power from the outset of the religion, only to be taken further within certain cultural and religious communities over time. Men in Islamic communities do also practice "modesty" in their dress, and sometimes wear hair covers, but this is far less common (and certainly less extreme) than it is for women.

A note on veiling and voice.

To add to this complicated debate about the role of the veil in women's lives, the opinions of women who do veil are poorly reflected in the discourse about it. Wing and Smith (2006) quote a female Muslim commentator on the situation: "The debate is biased in advance, the extremists on both sides have made the decision to think in the place of young girls, without taking into account their opinion, nor respecting the fundamental notion of free will" (in Wing & Smith, 2006, p. 748). Although the notion of "free will" may also be problematic given the discussion I have just presented about the complicated notion of 'choice' within patriarchal sociocultural structures, this does not pardon the lack of inclusion of Muslim girls and women in discussion about their own lives. I refer to the debate around the veil because it is the very attention it receives over other issues that, as MacDonald (2006) states, "eclipse" the diversity of interests and opinions Muslim girls and women have. And while I am aware that such a lengthy discussion here might perpetuate the very same problem – letting the veil become a point of focus – the existing reality of the veil as a centre for conversation about Muslim girls in school makes this discussion a necessary place to begin. In the following section, I address this problem using examples in Canada specifically and then address how digital media is changing the landscape of possible depictions of Muslim girls, their interests, and how they represent themselves and the practice of veiling.

Muslim women and girls in Canada.

In Canada, barriers to integration for women of the Muslim faith have been at the forefront of national politics on a number of occasions. In particular, much of the debate around Muslim headress in Canada has been ignited in Quebec, a French-speaking province that openly maintains close ties to French history and culture, a point of reference because France has

propelled policies of cultural assimilation pertaining to multicultural and religious practices (Keaton, 2005) and banned full-face covers in public places that relate in practice to religious dress (e.g. *niqab* is a problem but a full-face helmet for a motorcycle is not) (The National, 2013). The debate around veiling and this type of law leads to other forms of discrimination. For example, a young Muslim girl in Canada wearing *hijab* was ejected from a soccer game in Quebec, Canada's francophone province, in 2007 (CBC News, 2007) (which happened to be at the outset of the debate of the ban on veiling in France). The official ruling stated a concern for the girl's safety as the referee expressed concern that she might choke on her headscarf. A ruling by FIFA, the international soccer association, paralleled this incident in 2010. At that time, the Iranian girls soccer team was denied entry to the Youth Olympics for wearing *hijab* because FIFA states that it is against regulation to wear religious artifacts on the field (Al-Jazeera, 2010). Decisions such as these maintain women in a position of disempowerment, where they have little to say about rulings that impact them. And, as these decisions are made for them, inadequate attention is paid to how the decisions further ostracize Muslim girls from local and/or global society, or simply deny them the opportunity to pursue interests like sports.

In recent years, although politics in the province of Quebec vary from those in Ontario where this doctoral research was conducted, incidents of discrimination from Quebec have contributed to Canadian political culture nation-wide. Quebec was in the public eye again in 2010, with a proposed legislature, Bill 94, under which women would have to uncover their faces in order to access government services (Chung, 2010). Canadian academic and former leader of the Liberal government, Michael Ignatieff, supported this ban and described it as "a good Canadian balance" to the problem (CBC, 2010). At the time, Ignatieff's comment suggested a single iteration of what it means to be Canadian, while exposing a one-sided opinion about the

practice of veiling as a “problem”. In April 2013, the debate resurged in Toronto. A Muslim woman testifying against the man she accused of sexual assault became the subject of public debate about the place of full-face veiling in the courtroom. The discussion made its way to the Supreme Court, where they ruled that trial judges could make case-by case decisions about the issue, based on judicial scrutiny over the perceived devotion of the Muslim woman on trial, as determined by the jury. An additional factor allowed the jury and judge to attribute value the practice of veiling over the gain/loss of facial expressions as fundamental to assessing testimony (Lynch, 2013). Here too, decisions about the importance of these religious symbols are made without the women who veil, and in this case by people who may not at all understand what that practice means (what kind of value it carries) for that woman as an individual, and for that woman within her community. In 2013, the debate continues with Quebec Premiere Pauline Marois supporting a bill to ban religious attire, including *hijab*, *niqab*, the Sikh turban and kirpan and Jewish kippa from public offices and institutions (Siddiqui, 2013). Within these examples, there is inadequate representation reflecting the lives and opinions of girls and women who wear *hijab* or *niqab*, either about the veil specifically or how the regulations might impact their lives overall.¹⁵

Looking at veiling in the context of schools, I consider education scholar Claudia W. Ruitenberg’s (2008) research on citizenship, democracy and gender studies. She discusses the place of the headscarf in public schools and argues that public education should prepare individuals to transition from private to public life. In order to prepare for the diversity and challenges of the modern, global world, students must experience heterogeneous cultural and

¹⁵ There is also a lack of discussion about the historical presence of other forms of veiling, such as nuns in Canada. Grey Nuns, for example, represent various Roman Catholic communities and have had a public presence in social work, health and education in Canada for over 250 years (Hanrahan, 2009). The common attire for nuns is a loose dress or gown and head covering, comparable to some forms of Islamic veiling, and their attire has not in recent history been an issue of public debate so far as I encountered throughout this research.

pedagogical challenges in school to work with and within diverse cultures and global communities, and essentially to grow/learn through some of the challenges that come with facing and accepting cultural difference. Ruitenberg describes sartorial choices as closely related to how identities are built. Dress represents taxonomies, such as class and gender in specific ways. Denying people the choice to dress how they want disguises ‘sartorial regulatory codes’ as normal, hiding hegemonic intentions, imposing regulations that supposedly support liberation for women, which thereby take away their agency. By forcing everyone to dress the same way, standards set by the ruling power structures, in this case “the West,” are further normalized, while the important reasons behind diverse forms of dress for particular communities (and individuals) are lost. Although there is no regulation against wearing the veil in Toronto, according to Ruitenberg the discourse around the veil impacts both the people who wear it and the way those and others understand it. This is why I have spent so much time in discussion about the veil, because having a deeper and complex perspective on the arguments for and against it also impacts how the reader from the outset perceives the Muslim girls at the focus of this study. It seems then ever more important that women and girls have a voice in describing not only why they do or do not wear the veil, but also about what cultural, political, economic or other histories and interests matter to them and impact their lives overall. It is only with a more in-depth understanding of the lives of Muslim girls that the veil can be questioned as the defining representative tool used to discuss issues pertaining to those who wear it.

In the following pages, I discuss patriarchy alongside two particularly extreme incidents of violence against Muslim women. In these examples, I attempt to move polarized portrayals of the Muslim community into alternate and more complicated representations of them. I also

present a more diverse picture of Muslim girls and women, one that is increasingly supported by digital and multimedia platforms.

Challenging Extremist Discourse of Muslim Girls in/with Media

Recognizing the differences between the individual realities of Muslim girls, where some might be suffering abuse and discrimination addressing multiple forms of intersecting oppression, complicated at best. The tragic example of Aqsa Parvez and the media that surrounded the event highlight some of these problems. Aqsa, a Muslim Pakistani teen from Brampton, Ontario was killed by her father and brother in 2007 for not abiding by their traditional gender expectations (CBC News, 2010). In this case, religion (Islam) and patriarchy were heavily conflated in public discourse. Aqsa Pervez's murder was touted in media as an example of Islamic Pakistani gender-based violence. According to Khan (2008), articles like one in the magazine *Toronto Life* describe Aqsa's death in the context of Islamic orthodoxy. In this case, the religious based analysis inadequately considered the complexity of factors particular to the Parvez family's case (Khan, 2008) and omitted a clear distinction of patriarchy as a fundamental factor in the event, instead citing Islamic orthodoxy as the primary 'cause' for her death.

A similar story came to the forefront of media attention regarding the case of the Afghani Shafia family murders from 2009 in Montreal, Quebec. In this case, three daughters and the first wife of Mohammed Shafia were found dead in a vehicle near Kingston, Ontario. Police arrested Shafia, his son and second wife for the murder and convicted them to life in prison (National Post Staff, 2012). Shafia and his collaborators were described as staging the women's murders as a car accident, due to arguments that were "aggravated by daughters who dressed in revealing Western clothes, rejected the *hijab*, took boyfriends and spilled family secrets to the outside

world” (DiManno, 2011). While the violence and oppressive conditions of these women’s lives are a gravely serious concern, the presentation in the media of the tragedies as “honour killings” is often related to Pakistani (for Aqza Parvez), Afghani (for the Shafia murders), or blanket Middle Eastern cultural referents and Islam. One important and often overlooked question is if these incidents were causally related to Islam, or rather to Pakistani or Afghani cultural norms that have come to invoke Islam beyond what is dictated in and by Islamic scripture. To imply that these acts of violence reflect Islamic or “Middle Eastern culture” can greatly simplify complicated sociocultural issues, demonize entire communities as a result, and lead to the further marginalization of women from these cultures living in Diaspora (Visweswaran, 2010). On the other hand, there also seems to be a global hesitation about condemning cultures for cultural norms that tolerate violence against women, which are equally true in North America. Ultimately, an in-depth historical exploration of culture and religion as interrelated factors would be needed to fairly reflect any kind of cause-effect relationship for these incidents. In some cases, religious and cultural norms may be the cause of violence against women and other atrocities, but such examples should not condemn entire, diverse and often geographically disparate communities for it.

To this end, it is important to note that the same cultural critique about violence against women is all but absent from Western media. This is despite the reality of violence against women globally, including in the West, and at the hands of male relatives and male strangers. To clarify, I refer to Narayan (1997) who describes this problem as “death by culture” pertaining to Third-World women.¹⁶ Narayan comments:

¹⁶ Narayan (1997) describes ‘Third-World subjects’ as “individuals from Third-World countries temporarily living and working in Western countries, individuals born and [who] have lived in Western contexts but have social identities linking them to immigrant communities of colour, and to individuals who are members of communities of colour in Western contexts that have no sense of immigrant identity” (p.121).

I am concerned with...the ways in which “culture” is invoked in explanations of forms of violence against Third-World women, while it is not similarly invoked in explanations of forms of violence that affect mainstream Western women. I intend to argue that when such “cultural explanations” are given for *fatal* forms of violence against Third-World women, the effect is to suggest that Third-World women suffer “death by culture.” I shall try to show that fatal forms of violence against mainstream women seem interestingly resistant to such “cultural explanations,” leaving Western women seemingly more immune to “death by culture”. (p. 84)

Based on Narayan’s conceptions of “death by culture” for Third-World women, projections of them as victims of their culture can result in that culture being demonized (and in male perpetrators of violence not being penalized for their abuse). The importance of culture as it relates to race and religion will be addressed further in this chapter as a way to think about how homogenizing discourses can impact the way particular communities are represented in media.

To build on the limited view of Muslim girls and women reflected in media, and in an attempt to seek out forums where Muslim girls portray themselves, I found several interesting publications run by and about Muslim women and girls. I discuss the content of these alternate representations of Muslim girls in media to counter the predominant discourse about them discussed so far. For example, the Toronto “zine,”¹⁷ *AQSAzine*, was a publication where Muslim women voiced varied interests and opinions in creative ways. The zine was created by Muslim women for Muslim women to honour Aqsa Parvez. *AQSAzine* published a number of issues on themes including sexuality, ancestry, and “my Islam,” giving Muslim women and girls a place to

¹⁷ A ‘zine’ is a community-organized, non-professional and locally published magazine. *AQSAzine* is no longer in active circulation.

define what Islam means to them. The work in this publication ranged from experiences of being Muslim and queer-identified to coping with abortion and living with cultural hybridity.¹⁸

In other examples, online blogs are a relatively new opportunity for individuals to post multimedia content about any topic they choose online. Two blogs, “BADASS Muslimahs” (<http://badassmuslimahs.tumblr.com/>) and “Looking for Identity” (<http://hijabonmyhead.tumblr.com/>) have been created by Muslim women and aim to dispel the myth that veils are the defining aspect of a Muslim woman’s identity, or that wearing a veil means other freedoms of expression – in fashion, profession or other aspects of life – are lost. The blog “BADASS Muslimahs” commonly posts videos of veiled Muslim women in fashionable attire and shimmering make-up and accessories, of veiled or unveiled historic Muslim heroines, activists and rebels, and of Muslim girls and women performing music, slam poetry and theatre. On the blog “Looking for Identity” posts are primarily pictures of fashionable Muslim women in *hijab*. The content and title of “Looking for Identity” demonstrates a direct effort to challenge the persona of veiled Muslim women as anything less than diverse, beautiful and confident in their dress, style and body. These blogs depict women’s style and beauty and represent veiling as a heterogeneous practice that is not trying to hide women’s beauty, supporting instead the notion that it is a reflection of religious solidarity without necessarily being oppressive. Here, it is interesting to consider how a religious, sartorial artifact intended to represent sexual “modesty” contrasts with make-up and fashion designed to attract attention (of the sexual or romantic kind). What does this mean for the meaning of veiling? These online forums act as a form of political resistance against the assumed oppression of Muslim girls and women.

¹⁸ Paperback example of the publication is the “Love/Sex/Marriage + Immigration/Migration” issue, Fall 2009, Volume 2. Published by AQSAZine (Toronto) from author’s personal library.

Here, I argue that the community publication *AQSAzine* and these two blogs serve as representations of a diverse display of what it means to be a Muslim girl/woman and thereby uncover the importance of interrogating the experiences of this community in Western schools at a much deeper level. The idea to explore the lives of Muslim girls using digital media production grew as I encountered these interesting portrayals on blogs and in magazines, and complemented what I already knew about digital media production for young people. Again, the importance of offering young people, and particularly young people in marginalized communities access to digital media production training is a well-established field of study in education, noted for its ability to engage participants in explorations about their lives and changing identities while increasing their technological and media literacy skills (Curwood & Gibbons, 2010; Goldman et al., 2008; Halverson, 2010; Jenkins, Purushtoma, Weigel, Clinton, Robinson, 2006; Kafai, Peppler & Chapman, 2009). It then seemed to me an obvious pairing to explore the lives of Muslim girls, and of girls in a low-income school with poor access to technology, through a digital media production program that might serve to better inform the school about the community. In the following section of the literature review, I provide an overview of research in digital media and learning, with a focus on equity in marginalized communities to support why I have chosen this type of project as a way to explore the lives of Muslim girls.

Digital Media and Learning: Exploring Schools, Students and Communities

The research described in this section outlines how and why putting new media production tools in the hands of Muslim girls is an important learning process in the areas of media and technological literacy, civic participation and engagement, and explorations of self/identity for participants. To emphasize the important role of media and media production for young people today, I discuss Henry Jenkins' (2006) theory of 'convergence culture' and clarify

the relevance of digital media in contemporary culture and identify the larger scope of the role of new media in how certain communities are portrayed – and in turn perceived – by media viewers and users. I then address some of the background knowledge pertaining to children, computers and gender in schools to frame why feminist and technological interventions of the kind implemented for this doctoral research are needed. I go on to consider how digital media production can be a valuable process for under-served communities, including examples from a range of projects underway by educational researchers in schools.

‘Convergence culture’.

Henry Jenkins (2006) defines ‘convergence culture’ as the location “where old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways” (p. 2). Jenkins explains the convergence of culture in and with media in relation to three main topics: media convergence, participatory culture, and collective intelligence. He describes ‘media convergence’ as ways people are interacting with different forms of media, seeking out information on a variety of platforms and interacting with the flow of media on/across multiple forums. ‘Participatory culture’ refers to the public as being producers of media, and no longer being only spectators/consumers of media created by a few people in positions of power. Finally, ‘collective intelligence’¹⁹ speaks to ways in which pieces of information can be collected and shared in new media forums, affording power to users who contribute towards something together. The convergence of culture happens at the intersections of people participating from a wide variety of communities, cultures and locations around the world, using multimodal platforms to share their ideas and to build knowledge and create culture collectively.

¹⁹ The notion of ‘collective intelligence’ was originally coined by Pierre Levy in his 1999 publication *Collective Intelligence: Mankind’s Emerging World in Cyberspace* (Perseus Books).

Jenkins' work on convergence culture is useful as a way to think through the larger impact of new media on social and cultural relations. For example, he discusses how people follow reality television personalities like those on *Survivor* and *American Idol* online. Different fans gather information about their favorite characters, or about what is happening in the yet-to-be-aired, already-filmed shows, and share that information in order to uncover what is happening before the broadcast release. Jenkins considers how the pooling of minds into converging media allows for collective intelligence whereby the audience/user influences the outcome and production. In turn, corporate producers have to consider how their creations will be received and sometimes transformed by these mass audiences. This means that by becoming producers of media individuals and online communities can alter the standing power structure and push mass media producers to better reflect the interests and perhaps also lives of the viewer/consumer.

Digital media.

To bring this discussion back to the specific case of Muslim girls producing media in a low-income school, I discuss in brief the role of the story, of the production and consumption of narratives that are already situated in particular ideological and social realities (Anthias, 2002; Presser, 2005). As mentioned in Chapter 1, Dippo and James (2010) address the perceived understandings of local communities by teachers in inner suburban schools as partly based on negative media portrayals about local social conditions. An example of this type of negative representation and its broader implications is addressed by Richardson (2008), who examined the representation of the Jane-Finch community in local newspapers in the Toronto area in 2007, following the tragic shooting of Jordan Manners, a 15-year old boy in the Jane-Finch area killed in 2005 during what is known as "the summer of the gun". Richardson discusses how the discourse present in newspapers about incidents and people in the Jane-Finch region create a

negative representation of the community overall, one that has now become pervasive throughout and ubiquitous across the Toronto area. Thinking through Jenkins' 'convergence culture,' I question if limited portrayals of Jane-Finch and regions like it can be altered with greater participation in the production of media created by local community members? Websites like Jane-Finch.com (www.janefinch.com) suggest that communities like this one are indeed turning to digital technologies for more diverse and reflective self-representation online.

In relation to the power of public narratives, social and cultural theorists Arjun Appadurai (1996) argues that people's perception of social life have changed with the increased imaginary spaces opened by global mass media "which present a rich, ever-changing store of possible lives, some of which enter the lived imaginations of ordinary people more successfully than others" (p. 53). Media interrupts and constructs narratives in the public imagination that influence how people relate to and engage with each other (Appadurai, 1996). The signs and signifiers presented through mass media are highly influential to individual and group understandings of the diverse, complex, globally influenced, local social world. In order to make the local more global, that is to make sure that a wide-scope of minority communities also have a part to play in the creation of media that is also influential to local and global viewers, they too need access to and training in the production of digital media to be active participants in media.

In the report "Challenges of Participatory Culture," Jenkins et al. (2006) identify in more detail what is omitted in large part in *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (2006). In "Challenges of Participatory Culture," Jenkins et al. (2006) focus on three concepts: the participation gap, the transparency problem, and the ethics challenge. These three points refer respectively to limited access to technology and to the training and supervision needed for full participation with digital technologies, to the inability of young people to understand the

influence of media on perceptions of reality and society, and to the ethical dilemma educators and other adults face who are no longer adequately training younger generations to be active participants in society. In failing to do so, the discrepancy between the dominant, accepted social norms and the reality of interests and needs of diverse minority communities may be lost.

Creating opportunities for minority communities to participate in the networked culture of digital media is then the responsibility of adults in the community, such as educators, researchers, and parents. Ensuring that participation for young people includes in-depth media literacy and technological training is then also a part of this important process. If young people from a range of sociocultural and socioeconomic backgrounds can find ways to share information about their school and community lives through digital media, and on the global forum of the Internet, the existing divide between schools and communities that are “real” barriers between what people know about the students, and barriers relating to how students are (or are not) perceived, may be minimized. If Muslim girls, like those with their own blogs discussed in the previous section of this chapter, are able to talk about themselves and to respond to representation about their identities and interests, this can become part of the social repertoire about their community and may alter how others see them and how they see themselves. To exemplify how digital media can facilitate student participation and self-representation, I present a number of examples pertaining to the engagement of young people with digital media technologies.

Kids, computers and educational inequities.

In this section, I begin with a description of research focused on the unequal distribution of opportunities for students in school with regard to computer, science and technology classrooms, and then provide an overview of existing research in the area of digital media and learning/education, identifying the different ways digital media is important to improving

education for marginalized communities. Various forms of inequity based on class, gender, race and more are still prevalent in both rural and urban schools, particularly those in low-income communities (see Agbo, 2007; Bunar, 2011; Dei, 1997; Dei & James, 2002; Dinero, 2004; Dippo & James, 2010; Jenson, 2004; Jenson et al., 2003; Osler & Vincent, 2003; Rezai-Rashti, 1994; Richardson, 2008; TDSB, 2008, 2010; Warschauer, 2003; Zine, 2000, 2001b, 2006). As mentioned, within particular aspects of schooling, such as science and technology classrooms, girls are also notably under-represented and ostracized. This is a pattern that continues into the science and technology sector, maintaining this gendered-imbalance in the professional world and requiring intervention to retain girls in these fields (Anderson et al., 2008; Correll, 2001; Hill et al., 2010; Jenson et al., 2003; Jenson, 2004; Jenson, Fisher & de Castell, 2011; Rosser, 2006). Furthermore, schools in impoverished areas are technologically ill-equipped compared to more affluent schools, mirroring in local settings the global “digital divide” of greater technological knowledge for the rich over the poor related to both access to and experience with technological tools (Hargittai, 2002; Hsieh, 2012; Jenson, Taylor & Fisher, 2010; Livingstone & Helsper, 2007; Neuman & Celano, 2006; Warschauer, 2003). This means that even for those girls who might have an interest in developing some expertise in information and communication and new media technologies, and those who feel socioculturally comfortable and able to do so, limited opportunities are available.

In addition, Ito, Baumer, Bittani, boyd, Cody et al., (2010) discuss the importance of digital media for young people by considering their various levels of participation with media and address how this engagement creates an important social space for those involved. Student interactions with each other and the process of creating new media can define peer relations and reflect an important part of student identities (Ito et al., 2010). They position media production

and engagement with digital technologies within social and cultural contexts and explore what this means for young people at important junctions in their lives when participating in work and/or government, for example, are not allowed. Lange and Ito (2010) discuss the social context of media production for young people and explore how their engagement with digital media is interest-driven and related also to friendship circles. From this work, Lange and Ito discuss collaboration and community building through the process of media production for young people. For example, Lange and Ito (2010) discuss how young people copying and pasting code to personalize a social networking profile on a space called MySpace was for them an important show of their personal identities to their friends. In this case, student posts are described as an important community “show” through media that was related to young people navigating identity issues for themselves and regarding how other people also perceived them. Ito et al. (2010) do not discuss in much detail what happens to/for those children who do not have access to technology in order to be self-directed about their media production interests, but they do state that in school and afterschool/extracurricular programming are important support structures for student development.

Recently, research exploring the value and outcome of digital media production with children and adults has greatly increased in educational studies. Media production projects have been documented as providing valuable ways to access information from students not always easily accessible through ‘talk-based’ methods alone (Brushwood Rose, 2009; Brushwood Rose & Granger, 2013; Buckingham, 2009; Marquez-Zendov, 2007; Pink, 2001). For example, in a photo-journal study conducted by Marquez-Zendov (2007), students took photographs in response to questions about the purpose, challenges and benefits of school. During the process of learning about photography, students also expressed their perceptions of school against

photographs from in and outside of school grounds. Visual representations of student ideas at times juxtaposed their written explanations, and at other times supported their thoughts through images. In both cases, photos are argued to have offered deeper and more complex understandings of students' perspectives on the questions asked (sometimes described as 'photo voice'). Later in this dissertation, I complicate the discussion about work of this kind, exploring the social structures and dominant narratives about young people that are sometimes integrated in the design and development of this kind of project.

In another example, education scholars working in digital media production and social networking tools with young people, Goldman et al. (2008) provide examples of participants using media and technology as part of their involvement in and analysis of social justice issues. The incorporation of tools such as filming, email and online chatting into student civic and democratic practices intertwines digital media with learning. Throughout these projects, students learn to incorporate digital communication as a means for strategizing, debating and reflecting on topics such as 'adultism,' student 'drop-outs,' and school and community governance.

Education researchers Kafai, Peppler and Chapman (2009) present examples of students making media that address social justice issues in their work from an after-school program called *The Computer Clubhouse* for young people in the Los Angeles area. Also based on Jenkins' discussion of 'convergence culture,' the authors argue that an integrated approach to media education through creative media production that crosses platforms (e.g. television, videogames, Internet, etc.), such as is possible with the production program Scratch,²⁰ is essential to success in the political and social world of the future. The authors suggest that Scratch offers young people the opportunity to create new media forms or genres by manipulating and mixing original

²⁰ Scratch is a program created by the MIT Media Lab and Lifelong Kindergarten Group. With Scratch, users can create games, animation, and interactive stories and was designed for the purpose of informal and formal educational use. See <http://scratch.mit.edu/> for more details about this program.

and existing content, showing media educators their out-of-school interests with media and beyond. Dominant and counter-cultural representations are present and through the process of production participants engage with political and cultural issues while learning necessary media literacy skills (Kafai et al., 2009; Peppler & Kafai, 2007). Scratch is a multimodal platform and this multimodal engagement is an important part of 21st century literacy (Jewitt, 2009; Knobel & Lankshear, 2008; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001) that connects extra-curricular digital media production with more traditional/formal learning (i.e. literacy as a school-based practice). Luke (2003) similarly discusses multimodal literacy suggesting that “media(ted) texts constitute children’s first curriculum,” (p. 398) though which they learn about “social relations, power, gender and ethnic identities” (p. 398), although their engagement with multimodal and digital information are less linear and compartmentalized than prescriptive schooling.

In their work with adult immigrant women in Toronto, Brushwood Rose and Granger (2013) argue that the process of storytelling through digital media may be an important element in creating and recreating narratives related to individual experiences. Their focus is on the complexities of self-representation through digital media as a valuable interpretive engagement, and as a dynamic and multimodal process of narrative formation by the storyteller. Brushwood Rose and Granger discuss one participant, for example, as presenting parallel themes across stories about the subject’s life that emerged through the process of sharing life experiences in preparation to create a digital story. In this case, symbolic representations of frustrations related to technology in one case, and to the subject’s changed life since marriage and motherhood in the other, are connected through a story about the metaphorical “death” of her computer. Here, representation is tied to narrative and experiential discovery. Brushwood Rose and Granger also note that “what remains untold or silent in a story can both constitute and undermine a telling,”

(p. 230) – an important point I will return to in the conclusion of this dissertation. In short, video diaries or digital stories, photo-journals and documentary films are a few of the forms of media production demonstrating how broad conceptual skills related to multimodal literacy – such as articulating a clear understanding of complex social, political and cultural conditions and life experiences – can be acquired and refined through media production (Goldman et al., 2008; Knobel & Lankshear, 2008; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; Marquez-Zendov, 2007; Pink, 2001).

Media production and Muslim girls.

To summarize, I highlight some of the key benefits to running a media production club with Muslim girls in a low-income school in Toronto. Research of the kind I conducted for my doctoral studies can give participating students practical training in media and technology and meet the ongoing media literacy and education needs outlined in TDSB school curricula (see TDSB, n.d.). At the same time, media production can provide multilayered, complex and multidimensional insight and perspectives about participants' lives (Brushwood Rose, 2009; Brushwood Rose & Granger, 2013; Goldman et al., 2008; Kress, 2004; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2002; Knobel & Lankshear, 2008; Luke, 2003; Marquez-Zendov, 2007), act as a new and engaging form of communication and play between participants (Ito et al., 2010), and provide participants with transformative learning experiences (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). Each of these points responds to the problem of homogenous and dominating discourse about Muslim girls by creating opportunities for Muslim girls to represent themselves. Additionally, each of these benefits to conducting research through digital media production programs offers the possibility to interrupt some of the oppressive structures that may be affecting the lives of racialized and marginalized students, and in particular those pertaining to Muslim girls that I have taken the time to outline in this chapter.

