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Lending a Megaphone to the Muted: The Merits of Comprehensive Conflict Engagement through Photovoice in Refugee Resettlement Communities

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A Dissertation

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Lending a Megaphone to the Muted:

The Merits of Comprehensive Conflict Engagement through Photovoice

in Refugee Resettlement Communities

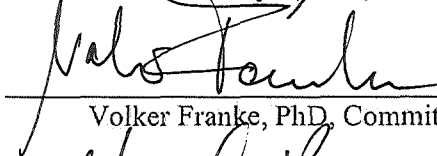
by

Birthe C. Reimers

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree in International Conflict Management



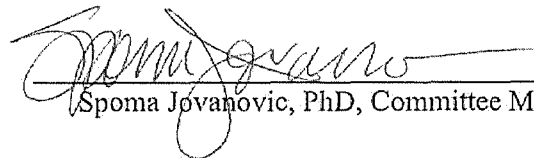
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Abstract

Local refugee resettlement sites are often overlooked as hotspots of conflict because of the unstated assumption that resettlement and escape from militarized conflict automatically mean peace. However, refugees are resettled in local communities into which old conflicts are imported, and where new ones emerge as refugees and locals need to find ways of coexisting despite cultural differences. This research was developed in response to calls by the US Office of Refugee Resettlement and the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations for grassroots-level data on the challenges faced by residents of resettlement communities and for the development of strategies for promoting intercultural understanding.

This dissertation delineates the development of the Comprehensive Conflict Engagement Model, based on which the image- and dialogue-based Photovoice methodology was modified and applied as a practical conflict intervention. This work bridges the gap between conflict theory and practice by collecting bottom-up information about the dynamics that shape people's lives in Clarkston, a refugee resettlement hub in Georgia, and exploring the utility of the CCEM applied through Photovoice as a comprehensive conflict engagement strategy that concurrently targets the internal, relational, and structural bases of conflict.

The results suggest that the participants were generally satisfied with aspects of their environment on which they had an impact and dissatisfied when they were impacted unidirectionally, without reciprocal relationships and the power to actively shape their experiences. The results further demonstrate that a CCEM-based adaptation of Photovoice is a suitable comprehensive conflict engagement strategy for practitioners operating at the community level.

Keywords: Comprehensive Conflict Engagement Model; Photovoice; refugee resettlement; structural violence; intergroup contact; intercultural understanding; empowerment; social change; positive peace; participatory action research; community engagement

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the loving memory of Jaja and Berky. Jaja, without you, I would not be who I am today; and Berky, without you, I would not be where I am today. In many conversations over time, you both demonstrated to me the power of connecting through candid dialogue, living life with passion, authenticity, and purpose, and embracing the opportunities we are given to make a difference in the lives of others. If I can touch and encourage even a fraction of the number of people you did, it will all have been worthwhile at the end. Thank you for everything; I miss you.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation would not have been possible without the love and encouragement I received from my husband, Benjamin Roberts. His support has been invaluable and words cannot express how much I appreciate it all. I would like to especially recognize his contribution in helping me share the insights derived from this project with a greater audience by developing the www.PhotovoiceClarkston.com website. Another big thank you goes to my parents who supported my many years of studies, even when they could not always see the light at the end of the tunnel.

I would also like to thank my dissertation chair, Dr. Sherrill Hayes, for his guidance, encouragement, and occasional “Yoda moments” over the past few years. He gave me the courage to break the mold, stay true to myself, and do the kind of work that I believe in. Thank you to Dr. Volker Franke for bringing curiosity and a fresh perspective to this project as well as a good dose of humor to the dissertation process, to Dr. Heather Pincock for her concise and constructive feedback along the way, and to Dr. Spoma Jovanovic for sharing her expertise and experience conducting community engaged research and using Photovoice with me.

Special thanks for supporting this project also go to CDF: A Collective Action Initiative, Clarkston First Baptist Church, and the Clarkston Community Center. They helped me get to know the community and its residents, made connections for me when I had none, provided beautiful meeting spaces, and helped share the results of this project with the local community.

Last but certainly not least, I would like to thank the wonderful individuals who committed significant time and effort to this project – its participants. “Be the change you want to see in the world” are among the most powerful words with which Mahatma Gandhi left us. The project participants all rose to the challenge and have become the change they want to see in Clarkston. Without them, none of this would have happened. Thank you, always.

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List of Abbreviations

ABCD	Asset building community developer
CCC	Clarkston Community Center
CCEM	Comprehensive Conflict Engagement Model
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CDF	The Clarkston Development Foundation (previous; now A Collective Action Initiative)
CITI	Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative
CYI	Clarkston Youth Initiative
DDR	Demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration
DHHS	Department of Health and Human Services
DSLR	Digital single-lens reflex camera
DV	Diversity Visa
DVD	Digital Versatile Disc
EEOC	Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
ESL	English as a second language

GA	Georgia
GED	General Educational Development
HIV	Human immunodeficiency virus
IDP	Internally displaced people
IRB	Institutional Review Board
K-12	Kindergarten through 12 th grade
MG	Match Grant Program
MS	Multiple sclerosis
NY	New York
ORR	Office of Refugee Resettlement
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PPCT	Process-Person-Context-Time
PRM	Population, refugees, and migration
PSFM	Penetration, segmentation, fragmentation, marginalization
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
RAP	Refugee Assistance Program
RFS	Refugee Family Services
ULI	Urban Land Institute
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees
US	United States
USRAP	United States Refugee Admissions Program
TV	Television
Volags	Voluntary resettlement agencies
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association
ZIP	Zone Improvement Plan
ZMA	Zuckerman Museum of Art

Chapter 1:

Introduction

“Photography has little to do with the things you see and everything with the way that you see them.” (Elliot Erwitt)

At the mention of people fleeing from international conflict and humanitarian crises, internally displaced people (IDP) and refugee camps abroad typically come to mind. Local refugee resettlement sites are often overlooked as hotspots of crisis and conflict because of the unstated assumption that resettlement and escape from militarized conflict automatically mean peace. However, resettled refugees are embedded in local communities into which old conflicts are imported, and where new ones emerge as refugees and locals need to find ways of coexisting despite economic struggles and cultural differences (United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2010). These constructed communities, in which diverse people are brought together by external forces rather than by personal choice, create unique challenges for residents, policy makers, and service providers alike. Clarkston, Georgia, is an exemplar of such a constructed community.

Clarkston is a major refugee resettlement hub located in a predominantly African American working class community and one of the most diverse towns in the American Southeast. For the past twenty years, it has been challenged by a flawed refugee resettlement system, economic hardships, and ongoing intercultural tensions (St. John, 2009). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has recommended that “refugees [...] must be at the centre of decision-making concerning their [...] well-being [and that in] order to gain a deeper understanding of the [...] problems they face, it is essential to consult them directly and to listen to them” (as cited in Green & Kloos, 2009, p. 460). However, this recommendation is not consistently put into practice. As a result, little is known about the intergroup dynamics in resettlement communities that shape the lives of their residents, and “the U.S. [refugee]

resettlement system is proving a strain on local resources and community relations” (United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2010, p. V). Clarkston is an exemplary case of this.

During preliminary field-work in Clarkston, residents of various backgrounds problematized intercultural conflicts and criticized that neither refugees nor locals were consulted in the decision-making processes that impacted their daily lives. This notion was echoed by Faith Hurt, the Regional Representative of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR). At the October 2013 meeting of the Georgia Coalition of Refugee Stakeholders, Hurt stated that in order to build community, educate the public, increase acceptance and support of refugees, and improve policy-making, local, ground-level knowledge was needed. She further noted that policies at the ORR were often made based on perceptions, and that it was imperative to get “local input to get it right” (Hurt, 2013). At the same time, the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (2010) has called for the development of community engagement strategies that facilitate and promote intercultural contact and understanding among residents of resettlement communities. These statements indicate a need to better understand the on-the-ground dynamics in refugee resettlement communities, involve residents in decision-making processes that affect their daily lives, and develop strategies to comprehensively engage emerging conflicts.

After an examination of theories, research, and practices in the field of peace and conflict studies and related social sciences (Allport, 1954; Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, 2006; Galtung 1969, 1996, 2000; Hewstone & Swart, 2011; Kriesberg & Dayton, 2012; Mayer, 2012), I developed the Comprehensive Conflict Engagement Model (CCEM). The CCEM suggests that in order to engage conflict comprehensively, long-term practical interventions must concurrently target all three bases of social conflict – its internal, relational, and structural roots (Kriesberg & Dayton, 2012). Based

on this model, I determined that Photovoice, an image- and dialogue-based participatory action research methodology, when modified according to the CCEM and supplemented by ethnographic fieldwork, would be an appropriate tool for comprehensively engaging conflict in diverse and divided communities like Clarkston. Photovoice has mainly been used in the public health field to engage mostly homogenous, non-internally conflicting marginalized groups through documentary photography and group dialogue. Previous research has shown its effectiveness as both a data collection and an empowerment tool that helps project participants raise public awareness of their needs (e.g. Duffy, 2011; Gant et al., 2009; Green & Kloos, 2009; Hergenrather, Rhodes, Cowan, Bardhoshi, & Pula, 2009; Kessi, 2011; Novak, 2010; Nykiforuk, 2011; Pritzker, LaChapelle, & Tatum, 2012; Rush, Murphy, & Kozak, 2012; Smith, 2012; Teti, Murray, Johnson, & Binson, 2012; Wang, 1999, 2006; Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang, Burris, Xiang, 1996; Wang, Cash, & Powers, 2000; Wilkin & Liamputtong, 2010). However, no previous projects have convened members of diverse and conflicting groups as a comprehensive conflict engagement strategy in an effort to transform the relationships between the participants themselves, their various identity groups, and structural facets of the ecosystem in which they live (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Galtung, 1969).

This study intentionally brought together a heterogeneous group of Clarkston community members to examine how everyday communal dynamics unite or divide the population in this refugee resettlement site. The resulting information is being shared with local decision-makers and social service providers to promote better informed decision-making. Introducing Photovoice to the field of conflict management, this project has also explored the applicability of the CCEM through Photovoice and its utility as a comprehensive conflict engagement strategy. It has thereby provided a mechanism for engaging conflict at the internal, relational, and structural levels in diverse and divided communities strained by intercultural tensions. As Hayes (2011)

has declared, the future of peace and conflict studies as a discipline will depend on the recognition of the “interdependence of scholarship, practice, and pedagogy, [and on the development of] a holistic approach to the knowledge created out of that relationship” (p. 329). By developing the CCEM based on an explicit theoretical framework that integrates previously disconnected concepts, models, and theories from peace and conflict studies and related social sciences, modifying the application of Photovoice accordingly, and examining if it is an effective comprehensive conflict engagement strategy capable of fostering small group dialogue that transforms relationships in diverse communities, this research contributes to bridging the existing gap between conflict theory and practice (Coleman, 2011; Hayes, 2011).¹

The results of this research suggest that the Photovoice participants were generally satisfied with aspects of their communal environment on which they had an impact, in which there was a bi-directional, reciprocal relationship. They were dissatisfied with institutions, objects, and symbols where they felt they were being impacted uni-directionally, without a reciprocal relationship in which they had the power to actively shape what was happening to them. Even when they had not been fully aware of the structural nature of some of their conflicts, the issues they brought up for discussion were often exemplars of manifestations of structural violence. The desire for a bi-directional, reciprocal relationship is a desire for empowerment, which is what the Photovoice methodology was created to facilitate (Wang & Burris, 1997).

The results of this first-time application of Photovoice as a comprehensive conflict engagement tool further demonstrate increased awareness, perspective-taking, bonding, connectedness and appreciation, hope for future cooperative relationships, empowerment, and self-assertion as a result of project participation. They support the undergirding theoretical

¹ For details, please see chapter 2.

framework (Allport, 1954; Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, 2006; Galtung 1969, 1996, 2000; Hewstone & Swart, 2011; Kriesberg & Dayton, 2012; Mayer, 2012) and the utility of the CCEM applied through Photovoice in comprehensively engaging conflicts in diverse and divided communities. From this project, avenues for further refining the methodology and the underlying theoretical framework have emerged. As a result of this, a feedback loop between conflict theory and practice has been established and a methodological bridge over the gap between theory and practice has been built (Coleman, 2011; Hayes, 2011).

Both the process and the product of this approach can be replicated elsewhere and used by researchers, conflict management practitioners, local policy makers, and service providers to make better-informed decisions that meet the needs of communities and comprehensively engage conflicts where issues of diversity are a source of ongoing tensions, including other refugee resettlement sites, IDP and refugee camps, demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) processes, and diverse inner cities ravaged by many of the same problems.

The next chapter reviews literature, theories, and practices central to refugee resettlement and conflict engagement, delineates the CCEM, and introduces Clarkston as well as the Photovoice methodology. The third chapter constitutes a detailed account of the implementation of this research methodology. The fourth chapter presents positive aspects of the Clarkston community that unite its residents. The fifth chapter describes negative aspects of the Clarkston community that divide its residents. The sixth chapter examines the use and utility of the CCEM, applied through Photovoice, as a comprehensive conflict engagement strategy. The final chapter includes the discussion of the project outcomes, avenues for future research, and concluding implications.

Chapter 2:

Refugee Resettlement and Comprehensive Conflict Engagement in Theory and Practice

“The insistence that the oppressed engage in reflection on their concrete situation is not a call to armchair revolution. On the contrary, reflection - true reflection - leads to action. On the other hand, when the situation calls for action, that action will constitute an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflection.” (Paolo Freire)

Constructed Communities

In this study, constructed communities are conceptualized as diverse and divided neighborhoods and towns into which segments of the population have (been) moved for utilitarian reasons, out of necessity rather than by choice. In other words, residents of these communities are brought together by external forces rather than by personal preference. Neighborhoods and towns where an influx of voluntary newcomers is unwelcome by the previously existing community and where diverse and conflicting groups coexist involuntarily can also be understood as constructed communities. The different groups in these environments often lead ‘parallel lives’ with little or no meaningful interaction (Cantle, 2005). Thus constructed communities differ from organically grown communities of choice, which are characterized by homogeneity, “organic or intrinsic relationships, [and the] mutual interdependence of [their] members” (Mijuskovic, 1992, p. 147; Tönnies, 1957). They also differ from cosmopolitan metropolises, which are equally diverse but draw large numbers of voluntary migrants who choose these cities as their domicile in pursuit of their goals (Germain, 2011; Simmel, 1950a, 1950b; Keith, 2005). Such constructed environments are prone to a variety of conflicts that create unique challenges for residents, policy makers, and service providers. Refugee resettlement communities are exemplars of constructed communities because large segments of the population are strategically ‘placed’ there by federal agencies, without a say by the refugees or the receiving local population. Understanding refugee resettlement sites as constructed communities is helpful because this terminology accounts for the complex nature of

coexistence of not only diverse groups of refugees, but of refugees embedded in local communities with their own histories and challenges that are likely to affect all residents' daily lives.

The Structure and Challenges of Refugee Resettlement

Since 1950, refugees have been resettled internationally through the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). According to the 1951 Refugee Convention, a refugee is someone who:

Owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country. (UNHCR, 2015a)

There are currently 15.4 million refugees in the world (United States Department of State, 2015a), but less than 1% of these individuals are resettled in a third country, i.e. a country that is not their country of origin, nor a neighboring country to which they fled and where they found refuge in a UNHCR camp (UNHCR, 2015; United States Department of State, 2015a). The United States accepts more than half of all resettled refugees every year, more than any other country in the world (UNHCR, 2015b). It has resettled approximately three million refugees in the past 40 years (United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2010).

The Refugee Act of 1980 governs current refugee resettlement policies and has established the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) under the umbrella of the State Department, and the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) (Brick et al., 2010; Eby, Iverson, Smyers, Kekic, 2011; United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2011). These two agencies share the domestic responsibilities of the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), “an

interagency effort involving a number of governmental and non-governmental partners both overseas and in the United States” (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2011, para. 3). The PRM awards a Reception and Placement grant of \$1,800 per refugee to voluntary resettlement agencies (volags) that are subcontracted to fetch refugees from the airport, provide immediate orientation, secure housing equipped with bare necessities, ensure that new arrivals go to appointments with social service agencies, and enroll them in ESL classes. The refugees themselves receive an initial start-up grant of \$1,100 for 30-90 days (Brick et al., 2010; Eby et al., 2011; Nawyn, 2010; Smith, 2008; United States Foreign Relations Committee, 2010). The ORR funds the Refugee Assistance Program (RAP) and the Matching Grant Program (MG), overseeing the provision of medical and financial services to refugees by volags (Brick et al., 2010; Office of Refugee Resettlement, n.d.; Nawyn, 2010; United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2011).

Upon arrival in the United States, refugees are immediately allowed to accept employment (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2015). Within six months of arrival in the U.S., they are expected to be financially independent (Brick et al., 2010; Nawyn, 2010; Smith, 2008). With the express purpose of assisting refugees to quickly reach this economic self-sufficiency, the Matching Grant Program contributes \$2 for every \$1 raised by participating volags, with a \$2,200 cap in federal funding per capita. If volags do not succeed at placing their clients in the job market within six months, they become ineligible to participate in MG (Brick et al., 2010). After one year in the United States, refugees must apply for a green card and become permanent residents, and five years after they receive their green card, they may apply for U.S. citizenship (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2015, United States Department of State, 2015b).

Scholars and policy makers have found the “one-size-fits-all” (United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2010, p. 3) provision of federal assistance to be dysfunctional and a barrier to refugees’ empowerment and resettlement success (Brick et al., 2010; Nawyn, 2010; Sowa, 2009; Tomlinson & Egan, 2002; United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, 2010). The structure of MG has pressured volags to concentrate their efforts on job placement without taking into consideration the refugees’ previous training, abilities, and needs. This commonly leads to suboptimal job placements and constitutes a strain on the refugee population and their employers (Brick et al., 2010; Nawyn, 2010; Sowa, 2009). A report by the United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (2010) has stated that “Resettlement efforts in some U.S. cities are underfunded, overstretched, and failing to meet the basic needs of the refugee populations they are currently asked to assist” (p. V). The Committee on Foreign Relations (2010) has attributed strained community relations to a disconnect between federal policies and the local communities that are expected to accommodate federally placed refugees without the proper funding or resources, and without a say in the decision to become ‘host’ communities in the first place. Faith Hurt, the Regional Representative of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), has stated that local, ground-level knowledge was needed in order to build community, educate the public, improve policy-making, and increase acceptance and support of refugees. Since policies at ORR are often made based on perceptions, it is imperative to get “local input to get it right” (Hurt, 2013). Additionally, the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations (2010) has called for the development of community engagement strategies that facilitate and promote intercultural contact and understanding among residents of resettlement communities. Clarkston, Georgia, is a refugee resettlement site in metropolitan Atlanta and an exemplar of the phenomena and challenges described above.

Introducing Clarkston

Clarkston is a major refugee resettlement hub and one of the most diverse towns in the American Southeast. For the past 30 years, its residents have been facing a variety of conflicts that have strained communal relations (Alexander, 2013; Horizon Theatre, 2014; PBS, 2012; St. John, 2007a, 2007b, 2009). Attracted by the availability of low-income housing, public transportation, and low-skilled jobs in Metropolitan Atlanta, economically disadvantaged African Americans started moving into the historically white town in the 1980s (PBS, 2012; St. John, 2007a, 2007b, 2009). In the 1990s, federal agencies started resettling refugees from around the world in Clarkston for the same reasons (Alexander, 2013; PBS, 2012; St. John, 2007a, 2007b, 2009). Although few long-time Caucasian American residents have resisted joining their former neighbors on the “white flight” out of town, many of those who have stayed are dissatisfied with the transformations Clarkston has undergone in the last 30 years (PBS, 2012; St. John, 2007a, 2007b, 2009). One example thereof can be seen in the PBS documentary *America by the Numbers with Maria Hinojosa: Clarkston Georgia* (2012), in which an older Caucasian resident stated that he felt that the refugee population was destroying the American way of life, and that he was afraid they were jeopardizing his “nest egg.” This was juxtaposed with an interview with the president of the Somali-American Community Center, Omar Shekhey, who noted that:

The people who are in the political power, they just believe immigrants are here to drain the resources of the country. They are not looking the other side. That we work hard, we are buying foreclosed homes, we are revitalizing the economy of this country.

Despite these conflicts, I found in preliminary fieldwork that there is a small but visible group of younger Caucasian Americans who have moved to Clarkston in the last decade purposely seeking its diversity. Among them is the current mayor of Clarkston, Edward “Ted” Terry, who was elected in 2013 after he had lived in Clarkston for two years (City of Clarkston, 2013). Yet in

contrast with the town's motto as a 'small town with a big heart' and in accordance with the above-cited Foreign Relations Committee report (2010), Clarkston community leaders and residents alike have recognized that even though the different groups coexist in close proximity, close communal ties are the exception, and they have identified a need for facilitated conflict engagement because many intergroup conflicts have been lingering covertly for years without open discussion or resolution. These communal dynamics, compounded by the artificial construction of the community and the pervasiveness of marginalization among its residents, render Clarkston a suitable case for this study.

In 2010, 61.7% of the 21,989 people who lived in the greater Clarkston area (defined by the 30021 ZIP code) were black, 18.2% of Asian descent, and 14% white. Over 50 different nationalities were represented in the population, 43% of whom were foreign-born (United States Census Bureau, 2011a, 2011b, 2013). The population is constantly in flux - 65% of the people living in town moved there in or after the year 2000 (United States Census Bureau, 2011b). According to a report by the International Rescue Committee, more refugees moved out of than into Clarkston in 2013, while 2,770 refugees were expected to be resettled in Georgia in 2014, a majority of them in Clarkston (McCrary, 2013). The income of 35.6% of the population is below the poverty level (United States Census Bureau, 2011b), and the mean household income is \$39,771, compared to \$67,610 in Georgia (United States Census Bureau, 2011b).

Whereas the discourse on refugee resettlement typically involves marginalized refugees among a dominant, (i.e. non-marginalized) host community (e.g. Nawyn, 2010; Smith, 2008; Sowa, 2009), both the refugees and a large segment of the predominantly African American host community are marginalized, living on the fringes of American society. Preliminary fieldwork indicated that the African American majority was grossly underrepresented in the civic arena. As problematized in *America by the Numbers*, all members of the Clarkston city council were

Caucasian Americans in 2012, although this demographic only constituted 14% of the population. Furthermore, although African Americans and refugees face many similar challenges, a sense of “marginalization among the marginalized” (Taywaditep, 2001, p. 1) has emerged among the African American population because newly resettled refugees are eligible for governmental support services that members of the host community do not receive.

According to St. John (2009),

Just as poor whites in the South had felt threatened by the prospect of fair competition from blacks in the years leading up to the civil rights struggle, poor blacks in Clarkston - who made up the majority of the American residents of those apartment complexes in which refugees lived - saw the newcomers as rivals. [There was] competition over limited resources - housing, jobs, government aid - that fueled identity-based hostility in Clarkston among adults (p. 171).

A similar sentiment was expressed by former Clarkston mayor Emanuel Ransom, the first African American mayor of the town, who acknowledged in *America by the Numbers* that he had run for political office in order to combat the steady influx of refugees. Perceptions of disparate treatment of ‘citizens’ compared to ‘foreigners’ among segments of the African American population and their prevalence as part of residents’ lived experience remained to be explored.

Based on these preliminary insights into the communal dynamics in Clarkston, it was my goal to develop a project that would respond to both the above-described calls by the ORR and the Foreign Relations Committee for the generation of grass-roots knowledge of on-the-ground realities and the promotion of intercultural contact and understanding among residents of resettlement communities. The development of this project started with the inception of an explicit theoretical framework of comprehensive conflict engagement that would undergird its methodological design and practical implementation.

Theoretical Framework

A recent survey found that new theories and tactics published by conflict resolution theory centers have limited impact on the knowledge or practices of conflict practitioners, especially when the theoretical contributions contradict their personal philosophies and methods (Coleman, 2011). In turn, much theory development is dissociated from the realities of conflict resolution practice. Coleman (2011) has attributed this to a lack of collaborative relationships between scholars and experienced practitioners during theory development and research design, acknowledging that scholars often fail “to take into account what practitioners and policy makers wanted or needed to know” (para. 4). As a result, theories in the field are insufficiently informed by practice and vice versa. Bridging this gap would “help determine if the practices actually do what we think they do on the ground and [...] explore how to make them most effective” (Coleman, 2011, para. 5).

Part of the intent of this research was to synthesize and integrate heretofore disconnected theories and link them to research methodology and conflict engagement practice in order to bridge the theory-practice gap in the conflict management field (Coleman, 2011; Hayes, 2011; Mayer, 2012). This was done via the CCEM. The multidisciplinary theoretical framework on which the CCEM is based is comprised of several concepts, models, and theories from the field of peace and conflict studies and related social sciences. These include the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954; Hewstone & Swart, 2011), the three bases of social conflict (Kriesberg & Dayton, 2012), structural violence theory (Galtung, 1969), positive peace (Galtung, 1996), the diagnosis-prognosis-therapy triangle (Galtung, 1996), ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and the bioecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, 2006).

Allport's (1954) socio-psychological contact hypothesis is one of the few explicitly articulated models of relational change that has been adopted by the conflict management field and incorporated in the development of a variety of small group dialogue processes designed to improve intergroup relations, most commonly in intercultural, interethnic, or international conflicts in diverse and divided societies (e.g. Azar, 2002; Cuhadar & Dayton, 2011; Fisher, 1994, 2007; Fisher & Keashly, 1991; Kaufman, 2002; Lieberfeld, 2002; Mitchell, 1993; Rouhana & Kelman, 1994). The basic premise of the contact hypothesis is that a lack of intergroup contact results in prejudice, bias, and an increasing rigidity of in- and out-group boundaries, which become institutionalized over time. It purports that bringing together members of conflicting groups reduces intergroup prejudice and hostility by allowing the parties to discover their commonalities and reducing or deconstructing their negative stereotypes of each other (Allport, 1954; Cuhadar & Dayton, 2011; Hewstone & Swart, 2011; Pettigrew, 1986). However, facilitated small group dialogue processes designed to deconstruct negative stereotypes, increase mutual understanding, rebuild trust, and promote constructive conflict resolution (Fisher, 2007) have been found to be most successful when participants are of equal status, cooperate to reach common goals, and are institutionally supported (Allport, 1954; Cuhadar & Dayton, 2001; Hewstone & Swart, 2011; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

While the contact hypothesis has not disappeared from the scholarly debate in the past sixty years, it has been criticized for suffering from a "unit of analysis problem," which overemphasizes interpersonal dynamics, fails to explain how they can be generalized to the intergroup level, and constantly "shifts between the individual and societal levels" (Cuhadar & Dayton, 2011, p. 283). In other words, the contact hypothesis singularly attributes changing intergroup relations to interpersonal interactions and fails to explain in what ways individual attitude changes affect collective processes (Forbes, 1997; Hewstone & Swart, 2011). This

socio-psychological angle takes into account two of the three bases of social conflict described by Kriesberg and Dayton (2012), namely internal and relational factors, but overlooks that “our perception of objects or situations depends on their context, the conditions in which they function” (Kriesberg & Dayton, 2012, p. 25). What is missing from the contact hypothesis is consideration of the systemic or structural factors that affect individuals’ constitution and interpersonal / intergroup relations (Galtung, 1969; Hewstone & Swart, 2011; Kriesberg & Dayton, 2012). For instance, Hewstone and Swart (2011) found that “the effect of contact [...] was [...] weaker for minority-status than majority-status groups” (p. 375), which they attributed to different perceptions of intergroup interactions depending on people’s status in society. Consequently, they have challenged experts in the field to develop contact-based intervention strategies that “prove equally effective for both groups” (Hewstone & Swart, 2011, p. 375). Because prejudice, a psychological phenomenon, “is not the sole, or even necessarily the main, problem of inter-group relations” (Hewstone & Swart, 2011, p. 380), especially in societies where structural inequalities limit marginalized groups’ access to status and power, it should not be the exclusive focus of contact research (Hewstone & Swart, 2011).

As stated by Hewstone and Swart (2011), if social change is a desired goal, more attention needs to be devoted to the “structural inequalities and power differences between groups, and factors that inhibit, or encourage, mass mobilization and collective action as legitimate forms of social protest” (p. 379). Galtung (1969) has referred to such structural inequalities and power differences as structural violence, violence’s most frequently occurring manifestation. Unlike direct violence, which consists of an immediate subject-object relationship, structural violence is systematically built into the social fabric and prevents entire segments of society from reaching their maximum potential. It manifests as unequal power, an uneven distribution of resources, the deprivation of basic human needs, and consequently unequal life chances (Galtung, 1969).

Examples of structural violence are racism, sexism, and classism. Both direct and structural violence are legitimized and justified by cultural violence, i.e. beliefs, ideologies, and value systems rooted in a particular culture that persist for long periods of time and that make direct and structural violence appear “okay” (Galtung, 1990).

In later iterations of his work, Galtung (1996; 2000) specified that the fulfillment of basic human needs is not only hindered by direct violence, but also by asymmetries in a society’s “deep structure,” which is rooted in its “deep culture.” The deep structure refers to patterns of relations between the various societal subgroups including different races and ethnicities, age groups, genders, and so forth (Galtung, 1996; Graf, Kramer, & Nicolescou, 2007). An asymmetrical deep structure in which there is a power imbalance between segments of society and where basic human needs are being violated is structurally violent and a source of conflict. This deep structure is rooted in and legitimized by the deep culture, i.e. the operating paradigms of a society, also defined as “a web of notions about what is true, good, right, beautiful, sacred” (Galtung, 2000, p. 33). When the core beliefs and ideologies in the deep culture result in the devaluation of particular segments of the population, this cultural violence legitimizes both direct and structural violence towards those groups (Galtung, 1990; Galtung, 2000).

If the deep culture is pathological, so is the deep structure (Galtung, 1996; Graf et al, 2007). The PSFM Syndrome defines four aspects or mechanisms of violent deep structures: Penetration, Segmentation, Fragmentation, and Marginalization (Galtung, 1996; Galtung, 2000; Graf et al., 2007). Penetration is the extent to which the powerful can condition the powerless into accepting a structurally violent deep structure. Segmentation refers to the extent to which elites control the dissemination of information and keep the rest of the population ignorant of the complete picture. Fragmentation is the extent that powerless population groups are isolated from each other, so there is no contact between them. Marginalization refers to the extent that

disenfranchised segments of the population are kept from fully participating in society and world affairs (Galtung, 1996; Galtung, 2000; Graf et al., 2007). The presence of any of these pathologies constitutes structural violence in its own right (Galtung, 1996).

It follows that the mere absence of personal violence (negative peace) is a far cry from positive peace, which Galtung (1996) has defined as a combination of “verbal and physical kindness, [satisfaction of] basic needs, survival, well-being, freedom[,] identity [...], equity [...], dialogue [...], integration [...], solidarity [...], participation instead of marginalization [and] building a positive peace culture [where individuals open themselves to] several human inclinations and capabilities” (p. 32). In the pursuit of such positive peace, Galtung (1996) has suggested that peace researchers need to integrate diagnosis (analysis), prognosis (evaluation), and therapy (restoration of equilibrium). With this diagnosis-prognosis-therapy triangle, Galtung (1996) has taken an approach to peace studies that parallels the health sciences, likening violence to disease and health to peace. In the same way that we cannot eliminate every disease, we cannot achieve complete peace. At the same time, however, we are capable of curing many diseases and improving overall levels of health. The same holds true for violence and peace. This requires us to diagnose the existence and manifestations of both (i.e. data collection in order to be able to describe the current condition), make prognoses as to the future development of the present condition and whether or not external intervention is needed (i.e. theory application), and facilitate deliberate therapeutic efforts to reduce violence and build positive peace, be they self-therapeutic or achieved through external intervention (i.e. conflict transformation practice). Galtung (1996) has therefore advised peace researchers to “look for causes, conditions, and contexts in various spaces - Nature, Human, Social, World, Time, Culture, [which] makes peace studies [...] challenging [and praxis] problematic, [but prevents us from being] doomed in advance [by a narrow focus]” (Galtung, 1996, p. 1).

Since internal, relational, and systemic types of ‘diseases,’ or, in the words of Kriesberg and Dayton (2012), the three bases of social conflict, do not exist in isolation, a holistic theory of human coexistence and development that accounts for the above-mentioned complexities is needed to guide the study of communal dynamics in refugee resettlement communities like Clarkston. Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, 2006) meets this need. Corresponding to Galtung’s (1996) above-cited call for multi-layered transdisciplinarity among peace researchers, Bronfenbrenner’s model includes but goes beyond the interpersonal processes described in the contact hypothesis. In this model, Bronfenbrenner advanced his ecological systems theory (1979), which suggests that individuals interact in five environmental systems, each of which impact an individual’s development and relationships. These systems range from the family unit to the culture and political system of one’s country, to the century into which we are born. They are called the micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-, and chrono-systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

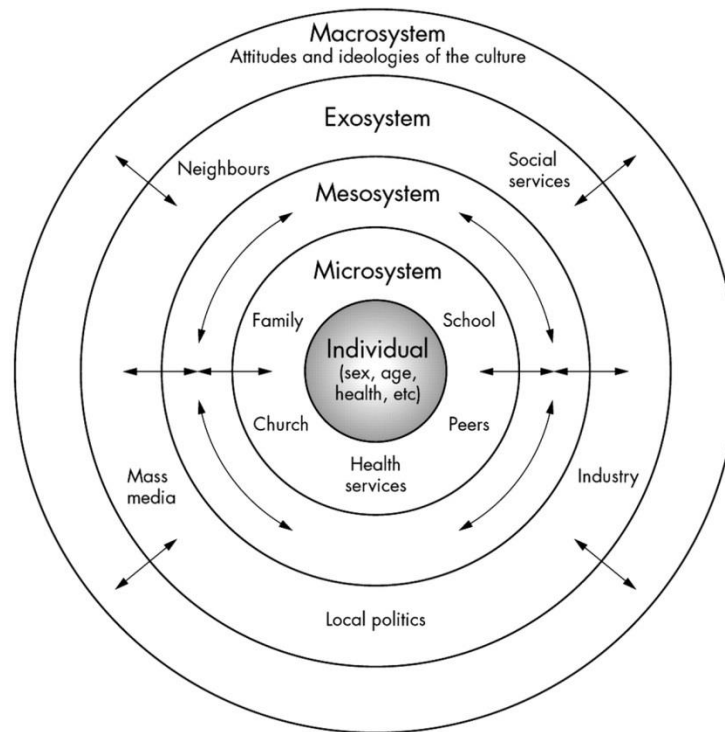


Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory²

The bioecological model of human development introduces the Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model to explain how the different layers of the ecosystem affect human beings in their development and relationships. In this PPCT model, proximal processes are defined as people's regularly recurring reciprocal interactions with "the persons, objects, and symbols in [their] immediate external environment" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 996). These proximal processes link the different layers of the ecosystem. They are influenced by the psycho-socio-cultural and demographic characteristics of the people engaging in them, by the context / environment in which they occur (ranging from people's immediate surroundings to their cultural value- and beliefs-systems), and by the time / historical events into which they are embedded.

