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## Show and Tell:
## Photo-Interviews with Urban Adolescent Girls

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**Abstract**
In this project, we used photo-interviews as a method to investigate the hopes and fears of urban adolescent girls who actively participated in their community organization. The photo-interviews were featured in a collaborative, creative arts program involving urban adolescent girls from a community organization and college students enrolled in a research methods course. Case studies of four adolescent participants are presented, illustrating the role of neighborhood context and past experiences in shaping hopes and fears. The potential synergy between image-based research and arts-based education is discussed.

Understanding how young people construct a positive sense of self is an important issue today, especially for urban adolescent girls who grow up in low-income, ethnic minority neighborhoods. Teenage pregnancy (Klaw & Rhodes, 1996) and school dropout rates (Yowell, 2000) dominate the research literature focused on urban adolescent girls. Although awareness has been duly raised about the difficult challenges that confront this target group, an exclusive focus on at-risk behavior and prevention programming can be limiting. Alternatively, research that promotes a positive youth development perspective assumes that young people, regardless of hardship or barriers, aim to develop positively, not destructively (Lerner, Ostrom, & Freel, 1995). New insights can be revealed about adolescence when a positive youth development framework is employed. For example, research that examines community participation (Yowell & Smylie, 1999) can help to

inform the processes by which some young people, amidst adverse conditions, are able to contribute positively to their own developmental trajectory.

Community participation can be facilitated through the availability of after-school programs. After-school programs provide young people the chance to develop support networks and positive self-conceptions in a safe environment within their community (McLaughlin, Irby, & Langman, 1994). Furthermore, programs that feature the arts, such as dance, music, or poetry, provide particular opportunities for self-expression and mastery (Heath, 2001; Heath & McLaughlin, 1993). We designed an after-school program with the visual arts in mind, noting the potential synergy between arts-based educational programming and image-based research (Ewald & Lightfoot, 2001; Stokrocki & Samoraj, 2002). Specifically, the current program partnered college women enrolled in a psychology research methods course with urban adolescent girls in a nearby community organization. We envisioned that the use of image-based research, namely photo-interviews, could illuminate important aspects of adolescent identity in urban settings, a research topic of interest to the college students, while simultaneously engaging urban adolescent girls in self-exploration in a creative arts program.

First, we further describe the relevant literature that guided the current project. Then, we outline the after-school program, including the nature of the collaboration and the types of activities involved. Next, we present case studies of four youth participants, highlighting their photo-interview projects, and what we learned about adolescent identity in urban settings. Finally, we discuss the implications of this project for future collaborative ventures between colleges and community organizations via arts-based programming.

# Guiding Literature

## Adolescent Identity in Social Context

The development of identity is one of the most salient developmental tasks in adolescence as young people attempt to determine who they are and who they would like to become (Erikson, 1950). As young people contemplate the future, they construct personalized images of what the future might hold, which take the form of hoped-for and feared "possible selves" (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Hopes and fears are important, as these images guide behavior, including investment in or avoidance of relevant activities (Oyserman, Terry, & Bybee, 2002). For example, someone who has a college-bound hoped-for possible self may be more likely to invest in their academics while avoiding the participation in delinquent activities.

Models within one's social context can communicate which possible selves are available and constrain the nature of adolescents' hopes and fears (Oyserman, Gant, & Ager, 1995). In the home, parents and extended family members are important models. Young people living in households with adults who have faced economic and social barriers may have limited access to a broad range of professionals who have college degrees, and making it difficult for them to envision themselves pursuing such goals (Klaw & Rhodes, 1996; Oyserman et al., 1995; Oyserman et al., 2002). In the school setting, stereotypical norms for one's demographic group may constrain the range of possible selves that individuals expect to be possible (Kao, 2000). For example, if it is perceived that African-American people infrequently succeed in academics, then African-American adolescents may not construct college-bound possible selves. Thus, although in the U.S., many adolescents hope to complete high school, pursue work, or attain a higher education, young people who live in

dangerous environments with scarce resources may hope for survival while fearing prison or death (Hagan & Foster, 2001; Oyserman et al., 1995).

