

Intergenerational Love Song: When I say...! You say...!

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses *Intergenerational Love Song: When I say....! You say....!*, a project I conceived and carried out in 2017 with four adult band coaches at Girls Rock Camp Toronto. Using song writing as a mode of inquiry, participants were able to reflect on their role as mentors to young people. This project sought to disrupt the ways in which band coaches at Girls Rock Camp think about the collaborative song writing process, the act of teaching and the ways in which listening is crucial to the ways in which we respond. In so doing, this project engages with broader ideas of power, dialogue and the binaries that make their way into discourses on gender and human development. This study is unique in that it brings into conversation musicology, pedagogy and girlhood studies in a grounded project that makes room for listening.

Note: It is recommended to listen to the songs in conversation while reading this project report and specifically during the sections that analyze each song.

Big Beef! Hard Life! <https://girlsrocktoronto.bandcamp.com/track/rogue-emotions>

(I really love this) Big Beef! Hard Life! <https://soundcloud.com/magali-meagher/i-really-love-this-big-beef-hard-life/s-ZOCJ4>

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To Sister Rosetta Tharpe and the black women who pioneered rock music, thank you for your electricity. To women and trans identified musicians who continue to resist erasure in music.

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FOREWORD

Who Rocks?!

I Rock! They Rock! We Rock!

Hey there! YOOhooo! I'm about to start this thing!!

This is what I have been shouting out over the last 8 summers to a group of 30 or more 8-16 year olds as co-director of Girls Rock Camp Toronto, a music program for girls and trans identified youth intended to create the conditions for participants to get to know themselves and each other through music creation. Now everyone knows that something is going to happen: a transition into a new activity or an announcement of some sort.

“Attention getters” are a device used in multiple contexts like classrooms, protests, group meetings; anywhere large groups of people assemble to do something. These can be casual nods or elaborate clapping schemes, shouted commands or the onomatopoeiac enunciation of a bird song. There is a call and there is a response. How successful the caller is in receiving the desired response is not always within her control. The responders may engage and turn their attention to the caller. They might ignore the call or resist and subvert by heckling or other means. My final project, *Intergenerational Love Song: You say...! Then I say...!* contains within it multiple calls and multiple responses, all nested within the context of Rock Camp. As a researcher, I have called out to participants to respond to the project design; an invitation to write a song in response to the musical creation of a group of 12-year-old girls, in the hope that we may all gain insights into listening, learning and teaching through music-making.

This dynamic is also present as I consider how this project is connected to the goals I laid out for myself after entering the Faculty of Environmental studies. My plan of study is an opening into thinking about the liberatory potential of music making. Sandinista, Wounded

Knee, Steven Biko, Diggers, Strange Fruit —these revolutionaries, historical events and truths— I did not learn about in school, but through song. Beyond history lessons and current affairs, music itself has the power to transform our way of knowing and being in the world. Through rhythm and melody, we are physically urged to *move*¹ in ways that have real life implications for individuals, groups and the environments we inhabit.

I conceived of *Intergenerational Love Song* after reviewing literature on a range of issues within two main components that make up my area of concentration: a) alternative and radical pedagogies and b) music as radical pedagogy and research method. Artistic practice offers individuals a means by which to reflect, communicate and act. I am interested in how learning and teaching through musical co-creation contributes to understandings of self and the socially generative possibilities that such practices make possible. This study is unique in that it brings together ideas in musicology, pedagogy and girlhood studies in a grounded project that makes room for listening. If you can hear me: Clap once!



¹ Here I refer to “moving” in the broadest sense of the term – physically, affectively and cognitively.

*At Rock Camp you can be you
 And have some fun times two!
 At rock at rock at rock camp!
 ...But we don't have to do what we don't want to do!
 We get to choose, How we want to groove!²*

PRELUDE

Who Rocks?

From Aerosmith's "Walk this Way" to the Rolling Stones "Brown Sugar", there is no shortage of rock and pop songs written by adult men about their sexual desires for girls and young women. Most popular feminist responses, affirmations of strength and the naming of objectification, have been from the perspective of adult women. The response by girls and trans identified youth about their experience in relation to this gendered, gendering, racialized and racializing gaze (in the case of "Brown Sugar" for example) has not attracted widespread commercial visibility. There are a number of reasons that girls and trans youth across ethnicities and class are restricted in their pursuit of rock music. Access to equipment and transport, the exclusion of girls and trans youth from public spaces as well as access to domestic spaces required for practicing, along with gendered parental restrictions on "play"³ are all factors that make girls' and trans youth entry into making rock music a challenge. Efforts to change these dynamics can be seen through a number of initiatives in media, concert promotion and

² Lyrics from Girls Rock Camp Toronto's last summer session in 2017. Written collectively by campers and staff at the Sony Centre for the Performing Arts.

³ Bayton Mavis, "Women Making Music: Some material constraints," in *The Popular Music Studies Reader*, ed. Andy Bennet, Barry Shank and Jason Toynebee (New York: Routledge, 2006), 347-354.

education⁴ that attempt to centre girls and trans youth in various aspects of music creation and presentation.

Girls Rock Camp Toronto is one in about eighty-five similar organizations around the world that offers music programming intended to build self-esteem in girls through music creation. As one of the founders and current co-director of the Toronto iteration of Rock Camp, I have received an education from my efforts to create the conditions for participants to learn about themselves and others while gaining new skills through collaborative music-making. Since its inception in Toronto in 2010, Rock Camp has been operating out of the Tranzac in the Annex neighbourhood. We organize two to three weeks of programming in the summer as well as occasional after school programs. For the past two years, we have also run a March Break camp in partnership with Dixon Hall Music School in Toronto's Regent Park neighbourhood. This last year has seen a growth in the organization's reach through a partnership with the Sony Centre for the Performing Arts and most recently a drumming program at Malvern Public Library in Scarborough.

One of the things an organization such as Rock Camp offers is the opportunity for girls, young women and youth within the trans constellation to contribute to the current cultural conversation and archive by creating music about their experiences from their perspective. This contribution is made available through access to the tools of creation (instruments and practice

⁴ She Shreds and Tom Tom are industry magazines that centre women in guitar and drumming respectively. Locally, Venus fest in Toronto created an inaugural music festival in 2017 focused on highlighting women and trans identified musicians in multiple genres of popular music. Unit 2 a "queer positive and QTBIPOC (Queer / Trans and / or Black, Indigenous and People of Colour) radical arts and community space dedicated to building community and building bridges", is an example of a smaller but mighty "do it together" space that takes an intergenerational approach to their programming by providing a variety of family friendly activities.

space), knowledge (guidance from musical mentors), and visibility (promotion of showcase concerts, production of CDs and ongoing performance opportunities). The pedagogical approaches of many Girls Rock Camps are to varying degrees critical, feminist, and operate under some form of anti-oppressive framework. Because of this, the Girls Rock Camp movement has developed creative and radical responses to the subjectivity of girls.

The songs created during Rock Camp are not merely an outcome of a pedagogy that engages with concepts of power, ethics and dialogue, nor simply the creative expression of its participants. But such arts-based programs may be viewed as a form of political participation in its own right. In the editorial to the journal *Curriculum Inquiry's* issue on creative acts and participatory practice, Rubén Gaztambide-Fernandez and Alexandra Arráiz Matute write that, “cultural production always involves forms of participation that always have political implications”⁵. In the case of song writing during Rock Camp, the politics of cultural production may be found in a “process of identification and subject formation as well as how youth negotiate the symbolic and material conditions that shape their lives”⁶. How this process may contribute to long-term health, skills building, acts of solidarity, activism or other outcomes is not so easily quantifiable. Nevertheless, the space occupied by organizations such as Girls Rock Camp in a city where accessible space for music creation, practice and performance is threatened⁷ becomes essential.

