

Photography as a Narrative Tool Used for Conflict Resolution in a Multicultural Context

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A Research Paper

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of

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## Abstract

### Photography as a Narrative Tool used for Conflict Resolution in a Multicultural Context

Laura Regev

This research paper explores the integration of photography in a conflict resolution program designed for adolescents. In view of the fact that theoretical and practical research on this approach is lacking, literature consolidating the value of such a program is assessed. Art therapy and narration are addressed in relation to the expression of trauma, a condition frequently identified in individuals involved in a cultural or religious based conflict. Empathy is reviewed as a trait effective in the process of dialogue between two conflicting parties, as it humanizes both assumed victims and perpetrators. Finally, attention to the role photography plays in the lives of youth, as an agent of expression, and of social action is considered. The analysis of the literature is directed into the construction of *Shooting for Peace*, a program aimed at providing a therapeutic process of reconciliation with members from both groups. Photographic narration is employed as a tool to tell, hear, and co-create stories with the other in a respectful and contained environment.

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## PHOTOGRAPHY AS A NARRATIVE TOOL USED FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN A MULTICULTURAL CONTEXT

### *Introduction*

*"Men build too many walls and not enough bridges"*  
Isaac Newton

Every year the city I live in welcomes thousands of new immigrants and refugees that aspire to enhanced life conditions. Often fleeing from countries where war, political violence, discrimination and poverty constitute reality, these families and individuals carry a powerful load of shattering experiences that inevitably shape their identities. Although filled with new opportunities and a safer future, living in exile carries its own challenges. As a child of a Moroccan/Israeli father and French mother who immigrated to Montreal in the 1980s, I witnessed the challenges surrounding the process of adaptation to a new environment. Among the difficulties immigrants face on a daily basis, co-existing with previously perceived adversaries is prevalent. The conflict between old and new realities places immigrants in an active state of questioning and insecurity. Naturally, these feelings are perpetuated within the family and place children in a particular dilemma. At home, children are narrated stories that shape their thoughts, beliefs, and outlooks on the world, including their perspectives on the *other*, a term I will use throughout this paper to denote a member belonging to the other side of the conflict. As a result, these beliefs manifest themselves in the interaction of the child with the other outside of home. At school, work, and in public domains, this could translate into isolation, hostility, and conflict.

The goal of this research project is to create a short-term art therapy program that addresses the ongoing need for youth in public schools to develop new types of relationships with the other. The art therapy program I designed uses photographic

narration to provide the participants with the opportunity to narrate, create, and exchange personal life stories in an intimate and safe space. The literature assessed for this paper strongly attests to the positive influence of narration in the process of conflict resolution with groups of individuals carrying a legacy of trauma, an aspect which will be developed in the present research paper.

In the first chapter, trauma is explored in relation to art therapy. Valued as an efficient approach in accessing traumatic memories, art therapy is also recognized for its empowering effects as individuals are led to appropriate their experience through creative exploration (Al-Krenawi & Slater, 2007; Collie, Backos, Malchioli, & Spiegel, 2006; Lev-Weisel & Liraz, 2007; Stepakoff, 2007). In conjunction, chapter two situates conflict resolution within a psychosocial context, praising the advantages of an approach encompassing emotional awareness (Hutchison & Bleiker, 2008; Landy & Hadari, 2007; Senehi and Byrne, 2006). Creativity, more specifically creative narration is credited for its capacity to stimulate feelings of empathy in situations of conflict (Al-Ajarma & Barzilay-Schechter, 2007; Lark, 2005; Speiser & Speiser, 2007). Bridging the information above with the literature exploring photography as a narrative tool in chapter three further confirms the potential of this medium to empower individual voice, challenge preconceived beliefs of others, and offer an opportunity to engender new memories.

Leaning towards a humanistic approach to conflict resolution, I was initially drawn to the work of Armand Volkas. Inspired by his own experience being the son of Holocaust survivors and facing the need to make sense of his family's legacy, Volkas developed a therapeutic approach called *Healing the Wounds of History* (HTWH)

(Kirstein, 2004). Relying on drama therapy, sociodrama, psychodrama, and intercultural communication approaches, Volkas originally brought together children of Holocaust survivors and children of Nazis. He later formed groups between Palestinians and Israelis, Japanese, Chinese and Koreans, as well as African American with European American. Narration is at the center of his approach. He believes that presenting ones own narrative and assisting in the stories of the other, allows for compassion, empathy, and mutual empowerment to occur. Having had the chance to participate in one of Volkas' HTWH demonstration workshop as part of a conference (Volkas, 2008), I witnessed and experienced the richness of this exchange, and aspire to create a similar creative environment in my practice.

The program I developed, *Shooting for Peace*, naturally carries its limitations. The complexity of conflicts based on cultural and religious identity is overwhelming, and can easily discourage the strongest activist. As beautifully mentioned in the preface and title of their book, Kalmanowitz and Lloyd (2005) carry "no illusion" that art therapy will "solve the conflicts which have been brought by so many complex factors" (p. xviii). However, as Diane Waller adds: "It might, though, just help some of its recipients to feel they have a voice, and to gain a bit of control over their lives." (p. xviii) In the same vein, my desire to witness and incite change, leads me to attempt to build new bridges for possibilities to rise.

### Chapter One: Creative Art Therapies and the Expression of Trauma

*In art therapy, making art, like poetry, may provide a place in which pain can live alongside joy, questions can live unanswered, symbols and metaphor can represent that which is beyond human comprehension, memories can be expressed and witnessed, with no illusion (Kalmanowitz & Lloyd, 2005, p. 3)*

In a context of conflict initiated by the discordance of belief between two cultural or religious groups in their home country or abroad, the individuals concerned often carry

their personal or shared load of experiences with events such as war, political violence, and discrimination. As termed by Kalmanowitz and Lloyd (2005), through these experiences, individuals are involved in “abnormal circumstances” (p.5). In response, these individuals may instantaneously or eventually exhibit normal responses of “overwhelming fear, anger and grief caused by loss, both collective and individual” (p.5). The vast majority of individuals who experience such abnormal circumstances maintain a psychological balance and resume a functional life. However, there are others who witness traumatic events that could develop a mental disorder identified as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). In the following section, I will present a sample of the literature examining the positive outcomes of art therapy in the treatment of PTSD. A closer look at the influence of narrative, more specifically storytelling, in the process of healing will follow. But first I will define and situate PTSD within the range of possible consequences following a trauma.

The American Psychiatric Association Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders Fourth Edition (DSM-IV: APA 1994) defines PTSD as:

A. The psychological reaction to an event or events where both the following are present: (1) the person experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual threat or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or other, (2) the person’s response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror. (p.467)

Among the other criteria, “persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma and numbing of general responsiveness” (p.468) as well as “persistent symptoms of increased

arousal” (p.468) such as “(1) difficulty falling or staying asleep, (2) irritability or outbursts of anger (3) difficulty concentrating” (p.468) are indicators of PTSD.

Although individuals with PTSD are subjected to the outmost severity of impact on their physical and mental health, most individuals who experience trauma encounter radical changes in their sense of personal identity, system of belief, and behavior. On both ends of the spectrum, however, some individuals are brought to or voluntarily seek professional help while others naturally revert to coping strategies or defence mechanisms. While some mechanisms are believed to be mature or immature defence strategies, all are considered as “mental processes that operate unconsciously to protect individuals against anxiety and awareness of internal threats and external stressors” (Punamäki, Kanninen, Qouta, & El-Sarraj, 2002, p. 287). The style of coping adopted depends on many factors. However, Punamäki et al. explain that mature defence mechanisms such as sublimation, rationalization and anticipation are more conducive to rehabilitation as the individual acknowledges reality as something that can be influenced. To recognize the existence of a trauma and adopt mechanisms to transform the pain leads towards a gradual regain of control and subsequently engenders the healing process.

Can art play a role in the recognition and transformation of pain? Interestingly, some authors not only argue that art can fuel the healing process but that some humans naturally revert to artistic expression in times of crisis, similar to how their internal system of defence would naturally be activated. Shaun McNiff, in the foreword of *Art Therapy and Political Violence* (Kalmanowitz & Lloyd, 2005), talks about that natural human response towards crisis. He states that, “The history of art and civilization, as well as our most personal experiences, show that difficult, painful and tragic occurrences often

inspires humanity's greatest expressions and affirmations of life" (p. xv of foreword). As an example, the authors of *Art Therapy and Political Violence* refer to a quote by the famous poet and Holocaust survivor, Elie Weisel who says: "I must tell you the truth...I know it is impossible to do and yet I must do it" (p.2). These few words express the magnitude of the pain involved in creating after events such as the Holocaust, but also imply that humans might be compelled to creatively transform the wound. This argument is reinforced by the fact that some humans put their own life at risk to continue creating under threat. Whether this manifestation is instinctive or whether it is learned, art has shown its capacity for initiating renewal.

Similarly, in the treatment of PTSD, some authors (Al-Krenawi & Slater, 2007; Collie et al, 2006; Lev-Weisel & Liraz, 2007; Stepakoff, 2007) favored the application of art making and art therapy over traditional therapies.

Concerned about the growing number of war veterans who develop PTSD, Collie et al. (2006) developed an interest in establishing a conceptual foundation of art therapy as a treatment for PTSD by situating it within the context of other PTSD treatments. Considering that traumatic memories in PTSD clients were "dissociated emotional, perceptual, and sensory fragments that lack coherent verbal, symbolic and temporal foundation," (Collie et al., p. 158) the authors affirmed that people with PTSD have difficulty expressing their experience and emotions with words. They underlined the validity of helping clients recreate a coherent trauma narrative by relocating the traumatic memories in their declarative memory to be able to re-interpret and integrate these memories into their life story. Since traumatic memories are difficult to access verbally, art therapy becomes an effective tool to retrieve traumatic narratives. Additionally, Collie

et al. discussed the usefulness of art expression in the management of stress, physical symptoms, and psychological disorders resulting from acute or chronic trauma. Other findings discussed by Collie et al. found that among 15 standard components such as group therapy, drama therapy, community service, anger management, and journaling, art therapy generated the most significant benefits for veterans with the most severe PTSD symptoms. Veterans revealed that art therapy helped them tolerate traumatic war-zone content, something they were unable to accomplish in other therapeutic groups. Particularly meaningful to my research interests is the speculation that art therapy might yield such positive results partially because it provides a “pleasurable distraction in conjunction with exposure to difficult content and this allows traumatic material to be processed without the negative short-term effects of verbal introspective interventions” (Collie et al., p. 159).