An ecological model broadens the scope of social context, suggesting that adolescents develop their identities in multiple social contexts which include the home and school, but also extend to the community and the larger political and economic arena (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Thus, to comprehensively understand how urban adolescent girls develop their identities, researchers need to be mindful of how young people learn and develop in their social ecology by studying such contexts as the neighborhood environment (Rosenthal & Cody, 2003). Although low-income neighborhoods may expose youth to risk and violence (Hagan & Foster, 2001), they also house valuable youth organizations that can contribute positively to identity development for those youth who participate (Yowell & Smylie, 1999). We suggest that an examination of urban adolescent girls who actively participate in their neighborhood community organization will contribute to youth development research as they represent young people who are trying to make use of community resources to positively enhance their own development.

## Potential Synergy: Image-Based Research and Arts-Based Education

Since our goal was to learn about the hopes and fears of urban adolescents girls who were active in community organizations, we wanted to use a methodological approach that aligned with our conceptual framework. In addition to using worksheet-type surveys and interviews that had been effective for eliciting the possible selves of adolescents, we were intrigued by the potential synergy between image-based research methods and arts-based educational activities. Since possible selves are rooted in personalized imagery (Ruvolo & Markus, 1992), it only seemed appropriate to incorporate a research method that allowed girls both to tell us about their hopes and fears and to show us images relevant to their hopes and fears.

Image-based research uses images to inform the research questions, not merely for illustrative purposes (Prosser & Schwartz, 1998). The photo-interview is an image-based research method that was developed within the tradition of visual anthropology (Collier & Collier, 1986). Photo-interviews can be used to gain understanding about the significance of issues to participants' lives, especially when participants take the photos themselves. Participants can take photos, annotate them with captions, titles, or journals, and then engage in interviews where the photos are used as a stimulus to spark conversation (Collier & Collier, 1986; Ewald & Lightfoot, 2001; Harper, 2000). Thus, researchers can gain both an insider and outsider perspective, rather than only the investigator's outsider perspective (Prosser & Schwartz, 1998).

Contemporary qualitative methods, particularly image-based methods and feminist research methods, suggest that the process of eliciting the voice of the participants may be better facilitated when there is a collaborative bond between the researcher and the participants (Gergen, Chrisler, & LoCicero, 1999). In order to facilitate this process, Gergen et al. (1999) suggested that researchers could conduct the research in the participants' own settings and use interviewing methods that reduce power differentials. Qualitative research methodologies that blur the boundaries between researchers and participants can move researchers from strangers to collaborative associates (Grauer, Irwin, Cosson, & Wilson, 2001), and photo-interviewing has been recognized for its effectiveness in this regard (Collier & Collier, 1986; Harper, 1998; 2000).

We also saw photo-interviewing as the basis for a powerful visual arts project. The arts have been tied to accessibility and communication in education, particularly among young people who would otherwise be considered "at-risk" for failure. Spina (1995) suggested that arts-based activities

increase accessibility to education, especially for students who feel constrained by the written word or by the English language. The power of photography, for example, is captured in the work of Ewald and Lightfoot (2001). Through many years of teaching photography in schools and communities, these educators have learned that photography projects can encourage youth to bring their home lives into the school or community organization. Since we were working closely with youth from a community organization, it was feasible to offer an arts-based educational program. Thus, the current project investigated the hopes and fears of urban adolescent girls through a creative arts program that featured photo-interviews.

# Method

## Context, Participants, and Docents

The current program was a natural outcome of an on-going educational partnership between women at our college and adolescent girls from a nearby urban community organization. Planning for each academic year involves a meeting with the teen program coordinator at the community organization so that the collaborative programs are designed to be mutually beneficial. We designed an after-school program that would be of mutual interest to college students studying research methods in psychology and to urban adolescent girls in the community organization who had expressed interests in creative arts.

The program took place in a small low-income urban community that we will refer to as Urbantown. One of the poorest cities in Massachusetts, approximately 80-90% of students in this community receive a "fail" or "needs to improve" score on the standardized exam required for high school graduation. Participants were fourteen adolescent girls, ranging in age from 13-19. The participants held leadership positions in a girls-only Urbantown youth organization where they organized peer-education classes in topics such as self-defense and health. The arts program was offered as an option for their leadership development. Eleven of the participants were Latina and three participants were multi-racial. All would be the first in their family to attend a 4-year college, and many would be the first in their family to complete high school. Parental consent forms, followed by youth consent forms, were collected in order to gain permission to analyze participants' arts projects for research purposes.

