

## CHAPTER 5

## Different Eyes/Open Eyes

*Community-Based Participatory Action Research*CAITLIN CAHILL, INDRA RIOS-MOORE,  
AND TIFFANY THREATTS

Knowledge truly is power. Historically, the winner of the war has determined the telling of its own history and that of the loser. Those of us that have been living under the thumb of oppression have mainly suffered from a lack of information, a lack of access, and a lack of inspiration; we are not taught to ask “Why?”—we are not allowed to ask the questions that lead to a stronger mind. Participatory action research is one of the most potent weapons against oppression, it offers an opportunity to gain both skills and knowledge, to conduct an investigation that roots out both the questions and the answers that expose injustice. In the process of simply learning how to ask questions, a researcher is able to find themselves at the heart of those questions.

(Annis, Fed Up Honey researcher)

In this chapter, we detail a process that was profoundly personal, sometimes painful, and, in the end, definitively political. None of us knew quite what we were getting into when we signed on the dotted line and decided to be part of this project; we didn’t know where our journey would take us. With the benefit of hindsight, we offer a retrospective reflection upon a community-based participatory action research (PAR) project in which we critically investigated our everyday lives in our neighborhood, the Lower East Side of New York City. Along the way we not only learned how to do research, but also we learned a lot about ourselves and our community. The research process engaged us in asking “why?” as Annissa suggests above; in asking questions

that lead to a critical perspective—in effect questioning our surroundings and in thinking deeply about what we cared about, what we knew, and what we didn’t know. Collectively we shared our desires and what got in the way of us accomplishing our dreams. We argued, laughed, and compared our experiences in our neighborhood and our perspectives on the world. In this chapter, we hope to do the same, to share the struggles and joys of doing participatory action research, and its potential for “opening eyes,” as Ruby, one of the researchers, explains:

I just see with different eyes now. Open eyes . . . like people always used to say Ruby open your eyes, open your eyes. But you never open your eyes. But then like literally your eyes are open; but your eyes are not open. And I just think that just recently I’ve been opening my eyes.

Here we discuss participatory action research as a process for personal and social transformation; in other words, as a process of “opening” our own eyes and seeing the world through “different eyes,” coupled with a desire to open others’ eyes. We propose the metaphor of opening eyes because our collective participatory process pushed us to adopt a more critical perspective on our everyday lives. This was not an easy process for any of us, but we think it is completely necessary if we are going to participate in making positive changes in our selves and our communities. The metaphor of opening eyes is also relevant to the goals of our project “Makes Me Mad: Stereotypes of young urban women of color” to “reverse the gaze,” speak back to problematic misrepresentations, and untangle the relationship between stereotypes and the gentrification/disinvestment of our neighborhood.

Our discussion will touch upon three “openings.” First, we discuss our experience doing community-based participatory research that provided an opportunity for us to look closely at our neighborhood, to question our surroundings (that we often take for granted), and to “see” how social/economic/political issues take shape in our neighborhood. Because how we understand ourselves is intimately bound with where we come from, opening eyes is about making sense of our everyday life experiences at school, in our neighborhood, etc. and drawing connections between our personal experiences and global economic and political processes. Our place-based research is grounded in radical and feminist geography, urban scholarship concerned with social change, activism and grassroots organizing. An investigation of place makes visible the sometimes invisible social issues that we grapple with every day. The focus of our project is upon the area of the Lower East Side, also known as “Loisaida,” reflecting the Puerto Rican/Nuyorican community who live(s/d) there. Through our research, we came to “see” the profound disinvestment and simultaneous gentrifica-



Figure 5.1 Fed Up Honey (photo credit: www.fed-up-honeys.org).

tion of our neighborhood, and the disappearance of “our” community, “our” culture, and “our” homes (Mele, 2000; Muñoz, 1998).

Digging deeper, we traced the connections between “at risk” stereotypes of young women of color as a “burden to society” or “teen moms” and the “geography of inequality” that characterizes the new, hip, trendy, whiter, Lower East Side (Lipman, 2002). Our bodies line the frontier of gentrification (Smith, 1996) and are “another front in the struggle for the direction of globalization. The stakes are high” (Lipman, 2002: 409). With a new critical consciousness, we saw our world with different eyes, as we understood the ways stereotypes of risk pathologize and target us, and justify our exclusion from the community in which we grew up, in the name of “civilizing” the neighborhood (Lipman, 2003). As we discuss later, in response we developed research products to “speak back” and intervene in the too-smooth commodified processes of gentrification, including a sticker campaign (Figure 5.7), our website, and our report.

The second opening speaks to how doing this research changed the way we look at ourselves. As our self-image was central to our inquiry, we reflected upon our personal and collective identifications, holding up a mirror and, in the words of Freire, “coming to terms with the roots of your oppression as you come into your subjecthood” (Freire, 1997[1970]: 31). In so doing, our research process awakened our critical consciousness and was personally transformative, as we shifted our understanding of ourselves and our relationship to our world. Third, we want to also invoke “vision” in terms of conjuring up a sense of possibility for a different future, a dream of quality public education, affordable housing, racial equity, and

democracy—in short, vision as a catalyst for change/action. Here we are concerned with opening others’ eyes and engaging the public in questioning the status quo. Is gentrification—and the displacement of working-class families—inevitable? Why are inequitable racialized group outcomes such as unemployment rates, high-school dropout figures, or home ownership rates accepted as natural (Aspen Institute, 2004)? Why are we stereotyped? And how do we also use these stereotypes to understand ourselves? Opening eyes is thus a project of poking holes in the accepted “truths,” the hegemonic discourses that normalize racial disadvantages and reinforce inequalities. In this chapter, we describe our personal journey—our “praxis”—an inside perspective on the processes of doing participatory action research and its relevance for “education as a practice of freedom” (Breitbart and Kepes, 2007; Cammarota, 2007; Cammarota and Romero, 2006; Fine et al., 2004; Fine et al., 2007; Freire, 1997[1970]; Ginwright et al., 2006; Torre and Fine, 2006a; Youth Speak Out Coalition and K. Zimmerman, 2006).

These “openings” speak to the potential of participatory action research as a pedagogy of citizenship, embracing all of the loaded contradictory and political implications attached to “citizenship.” We engage the term citizenship optimistically, in the sense of both feeling included and “at home,” not defined by arbitrary geographic boundaries. Citizenship = being recognized as a decision maker and as an agent of change. To be counted. We propose a pedagogy of citizenship as a critical process for engaging the public, across generations, in community governance and change. Building upon longstanding traditions of asset-based community development (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1996), our approach to research is founded upon an assumption of capacity and agency. We harken back and aspire to Septima Clark’s “citizenship schools,” the literacy/education initiative that became a cornerstone of the Civil Rights Movement by enabling disenfranchised Southern Blacks to participate in politics. Similarly, we think participatory action research offers a process for civic engagement and reflects the promises of democracy (Torre and Fine, 2006b). By placing value upon collaboration, deliberative process, and representation, PAR offers an alternative paradigm to the neo-liberal shift in governance away from democratic decision making, the shrinking public sphere, and the prevailing emphasis upon personal accountability and responsibility (Cahill, 2007a). Instead, PAR engages the transformative potential of collective responsibility to contribute to social change. What’s more, “people’s ability to exercise their free agency and choose in an informed and participatory way,” as political and economic theorist Amartya Sen (2004: 55) reminds us, is a “necessary condition for democracy” (Torre and Fine, 2006b: 268). In this way, PAR might be understood as a sort of “free space” for processing social inequities and reflecting critically upon the contradictions of our

everyday lives (Weis and Fine, 2000), and also a process for “practicing” citizenship.

