

Participatory Research, Culture and Youth Identities: An Exploration of Indigenous, Cross-Cultural and Trans-National Methods

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Comment on This Article

Abstract

This paper addresses the benefits of participatory youth research for young people who do not have the opportunity to speak out in their own immediate familial and cultural environments. Different cultural methodological processes are described with the intent of illustrating the limitations of blanket participatory designs for young people of indigenous, cross-cultural and trans-national identities. The paper includes a detailed discussion of three individual research projects developed by the author. Two involved young women of Samoan descent in New Zealand and one involved the participation of young people of diverse backgrounds in New York. These studies accentuate the potential for participatory research methods to empower young people not only within the immediate research context but also across cultures and geographical locations.

Keywords: *indigenous; cross-cultural and trans-national research; New Zealand; Samoan; Pacific and New York youth; gender; hip-hop; participation*

Introduction

Participatory studies are multi-faceted and are shaped by the nature, context, objective and population of each individual project. Any attempt to talk about participatory research methods and practices as homogeneous is therefore problematic. According to West (1996, 4), participatory research develops new perceptions and welcomes “the ability of community members to establish questions and categories.” Skeggs’s work (1994) accentuates the way participatory action research (PAR) can minimize the researcher-researched hierarchy, while Schwandt (1997) describes the types of communities to which participatory research caters. In his words, “participatory researchers typically work with groups and communities experiencing ... oppression or colonization by a more dominant group or culture” (Schwandt 1997, 112). Other scholars refer to these communities as vulnerable populations, creating some debate about who the oppressed and vulnerable groups are. According to Leavitt (2006), vulnerable populations are those who are restricted from exercising any autonomous decision-making in the research process. Other studies, however, identify young people, indigenous and third-world communities as vulnerable and seem to talk about them as disadvantaged, disenfranchised and marginalized (see Cowan 2004; Garland and Chakraborti 2004; Waters 1999). This has triggered some reaction from cultural and critical theorists and post-colonial, third-world and non-western scholars, challenging the way “vulnerable” groups are positioned in social inquiry (Davis and Reid 1999; Hudak and Kihn 2001; Nayak 2003).

Gunaratnam (2003 cited in Garland et al. 2006, 424) asserts that categories such as “vulnerable” can generate “simplistic or ... deterministic ideas about the behaviors or experiences of such groups.” Moreover, authors such as Batmanghelidjh (2006), Fine (1994, 1996), Gutierrez (2004), Maira (2002, 2005) and Torre and colleagues (2001) call for a paradigm shift so that young people, minority communities and other vulnerable groups are seen as agents of social change. In turn, as asserted by Schwandt (1997, 112), participatory research and practices should be about increasing “consciousness raising – empowering people through the process of constructing and using their own knowledge.” Anzaldúa and Keating (2002) and St. Pierre and Pillow (2000) concur, recognizing that consultation and direct engagement between researcher and participant is a critical platform for local communities to produce their own accounts about their cultures and societies. Moreover, as pointed out by indigenous researchers Ormond (2004), Smith (2002) and Tupuola (2004), there is a capacity for indigenous and minority populations to use participatory research as a vehicle for personal, academic and community change.

A similar push for agency appears evident in some participatory studies involving young people. In recent times, there has been a growth in youth development projects and youth-centered studies that invite young people to share personal insights about gender, ethnicity, sexuality and faith (Bolatagici 2004; Chaudhry 2000; Maira 2002; Welton and Wolf 2001). Anthologies such as *This Bridge we Call Home* (2002), *All About the Girl* (2004), *Youth in Society* (2004) and *Youthscapes* (2005) are examples of recent texts that address these issues from various cultures and geographical locations. Moreover, they help to capture some of the global

directions and objectives of participatory research methods involving young people. In their introduction to *Youthscapes*, for example, Maira and Soep (2005, xvii) suggest multi-sited ethnographies to capture the links between young people's local "everyday practices and 'global' macro-forces." Furthermore, studies like The Young People Project in Europe by Rogers et al. (2004) include young people taking on leadership roles, while research by Cahill et al. (2004) highlights the benefits of a democratic and respectful research environment with *womyn* of color.

The questions of interest in this paper are: what makes a successful participatory research process for minority youth? Is it enough to add minority youth to participatory projects as research leaders, interviewers or advisors? Or must their roles be more substantial, so that their participation is not "token involvement, but active engagement where youth have real influence in decisions"? (Horsch et al. 2002, 1). Furthermore, what is it about the engagement process among the researchers, participants and their communities that distinguishes effective participatory projects from those that are not effective? Recent literature reveals mixed responses to these issues. Torre et al. (2001 in Cahill et al. 2004, 236) asserts that "critical to the success of a participatory action research process is the building of a community of researchers." Some scholars go further by suggesting that "insider" researchers become key players in bridging the gap between researcher and researched (Koloto 2000; Suaalii 2000). Others assert a need to break down intergenerational and intra-cultural hierarchies (Campbell and McLean 2002; Gelsthorpe 1993; Russell 1992; Rhodes 1994); while, more recently, there appears to be a strong push by young researchers themselves for democratic methodologies that assign more autonomy to the youth (Caputo 2000; Gutierrez 2004; Soep 2003). All of these perspectives are valuable, yet they do not seem to address the challenges that some minority insider researchers face as they strive to create both culturally appropriate and democratic research methodologies in predominantly hierarchical and geroncratic societies. Furthermore, there seems to be little mention made about the global potential for participatory research to connect young people across local and global spaces, as addressed in Maira and Soep's (2005) concept of "youthscapes": young people's local and global identities.