In addition, 15 college students from a local liberal arts college, who were primarily Caucasian and from college-educated families, served as project docents. Docents were enrolled in an upper-level psychology course where the objective was to learn about research methods in developmental and educational psychology. The thematic focus for the semester course was urban adolescence. The semester's readings focused on identity development among girls in urban contexts, learning and motivation in community organizations, and various research methods. A wide variety of arts expertise was held by docents, including experience with photography and poetry. Docents were assigned to prepare lessons in small groups for which they had expertise or special interest. After each segment of the program, materials from participants were collected and analyzed by small groups of docents, to provide practical experience analyzing various forms of data. The class critiqued the relative merits of various research methods for studying urban adolescence, including what can be gained from traditional surveys and interviews in comparison to image-based and other qualitative methods.

**Program Outline**

The program convened in a community organization meeting room space once per week. The goals and outline of the program were announced, including the desire to learn more about teens' hopes and fears for the future and to collaborate on arts-based activities. After spending a few weeks getting to know one another, the official program began.

During the first week of the program, the participants completed a worksheet where space was provided to list three hopes and three fears in four domains: careers, people, places, and things. The worksheet was a modified version of Day, Borkowski, Punzo, and Howsepian's (1994) worksheet that was used to examine possible selves among Mexican-American youth. Each participant was paired with a docent to complete the worksheet. After completing the worksheet, the participants and docents discussed the responses.

During the second week, the participants and docents broke off into small groups of four, with two docents and two participants per group. Each docent taught a participant about interviewing techniques, using a semi-structured script that focused on understanding the hopes and fears described in the worksheets. After this training period, each participant interviewed another participant about her worksheet responses, with docents available for support. In the interviews, the girls asked each other about why they wrote the particular responses that they did. For example, one participant asked another, "You said that becoming a teacher was your most feared career. What is your reason for that?" Each participant had an opportunity to be the interviewer and to be interviewed by her peer. We hoped that this configuration would be more advantageous than having the docents conduct the interviews. Our design could possibly decrease the power differentials between the docents and the participants, thereby encouraging the participants to take a more active role in the research process (Gergen et al., 1999).

During the third week, participants learned about photography as a research method. Wagner (1979) suggested that research studies utilizing photography should use several photographers as well as analysts, provide consistent general guidelines across photographers for photograph selection and inclusion, and use photographs in combination with other forms of data. We note that our project includes these important elements. Specifically, the docents brought in examples of photos and discussed how the artists had used shadows, light, and symbolism to represent particular moods or thoughts. Each participant brainstormed a set of images that they thought represented their hopes and fears as a way to plan for the photos they would like to take. At the end of the session, participants were given disposable cameras with which they could take their own photos.. In the fourth week, the participants returned their cameras to us for black-and-white film developing, and learned more about photo annotation including captions, titles and commentary. During the fifth week, the participants received their developed photographs and selected the photos they wanted to include in their final project. They created captions for these photos and talked with their docents in a photo-interview about the meanings that each photo held for them.

In the remaining weeks, the participants learned about journal writing, poetry, and song as expressive mediums. The participants were asked to think about the ways in which song lyrics and poetry may "speak to them" and may represent some feelings and thoughts connected to their hopes and fears for the future. The docents shared some of their own journaling, poetry, and song selections, and shared what meanings those words had for them. The docents also shared audiotapes of teen diaries drawn from a public radio broadcast. The participants were provided with journals to take home. They could choose whether to keep the journal for themselves or share with others when they returned the following week. At the end of the program, the participants selected from the artifacts they had constructed in order to create a personalized art display. The collective exhibit

showcasing all of the individual displays took place at the end of the semester in a central community meeting space in Urbantown. Several college faculty, students, community members, parents, and young people from various programs in Urbantown came to see the exhibit, and much enthusiasm resulted from the event.

