Photovoice as a Social Process of Critical Consciousness

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The reluctance of some communities to participate in research and researchers' lack of penetration into the community are major stumbling blocks to successful community-based approaches. The authors' purpose is to determine how a photovoice project in a lower income, African American, urban community was able to generate a social process that resulted in active grassroots participation in a community-campus partnership. Through this partnership initiative, the authors asked neighborhood residents to take photographs of things in the community of which they were proud and the things they wanted to change, and to tell the story of why these were important. The authors used strategies from visual anthropology to analyze the 54 photographs, stories, and dialogue produced. Their analysis identified three distinct levels of cognitive-emotional interpretations that moved participants out of helplessness toward authentic engagement and participation. The authors discuss implications and lessons learned for community-based participatory research.

Keywords: *community-based participatory research; critical consciousness; African American health disparities; photovoice; empowerment*

National attention is focused on alleviating health disparities by adopting new paradigms of research and developing culturally relevant theories of health and illness. As a result, community-based participatory research (CBPR) paradigms have gained acceptance and respectability. These collaborative approaches to community-based problems are seen as a method to not only address health disparities but also effect social change (Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003; Smedley & Syme, 2000). Ideally, community concerns and issues should guide the research selection, community cultures and values should be incorporated into the research design, and community-created solutions should be implemented. Yet, the reluctance of some communities to participate in research and the lack of penetration into communities on the part of the researchers have been major stumbling blocks to successful community-based approaches (Merzel & D'Afflitti, 2003). How do university representatives elicit authentic community participation in neighborhoods where

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learned helplessness has created dependency thinking and where apathy has survival value?

Recent comprehensive reviews of community-based interventions for health promotion or poverty alleviation have revealed a dismal record of success over the past 30 years. In almost every instance, community participation in health promotion programs has been limited to some type of advisory board to assist in program implementation (Merzel & D'Afflitti, 2003). Comprehensive community initiatives have placed more emphasis on developing the capacity of the community but have still fallen short of the capacity building needed in impoverished neighborhoods (Kubisch et al., 2002). A major stumbling block has been the lack of well-articulated theories of change at the community level (Kubisch et al., 2002; Merzel & D'Afflitti, 2003; Potvin, Gendron, Bilodeau, & Chabot, 2005).

There is increased recognition that many public health concepts that inform philosophical and theoretical approaches have been based on inadequately developed ideas and often used in a superficial fashion (Bachrach & Abeles, 2004). Most health intervention programs have been based on theories of social change that target individual behavior (Potvin et al., 2005). Program developers who have used theories of community change have found these theories inadequate to account for the specificity of causal mechanisms and mediating relationships (Campbell & MacPhail, 2002). Inventories of essential attributes for increasing community capacity have been identified (Goodman et al., 1998) but do not explain how to leverage these attributes or how to proceed if the essential attributes are missing.

For instance, many public health approaches are based on the theoretical work of Freire (1970/2000), a Brazilian educator who used participatory strategies to teach adult literacy programs. Freire proposed an approach to learning that engaged the learner and the teacher as cocreators of knowledge. In this way, his approach was intended to shift the power dynamics of education from a dialectical approach as a simple transfer of knowledge to an egalitarian approach that created knowledge through communal introspection. This process of communal introspection he called dialogue, and his teaching methodology is foundational to many public health concepts of social change.

In his work with illiterate peasants, Freire (1970/2000) recognized three levels of consciousness that influenced how reality was interpreted and the behavioral responses that these interpretations elicited. At the lowest level of consciousness, the magical level, people were trapped by assumptions of inherent inferiority and lived within a culture of silent acceptance of the status quo. At this level, attitudes of helplessness and behaviors of passive adaptation actively contributed to their own oppression. Moving up to the naïve level of consciousness, individuals perceived and interpreted the social situation as basically sound but corrupt. However, instead of analyzing and addressing more fundamental issues of injustice, they exhibit behaviors of horizontal violence—blaming peers for the social reality of their lives. Finally, at the highest level of critical consciousness, individuals become aware that their own assumptions shape the interpretations of reality. Individuals with critical consciousness become aware of their own responsibility for choices that either maintain or change that reality (Freire, 1970/2000, 1973/2002).