⁵ Gaztambide-Fernández Rubén, and Arráiz Matute Alexandra, "Creation as participation/participation as creation: Cultural production, participatory politics, and the intersecting lines of identification and activism," *Curriculum Inquiry* 45.1 (2015): 6.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷ Rayner Ben, "Wave of closures hitting live venues has fans fretting, but politicians and a veteran booker say there's no need for panic" *Toronto Star* (Toronto, ON), Feb. 3, 2017.

Indeed for many of the participants at camp, it is one of the most important things they have done in their lives. It is crucial and they have told me so. I know this too because getting here and writing their original songs together is difficult. It is not only difficult in the way that all collaboration can be, although that is also true. It is difficult because for some of the campers, just getting to camp is a challenge. I think of one young rocker who travels across the GTA from Scarborough because her and her mother have been displaced and are waiting to move back into the promise of a new home in a revitalized downtown public housing complex. Her mother tells me there is something wrong with her health and this is why they are often late. Their temporary housing is filled with mold. Another, refuses to eat at lunch and controls her food intake. She is 9 years old and she bangs the drums hard.

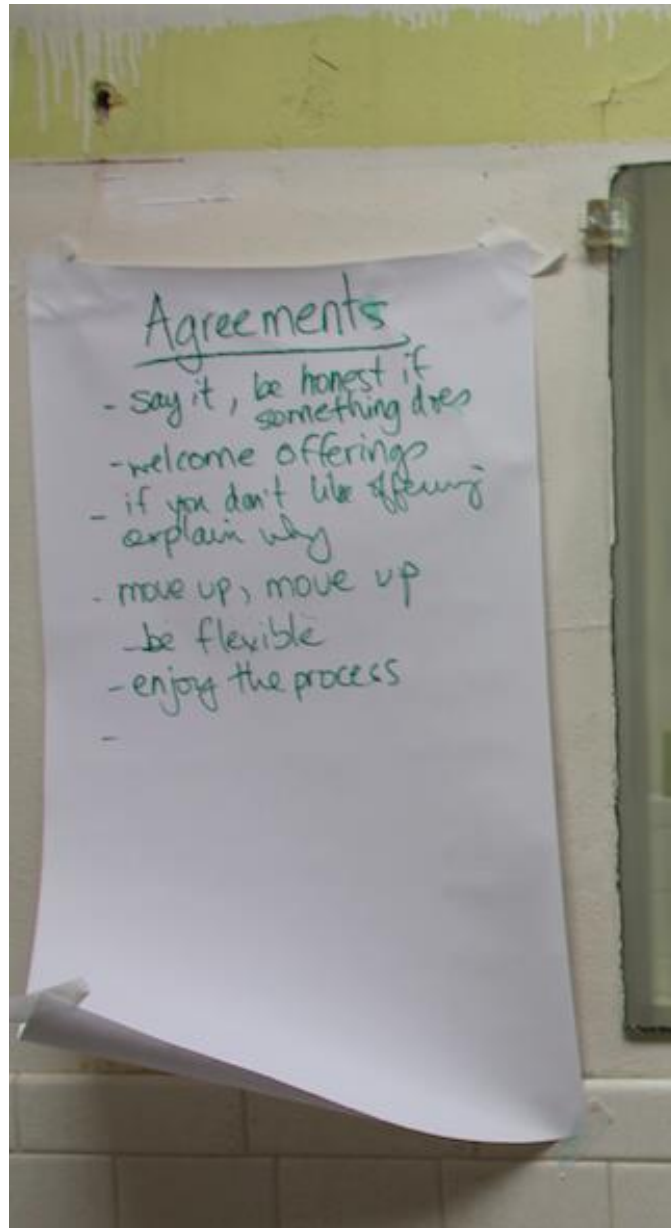
Thomas King tells us that stories are all that we are.⁸ We can understand from King's statement that narrative is central to personal and collective identity while also existing in a field of power from which it is born and interpreted. The truth *of* stories, the agents of their creation and their purpose play a role in determining the very real psychic and material effect these narratives will have on us as individuals and societies. These songs the campers write, are new stories that offer potential new ways of being. They are collaborative stories, about fantastical talking potatoes, electric flamingos or else they take on "real life" in ways that are forceful and resistant. Lyrics may even reflect conflicts they are having in the moment, while writing their song. It might be a way to "work it out", a useful vehicle, an embodiment of the collaborative process.

⁸Thomas King, "The Truth About Stories Part 1," *CBC Radio*, November 11, 2003, <http://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2398900256>

This brings us to the Tranzac, Rock Camp's home base, a former social club belonging to newcomer New Zealanders and Australians, now home to a community theatre and zine library as well as being an active popular music venue and community space. I find myself upstairs in this bright and somewhat dilapidated bathroom with a shower and two toilet stalls, a drum kit, some microphones and a few practice amps for a number of reasons that are worth including here. As a social unifier, an expression of identity and as an emotional outlet, there is no doubt that music has played a significant role in my life. As a young person, access to music-making offered me a certain safety and belonging outside of a home life fueled by stress and uncertainty. Equipped with a couple of decades of touring my own songs, playing in bands, participating in the running of a record label and most relevant to this project: being the co-director of Girls Rock Camp Toronto, I feel indebted to those who have also been carried along these sound waves with me.

I have learned from my friends in music that not all experiences are equal. That as precocious as I may have been to carve my way into a music scene which is predominantly the domain of young white adult men, my experience concurrently speaks to a degree of access to the tools of creation and the networks of influence afforded to me due to my comfortable social and economic position as a middle class white woman. By virtue of my role as Rock Camp organizer and co-director, I am invested in the outcomes of the project with a depth that incorporates my desires for a pedagogy that engages with justice, transformation and creative paths to liberation and self-determination for the young people who attend rock camp, those for whom the program is not yet accessible and the adult mentors with whom I work.

It is with this in mind that I conceived of this project in order to carve out an experience for Rock Camp band coaches to reflect on their practice as teachers and mentors by engaging in what they know well: song writing. I wondered what is made possible when songwriters engage with the creative work of children?



Rogue Emotions: Big Beef! Hard Life!

During the summer of 2016, a group of four 12-year-old girls came together to form the band *Rogue Emotions* and wrote a song that they called *Big Beef! Hard Life!* The girls in this group had different degrees of musical experience but all of them had taken music lessons for at least one year. The group consisted of a mix of racialized and white cisgender girls from working and middle class families including campers whose tuition was fully subsidized via a partner organization. Some of the band members had attended Girls Rock Camp previously and some paid full tuition. In preparation for writing a song together, campers participated in workshops on community agreements, conflict resolution and generally creating a safer space for one another through practicing communication and exercises that promoted the notion of accountability for actions.