The political potential of PAR lies in its intentional inclusion of excluded perspectives in the development of new knowledge. Inspired by the insight of Dr. Martin Luther King “that freeing black people from the injustices that circumscribe their lives, America will be freeing itself as well” (Guinier and Torres, 2002: 293), Lani Guinier and Gerald Torres argue that the experiences of marginalized people of color can be the basis for social transformation. We agree. We hope that our documentation of the pain young women of color experience when negotiating and challenging stereotypes of risk will shed light on what’s wrong with our society and point toward the possibility of social change.

As a practice of decolonization, PAR is committed to “re-membling” the excluded (bodies, history, knowledge, etc.) and interrogating privilege and power (Fine and Torre, 2004). In our project, this translated into a heightened consciousness with regard to our positionality within an intersectional framework and an articulation of our social locations and relationships to privilege (Crenshaw, 1995). As a multi-ethnic/racial collective of young women, aged 16–22, of Puerto Rican, Dominican, African-American, and Chinese backgrounds, facilitated by a white woman, we found it necessary to attend to our differences and acknowledge our standpoints; in other words clarifying where we were coming from. As Omi and Winant (1994) argue, opposing racism requires that we notice race, not ignore it. Along these lines, in our project, we made an explicit decision to address issues of white privilege and everyday racism, foregrounding the questions and concerns of young women of color whose voices are too often missing in public/academic discourse (even while their bodies remain hypervisible in the public sphere). This is a conscious engagement of “working the hyphen” (Fine, 1994), where we have decided to flip the privileges usually associated with whiteness and instead design a research project that is “by” and “for” young women of color.

In our discussion, we move between theory and practice, sometimes shifting abruptly between voices. Despite our differences, most of the time we have decided to write collectively as a strategic “we,” placing emphasis upon our collective “message” and upon our shared experience as young women of color. But at times we shift to our personal voices articulating our multiple positionalities and distinct points of view. This is reflective of our process that was rich with dissent and negotiation, while our shared perspective is a political stance speaking to the power of our collaboration.

The outline of the project that follows offers a broad overview of what was a deep, messy, and intense experience that has evolved over time. To begin, we will introduce broad outlines of the project and how we got started, next we will look closely at our participatory project through “the openings,”

along the way touching upon the underlying pedagogical principles—what we think of as the “necessary conditions” for community-based participatory action research: building a community of researchers and collective ownership over the process; facilitation; a safe space for dissent; an emphasis upon personal experience; a commitment to exploring the contradictions of everyday life; an engagement with issues of power; and an explicit consideration of the audiences and purposes of research.

### How We Got Started

We entered the room where we would be conducting our research, the room where we would be spending all our time, and I felt a sudden case of claustrophobia kick in. There was barely enough floor space for all of us to stand at the same time . . . The buzzing of the lights above was louder than our breathing. I found it to be funny yet terrifying, what if my stomach growled; as it has the habit of doing for no apparent reason at all except to humiliate me.

**(Janderie, Fed Up Honey)**

The research project “Makes Me Mad: Stereotypes of young urban womyn of color” was developed starting in summer 2002. We represent three of a team of seven who worked together on the project. Our study considered the relationship between the lack of resources in our community, the Lower East Side neighborhood of New York City, and mischaracterizations of young women. When we first began our project, we did not know what we were going to research. The area of investigation was open as the study was broadly defined as “the everyday lives of young women in the city.” We collectively determined the focus of the project after working together for several weeks, and after doing preliminary research on our neighborhood and our own everyday experiences. As mentioned before, the project is for and by young urban women of color and is reflective of our own concerns and the issues that personally affected us. We represent a diverse collection of personalities and backgrounds; the fact that we all felt so passionately about this topic is a testament to its likely importance to all young women affected by stereotypes that are pervasive in popular culture and the self-image issues that stem from them. This is a snapshot of our collaborative process that we think gives a sense of where we started and the evolution of our project. Along the way we share our different perspectives on what it was like to be involved in this project, our process, the challenges we faced, and the impacts of our research. To begin, Caitlin will discuss the background on the project. Then, together we—Indra, Tiffany, and Caitlin—reflect upon our processes of becoming a research collective. Next,

we discuss the “Makes Me Mad” project in detail, our personal process of opening and seeing our world with different eyes, and our understanding of participatory action research as a pedagogy of citizenship.

The original intention of the research was to study and understand the experiences of young women growing up in the city. Caitlin initiated the project as part of her doctoral research at the City University of New York (CUNY). While much of the research on urban youth focuses upon young men, who are closely surveilled in urban public spaces and social research, there was very little research on young women’s experiences growing up in the city. The studies that do focus on women in the city often foreground issues of fear (Madriz, 1997; Pain, 1991), and the studies on “young *urban women*” (code: Black and Latina teenagers) focus upon their bodies—teenage pregnancy and promiscuity (Harris, 2004; Leadbeater and Way, 1996; Murry, 1996; Tolman, 1996). Situating our interpretations and questions at the center of the research was a conscious political and theoretical undertaking. What are young women’s concerns? Questions? How are these different from the prevailing scholarship? In fact, there is very little, if any, research from a young woman’s perspective in the literature.

Urban environments are typically characterized and described using aggressive terms, such as “loud,” “violent,” “dark,” and “ghetto,” and more often than not little attention is paid to the womyn who inhabit the city, influencing the very fiber of urban environments as mothers, grandmothers, daughters, sisters, wives, and granddaughters. This project was specifically designed to emphasize the everyday lives of young womyn to make the voice that is so often ignored the central perspective through which our community, the Lower East Side, is viewed.

**(Fed Up Honeys, Rios-Moore et al., 2004)**

Young women aged 16–22 who lived in the Lower East Side neighborhood were invited to apply to be part of the project and paid a stipend for their work which initially involved a four-week commitment. We met at CUNY and at various sites on the Lower East Side. A diverse group of women reflecting the neighborhood demographics formed the research team, later self-identified as the “Fed Up Honeys”:

We are Chinese, Puerto Rican, African-American, Dominican, and Black-Latina. As diverse as we are, personalities included, we seemed to click instantly and our conversations flowed. We fed off each other’s ideas and we built on them as well. We spoke of personal experiences, shared our writings and discussed world issues we felt were impacting us.



Figure 5.2 Da 6th Boro Family (photo credit: Indra Rios-Moore).

The differences between us were especially striking to all involved, as Indra (Fed Up Honey) articulates:

We're almost like a boy band with members that meet pre-prescribed personality types that are different enough for any teenage girl to have a favorite. Jiang Na is quiet and shy with an undercover bravery of spirit; Shamara is loud and jovial but truly a sensitive person; Jennifer is also loud but is a story teller who takes guff from no one and is not a big fan of school but is an excellent business woman; Tiffany is quiet and reserves judgments but when she decides to talk she lets out pearls of true wisdom; Erica is all tough on the outside but is really very sweet on the inside with a propensity for crying; Caitlin is the kind soul that keeps us all on track and at the same time makes sure that we feel free enough to let loose—she's the glue; and I'm the crazy one, I let loose with random useless facts, make weird sounds for no good reason that anyone can discern, and am the anti-establishment representative of the group . . . All of us together make up "Fed-Up-Honeys," very different womyn with different opinions, and, though it takes time to get on the same page, when we get there we always have very interesting, fresh, new, and unique ideas to share and use.