This paper aims to analyze the process of engagement referred to by Horsch et al. (2002) in greater depth, using three different cultural methodological frameworks: indigenous, cross-cultural and trans-national. These different cultural designs reflect my shifting positions as an insider researcher during these individual studies as well as the diverse cultural identities of the young people with whom I collaborated. The term "insider" is used in this paper to accentuate the connections I shared with the participants beyond the common denominators of age, gender and race. This paper also pays attention to some of the unique ways young people, together with a researcher, maneuver their way through some cultural and personal obstacles. The intention is to highlight not only the engagement processes between participants and researcher but also why they were effective, despite adversities. The perspectives of Cahill et al. (2004), Gutierrez (2004) and Torre et al. (2001) provide valuable starting points here.

Finally, this paper addresses the trans-national benefits of participatory projects, paying attention to the unanticipated outcomes that were initiated by the young participants themselves. The aim is to highlight the immense potential participatory practices have in creating global satellite spaces for minority young people, as well as to indicate the utility that Maira and Soep's (2005) concept of youthscape has within research contexts – in particular, the scope for developing a trans-national space so that young people across cultures can engage and debate with each other about issues that are meaningful to them.

Background

I was first introduced to the concept of participatory research as a graduate student encouraged by the words of Lather (1989, 19): "Collaboration ... allows more than one voice, and more than one interpretative stance, into the analytical text on an equal footing." This participatory concept was not entirely new to me, as its principles of collaboration, collective consultation and consensus seemed to reflect the cultural codes of conduct of the Samoan culture, of which I am part. What inspired me to develop a participatory project was the opportunity to provide a platform for young Samoan women, as their voices were missing in some of the renowned literature about Samoan societies. I also did not think it was appropriate for me to speak on behalf of Samoan women, despite our shared ethnicities. It seemed important that I learn and listen from my peers, and share with them my own background as a Samoan born in New Zealand and raised in predominantly westernized urban environments with English as my first language.

The way the Samoan culture is defined and interpreted can vary (see Tupuola 1993 and 1998), reflecting the heterogeneity of Samoan people. Thus, the Samoan methodological frameworks described here are not intended to be blanket methods for all Samoans. Rather, each of these methods was shaped by the participants' own understandings and first-hand experiences of the Samoan culture. The diversity of methods also reflects the level of impact and contribution the participants had in shaping the research process of each study.

This paper draws on three participatory studies. Two of the studies were carried out in New Zealand with young women of Samoan descent. The first study, which I undertook for my master of arts thesis (1993), involved young women born in Samoa, as well as those of Samoan ancestry born and raised in New Zealand, myself included. The second study, which comprised my doctoral research (1998), included second- and third-generation women of Samoan descent born in New Zealand who held diverse self-given ethnic identifications, ranging from Welsh Samoan, multi-ethnic and Kiwi to "no identity." The third study was a post-doctoral project in New York City (see Tupuola 2004). This study was initially a literature-based study about diasporic youth identities but, at the request of young people, evolved into several community participatory projects in Manhattan, New York, involving young people of diverse backgrounds. The ages of the youth in these three studies ranged from 16 to 29 years.

Participatory Research and the Samoan Female

There is a rich collection of ethnographic research that explores and analyzes the maturational and socio-cultural experiences of Samoan girls in traditional Samoan societies (Freeman 1983; Holmes 1987; Schoeffel 1995; Shankman 1984; Shore 1981). An ethnographic study about young Samoan girls that affected me personally and culturally was that undertaken by Margaret Mead. This ethnography, *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1943), described Samoan societies as relatively easy-going and relaxed, coupled with the suggestion that young Samoan women, unlike their western peers, were sexually carefree, with a relatively stress-free adolescence. More than 80 years on, this study continues to be a point of debate and reference for discussions about the Samoan female (see Côté 1994; Freeman 1983; Holmes 1987). What seems to be lacking in these debates and conversations are the effects Mead's study appears to have had on generations of young Samoan women, silencing their voices. A personal example that comes to mind is the unpleasant remarks I and some of my Samoan female peers received from some fellow students in our anthropology, education and psychology courses, associating us with Mead's sexually permissive subjects (see Tupuola 1993, 1993a). Where was our outlet to share and have our experiences validated? I refer to the effect as "silencing" because, whilst Mead's study spurs high-profile academic debate, the reaction of Samoan women themselves is often missing.

With my masters thesis, I wanted to create a safe space so that young women of Samoan descent would have the opportunity to respond to Mead's study, and to talk candidly about issues that affected their own cultural identities and personal well-being. I also wanted to revisit the concept of adolescence, being curious that its associations with independence, sexual development and individuality seemed far removed from the traditional cultural expectations held for the young Samoan female. Thus, the research method for this study was intended to encourage young Samoan women, myself included, to be agents of social change. I wanted Samoan concepts to stand up on their own in western academia and not be cultural condiments to spice up adolescent literature (see hooks 1989). Gilligan's (1988, xiv-xv) words became an important methodological guideline:

There is a need for new concepts and new categories of interpretation Specifically, psychologists need to incorporate the ... recognition of the dangers in imposing one set of ethnocentric categories on another population and take on ... the complexity of interpretation and the construction of alternative world views.

