

# Practice

## "Everybody's Teaching and Everybody's Learning": Photovoice and Youth Counseling

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■ Social justice initiatives within counseling practice have led to calls for interventions that promote critical consciousness and connect youth to their communities. Photovoice projects, which fall under the heading of youth participatory action research, represent promising vehicles for this work. The authors suggest that photovoice activities have a place within the framework of developmental youth counseling programming and present an overview of a photovoice project conducted in collaboration with a community-based organization.

Although the language of social justice counseling theory has become more focused and explicit within the past decade, a dedication to the "dignity, diversity, and uniqueness" (Engels & Bradley, 2001, p. 101) of all people is fundamental to the heritage of the counseling profession. Crethar, Torres Rivera, and Nash (2008) noted that the counseling profession actually originated with concern for people affected by injustice. They defined social justice counseling as

a multifaceted approach to counseling in which practitioners strive to simultaneously promote human development and the common good through addressing challenges related to both individual and distributive justice. Social justice counseling includes empowerment of the individual as well as active confrontation of injustice and inequality in society because they affect clientele as well as those in their systemic contexts. (Crethar et al., 2008, p. 270)

In bringing this conceptualization to life, counselors have developed innovative interventions at many different levels of practice. Comstock et al. (2008) showed how relational-cultural theory provides a framework for socially just counseling through its elucidation of contextual, culture-based relational disconnections. Grounding their interventions in liberation psychology (Martín-Baró, 1998) and Freirean pedagogy (Freire, 1970), Duran, Firehammer, and Gonzalez (2008) connected community well-being with counseling practice among indigenous peoples. They explained that these socially just practices require that counselors become "enmeshed" in local culture in a way that creates what the authors called "epistemological hybridity"—a process of learning from community wisdom that promotes "liberation from orthodox professional Western practices as are

commonly taught in most counselor education programs" (Duran et al., 2008, p. 292).

Lee and Rodgers (2009) struck a similar chord as they encouraged counselors to move beyond "the passivity often inherent in counseling as 'the talking cure' to become active voices and conduits for social/political change" (p. 285). As with the other authors cited, Lee and Rodgers did not suggest that traditional individual counseling approaches are without utility; rather, counselors seeking to meet the needs of members of marginalized social groups should be ready to address issues beyond those that are individual and/or internal. Thus, counselors who can implement interventions that incorporate advocacy and social action will be in a better position to ensure that these clients can access the resources and services they need and to "address the significant social, cultural, and economic challenges that have the potential to negatively affect psychosocial development" (Lee & Rodgers, 2009, p. 284). Hipolito-Delgado and Lee (2007) further emphasized the importance of such advocacy and action for counselors working with marginalized youth, such as children of color and those in poor urban communities. These young people, they explained, experience oppression in mainstream institutions as part of their "daily routine . . . [which] involves negotiating the hardships that are a product of a legacy of discrimination" (p. 327). Hipolito-Delgado and Lee suggested that counselors could support young people in addressing these barriers through the facilitation of development of critical consciousness and the promotion of community connection and social activism.

The foregoing discussion points to the need for innovative practices that will allow youth counselors to move beyond conventional "talking cures," to connect adolescents to their communities, to facilitate social action and critical consciousness,

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and to promote the opportunity for professionals to learn from community wisdom in the process. In this article, we profile an example of a project, undertaken as part of a community-based organization's (CBO) after-school programming, that addresses all these aims. In this youth participatory action research (YPAR) project, *photovoice* (Wang & Burris, 1997) was chosen as a vehicle by which counselors and youth coresearchers could work together to facilitate knowledge creation as they promoted the empowerment and agency of participants. Counselors practicing in CBOs and after-school programs will find our example most readily applicable to their work, but counselors and researchers working with adolescents in other settings may find that they can adapt aspects of it for their use. We have, for example, created YPAR variations for use with groups of students within school settings (e.g., Smith, Davis, & Bhowmik, 2010). Such projects were time limited to suit the demands of an academic calendar and were independent of the current project, which was our first in a CBO after-school program and also our first use of photovoice. As we explain later, we consider YPAR photovoice interventions to uniquely blend many of the characteristics proposed within the social justice counseling literature: They move beyond talking to incorporate action and advocacy, they facilitate critical consciousness, they promote community connection and awareness, and they offer an opportunity by which counselors can be immersed in a process whereby they learn from the experiences and wisdom of youth themselves.

