EVERYDAY VIOLENCE IN THE LIVES OF YOUTH

SPEAKING OUT AND PUSHING BACK

Edited by
Helene Berman, Catherine Richardson/Kinewesquao,
Kate Elliott and Eugenia Canas

Excerpt

Fernwood Publishing
Halifax & Winnipeg

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Kate Elliott and Eugenia Canas

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Editing and design: Brenda Conroy
Cover design: John van der Woude
Printed and bound in Canada

Published by Fernwood Publishing
32 Oceanvista Lane, Black Point, Nova Scotia, B0J 1B0
and 748 Broadway Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3G 0X3
www.fernwoodpublishing.ca

Fernwood Publishing Company Limited gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Government of Canada, the Canada Council for the Arts, the Manitoba Department of Culture, Heritage and Tourism under the Manitoba Publishers Marketing Assistance Program and the Province of Manitoba, through the Book Publishing Tax Credit, for our publishing program. We are pleased to work in partnership with the Province of Nova Scotia to develop and promote our creative industries for the benefit of all Nova Scotians.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: Everyday violence in the lives of youth : speaking out and pushing back / edited by Helene Berman, Catherine Richardson/Kinewesquao, Kate Elliott and Eugenia Canas.
Names: Berman, Helene, 1950- editor. | Richardson, Catherine Lynn, 1962- editor. | Elliott, Kate, 1987- editor. | Canas, Eugenia, 1973- editor.
Description: Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 20200185764 | Canadiana (ebook) 20200185802 | ISBN 9781773631035 (softcover) | ISBN 9781773631042 (EPUB) | ISBN 9781773631059 (Kindle)
Subjects: LCSH: Youth and violence,—Canada. | LCSH: Arts,—Therapeutic use.
Classification: LCC HQ799.2.V56 E94 2020 | DDC 303.60835,—dc23

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Acknowledgements

We would like to begin by acknowledging that this study and hence, the writing of this book has taken place on many different Indigenous lands, in Canada. Some of these territories are unceded lands, where no treaty facilitated the changing of the political landscape from Indigenous into a colonial-settler society. Western University, where the study began due to the inspiration and activity of Dr. Helene Berman, is located on the territory of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Attawandaron Peoples. We would like to acknowledge the ancestors who were the traditional caretakers of the land, as well as all our ancestors, as authors, who have also survived in a direct line from the time of the first ancestor on Mother Earth. In addition to the many First Nations, we also acknowledge the Métis and the Inuit Peoples who also live in various communities in Canada and whose young ones have also shared their knowledge in this study.

We would also like to raise our hands to the many individuals and organizations who contributed to this work, in both direct and indirect ways. To all who have recognized that the violence we experience in our everyday lives profoundly shapes our physical and emotional health, even when that violence cannot be seen, we thank you.

We are grateful to the Canadian Institutes for Health Research, Institute for Gender and Health, for a Team Grant, Promoting Health through Collaborative Engagement with Youth in Canada: Overcoming, Resisting and Preventing Structural Violence, which enabled us to conduct the research on which this book is based. We also thank the staff at Fernwood, most notably Candida Hadley, Beverley Rach and Brenda Conroy, for their meticulous, thoughtful and enthusiastic comments throughout. To our funders and our editors, we are particularly appreciative of the support provided for work that pushes boundaries and extends prevailing conceptualizations of research, health and violence.

We extend tremendous appreciation to our national coordinator, Maria Callaghan, whose dedication to every aspect of this project was invaluable. Her patience, thoughtful input, friendship and utmost degree

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of professionalism ensured that we remained on track and achieved our stated goals and objectives.

The research described in this book could not have been successful without the wholehearted participation of so many youth. In particular, we thank Alia El-Tayeb, Michelle Brake and Jessica Yee, who, alongside our co-editor Eugenia Canas, assumed leadership on the National Youth Advisory Board (NYAB) at various times. We also acknowledge the contributions of all the young people who participated as advisors in the NYAB: Amanda Ghazale Aziz, Breann Maxwell, Curtis J. Kechego, Dobijoki (Emanuela) Bringi, Gina Uppal, Jayson Tower, Julia Tadman, co-editor Kate Elliott, Mina Harker, Keara Yim and Santiago Vargas. Despite our initial plan for a two-year term in the NYAB, many of these young people remained involved with this project throughout the five years. We are thankful for their commitment and the continuing inspiration they provided us.

