

# DOMESTICATED TIME AND RESTRICTED SPACE:

## *University and Community Women in Downtown Eastside Vancouver*

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DARA CULHANE

Buzzwords abound: time-compressed, time-crunched, multi-tasking madness ... People are taking shorter holidays or none at all. They're working evenings and weekends trying to keep up, and feeling anxious that they're not: not ready for the meeting, for the class, not up to speed, not fully in the know ...

Heather Menzies with Janice Newson, "The Over-Extended Academic in the Global Corporate Economy"

**T**HIS ARTICLE EXPLORES what may first appear to be a relatively mundane event and an apparently common-sense project: assembling approximately twenty women (faculty members, graduate students, community-based researchers) in one space (one room in one building at a designated address marked on a map), at one time (from 1:00 PM to 3:00 PM Greenwich time, according to a twenty-four-hour clock), on one day (a date plotted on the Julian calendar as 23 July 2000). The reason these diverse groups of women got together was to collaborate on designing and planning research intended to document and analyze the relationships between housing and health as created, understood, and articulated by low-income women living in inner-city Vancouver. Specifically, we were gathering to plan a six-week pilot project to test the participatory methodology we hoped to practise during a three-year research project entitled the Health and Home Research Project. Through offering a "thick description" of this event, I argue for understanding "time" and "space" as (simultaneously) material resources, representations, and enacted practices that reflect and reproduce social relations of inequality. I argue that definitions of, and rewards for, the "productive" deployment and exploitation of time and space – and punishments for their "unproductive" use – are differentially

distributed along axes of social, political, and economic inequality. In the context of the Health and Home Project, time and space – as resources and as representations – serve as markers of difference, as strategies and tools in a struggle for research collaboration.

Something that is rarely included in academic analyses is an analysis of researchers' working conditions. To criticize working conditions from the advantaged location of the university, particularly in an article that is also about chronically unemployed and impoverished women, may well be read as "privileged whining" par excellence. My intent, however, is not to elicit sympathy for overworked academics but, rather, to invite the readership of this journal – a predominantly academic readership – to consider how our goals as researchers, activists, and citizens are undermined or defeated by the effects of our working conditions. What should we be doing about this? I raise these issues both as a way of accounting for the material conditions from which this article has emerged and as a preamble to my central argument, which, simply stated, rests on David Harvey's (1990, 239) proposition that "spatial and temporal practices are never neutral in social affairs."

If there is one thing that contemporary academic women share, it is a way of being in the world that is overdetermined by "having no time." In the epigraph cited above, Heather Menzies and Janice Newson (2001, 4) refer to a recently published study by the Association of University Teachers in the United Kingdom, which reported that "the average work week for academics had risen to 59 hours by the mid 1990s, with women clocking an average of 64.5 hours a week." "Yes," I sighed when I read Menzies' and Newson's comments, "That's me and my colleagues."

My particular experience of being compressed by time and space, and the context from within which I offer these comments, involves a collaborative research project – a model gaining increasing attention in social research in Canada and elsewhere. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) has responded to demands for research to be relevant beyond the halls of academe by encouraging universities to form partnerships with community organizations and by urging faculty members to collaborate in broadly based, multidisciplinary teams. In December 1999 a project for which I am principal investigator, and that involves thirteen female faculty members, was awarded a three-year grant under the auspices of SSHRC's Strategic Theme Program in Society, Culture and the Health of Canadians. The goals of the Health and Home Research Project are to conduct a longitudinal study of relationships between housing and health among low-

income women in Downtown Eastside Vancouver, and to do so through developing innovative participatory methodologies involving community women as researchers as well as research subjects. Collaborative research partnerships are relatively new undertakings for all involved – funding agencies, universities, faculty, graduate students, community organizations, community-based researchers, and research subjects. They are extraordinarily labour-intensive and time-consuming as well as, so we all hope, innovative and productive structures and practices.