## ■ YPAR as Developmental Counseling Programming

Most broadly, we suggest that YPAR has a natural place among the contextualized, community-oriented, critical-consciousness-raising counseling programming described by authors such as Hipolito-Delgado and Lee (2007) and Smith et al. (2010). Participatory action research (PAR) itself is an approach through which university researchers partner with community members, young people, or members of other groups who do not usually have an agentic role in the creation of knowledge but rather are more often the objects of study themselves. In PAR, community and university coresearchers work together to identify issues of local importance, create ways to study and express meaning with regard to these issues, interpret results, and develop actions based on study findings. In this way, PAR represents an opportunity to transform the conventional, top-down construction of knowledge about diverse communities by outside "experts"; it democratizes this process by inviting marginalized groups to name and study their own realities and to take action on what they learn (e.g., Fals-Borda, 1991; Kidd & Kral, 2005; Maguire, 1987).

The PAR experience, however, can potentially create benefits in addition to the content generated by the research itself (Smith & Romero, 2010). PAR projects take place within an extended interpersonal process characterized by

mutuality and power sharing and can have a profound personal and interpersonal impact on university and community coresearchers alike. PAR research topics are generated as community issues are identified and then analyzed within a broad sociocultural context. Thus, although they begin at a local level, such discussions ultimately touch on the lives of all participants; this sociocultural context will have differentially shaped the experiences of each coresearcher on the team and thus will reach into the here-and-now process of the group. As university and community coresearchers work together across boundaries of identity and privilege, the building of trust and partnership within the team depends on the ability of all members to engage in discussions of this context openly. Previously published reports have relayed anecdotally the associated personal benefits of PAR participation, which is to say that these projects did not systematically assess researchers' experiences but rather that researchers conveyed them informally in the course of their work together. In this way, coresearchers have reported such effects as increased self-esteem and self-confidence (Lykes, 2000) and decreased feelings of isolation (Law, 1997). On the other hand, Smith and Romero (2010) assessed coresearchers' experiences formally through a focus group and subsequent qualitative data analysis. In their study, coresearchers reported similar personal impact along with a new sense of collective agency; university coresearchers also reported an enhanced sense of agency as well as a deepened understanding of the limitations associated with their professional socialization.

In providing a group experience through which youth can connect with their communities and each other as they "read the world" (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 32) and activate their own sense of agency, the foundational elements of YPAR would seem to dovetail with the contextualized, socially just counseling programming described earlier. Along these lines, socially just counseling practices that actively engage adolescents in the context of their communities and the social forces that affect them have been cited for their particular effectiveness. For example, the Achieving Success Identities Pathways (ASIP) program includes activities through which participants analyze the social forces at work in their lives, identify potential barriers to their success, and set long- and short-term goals (Howard & Solberg, 2006). Youth who participated in the ASIP program showed improvement in academic performance (as indicated by grades, credits earned, and classes passed) as well as behavior at school (as indicated by attendance, number of suspensions, and severity of suspensions; Howard & Solberg, 2006). Dotson-Blake, Foster, and Gressard (2009) encouraged counselors to get to know local communities and their leaders and to foster opportunities for community input and collaboration within their interventions. Hipolito-Delgado and Lee (2007) described an empowerment-based counseling paradigm that included the facilitation of adolescents' connection to and activism within community groups and social advocacy groups.

Just as PAR may have a personal impact for adult coresearchers, university researchers who have partnered with young coresearchers have observed that developmental benefits may be promoted by the YPAR experience. Writing of their YPAR work, Cammarota and Fine (2008) suggested that when young people learn to critically analyze social structures and discover their capacity to effect change through engaged citizenship, oppressive sociocultural influences are no longer internalized to the same degree. Along these lines, high school coresearchers have reported gaining feelings of pride, agency, and effectiveness from a YPAR experience; they also described feeling more connected to each other and more able to see themselves pursuing higher education and careers than before the YPAR project (Smith et al., 2010). Such outcomes are consonant with the goals of developmental counseling interventions, or programming that is not oriented toward the remediation of pathology but toward the facilitation of a "foundation for personal and social growth as students progress through school and into adulthood" (American School Counselor Association, 2004, p. 9). Anecdotal observations such as these remain to be substantiated empirically, yet, given that YPAR projects arise from the varied, unique experiences and backgrounds within each individual YPAR team, they hold promise as vehicles through which counselors can address the multiple multicultural realities that represent the increasingly complex "new diversity" (Borders, 2002, p. 183) of contemporary adolescent life.