As well, we acknowledge Janie Dolan-Cake for her assistance in drafting the Indigenous research report and Zeina Allouche-Ismael for facilitating our final meeting and conference.

We thank the many members of the academic community from Halifax to Victoria, and many places in between, who came from diverse disciplinary backgrounds to engage in a research endeavour that required working in partnership with youth and community partners. In many respects, this project asked us to step outside of our comfort zones, to give up — or at the very least, to share — power in a novel research initiative. We say a warm thank you to Dominique Damant, Marnina Gonick, Myrna Dawson, Stephen Gaetz, Simon Lapierre, Amanda Grzyb and Joan Samuels-Dennis, whose contributions, large and small, are greatly appreciated. We also are grateful to our lead knowledge user, Maria Luisa Contursi from Mindyourmind

Post-doctoral fellows reflect the future cohort of researchers, and we are inspired by, and grateful to, Catherine Flynn, Kristy Buccieri and co-author in this book Rita Henderson. We also extend our appreciation to doctoral student Nada Nessan for her contributions. Your wonderful insights, questions and contributions only served to strengthen our work.

It takes a community to prepare a collaborative publication, including all the various ideas, forms of creativity, energy and commitment. To you all, we, the co-editors and authors, are grateful.

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PART I

Why Y-Par? And What Is It?

Excerpt

1

Re-Thinking Violence, Re-Thinking Health and Re-Thinking Research

Helene Berman, Catherine Richardson/Kinewesquao, Kate Elliott, Eugenia Canas

Over the past two decades, Canadian researchers have contributed substantially to an enriched understanding of the range and complexities of young people's experiences of violence. While this body of work has been instrumental in the development of a multitude of anti-violence programs for youth, it also has notable limitations. First, the vast majority of this work focuses on various forms of *interpersonal* violence, including intimate partner violence, sexual harassment, sexualized assault, dating violence and, more recently, cyber-violence, but has little to say about *structural* violence. Second, much of the research in the area of violence among young people lacks a contextual analysis, including intersectional considerations of gender, race and social class within a colonial society on stolen Indigenous land. This tendency is particularly evident in the area of bullying, which is often approached in a decontextualized manner — de-gendered, de-classed and de-raced. Finally, the existing research tends to focus on the effects or impacts of violence and bullying, but omits the rich and nuanced responses and resistance of the youth. These responses and resistance point to the "resilience" or "strong-spiritedness" of youth and the knowledge, intelligence, capacity, skills, acumen and experience youth possess that can help them negotiate difficult situations. However, although youth are responsive, strategic and adaptable across contexts, they also require "positive social responses" during and after experiencing violence in order to feel like they matter, like there is a place and purpose for them in society and on the planet (Richardson and Wade 2008). The high rates of suicide amongst marginalized youth may demonstrate that resilience is not so simple, and we believe this is an important sign that we must address racialized violence and hate (Reynolds 2016) to create

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societies which are inclusive, compassionate and responsive to youth needs. Youth research should assist in youth self-empowerment, providing opportunities for increased input, feedback, awareness and pride in their ability to act, even when victory may seem impossible.

This book is the culmination of a five-year research initiative, conducted in five Canadian provinces, that explored the issue of structural violence as it impacts youth in our/their everyday lives. At the heart of this project, groups with different populations of youth used arts-based methods to address varied aspects of structural violence. Consistent with our belief that young people need to be at the table when discussing issues of importance to them, we used a youth-centred participatory action research (Y-PAR) methodology. We established the National Youth Advisory Board (NYAB), and we hired two national youth coordinators to work with this board. The governance structure was designed to privilege the voices of the youth through all components and stages of the project. Throughout this book, we describe our processes in detail and share what we learned, what worked well, what worked not-so-well and the challenges we faced.

