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Eyes on the street: Photovoice, liberation psychotherapy, and the emotional landscapes of urban children

Nisha Gupta[a,*], Eva-Maria Simms[b], Aaron Dougherty[b]

[a] University of West Georgia, 205 Melson Hall, Department of Psychology, University of West Georgia, 1601 Maple Street, Carrollton, GA, 30118, USA
[b] Duquesne University, 212 Rockwell Hall, Department of Psychology, Duquesne University, 600 Forbes Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA, 15282, USA

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ABSTRACT

Eyes on the Street is a therapeutic photovoice program which empowered 25 predominantly African American children (ages 7–12) to use digital photography to express and process emotions about their neighborhood, the Hilltop South community of Pittsburgh. Many of the Hilltop South neighborhoods suffer from the effects of systemic sociopolitical disenfranchisement and trauma. This program implemented photovoice as a trauma-healing intervention to empower youth in the Hilltop South to recognize, utilize, and artistically express their emotional responses to the public places of their neighborhood. The program's objectives were to create activities and spaces where children can practice emotional agility by articulating their feelings as images, and to introduce children to a self-advocacy tool with which to assert the needs of their community. This paper lays out the principles of liberation psychotherapy, discusses how they have guided the program development for *Eyes on the Street*, and showcases the details of the trauma-healing photovoice curriculum.

1. Introduction

Many of the predominantly African American neighborhoods that comprise the Hilltop South of Pittsburgh suffer from socioeconomic disenfranchisement, racial injustice, gentrification, gun violence, and addiction, which can be considered forms of systemic sociopolitical trauma. In 2016, PlaceLab, a community engaged research group at Duquesne University, received a request from the director of a Hilltop South youth community program to facilitate a photovoice workshop for 7–12 year old children regarding their experiences of living in their neighborhood. We titled this photovoice program *Eyes on the Street* in reference to the urban planning theorist Jane Jacobs, who coined the mantra "eyes on the street": the more that people watch out for and take an active interest in community activities around them, the safer and more secure these urban neighborhoods will be (Jacobs, 1961). We used this phrase with the belief that children's "eyes on the street" can not only yield neighborhood safety, but also sociopolitical healing and justice by giving voice to the wounds of oppression that the children witness around them.

As a team of clinical psychology students and faculty, we designed the *Eyes on the Street* photovoice curriculum with three objectives. First, we sought to teach children the art of digital photography to instill pride and self-efficacy regarding their photography talents, whereby self-empowerment in the arts has been linked with psychological resiliency (Secker et al., 2007). Second, we encouraged them to harness photovoice to document emotional experiences of living in the Hilltop South neighborhoods, through photo-essays that could be shared for social advocacy. Third, we introduced them to photovoice as a form of expressive arts therapy for trauma healing, since many of the children had been exposed to traumatic stressors on the streets of the Hilltop South. This latter objective is the focus of this paper; our approach to photovoice uniquely positions it as a *therapeutic intervention* for members of marginalized communities who have suffered the effects of sociopolitical trauma.

Photovoice is a community-based participatory action research (CBPR) method whose theoretical underpinnings lie in Paulo Freire's framework of liberation pedagogy for raising critical consciousness (Freire, 1973, 2000). This framework places the voices of oppressed groups at the center of research and theory, and assumes that marginalized community members are the experts of their own lives (C. Wang and Burris, 1994). Rooted in democratic ideals, photovoice is a community-based research method of documentary photography, based on the concept that photos can raise critical consciousness across society—even to the point of influencing public policy (Caroline Wang and Burris, 1997; Caroline Wang, Burris and Ping, 1996; C. C. Wang, 2006; C. C. Wang and Redwood-Jones, 2001). Photovoice empowers community members to document their everyday realities with cameras, and to record their communities' strengths and concerns through

* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: ngupta@westga.edu (N. Gupta), simms@duq.edu (E.-M. Simms), doug7481@gmail.com (A. Dougherty).

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photography to promote critical knowledge and dialogue about community issues that can effect sociopolitical change (C. C. Wang, 2006). Photovoice has mainly been used as a research method to document and advocate for healthcare, housing, and cultural and educational accessibility needs among community members such as homeless persons, the LGBTQ community, people with disabilities, immigrants and refugees, undocumented college students, and more (Hergenrather et al., 2009; Ramos, 2016).

In its effort to empower marginalized communities, photovoice as a research method has always possessed implicit therapeutic benefits. As psychotherapists, we made this implicit dimension explicit by introducing photovoice primarily as a *therapeutic tool* with which youth could express emotions about their neighborhood for the purpose of sociopolitical trauma healing. We situate the therapeutic power of photovoice within the theory and praxis of liberation psychology and psychotherapy (Martín-Baró, 1994; Watkins and Shulman, 2008; Russell and Bohan, 2007). This paper describes the program development of *Eyes on the Street* as a liberation psychotherapy intervention, including its theoretical underpinnings and details of the week-long curriculum implemented with children at St. Paul AME Church Summer Academy. We hope that this curriculum is adapted by therapists, researchers, and community organizers who wish to use photovoice to facilitate trauma healing, empowerment, and social advocacy among communities of care and concern.