Freire (1970/2000, 1973/2002) used an explicit process to move individuals from one level of critical consciousness to a higher level. On entering a new community, he would take time for informal conversation with the inhabitants. He would listen specifically for emotionally charged connections to people's daily lives. These

emotionally charged themes would be translated into drawings, which he would use to stimulate collective introspection and discussion. The influence of the culture on the individual and the influence of the individual on culture were always the emphases of the discussions and the cocreated knowledge. The goal was to engage the people to participate in their own learning, a combination of action and reflection that he called praxis.

The idea that social oppression results in a culture with limited capacity for analysis and initiative has evolved into a social change theory of critical consciousness (Wallerstein & Sanchez-Merki, 1994; Watts, Griffith, & Abdul-Adil, 1999). As a result, Freire's (1970/2000, 1973/2002) educational approach has become almost synonymous with the philosophy of empowerment and participation in public health and community development (Bopp & Bopp, 2001; Minkler & Wallerstein, 2003). Critical consciousness appears to be the impetus for changing attitudes of personal responsibility and behaviors of participation based on the ability to perceive social reality as a consequence of individual choices. However, this social change process of developing critical consciousness has undergone only a limited number of case study analyses and suffers from the lack of theoretical development and explanatory understanding.

For instance, Wang and Burris (1994) used Freire's (1970/2000, 1973/2002) educational approach to design a participatory health promotion intervention called photovoice. The intervention was first used with rural Chinese village women and was intended to function as a participatory process in a large-scale needs assessment. Similar to Freire's drawings, photographs and stories were used to identify significant community issues, critically reflect on the contributing factors, and identify possible solutions.

As a Freirian-based (1970/2000, 1973/2002) process, the photovoice project had three main goals: (a) to engage people in active listening and dialogue, (b) to create a safe environment for introspection and critical reflection, and (c) to move people toward action. Wang and Burris (1994) included a fourth goal: to inform the broader, more powerful society to help facilitate community changes. Since that endeavor, a series of these photovoice projects have been documented in the literature (Killion & Wang, 1999; Wang, Cash, & Powers, 2000; Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). Yet, although there have been many photovoice projects to date, to the best of our knowledge there has been no in-depth analysis of the social change process.

In fall 2000, our community-campus partnership used a photovoice project in an attempt to elicit greater community involvement among residents in a lower income, African American, urban community. To our surprise, the project produced an unanticipated unleashing of emotional energy that resulted in new levels of individual and collective responsibility and participation. In this article, we provide a detailed case study of this photovoice event and a rigorous analysis of the social construction of critical consciousness. We believe this analysis is essential for understanding better and optimizing the power of Freirian approaches to engage participatory behaviors and to address the theory-practice gap of contemporary public health practice (Bachrach & Abeles, 2004; Potvin et al., 2005). This type of analysis is particularly imperative in view of recent suggestions that public health practitioners adopt more nontraditional methods, such as photovoice, for problem definition and intervention (Baker, Metzler, & Galea, 2005; Wallack, 2000).

METHOD

In this article, we report on a retrospective ethnographic analysis of a photovoice project and the immediate aftermath of events. The photovoice project took place during a 5-week period beginning in August 2000. During this time, members of one African American community created the photographs and stories used as data. This qualitative analysis was begun in spring 2002, and data include the photographs, stories, the personal journal entries of the principal investigator and group process facilitator, and the e-mail correspondence between them. Furthermore, we implemented the photovoice project using the empowerment philosophies of community ownership with the community-campus governing board and civic association consulted for direction, advice, and approval at all stages of project implementation.

Although this photovoice endeavor was undertaken as a community project, the institutional review board for the University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston was consulted for clarification of ethical considerations prior to implementation. At the time, the institutional review board determined that the project was not intended as research and, consequently, did not require informed consent. However, releases were obtained from all community photographers and human subjects prior to public display. Authority for distribution and publication of the photovoice products was held by the governing board of the community-campus partnership. Accordingly, for this retrospective analysis, we obtained written consent from the partnership governing board and the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects granted institutional approval for this research.

