

Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation Project Proposal - Claudia Mitchell

CIRCLES WITHIN CIRCLES: GIRL-LED TRANSNATIONAL DIALOGUES TO COMBAT SEXUAL VIOLENCE

PROJECT OBJECTIVES: The project will support a Canadian initiative on girl-led transnational dialogue on sexual violence and well-being that has the potential to shift the agenda from one that is often top-down to one that sees participatory work with girls and young women as informing community and policy dialogue. This objective will be accomplished through several key activities: (a) a Think Tank on girl-led initiatives, media-making, and participatory dialogue involving girls and young women along with key global and national players in girls' education, including a core group of researchers all working in the area of participatory research with girls in global North and global South countries, and Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation scholars working with Indigenous girls to combat sexual violence; (b) follow-up virtual conferences; (c) a series of media-making workshops in 9 countries with girls and young women on sexual violence and well-being; (d) cellphilm festivals; and (e) the establishment of a travelling digital exhibition of girl-produced digital productions, so as to contribute to transnational dialogue. In addition to advancing the study of girl-led methods in relation to sexual violence, the project will lead to the establishment of a Circles within Circles global network of researchers, NGOs, and girls and young women focusing on dealing with sexual violence and working towards well-being.

CONTEXT: Gender Equity and girls' empowerment has long been on the agenda for Canada in relation to its work with global partners. The African Girls' Education Initiative (AGEI), which was UNICEF's centerpiece and, which predates the current United Nations Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI), was started in 1994 with funding from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), now Global Affairs Canada (GAC). It was based on the premise that by targeting girls, the program would reach a major proportion of the population of children who have been denied access to education. Since that time, Canada has led an impressive range of global initiatives on gender equality, and in its work through Global Affairs Canada, International Development Research Centre (IDRC), and various funding agencies such as SSHRC, has consistently advanced and supported the agenda of gender equality. The Global North, particularly through the development platforms of Canada and Nordic countries, such as Finland, Sweden, and especially Norway, have been leaders in gender equality programming and have provided both high level and 'on the ground support' to a number of countries engaged in transformation towards democracy and equality, particularly on the African continent.¹ This year's Foundation Conference "Building Communities: Ideas for the future of Citizenship and Belonging" highlights Canada's key role as a world leader in advancing discussion about democracy, and citizenship and belonging, particularly in the context of participatory dialogue through participatory methods.

¹ Over the course of the program, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided US\$ 45,097,576 to support AGEI activities in a total of 34 countries, two Regional Offices, and UNICEF Headquarters. Specifically, during AGEI-1 (1996-2000), Norway provided \$22,722,072 that was used to support work in 18 countries. During AGEI-2 (2001- April 2004), Norway provided another \$22,375,504, that was used to support continued work in the original 18 countries and initiate new work in an additional 16.

One of the legacies of globalization is the increased recognition of a borderless world that erases an ‘over there’ and ‘over here’, and which diminishes some of the distinctions between the idea of Global North and Global South. Nowhere is this more apparent than in concerns about the well-being of girls and young women in relation to sexual violence. As Canadians, we have become increasingly aware of the shameful situation of the many missing and murdered Indigenous girls and women, and statistics that note that Indigenous women are 2.5 times more likely to be victims of violence,² and 6 times more likely to be killed,³ than non-Indigenous women. The rates of violent crime against women aged 15 to 24 are 42% higher than rates for women aged 25 to 34, and nearly double the rates of women aged 35 to 44.⁴ World-wide, these numbers are particularly shocking in relation to girls and young women: over 120 million girls (one in ten) report some form of sexual violence.⁵ This concern for the well-being of girls and young women was evident at a roundtable on gender and circumpolarity that I co-convened with my colleagues at the Gender Forum at the University of Mid-Sweden in October 2015. In bringing together feminist scholars from Norway, Sweden, Russia, Finland, and Canada it was clear that while ‘North’ occupies very different meanings in these various countries (particularly in relation to Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples), there are many critical convergences when it comes to the lives of girls and young women, with high rates of sexual violence and challenges to their well-being clearly at the top of the list. Speaking of the popular perception that Nordic girls are the “ones who won the lottery”, Finnish scholar Elina Oinas (2011) reminds us of the increasing recognition of the limitations of talking about these critical convergences about ‘the north’ in the absence of dialogue with and about the social and material contexts of ‘the south.’⁶ The Sustainable Development Goals that call for good health, well-being, and gender Equality highlight the significance of a global agenda; how Canada can take a lead in this new agenda, both ‘from the inside’ of ensuring that we look closely at issues of girls’ and young women’s safety, security, and well-being, as well as methodologically in relation to sustaining participatory dialogue, is a focus of this project.