Camper bands are pre-determined by age, musical instrument choice. Girls Rock Camp Toronto participants may choose to play either keyboard, bass, guitar or drums. Campers have approximately 10 hours of band practice to write their original song while also spending their days learning how to play their instrument and attending a variety of workshops on subjects ranging from silk screening to media literacy and fat positivity. The songs are recorded and documented in CD format and made available through online streaming services⁹, making them accessible to wider audiences than would normally be made possible through pedagogical or domestic music practices as well as lending legitimacy outside of the pedagogical context. I have included the lyrics below.

⁹ Listen to Big Beef! Hard Life! here: <https://girlsrocktoronto.bandcamp.com/track/rogue-emotions>

We were waiting for the bus
And a guy came up to us
He asked us for a lighter
And we said no
I thought that I was 12 but I guess that I look 20
I don't know if it's a joke but it's not that funny

Big Beef, hard life x4
They say it's easy
I don't want to grow up
The thought makes me queasy!

This girl came up to us
And asked if we wanted a job
I said no! I said no!
We have better things to do than work hard for you
Now watch me walk away with no allowance money

Gotta work all the time and pay our own bills
Who will take me to the doctor when I get ill?
I should have saved my money when I had the chance
Now life is hard
I gotta pay the rent

Big Beef, hard life x4
They say it's easy
I don't want to grow up
The thought makes me queasy!

I first wrote about this song for an independent study course with Leesa Fawcett on Arts Practice, Girlhood and Learning. Below are some of the pathways I followed in trying to make sense of it. My interpretation of the song takes into account Christopher Small's concept of *musicking*¹⁰ that seeks the meaning of music deeply within the crevices between people, places and sounds and not within the limits of the confines of the tone, the essence of which can be

¹⁰ Small Christopher, *Musicking: The meanings of performing and listening* (Wesleyan University Press: 2011).

extracted only by those subjectively qualified to do so. An amateur, an outsider and an audience member are valued as players within a discourse that simply asks “*what is going on here?*”¹¹

Within this frame, *Big Beef! Hard Life!* is dependent on the context within which it is composed, performed and heard and all of the other aspects of its creation, including its lyrics, sounds and the social and personal context of those who inhabit its story.

Multiple fields of study offer the idea that one’s identity is revealed through the telling, writing or expression of story¹² and the intricacies connecting song, memory and identity are of particular value when exploring music as both method and subject. Both on an individual and social level, wrapping a message inside of a melody or rhythm gets the point across and makes it stick. National anthems, impromptu ditties, war cries and lullabies are all ways in which we can organize sounds to make new meaning. *Big Beef! Hard Life!* describes real life encounters with unknown adults that betray both the lyricists’ understanding of what it means to become an adult as well as what it means to be a girl.

The plodding keyboard line and fairly consistent drumbeat drive the song’s expository narrative. While at times some of the playing is tenuous and idiosyncratic, the vocalist delivers her lyrics with conviction. The singer’s strong and urgent approach and rounded vocal tone are

¹¹ Small Christopher, *Musicking: The meanings of performing and listening* (Wesleyan University Press: 2011).

¹² Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub. *Testimony: Crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history*. (Taylor & Francis: 1992).

Lucy E. Bailey. "Necessary betrayals: Reflections on biographical work on a racist ancestor." *Vitae Scholasticae* 26.1 (2009): 98-117.

Foucault, Michel. "Self writing." *Ethics: Subjectivity and truth* (1997): 207-22.

unexpected in a 12-year-old and embodies the paradoxes presented in the lyrical content of the song.

The first verse sees the narrator being alarmed about being misread as an adult:

We were waiting for a bus and this guy came up to us

He asked for a lighter and we said no

I thought that I was 12 but I guess I look 20

I don't know if it's a joke but it's not that funny¹³

That this interaction at the bus stop occurs in public is worth consideration. Although this may vary due to cultural and social circumstances, in a city like Toronto, the transition between navigating public space alone versus doing so independently, such as in the case of getting to and from school, occurs most often between 11 and 13 years of age¹⁴. This freedom exposes children to new experiences such as the one described above. The safety that may be afforded by familial accompaniment disappears when the girls stand alone at the bus stop and are approached and asked for a lighter. The lighter can be read as a symbol for a variety of real or perceived dangers: the use of illicit substances or perhaps an unspoken and premature sexualization of the girls that transforms the man's request into a proposition. The use of fire as a symbol for sexual desire is a common trope within popular music.¹⁵

A contradiction emerges between the confident vocal delivery and the discomfort expressed from being mistaken for someone older, something the singer finds "not funny". In

¹³ Rogue Emotions, *Big Beef! Hard Life!* Summer 2016, Girls Rock Camp Toronto, Track 7, Girls Rock Camp 2016 Compilation, 2016, CD.

¹⁴ Harris-Decima for Metrolinx, *School Travel Household Attitudinal Study Report*, Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area, 2011. <http://www.metrolinx.com/en/projectsandprograms/schooltravel/ENG-2011GTHASchoolTravelStudy.pdf>

¹⁵ Songs in the rock canon such as "Come on baby light my fire" by the Doors and Bruce Springsteen's "I'm on Fire" are but two examples of this metaphor.

this verse the “we” may possibly include other twelve-year-old girls standing at the bus stop with her, and perhaps is a reflection of the group writing process. While this may be a group experience, one that speaks to a larger social context, there is a solitude expressed in the frustration heard in the solo shout vocals that ensue in the chorus:

Big beef / hard life x4

Big beef / Hard life you say it’s easy

I don’t want to grow up! The thought makes me queasy! x2¹⁶

The paradox between performing resistance in the chorus and the expression of fear in the verse reminds us that the everyday realities of girls is at odds with a girl power narrative promoted by the neoliberal angling of postfeminism. This is further reinforced musically by the drummer’s minimal approach in the verse to a more dense rhythmic approach in the chorus. Under such a lens, girls are asked to be self reliant in the face of a sexism that is conceived of as an individual rather than collective problem.¹⁷ Yet, no amount of singing along to Beyoncé’s refrain “Who runs the world? Girls!” will create this reality. Instead, the band *Rogue Emotions* prefers to name the difficulties that lie ahead as they express a desire to retreat from the inevitable.

This girl power narrative is one that Girls Rock Camp often negotiates in that the promotion of self-esteem through creative expression is at the core of our mandate. Girls Rock Camp is often read within this empowerment framework despite efforts made to consider the

¹⁶ Rogue Emotions, *Big Beef! Hard Life!* Summer 2016, Girls Rock Camp Toronto, Track 7, Girls Rock Camp 2016 Compilation, 2016, CD.

¹⁷ Pomerantz Shauna, Rebecca Raby, and Andrea Stefanik, “Girls run the world? Caught between sexism and postfeminism in school.” *Gender & Society* 27, no. 2 (2013): 185-207.

social determinants that are central to any concept of wellness. These efforts on the part of Rock Camp range from sliding scale tuition with no documentation required to prove income, to workshops during camp that promote empowerment as being inextricably tied to accountability and responsibility to others, as well as efforts made for the camp to create meaningful and mutually beneficial relationships with organizations who may not have the same access to funds. Despite such efforts to counter this neoliberal approach to girlhood, Girls Rock Camp benefits from the conception of girl power as the central determinant in gender equality. From online funding campaigns to government grant applications and corporate sponsorship, the girl power vocabulary is nevertheless something that funders welcome.

The second verse introduces a new dilemma that reveals the singer's perception of the increasing social and economic pressures that adulthood may have in store. This concern may be due to the band's personal experience with parents or other adults in their lives expressing stress in relation to economic circumstances as well as their own direct experience with such stress or merely a growing understanding of the relationship between labour and capital.

