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VIOLENCE THROUGH THE EYES OF YOUTH: A PHOTOVOICE EXPLORATION

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In 2001 the CDC declared youth violence a public health issue. In summer 2008, we embarked on a project designed to explore the issue of violence from the standpoint of youth who are exposed to and affected by violence in their communities. Using photovoice as the primary methodology, the project sought to develop a more nuanced and deeper understanding of these issues, while simultaneously giving youth a voice and further developing their critical thinking skills. Digital images produced by the youth and the subsequent structured conversations focused on representations of violence, causes of violence and ways to address violence. Analyses of the images and conversations, especially in the context of the literatures on youth violence, race and poverty, support the utility of photovoice as a tool for understanding how youth perceive violence and underscore the need to listen to the voices of those affected by violence. © 2012 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

Each year, millions of children and adolescents in the United States are exposed to violence in their homes, schools, and communities as both victims and witnesses. (Finkelhor, Turner, Ormod, Hamby, & Kracke, 2009)

INTRODUCTION

In 2007, an average of 16 young people between 10 and 24 years of age were murdered each day in the United States making homicide the second leading cause of death for this age cohort (Center for Disease Control [CDC], 2010). This age group has also consistently exhibited higher homicide rates than all other age groups combined. As sobering as these figures are, they represent, according to Rich (2009), "only the tip of the iceberg . . . since . . . for every person who gets shot and dies, another four get shot and survive" (p. x). And for each person who dies from stab wounds, 64 survive (Rich, 2009). These staggeringly high numbers led the CDC, in 2001, to declare youth violence a public health issue (CDC 2010).

Behind these tragic numbers and trends are individuals, each of whom have, or had, a story to tell. Unfortunately, their voices have typically been silenced by a society that devalues their thoughts, denies their feelings, and dismisses their perspectives. They are our youth, in particular, our young people of color who live in poverty-effected neighborhoods across the United States. Homicide rates for African Americans in this age cohort are nearly 20 times the rate for Whites and nearly three times the rate for Hispanics, and the homicide rate for Hispanics is seven times the rate for Whites (CDC, 2009). They comprise the statistics and appear on the nightly news and in our print media, but they are rarely asked by the media or researchers what they think about their communities, their schools, the violence that they have to negotiate on a daily basis or what effect it has on their lives (Carr, Napolitano, & Keating, 2007; Fine et al., 2003). In short, they are invisible until tragedy turns them into a statistic.

On the assumption that we can develop a better understanding of violence and, consequently, more effective ways of addressing it by asking youth directly, in the summer of 2010 we partnered with the University Community Collaborative of Philadelphia (UCCP)[1], a Center at Temple University in Philadelphia that works with older youth (aged 14–24 years). This collaboration resulted in a project designed to explore the issue of youth violence from the perspective of adolescents who are exposed to and affected by violence in their communities and schools. Using photovoice as the primary methodology, the project sought to develop a more nuanced and deeper understanding of these issues, while simultaneously giving youth a voice and further developing their critical thinking skills. This article discusses that project, what we learned from incorporating the youths' perspective, and the implications for research and practice. First, we explore the intersection of race, poverty, and violence and then discuss the photovoice methodology to contextualize the issue and the project.

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[1]The UCCP, "prepares and supports youth and young adults to become confident, effective leaders and collaborates with organizations to create cultures that value and integrate the contributions of youth, thereby building stronger communities," and is described in greater detail later in this article. One of the researchers and co-authors (Barbara Ferman) is founder and Executive Director of the UCCP.

The Intersection of Race, Poverty, and Violence

The homicide rates cited above leave no doubt that race, poverty, and violence are inextricably bound. According to one study, among the major predictors of repeat injury are "being black, being male, and being poor" (Rich, p. xi, 2009). This is hardly surprising since one of the legacies of racial segregation in urban America is a proliferation of African American neighborhoods characterized by high concentrations of joblessness, low levels of education, and an extreme degree of isolation from mainstream institutions (Anderson, 2000; Sampson & Wilson, 1995; Massey & Denton, 1993; Wilson, 1987). This litany of disadvantages perpetuates the cycle of poverty and provides ammunition for an explosion of violence. Kaufman (2005) posits that the link between the micro and macro levels of society explains the differential statistics related to violence based on race and ethnicity. The "structural context of neighborhoods" (in particular, degree of disadvantage, mobility, and urbanicity), coupled with individual level factors that include low self-control, exposure to deviance, and weakened bonds, plays a key role in the proliferation of violence in poor Black neighborhoods.