Ignoring the Violence Embedded in Structures and Systems

Many of the anti-violence programs in Canadian schools are framed around the notion of bullying and emphasize the importance of respect, which is positioned as the opposite of bullying. They include prescriptions about how to foster respect for self and others and strategies that young people can use to avoid and resist bullying. Inherent in this conceptualization is the idea that the problem lies within the individual — the bully or the victim — reflecting a personal character flaw. As we have learned in earlier research (Berman and Jiwani 2014), much of what gets labeled as "bullying" can and should more aptly be described as racism, homophobia, classism, ableism or sexism. When we mislabel the problem, our ability to address it is limited. Youth, particularly young women and *LGBTQ2S+*individuals, challenge this conceptualization of bullying within the Me Too movement and speak out against sexualized harassment and rape and the structures that condone this form of violence. Similarly, young Indigenous activists name structural violence and demand social change within Indigenous rights movements, such as Idle No More and Standing Rock. Both of these movements make explicit the links between structural violence and the health outcomes for those harmed by that

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violence. We have begun to recognize that violence is not only a social problem, but that it also has significant adverse consequences for health.

This book extends current knowledge by exploring the complex dimensions of structural violence, the "everyday violence" to which many young people in Canada are routinely subjected and which gives rise to multiple manifestations of interpersonal violence as well as economic and health-related problems. We offer multiple perspectives and possibilities for youth that move beyond a psychiatric lens, which prioritizes individualistic rather than social understandings and solutions. Vancouver therapist Vikki Reynolds demonstrates an alternative perspective for youth in her article "The Problem's Oppression Not Depression" (2013, published in *Stay Solid! A Radical Handbook for Youth)*. Reynolds notes that structural violence is subtle and insidious and that the long-term impacts are perhaps more harmful than those associated with more overt forms of violence. Moreover, because the violence is embedded in the system and there is no identifiable perpetrator, structural and systemic forms of violence may be harder to name and to address. Reynolds tries to address this by naming a perpetrator: "Hate." According to Reynolds, "Hate" means state neglect, exclusion, acts of violence, humiliation and degradation. Without this identifiable perpetrator it can be difficult to solicit assistance from family, friends and professionals, as the violence is so often invisible and there are no clear pathways for resolution or justice. As well, when children learn that impunity exists for certain forms of societal violence, they get the message that it is somehow acceptable. This is how violence may be perpetuated across generations. As our research shows, however, creating a safe space in which youth can critically examine and articulate the many ways that structural violence shapes everyday life can serve as a health promotion strategy and a means of empowerment.

Toward a Definition of Everyday Violence

The notion of "everyday violence" evokes images that are difficult to reconcile with prevailing, though often idealized, conceptualizations of children and youth. Historically, childhood has been depicted as a time of innocence, and adolescence as a time for trying out adult roles, for experimenting and taking risks, but doing so within relatively safe parameters. The reality, however, is quite different. Recent global events, including mass shootings in schools, remind us that many young people

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in North America and elsewhere live amid danger and indeed are not safe. Such horrific acts typically give way to a collective sense of horror, shame and guilt and are accompanied, at least in the short term, by pleas for action on the part of governments, until the media turn their attention elsewhere. Scholars such as Thomas McGaith (2018) identify this form of violence on the part of disenfranchised men as a byproduct of capitalism. In an economic worldview based on competition and "survival of the fittest" in the business world, values such as sharing, compassion and understanding are not foregrounded. Some young men were taught that their feelings do not matter as much as their accomplishments. Wally Gordon (1997) makes links between violence and capitalism because of the inequalities that are bred and necessary for profit generation, such as maintaining a large pool of unemployed workers from which business can draw at low wage levels. Thus, society becomes highly competitive, rather than cooperative, particularly when the left (e.g., labour unions, social justice organizations) is attacked by government. Further, these inequalities play out in areas of race and racism, with many of the U.S. school shooters being white men with racist (and often sexist) ideologies, seeing themselves as the victims. Organizations such as the National Rifle Association in the U.S. perpetuate racism by making guns accessible for race-based crimes (Riley 2018). The "shooter" at Ecole Polytechnique in Montreal blamed young women engineering students for taking up the space that should have been provided to him, as a white male. He murdered fourteen women, shooting also at the men who tried to protect them. Although not limited to capitalist societies, structural violence is enhanced by the state's goal of keeping society stratified and maintaining differences between the wealthy and those living in poverty.