Due to its broad scope and ability to grasp the entire spectrum of reciprocal interactions in which human beings engage with others and their physical, social, and symbolic environments, the bioecological model of human development is fit for the study of all three bases of social

² Figure published in Dunn, Masyn, Yudron, Jones, & Subramanian, (2014) and McLaren & Hawe, (2005).

conflict as described by Kriesberg and Dayton (2012). It accounts for intra- and inter-personal processes as well as for systemic interaction effects. This study therefore adopts ‘proximal processes’ as an umbrella term for a variety of interactions and meaning-making processes among people, and between them and their environments, in order to study how these processes affect the continually morphing communal dynamics and residents’ coexistence in their community.

Development of the Comprehensive Conflict Engagement Model

Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) theory provides helpful concepts for the study of the complex sources, manifestations, and dynamics of and interactions within social conflict. Beyond that, however, practitioners and scholar-practitioners also need a practical mechanism for conflict intervention that comprehensively and concurrently engages conflict at the internal, relational, and structural levels (Kriesberg & Dayton, 2012). Such a tripartite endeavor cannot be completed via a parachute intervention, where outsiders hurriedly drop in and out of conflict zones to spontaneously intervene for a brief period of time without comprehensive knowledge of the local context, roots, and manifestations of the crisis (Musa & Yusha'u, 2013). The Comprehensive Conflict Engagement Model draws on Mayer’s (2012) conflict engagement paradigm, the theoretical framework laid out above, and the power of visual imagery (Mielczarek & Perlmutter 2014; Winkler & Dauber 2014) to provide a flexibly adaptable mechanism for practically and peaceably engaging social conflict at its three bases (Kriesberg & Dayton, 2012).

As Mayer (2012) has pointed out, the transformation of complex and deep-rooted conflicts takes time. He has therefore urged practitioners (“conflict interveners”) to move beyond conflict prevention, analysis, and resolution toward a more holistic approach that spans all aspects and phases of conflict: constructive conflict engagement. This new paradigm encourages practitioners to stay engaged in conflicts even when immediate outcomes and resolution are

unlikely (Mayer, 2012). Building on this paradigm, I use the term “*comprehensive* conflict engagement strategy” in reference to an intervention that targets all three bases of social conflict - internal, relational, and structural - as defined by Kriesberg and Dayton (2012) and understands that engaging in conflict transformation is a marathon, not a sprint.

As described above, traditional small group dialogue processes have fallen short of their conflict transformative goals because they solely target the internal and relational levels of conflict, but fail to impact the structure within which those relationships exist (Galtung, 1969; Hewstone & Swart, 2011; Kriesberg & Dayton, 2012). In order to be comprehensive, conflict engagement needs to concurrently work towards the improvement of internal predispositions and sensibilities, the development of positive, cooperative relationships, and a reduction in structural violence (Galtung, 1969). In other words, if empowered individuals and cooperative relationships are the flowers that grow from seeds, then the structure is the soil in which they are planted. For the flowers to blossom, the soil needs to be watered. To foster positive intergroup relations, we need to concurrently sow seeds and “nourish” a healthy deep structure in which they can take root and grow, not just within the confines of a planter (i.e. a small group dialogue workshop), but in a vast bed of soil (i.e. the larger community / society).

To achieve this goal, the Comprehensive Conflict Engagement Model builds on the traditional small group dialogue process model, whose effectiveness in reducing intergroup prejudice, hostility, and negative stereotypes while discovering commonalities, increasing mutual understanding, rebuilding trust, and promoting conflict resolution has been tested over time and space (e.g. Allport, 1954; Azar, 2002; Cuhadar & Dayton, 2011; Fisher, 1994, 2007; Fisher & Keashly, 1991; Hewstone & Swart, 2011; Kaufman, 2002; Lieberfeld, 2002; Mitchell, 1993; Pettigrew, 1986; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Rouhana & Kelman, 1994). The goal of small group dialogue processes is that their participants become ambassadors for improved intergroup

relations based on the learning that occurred over the course of a workshop. Transfer within the CCEM is premised on the theoretical concept of proximal processes, i.e. people's regularly recurring reciprocal interactions with "the persons, objects, and symbols in [their] immediate external environment" (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 996). These proximal processes will reflect and be transformed on the basis of the insights and relational learning and growth that have resulted from project participation. To further facilitate the transfer of insights to both the participants' networks, identity groups, and local decision-makers, the CCEM enhances the small group dialogue process model with a visual product that authentically documents challenges and opportunities in diverse and divided communities and the cross-cultural relational learning and growth that occur over the course of a small group dialogue process.

Captioned visual imagery makes people's authentic views and voices transportable through time and space. Its power has been widely studied and confirmed by scholars in disciplines ranging from communication studies to film studies and psychology (Mielczarek & Perlmutter 2014; Winkler & Dauber 2014). Since the processing of visual imagery is biologically based as a function of the eyes and brain working together, photographs are universal media for reaching diverse people of all backgrounds (Dauber & Winkler 2014; Hoffman, 1998). According to Winkler and Dauber (2014), "We process images more rapidly than words, giving them visceral emotional power. Visual stimuli heighten viewer attention, improve message recall, and [can] change audience opinion" (p. 1, see also Pfau, Haigh, Holl, Tedesco, Cope, Nunnally, Schiess, Preston, Roszokowski, Martin, 2006). Furthermore, pictures also heighten message recall because viewers accept them at face value (Hariman & Lucaites, 2003; Perlmutter, 1998; Pfau et al, 2006; Dauber & Winkler, 2014). When image and text are presented in conjunction, as in the case of captioned photographs, audiences remember the

information conveyed most clearly (Drew & Grimes, 1987; Fox, 2004; Lang, 1995; Dauber & Winkler, 2014).

Due to their universal appeal, “visual images [...] expand the audience base” (Dauber & Winkler, 2014, p. 10) for their creators’ views and voices. They create proximal processes, which are engines of change (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, 2006; Tudge et al., 2009), between the creators of captioned images, the people and communities depicted in them, and their viewers, i.e. members of the participants’ networks and the community as well as local stakeholders and decision-makers with the power to shape aspects of the structure that affect coexistence in the community.³ Depending on the available skills and financial resources for a project as well as the proclivities of the individuals involved, visual information packages may take a variety of forms apart from photography, such as videography or visual art. Whatever form they take, it is important that they authentically represent grassroots views and voices and can be disseminated strategically outside of the project space to transfer the insights derived from the process to respective networks and identity groups, social service providers, and local policy makers to promote better-informed decision-making that keeps a finger on the pulse of the people and reduces structural inequities.

As explained above, I had a two-fold goal in developing this project: First, to generate data on residents’ perspectives on the communal dynamics that unite or divide the population in

³ Processes based on the CCEM are not to be understood as mechanisms for direct public governance. As discussed above, their purpose is manifold and includes the diagnosis, prognosis, and therapy of communal conflicts (Galtung, 1996). Affecting the structure is *one* of the avenues for therapy / treatment. In order to also promote the internal and relational transformations described above, CCEM-based processes are not methods of aggregation, bargaining, and direct participation in decision-making (Fung, 2006). Instead, they are safe spaces in which participants exchange their views and “explore, develop, and perhaps transform their preferences and perspectives” (Fung, 2006, p. 68). The resulting insights are used to inform those with the power to affect local decision-making by including those individuals in the process and disseminating the resulting captioned imagery post hoc. If direct participation in governance is the sole purpose of an intervention, an approach singularly designated to this purpose should be adopted.

Clarkston. Second, to build a methodological bridge between conflict theory and practice by developing, implementing, and examining the impact of a practical conflict intervention based on the herein proposed CCEM to comprehensively engage conflict at the internal, relational, and structural levels. Before delineating the selection of Photovoice to pursue these goals and how I modified it in accordance to the CCEM, I will review how conflict research and practice can be united in and through community engagement.

Uniting Research and Practice through Community Engagement

Research that engages participants as co-creators of knowledge is labeled differently in various academic disciplines. The most widely used term is action research, which Stringer (2007) has defined as “a systematic approach to investigation that enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their daily lives. Unlike traditional [...] research that looks for [generalizability], action research focuses on specific situations and localized solutions” (p. 1). Stoecker (2005) has emphasized the importance of contextual specificity in participatory action research as it ensures that the results of the research will be useful to the particular community in which it is conducted. This is ascertained by using diverse “methods that make sense to people” (p. 31) and by involving members of the community as active participants in the research process (Stoecker, 2005). Such a collaborative approach concurrently maximizes the utility to the population and limits the likelihood that assumptions made by the researcher will impact the quality of the data.

Hayes (2011) has refined the participatory action research process for application by scholar-practitioners in the conflict management field. In reference to Mayer’s (2012) conflict engagement paradigm, he has coined the concept of community engaged research. Community engaged research is a longer-term process that allows scholar-practitioners to understand subtle and often complex conflict nuances by involving “community partners as integral members of the

learning and knowledge generation processes” before developing integrated engagement strategies that will do justice to the complexity of ongoing conflicts and foster “empowerment [...], social justice, and social change” (Hayes, 2011, p. 330/331). By virtue of the sustained engagement with the communities, scholar-practitioners are able to build the relationships that are necessary for the facilitation of conflict transformation processes. Thus, community engaged research transcends data collection and conflict analysis by becoming part of the intervention.

Community engaged research is not limited to any particular methodology and should be intentionally selected based on knowledge of both the issues and the people involved. As Tudge and colleagues (2001) have argued, “there must be a clear and consistent connection in research between the theory that we use, the methods we employ, and the way in which we analyze our data” (p. 11). In addition, Hedeem (2012) has suggested that by more carefully considering the needs and dispositions of participants in conflicts, the proper conflict resolution processes can be selected and better outcomes generated. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has stated that “refugees [...] must be at the centre of decision-making concerning their protection and well-being. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the [...] problems they face, it is essential to consult them directly and to listen to them” (as cited in Green & Kloos, 2009, p. 460). However, not all research methods are equally well-suited for this line of inquiry, and the general standard of conducting ethical research - to do no harm to its participants - is necessary but not sufficient in research involving refugees (Hugman, Pittaway, Bartolomei, 2011). Hugman et al. (2011) have recommended participatory research for gaining a better understanding of refugees’ experiences and needs while respecting their autonomy and preventing a sense of being sourced for “information [that] is treated like a commodity” (p. 1277).

One exemplar of community engaged research in a resettlement context that is precedent-setting and insightful in terms of research and practice is Daley's (2007) case study of community cohesion in an inner city in the British West Midlands. Approaching her participatory research from an interpretivist perspective, Daley (2007) used interviews and visual mapping to identify "existing community interactions between refugees and [...] long-term residents, [explore] different perceptions, meanings, and patterns of community relationships, [and investigate] possible factors influencing community relations, cohesion, and integration" (p. 161). She found "a lack of meaningful relationships [and] opportunities for inter-group contact" among long-term residents and refugees, coinciding with "significant prejudice [and] underlying tension" (Daley, 2007, p. 158). Daley (2007) further discovered that "shared aspects of identity helped bring people together but small differences in culture and faith were also linked to strong divisions" (p. 158). Her findings indicate that practical community intervention is needed to facilitate genuine dialogues and set in motion long-term processes that "resolve conflict and encourage participation and co-operation" in communities with a low propensity to intermingle (Daley, 2007, p. 167).

Although in a different geographic context and with the use of a different participatory action research method, Daley's (2007) work has demonstrated the types of conversations and transformational processes that I suggest be facilitated through Photovoice in Clarkston. The Photovoice methodology fulfills the criteria described above as a process that can simultaneously satisfy the data collection needs of researchers, empower marginalized communities, and facilitate comprehensive conflict engagement. The following section describes previous uses of the Photovoice methodology as well as its utility and suitability for this research.

Photovoice as a Research and Empowerment Tool

As suggested by Tudge, Makrova, Hatfield, and Karnik (2009), the study of proximal processes “requires collecting data about regularly occurring interactions and activities with the important people, symbols, and objects in the developing individuals’ lives” (p. 207). Photovoice is a participatory action research methodology that has mainly been used in the public health field to engage marginalized groups through documentary photography and group dialogue. It “is based on the concepts that images teach, pictures can influence policy, and community people ought to participate in creating and defining the images that shape healthful public policy” (Wang, 2006, p. 148; also Wang, 1999). Because the process requires participants to reflect on and document their interactions with the people, symbols, and objects in their environment throughout the project, Photovoice is an appropriate methodology for examining proximal processes in constructed communities. Before I delineate why it also lends itself to constructively engaging conflict at the internal, relational, and structural levels when it is modified based on the CCEM to incorporate intercultural relational learning and development, I will review the origins of Photovoice, a methodology with which readers may be less familiar than with traditional qualitative methods like interviews, ethnographies, or focus groups.

Origins. Photovoice is a qualitative research methodology that promotes contextual understanding and was designed to provide participatory opportunities to marginalized people and communities (Green & Kloos, 2009). Resembling narrative approaches like autobiographies, autoethnographies, life and oral histories, as well as literary journalism, Photovoice was devised to promote empowerment among its participants and their communities (Alvermann, 2000; Green & Kloos, 2009; Foster-Fishman, Nowell, Deacon, Nievar, McCann, 2005; Rappaport, 1995, 2000; Wang & Burris, 1997). The Cornell Empowerment Group (1989) has defined empowerment as “an intentional, on-going process centered in the local community, involving

mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and group participation, through which people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources” (p. 2, as cited in Rappaport, 1995, p. 802). Kenney (2009) has described the development of people’s “own realistic solutions for improving their lives” (p. 100) as an additional characteristic of empowerment. Reflecting on the intersection of empowerment and narratives, Rappaport (1995) has emphasized that “the ability to tell one’s story, and to have access to and influence over collective stories, is a powerful resource” (p. 802). In this way, community narratives and Photovoice alike are powerful personal and social change agents that help people take individual and collective control of their stories and that promote empowerment (Rappaport, 1995).

Photovoice is theoretically founded in feminist theory, which commands inclusivity in research and the acknowledgement of power issues, a community-based approach to documentary photography that unveils social grievances and political realities, and Freire’s (1970, 1973) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and *Education for Critical Consciousness* (Duffy, 2011; Wang & Burris, 1997). Freire (1970, 1973) understood teachers and learners as co-creators of knowledge through an egalitarian process of communal introspection, which he referred to as dialogue. In his own field work, Freire engaged in informal conversations to identify emotionally charged themes in people’s discourse. Based on these themes, he sketched drawings, which he used to stimulate dialogue (Carlson, Engebretson, & Chamberlain, 2006). Freire’s (1973) theory of social change is that through dialogue, disempowered individuals can attain increased levels of consciousness, be empowered to critically analyze social injustices, and take the initiative to promote social change. Through such education for critical consciousness, they can move from the magical level, which includes the passive acceptance of their circumstances and social oppression, to the naïve level, at which people can detect social injustice but blame it on their peers instead of analyzing its fundamental root causes, to the level of critical consciousness,

where “individuals become aware that their own assumptions shape the interpretations of reality [and take] responsibility for choices that either maintain or change that reality” (Carlson, Engebretson, & Chamberlain, 2006, p. 837; also Freire, 1970).

Beyond this education for critical consciousness, Freire (1970) emphasized the importance of intertwining theory and practice, science and action. He posited that reflection without action is merely an armchair revolution, true reflection leads to action, and action without reflection is pure activism (Freire, 1970). This philosophy undergirding the Photovoice methodology is consistent with Galtung’s (1996) diagnosis-prognosis-therapy triangle and with the CCEM. In previous projects, Photovoice has been proven to be an effective data collection and empowerment tool to raise public awareness of marginalized populations’ needs (e.g. Duffy, 2011; Gant et al., 2009; Green & Kloos, 2009; Hergenrather, Rhodes, Cowan, Bardhoshi, & Pula, 2009; Kessi, 2011; Novak, 2010; Nykiforuk, 2011; Pritzker, LaChapelle, & Tatum, 2012; Rush, Murphy, & Kozak, 2012; Smith, 2012; Teti, Murray, Johnson, & Binson, 2012; Wang, 1999, 2006; Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang, Burris, Xiang, 1996; Wang, Cash, & Powers, 2000; Wilkin & Liamputtong, 2010). However, no previous projects have concurrently explored the use and utility of Photovoice as a comprehensive conflict engagement strategy in constructed or other diverse and divided communities while collecting data and fostering empowerment. I will delineate in the section on the contributions of this research why and how it also lends itself to constructively engaging conflict at the internal, relational, and structural levels when modified according on the CCEM to incorporate intercultural relational learning and development. Before further discussing this adaptation of Photovoice for the field of conflict management, I will review key features and previous uses of the methodology.

Key features and suitability. Researchers using Photovoice ask participants to photographically depict and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of their communities (Wang &

Burris, 1997). Because this methodology gives study participants the opportunity to decide what particular facets of life in their community they want to address, it opens up for discussion any and all proximal processes that either prevent or breed social conflict at its three levels - internal, interpersonal, and systemic (Kriesberg & Dayton, 2012). Due to its ability to capture a broad range of lived experiences from residents' perspectives, the Photovoice methodology is particularly suitable for conducting exploratory research in complex environments such as refugee resettlement communities. It has been used as a platform for people who are "underrepresented, labeled, or stigmatized [...] to advocate their concerns using their language and experiences" (Wang, 2006, p. 159). This is facilitated by strategically using the images resulting from a Photovoice project to reach and inform community leaders as well as local decision- and policy makers "about issues of concern at the grassroots level" (Wang, Cash, & Powers, 2000; also Wang, Burris, Xiang, 1996). The more closely these individuals are involved with a project, be it as members of an ad hoc advisory board or as participants themselves - the more opportunities are created for fostering "a co-learning process in which [community members], policy makers, and researchers contribute to and learn from one another's expertise" (Wang, 2006, p. 156, also Kenney, 2009; Wang, Morrel-Samuels, Hutchison, Bell, Pestronk, 2004). To the extent that local policy- and decision-makers are involved, relationships are built and a sort of direct "pipeline" is created for community members' concerns and ideas into the consciousness of stakeholders with the power to implement structural changes at the local level (Kenney, 2009; Wang, 1999, 2006; Wang, Burris, Xiang, 1996; Wang, Cash, & Powers, 2000; Wang, et al., 2004).⁴

Photovoice allows those who are not fluent readers or writers of the dominant language to make their voices heard with the help of visual imagery (Wang & Burris, 1997). This makes

⁴ This constitutes an additional transfer mechanism to those discussed earlier in the section on the "Development of the Comprehensive Conflict Engagement Model."

Photovoice particularly apt for research in Clarkston where marginalization in the greater context of American society is pervasive and English literacy is low (P. Reeser [ESL instructor and community activist], personal communication, February 7, 2013). However, having one's voice heard is not merely a question of language, but also of political representation (Hayduk, 2004; Iyer, Mani, Mishra, & Topalova, 2012; Raskin, 1993; Song, 2009). Clarkston is a town where a large segment of the population has no formal representation because refugees cannot apply for citizenship until they have been in the United States for six years (United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2015, United States Department of State, 2015b). As a result, they are impacted by many policy decisions in their daily lives on which they, in turn, have no impact as voters although the country makes a commitment to resettled refugees that provides a clear path to citizenship (Hayduk, 2004; Raskin, 1993; Song, 2009; United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2015, United States Department of State, 2015b). In a Photovoice project that brings together diverse members of the Clarkston population, including citizens and non-citizens, those without formal representation are lent a megaphone to make their voices heard since the viewers of their captioned images and collages do not know who is a citizen and who is not. In this way, political stakeholders who have an open ear for the project output will hear the voices of *all* participants, regardless of whether or not they are their legal constituents.

Although Photovoice originates from the public health field, it is flexible for adaptation to a variety of disciplines and has become increasingly popular in different social sciences (Duffy, 2011; Gant et al., 2009; Green & Kloos, 2009; Hergenrather, Rhodes, Cowan, Bardhoshi, & Pula, 2009; Kessi, 2011; Novak, 2010; Nykiforuk, 2011; Pritzker, LaChapelle, & Tatum, 2012; Rush, Murphy, & Kozak, 2012; Smith, 2012; Teti, Murray, Johnson, & Binson, 2012; Wang, 1999, 2006; Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang, Burris, Xiang, 1996; Wang, Cash, & Powers, 2000; Wang et al., 2004; Wilkin & Liamputtong, 2010). In these studies, whose participants ranged from

internally displaced persons to women living with HIV, the elderly, homeless people, and urban youths, Photovoice was used as an outlet for participants to share their perceptions and to appeal “to policy makers [...] in the interest of social change” (Green & Kloos, 2009, p. 462).

Photovoice makes visible “talk, behaviors, thoughts, and emotions [of which] researchers are otherwise unaware” or to which they would not have access (Novak, 2010, p. 307). The resulting data make it possible to appropriately adjust policies that have been developed based on faulty assumptions about the respective communities (Wang & Burris, 1997).

Best practices. Three main challenges involved with Photovoice projects have been identified in the literature: 1) a possible overload in pictures, 2) difficulty making participants understand that they are becoming co-researchers and as such need to follow IRB protocol when taking pictures of others, and 3) ensuring that participants move from mere description to interpretation of their images in the discussion phase (Green & Kloos, 2009; Novak, 2010; Teti et al., 2012; Wang, 2006; Wang & Burris, 1997). As the authors have noted, these issues can be controlled when they are anticipated in advance by 1) limiting the number of photographs participants are asked to submit, 2) revisiting regularly the ethical guidelines that need to be followed and modeling / practicing repeatedly how to properly obtain written releases from people whose pictures are taken, and 3) showing participants examples of other Photovoice study outcomes, jointly analyzing how the images were used, and discussing / modeling how to interpret images (Green & Kloos, 2009; Novak, 2010; Teti et al., 2012; Wang, 2006; Wang & Burris, 1997). I incorporated this advice in the development of the training curriculum and the subsequent sessions to circumvent the described challenges. In chapter 3, I describe how I built on these theoretical and methodological insights in order to explore the utility of the Comprehensive Conflict Engagement Model, applied through Photovoice, not only as a data

collection and empowerment tool, but, in addition to those already established uses, also as a comprehensive conflict engagement strategy in highly diverse constructed communities.

Contributions of this Research

This research contributes to the existing body of work in two ways. The first contribution of this research is the generation of missing knowledge on residents' emic perspectives of and experiences with refugee resettlement and life in constructed communities (Demusz, 2000; Green & Kloos, 2009; Hurt, 2013; Rajaram, 2002; UNHCR, 2006). As discussed above, this information is needed by policy makers and social service agencies in order to make better-informed policy and programming decisions that meet the needs of the population (Daley, 2007; Hurt, 2013). By examining the intergroup dynamics between African Americans, refugees, and Caucasians in Clarkston, more in-depth and differentiated knowledge on manifestations of the 'marginalization among the marginalized' phenomenon has been generated. Gathering such knowledge is a necessary precursor to implementing sound policies and setting in motion sustainable, inclusive, and culturally relevant conflict engagement processes in Clarkston and other resettlement communities (Daley, 2007; Hurt, 2013).

The second contribution pertains to the connection of theory, methodology, and practice through the use of Photovoice as a comprehensive conflict engagement strategy. I have developed the Comprehensive Conflict Engagement Model (CCEM) based on an explicit theoretical framework that integrates previously disconnected concepts, models, and theories from the field of peace and conflict studies and related social sciences. This framework explains how the CCEM, applied through Photovoice, may be effective as a comprehensive conflict engagement strategy in constructed and other diverse and divided communities.

As documented above, Photovoice has been used successfully to empower individuals and promote social change since the inception of the methodology two decades ago (e.g. Duffy,

2011; Gant et al., 2009; Green & Kloos, 2009; Hergenrather, Rhodes, Cowan, Bardhoshi, & Pula, 2009; Kenney, 2009; Kessi, 2011; Novak, 2010; Nykiforuk, 2011; Pritzker, LaChapelle, & Tatum, 2012; Rush, Murphy, & Kozak, 2012; Smith, 2012; Teti, Murray, Johnson, & Binson, 2012; Wang, 1999, 2006; Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang, Burris, Xiang, 1996; Wang, Cash, & Powers, 2000; Wang et al., 2004; Wilkin & Liamputtong, 2010). Through the lens of the CCEM, the utility of the Photovoice methodology in impacting internal and structural causes of conflict has been demonstrated in those studies. However, it has not previously been used as a conflict engagement tool to engage conflict at the relational level, among diverse project participants belonging to conflicting groups. At the same time, small group dialogue processes have been shown to be efficient mechanisms for promoting internal attitudinal shifts and relational transformations, but they have failed to impact the structure within which those relationships are embedded (e.g. Azar, 2002; Cuhadar & Dayton, 2011; Fisher, 1994, 2007; Fisher & Keashly, 1991; Hewstone & Swart, 2011; Kaufman, 2002; Lieberfeld, 2002; Mitchell, 1993; Rouhana & Kelman, 1994).

If the traditional Photovoice methodology is modified based on the CCEM to incorporate the relational element present in small group dialogue processes via an assignment that encourages participants to hear and take each other's perspectives, then such a CCEM-based adaptation of Photovoice can concurrently target the three levels of social conflict in constructed and other diverse and divided communities. The contribution of this first-time application of the CCEM through Photovoice is illustrated in the following figure and can be approached and understood from two perspectives: from the vantage point of a scholar-practitioner using Photovoice, the methodology can be enriched based on the CCEM by adding the relational component. To the conflict practitioner using small group dialogue processes to engage conflict,

these processes can be enhanced by adding a visual imagery-based mechanism for promoting structural change.

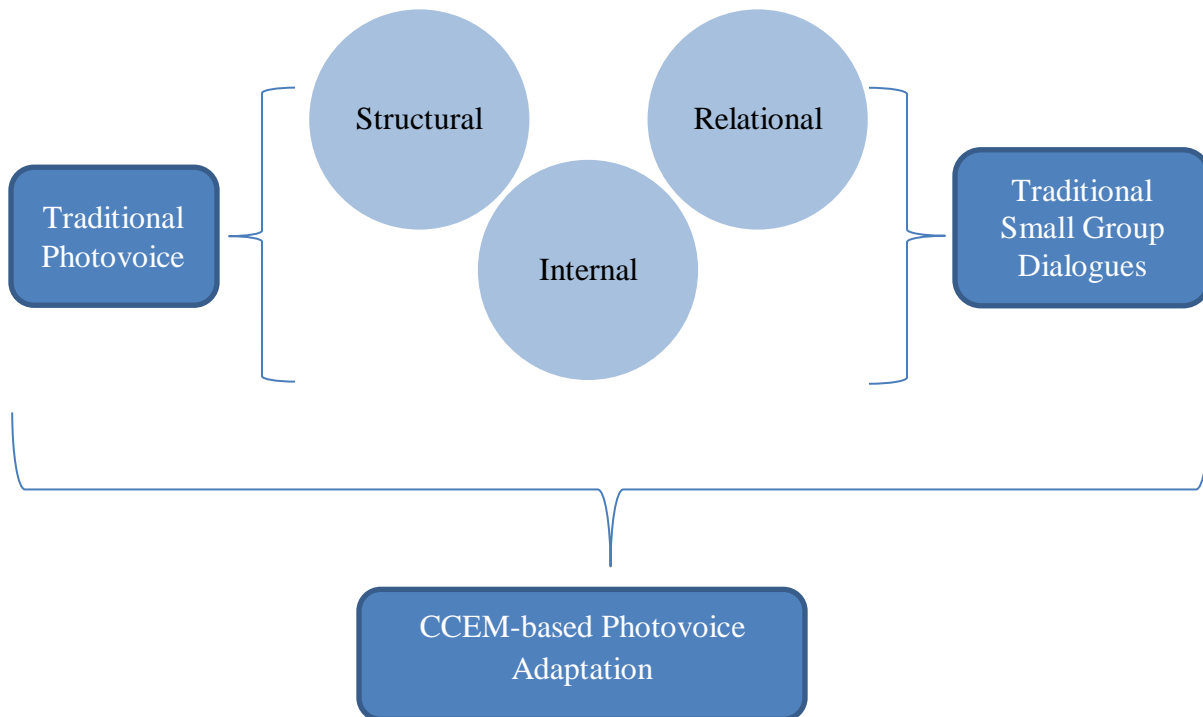


Figure 2. CCEM-based Photovoice Adaptation

By combining visual imagery and dialogue, Photovoice is particularly well-suited for identifying and documenting proximal processes, i.e. individuals' recurring reciprocal interactions with the people, objects, and symbols in their environment that shape their daily lives (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, 2006). It not only captures the views of the people taking the photos, but also represents the larger communities that are captured *in* them (Wang & Burris, 1997). Consequently, it is suited for identifying and documenting from an insider's perspective internal, relational, and structural sources of conflict (Galtung, 1969; Kriesberg & Dayton, 2012).

To move beyond documentation and directly engage conflict at the relational level, the perspective-taking paradigm (Krauss & Morsella, 2006) suggests that it is necessary to encourage

participants to hear and take each other's perspectives. As stated by Krauss and Morsella (2006), "Perspective taking assumes that individuals perceive the world from differing vantage points and that, because the experiences of each individual depend to some degree on his or her vantage point, messages must be formulated with this perspective in mind" (p. 150). In other words, people can only understand and constructively engage others' perspectives after they understand "where they are coming from" – quite literally so in the case of Clarkston or other refugee resettlement sites where people come together from around the world. Perspective-taking encourages the disclosure of personal and impersonal information and increases speakers' ability to appropriately code and decode the messages they send and receive depending on the individual(s) with whom they interact (Johnson, Johnson, & Tjosvold, 2006). In a conflict situation, perspective-taking increases mutual understanding, recognition of the legitimacy of the other's concerns, retention of the other's information and perspective, and concern for the other's well-being, which results in "the achievement of creative, high-quality problem solving" (Johnson, Johnson, & Tjosvold, 2006, p. 76; also Carnevale & Pruitt, 1992; Pruitt & Kim, 2004; Weitzman & Weitzman, 2006). Perspective-taking also promotes more positive perceptions of the dialogue process itself, its participants, and the generated output (Johnson, Johnson, & Tjosvold, 2006). Based on these insights and in accordance with the CCEM, I devised a relational Photovoice assignment to encourage perspective taking and promote relational growth.⁵

As discussed above, previous studies have shown that, compared to other small group dialogue processes, Photovoice also holds the potential for greater impact in the broader community. The captioned images authentically and tangibly illustrate residents' experiences and concerns. Visual imagery presented in conjunction with text has a longer-lasting impact on perceptions than words alone (Drew & Grimes, 1987; Fox, 2004; Lang, 1995; Pfau et al., 2006;

⁵ For details, please see chapter 3.

Winkler & Dauber 2014). The captioned images resulting from Photovoice can be used to reach and inform stakeholders and decision-makers who have the power to promote structural change outside of the project space by changing policies and creating new programs (Wang, 1999; Wang, Burris, Xiang, 1996; Wang, Cash, Powers, 2000; Wang et al., 2004). The methodology thus lends itself to facilitating comprehensive conflict engagement that establishes direct and indirect contact between project participants, the community, policy makers, and society at large. It thereby addresses all three bases of social conflict - internal, relational, and structural (Hewstone & Swart, 2011; Kriesberg & Dayton, 2012; Mayer, 2012).

In this way, the herein developed Comprehensive Conflict Engagement Model applied through Photovoice is theoretically capable of spanning *all three* sides of Galtung's (1996) diagnosis-prognosis-therapy triangle addressing the internal, relational, and structural bases of social conflict (Kriesberg & Dayton, 2012). It is used to collect data (diagnosis) based on which we can 1) make prognoses as to the future development of the situation and whether or not external intervention is needed and 2) facilitate deliberate conflict engagement efforts to build positive peace. To explore this in practice, this project deviated from most previous Photovoice projects and engaged a heterogeneous, rather than homogeneous, group of participants who broadly reflected the diversity of conflicting groups in Clarkston. By creating a micro-environment that imitated the intercultural challenges faced in the larger community, this study was designed to assess if participation in the project encouraged individuals to overcome these challenges and build more collaborative and supportive relationships. This new application of the Photovoice methodology resulted in the development of a set of best practices for its implementation. Consequently, both the process and the product of this research can be replicated elsewhere and used by researchers, policy makers, and service providers to make better-informed decisions that meet the needs of their target populations and by conflict

management practitioners seeking to comprehensively engage conflicts in diverse constructed communities.