Time and space have been subjects of interest to scholars for as long as anyone can remember. Many contemporary theorists critique conventional formulations of time and space, which locate these culturally diverse concepts in psychological characteristics or essentialist notions of “culture.” They argue, conversely, that time and space are more productively understood as both symbolic and material resources. Anthropologist Carol Greenhouse (1996, 12), for example, argues that “social time has no practical existence or intrinsic logic apart from its contexts of use.” On this basis, she rejects analyses of *concepts* of time in favour of analyses of *representations* of time, but she stipulates that “representations must remain connected to their sites of production and currency, along with the meaning of representation itself” (13). Drawing on extensive ethnographic research in India, Akhil Gupta (1994) persuasively critiques conventional assumptions that for “Westerners” time is linear while for “Others” it is cyclical. She argues instead that most cultures recognize a variety of notions of time, all of which are contextual, and that dominant representations of different peoples’ relationships to time, rather than reflecting actual beliefs or practices, serve more as markers of differences of value and social worth: civilized/uncivilized, disciplined/undisciplined, deserving/undeserving, moral/immoral, middle class/lower class.

Contrary to theories that reduce and limit understandings of space to simplistic materiality, Henri Lefebvre (1991, 26) argues that “(*social*) space is a (*social*) product” (emphasis in original). He urges theorists to include spatial practices, representations of space, and spaces of representation in their analyses. “Lefebvre’s formulation moves space from a purely physical materiality defined by boundaries or borders to a productive agency defined through the interactions between people” (McKerrow 1999, 277). Domestic space, considered within this framework, necessarily reflects social relations of inequality and is often critically analyzed as private and feminized space, which is devalued in relation to public and masculine space.

Finally, Foucault's (1977, 183-90) insights into the role of surveillance and visibility in constituting social relations of power and inequality continue to be instructive. Differential access to the means of observation (research) and to authoritative claims to represent some people's (and not other people's) domestic and/or private spaces, their presence in public spaces, and their time-related practices in everyday life is a foundational dimension in the construction of academic and popular knowledge about time and space. Although the work of the Health and Home Research Project aspires to be counted among the reflexive and critical approaches outlined above, the project's gaze emanates from the suburbs and is directed towards the inner city (see Ruben 2001). The primary objects of investigation are low-income, underemployed women rather than middle- or high-income, over-employed academic women.

I draw on the aforementioned authors to argue that access to and control over time and space, and their meanings, are differentially distributed along racialized, gendered, and classed axes of inequality within specific historical contexts. I turn now to Downtown Eastside Vancouver and to the Health and Home Research Project.

#### TIME, SPACE AND COLONIALISM

Canada's colonial geographies exhibit [a] pattern of violent expulsions and the spatial containment of Aboriginal peoples to marginalized areas of the city, processes consolidated over three hundred years of colonization. Here, however, both colonial and slum administration persist.

Sherene Razack, "Gendered Racial Violence and Spatialized Justice: The Murder of Pamela George."

It is neither accidental nor coincidental that a disproportionate number of women living in poverty in Downtown Eastside Vancouver are Aboriginal women (See Benoit et al. 2001). Some are descendants of ancestors who have lived in this particular space for thousands of years. Others come from all over Canada: dislocated and relocated, they and their ancestors have been moved through space and over time by laws, policies, ignorance, and brutality.

The "City of Vancouver" is constructed on land that has been owned and occupied by indigenous peoples of the Coast Salish Nation for many thousands of years. Europeans arrived in the form of traders in the late eighteenth century, and during the 100 years that followed,

approximately 90 per cent of the indigenous population of what is now Lower Mainland British Columbia died from epidemics of infectious diseases. In 1858 the establishment of the Crown Colony of British Columbia marked the consolidation of British governance and domination over the territory onto which Vancouver is now mapped. In 1923 the last status Aboriginal woman who had lived in Stanley Park died, and the Vancouver Parks Board bought out her daughter. Since that time, Aboriginal people have been designated “migrants,” “sojourners,” or “transients” when they cross the city’s self-proclaimed boundaries. The “violent expulsions” and strategies of “spatial containment” described by Razack have been instrumental in constructing the Downtown Eastside and other inner-city neighbourhoods in Canada as “Aboriginal spaces,” and they are constitutive of the social, economic, and political context within which the Health and Home Project conducts its research. Colonialism saturates social, economic, and political relations; public culture; natural and built environments; and all aspects of “health and housing” and research.