Conclusion: Reflecting on the Research/Production Process

While there are many advantages to doing this kind of work, moving away from talk-based qualitative methods to ones where participants are agents of multilayered productions also requires rigorous and critical interrogation of the role of the researcher. Speaking to the problem of accepting media production projects “unproblematically,” media education expert Buckingham (2009) argues that the use of visual media in research with youth requires a “greater degree of reflexivity about relationships of power that are necessarily unavoidably inscribed in any act of research” (p. 649). What is frequently overlooked in media production projects conducted with marginalized youth is the way the researcher/research creates and constricts space for participants to speak (Buckingham, 2009). Here, I consider Gayatri Spivak’s (1988) work in postcolonial and feminist studies wherein she queries, ‘can the subaltern speak?’ Spivak presents a discussion on the subject position of the ‘subaltern’ – marginalized people existing outside the hegemonic structures of power and discourse. She questions how or if the subaltern can be spoken of (or for) without reinscribing the dominant (Western) norm. Spivak argues that the discourse of subject-object alterity implies that the non-Western (non-white, non-English as a first language, non-Canadian/American, etc.) is always the ‘other’. To “give” voice to the ‘other’ is still to speak ‘for’ the other in a way that maintains current hegemonic structures.

Working with racialized students, it is important that the research method and theoretical framework be deeply embedded within practices that are reflexive and designed to assist the researcher identify where re-inscribing hegemonic power structures and imposing researcher bias are present. In an example from Jenson, Dahya and Fisher (2013), the researchers discuss how power structures circulating in one school maintain students there in positions of disempowerment where, even within the context of digital media production clubs, some

students did not truly have “voice”. In this example, students wanting to address contentious issues in the school, like hypocrisy about following the rules for teachers compared to students, teachers and administrators unavailability or outright refusal to address the issue (or deny that it happened), and inadequate regular access to good quality technology left students essentially, voiceless. One of the student groups who had started a production about a teacher chewing gum in this example was unable to complete that video because the teacher denied the accusation and refused to continue working with the students on the production. This group of students went on to make a technically good production about a library book fair, and while that topic was also of interest to them, their initial interest in making a news broadcast about something more political was lost. In the end, through the production they did complete, they were represented as happy children adequately engaged in their education (i.e. excited about books). Though this may be a fair reflection of a part of who they are, the other more political part had no place for representation in this school environment and would never be seen by viewers (in this case the videos were available to the school community on a locked internal server used by the school to share student work and announcements). How then can meaning be attributed to the small but notable “representation” of students’ lives in their completed video production about the book fair, without acknowledging the larger sociocultural context in which that production was made? I use this example to highlight the importance of school-based and research-related constructs, of political hierarchy, and of the power of the researcher and viewer in terms of what can be attributed to what is “seen”.

Throughout this doctoral work, I make an important consideration for alterity regarding who is producing meaning and how that analysis is formulated, considering the multitude of layers impacting what gets produced, by whom, and what that media product means in relation to

understanding the experiences of Muslim girls. What is important to note here is that although there are a wealth of benefits that can be attributed to engaging young people in digital media production work, there is some caution required regarding what kind of benefits are garnered from the work that young people do make. For this reason, I have applied the theoretical framework of Postcolonial Feminist Theory and methodological approach of Feminist Ethnography to design this study and analyze the data in terms of complex sociocultural and sociopolitical structures that impact the lives of Muslim girls in schools and in media. In Chapter 3, I discuss postcoloniality and Feminist Ethnography, which have together informed how I conducted this work methodologically and how I approached my analysis of students' digital productions.

Chapter 3

Feminist Theory and Methodology

Post-colonial Feminism/s: Approaching Research through a Feminist Lens

In this research, I approach my work through the lens of Postcolonial Feminist Theory. Exploring the digital media production work of Muslim girls through this lens invites an exploration of power relations that inform and impact how Muslim girls create media about themselves and also how that work pertains to the construction of knowledge about this community. In particular, approaching the work from the standpoint of Postcolonial Feminist Theory challenges me to explore how Muslim girls are portraying and representing themselves in media and in relation to the multitude of social, cultural, historical, political and economic structures impacting their lives. In the following section, I first introduce Postcolonial Theory with reference to key scholars in the field, and then address Postcolonial *Feminist* Theory to clarify how this approach relates specifically to the research I carried out.

Postcolonial theories.

Postcolonial Theory offers a way to frame my project in the context of historically situated power relations that are directly related to racial and cultural difference. Postcolonial theorist Ania Loomba (2005) describes (for many) a condition of sociopolitical relations in the context of “decolonization”. Loomba speaks to the changing state of cultures, communities and nations living with/in the aftermath of having been colonized, not to the idea that the imperialist and economically driven act of taking cultural, economic, political and/or military control of another nation or community can be undone. Loomba discusses postcolonialism as a condition or syndrome in which people around the contemporary world are living. And yet, she emphasizes the need to not homogenize the experience of postcolonialism, stating, for example, that in the Americas compared to India both the history and current political state are very different and

therefore different considerations need to be made to understand the social structures and power relations at play in each setting. She maintains that “to impose a single understanding of decolonization would in fact erase the differences within the term” (p. 22), differences that make the term useful for understanding various sociopolitical contexts. Considering differences across settings and exploring the boundaries that have been created in the aftermath of colonial rule is of particular interest in my work. Specifically, I discuss the impact of relational boundaries between colonial and colonized people and cultures in terms of how particular groups are portrayed, represented, and understood in public media and discourse.

To explain, I expand on the notion of difference in relation to Postcolonial Theory. Postcolonial Theory identifies ongoing social, economic, cultural and political differences between countries and individuals within shared histories of the colonizer and the colonized. According to this theoretical approach, there are groups and individuals who fit within the dominant sociocultural norm, and there is the “Other,” a person from a once colonized group who comes to symbolize a distanced, exoticized, and often demonized representation of non-white, non-colonial persons and cultural traditions. Ania Loomba (2005), Homi Bhabha (1994), Stuart Hall (1992) and Edward Said (1997), whose work in Postcolonial Theory and Cultural Studies are foundational to postcolonial studies, discuss the binary constructions of “us” versus “them” in terms of colonizing and colonized cultures (and individuals). This relationship is characterized by a formulation of the ‘Other’ as lesser than or estranged from Western civility, in order to maintain the power imbalance resulting from colonial rule. In a way, the division between “the West” and “the Rest” (Hall, 1992) is replicated in local communities with diverse ethnoracial populations (in the Western world), where the function of Said’s (1997) “Orientalism” – identifying the history of colonial constructions of the Orient by the West and

identifying the discourse of power within it – remains relevant in the context of minority versus majority groups today. In such cases, people of colour and other minorities are positioned against white or Western dominant norms by people holding positions of power. According to Narayan (1997) “Westerners” impose predefined roles on the Third-World subject,²¹ determining the locations they occupy and refining the expectations they come to live by. These imposed roles constrain to some degree not only what Third-World subjects share, but with whom they can share their ideas and experiences.

Narayan explains that there are three main roles that come to designate the Third-World subject. The first role is that of “Emissary” and refers to the expectation for a Third-World subject to convey the richness of the home culture to the outsider while the reality of cultural practices in relation to gender, class, religion, etc. are often omitted. This role impacts the “understanding” people in Western cultures have of Third-World cultures through surface level practices such as food and dress (e.g. “saris and samosas”),²² wherein culture is reduced to the most obvious depictions of it and only those aspects that are accepted by the Western world (often portrayed in limited and stereotypical ways through popular culture and mass media). Second, the role of “Mirror” allows the Westerner to re-focus conversations about the Other’s influence back on to the Western world – i.e. positioning a ‘Third-World subject’ as a Mirror refers to the process of deflecting conversation about the Other towards a discussion about how the West (or Westerner) has interacted on behalf of the Other or influenced international politics or policies effecting the Other. These examples reflect how being in a position of power in the West can lead to discussions and engagements with the Other that maintain the power of the West as the central focus. For example, Narayan uses the example of her own efforts to

²¹ Refer to page 33 of this dissertation for a definition of ‘Third-World subject’ according to Narayan.

²² “Saris and samosas” is a colloquial phrase I have encountered repeatedly in school-based research when teachers and researchers referred to the ways the school (inadequately) addressed multiculturalism.

discuss Third-World politics and problems with reference to international traditions and histories related to patriarchy, class and corruption with Western colleagues, only to have those discussions reverted back to the positive and negative role of the West in the ongoing problems of Third-World countries. In this case, discussions about the Third-World are used as a return to self-reflection for the importance (and power) of the Western world. With the West at the centre of discussion and the top of the influential hierarchy, non-Western communities are always seen as secondary, as marginalized, as oppressed. Finally, the role of “Authentic Insider” refers to the individual who, because they are of a particular heritage, are assumed to have expertise on that culture. These imposing roles limit what information about individual perceptions are portrayed by the Third-World subject and narrow the scope of what is known about how people from different and varied backgrounds experience the world. Narayan clearly defines ways the “us” versus “them” binary, which is fundamental to Postcolonial Theory, manifests in everyday communications between people, limiting what those from “colonized” or “colonizer” histories can know about each other. The dynamics of these histories and relationships become an integral part of cultural fabrics in the West and elsewhere, including in visual digital media where the portrayal and perception of certain groups, like veiled Muslim girls and women, interplay with standing postcolonial structures (which I will exemplify in Chapter 4).

I continue with an explanation of the importance of studying the dynamics of cultural relations as they relate to what I have described so far as racialized discrimination. As mentioned in Chapter 1, to racialize a community is to attribute assumed and often stereotypical commonalities about that group based on their perceived similarities (TDSB, 2010). This perception or view is tied to the postcolonial relations discussed so far in this chapter regarding

who holds the power to not only “see” (relating to the dominant gaze and view) but also importantly to who represents minority groups in the West. And, according to Kamala Visweswaran (2010) in *Un/common Cultures: Racism and the Rearticulation of Cultural Difference*, the ways we have come to Other certain ethnoracial groups has shifted from a focus on the once biologically-attributed category of “race” to culture, which is now a “substitute or stand in for race” (p. 3). Acknowledging culture as a learned and changing phenomenon, Visweswaran argues that in the demise of racism as a socially acceptable way to differentiate and quantify people and their abilities, culture has come to do the same thing. Visweswaran suggests: “The problem of [cultural] diversity, in other words, is that humanity cannot really comprehend it, and in its attempt to universalize itself, seeks to turn unlike into like, thus homogenizing and eventually eliminating other cultures” (p. 80). In this argument, Visweswaran draws on discrimination according to caste in India, and on complex histories aligning sociocultural acts of discrimination with gender and race, to explain how culture stands today in place of race as a divisive category among and across societies. For example, Visweswaran suggests that it is the “daily experience of harassment, subordination, and subjugation” (p. 150) that aligns with the social experience of racism, casteism and slavery that allows cultural differentiation to be comparable to pre-World War II racial differentiation, because both result in certain groups holding power over others.

Following the atrocities of genocide during World War II, global political standpoints towards race changed. Visweswaran discusses how anthropologist Franz Boas’ approach to race greatly altered how the term was understood. Specifically, Visweswaran suggests that at this time “culture, not race, was a more meaningful explanation of significant differences between groups of people” (p. 63). As this shift in how people came to be differentiated changed from

one associated with “the natural and the innate” to a concept of differentiation that “allows for multiple rather than binary difference” (Visweswaran, 2010, p. 66), larger structural institutions came to have the power to mould and influence cultures. This has meant that institutions and dominant power structures (including media) can re/present cultures in particular ways that serve the interest of the standing power structures. What this suggests is that while I discuss racial discrimination and cultural markers that make minorities visible in countries with predominantly white communities and Western cultural norms, I also consider how culture is constructed not only from within particular groups, but also “by the ruling institutions of society, the government, and elite academic institutions” (Visweswaran, 2010, p. 13) to further marginalize these groups. For example, as discussed in Chapter 2, the practice of veiling for Muslim women has become the central point for political discussion in Canada with regard to wearing the veil in public employment in Quebec, and wearing certain kinds of veils (covering the face) in courts across Canada. Rulings about these decisions impact the cultural make-up of Canada as a whole while also distinguishing Muslims as outsiders within the system (because of their “difference” as Muslims) from a judicial standpoint. The discussion of the veil does not apply only to Black African Muslims, Arab Muslims, Iranian Muslims, Malaysian Muslims, etc. – any rulings about wearing the veil apply across what have historically been understood as “race” categories and instead affect all Muslim communities and certainly those whose sociocultural practice it is to veil. According to Moghissi (2003):

Muslims are perhaps the best example of groups who are continuously targets of racism, without having an identifiable marker such as colour that works against blacks. Their religion, Islam, becomes a source of discrimination and exclusion. (p. 116)

This line of reasoning supports the notion that through culture, postcolonial influences continue to differentiate and position people within and against standing power structures internationally.

Responding to the ongoing problems of colonial influences on people from various ethnoracial and cultural backgrounds around the world, Loomba (2005) suggests postcolonialism is "...a *process* of disengagement from the whole colonial syndrome" (p. 21). Reference to postcolonialism as a process working to unravel a 'syndrome' – a syndrome by definition involving a number of symptoms or factors relating to, constricting or constructing an unhealthy system (Oxford Dictionaries Online) – limits the possibility of falling to any analytic extreme. From Loomba's standpoint, it is important to understand the lines designating the varying symptoms in order to improve the overall health of the system. And like Loomba, I use the term 'postcolonial' in this way to describe rather than evaluate ongoing social phenomena underlain with historically situated racial and cultural relations. In the context of Western educational structures serving diverse and sometimes displaced and/or migratory minorities, the question of postcolonial relations proves to be quite pertinent: considering the postcolonial condition in relation to schooling, historical, social, cultural and political structures that constrict and create intercommunity dynamics may make relationships between schools and their local communities more clear.

Understanding Postcolonial Feminist Theory.

Adopting an understanding of postcoloniality as permeating social relations, configurations of history and historical retelling, and identity, Postcolonial *Feminist* Theory draws on this work and applies it directly to the experiences of girls and women. In doing so, Postcolonial Feminist Theory breaks down the homogeneous category of "woman". In its place, it implements a discussion of 'woman/women' related to "relations of ruling" (Mohanty, 2003)

that guide complex configurations of class, race, culture, sexuality and other factors impacting individual experiences of womanhood, including deconstructing the presumed social constructs of what it means to be a woman (Mohanty, 2003; Narayan, 1997). Postcolonial Feminist Theory works to unravel the different factors impacting experiences without assuming that gender or any one socioeconomic, religious, or ethnoracial factor serves as the foundation of identity; it de-centers gender as the focus of women's studies, it maintains race/culture and colonial influences as important considerations in feminist analysis, and it looks to understand the role of power dynamics in relation to individual and social conditions.

I refer to Mohanty's (1988/2003) canonical essay "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" to exemplify how approaching women's issues with Postcolonial Feminist Theory can highlight postcolonial power relations that de-centre gender as the primary force in women's lives. Mohanty criticizes research identifying *all* African women as powerless victims of male violence and all Arab and Muslim women as belonging to singular patriarchal kinship structures, unchanged since the inception of the religion or across the many different Muslim countries/communities. In her critique of these feminist studies, where Western scholars homogenized and Othered what Mohanty (1988) also refers to as "Third-World women," she explains the problem of grouping non-Western women into one category:

What is problematic about this kind of use of "women" as a group, as a stable category of analysis, is that it assumes an ahistorical, universal unity between women based on a generalized notion of their subordination. Instead of analytically demonstrating the production of women as socioeconomic political groups within particular local contexts, this analytical move limits the definition of the female subject to gender identity, completely bypassing social class and ethnic identities. (p. 31)

Mohanty does not suggest that the experiences of women exist outside of larger systemic structures. Rather, she considers that it is both within these structures and in relation to local and particular histories and ideological norms that insightful analyses of women's experiences can occur.

In her essay, "Under Western Eyes' Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles," Mohanty (2003) reaffirms her intention in "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" (Mohanty, 1988/2003) to present the issues of Third-World women as related to both specific, contextualized, sociopolitical and historical structures *and* to larger colonialist institutions and political systems. At the same time, she addresses the limitation of the term "Third-World women" in the contemporary context of globalization and migration, the domination of capitalism in historically non-Western nations (e.g. Japan), and the ongoing inequities and struggles of Indigenous people worldwide. Mohanty (2003) acknowledges the progress of feminist scholarship since the 1970s and 1980s, the context in which her original and now canonical essay "Under Western Eyes" was written. She also clarifies that despite these advances, the fundamental necessity of locating particular women's groups within both their local and global contexts remains strong, framed for Mohanty under capitalist structures and the patriarchal and colonial power structures aligned with it. For example, she refers to the impact of global economic regulations such as those imposed worldwide by the World Trade Organization (WTO) regarding biomedical patents. In this example, she refers to the WTO regulation privileging scientific development of a particular drug that can also be derived locally from a tree in India, where the labour of extraction and processing is women's work. This global capitalist system directly impacts women and as a consequence, their socioeconomic position. In this example, it is necessary to look both to the

specific local and larger social, economic, historic and cultural frameworks impacting these Indian women, whose livelihood is intertwined in global systems related to their very particular circumstances and geographic region.

Building on these foundational ideas in Postcolonial Feminist Theory, I draw on Sara Ahmed's (2000) work on race and cultural studies. In *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-coloniality*, Ahmed examines how minority bodies are racialized and estranged within societies where they differ from the dominant norm and considers postcoloniality as a way to understand the past within the present, and in relation to the complex power structures that have evolved from a history of colonization permeating contemporary society. She says: "Strangers are not simply those who are not known in this dwelling, but those who are, in their very proximity, *already recognized as not belonging*, as being out of place" (p. 21). Broad historical dynamics and contemporary relations influence social perceptions about 'other' bodies and position particular people in specific settings as strangers, even if that setting is their current home. Ahmed's work astutely brings the discussion of postcolonial influences into settings where "strangers"/foreigners/non-Westerners are living with and within Western communities. In such cases "strangers" are more than people who are unknown – according to Ahmed, the stranger figure allows communities to locate themselves and the boundaries of space and nationhood against these bodies, that stand against or outside the dominant norm. In this way, the global structures of postcolonialism can be replicated in local settings and the position of outsiders inside the community allows the binary of "us" versus "them" (of "the West" versus "the rest") to continue.

Ahmed provides an entry point to look at social dynamics within a community drawing on postcoloniality deeply embedded in relationships between communities and the embodied

“strangers” within them. Regarding the role of postcolonialism in her discussion of embodiment, Ahmed identifies how strangers can be of a local community and geographically within a local community. Ahmed suggests “post-coloniality allows us to investigate how colonial encounters are both determining, and yet not fully determining, of social and material existence” (p. 11). Ahmed’s position on postcoloniality is relevant to my work because it locates racialized bodies, with their “social and material existence,” as connected to larger historical and societal forces. It is the embodiment of ‘strangeness’ that is particularly useful here, in that Muslim girls are identified by a religious practice inextricably tied to their bodies. In this example, racialization is very much about cultural and specifically religious difference.

Throughout this dissertation, I draw on Postcolonial Feminist Theory to consider the relationship between being a Muslim girl in a low-income area of Toronto, and to the surrounding cultural, historical, religious, social and political factors that impact how and what digital media they produce. How much of their perceptions and experiences are related to their embodied being and what are their experiences of estrangement or inclusion as related to larger social structures? I engage with Postcolonial Feminist Theory to critically examine student stories in relation to the constructs around what they say and how the common narratives about their communities and individual experiences are told through digital media. In the following section, I describe the methodological approach to my work and explain how it aligns with Postcolonial Feminist Theory as a framework. Together, taking a feminist and postcolonial approach to the methodological design and theoretical interpretation of the data has allowed me to explore the digital media made by Muslim girls with consideration for the surrounding social structures, institutional influences, and ethnoracial and/or sociocultural power relations that may relate to their process of production, and to the content they cover in that work. My analyses are

focused on power structures that relate to postcoloniality and technology rather than about the content of student work as stand-alone representations. As mentioned at the end of Chapter 2, this kind of in-depth and socioculturally situated analyses of digital media is increasingly being called for in digital media work. In response to popular inclinations towards using research collected through visual methods as ‘real’ or ‘authentic’ forms of participant self-expression, Buckingham (2009) says:

However attracting it may at first appear, this argument [to refer to visual data as simplistically representative] typically neglects the formative role (and indeed the responsibility) of the researcher; the generic and formal characteristics of the media that participants are asked to employ; and the participants’ understanding both of the context and aims of the research itself, and of the media that are used. By contrast, I will argue that the use of such methods – as of any method – needs to display a degree of reflexivity: we need to understand how research itself establishes positions from which it become possible for participants’ to ‘speak’. (p. 635)

Buckingham highlights the relationship between voice and the research context, which I will discuss in Chapter 4 and 5 of this dissertation. This reflexive approach to research is a foundational component of feminist research methods, the methodological approach I used to design and conduct this study. In the next section, I discuss Feminist Ethnography in detail and explain how this study was designed as an ethnography and intervention for girls from a feminist standpoint and how this approach works to integrate reflexivity into the process of data collection and analysis.

Conducting an Ethnographic and Feminist Research Study

In my doctoral research, I invited girls in a low-income school in Toronto to participate in digital media production clubs and other technology-based, extra-curricular programs. These programs were designed to intervene in the ongoing problem of inequitable access to technology for girls, particularly in low-income areas, to observe the ways girls interact with technology, to encourage self-exploration and expression among participants, and to refer to their multimedia productions to understand their perspectives and experiences about the school and community. Engaging young people in digital media production can be difficult work, due to the sometimes-complicated logistics of planning technology-based training sessions around school schedules and managing access to and use of equipment. Using digital media production in research requires researchers to maintain the position of observer while also facilitating training and assisting students with production. To understand what students produce, how and why they engage with technology and with each other, research design of this kind should take the larger social and cultural contexts of the school and surrounding community into consideration, including the position of the researcher as it relates to what can be “found”. As such, to acquire an in-depth understanding of the school environment alongside student work, I have conducted an ethnographic research study. I have approached this ethnography from a feminist standpoint and as a feminist intervention project in one school to ensure that girls and the issues pertaining to them were held at the centre of this work.

In this chapter, I first describe ethnography as my methodological approach. I then also discuss Feminist Ethnography, an approach to ethnography that maintains women and the many social, political, economic and other factors impacting their lives as a focal point. Following this overview of Feminist Ethnography, I address how I conducted a feminist intervention project in

one school and, in what ways students participated (or not) in different technology-based clubs. Finally, I explain my data collection methods and discuss my process of data analysis.

Ethnography.

Ethnography is a form of research that is focused on the cultural environments of participants, while also considering the impact of the researcher as a “dweller” in the space/lives of the research setting and subjects (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). While ethnography is very much about observing a research context from within that same environment, the presence of the researcher also has an impact on the people and cultural context. Engaging in an ethnographic study with Muslim girls allowed me to develop a complex interpretation of data collected in the every day context of students’ lives (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007), creating a space where I established relationships with participants and observed their interactions and work within that setting. In doing so, I maintained a dual position of researcher and participant and recognize that part of what emerged during this study is related to my position within it. This acknowledgment is important in feminist research as a way to maintain a focus on and better understand the power relations that exist between researchers and participants (Ansell, 2001). In this regard, as an ethnographic researcher there is a delicate insider/outsider role (Abu-Lughod, 1990). Srivastava (2006) refers to the information passing between researcher and research subjects, informing the position and perspectives of the researcher regarding the daily happenings in the school, as ‘currency’. ‘Currency’ here refers to the idea that identities are malleable and that what researchers “observe” is a matter of finding “shared positional space” that should be more than a matter of aligning students based on race, gender or other apparent common characteristics (Cousin, 2010, p. 17).

As an example, I refer to research conducted by Jenson (2004) exploring gender issues, pedagogy and technology. Referring to one study, Jenson (2004) comments on the fundamental importance of how her identity as an *apparently* heterosexual woman and then research assistant working in a school. She addresses how this perceived position made her privy to relationships with teachers and students, relationships her colleagues could not access during two and a half years of study in British Columbia. Jenson shows how her colleagues were perceived as “being [a particular] *kind* of “queer” (p. 108) and, carrying the stature and hierarchical roles of university professors, were much more on the “outside” of the school’s internal happenings. In her efforts to teach students computer skills, with a focus on equalizing the gender imbalance of boys dominating the lab, Jenson’s position as research assistant aligned her more closely to teachers and students in the school, creating a kind of shared currency because she was seen as a student/learner herself. More importantly, their perception of her as “normal” allowed her to break the socially normalized roles of boys as computer experts in a way that did not make female students feel that learning about computers would make them “queer,” as outside of normalized feminine, heterosexual markers of identity. What all this suggests is that the position and identity of the researcher is very much related to how the work unfolds and to what kind of ‘currency’ passes between researcher and participants. The focus here is on knowledge production being a negotiation between what is portrayed by research participants in relation to the researcher’s visible/physical presence (Ansell, 2001; Jenson, 2004) and how that information is interpreted and then written about by the researcher (Pink, 2007; Srivastava, 2006). In this doctoral research, I sought to observe points of connection among students, intersecting across different times, programs and locations in the school, looking at the various ways those involved, including researchers and educators, shape the research context. In the following section, I

discuss what it meant for me to conduct feminist research, and how and why it is appropriate for this work, including specific reference to Feminist Ethnography.

Feminist research and Feminist Ethnography.

Philosopher and feminist theorist Sandra Harding (1987) suggests: “One distinctive feature of feminist research is that it generates its problematic from the perspective of women’s experiences” (p. 7). In *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy with/in the Postmodern* Patti Lather (1991) discusses how research in community contexts with women can be used to contribute to improved social conditions for women. For example, Lather refers to research studying “the various forms of violence to women through community-based, at-home interviewing with the purpose of feeding the information gained back to the community” (p. 73) to build reciprocal and mutual support for women, by women. Including women’s voices about their own experiences is necessary in the process of knowledge production and distribution pertaining to every facet of social life, including education (Harding, 1987; Lather, 1991). In this regard, ‘feminist perspectives on methodologies’ (Lather, 1991) support women’s varied experiences, and the influences of factors like race, class, sexuality, and culture as understandable through a distinctly feminist lens. This approach requires not only that women be the subjects of research, but that women also establish for themselves what is important in the research (Harding, 1987; Lather, 1991). Feminist Ethnography is one methodological approach that maintains the principles of an ethnographic study, where the researcher observes the context of study while participating in the daily experiences of girls and women, emphasizing the need for the researcher to be reflective about her position as both inside and outside of the ethnographic space (Visweswaran, 1994).

Feminist Ethnography maintains a clear focus on the implications of conducting ethnographic research with women, looking to ‘rupture’ not only what is “known” by researchers but also how one comes to know (Lather, 2001). Lather (1991, 2001) suggests that Feminist Ethnography displaces the privileged position of the researcher and problematizes the romanticization of voice that suggests the ethnographer can tell the story of the ‘other’ – the very problem outline by Buckingham (2009) (which I discuss on p. 60, this chapter) as plaguing visual methods. As a way to approach research, Feminist Ethnography aims to expose interconnected ‘systems of difference’ like gender, race and class (Abu-Lughod, 1990), and calls for an understanding of the power relations that shape and limit research. Feminist Ethnography also highlights silences and omissions, considered valuable locations of information within this framework (Visweswaran, 1994). How ‘silence’ has been telling in my research will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7, the concluding chapter to this dissertation, though it can be stated here that the observations of the researcher can be informed both by what is said and what is unsaid (Ropers-Huilman and Winters, 2010; Visweswaran, 1994). From the standpoint of Feminist Ethnography, the researcher’s work is as much based on what is apparent in the data as it is based on what is missing from the data. I draw again on the work of Visweswaran (1994) to clarify how Feminist Ethnography exposes insider/outsider positioning, silences, and divisions of power embedded in social relations to influence the outcome of qualitative research. In the following example, I demonstrate how looking for intersecting social and cultural factors (re)frames both the process of data collection and the outcome of the research.

