CHAPTER 4

Struggling to see Through the Eyes of Youth: On Failure and (Un)Certainty in a Photovoice Project

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In Spring 2009, as part of Arizona's efforts to decrease obesity in South Phoenix, we—an educator (Jenny), a medical anthropologist (Seline), and a photographic artist (Andrew)—created an arts-based critical action research project to understand how low-income Latino youth in South Phoenix, who are so often the targets of neoliberal dominant health discourses, understood and articulated the health environment of their

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community. Seeking to confront and understand the issues inherent in feminist and other critical research methodologies that strive to problematize power relationships, we looked to photovoice to attempt to work with these youth in *more* rather than *less* empowering ways (Wang, Yi, Tao, & Carovano 1998). We sought to use an adapted form of photovoice as an arts-based methodology with the potential to contribute new understandings and to dismantling oppressive constructions (Finley 2008). We established the South Phoenix PhotoVoice[1] Project (SPPVP), through which we created and piloted a curriculum using photography to capture youth perspectives on health, body image, and the food and physical activity environments in their community.

Photovoice is a research method that is increasingly used by researchers to conduct participatory action research projects in which participants learn to use photography to document and share their perspectives on their communities (Wang et al. 1998). Drawing from feminist theory, documentary photography, and Freirian philosophies of empowerment, photovoice positions members of traditionally oppressed groups as experts from whom educators, researchers, and community leaders can best learn about community issues (Strack, Magill, & McDonagh 2004). Photovoice aims to empower participants, assess community needs and assets, and facilitate participants to take community action, all goals that are complementary with an anti-oppressive orientation.

In this chapter, we problematize the seemingly taken-for-granted notion among many scholars that photovoice methodology is always empowering for participants who find their "voice" (see, for example, see, for example, Hernandez, Shabazian, & McGrath 2014, p. 1947). We argue that while it may potentially be an effective tool of anti-oppressive methodologies, photovoice's liberatory potential is far from inherent (Higgins 2014). Janes (2016) points out that the claim of "giving voice" assumes a voiceless subject while reinscribing academic epistemic privilege. The experience of participating in research billed as "participatory" may, in itself, be oppressive to participants when the parameters are controlled by academic others and the "knowledge" produced may reinforce stereotypical views of their lives and "problems" (Wilson & Beresford 2000).

Researchers who deploy photovoice with the aims of engaging in anti-oppressive research must constantly reflect on their own positionalities and privilege and how they affect inquiry at every level (Brown & Strega 2005). Furthermore, they must be explicit in how photovoice can support decolonial goals while realizing that attempts to work

against oppression are located within oppressive structures. We contend that researchers committed to anti-oppressive research must learn to live with/in the uncomfortable spaces generated by the irreconcilability and impossibilities these reflections raise. Toward this end, we reflect on our work with/in a case study of an arts-centered photovoice project conducted with Mexican American tweens, and specifically examine issues of power that arose in this research project. We first describe the South Phoenix PhotoVoice Project (SPVPP) and then, taking up feminist explications and reclaimings of "failure" (Halberstam 2011; Lather 2001; Spivak 1987; Visweswaran 1994), we address some of the ways in which we struggled to enact a critical, participatory project. However, we do not explicate our ethical failures in order to simply provide tools for others to do this work "better" or "unproblematically." Rather, following Pillow (2003), we sit in a kind of reflexivity of discomfort, where the best we can hope for is to question our own power and authority without becoming paralyzed.

Case Study

When Jenny and Seline started the SPVPP, we envisioned it as an innovative community-based participatory research project that would combine data collection, community needs assessment, artistic production, and youth empowerment. South Phoenix, squeezed between downtown Phoenix, major freeways, and South Mountain Park, has been a settling point for immigrants for decades, and remains a rich mix of established families and new arrivals (Szkupinski Quiroga 2013). It is comprised of very low to lower middle-income neighborhoods with many African American and Latino residents and is characterized by extremely high rates of childhood obesity (Arizona HealthQuery 2008). Seline, a child of immigrants from a working-class background, has a strong commitment to community-based research and has worked with/in this community on issues of health and wellness since shortly after her arrival to Arizona. Jenny grew up in a white, middle-class home in the southern US, and her work has explored issues of race, class, and gender. Andrew is from a working-class family outside of Chicago and at the time of the project had recently graduated with a bachelor's degree in fine art photography. We all jumped at the chance to create something beyond a standard health education project when a modest funding opportunity appeared; Andrew particularly was excited to facilitate curriculum that

incorporated a documentary photo approach as a way to encourage students to develop social and ethical consciousness through art-making.