In addition to these highly public forms of violence, including racial and gender-based hatred, other acts of violence occur on a daily basis and are so pervasive and unrelenting that they go largely unnoticed. These acts warrant consideration and analysis. While some of these accounts can be described as interpersonal violence, it is the structure or system that emboldens some at the expense of others. The macro-politics influence micro-interaction. For example, the fact that perpetrators who harm Indigenous women in Canada are likely to get away with it does not deter men from attacking them. The low rates of sentencing in Canadian cases of rape and sexualized violence also offer relative impunity to perpetrators,

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with less than 1 percent serving time (Johnson 2012). In the United States, gender-based violence against women and girls has increased since Trump became president (Levin 2017; Huang and Low 2017). The public sexism of the president gives permission for other males to enact these same forms of violence, even in elementary schools.

The understanding of everyday violence that informs our work is derived from the ideas of John Galtung (1990), who coined the phrase "structural violence" in 1969. According to Galtung, structural violence directs our attention to the root causes of violence at the systemic level. In essence, structural violence is enacted when a group or structure monopolizes resources and penalizes others for both lacking those resources and trying to access those resources. Built into the structure of a society, structural violence "shows up as unequal power and, consequently, as unequal life chances" (Galtung: 171). When violence is successfully obfuscated, it appears to be an inseparable part of the society or the culture. A popular meme circulating on social media illustrates this issue of structural violence: "Just because you are white doesn't mean you don't have problems — it just means you don't have problems that stem from racial oppression." Such ideas try to promote understanding about what it means to live amid violence and discrimination on a daily basis and be subjected to the violence of the system.

The Pervasiveness of Cultural Violence

Structural violence is thus a process by which some groups are denied access to resources, and this inequality is maintained by what Galtung refers to as "cultural violence," which is enacted through language, religion and ideology. Structural violence can manifest in physical violence, but it also manifests indirectly in ways that are less visible. As anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes (2004: 13) observed, structural violence is "violence that is permissible, even encouraged." It refers to the often-invisible patterns of inequality that reproduce social relations of exclusion and marginalization through ideologies, stigmas and discourses attendant to gender, race, class and other markers of social identity. Structural violence "normalizes," for example, poverty, sexual harassment, racism and colonialism, erasing their social and political origins so that they become taken-for-granted as natural and inevitable consequences of individual characteristics or choices. In essence, structural violence fuels inequality

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between social groups, and this is initiated and maintained through the acts of government and institutions (James et al. 2003).

Other scholars describe structural violence in terms of "systems of oppression" (Boute 1998; Hill Collins 2009) or as violations of human rights (Ho 2007). Despite its pervasive existence and harm towards young people, structural violence is a relatively understudied phenomenon. It has been suggested that structural violence differs from other types of interpersonal violence in three major respects: 1) power relations are less visible and exist in various forms, infused in existing social hierarchies; 2) it functions at the macro level to shape individual behaviours; and 3) its problematic effects are pervasive and enduring, not just appearing sporadically in response to discrete violent acts (Montesanti and Thurston 2015). While structural forms of violence are often normalized — expressed in subtle and invisible ways — their negative consequences are highly visible, creating identity categories of marginalization and inequity that are evident in many aspects of everyday life among youth in Canada. For example, if the state propagates the notion that people must work to receive money, there is less likelihood that the population will expect higher rates of social welfare or a guaranteed annual income. Government rhetoric often casts people who don't work and who receive state money as lazy and a drain on society. Capitalist systems benefit from the notion that people must work, even for minimum wage. Some would say this is a form of economic structural violence.

Our conceptualization of everyday violence is derived from these ideas and is understood as a process that creates and maintains inequalities within different social groups. Rather than focusing on dichotomized notions of victims and perpetrators, which locate the problem of violence within individuals who are deemed good or bad, violent or non-violent, our attention to structural violence directs us to examine the *everydayness* of violence from the vantage point of complex political, social, historic and economic processes. In other words, it is not that human beings are inherently violent but rather that certain contexts and social formations, in effect, produce violence. From this perspective, the imposition of gendered, racialized and/or class-based social hierarchies, the curtailment of life chances, legacies of colonialism and the normalization of dominant discourses that often reflect the perspectives of the perpetrators, are also recognized as forms of violence. Although these forms of violence are often

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invisible, they are no less deleterious in their effects. Through structural violence, persons are socially and culturally marginalized in ways that deny them the opportunity for physical and emotional well-being and for full participation in society.