1.1. Sociopolitical trauma and empowerment in the Hilltop South

To understand our positioning of *Eyes on the Street* as a trauma-healing intervention, it is important to be aware of the history of sociopolitical oppression etched into its place. The Hilltop neighborhoods in Pittsburgh's South End consist of a patchwork of smaller communities which are historically Black and White working-class neighborhoods. During the first half of the 20th century, Pittsburgh was home to some of the most prominent Black musicians and athletes in America, and *The Pittsburgh Courier* was one of the most widely distributed African American newspapers in the country (Whitaker, 2018; Russdal and Bodnaer, 2018). However, the historic flourishing of Black culture in Pittsburgh stands out against a background of larger systemic oppression of Black communities. Trauma and place have a profound interlacing in Pittsburgh's communities of color, and systemic disenfranchisement, displacement, and segregation were the norm for African Americans in Pittsburgh (Brewer Jr., 2006; Fullilove, 2004). The redlining practices invented by HOLC (the government sponsored Home Owner's Loan Corporation) in 1933 during the new deal, and imposed by banks and the FHA across the U.S. in all major cities, classified neighborhoods according to lending risk (Hillier, 2005). HOLC had hired local real estate agents to appraise the housing stock. The redlining maps prevented African American households from buying property in most Pittsburgh neighborhoods because realtors would not work with them and banks would refuse to lend money. Besides achieving racial segregation by hidden systemic practices, redlining also meant that African American families could not participate in the wealth building process of buying real estate in the suburbs, which benefitted many White working class families after WWII. Over time, Black families frequently lost the investment value they put into their homes in declining inner-city neighborhoods (such as the Hilltop South neighborhoods) or found themselves in unstable and overpriced rental situations. The consequence has been income stagnation and blocked mobility, and an increasing number of families living in poverty for generations (Rothstein, 2017). Moreover, these discriminatory housing practices were occurring alongside an overarching landscape of segregation and racism-based violence faced by African American residents of Pittsburgh at the time.

In the wake of “urban renewal” (Fullilove, 2004; Simms, 2008) in the 1950's and early 60's, the Hilltop South received two Federal Housing Projects which concentrated predominantly poor Black families in what the occupants called “reservations” within a patchwork of working class White neighborhoods, which had also been redlined. Beltzhoover, a Hilltop neighborhood with larger homes and manicured lawns, was one of the few middle class African American neighborhoods that thrived in Pittsburgh. By the late 20th century, however, Beltzhoover became decimated by the closing of the steel-mills, the crack epidemic, and gang warfare and lost its hold on the middle-class American dream. St. Clair Village, one of the two low-income public housing developments, became home of the rival gang organization, and was eventually demolished in 2010. Its inhabitants were distributed throughout the other Hilltop neighborhoods. Gang violence and shootings related to the drug trade have made some of the streetscapes in the Hilltop unsafe for pedestrians (Gurman, 2011; Vaught, 2017). The stress of socioeconomic disenfranchisement on families, the rise in crime due to the influx of guns and drugs, and the decade long mass incarceration of African American men and their severe sentencing for minor possession of drugs (Alexander, 2012) have meant that many children today are living in impoverished conditions alongside the constant threat of gun violence in public places (Smith, 2014). For the purposes of this paper, we have included this particular history of Pittsburgh to raise critical consciousness of how the streets of the Hilltop neighborhoods are often the sites of violence as a result of ongoing sociopolitical oppression.

From a liberation psychology perspective, the impact of oppression and disenfranchisement on the Hilltop South communities is a form of *sociopolitical trauma* (Quiros & Berger, 2015; Karcher, 2017; Gupta, 2018a,b), whereby traumatic symptomology can emerge among the marginalized community members who have experienced systemic discrimination in history and present day (Martín-Baró, 1994; Duran and Duran, 1998; Watkins and Shulman, 2008). Liberation psychology is a theory and praxis of psychology that explicates the impact of oppressive systemic structures on individual lives, by demonstrating the intersection between the political and the psychological and “the links between an individual's psychological suffering and the social, economic and political contexts in which he or she lives” (Martín-Baró, 1994; Watkins and Shulman, 2008, p. 26). Liberation psychology urges mental health practitioners to expand their understanding of trauma to include the traumatic impact of sociopolitical oppression upon marginalized communities (Karcher, 2017). The impact of sociopolitical traumas on the health of urban populations has been well documented in public health literature (Centers for Disease and Prevention, 2012; Jenkins et al., 2009; Nugent et al., 2012; Parto et al., 2011; Rich, 2009; Roberts et al., 2011; S. S. Smith, 2014; Thompson and Thompson, 2009; Zinzow et al., 2009). Sociopolitical trauma can lead members of marginalized communities to feel “existentially unsafe” alongside emotions of “terror, hopelessness, helplessness, worthlessness, despair, distrust, rage, and oftentimes guilt” (Burstow, 2003). Liberation psychology observes that systemic oppression not only elicits traumatic symptoms among individuals, but across entire social systems (Watkins and Shulman, 2008). As such, the prevalence of gun violence, addiction, and family distress in the Hilltop South neighborhoods can be considered symptoms of sociopolitical trauma. Since Continuous Traumatic Stress (CTS) (Eagle and Kaminer, 2013) is political, trauma recovery must take place in cultural forums where public testimony, collective mourning, and social action can occur (Herman, 1997).