Indigenous Research Process

The following discussion briefly summarizes the cultural and participatory nature of the methodology, and includes feedback from the participants themselves. The Samoan elements of the methods framework were shaped around each of the participants' understandings and first-hand experiences of the Samoan culture. Therefore, the intention of the design of the research process for this study was for it to be unique and specific to these participants only.

I consulted with several young Samoan women about the recruitment procedures prior to the study. They suggested that I not be involved in the selection process, and that they themselves instead inform peers, friends, families, organizations, youth clubs and youth church groups about the study. After participant recruitment, I held an introductory meeting to give the participants the opportunity to meet with the researcher, and to ask questions before the fieldwork began. This meeting invited participants to engage directly with the researcher at the outset about the research topic, the proposed methodology, the timeframe, possible outcomes, ethical issues, publications and other matters. The following quotes from two young New Zealand-born women highlight some of the issues raised during this meeting, as well as the value of exchanging ideas with the participants before the fieldwork commences:

Oh confidentiality is really important to me, I'd never, like open up if I didn't trust anyone. So can we please be with, like people we feel comfortable with? (Tupuola 1993, 64).

I sometimes find it hard to say things out aloud, I'd find it easier to write my answers (Tupuola 1993, 63).

These responses highlight the importance of confidentiality. Some participants expressed concerns about being recognized, or of sharing their personal experiences with strangers, as they were afraid of being reprimanded if their comments were ever traced back to them.

Consequently, at the request of the participants, I created four smaller groups in place of the two I had initially suggested. Some participants chose to be in a group just with their friends, while others preferred to respond in the written form, with some participants wanting to respond in the Samoan language (see Tupuola 1993).

In place of a standard interview schedule, I prepared pages of quotations, paragraphs and extracts taken from a variety of sources such as Mead's ethnography, adolescent literature and written accounts about the Samoan female and Samoan culture (see Tupuola 1993). My intention was to capture a consensual and collective dialogue similar to those that take place at traditional village meetings in Samoa. The women were invited to select and respond to the quotations they found most relevant without any interference. Furthermore, these were only to be used as starting points for conversation, as two participants point out here:

Opportunities were given to us to choose which ones we wanted to comment on. The way this was set out gave us a chance to view my opinions openly. No pressure situations were present (Tupuola 1993, 58).

These quotes were very valuable and, like we just looked at them and thought, "Oh yeah, maybe or perhaps." They just helped but it wasn't a hindrance or anything (Tupuola 1993, 58).

These comments reaffirmed my role as the facilitator and reiterated the Samoan concept of *fa'aaloalo* (respect) in a manner that was conducive to participant comfort in this study. In traditional Samoan societies, respect often refers to young people deferring to their elders while, in this research, it meant for all participants to respect each others' viewpoints and experiences, irrespective of our age difference. As a result, the participants felt at ease to speak out against some of the traditional gender expectations of the Samoan culture, to display anger, pain, fear and other emotions. One particular session captured many emotions when the discussion about independence turned into a powerful dialogue and exchange about suicide, at the direction of several participants. I asked the women in this group if they were all comfortable discussing this topic, and when all agreed I offered to debrief with them individually or as a group at the end of our meeting. The participants asked to hold each others' hands for support as they began to share their stories. One example from a young New Zealand-born Samoan woman is included here:

I had a very close friend who committed suicide after living with her parent's aiga [family] ... her parents were in Samoa ... and she told me how she was treated like a slave and that she was very homesick. ... She killed herself ... But at the funeral ... it was sad 'cause when I spoke to her parents ... they believed their daughter was disobedient and ungrateful ... they were ashamed of her. But I knew what she was really like and what she went through 'cause she confided in me heaps, it's so unfair [breaks down and weeps] (Tupuola 1993, 305).

The willingness for these women to openly express sorrow, pain and despair captured the sense of trust and strong supportive unit that was developing in this study. What seemed to be taking shape was a unique dialogic engagement and mutual understanding between the researcher and participants that enabled many of us to share private experiences with each other without the fear of being ridiculed, ostracized or reprimanded. This may be because of our shared appreciation of the uniqueness of the experience, as in traditional Samoan societies, young women do not have a space to speak out about cultural, let alone private, matters. The privilege of speech is rightfully that of the elders (see Hereniko 1995). Furthermore, perhaps we were mindful that such candidness may not have been acceptable outside of the research environment, where some of us may have faced ostracism by our own immediate families (see Tupuola 1993 and 1996). In effect, the researcher as facilitator encouraged participants to engage in active dialogue within an environment that felt safe and non-judgmental. As one participant said, "this is probably the only safe place I can think of where I can really open up about this without being judged and punished."

In my thesis, I tried to capture the collaborative nature of the fieldwork, as well as the use of the Samoan language by some of the young women. Some western human development terminologies were replaced with Samoan concepts at the recommendation of the participants. For instance, *tuputupua'e* was used in place of "human development," and the terms *tupulaga*, *autalavou*, *taualuma* and *tamaita'i* were used instead of "adolescence." I also tried to capture the richness of our

conversations by developing a text that created an illusionary and equalized dialogue between the participants and renowned western adolescent theorists to shift the status of young Samoan women in the written text from object to, in the words of hooks (1989, 15), the “liberatory” voice. The participants received this process positively, as illustrated in the following response from an 18-year-old Samoan-born woman:

This is the first time that I have ever been asked for my opinion! This research encouraged me to really think about concepts and ideas from a personal perspective. We didn't face the pressure of using “scholar” lingo and it felt really liberating to be speaking back to authors who always speak for us.