The Position of the Researcher

Acting as the participant observer for this study, the first author had been involved with this particular community since 1997. Under the auspices of a community-campus partnership and clinical practice, she had functioned in several roles: as clinical faculty for community nursing students, as a clinician in a nurse practitioner geriatric practice, and as a doctoral student in nursing whose intentions were to engage the community in participatory action research. These various roles allowed her to interact with community members in their homes, in a health care setting, and with the leaders of this African American neighborhood over an extended period (1997-2005). As such, these experiences provided an opportunity to view health through multiple perspectives and multiple levels of influence. The second and third authors provided the guidance and analytical expertise essential to grasping the underlying significance of the social interactions as they unfolded.

The Setting

The community setting is a low socioeconomic, African American neighborhood of approximately 38,000, nested within a large metropolitan urban city. In this neighborhood, the effects of concentrated poverty are ubiquitous. For instance, 30% of families live below the national poverty level, 41% of the population is employed in low-paying jobs, and 32% of those over the age of 25 have less than a high school education. Despite the poverty level, the university had initiated a partnership with

this particular geographic neighborhood because of the community's reputation for having a highly organized and politically astute civic infrastructure.

However, after 3 years of working in the community and participating in the community-campus partnership, the first author was increasingly aware of a conundrum. There was a disconnection between the reputation of the community from the university's perspective and the inability of community leaders to engage residents in civic participation or move forward on community health projects. To generate interest in participatory research, the first author introduced the idea of a photovoice project to the community-campus partnership board and the community civic association.

The Photovoice Project

Both the community-campus governing board and the civic association approved the idea, and the first author sought additional funding for the project. The goal of the project was to document community health concerns through storytelling and photography. The objective was to engage community residents in a group dialogue process. This dialogue process was intended to spark a shared vision and prioritized agenda to improve the health of the community.

Recruitment. Recruitment was conducted through flyers distributed by the civic association. The flyers announced the project's intentions: to use photographs and storytelling to move, touch, and inspire participation in the creation of a thriving, prosperous, and healthy community. Recruitment criteria included men and women over the age of 16 who were living within the geographic boundaries of the community. Reimbursement for participation was US$100 per person for the 5-week process, which included two 8-hour workshops. A $100 prize was allocated for each of the 20 photographs and stories selected for public display. Forty-five participants attended the first workshop in August 2000. Twenty-four returned for the second workshop 5 weeks later. Although demographic data were not collected, participants included men and women who ranged in age from teenagers to seniors.

Design. Our photovoice project used a professional group process facilitator who was skilled in both the use of story as a way of influencing others and the use of dialogue to bring about organizational change (Simmons, 1999, 2001). During the first workshop, held at the local community center, we introduced the concept of story as a way of discovering knowledge, influencing others, and creating change. The project began with an exercise inviting people to tell a mini-story about how they got their name, their favorite pet, and the nicest person they knew. The participants appeared to have trouble articulating an abstract story and gave very concrete, short answers, such as "My mama gave me my name." The remainder of the day was used to generate enthusiasm and to teach the participants to express their own wisdom.

Two scenes from the movie *Amistad* (Spielberg, 1997) were shown that outlined four principles of influence, which then became the basis for group discussion: (a) find inspiration that blossoms when you lose (build sustainable hope by supporting each other), (b) aim lower (put your effort where you have impact), (c) balance facts and self-righteous soapboxing, and (d) tell your story (whoever tells the

best story wins). After watching the movie and discussing the lessons of the story, the group divided into smaller groups of three or four to practice telling "Who I am and why I am here" stories. During this exercise, participants demonstrated increased enthusiasm for storytelling and the idea of creating community change.

Before the close of the workshop session, the group collectively discussed parameters for the project and established rules of safety. They agreed to focus on the things in the community that they were proud of and things that should be changed. The facilitator suggested a five-sentence format to guide story writing. The stories were to focus at an emotional level, as a way to engage and influence a broader audience. The group addressed safety concerns, deciding that both trespassing and photographing illegal activity were inappropriate for the project. A professional photographer instructed the group on privacy issues and written consent from human subjects. Logistics and procedures for processing the film and returning for the second workday were reviewed. At the close of the day, a disposable camera was passed out to each individual.

Each participant was to shoot a roll of film and return it a week later. The film was developed and the pictures returned to the participants the following week. The participants were then to select their two favorite photographs and turn them back in for enlargement. These enlarged photographs would be presented back to the group along with the story of what the photograph meant or what meaning the participant was trying to convey. The group reconvened 5 weeks later for the second 8-hour workshop. Each participant brought one or two 8-by-10-inch enlargements along with the accompanying story. These photographs and stories were displayed around the room during the group dialogue. The workshop was intended to engage the group in critical reflection directed at community issues.