Amidst the sociopolitical trauma that the Hilltop South communities have endured, the traditionally African American residents nurture powerful and resilient community ties. As perceived by the lived experience of one of the authors Aaron Dougherty who grew up in Beltzhoover, the Hilltop South residents organically foster community ethos through everyday connections made in shared neighborhood spaces, including local, resident-owned retail and corner stores (some of which have gone out of business due to the disenfranchisement of the community), community centers, bus stops, laundromats, eateries, parks, community gardens, and neighbors' homes. Residents of the Hilltop South maintain power and resiliency by strengthening ongoing

bonds across these shared spaces to nurture collective emotional health and ontological security. The Hilltop South neighborhoods also host a wealth of programs which explicitly work towards trauma-informed care, cultural engagement and preservation, violence prevention, environmental equity, anti-gentrification advocacy, job training, and empowerment for girls, including organizations such as UrbanKind Institute, South Hilltop Men's Group, South Pittsburgh Coalition for Peace, Violence Against Violence, and the Brashear Association. These community programs focus their emancipatory efforts around "lifting up the good," which describes the principle of noticing and enhancing the good things, people, and events that are already strengthening the community.

As in many African American communities around the country, churches also frequently run afterschool and summer programs for children and victim support programs for adults (St. Paul AME, Kingdom Life Ministries). St. Paul AME Church Summer Academy is one such program. It is designed to reduce summer learning loss among children ages 7–12 from the Hilltop neighborhoods during the summertime when they are out of school. The academy is run by Pastor Cheryl Ruffin, who frequently invites local Pittsburgh universities to facilitate art and science learning workshops for the children. It is within this context that the members of Duquesne University's PlaceLab group responded to Pastor Ruffin's request to develop the *Eyes on the Street* photovoice curriculum. PlaceLab, under the leadership of one of the authors Eva-Maria Simms, has worked since 2014 with community partners in the Hilltop around improving children's access to public urban places, such as parks and streets.

1.2. Photovoice as sociopolitical trauma-healing intervention

While photovoice is typically positioned as a research method, *Eyes on the Street* emphasized the therapeutic aspects of photovoice to facilitate psychological healing from sociopolitical trauma. Recent studies have explored the psychological benefits of using photovoice as a trauma-healing tool with populations such as sexual assault survivors, men living with HIV/AIDS, and adolescent cancer patients (Rolbiecki et al., 2016; Nauert, 2018; Georgievski et al., 2018). Abigail Rolbiecki's 2016 study utilized photovoice as a therapy intervention for sexual assault survivors, for which participants took photographs to document experiences of sexual assault and recovery. The process of capturing images, discussing photos, and writing narratives allowed participants to process their thoughts and feelings surrounding their trauma, as well as reclaim their experiences from victims to survivors and from self-blame to self-empowerment. After the photovoice intervention, participants reported a decrease of PTSD symptoms and self-blame and an increase of post-traumatic growth (Rolbiecki et al., 2016). Her study corroborates the wealth of psychological literature demonstrating the therapeutic benefits of art-making to contain, process, and heal for trauma, including the use of expressive arts therapy to treat survivors of sexual assault, traumatized children and adolescents, victims of political trauma, and veterans with PTSD (Carey, 2006; Richman, 2014; Richardson, 2015; King, 2016; Lobban and Murphy, 2018).

When positioning photovoice as a trauma-healing intervention for children in the Hilltop South, our approach is best understood within the framework of liberation psychotherapy (Russell and Bohan, 2007). Liberation psychotherapists seek to help clients from marginalized communities gain critical consciousness of how their clinical symptoms and painful emotions may carry the effects of sociopolitical oppression (Freire, 1973; Russel & Bohan, 2007; Gupta, 2018a,b). Liberation psychology conceives of clinical symptoms as carrying important messages about injustice that are longing to give testimony (Watkins and Shulman, 2008; Gupta, 2018a,b). As such, liberation psychotherapy seeks to create spaces where marginalized clients' symptoms and emotions can be acknowledged and honored as natural responses to sociopolitical oppression. Liberation psychotherapy also seeks to help clients relate to their symptoms and feelings from a lens of empowerment rather than pathology, by giving voice to the important messages about injustice that are hidden within them. By transforming their painful emotions into messages of public testimony, clients can channel their sorrow, anger, and fear about injustice into activities of social activism. Becoming a self-advocate in the face of sociopolitical oppression can be incredibly healing, birthing newfound feelings of powerfulness and hope, wherein "activity directed toward social change that is relevant to one's life is intertwined with personal well-being … changing oneself by becoming active changes the world; changing the world changes oneself" (Russell and Bohan, 2007, p. 71).