FRAMING THE PROJECT: The proposed project will be housed in the McGill Institute of Human Development and Well-being (IHDW), which I direct, and is supported by the technologies and methods of the CFI-funded Participatory Cultures Lab that I set up in the Faculty of Education in 2011. As such, this project offers a unique platform on which to build and create synergy between and amongst a number of Canadian and internationally funded projects related to girl-led initiatives that combat gender violence and deal with threats to their well-being. At the center of my work in the Institute and the Participatory Cultures Lab is the study of local knowledge and ‘learning from the ground up’ through the use of participatory visual methods using cameras, cellphones, and other digital platforms in photovoice projects, cellfilm production, and digital storytelling. This work supports practices that draw on

² Violence Against Women in Canada Fact Sheet, Status of Women Canada (2013), p. 2. Available at: <http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/rc-cr/pub/violence-canada-eng.pdf>

³ Homicide in Canada, 2014, Statistics Canada, p.14. Available at: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2015001/article/14244-eng.pdf>

⁴ [57] Violence Against Women, 2013, Statistics Canada. Available: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/130225/dq130225a-eng.htm>

⁵ <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>

⁶ Oinas, E. (2011). *The girls who won the lottery*. Paper presented at the conference on Contemporary, Girls, Embodiment and Social Change. Helsinki.

participants' voices in finding solutions to the critical issues of sexual violence and the creation and maintenance of well-being.

As the co-founder and Editor-in-Chief of *Girlhood Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* (GHS), an award winning journal dedicated to the idea of girl-method 'by girls, with girls and for girls', I have been in the position to forge links between and amongst a number of national and regional contexts (e.g. Russia and Nordic research; North America and Nordic countries). I have convened various Special Issues of the journal, guest edited by leading girlhood scholars, on topics such as Girls and Post-Conflict (GHS 3:1); Nordic Girlhoods (GHS 6: 2); Girlhood and Post-socialism (GHS 8:3); and Indigenous Girls (GHS 9:2). The launches of these Special Issues have often been complemented by regional face-to-face and virtual events in Moscow, Sundsvall, Helsinki, and Montreal, so that the knowledge production has extended beyond the idea of 'just a journal'. As an organizer of various national and international conferences on girlhood, I have been in a position to support the development of new Special Issues: The "Girlhood and the Politics of Place" conference I co-convened in 2011 led to a themed issue of GHS and an edited collection. Many of the papers from the 2016 Girlhood Conference convened by the International Girls' Studies Association (of which I am a member of the Steering Committee) will become a Special Issue of GHS.

The national and global contexts in which I am currently working have afforded opportunities for projects with girls and young women that seek to ensure that this work is girl-led. This has meant refining participatory visual methods as approaches that capture local knowledge, and help to make that knowledge available for others through exhibitions, screenings, and digital curation.