Similarly, it has long been established that poverty and violence are highly correlated, yet it is not poverty per se; structural factors associated with low socioeconomic status, such as low community involvement, high rates of drug use, chronic unemployment, and crowded housing conditions, contribute to high rates of violence in the community (Dahlberg, 1998). For youth, other community factors may also contribute to high rates of violence, such as community disorganization, availability of drugs and guns, low neighborhood attachment, racial prejudice, and social norms encouraging violent acts (Hawkins et al., 2000). Individual level factors cannot be wholly discounted, yet when structural constraints are paramount, suppression of individual freedom to "choose" needs to be acknowledged.

Implicit in these structural factors is the potential for cyclical patterns of violence as youth attempt to cope with violence that they experience on an all too frequent basis. According to a comprehensive national survey of children's exposure to violence, some youth will exhibit strong resiliency while others suffer long-term mental, physical, and emotional damage (Finkelhor et al., 2009). Research indicates that mental health problems such as posttraumatic stress, behavior problems, phobias, conduct disorders (McCart et al., 2007), anxiety, and/or depression (Gellman & Delucia-Waak, 2006; McCart et al., 2007; Ng-Mak, Salzinger, Feldman, & Stueve, 2002) may occur. Empirical evidence also suggests that youth who are exposed to chronic violence, especially those who live in the inner city, may adapt, become desensitized, or normalize experiences of violence (Ng-Mak et al., 2002).

Philadelphia, the setting for this study, represents, in many ways, the perfect storm. With a population just over 1.5 million people, Philadelphia has a 23.8% poverty rate, which is significantly higher than the national rate (15.1%), a 48% percent dropout rate at the high school level, highly segregated residential patterns, and many neighborhoods where concentrations of poverty are at or above 40%, a figure that many social scientists use to delineate traditionally poor neighborhoods from the new high poverty neighborhoods (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).[2] One of the many aspects of concentrated

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[2]William Julius Wilson (1987) was perhaps the first to draw attention to these neighborhoods as representing a new, and indeed, very troubling, phenomenon. In contrast to the older black ghettos that, while racially segregated, contained significant economic integration and financial resources, these neighborhoods were characterized by low levels of education, very high joblessness, lack of businesses and other institutions, high rates of abandonment, crime, violence, and other pathologies that culminate from lack of opportunities and

poverty is the disproportionality of poverty across race; for example, the poverty rate for African Americans in Philadelphia is 30% compared with 7% for Whites (Center for Health Equality, 2010). Demographically, the city is 43.7% African American, 39.7% White (non-Hispanic), 11.7% Hispanic, and 5.7% Asian (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

The data on violent crime in Philadelphia, in particular shootings and homicides, when looked at in the context of the city's profile above, unequivocally demonstrate the intersection of race, poverty, and crime. In 2007, shootings in the city of Philadelphia were tallied at 2,004; 81%, or 1,628, of the victims were African American. Of this group, nearly 93% were male (n = 1,509). African American males comprised 75% of all the shooting victims and African American males between 18 and 25 years of age represented 36% of the total (Inquirer, 2007).

Turning to homicide, the statistics are equally confirming. In 2007, Philadelphia had 392 homicides, 331 by firearms (Inquirer, 2007). African Americans constituted 79% of all homicide victims; males accounted for 72% of these victims. Of the male victims, age breakdowns reveal that 45% were between 18 and 30 years of age (Inquirer, 2007). Almost all of these shootings occurred in poverty stricken, African American communities. In 2008, newly elected mayor Michael Nutter signed an Executive Order declaring the level of violence in the city a "crime emergency" and called on Police Department officials to develop a strategy to reduce violent crime (Office of the Mayor, 2008).

Photovoice

Photovoice is a qualitative research methodology that combines photography and group process to identify and articulate community assets and concerns to relevant stakeholders (Wang & Burris, 1994; Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). Originally developed to facilitate critical discussions among female migrant workers in China (Wang, Burris, & Xiang, 1996), this methodology has since been utilized to give voice to a wide range of vulnerable populations, many of whom are overlooked in the investigation of social issues, such as inner city youth (Strack, Magill, & McDonagh, 2004) and women experiencing ongoing violence (McIntyre, 2003), amongst others. The desired result of photovoice is empowerment through participation, and it has been found to encourage high levels of participation (Catalani & Minkler, 2009).

Participants take photographs to illustrate assets and concerns in their community and then engage in critical dialogue about the images represented in the photographs. Short writing exercises designed to explore the symbolic meaning of the images are used to stimulate dialogue. By providing participants with cameras, the process enables them to document their environments from their own personal perspective. Photovoice typically culminates in a public exhibition of participants' photographic work to which key community stakeholders are invited. The exhibition of the photographs provides a means of empowerment for participants by providing a public forum in which they can articulate their perspective to individuals in power (Wang & Burris, 1997).