We were attracted by the idea of using photovoice because of its reputation as an equitable way of working with a community and because of the potential to explore more deeply the creative capacity of youth beyond simply handing them cameras. Young people are often assumed to be socially incompetent, intellectually inferior, and in need of direction and guidance (Woodson 1999). Photovoice has the potential to be an anti-oppressive research methodology that allows youth to express their own views, draw upon their own life experiences, and use their art to speak freely (Woodson 2007). However, in order to tap into the creative potential of photovoice, Jenny and Seline had to view it as more than a method to elicit data; we also needed to place equal weight on artistic production, but did not feel capable of doing this alone. To this end, we invited Andrew to join the research team to help design the curriculum and teach youth the rudiments of photographic techniques and the implications of using photography in a critical fashion to address important individual and social issues. This was quite innovative, as we found few mentions in the photovoice literature of explicitly teaching participants to think like photographers and artists. Also, rather than provide them with the disposable cameras used by most photovoice projects, we invested in inexpensive digital point and shoot cameras. The cameras were portable and easy to incorporate within participants' daily activities, which encouraged them to reflect on their everyday practices through photography.

We framed the project as a photography class where youth would learn a skill, have an opportunity to express their creativity, and tell us about their worlds. In addition to being an empowerment tool, we envisioned using photography as a community-based arts practice that could deliver individual youth skill development and facilitate capacity-building (Purcell 2009). The stated goals of SPPVP were to encourage South Phoenix youth to use photographic images they created to document and reflect on the needs and assets of their community; to promote dialogue about community issues through group discussion about their photographs; and to promote community change by communicating points of concern and pride to policymakers and community members, through a culminating photography exhibit. We set out to build a project that would provide a unique opportunity for educators, health care professionals, policymakers, and stakeholders to view the food and physical activity environment,

health, and body image through the "eyes" of youth. These topics were mandated by the agencies that funded the project.

In partnership with a local community youth center that serves (in their words) "low-income, at-risk youth," we established a 12-week photography class that would be the core of SPPVP. In the initial weeks of the program, the youth were involved in orientation and training activities, including an introduction to our view of the photovoice ethos and process, a discussion of ethics, a field trip to a photography exhibit, and a series of lessons on photography techniques. True to our orientation of photovoice being more than just a method of data elicitation, the youth received training from Andrew, who worked with the youth for 1–2 hours in three sessions focusing on the basics of photography and the dynamics of using photography to communicate. Following the training, the youth went on two 1-hour group outings called photowalks to take photographs in their community. These exercises provided them with practice using their cameras and initiated the documentation of their health environment.

By this time, a core group of six Latino youth, aged 10–11, were attending classes regularly and were participating enthusiastically. We gave these youth the cameras to take home, along with weekly photography assignments that focused on specific subjects identified by us and the funding agency as relevant to health and wellness: body image, nutrition environment, concepts of health, and physical activity. We added an assignment to explore social relationships through photographs, as we discovered that the youth took photos of their friends and family every week, regardless of the assigned subject. These assignments provided a structure for the youth while encouraging them, we believed, to be free to explore and discover how they see the world. By entrusting the cameras to young people to enable them to act as documentarians, we hoped they would directly relate their own reality, informing the community around them about what the health environment looks like from their own perspectives. Giving the youth digital instead of disposable cameras suggested a long-term impact and demonstrated that they were provided with real tools and skills to accomplish real goals by participating in the project (Walsh, Hewson, Shier, & Morales 2008).