Learnings: What is apparent in all 4 sets of initiatives (See Figure 1) that are currently taking place⁷ (all of which are ones where I am the Principal Investigator or Co-investigator) is that there is a great deal to be gained when it is the voices of girls and young women that are shaping knowledge about their own lives, and where there is the possibility for dialogue across geographic and socio-political contexts. We are seeing, for example, that young girls and young women are more likely to be *risk-takers* in relation to issues that affect their lives in ways that adults might not be. They are also *innovative*, as we have seen in the vast range of technologies they have been willing to test out and the artistic platforms that they have seized, when it has been possible to speak out. More than anything, we are seeing that the time frames for girls and young women are very different from what is typically seen in adult-driven projects. There is an *urgency*, and so, the participants are typically action-oriented, and they want to see things happen.

⁷ Although this project "Evaluating the Potential for Improving Child Safety and Security Through Housing and Human Settlements Programming in Kenya. Rooftops Canada Children & Violence Evaluation Challenge Fund." in Kenya has ended, it led to a new project "Creating better economic opportunities for women in Nairobi slums through improved childcare options" in similar communities (and with some of the same researchers) funded through IDRC's GRoW program, in which violence against children is also a key feature of study, although the theme of the study is on barriers to women's empowerment.

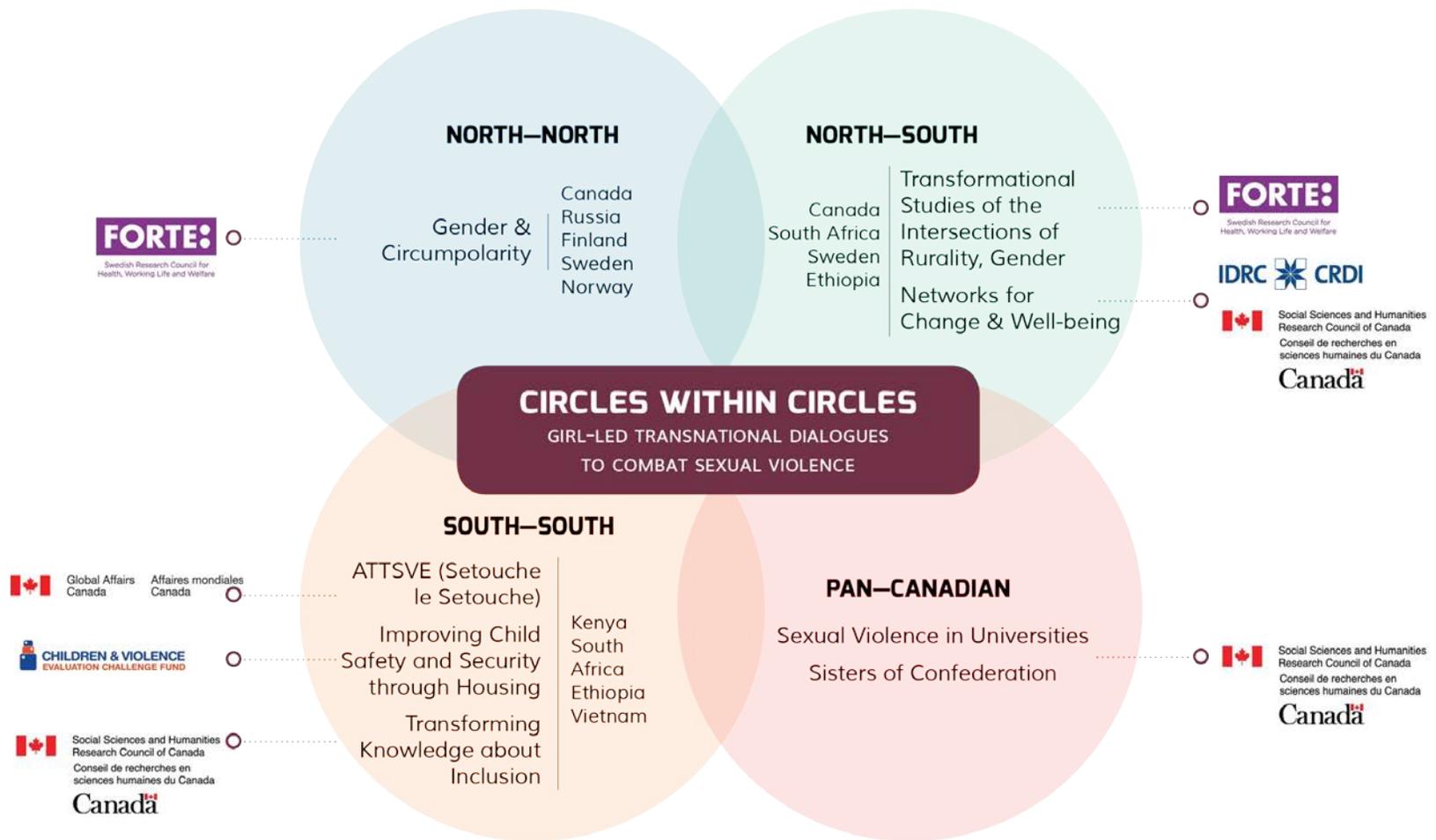


Figure 1

The policy implications are also exceptional, as we see in the work with girls in sub-Saharan Africa where it was the photos taken by 12-year-old girls of unsafe toilets at their school that convinced the UN to add safety and security issues to water and sanitation policies. What we are also learning is the potential for cross-fertilization of knowledge in North-South, and South-South dialogue.