(Cahill, 2004: 234)

It was exciting to relate to each other across differences and to learn about new ways of seeing the world. Even though we all lived in the Lower East Side neighborhood, we lived in very different communities. We identified with multiple various ethnic and racial communities, subcultures such as hip hop culture, and geographical communities defined by their block or within particular boundaries.

### Becoming a Research Collective

The way the project started set the tone for our work together. It is difficult to pull apart the pieces that made us identify our project as successful, but certainly our interpersonal interactions were critical to our feeling good about the project. Despite our cultural differences and our diverse views of the world and our environment, we just clicked. An unpredicted connection was made and soon after came a natural communication. You can't plan for something like this to happen, it just has to happen, as you do not know who will be part of the project and what they will bring to it. However, critical to this was an open and comfortable atmosphere. Early on Caitlin made us realize that we are all equal partners and our collaborative project really would integrate all of our ideas. This atmosphere of

democracy and community started us out with camaraderie and respect and became a very important part of our research approach.

Our project was structured by the principles of PAR, which starts with "the understanding that people—especially those who have experienced historic oppression—hold deep knowledge about their lives and experiences, and should help shape the questions, [and] frame the interpretations" of research (Torre and Fine, 2006a).

PAR is based upon a belief in the power of "knowledge produced in collaboration and action" (Fine et al., 2003). Placing emphasis upon the democratization and redistribution of power within the research process, PAR builds participants' capacity to analyze and transform their own lives and is committed to "giving back" to community collaborators (Breitbart, 2003; Cahill, 2007b; Fine et al., 2003; Hart, 1997; Pain, 2004; Torre, 2005). PAR is not really about a choice of methods or tools for participation—we did not follow a recipe for participation—but instead it is about taking seriously the agency and decision-making capacity of all involved. We were *all* involved in *all* stages of the research process: problem identification, data collection, data analysis, and the development of research presentations.

While we knew we would be involved in every aspect of developing and creating a research project, for many of us research was not something we were totally comfortable with, and a PAR approach seemed entirely different from what we normally associated with research, as Indra and Tiffany discuss:

**Tiffany:** I never thought of research as a tool to talk back to the community. I always thought of it as analyzing (sometimes over-analyzing) history. Like with researching past events—something we would get in school or looking up a lot of information on a certain subject. I also thought of research being used like statistics, making observations about things and only using them for big companies or businesses.

**Indra:** Even though I've had past experience with research, it's still been hard for me to grasp the concept that research can be a tool for changing society, never mind being able to embrace it as a powerful tool for womyn of color in particular. For a number of reasons, namely the fact that education alone is connoted with negative feelings and failure for communities of color, research is not understood fully and used to its full merit by communities of color. Because of this relationship or rather lacking relationship with education and research, I think we didn't understand the potential impact of our work at first.

From the beginning, Caitlin made it clear that our experiences and perspectives would guide the project: "What matters to YOU?" she asked us, "what

are your concerns about your community?” We interpreted the openness of the research agenda as a lack of structure, which was an unusual experience for most of us and very different from our experiences at school:

**Indra:** The fact that we had a very loose idea of what we were there to do gave us an opportunity to make the space our own and to express our thoughts and ideas more freely . . .

**Tiffany:** The unstructuredness of the project was great for me. I like not having barriers or a strict schedule of work to follow. It gave us time to get to know everyone and talk about what we wanted to do. Also it made me feel like the project was actually ours.

**Indra:** Because we were at CUNY, clearly an educational setting, there was potential for us to feel intimidated or feel that there were going to be specific expectations of us, but because we only knew we were going to be there to do some level of discussion and because our activities were loose enough to be group directed they resulted in shared thoughts and ideas that were particularly unique to us as a group.

**Tiffany:** If it was more structured it would have felt like school to me, and I know Caitlin was worried about coming off as a teacher but she wasn't. She gave us the opportunity to speak our minds about every- and anything even if it was racial . . . For me the unstructuredness helped me to develop ideas on what to do and made it easier to work knowing there were no barriers. The most important thing for me to be able to do this work was it not feeling like school.

(Cahill, 2004: 237–8)

In fact, while the project was undefined, it was not unstructured. But because it was collaborative it could not be planned in advance; instead our research evolved in a slightly messy and organic way. There was room for the unexpected to occur. Again this was a different way of working that was unsettling at first for some who were used to following directions, filling in scantrons, and who were not sure how to contribute to a very open process. The fact that we felt free and were encouraged to speak our minds on everything—including issues of race—was critical. In many of our experiences, White teachers shut down conversations involving race, but here this became our focus—looking at “at risk” stereotypes of young women of color—of us! This is an issue we were all concerned with and that we confronted every day; could this also be a worthwhile research focus?

### Learning through Doing

Building a community of researchers involves paying attention both to the processes of collaboration and to the development of research proficiency among all participants (Lykes, 2001; Torre et al., 2001). The development of research skills is significant because it serves to “even the playing field.” On our research team, some had more research experience than others; we helped each other and learned from each other. In addition, learning how to do research gave us a new vocabulary and tools for understanding the issues in our community.

We learned how to do research through *doing it*—in the process of researching our own everyday lives and community. In the beginning of our work together, we tried out different research methods, which included mental maps, behavior mapping, taking field notes, photography, a guided tour of places of significance in the Lower East Side neighborhood, and daily focus groups/brainstorming sessions. Through this preliminary research process we gathered a lot of data about ourselves and our community, which we then analyzed collectively, making sense of our shared experiences and where we differed. Our analysis fed into the development of our research questions and became the basis for our study. In this way our research followed a Freirian model as our process started with the critical reflection upon the conditions of our own everyday lives. Using what Freire identified as a “problem posing approach,” we collectively interrogated our personal experiences and identified issues that were important to us. As Freire states (1997: 64, italics in original): “In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation.” Opening our eyes and seeing the world—and ourselves—with different eyes is akin to what Freire identified as *conscientização* (1997 [1970]), a process of awakening our critical consciousness. As “subjects, not objects” (1997 [1970]: 49), we practiced a pedagogy of citizenship, transforming ourselves as we reaffirmed our capacity as agents of change (Ginwright and James, 2002).

### Opening #1: Researching Our Home Community

Doing research on one's own life is personally revelatory and potentially upsetting. To carefully examine our everyday experiences, to take stock in our neighborhood know-how, and to study the familiar can be both thrilling and disturbing. In our research, we focused upon what we shared—our community. Studying the changes in our neighborhood, the Lower East Side of New York City, forced us to “see” and question how economic, political, and social disparities took shape in the everyday life of our community.



Figure 5.3 Map of Lower East Side study area.

We did a day-long “field trip” through our neighborhood that created an opportunity for us to look at our surroundings with new eyes—as researchers—analyzing and documenting block by block the environment we usually took for granted. For some of us who usually stayed in our small corner of the neighborhood it was really eye opening to walk around and see how much our community has changed. And it was especially interesting to hear about and compare experiences with the others.