Conceptualizing Health

In the context of our research, "health" is defined holistically and is congruent with the World Health Organization's (2005) definition of health as a resource for everyday living. It is situated within a "social determinants of health" framework. Consistent with Indigenous notions of health, we understand that health is much broader than the health of the individual, but rather that it encompasses the entire community. Understanding how gender, race and class intersect and are expressed in disparate chances for health and well-being among Canada's youth is a considerable challenge. More than the absence of disease, health is a positive process of reaching one's potential and is experienced and understood differently across and within cultural groups. As set out in the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, an international agreement signed in 1986, peace, shelter, education, food, income, stable ecosystem, sustainable resources, social justice and equity are the prerequisites for health. Our research is premised on the view that, to prevent interpersonal violence, it is essential to ameliorate structural inequities and the social conditions, such as racism, gender inequality and poverty, that can foster violence (Thurston 1998; Thurston, Cory and Scott 1998). Youth resistance to violence was taken up theoretically and explored in the research because resistance to violence and oppression are considered both a symptom of health and health inducing (Wade 1997: 23). By not merely focusing on impacts and effects of violence, it becomes possible to get at youth agency, activity, thought-processes and spirited responses, all of which remain concealed when attention is paid exclusively to symptoms and other manifestations of illness.

Influenced in part by the tenets of critical social theory, our conceptualization of health encompasses an analysis of the manner by which dominant social, political and economic structures and policies contribute to, or limit, health and illness. For example, the complex vulnerabilities of Indigenous youth stem from a legacy of oppression and colonization and the multigenerational effects of social isolation, racism, entrenched

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poverty and historical trauma (Chandler and Lalonde 2009). The ways in which health is experienced by individuals and families are shaped by history, significant others, politics, social structures, gender, race and class. Understandings of health must, therefore, include making connections and achieving syntheses that go beyond the perception and knowledge of the individual (Commission on the Social Determinants of Health 2008).

One of the central premises of our research was that engagement with youth to challenge, overcome and resist structural violence is a health promotion strategy. We define health promotion as a process whereby individuals gain increased control over their health and the determinants of health (World Health Organization 2005). This process includes developing a critical awareness of one's social reality, participating in one's empowerment, social or civic engagement, and participating in the community. In the specific context of youth health promotion, key components include enhanced self-esteem, self-efficacy and civic engagement (Flicker et al. 2008). We demonstrate throughout this book that there is a direct relationship between youth health promotion and the participatory action research approaches that we employed to empower youth to overcome, resist and prevent structural violence in their lives. In the words of one youth participant, "Really, I think that structural violence has had … really, it's torn people down and it makes us feel powerless and of course it's going to have a negative impact on individual health, our families' health, our community health across the nation."

Although studies have consistently shown health to be determined by multiple factors, most research and interventions focusing on the links between health and violence rely on definitions of abuse and maltreatment at the level of individuals. Although still limited, there is some research evidence which shows that the health burdens associated with structural violence are substantial; much less, however, is known about how this process occurs, how structural violence shapes the everyday lives of youth, how they resist it and how it affects their health. Where our work departs from established trends is our focus on the development of a comprehensive, integrated and multi-faceted analysis of structural violence, an analysis that has been achieved in collaboration with youth and knowledge users from across Canada. Through processes of socialization, youth who are marked as being different by virtue of their skin colour, religious/cultural differences or sexual orientation are marginalized. It

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is the violence of this process of marginalization, often referred to as "othering," that needs to be further scrutinized. In this book, we clarify how this is accomplished and who benefits. We identify and discuss the policy implications and burdens that accrue from living in marginal spaces. Through youth voices, we demonstrate how gender, race, class and sexual orientation come together to increase vulnerability to different forms of violence.

Articulated within the contemporary Canadian landscape, issues of gender, structural violence and health assume a heightened significance and are directly implicated in questions of identity and belonging, experiences of exclusion, stigma and discrimination, policies of multiculturalism and immigration, and the contemporary climate of heightened surveillance and criminalization. In short, within the "matrix of domination" (Hill Collins 2009) of racism, sexism and classism, how do young people fare, how are their lives impacted and how can they participate in the development of strategies to overcome, resist and prevent structural violence? These questions form the point of departure for this anthology.