# Case Studies

Case studies can be useful for illustrating the complexity of human behavior; cases may be purposefully selected in order to test a theory (Yin, 1994) or to generate new theory that emerges from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For the purposes of this study, the case studies were used to generate knowledge about participants' hopes and fears for the future, synthesizing multiple artifacts created by participants, but concentrating on the photo-interviews. Thus, although gaining new knowledge was central, additional questions for the project included how the neighborhood context factored into the construction of hopes and fears (if at all) and how the photo-interviews contributed to the knowledge gained from the study.

Four participants were chosen for case studies, as they represented a range of points along the adolescent age spectrum and demonstrated investment in their photo-interview projects. Where necessary, we include a description of the photo rather than the photo itself in order to protect the identity of those in the photographs, and in all cases, we use pseudonyms rather than real names. Furthermore, we retain the punctuation and grammar of the participants' responses when quoting directly from them. We present the case studies in order of age, from youngest participant to oldest participant, and conclude with a synthesis of knowledge gained.

## Micah: Loss of Innocence and Freedom

Micah, the youngest participant, was a 13-year-old girl from Urbantown, MA with a multiracial cultural background who attended Urbantown Middle School. She was very successful in academics, as evidenced by her completion of one semester of college-level courses. Despite this success, she did not like going to school, a place she described as "hell on earth." From her worksheet and interview we learned that she hoped one day to be a fashion designer, a writer, or a rock star. In contrast, Micah feared becoming a custodian (her mother's occupation), a McDonald's worker, or a bus driver. She reported that she feared becoming like her mother, growing old, and being a mean teacher. The places that made her feel sad about her future were school, city ghettos, and small towns, and she was most hopeful about the future when in New York City, in her room at home, and with her boyfriend.

Micah took a total of ten pictures for her photo-interview project. She took eight pictures of people including her boyfriend, her sister, a friend's younger sister, and a picture of herself. The other two pictures included one taken on the street near her home and one of a kitten. In her photo-interview, Micah selected five photographs to discuss (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Micah's Photo-Interview**

| | |
|---|---|
| Photo 1:<br>Child picking her nose<br><br>Caption: *Carefree, innocent* | *"It makes me think about how innocent babies are and how it's alright to be real and just pick your nose. I really miss being innocent and being carefree."* |
| Photo 2:<br><br>Caption: *Somewhere I wouldn't want to live* | *"I think wow this can't be a part of Urbantown. Usually you see bad buildings or really nice huge houses, but this is more peaceful. I feel calm and safe. This area doesn't look threatening or bad. Like a place where old people live. It's not really a place I would want to live in."* |
| Photo 3:<br><br>Caption: *Helplessness, in a problem situation* | *"How cute a kitten! Who put it in the box? That's cruelty! It's helpless and I just want to hug it and take it home. I feel like I'm the cat trapped in a box of problems with only someone to come by to help me. Pull me out and take care of me."* |
| Photo 4:<br>Her band class sitting in a circle with the teacher at the front of the room talking.<br><br>Caption: *Boring band* | *"Yup, this is my school, a jail for kids. A day in band where my teacher has been lecturing for what seems to be forever. It makes me feel disappointed how school just brings you down sometimes. Like you just don't learn anything. Plus, who's having fun?"* |
| Photo 5:<br>Micah smiling, seated.<br><br>Caption: *Fake, not genuine* | *"God is that me? I look weird, like I'm fake. I think: why am I smiling like that? I look so different. I feel fake. Like I just smiled because. Or I'm just trying to be cool, but I did a bad job. But I love how calm I am. I have been feeling sad and my eyes express serenity."* |

When reflecting on Micah's photo-interview, the themes of lost innocence (Photos 1, 3, 4), the importance of appearances (Photo 5), and neighborhood context are salient (Photo 2). When Micah reflected on Photo 1, she saw the child as the epitome of innocence and being carefree; as she said in her photo-interview, "I really miss being innocent." Photo 3's mention of being trapped and helpless and Photo 4's reference to school as a "jail for kids" illustrates her perception of a loss of

freedom and innocent enthusiasm. Following this, the importance of appearances is evidence in her discussion of Photo 5, where Micah was struck by how "fake" she looks. This is important because Micah is suggesting that she sometimes puts on an appearance to look a certain way. Revisiting Photo 1, her admiration of the child picking her nose also suggests that she does not feel comfortable just doing as she pleases in front of others, which may have changed in recent years as she transitioned from childhood to adolescence.