## ■ YPAR and Photovoice: A Case Example

How does the YPAR process facilitate social analysis, critical consciousness, and interpersonal relatedness? By way of example, we profile a YPAR photovoice project conducted with a group of teenage coresearchers in an after-school program located in one of the poorest districts in the United States. This YPAR project is part of a collaboration between a team of university researchers (including the three authors of this article) and a CBO that houses the after-school program. The collaboration was established by the first author, a White faculty member in a counseling psychology program; the second and third authors (two female graduate students who self-identify as Black Latina and White) participated in the project as university coresearchers under the supervision of the first author.

We have written elsewhere about the first 6 months of work with the CBO, which preceded this photovoice project (Smith, Chambers, & Bratini, 2009); in brief, it was a time for the university coresearchers and the after-school program members to develop a relationship with each other and then to create a vehicle by which we could all work together. The CBO staff had been interested in this collaboration as a way to provide developmental support for its adolescents and was receptive to our idea of cocreating a modality for our work in collaboration with the teens. The teens themselves initially showed interest in photography as a medium that would allow them to be creative and that would also spark dialogue among

the group members. The CBO subsequently provided the teens with disposable cameras, and their work was eventually displayed within the CBO. Inspired by the warm reception that was given to their creative efforts, the teens became interested in pursuing further uses of images to document and explore community issues. We suggested YPAR photovoice (described below) as a vehicle, and based on the preliminary interest of the teens, we held a special meeting to which parents were invited where we described the project in detail. As we explain later, this intervention with the teens took the photovoice experience as a point of departure; however, we consciously integrated a group counseling element to further tailor it to our skills as counselors and to its use among adolescents. Our seven youth coresearchers included three female adolescents and four male adolescents, all of whom were high school students who self-identified as Mexican American, Chicana, or Dominican, and ranged in age from 14 to 18 years. YPAR meetings lasted 2 hours and were held once weekly over the course of a semester. Although the complete details of this project are beyond the scope of this article, we hope to encourage counselors and others who work with adolescents to consider implementing and evaluating YPAR programming as part of their toolboxes of socially just developmental interventions.

Photovoice itself was developed by Wang and Burris (1997) as part of a Ford Foundation project through which village women in China documented their everyday life and work realities. Emerging from the confluence of Freirean pedagogy, feminist theory, and "the efforts of community photographers and participatory educators to challenge assumptions about representation and documentary authorship" (Wang, 1999, p. 185), photovoice was created to accomplish three overarching goals: "To enable people (1) to record and reflect their personal and community strengths and concerns, (2) to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about personal and community issues through group discussion of photographs, and (3) to reach policymakers" (Wang, 1999, p. 185).

Wang and her colleagues have described preorganized photovoice projects for which community participants were recruited or invited to volunteer (e.g., Wang, 1999). As mentioned, our group came together first and later decided to conduct a YPAR photovoice project on the community issue that they proposed to study: young people's definitions of success in their community, and barriers and pathways with regard to its accomplishment. In either case, photovoice projects begin with conversation about the community issue that will be the subject of the team's work. Documentary photography is discussed as a method by which such community realities can be captured, explored, and expressed to policy makers and others. The responsibilities involved in operating a camera are also addressed, such as the rights of people not to have their picture taken without their knowledge and consent. Subsequently, team members receive cameras and basic instruction on using them and then are given a period of time in which to take pictures relating to the team's issue of choice.

The next phase of the process is focused on the team's interpretation of the photographs, the themes that they convey, and a critical analysis of both that leads to action. Wang (1999) suggested an acronym, SHOWED, to summarize the elements of a dialogue that invites participants to start with the image itself, and then move to a deeper analysis and finally to action: What do you See here? What is really Happening? How does this relate to Our lives? Why does this situation exist? What can we Do about it? Photovoice projects ideally conclude with a presentation, exhibition, and other action designed to bring the discussion and associated recommendations to the attention of community leaders, administrators, journalists, and other policy makers. As Foster-Fishman, Nowell, Deacon, Nievar, and McCann (2005) affirmed, a primary method of communicating photovoice project findings to policy makers is to organize exhibitions and presentations that policy makers are invited to attend. Wang emphasized that turning these exhibitions into transformative dialogues requires identifying and inviting relevant institutional gatekeepers such as community organization staff members, grant makers, school administrators, and local government officials. The *Youth Engaged in Leadership and Learning: YELL, A Handbook for Program Staff, Teachers, and Community Leaders*, developed by the John W. Gardner Center (2007), advised youth activists to go a step further in considering whether these decision makers might also be "allies" or "opponents" (p. 168) with regard to the issue under examination. Group members can then strategize ways to create partnerships with allies, as well as prepare persuasive arguments to help convince opponents who may not understand the group's point of view.