⁸ In the “Networks for Change and Well-being” project, for example, indigenous young women in Canada and South Africa are working together to create an international advisory panel on indigenous girls leading change in the area of sexual violence. While some of the participants have met face-to-face, what they are building on is the value of social media to keep this alliance active. The gender agenda of a Global Affairs Canada-funded project in Ethiopia (ATTSVE) was greatly enhanced when the Gender focal persons, who work directly with girls and young women on Agricultural Technical Vocational Education and Training (ATVET) campuses, and spent 5 weeks at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa working with various gender partners and especially a group called Girls Leading Change. But the potential for dialogue across local contexts is also apparent, as is being explored in a project that is helping to usher in Canada’s 150th birthday, “Sisters of Confederation: Media Making Workshops for Reconciliation,” which brings together 39 Indigenous and non-Indigenous girls and young women from across the country to consider issues of land, body, and consent.

While this work has clearly been engaging many across a number of countries in both the Global North and the Global South, it is an area that requires greater focus in relation to ‘from the ground up policy making’. What can be learned by looking across a variety of country contexts and how can this work inform policy across a variety of policy contexts (education, health, social development, immigration, and justice)? We also need to know more about how girls and young women, who are at a particular stage of their lives, can still be part of the policy cycle. Finally, we need to know more about the sustainability of these initiatives which, so often, are simply project-by-project. What difference would it make to have national, regional, and global partners in this work?

TIMELINE AND METHODS: As the ‘circles within circles’ configuration of the project suggests (Figure 2), the principal activities of this project focusing on girl-led/young women-led dialogue to combat sexual violence are meant to engage a variety of stakeholder groups from a number of different circles, with girls and young women at the center of the dialogue.

⁸ Mitchell, C. (2009). Geographies of danger: School toilets in sub-Saharan Africa. In O. Gershenson & B. Penner (eds.), *Ladies and Gents* (pp. 62-74). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