#### SPACE, TIME, AND THE MEETING: GETTING THERE

Immediatization and concretization of space-time brings the world back home.

Michael Jackson, *Paths towards a Clearing: Radical Empiricism and Ethnographic Inquiry*.

Finding space in which to hold the Health and Home Project planning meeting – in a most literal and mundane sense – was a challenge that presented a whole complex of material and symbolic obstacles. Since SSHRC requires universities to contribute to the projects it funds, Simon Fraser University (SFU) agreed to waive the usual rental fee for meeting rooms at the Downtown campus. Because space is at a premium in the Downtown Eastside, and renting meeting rooms would take money out of our budget that could be better used for salaries for research assistants and honoraria for research participants, I chose SFU Harbour Centre as the venue for the meeting. The physical distance between the Harbour Centre Campus and the western border of the Downtown Eastside is only a few city blocks.<sup>1</sup> The social distance, however, is vast, and transgressions are mostly unidirectional: “we” can go “there” to study,

<sup>1</sup> For critical analyses of issues to do with poverty, space, and representation in the Downtown Eastside, see Blomley (1998) and Sommers (2001).

to commiserate, to help, to rescue, to gawk, to shop, to exploit, to ally, and to work in solidarity. However, “they” rarely come “here.”<sup>2</sup>

The university-based women – faculty and graduate students – lived all over the Lower Mainland and worked at SFU’s main campus located, literally, on top of Burnaby Mountain, whereas the community-based researchers lived and sometimes worked in one neighbourhood: the Downtown Eastside, past the bottom of the mountain and along the waterfront. To travel to SFU Harbour Centre, university-based women drove or bused from our homes or offices – down mountains, over bridges, or across town – as quickly as possible, traversing significant distances from one familiar and secure (for us) place to another. Community women, for the most part, walked short distances between very different places. To get to the meeting, they crossed streets named by and for colonial governors, industrialists, and Canadian Pacific Railway executives – streets that now cover streams where salmon once came to spawn. Colonialism is constitutive of the landscape.

All of us came to this project with multiple and overlapping motivations. I speak here, though, only for myself. I had hoped, in various ways, to “make life better” for low-income women in the neighbourhood. I had wished, in various ways, to enhance my own sense of self as a moral being and as a responsible citizen. I also came to the project as a way of making a living and maintaining security of employment. When asked, community-based researchers said they sought work on the Health and Home Project for many of the same reasons: they wished to improve the lot of women in their community; they wished to develop their own knowledge and learn marketable skills; and they wanted to earn money. Similarly, graduate students said they sought work with the Health and Home Project for reasons involving personal and political commitment, social responsibility, training, and income.

Faculty members receive no direct payment from research grants over and above their salaries. However, conducting research – or, more particularly, publishing research results – is a requirement of our jobs, and the more we do, the more professional capital we accumulate, and the more rewards we reap over the course of our careers. Graduate students, who are located on the bottom rungs of these same professional ladders, will carry with them on their upward climb their research experiences with the Health and Home Project. These will form tangible entries on

<sup>2</sup> Razack (2000), analyzing relationships between non-Aboriginal men and the political location of Aboriginal women in inner cities in Canada, argues that crossing “the line between respectability and degeneracy and, significantly, returning unscathed” are “journeys of transgression [that] are deeply historical.”

their curriculum vitae and will provide them with less tangible but still profitable knowledge. In recent years, research has become one of the few opportunities for legitimate short-term employment in the Downtown Eastside. Thus for community-based researchers there was a real possibility that they might be able to transfer the skills they developed working for the Health and Home Project to future employment. For all of us, then, conducting research was an intellectual passion, a moral and political commitment, a source of income, and an investment in the future. However, these shared motivations and short-term associations create a fragile unity. A veneer of similarity thinly veils significant differences of power and privilege – differences that stretch back into historical time, permeate the present moment, and shape the future.