On a weekly basis, the youth discussed, in a focus group format (facilitated with the assistance of anthropology graduate student April Bojorquez), the photographs they had taken as a means of capturing the purpose and photographic intent of each photo. Their photographs

were downloaded onto a computer and we reviewed the photographs together. Andrew also gave the youth feedback on the formal and technical aspects of the photos, including composition, aesthetics, conceptual aspects, and intertextuality. Each week, the youth chose the photograph they wanted to discuss (usually their favorite) and we chose one photo whose subject matter, aesthetic value, or conceptual aspects intrigued us. We asked each participant to reflect on the following questions related to their photographs, using the mnemonic of PHOTO (Pies & Parthasarathy 2008): Describe your PHOTO; What is HAPPENING in your picture?; Why did you take a picture OF this?; What does this picture TELL us about life in your community?; and How does this picture provide OPPORTUNITIES for us to improve life in your community?

One memorable discussion was about a photograph of a car that the student, contrary to our initial assumption, claimed represented a healthy factor in her neighborhood. She began by explaining that a car was healthy because you could use it to go to the store to buy healthy food, and the air conditioning would keep you cool when the Arizona sun was too hot. As she continued to speak, the deeper reason she considered a car to be healthy came to the surface: if you were in a car, you were less likely to be hit by a stray bullet, a too common occurrence judging by the number of photographs depicting coffins and gravestones of peers and family members that students took. However, most often, these discussions did not generate new insights or critical analyses of structural issues determining health. Oftentimes, students parroted what they had been taught in school regarding, for example, recycling and keeping the earth clean. In an effort to understand what participants were thinking about when taking photos, we provided journals for them to capture their ideas, and instructed them to write down thoughts about a photograph they wanted to take, or had taken, or about how health issues impacted them and others.

Nearly 1000 photographs were taken by youth during the project. Youth participants and SPPVP staff (including curatorial specialist Claire Warden) chose over 100 photographs to be exhibited and used for various projects and presentations. At the same time, the youth explicitly indicated which of their photographs they did not want to be made public. Each student artist wrote descriptive captions for their photos, which were dictated to a SPPVP staff member, or they were excerpted from focus group discussions pertinent to the photograph. At the end of the 12-week

funded period, a gallery-style presentation of 43 selected photographs with accompanying captions was held at the community center for parents and family of the participants, community members, university researchers, artists, and staff of local clinics, schools, non-profit, and governmental social service agencies. Photographs were chosen based on the criteria that they represented themes discussed by youth in the project, visually articulated youth concerns to a general audience, contained artistic and aesthetic value, and ensured representation of all youth participants.

The youth were excited about the outcome of SPPVP, as the images they captured proved to be powerful. At the exhibit, each participant was acknowledged and gifted with the camera they had learned to use and with which they had created those evocative images. The youth and the culminating exhibit *South Phoenix Through The Eyes of Youth* were subsequently invited to show at the University Anthropology Museum. Select images from the exhibit were also displayed at the University Art Museum, a local church, and a Health Department public policy forum. SPPVP was even featured in a local PBS community issues show. On the surface, then, SPPVP appears to have been a successful project that used photovoice to engage community youth as partners, highlight their creative spirit, and empower them to bring their concerns about their community to the attention of policymakers. However, we are uneasy that in our quest to enact an anti-oppressive, participatory project, we failed to account for and adequately negotiate multiple ethical dilemmas centered around power dynamics; this failure often led us to too frequently default to positions of "certainty," through which we missed opportunities to more deeply engage with and truly hear the voices of the youth in the project.

On Impossible Dilemmas and the Possibilities of Failure

Research projects attempting to enact emancipatory, feminist, anti-oppressive, and participatory goals—such as those we set out to accomplish in the SPPVP—inevitably create ethical dilemmas for critical researchers (Olesen 2005; Patai 1991; Reinharz 1992; Wolf 1996). One of the main issues that creates a gap between the ideals of feminist, anti-oppressive, and critical research and the way it is often enacted is *power*, which creates hierarchies of control that are created and re-created before, during, and after fieldwork (Wolf 1996). Within this overarching

framework of power, researchers have identified dilemmas specific to visual participatory methodologies such as photovoice, including the researcher assuming that a community is homogeneous and harmonious, thus ignoring tensions revealed through photographs; researcher influence on the thematic content of photographs, and subsequent selection, analysis, and dissemination of the photographs; and the audience not honoring the photographic interpretation of the participants and substituting their own, potentially damaging, interpretations of the photographs (Evans-Agnew, Sanon, & Boutain 2014). These issues are magnified when the community "partners" are children and youth who may not be able to give truly informed consent when confronted with the novelty and excitement of being a photographer/photographic subject, and who may have unrealistic expectations about what can be achieved (Joanou 2009). Even the intent of empowering photovoice participants through providing a photographic platform to voice concerns is troubled as often it is unclear who initiates these projects, who directs the agenda, whose voice is privileged, and whether participants can speak without the authoritative interference of the researcher (Allen 2012).