The role of urban neighborhood context is illustrated in her discussion of Photo 2. Micah said she liked the look of this neighborhood, noting the contrast between this "peaceful" neighborhood that makes her feel "calm and safe" and other dangerous neighborhoods in Urbantown. Her interview suggests that she might not feel comfortable living here, as she said, "It's not really a place I would want to live in." This photo selection reveals that feelings of belongingness may be just as important as safety, and that Micah may feel more "at home" in her own neighborhood within Urbantown than this one where "old people [might] live." Although this photo provides some insight into her hopes for the future, the previous photos are more past-focused, emphasizing what has been lost from childhood.

**Jessenia: Piecing Together Shattered Dreams**

Jessenia was a 15-year-old junior of Puerto-Rican descent who attended Urbantown High School. As for her career aspirations, she was interested in graphic design, so she could work with computers, becoming a psychiatrist so she could help people, or a pop star so that she could be a good role model for young girls. In contrast, Jessenia did not want to become a teacher or a pediatrician due to her self-described lack of patience with children, and she feared becoming a social worker because "it's so hard to see a kid that's beat up or having so much problems." In one of Jessenia's self-authored poems, she described a little boy who used to live with her family but was taken away by a social worker, a negative experience that likely contributed to this fear:

> *"It's been one yr. since I last saw you.*
> *since I last hugged you.*
> *I can still hear you calling out to me with your funny little voice."*

Jessenia took eleven pictures for her photo-interview project. Three photos were taken of people (two of a friend's child, one of herself), five were taken of places in her neighborhood (two positive outdoor places, one negative indoor place, and two negative outdoor places), and three were taken at the girls' organization. Four of five photos she chose for her photo-interview were of places, while the other was of her friend's little boy (see Table 2).

The themes of urban neighborhood context (Photos 2, 4,5) and childhood (Photos 1, 3, 5) were salient in Jessenia's photo-interview. The urban neighborhood context was important as these photos all focused on "scary" places in her neighborhood that represent places that made her feel fearful about the future. She used the words "destroyed" and "hurt" for places featured in Photos 2 and 4, which contrast with Photo 3's place of "relaxation." These descriptions illustrate Jessenia's attachment to the physical spaces around her, her anger and sorrow as she watches them change, and yet a glimmer of hope for that which remains beautiful. Childhood is not all about loss for Jessenia; as she moves toward adulthood she is thinking about how she can change the future and make it a better place for others, showing her forward thinking and determination. Overall, there is a sense of Jessenia 's awareness of and unhappiness about her surroundings that represent her future

fears; however, there is a lasting impression of how hopeful she is for making change as she strives to piece together "shattered dreams."

## Table 2: Jessenia's Photo Interview

| | |
|---|---|
| Photo 1:<br>Friend's little boy<br><br>Caption: Happiness, Innocence, Imagination, Cute | *"Because I've basically helped raise him. Even though he's not mine I feel like he is. It makes me feel happy. And full of emotions that just hit me all at once. Unexplainable."* |
| Photo 2:<br><br>Caption: Scary, unsafe | *"It makes me think about the future and how we can change it. It makes me feel scared b/c this is a place where gangs hang out and how ignorant people have destroyed a place that used to be beautiful."* |
| Photo 3:<br><br>Caption: *Beautiful, relaxing* | *"It makes me think about my childhood. And the many times that I played there. It makes me feel happy and hopeful about the future. It's a place of relaxation, peacefulness."* |
| Photo 4:<br><br>*Caption:* Ugly, dark, lonely | *"I think about pain. Because I fell down those stairs so many times when I used to live there. It's a place I never want to live again. So many people got hurt."* |
| Photo 5:<br><br>Caption: *Shattered Dreams* | *"Memories, sadness, things that could've been, but were shattered by ignorance. It makes me feel sad because this is where the school I used to attend used to once stand but it was burned down."* |

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## Elena: Using Faith for Comfort

Elena was a 17-year-old high school senior of Puerto-Rican background at Urbantown High School. She was excited to graduate from high school and hoped to go to college. Specifically, Elena hoped to attain a medical degree to become a pediatrician, veterinarian, or nurse. She did not want to be a teacher, police officer, or a factory worker. She described herself as "special, intelligent, and beautiful" and her hobbies included talking on the phone and listening to music. The place that discouraged her about the future was Puerto Rico, because of the lack of opportunity, and she feared being put in prison and being surrounded by hate.