While photovoice has been utilized with youth to explore a range of community issues (see Wang, 2006, for a full description), only a limited number of studies have utilized photovoice methodology with youth to study violence. The themes that emerged from these studies centered on precipitators of violence, indicators of violence, and possible

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high concentrations of poverty. Geographically, economically, politically and culturally these neighborhoods are usually cut off from the mainstream. (For a more thorough discussion, see: *The Truly Disadvantaged* (Wilson, 1987)*; American Apartheid* (Massey & Denton, 1993); *The Code of the Street* (Anderson, 2000).

inhibitors of violence. The most commonly cited precipitators of violence were gangs and drugs (Wilson et al., 2007) and limited opportunities for youth (Asomugha et al., 2009). Indicators of violence included litter and graffiti, which were seen as signals of negative social relations in the community (Jensen, Kaiwai, McCreanor, & Barnes, 2006; Wilson et al., 2007), and the prevalence of liquor, fast food, and gambling in the community (Jensen et al., 2006). These latter items could also be construed as images of social disarray. In terms of violence inhibitors, the role of family, schools, and peers were indicated as important preventive factors in the production of youth violence (Morrel-Samuels, Wang, Bell, & Monk, 2005; Asomugha et al., 2009).

THE PROJECT

In an attempt to better understand how youth define violence and its causes and to solicit their thoughts on ways to address it, photovoice methodology was employed in a summer program with high school aged youth, most of whom were African American and from neighborhoods where the intersection between race, poverty, and violence is one of the defining characteristics. The project was a partnership between the UCCP and researchers at Temple University. Founded in 1997, the UCCP provides a series of after school and summer programs, credit-bearing internships, peer education activities, and paid employment designed to develop the leadership capacities of youth and young adults aged 14 to 24 years (see www.temple.edu/uccp for additional information about the UCCP and its programming). All programming is carried out by the Leaders Corps, former program participants, most of whom are in college and receive training and ongoing support from full-time staff. The UCCP's summer programming is six weeks, 20 hours per week. Typically, the UCCP enrolls 70–80 youth in various project based learning programs and, through funding from the Philadelphia Youth Network, pays participants minimum wage for their participation.

Participants. In summer 2010, participants were offered the opportunity to take part in a photovoice group. Because photovoice is grounded in an empowerment and community-based framework, it was an appropriate research methodology for one of the youth groups since the UCCP's primary aim is youth empowerment. Moreover, the UCCP's strong reliance on youth produced media, especially film, as a tool to engage youth and to give them voice, created an additional fit. During the UCCP's general orientation for its summer programming, the photovoice project was explained, and 11 youth signed up to participate; however, one dropped out before the program began. The 10 participants were between 15 and 17 years of age, and four were male and six female. Of the participants, nine were African American and one was multiracial. The participants came from different low-income neighborhoods in Philadelphia. In response to requirements of the funder, all participants were low income and had at least one documented barrier, such as homelessness or runaway, foster care placement, pregnant or parenting teen, youth offender, basic skills deficit, and/or needed additional assistance with education or employment (WorkReady Philadelphia Summer Programs, 2010). Since all of the youth were younger than 18 years of age, parental consent and youth assent were obtained for all participants once the study was approved by the Institutional Review Board.

The curriculum. Two Leaders Corps members facilitated the group, both of whom were African American males aged 19 years. The UCCP's Media Production Coordinator was

instrumental in photograph preparation and printing, framing and mounting, group activity support, and organizational input. The actual photovoice component, including photo-discussion sessions, evaluations, and program planning, was implemented by a team consisting of two graduate students in social work and two full-time faculty members from the university, one from Social Work and one from Political Science, all of whom were White and who worked in conjunction with UCCP staff.

Over the course of the six-week project, participants explored topics related to community assets and issues, especially violence, practiced camera skills, went out on group photo shoots, collectively discussed their images with an eye towards deconstructing what they represented, and engaged in other group activities geared toward the development of critical literacies. Participants were provided with digital cameras by the UCCP and typically did their photo shoots near Temple University's campus in North Philadelphia, which is a high poverty community. In fact, it is part of the First Congressional District, which, according to the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index, has the dubious distinction of being the second hungriest congressional district in the United States, a good proxy for poverty (Lubrano, 2010). For safety reasons, participants were not permitted to take the cameras home. Since many of the participants live in high crime neighborhoods, we feared that the cameras might put them at risk of being robbed or assaulted. Further, we were concerned that participants might put themselves in a position of harm while trying to capture a particular image. For example, people in their communities may become suspicious of an adolescent taking pictures around the neighborhood.

During the first two weeks of the project, several sessions were devoted solely to explaining the project and to discussing photography from both the technical aspects (e.g., how to use a digital camera, different angles, and lighting) and representational and empowerment aspects (i.e., photography as tool for youth voice). The remainder of the project comprised four photo shoots, one on community assets and three on violence. After each photo shoot, participants were asked to select two of their favorite images and then title and write about them. To facilitate the writing process, participants were given critical evaluation forms containing specific questions. Initially, we used the SHOWeD method, as discussed by Wallerstein (1987) and further outlined by Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001), which poses the following questions about the pictures: What do you **S**ee here? What is really **H**appening? How does this relate to **O**ur lives? **W**hy does this problem/strength exist? What can we **D**o about it?