In her book *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, Kamala Visweswaran (1994) takes the reader through a detailed description of her own experience of conducting Feminist Ethnography, examining its “failures” and successes. In the chapter, “Feminist Ethnography as

Failure,” Visweswaran describes the experience of trying to interview a woman who had been jailed during her time as an activist in the Indian nationalist movement. When Visweswaran and her research partner approached the woman for an interview, the woman agreed to the meeting. During the interview, however, the researchers were unable to engage in the conversation they sought out about the woman’s time in jail. The reasons for this misalignment between what the researchers intended and what the interview participant wanted to provide included: the researchers lack of knowledge about local customs of hospitality that interrupted the research process; the researchers’ inability to ascertain the family’s pre-existing expectations about them, cemented in an erroneous belief that the presence of a recorder indicated that the interviewers represented public TV/media broadcasters rather than independent scholars; and, the sociocultural, patriarchal assumptions mis/guiding the interview as being about the father, who had also been involved in the national movement. In this example, it was the social and cultural expectations and norms that were misunderstood and somewhat misaligned by the researchers and participant, leading to a research outcome that did not result in the desired discussion about the woman’s time in jail. The research process did, however, expose a patriarchal and colonialist system informing the research process, in that a distrust of Western mass media and assumed interest in the experiences of the family’s patriarch rather than matriarch guided the meeting. In the end, what the interview did expose was structures at play framing the lives of the people whose experiences the researchers sought to better understand. Here, Feminist Ethnography offers a methodological approach that requires the researcher to avoid positioning herself or research participants in simplified and subjugating ways. In this example, understanding the complex sociocultural structures surrounding the conversation the researchers had with the woman and her family resulted in something more than a failed attempt to get information. From

the standpoint of Feminist Ethnography, the researchers had to reframe their findings from the perspective of the complex and interconnected factors in place throughout the research process and in doing so were able to see something different from but equally important as their initial research purpose. Drawing on this approach, the researcher can consider how a multitude of factors act and interact to guide the outcomes of both what participants might say and also what researchers might see.

Before discussing the specific methods employed in this doctoral research study, I discuss a few perspectives emphasized in feminist research related to this dissertation, highlighting some of the ways I explore the interactions between researcher and participants. By examining student narratives about the relationship between the school and community through a feminist lens, in my work, girls' stories are considered in relation to their position within and/or against 'master' narratives (Lather, 1991; Visweswaran, 1994). This includes consideration for demonstrations of 'false consciousness' – described by Lather (1991) as “the denial of how our common sense ways of looking at the world are permeated with meanings that sustain our disempowerment” (p. 59). Lather explains that 'false consciousness' is not simply understood as a social or cultural construct, but is rather a complex layer to human consciousness and the unconscious, related in particular to what types of media students produce (discussed in Chapter 4). The researcher must also consider how the framing of participants' expressions is limited 'ventriloquation' – a re-articulation of speech acts and D/discourse²³ (Gee, 2008; Gee & Green, 1998) supporting individual beliefs that contribute to self-sustaining forms of oppression. With this in mind, I question the extent to which student media productions can act as representations

²³ “Discourse” with a capital ‘D’ refers to the larger symbol systems that contribute to the production of knowledge overall, while “discourse” with a lower-case ‘d’ refers to the discursive act of communication, through conversation or text or other form (Gee, 2008; Gee & Green, 1998).

of their internal constructions of self and analyze how external interpretations and expectations of that work impact how the work is understood (Lather, 1991).

In exploring both internal and external factors impacting what stories students tell, and how they tell them, insider/outsider group membership is also an important factor to consider. Linda Alcoff discusses group membership in terms of understanding how we define who is “insider” and “outsider” to which groups. This discussion is particularly important in relation to the Postcolonial Feminist Theory framing this research study, as it relates to the positioning of people involved in the project. In Alcoff’s (1991) essay “The Problem of Speaking for Others,” she explains: “one cannot assume an ability to transcend one’s location. In other words, a speaker’s location (which I take here to refer to their *social* location, or social identity) has an epistemically significant impact on that speaker’s claims” (p. 7). Alcoff also considers how we distinguish the boundaries of one group from another and what it means to negotiate changing positions of power between the different groups with which every individual aligns. Using herself as an example, Alcoff questions in which community she has valid group “membership,” based on her mixed ethnoracial background as a Panamanian-American woman. These layers of consideration for group membership and false consciousness add to the discussion of insider/outsider positioning of the ethnographic researcher, mentioned at the start of this methodology chapter, and are related to the “us” versus “them” binary of Postcolonial Theory. In the next section, I describe the feminist intervention project I conducted for this research, and discuss how and what materials were produced, i.e. *both the process and product* of production.

A Feminist Intervention Project: Design & Context

Design.

This project took place over three years, with my primary object of inquiry located in the 2011-2012 academic year. It was based within a larger Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada funded project titled “Smarter Than She Looks” (Principle Investigator Dr. Jennifer Jenson), exploring girls’ engagement with digital media and other technologies in schools. I worked as a research assistant in a school, referred to throughout this dissertation using the pseudonym Castleguard Junior Middle Academy (or simply Castleguard) from 2009-2012. During this time, I assisted with a range of programs including mixed-sex digital media production clubs focused on animation, audio-video slideshows and news broadcasts, and both mixed and same-sex videogaming clubs. These occurred at various times throughout the year, one to three times per week, sometimes over the lunch hour and sometimes after school. From 2009-2011, as I worked with students and became a more integrated member of the school-community, I came to know many of the Muslim and non-Muslim girls and made preliminary observations about their position at Castleguard. It was from here that I moved into the focus of my doctoral research, looking specifically at Muslim girls in the 2011-2012 year.

Working as a research assistant on this project, I was able to start observing the varied characteristics individual students displayed as they participated in different clubs. This offered a presentation of Muslim girls in the school in ways that contrasted the homogenizing discourse about this group, often presented as docile, subservient and generally oppressed people (detailed in Chapter 2). As mentioned, the *hijab* became a focus of this work when, in 2010, one student who normally came to school wearing a veil attended that day without it, her hair visible. When I asked why she was not wearing her *hijab*, the student informed me that her mother had made her take it off for school photos. I inquired further, asking if she preferred to have it on or off, and

the student indicated that her mother did not always wear *hijab* while she, the student, was more comfortable with the veil on. This anecdote ignited a deeper curiosity for me to understand the complex social and cultural context of that particular Muslim community (in this example, a Somali girl in a under-served Toronto area), and the preferences of girls in relation to their Islamic practice at school. On a larger scale, I started to question the representation of these girls, now demonstrating a range of personal characteristics and interests as one cohesive “group”. As has been discussed so far, this has become a growing area of work in recent years, with research underway to better understand the Muslim community in North America and the experiences of Muslim women in particular in greater detail and complexity.

To contribute to this growing body of research, from October 2011 to June 2012, I returned to the school designing a digital media production club with a focus on understanding the perceptions of racialized, and specifically Muslim girls, regarding the relationship between the school and community. Programming for this research was built on the now well-established modules created over the course of three years of Smarter Than She Looks, in which many master’s and doctoral students worked with Professor Jenson to refine the production plan and videogame play sessions for girls and boys involved in these projects (see Fisher, Jenson & de Castell, *in press*; Jenson, Dahya & Fisher, *in press*, 2013; Jenson, Dahya, Taylor & Fisher, 2010; Jenson, Fisher & de Castell, 2011). I also came into the school with seven years of experience working in media education, where I developed and facilitated film, animation and media literacy workshops for the National Film Board of Canada. During the 2011-2012 school year, I also continued assisting with the videogaming clubs established with Smarter Than She Looks and became involved in some classroom work. Because I wanted to engage with students in the every day contexts of their lives, I did not make the club available only to Muslim girls, but

rather to any girls in the school from grades 6-8. I chose to work with these grades because of my existing/previous work in this middle school (in which I already had an established relationship with community members there) and because much of the research about Muslim girls in schools is focused on high school, and so working with this age group might serve to fill a gap in research in this regard. I made the choice to have students self-select into these media clubs, and to create a space where students could discuss topics of interest to them in their regular day-to-day context. The purpose of this decision was to avoid what I observed at the school and during my years of media education work at the National Film Board of Canada as a sometimes-problematic push for students in under-served communities to create work about either the (assumed to be) unseen positive aspects of the community or the “issues” the students had locally (due to their marginality) – both of which could impose or at least emphasize students as being in disenfranchised positions. In both cases, I perceived such restrictions regarding content to limit what I might come to know about them and so left the topic of the digital media programs open. In this same way, I did not focus the clubs on the “issue” of being a Muslim girl. What this means is that although certain types of groups like an all Muslim club *might* create a more welcoming space to discuss topics like being Muslim, such a space could also guide the direction of student work based on the implied importance of religion in their lives. In this regard, I refer to Cousin (2010) who addresses ‘symbolic convergence.’ Symbolic convergence refers to the phenomenon of people coming together around a commonality, a shared experience or goal, which can further develop into a shared community narrative. According to Cousin (2010), such a narrative is often built around a shared grievance or injustice. For research participants, the questions being asked by the researcher can create a sense of obligation to deliver stories within these same wound-based narratives. As an attempt to avoid this kind of

guided outcome, I left the club quite open to any female students in the upper grades (6-8) interested to participate.

By inviting all girls to participate in these clubs, each of whom was racialized in some way as is the demographic make-up of the school population, my intention was to solicit experiences and topics of interest to students without leading their discussions in any direction. It seemed to me that asking Muslim girls about their experiences of being Muslim would necessarily put those experiences at the forefront of their lives. Instead, to ask Muslim and other girls about their lives in general would allow more room for stories of interest to surface that may or may not address the issue of Islam. In other words, I sought not to emphasize the religious practice of Muslim girls as the assumed dominant factor impacting their lives in schools and elsewhere by way of making Islam and wearing *hijab* the focus for discussion. In contrast, then, I aimed to observe whether, when and if Muslim girls identify their Islamic practice, including the veil, as the focal point of their experiences in school and the community through the various multimodal applications made available to them. I should note that throughout my time at the school students would ask me about my background and in some cases also about my religious practice. In these cases, or if Islam came up in discussion, brainstorming sessions or through student work, I made efforts to have open conversation with students about the topic to promote dialogue about Islam in the school. Throughout this research, I have aimed to openly explore what students identify as important and have maintained a reflexive approach to the research, examining what kinds of environments allow students to share their interests through digital media.

Context.

In the 2011-2012 year, there were several important changes at the school that made a significant impact on the implementation of this intervention. First, the primary contact in the school had been and continued to be Mr. Glendon,²⁴ who was the teacher-librarian and then, in 2011-2012, assigned a Grade 4 class. This employment shift made for rather distinct differences in the running of these clubs, especially as the library was previously openly available to us, with Mr. Glendon as a central point of contact for all students in the school. In addition, Mr. Glendon's responsibilities as librarian were such that his time was not tied up in the same manner as became the case when he was the sole instructor of a class of 26 boys and girls. Rather than run clubs in the library, I ended up using Mr. Glendon's already overcrowded classroom for production work, and negotiated library time with the new teacher-librarian for videogaming clubs, as this club required more space and projection/TV screens. As well, in the 2011-2012 school year, Castleguard Junior Middle Academy changed the make-up of the school day, moving from a short morning recess and full hour afternoon lunch, to two 45-minute "nutrition breaks," one at 10:25 and the other at 12:25. In the context of running digital media and technology-based clubs, this change was particularly limiting, as setting up equipment, initial training, and the process of both play and production are better suited to 60-90 minute time slots.

In October 2011, I met with Mr. Glendon to discuss the specifics of the clubs. Despite the limitations of the 45-minute lunch breaks it was Mr. Glendon's recommendation that after school was not ideal, because many students had to leave immediately to take the bus and/or escort younger siblings home. We agreed then on a Girls Media Club to run once per week over both nutrition breaks. The focus of the Girls Media Club would be creating online blogs using

²⁴ "Mr. Glendon" is the pseudonym for the teacher who supported this project.

different types of media, such as photos, short film, news broadcast, animation, written articles and podcasts. As well, we agreed to separate boys and girls videogaming clubs also over a nutrition break, each once per week. In this school, girls and boys in grades 7-8 had been separated by sex in 2010. I was able to start the recruitment process in all-girl classrooms and recruitment continued throughout November, even after the clubs started, to increase the number of participants and mitigate for the expected attrition that always happens over the course of the school year.

In the following paragraphs, I outline the various ways I became involved in the school from 2011-2012. Because of challenges to running the Girls Media Club, I also initiated numerous other programs in the school. I worked with several girls from a Grade 8 class creating audio-video slide show presentations for their science projects and I participated in Mr. Glendon's Grade 4 Medieval Times unit, bringing in iPads with the aim of working with students to create audio-video production as a culminating curricular activity. I also assisted in two-weeks of lunch hour computer-based gameplay with a small group of Grade 4-5 girls and boys in place for Smarter Than She Looks. Later in the year, I also established an afterschool news-media production club for girls and boys at their request, based on previous years' success of this club. Finally, I organized a full-day, media production and videogame development field trip to York University for students who had been involved in any of these activities over the year. Although the initial Girls Media Club did not result in the type, quality or quantity of productions I had hoped and imagined (which will be discussed at length in the following analytical chapters of this dissertation), my involvement with different clubs and in different ways in the school provided me with a rich and unique perspective from which to analyze the engagement of girls with technology at Castleguard. In total, there were 52 students who participated in one or more

of the clubs, 20 boys and 32 girls. Thirteen of the girls wore *hijab*, which served to identify them as Muslim. There were no examples of girls self-identifying as Muslim but not wearing *hijab*, which is not to say that they are not a part of the school, but based on the data collected here they are considered as a separate and unidentified demographic in this doctoral work.²⁵ Table 1 provides an overview of the different activities and the number of students involved in them.

Table 1. Overview of Research Activities

Activity/Club	Dates	Frequency	Participants	Overview of activities
Girls Media Production Club	Start: November 9, 2011 End: June 2, 2012	1-2/week, 45 minute sessions	8 girls	Audio-video production, editing, set-up blogs
Girls Videogaming Club	Start: February 6, 2012 End: June 12, 2012	1/week, 45 minute session	11 girls	Console-based videogame play
Boys Videogaming Club	Start: February 8, 2012 End: June 12, 2012	1/week, 45 minute session	15 boys	Console-based videogame play
Grade 8 Science Class	Start: January 11, 2012 End: February 15, 2012	1-2/week, 40 minute sessions	8 girls	Audio-video production, editing
Grade 4 Medieval Times Unit	Start: January 25, 2012 End: May 7, 2012	1/week, 40 minute sessions; 1 full-day field trip to Medieval Times in downtown Toronto	26 students in Grade 4 class (10 returned ethical consent forms to be used for research)	Classroom discussion and supervision of research in library, production of short iPad films about medieval times, fieldtrip to Medieval Times in downtown Toronto
Guardian Academy	Start: April 18, 2012 End: April 27, 2012	Everyday, 45 minute sessions	6 students (3 girls, 3 boys)	Computer-based gameplay of Guardian Academy
Castleguard News Network	Start: April 23, 2012 End: June 12, 2012	1/week, 75 minute session	13 students (5 girls, 8 boys)	Audio-video production, editing
Fieldtrip to York University	Full day: June 12, 2012	1 full day, 8:30am-2:30pm	37 students (22 girls, 15 boys)	Audio-video production or videogame development workshop

²⁵ This community – Muslim girls and women who do not veil – are an important group to consider in the future direction of research with the aim of diversifying the representation of the Muslim community in Canada.

Overview of Activities

Girls media production and videogaming clubs.

During the November recruitment, a significant number of students showed interest in the Girls Media Club, asking questions and also taking consent forms. From the beginning, there was miscommunication about where we would meet, at first trying to book time in the art room and library, but often ending up in Mr. Glendon's small and cluttered classroom. I asked the office to make announcements about the club's location, and also asked Mr. Glendon to add an announcement at the beginning of the school day, but these sometimes included errors about the name or location of the club or were omitted or forgotten from announcements altogether. In this regard, there was very little consistency for participants to get accustomed to. Regarding attendance, some girls had committed to activities running at the same time, had to walk home to pick up their lunches during the second break or escort younger siblings home. Over time, we agreed to run the club twice per week only during the first break, but this too meant that some students had conflicts with other clubs. As a result, although a regular group of girls came to the club, they did not all come consistently.

While students were attending the Girls Media Club regularly until winter break at the end of December, January presented a different story. One of the teachers in the school had arranged for a photography workshop for students at Castleguard for six weeks on the same day as the Girls Media Club. This workshop was delivered during class time, but also carried over into the lunch hour on many days. With the arrangement of a public exhibit at a downtown gallery in view, the photography work became a priority for students, meaning that only one to three students came to the Girls Media Club in January and the first weeks of February. These numbers persisted for the rest of the term for this particular club. In the end, there were 8 girls who participated regularly in the Girls Media Club, but only one formal piece of digital media

was produced to completion. Several unfinished clips, introductory videos, and observational field notes about interactions with students who were part of the Girls Media Club will be discussed throughout this dissertation.

On some days, an additional research assistant, referred to throughout by the pseudonym Laurie Mayfield (working on Smarter Than She Looks) was available to assist with production clubs and on some days lead videogaming clubs.²⁶ In January 2012, videogaming clubs ran at the second nutrition break, with a girls-only club on Mondays and boys-only club on Wednesdays. Participation in these clubs remained consistent. Many of the students in the Girls Media Club also came to the videogaming club. I assisted Laurie setting up and supervising these clubs, as well as collecting observational field notes. On days when Laurie could not attend, which became more frequent as the term went on due to her other obligations, I had the girls bring their cameras and computers down to the library so they could work on their productions alongside the videogaming clubs. This limitation in human resources, along with general technical difficulties with memory cards on old digital cameras corrupting, computers freezing up, and intermittent access to Internet made running the production clubs smoothly a challenge. To account for these difficulties, I also created an online account with Edmodo, an educational website modeled on the social networking site Facebook. This site allowed me to share media and ask students to comment on and engage with media in between sessions or if they were absent.²⁷ At the same time, the teacher-librarian present during the videogaming clubs complained that the games and students were too loud, asking that we move into the adjacent but

²⁶ Laurie Mayfield was invaluable to the club particularly at the start, during which time I was absent for one week in December when Laurie Mayfield ran the clubs with Mr. Glendon.

²⁷ References to *Edmodo* are largely documented in field notes, save for two examples of student commentary captured in screenshots at the time of posting. The Edmodo page was attached to one created by Mr. Glendon and when Mr. Glendon closed his page at the end of the school year, the Girls Media page also came down with it before I could store or copy the interactions posted there.

much smaller computer lab, further limiting our space and freedom to play. As these realities unfolded, I actively became more involved in the school in other ways, described in the following sections. Eleven girls participated regularly in the Girls Videogaming Club.

Girls Grade 8 science class.

In January, as attendance in the Girls Digital Media club faltered, I went around to classrooms again, opening the club to new girls who were interested. At this time, a teacher asked that I assist her class with an audio-video project for Grade 8 science. The focus of the project was for students to conduct a science experiment in a way to demonstrate a connection to an issue, problem, or need in the community. In the end, only two groups decided to present their project using digital media, and I worked closely with them for four weeks, in addition to running the weekly Girls Media and Videogaming Clubs during the nutrition breaks. This work involved bringing equipment down to the Grade 8 classroom and working with several groups to design their production plan. Over time, due to group members being absent and limited access to technology on only the days when I was in the school (Mondays and Wednesdays), most groups opted for more traditional presentations using Microsoft Power Point or no media or technology at all. The two groups who did work on audio-video projects included several girls who later came to participate in the York University fieldtrip as mentors to younger students, a valuable contribution to our trip. My relationship with these girls and their assistance on our fieldtrip was arguably more valuable than the students' digital production work, as one of the two projects was never completed because the microphone on the computer in-use broke on the last day of recording, right before the project was due. Both the students and teacher in this case were understanding of this failure, and in the end the students presented what they had without sound and delivered live narration over the images. These projects focused on the acidity of

drinks such as pop versus orange juice, relating to health issues in the community, and on making a home-made air freshener spray, considering the chemicals and cost of store-bought alternatives. Although I received ethical consent forms from eight students in this class, only five really participated by way of working on their audio-visual projects with me.

Grade 4 Medieval Times unit.

Mr. Glendon's Grade 4 class had also been asking when they would have a chance to work with me and of greater interest with the technology I had on-hand. I was often in class before and in between nutrition breaks. During this time, I interacted with students and assisted with class work, developing a relationship with them and supporting the teacher however I could. These students also saw me working with girls in the Girls Media Club over the nutrition breaks and were keen to get their hands on cameras and computers. Mr. Glendon and I agreed that it would be exciting for students, beneficial for him, and potentially informative for my work to also run a technology-based program with his class. Looking at the curriculum, we selected the Medieval Times unit as a point of focus because it asked the teacher to engage students in discussions about the differences between Medieval Times and modern day, and to consider how Christianity and Islam were a factor in society at that time. These topics presented obvious pathways into discussions about students' lives today and related to my research. We decided then on a culminating task that involved students producing short media pieces demonstrating their understanding of the unit. As the Smarter Than She Looks project had recently acquired a classroom iPad set, we sought to organize this work around iPad use. Although we ran iPad activities with the entire class, only 10 of these students returned their ethical consent forms. In the end, students gained experience using iPads and doing some short filming with this technology. However, we did not complete a culminating task on the iPads in the way we had

intended due to limited time and resources for the assignment. From a research standpoint with regard to my dissertation work, this time with the class brought me deeper into the Castleguard community, giving me the opportunity to get to know students in this class better and observe their interactions with this new technology. It allowed me to document interesting moments of technology use in my analytical field notes, complementing my fieldwork.

Grade 4-5 computer gameplay testing: Guardian Academy.

During this school year, our research team from York University also requested a small group of Grade 4 students who were interested in videogame play to participate in testing a computer-based, online multiplayer role-play game, *Guardian Academy*. Working with another research assistant, identified throughout this dissertation by the pseudonym Stan Klein, we arranged to have three girls and three boys from Grade 4/5 play *Guardian Academy* every day for two weeks. These students volunteered to play, enacting fantasy characters such as warriors, setting out on quests to defeat enemies and retrieve treasures. Many of the students who volunteered to play *Guardian Academy* were also involved in one or more of the other programs I was running, and so I also documented in field notes and videotaped some of their gameplay to enrich my observations and data regarding their self-expression, behaviour and interests in the context of different types of technology use.

Castleguard News Network.

A number of students in Mr. Glendon's class, as well as another Grade 4/5 split class requested a particular production club we had run in previous years called the Castleguard News Network (CNN). Under Smarter Than She Looks, we had designed a media production club with a news broadcast focus that was very successful in terms of generating student interest and scaffolding their work towards completing good productions (see Jenson, Dahya & Fisher,

2013). In this club, students were asked to produce short videos (under two minutes) about a “news-worthy” topic relevant to the school and community. Topics could include local events, community concerns, school rules, or other popular themes that were of interest to students. The specification was to complete these short broadcasts in two-to-three 90-minute sessions, meaning that they quickly had to decide on their topic, prepare their pre-production plan and schedule (i.e. who would be involved in the broadcast? What questions would be asked?), film and edit their work. At the request of students wanting to continue the legacy of this club, Mr. Glendon and I recruited an additional teacher I refer to using the pseudonym Ms. O’Bailey, and began running CNN afterschool in Ms. O’Bailey’s classroom. Thirteen students joined the afterschool club, all of whom had participated in either the videogaming clubs, previous CNNs or were a part of Mr. Glendon’s class working with me on iPads and/or playing Guardian Academy. Five girls and 8 boys in this club completed videos on animal rights, vandalism, bullying, racism, and one on a science lesson a group of boys had recently received about Antarctica.

Culminating fieldtrip to York University.

As the year approached an end, students were asking about a day trip to York University, something we had done in previous years. As such, I set out to plan the fieldtrip to York University in collaboration with my supervisor Professor Jennifer Jenson, Mr. Glendon and another York University research assistant referred to here with the pseudonym Sara Frank. We planned for a day where students would be tasked with producing short news segments, as many of the students were members of either Girls Media or the Castleguard News Network. To account for those who had less experience with digital media production, and to connect students across grade levels, I paired older students with younger students and aimed to have those with less experience partnered with people who had more experience doing this kind of work.

Students could select from two possible themes for their productions: 1) media and technology use, specifically expressing their preferred forms of media and technology; or, 2) role models, describing who and why particular people are role models to them in media and in the community (Appendix 3, p. 202). At the same time, students who had only been (and only wanted to be) involved with videogaming were invited to participate in a game development workshop led by another research assistant on the Smarter Than She Looks project. The day ended with a screening of student productions and prizes were awarded for the best produced broadcasts. Ten videos were created by 23 students (18 girls, five boys). An additional 14 students (10 boys, four girls) participated in a videogame development workshop. There were a total of 37 students in attendance on this day.

Summary of Data Collection Process

In line with visual ethnographic methodology, my data collection methods included 89 pages of single-spaced observational field notes, 44 student productions, 68 audio-video clips of students at-work, and audio-video recorded interviews with 14 girls who had participated in various facets of the year's programs. I also collected 129 photographs taken informally throughout the year. Visual, multilayered and multimedia content from students' projects are considered additional methods of data collection as they can present information that is at times absent from interviews or text-based data and can create artifacts students can return to and reflect on in future (Buckingham, 2009; Pink, 2001, 2007). In the case of my research at Castleguard, I did not have the opportunity to return to the school with the student productions to solicit commentary from students on what they had produced. Rather, I will discuss the self-reflexive process of video production in the context of students editing their work, at which time students viewed and reviewed their filming over and over again. While this lacks the distance of

looking back on completed work after the fact, it adds a detailed examination of the factors impacting what students come to produce to begin with.

In addition to student productions, visual recordings of students at-work have been collected to enrich the text-based ethnographic research, documenting student behaviour through sound and image recording (Pink, 2007). In this case, the purpose of audio-video documentation of students working is to show incidents of student engagement and to capture emerging moments of students' participating in skills (e.g. literacy) and engaging with concepts (e.g. community, discrimination, etc.) through the process of producing media. Interestingly, this form of data collection also contributed to the complex analyses of student productions in relation to the wider sociocultural context of the school by contrasting and informing how the digital media they did make came to fruition. Table 2 (below) provides a breakdown of the data collected.

Table 2. Overview of Data Collected

Type of Data	Quantity	Time/Duration
Student audio-video work	44 productions	Total running time 74m 45s
Audio-video of students at work	68 clips	Total running time 121m 57s
Video-recorded interviews	14	Total running time 127m 04s
Field notes	89 pages	Total running time 127m 04s
Pictures	129	n/a

Data Analysis

Process of analysis.