Elena included a total of eleven pictures in her photo-interview project, eight of which were pictures of outside locations near her home, and three of which were pictures of people in her life. When Elena was asked to choose the pictures for her photo-interview, she chose six, which will be examined in more depth here (see Table 3).

Many themes emerged from Elena's photo-interview project: spirituality (Photo 1), loss through death (Photo 2 and 5), urban neighborhood context (Photo 4), and freedom (Photo 3 and 6). The urban neighborhood context illustrated a fear she listed on her worksheet, namely what might be lurking in a darkened pedestrian stairwell in her town. Elena appeared to be very frightened of loss through death as illustrated through the graveyard and car accident photos. Her focus on these photos, freedom and the fear of loss through death, suggested that she does not feel that she had the freedom or control she desired. Spirituality was the dominant theme in Elena's photo-interview. Elena said that her Catholic religion was very important to her, and it is interesting to note that she saw her religion as connected to her friendship with the girl in the photo. It is possible that she found comfort through her faith in her religion, and this resource may have helped her in times of fear.

## Table 3: Elena's Photo Interview

| | |
|---|---|
| Photo 1:<br>Friend dressed up as a nun holding rosary<br><br>Caption: *Catholic, quiet & shy, "Today Self"* | *"Well this is my religion, I'm catholic and some people think that I'm quiet and shy like a nun. This picture makes me happy because in order for me to take the picture I had to force her (my friend) to get out of the house."* |
| Photo 2:<br><br>Caption: *Fear of being alone* | *"This picture makes me think about loneliness. That is one of my fears, being alone. Also it makes me feel in pain because loneliness to me is very painful. If I think about it I get a little scared."* |
| Photo 3:<br><br>Caption: *It's OK to be unique* | *"It makes me think about the weird things we have in this world. I also thought it was very interesting. I mean I think about it, it's good or OK to be unique in different ways. It makes me feel good about me being unique."* |
| Photo 4:<br><br>Caption: *You don't know what's there, somebody could be waiting for you* | *"It makes me think about darkness. I get very scared when I'm alone in the dark, just because you don't know what could be there. It makes me feel very scared of the dark."* |
| Photo 5:<br><br>Caption: *Car accident* | *"Ever since my mom really had a bad car accident, I've been really scared. I'm scared of driving and sometimes even scared getting into a car."* |
| Photo 6:<br><br>Caption: *I want full control of my own freedom* | *"It makes me think about freedom. The freedom that everybody in this world should have. I feel very happy and hopeful when I look at this picture."* |

**Sandra: Symbolizing hope through angels**

Sandra was a 19-year-old biracial participant who attended Urbantown Community College. She was interested in a career in the arts, specifically as a model, a fashion designer, or a photographer. The drawings in her journal were a testimony to her dreams, as she commented, "I always had a special gift for art." Sandra hoped to be successful, inspirational, and remembered by many. Interestingly, Sandra was only one of two participants in the program who took a photo to illustrate one of her desired careers; Sandra was also the oldest participant, and so she may have been closer to embarking on her career. Despite her elder status, she described tensions similar to her younger peers, brought on by the shift from adolescence into adulthood. In her written journal, she wrote:

> *"When i was young, i wanted to [be] older already, now i'm*
> *a teenager close enough to be an adult and i wish i was small again.*
> *ain't that something!"*

She shared that her favorite poem was "Phenomenal Woman" by Maya Angelou because she wanted to be a strong, phenomenal woman, and she admired strong women including her mother, her friend, and her mentor from the girls' organization.