Importantly, liberation psychotherapy also seeks to help marginalized clients experience pride regarding their identities and communities. Aligned with the insistence from Hilltop South community leaders to always "lift up the good," liberation psychotherapy not only focuses on healing community trauma but also on celebrating aspects of strength, joy, creativity, and resiliency in one's heritage, history, and community. Our *Eyes on the Street* curriculum adopted this concept of "lifting up the good" from the African-American preaching tradition as a guiding principle for our intervention. By seeking to lift up the good, our program sought to affirm that community members hold great power, creativity and expertise in self-emancipation, and that our tools as academics, psychologists and researchers can be offered to enhance their already powerful voices and projects. The spirit of "lifting up the good" also encourages movement away from a solely deficit-model approach to the experiences of marginalized communities (Hambacher and Thompson, 2015). Ultimately, by working through complex emotions regarding sociopolitical trauma, and by proudly embracing one's identity and culture, liberation psychotherapy strives to empower clients to strengthen their community engagement in the process of trauma-healing.

The *Eyes on the Street* photovoice curriculum sought to apply these principles of liberation psychotherapy for trauma-healing with the children at St Paul AME Church Summer Academy. We were mindful that many of the youth may have experienced repeated traumatic stressors, such as gun violence, parental incarceration, substance abuse, and neighborhood deterioration as a consequence of socioeconomic disenfranchisement. We were aware that they may carry strong feelings of fear, anger, confusion, grief, and powerlessness—traumatic emotions common to individuals and communities which have experienced sociopolitical trauma. Without available resources to express and work through trauma, these emotions can become suppressed and manifest as desensitization, apathy, hopelessness, and aggression (Watkins and Shulman, 2008). For instance, children's exposure to gun violence is associated with apathy and lack of concentration in school, aggression or withdrawal among peers and families, and a depletion of future goals (Garbarino et al., 2002).

Accordingly, our therapeutic photovoice program focused on helping children express their *emotional experiences* of living in their Hilltop South neighborhoods—both their painful emotions to work through trauma, and their pleasant emotions to celebrate community. Specifically, we suggested that the children take photos of any aspect of their neighborhood that elicited *painful* emotions in them, as well as any aspect in their neighborhood that elicited *pleasant* emotions in them. In doing so, we positioned photovoice as a psychoeducational tool to teach children about *emotional agility:* the ability to feel, label, express, and navigate nuanced emotions (David, 2016). Emotional agility is associated with an increased ability to cope with stressful situations and greater self-esteem (David, 2016). Moreover, emotional agility is identified as a core component of resiliency by the APA's Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescents: "The optimal functioning portrait of resilience for [Black] youth calls for youth to have emotional awareness, perspective taking, and emotional regulation skills" (American Psychological Association, 2008, p. 48; in Hewitt, 2017). We sought to help children consider that their emotional responses need not always be suppressed, but could be safely expressed as a source of power for individual and social transformation.

For the psychoeducational component of *Eyes on the Street*, we used Karla McLaren's evolutionary psychology framework of emotions from her (2010) book *The Language of Emotions*. Through this framework, we invited youth to explore how all emotions have an important function and purpose in society, both pleasant and unpleasant ones. Sadness can communicate that we are in pain and require others' comfort and support to persevere. Joy can alert others to aspects of society which nourish and sustain our well-being (McLaren, 2010). We paid special attention to anger—an emotion which is a valid emotional response to injustice, but which has often been censored, denigrated, and utilized to further oppress the Black community by perpetuating stereotypes against them (hooks, 1995; Collins, 2008). Our psychoeducational curriculum sought to normalize anger as a valid response to injustice, welcome it out of suppression, and encourage youth to channel anger into artistic and meaningful expression through photographs. In this manner, *Eyes on the Street* utilized photovoice as an expressive arts therapy tool to help children identify, express, and embrace their complex emotions as sources of wisdom, meaning, and empowerment. We encouraged children to share these emotions with one another and practice emotional vulnerability to strengthen their community bonds.

Aside from the benefits of emotional agility, *Eyes on the Street* encouraged youth to create emotionally powerful photographs for the purposes of social advocacy. Since the Hilltop South neighborhood is their home, we acknowledged that they were in the best position to educate others and spread awareness about the strengths, wounds, and needs of the community. We affirmed that the children are the experts of their own lives, aligning with the ethos of photovoice as a community-based participatory research method. We positioned emotionally powerful photography as an appropriate vehicle for consciousness-raising and social justice because it can spark *empathy*—a sense of "emotional infectiousness" that transforms individual emotions into collective emotions (Tolstoy, 1899). We tied the social advocacy potential of empathy to the evolutionary psychology of emotions by explaining that all emotions have the power for motivate *action (*McLaren, 2010). For instance, anger motivates communities to seek to reduce whatever injustice is sparking such anger. Sadness motivates communities to band together for support amidst personal and collective suffering. Joy motivates communities to continue cultivating the aspects of their community are eliciting such happiness in order to maintain well-being (McLaren, 2010). Since emotions motivate action, emotionally powerful photographs can spark emotional empathy in viewers which might motivate them to take action in society. In this spirit, we invited youth to become social advocacy photographers on behalf of their Hilltop South community, whereby liberation psychotherapy attempts to facilitate psychological healing by helping community members "discover themselves in their mastery … to realize that their actions transform reality, and thereby to see new avenues for action" (Russell and Bohan, 2007, p. 70).