During my analysis of this data, I examined how girls in the clubs perceive and portray their communities during the process of media production and through different forms of media, considering what narratives about the community were told, how (i.e. visually, verbally or textually, directly or indirectly), and by whom (considering race, religion, culture, etc.). My process of analysis approaches the visual data collected from a critical and contextual standpoint,

not assuming or imposing any false notions that what has been “captured” on camera as objective truth. Rather, drawing on Sarah Pink’s (2007) *Doing Visual Ethnography*, I recognize that visual meaning is constructed by the researcher and relates to the research approach, and is necessarily located within the larger scope and structure of the environment in which the data was recorded and analyzed. Pink (2007) states:

...social scientists often complain that photographs alone do not represent, for example, emotions, social relations, relations of power and exploitation, but need to be contextualized with verbal discourse or other knowledge in order to invoke such experiences. To analyze images, then, it is more useful to examine how people’s uses and definitions of the visible content and form of photographs or video sequences attach them to particular ideologies, worldviews, histories and identities. (p. 125)

To explore “uses and definitions of the visible content” I have coded the video files according to broad content themes, identifying specific narratives and patterning identified across each type of recording (video productions, but also students at-work and interviews). Researcher field notes and interviews have also been coded for broad content themes first and then for specific narratives and patterning on secondary analysis and these coded field notes speak with and against student productions. Working through this data, I align with Pink’s (2007) notion that “the connections between images are constructed rather than ‘given’ or ‘natural’” (p. 129). Pink suggests that ethnographers are curators of archival information, presenting what has been documented and found to tell a particular story or ‘order reality’ (p.129), though it is not the only story that can be told. Paying attention to the importance of how the material is organized, I have analyzed the data by collection method, not in chronological order. This decision is made in part because I am looking for ways different data collection methods (audio-video productions,

audio-video recordings, audio-video interviews, field notes) engage students in particular ways in the case of different media use, and also allow me to see certain things about them and the work they produced in this project depending on the data collection method and/or medium in use. The purpose of this categorization has also been to identify emergent themes from across the work and to avoid getting stuck in chronological timelines (see Pink, 2007) that may have propelled or interrupted students based on the inconsistency of school schedules and logistics (though these interruptions will also be discussed). Rather, I have looked across these chronological moments to identify how, where and when themes became apparent in student work, behaviour and discussion, identifying also those themes that persisted over time and across technological forms.

Coding of the data occurred in four stages. First, I identified etic codes from the literature on Muslim students in Western school, the school-community divide and digital media and learning. These codes are listed in Appendix 1 on page 198. Second, I watched all of the audio-video files, examined and read through the 89 pages of field notes from 2011-2012, as well as scanning field notes from 2009-2011, identifying broad content themes in the data. Emic codes that I constructed at this second stage of data analysis included misrepresentations in media students' produced, issues related to school-community relations and incidents of technological engagement. At the third stage of data analysis, I watched the audio-video files and read over the field notes again, adding more detailed sub-themes to each emic code. These broad themes and sub-themes are listed in Appendix 2 on page 199. Field notes were colour-coded within the original document and all of the audio-video data has been organized on a spreadsheet, making notes about each file, the participants, content, and colour-coding for themes as well as including detailed analytical comments. With all of the data compiled in this way, my last step was to

return to the information to construct more nuanced patterns through the emic and etic coding. In my analysis of this work, I refer to students by pseudonym and describe in parentheses their ethnoracial background, religion and grade level in (most) cases where I acquired this personal information about students through interviews or sometimes during informal discussions (documented in field notes). I include this information about students to present a more complex picture of who they are as individuals, and also to clarify which of the girls were visibly identifiable as Muslim through wearing *hijab*.

Approaching the data with Actor-Network Theory.

Postcolonial Feminist Theory framed the way I entered this research, guiding the direction of my work in terms of identifying the various factors involved in how racialized girls represent and express their experiences within the school and community. With its focus on the various factors that can impact women's lives, Postcolonial Feminist Theory is clearly reflected in the thematic codes I identified through the data. As a theoretical framework it has provided me with an important lens through which to look for overlapping and intersecting sociocultural layers impacting the lives of girls participating in this research. It became evident early on, however, that attempting to frame or structure student behaviour, and the topics they covered in their media production work within the existing constructs of race, gender, culture, socioeconomics, sexuality, etc., was important but not fully descriptive of the more complex and nuanced interactions I observed. Rather, these interactions were largely, it seemed, unstructured and variable. Throughout this research, it became apparent to me that rather than focusing on the original research questions of how Muslim girls portray school, community, and themselves through media they produce, what was of greater interest and relevance was the question of *what factors were involved in the process of coming to produce anything at all?* From the outset it was

clear that there were too many factors impacting the outcome of each technology or media-based session to ignore the importance of *the process of creating media*, before even considering how or if what they produced actually reflected their lives in a meaningful way. To look at the intersections of race, class, gender, culture, and religion, as suggested by Postcolonial Feminist Theory, allowed for important nuances in student behaviour to become apparent. However, without an additional approach that could consider not only the overarching structural factors at play but also the interactions between people, technologies, social structures and artifacts, it seemed that many important inter-relational nuances would still be lost.

At this point, I recognized the need for an expanded framework and turned to Actor-Network Theory (ANT). Actor-Network Theory is described by Bruno Latour (2005) as a theory about *how* to study things and so falls into this methodological section. Actor-Network Theory puts a focus on the movement, flow and change ongoing between various actors involved in any relationship, network or association. Within Actor-Network Theory non-human objects are as agential as humans, meaning that in order to trace connections and associations one must consider not only, for example, what is typed and what is read, but also the way the computer acts as a mediator to the transformation of that information from one subject to another. When we ‘follow the actors,’ as Latour suggests, the purpose is to pay attention to the minute elements, the small details, as they inform (or rather, transform) the “big picture”. This stands in contrast to the ways some social theory is applied to research projects where pre-existing (as though social structures can “exist” without the agency of people and things), overarching structures are used to describe and explain (as a cause) more specific incidents and interactions. The type of analysis I applied to the data I collected, messy by nature of trying to understand how associations among social beings might result in some kind of organized pattern, is one focused on describing how

students interacted with each other and with the technology in use. In doing so, I have used Actor-Network Theory to capture important moments that might otherwise be lost when approaching the research from the standpoint of theories focused on overarching social structures.

Despite Latour's (2005) resistance to the idea of ideological social structures as a useful way to understand social relations, I do not see ANT in opposition to big-picture theories. Rather, I use ANT to add to such theories, honing in on the assemblages, or component parts – on the fine-tuned, moving pieces that inform larger social systems (Latour, 2005). In the following three chapters, I keep ANT in mind. This informs how I talk about the technology as it is related to what students say and do in the process of making media, and with regard to the subject/topic they cover. Primarily, I discuss ANT in Chapter 6 where I address the way specific technological tools in relation to the sociocultural context (and actors there) relate to student behaviour. From this analytical process, I have organized my research findings into the following three chapters, each addressing different aspects of how sociocultural constructs relate to technologies and the associations that form in relation to them. I explore not only what type of media Muslim girls in this study produced, but also what kind of meaning can be derived from our collective work in that process of production. In the concluding chapter of this dissertation, I focus on the common thread across these three chapters, related very much to what was absent from them rather than what was “there” in terms of the data collected. In the next chapter, Chapter 4, I discuss mis/representations in media produced by Muslim girls at Castleguard.

Chapter 4

Mis/Representations in Media: An Exploration in Form and Content

In this chapter, I draw on Postcolonial Feminist Theory with regard to how racialized girls portray themselves in media they make, and how they can be mis/represented²⁸ and positioned as ‘Other’ through their media work. This analysis is based on their self-made portrayals and also based on the way that work sometimes gets remediated into other viewing platforms (for example, a news broadcast about a photography exhibit created by students in their school). In doing so, I consider the role of the technological tools in use, ‘following the actors’ with consideration for Latour’s (2005) associations between people and things, and the transformations of meaning that occur when moving through different forms of media and technology. I also look at the sociocultural structures at-play in the lives of Muslim girls related to their position as racialized and in an under-served school and community with a range of problems. Pairing an exploration of those larger structures with consideration for specific instances of interactions and associations with digital media and technological tools has led to interesting and unexpected results.

The focus of this chapter is to discuss how the content of student-produced digital media is not always a direct representation of their lived experiences, or in some cases even of their interests. As well, I address how different types of technology, and the context of their use, mediate what girls in this study said and showed both in photographs and on film. First, I provide a discussion of a digital media “success” story, referring to a photography exhibit organized by a teacher at Castleguard that also involved students who were participating in the media clubs organized for this doctoral research. Because the photography club conflicted with the Girls

²⁸ Refer to the description of “mis/representation” as a term on page 6 in the introductory section of this dissertation.

Media Club, I included some questions about it in student interviews leading to surprising perspectives on the photography project. Second, I discuss one salient example of three girls addressing the issue of racism in school for a Castleguard News Network (CNN) broadcast, and compare that to their conversations about those experiences in an interview with the researcher. Finally, I conclude the chapter discussing the importance of understanding *how* student produced media is made, drawing on Postcolonial Feminist Theory, Actor-Network Theory and referring to some aspects of Media Studies to complicate the question of representation of students' lives in their media work.

Digital media success stories: behind the scenes.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, the Girls Media Club began in November 2011. In January 2012, the club had dwindled from eight consistent participants to only one or two attending the Wednesday time-slot. During this time, I was informed that the girls in the club had a scheduling conflict as they were also participating in a photography workshop organized by one of the seventh grade teachers. The workshop schedule was Wednesday mornings and although this was a class-based project it often carried over into the lunch hour, conflicting with the Girls Media Club. The workshop was organized by a teacher in the school and facilitated by a professional artist/photographer working with Gallery 123,²⁹ a small art gallery in downtown Toronto. The artist-facilitator came into the school for five weeks on Wednesday mornings to work with students, teaching them to use cameras, frame shots, and create an exhibit of photographs. Students were excited about the project especially because Gallery 123 had arranged for an exhibition of the work once it was complete. In February at the exhibit opening at Gallery 123, CTV News was there to produce a short segment about the event. The broadcast aired on

²⁹ This is a pseudonym for the Toronto art gallery involved in the project.

evening television. Interested to understand the pull away from one media production club to another, I inquired about the project with students who were participating in both programs.

The field notes copied below describe how two students explained the photography workshop after it was complete. I asked first what the photography workshop was about. Speaking with Jasmin³⁰ (Indian Hindu, Grade 7) and Ifrac (Somali Muslim, Grade 7), I asked how they enjoyed the photography club:

I asked them about their photography project and they said it was good. It was about the theme of “judgment” and Jasmin said she took a picture of hands with different skin colour. Ifrac said she took a picture of herself reflected in water. I asked if they learned a lot and Jasmin said not really, they just took lots of pictures but didn’t really learn anything about photography. (February 22, 2012)

Jasmin’s dismissive tone and response regarding the learning outcomes from the photography workshop could be further investigated to understand more clearly what she understood to be ‘learning’ in this case. However, comments about the photography workshop from other students also highlight a lack of clarity regarding what was learned and what the photography workshop was about. Compared to the comments made by the two above, Ifrac and another student named Haboon (Somali Muslim, Grade 7) indicated that the theme of the photography workshop was ‘to be’ rather than ‘judgment’. The following excerpt from the interview with Ifrac and Haboon presents the reflections of the two students on the photography project:

Negin: What have you learned [about media] in school? What kind of opportunities [to learn] have you had here?

Haboon: We had a photographer come in and teach us how to use a camera, and what to do with a cam...uh if a picture comes out bad or if a picture is exposed to too much light.

³⁰ All student names are pseudonyms.

Negin: Was that these last 5 weeks with Ms. D? [girls nod heads yes] Ya, so, did you learn how to do that using...what kind of cameras did you use? What kind of computer programs did you use?

Ifrax: Photoshop I think, not that much.

Negin: Not that much Photoshop?

Ifrax: And we used Canon cameras.

Negin: Were they just point and shoots like these ones we have here? [Ifrax shakes head no] They were kind of nicer cameras?

[Ifrax nods yes]

Negin: Oh that's kind of fun. So did you learn a lot about how to frame shots, how to focus, all that kind of stuff?

[girls nod yes]

Negin: So what kind of photos did you take? If you had to tell me what you did over those 5 weeks, could you describe it to me?

Haboon: If we broke it down...first we were suppose to do it individually, and see what, like, outside explains who you are. And then eventually we thought maybe we should do it as a group, so we did it as a group. And we just, like, gave all the pictures that we think are, I guess like, that make us individuals and we put them together.

Negin: You put them together...like all of your different individual pictures as one big show kind of thing? [girl nod yes] And the theme was 'judgment', is that what you told me last week? Or, what was the theme?

Ifrax: Be.

Negin: Be? Like being?

Ifrax: Like be yourself.

Negin: Ok, did you like that theme? Did you get to choose that theme, or did you like that theme?

[Ifrax shakes “no”]

Haboon: I don’t know, it’s alright I guess.

Negin: How come? Like what’s kind of not so interesting about it?

Haboon: Um, the fact that outside was winter, and there’s not that much things to do, there’s not that much stuff I like about winter.

Negin: Ok, so because of the season it was hard to capture something? [Researcher turns to Ifrax] What did you think about the theme?

Ifrax: I think it was okay. It’s better than any other theme I could think of.

Negin: Ya? I was gonna ask if you could think of something different, what would you have done? [3-4 seconds pause]

Haboon: I don’t know.

Negin: Tough question...[2 more seconds pause]

Haboon: What you know.

Negin: What you know? Okay, what you would want to talk about if you had to talk about what you know?

Haboon: [pause] Um, my past years of being in school I guess, and what I’ve been taught and everything.

Negin: Ya, so talking about your experiences and all of that?

[Haboon nods yes.] (Interview excerpt, February 29, 2012, timestamp 6:30-9:31)

In this interview excerpt Haboon indicates that she did learn about framing and fixing photographs, but is disinterested in not only the theme, but in the way the project was designed to reflect the theme. Her comments suggest that to ask what it means 'to be' for her was inadequately reflected in the photos that were taken outside and in winter because there was not much for her to do, or many ways to show her range of interests and activities in the limited outdoor winter setting. Ifrac indicates that she cannot think of a better topic, but remains somewhat apathetic about the selected theme in her response.

In an interview with two other girls involved in the Gallery 123 project, Itran and Yabine (both Somali Muslim, Grade 7) also shared interesting comments on the project. Itran expressed that she learned about camera lenses and taking photos, but that she was not clear on the topic or theme as she entered the project late. Yabine clarified that the original theme was "individuality" but that as a class everyone decided that they were more interested in the theme of "be...like judgment, image, and the way you see other people and how people see you" (Interview excerpt, April 2, 2012, timestamp 9:00-9:14). Again, there is some concern over the final project presented as 'to be,' arguably different from the topic of 'judgment' or how one is seen. When I asked what kind of photos were taken Itran said she could not remember. Yabine described a photo of a person looking down, expressing how she felt being judged. It was striking at the time of the interviews that there was so much confusion over the theme of the photography exhibit and how important the theme was to understanding the photos. For Yabine, a memorable photo of someone looking down was described as a subject expression of being judged. And yet, if the theme was 'individuality,' 'to be,' or 'being' the meaning of this photograph would be different in each case. To further the discussion, I asked if judgment was an important topic in the lives of these girls. They offered the following remarks:

Negin: Ok, and do you feel that that's like an important theme for your own lives? Like is that something you have to deal with a lot, this idea of judgment?

Itran: Uh ya, cause, uh, I don't have a problem, but the way how people think of you, these days, how they think, like oh how, maybe what is she gonna say, how...maybe...

Negin: So are you saying you don't personally feel that, but you think that's how the world is?

Itran: No, ya.

Negin: So how come you think that? Do you agree with that? What is it that's made you feel that way?

Itran: Because most of the students and people outside, in our community, they change themselves technically doing their hair and stuff, they change, face surgery, body surgery, everything about them, which makes them insecure. (Interview excerpt, April 2, 2012, timestamp 9:48-10:49)

The conversation continued with Yabine explaining that the theme was important to the class because their friends change their looks based on what is popular on TV, referring to the desire to buy Nike Air Jordans and look like Kim Kardashian. It is unlikely that the students in this low-income community are able to afford the kinds of high-end fashion trends noted in this interview, and it seems that these particular students have removed themselves from and are critical of the consumer culture that they are uninterested or unable to participate in. It also seems that they approached this photography project as a way to express this aspect of their changing identities and social relationships, though it is unclear if this self-expressed interest to address issues of judgment and insecurity are a part of the final theme of the photography exhibit.

The photos and the way the photos were presented in the CTV News³¹ broadcast about the exhibit did not touch on consumerism, insecurity, or judgment, all mentioned by the girls interviewed about the topic of the project. The somewhat broad and perhaps multidimensional theme ‘to be,’ alongside the limited access to resources and environments for taking photographs to really reflect their ideas around the theme, complicates the way the work produced by students is presented and understood. In the CTV segment, the broadcaster begins with the following commentary: “When the kids from [Castleguard Junior Middle Academy] take a picture, they really know what they are doing” (CTV News Broadcast). Artist-in-residence, Jim Greenberg,³² (a white, young-adult male) led the workshop and continues by saying:

...we’ve been working on an identity based project under the theme of “be,” which is the theme for the exhibition. This is their work exploring what it means for them to be, uh now, in their current state, and who they hope to be in the future. (CTV News Broadcast)

Based on student commentary already addressed in this chapter, the pictures they took may not show who they are or who they want to be in the future. The comments of the five girls referenced in this section may not represent the opinions of all students who participated in the workshop, but they certainly give rise to important questions about how much students (and perhaps which students) understood the topic they were assigned, and how much care they took to “authentically” represent themselves within the allocated medium and design. In the CTV broadcast, the teacher leading the project, Ms. Dala, talks about how much students were able to “...look at their identity and accept who they are, and be respectful of each other’s own identities as well.” Students interviewed in the CTV broadcast demonstrate pride towards the quality of the photographs, and one girl discusses a photo with three hands of different skin colour on top of

³¹ I acquired a copy of the broadcast from CTV at a nominal fee to refer to in my research.

³² Like all names in this dissertation, this is a pseudonym for the artist.

each other as showing “three different races, it’s showing us that, how we’re all connected in some sort of way.” Another boy describes a photo of himself on a jungle-gym as delivering “a message that, you can like always be relaxed, even if you’re getting bullied and things”.

Although the photographs appear to be important forms of expression for these students, it is the adult commentary on the photographs that attribute a cohesive theme around “identity,” “acceptance,” “respect,” and the other descriptive terms used by adults to *attribute a specific meaning* to the work. While there may be something meaningful to derive from what students produced, especially when given the opportunity to speak with students and have them explain directly what they meant, it is difficult to ascribe a singular theme to all the photos presented in the exhibit. Other students interviewed in the broadcast focused more on the technical skills they gained, certainly important and valuable for them, but also quite separate from the thematic focus and arguably inadequately highlighted as an important and successful component of this project.

Based on this example, I propose that what was shown as reflecting what it means ‘to be’ [to be a young girl or boy of colour] was inadequately reflected to the outside world through these photographs, at least in certain ways described by the students interviewed here. Rather, what students did produce, at least in cases such as the young girl who took a photo of three hands of ‘different races’ on top of each other, were depictions of an issue (or several issues – judgment, multiculturalism, racism) in a somewhat formulaic, narrative way. Such a photo, with the explanation provided by the student, would be an excellent opportunity for deeper critique of both the photographic form and the content/messages being portrayed during the process of production. In this case, however, it appears (and sounds, from the comments of the students interviewed) that this type of critical reflection was not designed into the production work and there is a misalignment in some cases between what students intended and how the pictures were

displayed in the final exhibit. In the end, the CTV News broadcast of the event depicted images of girls and boys in the two participating classes (with Muslim and non-Muslim students), primarily on the playground outside the school “being” it seems, nothing more than children. For example, pictures from the project portrayed faces of the students, some veiled Muslim, some not, as well as pictures of students on the playground – none of which carried any discernible meaning to the uninformed, outside viewer. The iteration of the theme ‘to be’ is what allows the viewer to attribute meaning to the photographs. Considering Jasmin’s initial description of the workshop topic as ‘judgment’ rather than ‘to be’ (which at the time, Ifrax did not refute), and the latter conflation of the two themes by Itran and Yabine, I question to what degree the students engaged with the theme and therefore how much the photos represent it? From a Postcolonial Feminist perspective, the work represents not only the lives of these students, but can also become a representation of racialized girls in general, in particular as this work was distributed publically. And, in this case, both the teacher and artist-facilitator were also white, speaking about a student group comprised of almost entirely visible minorities. Postcolonial Feminist Theory prompts me to ask how such differences in power and in the positioning of certain people in power over others influences the way racialized girls in this case are represented.

To add to this discussion, I also consider what appears to be an imposition of a social justice and identity-based theme in the digital media production work conducted with these young people – a point worthy of further consideration regarding its impact on already marginalized students. Postcolonial Feminist commentary on this example highlights how individual stories of ‘Third-World women’ can come to represent narratives that reflect their ethnoracial backgrounds as a whole, often in ways that maintain Western positions of dominance (see Narayan, 1997; Mohanty, 2003). In the case of the Castleguard CTV News broadcast, by

the time the segment is viewed by the public it had been edited, altered, and modified by many hands. Although student work is represented in the photographs they created, a news segment is also organized by the people with the power to produce it. For example, the teacher and photographer curate the photographs and theme, and the CTV News broadcast team make selective decisions about what is shown and not shown in the process of filming and editing the news segment. The end result is arguably then a representation of not only what students intended (an intention that is unclear based on the interviews conducted for this research), but also a representation of the adult perspectives on how the photography project went and what the photographs represent. Selecting an identity-based theme ('to be,' or the perceived theme of 'judgment') for the work they produced immediately positions participating students on the margins of society as a "group" whose state of being is worthy of media spectacle. A "media spectacle," according to French philosopher Guy Debord (1967/1994) "is not a collection of images; rather, it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images" (p.12). The relationship between the viewer and images in this case is one that emphasizes the *need to explain who the subjects of the photos are to the outside world*, which presumes a lack of understanding by the outside world, reaffirming the position of these students as outsiders. This kind of 'Othering' is described by Sara Ahmed (2000) as people of colour being treated as *strangers* to a hegemonic norm. Ahmed (2000) states: "Strangers are not simply those who are not known in this dwelling, but those who are, in their very proximity, *already recognized as not belonging*, as being out of place" (p. 21). In the end, the meaning intended by students is changed in the process of production, structured and influenced by the agenda of the well-meaning adults trying to give these students a "voice" from their marginalized and

disempowered position – a voice which may only further embed them in their already disenfranchised social spaces.

In the CTV News segment, the broadcaster closes the piece saying “Greenberg [the professional photographer] says his protégés all have a great spirit and a lot of potential for expressing themselves, and who they want to be” (CTV News Broadcast), despite the photographs themselves being created with little evidence for such a claim. In the end, I also suggest that form and content are related in a way that requires some attention. It is not only the meaning or intent of students behind these photographs in question, but also that the meaning of the photographs changes when they are shown in the form of a news broadcast, a medium which has its own conventions and actors facilitating how that television segment is produced. The connotations within the photographs are transformed as they are portrayed through the medium of a news broadcast, which is designed to hold the attention of the viewers and I suggest may be doing so by playing with existing power relations (unintentionally or not). In the following section, I present another example of a behind-the-scenes look at media production with a focus on three Muslim girls, and discuss how their production challenges the way visual digital media intended to “represent” students can be understood. I approach the problem of representation in student media using an example from the after-school program Castleguard News Network (CNN).

Racism, from playground to film: on representation and accessible discourse.

In this example, I focus on media created by three Muslim girls in Grade 4 compared to the stories they tell about their lives in an interview. This example further highlights the complexities of attributing significance to the student productions and explores the deeply engrained social and systemic structures that also permeate the content of their work. First, I

describe the short video three Grade 4 girls created for CNN. My focus on the Muslim girls in this video will be explained as I contrast this work with comments they made in an interview where they tell stories about their lived experiences.

The following transcription is from a CNN news broadcast recorded by Salima, Nadia (both Somali Muslim, Grade 4) and Anara (Christian Ghanaian, Grade 4). Salima and Nadia both wore *hijab* most of the time, however, in the video they produce Nadia is not wearing her *hijab*, a potentially important factor emphasizing the complicated relationship between racial and religious discrimination where these girls are not visibly recognized as Muslim without their *hijabs* (though they are both black). Anara is not shown in the video because she is filming although they all worked on the production plan together. They filmed several “takes” of this video during the club, alternating narration of the same story, each time as though the story belonged to whomever was speaking. The final video is 58 seconds long and is transcribed in its entirety below, with visual descriptions of the scene in brackets.

[Mid-shot of Nadia sitting on couch in Mr. Glendon’s classroom. She is wearing a grey hoodie with white and pink GAP logo across the front. She reads the script they have prepared from her lap.]

Nadia: Hi, I’m Maiden Mills and today we will interview Brittany Simmons.

[Camera shot widens. Salima enters scene, sits down next to Nadia. She is wearing a soft pink *hijab* and a bright pink jacket with white sleeves.]

Salima: Hi.

Nadia: What type of bullying do you get?

Salima: Racism.

Nadia: Name one racism thing that happened to you.

Salima: When I went over the water fountain, a boy said, this is only for White people.

[Camera zooms in on Salima and then back out to both Salima and Nadia]. And he says no Black, and he pushed me and I fell down.

[Camera focuses back on Nadia]

Nadia: Did you ever stand up for yourself?

[Camera opens up again to include Salima.]

Salima: Ya, I did. I just said, I said to this White girl, she and her crew, um, they start bullying me and, I said, I said, I had enough, I said leave me alone, I had enough, and I told the principal.

Nadia: Good job. That's the, that's it for today.

[Both girls give the camera a "thumbs up" sign]. (CNN Recording, May 28, 2012)

This recording is particularly interesting because the girls had previously attempted to film this segment, at which time Salima and Nadia kept switching roles of interviewer and interviewee but each time told the same story, relaying the narrative as though it were her own. The repetition of this narrative across the interviewer and subject roles suggested to me that they had agreed on this story as an important one and at the same time that it did not necessarily reflect a "real" interview where (at least one of) the participants was sharing a story about her lived experiences. This observation, as well as the severity of the incident, prompted me to ask them more about it. The following field notes summarize the students' reply to questions about the incident:

Salima and Nadia off camera told me the white person water fountain story never happened to them. Nadia said they know about it because of other people's stories and things they see, but not things that happen to them.
(May 28, 2012)

I was unable to probe the girls further about their comments at this time because the club that day was ending, but it was a salient moment in my research because this incident exemplified the importance of knowing the students involved in media production work, and the importance of speaking with them about their productions, to understand what it is they chose to represent on camera. That is not to say that their choice to cover this story about extreme racism does not matter, as it can be argued that they endured some level of oppression by proxy of knowing that these experiences occurred to what they may understand to be *people like them*. Or it could be that they too see themselves as subject to racism and bullying, based on their own experiences and/or more widespread discourse and representation about Muslim and/or black girls being discriminated against. Their own life experiences may be related to the historical presentation and portrayals of black community members (segregation, cross-continental/immigrant African and African American or Canadian histories), even if as first-generation Somalis their tie to the history of segregation in North America is not so direct as what was described in the story they told. Anara also is first-generation Ghanian and so too holds a unique ancestry that may relate to narratives of segregation. At the same time, the choice to present this narrative in their news-media broadcast may also represent some of the more racially-charged (rather than religious) discrimination they have experienced, relating again to the reality that Salima and Nadia are both black girls and Muslims who may face racial and religious discrimination, especially considering that these girls did not always wear *hijab* to school. This intersection of factors impacting subject experience relates back to Postcolonial Feminist Theory (Mohanty, 2003; Narayan, 1997) and also Black Feminist Theory³³ (Hill Collins, 2000; hooks, 1984) that emphasize the importance of race (and class, among other factors) as embedded in the ‘politics of empowerment’ for women

³³ Black Feminist Theory addresses the intersection of race, gender, class, and other factors in relation to power, positioning and representation of black women in the distinct context of US history tied more directly to slavery and segregation (see Hill Collins, 2000; hooks, 1984).

of colour (Hill Collins, 2000). Nonetheless, I consider here the degree to which common stories about racism, and in this case bullying, echoed in the cultural consciousness of these students to the extent that they felt the narrative of segregation at a water-fountain represented something about their lives despite not having actually happened to them in these ways.