There are no *easy* answers to these dilemmas, and possibly *no* answers at all. Rather than being paralyzed by the ethical risks of anti-oppressive research, Lather (2001) proposes that reflexive researchers help to charter the complicated territory of doing research with others without proposing a solution or way of researching that is guaranteed to be ethical and risk free. Rather than intending to solve problems or tensions inherent in anti-oppressive research, we should highlight and explore our own ethical "failures." Feminist and queer scholars have theorized failure as a practice that is pivotal for understanding the difficulties of doing critical methodological, epistemological, and pedagogical work. For Visweswaran (1994), acknowledging failure does not solve ethical or epistemological problems, but can lead to new possibilities, as it helps situate us in a kind of tenuous, in-between place where we must suspend the belief that we as researchers can ever fully come to know or speak for those with whom we work. That is, acknowledging failure means realizing that participatory processes such as photovoice may assist in producing new knowledges rather than revealing local "reality." In the case of the SPPVP, this means that we must problematize how we enacted colonial models of speaking for the youth who participated, which echoed the deep ambivalence that Woodson (2007) states is a key but troubling feature of North America's

stance on youth, seen particularly in public policy, educational systems, and social problems that might claim to want to empower youth but that often seek to domesticate and train them instead.

Halberstam (2011), too, sees productive possibilities in failure, and attempts to reclaim failure as something not to be feared or avoided, but rather as something that provides opportunities for different ways of being in the world. Halberstam explains that "failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world" (pp. 2–3). Failure, through this perspective, becomes a way to circumvent and navigate through and around both academia's disciplinary strictures and broader society's modes of disciplining, ordering, and normalizing behavior. A comparison could be drawn with the sometimes messy, non-linear process of artistic inspiration which leads one to question, reconstruct, and deconstruct what is (Butler-Kisber & Poldma 2010). What might productive failing entail? In what follows we take up three theses that Halberstam offers to those who might value productive failure over traditional academic success; Halberstam urges researchers to "resist mastery" (p. 11), "privilege the naïve or nonsensical (stupidity)" (p. 12), and "suspect memorialization" (p. 15). In exploring these theses, we explicate the ethical missteps that we enacted and encountered in our project, which point to how we failed to enact the task of critical anti-oppressive research and to realize the potential of an arts-based practice, while simultaneously failing to fail productively.

Resist Mastery

Productive failure involves resisting *mastery*, by which Halberstam (2011) means the kinds of disciplinary dictates that determine goals, practices, and legitimate forms and enactments of knowledge. Throughout the SPPVP, we struggled with negotiating a variety of competing demands. The funder dictated a focus on health, specifically nutrition and physical activity. Seline and Jenny, as social science researchers who sought to collect data for eventual writing and publication aligned themselves with that mandate, yet also desired to foster critical perspectives among the youth beyond the funders' narrow definitions of health. Andrew, as a photographic artist, desired to help participants learn to see and enact photography as an art form. And finally, the youth in the

project sought the freedom to explore what they wanted. We stumbled as we navigated this terrain, as repeatedly we tended to exercise our power by defaulting to mastery. Jenny and Seline often led conversations back to health, while seeking to make students more "critical" by scaffolding discussions in those directions when feeling disappointed in students' less-than-critical approaches. Andrew struggled with wanting students to view photography as a documentary tool and agent for social change, while also steering them toward making photographs with both traditional and non-traditional aesthetic value.