We discussed the lack of support and places to go for young people. As one researcher described, “I am an interesting young woman who bores herself to delirium. Because there’s nothing to do. I’m bored . . . It’s like that I’m interesting is going to waste because I have nothing to do with it.” We also talked about the obvious discrepancies we noticed in the community, for example, the juxtaposition between the fancy new wine bar across the street from a disinvested public elementary school, and the line of poor Black and Latino elderly waiting to get breakfast from the soup kitchen down the block from the upscale design shop. What was happening to our neighborhood? “Lowa” or “Da 6th Boro” was definitely not what it used to be. Our neighborhood/study site (see Figure 5.3) is below 14th Street, east



Figure 5.4 Loisaida (photo credit: Caitlin Cahill).

of Avenue B, and above the Williamsburg Bridge. As most of the people in “our” neighborhood are Puerto Rican and Dominican, it is known also as “Loisaida,” a Nuyorican name for the Lower East Side (see Figure 5.4). Our area of the neighborhood includes one of the largest tracts of public housing in New York City, and not coincidentally, also experienced massive disinvestment and abandonment in the 1970s and 1980s. “Loisaida” definitely had a reputation as a dangerous “ghetto” neighborhood. But all this was changing. We discussed the shifting demographics of our neighborhood, which over the course of our lifetimes (the Fed Up Honeys were all born after 1980) had become both whiter and wealthier, and how this related to the gentrification of our neighborhood. Actually, some of us were not familiar with the term gentrification, and learning this new word and “naming” our experience was really important, as articulated by Janderie:

I have become more aware of the happenings in my environment and the world . . . While engaged in a deep discussion about what has become of the Lower East Side of our childhood we spoke of how little boutiques and trendy bars were popping up all over the place of the small businesses that used to be owned by locals. I shared that since this had been happening, the building where I lived had come under new management and every few months my mother was forced to pay a higher rent. Suddenly I hear one of the girls say the word gentrification. I had never heard the word before in my life, so naturally I asked “what’s that mean?” She explains to me that these yuppie ass, money having, culture seeking, white people are buying us poor people out of our neighborhood in part because they want a taste of our culture-rich environment, and the more of them who came in, the more of us are forced to leave because we can longer afford to live here. Oh! My! God! That’s what was happening to me!

Placing gentrification in the larger context of the cycle of global economic restructuring and making sense of the repercussions for our families and our community was really upsetting. Most of us understood the cycle of gentrification—disinvestment as part of a broader experience of racial discrimination and social inequality that includes the violence of poverty, poor-quality education, the lack of good jobs, and the threat of displacement. Through our research we began to see what Pauline Lipman describes as the “geography of inequality” in our neighborhood, characterized by a highly stratified labor force, new forms of racialization, and “a constellation of policies that regulate and control African-American and Latino youth, in particular, and sort and discipline them for differentiated roles in the economy and the city” (Lipman, 2003: 332).

While making sense of this was painful, our research project provided a way for us to engage and use this new knowledge productively rather than be demoralized by it (hooks, 1995). Our study of our neighborhood enabled us to understand and “see” in concrete terms the impact of socio-political forces on our everyday lives:

The trendy bars, the raised rent . . . the white people! There weren't this many white people in the ghetto before, then again it's starting to look less like a ghetto and more like confusion. Cute Italian and Japanese restaurants in one corner and a broke-down project building on the next. Every day I walked down the same three blocks and I found something else that hadn't been there before, like the annoying little boutique that sold hand-crafted figurines. And even more annoying was the tea shop that seemed to never have a customer inside. All I could think to myself was “can't wait to see how my neighborhood looks in ten years.”

Because we had a stake in our neighborhood, we were motivated to learn more and to move forward with our research. We started a list of opportunities and issues in the neighborhood that we would return to when we developed our research questions. For example, some of the opportunities we identified included: diversity, sense of safety, knowing people, pride, tolerance, a lot of hardworking people, knowing your neighbors. Issues and problems we identified included (among others): nothing to do, outsiders taking over, garbage, expensive unaffordable housing, and misperceptions of the people who live here.

In the course of doing research on our neighborhood, we read a report produced by a local nonprofit organization that features a hypothetical profile of a young womyn that fed into all the common negative stereotypes that are prevalent in the media and in society. An example: Taniesha, whose single

mother is a high school dropout on welfare, raising her and her two brothers. Taniesha, who has little supervision, drops out of high school herself, shop-lifts, and by the age of 16 finds herself with a police record, pregnant, and with HIV. In other words, Taniesha was a super stereotype, an exaggerated representation of what would happen to a young woman unless this organization stepped in to put her on the path of productivity. As one researcher said, “They are saying basically that we are all these things unless we had their help, their goodwill, to save us.” What a betrayal! We were enraged by the misrepresentations perpetuated as an oversimplified approach to fundraising buying into culture-of-poverty explanations to justify their existence.

We decided collectively to develop a “response” research project to speak back to stereotypes that oversimplify, reduce, and limit us. We realized that we, as the target audience for preventive and “at-risk” programming, could give a unique perspective on what we feel are our needs by refuting stereotypes directed at young urban womyn of color, identifying how these stereotypes impact us, and drawing connections between the relationship, lack of resources (or disinvestment), and misrepresentations of young womyn of color.

Reading the stereotype-saturated report was a turning point for the Fed Up Honeys because it forced us to confront what Freire calls the “the roots of their oppression,” the process through which one perceives social, political, and economic contradictions of one's daily existence. In so doing, we “awakened our critical consciousness.” As Annissa, one of the researchers reflects:

I was so totally saturated by stereotypes of women of color. So saturated that I had incredibly short-sighted assumptions about the other young womyn that I was going to be writing and learning with as part of this project . . . I spent my whole childhood and adolescence isolating myself from my peers because my mother thought—and eventually I thought—that was the best way to keep myself safe from crime, pregnancy, and ignorance. I saw my own people as ignorant—I just didn't really know why I saw them as ignorant. After 22 years of tricking myself into believing that I was living above the fray, through PAR I was able to find my own ignorance and learn more about how our community arrived at its current state . . .

Our own process revealed not only how young women of color are perceived by society, but also the interrelated and complex ways in which young women identify themselves. This informed one of our research questions:

- 1 How do stereotypes inform the way you explain/characterize/understand yourself? your understanding of your peers? your community?



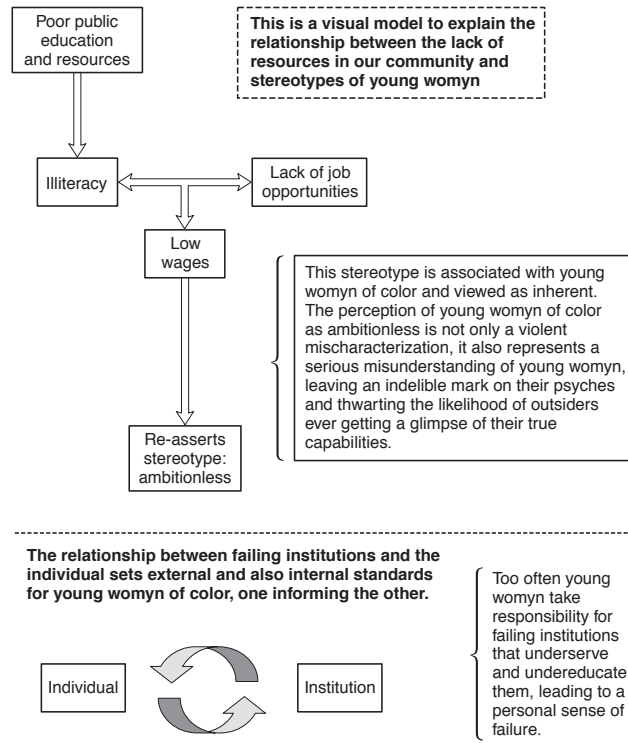


Figure 5.5 Our model (Rios-Moore et al., 2004).

Our study of neighborhood change and the disinvestment and gentrification of our community informed our second set of research questions:

- 2 What is the relationship between the lack of resources (for example, education) and the stereotypes of young urban women of color? In what ways does stereotyping affect young women's well-being?