From the Indigenous to the Cross-Cultural

The participatory and collaborative nature of the research process of my masters thesis proved effective, in that it respected and included the requests and recommendations of the participants from the very outset through the production of the written text. Furthermore, the research design and format of the meetings reflected the communication styles of all the young women and their understanding of the Samoan culture. The dynamic, honest and candid conversations amongst all the participants captured the active, respectful and reciprocal dialogic engagement taking place in this study.

In the second study, for my doctoral research, I used a similar methodology to analyze the ethnic and personal identity formation processes of second- and third-generation young women of Samoan descent. The research topic reflected my continual questioning of the concept of adolescence and my personal experiences as a woman of Samoan descent born in New Zealand. I was interested in learning why some of my experiences were different from those posited by some adolescent theorists in western academia. Forty young women of the age commonly known as adolescence (16 to 18 years) of Samoan descent, born in New Zealand, participated in the study. The specific focus was on personal and ethnic identity formation because, regardless of my age, these continue to play a significant role in my life.

Cross-Cultural Participatory Process

Scholars such as Hall (1977), hooks (1989), Katz (1993) and Kellehear (1993) inspired me to develop a participatory methodology, in which “theory should arise from the participants’ own analysis” (Hall 1977 cited in Comstock 1982, 8). The interpretation of the Samoan culture in the study was shaped by the diverse identities of young people of Samoan descent in New Zealand at the time. According to the literature about Pacific youth identities, there was an increasing cultural fusion taking place between their western worlds and their parents’ Samoan worlds (see Anae 1994; Macpherson 1996; Tupuola 1996). Moreover, there was an increasing number of Pacific youth pushing for a cultural renaissance through Polynesian hip-hop, Pasifika fashions, and performing and visual arts (Crosbie 1993; Lay 1996; Macpherson 1996).

To bridge traditional elements of the Samoan culture with the increasingly westernized and technological generations of young people of Samoan ancestry in New Zealand, a developmental version of the methodology was created for the pilot study, which could then be adapted as needed based on initial results. This design included four meetings, with activities intended to complement the diverse communication styles of the young women (oral, written, individual and group). Similar to my earlier study, the first meeting was to invite participants to comment on a selection of excerpts and quotations of diverse social and cultural interpretations and definitions of adolescence, personal and ethnic identity and New Zealand Samoan identities. What was ground breaking about this collection of quotations was the inclusion of excerpts by participants in my masters study. The second meeting was to invite participants to respond to two short films specific to ethnic and personal identity written and produced by youth of Samoan ancestry born in New Zealand. This was to acknowledge the increasing use of film, art and technology by Pacific youth to express themselves, as pointed out by Hereniko (1995, 17):

[as] more and more Pacific Islanders are moving into film and video to comment on their societies, scholars will need to learn how to "read" non-print media, if they are to gain a better understanding of the contemporary Pacific.

At the third meeting, I requested that participants complete a set of activities based on the model developed by the Canadian Teachers Federation (1990). These activities invited participants to respond to four scenarios that asked them to "Imagine If." The questions were designed for young people to write down suggestions concerning identity issues for their Samoan parents, educators and youth workers in their communities. The activity allowed participants to "talk back" to adults and authority figures within a non-geroncratic environment and without the fear of being reprimanded. The final meeting was an individual open-ended interview covering key issues of the research, including Samoan and western adolescence, traditional and contemporary Samoan cultures, ethnic identity and personal identity. The participants were offered the option to respond to the interview questions as a questionnaire.

I tested the research design in a pilot study, which proved valuable, as it resulted in a shortening of the list of quotations and excerpts at the recommendation of the initial participants. The editing process took place with consultation of three of the participants, and I also revised the interview schedule in consultation with other participants.

Participants in the main Auckland study were recruited through local community networks, including Samoan youth groups, churches, schools, sports clubs and after-school programs, with the assistance of four Samoan female colleagues and peers. The effectiveness of involving young Samoan women in the recruitment process was evident in the diverse ethnic self-identifications of the participants, as well as the diversity of neighborhoods (see Tupuola 1998).

Three introductory meetings took place and, similar to my earlier study, participants asked to be with their friends or to be in smaller groups for confidentiality reasons. Unlike my earlier study, however, no participant chose to respond in the Samoan language, and some of the women requested to have a focus group interview in place of the individual interview, as described in the following response:

It would be neat if we could all talk about the issues in the interview – um, all of us answer them as a group ... knowing that I have this support encourages me to speak out more, it's really, really good (Tupuola 1998, 110).

The offer made by several participants to meet with me after each research meeting to talk about any issues arising from the meeting and to discuss the progress of the study was a unique outcome. These young women became part of an advisory group that met for debriefing sessions to share their feedback on the research process. Some of the participants in the advisory group also became a supportive team for the researcher throughout the duration of the study. This rapport between the researcher and the young women was well captured in a participant's comment made anonymously at the final meeting:

I really enjoyed this research and I didn't want you Anne-Marie to feel alone, especially being from Wellington. You did a really good job with this study and it's because you showed us girls respect that we gave it back. You know how to practice the fa'aSamoa but at the same time you understand where we are from, being New Zealand borns. I hope this research was enjoyable for you as it was for us (Tupuola 1998, 110).

This response captures the fluidity of my own identity as the insider researcher. As pointed out by this participant, I had the ability to weave between the worlds of the traditional Samoan culture and, in her words, the "New Zealand born" Samoan. While our cultural ancestries and our place of birth are similar, we also shared a connection through our westernized worlds, through education, use of the English language and technology. These connections are important. However, as asserted by Chen (1992) and Mani (1992), it is also our differences that are important in the research process – thus my shift from the indigenous to the cross-cultural insider researcher.