In the analysis of a survey conducted with art therapists treating PTSD clients, Collie et al. (2006) dedicated a paragraph to the ability of art therapy to reduce arousal through its relaxing and meditative nature. Similarly, they underlined the capacity of creativity to activate positive emotions, increase reward-driven motivation, and provide clients with a sense of control. Finally, the authors stated that art therapy gave an opportunity for the individuals to express their shameful material in an open and accepting frame where the emotions were recognized and reflected by the others. Self-esteem was seen to be positively affected by this supporting environment.

Another study, completed with children who experience trauma at an early age confirmed the beneficial nature of art therapy with that population. Al-Krenawi and Slater (2007) studied the psychological effects on Bedouin-Arab children who faced the

possibility of their houses being destroyed because of government policy. Nineteen 11- to 14-year-old boys and girls were asked to draw pictures of where they lived, to write a story about their drawing and to talk about them. Although the results did not meet their expectancies as the children barely acknowledged the destruction of their homes in their drawings, Al-Krenawi and Slater hypothesized that it might be a reflection of the Bedouin-Arab cultural value of not complaining or a direct consequence of trauma. The authors, in a review of the work of a social worker specializing in assisting traumatized children in Canada asserted that children develop strong defense mechanisms to cope with the psychic pain and repress the memories of trauma. Resilience is also briefly mentioned as another possible factor supporting their results. However, Al-Krenawi and Slater quote Barnard and Mantell (1998) about the possible outcomes of untreated trauma which include “anxiety, sense of helplessness and loss of control; loss of relationship with parents, family and community; shattered assumptions about human existence and maladaptive behavior” (p.291). These results expose the dangers of falsely interpreting the drawings as healthy, leading to an underestimation of the sequels and care needed. Although art therapy has the advantage of having a visual representation of the defenses used by a child, therapists need to be cautious about their manifestation and the presence of cultural influences on the child’s drawing and behavior.

According to Lev-Weisel and Liraz (2007) the benefits of using art therapy as treatment for children who experienced trauma include the richness of the child’s narrative. Understanding the power of autobiographic reconstruction in the child’s healing process, the authors decided to compare the richness of verbal narratives to visual narratives in children whose fathers’ are drug abusers. As predicted, the authors found a

significant difference between the narratives of the two groups. The group who was asked to draw first and then narrate their life in the shadow of their fathers' addictions expressed negative emotions more frequently as well as lower life appreciation and optimism. The group who was solely asked to verbally describe their life had greater levels of splitting and showed higher resistance to expression. The authors explained that asking children to draw their narratives permitted richer subsequent verbalization of the experience as well as offered a less-threatening way to express their emotions. Additionally significant to this study is the discovery that using creative expression allowed for a decrease in the child's resistances and defense mechanisms. Combining this finding to the results of Al-Krenawi and Slater's (2007) study, it would be safe to say that although art facilitates a reduction of resistances and defenses, it does not completely eliminate them and therefore they need to be recognized in the drawings.

According to Stepakoff (2007), the strength of art therapy in the treatment of trauma survivors is partially due to the healing power of symbolization. Symbolization is defined by this author as "a process whereby an experience or emotion that has been unexpressed is given form" (p.400). The author argues symbolization has the potential to heal as it can "provide survivors with a sense of relief and solace and can attenuate isolation by permitting traumatic experiences to be shared with and acknowledged by others" (p. 400). Working with Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees in refugee camps in Guinea, Stepakoff used contemporary expressive therapy techniques combined with indigenous healing practices such as songs, drama, dance and letter-writing. In a case-study with a Liberian boy traumatized by witnessing the murder of his father, Stepakoff demonstrated the power of creative expression in rebuilding personal stories. He states

that symbolization helps relieve internal distress, fosters channels of communication with others in a group, which in turn prompts empathy within the group members. As mentioned by the authors presented earlier (Collie et al., 2007; Lev-Weisel & Liraz, 2007), trauma survivors benefited from a reconstruction of their past memories in an environment that allowed for both shameful and verbally inexpressible material to be divulged. Narrative therapy and creation of life maps allowed humans to make meaning of their stories and connect the external physical world to their personal inner experience (Caldwell, 2005). Taking into account these realities along with consideration of the Liberian boy's cultural background, Stepakoff worked with the child in building a memory book that included positive experiences with his father as a way of reconnecting with a nurturing internal representation of him. Although it is crucial for the traumatic experiences to be communicated and validated as an expression of the truth, it was equally vital for the boy to re-internalize positive memories of his father to allow for the healing process to solidify.

In the context of immigration, storytelling was equally recognized as empowering. In an evaluative study, Rousseau et al. (2007) created a program for immigrant and refugee adolescents to evaluate the influence of drama therapy in preventing emotional and behavioral problems and in enhancing school performance. In an attempt to bring the adolescents out of their silence, isolation and sense of alienation, the program led the group in storytelling using playback theater techniques that involved and empowered the collective. The results of the study show improved school performance and objective improvement in functioning in some domains. Although there were no significant results in some of the criteria, the adolescents underlined that the

program helped them feel better about themselves and the teachers became more aware of the necessity for special care. In accordance with the literature mentioned above, this program created a space where trauma and loss could be expressed and transformed through the sharing and validation of experiences, which consequently facilitated their adaptation and success in the new environment.

In summary, as humans witness traumatic events, they instantly capture and store the images and sensations surrounding the experience. Assisting to abnormal circumstances leads humans to develop physical and emotional responses. These responses often include defence strategies. While some strategies might be effective for short-term survival, others allow the individual to resume a normal life after the event has passed. In some cases, individuals revert to professional help to get rid of the haunting thoughts or symptoms triggered by the events. The spectrum of influence on a person's health varies considerably. In the worst of cases, people can develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. As seen in the paragraphs above, research has shown that art making and art therapy is significantly effective in the healing process of PTSD (Al-Krenawi & Slater, 2007; Collie et al, 2006; Lev-Weisel & Liraz, 2007; Stepakoff, 2007). Through art, PTSD clients succeed in recreating coherent trauma narratives, an exploit hardly achievable through verbal expression (Collie & al.). Exploring the narrative, in turn, validates the experience as an expression of truth and provides the possibility of internalizing alternative interpretation of the event (Stepakoff). Similarly, the relaxing and meditative nature of art serves the healing psychological functions of catharsis. Additionally, Wertheim-Cahen (2005) believes art activities "offer survivors a transition, even if only momentarily, from helplessness and passivity towards being in charge again"

(p. 216). Acquiring a sense of control over the event and their present life is highly empowering for trauma victims and is a strong precursor for successful rehabilitation. Visually representing the experience through drawing, collage, or photography externalizes the event from the person and puts it on paper. This process is valuable as it makes room for transformation but can also create a visual testimony about grief, injustice and loss. In an interview with Israeli war veterans, Wertheim-Cahen concludes that art enabled them “to communicate about the invisible scars of their war experiences” (p.213).

As stated in my introduction, narration carries a determinant role in the process of healing with self and with other in the aftermath of a conflict. Based on the findings of the numerous authors presented above (Al-Ajama & Barzilay-Schechter, 2007; Caldwell; 2005; Landy & Hadari, 2007; Lark (2005); Lev-Weisel & Liraz, 2007; Rousseau et al., 2007; Senehi & Byrne, 2006; Stepakoff, 2007), it’s appropriate to conclude that creative narration is a constructive process destined to engender meaning making, empowerment, empathy building, healing, mourning, and catharsis. In the following chapter, how these effects can also have a positive influence on the conflict resolution process will be examined.

## Chapter 2: Empathy building, an approach to conflict resolution

### *Conflict Resolution*

Adopting a therapeutic approach and formulating therapeutic goals requires a careful assessment of the population at hand. As my interest revolves around joining groups of individuals from various cultural backgrounds in a process of reconciliation, I must take into account the possibility of encountering individuals with a legacy of

trauma. Therefore, adapting an approach conducive to self-expression, meaning making and healing is paramount. In the same vein, the literature presented in this chapter, introduced with Armand Volkas' approach, will demonstrate the advantage of using an approach conducive to the expression of emotion, balanced dialogue, and creative expression, such as storytelling. I will then take a closer look at narration and empathy in conflict resolution settings between groups and in interpersonal conflict. As challenges and a need for caution are inherent to every approach, I will finally touch upon the guidelines handed down by some authors (Adwan & Bar-On, 2006; Kalmanowitz & Lloyd, 2005; Malhotra & Liyanage, 2005; Senehi and Byrne, 2006; Zelizer, 2007). A stronger apprehension of those factors increases the safety of the participants and inherently, the success of the project.

As mentioned in the introduction, Armand Volkas developed workshops combining drama therapy, sociodrama, psychodrama and group therapy to bring together “polarized groups...of participants who share a common legacy of historical trauma” (The Center for the Living Arts, 2009). The rationale behind his *Healing the Wounds of History* workshops revolves around offering an expressive space where previously perceived perpetrators and victims could interact (Kirstein, 2004). Using expressive techniques such as narration and role reversal exercises, Volkas aims to stimulate feelings of empathy by humanizing the other. He believes that humans have the capacity to become both victim and perpetrator. Hence, in his conflict resolution workshops Volkas promotes ways to bring out the uniqueness of each individual behind that set identity. Only after attaining this stage of empathy building, could a group be brought to grieve and mourn their losses collectively. Negative feelings of rage are articulated and received

by the group before moving on to the grieving process. Through the therapeutic component of his workshops, Volkas contains these multifaceted feelings and rechannels them creatively. Although Volkas understands the difficulty and resistance in encountering the enemy, he also believes humans have “a strong drive and spiritual need and desire to transform the pain” (Kirstein, 2004, p.56).

In addition to Volkas’ conclusions, other authors similarly confirm the influential nature of emotion over reason, as well as receiving the opportunity for open and safe interaction with the other. For example, Senehi and Byrne (2006) claim that storytelling may enhance peaceful relations only when the dialogue is characterized by shared power, mutual respect is present, consciousness raising is promoted and conflict resolution strategies are involved. The authors underline the strength of emotion over reason in helping people change their perspective about the other.

Hutchison and Bleiker (2008) similarly draw on the significance of emotions in the process of healing and reconciliation with the other. Acknowledging the lack of attention granted by politicians to emotions in periods of political violence and trauma, the authors argue that emotions are “central to how societies experience and work through the legacy of catastrophe” (p. 385). Often considered as subjective and irrational, emotions are often left out from political discourse. The authors suggest that:

Emotions play a particularly central role in constructing a sense of identity and solidarity that can emerge despite-or, rather, as a direct response to-the feelings of pain, solitude and fragmentation that are engendered by the trauma. (p.390)

Emotions, seen as an integral part of socio-cultural ways of understanding the world, have a pivotal role in the processing of personal and collective trauma, and subsequently in the process of reconciliation.