This girl came up to us and asked if we wanted a job

I said no! I said no!

We have better things to do than work hard for you

Now watch me walk away with no allowance money¹⁸

I find the clarity and analysis in this verse particularly compelling. The narrator identifies, denounces and critiques capitalist labour politics in four deft lines. Despite the consequence of

¹⁸ Rogue Emotions, *Big Beef! Hard Life!* Summer 2016, Girls Rock Camp Toronto, Track 7, Girls Rock Camp 2016 Compilation, 2016, CD.

being left without spending money, she chooses to maintain her autonomy rather than becoming bound by wage dependency. This anxiety about money is carried over into the bridge that is delivered vocally as a rap.

Gotta work all the time

And pay our own bills

Who will take me to the doctor when I get ill?

I should have saved my money when I had the chance

Now life is hard, I gotta pay the rent¹⁹

Again the lyrics reflect a connection between financial stability and health. Wealth is identified as a social determinant of health and the neoliberal narrative of individual responsibility for wellbeing is reflected in the expression of shame for not saving ones money to pay for doctor's bills. Also revealed is an anxiety about who might care for the narrator if she falls ill. For the narrator, to become an adult is to be alone. This perception is congruent with what the authors of the song may be experiencing with new found independence, navigating the city unaccompanied as well as an increasing and more complex understanding of the connections between themselves and the social institutions and society in general that is indicative of their particular age group.²⁰

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ William Damon, *Social and personality development infancy through adolescence* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1983): 272.

In their song *Big Beef! Hard Life! Rogue Emotions* expresses anxiety about what it means to grow up. A closer analysis reveals commentary about the hypersexualization of girls, the relationship between labour and capital as well as how health depends on social determinants such as wealth, community and access to care. In addition to the expression of personal life experiences and the revelation of larger social interconnections, these anxieties are in line with common social and developmental aspects of pre-adolescence. The creation of this song may serve as a useful outlet to those who wrote it – an expression of those *rogue emotions*. The writing process may provide the authors a means of identifying and reflecting on troubling everyday experiences with a peer group. As a contribution to the cultural archive and as a musically infectious tune, this song may also resonate with other teens, articulating similar experiences that otherwise would not be so easily rendered.

Above I have provided my take on how this song might be read as a counter narrative to popular music's dominant voices but when writing for the course assignment I was also curious about how adult audiences at-large might receive the song. My experience has been that the music made by children is either perceived as "cute" or "so cool" but I understand this to communicate that it is "fashionable". On the one hand, the music is devalued and on the other, the music makers are objectified. I wondered whether this song might be considered a marketable expression of girl power, an angsty teen anthem or a manifesto. As it turns out, the band coaches I approached to participate in my final project chose the very same song to respond to, which created an opening for further investigation.



Connie Tsang, 2016. Source: Girls Rock Camp Toronto, www.girlsrocktoronto.org (accessed Nov28, 2017).

RESEARCH APPROACH

Intergenerational Love Song

I was drawn to the Masters of Environmental Studies program because of its promise to allow the asking of questions through creative means. To permit myself an opportunity to theorize issues in pedagogy and music-making by at times making music and performance myself, has put me in a position to confront issues of personal identity, loss and shame within an academic context as well as to make deeper connections between personal experience and larger social structures and dynamics. In addition, to begin to make sense out of song writing as research; a challenge to traditional conceptions of what research is, has made the task of analysis and writing at times murky. Yet, it is not an opportunity I would like to take for granted.

Poetry, as writes Audre Lorde²¹, is not a luxury but to be afforded the time and space to reflect on one's story is a privilege and a risk whose outcome is not shared equally by all who engage in the practice. The vulnerability available to me through the act of song writing has provided a necessary space to think about how I might situate myself within the research process and to contemplate how to negotiate my multiple entry points to this specific work as an organizer at Girls Rock Camp, a researcher and a songwriter.

It is with this in mind that I hoped to extend this type of reflexive experience to the research participants by engaging them in a respectful encounter that would be beneficial for future action for change. Embodied practice described by Diana Taylor as a "form of knowing as well as a system for storing and transmitting knowledge"²² is a resilient, dynamic way to participate in transformational learning. This is also made possible in a participatory research model that draws on Freirian concepts of reflection, dialogue and action²³. In this project, song writing becomes a dialogical intervention between teachers and learners as well as within the research process itself between band coach participants and myself as researcher. The power dynamic that exists between adult teachers and child learners as well as the power at play between adult songwriters during the process of this project is of critical value to the analysis of the research findings.

Participants wrote a song as a way to reflect on teaching but we also learned more about the process of song writing. By using an arts-informed approach, band coaches were involved in the creation of new knowledge within the context of an existing arts and community-based

²¹ Audre Lorde, "Poetry is not a Luxury," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and speeches*. (Crossing Press, 2012): 37.

²² Diana Taylor, *The archive and the repertoire: Performing cultural memory in the Americas*. (Duke University Press, 2003): 18.

²³ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2011).

practice. Through this arts-informed method and the reflexive approach of the research design, band coaches have skipped the proverbial middle man in order to fold their learning into action that has the potential for reach through their future actions. Until the time when I might put verse to melody on this song cycle, this report stands in as my “song”; the fulfillment of my part in these multiple layers of engagement with knowledge making.

Without going further, I feel it important to acknowledge something that keeps nagging at me as I write. The book *Girlhood and the Politics of Place* offers many perspectives on “place” as a necessary lens through which to understand girlhood studies in a context that traverses geographies of experience and land as well as the policies and structures of influence and dissonance in the field. In her chapter *Placing the Girlhood Scholar into the Politics of Change*, Caroline Caron is concerned with girlhood studies scholars becoming more accountable to the social justice aims and claims they make, questioning the privileging of girls “voices” over their political agency. Participation and girl-centered approaches are hallmarks of girlhood studies that are rooted in feminist theory, yet Caron is concerned with “who should listen to these voices, for what purpose, and with what consequences, as well as that of who should bear the responsibility for making change happen.”²⁴ Engaging with the “voices” of children and young people is at the centre of this project and while the research participants are adults, it is clear that how participants engage with the musical work of campers, how they actualize their

²⁴ Caroline Caron, “Placing the girlhood scholar into the politics of change: A reflexive account,” in *Girlhood and the Politics of Place*, ed. by Claudia Mitchell and Carrie Rentschler (Berghahn Books, 2016), 128.

learning through their continued commitment to improving their mentorship practices as well as how I as an organizer remain accountable is pivotal to my research aims.

Four musicians participated in this study, all of whom are active or former band coaches with at least 2 years of experience as teachers, mentors and facilitators of the song writing process. A majority of participants have continued to teach at rock camp and were selected because of their intention to do so since my objective in creating this project was to provide an experience that might improve the learning experience for campers. Two participants are professional musicians and two play music primarily as a hobby. Participants were between 30-45 while the songwriters of the original recorded track were all 12 years of age at the time of writing.

In keeping with the current overall staff complement, this purposive sampling was intended to engage with participants from diverse sexual orientations, ethno-racial and class backgrounds as well as those with a range of experiences teaching and playing music in a variety of genres. Music has carried participants through class struggle, sexual violence, racist encounters, immigration, diaspora experiences as well as a common thread of gender discrimination. Some participants have challenged the ways in which stereotyping due to identity markers makes assumptions about musical taste, while their musical training and interests have all informed the writing process and the content of the song they wrote collectively. Some participants preferred to remain anonymous while others did not care. In this report, I use the pseudonyms chosen by participants. These are Fern, Daisy, Elise and Lucia.