Doing Research in Partnership with Youth

At the start of the project, we hired two national youth coordinatrs, who established the National Youth Advisory Board (NYAB), comprising ten youth, thereby ensuring a youth voice from the outset. The NYAB developed the terms of reference, which laid out the principles that would govern the NYAB and the scope of its activities. Representatives from the NYAB participated actively on the Steering Committee for the overall project team, which met monthly via teleconference.

Over the course of the research, we conducted thirty research groups in five provinces across Canada, with each group composed of youth who have been described as marginalized, vulnerable and silenced. The groups included newcomer populations, *LGBTQ2S+* youth, Indigenous youth, homeless and unhoused youth and youth involved with the justice system. While the groups explored different angles and perspectives on structural violence, we acknowledged the intersecting social locations and how particular locations made certain groups targets for structural violence while limiting the possibilities of their resistance. Groups typically included twelve youth. The youth decided which form of the arts they would employ to bring their message forward. Methods included

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photo novella, collage, zine creation, video creation and spoken word, as well as painting and drawing. The groups provided the youth with opportunities to discuss their everyday lives and interactions with different systems, including education, justice, health and the Department of Indian Affairs. The arts-based approach, in addition to sharing in circle for discussing and debriefing, has been used successfully with populations who may not be best served by words (Parsons and Boydell 2012; Yassi et al. 2016). The chosen methodology was derived from our assumption that art can be used to create increased psychological and cultural safety when processes are explored mindfully and respectfully.

The groups found that they could articulate their ideas and confront complex emotions and topics at their own pace. They could document their ideas and experiences visually and use these visuals to view the personal implications of social problems, hone collective analyses and find pathways for addressing oppressive social structures (Hartman et al. 2011). As well, researchers have noted that the arts can provide access to rich description, highlighting lived experience and meaning, and attend to contextual factors. This helps increase a shared critical awareness of how oppressive life experience relates to the quality of their health and well-being. Art provided a rich medium for exploring the "small acts of living" that help to preserve dignity in the face of social harm and humiliation (Wade 1997).

Addressing Everyday Violence: What We Did and How We Did It

Catherine Richardson and Allan Wade (2008) write that whenever people are mistreated, they resist in some way. Resistance and these "small acts," although seldom able to stop the violence due to inherent differences in power, serve as dignity-preserving protest (Wade 1997; Goffman 1963). Resistance can be described as:

> Any mental or behavioural act through which a person attempts to expose, withstand, repel, stop, prevent, abstain from, strive against, impede, refuse to comply with or oppose any form of violence or oppression (including any type of disrespect), or the conditions that make such acts possible, may be understood as a form of resistance. (Wade 1997: 25)

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Resistance is just one of many responses to violence and not all responses can be categorized as resistance. The creation of art can be considered an act of resistance when it performs any of the above functions, including signalling opposition to the violence.

The research we conducted is best defined as an arts-based implementation of youth-centred participatory action research (Y-PAR), funded through a Canadian Institutes of Health Research Team Grant. The formal title, Promoting Health through Collaborative Engagement with Youth: Overcoming, Resisting, and Preventing Structural Violence, was later modified when youth expressed their view that this title was cumbersome and did not fully reflect the essence of the project. Thus, the working title became Voices against Violence: Youth Stories Create Change. Prior research with girls and young women conducted by members of our team (Berman and Jiwani 2014) gave us the opportunity to consider the notion of youth as peer mentors and co-researchers, to learn about the many potential challenges inherent in such partnerships and to contemplate ways of overcoming these within a research context. Here we extend our work to include boys and young men, reflecting our belief that if we are serious about ending violence, we must also engage this group in the effort.

The everyday violence we address throughout this book is the result of social and structural inequities and is manifest in myriad ways, including racism, sexism, classism and homophobia. Unlike highly visible forms of violence such as intimate partner violence, civil war and genocide, everyday violence is more insidious. Through the telling of our stories and our best efforts at youth-centred PAR, it is our hope that readers will gain insights into how we can establish meaningful partnerships with youth — learning from both our successes and our mistakes. The book is divided into three sections. In Part 1, Why Y-PAR? And What Is It?, we provide the background to our research and present the research methodology and methods. In addition to the current chapter, Chapter 2, "Using Y-PAR and the Arts to Address Structural Violence in the Lives of Youth: Methodological Considerations," describes in detail the theoretical and methodological perspectives and approaches that informed this initiative. Chapter 3, "From Protection to Expulsion: A Critical Examination of Aging Out of Care," explores the experiences of the youth who have been wards of the state and who are often placed in numerous foster,

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group or adoptive homes. Chapter 4, "Symbolic and Discursive Violence in Media Representations Portrayals of Indigenous and Muslim Youth in the Canadian Press" offers insights into the ways that mainstream media shape prevailing discourses about youth in general, and Muslim and Indigenous youth in particular, and in the process, neglect consideration of the structural forms of violence that are so central to their everyday realities.