The video made by Nadia, Salima and Anara became even more interesting during the data analysis stage of this research, when I compared the content of the production to an interview conducted with the three girls. This interview began by asking the girls about their media consumption and technology use in and after school, and asking generally how they spend their time in the evenings and weekends at home and in the community. In this conversation, Salima and Nadia mentioned that they spent a portion of their weekends at their Islamic school, which then led to more questions about how they liked it and what they did there. Expressing that they liked their Islamic school better than Castleguard because they could pray and people were nicer to them led to a retelling of religious discrimination they faced in the community. The excerpt below starts following Nadia and Salima indicating that they prefer their Islamic school. I ask a clarifying question as they share their experiences in the school and community related to Islam in more detail.

[Anara, Salima and Nadia in the library. Camera turned to Nadia and Salima. Jasmin is in the library for the videogame club happening in the next room but asks if she can film our interview, so she is behind the camera.]

Negin: So do you feel that you are not accepted as Muslim in this school?

Nadia: Ya, ya...

Salima: Sometimes, some people. They say, some people say you can't wear hijab, or you can't wear a skirt.

[We are interrupted by another student bringing in a form to come to the York U fieldtrip].

[Nadia continues after a moment]

Nadia: Ms. Negin, you know at our religion class, I like it because see there's this two religion teachers, but it's mostly Arabic people and mostly Somali people. The wife is Somali and the husband is Arabic, and they don't judge just because you're Somali and stuff.

Negin: Right. So, Salima, you were saying...that sometimes people here tell you that you can't wear hijab? Can you talk about that and give me some examples of that?

Nadia: Ya ya, one time I was at the park, and then this girl's like this, "take off your" — it's always at my cousin's house — "take off your blanket." [Nadia mimics the girl making fun of her, waving her hands in the air and saying:] "Haha, I'm wearing a blanket on my head, or underwear". And then after, I was on the slide one time, and then after I got in a fight with this kid at my cousin's building, he said, "Oh, you can't fight me cause you're Muslim."

Salima: Ya, and when my sister, she was walking past a non-Muslim guy. And after, he came toward her, no he went past her, and he stopped for a second, and then, "You're in Canada, get that shit off your head".

Negin: Whoa, that's not very nice.

Salima: It means, it means, get that ugly, ugly, ugly, headscarf off your head.

Nadia: And we're suppose to wear it. (Interview excerpt, May 28, 2012, timestamp 16:10-20:00)

When Salima and Nadia discuss the differences (and preferences) of being in their Islamic school, they both refer to examples of religious discrimination that actually occur outside of the

school in response to the question about “here,” literally referring to school. In this example, then, the girls associate school with being a non-Muslim space referring to incidents of discrimination they experienced in the (also non-Muslim) community. They may have had similar experiences at Castleguard, but do not retell those particular stories if they did. In this example, they do conflate the school and community as the same or at least similar spaces, an interesting point of reference in response to the initial purpose of this research, that being to ascertain student perspectives on the school-community divide. Here, it seems, the entities of “school” and “community” are very much interrelated.

There are important points for discussion considering both comments in the interview and the CNN video the girls produced. In their interview, they describe the religious discrimination they face as ‘racism,’ and it certainly is a form of racialized discrimination, but one that is distinctly different from the polarized black-white racial discourse they address in their afterschool CNN video. In part, this choice could have related to the third participant, Anara, also black (from Ghana) but not Muslim, although Anara did not share any incidents of racial discrimination during her portion of the interview. Gender discrimination, however, was expressed by all of the students as a problem in their homes (primarily unequal distribution of chores between brothers and sisters) although this too was not covered in their CNN videos. So, while it is difficult to discern how and why there was a discrepancy between their own stories and that which they chose to portray in CNN, it is clear that what they did show was not a literal representation in the way of telling stories related to their lived experiences, or possibly even those actually happening in their school or community. These students opted to present an extreme and possibly fictional incident of bullying around racism, rather than one representing the incidents of either religious or gender discrimination they discussed with me in interviews. In

this case, interestingly, the example they did use is a publicly and historically recognized problem (segregation), somewhat removed from the more nuanced and specific forms of discrimination these students experienced. Importantly, this example may then point to a discomfort or overt silencing around religious discrimination in particular when offered an opportunity to discuss it in a more public (news-broadcast) form.

Considering the type of stories the girls shared in their interviews, compared to the one they recorded for CNN, I offer another possible analysis of the narrative discrepancy related to the media form they were working with – video production of a news broadcast. Their engagement with a type of technology (the video camera) and also the form associated with a specific type of production (news broadcast), may have informed what they felt was appropriate to discuss in that medium. I suggest that the camera and news-style recording they were asked to produce for CNN became focused on stories they already deemed acceptable within the school and that paralleled the type of story commonly presented on television news. In this case, for these students the acceptable story was a version of bullying, common in the school environment where bullying is a prominent theme in assemblies and on posters around the building. And, additionally, they referenced a type of discrimination clearly addressed in school curriculum over the course of, for example, Black History Month (February). The students then made videos about precisely the things they are taught and know to be acceptable discourse within the walls of the school. Alternatively, during their lunch-hour interview with me, the stories they told were different – powerful and related specifically to their Islamic practice. The context of filming in the two different settings elicited different information, insomuch that it is not only the camera itself that impacted the outcome of the interview and their media production, but also the situated meaning of the camera in each context that mattered. I suggest here that the students understood

the difference between filming for a research interview and filming for an imagined audience in the style of news broadcast, even if on an inherent or unconscious level, and that they may have selected their stories accordingly. One interesting question, then, is to consider why the idea of creating media for a public audience in the style of the evening news may not have seemed like a forum to discuss their real world experiences of religious discrimination?

Based on the video that these students produced in CNN about racial discrimination, I propose that it might, at least, demonstrate the ways popular stories (haven't we all heard some version of the water fountain story before?) can become embedded in the collective psyche of a community. Popular stories of racial and other forms of discrimination may then, in some cases, contribute to a kind of 'false consciousness' (Lather, 1991) where students can only conceptualize their own experiences within limiting and oppressive frameworks about who they are and who they can be. The question I ask is if the continued circulation of these 'stock stories' of accessible discourse and dialogue about racism and bullying contribute to students' sense of disempowerment? Alternatively, perhaps having access to stock stories of discrimination can protect these students from having to discuss the very real incidents they experienced, based on a religious discrimination (a form of racist aggression that might be similar to the fictional story they did tell) with a religious premise that is not so readily accepted and received by the surrounding community. In either case, this silencing about religious discrimination for this particular community, Muslim girls, is a form of oppression. The ongoing discussion about rights around wearing the veil in Canada and worldwide might be one factor contributing to the discomfort of Muslim girls and women to talk about their experiences of religious discrimination, particularly those incidents related to the veil. My position as a woman of colour, known to these students as being Muslim (although I do not cover my hair), may have had some

effect on their willingness to share their personal stories with me in the more private setting of an interview.

Conclusion

Approaching this work from the standpoint of Postcolonial Feminist Theory has challenged me to look for intersecting structural factors impacting the lives of the girls involved in these projects and invited consideration for which stories made it to the forefront of their discussion (and which ones were omitted). This made evident the ways audio and video representations of students' lives were more than simple representations of their experiences. In both the case of the Gallery 123 photography exhibit and the CNN video about racism, the girls produced work that was misaligned with the information they then discussed behind the scenes.

While it was valuable to be looking for the over-arching and intersecting impact of gender, race, religion and other factors on the experiences that the girls had, an analysis of this kind did not offer much insight into how and why girls talked about the experiences they had at different times, and through the different technological mediums available. For example, thinking about the conflation of racialized discrimination towards Salima and Nadia being harassed for wearing *hijab* (gender, racialized and religious discrimination) is one important aspect of the information they shared during interviews. However, why Salima and Nadia did not share their stories of religious discrimination in CNN is an important question not answered through the lens of Postcolonial Feminism alone. At this point, and as already addressed throughout this chapter, I also consider how or if the technology in place had an impact on the media students came to make.

With this in mind, I reframe the discussion with a more focused analysis on what information is shared in the different technology-based contexts, comparing how the particular

technologies and the settings around media being made were party to eliciting information (returning then to Latour's Actor-Networks, 2005). In the case of the Gallery 123 photo exhibit, media was produced on two levels: first by students taking photographs, then reinterpreted by the photographer leading the club, the teacher and CTV News broadcasters covering the exhibit. In this case, there was a transformation in the meaning of the work at the two stages of production. What is most important here is that in the second stage of production and presentation – in the public broadcast of this work framed by the adults involved – it is the students' state of 'being' that is misrepresented to the public. Meanwhile, the really important work of technological media production training that did appear to happen with some success, based on student commentary and the very concrete outcome of good quality photos being produced, is secondary to the supposed "identity" work the students were asked to do throughout this project. The representation of these students as needing to be seen as "individuals" overshadows the view of them as tech-savvy media producers, a more concrete outcome than the continued positioning of them as vulnerable subjects using the photography club to "accept who they are" (Ms. Dala, CTV News Broadcast) and explore their (otherwise implied-to-be lost and unclear) identities.

In the case of the CNN news broadcast, there is a distinct difference between what the girls share in the form of an interview and in their news broadcast. Most interesting in this example is the retelling of known stories in a medium that might actually reach an audience, compared to the interviews presented as private, anonymous, and for the purpose of research under the control of the researcher. This example puts into question the purpose, or at least the value of news media production intended to "represent" the student experience as a medium for student expression. Jenson, Dahya and Fisher (2013) discuss another iteration of a similar problem – structural barriers to the creation of media students find meaningful and important. As

an example from Jenson et al. (2013) (also discussed in Chapter 3), students wanted to interrogate inequities in their school but faced resistance from teachers, were unable to ask administrators about policies, and/or were faced with limited time and resources to complete the projects they wanted to in the time allowed. In this kind of work, the final productions students sometimes make in digital media clubs require complex consideration for social, structural and technological factors impacting what students produce.

These examples demonstrate how *what* students say and the work that they produce is shaped by what is available to them, including technological and human resources, and that work is influenced by the power structures and dominant narratives that circulate in the school and community. Importantly, the recirculation of common narratives of racism and bullying suggest that the narratives presented ‘in the end’ need to be questioned in terms of their “truth,” but also that why students chose to produce media about these stories over their lived experiences warrants further consideration for how they perceive the different types of media they are working with. In the next chapter, I discuss a different set of barriers to student production, focusing on the concerns of girls around Internet security, surveillance and body image present across Muslim and non-Muslim participants in this study.

Chapter 5

Dis/embodied Regulations: Fear and Insecurity Producing Digital Media

In this chapter, I focus on two concepts affecting what students intended to produce and what they did produce in their media work. I summarize these concepts under the themes of fear of having an online presence and insecurity in relation to body/beauty image. In both cases, I discuss students as more concerned about *how they are seen and by whom* over what they produce online (or how they might represent themselves). In this discussion, I consider how power in the imagined viewer – how an acute awareness of surveillance (alluding to issues of social control and the work of Foucault, 1995)³⁴ – alters student engagement with producing and posting media online, and how this also impacts what is known about students (based on what they say or do not say). With regards to fear, I approach the discussion with examples of the ways some students expressed fear of publishing information on the Internet, including concerns over criticism, stalking and cyber-bullying. In terms of student insecurities around body image, I also present examples of girls being “shy” on camera, or having explicit concerns about body and beauty image that impact the process of editing (and therefore creating visual media). From this discussion, I consider how certain narratives are omitted from production work due to institutional and cultural value systems teaching girls problematic lessons that hinder their desire or ability to produce anything at all. At the end of the chapter, I address how these examples relate to the silencing ‘student voice’ with a focus on who has the power in the visual world of “seeing” and how this impacts the production of knowledge and representation of racialized girls relating to their experiences in low-income schools and communities.

³⁴ I recognize that issues around surveillance are vast and that security and surveillance are complex and in-depth fields of study. I use the term to emphasize how much being watched or seen effects Muslim and other racialized girls in their media production work in this particular study.

Fear in Cyberspace

In this section, I offer examples of how girls approach the Internet as a space for self-expression, within the context of re/presenting themselves in videos and other multimedia forms on personal blogs. The original plan in the Girls Media Club was for participants to create multimedia blogs individually or in pairs. Initially, they were excited about the idea of having a space online to express themselves and their interests. The only requirements were that students create their own work, rather than reposting work already online, and that their topics be related in some way to the school and community. Students wanted to create blogs focused on health, book and movie reviews, community news, and had generally diverse ideas about the content of their websites. Despite their early enthusiasm, however, there were a multitude of barriers to the successful launch of these blogs. At the start of the Girls Media Club, we had run several sessions allowing students to interact with the technology in use, playing around with cameras and then working to create short videos with that footage to learn to use editing software. While the girls showed an immediate interest in creating blogs, an early group discussion on the issue of blogging illuminated some of the barriers to completing this work.

At the beginning stages of the club, a research assistant working with Smarter Than She Looks, Laurie Mayfield, assisted on a day I was unable to attend. I asked Laurie to facilitate a discussion and Internet search with students about blogs and blogging to identify students' existing knowledge about what a blog actually is (compared to a website or social media, for example) and to understand what kind of blogs students like. There were six girls present for this session, three Muslim girls and three non-Muslim girls. Although Laurie had asked students to record their small group discussions about the topics directly onto the laptop computers they had on-hand, using the audio recording program Audacity, these files were either corrupted in some

cases or not properly recorded. However, Laurie also video recorded some of their conversations and documented her observations in field notes. This was an important session for students to learn about the different types of online spaces, and for us to understand student perspectives on blogs before starting to create their own.

To begin the discussion, I present excerpts from Zubine (Bangladeshi Muslim, Grade 7) and Hibo (Somali Muslim, Grade 6) looking for blogs online. The excerpt transcribed below aims to demonstrate how little the girls understood about the different models of information available online, in terms of how each form is produced and who produces them. I include these comments to show the lack of media literacy these girls had at the outset, which I then relate to the more explicit fears they describe about having an online presence. Zubine and Hibo's discussion reflect the comments of many girls in the group that day, whose knowledge about how information is created online were at comparable levels. In the discussion, the girls are responding to Laurie who is asking them to make an argument for why the webpages they find are considered "blogs" and also to think about who makes them, and who the audience is:

LM: You don't have to say in your recording what a blog is, but some people are having questions about what the difference is between a blog and a website. Somebody found headlines from a newspaper and wanted to know, is that a blog?

[background, Hibo saying: "What about Twitter? Ms., Twitter..." overtop of Laurie]

Zubine: Oh no, because, see, a website, the difference between a website is, that it gives you information. Instead, the blog is from the person itself.

LM: Oh ok, sounds good. Does that make sense?

Hibo: Um, ya is Twitter one of the blogs?

LM: Is Twitter a blog?

Hibo: Ya, because. Ya it is.

LM: Do you think so? Why do you think Twitter is a blog?

Hibo: Because, you know how, because CP24 always writes on, and then after, I always see when they always write-it, they say “blog” in, when they write “twitter”.

LM: Oh really? Ok, ok, well here’s what I want you to do. You will start looking for your blogs.

Hibo: So we found Twitter, is made from an adult.

LM: Ok, but what you want to do is, once you find some that you like, you want to sit down...

[Zubine interrupts saying that the Internet connection through TDSB server is not working]

LM: ...when you find the blogs, I want you to take a peek and identify what you like about it...(Excerpt of audio-video recording of girls working, December 8, 2011, timestamp 00:30 – 00:45)

In this excerpt, Laurie lets Zubine and Hibo first share what they know before later (documented in field notes) taking a more critical look at the differences between some of these online spaces. Zubine and Hibo demonstrate how little they understand about how information on the Internet is created, who creates the information, and how multimedia platforms draw on information from different sources and sites (like a Twitter feed on the CP24 news page). For example, Zubine saying that a website ‘gives you information’ but a blog ‘is from the person itself’ suggests that she understands websites as more objective and the information available there as more factual than on a blog (when of course this is not necessarily the case and both are made by people). Hibo’s comments about Twitter being a blog “made by adults” and the conflation of media forms on the CP24 webpage similarly demonstrates a lack of understanding of the participatory nature

of the microblogging and social media site Twitter, and of the different types of websites converging on CP24's integrated media stream.

The video clip of Zubine and Hibo ends, but Laurie documents their continuing conversation in field notes. In these notes, Laurie comments on her time working with the girls through examples of online spaces (e.g. Facebook, wikis, blogs) to understand how they differ. Laurie identifies a few key points that came out of their discussions. One student, Teekay (Indian Sikh, Grade 7), is noted as saying that her mom argues with her about using Facebook because it is a place where she could face cyber-bullying. Another student, Saraj (South Asian religion unknown, Grade 7),³⁵ is also noted to have concerns about 'older guys hunting down other people'. During this session, the girls in the media club also expressed a general fear of criticism over what they would say in their blogs and concern that people might 'find out stuff about you.' Zubine is noted as saying that she was 'shy and unconfident' in the context of blogging, although she was generally active, present and talkative throughout her time in the club, presenting divergent aspects of her personality depending on the social domain (field notes, December 8, 2011). In an interview with Ifrax and Haboon later in the year (both Somali Muslim, Grade 7), asking about their media production experience and Internet usage, the girls say the following:

Negin: Do you two have Facebook?

Haboon: No.

Ifrax: I have one.

Negin: How come you don't have Facebook? [addressed to Haboon]

Haboon: My parents just don't like the fact that, like, I could be talking to anybody. And, you know, it could be, just scary.

³⁵ Saraj was present in the early stages of the club but not later when I conducted interviews with students and so I was unable to inquire further about her ethnoracial and religious background.

Negin: It could be dangerous? Do you have concerns about that as well?

Haboon: Ya.

Negin: What about you? [directed to Ifrac]

Ifrac: I'm only allowed to go to Facebook to talk to my sister. She's far away,
so...(Interview excerpt, February 29, 2012, timestamp 4:30—5:08)

I refer to the work of Davis and James (2013) to further discuss how efforts to keep students safe from harm online can sometimes leave them with the message that the Internet is a space to be afraid of. In their research on the practices and opinions of middle school students in relation to online privacy, Davis and James show that the messages about online privacy students receive from parents and educators typically fall in the categories of 'don't post' and 'stranger danger' (2013, p. 19). Their work suggests that adults tell students to generally be wary of putting information about themselves online and that they should also be cautious and blatantly fearful of what can happen to them if they do not follow the suggested privacy measures (those being, do not post and be wary of strangers). boyd and Hargittai (2013) similarly address how a fear-based approach to online privacy and activity by parents also resulted in parents having negative perceptions about their children's Internet use. In their study of over 1,000 parents in the US, boyd and Hargittai identify low-income and low-education, also related to race and ethnicity in the US (as in Canada, see TDSB, 2013), as correlated with increased fear of their children being sexually harassed and cyber-bullied online, compared to wealthier, higher educated (predominantly white) peers. Statistically, according to boyd and Hargittai's review of research in the area of child safety on and offline, threats to child security remain significantly higher offline and with/by people already known to children. At the same time, in order to combat those threats that do exist online, Davis and James (2013) suggest that the strategies students have in

place to be in control of online privacy “involve making use of the technological affordances available on particular sites to control access to specific content” (p. 7). This claim suggests that students with limited media literacy like those participants in this doctoral research might also lack the technological skills to protect themselves online and respond to the concerns of parents and educators about privacy and safety. Research conducted by the NET Institute (Sengupta & Chaudhuri, 2011), a US-based non-profit organization exploring networked industries, also describes the link between social network sites and online harassment as both inconclusive and complex. Based on a survey of 935 teenagers in the US, Sengupta and Chaudhuri (2011) argue that demographic factors and behavioural patterns related to how teens use the Internet are stronger determinants of online harassment than simply being online. For example, teens that disclosed private information attracted more unsolicited attention from strangers and others than those who did not share personal information online. In this report, Sengupta and Chaudhuri suggest: “Educated guidance can minimize disclosure of critical information and ensure appropriate social interaction in the public domain and hence avoid any adverse consequences” (p. 16).

In the example from this doctoral research, although the girls were excited about creating blogs they did not really understand what a blog was. Therefore, they could also not understand what it would mean for them to post information on a blog, at least initially. Learning to make media necessarily involves a certain amount of media and technological literacy inherent in the process of creation. However, the type of media literacy needed to overcome the fear of harassment online, and for the girls to then feel secure in their ability to evade and/or combat it, is one that requires dedicated, focused attention breaking down what is posted online, who posts that information, who reads that information, and what different types of settings each particular

platform has to better ensure the security and privacy of the user. In the scope of a media production club with already limited time (to complete what is already a very time-consuming production process), this was not something we could explicitly focus on, though we did try to discuss the ways privacy and online safety can be maintained throughout the club. Nonetheless, the issue of Internet security was fundamental to students being a part of Jenkins' (2006) 'participatory culture' and this barrier was further complicated by ethical and safety concerns of the school about posting student videos online. In the next section, I explain how students' existing uncertainties about Internet security were confirmed by the structural limitations of doing this kind of work within the limits of a school.

School structured insecurity.

Despite Mr. Glendon agreeing to the idea of a media production club focused on blogging before we began, once the club started additional concerns about posting student videos online emerged. The girls in the club had parent consent and assent forms signed, however, Mr. Glendon suggested that further discussion about posting online was needed between him, the principal, parents and I. The concern was related to what Mr. Glendon perceived as a gap between what is covered on the forms, the way the parents may have understood those forms, and also the expectations about a club of this kind in a school where normally production work is shown primarily within the school community. Mr. Glendon's points were certainly valid given the reality of English language barriers for some parents in the community in terms of understanding ethical consent forms, and due to blurry liability issues of the school for online harassment involving students. As a result, one alternative we considered was having the blogs password protected, at least until we could further discuss posting publicly with the principal. While this is how the girls started working on the blogs (password protected), they rightly

questioned the point of having a blog if it was only going to be read by the few people they would distribute the website and password to. The hesitation we (the adults) had around making the blogs public likely further informed the already existing concerns some of the girls had about having an online presence at all. Student concerns about being online, coupled with their enthusiasm for creating blogs, exposes a tension between students wanting to have a voice in a public forum and being concerned about how that voice will be heard and criticized, and by whom. Concerns over who might see their work and what kind of security issues this might present for them limit the kinds of stories that are posted online (in this case being none). The various concerns these girls have about their online presence alter the way these kinds of bodies – those of young, racialized girls in low-income communities, and Muslim girls in particular – are seen (or unseen). I did not engage in discussions with these students about the issue of having an online presence at length with regard to student usage of Facebook, and it did seem that few of the Muslim girls interviewed for this study actually used Facebook. One student, Ifrac (Somali Muslim, Grade 7) indicated that she is only allowed to talk to her sister in China on Facebook. Zubine (Bagladeshi Muslim, Grade 7) explained that she is not interested in using Facebook because she prefers to play games, and Haboon (Somali Muslim, Grade 7) simply said she did not use the social media site without explanation as to why. The younger students, Salima and Nadia (Somali Muslim, Grade 4) did not mention Facebook and Mina (Kenyan Muslim, Grade 8) was the only student who acknowledged frequent Facebook use.

From these examples, I am suggesting that the very presence of these Muslim girls is regulated in part as an indirect result of what they learn about Internet security, and also because of the limited access to media and technology training and literacy that could better equip them to engage in and respond to online profiles and the threats that could come with them.

In the next section, I discuss a different kind of barrier to the completion of girls' media work that became apparent in relation to their embodied self-awareness. First, I discuss how insecurities about seeing themselves on camera (and in general), highlighted by the self-reflexive process of editing, hindered the completion of production work for some girls. Second, I present an example that complicates how to understand the choice of some girls to stay off camera, considering the position of two Muslim girls in response to trends and norms in popular culture. These examples of why some girls stay off camera, or do not complete video work, follow the section about Internet fear because in both cases the girls are hyper-aware about being re/presented in a public and visual forum. I conclude this chapter by discussing how much of what girls produce is related to the real or imagined idea of who is seeing and watching them, and what that means in the context of media education for racialized young people, particularly in under-resourced schools and communities.

Seeing Oneself and Being Seen

Over the course of this ethnographic study, the issue of physical insecurity was presented by girls in various ways in the Girls Media Club, CNN and in interviews with participants. Here, I present a few examples relating to filming, and in some cases specifically to body/beauty image for girls at Castleguard, discussing how this presented a barrier to production and to student concerns about being seen.

To begin, I refer again to Sarah Pink's (2007) work, *Doing Visual Ethnography*. Pink suggests that one of the benefits to visual ethnography is providing research participants with audio-visual files they can refer to and reflect on after production is complete. Due to time constraints and the make-up of the school year and schedule at Castleguard, it was difficult for me to discuss student work with them after it was finished. Many of the final productions came

to fruition towards the end of the year or on the last day of the club at the York University fieldtrip. However, I did observe throughout the year the ways students, particularly girls (as compared to boys in CNN), viewed and reviewed, filmed and re-filmed their work. Here, I discuss how students watched and reflected on their work (to varying degrees) with the aim of creating the “perfect” video. I then present a theoretical argument for how the engagement of girls with the media production process, including use of certain types of technology and the necessary process of reviewing their work (and consequently seeing themselves on camera), impacts what gets done.

To support this discussion, I present two examples. In the first instance, I return to Salima, introduced in Chapter 4 as part of the CNN video about racism. Drawing on field notes, I describe a moment when Salima is editing a video interview I conducted with her, where she is the subject. The purpose of the video was to have sample footage for Salima to use while learning how to edit in CNN. While looking at the footage, the following interaction transpired:

I go to work with Salima and she says “it’s” so embarrassing. At first I think she means the fact that she/we couldn’t get the video file to rotate. I tell her not to worry, Mr. Glendon and I couldn’t figure it out either and it’s a learning experience for all of us, in many ways. She says again that it’s so embarrassing but with a different tone...and somehow I realize that she doesn’t mean the tech stuff but the video itself. I ask if this is what she means and she says yes, the video is embarrassing and she doesn’t want to use it. I tell her not to worry, first of all this is just an exercise in editing and second, she doesn’t have to use any video she doesn’t want to. (April 2, 2012)

The following field notes address some of the challenges Salima encountered moving from filming to editing at a later date, working on another video she had filmed with Anara about different types of bullying:

I go back into the classroom and help Salima further. She wants to move to the corner, I say ok. Sit with her and one of her files won't transfer – error message. I tell her to move on, sometimes it happens. More footage can be recorded later if something important is missing but lets work with what we have. Says she wants to delete it all. I ask why, she says that she said things she doesn't like. I explain about editing again and remind her we can cut those parts out. Then she says "it's ugly". I tell her it's not ugly at all, that she and Anara did a great job with it, and put so much work into it, and we should put the video together and can work on improving answers on the next one. I don't dwell too much on use of the word 'ugly'. I asked what she meant at one point and she went silent. (April 30, 2012)

In an interview with Salima (presented in Chapter 4), she describes an incident of discrimination against her sister wearing *hijab*. In this interview, Salima uses the word "ugly" to explain the meaning of the insult inflicted on them. I copy those few lines from the interview below:

Salima: Ya, and when my sister, she was walking past a non-Muslim guy. And after, he came toward her, no he went past her, and he stopped for a second, and then, "You're in Canada, get that shit off your head".

Negin: Woah, that's not very nice.

Salima: It means, it means, get that ugly, ugly, ugly, headscarf off your head. (Interview excerpt, May 28, 2012, timestamp 19:40-20:00)

It would perhaps be circumstantial to surmise that Salima was necessarily referring to her wearing *hijab* based on her comments about her CNN video recording (documented in field notes) where she also used the term “ugly.” It is clear, however, that whatever the specifics of her complaint she: a) internalized it to the point of choosing silence over an explanation when I probed her about the meaning of her comments further; and, b) felt that something about the video reflected a part of her that she deemed “ugly”. This suggests that the comment was in some way related to the way she looked in the film, as the word had also been used in relation to her *hijab* in the way she derived meaning from the stranger’s insult to “get that shit off your head”. Based on this harassment she and her sister experienced with regard to wearing the veil, it is worth considering how this (and possibly other experiences like this) might have impacted the way Salima perceived herself on camera in CNN and as result affected her ability to complete the editing process.