Chapter 3:

The Comprehensive Conflict Engagement Model in Praxis:

An Application through Photovoice

“Photography is more than just an image on a paper or posted on a wall; it’s a powerful or light-hearted message that conveys the message the photographer wants the audience to see through his or her lens. Photovoice has taught me that images are more powerful ‘voice’ tools rather than just arguing or not finding the right words to send your message across. In the click of a button and a flash of light an image is produced to express that message and even more in a powerful way. Photovoice has given me the courage and opened my eyes to the beauty in the Clarkston community and also the harsh reality that the residents face.” (Haben, participant)

Aims and Objectives in Data Collection

The objective of this research was two-fold and based on Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970), which emphasizes the importance of intertwining theory and practice, science and action. This research examined how everyday interactions affect the communal dynamics in refugee resettlement communities and explored the utility of the CCEM applied through Photovoice as a practical conflict engagement strategy to foster empowerment and transform relationships in diverse constructed communities strained by intercultural tensions.

While grassroots community activists and New York Times journalist Warren St. John (2007a, 2007b, 2009) have shared anecdotal evidence of intercultural tensions between the host and refugee populations in Clarkston, no scientific inquiry of these dynamics has been published and only little detail is publicly accessible (Alexander, 2013; Horizon Theatre, 2014; PBS, 2012; St. John, 2007a, 2007b, 2009). Hence, this research was exploratory. It aimed to generate knowledge of community members’ perspectives on the challenges and opportunities associated with refugee resettlement and life in constructed communities, and to examine the existence of patterns of marginalization among the marginalized.

According to Wang and Burris (1997) and Kenney (2009), the Photovoice methodology was developed to identify needs and challenges experienced by marginalized populations and to

foster social change and empowerment among participants in their communal contexts. By stimulating dialogues and critical self-reflection, this research was intended to foster empowerment and conscientization (“developing consciousness of social and political forces that limit people’s potential” (Kenney, 2009, p. 97) among diverse members of the Clarkston community. Expanding on these traditional uses of the Photovoice methodology that engage conflict at the internal and structural levels, this project was adapted based on the CCEM to encourage perspective-taking to promote humanization of ‘the other’ (Freire, 1970) and build positive, collaborative relationships among the diverse project participants.

Research Design and Procedure

Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) bioecological model of human development is based on his ecological systems theory, which suggests that in order to comprehend people and their development, we need to consider the system in which they live, i.e. their communal and environmental context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Therefore, the Photovoice project was embedded in ethnographic fieldwork in the form of participant observations.

Ethnographic fieldwork. “Participant-observation is the hallmark of ethnographic field research. It consists of simultaneously participating in as many of the activities as possible at a particular site [...], observing what is transpiring, and interpreting what the researcher has participated in and observed” (Seligmann, 2005, p. 235). Participant observation makes people feel comfortable in the researcher’s presence, builds rapport, and generates knowledge of the common beliefs and practices of specific communities (Mertens, 2005; Patton, 2002). Through participant observation, ethnographers are able to understand the community under study from both an emic and etic perspective (Bernard, 2006; Creswell, 1998; Mertens, 2005; Seligmann, 2005). Drawing on a range of data generated from a variety of potential sources including field notes, photographs, interviews, recordings, and questionnaires, participant observers can paint a

holistic cultural portrait in which they aggregate what they learned about a community and its complexity (Bernard, 2006; Creswell, 1998; Creswell & Miller, 2000). The resulting thick descriptions provide detailed insights into particular actions, interactions, and experiences, and contextualize individuals in particular situations, which brings to life for the reader their relationships with others (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

In this way, ethnographic fieldwork enabled me to gather comprehensive information that I could use to contextualize the views shared by the people in the Photovoice project. This elucidates the complementarity of the two approaches. Participant observations cast a wider net than Photovoice projects. They allow researchers to get a general sense of the proximal processes that affect communal dynamics and to sample a broader range of perspectives on life in town. Participant observations also help researchers become familiar faces in the community and build collaborative relationships and networks. These can be leveraged to recruit participants for a Photovoice project, foster community buy-in, and generate an interest in the photo exhibits (Bernard, 2006). Pursuing this strategy has allowed me to develop deeper knowledge of the community, which I utilized to fine-tune the Photovoice project and to complement and triangulate its findings (Bernard, 2006; Creswell, 1998; Mertens, 2005; Seligmann, 2005).

In April 2013, I got engaged in the Clarkston community to better understand the socio-ecological features of the Clarkston community, people's attitudes, and the proximal processes affecting intergroup dynamics (Bernard, 2006; Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Creswell, 1998; Mertens, 2005; Rubin & Babbie, 2005; Seligmann, 2005). My initial point of contact was the son of a local pastor who worked as an ESL teacher and identified as a community activist. Over an informal Ethiopian dinner, he shared his perceptions and experiences in Clarkston and provided me with additional contacts for widening my network. Among his referrals was the Clarkston Community Center, which is a central organization in town. My dissertation chair and I met with

the director, who was familiar with the Photovoice methodology and supported its implementation in Clarkston. She provided me with another set of contacts and highlighted a local non-profit organization, CDF: A Collective Action Initiative (previously known as the Clarkston Development Foundation), whose executive staff shared the same philosophical orientation towards community engagement and whom she recommended as a well-suited community partner. She also provided me with the meeting information of an interfaith group where I would be able to meet a broad range of residents. I followed up with all the leads I was given, thereby systematically broadening my network.

The first meeting with CDF confirmed that our community engagement philosophies and approaches were complementary, which became the foundation for mutually supportive collaboration. I put to use my background as a community mediator and started volunteering as a facilitator for CDF's community trust process.⁶ At the same time, their leadership leveraged community contacts ranging from residents to service providers and city officials on my behalf. By endorsing my project, they aided both in raising awareness of the project and future results among community stakeholders, and in recruiting participants. Through this process I was also introduced to the leadership of Clarkston First Baptist Church who shared information about the project with the congregation and made available the needed meeting space at their activity center.

In the following months, I continued to facilitate CDF's trust sessions and attended a wide range of community meetings including interfaith dialogues and quarterly meetings of the Georgia Coalition of Refugee Stakeholders. Since I wanted to strategically establish myself as a

⁶ In this project, we guided diverse Clarkston residents through a collaborative participatory process in which they directly determined a community project for funding and selected a group of trustees to oversee the implementation of the project

familiar face in the community with whom members of the general population would feel comfortable, I sought informal opportunities in which I could participate not as “a professional wearing slacks,” but as a “regular person wearing jeans” (see Bernard, 2006; Creswell, 1998; Greenwood & Levin, 2007; Mertens, 2005; Stoecker, 2005; Stringer, 2007). With this goal of building grassroots relationships in mind, I attended community festivals, helped clean the streets on King Day, and participated in a multi-day Kingian non-violence training that was hosted by the Clarkston Community Center. I also took part in the painting of a public mural. This collaborative effort involved individuals from all walks of life and was intended to build community both among painters and viewers of the art. Through my participation, I was able to deepen previously established connections and to make new ones.

While engaged in the community in preparation for the Photovoice project, I took note of people’s interactions and recurring discourses. I also conducted informal conversational interviews with key informants and a broad range of people representing the diversity of the community (Bernard, 2006; Rubin & Babbie, 2005; Seligmann, 2005). Throughout my involvement in Clarkston, I took notes of observations and conversations and kept a journal to reflect on my own perceptions (Bernard, 2006; Kressel, 2006; Rubin & Babbie, 2005; Seligmann, 2005).

My sustained engagement has continued beyond the completion of data collection. It has included a summer camp project with Clarkston children and youth, in which I introduced them to basic photography skills and storytelling through imagery, the continued facilitation of dialogues for CDF’s community trust process, and the painting of a second public mural. I also stayed in touch with many of the project participants and community partners. This ongoing involvement in the community has enabled me to gather comprehensive information that helped contextualize the views that were shared and triangulate the findings in the Photovoice project,

whose accuracy and authenticity would have otherwise been difficult to assess (Bernard, 2006; Rubin & Babbie, 2005). The following section describes how I adapted the Photovoice research procedure for conflict engagement in Clarkston and how I collected data to assess how participants were affected by the process.

Adapting the Photovoice process for conflict engagement in Clarkston. The Photovoice methodology itself is an image- and dialogue-based form of participatory action research. Researchers have used this two-step process successfully to create knowledge on marginalized people's perceptions and understandings of their communal dynamics, and to stimulate dialogue and change within the participating communities (Duffy, 2011; Gant et al., 2009; Green & Kloos, 2009; Hergenrather, Rhodes, Cowan, Bardhoshi, & Pula, 2009; Kessi, 2011; Novak, 2010; Nykiforuk, 2011; Pritzker, LaChapelle, & Tatum, 2012; Rush, Murphy, & Kozak, 2012; Smith, 2012; Teti, Murray, Johnson, & Binson, 2012; Wang, 1999, 2006; Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang, Burris, Xiang, 1996; Wang, Cash, & Powers, 2000; Wang et al., 2004; Wilkin & Liamputtong, 2010).

This project generally followed the Photovoice philosophy and protocol established by Wang and colleagues (Wang, 2006; Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang et al., 2004), but in details deviated from previous projects in accordance with the CCEM in order to explore the adaptability and utility of the methodology as a tool of constructive conflict engagement. Adapting the process consisted of several innovations that encompassed the inclusion of a heterogeneous group of participants, the use of an associative exercise and the discussion of optical illusions to prime the interested individuals for project participation, the mixed use of digital and cell phone cameras, the development and use of an online portal and website, the inclusion of self-reflective and relational perspective-taking assignments, and the examination of project impact on the participants via post-session and exit questionnaires as well as retrospective interviews.

Photovoice Process Adaptation
1. Recruitment of a heterogeneous group of participants
2. Priming via associative exercise and discussion of optical illusions
3. Use of digital and cell phone cameras
4. Development and use of an online portal and website
5. Inclusion of self-reflective and relational perspective-taking assignments
6. Examination of project impact on participants via questionnaires and retrospective interviews

Table 1. Photovoice process adaptation

Most previous projects convened relatively homogeneous, non-internally conflicting groups of participants and subsequently raised awareness of their situation or needs with the surrounding society. This project intentionally brought together members of diverse, conflicting groups within the Clarkston community to examine if the Photovoice methodology can be used as a practical conflict engagement tool. By creating a micro-environment that paralleled some of the intercultural dynamics faced in the larger community, this study was used to assess if participation in the project allowed individuals to build more collaborative, supportive relationships and promote structural changes in the interest of the community. The project consisted of six stages: recruitment, training, photo dialogues, action strategy development, assessment, and photo exhibitions, which will be discussed in the following sections.

Participant recruitment. Following the established Photovoice protocol (Kenney, 2009; Wang, 2006; Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang et al., 2004), I leveraged community contacts including CDF, the Community Center, First Baptist Church, and other individuals whom I had met during my involvement in Clarkston, in order to jointly identify potential change agents who had decision-making power that could be used to improve the status quo in town. Several city officials and leaders in the local non-profit sector agreed to get involved in the project. The

Regional Representative of the Office of Refugee Resettlement also expressed an interest in the project and asked for a presentation of its results to her and her colleagues. In this way, I created an audience for the project, its participants, and outcomes prior to recruiting the participants themselves.

A Photovoice project should have seven to ten participants, a number that allows for “practical ease and in-depth discussion” (Wang, 2006, p. 149) and generates sufficient but manageable data for analysis (Kenney, 2009; Wang, 2006). Due to the risk of attrition over the course of the project (Kenney, 2009), I aimed to initially sample approximately 15 participants who broadly reflected the diversity of Clarkston. To ensure the feasibility of the project, the following selection criteria were established: All participants should be adults (i.e. at least 18 years of age) living, working, or regularly volunteering in the 30021 ZIP code, and identifying as members of the Clarkston community. All participants had to be able and willing to attend all group meetings and commit to the project timeline (Kenney, 2009). They also needed to have at least intermediate English language competency. As a former ESL teacher, I was able to work with non-fluent speakers of English, but I did not have the resources to hire translators for multiple foreign languages. This limitation will be considered in chapter 7. To reflect the diversity of the people living in Clarkston, I aimed to recruit men and women, refugees from various countries of origin, African Americans, long-term and more recent Caucasian residents, individuals who were more and less active in the community, people of different educational, economic, and religious backgrounds, and different age groups to participate in the project. I also sought to involve local policy makers in order to ensure from the onset that the participants’ voices would be heard by those who had the power to effectively respond to their concerns.

In order to purposively recruit these individuals, I leveraged my previously established community contacts to reach potential project participants via snowball sampling after explaining

to my contacts the diverse types of people I was looking to recruit (Bernard, 2006). Since the study involved hard-to-reach and vulnerable populations, these key informants including community leaders, refugee service providers, clergy, and ESL teachers assisted me in identifying and developing a wide-cast referral network of community members whom I would not otherwise have been able to reach (Bernard, 2006). They also advised me on where to strategically place flyers around town to reach a wide audience. Furthermore, I directly invited suitable individuals with whom I had established relationships through my sustained community engagement. This recruitment strategy proved to be most successful since four of the participants in the Photovoice project were people with whom I had built relationships while painting, three had participated in the trust process, and two attended the interfaith dialogues.⁷

Prospective participants attended a recruitment session held at the CDF offices, during which I explained the purpose and timeline of the Photovoice project, discussed associated risks and benefits, emphasized the time commitment, and “convey[ed] expectations for project involvement” (Kenney, 2009, p. 101). After this overview, those interested in participating in the project signed their informed consent forms. They also participated in a practical exercise that encouraged them to share their perceptions of several optical illusions such as the well-known “My Wife and My Mother-in-Law” picture, drawn by cartoonist W.E. Hill, in which one can see a young woman, an old woman, or both, depending on one’s focus of attention and sensory organization (Boring, 1930).

⁷ Considering the high level of diversity in Clarkston and the relatively small number of people participating in Photovoice projects, it was not possible to attempt to randomly select a representative sample of the population, which could have maximized the inclusivity and representativeness of the project and its outcomes (Bernard, 2006; Fung, 2006). I therefore prioritized recruiting individuals who fit the criteria laid out above, recognizing that this strategy would preclude generalizability in the statistic sense. This is a challenge faced by most small group processes and qualitative research (Bernard, 2006), but one that did not prevent me from developing and testing the first-time application and utility of the CCEM through Photovoice. I will address in chapter 7 how future projects could be designed to create a forum that is more inclusive and more representative (Fung, 2006).



Figure 3. "My Wife and My Mother-in-Law"⁸

This exercise highlighted the power of visual imagery, the influence of perspective on what people see in a picture, and the power of words to help others see what we see. The recruitment sessions ended with an associative exercise in which prospective project participants reflected on key concepts central to the project, such as community, culture, and diversity.

Associative Exercise
When you think about <u>Clarkston</u> , what comes to your mind? Please write down three key words.
When I say <u>community</u> , what does that make you think of? Please write down three key words.
When I say <u>diversity</u> , what comes to your mind? Please write down three key words.
What does <u>culture</u> mean to you? Please write down three key words.

Table 2. Associative exercise

The participants. Upon completion of my recruitment efforts, fifteen individuals were signed up to participate in the Photovoice project, twelve of whom completed the entire process. Expecting some attrition, I had recruited more than the seven to ten individuals deemed ideal for

⁸ Figure published in Boring (1930).

Photovoice projects, so the project was not threatened by a few individuals' withdrawal (Kenney, 2009; Wang, 2006). Two prospective participants withdrew before the training because of conflicting work commitments. One of these individuals was a city official who had been an avid supporter of the project from the earliest stages of project development. Fortunately, another city official was able to participate and represent city government in this project. The other individual who withdrew prior to the training worked in education, and while she regretted not being able to participate, she expressed a desire and need for a subsequent project at her school. One additional participant withdrew after the training and first subsequent dialogue session because she felt overwhelmed with the technological aspects of participating in the study. Since she contributed data to the study both in images and dialogues, I have included her contributions in the subsequent analyses.

The thirteen participants included three African Americans, four Caucasian Americans, one Indian American, two Ethiopians, one Eritrean, one Somali, and one Congolese. Within this group were nine women and four men who ranged in age from 18 to 73. Education levels among the group ranged from primary school education to Master's degrees and a PhD, and the participants identified with various faiths including Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and the Ethiopian Orthodox church. Socio-economically, the group was diverse and included individuals who were receiving food stamps and lived in public housing or who sustained a family of eight on a single income as well as middle class home owners. While several of the participants were parents of adult children, two of them were raising their young and teenage children in Clarkston at the time of the project. Not unlike the kinds of groups convened in many other small group dialogue processes, the Photovoice participants were not a group of violently clashing extremists (Fisher, 1994, 2007; Mitchell, 1993; Rouhana & Kelman, 1994). Instead, they were relatively moderate individuals who each brought to the table their own diverse perspectives, but who were

generally respectful of each other's views and differences. Two thirds of the group had previously been involved in initiatives that were purposefully inclusive and welcomed diverse members of the community in an effort to share an activity or achieve a common goal. Half of these individuals had been more engaged in the community than the others and were recognized by the rest of the group as actively engaged individuals. The remaining third of the group had only had limited exposure prior to the project or had only recently started to get more involved. Approximately nine participants attended each session⁹, which was comparable to other Photovoice projects and allowed for "practical ease and in-depth discussion" (Wang, 2006, p. 149) and generated sufficient but manageable data for analysis (Kenney, 2009; Wang, 2006).

For ease in reporting and reading the project discussions and results, I have created pseudonyms for the participants. In order to protect their confidentiality, only their ethnicity and gender will be associated with the pseudonyms.¹⁰ Carroll, Chloe, and Lynn are African American females, Amita is an Indian American female, Tigist is an Ethiopian female, Haben is an Eritrean female, Gargaaro is a Somali female, Grace is a Congolese female, and Marjorie is a Caucasian American female. Kelile is an Ethiopian male and Tigist's father.¹¹ Brad, John, and Frank are Caucasian American males.

⁹ Although the participants had committed to attending all sessions, life happened and scheduling conflicts and sickness led to absences, most of which were compensated via intensive commenting on the pictures via the website or in direct communication with me.

¹⁰ To protect the respondents' identity and the confidentiality of their responses, I only divulge their ethnic background and gender. Other factors that may have impacted their views include but are not limited to their length of stay in Clarkston, previous life experiences, class / socio-economic status, as well as educational and religious backgrounds. However, to preserve confidentiality and limit the risk of potential negative impacts on the participants' reputation or quality of life as a result of being identified, I am withholding this information. Since the small number of participants would have precluded any meaningful statistical generalizations based on these demographics, this was both a necessary and worthwhile tradeoff in order to be able to get at sensitive issues in the project.

¹¹ Kelile, Tigist, and their family came to the United States as immigrants after they had won green cards through the diversity lottery. However, they had sought to leave Ethiopia due to continued conflicts and have experienced many of the same challenges in Clarkston as individuals who arrived under the refugee status. As immigrants, they did not receive the same support services as refugees described in chapter 2, but are commonly perceived to be refugees by others in the community due to their ethnic origins.

Training. The Photovoice training as well as the subsequent dialogue sessions were held at the activity center of Clarkston First Baptist Church. I selected this venue, an African American church, strategically to ensure that the often overlooked African American population would feel encouraged and welcome to join the project. The church was located centrally in town and in close proximity to the offices of CDF, which was convenient for the CDF staff member who attended most sessions in order to support the process.¹²

During the four-hour training, the participants learned about the Photovoice methodology, reviewed in detail the purpose of the study, and discussed their responsibilities regarding ethics and the power bestowed upon them as community photographers (Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang et al., 2004). The training included discussions of legal and privacy issues, the difference between what is legal and what is ethical, and of appropriate ways of approaching someone to take a photograph of him or her (e.g. Kenney, 2009; Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). In role-plays, the participants practiced obtaining written releases from people they would photograph (Novak, 2010; Teti et al., 2012).

As recommended in the literature, I collaborated with two professional photographers to show and analyze how pictures and different picture-taking techniques can be used creatively and abstractly to tell a story, and how they should *not* be used to distort or hurt anyone (Rudkin & Davis, 2007; Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). One of the photographers had previously conducted a photo project with the Lost Boys of Sudan¹³ in Clarkston, and she was a former instructor at the Showcase School. The other photographer was a Clarkston

¹² While the CDF staff member was not an official project participant, she would have liked to participate had it not been important for her job to stay a neutral party in the community. She still filled out an informed consent form in case that she did contribute to the discussions, which she occasionally did (see chapter 5).

¹³ The Lost Boys of Sudan are survivors of a mass exodus from southern Sudan to Kenya by way of Ethiopia as a result of the 1987 Sudanese civil war. At the time, most of these boys had not yet reached their teens, but had to flee walking thousands of miles from Sudan to Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya to escape death or life as child soldiers. After more than a decade in the camp, in 2001, 4,000 of the Lost Boys were resettled in the United States, including Clarkston (International Rescue Committee, 2014).

resident who specialized in urban photo journalism. After the initial photography instruction, the photographers and participants broke off into small groups to review camera usage and ensure the project participants were comfortable operating the digital and cell phone cameras they either brought or were lent for the duration of the project.

The use of digital and cell phone cameras was central to this project, which included the use of a password protected online platform for uploading and commenting on the photographs. The incorporation of cell phone cameras in the project added a new dimension to the Photovoice methodology as previous projects had mainly relied on disposable and digital cameras. In initial fieldwork, I had found that many people had camera phones in Clarkston, and it seemed appropriate to give people the option of using the devices with which they were most familiar and with which they felt most comfortable. Having asked friends for digital and cell phone camera donations before the onset of the training, I gave participants the option to choose the medium with which they were most comfortable. A third of them decided to use their cell phones to take pictures, the others used either their own or the provided digital cameras. My research assistant,¹⁴ who had created the website and served as the webmaster, showed the participants how to upload their weekly top three images during the last section of the training session.

¹⁴ My research assistant was an unpaid friend. He built and hosted the website, operated the technology during the dialogue sessions while I focused on facilitating, helped with administrative tasks and equipment transportation, and took notes, which I used to triangulate my own. His background as an African American male complemented my own as a white German female, which was helpful in creating an environment where everybody felt welcome.

Photography Training Content	
a. Anatomy of a Good Photograph	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Composition • Light • Focus and depth of field
b. Post-Processing Edit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Built-in editors, free apps, Picasa • Simple cropping and light adjustments
c. Photography as an Art	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abstracts • Portraits • Landscapes • Street Photography
d. Photographers at Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shoot a lot, observe, experiment
e. Technical Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group review & practice

Table 3. Photography training content

Ethics Training Content	
a. Do No Harm – Do Good	
b. Legal Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Photography in public places • Private Places - Privacy - Permission
c. Important Ethical Questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can a photograph lie? Can it be accurate but unfair? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ No staging, no stereotyping, no intentional misrepresentation of people / issues • Is it ethical to take pictures of others without their knowledge? • Can a picture harm someone?
d. Protecting Yourself and Others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explaining project to others • Obtaining consent & written releases • Practice

Table 4. Ethics training content

Website Usage Training Content	
a. Submitting Photos:	Upload picture → add caption and location → submit photo → photo approval → view submissions
b. Website Orientation:	Logging in, updating information, uploading images to assignments, view open assignments
c. OPTIONAL: Computer 101 orientation	for anyone needing help with getting photos off camera or phone and practicing the uploading process

Table 5. Website usage training content

The dialogue sessions. Following the ethics and photography training, the group met at Clarkston First Baptist Church on a weekly basis for 2.5 to 3 hours for four weeks to engage in group dialogues based on the photo prompts. Two months later, the group re-convened to reflect on any lasting impressions from the project and discuss potential action strategies to address some of the challenges they had identified. Beyond the participants and myself, my research assistant attended all sessions, and for most group meetings, a CDF staff member was present to give participants rides as needed and help with any potentially presenting issues.

The participants were given a new photo assignment at the end of training and the following three sessions, in response to which they took photographs around town. They then uploaded and captioned three images each to the www.PhotovoiceClarkston.com website. I explained that the captions were part of the “voice” in Photovoice. As a general guideline for writing the captions, I asked the participants to imagine somebody with the willingness and ability to use their images for positive change in Clarkston would look at them, and to write at least a few sentences or as much as two or three short paragraphs to share their thoughts and knowledge of life in Clarkston with that person. Despite these guidelines, there was a lot of variation in caption length and depth. The limit of three images per assignment was set in order to avoid a data overload and encourage participant focus. Out of the three images, the

participants identified their “number one” picture, i.e. the one they felt most strongly about, to ensure it would receive proper attention during the upcoming session.

The www.PhotovoiceClarkston.com website constituted a major technological innovation of the Photovoice methodology and was created to recruit prospective project participants, review the assignments, facilitate photo exchanges, gather ideas for action strategies, and supplement phone communication among the project participants and myself.



Figure 4. The www.PhotovoiceClarkston.com start page

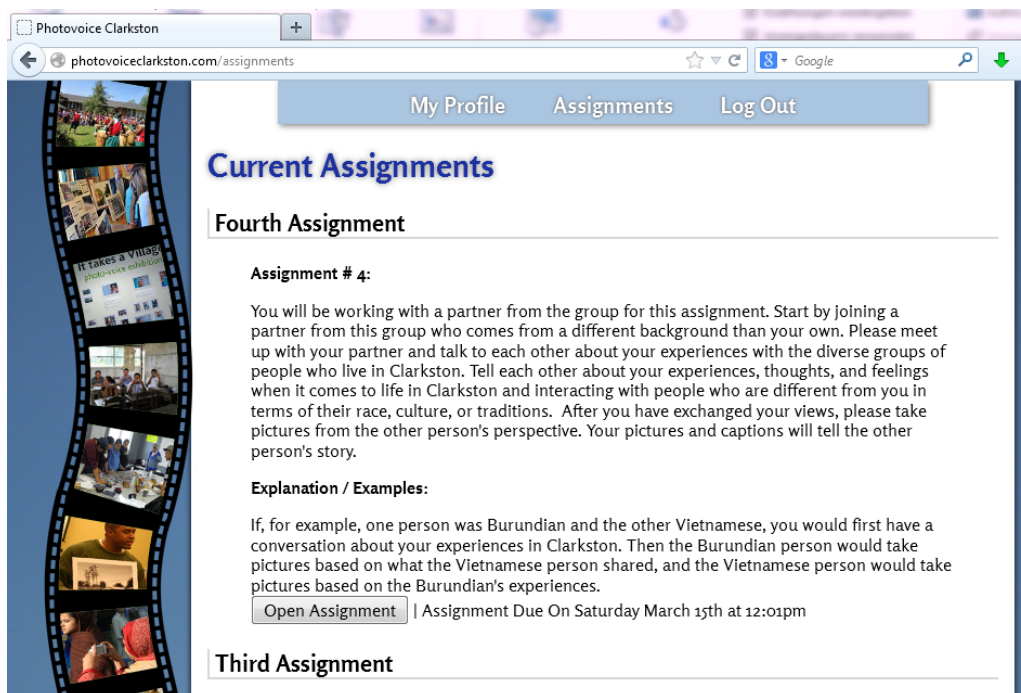


Figure 5. The *www.PhotovoiceClarkston.com* protected participant portal

Similar to popular image- and community-based social media, the participants could view and comment on each other's captioned pictures in preparation for discussion the following week. Some participants needed some additional help getting the pictures off their cameras and onto the website, so I met them where they were and guided them through the process. After the first week, three participants who were comfortable with the technology also assisted those who still needed help.

I then downloaded the images from the website, organized them thematically, and created a PowerPoint presentation that I used to structure the group dialogues each week. In order to ascertain that I had not mis-categorized the photographs, I asked the participants during every session if they agreed with my thematic organization, if they felt I had misinterpreted anything, or if they would have arranged the pictures in some other way. They did not express any disagreements with the themes. Being able to review, thematically analyze, and organize the images ahead of time freed up time and space for discussion during the dialogue sessions and made them more productive. To further aid this process, ground rules were included with every

PowerPoint presentation and reviewed at the beginning of each session. Furthermore, weekly agendas and conversation guides were reviewed and posted on the walls to give participants structure during their occasionally passionate discussions.

R	RESPONSIBILITY We take charge of our own words, fulfill our obligations, become accountable for our actions, and do not let other people down.
E	EMPATHY We listen deeply to one another's stories and connect to each other's feelings and experiences.
S	SHARING AIRTIME We ensure that everyone has an opportunity to tell his/her story, participate in group tasks and projects, and is included in the discussion.
P	PARTICIPATION We cooperate with others successfully in groups and interact harmoniously. We share, join, and work with others to make decisions and complete tasks and projects.
E	ENTHUSIASM We bring our energy, optimism, and creativity to encourage ourselves and others to be our best and build a positive learning community.
C	COMMUNICATION We commit to use our words clearly, positively, and respectfully, to have the courage to ask challenging questions, and to seek understanding of others' points of view.
T	TRUST We commit to be honest in sharing our feelings, emotions, thoughts and reactions with others, and have the confidence in others to be supportive and encouraging.

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Figure 6. Dialogue Ground Rules (University of Minnesota Human Rights Center, 2012)

At the end of the final prompt-based discussion, we scheduled a follow-up session two months later, dedicated to reflecting on any takeaways from the process and to discussing potential action strategies for addressing some of the challenges the participants had identified during the project. Their “homework” in preparation for that session was to generate ideas for

such action steps, taking into consideration the resources at their disposal in terms of time, talent, availability, and funds. My research assistant programmed a function on the www.PhotovoiceClarkston.com website where the participants could upload and comment on each other's ideas.¹⁵

Photovoice instrument. Following the established Photovoice protocol (Wang, 2006; Wang & Burris, 1997), this study used a Photovoice assignment guide, a semi-structured group dialogue guide, and an exit interview guide / questionnaire. The first three photo dialogue sessions followed the same format, in which the participants first introduced their “number ones.” They were asked to describe what was shown in their “number one” image, what it meant to them, and what it said about the relationships between people of different backgrounds in Clarkston. During these introductions, nobody other than the respective photographer was allowed to speak. This was done in order to ensure that everybody's voice was heard at the beginning of the session and that even quieter or less assertive individuals got an uninterrupted turn at least once.

Introducing Your #1s / Discussion Guide
1) What is in your picture?
2) What does it mean to you?
3) What does it tell us about the relationships between different groups of people in Clarkston?

Table 6. Discussion Guide

Thereafter, the images were displayed thematically and dialogue was initiated by inviting all participants to engage in conversations around the photo themes. Wang's (2006) SHOWeD guide, which consists of the following questions: “Say what you See here? What's really

¹⁵ A meeting with the curator of the Zuckerman Museum of Art prior to the follow-up session had revealed conflicting expectations about how the Photovoice images were going to be displayed. Therefore, discussing and building consensus regarding the display of the photos unexpectedly had to be added to the to-do list for the follow-up session. This reduced the time available for discussing action strategies and I considered adding another session if more time was needed. However, since the participants had only come up with a few ideas and because they did not generate as lively a discussion as I had hoped, the available time sufficed. Reflections on this matter and the suggestions that the participants did generate are included in the “The project is over, now what?” section in chapter 7.

Happening here? How does it relate to Our lives? Why does this situation, concern, or strength exist? What can we Do about it?" (p. 151), was reviewed and posted on a wall as a discussion guideline and reminder to help focus the conversation. At the end of each session, the participants were given a new assignment, which was discussed in detail in order to ensure comprehension.

Beyond recruiting a diverse group of participants and introducing advanced technology to the methodology, this project further deviated from the traditional Photovoice protocol by supplementing the two standard photo prompts established by Wang and Burris (1997) with two additional prompts that were more specific to the conflict engagement framework within which the project was conducted. Pursuant to the Photovoice protocol, the first two photo assignments asked participants to capture 1) what positive aspects they valued about their community, what united the community; and 2) what they thought negatively impacted intergroup relations; what divided the community (Kenney, 2009).

To avoid leading the participants in a direction that was irrelevant to them, the following assignment was developed based on the discussions that had unfolded in response to the first two assignments (Fade, 2003). During the first two weeks of the project, the participants had recognized that many of their perceptions of communal dynamics in Clarkston depended on who they were as people, their respective histories, and previous experiences. This confluence between the participants' insights and the academic literature, in which intercultural conflicts are commonly considered to be identity-based (e.g. Avruch, 1998; Burton, 1990; Kriesberg & Dayton, 2012; Rothman, 1997), prompted the development of the third assignment. It was designed to explore what aspects of their identities were the most important to the participants,

what mattered most to them in Clarkston based on those sub-identities, and which of their sub-identities commonly conflicted.¹⁶

In accordance with the CCEM, the fourth assignment was developed to expand the use of Photovoice beyond personal empowerment and the advocacy for structural change to include relational conflict engagement in constructed and other diverse and divided communities. Compared to the other assignments, it was the most practical in nature. Whereas the primary purpose of the first three assignments was to collect data on communal dynamics in Clarkston, the fourth one was designed to promote greater understanding and closer relationships among the members of diverse and conflicting groups who had been convened in this project. Inspired by traditional small group dialogue processes, the design of the fourth assignment was based on the contact hypothesis, which suggests that convening members of conflicting groups reduces intergroup prejudice and hostility by allowing the parties to discover their commonalities and reducing or deconstructing their negative stereotypes of each other (Allport, 1954; Cuhadar & Dayton, 2011; Hewstone & Swart, 2011; Pettigrew, 1986). Taking into consideration the strong focus on individuals among the project participants,¹⁷ as well as the crucial role of perspective-taking in conflict engagement (Johnson, Johnson & Tjosvold, 2006; Krauss & Morsella, 2006; Weitzman & Weitzman, 2006), this new assignment differed from traditional small group dialogue processes in that it was primarily partner- rather than group-based.

¹⁶ See below for the exact phrasing of the assignment. The experimental third assignment did not work the way it was intended because there was a disconnect between the way the instructions were conceptualized and the way that they were implemented by the participants. During the third session, it became apparent that this assignment would need to be revised or replaced in future Photovoice projects since it was too intangible in its current form. However, the discussion still provided deeper insights into the proximal processes that united and divided the Clarkston population and the impact of the Photovoice project on its participants. Therefore, I have integrated the relevant data into the other respective results chapters where applicable, identified by footnotes indicating their origin. The utility of the third assignment itself will be examined in chapter 7.