As much as possible, I attempted to replicate the conditions under which campers wrote their song in this scenario. Therefore the project took place in the bathroom and zine library at

the Tranzac as would be the case during a typical summer camp session. Because campers are most often beginners at their instrument, participants were asked to choose an instrument that they were the least proficient at playing. The participants played bass, drums, guitar and keyboard. The participants wrote their song over 3 evenings and had about 6 hours of writing and rehearsal time to accomplish the task.



Listening: If you can hear me now clap twice!

In grade 8 science I learned that sound cannot travel through a vacuum. To be heard, sound waves must bounce off of a medium and vibrate. It is the energy from this vibration that produces sound. This expansive understanding of sound makes space for multiple ways of understanding listening as more than just an audible experience. The act of listening is a craft that challenges those who undertake it to glean an invisible, yet open secret.

In the case of songs, the medium required to listen is physical and it is cognitive and by extension it is social too. Listening during this project took place from a variety of angles. Band coaches listened to young rockers, I listened to band coaches, band coaches listened to each other and we all listened to ourselves under the hegemonic shadow of taste and the myth of childhood innocence.

Structuring this section has been a challenge since inextricable from the process of analysis is not only my perception of the ways in which the band coaches chose to listen to the camper song but also my take on their song since unlike the band coaches, I had a chance to examine it in depth with much more time and attention. Setting these anxieties aside for the time being, below I describe some of the ways in which listening occurred during this project. In a later part of this report we will see how the interpretation of the camper song will influence the band coaches writing of their response.

Listening to the song *Big Beef! Hard Life!* solicited a number of reactions from band coaches. I asked them to reflect on their song selection during the initial session as well as during the debrief at the end of their song writing process. They described the musicality of the camper song as punchy, strong, defiant, dancy, energetic and polished. The vocalist received

compliments on her voice for its strength and control. Indeed, the singer's approach is direct and assertive.

The song's lyrics were also considered defiant as well as mature and polished. This led to a discussion about the age of the songwriters. In one instance, one band coach attributed maturity to the piece with a caveat: "as rock camp bands go." Participants didn't realize that the songwriters were 12 and had imagined that if they had been a little older, perhaps the campers would have approached the encounters with adults differently.

Fern: I think 15 year olds might be more like: hurry up and age. When can I get to be an adult?!

Daisy: That's really interesting to be rejecting that someone comes up to you. Some kids have more of a rebellious phase. It may not have been comfortable because that person may have seemed threatening but it could have been a totally different experience.

Fern: It could have been "cool you think I'm 20". "All of the makeup is working" or whatever.

Lucia: I remember feeling happy I was getting older at a certain age

Daisy: Yeah, at a certain age but when you are younger you want to be shielded and you want to be doing your thing.

Elise: Tweens are such a weird age. It's that transition between childhood to becoming a teenager.

This was a departure from my own assumptions about the campers. Had my reading of the situation categorized the campers as vulnerable as opposed to having agency? Participants drew on their knowledge of childhood developmental theory.

Fern: Our brains reorganize fundamentally when we enter adolescence. So before that we could be a totally different person and then the things we do in adolescence they can shape us for the rest of our lives, generally.

This conversation highlights an important dilemma within childhood studies. What is a child? The ontology of childhood is a necessary preoccupation within childhood studies as well as with theories in education, psychology and other social sciences that intersect with this particular moment of human existence. In writing on sex education and adolescent development, Jen Gilbert proposes that we might do well to pay attention to the ways in which adulthood is constructed in relation to childhood. Drawing on both developmental theory and psychoanalysis she considers how the space between childhood and adulthood is often framed as a trajectory:

In positioning the normative as the ideal, if fictional, center of developmental theory, children and youth are monitored according to their proximity to or distance from that ideal. By positioning adulthood as an accomplishment, developmental theory constructs children and youth as deficient.²⁵

How might these perceptions apply to the creative output of children? When musical taste intervenes in the ways that we listen to the music of children, it further contributes to our perception and valuation of these works.

In the final debrief session, I asked band coaches to answer some questions that would give further insight into their perspective on the camper song. By asking who the campers were responding to, band coaches provided their perspectives on the song and its authors. Some

²⁵ Jen Gilbert, "Risking a relation: sex education and adolescent development," *Sex Education* Vol. 7, No. 1 (2007): 49.

participants viewed the camper song as negative, jaded and even fatalistic. While others were more curious about why the rockers felt this way about their current situation and the anxiety of growing up.

Fern: It's neat that they took us from defiance and they brought us to a hypothetical future where they are kind of miserable.

Lucia: They are just dreading growing up, I wonder why? It makes me wonder why is it a hard life? I moved here when I was twelve, from Chile.

Daisy: I wonder since we are talking about personal experience. I wonder how observant they are then of the adults in their lives.

Elise: It may not even be adults in their lives, just media

Curiosity is essential to the act of listening. To wonder why is a wonderful opening into imagining something different. Maxine Greene writes: "Of all our cognitive capacities, imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternative realities. It allows us to break with the taken for granted, to set aside familiar distinctions"²⁶ Imagination is a democratizing force and to listen becomes a gesture that makes space for collective problem solving and resistance.

One band coach didn't find the chorus negative. Instead, she found it inspiring.

Daisy: If you are having a down moment you could repeat the chorus: big beef hard life. It's like you are consoling yourself. You could put it on repeat. It sounds like to me: not a "woe is me". It's more "It is".

²⁶ Maxine Greene, *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1995): 3

What might make such a statement of fact threatening, detrimental or something to be corrected? In writing on sex education and adolescence, Jen Gilbert draws on developmental theories and psychoanalysis to trouble the ways in which adulthood is constructed in opposition to childhood. Specifically she considers adult responses to risk-taking in young people. She writes: "The paradox is that recognizing the tremendous psychological work of making a self in adolescence means seeing the spirit of hopefulness in adolescent acting-out while insisting that risks which put the self or other in danger are not hopeful."²⁷ Even within a feminist organization designed for the purpose of self expression, for girls to act-out their anger remains risky business that threatens something in their mentors. Band coaches are both attracted to and repelled by the defiance in *Big Beef! Hard Life!* What shifts are made possible when we are able to follow through on this attraction to opposition and reimagine it as hopeful? If this is a hopeful song instead of a negative song written by jaded pre-teens, what new tunes might be sung?

I too was drawn to the defiance of the young rockers' song. It reminded me of my most intimate relationship to a child. When my daughter was a toddler, she would often say no. No to shoes, no to sleeping, no to up, no to down, just no. She would say yes to smoothies, yes to cutting with scissors and yes to imaginary crocodiles. When toddlers refuse to consent, they hold firmly onto their dignity. They may do it without consideration for others or the ability to connect their actions to consequences but if we are lucky enough to glimpse these small acts of defiance, they can be hopeful reminders that another way of thinking and being is possible.

²⁷ Jen Gilbert, "Risking a relation: sex education and adolescent development," *Sex Education* Vol. 7, No. 1 (2007): 58.