With regard to how this affected what students produced, the first video of Salima alone was never completed. Salima chose to discard it in place of starting something new with Anara the following week. The second video, an interview about bullying between Salima and Anara, was eventually edited with titles and credits, but it took me paying special attention to Salima while doing the editing work, and required ongoing positive reinforcement from me to assure her that the video was worth completing. In both of Salima’s videos, what emerged during editing is perhaps an unforeseen challenge couched in a process that asks the filmmaker to view and review footage that also has the filmmaker as subject. Literally, the student has to decide what aspects of the footage of herself on camera look good. It is uncommon in professional filmmaking, even at novice levels, that the director would also be both editor and subject of the film. And while professional film editing would focus on content, structure,

framing/cinematography, etc., for young girls starting out in a club like CNN, it may be the case for some that the reality of having to view their own bodies on film makes it hard to look past themselves towards more technical editing requirements.

In a second example of how girls' insecurities about their bodies impacted what was produced, I turn to Teekay (Pakistani Sikh, Grade 7) and Jasmin (Indian Hindu, Grade 7) who were working together on a blog called "Sports Wise". The blog was meant to be a space to discuss health and nutrition. These two students came regularly to the Girls Media Club and at additional times of the day or week if they knew I was in the building wanting to work on their video footage. As the year went on, it became apparent that they were not producing much at all, even though they seemed to be perpetually filming. Despite having spent several lunch-hours in the first term learning how to edit, each time the girls reached the editing stage they sat down at their computer, copied over their files, and then called me over to say they wanted to re-film. Although the question of their interest in editing can certainly be asked with regards to why they avoided it, in that perhaps they simply did not enjoy this very minute work, or might not have liked the way they looked on camera, the topic of their later media production offers some insight into issues at the forefront of their lives. Specifically, while they do not discuss their physical insecurities as part of the reason why they either avoid editing or aim to film perfect scenes, they do express a real concern for insecurity as an issue plaguing girls in general.

Teekay and Jasmin identified child insecurity as a topic they wanted to cover in their media production work. I briefly discuss some of Teekay and Jasmin's comments, with the following excerpts captured on camera while informally recording a working session with them:

[Mid-shot of Teekay sitting on the couch in Mr. G's classroom]

Teekay: See, there's a lot of kids that are really insecure about their body, how they look, and how people think about them. And I'm really insecure about my body, and how I look.

[Jasmin interrupts from the background]

Jasmin: Ahem, ahem ahem, VERY.

[Teekay responds telling Jasmin to "shut up" and the teacher warns her about language].

Cont'd 01:11 – 02:16

[Mid-shot of Jasmin sitting at a desk in Mr. G's classroom with a Apple laptop computer open on the desk]

Negin [to Jasmin]: Well, what is the story that you want to tell? What is it that you're going to tell?

Jasmin: A girl's being stalked, by a stalker.

Negin: Ya, and how does that relate to insecurity?

Jasmin: And she's being insecure of herself, she's letting him stalk her without doing anything.

Negin: Ok, and do you think that's something that happens a lot?

Jasmin: Ya

Negin: Ya? Have you ever experienced it or seen it?

Jasmin: No. No, I heard it happens in high school.

Negin: Where did you hear it from?

Jasmin: My brother.

Negin: Your older brother?

Jasmin: Ya. (Excerpt of students at work, April 20, 2012, timestamp 00:20-00:31)

Here, Teekay identifies insecurity as a serious concern for her and other children. For Jasmin, she discusses the issue of insecurity for girls who are being stalked and she addresses insecurity resulting in abusive relationships with older men, a fairly complex and nuanced understanding of the way insecurities can play out in some social relations. In this example, some of what the girls are discussing is informed by their own experiences (Teekay), as well as by the information they are being told by people around them (Jasmin's brother). In the latter example, there is again a common narrative about stalking circulating in the lives of these students, though it does not seem to have happened to them. This is not to suggest that it is not a serious issue or one worth consideration, but I question again how we can claim to know what is happening in the lives of students, at school or at home, if they are more inclined to retell already circulating narratives than stories based on their own experiences?

At the same time, insecurities for girls and women around beauty and body image are well-known social concerns impacting girls, often perpetuated by the hyper-sexualization and alteration of the female image in mass media (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001), and so an unsurprising topic overall. With visual media as the source of much anxiety around beauty, making media may carry particular pressures for girls with regard to the way they feel they should look on camera. Other examples of students' expressed concern over being on camera emerged during interviews. In one example, Deirdre (self-described as "half-Jamaican, half-Canadian," religion unknown, Grade 8), Zubine (Bangladeshi Muslim, Grade 7), and Mina (Kenyan Muslim, Grade 8) sit down for their group interview and ask if the camera is on. Before filming the girls had shown some concern for the video recording and I had to assure them that it would only be for my records (Interview February 13, 2013, timestamp 00:00-00:30). In a more extreme example of girls not wanting to be filmed, Itran and Habine (both Somali Muslim,

Grade 7), ask that they not be video recorded at all and have me point the video camera at the floor during their interview (Interview, April 2, 2012). They allowed me to leave the camera on to capture the audio. In this interview, the girls also highlight the issue of insecurity in reference to the topic of the Gallery 123 photography exhibit discussed in Chapter 4. Interestingly, while discussing whether or not the topic of ‘to be’ was well implemented in the workshop, they address the issue of judgment as important to them in the following ways:

Negin: Ok, and do you feel that that’s an important theme for your own lives, like is that something you have to deal with a lot, this idea of judgment?

Itran: Uh ya, because, I don’t have a problem, but the way how people think of you, people these days, how they think, they’re like, oh how, maybe what is she gonna say, how...blahblah

Negin: So you’re saying though, you don’t personally feel that, but you think that’s how you think the world is?

Itran: Ya

Negin: Ya? So how come you think that? [To Yabine] Do you agree with that?

Yabine: Ya.

Negin: And how come you think that? Like, what is it that has made you feel that way?

Itran: Because most of the students and people outside and in the community, they, they, they change their self technically, doing their hair and stuff. Uh like, they change, face surgery, body surgery, everything about them. Which makes them insecure.

Negin: Ok so you think there’s a lot of sort of insecurity, and people feel they need to be different?

Itran: Ya.

Negin: So how come, but you're saying you don't have those problems yourselves?

Itran: No

Negin: No?

Yabine: First we were doing individuality [in the 123 Gallery workshop], anything, and we could take any picture, like about nature or anything like that, and then as a group people felt like, everyone wanted to do judgment and stuff. So that's how we came to do that...

Negin: Oh I see, so that was the theme that was important for everybody and that's how you came to sort of do that, to cover that?

Yabine: Ya

Negin: So do you have any thoughts on the same sort of question that Itran was responding to, in terms of, um, why you feel that that is a theme that is important? Like why do you think that's a theme that was important to your class? Like, why is it important to you?

Yabine: Because, um, you know how people feel about you. And, like, um [long pause]...

Itran: Maybe people you know are changing. Um, close friends are changing in different ways, and they don't like how they look and stuff.

Negin: And you start to, you think you're starting to see that now, because of your age?

Itran: Yes.

Negin: Yes? Ya. So what are some of the ways you're seeing people changing?

Itran: Their style. Like they don't, they like one style, but if they see someone on TV they'll be like, oh everyone's gonna be wearing that, so wear that, and stuff. Like everything that comes out, everyone has to wear.

Negin: Ok so do you see, when you're watching TV and using media, do you see people who reflect yourselves out there, and the way that you want to be?

Itran: Ummm, ya, some people. But most of the people if they see new Jordans that come out, everyone in the school might have it, cause they'd be like, oh, cause maybe I'm gonna be popular or something.

Negin: So, who do you, who's sort of, if there are people who you do think are good role models, who do you think some of those people would be? Are there any?

Itran: Um, I don't know. But the way media is changing people, is kind of, difficult.

Negin: Difficult how?

Itran: Um, because, I don't know how to say it, but media, like if they see Kim Kardashian wearing something, everyone wants to wear it. That's how it is. So the media might say, oh Kim Kardashian has a new ring, and then everyone might be so sad and stuff, and then it'll be a lot of money and stuff.

Negin: So how does that sort of affect you? How come you don't want to wear those things?

Itran: Cause we don't want to, we want to go our own way. We don't want to follow how people do things now a days.

Negin: Ya, what do you think Yabine?

Yabine: Different people have different personalities. So um, like, if they're a role model to you, some people might say I want to be like them. Or like, I want to have everything

she has, or something like that. So it depends on how you are, if you want... (Interview excerpt, April 2, 2012, timestamp 9:47-14:42)

Itran and Yabine identify a few important realities in this interview excerpt: they do not want to be on camera; they see judgment and insecurity as important issues for themselves and their peers; and they see themselves as different from many of their peers, for whom conforming and reforming their bodies to the standard images of beauty and popularity is a norm that they do not want to adhere to. They do not identify any specific role models in media who reflect or represent themselves and generally describe media as a negative space, expressed by Itran as “difficult” and considered by both Itran and Yabine as having a potential for powerful influence (mostly negative) over their peers. Later in the interview, I ask the girls if being Muslim women in the community is an “issue” that they have to be mindful about. Both Itran and Yabine respond by saying that the community is multicultural and tolerant of religious difference (Interview, April 2, 2012). In this case, I question if their seeming comfort in their ‘state of being’ (Muslim girls) suggests that not wanting to be on camera is a specific discomfort to being video recorded and participating in media which they identify as problematic, rather than related to more generalized discomforts with their bodies and selves overall (as was the case with Teekay).

In a theoretical discussion about surveillance, urban space and video-recording, Koskela (2000) suggests that because women remain the object of the public gaze, women’s “exaggerated visibility” in media relates to “insecurity about being seen” (p. 255). In addition, Koskela suggests that being the centre of attention in this way is equally marginalizing for women. In the case of Itran and Yabine, this attention perhaps pushes them to refrain from being on camera at all, removing them from even the possibility of being in the public eye. Foucault (1995)

discusses the relationship between social control over individual minds and bodies in contemporary institutions, including schools, as related to the watchful eye of surveillance and authority. In the example I present here, despite the assurance that the interview filming was for my research, to be seen only by me, I propose that the purpose and function of a camera as a surveillance tool and with the interview conducted within the school as possibly implying that what is recorded would be watched by (imagined) others. The reality of digital distribution in particular may highlight at least the possibility that everyone or anyone might see what has been recorded (Koskela, 2000). The nature of video recording being for someone else to view speaks directly to the question of who will be watching and how they as subjects of the video recordings are being seen. Is it then the idea of participating in a form of media production (a video recording), and the disassociation with film, popular culture and the “difficulties” of media influence that made Itran and Yabine want to stay off camera, rather than a presumed discomfort with/in themselves (insecurity)? In this case, I consider if their request to not be on camera is an act of resistance rather than one of resignation. To close this chapter, I present a discussion on surveillance and address the question of why the girls in this study may not want to be seen.

Surveillance and Institutions: Understanding the lives of racialized girls

The culture of surveillance associated with the visual image (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001) stands out as an important consideration for how and why students hesitate to represent themselves online in both text and images. Theories of visual culture identify images as powerful components in the recent history of surveillance, with women in particular being monitored and in many ways defined by their representations, often as either sexual or maternal figures (Hill Collins, 2000; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001) at the centre of the public gaze (Koskela, 2000). With regard to the idea of being watched and monitored more generally, I refer again to

Foucault's (1995) work on surveillance culture and the real or imagined 'panopticon' – the regulatory system of an all-seeing power. In the context of digital culture, in the shared space of the Internet, an 'all-seeing power' has been made literal through the permanence of online digitized materials, available worldwide via the Internet to anyone with access. In this online space, although we do not know who is seeing, there is a prevalent sense of surveillance that crosses private and public life, education and work (Foucault, 1995), where everyone/anyone can in theory see images and information posted. It may be the case that those in already marginalized positions, without the media and technological literacy to access or control their information being distribution online, find self re/presentation and participation to be a continually inequitable process.

In these examples, postcolonial power relations in the hands of the already privileged are perpetuated in the lives of the racialized girls at this school. Their bodies and ideas are omitted from digital mass media and cultural forums because of various structural and individual factors. Those factors include the rules and regulations of the schooling institution around what students can put online within the context of their in-school work and how their parents at home construct 'safe' practices. Structural realities around adult-child relations, and specifically the way adults have normalized narratives about online threats and security in the name of protecting children, dissuade (at least these) young people from engaging in online environments. The hyper-sexualization and alteration of women's bodies is also a factor related to why girls feel insecure about how they look (Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2006; Markello, 2005), an additionally problematic issue for racialized girls in a world dominated by a limited and stereotypical imagery of black women (Hill Collins, 2000) (and arguably all women of colour). This may also relate to

how/why girls who have a physical look that is outside of the norm (including wearing *hijab*) might opt for quiet acts of resistance choosing not to participate in that culture at all.

In addition, the already well-documented reality of limited resources, meaning little access to technology and inadequate media literacy for racialized girls in low-income urban areas, also affects the relationship of students to not only what they produce but also to their position within the world of surveillance (and/or the mass production of self/images). That is a world that can contribute to the development of social networks and social capital (see boyd, 2008, 2011; DiMaggio, Hargittai, Celeste, & Shafer, 2004; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). There is then a social and economic issue that relates to how institutionalized messages about online behaviour impact students in low-income regions in the way they have at Castleguard concerning those who might have better access to equipment and training to also better respond to security and privacy concerns. What I mean here is that because of inequitable social structures between those who “have” and those who “have not,” who is represented on the Internet may also reflect these politicized and economic realities. Although the students at Castleguard might still have access to the Internet to look at what is posted there, they lack the power to contribute online, and may be fearful of the criticism and potential harassment they might receive. Such harassment takes the forms of online misogyny, cyber-bullying and other verbal/text-based abuses on commonly used social media platforms, and elsewhere. Based on the work I have reported on here, I propose that with the appropriate media and technological literacy and training, these young people might be in a better position to navigate those online spaces and protect themselves from harassment. With more knowledge and training about the Internet and online platforms, these students might have been able to report “trolls” (people who start arguments in inflammatory ways online) (“Troll (Internet),” 2013), sexual predators and

other violent, demeaning, and inappropriate behaviour to parents, teachers and online authorities – authorities that do exist on some sites (e.g. owners/managers of sites that do not allow for discriminatory and demeaning posts and comments) to block obscene and damaging users. In this case, the omission of these girls (ethnoracial minorities in low-income communities) from online environments maintains their position on the margins of the digital world. They are removed from the surveillance they cannot control, hidden before ever being seen. In the next chapter, I focus the discussion on how particular technological tools re/shape the picture of Muslim girls presented through their engagement with digital media.

Chapter 6

Technological Tools and Tempered Identities

In this chapter, I present a number of examples from the 2011-2012 year at Castleguard where student behaviour was explicitly mediated by the technological tools in use. I focus on how technology is an actor in the way social relationships and behaviours are assembled (Latour, 2005). Considering the ways researchers and educators seek to learn about students' lives, particularly in disenfranchised, racialized, under-served schools and communities, I argue that student identities can only be “seen” through dynamic opportunities to engage with diverse mediating tools.³⁶ Drawing again on Bruno Latour's (2005) Actor-Network Theory, I discuss the ways different types of media and technologies interact with students to allow for different presentations of student identities (in the context of media production in this project).

To highlight the role of technology mediating student behaviour, I offer snapshots of student engagement in a variety of clubs that were organized for this doctoral research. To recount, these examples include work with iPads in one class, the use of an online social networking forum for educators called Edmodo, and students playing an online computer game, *Guardian Academy*. Each example demonstrates how certain types of technology and the opportunity to engage with them, manifest diverse student behaviour. I conclude the chapter with reference to the final media production fieldtrip at York University to discuss how the technology in use and importantly the environment that technology is used in, impacts what students' produce. First, I briefly revisit Actor-Network Theory to frame the narratives presented

³⁶ Identity formation in digital media and online platforms about how individual personas are formed and performed in different on and offline contexts is a well-researched area of study (see boyd 2007, 2011; boyd, Change & Goodman, 2004; Tadros, 2011; Turkle 1995). I do not explore this field of research in more depth in this chapter because it moves the focus of the discussion away from the role of technology to the formation of identity, which I do not attempt to cover here.

in this chapter, considering how technological tools mediate the associations and relations between people in particular contexts.

Revisiting Actor-Network Theory (ANT)

Broadly, ANT explores the ways technological artifacts, knowledge, and social norms, expectations and interactions co-evolve in a society at a particular time and place, in relation to the prevalent tools and environments in use (Callow, 1986; Latour, 2005). ANT aims to reveal the relationships between people, culture and technologies, considering how each of these ‘actors’ mediate perceptions and experiences of individual people and social groups (Latour, 2005). Through ANT, Latour suggests that to understand social relations attention must be paid to the associations that guide how actors interact, looking beyond the broad social structures that often frame how and what is seen. According to ANT, ‘actors’ include human and non-human participants in networks of social relations (Latour, 2005). In this chapter, I focus on the notion of interconnected networks of relations that include technologies and people. In the context of this doctoral research, the technologies used to engage girls in new media work and play impact how students behave and what aspects of their personalities, interests and lives can ever be presented and performed. In the following sections, I describe “snapshots” from different new media programs in the school, relaying the stories of a few select girls whose experiences demonstrate the ways certain new media technology allowed particular behaviours and interests to be made visible.

Exploring Potential and Possibilities with iPads

I begin this section describing my observations with the Grade 4 class taught by Mr. Glendon. During the 2011-2012 year while at Castleguard, equipment for the Girls Media Club and CNN was stored in Mr. Glendon’s room. And, as previously stated, I spent time in his

classroom in between lunch and after-school activities. Often I would be there all day and choose to participate in classroom work to support Mr. Glendon and expand the scope of my ethnographic research. During this time, I observed the often chaotic realities of low-income, overcrowded, under-staffed schools – students with a wide range of learning needs and inadequate resources to accommodate for them, as well as a few particularly disruptive students distracting the entire class from the teaching and learning of the day. With such baseline observations in-hand, I was then able to note the changes in students that came with exposure and access to different types of technology.

In the spring of 2012, Mr. Glendon and I agreed to draw on the resources of the Smarter Than She Looks project and introduce his Grade 4 class to iPads, given that the project had acquired a classroom iPad set and was doing some game-based research with students already. To maximize these available resources, and to attempt to engage the students in hands-on technological training and media literacy learning, we aimed to use media production on the iPads as a culminating activity for their Medieval Times unit, as I alluded to earlier in this dissertation. As a review of this brief discussion in Chapter 3, the logic behind this decision was that it was a curricular unit currently underway, and that the discussions of class hierarchy, Christianity and Islam that are part of that curriculum would make for content that was interesting and potentially relevant to my doctoral research. Although time and resources meant that we did not complete these culminating tasks in the end, a recurring challenge throughout this study, we did engage students in all the initial preparations to get them ready for this work and I did observe their engagement with the iPads.

To begin their iPad training, I wanted to give students an opportunity to get their hands on the devices, to first learn simply by interacting with the technology. In my observations, I

note the following changes in student behaviour when iPads are distributed:

Mr. Glendon teaches more math and tells the kids we're going to do some iPad stuff once math is done. Doesn't help too much as incentive as many kids still sort of acting out today – usual stuff, Abdullah walking around, Salima not paying attention at all, Harm's being quite rude and Ayden is speaking out of turn. Some of them start getting up and walking over to me to ask about iPads. I'm sitting next to Salima on the far side of the classroom with my computer. I tell them to sit down and focus on their math lesson.

I'm still shocked that kids literally get up and start talking to other people or doing other things in the middle of lessons. Even if one kid does this or starts speaking out of turn it easily distracts the entire class.

Eventually we get to iPads and want to demo Pistol on the projector. We don't have the right adaptor so do a make-shift demo using the document reader. Not great but it works. I talk a little about animation and kids are really paying attention for once (all eyes on me, quiet in the room). (April 23, 2012)

In video footage of the students using iPads from this and other days, even those students who were most often disengaged from classroom activities, and sometimes disrupted other students, were very much engaged in the iPad games they were playing. While it would be an oversight to ignore the novelty of using iPads as part of the allure and engagement of students, as compared to their day-to-day classroom work, it is nonetheless important to recognize that these students certainly have the potential to be engaged and that the tools in their possession may play a part in how that potential develops. A change in actors (iPads) results in a change in octants (students) (Latour, 2005). I continue in this line of argument with another example – Salima, Nadia and

Anara from the after-school Castle hard News Network (CNN) club who also produced another short animated film about bullying with iPads during class time.

On April 20, 2012 (within the same month that Salima, Anara and Nadia were working on their CNN production, see Chapter 4, p. 104), Mr. Glendon and I worked with students to make animation on iPads. During this 1.5-hour time-slot, the three girls discuss the kind of pixilated film (animation using people) they wanted to produce. At first they disagreed on topics but then settled on bullying. Although the quality of the pixilation is novice, the girls complete their production, a visually-depicted narrative (there is no sound) of first Salima and Nadia fighting, and then Anara coming in to reconcile the friendship, ending with the three girls arm-in-arm and holding up Nadia's necklace which says "friends". In reference to the girls' excitement about being in the animated film, I observed the following in field notes:

I think this is interesting because they are so eager now to be in the shot, to be 'on camera,' except I get the sense working with the iPads does not carry the same concerns or connotations as a "camera". What I mean is that it seems some of the self-consciousness around being interviewed [by me or each other in CNN] on camera seems to dissipate in this space. This could be for a number of reasons, including it being a classroom assignment, there being no sound, the way animation looks (already surreal compared to real life), or the fact that they are not being interviewed, asked questions, etc. (April 24, 2012)

In addition to these notes, I also considered how the style of making an animated and fictional film, compared to what is asked of students in CNN which aimed to address "real" issues and events, presented an altogether different engagement with the work. The hesitations and efforts to perfect their recordings (and perhaps avoid having to do the work of editing) in CNN as

discussed in earlier chapters, appear to be less of a barrier to producing work with iPads, and/or to producing an animation as opposed to working in another form. This suggests that access to iPads and access to the kinds of media production that can be easily made on iPads (with the available software there) gave these students a different kind of opportunity to express themselves. Although the topic of this production was the same on the iPads as it was in CNN for Salima, Nadia and Anara (bullying), the girls were quick to produce in this medium and showed a comfort in their readiness to use the iPad built-in camera, a comfort that was lacking in their use of a traditional digital video camera. With this in mind, however, it is important to note that what was produced on iPads also lacked the depth of what was attempted in CNN. While iPads offered a quick form of technology training and a way, possibly, to circumvent the suggested surveillance related challenges of a traditional camera, the deeper journalistic work that was attempted previously was also lost in this example (though that does not mean in-depth work cannot be done with iPads, it only means it was not done in this case). It is important to consider the need for students to engage with multiple forms of media production and using various kinds of technology to understand a fuller scope of their interests and experiences and ensure that they have the opportunity to engage in complex and critical media production offering different forms (with varied conventions) for creation and expression.

Edmodo: A Window into Students' Lives

Edmodo is an online forum where educators can post multimedia segments, assignments, and other content for discussion by students. On this forum, students can respond to posts, post multimedia work of their own, engage in discussion with each other and with educators, and receive 'badges' from educators hosting the pages. It is a forum that is modeled on Facebook but offers more security in terms of privacy regulations, making it a "safer" and deemed more

appropriate for use in schools.

Two brief but interesting anecdotes stand out from my time at Castleguard with regard to the use of Edmodo by students. The first relates to Mr. Glendon's Grade 4 class who used Edmodo regularly. Mr. Glendon posted homework assignments and supplementary materials on this forum for students to engage with, and students interacted with each other and with Mr. Glendon regularly online. The Grade 4 students in his class often posted music or short YouTube videos they found entertaining, posts that in-and-of themselves were a window into the interests students had outside of school. In observations (February 22, 2012), I make note of how some students used Edmodo to post Islamic prayers and songs that were also available on YouTube. Students also shared their excitement about recent Islamic celebrations, something they rarely discussed in school, at least within the confines of the classroom where I most often observed their conversations. While they certainly may have engaged in conversation about Islamic practice outside of formal class time with each other, their playground and hallway conversations were not spaces where I had access to participate in those discussions. In this example, the use of Edmodo by students who went online to engage in discussion with teachers and peers afterschool and on weekends provided a platform through which an important aspect of students' communities and lives, including Islam, could be explored. I will discuss this in more detail in the concluding chapter of this dissertation.

After identifying the value of Edmodo as a space where students did enjoy communicating with each other, I created a Girls Media Edmodo page in an attempt to raise additional interest in the Girls Media Club from participants after school and on weekends. In particular, I thought this would be a good space to engage in media literacy work by posting different types of media and asking students in the club to discuss the clips. One of the students

who came regularly to the club, Zubine (Bangladeshi Muslim, Grade 7), was particularly interested in the Edmodo forum. This student was unexpectedly absent from school for several weeks in March 2012. Through our interactions on Edmodo, I discovered that her absence was due to travel to Bangladesh with her family (for reasons she did not share). However, during her time in Bangladesh, Zubine continued to think about what kind of media she could make to post on her blog, and attempted to produce work she found interesting, as she was in schools in Bangladesh. Zubine asked her brother to assist her in conducting interviews with students at a Bangladeshi school where one of her family members was an art teacher. Our online communication about this work, the only form of communication we had about it, is displayed in a screenshot from Edmodo below (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Screenshot of Sabine's Communication from Bangladesh on Edmodo

to Girls Media Club

Oh! I almost forgot! My topic to my new blog interview would be "Schools". My grandfather has a brother who's an art teacher so I got access to the school in Bangladesh! I got to interview the whole school (with the help of my Bro!)

Mar 1, 2012 | Reply | Share | Tag

Me - Hi it's great to hear from you! I did notice that you were missing this week and thought it was odd! That is so exciting about your interviews with the students in a school in Bangladesh! Have you done the interview already? What did you ask them? Why did you think this was an important and interesting topic to cover?
I think it's great and hope that you and your family are doing well and able to enjoy your time away. We look forward to having you back in March! We can communicate on Edmodo until then if/when you have access to Internet.

- Well, First Question: Yes, I've already done the interview with the school. Second Question: That would be a surprise 'till I come back. Third Question: I think this is an important Topic to cover because to know how school are different is an important thing to cover. What I mean is like how the school starts, finish, uniforms etc. Overall, I can't wait to show what I've done!

Mar 1, 2012

Me - Oh my goodness! I'm really excited, I can't wait to see what you've recorded already. I know your editing skills are already quite good, so I'm excited to see what you will do with it when you come back!
Do you have your book with you? You know that you can post to your blog from Bangladesh or anywhere! You can write about what you've been doing, or post pictures, if you want. I would love to hear more about your time there.
Looking forward to seeing you back soon.

Mar 1, 2012

- My brother said "Hi". I haven't taken pictures yet but I will, so don't worry.

Mar 2, 2012

Me - Sounds great Thank your brother for all his help with your media project. We look forward to having you back at school. I hope all is well!

Mar 8, 2012

- I've got bad news. My grandfather erased the interview before we backed it up. I'm really sorry. :(

Mar 19, 2012

Me - Oh no! I'm sorry to hear that, Are you back? I didn't see you this week? Don't worry, there's still time for us to produce something great this term. I have a new idea for those who are still interested -- a little competition of a kind! I want to hear all about your trip and your interviews. I'll be in on Monday at first break in Mr room and second break in the library for girls videogaming club.

Mar 23, 2012

Show fewer replies...