Photovoice incorporates both a methodological vehicle by which issues of interest may be captured and communicated via photographic documentation and a meaningful group process experience. We believe that the centrality of the group experience makes photovoice an especially useful vehicle for youth counselors who are considering the use of YPAR within their developmental programming. To represent our emphasis of the group/interpersonal aspect of YPAR, we offer a slight modification of Wang's (1999) acronym by summarizing the key elements of the photovoice dialogue component as SHOWED. Whereas the *E* was lowercase in Wang's formulation (indicating that this letter did not signify a specific component), we capitalize it to stand for Exploration in the here-and-now. In so doing, we are adapting language from Yalom's (2005) theorizing about group leadership technique to refer to counselors' active exploration of content in the context of group dynamics and the processing of those group dynamics as they occur. By expanding the scope of the photovoice dialogue to comprise the dynamics of the group itself, counselors can highlight and optimize the potential of YPAR to facilitate interpersonal growth and connection among team members. All of us were trained in group techniques according to Yalom's model and found that its characteristic process-oriented, power-sharing, relatively transparent leadership stance translated well to the YPAR context.

## The Photovoice Dialogue

The YPAR team's process began with wide-ranging group discussions of community issues and "hot topics." Team members discussed topics including gang membership, school dropout rates, and community violence as having central importance to their community's well-being. As the conversation evolved, the team began to look for broad themes that could represent these topics and decided on *community definitions of success*, to be explored along with associated pathways and pitfalls. The YPAR teen coresearchers then spent 2 weeks taking pictures to illustrate and document this topic. Team members created photographs of such scenes as a stack of library books (depicting a pathway to success) and a doorway riddled with bullet holes (depicting the violence in the community that represented an obstacle). Following the development of their pictures, each teen chose one of his or her photos for group analysis. The group engaged in dialogue about these images according to our adapted SHOWED format. Three of these dialogues were audiotaped and transcribed so that we could create the synopses that we provide in this article, which are organized according to the same format. The following example summarizes the team's responses to one of these photographs and demonstrates the potential for a conversation that begins with one photograph to touch on themes that go far beyond it. This photograph depicted a new pair of expensive sneakers, the possession of which represented a high degree of success for many of the community's adolescents.

*S: What do we See here?* We started off the team's discussion with this straightforward question, to which members responded with descriptions of what they observed in the photographs. With regard to the first photo, team members described "a pair of shoes on the floor," noting, for example, that they were "black" and appeared to be "brand new."

*H: What's really Happening here?* With this discussion prompt, we asked the team members to tell us what they thought the story behind the picture might be, and their conversation turned toward what Wang (1999) described as the application of a critical stance toward the image just described. Team members now reflected on the idea that, at first glance, the shoes looked like a necessity, an image that "you feel comfortable with," that they looked "hot and flashy and cool," and then they brainstormed possible interpretations of the "stories behind the shoes." These stories began with ideas about the conditions under which workers make shoes and other similar items. Mentioning the experiences of family members, the teens used the term "sweatshop" to describe workplaces where workers might be "taken advantage of," work long hours for little pay, and/or face hazardous safety conditions. One team member stated, "While they're making the shoes, they could get cut, lose a hand, or a finger, and that will make it difficult for them." Other team members educated the group about a fire that had occurred in a small local factory, saying, "There was a fire here a few years ago . . . they had fire escapes but [the workers] couldn't get out."

From this discussion, a second theme developed relating to participants' understanding of the "American Dream." Team members, most of whom were first-generation Americans, defined the American Dream from an immigrant's perspective: the idea that one is coming to America for a "better" and "more stable" life. One member described the way America was viewed in his family:

We come here because supposedly it's better here than what we have . . . since this is America, supposedly it's all better, you know, it's not like Mexico, it's not like Puerto Rico, it's not like Dominican Republic, 'cause America is the place to be.