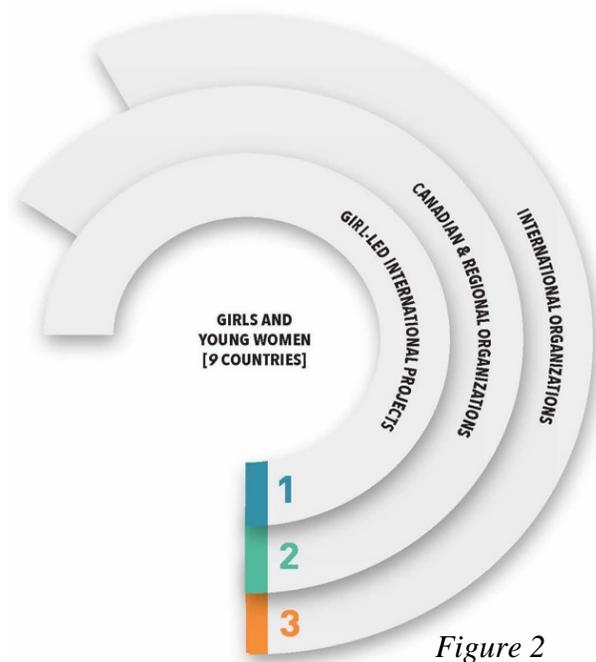


Figure 2

(1) Researchers from 9 countries (Canada, Russia, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa, and Vietnam), with whom I am currently working in a number of thematically-based girl-led projects dealing with sexual violence. (See Figure 1)

(2) Key Canadian and partner NGOs and various governmental organizations (Office of the Status of Women; Girls' Action Foundation; Canadian Women's Foundation; Agenda; FlickForsk; Gorbachev Foundation; Wapikoni; Native Women's Shelter of Montreal; and, African Population Health Research Centre).

(3) Global organizations focusing on girls and young women and sexual violence (UNGEI; Global Affairs Canada; Plan International; and, Sexual Violence Research Initiative).

YEAR 1

Residential Think Tank: The first main activity of the project will be a 3-day invitational residential think tank involving key players from each of the 3 circles (see Figure 2), and, in particular, highlighting the partnerships with scholars at so many universities across Canada with whom I already collaborate (Mount Saint Vincent, Dalhousie, NSCAD, University of Montreal, York, UBC, and University of Victoria). The event, to be held in May, 2018 will set the stage for the dialogue and interplay with girls and young women representing already-existing girls' advisory panels involved in participatory visual work on sexual violence (Indigenous girls and young women [National Indigenous Young Women' Council] and non-Indigenous girls ["Sisters of Confederation"]; Girls Leading Change Youth Advisory in South Africa). The focus of this event will be to build momentum and solidarity between and amongst the girls and young women and participants representing the 3 circles, particularly in relation to advancing girl-led media making and dialogue. The event will both show-case what is already happening and serve as a foundation for working together, both for media production in relation to policy change, and for embarking upon a way to capture community and policy dialogue.

A special feature of the think tank will be engagement with a number of Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation Fellows, whose work closely links to the project. These will include Myriam Denov (2014) at McGill's School of Social Work (with whom we have spoken regarding participation in this project), and whose work on child and youth adversity, child protection, and the effects of gender-based violence on children living in areas of armed conflict, political violence, and high incidences of HIV and AIDS is particularly relevant. We will also work with Cindy Blackstock (2012 Mentor) also at McGill's School of Social Work, who is addressing aboriginal children's and youth's rights to equality. We aim to establish new partnerships with Foundation Fellows Jason Edward Lewis

(2014, Concordia University, Design and Computation Arts), who is developing the Initiative for Indigenous Future (abtec.org/iif/) and the Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace (AbTeC) research network; Maria Campbell (2012, U. of Ottawa), working on understanding the culture and history of Métis communities; Ronald Ruding (2011, Concordia University), working on merging historical texts through a variety of technological medias in the creation of cultural stories; and, Steven Loft (2010, Coordinator of the Aboriginal Arts Office of the Canada Council for the Arts), who is merging Indigenous art, technology, and culture of Canada. We will also collaborate with policy stakeholders Isabella Bakker (2009, York U) who is researching women in economy and policy, and Kathleen Mahoney (2008, U. Calgary, Law), who is working on indigenous resettlement agreements.

Circles within Circles Project Website and Gallery: To support the establishment of a Circles within Circles network and to screen the visual productions, a project website and gallery will be set up in Year 1, with the technical team of RAs at McGill prepared to assist all teams to upload their cellfilms.