¹⁷ For details, please see the “People” section in chapter 4.

The participants were semi-randomly assigned to teams of two (and one group of three) via a drawing of names from a hat in their presence. The only condition was that the individuals on each team had to be from different backgrounds; otherwise another name was pulled. The teams were instructed to spend time together in Clarkston, sharing with each other how they experienced life in town.¹⁸ Unlike in previous weeks, they were then asked to take pictures around Clarkston not from their own, but from their partner's perspective, writing captions that captured insights they derived from spending time together.¹⁹

The fourth dialogue session therefore followed a different structure than the previous three. Rather than introducing their "number ones" and then engaging in thematic discussions of all submitted images from that week, the participants introduced each other while everybody else was asked to listen intently. Thereafter, the people who had been introduced by their team partner were asked to respond to their portrayals, indicating if they felt their partner had understood and portrayed them accurately, and allowed to elaborate or correct if necessary. Then the partners switched roles while the rest of the group was asked to focus on the stories they heard and the teammates' responses to each other's portrayals. This format was intended to encourage the participants to gain a deeper understanding of their respective team partners, and to promote greater understanding and appreciation of *all* participants' experiences and perspectives by having the entire group view everybody's pictures, witness the other teams' perspective-taking, and listen to everyone's stories. My research assistant and I recorded the participants' verbal responses and took notes on their non-verbal cues in response to seeing and hearing their own stories told by their team partners, and listening to everybody else's stories.

¹⁸ I asked the participants to spend at least two hours with each other so they could each get the opportunity to share their views and stories without feeling rushed. Several participants reported on longer conversations than that.

¹⁹ See below for the exact phrasing of the assignment.

Assignments 1&2	
1. This week, please take pictures of <u>positive aspects</u> of the Clarkston community that unite its residents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• These aspects can include objects, people, symbols, and the relationships between any of the above.
2. Think about aspects of life in Clarkston that (can) have a negative impact on the relationships between the diverse groups of people who live here, including black, white, and new Americans.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Imagine you were trying to tell somebody in power about the struggles Clarkston is facing when it comes to people living together in harmony. What is going wrong and what could be done about it?• Think creatively about how you can represent these concerns in pictures. Feel free to include objects, people, or symbols to express your thoughts on the matter.

Table 7. Photovoice assignments 1&2

Assignments 3&4

- 3. This week, pick three different identities that are a part of you and take pictures of life in Clarkston based on these different identities.** Choose three from this list: Race / ethnicity; Culture / region of origin; Gender; Age; Religion; Marital Status; Parenthood; Education / occupation / income; Ability / disability

Think about how you can tell the story of your life in Clarkston, of the things that matter to you (positive or negative) based on your different sub-identities. Please submit one picture for each of the three sub-identities you choose. Take pictures of objects, people, or symbols that are important to these different sides of you.

Explanation:

Many of you have mentioned that you have realized over the past couple of weeks how much what we see and how we feel about it depends on who we are as people, our own history, our previous experiences - our identity. However, nobody has only one identity. For example, I am a researcher, I am a woman, I am an immigrant from Germany, I am a daughter, I am white, I am a mediator, I am in my 30s, I am an educator. When I look at the world around me through the eyes of a woman, I pay attention to other things than when I look at the world as someone in her 30s. When I look at our project as a researcher, I see it differently than when I look at it as a mediator. Different things matter to different parts of us.

Similarly, a parent with young children is more likely to be concerned about school districts than a senior or someone who does not have any children. A person from Ethiopia is more likely to be excited about being able to buy injera than someone from Vietnam. A Muslim is likely to feel more concerned about access to a mosque than a Christian. So ask yourself what aspects of life in Clarkston matter to your different sub-identities and try to capture them creatively through your pictures.

- 4. You will be working with a partner from the group for this assignment. Start by joining a partner from this group who comes from a different background than your own. Please meet up with your partner and talk to each other about your experiences with the diverse groups of people who live in Clarkston. Tell each other about your experiences, thoughts, and feelings when it comes to life in Clarkston and interacting with people who are different from you in terms of their race, culture, or traditions. After you have exchanged your views, please take pictures from the other person's perspective. Your pictures and captions will tell the other person's story.**

Explanation / Examples:

If, for example, one person was Burundian and the other Vietnamese, you would first have a conversation about your experiences in Clarkston. Then the Burundian person would take pictures based on what the Vietnamese person shared, and the Vietnamese person would take pictures based on the Burundian's experiences.

Table 8. Photovoice assignments 3&4

Assessing Photovoice as a comprehensive conflict engagement tool. While conflict

theorists have provided us with frameworks for relational change and conflict transformation, few have created mechanisms that operationalize and measure such change. In other applied social

sciences, researchers have used the critical incident interviewing technique to empirically measure attitudinal, emotional, and behavioral changes as the result of particular experiences. Critical incident analysis involves the identification of important moments or turning points that trigger self-reflection and behavioral as well as attitudinal or emotional changes that transform people's perceptions of the critical incident itself (Collins & Pieterse, 2007; Flanagan, 1954). While this framework was not specifically developed for the conflict management field, its origins in applied social science and systematic nature as well as the established links between attitudes, emotions, behaviors, and conflict make it a transferable guideline for assessing the impact of the Photovoice process on its participants.

Based on the critical incident analytical approach, I developed questions for brief post-session questionnaires²⁰ to debrief and assess the impact of the project on its participants and the relationships between them (Collins & Pieterse, 2007; Lister & Crisp, 2007; Scottish Social Services, 2009). Collecting data on such critical incidents (or the absence thereof) at the end of each session allowed me to assess if and how engaging in the Photovoice process impacted the participants' relationships, and whether or not Photovoice can be used in a new way as a practical application of the CCEM to transform communal relationships in diverse environments. In order to assess what the participants took away from each session, and to learn about any attitudinal (e.g. increased awareness and understanding of different perspectives), emotional (e.g. increased bonding, connectedness, and appreciation of others), or behavioral changes (e.g. increased self-assertion, more collaborative interactions with other, more engagement in the community) that may have resulted from project participation, the participants listed up to three insights that they had taken away from that day's meeting. Via a 5-point Likert scale, they were asked to indicate how likely it was that their thinking, feeling, or actions would be affected by the points they had

²⁰ See appendix I.

listed. The participants had an opportunity to clarify and comment on their Likert scale ratings.²¹ They were then asked if anything noteworthy had happened while they were taking pictures that week, and if so, what it was. As a last step, they could check a box if they would like to receive a call so they could elaborate on their answers in a phone conversation, but nobody selected this option.

After the final picture discussion session, the participants filled out an additional, more elaborate exit questionnaire²² that asked them to identify what they had learned and shared during the project, whether or not they had visited any new places around town and met any new people, if they would participate in a project of this nature again or recommend it to somebody else, what they expected to remember about the project six months into the future, if they thought that this approach could be used to bring diverse communities together, and if they had any suggestions for improving the process. In the following weeks, I interviewed every participant individually to learn more about their experiences with the project. The interviews were based on Kenney's (2009) recommendations for Photovoice follow-up, which included the following questions: "1. What made you decide to participate in the project? 2. What was it like to be a Photovoice photographer? 3. What was it like to talk about your photos with other people from your group? 4. Did you find you were affected in any way by your participation in Photovoice? If so, how were you affected? 5. Did participating in Photovoice change the way you see your community? If so, in what ways?" (Kenney, 2009, p. 109). Based on these guidelines, I asked the

²¹ Many of the participants did not fill out the Likert-scales, or filled them in indiscriminately. With the exception of one questionnaire, no comments were provided to explain the participants' rationales behind their ratings. Therefore, the Likert-scale data are not included in this dissertation. They did not provide insightful information and it is unclear if their purpose was properly understood. The participants' responses to the open-ended questions were retained and are included in chapter 6. Please see chapter 7 for further reflections on this issue.

²² See appendix I.

participants to reflect on their motivations for joining the project and their experiences as community photographers and intercultural dialogue participants.²³

Subsequently, I prompted the participants to retrospectively compare their perceptions of and involvement as well as relationships in the community before and after the project. Retrospective research has been a recognized method for collecting self-reported change data as part of program evaluations for the past 30 years (Klatt & Taylor-Powell, 2005). Despite the ever-present risk of social desirability and acquiescence bias in social science research (Eck, 2011), this method has greater validity than traditional pre/post-testing because it avoids response shift bias, which occurs when participants understand the same question differently between the pre- and post-tests as a result of their participation in an intervention (Howard, 1980; Howard, Millham, Slaten, and O'Donnell, 1981). For this reason, I asked the participants to reflect on their attitudes, relationships, and behaviors *after* they completed the Photovoice project and then asked them to reflect back on the same *prior* to participating. After talking about any contact they had had with the other project participants since the last dialogue session, they were given an opportunity to bring up anything that they felt had been missing from the dialogues or interview, or to share anything they had not felt comfortable sharing in the group setting.

While the participation in the Photovoice project itself targeted two of the three social bases of conflict (Kriesberg & Dayton, 2012) - the internal and relational ones - sharing its output with members and leaders from the surrounding communities and stakeholders with the power to promote systemic changes also targeted the structural basis of conflict (Kriesberg & Dayton, 2012). To assess the potential of the Photovoice methodology to promote such structural transformations that improve the quality of life in refugee resettlement sites and other constructed communities, I followed Stoecker's (2005) guidelines for tracing impact in community

²³ See appendix I.

engagement and tracked any external impacts of the Photovoice project that imply the possibility of future structural changes. They are included in chapter 6.

Lending a Megaphone to the Participants' Voices

An additional component to the Photovoice process is the sharing of the products of the project, typically in the form of an exhibition (Kenney, 2009; Wang & Burris, 1997). While the project was still underway, three organizations indicated an interest in exhibiting the photos: my community partner, CDF: A Collective Action Initiative, the Georgia World Refugee Day planning committee, and the Zuckerman Museum of Art (ZMA) at Kennesaw State University. CDF asked to show the Photovoice images in conjunction with a film screening about another community engagement project in Clarkston hosted at a church in the Inman Park neighborhood in Atlanta. The Georgia World Refugee Day planning committee wanted to include the exhibit as part of its annual World Refugee Day celebration in Clarkston. The ZMA planned to include a selection of the Photovoice images in its inaugural "Hearsay" exhibition, which was conceptualized as a visualization of various histories and narratives of the American South.

While the philosophy underlying the Photovoice methodology heavily emphasizes a group-driven process, I had learned over the course of this project that the particular group I was working with functioned better when I took the lead and made suggestions that they could then modify rather than originate themselves. This may have been due to a number of possible reasons, such as cultural norms and orientations or role expectations (Hofstede, 2001), busy schedules, limited commitment, or, as one participant put it, a sense that: "we agreed to take these photos for you and to share with you what they represent, and we also agreed to let you use them as you see fit, so you should feel free to go ahead and do that." For this reason and in order to move the process along and ensure that we would have a product to show by the June deadlines, I

adopted a buy-in model, where I let the participants come to a consensus as to whether or not they liked the options I presented to them. They all seemed content with that approach.

Since two of the three exhibitions were scheduled on consecutive days and all of them within one month, I sought to maximize the utility of time and resources by using the same visuals on all three occasions. While CDF and the Georgia World Refugee Day Planning Committee were flexible regarding the specifics of the exhibitions, the ZMA had particular restrictions and guidelines in terms of the number of photographs to include (their initial request was for 25 images), the size and resolution of the images, and the maximum caption length. To be able to use the images in all three settings, I used the ZMA's guidelines to compile the materials. In an effort to ascertain that every participant's voice got represented, I selected at least one of everybody's most expressive pictures - both in terms of visual imagery and caption - for inclusion in the exhibits. I once again followed the above-described buy-in process and presented my proposed selections to the participants for approval. Sorting through the approximately 130 pictures I had received, I felt that I could not do any of the participants, the level of depth of the discussions, nor the process any justice by adhering to the 25 photograph limitation and only including one or two of everyone's pictures. Therefore, I conferred with the museum to ascertain if it would be acceptable to submit a combination of individual pictures and collages, which I was told was amenable. Subsequently, I worked with one of the photographers who had assisted with the training to maximize the picture quality of the images that the participants had submitted to me, and created twelve thematic collages that captured the main ideas the participants had discussed over the course of the project. In two additional group meetings, the participants reviewed, edited, and approved the collages and jointly devised captions for them as a group. The creation of these collages was consistent with Rappaport's (1995) notion that "helping people to identify, create, and tell their own stories, individually and

collectively, is an endeavor consistent with the development of empowerment” (p. 802). Further reflections on the photo exhibition process will follow in chapter 7.

Validity & Generalizability

The validity of the Photovoice methodology has been supported by Rudkin and Davis (2007), who compared the results of a Photovoice project to those of a questionnaire designed to examine teenagers’ relationships with their surroundings. They found that, when combining the youths’ ratings of their photographs with scientists’ assessment of the photos in terms of their relevance to social connectedness, the results correlated significantly. Rudkin and Davis (2007) further noted that questionnaire-based research is flawed in that “fixed-format response options carry built-in assumptions about worldviews” (p. 109), whereas Photovoice participants are able to express themselves freely and can do so “in ways they deem meaningful” (p. 109).

To corroborate its validity, the present study generally followed the established Photovoice protocol (Kenney, 2009; Wang, 2006; Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang et al., 2004). Whereas it is not possible to eliminate all bias in qualitative research, it is important to recognize potential biases and contain them to the extent possible (Eck, 2011). Spending time in the community, becoming a familiar face, and blending in as much as possible reduced the likelihood of response bias occurring. If participants had feared that identifying information might be released or if they had not trusted their fellow study participants, they may have self-censored and given biased responses (Babbie, 2010). To assuage such fears, I emphasized that participants should only take pictures they were comfortable taking, fostered a positive group climate, and stressed the importance of respect for different experiences and opinions. Participants may have believed that certain views would be received more positively than others, or that sharing certain stories would yield a personally desired result. To limit such social desirability and acquiescence biases and to avoid cultural misunderstandings, I reiterated in the group meetings that this was a

participant-driven process of data collection and interpretation, that I was genuinely interested in the participants' subjective views and experiences, and that there were no right or wrong contributions. Familiarizing myself with the participants' backgrounds, observing their non-verbal communication, asking probing questions as necessary, and triangulating the Photovoice findings with field observations, my research assistant's notes, informal interviews, and reports compiled by local non-profits also helped me gauge the validity of the participants' responses (Bernard, 2006; Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Immersing myself and engaging the community prior to and during the study enabled me to understand its features and history in order to contextualize the Photovoice results and support their credibility (Bernard, 2006, p. 196; Kenney, 2009). I also kept a reflective journal that accounted for biases and personal perspectives, and took them into account during analysis (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Finlay, 2002). This reflexivity along with an account of negative cases, the inclusion of thick description, and member-checking contributed to the study's credibility and authenticity (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Finlay, 2002). On a weekly basis, I elicited feedback from the project participants to ascertain that I had correctly identified the themes that had emerged from the images they had uploaded. At the end of each session, I further summarized what I had learned from the discussion and asked if I had accurately captured their views and experiences and made revisions to my notes when necessary (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Fade, 2003).

As Wang and Burris (1997) have noted, scholars using Photovoice cannot assert representativeness in the quantitative research sense. However, sufficient internal and external replication, i.e. a validation of findings by the same or other sources, can "suggest that the findings provide a reliable picture of people's priorities at a particular historical moment" (p. 382). To this end, the methodology of this project has been explained in such detail that enables

“another researcher to repeat the study, although the exact conditions could not [...] be replicated” (Fade, 2003, p. 142). I have connected the study findings to relevant theories of psycho-socio-cultural dynamics in refugee resettlement and other constructed communities (Kenney, 2009). Although the findings of this study are not generalizable in the statistical sense due to the small number of participants and non-random sampling²⁴, their relevance extends beyond Clarkston because they are theoretically / conceptually generalizable (Fade, 2003; Mason, 1996). Since the findings of this study can be used in support of existing theories, they can be transferred to similar cases by extension of these theories. They also provide insights that will prompt larger-scale investigations in the future (Fade, 2003).

Ethics

Both as a researcher and as a conflict practitioner, I took seriously the ethical obligation not to cause harm to the Photovoice participants and recognized the dual vulnerability that was associated with their marginalized status in society and the use of visual imagery. I have completed three Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) modules on the responsible conduct of social and behavioral research and obtained IRB approval before collecting any data for this research (Palibroda et al., 2009). Del Soto (2008), Ellis, Kia-Keating, Yusuf, Lincoln, and Nur (2007), as well as Hugman et al. (2011) have recommended the use of participatory action research methods to mitigate the power differential between study participants and researchers. The collaborative process fostered the development of trust and increased sensitivity towards each other’s experiences, needs, cultural norms, and values among the project participants and myself. I further created an environment of trust by reinforcing the validity of everybody’s points of view and the confidentiality of the group dialogues (Kenney, 2009). By empowering members of the community to become actively engaged co-researchers, a role that I

²⁴ For details, please see section on “Participant recruitment.”

repeatedly emphasized, their autonomy was respected and their voices heard (Del Soto, 2008; Ellis et al., 2007; Hugman et al., 2011; Kenney, 2009). Along with empowerment comes responsibility, so during training, we discussed the importance of not abusing the power and authority bestowed upon the participants as community photographers (Palibroda et al., 2009; Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). To limit the risk of stigmatization in the community, community leaders including the mayor, a city councilman, the Office of Refugee Resettlement, as well as local non-profit organizations were involved in the project from its onset (Kenney, 2009). The participants were further equipped with notes outlining the nature and purpose of the project in basic terms to hand to interested or questioning members of the community (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001).

Three types of written consent were used in this study to protect the privacy of the participants and of the people whose images they captured. First, after full disclosure of the rationale, implementation, and purpose of every step of the research process, risks and benefits associated with project participation, expectations of participants, the possibility of not achieving the desired effect in the political arena, and their right to withdraw at any time, the study participants signed informed consent forms (Kenney, 2009; Palibroda et al., 2009, Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). However, as suggested by Hugman et al., (2011), informed consent was approached as a “process rather than an event” (p. 1278), and I repeatedly reminded the participants of their rights and the risks associated with participating in the project.

Second, after receiving training on photo ethics and people’s right to privacy, the participants asked those members of the community whose pictures they took to sign written release forms (Kenney, 2009; Novak, 2010; Teti et al., 2012; Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). Wang & Redwood-Jones (2001) have acknowledged that obtaining these releases prior to taking someone’s picture may result in some loss of spontaneity, but have countered that the protection

of people's privacy and the assurance of everybody's safety take precedence in ethical research. A photographer taking someone's picture without their knowledge could put that person in harm's way, if, for instance, he or she was being photographed in a location to which his or her access has been restricted (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). Photographing people without their consent could also trigger verbally or physically violent responses and put the photographers at risk. "The camera is not a shield, and participants must be aware of their surroundings and potential dangers at all times, in addition to obtaining the subjects' permission prior to taking the picture" (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001, p. 567). For these reasons, it was imperative to ask people's permission to capture their images and get written releases (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001).

Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001) have stated that it is not necessary to obtain authorization for images taken of groups "so large that individual faces [are] unrecognizable" (p. 565) and for pictures focusing on objects that include persons coincidentally walking by. Whereas it is considered unethical to take someone's picture without their consent, it is also unethical to stage a picture, especially if this is done to misrepresent individuals / groups or to distort situations / circumstances (Kenney, 2009; Novak, 2010; Rudkin & Davis, 2007; Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001) have suggested that photographers can compensate for their subjects' loss of spontaneity with patience, waiting for them to resume their normal activities after signing a written release and before taking their pictures. Although "IRB rules [force] participants to present a sanitized version of their 'reality'" (Novak, 2010, p. 299), it is important to remember that this research was about meaning-making rather than news reporting. It focused on participants' *perceptions* of the psycho-socio-cultural dynamics in their community, many of which could only be represented symbolically via visual imagery. The two main purposes of the pictures themselves were to be used as talking points for

discussion and as illustrations of the discussion-based findings (Kenney, 2009). For this reason, the photographers and I discussed with the participants during training how to take and interpret symbolic pictures that were “metaphorically representative” of life in Clarkston (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001, p. 569; also Rudkin & Davis, 2007; Wang & Burris, 1997). At the end, I obtained participants’ permission to display their images in the final photo exhibitions and include them with this dissertation and subsequent publications (Kenney, 2009; Novak, 2010; Teti et al., 2012; Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001).

Analytic Strategy

The project results are presented in three chapters. Chapter 4 documents the data collected regarding residents’ perspectives on positive aspects of the Clarkston community that unite the population. Chapter 5 presents the participants’ perspectives of negative aspects of the Clarkston community that divide its residents. Chapter 6 shares insights into the use and utility of Photovoice as a comprehensive conflict engagement strategy. The majority of the data presented were derived from the Photovoice dialogue sessions and supplemented with data from fieldwork and engagement in the community, as indicated.

The presented findings are the results of a connecting analysis in NVivo (Bazeley, 2007; Kenney, 2009, Maxwell, 2005; Maxwell & Miller, 2008). The study participants’ comments that emerged from the group dialogues, follow-up interviews, and questionnaires, as well as my field notes, were the units of analysis (Kenney, 2009). After transcribing all group dialogues and interviews and typing up all field notes, I thematically coded the texts. The codes were partly based on themes that I had derived from the literature review, while others emerged during the project itself. Beyond “fracturing initial text [i.e. transcripts] into discrete segments and sorting the segments into categories,” I looked for connections between codes in order to “understand relationships among the different aspects of the text” (Kenney, 2009, p. 110). The meaning of

the text for the participants was the focal point and it was analyzed in relation to its context, i.e. the four project assignments (Maxwell & Miller, 2008, p. 468). Since the group dialogues were based on photographs, the latter are herein used to illustrate the analysis findings (Kenney, 2009). The following sections are thematically organized and structured according to the weekly assignments. Due to the richness of the collected data both in depth and breadth, the presentation of findings focuses to the most salient themes that either reoccurred across sessions or were discussed most intensively.

Chapter 4:

Positive Aspects of the Clarkston Community that Unite Its Residents

“People need to be heard. Thank you for allowing the exchanges. It is nice to experience Clarkston through other people’s lenses. Each week, I am more excited to see how this project will turn out and can be a catalyst for positive change in the community.” (Carroll, participant)

This chapter and the next describe central communal dynamics that affected residents’ lives in Clarkston at the time of research. In the interest of maintaining the integrity and authenticity of the process and in order to fully represent the project participants’ voices, the collected data are presented in raw form, including photographs with complete captions and only moderately abbreviated participant quotations that contextualize and explain the meaning behind the visual data.

The first assignment asked the Photovoice participants to identify positive aspects of the Clarkston community. Wang and Burris’ (1997) Photovoice protocol recommends starting with the positive before the negative. This approach gives project participants an opportunity to get used to the process and everybody involved in a low-stakes context. Systematically collecting data on assets in the community is furthermore beneficial to the conflict management scholar-practitioner because this information can be built upon when developing strategies for sustainable long-term conflict engagement following a Photovoice project. The project participants identified a variety of communal connectors that fostered acceptance, inclusion, and unity. These connectors included specific small businesses, non-profit organizations, as well as recreational activities revolving around art, soccer, and food. People - their diversity, volunteer work, and intentional efforts to serve as community connectors were also recognized.

Clarkston Village

Several participants submitted pictures of the Clarkston Village, a strip mall anchored by a privately owned grocery store called Thriftown that is surrounded by a number of ethnic

restaurants and other small businesses. These images sparked a lively discussion amongst the project participants, all of whom felt that either the Village as a whole, or some of the individual small businesses of which it is comprised, played an important and uniting role in the community. They described Clarkston Village as “vital in building, strengthening, and sustaining [their] diverse community” and as “the place in the community that most enthusiastically embraces the refugee population.” Two businesses stood out in the discussions: Thriftown and Kathmandu Kitchen and Grill.



Photograph 1.

“Clarkston Village - Clarkston Village is a good place, it's a historic place. The people who have a business there, they are coming from different countries. They are Ethiopians, a German, Koreans, Nepali, Burma, Eritrea, and Guinea. So that is a very good place for all refugees who do not know English. But even Americans like to come to this place to see the newcomers to America. People come from many different states to just come and visit new refugees and the small businesses. They come to eat there, like at the Ethiopian and at the [Nepali] restaurant. We have different cuisines there. And Clarkston is quite nice. I like Thriftown. The owner is very good to the community. He likes his customers and he likes the neighborhood. Many people have different problems, sometimes they don't have food stamps, but if they go there and tell him that they don't have food stamps, he helps them. All the workers at Thriftown are refugees mixed with Americans. They are from Vietnam, Iraqis, Ethiopians, African Americans, Burmese, Senegalese, and some people from Sudan work there, too. I am like the owner there! Always, when there is a meeting, they tell me to go on their behalf.” (Gargaaro, photographer)

Thriftown. Clarkston Thriftown Inc. is a grocery store that has gained prominence in Warren St. John's (2009) book *Outcasts United* and in the stage play *Third Country*, which follows the story of a newly resettled refugee, set in the context of and “inspired by real life events in [...] Clarkston, Georgia” (Horizon Theatre, 2014). In both of these sources, the

Caucasian American owner of German origin is displayed as a “friend of refugees” and an informal mediator between the predominantly Caucasian city government and the highly diverse population. These portrayals were confirmed by the project participants, who stated that they “like[d] what the owner does for the community,” that he “likes his customers and [...] the neighborhood,” and that he would help individuals who run out of their food stamps. They further described Thriftown as “one of the most important institutions in the community,” “really committed to the community, more so than others,” “a model for the community,” “a welcoming force for refugees,” a place where “you feel at home,” “a staple,” and the “foundation” of Clarkston. These characterizations were supported by examples of the store owner’s embracing diversity on the one hand by staffing the store with a diverse group of employees, and on the other hand by selling a variety of ethnic or specialty foods that cater to the needs of the diverse customers. As Chloe (African American) put it,

Thriftown [is a place] where the refugees and the people that, you know, are very local... they go there and one of the things that I like about Thriftown very much is how they have tailor-made that shop to represent as many people. So you go in and you know like... “oh you know, I need some curry leaves” and they say “oh let me find out if we can find some curry leaves.” I went in there now and they have a whole gluten free, organic section, and that speaks to another community. It’s just catered to everyone...



Photograph 2.
 “Checkout at Thriftown” (John, photographer)

John (Caucasian American), who tried to help Gargaaro (Somali) find several photo releases that she had obtained from individuals of whom she had taken pictures in the community and that she had misplaced at the store, explained that he was very impressed with the store management who did not get irritated with Gargaaro frantically searching for her paperwork, and instead “took her seriously” and “tried to help.” He further described Thriftown as having “goods for every group. Whatever you need, it’s there! It’s the owner and the staff, they are very kind, very helpful, they are generous.” Even Carroll (African American), who did not shop at Thriftown herself because she was mobile and could go to less expensive chain stores in surrounding communities to buy her groceries, appreciated its existence and recognized its value for the Clarkston community,

I have been in Thriftown before. I don’t shop there because I think the prices are high. So I don’t shop there, there is not something in there that I use that I can’t get somewhere else at a better value, but I like that it’s there because [...] some people, they are going to have to take everything that they are going to feed their families and they are going to need to carry it home, and so that it’s there, I think it’s wonderful.

The group discussed a perception that the city was making a deliberate effort to drive out Thriftown and other refugee-owned or refugee-friendly businesses by building a Family Dollar Store right across the street. Following several statements indicating people's protectiveness of Thriftown, Chloe (African American), who has been actively involved in the community for several years, suggested that it was within Clarkston residents' power to decide which stores would thrive, stating that "We can choose to put our dollars where we want to, which is at Thriftown." Overall, Thriftown was portrayed as both a model and a symbol of acceptance and inclusion of all, and as a place that was cherished for both its tangible and symbolic value.

Kathmandu Kitchen & Grill. At the opposite end of the Clarkston Village is Kathmandu Kitchen & Grill, a Nepali restaurant and multi-purpose meeting space. Similarly to Thriftown, participants described it as "the go-to place for everyone in Clarkston," "the meetup place," "a social institution," and a "great place to go have coffee." In contrast to Thriftown, Kathmandu was described as a business that had a clearly Nepali cultural identity, but that was welcoming and inclusive, frequented by all. A picture of teenagers playing a Nepali board game in the restaurant stimulated a lively discussion among the participants. They explained that a similar game was also played in their respective cultures, exchanged the various names for it, and discussed differences in rules. Finding this unexpected commonality gave the participants an equally unexpected opportunity to relate to each other and explore intercultural similarities. This discussion prompted several comments about the power of games to bring people together. For instance, John (Caucasian American) noted that many different communities play games, including the Somali and Burmese communities. Grace (Congolese) agreed stating that "All the people like [playing games]. Sometimes from Africa, Ethiopia, Somalia, they play game. [...] They pursue to play game." She gave personal examples of how her sense of inclusion was affected by different groups inviting or barring her from joining in games that they were playing.

Brad (Caucasian American) summarized that games “transcend language and different cultures” and that they can be used as building blocks in building community.



Photograph 3.

“Nepali Pool at Kathmandu Cafe”

Comment as shared in discussion: I have been in [Kathmandu Kitchen and Grill] quite a few times and I’ve never seen this game being played. There’s like a little room that they have created by the front door now, and this is a traditional Nepali thing [...]. I don’t know what this says about how different communities relate to each other, but this community is like the rest. They are keeping their culture alive. Bringing it here. [...] I liked, they were having a lot of fun. There was a lot of laughter, joshing and kidding. And there was also, they were real serious about the game. (John, photographer)

Chloe (African American) shared with the group that she had previously run a small breakfast business out of Kathmandu, which allowed her to get increasingly familiar and appreciative of Nepali culture. She described a weekly ceremony in which young Nepali adults served their elders and helped them with their medications. She commented,

It was just so beautiful. I just really am fascinated by the Nepali culture and the love that they share between one another. The young and the old, and I think that sometimes people want to talk about the deficits that, and this is quote unquote, “this refugee community” brings, I think that we really need to examine the assets that these cultures bring and how some of those assets we might be able to adopt because the real social security is, you know... my child or my grandchild feeling that they want to and have

that deep desire to care for me and not this artificial social security that we think money can take care of, so for me that Kathmandu restaurant and what they do as a culture, I really, really appreciate that.

Kathmandu Kitchen & Grill served as an example of a successful small business that let individuals preserve their culture while simultaneously inviting others in, be it through sharing a meal, having a conversation over coffee, playing a game, or witnessing another cultural event. John (Caucasian American) specifically contrasted Kathmandu with other ethnic restaurants in the Clarkston Village, which he found to be less inclusive as his “sense [was] that they only cater[ed] to their own nationality.” Because of Kathmandu’s open door policy and willingness to include “cultural others,” they won admirers of their culture and supporters of their business, willing to serve as intercultural ambassadors.

Clarkston Community Center

The Clarkston Community Center (CCC) is a non-profit organization that regularly hosts special events, offers a variety of programs and classes, and describes itself as “a gathering place for art, education, recreation and community building for Clarkston and Greater DeKalb County residents” of diverse backgrounds (Clarkston Community Center, 2014).



Photograph 4.

“The Clarkston Community Center and the public library provide great resources, and space for the community.” (Kelile, photographer)

While John (Caucasian American) suggested that many non-refugees perceived the CCC to be mainly catering to refugees, the other participants emphatically asserted that they did not think this was accurate and that everybody was welcome and involved. For instance, Chloe (African American) stated,

I think the community center is a positive place because it brings together so many different people that I think otherwise probably wouldn't come together and then it allows so many different expressions of, you know, from the Yawuru dancers to capoeira, to the contra dancers, to tai chi, and ESL and GED and after school, and all, you know... I mean it's just so awesome [...] and there's older people there, there's younger people there... you know, [...] there's just so many great, great things.

Recognizing the value of the CCC for all members of the community, Carroll (African American) described it as follows,

[...] Once a school, this building now serves to educate and entertain city residents on cultures from around the world. It is a gathering place, a celebratory facility, an

afterschool mecca, and more. If you're homesick for your native land, you may attend one of the many festivals and events held here. If you need a venue to host your wedding reception or graduation party, this is the place. If you'd like to learn about people and traditions from other nations, you'll have that opportunity here. Come to dance, sing, learn, and build a new family made of people coming together with the spirit of neighborly warmth. The Center is the heartbeat of the city."

Similarly, others referred to the CCC as "a previously segregated school that's now open to everyone," "a constant hub of activity," as a place "that brings the city to life" and that "holds a great deal of promise to create a wholesome community that celebrates and appreciates the diversity of this great town." It was also called a "safe haven" that brings diverse groups of "people together to share thoughts, exchange ideas, address and express concerns" while getting "an opportunity to get to know one another's stories."

Several participants characterized the CCC not only as a place where they could go to take advantage of its varied programming, but equally as a place where they could volunteer and make a positive contribution to the community. Chloe (African American) explained that one of her daughters started volunteering at a CCC-affiliated summer camp at the age of twelve and that this volunteer experience "definitely molded her into wanting to dedicate her life to service."

Similarly, Tigist (Ethiopian) shared,

I took [a picture of] the CCC personally because, when I started high school, that was kinda like the foundation for me to get more involved in the community and it was the place that connected me to the rest of the community. I just have positive experiences with the CCC. It's just nice to see, comparing it to other cities, that we have a community center that is very involved in the community and is welcoming to the youth and is like a positive place for us.

Tigist further referred to the CCC as “a place where [she could] go to help, plan, laugh, and feel included.” Her father Kelile described the CCC / Clarkston library complex as a safe place where anybody could go to find information and look for jobs. He further explained why, as a parent, he was particularly appreciative of the fact that the Clarkston library and the CCC were right next door to each other:

When my daughter was nine to eleven, I could not protect her when she went... and I dropped her off at the library and I could go to the Community Center at the same time.