Cross and Rosenthal (1999), on their end, compared three models of conflict resolution: (a) distributive bargaining, (b) integrative bargaining, and (c) interactive problem solving. Their results show that members in the interactive problem solving model group became less pessimistic about the conflict and showed greater positive change in their attitudes towards the members of the other ethnic group. The difference is justified by the model's social psychological component that addresses the needs and fears of the members of both sides. As this research was completed with Jewish and Arab students to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian dispute over Jerusalem, this model proves to be most appropriate for conflicts that involve "underlying unmet needs of identity such as security, recognition and belonging" (p.566).

Other factors that are part of a psychosocial model resurface as ingredients to a successful conflict resolution experience. As previously implied, meeting the other is the first and most essential criterion to set the process of conflict resolution in motion. It entails breaking the physical barrier between both parties but most importantly, it entails confronting the cultural and political divide through group dialogues. Secondly, the will and aspiration to actively engage in such an endeavour is as imperative to sustain the project as mere presence. More specifically, some authors (Helsing, Kirlic, McMaster, & Sonnenschein, 2006; Isseroff, 1998) relates the will with the capacity to face ongoing criticism or rejection from their peers at home for participating in such projects. Oftentimes, participants in conflict resolution or peace workshops are perceived as

traitors once they return home, which can solicit a great amount of stress within and around themselves. As mentioned by a young Israeli peace activist, “we have to put more energy into gaining acceptance in our own communities than we do in our work with Palestinians” (Helsing et al., p.209).

Finally, most authors (Adwan & Bar-On, 2006; Kirstein, 2004; Senehi & Byrne, 2006) attest to the empowering effect of shared space for dialogue or more specifically, storytelling. For example, Adwan and Bar-On witnessed the usefulness of allotting time before each session for both groups to share personal experiences through storytelling. The rationale behind this task was to represent the outside reality of asymmetric power relations and violence in the room before moving to the pragmatic phase of the meeting. The act of sharing their pain, mistrust and fear is equally paramount in establishing a feeling of humanity in the group. Senehi and Byrne hold the same belief and assert that storytelling “provides for a collaborative process of meaning making and relationship building that is a necessary first step for social change and that mediates between the personal and the political” (p. 236). Storytelling empowers the voice of each individual as well as groups, moreover it provides the opportunity for the de-silencing of experience.

#### *Creative narration and empathy*

As seen previously, dialogue characterized by shared power, emotional expression and creative approaches is commonly associated with positive results. Moreover, empathy is often underlined as the quality both triggered by narration, as well as responsible for its success.

In order to understand the link between empathy and narration, I will briefly define both terms and present a number of research exploring creative narration. I will begin with

research in a context of conflict resolution between Israeli and Palestinian researchers, followed by two studies exploring empathy on an interpersonal level.

The narrative, described as “the stories we tell about our own and other’s lives are a pervasive form of text through which we construct, interpret, and share experience: [we dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative]” (Schiffrin, 1996, p. 167). They are integral to being human and existing. Human interaction could thus be viewed as two sets of narratives intersecting and interacting with one another verbally, physically, or both.

On the other hand, taking a closer look at the literature on empathy in order to grasp the potential behind this trait teaches me that in some cases (Wied, Branje & Meeus, 2006) empathy is considered as a dispositional trait, and in other cases (Al-Ajarma & Barzilay-Schechter, 2007; Speiser & Speiser, 2007) it is viewed as a flexible state that is subject to change. Defined as “the ability to understand and share another’s emotional state,” (Wied. et al.) empathy is invariably thought to promote helping and cooperative behaviors, even in non-profitable situations for the party exhibiting the behavior (Rumble, Van Lange, & Parks, 2009).

Volkas’ approach in stirring feelings of empathy in his group members by humanizing both assumed victims and perpetrators through story-telling, role reversal, and other creative techniques was similarly adopted by different researchers around the world (Al-Ajarma & Schechter, 2007; Joubran & Schwartz, 2007; Serlin, Berger & Bar-Sinai, 2007; Speiser & Speiser, 2007). A significant amount of research exploring different creative approaches to conflict resolution, some revolving around the

stimulation of empathy, was produced in the aftermath of an international academic conference titled *Imagine: Expression in the Service of Humanity*. The studies presented below are based on an analysis of the workshops held during the conference where Israeli and Palestinian researchers participated.

In an attempt to explore the influence of art in creating peace, Yousef Al-Ajarma and Keren Barzilay-Schechter (2007), a Palestinian and an Israeli woman both living and studying art therapy in Cambridge, developed a relationship based on reciprocal curiosity about the other. They decided to use verbal dialogue, movement, role reversal, national songs and chants to narrate their story and interact with one another. In retrospect, Yousef validated having the opportunity of genuinely sharing emotions of sadness, happiness and pain with the other while Keren witnessed her defences slowly being transformed. Using art as a container, both Yousef and Keren were able to surpass their feelings of frustration and rage to develop feelings of empathy. Acknowledging her defenses, Keren states she progressed from using immature defences such as denial and projection to intermediate-level mechanisms of displacement and intellectualization to more mature defences (Al-Ajarma & Barzilay-Schechter). Kouttab (2007) explains that groups typically revert to splitting as a defence mechanism in situations of conflict by identifying themselves as the good group and the others as the evil group. In all likelihood, Keren and Yousef initially employed splitting as a defence and gradually developed space for dialogue through creative expression.

In another study, Speiser and Speiser (2007) used sociometric exercises asking individuals to group themselves according to height, religious beliefs or political orientation with the ambition to provoke an exploration of novel identities. Later they

used movement and freeze frame activities to create feelings of connection, disconnection, distancing, and closeness. The authors witnessed that a breaking down of set identities opened the door for different connections to occur.

Joubran and Schwartz (2007) conceptualized the concept of empathy differently. Observing the process of their own developing relationship in a context of national-religious conflict, Joubran and Shwartz recognized that a friendship based on virtue, that entails loving one another solely for who they are and based on a common loyalty towards good, was the only kind of friendship possible. Equally important to the authors is commitment to the cause. While they both maintained conflicting opinions on the political situation and lived a entirely different realities, they stayed highly devoted to the mission. As much as Volkas supports that humans have a strong drive and desire to transform the pain in relationship to the enemy (Kirstein, 2004), Joubran and Schwartz expressed a hunger in collaborating with one another to transform the enemy into a friend. Although the authors stay skeptical about the strength of friendship between a few individuals and ascertain the need for conflict resolution to take place on an institutional level, they advocate the power of pursuing the good and networking until intergroup violence becomes the least logical solution (Joubran & Schwartz). In their workshop, Landy and Hadari (2007), also witnessed a manifestation of that drive to embrace the enemy. Through dramatization, the wish of an Israeli settler to embrace a Palestinian woman was realized and emotions of relief were expressed. Giving the Israeli settler's strong desire a creative outlet, the conductors valued the necessity to keep on planting seeds of hope.

In his article, Knudsen-Hoffman (1989) strongly advocates the following critical roles in the process of reconciliation: (a) acknowledgement of the conflict; (b) acceptance of the anxiety caused by the stirring of undesirable feelings; and (c) the examination of the motives behind the frustration. The author also suggests the help of a mediator.

Reflecting on one's own internal process, a few authors address the value of acknowledging the presence of the shadow, an established concept brought forth by C.G Jung that I will simplify for the sake of this paper as the hidden and undesirable self. McNiff (2007) suggests that making art in a supportive and attentive group and expressing salient emotions enables individuals to surpass the negative feelings of alienation fed by the shadow. He believes that by acknowledging despised aspects of ourselves we may be less likely to attribute them to others. Creativity allows the shadow to be expressed and transformed into productive work with the other. Serlin et al. (2007) use movement exercises in their workshop to help participants become conscious of their shadow so they can avoid projecting it onto others by means of aggression. The shadow also contains collective unconscious material, therefore helping individuals to accept their shadow and to transform it becomes imperative in working with groups who are greatly influenced by the collective unconscious.

Lastly, Byers and Gere (2007) speak about the dangers of intergenerational reenactments of trauma claiming that what is not processed in a lifetime might be passed on to the next generation. They promote making sense of traumatic experiences by openly grieving in a holding environment so that healing may occur. Just as Lev-Weisel and Liraz (2007) emphasize the value of helping trauma survivors reconstruct their life story, Byers and Gere highlight the strength of narrative making in allowing negative life

events to be integrated and processed. Although Byers and Gere do not consider empathy in their article due to the absence of participants from one cultural group, they clearly establish narration as the starting point in the reconciliation process.

Lark (2005) attests to analogous findings to the authors previously presented. She asserts that validation of experience through open dialogue combined with visual expression could stimulate and establish strong feelings of empathy for the respective other. Her study was influenced by David Bohm's dialogue model which encourages open-ended exploration of implicit assumptions using suspension of reaction, individual and group reflection, as well as encounter with the other. This type of dialogue has the intent to create an open-ended exploration of each individual's thoughts with no set limitation, as well as to encourage a self-reflective thought process. Lark explains that visual expression allows for the expression of deeply encoded and internalized experiences, and also serves as a common language in multilingual groups. In her pilot study, she encourages her members to create a piece in response to a question on racism and to silently place it on the wall in relation to another piece. The members then create a second piece about the personal reflection of that visual dialogue. Essentially, this workshop allows individuals to express delicate subject matter in a free, contained, and acceptable manner by creating a space where validation of experience is generated. Although the results of her study could have been influenced by the participants' benefits in being cooperative, Lark states that members emotionally reacted to the powerful messages. In addition, they visually expressed and displayed emotions of sadness, sorrow, recognition, and shame, which helped them to develop feelings of empathy towards one another.

Empathy, although understudied in the context of conflict resolution, has stimulated much interest in the minds of researchers seeking to untangle the dynamics of interpersonal relationships. Wied et al. (2007) explored the relationship between empathy and conflict resolution in friendships by assessing the dispositional affective empathy and conflict resolution style adopted by 307 adolescents. Among the four styles of problem solving, conflict engagement, withdrawal, and compliance, the authors predicted and found that dispositional affective empathy was positively linked to problem solving and negatively linked to conflict engagement. In accordance with the literature, the authors confirmed that empathy prevents destructive acts and facilitates constructive ones, is positively related to prosocial behavior such as helping, and negatively related to aggressive and antisocial behavior. Similarly, Rumble et al. (2009) evaluated the capacity of empathy to sustain cooperation in social dilemmas. The authors' findings suggest that although empathy is considered a short-term emotional state, it has relatively enduring effects on cooperation within a social interaction. More specifically, they argue that empathy helps individuals to reduce or eliminate the detrimental effects of *noise*, a term used to describe a situation "in which the intentions or actions of the other(s) are uncertain or unclear" (p.2). This finding is a compelling argument for the use of empathy building in conflict resolution, as workshop participants are often insecure about the intentions or actions of the others.

Combining the findings of the research presented above leads me to conclude that empathy significantly affects people's assessment of a situation and behavior towards one another. The literature also demonstrates that empathy can be acquired or stimulated. Finally, narration or, more specifically, creative exploration of self with the other seems

to be an effective and low-risk approach to empathy building in the context of conflict resolution.