1.3. Liberation psychology and self-reflexivity

Liberation psychology practices beckon practitioners to engage in critical reflection about our own social positionality, to be aware of our biases and worldviews and reduce the possibility of perpetuating oppression (Watkins and Shulman, 2008). The authors of this article were all members of the Duquesne University Psychology Department at the time of this program and represent an array of intersectional identities and motives for participating in this project. Nisha Gupta identifies an Indian-American, queer, cis-gender woman from an upper-middle class socioeconomic upbringing. Her work entails designing arts-based therapeutic interventions to facilitate sociopolitical trauma healing, often regarding the trauma of homophobia, racism, and gender violence. Designing *Eyes on the Street* as a trauma-healing intervention emerged from her trauma focused clinical work. Eva-Maria Simms identifies as a female immigrant from Germany, whose working-class family history was marked by fascist violence and racism. Her research group, PlaceLab, focuses on place, violence, and healing trauma and integrates community members into the research process and jointly develops projects which communities can use to reclaim their places and public street lives. Aaron Dougherty identifies as a white cis-gendered bisexual male who has grown up and lived in various neighborhoods of the Hilltop South. His participation in this project is motivated by his desire to give back to his community and highlight the vibrancy and resiliency of this neighborhood through academic research and community engagement as a mental health professional.

1.3.1. Eyes on the street curriculum

The *Eyes on the Street* liberation psychotherapy intervention occurred through a series of workshops across five consecutive days at the St. Paul AME Church Summer Academy in Beltzhoover, Pittsburgh. Each session was an hour and a half. Five clinical psychology facilitators and five camp counselors teamed up to work with the 25 children (ages 7–12) in large and small groups. Two psychology facilitators were native to the Hilltop South community, and at the time of the project were current residents of the neighborhood. Their guidance was essential to the project, due to their familiarity with the dynamics and history of the Hilltop South, as well as their personal investment in strengthening the youth engagement, emotional resiliency, interpersonal bonds, and development of their own community. This section of the paper describes the activities implemented on each day of the *Eyes on the Street* photovoice curriculum.

1.3.2. Day 1: introducing the emotional power of photography

On the first day, we spent 20 min introducing the program to the children before accompanying them on a 1-h neighborhood walk to take photos. We introduced ourselves as psychology students who would be facilitating an exciting project with them: we would be lending the children digital cameras and helping them create a photography exhibit by the end of the week. We explained that one of the main tasks of psychology is to help human beings express their emotions, and photography is a powerful tool with which to do so. Accordingly, we invited children to participate in the main "psychological task" of this project: to take photos that express their *emotions* about their neighborhood. Specifically, we invited them to capture aspects of their neighborhood which bring pleasant emotions and which they don't want taken away, and aspects which elicit unpleasant emotions and which they wish to change.

Next, we introduced the social justice potential of photovoice to the children. We reflected on how photographers have the power to change the world by expressing emotions through the art of photography. This is because emotionally powerful photographs can invite others to feel the same emotions that the photographer feels about the world. For instance, if someone walks by a pile of litter on the street and it makes them unhappy, they could take a photo of it to express their sadness about it. Then, others who view that photograph may also feel sad seeing that image of litter. Consequently, these feelings of sadness may motivate them to clean up litter next time they walk by it, or to avoid littering in the first place. In this manner, we invited children to reflect on how art can spark emotional *empathy*. And since emotions motivate action, emotionally powerful photographs can also motivate people to take action and make a difference in their communities.

We also suggested to children that the *Eyes on the Street* project can help them acquire creative expertise as digital photographers. The children responded enthusiastically about the chance to evolve their photography talents, a natural artistic medium for their generation particularly with the accessibility of smart phone cameras. We introduced the children to five photography techniques with which to capture emotionally powerful photographs: *lighting shots* which use shadows and lighting to evoke moods; *down low angle shots* which entails crouching down and tilting the camera up to portray majestic size; *close-up shots* which involves leaning in close with the camera so viewers feel like they can touch or smell the photo's subject; *wide shots*

which involves stepping back and taking a photo of a wide open space so viewers feel like they are in the scene; and *portrait shots* which capturing people's facial features to convey emotion and relationship. We showed children example photographs to illustrate each technique, and invited them to share what emotions arose for them in responses to each photo. These techniques incited excitement among the children about improving their self-efficacy with the craft of photography. Discussing their emotional responses to the photos also helped the children begin connecting with, labeling, and sharing their own emotions.

Finally, we distributed digital cameras and guided the children around Beltzhoover with the task of taking emotionally powerful photographs. The children were invited to take photographs of anything they noticed during the walk which filled them with *pleasant emotions*. They were also encouraged to try out the five photography techniques in order to capture emotionally powerful photographs.