People are always doing that. They drop their kids off at the library and they can go to the Community Center.

Over the course of the project, the participants discussed repeatedly that long and unconventional work schedules prevented many adults from actively partaking in community-building activities and looking after their children. Having a safe haven like the CCC / library complex provided them with opportunities to pursue both in the limited free time at their disposal without feeling guilty or worried about their children. Creating additional such opportunities was discussed as a strategy for improving communal dynamics.

Recreational Activities

Beyond their discussions of the recreational programming offered by the CCC, the project participants also listed a number of additional recreational opportunities that they considered to be current or potential future community connectors. Among these were art, soccer, and the sharing of food.

Art. Brad (Caucasian American) and Kelile (Ethiopian) felt particularly strongly about the power of art to bring together diverse groups of people. Brad, an artist himself, reflected on the utility of art to transcend linguistic and cultural barriers. He suggested that, by sharing an experience and creating a piece of artwork, “you communicate through expressing as opposed to

language, which is really nice.” Kelile’s submission of a photograph of Clarkston’s first community mural and the subsequent discussion thereof illustrated practically what Brad had argued theoretically. The mural shown in Photograph 5 was painted collaboratively by Clarkston residents and friends in the fall of 2013 under the leadership of a local artist and staple in the community. Since this first mural, the artist won a regional award to create a second mural that has been mounted to the walls of the Clarkston Community Center. As part of my community engagement, I participated in the painting of both murals. I was able to observe great diversity among the participants in these events and noted how effortlessly everybody worked together in accomplishing their common goal.



Photograph 5.

“Clarkston Community Mural on the Decatur Pediatric Group Building” (Kelile, photographer)

Kelile commented during the session,

I think all of Clarkston residents remember [the artist]. This mural is her work with the youth. [...] And I like it because [she] appreciates and tried to push all of the Clarkston community to look at the good things and at the same time to appreciate this artistic people’s participation in the community.

Further reflecting upon the artist's role in the community, Kelile remembered viewing some of her artwork at her house, which made him realize the breadth of her body of work and regret that

We didn't appreciate her, we didn't push her to do community-wise. Next time, we have to do that. We have to push her to make it all the people, interested people in the art to contribute to the community I think. And I appreciate [the artist].

Realizing how much the artist had to offer, Kelile wished that he and others had given her more intentional and supportive feedback to encourage her to involve more community members in additional arts projects around town. He expressed resolve to do so in the future. Carroll (African American) had previously taken an arts class with the artist and used it as an example of art being an avenue to meeting new people. Seeing the diverse backgrounds of the Photovoice participants who spoke out in favor of arts programming and the diversity and enthusiasm of the individuals who participated in the creation of the public murals, it appears that arts-based programming could be developed long-term to constructively engage and unite different community groups.

Soccer. Similarly to art, the Photovoice participants discussed the role of soccer in Clarkston both in general terms as well as relating specifically to the Fugees Family, founded by Luma Mufleh and most famously documented in Warren St. John's (2009) *Outcasts United*.²⁵ As Tigist (Ethiopian) stated without contest, "soccer is a big part of Clarkston." John (Caucasian American), who had previously been employed by a nearby YMCA and who had done some independent consulting work in Clarkston, was one of the individuals who brought soccer to schools and after-school programs in the Clarkston area.

When we first started looking in Clarkston, we were doing things that centered around refugee kids, and I said let's see if we can get something started in schools and there was

²⁵ See also St. John (2007a).

some kind of resistance to that, but the reason was that all the kids are there. Go there where they are. And it happened. [...] You could see how the kids were paying attention. [...] And every week it was a soccer lesson and a life lesson, how they relate to each other. And so what does it tell us about relationships among different groups? Well, all kinds of kids are there, it can happen.

He felt strongly about the power of soccer in uniting the entire population, including American-born children and their parents. He shared,

You know, we were told, I've been told African American kids don't play soccer. Well, if you go to South DeKalb, you'll see that in fact they do. And at the schools here in Clarkston where we got our programs started, not only did children play, but their parents showed up to watch it.

Brad (Caucasian American) similarly described soccer as a sport that "brings so many people together. It's kind of this universal sport [that] connects people and you have that shared experience." Kelile (Ethiopian) added to the discussion of the merits of soccer his perspective as a parent.



Photograph 6.

“Indian Creek Elementary School Activity Field” (Kelile, photographer)

Describing the above picture that he had taken of a soccer game played at the field at Indian Creek Elementary school, which is adjacent to a playground and surrounded by a running track, he shared,

There is a playground for the kids, and the track, and the field. People... you know, our kids are separated [from us parents] these days. But I like that when I want to use the track, I can bring my kid there and she can play there and I can do like mine and this relation is good for the community.

While there was unanimous agreement in the group that soccer “really does have a meaning to the people in Clarkston” (Carroll, African American) that can be used to bring people together around a commonly enjoyed activity, the participants’ views of the Fugees Family were more differentiated.

The Fugees Family is a non-profit organization that started out as a soccer team for refugee children in 2003 and has since grown to include after school tutoring as well as a middle and high school, exclusively for said population. The participants’ views ranged from

endorsement and adoration to skepticism and empathy. Marjorie (Caucasian American) referred to the Fugees as “a big part of this community, a huge part of this community,” reiterating multiple times that she “just love[d] them.” Brad (Caucasian American) was impressed with the Fugees and the fact that they had grown from a soccer team into an educational institution and “an outlet for refugees to get the proper services that they need.” Explaining why he took a picture of the Fugees bus, he said that it was symbolic of their growth as an organization, which made him believe that “you can start with this one thing that kind of unites people, and build off of that.” Brad described how he had many times seen the children rush to the bus, eager to make it to the school on time. He felt that it was good “just to see all that... all those cultures together, moving to get to this place where they are all gonna learn and/or play soccer.” Marjorie equally rejoiced in her own observations of the Fugees’ growth, symbolized by the increasing number of their buses.



Photograph 7.
“Fugees Bus” (Brad, photographer)

John (Caucasian American) had previous experiences trying to work cooperatively with the Fugees and was more critical of their leadership. Without wanting to take anything away from the organization's accomplishments, he felt that "the person who started that and [ran it was] not open to working with others." He regretted this stance because he saw the potential for "ways things could be accomplished by working together that [were not happening and would] not happen" because of the founder's attitude. Chloe (African American) tried to empathize and referenced a story that Dr. Bernard Lafayette had shared during the Kingian Nonviolence training²⁶ in which I had also participated as part of my community engagement. The moral of the story had been that even though family members sometimes go astray, you should always keep a door open for them to come back, which they often will eventually. Chloe applied this to the Fugees saying,

I think sometimes, when we have an experience with someone, I think it's important for us to say "at that time they weren't open," because things change, especially if it's something small and you're trying to stay focused and you are not sure yourself, that could be interpreted as "oh I don't want to be bothered," but it could also be interpreted as "I just need to stay focused to get this rolling and once I do, I'll revisit that."

Chloe then gave the example of a community festival that she had been organizing and of her interactions with the Fugees founder. While the latter had declined getting involved, she had apologized for this lack of involvement, asked to be kept engaged, and explained that her declining was due to a scheduling conflict with several soccer tournaments. Chloe concluded by asking that everyone "be mindful of how [they] portray people through [their] experiences [with] them." Marjorie (Caucasian American) supported Chloe's empathetic stance and historically

²⁶ Dr. Bernard Lafayette of Emory University is a former associate of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s. He periodically facilitates Kingian non-violence trainings, in which he teaches participants about the history of the civil rights movement and the principles and execution of non-violent resistance, in metropolitan Atlanta and beyond.

contextualized John's experience by noting that, at the time he was trying to work cooperatively with the Fugees, the city had a hostile attitude towards them, which may have explained their reluctance to cooperate. Carroll (African American) remembered attending a city council meeting, in which the Fugees had asked permission to use a field in Clarkston to practice; a request that was met with fervent resistance by the mayor and city council at the time.²⁷ Carroll never understood this opposition and instead described her sense of pride in the Fugees when they became a defining feature of the Clarkston community,

I was excited to see them in *Southern Living*, and [...] when I was at work, I met a lady and her son plays soccer and she said to me "Where do you live?" You know, just trying to get to know each other, and I said "I live in Clarkston," and she was like "Oh, the Fugees play there, have you read this book?" I mean she was like really excited about things about the community, and it just made me feel proud for positive things that are happening.

She further suggested that rallying behind a group of people making a positive difference, cheering them on, and enjoying their success was something that could bring joy and unity to the people in Clarkston. With the exception of John's ambivalence, the group overall seemed to agree that the Fugees were a positive force in Clarkston.

Food. The Photovoice participants discussed both directly and indirectly the power of food to bring people together. On the one hand, they gave examples of intercultural social situations that revolved around the sharing of food and beverages. On the other hand, the participants took great pleasure in talking about food, the precise location of restaurants, recommendations for specific grocers, previous experiences tasting different foods, and so forth.

²⁷ For additional details, see St. John (2009).



Photograph 8.
 “Eritrean Love for Coffee and Tea” (Haben, photographer)

Whereas Haben (Eritrean) initially captioned the above photograph as one that represented specifically Eritreans’ love for coffee and tea, she elaborated upon questioning that, in fact, Somalis, Ethiopians, and Eritreans - historically conflicting groups - all frequented the coffee shop in which she had taken the picture. When I asked her about Americans, she said that “actually everybody goes.” So whereas she initially took the image as an image of an ethnic community, she realized that it was actually more inclusive than that and that it was a “hang-out spot” that facilitated intercultural encounters.

After Brad (Caucasian American) suggested that the sharing of food and coffee was among the proximal processes that transcended cultures and enabled shared experiences, Chloe (African American) shared two positive experiences around food that promoted intercultural understanding and appreciation. She recognized that different cultures were easily misunderstood if approached with assumptions.

That’s Hamdi’s restaurant right there. [...] I did a contract with the Board of Health and I had to go in and interview these people at the restaurant. And so I saw everyone getting a banana, so I was like [...] “Man, this is an interesting culture, they have banana as a

dessert with every food.” So I then meet [a Somali lady], and also she used to work over at the after school program, she comes to my house to have food with me, so she asks me for pepper, and then she asks, “Do you have a banana?” So I’m like, “You guys really need a dessert every time you eat?” So she says, “No, in Somali, every time... they love spicy food,” but then they put a banana on top of the food and they eat the banana and the food together so that you have the contrast of sweet and pepper, and I just chuckled for like forever, because I was like... you know we have our own interpretation and we don’t ask the question, and then when we go with that interpretation as a fact, when we find out... who would have thought? Just like with the Nepali people, they put black pepper in coffee, to bring up the spice of the coffee, and I was like “Who would have thought to do that?” But then you do it, it’s like “Oh, this is good, you know,” so it’s just so fascinating, the different things that people do that you can even incorporate to bring an enrichment to your own life, you now... I just, I just love Clarkston. Hahahaha

Chloe’s sharing of this story was met with smiles and laughter, and, according to our session notes, my research assistant and I perceived the mood in the room to have been very positive and light. Over the course of the project, there was a noticeable trend of such atmospheres transpiring whenever somebody shared a story of intercultural learning and appreciation. One example thereof was John’s (Caucasian American) and Kelile’s (Ethiopian) report of their experience with the fourth assignment, in which they had been asked to spend time together, share their experiences in and views of Clarkston, and take pictures documenting the other person’s perspective. They told the group that they had ended up sharing an Ethiopian meal at Kelile’s house. Kelile explained that although he had felt that offering John some of his traditional food was the polite and appropriate thing to do, he initially was “afraid to offer, bring the food, especially who doesn’t know about those culture food.” This happened during lent, so

when night fell, Kelile and his family needed to eat, and he did end up offering John some of their food. Kelile described his surprise when John perked up at the offer, told him that he knew about Ethiopian food, and, when offered a fork and knife politely, declined saying that he wanted to eat with his hands, the way that it was supposed to be eaten. Kelile was “happy when [he got] this answer from [John.] [The family] enjoy it.” After Tigist (Kelile’s daughter, Ethiopian) commented that it was not possible to come to her family’s house and not eat, a few people in the group, including myself, made jokes about having to stop by the family’s house for one “pertinent reason” or the other, expressing appreciation of Ethiopian food and hospitality. As noted by my research assistant and myself, Kelile’s face told a story of great joy in these remarks.

The participants’ discussions pertaining to food showed a close perceived link between food and culture. Since many examples were given of diverse patrons frequenting ethnic restaurants, there appears to be an openness towards and interest in international foods. As suggested by John and Brad (Caucasian Americans), food-based activities and celebrations can be used to bring together diverse groups of Clarkston residents and food can be used as a starting-point for exposure and appreciation of different cultures.

People

Clarkston is a small, densely populated, and highly diverse town. While there are those in the city who do not embrace it, the diversity of its residents is an undeniable part of Clarkston’s identity.



Photograph 9.

“Clarkston is probably one of the most diverse 1.1 square miles in the world. The following words may be sung to the tune of ‘Jesus Loves the Little Children:’
 Clarkston takes in all the people,
 People from around the world,
 Red and yellow, black and white,
 Home of the Brave, the Free, the Plight
 Clarkston is a home for all the world.”
 (Carroll, photographer)

The picture above sparked a lively conversation around the value of diversity and how it could be used to economically develop the town. Commenting on her picture, Carroll (African American) suggested that Clarkston is

One of the most diverse 1.1 square miles in the world, which would be a really cool thing when you want people to come in your community and look and invest in your community and all the things that can be a part of it. It makes it kind of cool, the number of languages spoken, and people groups and all those kinds of things ... it is a pretty cool place right here.

John (Caucasian American) added that:

In the spring of 2013, the City of Clarkston commissioned the Urban Land Institute to make recommendations for business and economic development. In its report, [the] ULI described Clarkston's diversity and international culture as unique in the Atlanta region and as a primary asset in attracting new businesses and encouraging economic development.

The group agreed that these findings were somewhat ironic considering that, in their perception, the city had commissioned the Urban Land Institute to problematize the high levels of diversity and to get recommendations for building more chain stores that would attract middle class Americans, thereby changing the city demographics. While there was recognition among the project participants of the challenges presented by cultural and linguistic differences, these particular individuals all stated that they saw value in diversity. Brad (Caucasian American) summarized the sentiment as follows: “The diverse population of Clarkston, if united under a common goal²⁸, has the potential to be a model city for other cities adapting to culture disparities and language barriers.”

While Clarkston is a place where people and cultures conflict, it is also a place where individuals who make an effort to build metaphorical bridges between cultures and over imported and local conflicts are visible and recognized. Conceding that “many people still hold on to fear, misunderstandings, and some even still harbor hatred in their heart,” Chloe (African American) and others pointed out that there were many individuals in the community who were “working daily to bring understanding, justice, and togetherness here in Clarkston,” and who were “working together to make [the Welcoming Charter and the Compassionate Charter signed by Clarkston officials] the reality that [their] city lives by.” As discussed in above sections, the owner of the Thriftown grocery store and a local artist were among these widely recognized individuals as repeatedly evidenced during my community engagement. Ms. Sheila²⁹, an African American lady who was bound to a wheelchair and had long converted to Islam, was another person who stood out and whose role in the community was discussed in the project. I got to know Ms. Sheila during my community involvement. She participated in the interfaith dialogues

²⁸ The absence of a common goal was problematized as a negative dynamic in Clarkston and will be discussed in chapter 5.

²⁹ Pseudonym

at First Baptist Church, the trust process facilitated by CDF, as well as town hall meetings. She approached all of these gatherings with universal friendliness, an attentively listening ear, and a desire to help people recognize the needs of all Clarkston residents. There were few community events I attended at which Ms. Sheila was not present as well.



Photograph 10.

“At the Avalon Apartments in Ms. [Sheila’s] House” (Marjorie, photographer)

Marjorie (Caucasian American) commented on the above picture,

Oh, I just love Ms. [Sheila]. She is just an incredible person and she has had to have wheelchair assistance for so many years and she is just incredible, incredible. Her contributions to the community, to the people in the community. Just a loving, loving person, I just love this woman. I can sit and talk to her all day long and she has always got something new to tell [...]. And she loves our community. [...] She has always cared about the city of Clarkston, and only in the last year and a half to two years has she actually been living within the city limits, but always came to city council meetings, as

long as I can remember. Even when there was no wheelchair access, she got into the building.

There was agreement in the group and among my local contacts regarding the value of Ms. Sheila's contributions to the community.

Another individual who stood out for her efforts was one of the project participants, Gargaaro (Somali). Gargaaro's identity was explicitly rooted in her self-understanding as a community connector and benevolent helper. She created her own job title as "community outreach" and set up shop in front of Thriftown, where she would listen to the needs of passers-by and set in motion everything in her power to find solutions to people's problems. This was such an integral part of her identity that most of her commentary in all Photovoice sessions revolved around her helping and connecting activities. She described herself saying,

I will tell everybody to know [Gargaaro]. She's a connector, loving people, understanding, I mean listening about different problems. [...] Whatever I give, whatever they bring for the refugee, I divide for my friends, African American and refugee.

Because we share together. That was my goal, to share together. And love.

Gargaaro gave many examples of her efforts, including an incident in which she connected a disabled African American Clarkston resident, who was going to get evicted because he had not been able to pay his rent, to a church that ended up paying in his place. She also told of a program in which she assisted that brought together Darfurians and South Sudanese by asking them to look each other in the eyes and shake hands. Another example was about her taking a fellow refugee, who had lived in Clarkston for seven years, but who had never taken ESL classes and did not know how to maneuver the American bureaucracy, to the Department of Labor after he had lost his job and insurance coverage while suffering from glaucoma. In all her examples, Gargaaro emphasized that she did not make a difference between people of different

backgrounds; that she loved all and was willing to help all regardless of their nationality, ethnicity, age, or religion. Despite her self-focus, Gargaaro did not stand alone with her view of herself, which was confirmed by the other project participants attesting to the key role she played in Clarkston. Brad (Caucasian American), who was paired with her for the partner assignment, submitted the following captioned images to capture her agency in Clarkston:



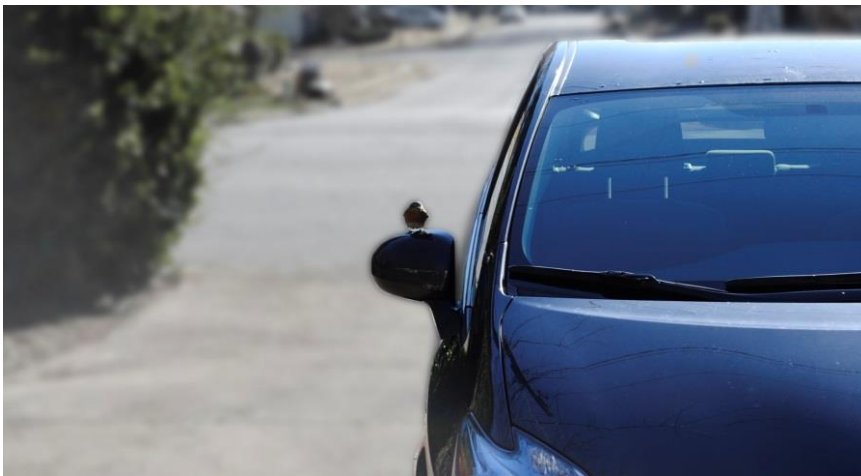
Photograph 11.

“I see [Gargaaro] as someone who spreads passion and life into others. Her presence and outgoing personality make people smile. She is a leader and counselor to the people of Clarkston. This is represented by the color radiating out of the central flower.” (Brad, photographer)



Photograph 12.

“This is a common path [Gargaaro] takes to get to Clarkston Village. She sets up meetings, interacts with strangers, buys groceries, and is a loyal patron of the businesses here and within Clarkston. She demonstrates a caring of all cultures and ethnicities through her interactions with these citizens, businesses, and organizations. Her engagement is exemplary of how community members should interact.” (Brad, photographer)



Photograph 13.

“This image to me represents a vulnerable animal sitting on a strong and powerful machine. The bird and its stance represent [Gargaaro], very strong and looking straight ahead towards prosperity. The automobile represents the convoluted process of setting and assimilating in the United States. To me, the willingness to stand alongside the process that is the machine and voice her opinion as a confident humanitarian is inspiring!” (Brad, photographer)

Commenting on these images, Brad shared the following:

Meeting with [Gargaaro], I met a lot of other people. So she really kind of was a connector, connection to all these other sources. And if there's one thing to just meeting with her, you definitely get this passion and sense of... she wants to have... everyone's her family and she wants everyone to be a part of it. And she's not excluding anyone, which is very... inviting and nice to see. She's just very, very willing to help anyone. I told her yesterday, she asked me if I watched the news, and I'm like “no, I don't have a TV” and she's like “I will give you a TV!” I'm like “I don't want a TV!” But she's just

like if she puts it in her head that you need a TV, she'll get you a TV. So I wouldn't be surprised [if I had a TV waiting at my door when I come home].

While Gargaaro's activities were particularly recognized, all but three of the project participants had previously volunteered in the community, some more extensively than others. For instance, Chloe (African American) spent most of her time engaged in a variety of community activities, both those specific to uplifting the African American population and those that involved the entire diverse population. She gave an example of a Malaysian family whose income was \$600 per month and who was paying for the child's school lunches. Shocked to learn that refugees were on their own after 90 days of support by the voluntary agencies, Chloe took this family under her wings and made sure they would get free lunches for the child. She summarized her experiences volunteering as follows,

I've always valued relationship building, but just showing up, it doesn't happen between 9 and 7, it's not going to be cookie cutter Monday through Friday, it's being there at 3 in the morning. And the question becomes for the people on the other side who are well-meaning, how much do I give without disrupting completely my own life? So that's again where that compassion comes in.

Carroll (African American), too, was particularly intentional in her community involvement. She attributed this to a personal need for having positive experiences in Clarkston that would contrast the negative experiences she had had with several break-ins into her house and visits from the police. Describing the power of volunteering and community involvement and the importance of making these priorities, she explained why she did not just sit "at home with [her] feet up" on weekends:

I like meeting the people here. I love coming to things like this, or the CDF trust thing or I took a little paper making class with [a local artist] and met some other people. [...] I

like those things and I think that over time, in any situation, enough of that whatever just can't exist together, gets diluted out enough until you really do have a different kind of sense of people living and belonging, working together and being accepted and you can find enough positive things that change how you feel about an area.

John (Caucasian American) had been an avid advocate for education and recreation for years, both professionally and on his own time. Tigist (Ethiopian), whom I had first met when she was volunteering at the Community Center during her spring break, also had a reputation as someone who contributed a lot to the community through her involvement in a range of communal organizations and initiatives, both Ethiopian and intercultural. Reflecting on her imminent departure for college, Frank (Caucasian American) stated that the people in Clarkston “wanted her to stay in Clarkston. Just from the people [he had] known and talked to, she [was] a really important part of this community.”

However, not only Clarkston residents made a positive impact on communal dynamics. Lynn (African American) submitted this photo to document another positive aspect of the Clarkston community:



Photograph 14.

“In this picture there are three young college students who are walking around the Clarkston Station to sign up young children for a youth program in Clarkston” (Lynn, photographer)

During the discussion, Lynn said that she “thought it was really neat” that students from Atlanta made an effort to help out in Clarkston by signing up children and teenagers of all backgrounds for a youth program. This comment brought attention to a noteworthy fact: While Clarkston residents themselves play a central role in shaping their daily lived experiences, many of the individuals who work, volunteer, and otherwise participate in events without living in the town also contribute to its communal dynamics. Most of the individuals whom I met working for the many non-profit organizations in town lived away from Clarkston, but spent most of their waking hours there, doing everything they could to make a positive contribution. The project participants pointed out several of these individuals and expressed their appreciation for them.

Many of the discussions revolved around particular people and specific experiences and stories. While as social scientists we may strive to generalize and summarize, it deserves mention that the way the Photovoice participants thought about and made sense of life in Clarkston was innately detailed, personal, and specific. No story could be told without somebody asking for clarification as to the exact location of a particular venue or the identity of a person. Names mattered, people mattered.

Summary

The purpose of the first step in the research process was to identify the communal dynamics that shape everyday life in Clarkston. Chapter 4 shed light on the factors that, in the eyes of the Photovoice participants, had a positive influence on intergroup relations in the Clarkston community. Among them were the Clarkston Village with the Thriftown grocery store that very intentionally catered to the diverse population, and Kathmandu Kitchen and Grill, a thriving center of Nepalese culture and a popular congregation and meal-sharing location for all. The Clarkston Community Center with its varied programming available to everyone and a number of recreational activities that ranged from the arts, to soccer, and the sharing of food and

drink were also named as positive forces in the community. Finally, the participants talked about the benefits of the high level of diversity prevalent in Clarkston and highlighted the contributions of individuals who stood out in their pursuits to unite the community. These findings will be discussed in chapter 7.

Chapter 5:

Negative Aspects of the Clarkston Community that Divide Its Residents

“With every issue, don’t assume it’s about personalities; look for structural factors at work.” (John, participant)

The second assignment asked the Photovoice participants to identify challenging aspects of life in Clarkston. After a lively exchange of views and much agreement on what positive factors unite the population in the first week, the participants seemed unafraid to speak their minds regarding the challenges they faced in Clarkston. As in the first week, there was overlap in the participants’ concerns, some of which came as a surprise to them, particularly all groups’ struggles with the city administration and police. Other challenges identified included deterioration and poor living conditions and a resulting concern for children’s safety; challenges in education; poverty and marginalization among the marginalized; as well as resource competition and employment-based divisions.

City Administration and Police

The Clarkston city administration and police have been problematized as hostile and prejudiced towards refugees in both St. John’s (2009) *Outcasts United* as well as in the stage play *Third Country* (Horizon Theatre, 2014). At the time of the Photovoice project, the city council had hired a new city manager and police chief, and the citizens had elected a new mayor. Some of the project participants acknowledged that they had recently observed some improvements in the city administration. As Chloe stated,

In the meetings held by both the police and administration, positive things are happening in the city, but it is taking a while for it to translate to the people. While there are many things happening to improve Clarkston, [...] many people in various sections of the city feel the improvements don't positively impact them. The police and the administration

[...] have presented excellent results to the city compared to where it was even just five years ago, but we have a long road ahead.

Despite such tentative recognition of improvements, criticism outweighed praise.

City administration. None of the Photovoice participants were overall satisfied with the performance of the Clarkston city administration. They perceived those in power to be hostile, hypocritical, and inefficient. Other concerns included deficiencies in economic development, taxation, and illogical city limits that resulted in an overlap in jurisdiction between the City of Clarkston and DeKalb County. The following photo caption succinctly summarizes the participants' discussions regarding the challenges residents faced in dealing with the city administration:



Photograph 15.

“You can’t fight City Hall!” - There are power struggles in any administration, but for a town so small, we seem to have a lot of them. From how tax dollars are being spent, to avenues for economic development and quality of life, it seems that we are not making progress on what should be the priorities for our city. There is a lot of motion, but not a lot of mission. [...] City government needs to be more transparent and make allies out of its 'squeaky wheel' citizens. Something must be done to decrease the number of discouraged and apathetic citizens, and engage people in a strongly-united, incredibly-positive city vision.” (Carroll, photographer)

Perceptions of hostility were initially based on the previous administration and a sense that the city had harassed the small businesses in the Clarkston Village and tried to “drive them out by using the code arbitrarily and mak[ing] things difficult for them.” Certain city officials had been overheard by several participants talking “openly about driving out these businesses and driving out businesses owed by people of a certain color.” While some members of the group felt

that such hostility may no longer have been as big a concern with the new administration, others were still apprehensive. John and Marjorie (Caucasian Americans) specifically stated that they thought the Family Dollar that had been erected across the street from the Clarkston Village had been “recruited into the community as something more attractive than what [was] already [there].” Gargaaro (Somali) added that she had been told to her face by a council woman that the city council intended to “take [these] business[es] out, the small business[es] should go out.” According to her account, the city council wanted “Spanish, [...] Spanish restaurants, [...] white people, rich people to come and build this [...] city.” John confirmed having heard this, and added that other city council members had been overheard saying the same thing.

Gargaaro (Somali) provided another account of perceived hostility. She reiterated multiple times and at separate occasions that she felt that the above-mentioned member of the city council was not to be trusted because she had turned around on the very people who had helped her get elected.



Photograph 16.

“Clarkston City Hall Annex” (Gargaaro, photographer)

Using the above picture of the City Hall Annex as a starting point for her remarks, Gargaaro described her experience as the former “campaign manager” for said council member as follows:

[I was] like campaign manager. For the council woman. [...] When I campaign and she succeed, and she succeed from refugee, no white American give her a vote. Was two African American and a lot of refugee who was citizen in America.³⁰ When she get, she turn like a liar. And started talking bad about... she’s a hypocrite, by the way! And she turned talking about “nasty refugee” and “don’t trust African American” and that the people who give her vote. [And they brought in the new] city manager, they hire new city manager. When they hire city manager, they become a team, very strong team, to arrest refugee. They fired Chief Scipio, because he used to like refugees, you remember that one?

While this particular account was not corroborated by the other participants in its specifics, nobody objected to Gargaaro’s remarks either. However, three other participants submitted images of the Clarkston City Hall and/or the City Hall Annex, sharing their concerns about what they felt was happening inside. Carroll (African American) commented as follows:

The City Hall Annex is akin to a white-washed wall for the community at large - beautiful on the outside, but rotting and decaying underneath. [...] From the Mayor’s Office, Police Chief, and City Manager, to each citizen of the city, we must come together to unite our voices, celebrate our diversity, and build a safe community with healthy respect for each other as our foundation.

John (Caucasian) questioned if the city administration shared these aspirations asking “Is there a concern? Is there a thoughtful effort to make this a better place? Is that what it’s about? I don’t

³⁰ As explained in chapter 2, refugees may opt to become U.S. citizens after they have lived in the country for six years. Gargaaro was referring to these individuals who had obtained the right to vote via naturalization. It is common for people in Clarkston to continue to refer to individuals as refugees even after they have adjusted their status.

think so.” The perception that the city administration lacked “empathy and compassion for the people” and that it “alienate[d] itself from the people [and therefore couldn’t] be successful with [the] main purpose of [its] mission” was one shared by all the Photovoice participants. This sentiment of alienation took several forms, including a sense that the city did “not pay attention to what the residents need[ed]. Like [...] cleaning up [around town,] something that the city should be in charge of, something they should organize to take care of.” The following image of a street sign that had two street names - Central and Church - painted on top of each other further illustrated the participants’ concerns regarding the city administration’s lack of care and diligence:



Photograph 17.

“‘Blurred Vision’ - I can't believe this sign is even up. This is really a shame on the city if they allowed this to happen. To me, this signifies the lack of care and attention to detail by the city.” (Amita, photographer)

Amita (Indian American) explained during discussion how the existence of this street sign made her feel:

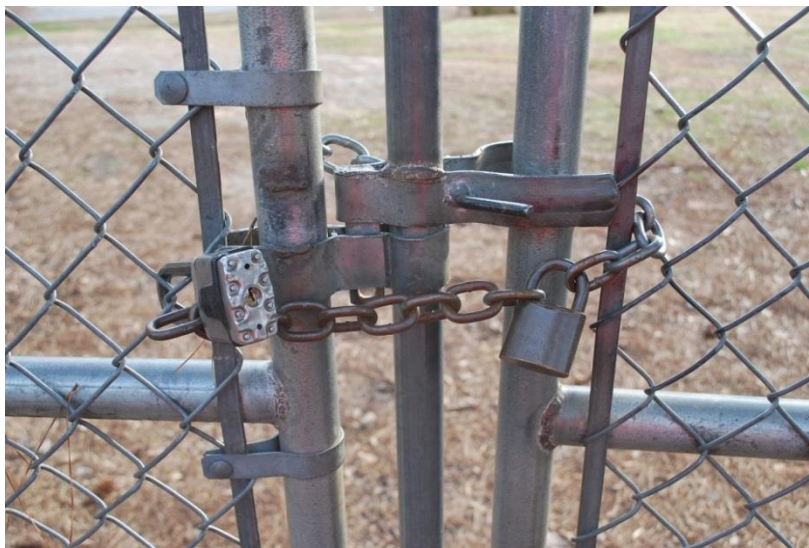
There was money paid for it and I guess they didn’t want to put more money in, but you know, it just doesn’t make you feel good [...]. People are supposed to be in charge and try

to make things better. And so to me, it just shows a lack of care and attention to detail when I see a sign like that.

Not everybody in the group had previously noticed this sign, but all participants were stunned by its existence.

Some participants provided suggestions for improving the city's effectiveness. John (Caucasian) found that "the City of Clarkston [did] not have a tax base to adequately support its operations." With this problem in mind, Carroll (African American) particularly emphasized the need for increasing opportunities for economic development and restructuring the taxation system to reduce the burden on homeowners while imposing an impact tax on irresponsible landlords.

The following abstract photograph represented these ideas:



Photograph 18.

"Who has the keys to unlock the city's potential, and why haven't they been used?"

The gates have been padlocked on Clarkston's 'Field of Dreams.' People complain about access to resources, but they are not willing to put their shoulder to the plow, and give of their time and energy to lend a hand. CDF worked hard to engage the community, but in the end, the people that will benefit most (families with students) were not out in numbers that made me believe the problem is worth all of the resources I believe there is a need, but I do not believe it is Clarkston's highest priority.

The key to access increased resources in Clarkston lies in economic development. We have got to create, nurture, and sustain opportunities that will make Clarkston a 'destination' for people to live, work, shop, play, and learn. We cannot afford to be one of the metro area's best kept secrets. We must increase the city's tax revenue without further burdening the homeowners. We need to have impact taxes levied on landlords and slumlords. We need to make it more desirable to be a Clarkston homeowner than a renter or apartment dweller. Clarkston is bleeding cash to vampire people that use its resources to get on their feet, and move on without investing for the next generation." (Carroll, photographer)

Additional questions regarding taxation arose in several instances. Because the project participants felt that the population was being under-served by the city administration, they were concerned that their tax dollars were not well-spent. This included taxes paid to support “excessively rigorous and often seemingly arbitrary enforcement of codes” as well as questions concerning the city limits and whether or not local public schools, none of which were within the city limits at the time, should be the responsibility of the City of Clarkston or DeKalb County.