However, team members shared their observation that, in many cases, immigrants often do not achieve a better or more stable lifestyle when they come to the United States. As one participant explained,

I think that people come from a different country, wishing they're going [to] find something better in life. Like they say, their dream. But they really don't know what they're coming to. They could find themselves making these shoes, and their whole lives could change because something bad could happen to them. The fact that they don't get paid enough money to feed their kids . . . I think that's another thing, too. People supposedly have a dream, but then, as many people say, their dream is a, is a nightmare.

*O: How does this relate to Our lives?* As indicated, team members' knowledge of low-wage work was informed by personal experiences. As a team comprising primarily Mexican Americans and Dominican Americans, several members now shared their own or their family members' stories of immigration. As one team member said, "Here, when we talk about people, and immigrants, and people that might have to work in sweatshops, and cut their fingers and stuff, we're talking about *family*." Another member reiterated, "I'm only the first generation to be born here, so the images, they're close to me."

Another discussion theme related to the connotations of the word *immigrant* in American society. When one team member defined an immigrant as "someone who crossed to another country," another member noted that, in her experience, "immigrant means Mexican." Another highlighted the "negative feelings" that he perceived Americans to have about Central and Latin American immigrants as compared with European immigrants, saying,

They make it seem like all immigrants are those who cross the border, but yet someone else could come from the whole other side of the world and they're not called immigrants—they're called *people* who want to come and better themselves.

Team members described the incongruity of the treatment of immigrants in the United States given the nation's history as a country "built by immigrants":

There's no native Americans here except for the Native Americans. That's why they call it native, 'cause you are of this country. Not England, not German, France, no. I'm equal to a Caucasian person from Europe, 'cause you know what, they came from their country and I was born in mine. And we're not Native Americans—we're both equal as immigrants.

Team members also grappled with their own American identity. One theme involved the perception that Central Americans, and people of Mexican descent in particular, were automatically assumed to be immigrants "with no papers" in the United States. The teens described experiences in which they were automatically *not* considered to be American. At the same time, team members qualified their American identity, feeling strong ties to their ethnic heritage. As one explained, "People say, 'You should consider yourself American because you have this many years here' . . . but I believe I am also Mexican, and that's who I am."

*W: Why does this exist?* This question prompted discussion of team members' perceptions of the root causes of the circumstances they had just described. Group members identified two reasons that immigrants and other low-wage workers may face "unsafe" conditions. One team member summarized, "The employer pays less money [to workers] so he can get more." Another added, "One person struggled to make a pair of shoes so that another person could get it at a cheaper price." Thus, group members connected low wages and poor working conditions to profit motives and to lower prices for consumers.

Relatedly, members contributed the idea that immigrant families "don't really understand fully what we're getting into" prior to coming to the United States. Commenting on the difficult circumstances that may be faced by immigrants in the United States, one group member explained,

We come all innocent and not knowing. We may have an idea of what it is like to live in America, but we don't really understand fully what we're getting ourselves into. So we come anyway, and take the risk, when at the end, you may end up killed.

*E: Exploration in the here-and-now.* As mentioned, we created an additional element within the SHOWED framework by emphasizing here-and-now exploration of issues within the context of the group's process. It should be noted that university coresearchers were participants in this processing, whereby team members gave each other feedback and shared what they may have been holding back earlier. For example, as a White team member taking part in this conversation about immigrants' experiences in America, one of the university coresearchers (the third author) checked in with the group about how her presence might be affecting the dialogue:

I wanted to ask, what it's like to have me in the room when we're talking about all these things? I noticed [team member's name], when you were talking about people coming from different parts of the world, when you were talking about people from European backgrounds, you weren't looking at me, and I was looking at you. . . . What is it like for you to have me here, 'cause, I mean, does it affect what you feel you can say?

In response to her inquiry, one group member recalled hurtful experiences associated with feeling "generalized" and stereotyped as a Mexican American, saying she was consequently hesitant to make "general" comments about Whites:

It's not every American, it's not every White person that acts the same way. So, like I know you told me it doesn't bother you, but I don't want to be too general. If I do that to you, I know when they do it to me, it hurts. I don't want to . . . you know, I know what it is, and I don't want you to feel the same way.