For example, although community-based researchers received fifteen dollars per hour in wages during the six-week Health and Home pilot project, most of them were women who were or had been partially and/or wholly reliant upon social assistance support. Single women on social assistance in Vancouver in 2000 received around \$500 per month as a basic income. Starting salaries for faculty members at Simon Fraser University in this same year hovered around \$50,000 before taxes. Faculty women take home, therefore, from five to eight times as much money per annum as do the community-based researchers. Graduate students, earning fifteen to eighteen dollars per hour on part-time contracts, fell somewhere in the middle of the Health and Home Project's income hierarchy.

Whereas community-based researchers could hope for employment on various short-term contract research projects in the near future, as a tenured faculty member I enjoy a degree of professional and economic security unimaginable to them and imagined, but not yet realized, by graduate students. Absent individual misfortune or illness – or radical restructuring of postsecondary education – the odds that I will be able to realize my plans for further research are better by far than are the prospects for community women, and better by some than are those for graduate students. The past, therefore, pervades the present and influences the future.

Most university-based women have some degree of choice in where we live and how we are housed. Sometimes women are even consulted by planners, architects, and builders who are themselves, sometimes, women. We are beneficiaries of the struggles of women of previous generations who insisted on their right to "rooms of their own" and who were located in sufficiently privileged class- and race-based positions to

be heard (and sometimes even listened to). While we may rarely have time to cook, we do have fully equipped kitchens and the economic wherewithal to purchase ingredients. For the most part, we live in larger spaces, in safer areas, have more privacy, and exercise considerably more control over our living conditions than do the low-income women with whom we work on the Health and Home Project.

Purchase or rental costs in Canada's unregulated private housing market have soared in the last two decades, and Vancouver leads the nation in unaffordable housing (Hulchanski 2000). The average cost of purchasing living space in Vancouver is \$25,000 per square foot. It is hard to rent a one-bedroom basement apartment in the working-class but rapidly gentrifying East Vancouver neighbourhoods that border the Downtown Eastside for under \$600 per month. Many women in the Downtown Eastside live in single room occupancy hotels (sros). Conditions vary in sros but most rooms are small – around 150 to 300 square feet. Rent (usually between \$325 and \$375 per month) is frequently deducted from their social assistance cheques and paid directly to hotel owners. Often they are not permitted to have guests or visitors in their rooms or, if they do, entrepreneurial desk clerks demand payments of “guest fees.” Women who live in sros sometimes jokingly describe the cockroaches and bedbugs that infest their rooms as their “pets.” They talk about doors that have no locks and about dirty bathrooms shared with strangers. Many have trouble sleeping and often fear being attacked by men who sometimes come crashing through locked and unlocked doors. Some women sleep outside in public spaces for either economic, health, or safety reasons. Increasing numbers of people are excluded from the possibility of built shelter in this city.

University-based women are not frequently troubled by cockroaches or bedbugs. We do not usually share our bathrooms with strangers. We may have trouble sleeping for a variety of reasons – most often work-related stress – and some of us may fear violence and violation from intimate strangers, but we do not regularly experience people crashing through our doors and attacking us in our sleep. While we may enjoy camping as a recreational activity, most of us have not been coerced to sleep outside in a public space for either economic, health, or safety reasons.

When you have money and are thus a consumer, or potential consumer, of housing in the private market, advertisers seek to seduce you. Banks compete to entrap you in complex mortgage deals. Realtors entice you and jostle with each other to pander to your every whim (within the confines of your mortgage eligibility limits, of course). No seductive



advertisers, or wily bank managers, or slick realtors, come knocking on poor women's doors. When you don't have money, you are vulnerable to being victimized by private landlords: you are pressured to exchange sexual services for space, to be silent about bugs, to do without repairs, to sacrifice safety and security for basic shelter. Aboriginal women suffer additional discrimination from landlords who commonly and unashamedly refuse to rent to Aboriginal people.