The Clarkston city limits were cause for much confusion and frustration as was discussed both in the Photovoice project and in conversations during fieldwork. Narrowly defined, the city limits encompassed 1.1 square mile at the time of the project. It was surrounded by unincorporated DeKalb County, an area often referred to as the Clarkston area, which was demarcated by the 30021 ZIP code and which was governed by multiple, not always well-coordinated entities. Many Clarkston residents (both narrowly and broadly defined) were frustrated by what they perceived to be “illogical” city limits. As John (Caucasian American) described it, “people there [had] to relate to all these different entities, and it [was] draining.” Marjorie (Caucasian American), who had first lived outside of and then moved within the official city limits, described her frustrations as follows:

I think the biggest thing down here, and when I first came, I came to live in Clarkston, and I had a 30021 [ZIP] code, nobody told me it was unincorporated DeKalb County with a Clarkston 30021 mailing address and I was very angry about that because I didn't know the difference. So for a long time, I was living quote unquote “outside the city limits,” so when I decided to make the move, I made a point to making sure that I moved back within the city limits, because when I went to register to vote the first time, I said “what are you talking about? I live in the city of Clarkston.” And they said “Oh no, you live in unincorporated DeKalb County with a 30021 area code, Clarkston mailing address” and it

was crazy, I was furious, I was absolutely furious, you know... It's the way it's set up that makes it very difficult, I think.

Concerns with the city limits not only pertained to voting rights, but also to a lack of influence over the schools that served the local student population. Chloe (African American), a mother of school-aged children, described the poor conditions prevailing at the Clarkston area schools³¹ and pointed out that “if the schools were within the city limits, [the deficiencies] could be addressed through the city.” However, Chloe’s perception was that because there were segments of the population who were not supportive of the economically disadvantaged refugee and African American populations who constituted the majority of the students attending the schools in question, they did not want to incur “the unwanted tax burden” of having the schools under city jurisdiction.

At the time of the Photovoice project, an initiative was underway to annex some of the unincorporated DeKalb County area to officially become part of the City of Clarkston, but no decision had been reached.³² John shared that several years prior, he had learned that “the budget of the city of Clarkston was 2/3 of the budget of the Decatur YMCA. Pitifully small amount of money!” He concluded that “in the years that [he had] worked in the community, a major obstacle was the city. And it might be a good thing if the city just went away. If it didn’t exist anymore, if it was unincorporated Clarkston area.” Reflective of the divisions in the community, there was lack of agreement within the group as to whether or not this was a good idea.

Police. The Clarkston city police were a point of discussion during each of the four Photovoice sessions. Parallel to perceptions of some improvement in the city administration, two

³¹ Discussed later on in this chapter.

³² On November 4, 2014, the annexation was approved in a special election (Murchinson, 2014).

of the participants acknowledged that they felt police performance had improved compared to previous years. As Marjorie (Caucasian American) stated,

The policing of the City of Clarkston has very much changed to the positive when it comes to matters of the community. It's not old-school the way it was. I think things here in the city are 100% better than it was say a couple of years ago.

Carroll (African American), whose house had been broken into multiple times in the eight years that she had lived in Clarkston, shared:

I have had both positive and negative experiences from what has happened at my house over time. [...] I guess for me it's more positive these days than it was in my first encounter. I was hoping never to know a policeman by name, but now I know. [...] I'm just thankful that I could call when I am going to be out of town, submit my little form, and they come by and check on the house and put a business card on the door. I just think that's nice [...] I have Chief Hudson's cell number in my phone, hahaha.

Amita (Indian American) added that while she had heard many negative stories about the police, she personally derived a sense of safety from the constant police patrols in the neighborhood.

Marjorie (Caucasian American) suggested instead that her sense of security was independent of her proximity to the police station and that it was mainly a result of living in a small town. Amita acknowledged that being a major contributing factor to her sense of security as well.

For Grace (Congolese), who appeared to be suffering from an undiagnosed mental illness³³), the police contributed to a sense of fear and insecurity. According to her own retelling of events, she was temporarily kept from participating in the project because police picked her up from her apartment, hospitalized, and medicated her without her consent because somebody in the community had aspersed her. She was furious that she had been force-medicated and fled the hospital. One of my community contacts, who was familiar with the events that had taken place, suspected that this had happened to Grace because she did not speak English well enough to defend herself when questioned at her apartment. Upon her return to the project, Grace stated:

I have a question for the police, too. Because now we're confused everywhere we're going: "No, I will call police! I will call police!" [...]. You know, sometimes I'm saying [it has become like their chant]. "We call police, we call police!" If you are American, [...]: "No, we call police!!" If they say "I will call police," you need to scare like, to be afraid like police. No, they police [should be there] to help people here in Clarkston. Which kinds of people live in Clarkston? They don't speak English very well. They from somewhere. We're leaving the apartment, like "I don't speak English." [...] Sometimes the police come over there, you don't speak English, how you talk with them? I think they need help how to communicate with the police. What time you can call police. And why calling police. There's other thing like you can talk [to each other], no call police.

³³ Grace never directly addressed her apparent mental illness, and I do not know if it had been properly diagnosed. My community partners who had referred her to the project suspected that it may have been PTSD, but none of us were therapists with the necessary diagnostic training to say this with certainty. Grace had days on which she expressed herself more clearly than others, and I have only included instances where her comments clearly related to what was being talked about and where there was a meaningful back and forth between her and others in the group. As PTSD and related mental disorders are prevalent in refugee communities (e.g. Faze, Wheeler, & Danesh, 2005; Kulwicki & Balllout, 2015; Momartin, Silove, Manicavasagar, & Steel, 2004; Norredam, Jensen, & Ekstrøm, 2011), separate projects in collaboration with therapists may shed light into the needs and challenges experienced by this demographic.

Why? And the police when they came, they don't care. They don't care, when they come... "creck" (sound).

While the exact circumstances of Grace's experience remained unclear, it was obvious that she and those aware of her situation were shocked and appalled by what had happened. Her sense that the police felt more like a threat than like protectors and helpers was one shared by others in the group and most of them were critical of the constant police patrols. Especially those project participants who were born outside of the United States felt that they were being targeted by police. Kelile (Ethiopian) thought that the police mistreated foreign-born residents and that they immediately ticketed people who were not fluent in English or had an accent regardless of whether or not an infraction had actually taken place. What he found particularly disconcerting was that there was no chance of fighting these tickets because the local court was biased in favor of the police. He stated,

In Clarkston, the way other people who are coming from other areas... other countries... and live here, most of the time complain about the police department because whether they do against the rules or not, most of the time the police officers handle them mistreated, or mis... I don't know how... against the rule. Because where they contact with them, when they get their languages, their second language, the police officer immediately write the ticket. Always. Most people complain about this. Whether they do against the rules or not, and I don't know how, when I talk with people, they say to me, they try to confront on the court, but always get that fine.

Tigist (Ethiopian), Grace (Congolese), and John (Caucasian American) reaffirmed that this was a prevalent experience people talked about in the Clarkston community. Tigist said:

I think it's mostly like [the police] see them making a small mistake or I don't know, their speed limit is up by like a few numbers of whatever, and they catch them and then after

talking to them or saying like “why were you whatever doing?” and then they hear like the accent of their pronunciation of words... they don’t just go with a warning, they automatically go to the next level of giving them a fine or a ticket or whatever. That’s what I’ve heard.

John interpreted this “money making [...] harassment” as a tactic for driving out refugees and proactively changing the city demographics.



Photograph 19.

“We need equal treatment according to the traffic rules.” (Kelile, photographer)

Gargaaro (Somali) shared numerous personal experiences of perceived police misconduct that she likened to the torture that she had experienced in her home country. Her accounts need to be understood in the context of some administrative changes that had previously occurred in Clarkston. According to St. John (2009), the Chief of Police who preceded Chief Hudson, Tony Scipio, a native of Trinidad, had been “a breath of fresh air” in Clarkston because, unlike his predecessor, he was open-minded towards refugees and emphasized the importance of cultural competence among the police force. However, after seven years of service, Chief Scipio was

retired (Hunt, 2012a; Parker, 2012).³⁴ The new city manager, Keith Barker (African American), who had been appointed by the city council in May 2011 (City of Clarkston, 2011), hired Chief Hudson (Caucasian American) as Chief Scipio's replacement in January 2012 (Hunt, 2012b).

Gargaaro (Somali) described her experience of these and subsequent events as follows:

When they hire city manager, they become a team, very strong team, to arrest refugee. They fired Chief Scipio, because he used to like refugees, you remember that one? [...] Chief Scipio, they fire Chief Scipio. And they bring another Chief, she was a Captain, I don't know what's her name [Chief Hudson], I don't like to know her name. I don't like to know her name because she is the worst in the world. Started chasing refugee, giving ticket, because we come from torture country and the war country, so they start torturing us with the ticket. Myself, they gave me a ticket, as a community outreach, I didn't have any problem with them. They give me a ticket. They just want to have money, a lot of money.³⁵

The following week, Kelile (Ethiopian) referred back to Gargaaro's statement saying:

Last time, [Gargaaro] expressed what I had inside. Therefore, about the police in Clarkston... they have to plan to get money in the name of the rule. And the court is no good for the residents in Clarkston. That's my... they think that the way to get money from the residents, that's not a good way, I don't understand why... how they think like that. Especially the immigrants. When they get their language from their mouths, they

³⁴ The exact circumstances of Chief Scipio's retirement are unclear. During the dialogue sessions, Gargaaro claimed that the city council and the city manager had plotted to "fire" him "because he used to like refugees." Independent sources (Hunt, 2012a; Parker, 2012) stated that Chief Scipio retired. According to Parker (2012), "Some Clarkston residents said Scipio's departure was sudden, but Mayor Emanuel Ransom said Thursday that it wasn't" (para. 3). Scipio himself could not be reached for commentary (Parker, 2012).

³⁵ Gargaaro's, Grace's, Kelile's, and Tigist's described experiences point to the wider dynamics of policing that are likely to occur in refugee resettlement sites, both in terms of language and cultural barriers. They also demonstrate the fear police can generate for people who have histories of trauma and life in oppressive regimes where human rights violations are often perpetrated by security forces. While this issue was not discussed in depth by the participants, it merits further exploration in the future, possibly in a project involving refugees and members of law enforcement.

use this fine for that purpose. Therefore, I don't like for Clarkston that way. That's my idea. But most of the things is expressed by [Gargaaro] last time.

Overall, the perception that tickets were being given abundantly, inconsistently, and for the predominant purpose of generating income for the city was universally shared in the group and an unexpected dynamic developed: While the police were initially brought up as a divisive factor in the community by Grace (Congolese), Tigist (Ethiopian), Kelile (Ethiopian), and Gargaaro (Somali), within a few minutes of discussion, the participants realized that *all* of them, regardless of their racial and national backgrounds, including the Caucasian American members of the group, had had problems with the police, especially with "excessive ticketing" for minor traffic offenses and code violations.³⁶ Examples included tickets for briefly parking or washing a car on one's own lawn, not coming to a complete stop driving off of one's driveway, and a safety violation for cutting trees in one's backyard although this was done by a professional company.

The most common experience shared by all the participants pertained to speeding tickets. Haben (Eritrean), Lynn (African American), Carroll (African American), Brad (Caucasian American), and John (Caucasian American) each shared stories of how they themselves or their visitors got ticketed for going just above the speed limit, some multiple times a day, which had resulted in their families and friends no longer wanting to visit them in Clarkston. John concluded that "excessively rigorous and often seemingly arbitrary enforcement of codes, regulations, and laws [was] a primary source of income for the City and of bitterness toward [...] the police force and the administration on the part of residents." Chloe (African American) added that residents did "not feel like the police value[d] the community" and that "as refugees and poor working class people in the community [residents did not] feel the security of the police

³⁶ The recognition that residents of all backgrounds shared negative experiences with the police is not intended to downplay the prevalence and ramifications of racialized policing in the United States (e.g. Harris, 2007; Vera Sanchez & Rosenbaum, 2011; Weitzer, 2000). However, this insight warrants notice because the realization that the participants had all experienced challenges in their interactions with local law enforcement led to a positive turn in the dynamics of the group, even if the nature or level of police harassment may have varied.

but always the financial burden of a ticket and fines.” When discussing what change they were hoping to bring to Clarkston, the participants agreed that they wanted the police and administration “to work with the residents, business owners, complex managers, and tenants [in a culturally sensitive way] to bring a greater sense of a safe and secure community” for all residents, regardless of their backgrounds. Safety and security were also major concerns when it came to the youngest Clarkston residents. According to the participants, children were often seen running the streets on their own from a very early age. This concern mainly stemmed from the deteriorated living conditions in large segments of town.

Deterioration, Poor Living Conditions, and Concern for Child Safety

“The landscapes in many locales in Clarkston leave much to be desired. The uncleanliness, over-spilling dumpsters, and worn structures convey a message of neglect and not one of promise” (Brad, Caucasian American). The project participants described emphatically in both words and images their displeasure with the physical constitution of Clarkston. The images documenting the physical deterioration and poor living conditions that were prevalent in Clarkston repeatedly coincided with discussions of lacking city administration (see above), poor landlord-tenant-home owner relationships, and a concern for child safety. The poor physical state of many buildings in Clarkston was also described as a cause for embarrassment, an inhibitor to feeling good about the community, and a hindrance to attracting economic development because potential investors could not feel confident that they would get their return on investment in a place looking as documented in the participants’ collage³⁷ below:

³⁷ Please see the “Lending a Megaphone to the Participants’ Voices” section in chapter 3 for details on how the collages and their captions were created.



Collage 1.

“Deterioration & Neglect - One of the reasons the federal government selected Clarkston as a refugee resettlement site is the availability of low-cost housing. With a few exceptions, most of the low-cost housing is in large, older, and generally poorly maintained apartment complexes. Even to passersby the poor management is obvious, characterized by dilapidated and run-down structures and trash-littered grounds, sidewalks, and streets. Residents complain that apartment managers are unresponsive to their maintenance requests, do not see to it that trash is picked up on a regular basis, do not keep up with regular pest control. Some report that managers, who are mostly American-born, are overtly hostile to refugees. In some complexes fires are not uncommon and children and adults have died in apartment fires. Neither the City nor the County has consistently enforced health and safety codes. As a result, the stark contrast between the maintenance of the apartment complexes and the rest of the neighborhood contributes to an “us vs. them” attitude on the part of many in the community.” (The Photovoice Participants)

Brad (Caucasian American) and Amita (Indian American) submitted the images of the Fox Trail apartment complex on the top row of the collage above. Amita used her pictures as a starting point for an introduction and application of the Broken Windows Theory (Wilson & Kelling, 1982):

[Apartment complex owners seem to] disregard the needs of their residents. [These photos depict] the lack of care to their surrounding community - they don't care if the [complexes] look dilapidated and run down and if [they] may potentially bring down the value of the entire neighborhood. [...]. Right now, it feels like an “us versus them” vibe

in the community because there are stark differences in [these complexes] and the rest of the neighborhood. [...] This symbolizes the broken window theory.

The concern in this case was less with the residents of the deteriorated apartment complex than it was with its owners who were failing to provide basic necessities to their residents, such as washers and dryers on site, or clothing lines outside to hang-dry their clothes. As a result, the residents placed their clothes on bushes, which Brad considered a health risk due to potential bug infestation. Amita described the neglectful appearance of many apartment complexes as an eyesore to neighboring home owners, who were embarrassed to host visitors and felt that the value of their own properties was diminished by this type of sight.

Subsequently, the participants discussed the conflicting interests, priorities, and resulting tensions between home owners, apartment complex owners and managers, and renters. Home owners identified and were described as being concerned with the value of their properties and burdened by the expenditures that they incurred as a result of apartment complex managers improperly maintaining their buildings. Examples included the flooding of a yard as the result of neglected gutters in a neighboring apartment complex and recurrent trash spill-overs from complexes that did not provide sufficient dumpsters. The owners of these residential properties were referred to as “slumlords” who were willing to let their residents live in “crappy housing” characterized by unsanitary, unsafe, and uncomfortable living conditions in order to maximize their profits. The apartment renters’ priorities were identified as a low cost of living and safety, in that order. Some felt that the renters were not to blame for some of the unaesthetic appearances of the properties because they were not being provided the proper amenities to keep them neat, while others felt that all had individual responsibility to keep their own space sanitary and tidy. Grace (Congolese) felt particularly strongly about people’s responsibilities as the metaphorical kings and queens of their castles,

The pictures showing like kind of people is living in this area. And which kind of people living there. [...] Because... let me say something... if you have your living somewhere [...], if you are inside, in French they say you are manager where you are living. Nobody come here tell you “you need to clean here, you need to throw trash somewhere,” because you have skill, you know where you can throw trash. You cannot throw trash in the road. The kind of people living here [act] like they don’t know, they don’t have skills. You see trash like this outside. You cannot throw trash outside because people will be sick. [...] Tell them like everybody knows you need to throw trash somewhere, but you know but you don’t wanna do it. They need to tell them if you’re somewhere, you are like manager where you stay.

The images in the second row of collage 1 showed the Brannon Hills Condominiums, an extreme example of the negligent behavior described by Grace. John pointed out that, as condominiums, the individuals living there owned their condos, so it was their own responsibility to maintain the property. He further stated,

It’s a condominium. You can buy an apartment for \$15,000. [...] That’s what they all look like. Or at the top, it’s one that just burned down. A unit of probably six apartments. And they were going through, there were some guys in there doing salvage, pulling out copper and stuff like that. In the complex, there are several concrete slabs, just where there will be a slab there, when they get back and let stuff off, there are several slabs, maybe five or six, there are fires.

During fieldwork, I went to Brannon Hills twice and felt uncomfortable and nervous walking the property. Not only were the first two buildings burnt down and the rubble left in place as shown in the collage above, but there were also numerous broken and barred windows as well as vacant condos that had been broken into and vandalized. Dumpsters were overflowing and trash was

scattered everywhere. The following collage is composed of pictures that I took during said fieldwork:



Collage 2.
"Brannon Hills Condominiums" (Birthe C. Reimers, photographer)

It was only after my visits that I learned that Brannon Hills had been and continued to be a common site for homicides (Chidi, 2015; Coen, 2011; Cook, Morris, & Spink, 2014). When discussing the images, the project participants all stated that they were avoiding this property because they did not feel safe there either. I have included my own images in this text to further contextualize the Photovoice discussions for the reader, so she or he may *see* why the participants were frustrated with the city administration's inconsistent code enforcement, neglectful and destructive behavior among some residents, and unsafe conditions.

Many of the participants raised issues of deterioration and neglect in the context of child safety. Haben (Eritrean) was concerned that there was a lack of safe play spaces, be they formal playgrounds or safe zones for children in apartment complexes.



Photograph 20.

“Playgrounds serve an important role in child development. Clarkston needs to adopt more playgrounds in the neighborhoods, because they are not just luxuries, they can help to progress the child’s social and physical skills. Playgrounds serve a positive recreational service; it’s a great hangout for the kids, and a great place for parents to meet and interact.” (Haben, photographer)

Further describing her intent behind submitting the above image, Haben stated:

The playground... I don’t see many playgrounds in Clarkston. I wish they had more playgrounds for kids. [...] I think that playgrounds are important for kids for social and physical development. It’s also a great place for parents to meet one another and to really interact. [...] This playground [...] looks so broken and ugly, and so I was just like “Where do the kids have a place?” They need a place where they can just be kids and have fun. And I don’t think Clarkston has that place where they can just feel safe and just

play freely and also where the parents can have, like their minds can be relaxed and know that their kids are having fun and that's one of the things that lack in this community.

These shortcomings did not only pertain to official public playgrounds, but also to a lack of safe play facilities in the apartment complexes around town.



Photograph 21.

“We need to strive for better living conditions, many of these apartments are not safe for the families and children; maybe we can implement more for a gated neighborhood to better protect these families, especially the children. Also, the conditions of the apartments look terrible, maybe a new paint job, gardening, is in order to give it a modern look.” (Haben, photographer)

Discussing the image above, Haben explained:

I took this picture by The Plantation, the neighborhood, and it kinda goes along with [the] broken windows theory. I used to do community service with the refugee kids over there, and most of the time when I see that area, is very, is not clean, is very messed up. [...]

They are just really unsafe and then I was like “Maybe if they can clean it up, they can get like a gated place to protect the children there and the families because anybody can just enter and you don’t really know who belongs to the community and who doesn’t.” So I

hope they just strive for better living conditions, because I think most people, because they are just refugees, they are like oh it's okay, we can just place them here, and it doesn't really matter [...].

Brad (Caucasian American) agreed that it was important for the city and apartment complexes to provide playgrounds where children could have a proper outlet so they would not wander the streets aimlessly, contributing to the widespread deterioration, and get themselves and others in trouble:

I noticed a lot of [...] young, young kids wandering around that do kinda look like they are looking for something to get into because there aren't those playgrounds where they can play and have that outlet. In my neighborhood, there's kids that throw rocks at houses and a lot of smaller kids, too, I've seen playing alone and I was driving through a complex and there are all these huge dumpsters, running on the tops of them and smacking each other with sticks and that's something little kids do anyway, but these kids were like three, four, and there's no adults in sight, which is just kinda... it's not good.

Lynn (African American) expressed similar concerns when describing her frustration with a hole that had been gaping in a fence at her apartment complex that both teenagers and young children had been using to cut across properties:

What happens is at night there's a lot of teens that jump over back and forth through the fence. Sometimes they party and I can hear them outside my window. Usually it's just them running back and through this big gaping hole and it's... in the daytime it's dangerous because there's little teeny kids, and the fence is... it's really down. [...] And it's really causing a problem with the two complexes. The other side, this side, and the people that are in the complex because you have little kids running back and forth and they can go over the fence, but they can't get back on the other side. Once they get over,

they can't get back. It's the way the fence is down. [...] It's just a matter of time [until someone gets hurt]. If you see the picture of how the fence is laid out... if they do try to get back, they are gonna get stuck, you know what I mean, caught up in it. [...] It's the little ones that are gonna suffer, really.

As evidenced in Lynn's remarks, the participants were not only concerned with Clarkston youth behaving recklessly when unsupervised, but also with the vulnerability of the younger children.

Sparked by Brad's image below, the group discussed the dangers of unsupervised play in the presence of potential predators who could take advantage of the situation and prey on small children in this environment. While all children were at risk, Brad and John pointed out that refugee children were especially vulnerable due to the fact that "in many/most refugee families, all the adults [had] to work to earn enough to get by. Often younger children [were] left in the care of older children after school and on weekends" (John, Caucasian American). For this reason, "people who [were] taking advantage of these situations [might] snatch up kids and make them do what they want, and [as] a refugee [...], you are already vulnerable, and this just accelerates that vulnerability" (Brad, Caucasian American). The following picture was inspired by a story Brad had heard about a child who had been seized during play and violated by an adult.



Photograph 22.

“Blanket - The blanket on the side of the road reminded me of a story I heard about a young girl who was repeatedly violated after school by a maintenance man at one of the apartment complexes. The image represents the vulnerability of children and the need to keep them safe.” (Brad, photographer)

The examples and stories provided by the other members of the group were particularly frustrating to John, who felt that there was a lot of unused potential in Clarkston in terms of the availability and accessibility of recreational opportunities that could have provided safer spaces for Clarkston’s youth. As others shared examples of existing facilities being misused, for instance tennis courts being used as ball or even dog parks, John found that “this community [had] every kind of recreation facility that you would want. [...] But [most of them] were not used and they were not available to be used, you couldn’t get access to them.” While the necessary structures existed, organized supervision and programming that ensured proper usage did not.

Using the metaphor of his children crossing the street, Kelile (Ethiopian) expressed his concern for his children’s safety and well-being on both a physical and a psycho-emotional level. He explained that he was worried every time his children crossed the streets because many people

did not follow the traffic laws in Clarkston. At the same time, he was hoping that he and his wife were equipping their children with all they needed to successfully navigate growing up between two cultures, in which their teachers and the local organizations in which they were involved also played a large role.



Photograph 23.

“Parenthood - The two sidewalks serve as paths that kids from other countries can take in a new environment and culture. With the many challenges they're going to face, I as a parent worry how my kids are going to overcome those obstacles on the way to their dreams. The street symbolizes actual streets that kids cross to go to school, the library, stores, the community center, etc. [It also symbolizes] a path to their future in this society. We parents worry both when they cross the streets and the path they're taking to their future and whether they'll be strong enough to get through the tough times.” (Kelile, photographer)³⁸

Recognizing that “the people [had to] share in the responsibility of supporting a community where children [could] safely and successfully live, play, and learn” (Carroll, African American), the participants discussed a need for collaborations among parents, youth-serving nonprofits, schools, apartment complex managers, the city, and the county to use and maximize Clarkston’s recreational potential in a safe and cleanly environment that was accessible and affordable for all.

Education

The topic of education was not a clearly positive or negative, but rather a controversial one. Similar to recreational facilities, education was identified as an issue of great potential in

³⁸ This picture was submitted as part of the third assignment.

the face of many shortcomings. The participants embraced the presence of the Atlanta Area School of the Deaf, Georgia Piedmont Technical College, and Georgia Perimeter College in Clarkston. They also valued the ESL and tutoring programs offered by several non-profit and faith-based organizations to help those who needed additional support in their school work. Tigist (Ethiopian), Kelile (Ethiopian), and John (Caucasian American) described Indian Creek Elementary School as an integral part of the community and applauded the teachers who were going above and beyond to work with a challenging, highly diverse student population.

According to Tigist, a former student at the school,

The teachers are really connecting and trying to be really involved with the students, plus the parents, and trying to give them all the help they need. Like while I was there, they started a Saturday tutoring, afterschool tutoring, teachers would stay after school to help with most of the things you need help with. They're really welcoming to immigrants and refugees. And they try their best to reach out to the parents and make sure that the parents are understanding how well their students, their kids are doing at the schools.



Collage 3.

“Clarkston’s diversity is most evident in its schools. This is a second grade classroom at Indian Creek Elementary School, one of the schools serving the Clarkston area. Indian Creek enrolls over a thousand students literally from around the world. In this classroom alone are kids from Bhutan, Burma, Iraq, Malaysia, Somalia, Sudan, Thailand, and Vietnam, as well as native-born kids. They have been in the US from as little as a few weeks to four and-a-half years. At the time these photos were taken, there was an Iraqi boy who had been in the class only a couple of weeks, spoke no English, and seemed never to have been in a classroom before. A school that reflects the diversity of the community and that is working with the community to help students learn is a great asset. Not surprisingly, the diversity of language, culture, and prior educational experience poses enormous challenges for Clarkston schools. Here we see some of the ways they are attempting to respond: kids playing together; kids who speak English helping kids who don’t; children working in mixed-ability groups to carry out relatively complex mathematical tasks; kids who are thriving helping kids who struggle.” (The Photovoice Participants)³⁹

While recognizing these positives, the participants were overall concerned with the quality of education provided at Clarkston area K-12 public schools and the physical conditions under which students were expected to learn. They discussed that due to closures of eight public schools in economically deprived southern DeKalb County a few years earlier, the student populations at Clarkston area schools far exceeded the existing capacities. Many students spent their days in trailers instead of classrooms and had to line-up outside for breakfast. Looking for

³⁹ Please see the “Lending a Megaphone to the Participants’ Voices” section in chapter 3 for details on how the collages and their captions were created.

remedies to these shortcomings, the group took issue with the fact that the city had no control over and no responsibility for the operations at these schools based on the fact that none of them were located within the actual city limits. According to Chloe (African American), an actively involved mother of several school-aged children,

In the city limits of Clarkston, there is a big push back about having Clarkston High School and Indian Creek as the responsibility of the city of itself. People say it's gonna be another unwanted tax burden and all of these things. [...] These children are a part of your city, so while DeKalb County is responsible for the real estate, which is a property, who is responsible for the citizens and more importantly the children? Indian Creek has 1100 students in that school. [...] The children have to wait outside. The line for breakfast goes out, wraps the school as if it's a soup kitchen, and no matter what the weather, the children have to stay outside and the parents were very concerned about that. [...] Both at Clarkston High School and at Indian Creek Elementary, they have trailers, trailers, they have trailers here but we have empty DeKalb County school buildings that are just collecting dust and mold. So, you know, [...] that becomes really a moral issue at the end of the day, you know when it comes to how do we take care of the citizens, especially when the citizens are 18 and under and furthermore, when they are new arrivals. Or if they've been here for generations, [...] the issue is access to resources and the eradication of generational poverty. That will begin becoming the perpetuation if these children feel that, you know, they are part of the soup kitchen or that they don't need to go to school because the Maslow Hierarchy of Needs⁴⁰ is not being met.

In response to Chloe's remarks, Kelile (Ethiopian), whose daughter had gone to Indian Creek Elementary shortly after the family had arrived in the United States, stated that the school had

⁴⁰ See Maslow (1943).

always seemed good to him, that he had been satisfied with the teachers, staff, and administrators. Reflecting on the discrepancies in perception, Kelile concluded that, at the time, he had been lacking a point of reference to which he could compare the status quo at the school. The insight that individuals who had fled war-torn countries and lacked a comparative reference point in terms of public education standards would be more likely to accept a sub-standard status quo than if they knew differently, was one that resonated with the group and that they subsequently applied to other issues they discussed. Looking ahead, Chloe (African American) and Gargaaro (Somali) concluded that:

We see Clarkston and the community in collaboration with the school, state, and county working to move our children's educational experience in a positive direction to come up with the solutions for the areas of deficit while discovering our assets to build an environment where the educational experience of our community will have a tremendously positive impact on the community.

This wish for greater coherence and collaboration among the governing entities in Clarkston in an effort to create an improved experience – educational and otherwise – was one shared by all in the group.

Poverty and Marginalization among the Marginalized

While empathetic with the plight of recent immigrants and refugees throughout the Photovoice project, Chloe (African American) also repeatedly and fervently raised the issue of generational poverty and how it affected the native-born “brown” population (African Americans and Latinos), whose similarly challenging life circumstances she felt were often overlooked and unaddressed. Her descriptions and analyses of the situation went in two different directions: on the one hand, without using these exact words, she confirmed that there was a sense of marginalization among the marginalized within the African American population, which is

something I had previously been told during fieldwork as well. On the other hand, she made an effort to consider the dynamics more abstractly and found that poverty was poverty, and poverty was physically and psychologically harmful, regardless of one's origins.

Pointing out the differences between the foreign and native born populations in Clarkston, Chloe also looked for root causes of such differences. She suggested that class, education, political savvy, and transferable skills may have been the greater determinants of one's fate in Clarkston (and elsewhere in the United States) rather than race or nationality:

I just challenge them to look at the issue of poverty because a lot of times, when you deal with refugees, first of all refugees and asylees, if they got to this country, there is some level of either educational or political savvy that they have, a lot of times, in order for them to have even made it to get to this country. So what they have is called transferable skills, so once they learn the language, they are able to rebuild a lot quicker than the original refugees [referring to slaves] who were brought here and were mentally broken down if not more, and then you know that cycle has been continuing.

Chloe further drew attention to the pervasive mental health issues in the Clarkston community. Her concern was that while it was widely understood that many refugees suffered from PTSD, and that males from patriarchal cultures were at a high risk of committing suicide when they could not properly provide for their families, few people were aware of the existence of intergenerational trauma and depression and their effects on the African American and Latino populations:

We have to really understand that people come home from the war and we talk about Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, there is also something called Post Traumatic Slave Disorder [...]. And we have to understand that there's a lot of undiagnosed mental illness and depression within the brown community and it doesn't even have to be brown people,

because I am sure the people who live in trailer parks in parts of Georgia, it is not a color issue, it is an issue of poverty, and poverty causes mental distress. [...] But all I know is what my experience has been as a brown woman in America.

John (Caucasian American) shared Chloe's concerns and added that a lot of the things that African American families had experienced during slavery and the Jim Crow era were quite similar to the torture that refugees experienced in more recent decades. This statement was met with resistance by Gargaaro (Somali), who felt that the torture that prompted refugees to flee their home countries was not comparable to what African Americans had experienced. This led to the following discussion that created an atmosphere in the room that felt like emotions were boiling below the surface and sensitivities were about to break through the "crust" of politeness:

Gargaaro: But let me say, the way we are tortured is not the way African Americans suffer from that.

Chloe: Not today.

John: Well, you don't know the history of this country.

Gargaaro: Oh yea?

Chloe: Read the Autobiography of Frederick Douglass, I'mma bring one for you.

Gargaaro: Okay, thank you.

Chloe: Yea.

John: Even within the nationalities, there are these issues or differences. Like the Bhutanese community, there is a part of it that has these transferable skills, they were professionals in Bhutan, and there is a larger group who were peasants, farmers, illiterate, uneducated. One is thriving, relatively, the other is struggling.

Chloe: And that's the same, you can use that same comparison here with the field nigger and the house nigger. You know, the house niggers were the ones that lived in the house and, you know, they...

John: Go see 12 Years a Slave, [Gargaaro].

The tension in the room, which may not be entirely reflected by the words exchanged alone, deeply upset one of my community partners, who attended most sessions in order to support the process and who had come to the country as a refugee as well:⁴¹

I just wanna... although I'm not officially participating, but I really wanna... working with the community, to me, when I was working with African Americans at Avalon... during the evictions... Once you got eviction notice, it looks like a war, it smells like a war, and it feels like a war. It was like a war. And people did not know where to go, they didn't have food. I really felt it's war at Avalon Station because it's ten families who were evicted. And it was a war, and it felt like a war! It felt like a war! It smelled like a war! It was a war! [Crying, screaming] It's not a matter of who is more victim of torture. It's about injustice! No matter, it's poverty, it's war, if it's... whatever it is, it's not that we are tortured more and you less, it's about to come together... It doesn't matter if I was tortured there, or here, it's just injustice all over the world. It's not that African American is less tortured than we refugee, or more tortured, let's not have that fight who has more torture. Or more or less having. It's just about we are experiencing injustice, no matter if it's war or racism or slavery.