The community assets photo shoot and writing activity were used as a trial run for the photovoice process. This practice session revealed some participant confusion regarding the SHOWeD questions; thus, we modified them slightly to improve clarity and then spent time explaining to the participants the meaning behind the inquiries. The new critical evaluation forms contained the following questions: What do you see here? What does this picture mean to you? How does this picture represent the theme for this assignment? What created the situation in the picture? Forms were collected at the end of the session and reviewed by the research staff. Additionally, the images selected by participants were printed for distribution during the subsequent session where participants engaged in the photo discussions using the forms as prompts for the conversation. During these sessions, which were facilitated by members of the research team, participants explored the images, delving into how they related to violence. These sessions were audiotaped and were the source of qualitative data.

While we developed many activities to ease participants into the photovoice methodology and to develop cohesive group dynamics, the "roots of violence" activity was central to the project. Following research conducted by Asomugha et al. (2009), we used the

roots of violence activity to insert some structure into the overall process by having participants explore what they believed to be the social, community, and individual factors that contribute to violence. We began by drawing a tree on the board and then discussing the literal characteristics of it (e.g., leaves, branches, roots). Given the complexity of the social and individual factors that contribute to the issue of community violence, we decided to experiment with another issue first, asking the youth to explore the "roots" of homelessness as a way to practice differentiating between cause and effect. We then turned our discussion to violence where participants identified the following root causes: poverty, gangs, drugs, and disagreements, with the latter primarily related to issues of money, infidelity, and drugs/possessions.

For the first photo shoot on the topic of violence, participants were asked to think about the roots that they explored during this session, in particular, "poverty or disagreements." After reviewing the photographs and staff and participant feedback, the team determined that additional activities were needed to supplement this initial discussion. Thus, after the photo discussion, we engaged participants in a further exploration of the roots of violence asking them to rank the themes they found most relevant and wanted to be the focus of their photographic work. In addition to poverty and disagreements, the participants indicated money, human rights, law, and love as the other areas. In between the remaining two photo shoots, we had participants brainstorm on how they could illustrate their themes, creating a list of possible concrete objects to photograph. We then asked them to work independently on some notes of what they might want to photograph during their next photo shoot.

Finally, we provided some additional input to their lists that would facilitate the photo shoots. Collectively, the participants took 612 photographs for the three violence photo shoots. The number of photographs per participant ranged from a low of 29 to a high of 102. As discussed below, the themes generated played a much larger role in the photo-discussion sessions than they did in shaping the actual photos that the participants took.

The project culminated in an exhibit attended by youth from all of the UCCP's programs as well as family members and members of the surrounding community. Each participant was given a CD containing all the digital images that they created throughout the project and the four-framed prints that were a part of the exhibit. At the last session, participants completed an "Image Use Consent Form," which allowed them to decide if they wanted to grant permission for their photographs to be included in professional manuscripts and/or become part of a website devoted to issues of youth violence. The form was explained in its entirety, and each of the areas where they had a decision to make about granting permission was discussed in full. Participants completed the forms and took them home to obtain the signature of their parent/guardian. Contact sheets that contained all the images they created throughout the project were printed so each participant could review the photographs and mark out any that they did not want to be used under any circumstances. We wanted to ensure that the participants retained all rights to their images and granted permission only for images they felt comfortable in having us use. All of the youth granted some level of permission for their images to be included in other materials, but only four gave explicit permission for their photographs to be used in the production of an academic manuscript.

Data collection and analysis. The three photo-discussion group sessions devoted solely to the issue of violence constitute the primary source of data for this study. For two of the three sessions, the participants were split into two groups of five with the final session combining

all of the participants in one group. Discussions centered on the photographs selected by participants from their photo shoots during the previous session. Using the same questions from the forms that the participants filled out (see above), each session started with a random choice of one photograph and the question, "what do you see here?" Each of these sessions were audiotaped and then transcribed into written text. We had 360 hours of audiotape and 238 pages of transcript. Members of the research team independently read and coded the written text. Each coder developed themes independently, which were then subsequently reviewed for consistency. While slight differences in wording for some of the categories were present, the coding was highly consistent across reviewers. Results from the content analysis are discussed below and have been divided into the three areas, which relate to the questions posed in the critical evaluation forms: representations of violence, causes of violence, and ways to address violence.