Type a reply...

to Girls Media Club

Hey guys! I'm sorry I didn't come to school. Apparently I had to go to Bangladesh for "some reasons". February isn't the best month in my family tree :(but I'll come in march 18 so don't worry.

Mar 1, 2012 | Reply | Share | Tag

In this example, although Zubine was unable to complete the production she wanted because the footage was erased, the ongoing connection to the Girls Media Club through Edmodo gave us the ability to communicate about it online. When Zubine returned to school she did not return to the Girls Media Club, and when I asked her how her trip was she did not share any information and her mood seemed altogether down. The reasons for her change in demeanor, the loss of excitement she had for producing media and participating in the club, could be many. However, it is important to note that access to Internet from Bangladesh and having the Edmodo forum available gave me an opportunity to engage Zubine in ongoing support and discussion about her media production interests, and may have in some ways contributed to her interest in attempting to film something while overseas. Given that the intention behind the film was to post it on her Girls Media Club blog, it is reasonable to suggest that the Edmodo forum acted as a link back to the Castleguard school and activities there for Zubine while she was away. Without it, given her quiet and distanced demeanor after her return to school, I might not have any information about her trip to Bangladesh at all. Although I cannot speculate on what happened while Zubine was away, I have some information about her absence and was able to stay connected to her throughout at least a portion of her trip.

Playful Personalities in Videogaming

Guardian Academy is an action-adventure, fantasy role-play game that was part of a research study under Smarter Than She Looks. Everyday for two weeks a small group of girls and boys from grades 4 and 5 came to Mr. Glendon's room at the second nutrition break to play the game. Three girls from Mr Glendon's class, Nadia, Salima (both Somali Muslim, Grade 4) and Ophelia (Jamaican, religion unknown, Grade 4) are the focus of the descriptions in the

following section.

In video footage of students playing Guardian Academy (April 19 and April 24, 2012) Ophelia, Nadia and Salima are at their laptop computers, waiting for the game to load at first and then engaged in focused gameplay once they enter the game environment. During regular class time, Nadia, Ophelia and Salima would oftentimes walk around the class during lessons and call out while other people were talking. During their playtime with Guardian Academy, Nadia still occasionally got up and wandered around the room but Salima and Ophelia are particularly focused on the game. Nadia also only gets up when her computer or Internet connection are not working. In field notes, I comment:

In fact, Nadia, Salima and Ophelia are all also ones who don't focus well in regular class time and are often getting in trouble, but here they work well. Nadia is still impatient and yells out a lot, but when she gets into play at least her energy is directed and she has some purpose there. (April 19, 2012)

Here again the complexity and possibility of student personas, of how they can behave and under what parameters they might perform in a more “engaged” way is very much related to what types of tools they are working with.

In addition, student behaviour documented in field notes show important moments of interaction with the game, and between girls and boys in the club, considering the ongoing reality of videogames being very much ‘boy culture’ (Burrill, 2008; Jenkins, 1998). In the following field notes, I provide excerpts demonstrating the behavior of girls playing Guardian Academy. This behaviour is only apparent because the girls were specifically invited to come and play Guardian Academy. Having an equal number of girls and boys in this group was a focus for the research team to ensure that the boys did not dominate the gaming and technology-based

space, behaviour that reaffirms long-standing notions of technology as ‘masculine culture’ (Franklin, 1990; Jenson, 2004; Jenson, Fisher & de Castell, 2011; Scharff, 1991; Wajcman, 1991, 2004). Building on research supporting equal interest in gameplay for girls and boys given equal opportunity to “skill-up” with videogame technologies and challenge commonly held assumptions about girls lack of interest in competitive videogame play (Jenson & de Castell, 2008), the Guardian Academy program focused on also offering girls a chance to explore something they had an interest in, gameplay, but that they were not always included in. To highlight how this opportunity led to particular behavioural performances from students, I refer to field notes from Castleguard. Research assistant on the Smarter Than She Looks project, Stan Klein, notes:

...when the session was over, Salima (usually quiet) said to Neil ‘Ha! You got beat by a girl!’.

[Then] To Nadia, ‘I beat him! Three times!’ (April 24, 2012)

In this observation, Salima asserts herself explicitly as a female gamer and interrupts her normally shy demeanor with an outright and aggressive display of competition through play. Stan also comments on Nadia who is engaged in a player-vs-player (PvP) battle with a boy:

At 1:30, Nadia was in PvP with Vick, apparently frustrated.

“Hey who’s Blaze? [Vick’s character] Stop that! I’m not even playing!”

The mood shortly turned and she became competitive, shouting challenges to him across the room. (April 18, 2012)

Ophelia also demonstrates enthusiasm for the game:

As the session came to a close, Ophelia expressed her enjoyment loudly:

“I’m a wizard and I can kill zombies!” (April 18, 2012)

All of these excerpts highlight the way playing this particular game gave these girls an opportunity to show that they certainly can be involved, invested and engaged in particular kinds of gameplay, in action-adventure and competitive fighting games, and in learning activities in the way research identifies that videogames can be power learning tools (Bogost, 2007; Gee, 2003, 2009; Kahne, Middaugh & Evans, 2009; Nolan & McBride, 2013; Squire, 2006; Squire & Jenkins, 2003). Engagement with the game, and the ways the game acted on the girls, established for them the possibility to be altogether different types of students. Despite the game being one for leisure rather than education, the engagement of students with the form of gameplay – learning how to play the game by playing it – presents a worthwhile picture of how certain students who are identified as “failing” within the discourse of being “disengaged” can and do show engagement when the setting and tools are changed. Though they might not have learned math, science or social studies during gameplay, for example, they did learn how to play the rules of the game, how to navigate the game space, how to turn on their computers, load up the game, create their characters, etc. I aim to highlight here, again, that the students are very capable of learning or being engaged, despite their day-to-day disengagement with or lack of attention to, traditional teach-and-test classroom pedagogy and curriculum (de Castell & Jenson, 2004; Kafai, Peppler & Chapman, 2009; Salen, 2008; Simpson, 2009). To conclude this chapter, I refer again to Actor-Network Theory in relation to the fieldtrip with students from the Girls Media Club, CNN and videogaming clubs to York University at the end of the school year.

Observing ANT @York University

In Bruno Latour’s (2005) *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* he writes “a culture is simultaneously that which makes people act, a complete abstraction, created by the ethnographers gaze, and what is generated on the spot by the constant

inventiveness of members interactions” (p. 168). Drawing on Latour, I am considering how the social structures often discussed as impacting social relations do not "exist" outside of the agential forces of not only people, but also of people and material artifacts like digital technologies. What we do, how we behave and interact changes depending on our environment and the objects that are a part of that environment. When students are engaged with computers, iPads, videogames or cameras, they interact differently, showing different aspects of who they are. In this way, technology is a factor in transformational processes of both *being* and *seeing*. According to Latour, society consists of "bundles of composite entities that endure in time and space" (p. 218). This means that each lasting or enduring social moment has a subjective position within a particular time and place – a time and place that is also moving and changing. Everyone and everything involved is an "actor" in these always evolving networks. According to Latour then, there are no social "structures," only social networks and limitations to the ways we perceive them. Actor-Network Theory is about following the path of associations to understand the moments that inform the whole. The alternative – superimposing rigid form on complex interactions – runs the risk of overlooking important moments between people and material things that are essential to understanding social relations (Latour, 2005). In the example of students from Castleguard working on media production at an end-of-year fieldtrip to York University, and considering the aforementioned examples in this chapter and throughout this dissertation, I attempt to better understand students in a way that accounts for the complexity of their interactions with each other and the technologies available to them.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, at the end of the school year, as had been done in previous years for students involved in Smarter Than She Looks clubs, and at the request of students who knew about this trip, I organized a fieldtrip for students to York University. With the help of

research assistants from the Smarter Than She Looks project, along with Mr Glendon and Dr. Jennifer Jenson, we coordinated 37 students to be bused to York University from Castleguard for one day. The students in attendance included 22 girls and 15 boys from grades 4-8. Twenty-three of the students participated in a media production project and 14 students in a videogame development workshop. In this section, I focus on the work of the 23 students who completed 11 videos in the four hours (10am-2pm) they spent at York University. Considering that the combined productions from Girls Media Club and CNN totaled only six complete videos (and many incomplete videos) for the entire 2011-2012 school year, having 10 complete videos in one day – edited with titles and credits – was notable.

There were a number of differences in the design of the media production students were asked to do on their fieldtrip at York compared to attempts made at Castleguard during the school year. First, students were away from school, a point I do not want to overlook as fundamentally important to students' ability to produce good work, due to the reality of the often-hectic school day and environment. Mainly, as mentioned briefly in the methodology section (Chapter 3), both the make up of the school day with regard to the shorter nutrition breaks and the lesser access to the library, compared to previous years, very much changed the dynamic and capabilities of running media production clubs in this school. During the fieldtrip to York University, students had a longer block of time in a physical environment more conducive to production, in terms of having enough room and not being continually interrupted in the process of production by school bells, announcements, peers not involved in the digital media club or by other prevalent school-based responsibilities and concerns (e.g. homework, tending to siblings, picking up lunches). Students were also working in the relatively new, glass framed Technology Enhanced Learning Building at York University – the building an artifact

commanding excellence in its stature and design. This is a very different environment than that of Castleguard – an old, depleted school with broken air conditioning and used furniture, to name a few of the school building’s shortcomings. However, differences from efforts to produce work at Castleguard cannot be accounted for by spatial and temporal changes alone and I continue by outlining the other factors that impacted the outcome of this day.

At York University, and being on a fieldtrip, there were also additional human resources supporting student work, such as teacher-supervisors, peer-researchers supporting the trip, and two Grade 8 students who had been involved in clubs in previous years with Smarter Than She Looks who came along to assist younger students. In part, the ability for students to produce at York University on this day might also be related to the work of that day being for the purpose of a screening at the end of the day among only those students, teachers and researchers attending the fieldtrip. This change may point back to larger questions about online participation and also the perceived (or feared) surveillance associated with video cameras and the wider distribution of digital media on blogs (discussed in Chapter 5) and across the school-community (in the case of CNN where videos were not going online but understood to be made for the school-community to view). Based on the outcome of this fieldtrip, I am suggesting that the collective assemblage of actors and actants at York impacted how those participants interacted (Latour, 2005). In the fashion of Actor-Network Theory (Latour, 2005), I aim to draw attention to the reassemblage of associations between the students and the materials they had in use as related to what they produce and how they behaved. From the standpoint of ANT the focus of my observation is to identify how the change in what is available to students in terms of resources – considering the make up of the school versus university setting, in this case – greatly altered what they did, or perhaps more importantly, what it is that they were able to do.

In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss some of what was produced at York University fieldtrip. I do not offer a content analysis of the work produced on this final day of media production to avoid the problem I identify in Chapter 4 regarding adults and outsiders attributing collective meaning to the work of individual students. However, I have included an overview of the content of student media work from this day in Appendix 4 (p. 203). The focus of this section is instead to demonstrate how engagement with a variety of tools throughout the year, and conducting research using different media forms and in diverse environments can create a variety of possibilities for student productions and relatedly a diverse picture of student interests. As mentioned in Chapters 4 and 5, existing social structures can be reproduced within sociocultural spaces and this is in some cases related to how digital media programs are designed and what is considered to be acceptable and/or normalized discourse in the school (such as racial discrimination but not necessarily religious or gender discrimination as discussed in Chapter 4). Looking at student productions from York University offers an altogether different perspective on the lives of these students through individual and technologically mediated windows created in the distinct context of this York University fieldtrip.

Referring again to the assignment given (Appendix 3, p. 199) on this day at York University, students had the option to create videos about their role models, future career interests or technologies they found interesting. Having found the open structure of the Girls Media Club to result in the reproduction of narratives already circulating in the school, I asked students to select topics of interest that had come up with students throughout the year at Castleguard but had not been made the focus of productions during either Girls Media or CNN. These topics focused on either future careers and role models or their preferred technologies and media interests. I consider here the extent to which socially-situated design related to the actors

involved and the context of the university, where it seemed relevant and well-suited to inquire with students about their role models, future career interests and preferred technologies (as we were in the Technology Enhanced Learning building), were a part of the actor-network (Latour, 2005) making up this particular day and creating space for students to produce work on these topics. I continue with an overview of the factors that may have made it possible for these topics to be covered through successful (and complete) media productions at York University in a way that was not done throughout the year at Castleguard.

To begin the description of this changed environment for producing media at York University, I observed on this day that participating students did not hesitate to be filmed using the built-in laptop cameras, and they also worked quickly to address and revise interview questions and edit their productions. Students recorded their videos directly on laptops rather than through cameras to expedite the recording process. Though this very much limited the actual camera-work and shot framing they could do, it may have also mitigated some of the surveillance issues discussed in Chapter 5. Filming directly onto laptops also reduced the editing process by one step as students did not have to transfer their files from camera to computer. In preparation for making their films, students quickly created probing questions related to why certain individuals were seen as role models, why students wanted to pursue certain careers, and what was the impact of media and technology on young people. Of the 10 Muslim girls who participated, three identified famous black celebrities as their role models, two named their mothers as their role models, two named teachers and York University researchers and Mr. Glendon as role models for supporting technology and media production work, and one explained that she wants to be a York University professor because “York University is the best and when I was in grade 4 my teacher was all up in technology” (Nadia, Somali Muslim, Grade

4, excerpt from York University video production, June 12, 2012). In addition, one girl explained that she would like to work in videogaming, one expressed an interest to become a psychologist to help people with mental disabilities following the completion of her master's degree at Ryerson University, and another explained that she loves to use her mobile phone to communicate with friends, take pictures and surf the Internet. The point here is to emphasize the importance of actor-networks and to consider how the actants involved in this setting influenced the outcome of those particular associations (Latour, 2005) and in this case of the digital media production work of these Muslim girls. The girls here refer to York University researchers as role models and to their technology-savvy teachers involved in *Smarter Than She Looks*. In addition, the girls who refer to famous figures like Michele Obama and Martin Luther King offer some insight into who they relate to in public media. One student, Haboon (Somali Muslim, Grade 7), named a Toronto-based female news broadcaster, Andria Case, as her role model because "of her [the news broadcaster's] success being a black person and a woman." Haboon continues by saying: "Most people who are both of these are put down but she has shown me that she does not care and loves her job as a TV anchor" (from Haboon's York University video production, June 12, 2012). I discuss the intersection of race and gender as factors related to student identities and who they identify with in Chapter 7, the conclusion to this dissertation. At this point, however, I highlight the relative ease with which students produced media and as a result shared information about their interests at York University compared to at Castleguard, where a multitude of factors limited our ability to complete work and where complex sociocultural and environmental factors arguably influenced what students chose to talk about throughout the year. Callon (1986) suggests: "The actor-world is the context which gives each entity its significance and defines its limitations. It does this by associating the entity with others

that exist within a network” (p. 30). These examples from York University are not only a reflection of a particular aspect of student interests, they too are a reflection of interests within the context of the University setting, the TEL building, created with laptop computers instead of cameras and for the sole purpose of one screening at the end of this day with those peers also present, rather than with a broader (real or imaged) audience. It is the totality of this particular context, of this actor-world (Callon, 1986), that contributed to the work students were able to produce.

The snapshots of student engagement with different types of technology that I document in this chapter demonstrate how it is that different settings and access to different types of tools allow for particular aspects of students’ personalities and interests to be performed. Callon (1986) describes actor-networks as part of actor-worlds saying: “In the absence of one ingredient the whole would break down” (p. 23). According to Callon, tools and the social context in which tools are used make a difference as to how actants and actors relate to each other. From this standpoint, exploring the lives of Muslim girls or any racialized communities may require close consideration for all of the actors and actants involved as they interrelate towards a network of associations (Callon, 1986; Latour, 2005).

To review the narratives presented in this chapter, I discussed the case of using iPads to make animation in the school, where the students were able to work with a mobile device with all of the needed recording software built in (a software that did not require any in-depth editing). In addition, working with iPads and making animation rather than filming something more “real” (as is done with a video camera) may have changed the way students associated with media-making in this context. Working with iPads in the school, however, one group of students still reproduced the bullying narrative they had already covered in CNN, something they did not

do or address in any way through their work at York University (though they could have, for example, discussed cyber-bullying as related to technology or media, referred to anti-bullying campaign figures as role models, or brought this important topic into their work in different ways within the parameters of the assigned topics). The example of Zubine using Edmodo from Bangladesh showed a different perspective on how tools renegotiate associations, how interesting and alternate networks can be traced by following actors and actants with a continued focus on tools and actor-worlds (Callon, 1986; Latour, 2005) on digital, networked platforms. The observations made during Guardian Academy demonstrate also a range of possible behaviour and levels of engagement students can have when, again, the tools in use are also changed and consequently change how student behaviour is contextualized and interpreted. In this latter case, vocal student excitement and competition are seen as forms of engagement within the context of videogame play.

In this chapter, I have drawn attention to the ways engagement with certain technological tools and also the social environments where those tools are used created opportunities for students to form and perform different aspects of their identities and interests. Notably, however, throughout the many different approaches to digital media production over my three years at Castleguard, and the one year with Muslim girls as the focus of study for this doctoral research, Islam did not emerge as a prevalent topic for the content of student media productions or in discussion with me. I am not suggesting that Islam should or needs to be at the centre of student work, however, I cannot ignore the near-complete lack of discussion about this topic over the course of a lengthy and detailed study and with such a high proportion of Muslim students in the Castleguard school. Latour (2005) considers absence in social science research, suggesting that what is truly invisible leaves no trace and nothing to be discussed. From the standpoint of Actor-

Network Theory, the identification of trace elements, of markers and moments related to Islam, indicates a need to redirect some attention to the networks surrounding those markers to better see their relational pathways. In the concluding chapter of this dissertation, I discuss this absence of Islam at Castleguard during my time there in more detail in relation to ANT and reflect on what this means from the standpoint of Feminist Ethnography and Postcolonial Feminist Theory.

Conclusion: Exploring Absence in Ethnographic Research

Re-Writing the Common Narrative: Measuring the Immeasurable

Exploring *absence* is a challenging task as that which is absent cannot be seen or documented and leaves little in the way of concrete examples for discussion. Although Islam was not very present as a topic for discussion, or covered in the digital media production of Muslim girls at Castleguard over the years of this study, its embodied presence among the girls who veil, as well as a few examples of when it did come up in discussion, present ‘trace elements’ (Latour, 2005) to explore. In this concluding section, I respond to the research questions guiding this study about what Muslim girls portray in their digital media productions and begin this discussion by addressing what is omitted from that work. Feminist Ethnography identifies that what is omitted from research, what is unseen or invisible, is as important as the information that can be witnessed, collected and documented by the researcher (Visweswaran, 1994). I turn to Actor-Network Theory (Latour, 2005) to talk about something that was not often “there” (Visweswaran, 1994) in any way beyond the visible sartorial marker of wearing *hijab*, following the path of associations related to Islam in the moments it emerged. The purpose of this conclusion is not to rearticulate a problematic assumption about the need to examine Islam as the most important factor in the lives of Muslim girls. Rather, the purpose is to discuss the holes and inconsistencies in what might be “found” through a research study of this kind, to better identify ways of exploring the lives of already marginalized students without silencing them further. Following a discussion about what has been absent in the media production work of the girls involved in this study, I also respond to the research questions with a brief overview of intersecting sociocultural factors (e.g. race, gender, sexuality) as they related to student work

(and students at work) and return to a discussion about the role of digital media production with regard to giving marginalized students “voice”.

First, I provide a brief review of the focus of my analyses in this dissertation. Based on data collected during this ethnographic study, I have discussed what kind of meaning can be derived from student media productions, considering how student-produced videos and photos are framed within and informed by existing social structures, social expectations, and by the intentions and interests of adults. In particular, in Chapter 4, I have highlighted how common narratives of discrimination and embedded assumptions about marginalized students being misunderstood and ultimately read as Other are reaffirmed through certain kinds of digital media production practices. In Chapter 5, I examined how student concerns over being seen, and/or surveillance, impacted what they produce (or rather, end up *not* producing at all). The importance here has been a consideration for what we see and do not see about the students participating in this study through social media and digital media, and an analysis of how this relates to sociocultural structures surrounding those particular tools in use. Finally, in Chapter 6, I explored the ways student engagement with different forms of new media and technology allowed for varied behaviours and interests to be performed, offering a wider view into student lives through examples that demonstrated how using different tools render diverse student behaviour. Throughout this research, I have sought to create environments where students might discuss their experiences in school and in their local communities openly. In my analysis, I have highlighted how achieving this goal was complicated by sociocultural forces, related to postcolonial power structures, mis/representation in digital media, and to technologies available in the school and community. As I conclude this work, based on the data collected and observations documented throughout my time at this school, I cannot ignore the compelling

silence related to Islam and so address this topic in the following pages.

Exploring the art of silence.

As discussed in the methodology chapter (Chapter 3), Feminist Ethnography asks the researcher to consider silence as an important aspect of the data collection process (Visweswaran, 1994). In *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*, Visweswaran (1994) articulates why it is difficult to conduct research with groups accustomed to living in already marginalizing environments. Visweswaran presents an example of a researcher who “returned from fieldwork claiming they could not study gender because it was not ‘at issue’ in that society” (p. 30). In her work, Visweswaran continues, stating:

Indeed, the fact that it was not at issue may have been the issue. Perhaps women chose not to discuss gender issues with an outsider. I would argue that a feminist anthropology cannot assume the willingness of women to talk, and that one avenue open to it is an investigation of when and why women do talk – assessing what strictures are placed on their speech, what avenues of creativity they have appropriated, what degrees of freedom they possess. (p. 30)

As such, the researcher must deliberate over what is missing from the data, rather than only making an analysis based on what is “there”. Visweswaran (1994) argues that silences are a “central site for the analysis of power” and considers silence also as a possible form of resistance, “a refusal to speak” (p. 51). Exploring such silence may then illuminate some of the otherwise unseen social and relational connections that are a part of communities with whom research is underway.

In the case of Castleguard, silence around the topic of Islam was evident. Though official demographic numbers on the Muslim population in the school were not available to me from the

Toronto District School Board, a walk through the school corridors on any day make clear the prevalence of the Islamic community there. Though the boys cannot be visibly identified as Muslim, compared to their non-Muslim male peers who are also of African, Afro-Caribbean, and South Asian descent, the girls in *hijab* are unavoidably noticed, and they are many. There are girls who cover their hair and dress in “Western” styles (e.g. jeans and t-shirts), and there are girls who cover their hair and also wear loose, ankle-length black overcoats on top of their clothing (called *abayas*). Though no girls in the school wear *niqab* – the form of dress adopted by some Muslim communities to cover the face – some of the mothers in the community do wear *niqab* and are often seen walking around the school. Despite this reality, with the exception of references to sanctioned absenteeism due to Islamic celebrations, and the occasional clarification about who is Muslim for dietary purposes (particularly among the boys, though most could be identified as Muslim by name), Islam was rarely discussed with students or in school curriculum so far as I observed. This stands in contrast to the presence and impact of Islam in schools, aforementioned in this dissertation based on research focused on the marginalizing experiences of Muslim girls (Caida & McDonald, 2008; Haw, 1998, 2009; Kassam, 2007; Khan, 2005; Rezai-Rashti, 1994; Zine, 2000; 2006) and with regard to the reality of Islamophobia propagated by public media worldwide as having an impact on the lives of Muslim men and women in the West (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Ahmed, 1982; Hoodfar, 1993; Macdonald, 2006; Moghissi, 2003; Said, 1997, 1998). To summarize this point, in my three years at Castleguard, facilitating media production clubs focused on school and community issues, assisting in classrooms, and supporting other technology-based programming, Islam was infrequently (if ever) a topic of open conversation. And yet, the research referenced in Chapter 2 of this dissertation in particular highlights the powerful impact mis/understandings about Islam has on the Muslim community in

the West, especially for girls and women. In these closing pages, I address this gap between what I identified in the literature at the start of this research and what I found (or rather did not find) throughout my study. I respond in part to one of my research questions regarding what Muslim girls portrayed about themselves, the school and community in media they make by addressing this absence.

Of the 14 girls interviewed for this project, 9 were visually identifiable as Muslim (wearing *hijab*). In my interview questions, I asked these students to tell me about their daily lives, inquiring about what they did afterschool and on the weekends, including but not limited to their access to technology and technology use. As discussed in Chapter 4, only two students, Nadia and Salima (Somali Muslim, Grade 4), discussed Islam as a part of their lives freely. Nadia and Salima described their sense of community and belonging at their Islamic school on the weekends³⁷ and shared stories of discrimination in the community, related specifically to wearing *hijab*. Itran and Yabine (Somali Muslim, Grade 7) also shared a few comments about their experience as Muslims in their interview, but only at my request. I had purposefully not asked about Islam in most of my interviews to allow students to discuss their school and community lives with reference to the themes that they chose to share, probing about Islam-related issues if students brought them up. In some ways this offered valuable insight into other issues at the forefront of student concerns in this community, such as gun violence, which was a recurring theme over the years with boys and girls at Castleguard (see Jenson, Dahya & Fisher, *in press*; 2013; Jenson, Dahya, Taylor & Fisher, 2010). In other ways, this led to rearticulations of narratives commonly circulating in the school such as bullying and racial segregation, as discussed in Chapter 4. In the case of Itran and Yabine, they said the local community

³⁷ I did not ask all students if they attend Islamic school, however, it is not unusual for young people to learn the Qur'an and this often occurs through Islamic schooling in the evenings and/or on the weekends.

(generally) was supportive of religious difference and that being Muslim was not a point of focus for their position as community members. And while this should be accepted as a valid assessment of the role of Islam in their lives, one not necessarily laden with conflicts for these Muslim girls in this community, it is important to note that positive references to Islam, Islamic school and the community were *as infrequently mentioned* by Muslim girls as negative ones. In another example from the York University fieldtrip, Haboon (Somali Muslim, Grade 7) and Salima (Somali Muslim, Grade 4) identify their mothers as community role models in their final productions there, alluding to associations of support and understanding related to important figures in their lives who are also presumably Muslim. However, neither student made explicit the association between their mothers as role models as related to a shared Islamic practice. With regard to these examples, I am suggesting that there might be a tension associated with discussing Islam for these students in this particular school environment and in general (as being at York University did not invite greater discussion about Islam), one that could be addressed through further inquiry exploring what students want to talk about, and the extent to which local schools and communities (as socioculturally complex contexts) constrict or afford their opportunities to speak. I expand on this point with a few brief examples emphasizing how the use of certain tools made alternate networks and associations related to Islam more, emphasizing again those ‘trace elements’ that were present (Latour, 2005). These examples further support the need for investigation into the creation of educational spaces that encourage open and equitable dialogue and demonstrate how digital media production might support this effort.