One option for low-income women is to seek housing in one of the all-too-few social housing developments. Waiting lists for such spaces can be long, but most buildings are clean, well equipped, well managed, safe, and secure. Women must first find out where and how to apply for a place in a social housing project, then present themselves appropriately and wait to be selected or rejected by social housing managers or advocates charged with the unenviable task of allocating scarce resources in an environment where demand always and increasingly exceeds supply, of determining who among the needy are the most needy, or deserving, of shelter, safety, and security. Who has earned the privilege of sleeping unmolested by men, beasts, rodents, or insects?

In the context of ever-decreasing government funding of social housing, it is difficult to be certain about what constitutes responsible or constructive critique. Poverty, however, is relative. So too are its impacts on persons and personhood. Social housing, being a program associated with the rapidly retreating welfare state, has increasingly come to be provided not as a universal benefit of citizenship oriented towards the goal of equality among citizens or the well-being of future generations (housing is not accessible to Aboriginal people in British Columbia as an Aboriginal or treaty right) but, rather, as an illustration of benevolence. Increasingly, social services (including housing) are made available to "targeted" groups designated as having "special needs." Of particular interest to the Health and Home Project is housing for "single women." Raibmon (this volume) demonstrates how, in the early years of the twentieth century, federal Indian housing policy pushed Aboriginal people out of multifamily Big Houses and into small houses built for "nuclear families," thus reflecting European models of the ideal bourgeois family form. In other words, housing was designed and provided to meet the goals not of shelter, per se, but, rather, of assimilation. And it did this through undermining First Nations' ways of living and reorganizing domestic space and social relations based on extended family kinship networks. Today, low-income "single women" (many of whom are Aboriginal) living in social housing in Downtown Eastside Vancouver

are often deemed to require only 300 to 500 square feet of space, and they are frequently prohibited from having guests or visitors for longer than a few hours at a time. Housing policy makers have determined that “single women” who are poor must, literally, live SINGLY all the time. They may, of course, invite guests in for a few hours to share a meal or other social activities. They often may not, however, have relatives, friends, children, and grandchildren stay with them for varying lengths of time, as is the norm not only for Aboriginal families but also for many non-Aboriginal women. Housing policies that structure “single women’s housing,” therefore, *proscribe* social relations and dictate the effects of the status “single woman” in everyday life at the same time as they respond to pressures exerted by inflationary real estate markets and the needs created by poverty.

#### TIME, SPACE, AND THE MEETING: BEING THERE

Control over time is not just a strategy of interaction; it is also a medium of hierarchic power and governance.

N. Munn, “The Cultural Anthropology of Time: A Critical Essay.”

Organizing the planning meeting had been an extraordinarily difficult and time-consuming project. Countless phone calls and e-mails were exchanged among faculty women, who juggled classes, meetings, and professional and family commitments, and who negotiated with each other to finally achieve a common three-hour time block when (almost) all could be present in one time and at one place. This having been accomplished, graduate students were informed by e-mail. Those community-based researchers with telephones were called, messages were left for others with friends, notes were pinned on drop-in centre notice boards, and word of mouth chains were activated. Along with contracts to sign and various written materials explaining the organization and goals of the Health and Home Project, we provided each community-based researcher with a brand-new daytimer and a pen: instruments of discipline.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> In a frequently quoted passage, Harvey describes his notion of “time-space compression,” which characterizes the contemporary postmodern era: “New technologies of transportation and communication (shipping, railroads, airplanes, video, telephones, personal computers) have changed our experience of proximity and simultaneity.” Feminists and other critical scholars have been quick to point out the errors in Harvey’s universalizing formulation: most people in the world do not have access to these tools of transportation and communication.