### *Challenges of conflict resolution programs*

Since conflict resolution projects often include a therapeutic component, some authors felt the need to evaluate both the validity and reliability of these projects, as well as establish the cautionary steps of running such a program.

Malhotra and Liyanage (2005), interested in testing the effectiveness of such programs, examined the long-term effects of peace workshops in protracted conflicts. Disturbed by the lack of longitudinal studies on the effects of peace and conflict resolution workshops, the authors built the assumption that a few variables would intervene in sustaining long-term impact of such workshops. These variables include the lack of societal support, the presence of power differential between groups, and above all, the effect of social pressure on the group members to conform to the dominant norms and beliefs once they return to their respective societies. In their study, Malhotra and Liyanage used the development of empathy as their measure of the success of intergroup contact. Inconsistent with the authors' assumptions, the results show that even after a year without contact, the members who participated in peace workshop developed significantly higher rates of empathy than did the members of the other group. Empathy, they conclude, might play a crucial role in reconciliation between groups in conflict.

Zelizer (2007), on the other hand, evaluates the lessons and challenges learned from the programs born out of the union between art-based practitioners and conflict resolution. He speaks of the importance of analysis in which "examining the sources of the conflict, the parties involved, the dynamics of the situation and the possible areas of

intervention” (Zelizer, *The impact of analysis*, ¶ 13) are considered as vital. Essentially, a one-to-one case approach needs to be adopted in order to respect the particularities of each situation. Similarly, Zelizer warns against the danger of producing harm instead of assistance. A careful assessment of both groups involved needs to be undertaken in order to reduce the chances of legitimizing one group over the other, or introducing resources that might lead to an increase in competition through imposing culturally inappropriate processes. Finally, the author encourages collaboration, self-care for the professionals, long-term commitment, and grounding work locally.

The multi-layered nature of an intergroup conflict directly affects the complexity of developing and running a conflict resolution program on two levels. The first level is intrinsic to the program itself, as seen previously, while the other concerns the people involved. Although, some authors such as Landy and Hadari (2007) witnessed the need of the participants “to embrace the enemy and feel deeply relieved,” (p.419), others such as Kalmanowitz and Lloyd (2005) address the standard reactionary manifestations of the individual placed in a context of reconciliation with the other. The authors underline the context and impact of violence on the individuals with whom they work. They suggest that:

When violence is ongoing, pervasive and unremitting, it may form an integral part of each individual’s internal world, identity, values, beliefs and history and not only affect a part of their present, but also inform whom each person will become. It will invariably inform the community itself. (p.15)

Similarly, Senehi and Byrne (2006) address the impact of intergroup conflict on identity. As people are shaped by the stories they hear and experience, the conflict

becomes an integral part of one's identity. For youth especially, growing up in such an environment shapes their perception and consequently, affects their future political choices and actions. Similar to identities, in periods of war and conflict, societies tend to develop their own narratives to explain the conflict. Oftentimes, each population perceives their narratives as superior, while devaluing and dehumanizing the narrative of the other (Adwan & Bar-On, 2006). Regardless of the individual's will to engage into a reconciliation program, his identity and narrative will resurface naturally, and will, therefore, challenge his implication in the process of peace building. According to Isseroff (1998), the most difficult endeavour lies in challenging each side's conviction of "being right". Working on transforming this basic perception, he believes, is essential for successful dialogue to occur.

The research presented above sustains a favorable outlook on methods of conflict resolution prone to the inclusion of emotions, creative expression and equal opportunity for narration. In their research, Cross and Rosenthal (1999) put forth the interactive problem solving approach as the most effective model for conflict resolution as it underlines the value of providing a secure environment where the needs and fears of each individual can be openly disclosed and addressed. In retrospect, many other authors (Adwan & Bar-On, 2006; Cross & Rosenthal, 1999; Lark, 2005; Malhotra & Liyanage, 2005; Rousseau et al., 2007; Senehi & Byrne, 2006; Volkas, 2004) similarly sustain that a method operating on shared experience is conducive to generating feelings of empathy within the group, as storytelling activates emotions over reason. Art, as a visual means for communication and storytelling, is comparable to verbal dialogue in the process of conflict resolution. As noted by Kaplan (2007), the existence and evolution of art and

conflict in human history places both “among the behaviors that have been cited as ‘what makes us human’, but they can also be grouped with the kinds of human conduct that have helped us to survive until today” (p.91). The historical relationship between both elements results in the undeniable influence of one over the other. Based on his observations, Kaplan depicts how art can be used to diffuse emotions prior to and after experiencing the consequences of a conflict. The capacity of art to access the less conscious parts of the mind facilitates the engendering of creative problem solving, as well as favors the stimulation of emotions. In a conflict resolution setting, these two factors widen the doors for dialogue and openness to the other.

### *Chapter 3: Therapeutic Use of Photography: A Narrative Tool*

While most art therapy interventions rely on traditional mediums such as painting, drawing, sculpture, and collage, a rare few operate with the photographic image. Some interventions involve manipulating old photographs brought in by the patient, while others entail the act of capturing new images. In the following chapter, I will briefly introduce the use of photography in the fields of art, history, and anthropology, in order to outline the logical passage of photography from the studio to the therapy room. A section will be devoted to youth and photography, as I will construct a program aimed at this population. A closer look at the influence of photography on empowerment and empathy building will follow an overview of Judy Weiser’s *Phototherapy* approach, focusing on the projective technique and self-portraiture. I will end with a section on social action to underline the value of sharing the process with a wider public, an idea I would like to follow by including the possibility of an exhibit in the design of the program constructed for this research paper.

*Brief Overview of Photography in Art, History and Anthropology*

In the last few decades, photography exponentially progressed into becoming one of the most present and influential media in the lives of the human being (Knowles & Sweetman, 2004). It is unequivocally found in most households, predominates on the walls of the city, fills our computer screen, and, lastly, occupies the pages of our family albums. In fact, photography is simultaneously part of mass communication, our private experience, and remains an art form. Our everyday encounter with photos creates a wealth of possible connections between the world of the image and ourselves.

Prior to the gradual infiltration of photography into the therapy room, a few artists had invited their public to contemplate their work beyond the aesthetics. A quote by Ansel Adams, renowned artist and photographer, illustrates this idea beautifully: “Forget what it looks like. How does it feel?” (Wheeler, 2009, p.64) Wheeler describes this notion as *psychological aesthetics*. He presents it as the interaction between the photo in form, the psychology behind the experience and the practice of making, viewing and thinking. In sum, psychological aesthetics refers to the immediate impact of a photograph on the viewer’s senses, emotions and perceptions. Wheeler believes that it is the combination of influential factors in photographs that enables them to act as such “powerful catalysts and containers” (p.64).

Similarly, historians believe in the pivotal role of a photograph in determining how an event will be remembered and internalized. Adelman (2009) underlines the similarity of our inclination to resort to childhood pictures to comprehend our past with our tendency to base our historical knowledge on images that are published, displayed and more specifically over-exposed to us. Additionally, as a viewer, we have the ability

to manipulate reality by what we physically do with the picture but also by how we mentally relate to the image. In her article, Adelman challenges the neutrality of intention behind the popularity of books on the war in Iraq and questions this irrational need to review war images. She argues that one of those irrational needs is “the need to see American masculinity made whole again; the American men in [war images] are nothing if not competent, strong, and manly” (p.261). Her claim asserts that images have the power to influence public belief with honest or not so honest principles. The author also believes that providing photo histories of the war in Iraq provides an enforced artificial closure to an event that is still in process.

Media and, more specifically photographs, have the ability to create truths, a reality that remains at once dangerous and profitable. Dangerous when the truths are imposed by an influential party and advocated as the only truth, and profitable when the truth is explored on a personal level and transformed for better outcomes, such as in therapy. In light of the postmodernist philosophy, there is no clear objective description and interpretation for one image. As mentioned by Weiser (1999), “people’s experience of reality actually construct its meaning for them, and their eventual definition of it will be based on their deconstruction of that meaning” (p.2). Back to Wheeler’s (2009) concept of psychological aesthetics, it is the *reality gap*, term employed to define the gap between the reality and the captured, that engenders a space for interpretation. As photography is the most widely used art form in the domestic realm, its capacity to deliver, create or alternate the truth is considerably consequential in personal narratives. Weiser (1999), talking about phototherapy declare that “it permits the complex

examination of a slice of time frozen on film as a 'fact', and it also allows an endless variety of 'realities' to be revealed as each viewer responds to it differently" (p.4).

As much as photography stimulated an interest in the minds of researchers in the fields of art and history, it equally appealed to anthropologists seeking to estimate the value of photography in the study of people. One such anthropologist, John Collier developed the *Photo-Interview*, a technique where photographs of the interviewees and their environment are used or offered during the process of interviewing. Duteil-Ogata (2007), a French ethnologist inspired by the work of Collier, used photographs taken on a previous trip to Japan to interview ten French women of Japanese origin about the role played by their cultural practices on the transmission of their religious values. Setting up an album with pictures referring to the theme he was exploring, the author asked his interviewees to respond spontaneously as they turned the pages. As the women recognized the subjects in the photographs, they made links to their experience with these traditional symbols and entered a discourse on their childhood memories and current practices. Identifying with the objects in the photographs and remembering stories revolving around these objects, feelings of nostalgia were recurrently evoked. The author underlines the evocative power of photography in stimulating collective and individual memory. Additionally, he noticed that initially incorporating photography in the interview process indirectly led his interviewees to share their personal albums and to accept to create new images of their own. The unique connection between photography and nostalgia makes photo-interview a strikingly compatible tool for interviews exploring the immigration process.

Bendiner-Viani (2005) similarly incorporated photography while collecting the narratives of people in her neighborhood. Interested in building an understanding and representation of the residents' emotional-phenomenological experiences of walks through their common neighborhood, Bendiner-Viani photographed places and objects that were particularly valued by the interviewee. Holding the belief that "photographs can momentarily suspend the taken-for-granted-ness of the world" (p.461), the author valued the process of awarding importance to the detail by photographing them and associating them with the narration of her *tour-guides*, a term used to denote her interviewees. The objects in her subjects' environments held little meaning until they were placed in the social context of her subjects and associated with the lives and identities of people around them. The author speaks of spatial experience being strongly interconnected with personal identity and a sense of belonging. She builds an account of these "taken-for-granted" objects and stories to reinstate a sense of poetry in these people's lives.

As exhibited in the afore written paragraphs, photography is revealed as a substantial instrument in the development, comprehension and possibly transformation of one's narrative. Photography can furthermore revive the emotional attachment to one's narrative. More specifically, the emotional content of an image combined with the available space for interpretation as well as the link of photography to the past, makes this medium an asset in therapeutic disclosure.