RESULTS

Representations of Violence

In terms of representation, participants discussed a number of issues, but the themes and images most prevalent were trash, graffiti, and the (housing) projects, which is similar to findings from other photovoice studies with youth. Participants referred to the large amounts of trash in impoverished neighborhoods and the lack of interest the community has in responding to the problem: "People don't care about the communities. That's why there's trash around. More people don't care than the people who do care." This disconnection between community members and the state of their neighborhood may be a representation of low community involvement or low neighborhood attachment, both of which have been linked to violence as contributing factors. This idea was further illustrated in this comment: "Since the topic was violence, we took pictures of trash because trash is hurting our communities making them look dirty." Figure 1 illustrates the way in which trash was represented in their photography.

Unlike the discussion around trash, which was always viewed as a negative, participants explored the beneficial and detrimental effects of graffiti on the community and its members. Some saw it as an art form as in the following comment: "You got [to] ride around the neighborhood, the whole City of Philadelphia, you're going to see murals, graffiti that look like art and stuff like that." This same person, however, recognized that it could be misconstrued as "territory markings," which he and other participants felt could lead to violence: "People write graffiti and it mean different things. Like, it can mean, say, well, since this North Philly, a West Philly person can write West Philly all on there, which leads to like the little gang stuff." Participants also differentiated the community's reaction to various types of graffiti, and one youth stated: "I think the community like it. Because that's what our community is about. So when it's not graffiti, they look nice. But if it just a tag and it's just cuss words and all that, then the community doesn't like it. But other than that, if it's artistic, they like it." Figure 2 illustrates both the artistic as well as the territory marking that is often found in neighborhood graffiti.

Finally, numerous participants cited the high levels of violence associated with housing projects: "I saw that a lot of bad things happening, like, around the area [near] the projects." While perhaps more poignant than some of the other comments, one participant stated: "Every project I know, people call them the death trap." Even commonplace occurrences take on new meaning in the housing projects as one youth suggests here:
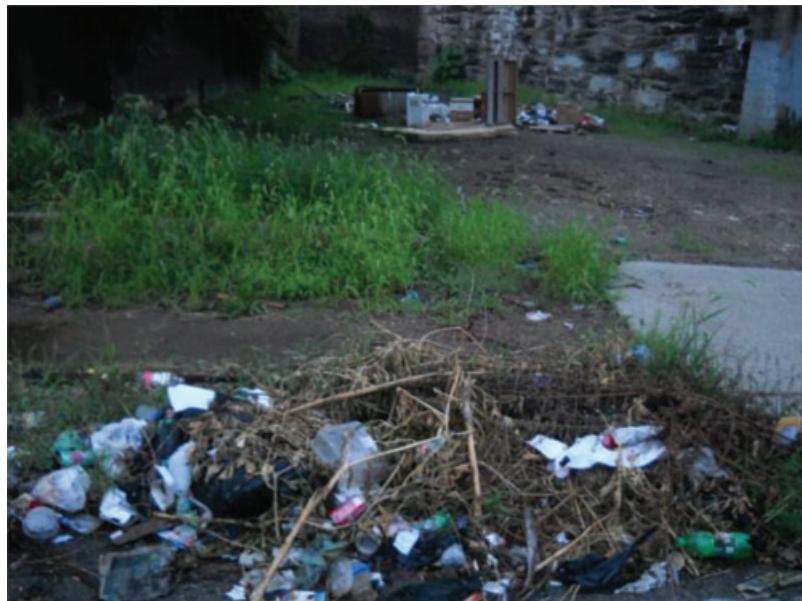
Figure 1. The figure illustrates the trash in the streets.
"Keeping our community clean isn't easy. As young people, we try and come together to keep it clean, but it's hard. Don't make your community a DUMP."

Figure 2. The figure provides an example of graffiti that can be found in the neighborhood.
"Since this is North Philly, a West Philly person can write West Philly all on there, which leads to like the [little] gangs and stuff. So North Philly will go to West Philly and write all graffiti on their wall. And then they find somebody from North Philly doing it, they want to fight them or whatever, which can lead to violence."

Figure 3.   The figure depicts a housing project.
"If you see a project building, it's always a place you want to stay away from because you know there's going to be a lot of violence and drugs."

"From my point of view what I see is, like, everything that happen or every time we go around there, something violent is happening, no matter it be just fighting from a little argument or anything." Figure 3 shows the starkness of one particular housing project.

Causes of Violence

When we moved from representation to explanation (of why violence occurs) the conversation, not surprisingly, coincided with the earlier discussions of the root causes of violence, namely, money, drugs, disagreements, and love. "Gangs" was replaced with references to "territory." Our assumption for why this substitution occurred is that Philadelphia does not have a major gang problem in the way that Los Angeles for example does, but it certainly has rival territory/neighborhood issues that resemble, albeit on a smaller scale, gang-related violence. As mentioned in the previous section, graffiti may be used to mark particular areas or even certain blocks within in one area: "The territory markings are like different sets and different neighborhoods may have their own territory. They have their own boundaries." Territory was also inexorably related to two of the root causes of violence—money and drugs: "Like that block that you get all your business off of. You can't mess it up and let people in [referring to selling drugs]."