Given her interest in photography, it was not surprising that Sandra took the photo-interview project seriously, taking photos of objects that symbolized hopes and fears, rather than people or places. In total, she took nine photos. Three depicted angels, one was of roses, one was a clown, two were of the girls' organization, one was of her artwork, and one was of a doll. Sandra chose five pictures which will be examined in more depth here (see Table 4).

The themes of expression (Photo 3 and 5) and spirituality emerge from her photo-interview. Photos 3 and 5 represent a conflict between expressing one's true self and putting on appearances for others. Sandra uses the photo of the dancer to represent a strong phenomenal woman and the picture of a clown to represent the happy face she puts on to mask stress. In her photo-interview, Sandra said this photograph was powerful for her and that she likes when she "can tell people how I feel and not hide it." The dominant theme in her photo-interview involved her use of angels as symbolic of hope. In her photo-interview, she speaks of a guardian angel looking over her, the potential doom that lurks in life, and being "reborn" as an angel. Her arrangement of the objects in Photo 2 is significant: she, the angel, is in between the black rose—death—and the white rose—life. Perceiving herself as the angel in this photo may indicate her own role as a "guardian angel" for someone else, while Photo 4's dream catcher represents her desire to focus on her dreams. Rather than focus on specific hopes for the future, Sandra appears to strive to maintain a general optimism for her dreams for the future.

**Table 4: Sandra's Photo-Interview**

| | |
|---|---|
| Photo 1:<br><br>Caption: *Guardian Angels* | *"I have more than one so it's all over my house. Make me feel secure, Guardian Angels protect me."* |
| Photo 2:<br><br>Caption: *Reborn* | *"Black means death—and the white rose means life. A good thing is that the angel is me. When I see the picture I feel appreciation and so I'm very lucky to have a lot in my life."* |
| Photo 3:<br><br>Caption: *Picture I drew* | *"Female having her own style of expressing who she in everything. Dance is what makes me who I am. It makes me feel that I'm who I am and I'm not scare (sic), because my mother brought me into this world for a reason to be who I am."* |
| Photo 4:<br><br>Caption: *Dream Catcher* | *"What I feel is that all my dreams are going to come true."* |
| Photo 5:<br><br>Caption: *The Clown* | *"Sometimes people put on fronts. Sometimes I feel stress and I put on a face and when I go into my room I explode."* |

## Discussion and Implications for Future Work

This study revealed many interesting aspects about the hopes and fears of urban adolescent girls who were leaders in their community organizations. The worksheet-type surveys and interviews provided information about the nature of their hoped-for and feared careers, including the observation that professions in creative arts and service were favored while manual labor was not. In addition, when the girls spent their time with family or at the girls' organization, they felt hopeful about the future, while spending time in places such as city ghettos or the streets made them feel fearful about the future. The photo-interviews added additional insights. It is interesting to note that many of their photos were of people in their lives and places in their neighborhoods, highlighting the importance of broadening inquiries to include the community context. Also, rather than only taking photos of their hopes and fears, the participants took photos that reminded them of significant past events or aspects of their current identities—which are important bridges to future selves (Markus & Nurius, 1986). In their annotations and interview responses, the participants talked about innocence lost, hopes and faith in the future, their struggle for freedom of expression, and their awareness of their neighborhood context—from their own perspective—adding richness to the cases.

Certain themes, such as innocence lost and the struggle for freedom of expression, are consistent with past research concerning adolescent development in the United States. As young people move into adolescence and see adulthood on the horizon, they may experience the tension of wanting more autonomy yet staying in close connection to parental figures (Brown & Gilligan, 1992; Erikson, 1950; Gilligan, 1982;). Indeed, increased responsibility and a "loss of childhood" may be common in the transition to adulthood, although low-income youth living in dangerous neighborhoods may be more likely to experience premature "adolescent role exits" into adulthood (Hagan & Foster, 2001).