Every day with Esmé I wonder if I am crossing boundaries that I shouldn't. I attempt to remind myself to balance my needs (which I often deem in her best interest) and hers. It is not ballet but modern dance; at times fluid and also frenetic and jerking. I wonder whether I am guiding her, controlling her, or both. I am filled with questions. What impact will my actions have on her development and on the way she learns? In a sexist world, where she is undervalued and discriminated against for being female, how do I help her preserve her dignity while respecting others? How do I model this behaviour, when I too sometimes feel unsure?

Esmé teaches me about much more than just power struggles. When she learns something new, she says "oh" in a matter of fact way. If I inform her that her shoes are on the wrong feet, her response is neutral, as she calmly switches them around. There is no shame in her not knowing or making mistakes. At some point in our lives, this detachment evaporates and is replaced with moments of anxiety, embarrassment and self-doubt. What happens after two?



Opinions! Opinions!
People are different! Have different Opinions!
OPINIONS!!!²⁸

Responding: If you can hear me clap twice!

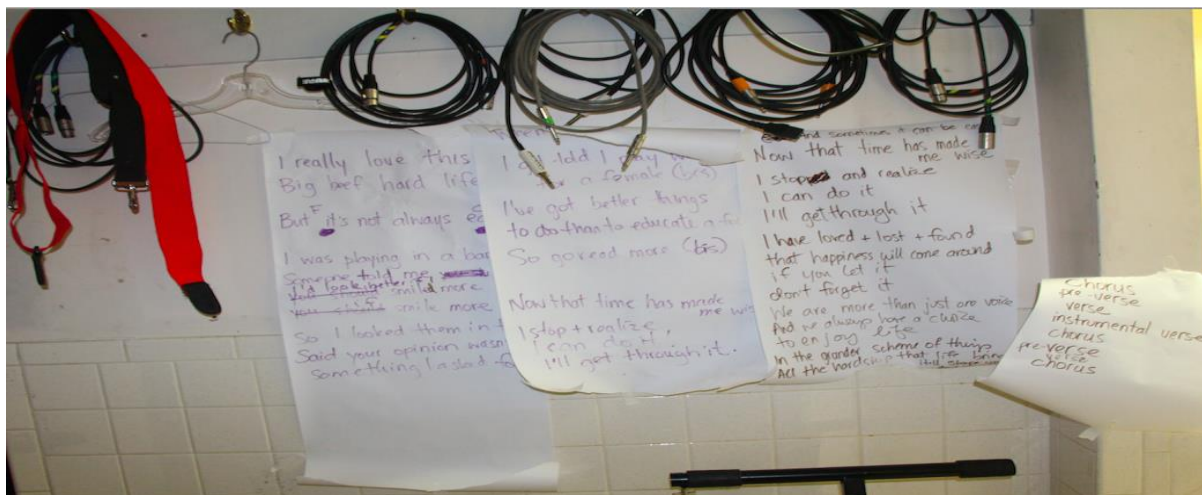
Not to be mistaken with call-and-response songs that engage audiences in an embodied experience of music and enliven the meaning of the rhythms and lyrics sung, “answer songs” have a long history in popular music as a way for songwriters and singers to elaborate an existing story, theme or melody. Answer songs, diss tracks and battle raps may subvert or add to an existing tune or narrative. In American popular music of the twentieth century, women and trans identified people have engaged with this form of response across genres. For example, soul singer Vicki Anderson offers a black feminist critique to James Brown’s *Superbad* with *SuperGood*, Liz Phair’s double LP *Exile in Guyville* is a song-by-song, albeit sometimes conceptual, rejoinder to the Rolling Stones *Exile on Main Street* and finally, Wendy Carlos radically reframes chamber music by experimenting with Moog synthesizers in a electronic reworking of Bach called *Switched on Bach*, effectively popularizing synthesizers which until the release of this work had been the domain of experimental music ²⁹. A more recent example is the song *The Body Electric* by *Hurray for the Riff Raff*. Songwriter Alynda Segarra addresses the ways in which popular music normalizes violence against women and trans people. She gestures

²⁸ Opinions written by the band Neon Eyes who formed at Girls Rock Camp during the summer of 2013. This song was a result of campers working through conflict within the song writing process. Neon Eyes, *Opinions* Summer, 2013, Girls Rock camp Toronto Compilation, Track 5, 2013, CD

²⁹ Thom Holmes, *Electronic and experimental music: pioneers in technology and composition*. (Psychology Press, 2002), 157-170.

to the murder ballad folk tradition with a mournful response that references the country and blues classic *Delia's Gone*.

Response songs often “speak back” to the powerful. In this scenario, my hope was to level the playing field. By putting band coaches in a position to engage directly with the songs of those they teach I was hoping to interrupt some of the ways in which power operates. Does the effort to respond to something mean that it is valuable to you? Besides this, any act of co-creation demands a certain vulnerability and risk. Much like the campers, the band coaches entered into this project with an openness required of song writing. On the way to composing a song, players will experiment with sound and play with concepts in order to organize their poetry into a structure. This improvisation requires a certain vulnerability. In their book on the relationship between improvised music and social change, Fischlin, Heble and Lipsitz describe improvisation as “a manner of speaking that requires listening.”³⁰ This happens within the dynamics of the song writing and in our situation, between the songs in conversation. This listening informs the response that follows.



³⁰ Daniel Fischlin, Ajay Heble, and George Lipsitz. *The fierce urgency of now: improvisation, rights, and the ethics of cocreation*. Duke University Press, 2013, xii.

(I Really Love this) Big Beef! Hard Life!

CHORUS

I really love this
big beef hard life

PRE-VERSE

But it's not always easy...

VERSE 1

I was playing in a bar
when someone told me I'd look better if I smiled more

so I looked them in the eye
said, "Your opinion wasn't something I asked for"

when I'm playing my guitar
I get told I play well for a female

I've got better things to do
than to educate a fool - so go read more

CHORUS

PRE-VERSE 2

and sometimes it's easy...

VERSE 2

Now that time has made me wise
I stop and realize I can do it
(I'll get through it)

I have loved and lost and found
that happiness will come around if you let it
(don't forget it)

we are more than just one voice
and we always have a choice to enjoy life

in the grander scheme of things
all the hardship that life brings
it'll make you - don't let it break you

There is a rich literature in musicology that makes the connection between the process of creating music and larger societal dynamics of power, place and self.³¹ This analogy extends to the inner workings of individual pieces of music or the elements that describe them. In this next section I would like to interpret the song *(I Really Love This) Big Beef Hard Life* with some of these dynamics in mind.

(I Really Love This) Big Beef Hard Life is introduced with a drum fill that makes no doubt about the reggae texture it employs, marked especially by the signature of the guitar chuck on the 2 and 4 beat. The drums are explosive at times as they colour the rhythm held down by the other instruments. The choice of reggae as a genre received some discussion during the song writing process. In part due to an intervention I made that unsettled me in my role as a novice researcher. In an attempt to maintain some focus within this research, I chose to analyze the songs as texts and the reflection that came out of the project debrief as opposed to the song writing process itself. There is much to be gained from observing the act of co-creation and this is a moment that falls somewhat outside of the envelope of this particular study but I believe it is worth taking a peek at since it speaks directly to the notion of listening and responding.