1.3.3. Day 2: teaching youth about the function and purpose of human emotions

On day two, we informed the children that we planned to take them on another walk, and this time they could take photographs of aspects of their neighborhood that filled them with unpleasant emotions. We spend the first 20 min of the workshop contextualizing this activity through psychoeducation about the functions and meanings of human emotions such as anger, fear, disgust, sadness, grief, happiness/joy, gratitude, and pride.

First, we invited the children to wonder about the purpose of fear. After they offered their own ideas, we suggested that fear serves as an internal protector that alerts impending threats of danger in the environment and motivate us to turn the other way (McLaren, 2010). We also explored the function of anger: how it can emerge after being wronged and suffering from an injustice, or after witnessing an injustice upon a loved one. Anger helps us take a stand by declaring the message: "NO! That is not acceptable, and I will not stand for it!" (McLaren, 2010). We suggested that anger can be expressed in constructive ways that can lead to action. We also wondered about the function of sadness, and explored how it helps gather social support and comfort in times of suffering. We mentioned how Charles Darwin said humans evolved to produce tears during distress, which inform people around us that we are suffering and require their support. It is difficult for people to overcome suffering on their own; our survival depends on signaling to others that we are in need of comfort and help (McLaren, 2010). We also explored the function of pleasant emotions. Happiness can send the message that it is crucial to nourish and maintain whatever it is that evokes pleasant feelings. Gratitude can also preserve personal and collective well-being; "thank you" can communicate to others that their efforts do not go unappreciated and are essential to our health (McLaren, 2010).

Then we explored that every emotion can motivate action. Fear can motivate us to avoid threats in our environment and to eliminate these threats on behalf of communal safety. Anger can motivate us to demand that we be treated fairly, become devoted to changing injustice, and ensure that our voice be heard. Sadness can motivate us to reach out for support and create community bonds to accelerate healing. Happiness can motivate us to produce more of whatever has spurred such pleasure and spread the joy. Gratitude can inspire people to continue working hard to create sources of joy in their community (McLaren, 2010).

Next, we began our neighborhood walk and photo-taking activity. This time, the children insisted on bringing us to a particular neighborhood location which they knew would incite unpleasant emotions: an abandoned school ground. We followed their leadership during the walk, affirming the commitment of community-based participatory action research (CBPR) to restore power to the hands of community members.

1.3.4. Day 3: processing complex emotions via photo selection

On day three, we invited the children to select two of the most emotionally-powerful photographs taken on both days: one photograph that captures pleasant emotions and one that captures unpleasant emotions. We distributed a feelings chart which contained 30 emotions words so they could experiment with languaging their nuanced emotions with words like "enraged," "compassionate," "heartbroken," and "optimistic" (see appendix). By helping youth build their emotional vocabulary, we wanted to assist them in gaining practice to language their emotions as a vehicle for healing and empowerment amidst any potential traumatic circumstances in their lives.

The children were encouraged to experiment with these words while discussing and selecting emotionally-powerful photographs. We brought in laptops with their photos uploaded onto it. The children were divided into small groups to gather around the laptops and view a slideshow of their digital photography, with the invitation to discuss, review, and select their most emotionally powerful photographs. During this process, we used psychotherapy skills to guide youth to express specific emotions evoked by their photos, encouraging them to use words from the feeling chart. We asked: *What emotions did you feel when you first took that photo? What emotions come up for you now while viewing it?* We sought to increase the children's emotional agility in order to realize that it is okay to experience two contradictory emotions at once: loving and sad, scared yet hopeful. We also asked: *Is there a story that goes along with this image?* They attached narratives to their photographs and shared intimate experiences with one another about living in the Hilltop South neighborhoods. While languaging the complex emotions and stories attached to their photos, the youth seemed to empathically identify with one another and offer each other a comforting, responsive stance. In this manner, the photovoice program served as a kind of group therapy.

Eyes on the Street cultivated intimate bonds among participants by creating a safe space for these young community members to confide about their emotional experiences with one another, relate to each other, and often realize they are not alone in their feelings about their community—both the joys and the pains. By the end of the day, each child had selected two photographs which expressed pleasant and unpleasant emotions about their community.

1.3.5. Day 4: writing emotion-driven messages to the community

On day four, the children wrote descriptions for their selected photographs. We provided three instructions to help facilitate the writing process. First, we invited them to write a caption for each photograph that expressed the core emotion(s) evoked by that image, using the feelings chart as a tool for expression. Second, we invited them to write a short essay for each photo that conveys "an important message to the community" inspired by these emotions, with the reminder that every emotion has an important message to convey. Third, for the photograph that expressed unpleasant emotions, we encouraged children to write *one specific action step* that community members could take to make a positive difference in the neighborhood in response to that image. This third instruction sought to help children harness their emotions as a way to motivate viewers into social action, affirming the social advocacy spirit of the project. It also served to remind youth that their ideas matter and can make a difference.