In addition, the struggle for freedom of expression, or being "fake" when one wants to express one's "true" self, is consistent with previous literature focusing on adolescent girls (Pipher, 1994). Brown and Gilligan (1992) also write about how girls struggle during adolescence with finding their "voices" and having the courage to speak up about how they truly feel. Others have suggested that "losing one's voice" may be a phenomenon affecting middle-class, white adolescent girls, and that urban adolescent girls of color may be more comfortable speaking out about their feelings (Harter, Walters, & Whitesell, 1997; Way, 1995). Our findings suggest that some key aspects of the adolescent transition to adulthood, including issues of voice, may be similar for many adolescent girls regardless of income and cultural background. Thus, although it is important to recognize particular challenges for some adolescents, it is also important to acknowledge the generality of adolescent experience where it exists. In doing so, we do not needlessly position urban adolescents as exotic, necessarily different, or deficient.

The neighborhood context was an important feature of the participants' experiences, as demonstrated by the number of photos taken outside, around their homes, and at the community organization. Consistent with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model, contexts outside of the home can shape one's sense of possibility. Although some of the photos selected for the photo-interview projects depicted "scary" places in Urbantown, participants also selected photos of outdoor places that represented positive memories and hope. This suggests that the girls were not only aware of their surroundings when considering safety, but they were also aware of the beauty in their environments. It is also important to note that although the participants did not select photos of their youth organization for the photo-interviews, they did take these pictures and described their experience positively. Although the current project did not inquire specifically about the role of their

participation in the community organization, one can surmise that the very experience of holding a leadership position in a girls-only community organization, emphasizing power for girls in the world, was positive. This experience may have contributed to the girls' forward-thinking and plans for creating a positive future for other young people.

We also found the emphasis on spirituality by the participants to be important, and is an aspect of urban adolescence that is frequently overlooked. Spirituality can be a positive coping mechanism for dealing with fear, hopelessness, and distrust (Ross, Mirowsky, & Pribesh, 2001). As a future area of study, it would be interesting to investigate how spirituality, religion, and faith in one's hopes can serve as buffers for the stressors and challenges of adolescence, and to do so across a diverse pool of participants and contexts (Rasmussen, Aber, & Bhana, 2004).

It is important to note that there are limitations to our project. Clearly, with a focus on only four participants within one youth organization in one urban neighborhood, we need to be cautious with generalizing to a larger population. In addition, the photo-interview project was only a component of the larger program and so it may be that the results are influenced by that time period when the participants had access to the disposable camera. Perhaps, with a longer program and more time to take photos, the photos would be different than what we observed. Despite these limitations, we do think that our project illustrates the promise of integrating arts-based educational programming and image-based research methodologies and what could be learned from photo-interviews. Thus, the project raises important implications for future programming that can be explored.

**Future Programming**

Given that urban adolescents may not have access to college-bound, professional career role models in their neighborhood, and that college students attending school in a rural or suburban setting may not have much interaction with urban youth, we think that programs encouraging collaboration among college students and urban adolescents are critical. We were intrigued that so many of the girls in our program were interested in careers in the performing or visual arts, and the possibilities that exist for collaboration with colleges on that front. Future programs could allow young people to take a more active role in the artistic creation process by inviting college students majoring in the arts to collaborate with young people who are interested in the arts. Working together, the group could engage in an urban landscape or mural project, in addition to working together on educational outcomes such as writing brochures to advertise their project or a final report to the city. By further engaging local artists as guides or guest speakers, both parties can benefit from the leadership and inspiration (e.g., Grauer et al., 2001).

Finally, we see great potential in the synergy between image-based research methodologies and arts-based educational activities. Our inquiry, grounded in a photo-interview project, provided important insight into adolescent life while simultaneously engaging young people in an activity in which they took pride and mastery, culminating in a neighborhood art exhibit. The combination of writing, speaking, and the visual arts can be effective; captioning, journaling, and oral photo-interviews can each provide insights into the participant's experience, more than any one method alone. As per Ewald and Lightfoot (2001), many possibilities exist with extended programming using photography, and the visual medium allowed young people to "show" and "tell" about their hopes and fears. Understanding positive youth development is increasingly important as urban adolescent girls are frequently portrayed as and labeled by their risks and failures, rather than their strivings for positive growth. Our project provides a valuable example of mixed-methods research that also has educational benefit. Exciting possibilities exist at the intersection of the arts and educational

research, especially when placed into the context of university-community partnerships. We look forward to gathering insights from new models in this domain.

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