YEAR 2

Fieldwork: Girl-Focused Media-Making Workshops: A key component of Year 2 (and extending into Year 3) will be the fieldwork based on a series of girl-focused media making workshops taking place in 9 countries, building on the well-established digital practices of the Participatory Cultures Lab at McGill ⁹ involving cellphones to produce short cellfilms. The groundwork for this fieldwork will be set in Year 1 at the think tank. The research teams and girls and young women participating in the event will bring and share valuable knowledge of cellfilming and other digital platforms to the workshops. The fieldwork and media-making training will be facilitated over a period of several months through digital workshops, at which groups of girls and young women at each site will use their own personal cellphones to create cellfilms to ‘picture well-being’. These workshops will not simply be about media making, but also about dialogue and the significance of images that girls and young women want to produce to inform transnational dialogue about combating sexual violence. A special feature of the project is to make sure that there is an opportunity for a follow-up workshop in each setting where cellfilms can be screened, discussed, and, in some cases, even ‘revised’ through the ‘speaking back’ method.

Participants in the fieldwork: The girls and young women who participate in the media-making workshops will be drawn from the various girl-led media making projects focusing on sexual violence as mapped out in Figure 1 and representing 9 countries: Canada, Russia, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa, and Vietnam. The strength of this approach is that most of the research already has ‘girl-led’ advisory structures, and the researchers who will be working with the girls and young women are already experienced in building local knowledge through media making and have extensive experience in working with ethical and technical protocols in relation to cellfilm production. What is unique about this initiative is the

⁹ <https://participatorycultureslab.com/>

opportunity to build this synergy across the various girl-led groups, while also respecting diversity of geographic, cultural, ability/disability, and language.

Cellphilm Festival Part 1: In Years 2 and 3 we will host a cellphilm festival at McGill, built around the annual Cellphilm Festivals¹⁰, to be hosted by the Participatory Cultures Lab.

Virtual Conferences: We will also host a series of Virtual Conferences as a way to continue to build the Circles within Circles Network. (See Year 1). We will embark upon the first Virtual Conference in Year 2. This half-day event will feature speakers and presentations on key themes emerging from the conference in Year 1 (e.g. ethics in addressing sexual violence; cultural contexts for understanding sexual violence Girls and media making in under-resourced settings; evidence for ‘from the ground up policy making’; and, Girls and young women as knowledge producers in the area of sexual violence).

YEAR 3

Field Work (continued): Some of the media making and follow-up speaking-back workshops will carry over into Year 3.

Virtual Conferences 2 and 3: The topics for these virtual conferences will emerge from the think tank held in Year 1.

Cellphilm Festival Part 2

LEGACY OF THE PROJECT AND DELIVERABLES: This Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation Fellowship will provide the funding needed to host the transnational think tank and follow-up virtual conferences, and to support the fieldwork amongst already existing teams of researchers working with girls and young women in the area of sexual violence across 9 countries; it would also support the setting up of appropriate digital platforms for exhibiting and studying the work. As such, the project will have a significant impact on building a sustainable framework for implementing girl-led media production in combating sexual violence across a variety of policy contexts and across social and geographic diversity. Through the think tank event, along with virtual conferences involving already existing teams of researchers and national and international organizations focusing on girls and sexual violence, the project is meant to contribute to building a sustained network for supporting youth-led media making initiatives to combat sexual violence. Critically, it will also offer exceptional training opportunities for masters and doctoral students also working on the project (international teams, multi-groups of stakeholders, working with the analysis of cellphilm data). In supporting a ‘from-the-ground-up’ approach to community and policy dialogue, the project also supports several priority areas of the Canadian government, both in relation to the participation of youth in policy making, and to the significance of young women and leadership – both within the global agenda for sustainable change. The expected deliverables will include:

Online Web Portal: This site will serve as a communication tool for the Network, but will also serve as a blog and gallery space for the Digital Exhibition that will be made up of

¹⁰ <https://internationalcellphilmfestivalblog.wordpress.com/cellphilm-archive/>

approximately 200 cellfilms and other digital media from 9 countries represented by 12 sites addressing critical issues related to sexual violence as identified by girls and young women.