Data. The data for this retrospective study included 54 photographs and stories generated by the community participants, the first author's personal journal entries begun during the planning stage of the photovoice project, journal entries recorded by the group facilitator after each workshop, and e-mails between the first author and the group facilitator over the course of events. These personal documents functioned as ethnographic field notes that recorded events as they occurred, and informed the analysis and interpretation of events.

Analysis. Because the data existed in multiple media, analytic strategies drew techniques from ethnography and visual anthropology (Fetterman, 1998; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999; van Leeuwen, 2001). First, we employed these analytic strategies separately to identify themes and then integrated through the interpretive lens of cultural anthropology and organization psychology (Druskat & Wolff, 2001; Strauss & Quinn, 1997). As a result, the strategies spiraled to higher levels of abstraction, which, in turn, led to an increasingly deeper understanding of the social interactions and cultural processes involved.

First, we used iconography as an analytic strategy to explore the meaning of the photographs (van Leeuwen, 2001). This analytic strategy focuses on increasingly abstract levels of meaning. At the most superficial level is the everyday recognition of the subject matter as a car, an old house, or a pile of trash. At the second level, the analyst looks for a commonly understood symbolic meaning, which might or might not have been intended by the photographer. At this level of analysis, a cemetery would be recognized as a symbol of death, a wall would be recognized as a symbol

of a boundary or barrier, and a dilapidated building would be recognized as a representation of abandonment. The third level moves to a more abstract interpretation, usually requiring supplemental research to understand the significance. This third level of analysis encompassed an extensive literature search to inform the interpretation of the social process of creating critical consciousness.

The stories that accompanied the photographs presented a different analytical challenge. We first attempted to use a classic method of approaching stories: what was done, where it was done, who did it, how it was done, and why it was done. This method was unsuccessful because the majority of the stories took on a more explanatory model of narrative and did not necessarily fit into the classic story format. Alternatively, matrix displays were developed, and each story was analyzed according to the agent (who did it, actual or implied), agency (what was done or not done), scene (location and time orientation—past, present, future), moral message embedded in the story, and emotional tone it conveyed. Field notes were incorporated into the analysis and guided further theoretical interpretation and synthesis.

As the analysis progressed, the interpretation of the data was heavily influenced by theoretical work from cultural anthropology and organizational psychology (Druskat & Wolff, 2001; Strauss & Quinn, 1997). These research trajectories suggested a framework to understand how culture is internalized and manifest into patterns of behavior. Propositions of these theories that guided the interpretation of data are (a) that cultural norms manifest as characteristic or typical patterns of thought and behavior among a group of individuals based on shared or similar social experiences, (b) that cultural norms of interpretation represent the cognitive-emotional process of creating meaning that is shaped by these shared social experiences, and (c) that every behavior elicits an emotional response and every emotion elicits a behavioral response, which are shaped by these cultural norms of interpretation.

Validity

Issues of validity were approached based on understandings of narratives, abstractions, and interpretations suggested by recent reflections on the trustworthiness of qualitative research (Kvale, 1995; Maxwell, 1992; Morse, 1998). Based on this perspective, the theoretical interpretations of the researchers are not dependent on the emic interpretations of the participants themselves but are requisite on the researcher's conveyance of the methodological rigor of the research process. Nevertheless, community participants in the photovoice project have examined the evolving renditions of the analyses and concurred with the findings of this study. Ultimately, validity will depend on the usefulness of the findings for further theory, research, and practice.

FINDINGS

As a Freirian-based process (1970/2000, 1973/2002), participation in the photovoice project provided multiple opportunities for reflection and critical thinking. These opportunities included deciding what to photograph, developing a story of why it was important, experiencing the entirety of the group's creation, and, finally, participating in a group dialogue of introspection. Our analysis identified three dis-

tinct hierarchical levels of cognitive-emotional interpretations that moved participants from passive adaptation to higher levels of critical consciousness. These three levels were labeled emotional engagement, cognitive awakening, and intentions to act. The presentation of findings will move from examples of passive adaptation through the three hierarchical levels of cognitive-emotional interpretations.

Passive Adaptation

Although most (34 out of 54) of the photovoice stories were oriented toward a communal identity and deeply felt concern for others, the photographs, stories, and dialogue reflected community norms steeped in apathy, dependency thinking, and an intense distrust of themselves, their neighbors, and the larger community. Comments from the participants during the first workshop, and many of the photographs and stories, clarify how the rhetorical moral message "We have to do something" is undermined by the cultural norms of distrust and blame that are pervasive and destructive to all attempts at individual and collective action. Comments from the workday sessions included the following:

> Where my brother-in-law lives, people help each other . . . But here if you do that, people get mad. Me and my brother tried to pick up around the neighbor's house and people got mad.

> You see people who want to do something, but if you mention it they say, "Why don't you do it?" But one person can't do it all by himself.

> I just want to say that it is hard to be part of a group and still remember to do right, but it is dangerous not to be a member of a group. And I don't like the way all the groups are isolated from each other. If you do something good, you end up isolated, and that is dangerous [other teenage boys animatedly nodding in agreement].

The photographs and stories categorized at this level of critical consciousness were narratives of despair and anger. Emotions were salient in these narratives and the cognitive-emotional interpretation is one of helplessness. As an example, one photograph showed a dense cluster of trees and bushes accompanied by this narrative:

> *The Beat Up Trees*
>
> The elderly person is screaming for help, but no one can witness to their situation because the trees are in the way. Humans continually get hurt and nobody can see what's going on because the trees are in their vision so they can't see.

Emotional Engagement

The opportunity to tell their stories to a listening audience provided an emotional impetus for participants to engage at an intrapersonal and interpersonal level. At this level of critical consciousness, emotions of despair and anger are still evident, but the capacity to question the status quo is apparent. The overt or covert cognitive-emotional interpretation of events at this level is "Who is responsible?"

Trash piles, dilapidated buildings, and abandoned houses are prominent features of the community and are reflected in the choices the participants focused on. Improving the aesthetic environment has been a community priority for years, but they have made little progress. They rationalize that "others" use the community for a garbage dump but rarely acknowledge any responsibility. The photographs and stories explicitly connect issues of community identity with the aesthetics of the landscape. The next narrative describes a concrete wall that was part of an abandoned project. Located at one of the major entrances to the community, the wall is now covered with graffiti. Although the author incriminates the larger society for abandonment, the story also contains a poignant message of the community's inability to envision an avenue of escape.

The Welcome Wall

This graffiti wall is one of the latest landmarks that announce that you are now entering the community. We are sadly closed off by this defaced wall, inside a community without a view. It was the last straw that broke the camel's back. Before this wall and the rest of the trash pile left from this abandoned project, I could pretend we belonged to the city.

As another example of emotional awakening, the next narrative reflects the invisibility that is a dominant emotional theme in the photographs and stories. The photograph that accompanies this story shows an overgrown, unkempt cemetery but the central focus of the photograph is on the skeletal remains of the cemetery's empty signboard. A rationale for the community's lack of agency is suggested by the title, yet the author of the narrative still asks "Who is responsible?"

The People Who Are Afraid of Making Waves

This is a cemetery where someone's loved ones are buried. This signpost is empty. Who is responsible for the tragic eye sore that sits at the intersection of one of the busy streets of the community?

Cognitive Awakening

The next level of critical consciousness is labeled cognitive awakening and reflects a growing recognition of responsibility and complicity in the social reality of their lives. At this level the emotional overtones reflect sadness and the cognitive-emotional interpretation of events acknowledges that they are part of the problem. As an example, this narrative appears as a metaphor for the community's lack of agency. The photograph shows an old, abandoned house crumbling in disrepair.

The Old House

Once there was an old house, and an old woman stayed in the old house. The old house that the woman stayed in was horrible. It had rats and roaches, the ceiling had holes in it, and it was just nasty. Her family came to visit one day, and she told them she was dying. It was shocking, and the kids were crying, and they heard her say, "Please fix my house before I die." The family said, "Yes, we will do it right away." So days passed by and the house was the same. The old woman finally died in the old house and the family came right after she died and they said, "It's too late, we should have done it right away."

As another example of cognitive awakening, the next narrative implicitly holds the community responsible by asking "How do we allow this?" The photograph shows a large pile of household trash that has been dumped by the side of the road.

A Depressing Sight

When I saw this, all I could do was stare. I can only imagine what the visitors to our community think. What's more depressing is that this site is on most streets throughout the community. How do we allow people to destroy and depreciate the value of our property and community?

Finally, the next author explicitly asks why community members participate in their own exploitation. The photograph shows a local neighborhood grocery store.

The Need for a Grocery Store

This is the picture of a grocery store that has been thriving for at least 50 years. The owners won't participate in, or contribute to, anything we do in the neighborhood. Why do we support them when they grab their children, their fine expensive cars, and our money and dash out of the community before dark everyday?

At the beginning of the second workshop, participants were asked what the experience of the photovoice project was like for them. Repeatedly, responses indicated a shift in perspective and the cognitive-emotional interpretations of events:

We have the same stuff that they show on TV of third-world countries. It is right here, and we are living in it.

I knew we had some problems out in the neighborhood, but this was an eye opener.

We get used to it and it's all normal and we don't feel anything anymore. We've all adjusted to it because we see it everyday. I just walk past it everyday. My own house is just as bad as those houses in the pictures. I didn't see it.

Intentions to Act

As the dialogue continued, the group participants shifted to an even higher level of critical consciousness, labeled intentions to act. At this level, participants are able to envision a new future and emotions were hopeful. The cognitive-emotional interpretation of events at this level acknowledges that they are also part of the solution. In this final category, it is important to note that the comments focus on their ability and responsibility to act. Only one photograph was categorized at this level.

Dream Field

I would like to see a big supermarket on this field so the people of the community could shop near home. It is time for the people of the community to spend our money in the community so it can work for the community. I believe a community-owned supermarket would be a good start. That's my dream.

However, there was increased evidence of this higher level of critical consciousness as a result of the group dialogue process. Three of the participants joined the community-campus partnership and the meetings became lively, honest discussions attended by all board members instead of the usual two or three. Two of the

participants used Lego building blocks to build a model of their vision for a new community center. Other participants talked of joining their community civic clubs and of individual intentions to make the community a better place to live. Personal reflections indicated intentions of responsibility:

> This has been a mirror to see ourselves. Now it is up to us to do the rest.
>
> This has totally changed my life. Now I have a sense of duty, a part to play.

The mother of one teenage participant approached the group facilitator after the second session and said,

> You have no idea how much this project has influenced my son. Before this started he was not doing well in school. After the first workday, he started doing well. He said that now he could see why he had to study—so he could make a difference.

The photovoice display was publicly exhibited at the local community center, community college, and at the annual community awards banquet where city and state political representatives were present. One young man continued to document community changes through photographs and stories at the request of the partnership board. These "after" documents were added to the display as evidence of individual and community action brought about by the photovoice project. There were photographs of cleared-away trash piles and automobile tires ready for hauling to appropriate dumpsites. One of these photographs showed an empty lot where a dilapidated house had recently been demolished. It suggests a metaphor for the internal changes that were experienced by participants.

> *A New Life*
>
> This empty lot will soon be a new house. These tracts were made from the big trucks and machines that were used to tear down the old house and clear the lot. The tracks symbolize two messages. The first message is of strength and power—the destruction of what was. The second message is one of life. Looking at the tracks you can imagine a new life. You can almost see the new house, with happy children playing all around. I don't know what the house will look like, but I know it will be beautiful.

In summary, our analysis delineated three distinct, hierarchical levels of cognitive-emotional interpretations that moved individuals out of passive adaptation. As another level of analyses, we place these hierarchical levels of critical consciousness in comparison to Freire's (1970/2000) theoretical framework and two similar case study analyses of Freirian-based interventions (Table 1). At this level of analysis, placing our analysis within the context of existing literature, there are striking similarities in the movement from one level of critical consciousness to another. This comparison analysis of Freirian-based interventions provides the basis for discussion on the implications for practice.

DISCUSSION

In summary, our findings support Freire's (1970/2000) theoretical framework of critical consciousness as the movement from interpretations of dependency to inter-

TABLE 1: Models of Critical Consciousness

Freire (1970)	*Wallerstein and Sanchez-Merki (1994)*	*Watts, Griffith, and Abdul-Adil (1999)*	*Carlson, Engebretson, and Chamberlain (2005)*
Three levels of consciousness	Three-stage model of change	Five-stage model of development	Photovoice as a social process
Magic level of consciousness: People are trapped by assumed inferiority and live within a culture of silence; passive acceptance actively contributes to their oppression		Acritical stage: Individuals are unaware of resource asymmetry; the capacity for critical consciousness is limited; internalized oppression sustains feelings of powerlessness or inferiority	
Naïve level of consciousness: People see themselves as essentially sound but others have corrupted the system; they engage in horizontal violence, blaming peers for problems rather than analyzing issues		Adaptive stage: Inequity is acknowledged, but the system seems immutable to change; predatory, antisocial, or accommodation strategies are employed; they do not understand their role in the maintenance of the status quo	Passive adaptation: Frustrations turn to emotional apathy, and blame is placed on others; the cognitive-emotional interpretation of events is helplessness
Critical level of consciousness, Step 1: Unveiling oppression—Individuals gradually become conscious of their own perceptions of reality and deal with it critically	Action orientation to caring: Individuals begin to break through personal denial, recognize their personal connection and susceptibility; active questioner	Precritical stage: Complacency gives way to a critical awareness of, and concerns about, asymmetry and inequality; adaptive patterns are questioned	Emotional engagement: Raw emotions of anger and despair are displayed; the cognitive-emotional interpretation of events questions "Who is responsible?"
	Individual responsibility to act: Critical thinking shows a mixture of understanding personal and social nature of problems, but most continue to blame individual behavior instead of recognizing the link; able to articulate a new sense of responsibility to choose behaviors		Cognitive awakening: Emotions of sadness displayed as cognitive awareness of complicity becomes salient; the cognitive-emotional interpretation of events is "We are part of the problem"

(continued)

TABLE 1: (continued)

Freire (1970)	*Wallerstein and Sanchez-Merki (1994)*	*Watts, Griffith, and Abdul-Adil (1999)*	*Carlson, Engebretson, and Chamberlain (2005)*
	Social responsibility to act: Individuals recognize the complexity of the problem and their role in creating change, understand the need for social responsibility	Critical stage: Critical consciousness skills undergo their most rapid development, leading some to conclude that social change efforts are necessary; adaptive behaviors used less frequently	Intentions to act: Emotions of hope are evident, and participants are able to envision and articulate a new future; the cognitive-emotional interpretation of events is "We are part of the solution"
Critical level of consciousness, Step 2: Rejecting damaging images—Replacing damaging self-image with pride and acquiring skills for self-reliance to function autonomously		Liberation stage: Awareness of oppression is salient; involvement in social and community development is frequent; adaptive behavior is eschewed; critical consciousness is an established component of self	

dependency. Based on cultural theories, these cognitive-emotional interpretations are shaped by shared social experiences whether these experiences consist of everyday interactions within the community or a novel experience such as a photovoice project (Bopp & Bopp, 2001; Druskat & Wolff, 2001; Strauss & Quinn, 1997). This indicates that experiential processes that tap into strong negative emotions have a pivotal role to play in community-based endeavors attempting to engage authentic participation.

We suggest that a common feature in the movement from one level of cognitive awareness to another is emotional engagement and collective introspection. As such, emotional engagement and collective introspection become keys to the shift in cognitive-emotional interpretations that recognize responsibility for change. This shift in interpretations appears to be the prerequisite to authentic, engaged participation. This is in direct contrast to the stated goals of previous photovoice projects that have explicitly targeted powerful others as the agents of social change (Wang & Burris, 1994; Wang, Morrel-Samuels, Hutchinson, Bell, & Pestronk, 2004). We propose that this philosophical placement of agency has compelling implications for academic facilitators, community development practitioners, and health promotions interventionists.

During the first photovoice experiment, Wang and Burris (1994) explicitly placed the agency for action and social change in the hands of more powerful policy makers for practical and ethical reasons. In Chinese society, women are considered inferior to men, have little or no power even within the family unit, and might easily be targets of oppressive political repercussions. The limited role of social advocate has continued throughout the various photovoice projects and, indeed, these projects have become a novel way to accomplish a participatory needs assessment.