Another team member agreed, adding that she felt "like maybe I shouldn't say certain things 'cause you might get offended." In connection with this dialogue, a team member reflected on the fact that the team had generally "danced around the issue" of Whiteness. We noticed that even after the White university coresearcher (the third author) had acknowledged her racial background, the team continued to mention prejudice only as it existed between people of color; for example, team members openly discussed an incident of prejudice that had occurred between a Mexican group member and a Honduran adolescent. The White coresearcher contributed her thoughts about how White people play a role in avoiding discussions of Whiteness, noting that White people are often uncomfortable with these conversations and can even "forget that we have a race."

The team agreed that honest (and sometimes uncomfortable) dialogue was necessary for learning. This insight was expressed by a team member who offered, "If you say something, you learn something." Another team member elaborated on the difference between open, educational dialogue and detrimental reactionary responses in the following way:

I think I hear a difference between . . . hearing someone say something ignorant about Mexicans and then reacting by saying something ignorant about them, versus hearing something ignorant about Mexicans and then having a reaction and being honest about it, or being angry about it, or whatever it is, but not to get back at them . . . but to kind of stop the ignorance, and like, *educate*.

*D: What can we Do about it?* In this part of the dialogue, team members brainstormed ideas for actions that we could take to support community members as individuals, as im-

migrants, and as workers. The team generated the following action steps:

1. *Challenge our own stereotypes.* In examining their feelings about being stereotyped, team members recognized that a first step for them was to acknowledge their own stereotypes, commit to dismantling them, and bring this commitment to their everyday interactions around race and ethnicity. One member elaborated by saying, "If you're criticizing me for my race, I'm stooping down a level by just going at it with you, you know. I don't want to do that."

2. *Increase our knowledge of the personal side of work and economic production.* Team members suggested that, too often, we do not stop to think about who makes the things we buy. One team member nominated this idea as the single most important piece of learning that came from the photovoice discussion: "We should know that a person, a human being, made it."

3. *Through research and learning, we can make powerful choices.* As one team member stated, "If we do research and learn about how a corporation treats their employees, we could decide, 'I'm not wearing [that brand] ever again.'" Another group member agreed that "money has a lot of power," adding that we can use our power as consumers by supporting companies that treat workers fairly.

4. *Through research and learning, we can educate ourselves and others.* The team agreed that by taking responsibility for our own learning, we can help educate others about the implications of social realities beyond conventional curricula. This same action step was also generated in response to another photograph, at which time a team member underscored its importance: "We should do research to learn what we don't learn in school, because there is a world outside our textbooks that we don't know about, and we should." Our YPAR team implemented this action step by mounting a photographic exhibition at the CBO for program staff, family, and community members, and the team also prepared an associated program that was presented to the funders of the CBO's after-school program. The team later presented this program at an annual professional conference attended by educators and psychologists.

### Processing the YPAR Photovoice Experience

As the photovoice project proceeded, the SHOWED dialogue format was applied to the other photographs selected by the YPAR team for analysis. This included a photo of a stack of library books (which generated discussion of education as a pathway to success, and also the exclusion of the experiences of people of color from mainstream curricula) and a photo of a medical office (which generated appreciation of the helpful resources available in the United States, as well as the sense that many of these resources are not readily available to members of poor communities). The final audiotaped dialogue in the series concerned team members' perceptions of the YPAR photovoice experience as a whole. Following a

procedure initiated within other projects of our larger university PAR team, we used a semistructured protocol to guide our conversation about the YPAR experience (Smith et al., 2010). The protocol included open-ended questions regarding the experience of participation in the project, such as “What has your participation meant to you?” and “What do you think about your team’s action project?”

In the following sections, we summarize four central themes that emerged from participants’ discussion. We derived these themes through an adaptation of consensual qualitative research techniques (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997), a methodology originally created for the analysis of individual interviews. In brief, we independently proposed domains, or themes, within the group narrative and then argued these to consensus. We then independently identified core responses or contributions within the narrative that corresponded to these themes and argued them to consensus as well.

*First impressions, and then giving the group a chance.* Participants compared their ambivalent initial impressions of YPAR and also recalled moments when those impressions were disconfirmed. One team member remembered being concerned about the different levels of enthusiasm and commitment that she noticed early on, saying, “I thought it was going to be difficult. I thought they were going to disturb everyone else as we talked, and they had their own conversations and stuff. But after that it went—I think it went good.” Another participant shared,

I thought it would be awkward only because, um—hard to believe, but a lot of people don’t like me. So I, I thought, I would have thought people would have been like, Oh you know, I’m not going to talk ‘cause she’s here, blah, blah, blah. But it didn’t really turn out like that, you know!