For example, when we began, youth participants seemed to fully embrace individualistic, neoliberal, medical models of health that circulate as dominant discourses. In group discussions, they often framed "health" in terms of individual behaviors and choices, equating "being healthy" to eating fruits and vegetables and exercising, getting fresh air, and not doing drugs or drinking. These constructions of health integrate neoliberal discourses of individual responsibility for health, which sometimes manifested in discussions with the youth voicing the idea that unhealthy people "lack motivation" and have lazy lifestyles. Participants' discussions of health also often reflected a mechanistic concept of the body, as they tended to argue that avoiding obesity is simply a question of caloric intake (eating right) and output (being physically active). Participants were very aware of health messages coming from school and community programs, as they were able to easily repeat messages linking health to behaviors such as physical activity, not smoking, and recycling. While participating in these conversations, Jenny and Seline often became frustrated, because as critical researchers seeking to embrace an anti-oppressive stance toward neoliberal discourses of health, we wanted to encourage students to engage in critical dialogues about the kinds of structural and environmental racism and classism that we saw directly tied to issues of health. We also wanted to help students see past these dominant discourses and to cultivate more complex, contextualized, and structural perspectives on health as well as obtain "good" data to show how photovoice helped us enact a critical pedagogy of health with youth. During discussions, we found ourselves asking probing questions to push students toward different, more critical emphases. We also realize in retrospect that we were imposing an agenda and trying to force outcomes that were possibly at odds with what the youth themselves wanted to explore.

Andrew was most interested in providing the technical skills and conceptual understanding to allow the students to treat photography as

Fig. 4.1 Photograph by Berenice

an art form, while simultaneously valuing student-made photographs that exhibited non-traditional aesthetics. For example, a photograph of a single tree being propped up against a wooden pole—with a dead-center subject and lack of focus—might not be considered a traditionally "correct" photograph within the canon of modernist photography (see Fig. 4.1). The lack of formal qualities could prevent this from being a choice of a photograph to be exhibited, but my (Andrew's) ties to contemporary art that gives value to photographs that kill the modernist father made me advocate for this image to be included in the final exhibit. However, even this valuing of non-standard aesthetics—because it is at least partly a reaction against modern aesthetics—keeps me tied to a particular arena of mastery.

Thus, our respective disciplinary standards of evidence and artistic value were unconsciously used as an instrument of power that again tipped the balance in favor of expert knowledge (Freeman et al. 2007). While mostly consciously unaware of it at the time, in following the

dictates of our funders as well as the rules of "good" social scientists, artists, and anti-oppressive researchers, we rendered ourselves unable to see and hear other data, and missed out on seeing what else might have arisen in the project. Here, our disciplines got in the way, because they offered "maps of thought where intuition and blind fumbling might yield better results" (Halberstam p. 6). Even while positioning ourselves as constructing a more empowering and less traditional project, by focusing so much on collecting the "right" data and valuing the "right" aesthetic, we belied our commitments to "what is already known according to approved methods of knowing" that "do not allow for visionary insights or flights of fancy" (Halberstam 2011, p. 6). We thus stayed in "well-lit territories" and knew "exactly which way to go" before starting our journey (p. 6). What might this project have been if we had not tried to lead the way, not known our outcome ahead of time? If our goal had been to lose our way—to resist mastery?

Privilege the Nonsensical

Second, Halberstam posits that productive failure involves privileging the "naïve or nonsensical (stupidity)" (p. 12), which refers "not simply to a lack of knowledge but to the limits of certain forms of knowing and certain ways of inhabiting structures of knowing" (pp. 11–12). Furthermore, this concept values the nonsensical/nonsensible over sense-making knowledges grounded in taken-for-granted, normative ways of being and doing. Beholden as we were to disciplinary structures, we only gave lip service to the anti-oppressive stance of acknowledging epistemological diversities and multiple ways of knowing (Moosa-Mitha 2005). Rather than co-creating an intersubjective and dialogical knowledge with the SPPVP youth, we asserted our epistemic privilege as adults and as academics. Additionally, we did not sufficiently grapple with issues of race and class, and the power differentials therein. Jenny engaged in what Pillow (2003) calls "reflexivity as transcendence," acknowledging her positionality as a white middle-class academic who was working with working-class Latino students, but naively operating under the assumptions that through this acceptance, and because she constructed herself as a "critical" scholar, she could somehow transcend or bridge the differences between herself and the students. Seline, positioning herself as an insider due to her identification with the youth in terms of ethnicity (Latino), class background (working-class), and experience (immigrant),

did not critically consider the important power-laden differences of age and education (Zavella 1993). Andrew acknowledged that at the time he did not spend much time reflecting on issues of subjectivity, positionality, and power, perhaps naively taking for granted that his enthusiasm for the project was enough to help him connect with the youth and transcend any power differentials he might embody or encounter.