Figure 5.5 presents a model from our report (Rios-Moore et al., 2004) that shows how the stereotype of young women of color as “uneducated” or “lacking ambition” is produced within a deficient public education system.

In our research we found that what was the most disturbing was when we internalized the stereotypes and when we took on responsibility for failing institutions, such as our neighborhood zoned high school, and blamed ourselves for failure. If what is expected of us is very little and we are constantly faced with these negative stereotypes, there is a danger that we will become exactly what they want us to become. These stereotypes keep us down, and then our mind set is “If that is what they think I am, that is what I’m going to be.” Part of our research process involved breaking down how the cycle of reinforcing stereotypes leads to the ways we begin to explain and understand ourselves. This feeds a struggle that has some of us resisting stereotypes and others using them to interpret the world around them. It is this fierce struggle that gives our work its significance (Rios-Moore et al., 2004).

**Collective Analysis: Rituals to Share Power**

It is through the praxis of the struggle—through reflection and action upon the world—that we are able to transform it (Freire, 1997 [1970]). In so doing we transform ourselves, as Annissa reflects:

By the end of our time together during the summer we came to the agreement that we wanted to provoke others into rethinking the standard negative stereotypes of young urban womyn of color that they encountered. But before we could even realize that that was what we wanted to do we had to (through angry eruptions, upset, and discussions) realize that we were living under the veil of those stereotypes ourselves. We had to touch upon some of those emotions that those oppressively heavy misconceptions had laid on us, and that was a difficult and sometimes painful process.

To face stereotypes as a collective was to come to terms with our experiences of everyday racism. This was a painful, emotionally loaded process. But as hooks (1995) argues, in order for rage to not consume us it must be engaged and used constructively, and it is this engagement that leads to social transformation. But, how do you move from the pain and personal struggle to develop a coherent analysis (Cahill, 2004)? And, keeping in mind the critique that participatory work often prioritizes consensus (Kothari, 2001), a significant challenge then is to create a safe space for sharing different perspectives, where everyone’s point of view is taken seriously, even if disagreed with. This is especially important when the area of inquiry is so personal and close to home.

Indra describes our negotiated process:

The initial process of choosing a research question/focus was difficult because it required us to have really long and heated discussions about everything and anything that happened to come up. I have never had such an intense conversational experience. It had a great deal to do with the small size of the room that we were in and the amount of hours that we were all together—but it created an environment that forced confrontation. There was nowhere to run from any disagreement. We all had to wrestle with our opinions and with our reactions to others' opinions and yet still find a way to work together, to incorporate all of our ideas, and to create something together that spoke for all of us. The fact that we were all able to do that—to disagree, to respect each other, and create research that spoke for us—I found to be truly inspiring. If it was possible for us, imagine what it can do for others . . . I will always remember the mini-explosions of thought that kept us going and forced us to confront some of the toughest and most unique parts of ourselves . . . What we realized was that not all differences of opinions need to be resolved. Not everyone has to think like you and you don't have to think like everyone. It's okay to disagree and express opposition because it helps others to see things from every angle possible. This was one of our biggest accomplishments, the ability to see the world through someone else's eyes and to let others see the world through ours.

We agreed to disagree and collectively analyze our differences as part of our process. In order to maximize the participation of all of the researchers involved, we established a series of practices, repetitive ways of working—rituals to distribute decision making and share power—that were transparent, collaborative, and facilitated group ownership and collective negotiation. Through this praxis we collectively shaped our research questions and also analyzed our data. Key rituals involved free writing in our journals and reflective note taking (see Cahill, 2007b). “Free writing” was a way for the researchers to think through individually and privately on paper issues such as “what I like about my neighborhood” or “personal experiences of racism in school.” Journals thus served as a private space for reflection, for spending time thinking through and developing one's own perspective. They also served as a preparation for sharing excerpts of what we wrote with each other. This could be a way to start a group discussion or to compare perspectives with each other. The practice of journal writing established a process of moving from personal to shared experiences. As we shared our writings, Caitlin would take reflective notes on what we were saying on big sheets of paper on “our wall” (see Figures 5.6a and b). Caitlin would then check in—“is this what you were saying?” The notes



Figure 5.6a The Fed Up Honeys at work.

would serve as documentation to which we could refer back. Our collective wall was a public memory of shared knowledge production from which we could build new ideas and construct our project together.

One of the challenges in working collaboratively was making sure that everyone was involved—this involved sometimes interrupting silences (“Jasmine what do you think?”); or disrupting dominant voices by creating regular opportunities for group reflection and checking in with the group periodically (“Do we all agree? Why or why not?”). Checking in and clarifying our understanding of each other's opinions was especially important when we were trying to articulate conceptually complex ideas. It was necessary for us to “break down” and clarify the group's understanding of the sometimes abstract and theoretical interpretations offered by individual research team members. This, in turn, generated richer analysis of our data (Cahill, 2007b).

Following is an excerpt from a conversation as we started to identify our research questions. It demonstrates how we supported each other in “breaking down” and clarifying our interpretations:

**Carmen:** . . . I think that we should like focus a little bit on women and their relationship to the neighborhood and the challenges that they



Figure 5.6b Analyzing data on “our wall.”

face because of the report that you read. It seemed that society, well like the neighborhood, puts out an image about how women should act 'cause they in a certain neighborhood. And I think that's a crime . . . so I think that then we should focus on that.

**Caitlin:** On kinda, what are the real challenges that women are facing in their neighborhood . . . instead of focusing on that women behave a certain way in a certain neighborhood—but instead—what are the challenges for women in that neighborhood. Is that what you're saying?

**Carmen:** Yeah, because like, to me, it seems that just because somebody comes that doesn't know anything about the neighborhood, and never lived here for like quite as long like we have, and get to know everyone in the neighborhood . . . That they come and they say “it seems like women in this neighborhood act like this and that.” And when people see that, people be like “oh, it's true—look” and they do it. And like you know, and, that doesn't seem like it's right . . . because people are saying like—the strawberries are red. And you like . . . yeah that's true, they are red. And you're going to say it too. And that's like you're doing something and you don't know that you're doing it and yet when somebody tells you, you do it even more.

**Ruby:** Yeah. That's just what I was going to say. They're reacting to the stereotype. And making them true. More realistic.

**Caitlin:** Okay. What is the power of stereotypes? How do stereotypes become reinforced or . . .

**Carmen:** True.

**Caitlin:** Or become true?

**Annissa:** They become a part of—

**Carmen:** I didn't make myself clear before—

**Caitlin:** No—I think you are expressing a really complicated idea and I think we are all trying to figure out how to best say it.

**Ruby:** I don't want to think about something that you weren't really saying. I'm just trying to get a better idea of it.

**Annissa:** I think most importantly once they become marketed they become the only means for us to get the kind of attention that we need. It makes me think of minstrel shows. Black people would never run around in black face but that was the only way that they could get the money that they needed—

**Ruby:** That's what they have to do.

**Jasmine:** And now you see these rappers doing the same thing. Hos, bitches, and hos types of thing.

In our discussions it was necessary to confirm and clarify: “Is this what you meant?” For example, when early on in the research project Carmen suggested that other students at her school brought failure upon themselves, Caitlin questioned what she meant by that—“Do you mean that they don't try to succeed at school because they don't care? Or they do try but still don't succeed because they aren't capable?” And later, Indra asked Carmen why she didn't think the students cared and then, how she herself fit into this understanding as Carmen was also having a hard time in school. This process of “breaking down” served to reflect back our interpretations in a way that drew out political/social/ethical implications. Later Carmen decided to drop out of her zoned neighborhood school, which a year later was forced to shut down, and instead she chose to finish her high school education at an alternative, student-centered school. And she graduated!