The complexities of personal and ethnic identities were debated at great length in this study. I include here a short excerpt from a conversation that referred to the ethnic label "New Zealand born Samoan." At the time of this study, much of the literature about young Samoan people in New Zealand adopted this label as way of making a clear distinction between their peers born in the islands and those born in New Zealand (see Anae 1997; Macpherson 1996; Tupuola 1993). This push for cultural distinction by the New Zealand born Samoan generation was something that was also shared by these participants. However, as illustrated below, the distinction these second and third generation women wanted to make was from, in their words, "educated and elitist New Zealand born Samoans":

I am personally against this label "New Zealand born Samoan" ... it's so western, it's just another label that lumps us together and it's way too academic. Like, I'd never heard of it until this research and I kind of think, it's because the elitist, the Samoan academics are the ones who formed this label, not us, not someone like me (Tupuola 1998, 166).

Both my parents were born in New Zealand and they make a big deal about who they are and they expect me to walk around and say that I'm New Zealand born Samoan as well. My dad went to university here in Auckland and like he said it was a new thing in his time and like it was a really political thing, so I really believe this label ... was created by people like my parents, the educated Samoans, it's like they imposed it on the rest of us thinking that we would all agree, but like we don't. I think the good thing about this study was that you—Anne-Marie - never said to us, "you're this identity" ... you didn't shove it down us (Tupuola 1998, 167).

These comments and other conversations about cultural identity became critical reflection points for me as the researcher. How up-to-date were my understandings of younger generations of participants? Was I part of the elitist and educated Samoans that these women were referring to? Why did this study attract such diverse groups of young women of Samoan descent? The ongoing consultation and collaboration with my young female Samoan peers prior to the study, the continuing dialogue among all participants throughout the study and the debriefing sessions with the advisory group all helped to address these questions. The participatory engagements were also effective in recruiting a diversified group and in bridging traditional Samoan and western forms of communication in fieldwork activities. The following comment was a positive response about the use of short films and a reminder to me of how the arts are an important research tool:

If you want to include us young ones and really want to listen to us then you need to be up with our arts, our lyrics, our films, our language. Teachers, parents and researchers need to realize that we are not adopting the identities and ways of our immigrant parents, we are creating our own, as we are products of so many things. It was good that this study acknowledged this (18 years old).

The conversation that followed from this participant's response turned into an impromptu debate about labels, stereotypes and their restrictions. This exchange was unique because of the way participants confronted the Samoan dialogic hierarchy between the young, their elders and figures of authority by directing their dissent towards them:

There's all this research on traditional Pacific communities, studies focused on impoverished communities, but just because we're upper middle class, or mixed race, we're never invited to contribute, it's almost as if we don't exist (17 years old).

In New Zealand there is this real interest in poor Pacific Island teenagers But there's not enough studies, like this one, that invite young Samoan girls or Pacific youth from all walks of life and with diverse tastes in music and fashion to speak out. ... I hate hip-hop and I am sick and tired of getting that kind of music plastered all over the place by different agencies, um health, education, trying to get us Pacific kids interested. ... There is this ... narrow perception of the young Pacific Islander out there ... that ignores my reality and my needs (18 years old).

Within the context of this study, these powerful responses illustrated a critical dialogue taking place. Why were these women not hindered by my presence as a researcher when they shared these criticisms about research? I asked them this question at the end of the meeting, and they responded with the following:

I saw this as my only chance to let this all out – where else can I say all of this? I hope that through this study my words will get out there to the public so they can see how this affects me (16 years old).

Who can we talk to about how we really feel? I've been raised to never question my teachers and like those in authority and so I'll be keeping my feelings all inside of me ... until now, until this study It's only because this study involves us that I feel okay to speak out ... without you judging us (18 years old).

These responses are reminders of the difficulty some young people of Samoan descent have in sharing their opinions with those in authority. Part of this may have to do with their Samoan affiliation; part may reflect the lack of opportunity provided for them to share their views with influential figures in the areas of education and health and research. This study was seen, in the opinion of these young women, as an effective mediator between them and, in the words of a 17-year-old participant, "researchers, agencies, teachers and those in authority." My impression was that this study was becoming a vehicle for these young women to talk back to adults. However, when the topic about young Pacific Islanders in New Zealand arose, the focus shifted to young people themselves, as seen in the following:

This is hard to say but I think my generation are used to getting all these handouts, um, there's this real dependent mindset kind of thing and so I always say to my Pacific mates why don't you just go for it ... some of them are really bright, but for some reason they just fulfill the stereotype that Pacific kids are dumb (16 years old).

There's this dominant voice in our Pacific communities, like it's always the same young people and teenagers talking for us, and they go on about the same thing, like hey be a good sports person, um, be a great singer or rap artist or something, but you hardly ever hear them say, do your best and do well at school, get a job (18 years old).

At the time of this study, the issues raised here were not widely discussed in the academic, educational and research communities I was part of in New Zealand. I analyzed my own associations with Pacific youth to find some agreement with these women. In my experience, there did seem to be a tendency in the literature to associate Pacific youth with hip-hop and the same speakers did seem to be continually invited to speak on behalf of young Pacific communities. Although these comments were intended for those outside of this study, they became critical learning points for me in my future studies. An interesting process was taking place here – the objective of this participatory research was to encourage a critical consciousness amongst these women, yet the challenge was now for me the researcher to be an agent of social change within my own circle of researchers, educators, academics and policy-makers.