### *Photography in Therapy*

For these reasons and others that will be considered in the following paragraphs, photography slowly acquired a place of its own in therapeutic treatment. A pioneer in the recognition and incorporation of photography in the therapy room, Judy Weiser (1999)

saw the photograph as a transitional object capable of carrying the load of the real event. In the introduction to her book, *Phototherapy Techniques: Exploring the Secrets of Personal Snapshots and Family Albums*, Weiser (1999) establishes the link between phototherapy and postmodernist theory. In both, she affirms, realities observed in an image are dependent on the viewer. Moreover, the photo in and of itself is dependent on the person who takes it. A result of these realities is that photography is made into a multi-dimensional tool endowed with the possibility of finding meaning around and within the image itself. The phototherapy techniques proposed by Weiser (1999) explore these possibilities. The projective technique is based on the idea that “the borders of every snapshot form both a window into the image and also a window into the viewer’s mind” (1999, p.56). Consequently, the projective technique leads clients into an exploration of their rational and emotional reactions to a photograph. With the assistance of a professional, the “truths” associated with the image are closely examined as evidence of the experiences, beliefs, and behaviors that make up the lives of the clients. As mentioned by Weiser, every truth is relative to one’s upbringing, culture and set of experiences. Hence, in a group context, laying out the set of truths associated to one image is a helpful way to map out the variety of realities present in one group. In a conflict resolution setting, this activity could be helpful in breaking down feelings of superiority of one group over the other, as each member’s projection would be assumed as different not superior.

A second method, *working with self-portrait*, proposed by Weiser (1999) refers to the creation, collection or transformation, of real or imagined photographic representation of self in therapy. The benefits of this approach include the possibility of observing

elements of the self from a new perspective, which would otherwise not be perceivable to the eye. More specifically, the image could be placed within its context, acknowledging who and when the picture was taken, to establish a wider sense of the reality surrounding the event. This method, however, can be powerfully confrontational as self-portraits can be significantly revelatory (Weiser, 1999). Nuñez (2009), in reference to her own process with self-portraiture, affirms: “ I am focused on my interiority, even though the camera will mainly register my outer appearance” (p.55). The access to one’s interiority could be at once a fragile but rewarding experience. More specifically, through self-portraits, the author mentions how she was able to physically separate from her dark side and observe the multiplicity of identities she adopted on a daily basis. In parallel, Martin (2009) believes re-enactment phototherapy using self-portraits offers the possibility of making visible, transforming and possibly creating a new ending to an issue or old trauma. Similarly, Kirstein (2004) notes that Volkas occasionally brought photographs into his workshops. He built them into his activities by asking his members to re-enact the events shown in the photographs. The photographs could be depictions of violence, oppression or discord with both victims and perpetrators, and asks the members to play their identified role or the other. By asking his members to identify with self or the other, Volkas is aiming at eliciting a culture of empathy in the group (Kirstein, 2004).

In situations where groups are averse to each other based on differing religious or cultural beliefs and a history of conflict still pervading their lives, re-enactment phototherapy seems fit. First, phototherapy might produce visual evidence of common identities other than cultural or religious. Second, re-enactment phototherapy could offer the space to rehearse an alternate scenario with the other and simultaneously provide a

visual proof of that alternative. The suitability of this approach is naturally contingent to the needs, the limitations and the stage of conflict of both groups. A careful assessment of those factors is essential in offering a culturally sound approach.

*Empowerment and Empathy Building through Photographic Narrative*

As people are driven to instinctively record the majority of the events occurring in their lives, and often broadcast them publicly, one wonders what drives them to do so. Martin (2009) questions whether this tendency is linked to a more fundamental desire “to be seen, to be heard, to have an audience, and to be noticed” (p.38). Moreover, he questions whether photographs could play the role of *mirroring* for clients in therapy, where the image would allow the client to see “what is there to be seen” (p. 42). Referring to Winnicott’s notion of the *gaze*, Martin addresses how photographs used in therapeutic sessions could imitate a mother’s nurturing and loving gaze for her child, where the infant finds a reflection of himself (Winnicott, 1967). The act of mirroring enables an infant to begin to develop a sense of being and integrate emotions and instincts (Ayers, 2003). Addressing this absolute dependence of a child on his mother, Winnicott (1971) writes: “When I look I am seen, so I exist. I can now afford to look and see. I now look creatively and what I apperceive I also perceive. In fact I take care not to see what is not there to be seen” (p.114). Following Martin’s reasoning, looking at oneself in a photograph could imitate looking at oneself in a mother’s loving eyes. Can the need to be seen publicly report to what Winnicott refers as the infant’s need for the gaze? Would seeing oneself in a photograph compare to finding the reflection needed at an earlier stage? Although there are no simple answers to these questions, some authors shed light on the positive effects on the individual of portraying the self with an audience.

In his thesis paper, *Phototherapy with a Street-Involved Youth*, Kelly (2004) recognizes the power of phototherapy in strengthening the positive impact of narrative sharing on one's self-image, self-esteem, and self-awareness. Granting his participant the opportunity to recount his story verbally and with the assistance of photographs, Kelly accessed a wealthier set of disclosure and emotional display. Moreover, as street-involved youth have experienced a loss of voice and encounter a great deal of discrimination, reassuming a place of importance in someone's eyes is highly empowering. His participant's testimony speaks of acquired feelings of hope and inspiration. Although the process of viewing old photographs is experienced as painful, sharing the stories attached to these emotions could reinsert feelings of control over one's own life.

In another context, the documentation of change is similarly assessed as empowering. Orr (2006) asked her first-year art-therapy students to create a film documentation of their experience with the intention to establish a clearer picture of the needs of that population. Although most expressed a reticence to publicly portray experiences that were emotionally powerful before and during the process of documentation, they unanimously admitted to the rewards of having a visual account of their evolution at the end of the process. Developing a narrative attested to their efforts and progress and was highly empowering for their esteem to launch into the year to come.

On a wider scale of influence, photographic narrative was shown to stimulate feelings of empathy in a group context. Following the assumption explored in previous chapters that narrative sharing is conducive in generating empathetic feelings for the

other, photographic narrative plays a similar role. Wolf (2007) describes how the graduate students who participated in an online forum of phototherapy, developed significant feelings of empathy for their classmates sharing intimate details of their process. Posting art work representing the highs and lows of their experience was beneficial for two reasons. First, it gave them the time and space to creatively process their emotions. Second, seeing other students going through similar moments of pain and discouragement validated their own feelings of doubt.

### *Youth and Photography*

Children and adolescents are often highly drawn to cameras or any recording devices. Even more so in the past few years, due to the fact that the capture and exchange of images is made on a daily basis with the advent of camera phones, webcams, and affordable digital cameras. Familiarity, however, is not the only factor connecting youth with photography. Williams (1987) coincidentally discovered that adolescents actively welcomed having their pictures taken when admitted to the treatment facility she was working in. She, therefore transformed what originally was an administrative task into a therapeutic intervention. She explains that the natural narcissism of adolescence made photography and specifically, self-portrait appealing for adolescents to explore. Having their pictures taken on their arrival became a springboard for questions, discussions and initial emotional catharsis. Williams also allowed the teenagers to update their portrait at meaningful intervals. Allowing the teenagers a chance to decide how they wanted to portray themselves and their evolution reinforced self-examination. In addition, the pictures allowed the teenagers to have a safe starting point from which to negotiate. It could be used to create a psychological distance from the conflict in question, and allow

teenagers to feel more comfortable disclosing by projecting onto what the image seemed to be saying. As explained by Weiser (1999), “self-portrait images give clients a means of symbolizing themselves to themselves in their own privately coded language and of seeing themselves from an external position much as another would see them” (p.122).

Testing identities is intrinsically equated with the stage of adolescence. Digital technology is similarly predominant in the lives of teenagers. As the access to digital cameras has become more accessible, so has the possibility of using familiar means of self expression with adolescents. Martin (2009) believes photography “is particularly beneficial in work with young people on their sense of identities and community and in working with marginalised groups” (p.39).

Additionally, photography is a non-threatening and enjoyable tool to use. Unlike other artistic media, photography does not necessitate a significant amount of training or talent. Johnson and Alderson (2008) similarly linked the success of therapeutic filmmaking with the familiarity of adolescents with television, “making video techniques an attractive alternative to traditional methods” (p. 12). Using a tool familiar to the generation in question is shown to be simultaneously a pleasurable, rewarding and empowering experience.

#### *Photography and Social Action*

The techniques assessed so far highlight the worth of both the process and product created when incorporating photography or film in a therapeutic intervention. However, another possible outcome of photography and film is social change. As explained by Kaplan (2007):

One way in which social action and art therapy are linked is through the versatility and power of the image. Social action is ultimately predicated on the relationship between personal and collective suffering, and the image has the unique ability to bring to consciousness the reality of a current collective predicament, as well as the universality and timelessness of an individual's suffering. Moreover, images can concurrently heal personal-collective wounds while demanding a response to injustice. (p.22)

Although combining art therapy with social action moves the therapy outside of the consulting room and disrupts the usual therapeutic frame, the benefits of such an approach resembles significantly the ones associated to traditional individual or group therapy. *Photovoice*, developed by Dr. Caroline Wang in 1992, is a technique that enables community residents of all ages and languages to share information about their communities through pictures (Pies & Parthasarathy, 2008). One Photovoice project was implemented in an after-school program of adolescents living in a predominantly low-income, urban neighbourhood. The researchers were interested in observing how the characteristics of adolescence would influence the Photovoice process (Strack, Magill & McDonagh, 2004). Their findings reveal that the project helped the teenagers develop their personal and social identity as well as build social competency. Interestingly enough, one of the challenges encountered was the temptation of youth to take random pictures of friends and family as they are used to, instead of focusing on community assets and deficits. The authors suggest including a short training at the beginning of each project to help adolescents use their creativity to communicate a message. However, once

this challenge was surpassed, the teenagers captured meaningful images that portray beautifully the conflicts they encounter.

Having the opportunity to exhibit these images empowered the teens significantly and gave them a sense of being heard. These feelings bear resemblance to the ones stimulated in traditional therapy. As underlined in another Photovoice project implemented with homeless people, this approach is a way to document the struggles and strengths of the individuals, to promote critical dialogue through group discussion, and to reach policy makers (Wang, Cash & Powers, 2000). Projects such as Photovoice touch upon benefits usually found in traditional individual therapy including self-expression, empowerment, and confidence building. They are also closely linked to group therapy as they promote dialogue between the participants, and improve socialization skills. Finally, social action projects, if successful, might generate healing in the collective.