Having money was associated with greater opportunity and better personal appearance. People with money were believed to look better, live in better areas, and have greater opportunities for relationships. Money was seen as a way to have friends as indicated by one of the participants: "You can be the ugliest person on earth, just because you have money, everybody likes you." Alternatively, the money itself brings a certain edge to the individual: "When you have money, people respect you more. They be like, 'Oh she is cool. I want to be with her because she has money.'"

Selling drugs was named as a common means for obtaining money, and, as with graffiti, participants expressed ambivalence about drugs. Many suspended judgment on an individual choosing to sell drugs if it was to support his or her basic needs or family: "For some people, they don't have a choice. Like say you are raising all your brothers and sisters; in some way you gotta make money." Participants also acknowledged how money and the availability of this option were linked: "For some people, it's hard to not get [involved selling drugs] because they see so many people and their friends, I guess, influence them. And they see how they making quick money and stuff like that. But sometimes that's not the best way to make quick money."

However, the damaging effect of drug use on the individual and community was also recognized: "Drugs are hurting our community because it's producing more people to get on drugs. And they can't keep up with the rent. So they wind up being in dirty places, and they make it look dirty like littering and do whatever they want. And they just make our city, like, dirty. They killing the people that's in our community and killing our community." The detrimental impact of drugs was inherently related to violence. Participants described the violent conflicts that could result should members of the community confront drug dealers or if dealers from other areas attempt to sell drugs in the "territory" or neighborhood of a specific drug dealer: "Some people can't get involved in the community 'cos they start havin' meetings to stop drugs, and those that are selling them are gonna find out, and try to do certain things to you. Threaten you and stuff. You really can't do that."

Disagreements over trivial matters, or what the participants described as "dumb stuff," seemed to be the catalyst for verbal, physical, and gun violence. The types of disagreements participants described included situations that began over property damage and conflicts in peer and romantic relationships. One participant suggested that people argue over trivial matters, such as a parking spot, and this can turn quickly into a physical altercation. Other participants discussed the consequences of disagreements between individuals: "It's not a fight between two people. It's a fight between two groups or three groups or four groups." Another participant elaborated on this point further: "Everybody is scare of everybody now. Nobody can man up and fight each other. Even if you do want to fight by yourself, the other person is gonna fight with other people. Even if both people want to fight by themselves, their family are not gonna let them or their friends are not gonna let them." This can lead to a cyclical pattern of retribution that is an impediment to any lasting resolution.

Love was a cause of violence when events such as infidelity, breaking up, or pregnancy occurred in a relationship. One participant shared the following personal story: "My cousin died because she was in love with this boy, but this boy he didn't like her no more. And she wound up getting pregnant by him, and he didn't want to keep the baby. And he shot her and the baby. Because she was going around telling everybody that she was keeping the baby … she was sitting on the corner and he shot her." The love for family members was also a cause of violence when an individual sought retribution for a loved one's death or injury: "If somebody killed my cousin or whatever, I'm not going to go

Figure 4. The figure represents abusing love.
"A heart made out of hands means a relationship with love and physical abuse with the hands. It represents violence, abusive relationships."

out and kill them. But I'm gonna want to do something for vengeance. I mean, it's not always the best way. But sometimes it's called for. 'Cause, I mean, that's like your family, all you got and everything. And you got to protect that." Participants also discussed the role violence plays in terms of patterns of abuse that can occur between partners. Figure 4 provides one participant's perspective on how love is related to violence.

Addressing Violence

When the conversation turned to the role the community could play in improving the quality of life within the neighborhood, a strong sense of normalcy or detachment from social problems was expressed as reflected in these statements: "It's [shootings in Philadelphia] normal," "Some people are just used to it [the trash]; that's why they throw stuff around," and "Violence gonna happen no matter what." Participants often spoke in quite a matter of fact way about these community issues.

Moreover, apathy was a major theme that ran through the discussions. Participants did not use the word apathy, but many of their comments referred to community members, and even themselves, not caring or not getting involved, which we are interpreting as apathy:

You can try to come together as a community. But you have a lot of people who don't want to do that. Everybody is kinda about themselves nowadays. So it's gonna be harder to stop drugs without the community participation.

People don't care about [helping] the communities. That's why there's trash around. And more people don't care than the people that do care. So that's why so much litter.

Some of the apathy is no doubt explained by a sense of powerlessness as evidenced in the following two quotes: "I don't think anything can be done [about shootings]" and "we can't do anything about the drugs. It's not up to us." These quotes may be illustrative of the normalization and desensitization to violence and other community issues that can occur for those exposed to such social problems.