## Opening #2: Personal Transformation

### *The voice of a young womyn of color*

I am an interesting young womyn who bores herself to delirium. And a comedian who can't tell a joke. I am a responsible sister and a helpful daughter. I love to be me and yet I am different around others. I

am extremely emotional but want to hide my feelings. I have a hard time trusting some and put too much trust into others. This leads to hurt feelings and total vulnerability. I want to be vulnerable but it makes me feel weak. I want to feel weak but no one wants to care for me. I want to care for those I love and want them to care for me more. I never believe anyone can love me as much as I do them. I want to take care of people but don't want them to need me. I am too clingy and never see friends and family. I am a complete idiot but an intelligent person. I am lacking education. I have no communication skills and I am a good listener. I am a good listener who hates to hear people speak. I am a reader who watches way too much TV. I am a good friend and girlfriend but I have few friends and no boyfriend. I am open and bold but hold my tongue when I'm hurt. I put people in their place and yet others walk all over me. I try too hard and yet do nothing at all. I am a procrastinator but I am always early. I help and help and help, and get nothing in return. I am not where I would like to be and want to be so much further. I am very opinionated and yet know nothing about the world. I know where I want to go but I am confused. I know what I want but I am confused. I know how I feel but I am confused. I know what I mean but I confuse myself. I am boring and fun, and innocent and cruel. I am trusting. I am always here. I am always there. I am always needed. I am loved and hated. I am admired. I am spiteful but not jealous. I am very jealous. I am scared of everything. My face shows bravery. I am angry. I am in love. I am confused again . . . Honestly, I am too much to put into words.

(Erica Arenas, *Fed Up Honey*, 2002; Rios-Moore et al., 2004)

“This is an example of how a young womyn describing herself manages to convey the difficulty and challenge of being a contradiction . . . of being many things at once. Her words exemplify our struggle to find a voice through research” (Rios-Moore et al., 2004). As the emphasis in our project was on challenging stereotypes, in our autobiographical writings we foregrounded our contradictory selves, or, perhaps more accurately, the push and pull we experience in negotiating the contradictions of our everyday lives. For young people who at this time in their lives are investigating, “trying on,” and refashioning possible selves, participatory action research offers an opportunity for critically reflecting upon the different ways we identify. The research process opened our eyes to new ways of understanding ourselves and the world.

Conscientization involves the critical reflection upon the contradictions in one's own everyday life and the transformation of oneself as part of this process. Dialogue is a key component of conscientization, according

to Freire: “it is in speaking . . . that people, by naming the world, transform it, dialogue imposes itself as the way by which they achieve significance as human beings. Dialogue is an existential necessity” (Freire, 1997[1970]: 69). Through the dialogic process of collectively working through and making sense of personal and shared experiences, there is the potential for identifying new ways of being in the world. Key is the collective act of sharing and processing together our personal experiences, for example, the private pain and humiliation that comes with racism. In this way, we became aware of how our personal experiences are connected to broader social problems and at the same time we felt a sense of solidarity.

Discussing together the persuasive and dangerous characterizations they face in their everyday lives but don't often have the space to speak seriously about was cathartic or, as one researcher put it, therapeutic—“We opened up to each other and expressed ourselves passionately. It was like I was getting paid to go to therapy.” The collective critical reflection process of PAR provided a space for expressing and releasing emotions and working through the pain and confusion of personal and shared experiences in a supportive setting.

**Jasmine:** This is good because like—this is not something that happened over a year. This is like years of stuff that's just like festering inside of people and there's no place where you can just go and have people of different . . . coming from different areas, and talk about stuff. And—

**Janderie:** And not let it get hostile.

**Jasmine:** Yeah exactly. So this is perfect. This is something that people need. Especially if they come—if they're very frustrated. Because that frustration just leads to violence.

By collectively creating a narrative framework to interpret their experiences of racism, the young women redefined “the problem” and in turn their selves (cf. Cahill, 2007a). Through the PAR process, the researchers developed a social analysis weaving together tales of discrimination, of disinvestment and White privilege. Together, the Fed Up Honeys reworked their personal stories, and created a shared space for validating experiences of structural racism and poverty (made concrete in the virtual space of their website [www.fed-up-honeys.org](http://www.fed-up-honeys.org)).

Whereas at the beginning of our research process what was most remarkable to all of us were our differences, through the process of doing the research project we identified a collective identification as “young urban women of color”—a shared standpoint based on an identification of intersections of race, gender, and place. Key to our collective reconstruction

of what it means to be a young urban woman of color is the bifurcated perspective of being the “other,” what DuBois (1989) calls “double consciousness” (Cahill, 2007a). Acknowledging the power of stereotypes, “as expectations of who we should be or who we will be,” as an “axis around which everything revolves,” we identified examples of how we use, relate to, and resist stereotypes and how we “define our (them)selves against and/or through stereotypes” (cf. Rios-Moore et al., 2004), as researcher Erica Arenas explains:

Sometimes, as a defense mechanism, people will adopt stereotypes as their own. If you take the stereotype and make it yours then there is no way that it can be used against you. When we do this we sometimes lose sight of the negativity in the stereotype and we begin to use these stereotypes as our excuses for why we are the way we are and why we do the things we do. For example: “Don’t make me get black up in here” or “I’m Puerto Rican, I can’t speak proper English.”

As part of our research we deconstructed the stereotypes and identified everything they leave out:

- background
- struggle
- lack of support
- the inherent diversity of every womyn
- the abuse that some womyn face
- the challenges the young womyn sometimes face that leave them in compromised stereotypical situations
- the aspects of life that make this more complicated
- the true multifaceted stories of how/why negative things happen to young womyn
- the ability for young womyn to think for themselves
- everything that makes each life special and unique!

In our project we considered the ways that young women related to or challenged stereotypes. We found that the stereotypes can also be viewed as expectations of who we should be or who we will be. The lack of space to define ourselves affects not only our own self-image but also the way we perceive our peers through the stereotypes. This cycle of reinforcing stereotypes leads to the ways we, as young womyn, begin to explain and understand ourselves, and feeds a struggle that has some resisting stereotypes and others using them to interpret the world around them. In our research, we tried to untangle the ways violent mischaracterizations seeped

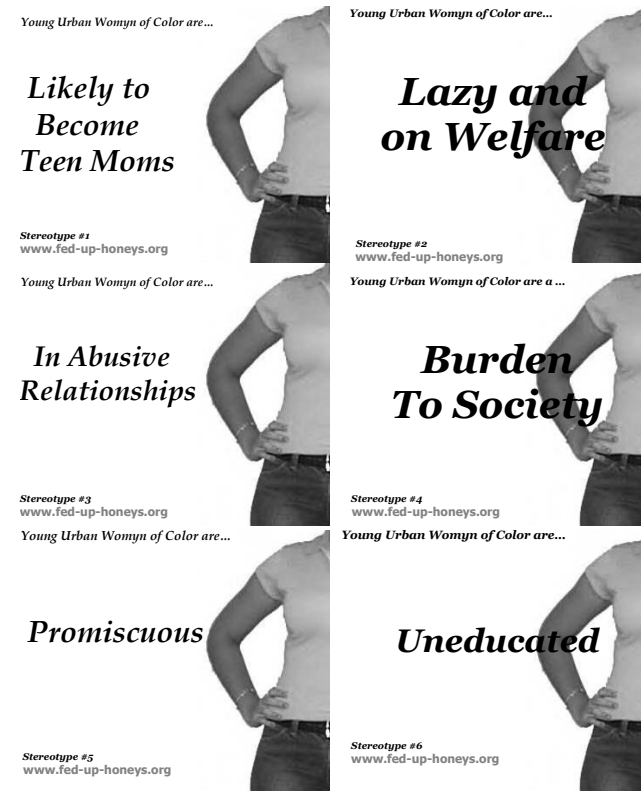


Figure 5.7 Our “stereotype stickers” (credit: www.fed-up-honeys.org).

into our consciousness, the way we understood ourselves (Rios-Moore et al., 2004). This was necessary for us to see ourselves clearly, with “different eyes,” and this is also what we hoped to do in our research project:

We are looking to plant a seed in the minds of society. We wanted our stickers to upset you to the point of inspiration. We want our beautiful, young, urban womyn of color to realize what it is we have against

us and we hope it will give you all the motivation to go against the grain; to prove everyone wrong. [See Figure 5.7.]