Trans-National Research, Bridging Cultures

Questions were left hanging after my doctoral study about the increasingly transient identities of some of the participants, as well as the tendency to adopt ethnic self-identifications that did not reflect their genealogy. In this post-doctoral research, I set out to explore Pacific diasporic youth identities from a global perspective by exploring the youth cultures and identities of their African, Latino and Hispanic peers in the United States to have a better understanding of why an increasing number of Pacific youth in New Zealand seemed to be adopting self-created identifications strongly affiliated with American hip-hop and gangsta cultures. New York City was the location of this study, with its large Latino, Hispanic and African-American population and historical connection with the creation of the hip-hop culture (see Bhattacharyya et al. 2002; Kymlicka, 2000). Moreover, studies like Henderson's (1999) identify the connection some Pacific youth have made with their New York peers through contemporary media and popular culture.

To fully participate in the lives of young people in the United States and to understand the nuances of their multiple worlds, I spent a lot of time interacting with young people by attending youth-directed activities ranging from drama performances, art exhibitions, cultural events and activist rallies to underground rave parties, spoken-word battles and hip-hop gigs. I was also invited to contribute to and participate in some of the local community youth events and conferences and to dialogue with youth workers, students, youth educators and youth activists about global identities. Through my face-to-face interaction with diverse youth, I came to appreciate and familiarize myself with the varied ways young people were expressing themselves through different slang, accents, street talk, hand signals, street tags, graffiti, street gang colors and symbols (see Tupuola 2001a).

My entry into the lives of these youngsters was based on our shared histories and journeys as "marginalized" peoples. We shared an understanding about transient and fluid ethnic and personal identities, as well as experiences of cultural displacement, colonialism and prejudice, despite our geographical differences. However, our migratory, political, diasporic, cultural and racial connections and histories were different – thus my shift from the cross-cultural insider researcher to the trans-national. My role in the context of this study was to create a space for young people to dialogue with each other despite their geographical distance. The

objective of the trans-national participatory method was to facilitate a trans-cultural dialogue between young people in New York and Pacific youth in New Zealand.

In consulting with young people of African, African-American, Hispanic, Asian and Latino backgrounds, I had to keep the design of this participatory study flexible and multi-media to open up dialogue for young people across diverse cultures from the point of view of the author, performer, lyricist and filmmaker (Houston 1992; Kellehear 1993). The youth suggested I meet with young people in their own chosen environments — such as cafes, art galleries, youth rallies and youth programs. Furthermore, some of the young artists requested to respond through hip-hop and rap lyrics, visual arts, scripts, poetry and personal journal entries (see Tupuola 2001a; 2001b).

In order to encourage a trans-cultural dialogue between the young people in this study and the participants in my two previous studies, I prepared quotes, comments and poems about the ethnic self-identifications of New Zealand Pacific youth with the assistance of participants from my doctoral study. I also prepared a selection of short video clips (drama and music), all written by young Pacific Islanders addressing identity issues in New Zealand. I invited a small group of young people of African, African-American, Hispanic, Latino and Asian backgrounds to respond to the design of this study as well as the material I had planned to use prior to the fieldwork. Overall, the reception was positive and they were excited about spreading the word about this study to their peers, as captured by their feedback:

It was cool ... reading quotes, poems and interviews by teenagers in New Zealand and I was really taken back by some of the short films that the kids over there produce, very powerful (16 years old).

This is a unique design ... I like that it doesn't use the standard interview ... the quotes are powerful and I really liked the videos ... this is going to get a lot of interest from my friends ... it's a different and awesome way for us to learn about kids overseas (20 years old).

The initial group of New York youth helped to recruit young people of African, Asian, Latino, Hispanic, Middle-Eastern and Pacific Islander background. The suggestion to meet participants in their own environments proved effective for young people of Pacific Islander background who lived outside Manhattan. As I listened to their experiences of identity, their reluctance to acknowledge their Pacific ancestry became evident:

If you asked me what I was I'd say Latin King straight up. I'm no Samoan, my parents are, but I don't go there (17 years old).

Straight up? I'd rather say I was Chicano or Latin man, not Pacific Islands ... 'cos it's just easier, no one knows the difference over here, so I just pretend to be whatever, you know Latin or something, becous I always get mistaken for one of them anyways (19 years old).

Why did these young people opt for these identifications? Was it of their own choice or were there other reasons based on their individual circumstances? When I asked them these questions their responses implied several things — convenience, a longing for a local identification and survival, as illustrated in the following:

That's tough ... usually I just pass off as a Mexican or Hispanic and I go along with it. I speak fluent Spanish and that's how I survive in New York. I guess it's not so much a matter of choice but a way of surviving I guess, eh (19 years old).

When our conversations turned to the issue of survival, I shared with them some of the findings of my doctoral study, including the growing emulation of young Pacific Islanders in New Zealand with the American urban, “gangsta” lifestyles. Their responses were mixed. One respondent seemed startled that youth in New Zealand showed an interest in their lifestyle. His impression of New Zealand was that it was peaceful and tranquil and that youth from there in his words, “had no reason for gangstas.” Other participants appeared sympathetic and placed the onus of gangsta culture on structures outside young people’s control or making:

It's hard, 'cos I can't judge them, I don't know what's happenin' in their lives. ... if some of the kids are doing it to be cool, then that's stupid, 'cos being a gangsta is more than lookin' hip, talkin' the slang, and taggin' your turf, it's like risking your life. I mean, I seen Once Were Warriors and man, those New Zealanders live like some of us and, maybe those Pacific kids are struggling and trying to make some kind of living. I wish they wouldn't turn to the gangsta life, I'm only 19 and I'm always living in fear I don't want that for those kids over there (19 years old).