The main practical objective of the meeting was to plan and organize a series of interviews with women in the community that would document their perceptions, experiences, and analyses of relationships between health and housing in their everyday lives. At this meeting, at which few women – either university- or community-based – arrived precisely on time, where two fifteen-minute coffee/smoke breaks overflowed to twenty to twenty-five minutes, where several women had to leave early for various reasons, and where some hung around after the meeting chatting for an hour or so, there was a heated discussion about how we would handle situations in which interviewees failed to be punctual. The discussion revealed a good deal about the diverse structures and demands that shape time-management, and performances of the same, for both university- and community-based researchers.

Some of the questions we addressed were: was insisting on punctuality evidence of middle-class affectations and latent desires to regiment and discipline the poor? Did NOT requiring or expecting punctuality reveal and reproduce judgments based on stereotypical assumptions about “different senses of time?” Some women argued that, since it was the community women’s knowledge and expertise that was central to this project, we should adapt to their schedules and not try to enforce our own. Other women said that community women were just as capable as was anyone else of making it to a meeting on time and that it was condescending and maternalistic to assume otherwise.

Graduate student and community-based research assistants were paid by the hour, and their total wages were budgeted based on time necessary to organize and arrange meetings, conduct interviews, transcribe tapes, and analyze data. If an interview scheduled for two hours took four hours because the interviewee was late or did not show up at all, would the research assistants be paid for their time? Since interviewees were to receive an honorarium of approximately twenty dollars for participating, wasn’t it reasonable to expect them to be on time for “their job,” so to speak? Everyone had other commitments as well: graduate student research assistants had classes to attend and papers to write; they and community-based researchers often had other part-time jobs; and most of us had families and attendant responsibilities. There was no consensus on the answers to any of these questions either within or between the university-based group and the community-based group. We did agree that we should focus on creating conditions that would facilitate the participation of interviewees. If the research was seen as worthwhile, if they felt respected when they participated, if honoraria

and food were provided, then women would be more likely to make and keep appointments for interviews.

Unlike for graduate students and community-based research assistants (who were being paid by the hour), for faculty women the major issues were pressing commitments and schedules, and concern about the problem of “wasted time.” As an academic, a shorthand definition of what constitutes “wasted time” in the eyes of my employers is time spent engaged in an activity that cannot be entered in the annual on-line CV update review form that determines my job security, promotion, and salary. In other words, wasted time is time spent on activities that may not result quickly enough in a publication in a scholarly journal (preferably); another successful research grant application; a presentation at an academic conference; a public speech to an elite audience; an important meeting that constitutes service to the university, to my discipline, or to the community as a whole; training graduate students; teaching registered fee-paying undergraduates. There are no spaces on the form to document the effects of university corporatization and restructuring on faculty working conditions. How can we account for the additional hours required to respond to e-mails, demands to develop on-line courses, and other pressures generated by new technologies? There is no space on the CV update form to claim time spent waiting, watching, listening, learning, attending community meetings, helping out at events, discussing research, building mutually respectful relationships with research subjects. This raises an important question: how can we hope to shift traditional power relations between researcher and researched, even within the limited confines of interpersonal interactions within specific research projects, if we cannot control our workloads sufficiently to allow the necessary time to do so?

Many of the community women with whom we work perform hours of unpaid labour as volunteers in social service centres and as caretakers of family and friends. This is hard work, and the rewards are few and far between. They describe daily schedules structured by the struggle to survive in poverty in a decaying welfare state: going to appointments with social workers, nurses, doctors, advocates, parole and probation officers, and researchers. In fact, they often waste considerable time waiting for professionals and paraprofessionals who are overworked, stressed out, hurried, harried, overbooked, and who can rarely keep an appointment time precisely. It was not uncommon for the women we interviewed to spend significant parts of their days and nights making the rounds of drop-in centres, missions, and time-specific food banks, soup kitchens,

and sandwich lines. They check – sometimes daily – where their names are on various waiting lists for housing, medical care, and alcohol and drug treatment. They meet with friends and relatives. Older women, in particular, are often nodes in far-flung informal mutual aid networks that carry tremendous burdens of responsibility, particularly for the care and protection of younger people.