### Opening #3: PAR as a Catalyst for Change

Our project is a voice for young womyn of color but it is an issue that the whole community and society needs to acknowledge and be committed to change. The first step is admitting the problem (admitting to these stereotypes), the next, which is where so many fall short, is to take action in change.

(Fed Up Honeys, 2002; Rios-Moore et al., 2004)

According to Freire, conscientization is not “an armchair revolution.” The “discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must also involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection: only then will it be praxis” (Freire, 1997 [1970]: 47). Freire’s conceptualization of praxis, as “the reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (1997 [1970]: 36), places emphasis upon agency. This was also the emphasis of the “Makes Me Mad” project:

Presumably, the main audience for our research would be people outside of our community because it would be simple to assume that these are the people that are misunderstanding us and are the main consumers of stereotypes of young urban womyn of color. But over the course of our discussions we came to the very difficult realization that we too were consumers of these negative stereotypes, so we decided that our primary audience should be our peers. If we only communicated with outsiders that presumes that our peers (and ourselves) don’t have the level of agency needed to make change to the predominant perceptions of us and we strongly disagree with that belief.

(Rios-Moore et al., 2004: 3)

The metaphor of opening eyes also speaks to vision in terms of conjuring up a sense of possibility for ourselves and also for our community: a dream of quality public education, good jobs, affordable housing, racial equity, and democracy. Reflecting upon the relationship between stereotypes and our self-identifications, we engaged in a pedagogy of citizenship, in which we collectively thought through how to make changes within both our own everyday lives and our community, as Annissa reflects:

In a highly patriarchal society where even white womyn still face a great deal of the same limitations and misconceptions that their

grandmothers once faced, womyn of color are all the more in need of the space and the encouragement to start shaping their paths within society. Part of the journey starts with womyn of color smashing the skewed pictures of themselves that they see being constantly portrayed and reified in the world that they live in. Participatory action research is one such method of making sure that we as womyn of color could control how our voices and our thoughts would be portrayed and interpreted through the lens of research. We crafted a project that made our voices the centerpiece and were able to develop new and innovative approaches to research that are more likely to catch the attention of our peers and urge them to re-think their own self-perceptions and those of their communities.

Personally, we changed how we viewed the world, our neighborhood, and our own circumstances. What this meant was different for each of us, but we all saw the world with “different eyes” as a result of the research process. For example, Alice understood her experiences in the Chinese immigrant community differently after participating in the project and as a result she developed a website addressing stereotypes of young Chinese women ([www.fed-up-honeys.org/cn](http://www.fed-up-honeys.org/cn)). As mentioned before, Carmen transferred from her zoned public high school to an alternative student-centered school, where she succeeded in graduating. And while some of us felt ambivalent and even angry toward our disinvested neighborhood, we decided that rather than abandon or be pushed out of our home community, we collectively developed a proposal for “Community building needs from a young womyn’s perspective”—a proposal that honors our belonging and inclusion. In our proposal, we advocate for community participation in the development of our neighborhood and our own involvement. To this end, we created a concrete list of practical solutions in the conclusion of the *Makes Me Mad* report, arguing for our concerns to be taken into account (Rios-Moore et al., 2004).

If research is understood as a means “to change the world, not only study it” (Stanley, 1990: 15, cited Maguire, 2001), action must be understood as integral to the process. To this end, it is critical to address both the purpose of doing research and the intended audiences. Questions we raised along these lines included: What do we hope to accomplish with our research? Who should we “speak to”? In our consideration of potential audiences, we thought about how we could design a research project to serve “our community.” With this in mind then we thought about how we might effectively reach out to our community with “our message” (Cahill and Torre, forthcoming).

**Tiffany:** When we decided on researching stereotypes then using it to educate the womyn in our community it seemed new, like something no one has done before. Most likely there were and are many who do this but are not recognized, but that's where our research will be different. We have explored many options to speak to our community and have come up with very effective ways like the stickers, website, and paper to reach our community. Using our research to talk to our community made me realize that research is not just words of a paper or statistics, but it can be used to empower. Research can be anything the researcher wants it to be and that is a powerful thing.

Speaking back was probably the most satisfying part of our research process—thinking about creative ways to reach out and get our message out to the public: “We call these our babies and we couldn't be more proud of our accomplishments.” Seeing the results of our research and getting positive feedback has been personally meaningful to each of us. There is a concrete difference between sitting in a room “complaining” (as some would see it) and effectively exploring, researching, and developing research “products” for reaching out to our families, our neighborhoods, and society in general. We developed a few different ways of “speaking back” with our research: including a sticker campaign (see Figure 5.7), two websites ([www.fed-up-honeys.org](http://www.fed-up-honeys.org)), a “youth-friendly” research report (Rios-Moore et al., 2004), book chapters (Cahill et al., 2004), and presentations at conferences, schools, and local community-based organizations.

As is evident in the title for our project “Makes Me Mad,” we wanted to express our anger in order to engage others, depending on who they are, to either feel their own pain or experience the pain and guilt of acknowledging racism. With our “stereotype stickers” (Figure 5.7) we wanted to “prick the ‘psychic amnesia’ that has infected America” (Torre and Fine, 2006a). Each sticker features a stereotype about young urban women of color including: “Likely to become teen moms,” “In abusive relationships,” “Promiscuous,” “Uneducated,” “Lazy and on welfare,” and “Burden to society.” In the sticker campaign we hoped to upset and motivate “to go against the grain, to prove everyone wrong” and “to realize what it is we have against us.” We created the stickers especially for other young women of color, but we posted them all over our neighborhood as we hoped to provoke the public in general into rethinking these stereotypes and how they related to the gentrification of our community. We also used the stereotype stickers to “advertise” our website.

Our website [www.fed-up-honeys.org](http://www.fed-up-honeys.org) (Figure 5.8), “created by young womyn of color for young womyn of color,” is a kind of one-stop-shop experience where visitors can find out about the “Makes Me Mad” research



Figure 5.8 Our website (credit: [www.fed-up-honeys.org](http://www.fed-up-honeys.org)).

project. On our website you can download our study and learn more about our research. We have a page devoted to the Lower East Side that includes links to community organizations and businesses that connect to young people's interests. We have a page of resources especially for young women (links to other websites with information about health, sexuality, financial resources). We also have a “rant” page because venting was key to our own process so we wanted to create a virtual space for self-expression, where people can post their frustration. Another page includes poetry of relevance to other young people of color and features a beautiful poem about taking cold showers in the projects.