In Part 2, Voices against Violence: Youth Stories Create Change, Chapters 5–8 describe several of the research groups that we conducted. Chapter 5, "Indigenous Youth and Uses of Art in the Fight for Justice, Equality and Culture in Canada," demonstrates how ethical and respectful research can be conducted with Indigenous youth, including interaction with community and Elders. Here, we highlight the colonial context and the particular challenges faced in relation to the Indian Act, structural racism and the privilege of many Canadians to remain oblivious to issues that harm Indigenous youth and communities. Chapter 6, "Structural Violence in the Lives of Youth Experiencing Homelessness," explores youth who face homelessness or are only sporadically and temporarily housed. Living in shelters and on the street poses particular challenges, intertwined with struggles related to mental health. This chapter explores emotional experiences, such as anxiety, depression and PTSD and how they relate to a lack of safety, to uncertainty, to high-risk living and to experiences of historical violence. Chapter 7, "Newcomer Youth Seeking Inclusion and Caring Responses after Arriving in Canada," focuses on experiences shared by the immigrant and refugee youth population. Chapter 8, "Trans Pirates for Justice: Gender and Sexual Minority Youth Resist Structural Violence in Systems of Care," focuses on structural violence and mistreatment directed towards sexual minority and gender-fluid youth. Language and the inaccurate use of pronouns and labelling are taken up as examples of indignity and humiliation that are directed at non-heteronormative youth. It explores painful aspects of state-managed living, such as issues of identity, cultural erasure, impoverization, theft and loss of possessions and mental health issues. Chapter 9, "The Emotional Exhaustion Created by Systemic Violence and How We Respond through Social Movement and Action," offers a personal reflection from a young Indigenous woman and her effort to address structural violence through zines.

The final section of the book is called Speaking Out and Pushing Back:

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Learning from Youth. Chapter 10, "Can It Make a Difference? Evaluating Y-PAR as a Health Promotion Strategy," presents various avenues to analyzing research effectiveness and what makes research "valid" in non-positivist terms, such as how it can enhance lives in the community, contribute to greater cultural knowledge and support effective policy development. Chapter 11, our final chapter, "Speaking Truth to Power," offers summary thoughts, examples of findings and research creation and critical reflection and suggestions for others working with this population. We trust that the reader will come away will inspirational stories and sharing from the youth as well as rich information about this methodological approach, which has helped us connect with youth around their crucial life experiences of harm, disconnection, resistance and, we hope, future belonging, inclusion and feelings of being valued. Indigenous cultures believe that children are gifts from the Creator. Though these ones have grown, they continue to carry the gifts, importance and contributions that will nurture our communities and the generations that follow. We cannot forget them.

About the Co-Editors

Our research was conceptualized from the onset as a partnership with youth. We paid careful attention throughout all stages of the project as to how youth would be involved, from the conceptualization of the project, throughout implementation, evaluation and decisions about what to do with the knowledge we generated. Given the central place of youth voices in this work, it is therefore not surprising that among the four co-editors of this edition, two (Elliott and Canas) are young and emerging researchers, respectively, and two (Berman and Richardson) are more senior and well-established researchers. We have all entered this research space in different ways, for different reasons and with different — as well as some shared — hopes and dreams. We offer here brief autobiographical statements in order to situate ourselves in the work and thereby provide meaningful context, culture and history.