Database: The digital material from the 12 sites (Cellfilms, tags, blogs) will provide a rich data source on youth-led media production in relation to a critical global issue.

Academic and Media Publications: The project will lead to an edited book in the new Berghahn “Critical Girlhood Series”: *Circles within Circles: Transnational Dialogues with Girls and Young Women to Combat Sexual Violence*. It will also lead to guest edited issues of *Girlhood Studies* and *Agenda*. The plan will draw on the 3 proposed virtual conferences in Years 2 and 3.

Policy Briefs and Support-to-Policy Webinars: An important feature of this work is ‘getting the word out’. We intend to produce a series of 6 to 8 policy briefs organized around key themes in the project: (Girls and media making in under-resourced settings; Evidence for ‘from the ground up policy making’; and, Girls and young women as knowledge producers in the area of sexual violence). We will also support knowledge translation through a series of 3 to 5 method-focused webinars modelled after the highly successful photovoice and participatory video webinars produced with IDRC through the Participatory Cultures Lab.¹¹

CONCLUSIONS: This project offers a unique opportunity and comes at an exceptionally timely moment, both in Canada’s history and globally, to find ways of enhancing and sustaining the engagement of girls and young women to combat sexual violence. As we are reminded daily through social media and newscasts, the situation for girls and young women remains precarious. We know that Canada has made a commitment through its support for the *Call to Action* to address these issues amongst Indigenous populations, and we also recognize the significance of the Advisory Committee on Sexual Violence established by the Status of Women, Canada, to address these issues more broadly. Support through the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation Fellowship will go a long way towards ensuring that Canada can both lead and learn from work in the circumpolar regions and in relation to the critical agenda that the South offers.

ANNEX 1: Letter from Nora Fyles, UNGEI

ANNEX 2: Policy brief on Photovoice

ANNEX 3: Link to *More than Bricks and Mortar*

¹¹ Webinars: 1) Mitchell, C., & MacEntee, K. (2016, May). *Participatory video: Taking a no editing required approach*. Webinar. International Institute for Qualitative Methodology (IIQM) Master Class.; 2) Mitchell, C., Thompson, J. & Rivard, L. (2015, June). *Photovoice: A tool for research and community engagement*. Webinar. IDRC: GRoW.

BUDGET

Description of Services	Item and Details	Amount (\$)	Notes
Professional Support Expenses	Doctoral Research assistants	20,000	10k each for 2 students to bring knowledge on, and assist teams with, cellphilms in Yrs 2-3
	Fees paid to research personnel (students, technicians)	33,000	Split between Yrs 1-3
	Course buy-out	15,000	Split between Yrs 1-2
	<i>Total 1</i>	\$68,000	
Travel and Participation Costs	Travel for research, learning, networking	15,000	Split between Yr 1-3
	TF participation expenses	25,000	Split between Yr 1-3
	<i>Total 2</i>	\$40,000	
Electronic and Technical Supplies	Equipment for PI's use	7,500	Split between Yrs 1-3
	<i>Total 3</i>	\$7,500	
Knowledge Dissemination Costs	3-day Think Tank venue rental, lunch, dinners & break catering, AV equipment rental + setup	8,000	Yr 1, May 2018.
	Accommodation + breakfast	12,000	55+ single & double rooms
	Air & train, car rental & gas, taxi shuttle	10,000	Held Year 1, May 2018
	Website design	5,000	Yr 1; Expanded in Yr 2
	Girl-led & media making workshops	24,000	\$2,000 x 12 teams in Yrs 2-3
	Digital exhibition, creation, & promotion	7,000	3 Virtual conferences in Yrs 2-3
	McGill Technical Services	1,000	Yr 1
	Manuscript preparation	10,000	Yr 2-3
	Policy & book preparation	10,000	Yrs 2-3
	<i>Total 4</i>	\$87,000	
University Administration Expenses		22,500	
	<i>Total 5</i>	\$22,500	
	TOTAL COSTS		\$225,000 CAD