In our report *Makes Me Mad: Stereotypes of young urban womyn of color* (Rios-Moore et al., 2004), we discuss our study, how we went about it, and what we found out. We designed it to be “youth-friendly” and wrote it in a friendly personal voice to appeal to young people in particular, but with the hopes of engaging everyone in our community to take seriously the issue of stereotyping and its impact upon young people. The report includes concrete steps for making change (as mentioned previously), a list of “community building needs” and addressing the lack of resources in our neighborhood, such as education, health, and housing resources. We distributed the report in schools and youth organizations in our neighborhood, and we also shared it with policy makers. Across the country, teachers have been using our website and our study in their classrooms.

Some of our most rewarding experiences have been presenting our research at conferences and doing educational workshops in organizations

and schools in our community. We find young people especially excited to talk about racial stereotyping in their schools. We have received a lot of positive feedback from young and old people and we continue to work to get our message out there in the world. We hope to encourage expression and foster a space that will give peers and youth alike a chance to voice themselves, challenge, and complicate the stereotypes and misconceptions of our peers and communities.

Through the fed-up-honeys website and our sticker campaign, we want to stress the importance of self-directed and community-supported action for change. Using the vehicles of action research, research products such as our stickers, and the website, we want to help in the process of motivating and taking part in a revitalization of active community participation. We believe that by simply living your truth and encouraging others to do the same, you can participate in your community's growth. In the process of being true to yourself and the network of people that make up your community, you can help to knock down the myths that hold down our communities.

### **Conclusion: A Pedagogy of Citizenship**

The ultimate and most beneficial means to an end of the negative effects of such a stark lack of resources is a community that is self-sufficient and self-concerned. It is a priority to have young womyn who can feel connected and have a desire to contribute and be involved in their community. But there have to be ways to become involved in the community. Our research has identified several important ways to build a stronger and more positive community, one that is able to stand in the face of the stereotypes that its children have been pegged with (Rios-Moore et al., 2004).

When we speak of self-sufficiency, we do not condone the abandonment or disinvestment of our community. We know all too well what that is about. No, instead we are arguing for sovereignty as a "praxis of self-determination" (Tuck, 2007), a "restorative process" (Grande, 2004: 57) acknowledging the assets already existing within our community, and a recognition of our capacity to make change. Our own experiences of doing research on our communities taught us just how important it is for young people to learn about the history of their neighborhood if they are to be engaged in making or resisting changes, as Annessa argues:

For those of us who don't know the history we just see the results of the disinvestment. We just see the results of the degradation and all we feel is that crater and that we're just sinking deeper and deeper into it. And feel incredibly helpless and at the same time, you know, like pissed off, and that you can't use your pissed-offness in any way.

Without an understanding of our personal situation we are unable to make or "see" a possibility of change. Many young people feel demoralized by the "system" taking responsibility for failing institutions, such as the terrible public schools we are forced to go to, leading to a personal sense of failure. We think it is astonishing and saddening that the only way we could break through the misconceptions and stereotypes was to become part of a participatory action research process. And the fact that we expressed interest in participating in the research project indicated that we already showed some bravery in being willing to step outside of our comfort zone. But we think that there has to be a way to reach out to people who are not yet brave enough to take such a step. How do you reach them? This is the issue that so many social justice organizations deal with: How do you reach the apathetic, those who have been sleeping for so long that they've forgotten what awake is and how uncomfortable growth can be? Or those who are so busy they have no time to reflect or participate?

Our recognition and personal experience of unconscious denial and hopelessness is what inspired us to try to wake up other young people with our research, to force them to think about stereotypes and motivate them with anger, to force them out of the comfort zone as a prelude to engagement. But this is not enough. Getting mad is a first step, but we want to convince other young people that their opinions matter, that their concerns and needs are important, that they are citizens! With this in mind, we identified many "community building needs from young womyn's perspective" in our study, including the succession of jobs that are underpaying, the lack of a living wage, overcrowded homes, the lack of financial investment, environmental justice issues, and the under-education of young people. We want to engage young people in thinking about what they need, desire, and want to change in their community. How can we develop young people's civic literacy? We want to involve young people as decision makers in our community, as agents of change (Ginwright and James, 2002). Participatory action research offers a promising process for engaging young people in community governance. That said, we realize that communities that do not value the input of adult citizens may not be inclined to value the contributions of young people (Carlson, 2005). While we are optimistic and excited about the possibilities of change, we are not naïve.

We conclude with a call for a pedagogy of citizenship as a critical process of personal and social transformation. We think this is especially important work to do now at this particular political moment. Why? Why now? Is it because young people are less engaged in civil society? Are they more alienated these days? No. We don't think so. We agree with scholars who move beyond narrower conceptions of political participation and demonstrate the diverse ways that young people are already actively involved and engaged



in community struggles (Akom, 2006; Ginwright et al., 2006; Stovall, 2006; Torre and Fine, 2006a; other chapters in this volume). Nevertheless, we are very concerned about the contemporary neo-liberal political context, which puts a premium upon individual responsibility and personal accountability: “each person should be obliged to be prudent, responsible for their own destinies, actively calculating their futures” (Rose, 2000: 324). As we are staying so busy trying to get to where we want to go (to college/to a better life/to a new neighborhood/to reach our dreams), we are increasingly isolated. And so we worry that other young people who are caught up in trying to pass the test—to graduate, to get into college, or just get by—might lose sight of the big picture of racism, the lack of investment in our schools—in us!—in our education, and the violence of poverty, and the fact that very few “good jobs” are available. The “Makes Me Mad” project challenges the blame that gets projected on the bodies of young women in the form of stereotypes. We don’t want young women and their/our communities to internalize and take personal responsibility for the bigger social/political problems that plague their/our neighborhoods and everyday lives (see Figure 5.5).

We are especially distressed by the fracturing and displacement of our communities and concerned about how this may impact our generation. Psychologist Mindy Thompson Fullilove’s definition of “root shock” is relevant to the potential trauma of a loss of place and cultural dislocation that speaks to our experience of gentrification: “a profound emotional upheaval that destroys the working model of the world that . . . undermines trust, increases anxiety about letting loved ones out of one’s sight, destabilizes relationships, destroys social, emotional and financial resources” and increases health risks (2004: 14). With this in mind, and with urgency, we want to invoke a pedagogy of citizenship as a call to arms—an embrace—of community-based collaboration and engagement in addressing social and political issues that take place on the ground in our neighborhoods. Critical to this process are the questions that Ginwright et al. raise (2006: 117): “How can civic engagement in the community shape young people’s political identity and consciousness? How is space created in which to sustain political consciousness in community settings?” As Jasmine, Fed Up Honey, explains: “People, most importantly young women, do not feel invested in their community or connected to it if they don’t have the positive aspects of their community, their lives and their personal strengths reinforced to them.” For us, taking control of one’s self-definition, one’s identification is also about staking out a position in the community. A pedagogy of citizenship is founded upon this praxis, the investigation of everyday life as part of a process of identification with where you come from and your sense of place in the world. And, perhaps it may also be a basis for claiming space and rights in the larger society (R. Flores, 1997; W. Flores, 1997). We hope so.

## Note

Please note, names have been changed to protect the confidentiality of those involved. In this chapter, we draw upon transcripts from our taped discussions and our unpublished and published collective writings: Cahill, 2004; Cahill, 2007a; Cahill, 2007b; Cahill and Torre, forthcoming; Cahill et al., 2004; Rios-Moore et al., 2004.

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