Kate Elliott is Cree-Métis with family ties to Selkirk, Manitoba. She has lived much of her life on Vancouver Island, on the traditional land of the Coast and Straight Salish Peoples. She is a member of the Métis Nation of Greater Victoria and was involved with local governance and in charge of a youth program. While she was doing her bachelor of science in nursing

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at the University of Victoria in 2011 she began to realize the health and social implications of structural violence for Indigenous Peoples. She continued to advocate for Indigenous Peoples in the health professions and received a master of public health and social policy with a specialization in Aboriginal health and is now in medical school. In addition to numerous other volunteer projects, Kate has been highly involved in the Voices against Violence project and served in an elected role as Minister for Youth and Sport for Métis Nation British Columbia. Kate recognized that the Métis in British Columbia are less visible and less acknowledged than they are in the traditional Prairie Provinces. She wanted to change this but has faced a profound ignorance of who the Métis are, in part because of how the "pan-Aboriginal" approach invisibilizes discreet First Nations, Métis and Inuit. Kate is dedicated to fighting racism and exclusion in the health care profession and brought this analysis into the Voices against Violence project, facilitating a Métis research retreat for Métis youth on Canada's west coast.

Helene Berman grew up in a suburban New York Jewish liberal household during the 1950s and 1960s. It was there that she first learned about inequality and social justice, about hatred and prejudice, about labour struggles and civil rights and about the value of collective action. She remembers that the city of New Rochelle, where she lived, was where the first northern busing case took place. (Busing was part of a desegregation movement in the U.S., where African American children were integrated into the mainstream white school system. It was met with racist backlash and violence.) Helene remembers, as a child, playing "protest" during recess and marching in civil rights parades. She attended the University of Wisconsin during the Vietnam War and was involved in anti-war protest and the feminist movement during the era of *Our Bodies Our Selves*, Gloria Steinem and *Ms Magazine*. She carried her activism into her studies and work as a nurse and, as a descendant of Holocaust survivors, became increasingly aware of the persistence of trauma from historical violence. Applying successfully to the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and then coordinating the Voices against Violence project helped to advance the reality that racism and discrimination are indeed issues negatively affecting health. Her commitment to conduct research that is participatory, engaged and activist helps to create spaces within a research context where power differentials and hierarchies can be interrogated, where we

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can re-think what it means to do research, how we understand health and how we conceptualize violence.

Catherine Richardson/Kinewesquao is a Métis educator, with Cree/Dene and Gwichin ancestry, and a therapist. She says she became an anti-racism activist in elementary school. She started to speak out when she saw darker skinned children being isolated and picked on by others, segregated in special education classes. She recalls later learning that many of these children were Indigenous and were adoptees or foster children in the child welfare system. Today she identifies proudly as Métis and, after years of learning about Canada's history of colonialism and writing a PhD dissertation on Métis identity, she became truly aware of the massive dispossession for Indigenous Peoples and the deliberate violence on behalf of the government. Since then she has been a practitioner and teacher of response-based practice, advancing therapeutic processes for naming and recovering from violence.

Eugenia Canas came to Canada from El Salvador when she was fourteen years old. She brought with her a love of art and a deep sensibility as to how structures of power and individual agency interact with each other to shape people's lives. Eugenia studied art and literature, visual linguistics and later art therapy to get at these issues. Her experience in coordinating the Voices against Violence National Youth Advisory Board motivated her to pursue doctoral studies. In her community-research and scholarly work since, Eugenia has been committed to illuminating what aspects of our institutions and professional work serve to uphold, or invalidate, the voices of populations who have previously been excluded from shaping our society.

Beyond Boundaries: Working across Difference

Our research team is composed of individuals from highly diverse backgrounds. Collectively, we work in varied settings with different sets of priorities and, at times, competing agendas. We are youth, and we are adults. Some have advanced degrees, others have none. Some are employed within university settings, where engaging in research is an expectation of our professional roles. However, within the academic environment, there is typically a well-understood hierarchy of types of research and a set of values associated with each. Accordingly, the randomized control trial is positioned at the top — the "gold standard" for knowledge generation

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— while qualitative research and indeed participatory action research are accorded a lower place. Others on our team work on the front lines, in community organizations where research is valued and appreciated, but not integral to one's employment, and is often done on one's own time.

Throughout this book, we describe the research that has been conducted with different populations of youth across Canada, and the strategies we have used to transcend the boundaries and straddle the multiple divides that we inevitably encountered. We describe how relationships and networks were built in order to facilitate the ongoing research activity. The final chapter offers critical reflections on our process, with the hope that others can benefit from our insights and the many lessons learned along the way.

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