Knowing the speaker's identity and background as an individual who had fled a high conflict country, the participants listened intently and gave visual cues to suggest they agreed with this point. This emotional moment ended up being a critical incident that led to a turning point in

⁴¹ As indicated in chapter 3, this person did sign an informed consent form for any of her commentary to be included in my write-up.

Chloe's narrative, changing it from a one about the problems of US natives to one of shared struggle to overturn domination, irrespective of the circumstances. Referencing Nelson Mandela's achievements in South Africa, she concluded during the dialogue session that only approaching each other from a perspective of love could end domination.

In preparation for this dialogue session, John (Caucasian American) had submitted the following image of the offices of Refugee Family Services earlier that week:



Photograph 24.

“Offices of Refugee Family Services. RFS is one of the oldest refugee-serving organizations in the Clarkston area. It goes back to the very first Vietnamese refugees in the mid-70's and was founded by a Vietnamese woman. The range of services is impressive: the range of initial resettlement services provided to new refugees; afterschool programs for children and youth; political and policy advocacy for refugees and immigrants; a school-liaison program to assist families when their children are having difficulty in school. Though impressive, the services provided do not begin to meet the needs of refugees.

Nevertheless, this wonderful organization is representative of a problem the refugee-serving organizations pose for the community: There is another population in the community that is equally large with exactly the same problems that refugees have - low-income African Americans.

Yet neither the refugee-serving organizations nor any other organizations provide similar services to the African Americans. The discrepancy is a source of great resentment and an obstacle to inclusion of African Americans in efforts to solve problems and build community in the area.” (John, photographer)

As expressed in both his caption and the subsequent discussion of the image, John did not intend to discredit Refugee Family Services as an organization or dismiss any of the work they were doing for the refugee community. Instead, the purpose of this picture was to highlight that no

equivalent services were available to the predominantly economically disadvantaged African American population in Clarkston, which was driving a wedge between these population subgroups and made African Americans feel unwelcome and unappreciated. To illustrate this, he shared a conversation he had had with an African American lady who had been running the kitchen at an after school program. He had noticed that few African American children were participating in the program, the following dialogue evolved:

“You know, [the way it looks to me,] African Americans don’t show up and there is not things for them and they don’t show up.” And she told me... she lived in the Clarkston area... and she told me about her own family, she said “I try to tell them that there are these things available for them, and they don’t believe me, they won’t try.”

A local African American pastor had also addressed the actual and/or perceived inaccessibility of services for African Americans during fieldwork. He had referred to the prominent train tracks in Clarkston as the physical and symbolic dividing line between mostly African Americans on the one side, and refugees, whites, service providers, and infrastructure on the other. While refugees and whites had easy access to the services and amenities they needed, African Americans either did not have the same privileges or had to cross the tracks to reach them, according to the pastor. When discussing this idea in the group, the participants were intrigued by the pastor’s metaphor, but did not feel like the lines were as impenetrable and that with some effort, people could get to where they needed to go. For instance, Carroll (African American) suggested that the tracks were what people made of them, and that it was up to the individuals whether they would let themselves be stopped by the train.

I lived a long time ago in a community that had a train and it stopped the whole city because there wasn’t an overpass and here it’s like the train can go by and you can get

around it if you need to, so it never felt like the other side of the tracks to me, just because I can be stopped by the train or I can go around the train.

The participants agreed that refugee-serving organizations like Refugee Family Services should not be penalized for focusing their efforts on their target populations since the donors funding these non-profit organizations required that their money be spent on serving refugees only.

Carroll explained:

When refugees come to the United States, they have an opportunity to start from scratch. People and services are attracted to that spirit of the underdog. Generational poverty [as prevalent in the African American community] is not attractive and people do not flock to aid people caught in this cycle. What can be done and what people are willing to do are two very different things. [...] To break this cycle, those with a passion to serve [the African American] population will need to put on their wading boots, walk into the water, and teach people to fish by hand, not hand-out.

This remark circled back to Chloe's statements about the historical root causes of generational poverty among African Americans discussed above and why she thought that breaking the cycle was a big challenge. The image prompted the rest of the group to reflect on the existence of other organizations in the community that specifically provided services to African Americans.

However, they could only think of one organization called Positive Growth, Inc. that, while open to the entire community, ran a residential program specifically for African American boys in Clarkston.

Supplemental data from fieldwork. While this discussion was one of the more intense ones in the project, I obtained the most passionate account of the relationships between refugees and African Americans in Clarkston from an older black gentleman during fieldwork. This

impromptu and unstructured interview occurred after a town hall meeting that Charles⁴² had accidentally walked into while looking for a planning meeting for an African American Festival that was also being held at the Clarkston Community Center. During a break, he told me that he had been born and raised in Clarkston and that his family had lived in town since the 19th century. During our conversation, he took me on a journey of “how things used to be,” including the places and spaces where blacks and whites would and would not intersect during the Jim Crow era. He described Clarkston as a town where, despite segregation and compared to other parts of the Deep South, blacks and whites had lived alongside each other relatively politely and peacefully. At the time of his recollections, the city was under the jurisdiction of a mayor whose son “came to the black neighborhood and treated [people] like he was one of [them]. One of the nicest people you’ll ever meet.” Charles said there was no trouble, so the single police officer who patrolled the city was welcomed into their homes by all of the residents. He stated, “We used to have all these services provided here, we were self-contained, it was beautiful.”

According to Charles’ memories, intergroup relations in Clarkston changed when refugees started being resettled there. With tears in his eyes, he recollected:

Clarkston has changed so much, it breaks my heart; all these foreigners came here and took over the town and they look at us funny like “What do you want here?” Nobody cares how we feel. [...] Vietnamese people look at us like we don’t belong here.

Refugees think they are better than us. They moved here where the white people live, but we couldn’t live here. [...] I don’t like what Clarkston has turned into. Nobody cares anymore. It used to keep itself up. Clarkston Community Day [a neighborhood festival organized by African American residents] will be held in the black neighborhood because

⁴² Pseudonym

we don't think these foreigners want to learn about black history, they don't want to know us or about us.

Charles subsequently compared the way he felt African Americans were being treated by refugees, in his view foreigners who had no right to condescend or discriminate against any Americans, to the way he had felt treated after returning from war:

Every man in my family fought for the country but never got treated right when they came back here, they called them nigger and didn't treat them right; no sympathy; we were treated well elsewhere, but not at home... it is still kind of like that.

What Charles struggled with the most was that many of the refugees who were disinterested in the African American community and who treated them disparately were other individuals of African descent:

We don't feel like the refugees feel like we are part of the neighborhood. They are never interested in anything we do. They never come to our school. They are not interested enough to participate in anything we organize. White people used to keep a friendly distance, but now we don't even know how to connect with the foreign people, especially the Ethiopians. We don't feel like we connect with them. Somebody must have told them to stay away from us and beware. They are black, they are the same people we are, but somebody put fear in them somehow.

Immediately following these remarks⁴³, Gargaaro (Somali), who was also attending the town hall meeting, walked over to us, said hello to Charles and handed him a bottle of water. He turned to me and smiled, saying "That's never happened to me... that was a break that I never thought would happen!" When the town hall meeting resumed, Gargaaro stated: "The Americans need to respect refugees, but refugees also need to respect Americans. We need to work together and be

⁴³ I do not know if Gargaaro had overheard what Charles had said or if it was her intuition that led her to approach him in this way and at that moment, but her timing could not have been better.

one family, we want to be part of the family.” Afterwards, Charles thanked me for listening to him and stated that he had felt relieved to have felt like somebody had actually paid attention to his concerns after so many years.

During previous fieldwork, I had heard multiple times that such experiences and perceptions existed among the African American community in Clarkston. While some of the remarks during the Photovoice sessions, especially Chloe’s (African American), had alluded to such a phenomenon, these remarks had been less fervent and less accusatory of the refugee population. When I probed into this variance in conversations with my community partners, they suggested that the differences in perception and experience among African Americans in Clarkston was likely dependent on whether they were long-time residents like Charles, or individuals who had moved there in the last decade or two, as was the case with the African American Photovoice participants. During his follow-up interview, John (Caucasian American), who had worked with diverse populations in Clarkston for many years and who was the first person to bring up the lack of support for marginalized African American during the Photovoice sessions, shared this same theory. Suggestions for further exploring the phenomenon of marginalization among the marginalized will be discussed in chapter 7.

Resource Competition and Employment-Based Divisions

The final major source of conflict discussed at length by the project participants was competition in terms of access to resources, support, and employment. There was a shared sense in the group that in an environment of scarcity, many people in Clarkston were protective of any advantages they had secured for themselves and were hesitant to share them with others. Their sentiments about this behavior ranged from understanding to criticism. For instance, Brad (Caucasian American) attributed people’s unwillingness or inability to help others and share their resources to their drive for self-preservation and comfort, to which he could relate:

That level of preservation that everybody has to secure. I wanna come home and I wanna be comfortable and I wanna be relaxed, and that's very valid. You wanna hold that [...] in regard, but then these people are coming and they have to fight, struggle for everything, no, you're not gonna help someone else, you're trying to preserve for your family, what [Chloe] said, too, sometimes you stay so focused, you kinda have to push everything to the side until this right here, right in front of you is secure and stable. And then you can start developing everything else outside of that.

John (Caucasian American) and Chloe (African American) agreed with Brad and added that being involved in the community, connecting with others, and helping where help was needed took time and both the ability and willingness to make oneself available at odd hours. "So many people are so desperate, they have to work so hard and they don't have time. [...] They are desperate, they are distrustful of other people, they are desperate to get what they need" (John), so the drive for self-preservation often superseded the building of mutually supportive relationships.

With a less forgiving attitude in this matter, Gargaaro (Somali) expressed disappointment in some of her fellow Muslims who would not share their resources or help out other Muslims because they were not from the same country as themselves, thereby elucidating divisions along national and religious lines:

I just take one man from Sudan to Refugee Family Services, and one Somali woman, I met her, I don't remember her name. This man is Sudan, and this lady, she is Somali, and I asked her about this man and [I told her] "this man stay here for 30 years and he has a family, can you give him job?" She say "I will give him job because of you." Because I'm a Somali like her, so she is giving him job because I'm Somali and she's Somali. [...] The job, the driver was Somali. [...] That person, I call him. Somebody give me the

number of the driver. I call the driver, I say “Why you didn’t take [Suleyman]⁴⁴ [to his job on the second day]?” He start Friday, Saturday was second [day]. He say “Are you forcing me to take him anywhere? He’s not Somali.” So [the man from Sudan] miss work.

Gargaaro compared this behavior to local Christian churches, whom she commended for helping anyone in need, regardless of their national or religious backgrounds, and suggested that it was “ugly” and shameful for Muslims not to extend the same helping hand even just amongst each other.

We have some new people here, is Hindu, Malaysia, Burmese, Nepal, these are people from Nepal and Bhutanese, they need help, too. [...] There coming new people here and they don’t have food because they didn’t apply for food stamp. The food stamps delayed for three months. When I [went to see this Malaysian family], the family was Muslim. [...] [So at the interfaith meeting], I said [to the five or six Muslims there], “we have mostly Malaysia family, they don’t have food and the fridge is empty right now.” I call church from Marietta, church from Alabama, Victory Church, they take food. I go to the Thriftown, they give me \$300 food. I’m telling you within four days, nothing was there. So I told them Muslim, wake up and help your Muslim! [...] The Christian help the Muslim if you call, [someone] don’t have rent, they are coming and pay the rent. Victory Church, Alabama, and Marietta, [...] they come and pay. But when I call the Muslim, come and help the Christian, no! That is it, you can be kicked out. [Even] when you say you are Muslim [and you have] a problem, they say “this is not our races, [not our country men], I’m not gonna help.”

⁴⁴ Pseudonym

As someone who prided herself in her role as an active community connector across ethnic, national, and religious lines, Gargaaro was visibly upset by the behaviors she described. The rest of the group listened intently and appeared pensive by the end of her statements.

Employment-based divisions. The project participants engaged in a lively discussion of employment competition and poor work-conditions. This discussion was set in motion by the image below.



Photograph 25.

“Untitled - The man is going to work at the chicken place where only [refugees] can work. I don't think that's fair to others that need jobs. They make \$12 an hour; that's good money. But I found out that no one wants to work there because of the working conditions and it is hard work.” (Lynn, photographer)⁴⁵

By submitting this image and caption, Lynn (African American) raised a concern that St. John (2009) also described in his book - the perception among many economically disadvantaged African Americans, as well as immigrants who had lived in the United States for many years, that newly arrived refugees were taking away their jobs. Paying twelve dollars an hour, work at the metropolitan Atlanta chicken plants was considered a lucrative employment opportunity by many

⁴⁵ This picture was submitted as part of the third assignment.

in the community, so perceived exclusionary hiring policies⁴⁶ resulted in dismay. Some of the group members responded with astonishment at what they perceived to be segregation reminiscent of the Jim Crow era. As Lynn stated,

That was interesting to me; that that could even happen or [that it is] still go on. It's just mind-boggling to me that something like that is still happening, you know what I mean? [...] That they can separate things like that...

Other speculations concerning the reasons behind these policies ranged from wonder "if particular communities or populations [were] trying to protect those jobs for their people," to a concern that the employers were taking advantage of new arrivals' ignorance of labor laws.

Carroll (African American) speculated,

One of the things that it makes you wonder about is like... if you think about when the industrialization started and the unions started and things like that... when people don't know... they are in poor conditions and they can keep them in poor conditions. [...] So if you have someone who says "we need whatever, this is not healthy, this is not whatever," it changes the employers' responsibilities. So if you get someone who is too connected or who knows, then it's a different level of exposure, so I just wonder if [employers have come up with a plan to] pay a lot to the people who are here, they are thankful to be paid a lot, so they will put up with this. But if we have someone else who could really use that same wage, but knows another way, maybe it's not a good thing then from the employer perspective.

In support of Carroll's hypothesis, Grace (Congolese) shared that the DeKalb Farmers' Market would only hire individuals who had not lived in the country for more than a few years. "If you

⁴⁶ I was unable to verify if these employers indeed only hired refugees who had limited knowledge of the English language and of U.S. labor laws as discussed by the project participants, but it was a common and oft-discussed perception around Clarkston.

are new, you can work at Farmers' Market. If you know everything, you cannot work at Farmers' Market." Chloe (African American) concluded,

When you first come to the country, [...] you don't know what you don't know and because you don't know what you don't know, people take advantage of you. [...] If you come to this country as a refugee and you don't know, they'll give you a job because you don't know how to defend your rights.

This reasoning resounded with the other participants and a discussion of unhealthy and hazardous work-place conditions followed, which connected back to a concern Kelile (Ethiopian) had brought up in a previous session regarding the poor conditions prevailing at Clarkston area schools. Comparing these two instances, they pointed out that the underlying issue was one of relativity. They shared that people coming to the United States often thought that because this was America, all had to be well. So as long as the conditions in Clarkston were better than those in people's countries of origin, by comparison they seemed good enough, which led to complacency and exploitation. The participants agreed that as long as better was possible and commonplace in other parts of the country, "okay" in comparison to people's countries of origin was not good enough, be it in schools or at places of employment.

Summary

Chapter 5 presented aspects of life in Clarkston that the project participants identified as divisive or challenging. Among them were concerns regarding the city's administration and police, especially perceptions of ineffectiveness, hostility towards refugees, and excessive ticketing for the sole purpose of generating revenue for the city. Along with these concerns came criticisms of the poor physical condition of the city, including public spaces like playgrounds as well as private apartment complexes. Said deterioration and neglect led to a concern for children's safety and well-being. These worries were not alleviated by the public K-12

educational institutions in the area, which participants described as overcrowded and overwhelmed. Many of these dynamics were attributed to poverty and unequal access to support services. Specifically, the disparity in available support services for the African American community that found itself in a cycle of generational poverty and shared many of the needs of newly arrived refugees was discussed. An interview with a long-term African American resident of Clarkston that took place during fieldwork was adducted to supplement the insights gained from the Photovoice sessions and to further examine the prevalence of marginalization among the marginalized. Finally, the participants discussed competitive behaviors that some members of the community exhibited in the pursuit of self-preservation, including the competition for work at chicken factories and the conditions under which individuals were willing to work in order to make a living. These findings will be further discussed in chapter 7.

Chapter 6:

Photovoice as a Conflict Engagement Strategy

“There is power in telling someone’s story [through imagery]. People can ‘get you’ in more ways than just listening to what you say aloud. I am thankful each week for the opportunity to participate and for all the ways my life has been enriched by this project. I gave extra thought to representing someone else’s life and the responsibility that brings.” (Carroll, participant)

Chapters 4 and 5 were based on the standard Photovoice protocol established by Wang and Burris (1997) and documented the data collected regarding residents’ perspectives on the assets and challenges that shape communal dynamics in Clarkston and that unite or divide the population. Chapter 6 explores the use and utility of Photovoice as a comprehensive conflict engagement tool. The results of this project demonstrate that Photovoice, when modified according to the CCEM, is a suitable comprehensive conflict engagement strategy for practitioners operating at the community level.

This chapter starts with a presentation of the data collected as part of the innovative partner assignment that I devised in accordance with the Comprehensive Conflict Engagement Model to use Photovoice as a tool to encourage the growth of collaborative and supportive interpersonal relationships among the participants while also promoting personal empowerment and structural change in diverse and divided communities. Since the fourth assignment constituted my original contribution to the advancement of the Photovoice methodology as a comprehensive conflict engagement tool and because it was the most practice-relevant assignment, I present all the submitted images and discuss each project team individually. The data include captioned images, excerpts from the resulting dialogues, responses to the post-session questionnaire, and quotes from the follow-up interviews specific to the partner assignment.

The second part includes the data that were collected in order to evaluate the overall impact of the process on its participants. It includes their responses to the post-session and exit

questionnaires, which they filled out after the final group session, and the follow-up interviews conducted in the weeks following the project. This section also encompasses the participants' feedback regarding the use of photography in the project because it contributes to a more complete picture of the practical use and utility of Photovoice as a conflict engagement strategy in diverse communities, on which I will further reflect in the discussion chapter.

The third part documents the outcomes of sharing the captioned photographs and collages with policy makers, service providers, and the surrounding community to explore if structural changes can be promoted through Photovoice. It includes records of the conversations, projects, and exposure that have resulted from the process.

Internal and Relational Impact of the Experimental Fourth Assignment

The fourth assignment, in which the participants were paired off, instructed to spend at least two hours with each other to share their respective experiences, challenges, and hopes living in Clarkston, and asked to document their partners' stories photographically, resulted in cognitive and emotional shifts among the participants. They all reported on learning and better understanding some aspect about their partner's personal life experience or culture and/or on feeling closer and more connected to that person as a result of completing the fourth assignment. Several participants also shared that they were moved by hearing the other group members share each other's stories and that it had made them feel more connected to them as well.

The power of the fourth assignment in creating a sense of connectedness among the participants was evidenced in the captioned images submitted that week, the conversations that evolved around them, and the subsequent debriefing questionnaires and follow-up interviews. The following data are organized and presented according to the teams that worked together.

Carroll and Haben. The most intensive connection was made by Carroll (African American) and Haben (Eritrean), and it has lasted beyond the project as the two remain in contact

a year and a half later. They spent an afternoon at the ABC Coffee Shop at which Haben had taken the photograph titled “Eritrean love for Coffee and Tea” three weeks prior (see photograph 8, chapter 4). As she explained during discussion, Carroll had remembered how affectionately Haben had spoken of the café and suggested meeting there to honor her culture and facilitate instant comfort. After losing all sense of time while sharing their stories, Carroll and Haben connected over their shared love of Nicholas Sparks’ novels, learned about each other’s families, and talked about hopes and dreams for the future. Haben described her experience with this situation as follows during the group dialogue that week:

When I was talking to her, I felt like I’ve known her for so long because she just makes me feel so comfortable. That’s one of the things that I really liked about [Carroll]. And we talked for a while. [...] It was just one of those things where I think I can just talk to her and the time will just pass and [...] you’re not constantly looking at your time and... I don’t know... it was just amazing.

Haben submitted the following captioned images to represent Carroll:



Photograph 26.

“Crime Happens Everywhere – [Carroll] is an amazing person. And just like this tree that changes its leaves with season; she blooms with vibrant personality and knowledge. I chose to take a picture of this tree because it has endured the cold weather and remained in its beauty. In spite of her struggle with the unwanted visitors for 2 years to her home she continues to live in the Clarkston community, this symbolizes her strong willingness and passion for this community, as this tree still remains rooted to the ground, but yet grows with leaves as she has grown with compassion.” (Haben, photographer)



Photograph 27.

“Our shared love for Nicholas Sparks’ books and movies such as the Notebook are easily accessible in the Clarkston library. One of [Carroll’s] other favorite authors is Marry Higgins Clark, whose books she has been reading since high school. Her favorite book by Miss Clark is titled: Love Music Loves to Dance. If someone recommends a book or author to [Carroll], she reads the book and if she likes it, she will read the entire series of books they have written. [Carroll] loves to write poetry, nothing in particular, just whatever strikes her mood. She has three copyrights and entries in a devotional book (4 entries); she also does key note speaking and will like to become a key note speaker one day. [Carroll] is making a positive mark among her community members and whomever else she has crossed paths with thus far. She is AMAZING!” (Haben, photographer)



Photograph 28.

“The gift that she has is turning something negative to a positive by volunteering with CDF and MS walk partnering with Home Depot; she has been the cheerleader for the Clarkston community volunteer programs. Although she is rarely home, she is an active member in the Clarkston community trustee meetings, she has dedicated her time to her family and still finds the time to give back to the community. She has given the best part of herself to the community and her family raising her four accomplished kids [Craig, Calista, Chrissette, and Carmen]⁴⁷.” (Haben, photographer)

During the discussion, Haben emphasized how much respect she had for Carroll’s dedication to Clarkston, her compassion, relentlessly positive spirit, and her accomplishments as a writer. Her characterization of Carroll transcended all notions of race, nationality, and culture, and instead focused on her personality and individuality. Haben concluded that “overall she’s just an amazing person. I was so happy that I got paired with her.” As Carroll pointed out, “That was very mutual.”

Carroll submitted the following images to represent Haben and her life experience:

⁴⁷ Pseudonyms



Photograph 29.

“[Haben] is still in the process of blooming into the person she wants to be. She has overcome language and cultural barriers, isolation due to the lack of a diverse student population and more. She credits ‘having to adapt from an early age’ for the life she now experiences. At school, she has no White friends. [Haben] says there is ‘no mixing at Kennesaw State University,’ but rather than allowing that to stop her, she hangs out with the campus’ International students, enjoys her family, and a Starbucks Soy Caramel Latte.”
(Carroll, photographer)

During the group dialogue, Carroll elaborated on this photograph of the rose bud and explained that it not only pertained to Haben, but to Tigist (Ethiopian) as well:

I took the picture of the flower because I felt like she is just blossoming and that the bud is still tight on that flower because it’s like... oh my gosh, I say it to [Tigist], too, I’m just so thankful that I can experience it now and I look forward to the kind of adults they are because they are becoming such beautiful people.

In the following picture, Carroll sought to capture Haben’s experience as a refugee from Eritrea who came to the United States as a child, and as a young college student in the Atlanta area:



Photograph 30.

“[Haben], a dual citizen, loves to travel. At 8 years old, she took her first plane ride. With her 9-year-old sister in charge, [Haben’s] mother waved goodbye to her daughters bound for the United States and the hope of a better life. Her family sacrificed their riches, but they feel lucky to have gotten their papers and the opportunity to build their lives here. [Haben] completed high school and her studies at Georgia Perimeter, and now attends Kennesaw State as an Information Systems Major.

Besides the long distance she must travel from Stone Mountain to Kennesaw, you may be wondering why this picture represents [Haben’s] travel bug. To the untrained eye, this is a campus-marking sign, but this picture is really the street sign of ‘Clarkston’s airport.’ How so? Well, with the large number of students, like [Haben], that have attended this campus on their way to complete their 4-year degrees, Georgia Perimeter College should be known as the ‘Hartsfield-Jackson of the University System of Georgia.’”
(Carroll, photographer)



Photograph 31.

“What are the things that you notice in this picture? At first glance, some may think this is a picture of a beautiful Muslim woman. Others may knowingly identify the colors and patterns of her aderea as those of a member of the Bilen Ethnic Group from the Keren Region in Eritrea. For me, it is [Haben]’s kind eyes and warm smile.

[Haben] is from Eritrea. The Bilen Ethnic Group, to which she belongs, is one of nine ethnic groups from her native homeland, each having an identifying color and pattern for their aderea. Thinking that [Haben] is a Muslim is a common misconception from two perspectives. First - [Haben] is not a Muslim. She is Catholic. And secondly, her aderea, or head scarf, is often thought to be a religious accessory, but it is not. It actually has a cultural root - along with her nose ring.

The funny thing is that [Haben] said when she wears her scarf as shown, that it is just because she is having ‘a bad hair day!’” (Carroll, photographer)

Commenting on this photograph, Carroll emphasized how much she had learned about Eritrean culture from Haben, how easily assumptions led to misconceptions, and how much less ignorant she felt as a result of having talked to Haben. She appreciated that Haben had introduced her to some of the other patrons at ABC Coffee Shop and stated that “it was just very fun to be drawn into that.” In the individual follow-up interview, Carroll further elaborated on the feeling of ignorance that she experienced when she first sat down to talk to Haben and asked her about her scarf. She also drew a parallel between her own misconceptions about women wearing scarves to misconceptions other people have of her:

I felt like a tourist [...], but you cannot be a tourist when you’re in your own home, but you very much can be. [...] Oh my goodness, I had no idea and she was telling me some

of the misconceptions that people have and right away you become kindred because I know that people have them about me and it's like... really cool to know that maybe you're connected and you know you are. [...] Like someone's just sharing... and now it's like when I see someone in a scarf I feel like a little smarter. [...] I had no clue. [...] Because before then I would have thought they were Muslim, too, because their heads were wrapped. I never stopped to ask a question. I don't think I've ever been rude to someone, certainly not intentionally.

Spending time with Haben did not only grow Carroll's knowledge and appreciation of Eritrean culture, but led her to share her fondness of Haben with her family, who were not involved with the project:

After we met and I called my daughters, because I have three daughters and they are older than she is, and I was telling them "I met her before, today I *met* an amazing young woman." I said "You guys should know her. You really should know her and hear her story and I think it would just probably be good." So I was telling them a little about her, you know, can you imagine where your life would be? Because they are closer to her age, but just hearing their responses, too, just gave the experience a greater depth for me. Because I already knew it was just so powerful to hear some things that happened in her story. I thought it was pretty cool, but thank you for that. [...] That really was a nice treat.

In the individual follow-up interview, Carroll disclosed how deeply she had been touched by the pictures Haben had taken to represent her. She felt understood by Haben at a deep level that went beyond words, noting that Haben had taken pictures of things that were of central importance in Carroll's life, but that she had not actually told Haben about:

There were many things that were so... we didn't talk about it, she didn't know, [but] we were just connecting. I'm a big lover of trees and she had a tree... and I'm a numbers person and the fact that she could have taken anything on the playground the fact that she took some that had numbers there it was just interesting to me... I don't know... Once I ran away... this was a bad situation... from my visitation with my father and when I ran away, I ran away to a library and I called my grandparents and my mother decided to come and get us. It was really a bad thing. But I went to a library and I used to go to that library to get away from that situation on summer visitation. [...] [Libraries] and books are very important and the fact that she took a picture of that library... oh my god... I didn't tell her that, but it was there! So what she had, had a meaning. I didn't even share... but it was like of all the things we talked about... like if I hadn't had another meeting, we still would be sitting there. She was such a joy. I know that... you might've picked [the pairs] in whatever way you pick them⁴⁸ and I heard it and I observed it myself: people, they were sharing. What perfect pairings!

From this interview, it became evident that Carroll had not only experienced a deep connection herself, but also observed similar connections between the other partners in this assignment.

Haben wrote on her post-session questionnaire:

I wanted to take pictures that express the great respect and compassion [Carroll] has. I tried to capture what is important to her and I was really happy and focused when I was taking the picture. I really loved this assignment. It linked us to become even closer and I don't think that could've happened without this assignment.

Kelile and John. John (Caucasian American) and Kelile (Ethiopian) also reported on having made a special connection during the fourth assignment. As described in chapter 4, Kelile

⁴⁸ As described in chapter 3, no two people were put together intentionally. Names were randomly drawn during a previous session and the only restriction was that the partners had to be of different ethnic/cultural backgrounds.

had invited John to his house because he wanted to avoid outside distractions and involve his entire family in the conversation. They ended up sharing a traditional Ethiopian meal, together with Kelile's wife, his daughter Tigist, and his son. While offering a visitor a meal was the culturally polite and appropriate thing to do, Kelile had initially been "afraid to offer, bring the food, especially [to someone] who doesn't know about those culture food." However, John was quite excited at the offer and insisted on eating the meal in the traditional way, i.e. with his hands. Kelile, in turn, was "happy when [he got] this answer from [John.] [The family] enjoyed it." Kelile's face told a story of great joy when the two men shared this experience with the group and when his traditional Ethiopian food was appreciated not only by John, but also the rest of the group. As they shared during the discussion, their conversation over dinner had included their respective cultural and professional backgrounds, religion, and their experiences in and around Clarkston.

Kelile expressed his appreciation for John's many efforts in the community and his tenacity in pursuing positive change. The following collage was the starting point for his remarks:



Photograph 32.

“[John]: Education, recreation, schools, diversity, community, resources” (Kelile, photographer)

Explaining this collage, Kelile stated:

We were together and ... it’s hard to explain, express, it was in two hours. Especially the most hopeful and willing to help like [John]. Is hard to explain because especially my English is not enough to explain him as he is. But as you see there, on the picture, Indian Elementary School, Perimeter College, and our community field behind the Community Center. [John] is this community, is the man. He never give up. He never, never gave up even though he was by himself. And he didn’t have a group or organization always. [...]

He never stopped promoting education, recreational, and other good activities to Clarkston. Therefore, I saw here, in this community, he’s hopeful, he’s polite, thinking, and tries always to help the community. [...] Wow, he’s great. He has good thinking. I don’t know how, but I want to express him as he is, but my English is not enough. [...]

[John] is the man, like that.

John's face was glowing at these remarks and he humorously responded with a chuckle that he was glad Kelile thought so. The conversation was interrupted before John could respond by a large insect in the room that had caught everyone's attention. The resulting interaction was reflective of the positive rapport that had been established in the group at that point. John and Kelile themselves were not particularly phased by the animal, but a few participants were scared and discussed their allergies to insect bites, which was met with concern by others. Finally Kelile took the initiative and said he was going to take care of it. His daughter Tigist tried to dissuade him, but he insisted that he could do it. While the others dramatically discussed the nature of the insect and begged Kelile to be careful, giving suggestions for how to best handle it, Kelile killed the insect. Under much laughter, a light-hearted ping-pong-like back and forth ensued about who was "the man" after all, with both John and Kelile humbly disavowing the title for themselves.

John then returned to the assignment and responded to Kelile's previous remarks regarding his tenacity by sharing part of the preceding dinner conversation:

He said I don't ever quit, that's true, but there's also... it's very frustrating. And [Tigist] said something when we were talking [...]. I said something along [the lines of] "I haven't really accomplished anything." She was like "WHAAAT!?!?!?" Hahaha... Oh yes!!! But so, I probably have, but it's been like... I see so many possibilities...

This remark suggests that it was rewarding and encouraging for John to be recognized by Kelile and his family for his efforts in the community.

When it was his turn to represent Kelile's life in Clarkston, John addressed the challenges that Kelile and his family had had to overcome after moving to the United States and the important roles that education and the support of family, friends, the Ethiopian community, and their church played in their lives. John also brought up Kelile's grievance that there was a scarcity of opportunities for developing relationships across nationality groups, which John

attributed to people lacking the time and the concrete opportunities for coming together. John took three images of important buildings to document Kelile's life in Clarkston:



Photograph 33.

“Offices of the Ethiopian Community Association, on North Indian Creek Drive. [Kelile's family] arrived in the US in May 2005 on a Diversity Visa. Coming on a DV they had no support from government agencies or refugee-serving organizations. The Clarkston area Ethiopian community was their primary source of support. When they first arrived they lived with an Ethiopian family in Stone Mountain. After they got settled, with jobs - or in [Tigist's] case, in school - and their own apartment, [Kelile] was active for a while in the Ethiopian Community Association. Every September, Ethiopian families from across metro Atlanta gather at the Clarkston Community Center for a day of socializing. At his daughter's urging, [Kelile] has taken part in activities in the broader community, but he says opportunities for developing relationships across nationality groups in the area are limited.” (John, photographer)



Photograph 34.

“Georgia Piedmont Technical College. When he first arrived, [Kelile] took ESL classes offered by the College at Clarkston International Bible Church and the Starnes Center on Montreal Road. In Ethiopia, [Kelile] worked as a surveyor in the Ministry of Urban Development for 20 years. In his third year in the US, he took a job with a schedule that permitted him to attend classes during the day. He enrolled in courses on drafting and information technology at the College. But when his new employer laid him off after 11 months to avoid having to increase his salary, he had to stop taking classes and has not been able to get back since.” (John, photographer)



Photograph 35.