Closely related to the issue of relying on disciplinary mastery, we struggled with tensions between seeing photographs as "data" or as "art." The youth were often more interested in making photographs of whatever they wanted to—often seemingly (and, to Jenny and Seline, frustratingly) ignoring our weekly directives. At the same time, Andrew gave priority to helping develop participants as artists, which often meant encouraging them to not only pay attention to the weekly directives but also to follow their intuition while making photographs. As project "leaders," Jenny and Seline generally steered the project to the default position of collecting "data" to meet the funders' goals as well as research goals. We thus privileged "sensical" data over "nonsensical" art, which undermined our stated commitment to bring artistic perspectives to photovoice. Being true to our original intention of having an arts-based praxis could have given us "a fresh perspective so that our old habits of mind do not dominate our reactions with stock responses" (Eisner 2008, p. 11).

Additionally, we tended to make sense of student perspectives through our own (limiting) lenses of critical pedagogy. For example, as the project progressed, students, while sometimes echoing dominant health discourses, often veered from photographing individual aspects of health and began photographing pictures of subjects deemed (by us) as health issues: broken glass on the streets, littered playgrounds, and graffiti (see Fig. 4.2, *Left*). We wanted desperately to interpret these images as examples that students were developing more critical dispositions, and perhaps they were, but more likely is that our youth "partners" were providing us with images of what they thought we wanted to see rather than what they wanted to show us. We now look at the photograph of the graffitied wall and the staged thumbs-down gesture provided by a participant and see evidence of their wanting to do what was expected of them, rather than a free expression.

Our desires to make sense of their photographs as "data" through the lenses of "criticality" prevented us from letting the creative process unfold without controlling the pathway, the outcomes, or the learnings (Wehbi 2015). We led youth participants closely down a known path

Fig. 4.2 Photograph by Joseph (L) & Roucelin (R)

with known interpretations, thus subtly communicating a system of superior and inferior knowledges and their place within it (Halberstam 2011).

Yet, the youth continued photographing what they deemed important and pertinent to their own concepts of health. Participants resisted negative stereotypes of low-income neighborhoods through offering portraits highlighting happy loved children and adults engaged in family events, activities, and creative work (see Fig. 4.2, *Right*). This photograph was chosen as a favorite by the youth who took it and was included in the final exhibit selection because of Andrew's insistence on its artistic qualities. We (Jenny and Seline) missed the shining eyes of the boy and instead saw the sugary empty-calorie cake being celebrated in a neighborhood with skyrocketing obesity rates. Andrew did better in appreciating the nonsensical, at least in terms of aesthetics, as he chose the photograph because of the contrast between the happy occasion and the heavy shadows, which usually elicit darker associations. However, Andrew also missed why the participant took this photograph—to capture a treasured moment of family unity.

Suspect Memorialization

Finally, Halberstam (2011) argues that productive failure requires us to "suspect memorialization," or, to work against it (p. 15). Being wary or suspect of memorialization is important, to Halberstam, because historically memorialization tends to "tidy up" messy and problematic histories, including histories of genocide, slavery, war, and other atrocities.

Fig. 4.3 South Phoenix Art Exhibit Postcard

As Halberstam argues, memory serves disciplinary functions—it is a kind of power ritual that "selects for what is important (the histories of triumph), it reads a continuous narrative into one full of ruptures and contradictions, and it sets precedents for other "memorializations"" (p. 15). We constructed just this kind of memorialization, in both the final exhibit and in the final reports we constructed for the funding agencies. The final exhibit is impressive, full of beautiful photographs and interesting, and provocative captions highlighting the voices of the youth photographers discussing their photographs (see Fig. 4.3).

However, this depiction of the neatly packaged and wrapped up photography exhibit conceals the difficulties we experienced and the power dynamics involved in selecting the photographs and putting the exhibit together. Often, Jenny and Seline were more focused on choosing photographs that more closely reflected the theme of health and demonstrated participants' engagement with critical ideas regarding discourses of health. Andrew, however, sought out photographs that were artistic and wanted to curate an exhibit that prioritized the photographs as art rather than data, and typically cared less about how they fit with the theme of health.