Throughout the 2011-2012 year, I documented in field notes incidents of students discussing Islam with me or in their digital media production work. In particular, I observed that one of the times students openly discussed Islam was in relation to a material artifact I wore,

specifically a long necklace with Islamic scripture on it which dangled outside my clothing near the navel, eye-line with some of the grade 4 students. This necklace is inscribed with Arabic text from the Qur'an. In my field notes, I describe how this object acted as a trigger for discussion about Islam with these students:

I think the biggest 'tell' that me being Muslim matters [to them] comes out in these moments when kids are asking about my religion, looking at my chain, asking these questions over and over again like they are looking for something to connect to. And yet there is a silence. In the school I've heard so little about Islam, Muslims, *hijab* or anything related. It's not really discussed at all, after all this time. (April 30, 2012)

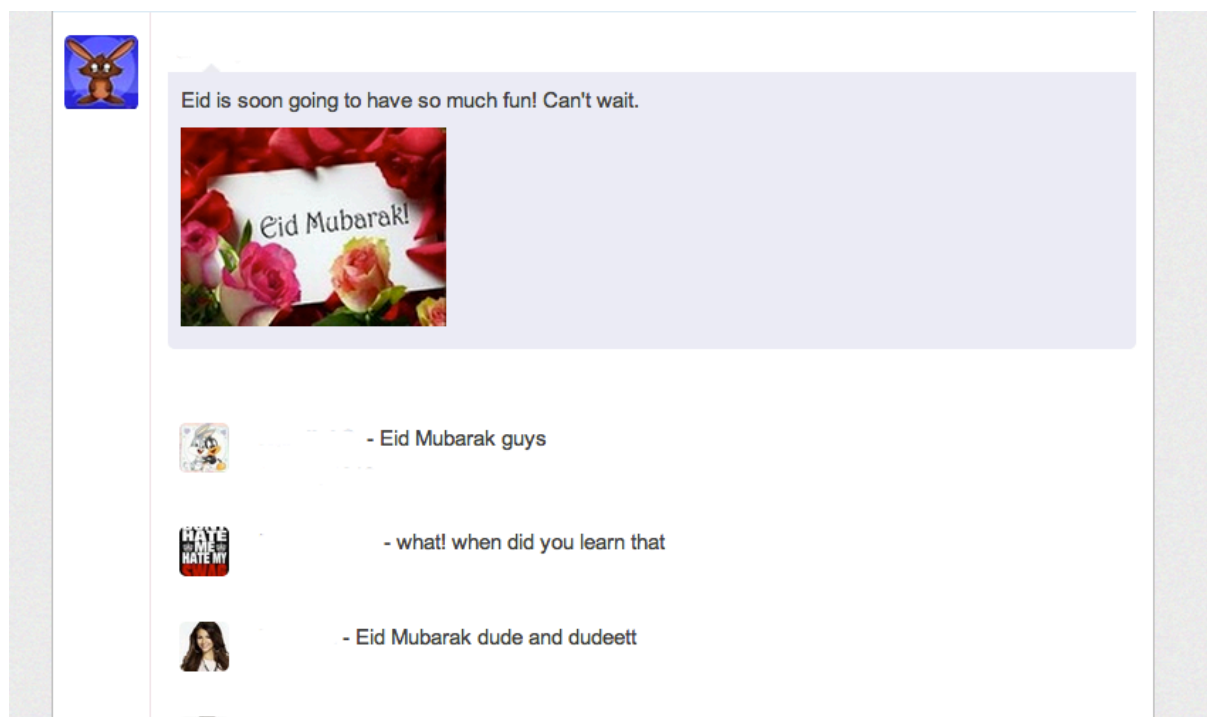
This example suggests that certain probes, like my necklace, created an opportunity for discussions about Islam. Referring to Actor-Network Theory (Latour, 2005), I consider how the material object around my neck became a part of the interaction between me and some Muslim students, mediating our conversation and in those moments dictating the nature of our association as members of the Islamic community (as compared to a more traditional student-teacher/researcher association). That the students all recognized the Arabic script and used this as fodder for conversation about Islam suggests that given the appropriate circumstances some students might be more inclined to discuss Islam in the classroom.³⁸

To expand on this dynamic between student interests and what they can or do discuss in school, I refer to an example from Mr. Glendon's Grade 4 class. As mentioned in Chapter 6, Mr. Glendon set up an Edmodo site for his students where he posted homework assignments and encouraged ongoing group discussions about classroom work. Students often frequented this

³⁸ These incidents also indicated that many of the students were literate to some degree in Arabic script and in particular with reading the Qur'an as they tried to read the calligraphy on my necklace, something that would surely take up time and require a great deal of effort to learn, though most did not expand on this part of their life through our digital media work or in our discussions.

social media site after school and on weekends from home or the local library. Students used Edmodo to share YouTube videos and stories about their weekend activities, contributions that went beyond the formal purpose of the site in terms of its educational use by Mr. Glendon. In this way, a ‘community of practice’ involving the participation of member-directed conversation and engagement in content that is relevant to their own lives developed online (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). The screenshot below (Figure 2) from Edmodo captures one example of how the platform was used by some of Mr. Glendon’s Grade 4 students.

Figure 2. Screenshot of Student Engagement on Edmodo from Mr. Glendon’s Class (February 2012)



In this example, students used Edmodo outside of school to express excitement about an Islamic celebration. A student refers to *Eid* (which means “holiday,” “celebration” or “festival”) and one student posts a digital sign saying “Eid Mubarak” which translates (roughly) to “blessed

festival”. A non-Muslim peer responds saying “Eid Mubarak” to the class, and a short dialogue ensues. In field notes I express that “younger kids [in Mr. Glendon’s Grade 4 class] seem to be quite open about their Islamic identity on Edmodo where over Family Day weekend many of them posted these Islamic prayer/songs that were YouTube videos” (February 22, 2012), although even when I asked students about their weekend in class most did not engage in any further discussion about these activities. What impacts the tone and designates acceptable and unacceptable discussions in the classroom about Islam, or about other topics relevant to the lives of Muslim students?

It is important to highlight that Edmodo as a platform created a number of opportunities for students. The first is that it provided students with a space they could take ownership of, and post about content that was important to them but that was seemingly absent from in-school discussions. Interesting this was predominantly text-based though photos and videos could be posted there. Those visual media forms that were posted to Edmodo were not of students but rather video files or images copied from the Internet. The second important factor in this example is that the online social media space created opportunity to speak about this important Islamic celebration and gave educators and researchers a view as to what was going on in the lives of these students outside of the classroom. In this way, the integration of digital media with formal schooling in effect created a bridge between the school and community and Edmodo served as the mediator for student interests in text and using videos and images available online. At the same time, however, in Chapter 5 I discuss the complex barriers to precisely this kind of participation that results in these students not having access to online communities of this kind or to the skills needed to participate in them safely/securely (remember that Edmodo is “safe” because it is locked and controlled by the teacher). Here then, I point to the importance of

comprehensive media education for both students and teachers in order to more fully and regularly integrate multimedia technology use in formal and informal education. Continual access to a variety of technology may contribute to the creation of sustainable bridges between the school and community, engaging students in meaningful online activities on an ongoing basis (and better reflecting the varied worlds of these inevitably diverse students beyond the already marginalized walls of the school). The aforementioned examples from this research indicate that being Muslim does have some impact on the lives of students, either in celebration (e.g. Edmodo and *Eid*), in additional schooling (e.g. Islamic school and learning Arabic), or regarding discrimination (e.g. interview with Salima and Nadia). The lack of representations of Muslim life for these students in school suggests there might be something missing from the narratives and multimodal discourse commonly addressed and arguably accepted there. Why there is so much silence in the school about this topic might be a point of departure for future research, to better understand what sociocultural factors would in effect create an environment where students want to and can discuss how their religious practice relates to their schooling.

The issue of silence around this topic invites greater consideration for how media education and technological training might construct opportunities to break the ongoing silences about Islam in this school, through the safe use of social media sites and other online communities. Importantly, in this regard, taking a media education approach to interrupting oppressive social structures offers ways to create environments where marginalized and racialized girls might have more authentic opportunities for “voice” and visibility. Research focused on demonstrating the multiplicity of student experiences may better reflect the complexities and multiple realities simultaneously at play for Muslim girls (see Law, 2004), and move to break down some of the homogenizing categories that have become common with

regard to discourse about this community. In the research I have conducted the tension between the embodied visibility of Islam through female students at Castleguard and the discursive silence about Islam as it was infrequently addressed in the day-to-day of the school leaves me with a lingering discomfort about this topic. Though I cannot answer the question of how Muslim girls portray their lives in media they make (or at least not in any way related to their identities as “Muslim girls”), in these final pages I return to the research questions and consider the role of digital media with regard to better understanding the complex experiences of Muslim girls in low-income Western schools.

Closing Remarks: Oversights and opportunities for visibility

To review, the questions I sought out to explore in this research are: How do Muslim girls portray school, community, and themselves through media they produce? Based on students’ media productions, how does religion, race, culture (including media, technology and popular culture), class, sexuality and/or gender - and which/whose religion, race and/or culture - impact students' perceptions of themselves, communities and schools? I address these questions recalling Postcolonial Feminist Theory, de-centering gender as the primary focus of women’s identities and exploring the larger sociocultural contexts and intersections of factors impacting the lives of Muslim girls in this study (Mohanty, 2003; Narayan, 1997; Visweswaran, 2010) and in my analysis (Visweswaran, 1994) throughout their digital media production work.

With regard to my first research question, what I have addressed throughout this dissertation, and in particular in Chapters 4, 5 and this conclusion, is that how Muslim girls portray themselves, school and community is strongly related to the context in which those portrayals are being produced, and is also related to access to particular kinds of technology that carry associated genre-specific norms, expectations and possibilities. I also argue that what gets

made by students is closely related to existing social structures dictated and determined by people in positions of power (such as, but certainly not limited to, teachers and workshop facilitators). In Chapters 4 and 5, I consider how postcolonial social structures impact the possibilities of self-representation for Muslim girls in school-based digital media production at Castleguard. I argue that efforts to better understand the divides and also avenues for bridging schools and communities in these complex sociocultural environments may require in-depth interrogation of both the networks of associations in specific contexts (like classroom learning, extra-curricular programming, and fieldtrips), and the larger social structures related to power and portrayals of certain communities that inform and influence how knowledge about these communities is produced.

Regarding the second research question, which aimed to illuminate the complexity of intersecting factors that relate to student experiences, I briefly revisit some of the data collected during this study to demonstrate the multitude of factors that are related to students' lives (making no effort to come to a conclusion about what these simultaneously existing realities mean). In this closing chapter, I have already discussed the ways Islam as a factor related to the lives of Muslim girls was very much omitted from their portrayals of self and discussions about the school and community. With regard to race, as discussed in Chapters 4 and 6, some students did address racial discrimination and also positive black role models (mothers, Martin Luther King, Michele Obama, and CTV's Andria Case). It is important to note here that these students showed an alignment to the racialized experiences of visible minorities in both positive and negative forms. I do question if some of these stated role models would still be the case were there more prominent and positive portrayals of Muslim men and women in popular

culture/media for these students to look up to (in the way Haboon and Salima look up to their mothers).

Socioeconomic status, gender and access to technology were also interrelated factors that emerged throughout this research (though in interviews rather than media production work). Access to technology was related to socioeconomic status regarding how many computers were available to students and access to these computers was in some cases distributed based at least in part by gender. For example, in one case Zubine's (Bangladeshi Muslim, Grade 7) brothers dominated computer use while she only had access to Internet using her iTouch device. In another example, Mina's (Kenyan Muslim, Grade 8) family all (boys and girls) had their own laptop computers (though as the second youngest she shared her computer with her younger sister who it seems did not use the computer often). Mina's family also bought her a digital camera and made her the family photographer on their vacation. In these examples access to technology was related to financial resources and also then to who dominates computer use in the home when limited resources were available (discussed in Chapters 2 and 6 in relation to technology as 'masculine culture,' a divisive and common gender-based problem).

Sexuality as a topic for discussion was not directly introduced by students in any of the attempted media forms throughout the year. In some cases this may relate to their age, in particular for those who were in Grade 4 (9-10 years old) in that this topic may not have been part of their common repertoire at this age (though this does not mean it is not relevant to them). For the older students, many of whom were in Grade 7 (12-13 years old), issues related to gender and sexuality like body image and being stalked by older boys (Chapter 5) did come up, suggesting that these may be prevalent topics of discussion for some 12-13 year old girls. In her study exploring the experiences of lesbian young people in Toronto schools, and in discussion of

gay males and lesbian girls publically addressing their sexuality, Khayatt (1994) suggests “that women, in general, are socially expected not to express sexual needs, nor is it seen to be appropriate for women to initiate sexual activity at a young age” (p. 49). This reality for girls regarding hetero or queer sexualities may also relate to the infrequent portrayal of this aspect of their lives in their digital media productions (and in conversation with me). Such a reality regarding sexuality and in particular regarding queer sexuality, already a silencing experience for young lesbian girls in schools (Khayatt, 1994), might be compounded for Muslim girls with heteronormative and conservative expectations associated with Islam. *Hijab* and other forms of covering are related to “modesty” and oftentimes to patriarchal control (Mernissi, 2003) regarding women’s sexual appeal.³⁹ According to Hooghe, Dejaeghere, Claes and Quintelier (2010), sex and dating for Muslim students in the West is complicated by religious expectations relating (assumed) heterosexual engagements to family values and a larger life-purpose focused on having children. These elements of sexuality as related to private family and religious expectations make it no surprise then that Muslim girls in this study did not enter into conversations about sexuality in the (potentially) public forum of digital media or with me. Hooghe et al. (2010) also discuss the intersection of socioeconomic status and education as related to social, cultural and political tolerance or liberalism (e.g. higher socioeconomic position as positively related to quality and level of education, and both of these factors as related to more tolerant and liberal social, religious and political perspectives), further complicating the position of sexuality and discourse about sexuality (or a lack thereof) for the Muslim girls who participated in this doctoral research (as participants were from a low-income community). It is precisely because of the overlapping and inseparable reality of factors that became apparent

³⁹ Refer again to the passage quoted from the Qur’an in Chapter 2 on page 27 and the larger discussion about *hijab* referring to this religious practice as traditionally related to modesty regarding sexuality specifically.

throughout this work that I have focused my analysis in this dissertation on the broader sociocultural contexts impacting what students were able to make in the context of Castleguard, and the importance of exploring the technological tools that also impacted my analysis of the ongoing postcolonial structure influencing how they engaged in digital media production.

Within this nuanced analysis there are also limitations to this study. Namely, conducting an in-depth Feminist Ethnography in one school, with its very particular sociocultural and socioeconomic configuration, makes the application of these findings across comparable groups (if one could argue for “comparability” across Muslim girls) difficult. Although this is a very real limitation to doing both ethnographic and school-based work, I do not see it as a shortcoming to the research as my focus was to explore the lives of Muslim girls in this particular community. The frequent interruptions at the school and efforts to engage the girls in different types of digital media production throughout the year also make it difficult to replicate this research, as so much of what I ended up doing was in response to what was happening in the moment in the school (despite having a systematic plan in place at the outset of the project). It was the case then that I did not complete the study I sought out to do in the way I intended, and instead of offering an analysis of what students portrayed and through digital medium they made, I have focused on the process of production and the multitude of factors that impacted our efforts to create that work. To build on this research future projects might consider the complex and intersecting sociocultural and socioeconomic factors that interplay in not only the design of digital media production with marginalized young people, but also in the implementation of the project and post-production interpretation of what students created. Finally, although Muslim girls were the focus of this study, and because I outline the embodied practice of veiling as important within the context of this digital media production club (working in the visual forms of multimedia

blogs and audio-video production), I am not an Islamic scholar and this is not an Islamic analysis of the students or their work. Additionally, because of the enduring silence around the topic, I was not able to really explore the embodied experience of veiling for Muslim girls in relation to their school and community through their digital productions (in which they did not discuss or address this religious practice). Instead, what I have been able to comment on is the tension between this very explicit practice of wearing *hijab* and the silence around it both in terms of what students create and show about who they are (physically) and what students say (or do not say) “on camera” (with real or imagined audiences in mind). In my efforts to not impose discussions about Islam (or any particular subject) I may have participated in a space where Muslim students were unclear about when and with whom they could discuss their religion, a social and contextual force only apparent to me as I reflect back on this project. I see now the tricky work of navigating a research space so as to not impose a focus on assumed injustice or difference, allowing for positive and unexpected articulations of lived experiences by participants, while simultaneously creating space to speak about oppression.

What I have hoped to show throughout this work is that while systems of oppression are very much at play in the lives of girls in the Castleguard community, and many questions remain about the place of Islam in relation to those inequitable structures, the complexity of student experiences and the factors impacting them cannot be overlooked. Building off the work I have conducted here, a future study related to bridging the school-community divide for Muslim girls might focus on how digital media and technology (with appropriately complex media education and technological literacy) can create environments for students to represent their interests without the same sociocultural influences already circulating in the school. Creating environments with improved access to technology and integrated media education in schools for

teachers and students might provide students with clear and applicable forms of power using digital media and technology, through which they might be able to respond to dominant narratives about “Muslim girls” and interrupt the structures that may be limiting what they say and do. To this end, such opportunities for students could also alter the way educators and other adults understand and represent their students, bridging the ongoing divides between schools and communities by strengthening how members of those communities understand each other.

So much of research about young people and digital media is focused on how students engage with new technology, what they produce, and what they learn throughout that process. In this dissertation, I have aimed to highlight what such a focus means for students when media production work is enveloped within ongoing postcolonial and continually marginalizing structures. Digital media production does not “happen” in a vacuum. The work of making media and becoming media literate is couched within the same social structures that support and maintain ongoing inequities locally and globally. The power of digital media production lies in the relatively low-level technological skills that allow some individuals to participate in networked communities (meaning that a person does not need to be a computer programmer or professional media maker to participate in the digital, networked media world). This is a potentially impactful skill-set for under-served communities when paired with access to technology and with in-depth, critical understandings of the problematic and possibilities embedded in the standing social order. For Muslim girls, and for other racialized and marginalized communities in Canada, such power can only be found when inequities related to representation and Othering are first acknowledged as part of our social system and then also critically worked into comprehensive media education for teachers and students. Mis/representations and flat-out omissions (silence/silencing) of particular communities in and

through digital media and online networks are a reproduction of imbalanced power structures that leave Muslim girls on the fringe of a fast-moving and socially powerful technological world.

Ahmed (2000) argues:

The central question for post-colonial feminism has been, ‘who is speaking here?’

Indeed, the question, ‘who is speaking here?’ has become familiar. The question does not demand to know the particularity of the ‘who’ that is speaking. The question, as it has gained our critical attention, calls for us to refuse any such particularism and to grant the ‘who’ a tenuous existence as marking only a position from which a speech *can be* made.

This question has become a reminder of the relations of force and authorization that institute the very possibility of speech: some speak precisely because they are in the position to be heard, to command our attention. (p. 60)

In her comments, Ahmed astutely addresses the question of who speaks and under what conditions. I am suggesting that digital media may be used to create empowered positions for Muslim girls that contribute to the constructions of important opportunities for them to speak, but *only under the appropriate conditions*. These conditions require, again, access to technology and in-depth media literacy and education for educators and students.

Such a shift in media education may invite marginalized communities to participate in wider social and cultural spaces where self-directed and self-controlled choice to engage there could result in a more diverse range of community members being seen, heard and ultimately better understood. Increasing access to technology for marginalized communities and improving the quality and quantity of comprehensive media literacy in education may be practical and tangible ways to counteract oppression for Muslim girls and for other racialized and minoritized communities in Canada. A shift in the focus of our collective attention to what might be seen

through the lens of varied technology use, and through in-depth social and digital media production (alongside consumption), might shake the long-standing and historically situated narratives of oppression that continue to circulate across and between diverse communities living within a postcolonial social order. In this case, the digital media tools that sometimes contribute to ongoing oppression may also be the instruments for social transformation, redirecting the distribution of power to people with knowledge, training and resources to represent and speak for and about themselves.

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Appendix 1: Thematic Data Coding (Etic Codes)

1. Racialized students in low-income schools/communities experience discrimination that contributes to their disengagement in school and marginalization in school and the community.

Sub-themes:

- discrimination occurs at the hands of teachers from outside the community
- marginalization occurs as a result of psychosocial stressors (poverty, violence, racism, etc.)
- negative media representations of minorities, women, Muslims, and people in their community in general influence the way racialized students are perceived by others and perceive themselves
- for girls, discrimination is ongoing as a result of broader gender inequities relating to STEM, domestic responsibilities, and overall gender expectations

2. Need to move away from homogenizing discourse of racialized students towards more complex understandings of intersecting factors (e.g. race, religion, gender, education, individual goals, socioeconomic status, etc.).

Sub-themes:

- emerging movement to dispel myth of homogenous oppression for Muslim women/girls, reflected in recent research and public discourse (e.g. blogs)
- over-emphasis on veiling as predominant factor in experiences of Muslim girls needs critical interrogation

3. School-community engagement can be increased through various outreach measures, including service learning for students, parental involvement in school, and inclusive curriculum and pedagogy (to better understand students' cultural norms and expectations).

Sub-themes:

- student opinion on the issue of school-community divide is lacking

4. Increased access to technology in low-income schools supports student engagement and learning, especially for girls/women who are marginalized generally from the technological world.

Sub-themes:

- media-making as empowerment for marginalized young people (can improve literacy, critical thinking)
- media-making as a way to represent complex, multilayered student "issues" impacting their lives
- giving girls opportunities to engage with technology exposes their interest in technology, otherwise hidden behind the 'masculine culture' of technology use

Appendix 2: Thematic Data Coding (Emic Codes)

Field notes & Interviews	Student Productions	Audio-Video Files of Students At-Work
<p>1. Barriers to completing projected media production plans or videogame play</p> <p>Sub-themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • structural/institutional barriers • limited technological resources • limited human resources <p>2. Cultural expectations in school and/or community deter or interrupt girls' participation in extracurricular clubs or otherwise take up their "free" time</p> <p>Sub-themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • parental restrictions <p>3. Demonstrated ownership, excitement and/or engagement over use of technology by girls</p> <p>Sub-themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • includes interest in further opportunities to use technology • includes acknowledgement of hands-on learning as more engaging than prescriptive learning <p>4. Muslim girls demonstrating behaviors that contrast commonly accepted/assumed notions of their subjugation and relegation to traditional gender roles.</p> <p>Sub-themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • autonomous behavior, 	<p>1. Content themes (things they say they want to talk about or produce media about)</p> <p>Sub-themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • social issues related to discrimination, violence and/or the community • social issues more broadly (e.g. endangered animals) • school issue (e.g. recess) • technology likes/dislikes • media (e.g. body image) • future career goals • mentors <p>2. Cinematic choices</p> <p>Sub-themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shot choice • editing • transitions • credits • special effects 	<p>1. Muslim girls demonstrating behaviors that contrast commonly accepted/assumed notions of their subjugation and relegation to traditional gender roles.</p> <p>Sub-themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • autonomous behavior, independence • rebellious behavior • show of responsibility and ongoing engagement in education afterschool and on weekends through religious classes • patience <p>2. Girls as reserved, "shy," quiet or self-conscious</p> <p>Sub-themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in front of camera • in general <p>3. Girls as high-energy, demanding of time/attention.</p> <p>4. Content themes (things they say they want to talk about or produce media about).</p> <p>Sub-themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • social issues related to discrimination, violence and/or the community • social issues more broadly (e.g.

<p>independence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rebellious behavior • show of responsibility and ongoing engagement in education afterschool and on weekends through religious classes <p>5. Fear or dislike of technology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • privacy • cyber bullying • fake information • technology “failing”/distrust • waste of time <p>6. Girls as reserved, “shy,” quiet or self-conscious</p> <p>Sub-themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in front of camera • in general <p>7. Boys performance of stereotypically masculine gender roles, including “taking over” technology, in relation to girls</p> <p>Sub-themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • includes inequitable use of technology by gender at home <p>8. Content themes (things they say they want to talk about or produce media about)</p> <p>9. Explicit examples of discrimination, violence and other issues in the neighbourhood</p> <p>10. Misrepresentation of student experiences in final media productions</p> <p>Sub-themes:</p>		<p>endangered animals)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • school issue (e.g. recess) • technology likes/dislikes • media (e.g. body image) • future career goals • mentors <p>5. Misrepresentation of student experiences in final media productions</p> <p>Sub-themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • influence of popular media on what students say or create • ‘stock stories’ (e.g. bullying, racism)
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • influence of popular media on what students say or create <p>11. Explicit incidents around Islam</p> <p>Sub-themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interest in a female role model who is also Muslim • mentions of Islam in class or media productions <p>12. Explicit incidents of technology mediating behavior (“showing” different kinds of behaviour)</p>		
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Appendix 3: York University Fieldtrip Media Production Assignment

In your groups, select from one of the two topics below:

Topic A: What was your favorite use of technology at school, at home, in the community? OR

Topic B: What do you want to be when you grow up? Who are your role models in the community, in media?

Ask each other at least 3 questions about the topic and try to cover the main questions: What? When? Where? Why? Who? and How?

Your task is to film and edit a short 2-3 minute video of interviews sharing your opinion and experiences. The team with the most interesting, well-produced (professional, simple, well-edited with credits and titles, etc.) will WIN A PRIZE at the end of the day!

Appendix 4: Overview of Work Produced at York University Fieldtrip

In this overview of student work from the York University fieldtrip, I outline which of the set topic areas students selected and summarize the content of their videos.

Group /Pairs	Student Pseudonyms	Set Topic Choice (see Appendix 3)	Summary of student responses (content of media productions)
1	Francesca	Topic B	Veterinarian, to help animals. Go to Ryerson University. Inspired by her father who takes good care of their pets.
1	Fatuma	Topic B	Psychologist. Wants to go to Ryerson University. Wants to study the human mind, how it works, mental issues. Wants to become a psychologist after getting a first degree and a master's. Inspired to do this by interest in the human mind and to help people with mental issues.
2	Emma	Topic B	Kindergarten teacher. Wants to help kids to have better jobs when they get older. Wants to study language/English.
2	Jasmine	Topic B	Teacher, loves working with kids. If that does not work out wants to be a doctor.
2	Mubir	Topic B	[First response distorted due to noise]. Alternate response of what Mubir wants to do is be a basketball player.
3	Itran	Topic A	I use technology all the time. Mostly use iPod to talk to friends, play games, listen to music and alarm clock. Enjoys the videogame club at Castleguard.
3	Yabine	Topic A	[Itran responded to questions]
4	Alexandra	Topic A	Uses computers at school to do research or to find out lyrics to a song they wanted to sing and to do research. At home shares computer with at least 3 people in the family. At home uses computer for homework in science and math and other subjects in school
			For girls, media images like Beyonce really affects girls. e.g. Beyonce had a baby and was slim in a month and this is not realistic. For boys affects boys who want a

			particular kind of hair and 6-pack abs.
			Does not think media will change, it is there to make other people feel insecure.
4	Senjara	Topic A	Use a computer at school for homework and research if has a project. At home goes on websites to talk to friends or do research. Does not use technology in the community like with laptops. Media affects girls and boys because in magazines famous people have slim bodies and this makes people want to change their look. Media will change because people will also change.
5	Ifrac	Topic B	Wants to be a videogame tester. Mr Glendon, Negin and Sara (pseudonym of Smarter Than She Looks research assistant) as role models because of their involvement in technology.
5	Nadia	Topic B	York University Professor. York University is the best because in grade 4 had a very tech-savvy teacher. Mr Glendon, Negin and Stella (pseudonym of Smarter Than She Looks research assistant) as role models because of technology interests, iPads and videogames.
6	Teekay	Topic B	Event planner, teacher or chef. Self-directed (no one inspired her).
7	Zubine	Topic B	Martin Luther King because he helped others and wants to help others as well .
7	Hibo	Topic B	Michele Obama (related to fighting child obesity).
8	Haboon	Topic B	Wants to be a teacher, mother as role model. Andrea Case CTV Broadcaster as role model (as black woman in media). Dancer, passion for dance. Role model in community is mother. Negin as role model in media for teaching video.

8	Salima	Topic B	Dancer, passion for dance. Role model: mother. Negin as role model in media for teaching video.
9	Eldon	Topic A	Laptop. Like it because you can go on Internet (YouTube and games).
9	Isaac	Topic A	iPhone 4s because it has games and video chat. Work on projects on device.
10	Nilo	Topic A	Favorite technology is a phone because you can text, pictures, websites. A lot of TV and computers can damage your eyes.
10	Anara	Topic A	Laptop, play games. Too much media can be bad for kids.
11	Nerun	Topic B	Wants to be a car engineer and use media
11	Velay	Topic B	Space scientists because likes computer programming and media. Role model is another teacher in the school.
11	Lebron	Topic B	Wants to be a movie producer and TV show producer. Role model is Mr Glendon for teaching media.