*Leave out Violence*, also known as LOVE, is a non-profit youth organization focused on providing youth with the means of overcoming their challenges with violence. Through the creation of multi-media projects using photography, video, radio broadcasting and journalism, youth are granted the opportunity to “creatively articulate the impact of violence on their lives and explore positive alternatives” (Leave out Violence, 2009). Additionally, the program incorporates a leadership training in order to shape the youth in adopting leadership roles in their own communities. The organisation extends their efforts to the public by creating exhibits around the province of Quebec. As mentioned by Proulx (1996), “the 250 people who saw “LOVES’s” first exhibit of mounted photographs, poems and narratives last June were amazed at their power.” As the Photovoice projects presented earlier, LOVE inspires to empower the youth through

the development of expressive projects but also seeks to share the process with a wider audience (Leave out Violence, 2009).

Frohmann (2005), in her work with battered women, developed the *Framing Safety Project*, designed to lead women who are or have been battered into an exploration of their experience through photography and narrative. The project in part aimed to “educate the community about battering as a social problem, the causes of battering, and available resources and interventions” (p. 1398). Based on feminist method, the project allowed the women to decide how and when they participated. As mentioned by the author, taking their own photographs “is a way for participants to tap into the subjectivity of their battering experiences. It provides a means and opportunity for women to shift their orientations to specific settings, to become observers, observer-participants, or participants” (p. 1401). Mounting an exhibit furthered their observation experience as they witnessed other women reacting to their work and life stories. The women felt empowered by their own personal process and concurrently by their decision to advocate for the cause. The exhibit aimed to challenge the observer’s stereotypes and assumptions about battered women, but also about Mexican immigrant women. Frohmann underlines the importance of breaking stereotypes by observing the “multi-dimensionality of women’s lives, their strengths and their struggles” (p. 1410). Furthermore she posits, “they are women with agency who put themselves in the public eye to create change” (p.1410). Educating the community by portraying the experience of these women becomes a catalyst for social change, the author argues.

Another perfect example of an initiative leaning towards collective confrontation and healing is the *Face 2 Face* project (JR & Marco, 2007). Based on the idea that

Israelis and Palestinians share multiple similarities such as physical appearances and language, this project was created to display these similarities on the walls of the cities. Two French artists gathered 41 comical close-up portraits of men and women from both sides and posted enlarged photos of dyads portraying one Israeli and one Palestinian of the same profession, around the cities. Considered one of the biggest street art exhibition, the artists were avid to demonstrate through images that art and laughter can challenge stereotypes. As evident in the movie, this venture created some controversy and triggered reactions of resistance. However, the humorous overtone of the photos stimulated comparable reactions of laughter, surprise, amusement, pleasure and empathy. This project was able to suspend reality for just a moment in the life of the participants and the viewers and offer them the opportunity to feed their hopes for a better future.

In her article about a project she designed for homeless African American women living in her city, Washington (2008) speaks of the value of exhibits and performances in how it enables audiences to be involved in the cause. She asserts that art “enables audiences to see and feel the situation in a manner that is different than what they would normally achieve through other forms of representation” (p.156). More specifically, she believes art “capture aspects of human existence that social science cannot, and the humanities remind us of the importance of placing a human face on what often times are seen publicly as faceless problems” (p.163). With the outcome of the exhibit she held with her group, Washington was able to assess that the exhibit enabled discussion on the aesthetics and the story lines, stirred reflection on social structural issues, initiated interest in personal stories, and actively engaged the visitors in relation to the art work.

Moreover, this approach generated feelings of closeness when visitors expressed identifying with the stories or events portrayed on the walls.

Clover (2006), on the other hand, explored two participatory photography projects in order to understand what made exhibits so empowering for the participants and the audience. Participatory photography is “whereby marginalized or disadvantaged people are provided cameras and the opportunity to document, analyze, and make meaning of their own experiences and realities through images and symbols of their own choosing” (p.276). Activist artists, she maintains, are capable of understanding and using symbol and metaphor in social ways. This in turn helps communicate through a single image feelings, dreams, fears, and makes a “connections between things that are concrete and things that are abstract” (p.288). Similarly, the author underlines the ability of activist artist to master irony. Considered as an element that “creates tension between ignorance and wisdom, comedy and tragedy, and perception and reality” (p.288), irony permits the audience to reach a deeper level of understanding. Finally, activist artists make use of imagination in their work. Imagination opens new doors of possibilities and challenges humans in their perceptions. As the author states, imagination has the ability to “invent new lives, new spirits, new spaces, and new forms of social engagement” (p.288).

#### *Chapter 4: Shooting for Peace: Photography in Art Therapy*

This research has looked at an assortment of theories and experiments conducted on the topics of conflict resolution, empathy building, creative arts therapies in the treatment of trauma, and photography as a therapeutic approach. The connection between narrative and the subjects listed above was a theme running throughout the research. While some affirm that sharing one’s narrative with the identified other is conducive to

the process of reconciliation (Al-Ajarma & Barzilay-Schechter, 2007; Byers & Gere, 2007; Joubran & Schwartz, 2007; Kirstein, 2004; Lark, 2005; Wied et al., 2007), others sustain that narration, more specifically creative narration, has a pivotal role in relation to trauma (Al-Krenawi & Slater, 2007; Collie et al., 2006; Kalmanowitz & Lloyd, 2005; Lev-Weisel & Liraz, 2007; Stepakoff, 2007). Photography, in conjunction, is presented as an influential narrative tool in the fields of history, anthropology, therapy and social action (Adelman, 2009; Duteil-Ogata, 2007; Kelly, 2004; Nuñez, 2009; Wang et al., 2000; Weiser, 1999; Wheeler, 2009). Although some authors (Kalmanowitz & Lloyd, 2005; Malhotra & Liyanage, 2005; Senehi & Byrne, 2006; Zelizer, 2007) warns us of the limits and cautions to be taken while developing and running a conflict resolution program, others (Cross & Rosenthal, 1999; Hutchison & Bleiker, 2008) strongly demonstrate the advantage of a psychosocial approach over other approaches. The knowledge posited above substantiates the suitability of photographic narration in the efforts to create a favourable environment for exchange and development of empathy with the other.

#### *Program Goals and Structure*

The Shooting for Peace program designed within this research paper, is based on the knowledge synthesized from an in-depth literature review of the methods proficient in the process of reconciliation within groups whose members live with a history of conflict with one another. Additionally, the program is constructed with an assortment of activities borrowed from the many workshops I attended or offered during my practice as an intern and graduate student of Art Therapy. As my experience and knowledge is limited within the context of conflict resolution, I keep a safe and cautious stance vis-à-vis what I propose. During my internship, I had the opportunity to co-lead theatre

workshops with adolescents recently immigrated to the country. Therefore, some of the activities I witnessed as being highly effective in improving communication and cohesion within the group, were borrowed for my program.

The program would consist of a group that would run for seven weekly 2-hour sessions. A maximum of 12 participants with an equal number of members representing both groups would be ideal. This size at once preserves the intimate atmosphere necessary for this type of work, but also provides a wide enough spectrum of experiences and personalities within members to give an accurate representation of outside reality. In order to maximize the chances of implication and the general success of the project, providing quality material is essential. Apart from the disposable cameras, the therapists are equipped with a professional camera, lighting material, and a backdrop if possible. A box of props with a wide variety of costumes, objects and material is also prepared.

The aims of the Shooting for Peace program are to provide a contained and safe environment so as to acquire a different type of experience with the other; challenge the perceptions of the other held by each member, and foster the development of a desire to transform them; implement a space for dialogue which is respectful, creative, and intimate; foster the development of empathy within the group; and to create a space for critical dialogue within the community.

As a therapeutic intervention, Shooting for Peace aspires to foster individual growth. Hence, the program aims to provide an opportunity for empowerment, meaning making and creative development. Throughout the workshop, participants present, direct, and transform their narrative. In doing so, each participant benefits from being in full mastery of his process.

The program will foster and encourage a group ethic of non-judgment and acceptance of images and stories. Confidentiality will also be respected in the group.

*Week 1: The Power of Projection*

On the first day of the program there will be a warm-up exercise to introduce every member by name, an “ice-breaking” exercise, followed by an activity centered on projecting one’s thoughts onto an image. Both the warm-up activity and the ice-breaker are inspired by exercises used by Armand Volkas in his *Listening to the Stories of Your Enemy: Transforming Legacies of Historical Trauma into Constructive Action* (Volkas, 2008) workshops. The warm-up exercise will consist of going around the group asking the participants to say their name followed by a movement. In response, the group repeats the name and movement chosen by the participants. This activity will be recalled at the end of the session where participants need to recreate the original movement of their fellow participant thus resorting to their memory. The ice-breaker activity will consist of passing imaginary objects/subjects around the room. The participants will be asked to respect the size, texture and fragility of the object/subject. For example, passing around a bird would demand for attention and care. This activity aims to regroup the participants around one common goal, install an atmosphere of playfulness, as well as to incite the participants to use their imagination and creativity throughout the session.

A discussion on the goals of the program will be inserted in the presentation of the art therapist as well as an orientation to art therapy, and the use of photography in the workshop. Articulating the purpose and goals of the workshop to the group, the art therapist will make the effort to present reconciliation in a non-threatening and

overwhelming way. Acknowledging the legitimacy of identities, opinions, and beliefs, the art therapist presents the workshop as a trial for collaboration using photography.

The purpose behind the projective activity is to initiate the group to the use of images in the expression of self. An abundant and varied source of cut-off images from magazines, books, and newspapers will be placed in the middle of the circle. Participants will be asked to select an image that spontaneously strikes a thought or emotion within themselves. One by one, the participants will be asked to create a reality around that image, translate it into a short story, possibly representing a reality or fiction. Participants will be encouraged to spontaneously construct a story around the elements in the image, even if it seems to lack continuity or common sense. Prior to initiating their story, the other participants will take a minute to silently imagine their own story around that image. A word on mutual respect, concerning both what is spoken and how to react, will be articulated to insure the safety of the group. A short discussion will follow the activity where participants will be asked to share their thoughts on the process. They will be brought to reflect on the discrepancy between their projections and the stories narrated by others. As mentioned by Weiser (1999), projective technique:

...is a comparatively painless way to begin to consciously acknowledge that there can be more than one correct way to encounter a person or experience. There are reasons for people's differences in perception, and dialogue based on projective perceptions can help clients recognize them. (p. 18)

Factors influencing one's story will be briefly pondered. The aim of this activity is to introduce the group to the ideas of perception, interpretation, and personal narrative. This exercise demonstrates the strength of an image in triggering different reactions from one

person to another. Based on environment, education, culture, and other influencing factors, participants are shown that each individual develops his or her own meaning for an image.