Another member recounted his first impression of YPAR:

I thought it would be, like, boring or something, but then—and I didn’t know you guys, so even more, I was thinking, what am I doing? But then, when I went to the—when you guys came to talk to us and our parents, and you said, it’s what you want to do and whatever, it sounded cool.

*Discovering connection and intimacy.* This discussion theme emerged from an experience that virtually every team member reported: realizing that they had more in common with the team than they had initially imagined. One participant described a process by which she became aware of common feelings and experiences that helped her to be more open with team members, which in turn created opportunities for further connection. “If you think about it, it’s kind of like a domino effect,” she said. Other members also expressed feelings of connection in association with others’ stories. One participant poetically described the team members’ realization of their shared experiences as “starting, kind of, out in the branches

... and then, like, getting down to the root.” Another participant reflected on the surprising revelation of the team’s ability to connect deeply: “I thought it would be like, just like, some stupid whatever conversation, you know? (pause) I mean, I never expected it to get, like, this far. . . I didn’t think it’d go down deep. So that was really cool.” Another participant expressed her appreciation to group members for sharing their personal stories because these intimate, often emotional exchanges proved to be powerful learning experiences:

And it wasn’t because it was something that I didn’t know existed, but it was because it’s different when you hear it from somebody, somebody that’s been through it, you know what I mean? . . . And I appreciate having had that experience and having been challenged and, like, learning something.

*Discovering our strengths.* Team members commented directly on the strengths that they had observed in themselves and others in the group. For example, one teen proclaimed, “Everybody here expressed themselves differently, so some people are talkers and some people are more artistic and more creative, and that’s where taking pictures came in.” Another expressed the growth of his appreciation for another team member, saying, “[She] has a lot of important things to say.” Members reflected on their own growth as well, with one teen reflecting on the development of his empathic abilities:

When I leave from here, and I go to my house, and somebody wants to tell me something or wants to share something with me, before I used to say “No,” or “Later,” or whatever. But I learned how to say, um, “Okay” and “Sit down,” and like, listen to them—because here, everybody listens to me when I speak.

We were struck by how similar this statement was to feedback offered by an adult participant in another of our PAR collaborations:

I see myself to be more conscious of other people’s feelings, and more considerate, you know, and not, just like, so hard, ‘cause before, you know, that’s what I felt . . . now I know how to sit and listen to somebody, where before I’d be like, get over it. (Smith & Romero, 2010, p. 20)

Another team member found her voice:

Now when I have something to say, I say it. . . . When I started coming, maybe I don’t want to say too much. Like if I said something and you would be like, you’re like, that’s too much, you know? So I was cautious at first. I don’t want to say the wrong thing. But I’m surprised. Like, I really came out.

In addition to discovering their own strong voices, youth coresearchers remarked on their new awareness of being hold-



ers of knowledge from which other people, including adults, could benefit. One member remembered a day when she created a “teachable moment” for one of the university coresearchers:

Like, I don’t want to put you on the spot, but you know that time, when we were telling you about that immigration stuff, and what it is to come here, and you didn’t know? And I was like, how come you didn’t know that?

Another summarized, “I feel like I, like not only I, not only myself, but everybody, I feel like, can teach someone.”

*Increased critical consciousness.* Team members reported being more observant about what was happening in their world and expressed increasing awareness of others’ thoughts, feelings, and perspectives. One team member stated,

Now I try to think outside the box. . . . I learned about the Dominican experience, which I didn’t even know about. That was deep. And I mean, I know what it is to be an immigrant, but then I learned the *deep*, the in, in . . . inner part.

Related to this enhanced awareness of others’ sociocultural experiences, team members described feeling more able to speak up against prejudice and oppressive practices. Referring to this increased confidence, one team member shared,

It’s so much more than just like, this textbook thing of, you know, “It’s bad to be racist.” I feel like I, I know your struggle, and it really personalizes it for me, and it’s just like, I don’t have tolerance for it anymore.