The choice of reggae was suggested initially as an antidote to the angsty defiance of the campers' song because of the cliché that it is a genre that promotes a laissez-faire attitude. While this is a dimension of its musical aesthetic, Daisy pointed out the revolutionary origins of

³¹ Reagon, Bernice Johnson. "Bernice Johnson Reagon – 'Coalition Politics: Turning the Century'." 12 01 2008. [She who stumbles...may not fall](http://shewhostumbles.wordpress.com/2008/01/12/bernice-johnson-reagon-coalition-politics-turning-the-century/) . <<http://shewhostumbles.wordpress.com/2008/01/12/bernice-johnson-reagon-coalition-politics-turning-the-century/>>.

Christopher Small, *Musicking: The meanings of performing and listening* (Wesleyan University Press: 2011).
Daniel Fischlin, Ajay Heble, and George Lipsitz. *The fierce urgency of now: improvisation, rights, and the ethics of cocreation*. Duke University Press, 2013, xii.

the genre and how reggae music as a form of resistance is in fact far from easy listening. To significant material effect, the commercialization of reggae and other forms of black music in North America and Europe has in fact shut out black musicians.³² In her book *Right to Rock: The Black Rock Coalition and the Cultural Politics of Race* Maureen Mahon writes: “in the music business as in the antebellum south, black resources provide white wealth.”³³ This appropriation favours a limited reggae catalogue in mainstream white radio stations that makes way for a shallower, common sense³⁴ understanding that glosses over the revolutionary aspects of the genre. I suspect that for ease of completion given the time frame, the band coaches did not adhere to a strict reggae format adding rock and pop elements.

The chorus picks up on the young rockers titular refrain of “Big beef! Hard life!” by joyfully, yet assertively defying the young rocker’s emphasis on a vast and harsh existence with the line “I really love this.” Using two separate voices to sing each phrase reinforces this further. During the debrief session, band coaches expressed that their song was a gesture of love and reassurance that they hoped would provide a sense of hope to *Rogue Emotions*. This is evidenced here in the celebratory chorus. However, the song resists blind optimism.

The first verse, borrowing the phrase “x person came up to us” from the original, does not shy away from expressing the gender discrimination these adult musicians continue to

³²Sikivu Hutchinson, “The Mysogynoir of Rock: Shredding while Black and Female,” *Huffington Post*, July 27, 2017, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/the-misogynoir-of-rock-shredding-while-black-and-female_us_59782cb7e4b0940189700dc0

³³ Mahon, Maureen. *Right to rock: the Black Rock Coalition and the cultural politics of race*. Duke University Press, 2004, 158.

³⁴ Here I am referring to Gramsci’s notion of common sense, which dian marino describes as “an oppression so deeply embedded in a culture that it is assumed to be natural and inevitable”. dian marino. *Wild garden: Art, education, and the culture of resistance*. (Between The Lines, 1997), 127.

encounter as women. There is a sense of urgency in this verse, manifested musically with double time.

I was playing in a bar
when someone told me I'd look better if I smiled more

so I looked them in the eye
said, "Your opinion wasn't something I asked for"

when I'm playing my guitar
I get told I play well for a female

I've got better things to do
than to educate a fool - so go read more

By speaking from their experience, this verse achieves the purpose of modelling resistance to condescension and disrespect.

The second verse is a departure from the commiseration found in the first. Continuing to fast forward into a hypothetical future adulthood. The message is meant to reassure the rockers that time will diminish their anxiety.

Now that time has made me wise
I stop and realize I can do it
(I'll get through it)

We are more than just one voice
and we always have a choice to enjoy life
in the grander scheme of things
all the hardship that life brings
it'll make you - don't let it break you

The song responds to the campers' imagined loneliness that comes with the responsibilities of adulthood. Here there are two messages given. On the one hand, a sense of collective power is suggested in the line "we are more than just one voice". This quickly turns around to put the onus on the individual to enjoy life. These two statements seem at odds. In

what ways might an “it gets better”³⁵ message minimize the social and structural realities faced by the campers?

“If you see the light in me
I will be your rising sun”³⁶

RESONANCE

Band Coaches Reflect on Process

After the song writing process was completed, we spent a couple of hours going over questions to engage the band coaches in a critical reflection of their experience. This included a guided meditation wherein I asked band coaches to think about what was going on for them when they were 12 years old, the same age as the campers. Coaches were given the opportunity to analyze their own song in writing.

Overwhelmingly, band coaches were satisfied with what they had written. They hoped to inspire the young people that they were writing to but recognized that their audience wasn’t necessarily clear throughout the song writing process. The themes that stood out to them were to enjoy life, keep going and be strong as a community.

When asked what it was like to respond to children band coaches felt that their response was an act of love, their intentions were good but that they were sensitive about coming off as “preachy”. There was an overwhelming sense that given time constraints and the project goals,

³⁵ This is in reference to a viral video campaign popularized by sex columnist Dan Savage as a response to gay youth suicide.

³⁶ Midnight Sun, Untitled, Summer 2016, Girls Rock Camp Toronto, Track 3, 2016, CD.

they could not help but speak from the position of “adult”. It was perceived that doing differently would require more resources of time or effort.

Lucia: We could have also agreed with everything and said ya you are right but we didn’t do that

Daisy: It might be tricky though. Are you being disingenuous? What you know, you know. You can’t unknow it. You would have to go way outside the box and imagine ourselves as 12 year olds now and go outside of our story.

Elise – When you are writing somebody else’s story in a song. It takes longer to put yourself in.

Certainly time lends itself to the potential for more iterations, more opportunities for conversation and the stimulus engendered by stepping away from a task. How else might we expand our ability to listen closely in order to imagine differently? dian marino describes “cracks in consent”³⁷ as the resistive moments that we have all experienced in informal and formal ways throughout our lives; the ways in which we may have disrupted the power structures around us in big and small ways . She suggests that one of the roles of an educator is to “help people organize their sense of resistance and alternative directions, and show that these elements have a long history within us all.”³⁸ Might this have been accomplished somewhere within the band coaches response song?

All of the band coaches wished to inspire the campers through their song yet when asked whether they believe their 12 year old selves would feel a connection to the music and lyrics, the overwhelming response was that they would not. Musically, the song was uplifting. While some band coaches felt that the chorus and the first verse may have been relatable, the second verse in which they attempt to quell *Rogue Emotions* feelings of anxiety about growing

³⁷ dian marino. *Wild garden: Art, education, and the culture of resistance*. (Between The Lines, 1997),130.

³⁸ Ibid.

up was unanimously considered unrelatable. For many of them twelve was an age of personal upheaval, either because of severe parental illness, immigration or financial precarity.

Coincidentally, many of these themes emerge in the *Rogue Emotions* song. Their 12-year-old selves inhabited a different world than their adult selves.

I then asked them if they thought their song would reach the members of *Rogue Emotions*.

Daisy: It could be taken as a bit of a dismissal of their feelings and the difficulties they raise but it could also be seen as similar because we did talk about struggles and difficulties at the beginning of our song.

Band coaches were eager to have a conversation with *Rogue Emotions* in order to learn more from their reaction to their response song. The writing process stimulated questions about how to listen more closely to campers and whether or not wisdom comes with age.

We also discussed the expectations we have of the children we work with. Here Jen Gilbert provides a different way of thinking about childhood:

While we are accustomed to seeing the adolescent as requiring an adult, both for its construction as a historical, social and psychological category, and in the ordinary sense that adults provide support for the social and psychological work of growing up through adolescence, we are less accustomed to considering how the adult needs the adolescent.”³⁹

³⁹ Jen Gilbert, “Risking a relation: sex education and adolescent development,” *Sex Education* Vol. 7, No. 1 (2007): 47.