“St. Michael's Ethiopian Orthodox Church, on Smith Street in Clarkston. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church is one of the oldest Christian churches, going back to the time immediately following the crucifixion. Their faith is important to [Kelile's] family, and participation in the life of St. Michael's is another important source of support as they continue their adjustment to life in America.” (John, photographer)

During the discussion, John compassionately talked about Kelile's struggle to make connections outside of the Ethiopian community and about his experiences working in the United States. He

emphasized that Kelile placed great importance on education and that he had been a land surveyor, “a professional” in his home country. John viewed critically that Kelile was now forced to accept inferior jobs that did not match his high level of competence. He also expressed dismay with Kelile’s previous employer, who kept him from taking ESL classes and pursuing an American degree that would have helped him seek professional employment again:

Well he took English as a Second Language through what used to be DeKalb Technical Institute, now Georgia Perimeter Technical College. At that site and at the International Bible Church, they had a program running there [...], so he studied language there, but when he took this other job, he started taking classes at the Georgia Piedmont... I think drafting and computers information technology, math... [Kelile] had been a surveyor in the Department of Urban Development in Ethiopia for 20 years, he’s a professional. And so it sounded like maybe he was on the track to get back in that kind of direction and he was let go from this job. He was let go because, if they had kept him longer, they would have had to raise his salary, so they let him go. And he had to stop taking classes.

It became clear during the discussion how highly John thought of Kelile, how he appreciated having had the opportunity to learn more about the Ethiopian community in Clarkston, and how much of a cheerleader he had become for Kelile and his family. When asked how he felt about John’s portrayal of him, Kelile said “He gets me already,” a sentiment which Tigist reinforced by interjecting “Yea, he’s captured his story perfectly. [...] He did get his story.” Kelile used John’s remarks as an opportunity to elaborate on his passion for education, the hopes and dreams that he had associated with it, the disappointments he had had to face, and the shift that he made from his own dreams to supporting his children:

I always trusted in education. From my beginning, I didn’t satisfy it. I tried many things at home to continue my education, but I don’t. Especially my mom is factory worker in

Pepsi Cola in my country. Therefore, I can't go to university. I go learning this surveying in école technique in my country to study topography. [...] That's two years course, but I want to go further. More than two years college, but I have to get money to help, to stand [like a] man. That's why. After, I get married and I get these children... It changes to them. Change it to them. But always, I tried. I tried to study the Italian language; I tried to promote my French ability. No way for me. After I came in this country, I hope I got good chance to get to school. No way. It's hard! I hope, yes. I know, country of hope. Yes is. For all the peoples, I know. But in case of my family, I have to help them. Not for me only, okay? Therefore, I want to still have inside... anyway, I tried three times in the Tech, they say English, IT, and math. After eleven months, I stopped working for [my old job]. They lay off me. Before I make twelve months, they lay off me. Therefore I stopped. I tried to concentrate on my kids. Anyway, it's good. There are good in Clarkston. And the future, too. I try to continue living in Clarkston, I try to get a home in Clarkston; maybe it will be already finished in these three, two months, about the whole home. Okay? And I like to live in Clarkston. Anyway, [John] explain in good way.

At no other time during the project had Kelile spoken this much at once. His body language and manner of speaking made it obvious how cathartic it had been for him that John had raised these issues with the group, and that this presented an opportunity for him to acknowledge and release these feelings and experiences himself. At the end of the discussion, Kelile gave John, my research assistant, and me firm hugs and thanked me for providing a forum for this moment to happen.

On the post-session questionnaire, John stated that while it generally seemed "very difficult for people from different communities to get to know each other [...] in spite of the high-density extreme diversity," "getting to know a person and their relation to the community generates

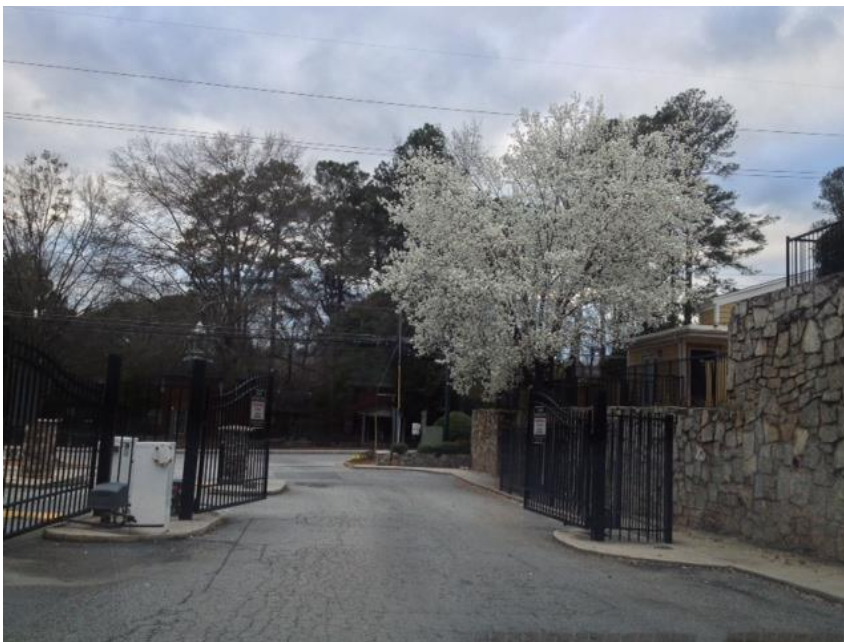
insight about issues and possibilities.” He also reiterated that “it [had been] wonderful visiting [Kelile] in his home, getting to know his family, having dinner with them.” Finally, John stated that he expected to remember “the experience of getting to know another person and telling the story of his relationship to the community through photos” six months into the future. Kelile wrote that “in a short amount of time, you can find out a lot about a person,” and that “even though we all came from different origins, we can understand and work together as a group.” These comments suggest that both men took from their experiences with the fourth assignment a sense that it was, in fact, possible to get to know people of different cultural backgrounds if an intentional effort was made and confidence that growing such connections would help joint efforts to promote positive change in Clarkston.

Amita and Lynn. As described in chapter 3, the project participants were paired up semi-randomly for the fourth assignment. No two people were put together intentionally. As names were randomly drawn during a previous dialogue session, the only restriction was that the partners had to be of different ethnic/cultural backgrounds. Amita (Indian American) and Lynn (African American) were a “lucky” match because Lynn had been facing severe health issues suffering from breast cancer, while Amita was a public health professional and with an interest in health concerns in Clarkston.

As a result of her relatively recent move to Clarkston three years prior and her medical challenges, Lynn was living a rather isolated life without much outside contact apart from her adult daughter, who lived elsewhere in the metropolitan Atlanta area. Thus she expressed much appreciation for Amita’s open ear during their one-on-one conversation, which they spent sitting on a bench in front of First Baptist church on a sunny afternoon following the previous week’s dialogue session. Beyond Lynn’s health issues, their conversation revolved around Lynn’s move to Clarkston without knowing anything about the town and its demographics, and her growing

understanding and appreciation of it. Furthermore, the two women talked about their experiences with interracial relationships and bonded over their shared love of food. Amita described their conversation as “an organic process, [in which Lynn] initially just asked about cultural things and then the conversations just kind of evolved.” She said that they had talked about “quite an array” of topics, including “two different people from two different backgrounds coming together and what that’s like.” Lynn described the conversation as “really good and educational,” and stated with a chuckle that “it was nice to talk to someone younger, [someone] that was open and honest and just let it go.” She contrasted this to her daughter, who Lynn felt “[did]n’t tell [her] things.” Amita interjected that she also did not tell her parents things, which resulted in much laughter in the group.

Based on the conversation they had shared, Amita submitted the following images to document Lynn’s experiences in Clarkston:



Photograph 36.

“[Lynn] told me that she moved to Clarkston from upstate NY to be closer to her daughter. She lives in Clarkston Station and told me quite a bit about her neighbors and how diverse the neighborhood is. She told me about some of the perks and things she’s learned while living here.” (Amita, photographer)

Describing this image during the discussion, Amita shared that:

[Lynn] came from Upstate New York to Clarkston to be closer to her daughter and that's funny because she told me that when she moved to Clarkston, she didn't know the background of, you know, like how many refugees are here and this is like a hot spot in Atlanta. And so... her complex is incredibly diverse, and so she kinda came to know it as she was living there and started to see "Wow, there's people from all over that live here." [This photo shows the] entrance to her complex [and] it's two-fold - to show actually, literally where she lives, and then... I think a lot of you know that she was diagnosed with breast cancer recently, so we actually talked a lot about just how that's been and it's been difficult, but she's so hopeful, which is really... I can't imagine what it's like, but whenever she would talk about it, she's just really hopeful, and I thought that tree kinda resembled this new life, or kind of this rebirth and having to go through it.

Later on in the group discussion, Amita reiterated how much Lynn inspired her:

Having dealt with treatment and just how positive you can be through something like that. And having to make changes. [...] And you know, I feel like [she is] very much a grow with the punches [type of person], she's like "yeah, you know... my skin's really sensitive, I have to use a different make-up," but then she was telling me about the beauty class [for cancer patients] that was offered through her complex and it's just really like life goes on, and I know that's obvious, but just how positive you can be about it.

Part of the perseverance that Amita saw in Lynn also came from the fact that, when her compromised health permitted, Lynn would get on the Marta bus - not to reach a particular destination, but simply to explore her surroundings.



Photograph 37.

“[Lynn] primarily relies on Marta as a primary source of transportation. She said sometimes she will take the bus to explore the city and discover new places.” (Amita, photographer)

Putting herself in Lynn’s shoes, Amita was intrigued by her approach to exploring Clarkston and its neighboring towns.

I get by everywhere in a car and she doesn’t have a car and we were talking about what that’s like and she made this comment that was really great. Sometimes she will get on the bus just to discover new parts of the city, and so I thought that was really cool. I guess I just never thought about exploring it through public transportation. And she said a lot of times she would find new places just by hopping on the bus and checking out the city.

Learning about the central role public transportation played in Lynn’s life as in the lives of many other Clarkston residents, Amita acknowledged that she had never ridden a Marta bus before, but that it would be worthwhile to “encourage people to try to experience life” that way and overcome Atlanta’s’ resistance to public transportation.

Both women submitted images representing food that week - one of Lynn’s pictures was a photograph of the H-Mart in Doraville, where she and Amita both liked to buy their groceries.

While this was a photograph that Lynn had taken from the Internet, it still showed how their

conversation around food had left a lasting impression on both assignment partners. Along with Amita's photo of the bus stop and Lynn's explorations by public transportation, this picture also drew attention to the fact that the lives of Clarkston residents, even the most isolated and immobile ones like Lynn, are not confined to Clarkston alone. In the same way that refugees cannot be considered in isolation but embedded into a local community, all residents of refugee resettlement sites need to be understood in the context of the greater surrounding areas that make up their ecosystem.

Discovering their shared love of food gave Amita an opportunity to share some of her own Indian cultural background with Lynn, and it appeared this was another example of conversations around food functioning as a gateway to greater intercultural learning and appreciation.



Photograph 38.

“We talked about our love for food and found out we have a similar curiosities in trying new foods and learning about other cultures. I suggested Kathmandu Grill and told her it's a great place to get Indian and Nepali food, and recommended the momo and curries. She wrote it down and said that she's excited to go after her body recovers from treatment.” (Amita, photographer)

While the images Lynn submitted that week did not directly reflect Amita's cultural heritage, she did talk about it during the discussion:

Talking to [Amita], getting to learn her background, some of her religious aspects that I had questions about, about the clothing, about the food, about the emblem on the head... she really cleared a lot of it up for me. It was a great experience. It was nice talking to her.

One of Lynn's pictures that week was a professional photo of the spa where her daughter works, intended to represent the spas that Amita frequents on a regular basis. While this missed the intention of the project, the caption still reflected Lynn's recognition of the importance of health and culture in Amita's life, suggesting that "[Amita] lives a healthy life by going to spas and having massages regularly. She takes life with ease. She also keeps in touch with her culture and religion aspect of Indian life." As Lynn reiterated on her post-session questionnaire, she "enjoyed learning about [Amita's] culture and religion." She also felt inspired by Amita's healthy lifestyle and stated that the idea of "healthy living for life" helped her "keep up hope." Her learning about Amita that week was summarized in the caption to this image:



Photograph 39.

"[Amita] enjoys exercise and bike riding on the bike path in Clarkston. She was all so able to tell me about her culture, healthy eating, diet and exercise." (Lynn, photographer)

Lynn concluded:

I learned [from talking to Amita] that there is a whole lot of things here in Clarkston that I need to experience because it's like I've been sheltered in, you know. With everything that's going on, I haven't had a chance to get out and really enjoy being here.

In her post-session questionnaire that week, Amita noted that her take-aways from the fourth assignment were that “we have more in common than we often realize” and that “connecting with people can be really rewarding.”

Brad and Gargaaro. Brad (Caucasian American) and Gargaaro's (Somali) fourth assignment did not work out exactly as planned. Gargaaro did not submit any images (and by extension no captions) to share Brad's story, and she did not attend the subsequent group session due to a scheduling conflict, of which she had informed me a day or two before the meeting. While Gargaaro and Brad had spent time together in preparation for the session, Brad stated that he thought she had had difficulty comprehending the idea of putting herself in somebody else's shoes and documenting her partner's life visually, which required a level of abstraction and external locus of focus that was hard for her. He further explained this stating:

I went through what we were supposed to do today [again] and how we were supposed to describe the other person, but that just wasn't... it wasn't there. [...] I didn't know how to explain it and I wish I could, and that was frustrating. I didn't know how to... I needed a translator.

Despite the absence of an interpreter, from whose assistance both Brad and Gargaaro might have benefitted had one been available, Gargaaro had been happy to share her own experiences with Brad during their one-on-one conversation. He subsequently documented her life as follows:



Photograph 40.

“I see [Gargaaro] as someone who spreads passion and life into others. Her presence and outgoing personality makes people smile. She is a leader and counselor to the people of Clarkston. This is represented by the color radiating out of the central flower.” (Brad, photographer)



Photograph 41.

“This is a common path [Gargaaro] takes to get to Clarkston Village. She sets up meetings, interacts with strangers, buys groceries, and is a loyal patron of the businesses here and within Clarkston. She demonstrates a caring of all cultures and ethnicities through her interactions with these citizens, businesses, and organizations. Her engagement is exemplary of how community members should interact.” (Brad, photographer)



Photograph 42.

“This image to me represents a vulnerable animal sitting on a strong and powerful machine. The bird and its stance represent [Gargaaro], very strong and looking straight ahead towards prosperity. The automobile represents the convoluted process of settling and assimilating in the United States. To me, the willingness to stand alongside the process that is the machine and voice her opinion as a confident humanitarian is inspiring!” (Brad, photographer)

Reflecting on his experience spending time with Gargaaro as she went about her typical business in Clarkston, Brad shared:

I feel like when you’re with [Gargaaro], you’re really along for the ride. It’s just a storm of information and it’s... I was really excited. It was exciting because we met at Abyssinia Café and she was with two other gentlemen and she was supposed to meet somebody else... And she was like “I hope this guy from Burundi gets medication for his glaucoma, and I’m hoping this guy from Congo will get an apartment for his family.” She’s just all over the place all of the time. So the picture is really summing up... [The picture of] the tiny bird on this car which I’m deeming the machine, it’s representing this convoluted sort of system that we have and her willingness to jump on board and go along for the ride and just look straight forward and just try to do as much as she can. And then the flower is like her spreading, like she hugs everybody and this Photovoice project is the first time I met her and she came up and hugged me and I was like “I hope... I wonder if she does know me.” That’s just who she is and everybody knows her within that Clarkston village. Like she’s like “This is my Columbian family, this is my Marietta

family,” she just has families all over the place and it just seems like she’s very... she’s very connected. And she’s very savvy, she’s very strong-willed. She’s very determined. And that pretty much sums it up.

Brad further recognized how willing Gargaaro was to help anyone in need, regardless of their nationality, race, or creed.

Since Gargaaro was not present the day that Brad shared her story, I did not get any feedback from her regarding the way that he had portrayed her or about her overall experiences with the fourth assignment. However, Brad’s telling of Gargaaro’s story was consistent with my own experiences spending time with her in the community, and with the way that she had spoken about herself in previous group sessions. Even though this did not end up being the reciprocal dynamic that it was intended to be, Gargaaro did speak very fondly of her time spent with Brad the next time I saw her and sought to involve him in her activities on multiple occasions afterwards. Brad, in turn, noted the following takeaways from the session on his post-session questionnaire:

Taking pictures of other’s stories helps community members empathize and find common ground. Going through someone’s motions as they engage with community helps identify new opportunities to communicate. I learned quite a bit about the current life of [Gargaaro]. I was able to view and experience her life in a context that was foreign to me and is now becoming part of my life.

This shows that even in an instance where only one project partner fully understood the exercise, a positive experience and greater empathy, understanding, and appreciation still resulted, even if not in equal parts for both partners.

Tigist, Chloe, and Frank. Since Grace had not been present the day that the project pairs were formed, Tigist (Ethiopian), Chloe (African American), and Frank (Caucasian American)

constituted a team of three. Unlike the other project partners, these three already knew each other to a certain extent from previous community engagements. They met for dinner at Abyssinia Café in the Clarkston Village. Chloe brought two of her elementary-school aged children and Tigist was joined by her older brother. According to Frank's retelling of their meeting, the children had been "very inquisitive," which had led them to "go this way and go that way" in their conversation. Tigist and Frank⁴⁹ shared with the group that the three of them had talked about Tigist's arrival in the United States nine years prior, her adaptation to American culture, her engagement in the community, and her pride in her Ethiopian heritage. Chloe had shared her experiences with her recent run for the school board and her thoughts on education. She had also shared personal stories about her life, including her move from New York to Clarkston, her family's life circumstances, her children, and her involvement in the community. Frank, a member of Clarkston's city administration, had shared with the others his views on small town government as well as his efforts to support small businesses and work with residents to jointly develop action oriented solutions to their concerns.

Recognizing Tigist's involvement in the community in general and at the Community Center in particular, and seeking to capture Tigist's transition from a teenager reliant on others to a young adult about to move away for college, Frank submitted the following picture to represent her experience:

⁴⁹ On the day of the group session, Chloe was very sick and therefore absent, but she had sent some comments electronically prior to the session.



Photograph 43.
“Untitled” (Frank, photographer)

Frank explained this photograph as follows:

[Tigist] is very involved in the community. She does a lot at the Community Center.

She’s there a lot. Very driven and intelligent. But also proud to be Ethiopian and she has a great shirt that says “I’m Ethiopian,” I should have taken a picture of that one, but you weren’t wearing it that day... and so... One of the things that stood out for me was how [Tigist], really, for the most time she’s been here, has kinda been in that passenger seat, sort of reliant on other people for transportation or for help, but now she’s actually kinda getting to that point where she’s gonna be graduating, you know, applying to colleges, getting a driver’s license probably pretty soon I imagine, and she’s gonna be sort of on her own and I hope she doesn’t go too far. We want her to stay in Clarkston. Just from the people I’ve known and talked to, she’s a really important part of this community.

To represent Chloe’s life, Tigist submitted three images of buildings in Clarkston that stood for Chloe’s community involvement:



Photograph 44.
“[Chloe] - Kids, training, CYI [Clarkston Youth Initiative], meetings, events at the Clarkston Community Center” (Tigist, photographer)



Photograph 45.
“[Chloe] - Training sessions and accomplishments, continuations at the Family Life Center / First Baptist Church” (Tigist, photographer)



Photograph 46.

“[Chloe] - Present and future at the Atlanta Area School for the Deaf” (Tigist, photographer)

Tigist explained these images as follows:

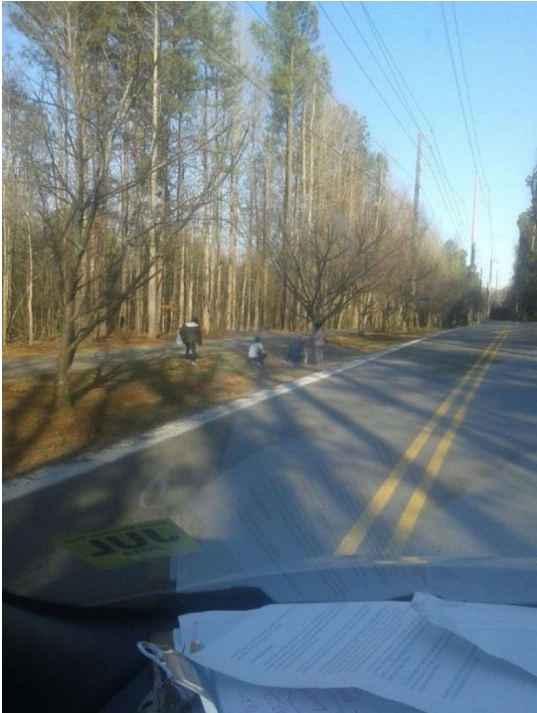
I took the pictures of what she’s doing and how her involvement affects a lot in the community and how she does a lot for the community of Clarkston. And the first picture, the Community Center, where her kids, like every [day] after school, are there to get tutored and they come and help out for different events and she does a lot of her meetings and her trainings and everything there. Plus, the First Baptist Church, [she works with the First Lady a lot] and the last one is the School of the Deaf, and that is her... I wrote that to be the present and the future because school’s really important to her and education for kids is definitely something she stands for. And how she [does a lot for her kids] that she didn’t have for her own and right now, she’s like the head committee chair for the festival that’s gonna be taking place April 26, [co-sponsored by First Baptist Church] ... that’s kinda like her launch for the future. That’s why I said it’s the present and the future, [...] the festival is gonna take place [at the School for the Deaf]. And since it’s a school and education is really important to her...

While the pictures Tigist took to represent Chloe were focused on her more professional, activist efforts, Tigist shared during the discussion that she had also learned a lot about Chloe as a private person, information that had been new to her although they had previously been involved in shared activities around town:

Something new I found out about [Chloe] was that she had a brain surgery, like a tumor. I never knew that. And I guess what she talked more about her personal life. I know her mostly in meetings and trainings and here and there and volunteering, and to see like the other side of her personal life, it was kinda nice and just... you kinda see the person outside of their comfort zone and you get a new idea of what they've been through, so... like a new info of her I guess.

As a result of the time they spent together, Tigist got a more multi-dimensional picture of Chloe and a greater appreciation of her struggles compared to solely the community activist side she had known before.

An acute cold kept Chloe from attending the discussion session, but she had submitted the following pictures representing Frank's life in Clarkston earlier that week:



Photograph 47.
“[Frank] loves the trails and runs the bike paths to extend and expand to create a pedestrian safe community. He wants to have shared roads and walkways for the people of Clarkston” (Chloe, photographer)



Photograph 48.
“Clarkston has a great asset and advocate with [Frank being a leader in] the city. The personal citizen I interviewed has demonstrated through our conversation he is an ABCD type of guy, meaning asset building community developer.” (Chloe, photographer)



Photograph 49.

“[Frank] likes to go out and have coffee with the neighbors to discuss plans for the future of Clarkston and their concerns and conversations on action oriented solutions. He also frequents small businesses and supports the small business owners in Clarkston and its surrounding area.” (Chloe, photographer)

Due to her absence, Chloe was unable to further elaborate on her pictures. However, Frank said that he felt Chloe had represented his approach to local government very well. Further reflecting on the process, he shared that he especially appreciated that it had given him an opportunity to not only be a local government representative, but also a citizen and a private person. He stated:

It was fun to just have some coffee and, you know, get a little caffeine going and then kinda just talk about anything. [...] I think one of the benefits of this process is just it encourages us to ask more personal questions. You know, I’ve really been in the mindset, the past several years, of just more about issues and sort of more policy stuff and community building, but [...] when just talking to [Tigist], it was more just like “Tell me about your life,” you know, “Where are you from?” That’s not something that I typically will ask. I mean I enjoy learning about it, certainly, anyone talks about it, it’s exciting, but it’s, you know, sometimes you gotta kinda sorta ask those questions specifically to get that answer. And so it was very enlightening. Yea, it was very nice. [...] They kept

saying “what do you want to do in Clarkston?” And I was like “well do you ask me personally or do you ask me as the [city government official]?” And it’s always two different answers, because, you know... [...] Well the elected position is to represent the people, but you know, me personally, I’d like to, I think we should just do this [...]. They were like “Tell me what you really think, what you really want.” So I was honest about it. Not only did Frank enjoy being provided with a framework in which he could be himself and talk about his personal rather than professional views, but Tigist, too, agreed that it had been nice to be able to connect with Frank on that different level and see him in a new light.

[Frank] ... he had to just be [Frank] for that few hours. Not be the [city official]. He was telling us how he moved here, and how he had to live with [the local artist] for a little while and things like that, so it was nice just to meet like [Frank], the person, not the [city official]. Cool either way.

Overall, all three team mates recognized each other’s dedication to making a difference in the Clarkston community. Before he headed off to a meeting with the Clarkston police, Frank stated that he was glad to have been able to take in the different concerns the other project participants had raised and that he needed everybody’s help to change the status quo that had lasted for decades and needed changing. In her reflections on that week’s assignment, Tigist recognized “The positive that is in everyone’s thoughts and how we all want change for Clarkston,” and that “Walking with someone different from you can give you a new outlook on so many things.”

Humor. What stood out to my research assistant and me during this dialogue session was the exceptionally positive atmosphere and joyful mood in the room, which we both highlighted in our respective notes. Everybody appeared to be intently focused on what the project partners were sharing, mirroring the emotions of those talking. Many had big smiles on their faces and

gave verbal cues (“awwh,” chuckles, and the like) suggesting that they were enjoying what was being shared. What particularly stood out was the high frequency of humorous remarks; I coded 111 instances of laughter and 26 chuckles in the group during this session. To compare, there had been 38 instances of laughter and 24 chuckles in the first session, 24 and 18 in the second, and 38 and 13 in the third dialogue session.

In this fourth session, the participants were playing off of each other’s remarks and seemed to genuinely “vibe” with each other. This gave the impression that they had gotten familiar and comfortable with one another. Laughter was prompted by a range of triggers, including a “funny cropping job” on one of the pictures, an instance of miscommunication between my research assistant and me, meta-communications about individual participants’ communication styles and word choices, “sneaky” approaches to taking pictures and “smart” remarks, witty references back to what somebody else had said earlier during the discussion, expressions of excitement, each other’s little quirks with which we had all become familiar, the “who’s the man now” situation with the large insect, and jokes about “*having to go to Kelile’s house for dinner.*”

The following are examples of exchanges that triggered laughter. The first one occurred when I asked Haben (Eritrean) to talk about the images she had submitted to represent Carroll (African American):

Haben: Okay, can I *read* what I wrote?

Birthe: Ummm... (hesitant)

Haben: Yes!

(laughter)

Haben, who had generally been rather quiet and soft-spoken during the process, took the other participants by surprise when she asserted herself and took the lead on how to discuss her images in the group.

John (Caucasian American) was the originator of many witty interjections that made the others laugh. One such situation arose when Amita (Indian American) talked about being a foodie:

Amita: I mean I'm a huge foodie, and so that kinda led then to the Kathmandu...

John: You're not HUGE.

(laughter)

Amita: Foodie!

(laughter)

When transitioning into talking about Frank's pictures of Tigist's life, the following exchange occurred in reference to picture 44:

Birthe: Okay, so then we have [Tigist's] life in Clarkston through [Frank's] lens.

Frank: Yup.

John: Through his windshield.

(laughter)

Laughter was also triggered by Frank's (Caucasian American) and Tigist's (Ethiopian) shared memory of their meeting with Chloe (African American) and her active children:

Frank: Yea... [Chloe's] two younger kids were there and they were really cute, but...

(Tigist laughing)

Frank: You know, one's like climbing over me...

(Tigist laughing)

Frank: And the other one's like "I've got a question" (singing) every 5 minutes.

(laughter)

[...]

Frank: But you know, real smart, real inquisitive...

(Tigist laughing)

Lynn's (African American) and Amita's (Indian American) exchange regarding open communication with one another but not with their own family members also tickled the other participants:

Lynn: It was a really good session. It was nice. It was nice to talk to someone younger, hehehe.

(laughter)

Lynn: That was open and honest and just let it go. Hahaha. Cuz when I talk to my daughter, she doesn't tell me things. Hehehe.

(laughter)

Amita: I also don't tell my parents things.

(laughter)

These examples are indicative of the bonds that had been created and the overall friendly atmosphere that persisted in the room. Even when the humor was unintentional, it was palpable that the participants were laughing with, not at each other.

In retrospect, everybody present that day stated that they had tremendously enjoyed the session, that they had cherished hearing everybody's stories, and that they felt closer and more connected to the others for it, which was also evidenced in their behavior towards each other during and after the session. These data suggest that this perspective-taking partner assignment is able to build and strengthen respecting, amicable, and cooperative relationships among the

project group and that it is therefore a useful and central component of using Photovoice as a comprehensive conflict engagement strategy at the community level.

Overall Internal and Relational Impact of the Photovoice Project

To examine the internal and relational impact of the Photovoice project on its participants and to elicit their feedback on the process, I administered post-session and exit questionnaires and conducted individual follow-up interviews. All project participants reported positive experiences with the Photovoice process in general and described several forms of positive impact, both cognitive / attitudinal and emotional / relational.

Awareness of communal dynamics and understanding of diverse perspectives. Over the course of the Photovoice project, its participants both gained broader awareness and understanding of the communal dynamics that affected the community as a whole and of the challenges faced by particular sub-groups. Among these was an increased awareness of the sub-culture of the deaf community in Clarkston, of the inadequate provisions for children around town, the role of religion in many people's lives, the need for economic development, and of the disempowered position of non-English speaking residents of large apartment complexes that did not adhere to proper housing and sanitation standards. The two youngest Photovoice participants, Tigist (Ethiopian) and Haben (Eritrean), both specifically stated that due to their involvement in the project, they had started noticing things around town that they had never seen before. Two American-born participants (Brad and Lynn) described realizing that "the refugees" are not a homogeneous group and that "there is far more segregation amongst refugees than [...] expected." Brad and Tigist also emphasized that the common perception of the train tracks representing divisions in the community had stuck with them. In his follow-up interview, Brad shared:

Specifically the railroad tracks. I saw them as being positive and a nice aesthetic to the community. A lot of people see it as a divide between who lives on the other side of the tracks; they have that kind of perspective. I had not really looked at it like that. Since that project, that day we spoke about it, it's been brought up a couple of times [by] people outside the project. Yes I have been asked, "Oh you are on the other side of the railroad tracks?"

The recognition of a multitude of perspectives was a recurrent theme in the project questionnaires and follow-up interviews. The participants described meeting new people with whom they had not previously had any contact and becoming increasingly aware of how and why perceptions of a variety of issues affecting the community differed. Brad (Caucasian American) commented:

It's good to get other people's viewpoints. I think it also fostered a sense of openness, we could share both what we liked, differences, and then what we had as dislikes and the conflicts that came up. I think it's good to hash that out in an atmosphere where you know that you shouldn't be judged for what you're saying. It's a safe environment.

He captured his appreciation for the multiplicity of perspectives in the following image:



Photograph 50.

“As I was walking outside to hunt for good shots I heard all of these birds chirping from the tree above. The orchestra of tones seemed chaotic, but as I continued to watch, the sounds eventually stopped and the birds flew off as a synchronized group, leaving the tree quiet... Over the past year I believe I have become a better listener, which in turn helps me to see other perspectives. The birds reminded me that I have both the ability to express and hear other’s voices!” (Brad, photographer)⁵⁰

Tigist (Ethiopian) shared that while walking around the community and taking photographs, she got to know “people who live behind the CCC and who don’t usually come out.” Lynn (African American) stated that through her participation in the project, she met “people from other cultures and got views on the way they see things,” which “broadened [her] spectrum on life [in] other cultures” and helped her “understand the community better, the diversity of it.” Brad (Caucasian American) described realizing that “people have very different interpretations based on interactions and past experiences,” which in turn “influence their interactions with the community.” He said this understanding affected his perspective on several issues in the community and brought to the forefront the need for background information in order to contextualize and understand people’s stories and behaviors:

I saw other people’s perspectives and what I thought to be true wasn’t necessarily the case, but at the same time I realized that you can’t take everything you hear as truth. [...]

⁵⁰ This picture was submitted as part of the third assignment. Brad stated in this caption that he had become a better listener over the course of a year. I followed up on this during his interview to better understand the contribution of the Photovoice project to his personal transformation during that time span. He explained that he had been struggling with depression and a lack of human interaction, and that around the time I had first made his acquaintance during my fieldwork in the spring of 2013, he had just decided to get more involved in the community to get to know more people around him. He described his participation in the Photovoice project as the culmination of his efforts up to that point in time. While Brad’s improved listening skills cannot solely be attributed to this project, he said that it did play an important role. For further details, please see the “Therapeutic impact” section in chapter 7.

I am saying that there are different opinions everywhere, but they're still trying to express themselves and how they felt. [...] They could not necessarily be lying; it could just be a different perspective. They saw it a different way.

Similarly, Amita (Indian American) said she learned "how important it is to be mindful and aware of past experiences and how [they] may have influence on people's perspectives and feelings today." In her follow-up interview, she explained that this insight made her more sympathetic to refugees. She described several behaviors that had previously frustrated her - refugees disregarding traffic rules, or leaving grocery carts around town - which had made her feel like they were "bringing down the value of [the] community." However, Amita attributed the following shift in thinking to her participation in the Photovoice project:

When I hear stories, individual stories, it puts everything back into perspective like suffering or injustices, you know experiences. It's like why am I worrying about [refugees] following the traffic signals. They have so much already going on and a lot of it is that they're just not educated. It's almost like you're reframing it in your mind. It brings you back to I guess like putting things into perspective. Why am I getting so upset about that? Think about maybe why they are behaving the way they are. So I feel like with something like this, sometimes you have to reframe periodically to put things back in perspective. "This isn't a big deal. Think about the big picture. Think about how we all connect. