Youth Perspective on Multiculturalism Using Photovoice Methodology

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Abstract

With increasing diversity and multiculturalism, there is a greater need to understand ways to foster positive intergroup interactions. In this study, youth ages 14 to 18 from three different regions in the United States (N = 21) were given camera phones and instructed to take pictures of what multiculturalism meant to them and how it played a role in their life. Interviews and focus groups were conducted and transcribed, followed by thematic coding. Generally, youth had ideal views and attitudes about multiculturalism, but they also expressed, to varying degrees, a lack of institutional support (i.e., educational opportunities) that encouraged acquiring knowledge about diversity and multiculturalism. Youth suggested that schools should formally incorporate dialogue about multiculturalism in the school curriculum, as a way to reduce misunderstandings among different groups which in turn may facilitate greater empathy and positive intergroup relationships.

Keywords

multiculturalism, photovoice, qualitative method

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Psychologists tend to agree that with increased global mobility and intergroup interactions, multicultural awareness and competence becomes increasingly important (Leung, Maddux, Galinsky, & Chiu, 2008). It is predicted that by the year 2025, more than half (61%) of the U.S. population will be of Hispanic and Asian origin (Hodgkinson, 2004). Intergroup contacts will continue to increase (Arnow, 2001), as will the importance of understanding ways to facilitate harmonious interactions within multicultural societies.

Although limited, several studies have explored the relationship between multicultural contexts and youth outcomes. Multicultural contexts have been argued to promote adaptability, flexibility, and empathy toward others (Ramirez, 1983), characteristics that are beneficial to interpersonal relationships. For example, Kinket and Verkuyten (1999), in a sample of 460 Dutch youth (of Dutch and Turkish origins) between the ages of 10 and 13, found that when teachers were mindful of encouraging tolerance in multicultural classrooms, individual’s tolerance toward others increased (Kinket & Verkuyten, 1999). Similarly, Kurlaender and Yun (2007), in a sample of 15,800 eleventh-grade students from 58 high schools in large urban school districts, found that students of all ethnicities felt more comfortable being in contact with, and working with, peers of other cultural backgrounds when they attended more ethnically diverse schools. Studies also suggest that a positive relationship between diversity and youth development exists; in other words, greater exposure to different cultural groups may lead to development of a more empathetic and open perspective (Carrell, 1997; Okin & Reich, 1999). This notion is consistent with social contact theory (Allport, 1954) whereby increased intergroup interactions result in more favorable attitudes and lower prejudice toward the out-group (Allport, 1954).

However, some argue that more diversity can actually hamper interpersonal relationships by increasing aggression and bullying (Monks, Ortega-Ruiz, & Rodriguez-Hidalgo, 2008; Vervoot, Scholte, & Overbeek, 2010). This argument is upheld by the occurrence of the in-group/out-group bias articulated by social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Social identity theory suggests that in-group/out-group biases are rooted in perceived threats to one’s group, which in turn may lead to a sense of competition for available resources (Vervoort, Scholte, & Overbeek, 2010). One might therefore assume that social identity theory considers the nature of intergroup contact as dictated by attitudes at the societal level. The sociopolitical atmosphere of greater society can influence youth attitude with regard to culture, race, and ethnicity (Maharaj & Connolly, 1994). This is an important piece of information to keep in mind when working with youth in multicultural contexts. Additionally, Putnam’s (2007) work alludes to the idea that political attitudes
may shape in-group/out-group relationships, social identities, and educational policies. This highlights one reason why multiculturalism may serve to hamper positive interpersonal relationships.

The overarching aim of this study is to use a qualitative data-collection technique known as Photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1994) to explore youth’s perspectives about multiculturalism and its potential role with respect to youth’s interpersonal relationships. We present a discussion of multiculturalism, multiculturalism and youth interpersonal relationships, followed by a description of the photovoice methodology and its utility in illustrating participants’ perspectives.

**Multiculturalism**

Multiculturalism is a concept frequently used across many disciplines in the social sciences. However, there is little consensus regarding its meaning. Philosophers at the time of ancient Greek civilization described multiculturalism as the notion of “world citizenship.” World citizenship in this context entails the consideration of the culture one is born into, in addition to one’s membership to humanity as a whole (Nussbaum, 1998). The American Psychological Association (APA, 2003) Guidelines described multiculturalism as possessing competence in working with diverse populations and having respect for others’ world views, while contributing to social justice. In addition, according to Arnow (2001), a multicultural environment includes valuing and learning about diversity, while understanding one’s own cultural heritage, fostering cultural sensitivity, and understanding one’s responsibilities as citizens of a pluralistic society. Fowers and Davidov (2006) framed multiculturalism in terms of virtue ethics, stating that the cultivation of cultural competence requires the capacity to recognize, and appreciate different belief systems. Multiculturalism therefore involves the internalization of cultural competence by incorporating it as part of one’s character (Fowers & Davidov, 2006). By highlighting the different ways one can define the term multiculturalism, it is clear that there is no one standard definition of multiculturalism.

Thus, the literature, to date, is not consistent with respect to the construct of multiculturalism. One way researchers have measured multiculturalism has been through the extent of one’s multicultural experience (i.e., amount of time spent abroad; amount of interaction with a foreign culture; Leung et al., 2008). In recent years, developmental scientists have described multiculturalism as the development of ethnocultural empathy, intercultural sensitivity, intercultural competence, and broad understanding for civic issues (Cushner, 2008; Endicott, Bock, & Narvaez, 2003). These characteristics of
multiculturalism complement Fowers and Davidov’s (2006) idea that multiculturalism promotes an inclusive attitude.

**Multiculturalism and Youth Relationships**

It is interesting to note that although social contact theory asserts that more contact is associated with fewer accounts of prejudice and discrimination, other studies have reported a positive association between intercultural contact and conflict (Forbes, 2004). These discrepancies in findings may occur because of the different levels of analysis. At the individual level, one is more likely to become accepting as contact with others increases. However, at the group level, groups are more likely to develop in-group biases unless the groups are striving for common goals (Forbes, 2004).

Furthermore, when discussing youth interactions in multicultural contexts, one must consider the role of interpersonal violence. Interpersonal violence among youth is not a new phenomenon. This is often referred to as bullying, something that many schools struggle to find a solution to. Monks et al. (2008), in a cross-cultural study with youth in Spain and England, found that youth of all cultural backgrounds report more personal, rather than cultural victimization; however, youth from cultural minority backgrounds reported cultural victimization in more instances than youth from cultural majority backgrounds. Similarly, a study carried out in the Netherlands found that youth from ethnic minority backgrounds were more likely than their ethnic majority peers to experience racist name calling (Verkuyten & Thijs, 2002).

It is also important to examine youth attitude toward multicultural contexts in order to understand the factors that lead to the apparent negative, as well as the increasingly recognized positive outcomes of diversity and multiculturalism. A more inclusive multicultural environment in schools may aid in the development of positive intergroup interactions (Arnow, 2001). Arnow (2001) suggested that, to achieve a more comprehensive multicultural environment, the current additive approach (e.g., celebrating Black history for only 1 month) regarding culture must change as it merely reinforces stereotyping. In support of this, Hudley and Taylor (2006) emphasized that a more inclusive multicultural context promotes positive identity development among ethnic minority youth, essentially buffering against negative outcomes such as aggressive behavior, interpersonal violence, and depression.

It is well known in the social psychology literature that perception influences behavior. Arnow (2001), and Hudley and Taylor (2006), brought forth the importance of investigating youth perspective regarding multiculturalism. Although studies on youth violence have considered youth’s perspectives
using methodologies such as photovoice (Messias, Jennings, Fore, McLoughlin, & Parra-Medina, 2008), *multiculturalism* thus far has not been considered from a youth’s perspective. The present study adopts the Photovoice methodology to gain a more in-depth understanding of how youth perceive, understand, and acknowledge multiculturalism as it relates to their lives.

**Introduction to the Photovoice Philosophy**

Photovoice began with an adaptation of the methods used by Freire (1970). It was Freire’s (1970) philosophy that learning occurs in dialogue and that this promotes the development of “critical consciousness.” Photovoice is a method rooted in three theoretical frameworks: feminist theory, arguing for inclusion (Wang & Burris, 1994); critical consciousness, embedded in Freire’s (1970) idea of self-reflection; and documentary photography as a means to social reform (Wang & Burris, 1994). Recently, Photovoice has been used with youth participants. Projects include the discussion of societal images of youth (Messias et al., 2008); the discussion of the influence of immigration on Latino adolescents (Streng et al., 2004); and the Yes! Project, empowering youth to be civically engaged (Wilson et al., 2007). As Chio and Fandt (2007) stated, the Photovoice method gives a “voice, via camera, to members of communities not typically represented” (p. 486).

Drawing from Freire’s (1970) philosophy, Chio and Fandt (2007) asserted that Photovoice creates an equal stage between experts and nonexperts in a given study by granting autonomy to those whose lives are being studied (Chio & Fandt, 2007). Photovoice fosters participation, sets the stage for creativity, and provides the opportunity for self-reflection (Chio & Fandt, 2007). In addition, the creativity of the Photovoice method is valued by youth and lends an interactive way to engage and empower youth in the research process (Messias et al., 2008). Group discussions and collages furthermore facilitate the ability for youth to think structurally (beyond the personal level; Sirin, Diemer, Jackson, Gonsalves, & Howell, 2004); this is important when considering greater societal factors such as multiculturalism.

**Method**

**Participants**

This study was conducted in three regions in the United States: Northern Colorado (Fort Collins and Loveland); Oakland, California; and South Bronx, New York. The photo projects and focus groups were carried out in
October and November 2009, and in April and June 2010. All youth were required to give written assent. Youth under the age of 16 obtained written consent from their guardian. Youth who attended every session of the study received US$20 of compensation. The participating youth portray populations from different contexts. The Fort Collins group was predominantly composed of middle-class high school students residing in a suburban setting. These youth were recruited by sending out a flyer to various afterschool programs. The Fort Collins group consisted of 4 youth between the ages of 14 and 16 of equal gender distribution. Two youth identified as White, one as Asian, and one did not disclose ethnicity. This group served as a pilot group as we tested the photovoice procedures with them. The other group from Colorado was recruited through the Loveland Boys and Girls club. This group consisted of 4 youth between 14 and 16 years old of equal gender distribution. One youth identified as African American, one as White, one as White/Hispanic, and one as Puerto Rican/Italian.

Through a contact at the East Bay Asian Youth Center, youth in Oakland were told about the project. Eight youth expressed interest and participated in the project. The Oakland group represented high school students living in adverse conditions and low socioeconomic status (SES). Males and females were equally represented. Three youth identified as having a Southeast Asian background, 2 identified as Mexican, 1 preferred the general Latino identity, and 2 youth identified as Black/African American.

Finally, through a contact at a youth afterschool program in South Bronx, New York, a fourth group was recruited. The South Bronx group consisted mainly of recently immigrated youth (born outside the United States) living in adverse conditions and low SES. The youth group leader informed us that these youth were often targets of gang violence. This group included 5 youth between the ages of 15 and 18. Two youth had emigrated to the United States from Togo, West Africa. Two youth came from Honduras and identified as Garifuna (The Garinagu, plural for Garifuna, are the decedents of an indigenous group in Central America). One youth identified as Black and was born and raised in New York.

**Data Collection**

*Session 1.* Borrowing Royce’s (2004) methods, a workbook was used to guide youth through the steps of the project. We used a modified version of the workbook Royce created and used this as a template. This workbook included a brief description of what Photovoice is, what is expected of the youth (e.g., that the youth would be expected to discuss the reason for their
picture), how to receive signed consent for pictures of nonparticipants, how to keep track of their pictures, and finally, guidelines for discussion of their pictures. The first session lasted about 1 hr and included a brainstorming session, handing out of pocketbooks (which youth used to document their photography by including consent for pictures of nonparticipants and jotting down key words as reminders for discussion), describing the context and ways to take photos, and handing out of camera phones. Camera phones were used so that youth would be able to call 911 if an unsafe situation were to occur. Rules were emphasized to keep youth out of dangerous situations when taking pictures.

**Session 2.** During the next meeting, we carried out one-on-one interviews with the youth. Youth were asked to state their age, residence (zip code), and what ethnicity they identified with (this last question was open-ended). Using a semistructured form of the mnemonic SHOWeD (Wang, 1999), youth described each picture they took. SHOWeD stands for the following: what do you SEE? What is really HAPPENING? How does it relate to OUR lives? WHY does the situation exist? What can we DO about it? Because we did not make youth write short essays (as did other projects), we did not follow the mnemonic strictly. Instead, we interviewed and tape-recorded the session since this seemed to be an easier way to engage the youth in conversation. Youth were asked to choose two, or three, of their favorite pictures to later share in a group setting.

**Session 3.** A slide show was created with the pictures that youth chose. A focus group was facilitated. Ground rules were established by letting youth tell us what the rules for group conversation would be. This was done to give youth a sense of control of the group situation rather than to impose rules as authority figures. Once the interviews and focus groups were completed, the audio-recorded sessions were transcribed verbatim and transferred into a word document.

**Data Analysis**

Analytical strategy included thematic analysis with coding themes, as previously used in other Photovoice projects (Wilson et al., 2007). We first carried out a preliminary reading of the transcribed focus groups, allowing us to identify recurring topics and to develop a list of themes. Due to the relevance of perception, as discussed earlier, we decided to code emotional reactions in addition to the other general themes. We coded the focus groups into eight themes as described in the following results section. The numbers of comments for each theme were also counted to capture frequency and by whom.
Results

Acceptance/Tolerance

All of the groups expressed acceptance and tolerance regarding multiculturalism. One way acceptance was expressed was through inanimate objects. In response to a picture of a desk, one youth in Fort Collins, a 15-year-old boy who identified as Irish/Welsh/Cuban, stated, “That desk isn’t prejudice.” This was the youth’s way of saying that just like the desk; we need to accept one another in the classroom. Similarly, one 16-year-old Mien boy from Oakland expressed, “Busses are just very diverse, I mean everyone takes that bus . . . we all gotta get along, especially if you are sharing a seat with someone.” This statement reiterates the notion of coexistence and need for acceptance. In Loveland, a 16-year-old White girl looked at a picture of a tree and commented on how cultures are like branches on a tree: different yet attached to one another. In addition, in Fort Collins, youth generally felt that there was a need for acceptance and tolerance to coexist and to maintain order. For example, one youth, upon reflection of a picture of leaves taken by his peer, stated, “They’re all forced to live in close quarters, like they might not be the same kind of leaf as the other leaves, but they’re there, and they have to cooperate to maintain order.”

In Oakland and in South Bronx, some statements were made about how, in their everyday experiences, there is a lack of acceptance and tolerance. These statements were also coupled with a sense of sadness. One boy in Oakland poignantly stated,

Some people they [have] negative energy. I don’t look at it like everybody [is] saying oh you [are] this race . . . Everyone is an individual. But people do that (referring to in-group bias) and we have to start [accepting people for the individual they are]. I bet you everybody at one point in life did something that like sexism, racism, something like that. Like judge [identity concealed], you feel me, her daughter got killed by some dude with dreads and now she’s sending everyone back to the hall who has dreads. It’s how it is. (15-year-old Vietnamese boy)

Furthermore, all youth noted that childhood innocence was the most ideal state of acceptance. In Fort Collins, one youth (in response to a picture of a playground) expressed that children accept one another without prejudice and that this seems to change when religion and politics are brought into the equation. Youth in Oakland, on more than one occasion, expressed intercultural and interracial friendships as portraying the ultimate state of acceptance.
Celebrating Difference

The greatest amount of discussion about celebrating differences came from youth in Fort Collins and Oakland. In Fort Collins, the general sentiment was that of embracing uniqueness. There was a lot of discussion about one picture in particular, taken by a 15-year-old Korean/American boy. The photographer of a picture of fall leaves stated, “Different cultures they stay next to each other but they don’t fit together like a puzzle would. It’s more chaotic. And a lot of them blend together, but then there are ones that stand out from each other.” This statement was answered with the idea that sometimes it is okay to stand out. Generally, the emotion that accompanied this theme was that of enthusiasm. For example, in Loveland, a 15-year-old White/Hispanic boy commented that he liked that everyone had a different idea about a picture, highlighting multiculturalism in itself. Furthermore, in Oakland, this idea of embracing difference was discussed by stating that “[being around] difference can teach us respect for one another.”

Unity

There was a lot of similarity between the groups about the relationship between multiculturalism and unity. Many youth spoke about “coming together” or “becoming one.” Some examples that illustrate this notion include the discussion about the picture of one youth’s parents in Fort Collins. In reference to his own picture, one youth stated, “I took it because I was thinking about how they’re (referring to his parents) both from different backgrounds, and despite any difference, they still love each other.” This illustrates the unifying qualities of the togetherness represented by the picture.

Furthermore, two young boys from Honduras (South Bronx group) described their reason behind taking a picture of several world flags representing the World Cup Soccer held in South Africa in 2010. They called their picture, “32 countries united to win.” Other explanations of unity that came from South Bronx had similar characteristics of uniting to achieve a goal. Youth, for example, described how they united by working with one another for the community in the community gardens.

Finally, the lengthiest discussion about unity came from youth in Oakland. There were several pictures taken by youth in Oakland that provoked discussions about unity. In reference to a picture of three girls holding hands, the following discussion took place:
B: “Ok I think . . . are they holding hands? [J nods her head yes] Ok that’s cute. Are they 3 different races? [J nods] All three races are holding hands, and coming as one.” (15-year-old Black girl)

J: “[Laughing] She’s smart.” (14-year-old Cambodian girl)

A: “Yeah, you feel me, they’re all mixed cultures and they’re holding hands so they’re united, [and] so that’s multiculturalism.” (15-year-old Vietnamese boy)

J: “Yeah like they’re all different races and ethnicities but, it’s like the history may be different and unique and stuff, but they’re all equal.”

The discussions with respect to unity all possess a similar characteristic; one of idealism. All youth seem to idealize multiculturalism as an ultimately unifying concept. Youth express that multiculturalism when “done right” is what society needs to strive for and maintain.

**Sameness Despite Difference**

All youth groups talked about sameness despite difference. However, the Fort Collins and the Loveland youth spoke about the concept in very abstract ways. For example, in reference to a picture of different color heirloom tomatoes, one 15-year-old White girl stated that “even though they’re all different kinds of tomatoes, they’re still tomatoes.” The 15-year-old Korean/American boy who took the picture replied by highlighting the idea that although they look different, “they’re all the same on the inside; just like people.” The picture of the tomatoes is one example of the abstract thought portrayed by the youths in Fort Collins. In Loveland, the same idea was portrayed in discussing a picture of trees. It was highlighted that although there are different trees, “they’re still a tree” (14-year-old Puerto Rican/Italian boy).

Whereas youth in Fort Collins and in Loveland portrayed abstract ideas to describe the concept of sameness despite difference, youth in Oakland and South Bronx provided very concrete examples from their lives. One 18-year-old girl from Togo, West Africa described how, just like in Africa, grocery stores also sell Cassava root. She acknowledged that Africa and America are very different, but they have similar foods. Another example of concrete images is described by a 15-year-old Black girl in Oakland, who took a picture of herself with some friends in shadows, informed us that she wanted to take this picture to show us that even though the people were ethnically different; their shadows were the same shade. She said that she “just wanted
to show that no matter what skin color you [are] . . . inside you [are] all the same.” This last phrase captures the youth’s thoughts with respect to the theme of sameness despite difference across the different youth groups.