Our hope was that this writing process would seamlessly follow from the conversations that children had participated in the previous day. In reality, the children approached the writing activity with varying paces, levels of confidence, and motivations to do the task. Therefore, it was important to pay keen attention to each child and remain patient and encouraging amidst their writing struggles. We also became aware of resistance among some children to explicitly language the emotions behind some photographs through writing. This was a learning moment in designing a trauma-sensitive therapeutic arts project. In retrospect, we realize that some people might not want to language their traumas verbally; while an image can act as a safe

container, words may feel too overwhelming. A future iteration of this project would involve heeding the wisdom of the children's boundaries and respecting their resistance to explicitly languaging their experiences through writing. If resistance arises, we would strive to engage the youth in an open dialogue of what might be emerging for them, while remaining respectful of their boundaries.

1.3.6. Day 5: showcasing youth's emotions and insights via a photography exhibit

On the final day, we celebrated the children's photo-essays by constructing a photography exhibit. We set up display boards that showcased their photographs and essays and hung them all over a large room at the St. Paul AME Church. We had originally planned to invite the children to construct the exhibit themselves, but they were tired by the end of the week, their attention span was waning, and they wanted to relax and play. As such, we set it up for them as a gift. The youth exclaimed feelings of pride to witness their photography set up as a professional exhibition. They seemed to enjoy viewing their collective artwork, and felt pleasure by witnessing others pay attention to their work. The director of the summer academy who had requested the program, Pastor Cheryl Ruffin, attended the digital photography exhibit along with the camp counselors. The adults made their way through the exhibit, stopping at each photograph and reading its accompanying essay. Pastor Ruffin shed tears and remarked that the children do not often get to feel heard by others, nor receive reinforcement that their voices actually matter. It was clear to her that throughout the *Eyes on the Street* curriculum, their emotions and voices were heard, validated, and empowered every day. Now, this exhibit allowed adults of the Hilltop South community to reflect on children's emotions and insights that were displayed through their artwork in response to their neighborhood.

We ended the celebration by reminding to the youth that their emotions and ideas matter and can make a difference. Juice and snacks were distributed and we initiated an apple juice toast to their hard work and talents. The children who participated in the *Eyes on the Street* project had a tangible product of which to be proud. The photography exhibit seemed empowering for the community as a whole, indicated by the joyful feelings in the room among children and adults alike. These celebratory feelings validated the benefit of using photovoice as a therapeutic vehicle to facilitate emotional resiliency, community bonds, and social advocacy among youth.

The photography exhibit was left with Pastor Ruffin to show to the children's caregivers in a camp event several weeks later. The photo-essays were also left with Pastor Ruffin to make use of and distribute to her community. We also a produced digital scrapbook of the photo-essays to preserve the children's artwork and ideas, and for easy distribution among Hilltop South community members. In this scrapbook, we wrote the details of the *Eyes on the Street* curriculum as a how-to manual, similar to this article but in a jargon-free manner. By doing so, we hoped to make the intervention sustainable and easily implementable by the Hilltop community leaders in the future if they wished to replicate it. Thus the scrapbook also served as a digital "toolkit" for adult community members to implement photovoice themselves as a trauma-healing intervention. Finally, a thematic analysis of these photo-essays was also conducted to yield youth-driven insights to share with community organizers.

2. Discussion: the therapeutic and emancipatory benefits of research

A therapeutic appropriation of photovoice blurs the boundaries between qualitative research and therapy, reminding qualitative researchers that the *process* of doing this kind of research can be just as transformative as the final product. Frequently, qualitative researchers delineate a clear distinction between research and psychotherapy, asserting the ethical importance of separate roles, processes, objectives and outcomes between the two (Sanjari et al., 2014). In a different camp, a number of qualitative researchers request explicit acknowledgement of the therapeutic benefits of our work upon research participants, striving to embrace these healing qualities rather than deny them (Murray, 2003; Halling, 2005; Harper and Cole, 2012; Rossetto, 2014; Gupta, 2018a,b). Murray (2003) and Rossetto (2014) have studied how research participants experience psychological healing while participating in in-depth qualitative interviews. Harper and Cole (2012) discuss how member-checking can serve as a kind of group therapy for research participants. Halling (2005) has discussed how dialogal phenomenological research can bring co-researchers together to experience intimacy, companionship, and healing from isolation. Gupta (2018a,b) has applied these principles of dialogal phenomenological research to facilitate healing specifically for members of oppressed communities. These researchers request more explicit appreciation for the ways that qualitative research can achieve secondary therapeutic benefits.

Eyes on the Street differs in that we privileged the therapeutic benefits of the photovoice method as primary to our program objectives. Privileging healing allowed us to intentionally blend together our dual roles as researchers and psychotherapists rather than separate the two. Moreover, privileging healing allowed us to fulfill one of the overarching objectives of liberation psychology: to use research as a vehicle for "acts of psychological restoration" to combat the traumatic psychic effects caused by sociopolitical oppression (Watkins and Shulman, 2008, p. 268). The trauma-healing focus of the photovoice program is key here. Rather than considering the emergence of traumatic emotion to be a potential side-effect in doing a photovoice project with community members who have experienced sociopolitical oppression, we intentionally designed the photovoice curriculum as a vehicle for youth to confront, contain, and empower the important messages imbedded in traumatic emotions. In this light, *Eyes on the Street* can offer the potential for emancipation amidst the realities of sociopolitical oppression—by harnessing the wisdom in the symptom as messages of social advocacy with which to change systemic structures. As a result, trauma itself can begin to lift as vitality is restored.