At the end of the session, participants will be asked to keep their chosen image for future sessions. In preparation for the following week's activity, participants will be assigned to think about a story that was told to them, or experienced that particularly touched their lives. As a connecting assignment, they will be handed disposable cameras and instructed to create self-portraits, with the help of others or by themselves, over the next two weeks. Creativity, exploration, and spontaneity will be encouraged. To close the first session, participants will regroup in a circle and re-enact the movement chosen by every other participant in the room. This session touches upon initiating the participants to creative expression, projection through an image and narration, and situate them in a context of equality and respect with the other.

*Week 2-3: Capturing my Story: A Photographic Narration*

This activity builds from the previous week and invites participants to share and compose a photographic narrative of the story they brought from home. In order to create a cohesive, respectful environment as well as to alleviate the possible tension around narrating one's story, the participants are directed into a warm-up activity called the "human chain". This activity is borrowed from Drama Therapy workshops I co-led with high-school students in immersion classes, while completing my internship with the Trans-Cultural Psychiatry team at the Park Extension Local Community Service Center (CLSC). This activity asks for one participant to volunteer to wait outside of the room, while the others create a knot with their bodies by holding hands and crossing over and

under the heads and arms of the others. The volunteer is then called back into the room, and is asked to untangle the big knot by strategically moving around the participants who keep their hands tied to one another. This activity solidifies the tie between the participants and metaphorically represents both willpower and resistance.

Following the warm-up, half of the participants, mixed among the cultural groups, are asked to present their story within a 5 to 7 minute frame. Afterwards, the participant selects a specific scene that he wants to capture on photograph and assigns other participants, from both origins, to enact the roles. Assuming the role of the director, the participant is granted full mastery for the scene, and decides when and how to capture the shot. This activity demands for a considerable amount of focus among the participants as well as mutual respect and a willingness to lend oneself to another person's story. Successfully done, this activity could be highly empowering for the participant acting as the director, and provides a close-up experience for the others who literally put themselves into his shoes. The re-enactment solidifies the value of the story for the narrator while the photograph offers a visual testimony of this significant moment. As put forth by Senehi and Byrne (2006), "to participate in storytelling as a teller or as an audience member who has direct access to the teller is to participate in the construction of meaning" (p. 239).

Along with the opening exercises, the main activity of these two sessions is to address group dynamics. Through the human chain and by lending oneself to the story of the other, the participants take part in a group effort. The participation and collaboration of each is key to the success of the group. However, individuality is

maintained by conferring on the narrator the authority to lead the realization of his tableau.

This process is repeated the following week in order to complete the activity with every member of the group. An opening activity for the third week could include a rhythm game where members are placed in a circle and asked to create a sequence of noise and rhythm using their hands and feet. An alternative to this game is dividing the students into two groups, placing them in lines facing each other, and assigning a leader who will direct the group into a rhythm with claps, stomps, and vocal sounds. Each group challenges the other, alternately. When individuals join their hands, feet, and voices to create a uniform sound and transform it into a rhythm, a vigorous energy is transmitted within the room. Feelings of strength navigate within the members, which in turn, solidifies the sense of unity within the group. Coupling confrontation with creativity and music exhibits an alternative to the usual negative outcome of confrontation.

As a closing ritual for this week and the following ones, the “Kaleidoscope” is favorable as it offers the art therapists a general idea of the thoughts and feelings going through the room. Dividing the group in two and placing them in lines facing each other, the members from one row are assigned to spontaneously say words representing the session as well as their personal experience. In response, the other row follows with a body gesture representing one of the words pronounced. When completed, the actions are reversed. In addition to allowing the art therapist to assess the state of the group, this activity offers the benefits of mirroring to its members such as the generation of attention, validation of emotion, and empathy towards the other. Both activities mentioned above are adaptations of activities practiced during my internship at the CLSC.

*Week 4: Think out Loud*

The fourth week is devoted to recapitulating the experience of the previous two sessions. Choosing a physically driven opening activity such as moving across the room in pairs in a random but synchronized manner could both stir energy within the group and help the members regain a sense of playfulness. Following the warm-up activity, the members form a circle and receive the images captured the previous weeks. A time for personal reflection is allotted to the members before settling in a group discussion about the results of the exercise. Although the conversation could naturally take many directions, an exchange around the following questions could be considered: (a) what is the experience of sharing a significant moment in one's life; (b) what are the risks and advantages of such an experience; (c) what does it mean to participate in someone else's story and incarnate the role of a stranger; (d) what do we consider reality and how does it affect our perceptions, opinions and actions; (e) what roles do we play within our own cultural, religious, social and familial setting; (f) how do stories shape our lives.

Members are asked to pick the image they are most satisfied with and write a brief description on another piece of paper. This activity permits the narrator to regain control over this precious memory and, in turn, internalize the experience of the event as well as the activity as a new segment in their personal narrative. Taking the time to internally assess the events of the activity is a pivotal part of the process.

In the last three sessions, the members are granted the opportunity to share a significant moment in their lives and assess their experience. As mentioned by Senehi and Byrne (2006), the opportunity of storytelling is "important for youth because it engages them in an interactive and natural process that empowers their voices" (p.236).

Furthermore, the youth benefits from experiencing an unusual interaction with the other in a safe and contained environment. This opportunity is conducive to acquiring knowledge about the other, developing openness towards the unknown, and eventually considering different options for the future. Students are reminded to bring back their disposable cameras for the art therapist to develop the pictures in the following weeks.

*Week 5-6: Images as Witness*

Week five and six revolve around working on an alternative and unconventional narrative with the other. Inciting the members of both groups to relate to one another on different parameters and identities is the main goal of the session. Hence, an opening activity concentrated on regrouping the students based on a variety of identities such as height, eye colour, date of birth, favorite sport's team or favorite school subject is favorable to this exchange. Factors of speed and play can be used to make the students more physically involved and stimulated. In order to prepare for the main program of the session, participants are then asked to regroup into one of the previous random identities. During the next half of the session students are guided in the realization of a short story, choosing elements from each individual story, with the possibility of adding a comical, satirical, or fantastical element to it. Although the purpose of the workshop is for participants to embrace the possibility of a new relation with the other, combining few stories into one removes the authenticity of each. Therefore, adding a fictitious element protects the value of each by creating a distance from the original stories. Furthermore, fiction and comedy are well suited for this population.

Promoting imagination, the art therapist encourages the students to make use of the box of materials as props for their scene. They are given a limited amount of time to

prepare until they are finally asked to pose for a photographic capture of the story created. A short amount of time is granted for groups to act out a segment of their creation in front of the others or offer a brief presentation of the characters and the climax of the story, depending on their level of comfort. A word on respect should be introduced with the presentation of the activity. Although the task of respecting the desires, limitations, and tastes of every member could be challenging, it is crucial for the safety of the activity and, subsequently, the pleasure of participating in it.

Capturing on print the stories created and interpreted by the group members produces a visual testimony of the event. In turn, these stories create memories to be assimilated to each one's narrative. Following Weiser's (1999) belief that through capturing portraits of the self in hypothetical situations one "can achieve change; seeing that image helps make the possibility real" (p. 20). Thus, this session might implant seeds of change in the group. Simulating interactions otherwise seen as improbable allows the participants to "test out" a possibility before initiating these events in reality. Including a comical, satirical or fantastic element in the story at once revives the playfulness in the activity and offers distance from the original versions in order to preserve the integrity of the story. This approach materializes the possibility of a different situation. The kaleidoscope could once again be used as a closing activity to assess the state of the group and the students after an activity that might have been confronting for some.

#### *Week 7: Exhibiting a Memory*

The final session is devoted to an in-class exhibit and discussion of the work accomplished in the previous weeks. Subsequent to the warm-up activity, the students reclaim the images they captured which includes the self-portraits from the disposable

camera, the interpretation of the first narrative, and finally the composition of the group's story. Granted with proper material to display the triptych on the wall, students are asked to select from the prints and exhibit the three images of their choice, placing one next to each other. Students are then allotted free time to walk around the room and explore the triptychs of all.

The objective behind closing the program with an in-class exhibit is to consolidate the process of each individual participant, including his or her creative realization. In turn, displaying the photos on the wall creates a visual testimony of the stories narrated, interpreted, and constructed by the whole group. This valorizes the evolution of the participants as a group, and portrays the efforts of collaboration.

In the last segment of the session, students are brought to reflect on their work. As this project is partially devoted to artistic creation, a focus on the experience with the camera and the creations is valuable in addition to a reflection on the process. This moment is reserved for the participants to share their views on the program and inform the art therapist about possible alterations to be made. Similarly, the art therapist seeks to uncover whether his objectives were met and how did the participants benefit from such an experience.

The closing of the program is achieved through an unofficial in-class exhibit with drinks, snacks and music with a short interruption to close the session with a circle of gratitude and goodbyes. The "ice-breaker" used on the first session, centered on passing around an object could be recalled in order to pass around symbols of hope, change and appreciation.

*Public Exhibit: Shooting for Peace*

As I strongly believe in the benefits of extending the outcome of the workshop to social awareness, I propose setting-up a public exhibit with the work accomplished by the group members. As in the Photovoice and Face 2 Face projects presented earlier, an exhibit could foster critical dialogue in the community and challenge the status quo often present in controversial social causes. Projects with an artistic component have the benefit of empowering those participating as social activist but also as artists of the community. Art, often reserved to the professionals, is now transferred into the hands of youth participants and, through its repercussion, onto a wider public, as it is transported into the homes of the community. Iseroff (1998), however, teaches us that the most difficult endeavor lies in facing the ongoing criticism and rejection from peers who resist change in that direction and perceive the activists as traitor. An atmosphere of fear and rejection is far from the desired outcome of such a program.

There are both significant advantages and risks in pursuing an exhibit with work produced during a therapeutic workshop. The dangers include breaking the therapeutic frame, creating tension between the participants of the workshop and their families, and friends, and limiting the openness of the participants who fear the repercussions of having their work exhibited. As this project intrinsically touches upon a delicate subject matter and demands for an active challenging of perceptions, exteriorizing the process might hinder the success of the program. However, the benefits of an exhibit are also significant. As mentioned earlier, art has the capacity through its play with metaphor, irony and imagination to stimulate new reflections and understanding in the viewers (Clover, 2006). Without an exhibit, the process would be limited to the group participating, and would close opportunities to provoke reflection in the wider

community. Even though conflict between two cultural or religious identities does not straightforwardly require the help and support of the wider community to improve the future outcome such as the causes of poverty, abuse, and ostracism of a minority group, challenging ignorance and status quo is primordial in the evolution of the conflict.

An estimation of the risks needs to be established before the realization of the project. Moreover, the art therapist needs to stay clear about the process with the participants, their families and the school. Although presenting the idea might negatively impact the rate of participation, caution is necessary for the safety of all. Measures such as consent forms for participant and parents, personal control over level of implication in every step of the workshop, and review of ethics maximizes the quality of this workshop.