**Segregation**

Youth living in more diverse contexts, namely in Oakland and the Bronx, were more vocal about their experiences of segregation among different cultural groups. Although not talked about in great detail, the youth in Fort Collins were highly aware of the separation between groups of people. The Loveland youth made no mention about segregation. For the youth in Oakland and the Bronx, much of the discussion about segregation was accompanied by a sense of sadness. One discussion in Oakland clearly portrays the emotions of sadness linked to the discussion of segregation. It is also interesting to note that much of the sadness is linked to the reality outside of their school environment.

This (pointing at the focus group) is the perfect example of how we should get along, and the fact is that, yeah ok, we get along like this, and then outside [of] school it’s different. If someone goes against you, you stick with your own. You know, like you’re all just playing volleyball the other day. Like they [are] playing, but when someone hits a “dude” they have some problem. Even when [they’re] getting along with different cultures [they] gotta go against each other. (15-year-old Vietnamese boy)

**Need for Belonging**

The need for belonging was identified as a theme because some of the youth had insight into why people are not able to live peacefully with one another. Oakland youth were the most vocal about the idea of a need for belonging. However, the need for belonging was expressed by youth in Fort Collins as having a sense of identity with respect to a particular cultural or ethnic group. For example, one 15-year-old White girl, in reference to a friend from Saudi Arabia, stated, “I’ve known him my whole life . . . He just tries really hard to fit in and [to] be like everyone else, he’s not the most proud of his culture or his ethnicity.” Youth in Oakland, and in the Bronx, talked about how one might not feel comfortable venturing outside of the culture one is familiar with.
Misunderstanding

Misunderstanding as a theme identifies the discussion about why cultural groups might not get along with one another. The idea that misunderstanding in multicultural contexts leads to violence was most clearly expressed by South Bronx youth. Youth who spoke about misunderstanding mentioned that in some instances lack of communication between different groups of people hindered any positive outcomes that youth insist should result from multiculturalism. One youth in Oakland expressed frustration with the notion that people do not seem to want to “sit down and just talk” and that they choose instead to “shoot each other” instead. When asked what they would do about the misunderstanding, one 16-year-old girl from Togo, West Africa stated that she would want us to learn about each other’s cultures and that if we “know (and understand) what [people from other cultures] are doing, then we (as a society) will be better.”

Lack of Institutional Support

We found that youth in Loveland made no reference to this idea and that youth in Fort Collins mentioned that there was institutional support and not a lack thereof. Two youth in Fort Collins took pictures of their high school hallway. When asked how they felt about seeing all of the different flags in their school, one 15-year-old Korean/American boy stated that it “sets a welcome.” Furthermore, a 15-year-old White girl talked about Rosa Parks and segregation and how nowadays people have, for the most part, “gotten past that” (referring to institutionalized segregation).

In Oakland and in the Bronx, however, there was a lot of discussion about the lack of institutional support and the lack of education about the topic of multiculturalism. When asked what should be changed to decrease negative outcomes, one 15-year-old Vietnamese boy vehemently stated that he “in fact, would have a class on this!” One 16-year-old West African girl in the Bronx portrays the need for education about the topic of multiculturalism. To elaborate the need for better education on the topic, the same youth from the Bronx stated,

Knowledge is kind of a powerful thing. You need knowledge to go forward . . . You have to know that there was slavery; there was discrimination in this country. If you know the history then that will prevent you from doing other stuff [referring to violent or discriminatory behavior].
It might be interesting to note that the two sites that felt a greater need for education regarding the topic of multiculturalism were in fact the more ethnically diverse sites.

**General Analysis**

Whereas the first four themes provoked more positive emotions and youth had more idealistic notions about them, the last four themes provoked a notion of harsh reality, coupled with feelings of sadness. It is interesting to note that the Loveland youth made no mention of any of the final four themes. However, the youth in Fort Collins made note of these themes in a very global, thoughtful, and abstract manner, rather than making reference to their daily experiences.