Although not part of the formal discussion group, but critical to our overall analysis below, most of the participants said that they personally knew someone who had been murdered, died accidentally, or committed suicide; some had experienced all three. When discussing suicide, they referenced it as a form of self-violence.

DISCUSSION: LEARNING FROM LISTENING

Analyzing what the youth said and, even more importantly, how they phrased it, suggests that much can be learned from incorporating the voice of low income youth of color into the discussion on violence. First, several topics were discussed in a highly nuanced fashion, suggesting the ability to draw connections between complex issues and a sophistication about the realities of poverty, a sophistication that was fueled by a strong pragmatism. Drug dealing, while not necessarily appreciated, was also not condemned since it does offer an economic lifeline in many very low-income communities. Life in impoverished neighborhoods is harsh with severely truncated opportunity structures. Thus, if illegal channels such as drug dealing provide alternative ways of making money, not surprisingly, some people will pursue that avenue. Similarly, graffiti was seen as an art form, but also as a potential source for conflict when it was construed as invading someone else's territory.

Finally, the community's role was discussed in a highly nuanced fashion with participants talking about what the community could do to address violence, but then quickly slipping into a more resigned space of apathy and defeat. Why expend energy on community involvement when the odds of getting anything done are so unfavorable?

Second, the images selected by the participants all represented chaotic situations—trash strewn lots, graffiti covering up other graffiti, and woefully undermaintained housing projects—which all connote neglect, abandonment, and a general sense of lawlessness. This depiction is consistent with social disorganization theory as developed by Shaw and McKay (1949), and subsequently fine-tuned by other researchers, to explain high rates of delinquency and violence in certain urban neighborhoods. Violence, in their view, did not stem from the individual but rather from the inability of community institutions to develop and enforce community norms that deterred such behavior (Shaw & McKay, 1949; Kornhauser, 1978; Sampson & Groves, 1989). A racial dimension was added to the theoretical framework to account for the persistent patterns of racial segregation. This segregation has resulted in high concentrations of disadvantage within many African American communities, thereby impeding the development of formal institutions and informal social bonds that promote and preserve conventional values (Sampson & Wilson, 1995; Massey & Denton, 1993).

Third, the way the causes of violence and the role of the community were discussed revealed a culture of expectations shaped by acceptance, normalcy, and incapacity. The community was presented as uncaring, powerless, or both. In the discussion groups, we repeatedly heard participants comment that violence, drugs, trash, and other forms of "chaos" were normal: "Some people are just used to it [the trash]; that's why they throw stuff around"; "It's [violence] probably in every neighborhood. Literally every corner. It's around"; and "It's [shootings in Philadelphia] normal." It was this normalization,

combined with the daunting nature of these issues, that often led to the apathy that was expressed when we asked what the community could do to improve conditions. This absence of collective capacity is often, and unfortunately, matched by an institutional neglect both perceived and real. In many low-income communities, residents, especially youth, do not see legal institutions (police and courts) as their protectors. In fact, they are often viewed as oppressors (see for example, Carr et al., 2007; Fine et al., 2003; Hagan, Shedd, & Payne, 2005), which reinforces the sense of collective incapacity and inspires many to establish their own system of justice and social control.

According to Black (1983), people turn to crime as a form of social control when faced with these types of situations. These self-help crimes occur in "stateless locations" or "settings neglected by law" (Black, 1983, p. 41). When legal forms of protection and redress are perceived as absent, the individual becomes the defender and enforcer. This form of behavior, according to Black (1983), extends to intimate relationships as well. Interestingly, one of the themes that emerged from the discussion groups was love as a cause of violence. One of the obvious problems with such forms of behavior is that it merely perpetuates the cycle of violence as retaliation leads to additional reprisals and so on. In short, the individual level response to chaos ensures that chaos will continue.

Limitations

The primary limitations were sample size and application. First, there was only one photovoice group comprising 10 youth with data collected from a nonrandom sample. If additional groups were possible, we might have uncovered further themes due to a greater number of participants. Future research may seek to replicate this methodology across several groups to determine what differences might emerge and make comparisons by demographic characteristics (e.g., gender). Notwithstanding the small sample size, these findings are important to the substantive literature as they help to fill a significant gap by including the perceptions and experiences of youth.