## Chapter 5

### *Summary and Discussion*

As my process of research was initiated by my thirst to uncover the potential of photography in a context of conflict resolution, I engaged in a vibrant search for literature pertaining to the subject. Deceived by the lack of research on the topic, I was determined to lead my literature review towards the construction of a program suited to this particular population. My extensive field of interest was quickly narrowed down to the investigation of how photography could be used as a medium in the process of reconciliation between multi-cultural groups in conflict.

The chapters presented above are placed in a methodical order. In the first, art therapy is situated in relation to trauma. Referring to the natural inclination of humans to revert to artistic expression in times of crisis, some authors (Al-Krenawi & Slater, 2007; Collie et al., 2006; Lev-Weisel & Liraz, 2007; Stepakoff, 2007) attest to the uniqueness

of art in the expression of trauma. Art is valued as the efficient and proper approach in helping trauma victims recreate a coherent narrative (Collie et al., 2006). In addition to its ability to access traumatic memories, creative expression positively influences the healing process by empowering the victim, helping him to externalize his thoughts and by creating a visual testimony of grief and loss. Considering the high probability of encountering first or second hand experiences with trauma in conflict resolution workshops, granting participants with the opportunity to visually represent a segment of their personal narrative seems fit.

This reality is echoed in chapter two, exploring empathy building as an approach to conflict resolution. The cited authors similarly advocated the potential of narration in the reconciliation process. Starting with the work of Armand Volkas (Kirstein, 2004), my initial source of inspiration, lead me to understand the value of designing a space for creative dialogue between two groups who in reality live in isolation from each other. The ignorance of the pain and experiences of the other perpetuates the feelings of anger, rejection, and hate in each group. An analysis of the literature (Adwan & Bar-On, 2006; Senehi & Byrne, 2006; Zelizer, 2007;) further validates shared power, mutual respect, and consciousness-raising as pivotal ingredients to a successful encounter. Storytelling, in turn, is repeatedly acknowledged as the influential tool efficient in generating respect and empathy towards the other, but most importantly is associated with meaning making. Many authors (Hutchison & Bleiker, 2008; Landy & Hadari, 2007; Senehi & Byrne, 2006) speak of the relevance of emotions in a process of dialogue. Creative expression, storytelling, and empathy are all closely related to the human expression of emotions; expression of self or of an event, and towards another person's experiences.

Narrowing down storytelling to one medium, chapter three introduces photography as the narrative tool of choice. A brief overview of photography in fields such as anthropology, art, and history draws on how this medium plays an influential role in portraying historical events and creating truths (Adelman, 2009), generating emotions in an audience (Wheeler, 2009), and capturing emotionally filled objects, places or moments constituting one's identity (Bendiner-Viani, 2005). In individual therapy, photography is named as a tool proficient for projection, dialogue with self, self-confrontation, testing out different identities, expression, narration and catharsis (Kelly, 2004; Martin, 2009; Nuñez, 2009; Weiser, 1999). Hence, photography could markedly accomplish the task of creatively and rewardingly portraying the self in a context of dialogue with the other. For youth particularly, photography typically falls into their field of mastery and preferred artistic medium. Testing identities, common to both self-portrait work and the stage of adolescence, is conducive to challenging perceptions of individuals immersed in their defenses and beliefs. As evidence of change, a photographic image could also be transported into the public realm, adopting the role of a messenger. Crossing the private sphere brings the dialogue out in the public.

Chapter four presents the construction of the program following a session-by-session approach. The selection of warm-up exercises and activities scheduled for each session corresponds to a desired progression of events. The evolution leads towards the realization of a triptych composed of a self-portrait, a group portrait representing one participant's personal narrative, and finally another group portrait combining multiple narratives. The triptych metaphorically symbolizes the passage from individuality to sharing oneself with another to collaboration. This process demonstrates the possibility of

preserving self-identity, and assuming the role of collaborator in other people's stories. This possibility could also be considered as a responsibility; the responsibility of each in the story of the other. Assuming the roles of director and spectator, the participants are empowered by the opportunity to share, hear, and act. Creating photographs in the course of the process creates a testimony but also symbolically frames and contains the experience, one image at a time. In turn, the triptych integrates the images into one set of experience.

Shooting for Peace transforms the theory assessed in the literature review into a practical application. Taking into account the complexity of such an endeavor, realistic aims I aspire to are: (a) providing a new space where previously disconnected individuals interact; (b) granting opportunity to be heard and to hear the other; (c) challenging opinions, beliefs and perceptions on the other; and (d) triggering personal reflections. At its best, participating in a reconciliation program could ignite a desire to transform one's own perception and actions towards groups previously categorized as the enemy. As mentioned by Kalmanowitz and Lloyd (2005); "Context shapes an individual's priorities and expectations, as well as the meaning and impact of violence on the individual" (p.15) therefore, adding to one's experience might alter one's context. In the long term, achieving these aims could interfere in the transmission of fear, hatred, and ignorance from one generation to the next. Adding to the frame of reference, this experience opens new windows of hope. As beautifully expressed by Joubran and Shwartz (2007), efforts towards changing individual perceptions are not as effective as imposing conflict resolution on an institutional level, however, pursuing the good and networking until intergroup violence becomes the least logical solution is vital.

As I based my choices of interventions on both a synthesis of the literature and my experience as an Art Therapy Intern, several of the activities shaping the sessions are rooted in Drama Therapy practice. During my internship, I was granted the opportunity to co-lead theatre workshop in immersion classes. Partnered with a Drama Therapist allowed me to discover and adopt some of the activities I witnessed to be effective with adolescents. Therefore, the choice of warm-up activities as well as the opening/closing exercises for each session is limited to this approach. As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, the construction of this program was performed with precaution and prudence, corresponding to the level of experience and knowledge I have.

The program I designed carries its limitations. Based on an assessment of a broad spectrum of literature and acquired experience co-leading groups of art and drama therapy in immersion classes, the program is at its preliminary phase. A pilot study would evaluate the course of program, its suitability with the population at hand, and adjustments to be made. At this point in time, a few factors integral to the program's limitations are worth mentioning.

The first entails determining the extent of "therapy" within the program. Shooting for Peace finds itself situated between what Weiser calls "phototherapy" and "therapeutic photography". The second is described as:

Done by individuals by and for themselves in non-therapy settings for the purpose of their own personal growth and insight, creative artistic statement, as an agent of personal/political/social change or community-strengthening—or even more broadly when using the camera for the purpose of qualitative research or as part of

organized community-based research projects (such as Photovoice). (Weiser, 2001-2010, Comparisons with other field section)

Shooting for Peace fits within this definition as it aims to be “an agent of personal/political/social change or community-strengthening” (Weiser, 2001-2010, Comparisons with other field section). However, this workshop is designed to be led by a professional therapist, more specifically an art therapist, and entails the adherence to a strong code of ethics. Since the workshop is limited to seven sessions and includes a group of twelve participants, the objectives differ from the ones achievable through individual Phototherapy which according to Weiser, takes it “several steps deeper into guided unconscious process work” (Weiser, 2001-2010, Comparisons with other field section). In result, Shooting for Peace offers a professionally guided workshop aimed at challenging perceptions on the other in a safe and contained environment, but is limited in deeper exploration of self and the unconscious. The evolution of the sessions depends on the participants and their emotional reaction, and thus, may be subject to change and adaptation during the course of the sessions. A deeper therapeutic work is especially significant when working with individuals who experienced or carry a legacy of trauma, however, such is impossible within the limitations of this workshop.

Analogously, the second limitation involves the influence of outside reality on the participants. The art therapists need to assure the equality of both groups in every step of the realization. As mentioned by Zelizer (2007), one danger of conflict resolution workshops is to produce harm instead of assistance. Despite all vigilance, the participants are influenced by a number of factors integral to their cultural and religious identity. Hence, their participation and behavior will be tainted by these factors. Al-Krenawi and

Slater (2007) demonstrate through their findings on Bedouin-Arab culture, that culture can influence the drawings of the participants and the outcome of the results. If the cultural value of “not complaining” was ignored, the lack of expression in the drawings could have been understood as lack of suffering. Similarly, the influence of social environment on the participant might highly affect the willingness to participate in the workshop. Fear of being isolated in their community for betraying their group, participants might resist or superficially engage in the process. The workshop needs to offer a contained and safe space for exploration.

The third limitation follows the previous two as it illustrate another side factor in creating a short-term project with individuals carrying loaded history. Narration, being the center of this workshop, also carries its dangers. Liberty to express and narrate stories involving the other might threaten the safety of the group, as opinions and accusations might engender friction between the members. These limitations could be further assessed in a pilot study, evaluating the pros and cons of the activities forming the sessions. Adopting a flexible approach adapted to each group and taking into account the levels of trauma and willingness in the members is essential. This would entail a careful evaluation of the groups prior to the intervention.

### *Conclusion*

Often discouraged by the black and white world of hatred and love, I ventured myself into a research combining my passion for photography and my deep desire to create a space where grey zones of reflection are stimulated in the context of conflict between nations. Fueled by the many inspirational figures and projects discovered along the way, I was able to sublimate my feelings of powerlessness towards the cause and

direct it to collect literature advocating the possibility for change. Acknowledging the impact of emotions in the personal and collective experience of conflict, I decided to adopt an approach inclined towards the inclusion of both emotional expression and stimulation. The narrative, existent in many art forms, allows the sharing of “being human” with the other. The narrative is formed by and shapes identity. Humans recognize themselves in stories, find meaning, and build dreams through them. Granting youth with the opportunity to choose, narrate, and transform a story might empower their voice by awarding them a chance to speak, be heard and listen in return. In their field study, Landi and Hadari (2007) came across an old man, speaking words of hope who said: “May you grow a green tree in your heart and perhaps a singing bird will come” (p.420). Reflecting on their own process of reconciliation, the authors concluded that:

they would continue to work on planting the seeds necessary for the green tree to grow. But they remained aware that they had no control over the flight of the singing bird, even though they felt more prepared to recognize it when it was present. (p. 421)

This quote beautifully portrays the vulnerability of an individual challenging his own limitations in his combat to reconcile with the other. Nonetheless, a hopeful message subsists. Humans have the power to plant seeds in their own heart or in the heart of others. Even though, some environments might strive to hinder the growth of the tree and succeed, some will flourish nonetheless. My hope is that Shooting for Peace could open new doors of opportunities for participants to relate to one another. A multi-cultural city like Montreal could benefit from interventions ameliorating the state of relationships

between its cultural and religious groups. Artistic projects have shown to defy the general low success rates of reconciliation projects.

Stepping outside the box and combining creativity with inspiration triggers new outcomes to complex issues, or, as beautifully said by McNiff (2007):

Because creative expression is about bringing something new to this world, something that didn't exist before, maybe it is worth considering how these life-affirming methods can inform domains that desperately need help in fostering human understanding. (p. 398)

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