One example of this conflict between seeing "data" versus "art" involved an image showing a pair of hands holding green apple taffy. Andrew loved this image for its aesthetic and artistic qualities, while Seline and Jenny had reservations about highlighting candy in an exhibit that was supposed to be about health, which, they feared, might reveal that the youth had not become as critical as we had hoped. Furthermore, and critically, while the youth participants were able to choose the photographs they discussed each week and had a large role in creating the captions for the various photos they chose throughout the project, none of them were part of the process of narrowing down the photos for the final exhibit.

Reflecting on this process, we cannot help but wonder what kind of learning might have happened—for us, for the youth participants, and for the public viewing the exhibit, if we had attempted to resist memorialization—that is, if we had been able to expose rather than conceal the difficulties we experienced creating the exhibit? Including the difficult, messy, dialogic process might have productively disrupted what appeared as a coherent narrative both in the exhibit and the report we created for our funders. We might have refused, instead, to provide a singular perspective; we might have left our too neatly tied up conclusions "remain complicated and uncertain" (Simon 2011, p. 433). The final exhibit and report deny the process of the project, which often included anxiety and frustration. However, what learning might have happened if we could have let that discomfort remain instead of smoothing it over? We might have created an exhibit that unsettled and provoked; an exhibit that might have disturbed the stories we told ourselves about SPPVP being a coherent, knowable, representable project and process. Instead, we sought to avoid that difficulty altogether. As Rayner (2012) argues, meaning-making often relies on avoiding messy knowledges. Working against memorialization, however, requires researchers to ask what is left out when we avoid difficulty and messiness.

(In)Conclusion: Uncertainty and a Reflexivity of Discomfort

Against privileging mastery, the sensical, and memorialization—all of which are centered in fictions of certainty—feminist, critical, arts-based, and anti-oppressive scholars encourage researchers and educators to, instead, embrace uncertainty (Sandlin 2010). One aspect of embracing uncertainty is recognizing that the narratives researchers and

participants generate can only ever be partial, unfinished, and in process (Ellsworth 1989). An educator rejecting certainty "revels in the detours, twists, and turns through knowing and confusion"—that is, she chooses "getting lost" over following a path (Halberstam 2011, p. 15). Anti-oppressive researchers Jazeel and McFarlane (2010), for example, advocate for enactments of anti-oppressive knowledge production that remain both uncertain and emplaced, as they trouble the taken-for-granted notion that knowledge travels unproblematically across borders and bodies. Moosa-Mitha (2005) argues that the very epistemological assumptions underpinning anti-oppressive research are characterized by their acknowledgement of the socially constructed and tentative nature of knowing, stating, for example, that researchers working within anti-oppressive research frameworks acknowledge and embrace multiple ways of knowing, conceive of knowledge as situated and subjugated, recognize that not everything is knowable, conceive of knowledge as tied to action and thus consider it neither neutral nor abstract, and position knowledge as intersubjective and dialogical. These assumptions are also reflected in Ellsworth's (1989) assertion that people do not experience critical learning in neat, straightforward, linear, or orderly ways—but rather it depends on experiences that are left "opened and unfinished' (p. 123). It is this very openness, indeed, this moving away from cohesion and unity, that actually constitutes critical learning (Ellsworth 2005).

We have to find ways to take up these disquieting and discomforting spaces of uncertainty in our research practices (Burdick & Sandlin 2010). This chapter constitutes, for us, a reflexivity of discomfort (Pillow 2003), through which we do not offer neatly tied up answers, but, rather, sit in a kind of uncertainty and discomfort, leaving "what is unfamiliar, unfamiliar" (Pillow 2003, p. 177). We do not dismiss the importance of examining issues of power and ethics but recognize that reflexivity is inextricably linked to power and privilege that cannot be easily or comfortably erased. Writing this has not been easy; it has forced us to confront some uncomfortable truths, acknowledge the tensions that arose among the team due to holding fast to our own disciplinary perspectives, and examine how imposing our own agendas has ethical implications.

Notes

1. Contrary to conventional usage, we capitalized the "v" in Photovoice to highlight the voice of youth participants.

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