A second limitation of this study is that the results were not further extended for social action. An important component of photovoice is the inclusion of key stakeholders as a final outlet for study findings. While participants did have an opportunity to present their results to a large group of people, which included youth in other programs along with family, UCCP staff, and university professors and staff, community leaders were not present at this session. Creating an interaction between these two groups may have facilitated a dialogue that could influence change. Other efforts to disseminate the findings within in the community (e.g., inclusion of their photographs on a website devoted to the prevention of youth violence) may not necessarily reach those that are charged with social policy and community organizing.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

As stated in the beginning of this article, race, poverty, and violence are strongly correlated. This correlation is largely attributable to structural factors (policy and institutional practices) that distribute resources and advantage in highly unequal ways (Dreier, Mollenkopf, & Swanstrom, 2004; Ferman, 1996; Macedo, 2005; Massey & Denton, 1993). Addressing these factors will require wholesale policy changes, which clearly are beyond the scope of a group of young people or the community in which they reside, a message that emerged from the discussion groups. However, as illustrated in Figure 5, another level of structural

STRUCTURAL FACTORS	OUTCOMES	NEIGHBORHOOD MANIFESTATIONS

Policy/Institutions ⟹ Unequal Distribution of resources/ Drugs/violence/ Concentrated poverty ⟹ collective incapacity

Privileging of Knowledge/ Voices ⟹ Incomplete information/ ineffectual policy ⟹ Alienation/self-reliance/destructive behaviors
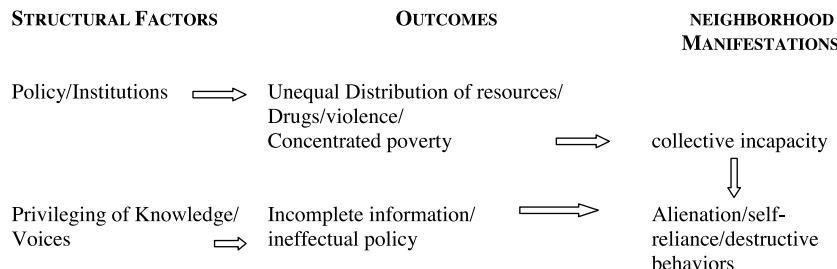
Figure 5.   This figure maps the structural factors related to violence.

bias exists. Related to knowledge, which ultimately informs the policymaking process, this level parallels, and reinforces, the disengagement and marginalization caused by the first level of inequality. However, we believe that it is amenable to intervention.

The use of photovoice as a tool for understanding how youth perceive and negotiate the violence that they encounter underscores the need to listen to the voices of those who are most effected by that violence. While this may sound obvious on the surface, an overwhelming tendency in both research and practice is to privilege certain kinds of information over others. Unfortunately, this bias often leaves out the most critical voice. No one denies that violence is a very serious problem. And the data make clear that young men of color, especially African Americans, are the biggest victims of this violence. Where consensus breaks down is in how to address this problem. If people perceive their communities as chaotic and powerless and the "state" as irrelevant at best and hostile at worst, then traditional means of addressing violence (e.g., more police, longer sentences, more prisons) will not satisfactorily address the problem. What may appear to be rational action from the perspective of those once removed from the arena may not, in practice, be rational or supported by those targeted within the arena. Thus, practitioners and researchers need to see the world through the eyes of the people who populate that arena. Otherwise, even good intentions will be ineffective or, worse, counterproductive.

Accessing this perspective leads to the issue of *how* researchers and practitioners gather information. Traditional data collection tools may prove inadequate. The particular wording of questions in surveys coupled with suspicions of research and researchers by marginalized populations can significantly impede the data collection process. Moreover, focus groups, as Messias, Jennings, Fore, McLoughlin, and Parra-Medina (2007) point out, are driven by the researchers' questions, which may or may not be of interest to the focus group participants. By contrast, processes such as photovoice, that turn "subjects" into "participants," hold the promise of yielding more accurate and nuanced information. And the participatory nature contains the possibility for engaging and, ultimately, empowering marginalized groups. This process alone may help to reduce violence in the community.

Numerous studies have shown that meaningful community involvement and positive connections to adults can reduce the incidence of youth violence and other criminal behaviors (Catalano et al., 1998; Gambone & Arberton, 1997). Other studies have suggested that this "connectedness" may buffer the effects of constant exposure to violence in the community for those youth affected by it (Doll & Lyman, 1998). Finally, the kind of skill building, knowledge development, and sense of belonging that community engagement strategies embody often translate into self-efficacy and, ultimately, positive behaviors and academic success (National Research Council, 1992).

Developing efficacy at the individual level may be the first step towards re-establishing the collective capacity that many researchers have associated with a reduction in violence (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997). Moreover, the collaboration endemic to the process of conducting research can inspire the kind of bridge building necessary to re-legitimate the state in the eyes of these groups. We realize this is a very tall and idealistic order, and we are under no illusions about how difficult the task is or how high the potential for failure. However, what this project confirmed is the existence of parallel worlds each with its own set of norms, expectations, and rules and each highly suspicious of the other. This scenario is guaranteed to lead to repeated failure. Therefore, mechanisms that have the potential to decrease the distance between those worlds should be fully embraced.

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