This participant conveyed not only a new awareness but also her sense of connection and responsibility with regard to people of whose oppression she was now aware. In accordance with the action plan that the team had developed, team members reported that they now pushed themselves to challenge their own stereotypes about others and to speak up when they witnessed prejudice: “I can’t *not* say anything anymore.” A Mexican American team member stated that her experience in YPAR had led her to try to understand the racial tensions between people of color in her neighborhood. She explained,

Through this, I’ve seen, like right now, I understand more why people might act the way they do, you know? . . . A girl that wanted to hit me, she’s Black, so I . . . like, the way I took it was, well, I kind of think she’s coming out from what her people have to go through.

As team members discussed the impact of racism and poverty in their lives, they also shared realistic feelings of sadness tinged with hopefulness:

Like, where I lived, there was mad stuff going on but I didn’t really know so I didn’t see it. . . . But then, eventually, I guess

. . . like, the fear is always kind of there a little bit. But then I understood it and it was more sad than anything else, and at the same time, I started to see things about my block that were good, like the people in my community.

Another teen echoed the experience of fear: “I mean, if you ask me if I’m Mexican, I will downright say, yes, I am, but now I feel like, um, how back in the 1960s they targeted Black people. Now we’re a target.”

## ■ Implications for Counselors Working With Youth

In this article, our goal was to present the use of YPAR photovoice as a vehicle for developmental counseling programming. The experiences and benefits reported by the teens in this project suggest the following implications for counseling professionals regarding their potential involvement in YPAR photovoice.

1. *Photovoice allows for the use of creative and visual modalities as a springboard for communication.* Whereas spoken communication is an important aspect of counseling interventions and is most often its only primary modality, photovoice is an approach that incorporates a specifically visual experience to capture and convey meaning, and serves as a point of departure for discussion. In this way, photovoice may function to invite the participation of more adolescents with varied expressive styles than would traditional, verbally oriented interventions alone. As one of our participants stated, “Some people are talkers and some people are more artistic and more creative.”

2. *The climate of respect and mutuality within YPAR can create an environment in which youth discover their own agency.* PAR is theoretically premised on a commitment to power sharing and to the value of knowledge that emerges from every social location. This theoretical ideal, however, received real-life support from our young coresearchers, who affirmed their discovery of their own ability to think critically and “outside the box,” to offer their own views and opinions with more confidence, and to see themselves as having wisdom to offer the world. As one participant stated, “Everybody, I feel like, can teach someone.”

3. *The YPAR photovoice process invites youth to interrogate their own assumptions as they examine critically the operations of racism, classism, and other sociopolitical forces at work in their lives.* Here-and-now processing of discussion content provided our team members with an opportunity to critique their experiences of interracial tensions, to be part of a larger analysis of sociocultural oppression, and to discover in themselves a commitment to prosocial change. These statements are equally true for us: As university-based coresearchers, we have valued the opportunity to be part of a YPAR team in which all of us not only examined the world around us but also examined the world as it was *in* us.



By creating a space in which youth can stop, take stock of their sociopolitical surroundings, and deliberate about the actions and options available to them, YPAR photovoice projects may be especially relevant developmental activities for urban youth. Lee (2005) wrote of the highly charged, sometimes chaotic political realities that face many urban youth along with higher rates of crowding, crime, and poverty. Echoing these points, Green, Conley, and Barnett (2005) contended that counselors working with urban youth should therefore aim to "promote an understanding of dominant cultural practices and facilitate awareness of the relationship between one's own personal background and culture and the broader context" (p. 190). YPAR photovoice may offer just such a vehicle to counselors working with youth in urban settings.

An account such as ours offers a foundation for more extensive research and evaluation, and we look forward to learning from future efforts to examine the place of PAR, YPAR, photovoice, and related projects within developmental counseling practice. The lesson from our experience is that YPAR shows promise in living up to its idealistic theoretical underpinnings: that it democratizes the process of knowledge production as it increases critical consciousness, connectedness, and agency among its participants. One of our young coresearchers conveyed this promise through an impressionistic vision of the YPAR experience:

If I could like paint a picture of this, I feel like . . . all of us are sitting together in a circle and we're all giving our opinion, or saying how we feel about certain things, and then there's, like, something in the middle where it all comes together. If I could paint it, it would be all of our ideas, somewhere, like in the middle or somewhere floating, where I could see it. And that's what I feel, that's what our dialogue is. Like, everybody learns from it, everybody's teaching and everybody's learning, so we're all teachers and learners at the same time.

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