Women who are significantly involved in drug and alcohol consumption keep the appointments necessary to find money to purchase and to consume drugs. Homeless women and women living in sub-standard accommodation talked about the stress of having to be out and about, moving around all day: they talked about having no time to rest, nowhere to feel safe, little uninterrupted sleep. Other women we interviewed – particularly those who were unemployed, single, and/or childless or living away from their children and not involved in significant drug and/or alcohol consumption – described boredom, loneliness, and difficulty finding ways to fill time as major daily problems, which they often pointed to as a source of depression and malaise.

Community women and university women share the experience of having little control over our own time. The differences between us lie in what we are paid for our time, in how what we do with our time is represented (i.e., as valuable or not), in the range of options available to us to take greater control over our time, and in the consequences of making assertions such as those presented in this article.

#### CONCLUSION: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? AND WHEN?

Why are academics so seemingly unengaged? One reason is that many are run off their feet. Their time is occupied, often by others' demands upon it. They're over-extended ...

And what are the effects, not just on our mental and physical health, but on our ability to think for ourselves, to know our own minds, and to act based on what we think is important [?]

Heather Menzies and Janice Newson, "The Over-Extended Academic in the Global Corporate Economy."

The question most frequently asked of researchers working with marginalized people, and the question we persistently ask ourselves, is the obvious one: "Will doing this research change anything? Who will benefit from it?"

Traditionally, the practical benefit of social research has been measured in two ways. First, have findings convinced governments and policy makers to institute changes that will benefit disadvantaged people? Second, and similarly, have community-based advocates and lobbyists been able to use research findings to gain access to resources (from public and private sources) and/or to pressure governments and policy makers to make desired changes? Writing from within Gordon Campbell's "New Era for British Columbia," it is hard to keep faith that education, evidence, or findings based on rigorous research will make any significant difference to governments driven by ideology and the single-minded pursuit of profit for the few at the expense of the well-being of the many. Research from many disciplines in the sciences and humanities has, for many years, demonstrated "evidence-based" relationships between poverty, poor housing, and ill health. Yet welfare rates are being reduced, eligibility criteria are becoming more restrictive, disabled people are being disintegrated, health care services are being privatized, and access to safe housing continues to elude many women.

Like many contemporary researchers, I try to understand the inequalities and power imbalances between researchers and research subjects, and how these inequities shape the experiences and consequences of research for diverse participants (See Fine et al. 2000). I strive to be critically self-reflexive and, however partially and imperfectly, to change these relationships within the context of the specific research I carry out. At the same time, looking closely at how researchers and researcher subjects are differently located in class and race hierarchies brings into focus the limitations to the possibilities for establishing more egalitarian relationships within research projects, which are themselves embedded within contexts of privilege and social inequality.

Neoliberal governments and policies challenge academics to reflect more critically on the place of social research within broader movements for social change and social justice. Increasingly, debates revolve around how to create a more politically engaged poverty scholarship – one that, while not necessarily abandoning longstanding goals of advising policy makers or supporting advocacy and lobbying, also does not limit itself to these audiences and conventional processes. Maskovsky (2001, 480), for example, urges university-based scholars to orient their work towards supporting "the activist agendas of the poor themselves."

Downtown Eastside Vancouver is, indeed, an impoverished community where life is hard. At the same time, it is also a very active and activist place (see Sommers 2001). Some women residents are involved

in waged and unwaged work, and many volunteer their time in a variety of community groups, including educational programs, advisory boards, arts projects, sports teams, and political organizations. Despite numerous barriers and obstacles, many use their time creatively and constructively to create spaces for community well-being. The amount of organized resistance to social injustice and the widespread commitment to social change among residents of the Downtown Eastside puts the complacency and apathy of the sheltered, privileged university community to shame. Clearly, low-income, community-based women have much to teach university-based women about activism and resistance. As we seek ways of linking our work to grassroots movements, we should also consider the relationships between our own rapidly restructuring workplaces and our capacity to be effective.

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