Liberation psychologists Mary Watkins and Helene Shulman describe the therapeutic aspects of participatory action research as involving "the original sense of care or attending to the soul," explaining that social injustice inflicts a kind of "soul loss" from one's energy being depleted by oppressive power structures (Watkins and Shulman, 2008, p. 268). Accordingly, participatory action research can be psychologically re-generative for research participants: "to articulate one's experience and insights, to learn about and then begin to defend [their] rights, to make a space to invite others' testimonials, and then to act to redress the injustices one has witnessed are acts of psychological restoration" (Watkins and Shulman, 2008, p. 268). *Eyes on the Street* sought to facilitate psychological restoration for children in the Hilltop South by inviting them to express, reclaim, and empower their complex emotions from sociopolitical trauma using photovoice. Through photovoice, we affirmed that their feelings are valid and real. Through photovoice, we affirmed that their feelings have the power to make a difference. Through photovoice, we sought to equip them with a set of psychological and artistic skills that they can harness throughout their lives in order to transform emotions into power, suffering into voice, and trauma into action. We hope that their artwork and words can be a seed of community resistance against the systemic erasure of livable public places in our cities.

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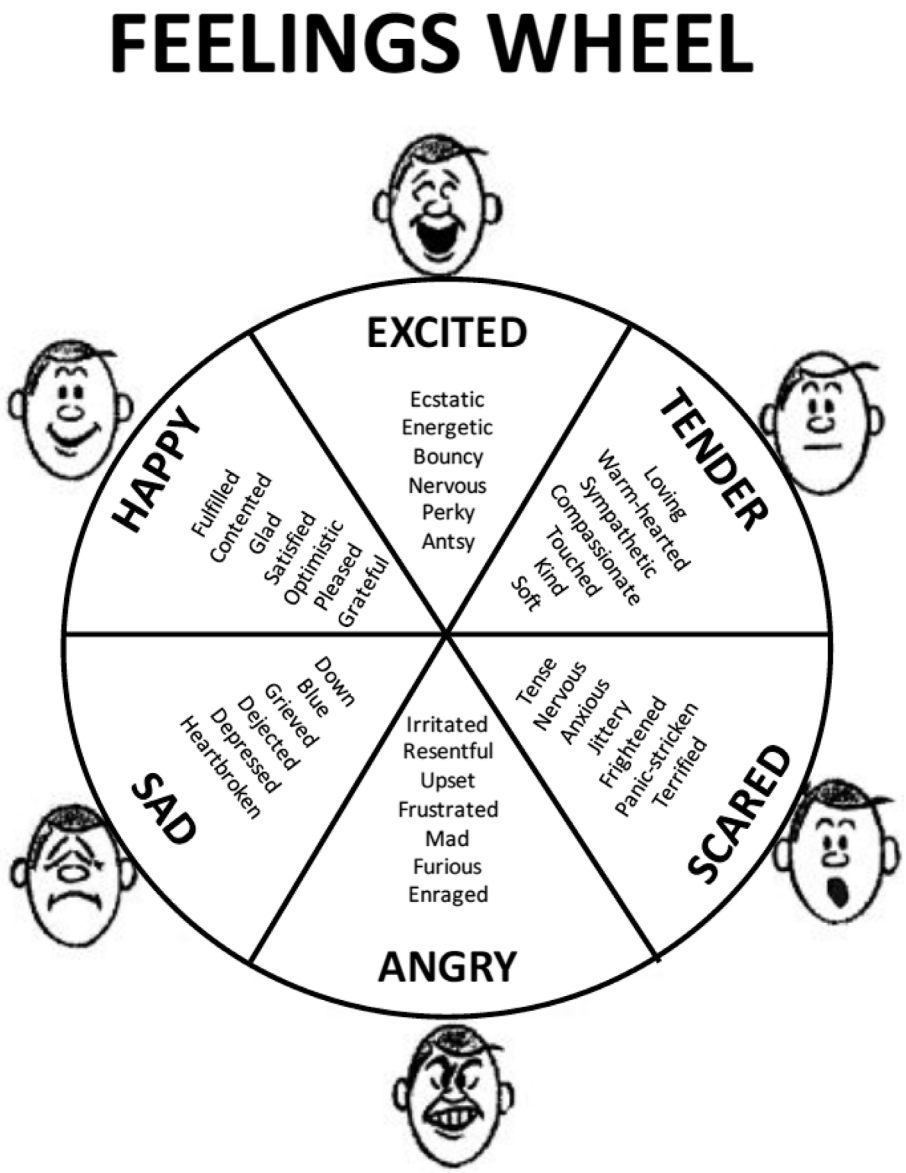
Appendix



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