**Discussion**

The ideal multicultural environment is one that is process oriented and widely integrated throughout curriculum and practice (Arnow, 2001). A multicultural environment is an environment in which individuals are prepared to live, to learn, and to work together to reach common goals in a culturally diverse world (Arnow, 2001). Having a positive perception of an environment that is supportive of multiculturalism has been found to decrease interpersonal violence by means of increased community engagement, ethnic identity, and positive peers (Le & Johansen, 2011). In addition, Juvonen, Nishina, and Graham (2006) found that ethnic minority youth were less likely to experience bullying in more diverse settings, again highlighting the possible benefits of increased multiculturalism.

However, as previously noted, in some instances, multiculturalism can lead to intergroup conflict (Forbes, 2004). This may depend on the sociopolitical climate of the particular context. Ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) has been used to explain the difference in intergroup climate. This theory posits that particular policies as well as the particular history of intergroup relationships may serve to explain the difference between whether social contact leads to conflict-laden intergroup relationships (Maharaj & Connolly, 1994). Furthermore, it has been asserted that people’s behavior is determined by the ideologies of the overarching sociocultural environment. Therefore, if the school environment in which youth develop is not supportive of the diversity of its students on a curriculum-wide basis, the school environment may, in essence, contribute to the growing
problem of school violence (Arnow, 2001). Interestingly, the notion set forth by Arnow (2001) is upheld by the focus group discussions portrayed in the current study. In addition, the data showed that in more diverse contexts, such as in Oakland and in South Bronx, youth reported greater instances of intergroup conflict. Vervoort et al. (2010) argued that this may occur in contexts where increases in diversity may produce a sense of competition; it may evoke a sense of social threat and, in turn, increase the need to establish group dominance.

It is important to note that the two contexts that experience greater diversity indexes are also larger cities. Putnam (2007) found that diverse communities are indeed larger, more mobile, have higher crime rates, and are less likely to endorse equality among its residents. In addition, most individuals living in highly diverse contexts (due merely to the nature of immigration trends) tend to have lower levels of education, be of lower SES, and are less likely to speak English (Putnam, 2007). One is therefore urged to take caution when assuming relationships of cause and effect. It is important to understand that people living in highly diverse contexts, such as Oakland and the Bronx, are less likely to engage in the community and be less trusting of their neighbors regardless of their ethnic group membership (Putnam, 2007).

However, youth interviewed in this study voiced many positive ideas regarding multiculturalism. They were very enthusiastic of the “what-could-be” with respect to the concept of multiculturalism. However, they also talked about the disappointing realities they faced on a daily basis (especially youth living in the two highly diverse contexts). When asked what they would want to do about it, youth were adamant about the need for increased communication. Although the youth in Fort Collins do not reside in a highly diverse setting, they had sophisticated insights about the lack of communication between groups of people. These sentiments closely matched sentiments portrayed by youth in Oakland in particular. In Oakland, one youth was clear about the need for more education about this topic. It is likely that schools and community centers are areas where public policy can make a difference in fostering acceptance and tolerance among different cultural groups.

As Arnow (2001) suggested, the current state of the public school curriculum is not “where it should be.” Reinvesting in school curriculums as a driving force for change with respect to in-group/out-group attitudes may help bridge the gap between what youth state are the ideals of multiculturalism (how it should look) and the realities they observe.
Conclusion

The goal of this study was to explore youth’s perceptions of multiculturalism using a unique qualitative methodology known as Photovoice. Photovoice has been shown to give youth (and other marginalized groups in society) a voice with respect to discussions that they may feel passionate about. It is a methodology that encourages dialogue and equality between those doing the research and the “subjects of research.” By giving youth a voice, we were able to understand multiculturalism from the perspective of those who are the most affected by multiculturalism. It is hoped that this study will encourage educators to hear the voices of youth, especially regarding their ideals of multiculturalism and to take note of the need for communication about multiculturalism among youth. Communication, per the request of the youth, is hoped to foster the positive aspects of multiculturalism highlighted by the youth in this study. This study lends support to the notion that youth are, in fact, willing to talk to one another in hopes that this will decrease intergroup violence.

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References


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