You shouldn't blame the kids, I mean, if kids in New Zealand are joining gangs, then that says a lot about where New Zealand as a society is going. I mean, that's why kids here are in gangs because, like me, I don't have a family, I'm poor, I face discrimination as a colored person and the list goes on. So I mean, it has to do with economics, politics, things that those teens have no control over (19 years old).

There was a genuine concern among the American participants for the well-being and welfare of their New Zealand peers. The quotes and excerpts helped to capture the experiences of Pacific youth in New Zealand and were, in the words of one participant, “a powerful way of connecting us in some way; I felt I got to know them through their words.” These “words” inspired a participant to put me in contact with a couple of ex-gangsta youth workers. When I asked them what advice they had for Pacific teens thinking about joining a street gang, their response was “Don’t do it!” When I invited them to talk more about the current youth gang culture in New York, they assisted me in meeting with some of the young teen gangs they worked with. The following comments emerged about the addictive nature of the gangsta culture:

I can't say to one of my peeps, hey bro' give up the colors, 'cos, it's like dissin' the gang and like this is a small hood and like everyone will hear about it ... if I can help someone, like the kids in New Zealand, then hey, I mean I will because I don't see any consequences, I mean, if they are only thinking about it, then, nah, my advice would be don't do it man, 'cos it's like an addiction (17 years old).

I'm sitting here in all my colors and stuff, asking you to tell kids in New Zealand not to do the gangsta thing ... It's contradictory man, but it's like, I don't like the way I am and I have my regrets doin' what I'm doin' but and I don't want them kids to be regretting stuff too (17 years old).

As we talked more about the complexities of the street gang culture, the conversation took a turn towards popular culture and hip-hop and rap. Some of the teens expressed anger with the way some music videos were, in the words of one young man, "gettin' kids interested in gangsta." As I shared with them quotes from the participants in New Zealand about hip-hop, a young female responded with her definition: "Hip-hop is like a bridge between the them and us, it's a powerful way to get our perspectives out to the masses, so the adults, institutions, oppressors have no choice but to listen to us." Another participant agreed and continued to say, "hip-hop is about expression, but like this one [points to quote] by this kid in New Zealand about gangsta rap and stuff, nah, that's just commercial man, it's not real, we gangstas, it's not like we sit here and rap all day, that's the impressions these videos give out."

When I began to describe some of the Pacific hip-hop trends in New Zealand, a couple of participants interrupted with somewhat "heated" and emotive responses, as expressed in the following:

I don't mean to be hard but I'm really sick of kids from around the world taking our music, actin' all thug ... usin' our language ... like some kind of commodity. I think they just miss the whole point. Hip-hop and rap came about for a cause, to get us out of the ghettos, to politicize our situation, but now, everyone around us is benefiting from it except for us, those of us who live here. Look at where I live! I'm still here in the ghetto, nothing has changed for us! (18 years old).

You know we talk about this kind of thing a lot because, like she says, everyone else is you know, getting all cool because of it, or ... you know young people are making money out of it ... I mean, the kids over there are just hypocrites because they're just helping out the corporate economy not those who really need it (19 years old).

These participants held strong views about the globalization of hip-hop and the commercialization of gangsta culture. However, as a young female participant claimed, "it's not just kids in New Zealand ... it's happen' elsewhere ... it's good y'all talkin' about this 'cos – we couldn't say this out there [points to window] ... we'd be

called racists or somethin' but it's about us taking ownership back of our own culture, 'at's all."

I showed the youth a hip-hop video clip by a young Samoan hip-hop artist, King Kapisi, in response to these comments; the setting in the video is a traditional village in Samoa with the rap artist dressed in traditional Samoan attire. The message in this video is to retain strong Samoan identities. The tone of the New York youth's responses changed and became very positive after they watched the video, as these comments illustrate:

That's impressive; I like how they're not all straight out copying us Americans, I mean, it's good to hear that they are making it more of their own ... I guess what I was saying last time was that if kids are goin' to take on hip-hop abroad, then it's important that they know the history and to go from there (17 years old).

I hope the Kiwi kids set a good example for some others, I mean, it's cool they are indigenizing it and all. I mean, I was really talkin' to those New Zealand kids who are doing the straight copying, I mean, they are the ones who need to think about what they're doing (16 years old).

The dialogue that took place in this meeting between young Pacific people in New Zealand and teen gangsters in New York highlights the unique way participatory research methods can bridge different cultural and human experiences between different groups of young people. The excerpts and quotes from the young people in New Zealand became, in the words of one participant, "human starting points in our conversations ... they weren't words from a textbook, these [were] from living, real, human lives."

As I reflect on the participatory nature of this study, the consultation and collaboration that happened between the young people in New Zealand and New York were invaluable. The unique design was established through ongoing consultation with young people at the outset of this study. An effective feature, at the recommendation of young people, was the different venues for this study (e.g., hip-hop venues, art galleries, rave parties and film studios), reflective of the diverse youth involved. The participatory process of this study differed from the previous studies in that the engagement process was in some sense an imaginary dialogue between youth from different geographical spaces; my role as the trans-national researcher was to facilitate this dialogue and relay the words of the New York youth back to Pacific youth in New Zealand.