In contrast, our photovoice project implicitly placed the agency for change into the hands of community participants. This is not to suggest that targeting political allies for social change is an inferior goal, as previous photovoice projects have been pivotal in stimulating concrete improvements in the communities involved (Wang, Cash, et al., 2000; Wang, Morrel-Samuels, et al., 2004; Wang, Yuan, & Feng, 1996). Rather, our purpose in raising the issue of agency is to point out that the outcome goals of any project effect implementation procedures, evaluation objectives, and, ultimately, the determination of success. Accordingly, since the purpose of any Freirian-based intervention is the cocreation of knowledge, the discussion turns to lessons learned from the academic perspective.

As a social process, cultural norms of interpretation tend to be self-reinforcing and are usually quite difficult to interrupt and shift (Strauss & Quinn, 1997). Evidence suggests that novel experiences, such as photovoice, that are able to arouse strong emotional reactions and challenge the assumptions embedded in cultural norms lead to more significant cognitive changes than would occur without the emotional element. Literature also suggests that this emotional engagement is a necessary key ingredient for communal healing (Das, Kleinman, Lock, Ramphele, & Reynolds, 2001). Storytelling becomes a fundamental means to this emotional engagement as a prerequisite to shifting the cognitive-emotional interpretations that create individual reality (Mankowski & Rappaport, 1995; Mattingly & Garro, 2000; Pennebaker, 1997). Our findings support these suggestions.

However, emotional engagement is not sufficient to raise critical consciousness. Community interventionists have consistently found that critical thinking does not happen spontaneously (Bopp & Bopp, 2001; Campbell & MacPhail, 2002;

Wallerstein & Sanchez-Merki, 1994; Watts et al., 1999). When it does happen at all in historically marginalized and oppressed communities, it most often must be facilitated. Our photovoice project used an elicitation approach that specifically called for critical reflection by focusing attention on both positive and negative issues within the community. We believe this was a pivotal key to emotional engagement and the critical reflection necessary to raise critical consciousness.

Similarly, just as critical consciousness does not happen without active facilitation, the sustentation of that critical consciousness and participatory energy also requires active facilitation. We argue that the academic role in any community-based participatory endeavor cannot simply be to provide resources at the request of community members. Facilitating whatever direction the community chooses, in communities with historically dysfunctional patterns of cognitive-emotional interpretations, only maintains dysfunctional cultural norms and risks returning participants to interpretations of helplessness (Bopp & Bopp, 2001; Campbell & MacPhail, 2002; Wallerstein & Sanchez-Merki, 1994).

Consequently, we suggest that attention to healing must take on a central role in these communities. This means that an ongoing supportive infrastructure is required to provide a context for continuous examination of intrapersonal and interpersonal power dynamics (Martin, 2001). Although community-based practitioners and researchers cannot empower and control simultaneously, we argue that there is a necessary middle ground of facilitation that is needed to channel energy into constructive ventures and avoid self-sabotaging activism. This is what we believe Freire (1970/2000, 1973/2002) alluded to when he proposed that action and reflection must occur together, the ultimate goal is to collectively learn to perceive, to interpret, and to behave differently from before.

From a practice perspective, it is our contention that each individual fulfills multiple social roles that are embedded in a variety of overlapping circles of cultural norms. These cultural norms influence the cognitive-emotional interpretations of events and the behaviors these interpretations elicit. Although these cultural norms tend to be self-reinforcing and enduring, they are not static entities but exceedingly dynamic processes. As such, they are amenable to change. Each time an individual moves to a higher level of critical consciousness, they change their cognitive-emotional interpretations of events, they change their behavioral responses to these interpretations, and they become a possible catalyst for social change.

We suggest that engaging this type of participation is the fundamental goal of community-based participatory research efforts. It requires that the social process of learning be intentional, explicit, and ongoing (Bopp & Bopp, 2001; Martin, 2001). We believe that this type of participation is the necessary first step in changing dysfunctional patterns of beliefs and behaviors that are destructive to a healthy and sustainable communal life.

CONCLUSION

In our ethnographic case study, we examined how the use of photographs and stories was able to facilitate a social process that resulted in higher levels of critical consciousness. Specifically, our findings suggest that active facilitation is necessary to engage and maintain participation in historically marginalized and oppressed communities. We suggest that understanding critical consciousness as a social process

of shifting cultural norms, from dependency to interdependency, has pragmatic utility for community-based practice and research. We believe that this type of theoretical development is essential to better understand and optimize the power of Freirian approaches to actively engage citizens for meaningful community-based participatory work.

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