How might a reciprocal approach to teaching look in the response song writing process? Instead of correcting expressions of displeasure, anxiety and rebellion, how might we see the ways in which we need young people to reflect our own circumstances and states of being?

An important way of relating is through taste. Band coaches grappled with how to put into action disparate experiences and tastes in musical genres. It was acknowledged that some campers are quite resistant to new genres of music, which poses a dilemma for band coaches who want to make room for self-expression but also want to expose the rockers to new types of musical expression. One band coach expressed that they wondered if they ever limit the genre or style campers might choose because of the language she uses. She wondered if she was rewarding certain preferences that were aligned with her own musical tastes. As much as band coaches were curious to have a conversation with the campers on their response song, I too am interested in sharing this report with band coaches to further grapple with some of the theoretical and practical ideas that have come out of the project.

Personal Reflections

In her introduction to *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects*, Deborah Britzman draws on the theorizing of Anna Freud to propose that education, teaching, learning and all forms of reflection on the practice is interference that would benefit from a different register of consciousness made available through psychoanalytic insight. Britzman questions education centering identity, focusing on building self-esteem and offering role models as heroes. She sees the current pre-occupation with the possibilities and limitation of pedagogy as an extension of education's desire for mastery, the will to power and the upholding of the binary between the

educated and the uneducated. She writes: “education does not solely reside in the teacher’s efforts, the good curriculum, and the question of locating the source of empowerment”⁴⁰.

Instead, Britzman seeks to understand how affect, specifically love and hate, play a role both in the social context, between teachers, students and institutions, and internally, within the learner or teacher themselves. At the centre of Britzman’s argument is a call for ethics in education that requires grappling with “difficult knowledge”. I understand this to mean knowledge that illuminates historical and social power structures, which in turn, inform incommensurable aspects of social relations. How might listening to the young rockers anxiety about growing up be difficult knowledge?

Initially I found this critique of critical pedagogies in education frustrating, perhaps because it disempowers both educators and learner and presents an ambiguity that is unsettling. To positive effect, the rhetoric of empowerment has been extremely useful at rock camp. However, there is much to be gained from recognizing the ways in which familial histories, experiences of violence and other internal or psychic mechanisms allow or prevent us from engaging in learning or reinforce entrenched ways of teaching. Recognizing how the unconscious plays a role in education demands that we reflect not only on the process of teaching and learning but also on the ethics of the practice of education itself. This analysis asks more of those engaged in educational practices. Indeed, it asks more of me as a researcher.

At moments during the research process I was left disappointed with how things were proceeding. Despite my efforts to believe what I knew deep down was the contrary, my

⁴⁰ Deborah P. Britzman, *Lost subjects, contested objects: Toward a psychoanalytic inquiry of learning*. (Suny Press, 1998), 6.

insecurities as a novice researcher prompted in me a fear that my interventions within the song writing process were disrupting the objectivity of my research. What dian marino called “lurking”⁴¹, or the act of withholding some of what I knew in order to allow the research participants to fully participate in the unfolding song writing process. This prompted a discussion during the second session with the participants about what they wanted out of our interactions. They were very open to me engaging with them as a way to stimulate their writing process but I remained cautious. They joked that I could be their band coach. To take on the role of both researcher and band coach seemed confusing. There were two moments that I think are worth noting. As stated earlier, I asked if they were comfortable with their choice of reggae as a genre and in another moment I found myself asking if anyone else wanted to sing in the microphone as two of the participants had become the default lead vocalists. In the first instance, I was uneasy with the choice because they had chosen it as a way to confront the original song. In retrospect, I had become attached to my own interpretation of *Rogue Emotions’* tune. Had I taken the original song too seriously? In what ways had I listened or not listened to the band coaches’ song? In addition I wondered whether my authority had interfered with the process. Had the song they wrote been influenced not merely by the original but also by my expectations of them? Certainly, song used as method would create an engaging and comfortable research experience for practitioners.

In and of themselves, the arts broadly speaking have qualities that set them apart from other modes of communication. Embodiment, symbolism, and other imaginative characteristics

⁴¹ dian marino. *Wild garden: Art, education, and the culture of resistance*. (Between The Lines, 1997),126.

provide “diverse languages for gaining insights into the complexities of the human condition.”⁴²

These democratizing aspects of arts-based practice and research do not erase questions of ethics in representation or responsibility that arise when the researcher makes use of the power that exists in the ability to “make others inhabit your story of their reality.”⁴³ The site of this dilemma of power in representation does not only play out in the form of a response or act of musical creation, it also occurs in the listening. What does an ethics of listening sound like?

If this project sought to disrupt the ways in which band coaches at Girls Rock Camp think about the collaborative song writing process, the act of teaching and the ways in which listening is crucial to the ways in which we respond, so to did it succeed in illuminating some of the ways in which controlling environments through programmatic design alone is futile without tending to the emotional worlds of those that come to play.

⁴² Ardra Cole and Gary J. Knowles. *Lives in context: The art of life history research*. (AltaMira Press, 2001), 59.

⁴³ Philip Gourevitch, *We wish to inform you that tomorrow we will be killed with our families: Stories from Rwanda* (New York: Picador: 1999), 181.

This is reality, this is for real

Don't call it a come back baby!

This is reality, this is reality

This is for real!!!!!!!!!!!!!!⁴⁴

AFTER PARTY

At the end of the project, I asked participants about how they would apply this experience to teaching at Rock Camp. Unanimously, band coaches wanted to develop their listening skills in order to create an environment that promotes participation, a sense of contribution and belonging during camper band practices. They expressed a desire to listen more carefully, to pay attention and be more aware of dynamics between band members.

A few coaches proposed mechanisms through which this could be achieved. For example, Daisy suggested that stickers with emoticons could be used to make the process of decision-making more anonymous and interactive. Some coaches also mentioned increasing the number of times and the variety of ways in which “checking in” takes place. Band coaches wanted to continue to use camper agreements as a basis for maintaining an ethical working dynamic. These reflections were a product of the song writing process itself. Band coaches also expressed how the debrief activity wherein they were guided through a mediation that brought them back to their 12-year old selves helped them think more deeply about what might be percolating within the young rockers. To this end I anticipate that creating training tools that encourages self-awareness in relation to group dynamics would be of benefit. I would like to explore ways in which to replicate this project in future volunteer training. To respond to a

⁴⁴ Pitch Black Stars, *Untitled* Summer 2016, Girls Rock Camp Toronto, Track 1, Girls Rock Camp 2016 Compilation, 2016, CD.

camper song, and to engage in critical reflection may prove to be a productive and context specific method for teasing out larger systemic power imbalances. Currently this is done through both anti-oppression training activities and discussion.

Incorporating listening activities may also be of value.

In addition to making adjustments to volunteer training, band coaches expressed an interest in learning how their response song might be taken up by campers. Creating an opportunity for both bands to come together for a long table discussion or an informal conversation, facilitating the writing of a new song by forming a mega-group of both bands or using the two songs as an example in a workshop scenario may generate further insights. These ideas may intersect with a forthcoming youth advisory committee or engage LITs (Leaders in Training). This project reminded me of the urgency of creating better and different structures while also tending to the affective aspects that underlay the learning and making of music at camp. This report offers a small reminder to organizers and staff: if you can hear me, clap twice!

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