Youthscapes within Research Contexts

Following my experience in New York, I was able to share the responses and experiences of the young people there with young people of Pacific descent in different cities in New Zealand. I refer here to a workshop that I participated in during a summer youth program in Auckland. This was led and developed by Pacific youth of Tongan, Samoan, Niuean, Fijian and Tokelauan backgrounds with the intent to have young people, youth workers and young educators of Pacific descent

brainstorm about various issues relating to identity. An issue that caused some debate was the global influences of hip-hop and gangsta culture. Some attendees supported a return to traditional cultures while others called for an acceptance of a global youth identity. What were missing at this point of our discussion were the voices of young people from abroad in order to give another perspective. As the dialogue turned to the influences of the United States, I was intrigued by some of the generalizations made about hip-hop, as well as gangsta culture in New York. I contributed to this discussion by citing comments by participants in my study in New York and screened video clips for the youth that highlighted the identity challenges facing young people in the United States.

The following comments were made anonymously in the final evaluation forms of the workshop. They highlight the potential for participatory studies to mediate current global debates about youth identities and cultures:

It was refreshing to listen to these, they're insiders right? So, here we are talking about them as if we are them and then Anne-Marie's work put it all into perspective ... very valuable (19 years old).

When Anne-Marie read out the quotes about gangstas and stuff, I was shocked, I mean, you know it was an eye opener for me Like in my 'hood, the girls are all joining up and like in my school, there's lots of gangs ... and a lot of it is to be cool ... I wish they were here to listen to these USA kids' advice, they need to hear it (14 years old).

The sharing of perspectives across different cultures (Pacific, New Zealand, United States) encourages an exchange of perspectives that is based on human experience rather than on generalizations and preconceptions. Participatory research methods are critical in enabling these exchanges and in creating meaning through dialogic engagements that embrace young people's words in their many forms.

From Research Participant to Agent of Change

According to Schwandt (1997), participatory research should be about consciousness-raising and empowering people through the construction and use of their own knowledge. My studies with young women of Samoan descent in New Zealand and diverse youth in New York are illustrations of the unique ways participatory research processes enable young people to empower themselves through active, dynamic and dialogic engagement both in the fieldwork and in written texts. The development of each method involved active and ongoing collaboration and consultation with the participants. The roles of the participants were substantial and had real influence on the decision-making processes in the research (see Horsch et al., 2002).

These studies also capture the fluidity of participatory research, symptomatic of the ongoing shifts (personal, cultural, political and relational) taking place amongst the participants, with the researcher and within themselves. The tone of voice, the degree of engagement and critical thinking, and the direction of the conversations shifted in tune with the interests of the participants, their emotions and their

insights. It was the participants who steered, directed and fine-tuned the research frameworks so as to feel safe to share their stories as immigrants, students, artists, activists, performers and young people. The democratic nature of these research designs had to be implemented with caution, however, for while it is important for young people to speak out with agency, the risks that this may bring to the well-being of some of the participants had to be considered. Within traditional Samoan contexts, the concept of participation is not often associated with young people; creating a participatory research method to prioritize youth participation therefore conflicted with Samoa's geroncratic hierarchy of speech. In effect, the indigenous and cross-cultural Samoan methodologies here are examples of a paradigm shift and are instrumental catalysts for social change. Young women utilized these studies to speak out about very private matters, to encourage each other to think outside the box and to step outside their comfort zones.

The third study in New York City highlights the potential and capacity for participatory research to capture the "lived" worlds of young people. By consulting and collaborating with young people at the outset, this study embraced the unique ways young people use art, music, film and written scripts to tell their stories. As the trans-national researcher, I became a cultural mediator between young Pacific people in New Zealand and the young people in New York. The sharing and exchanging of quotes, poems and video clips of young people in New Zealand with their New York peers formed, in the words of a participant, "cultural bridges." To some extent, the participatory and inclusive nature of this study also helped to create an illusionary dialogue amongst young people from diverse backgrounds. It seemed that by providing a space for these exchanges to take place, human connections were being made that at times were emotional and powerful.

Maira and Soep's (2006) concept of youthscares seems fitting and deserves further exploration within participatory research contexts. As shown in my New York study, young people were identifying with both their local and global worlds and were seeking unique ways to articulate these. Furthermore, this study was effective in connecting groups of young people from different backgrounds and cultures and in sharing their viewpoints about controversial and sensitive issues.

Overall, the studies here illustrate the diverse ways participatory research can benefit young people who do not have the opportunity to share, exchange and engage with other young people about issues most pertinent to them. The features of participatory research, such as agency, critical consciousness, empowerment and change also need to be viewed within appropriate cultural contexts. In some societies and cultures, these are privileges inaccessible to young people. Thus, issues relating to voice and visibility need to be interpreted with caution. In the context of the Samoan studies, voice for the young women was not just about speaking up and talking back in the research process, but also about having their words stand on their own in the written text and within academic contexts. Their view of participatory methodology is recognized by Hall (1977), who argues that theory should come from the participants' own analysis.

Finally, it seems that, in an era where young people are connecting with their global peers, there is a need for participatory research to facilitate more interconnections, perhaps by developing global satellite research sites so that young people have a space to participate and engage in active dialogue and debates amongst each other without the fear of reprimand and ostracism.

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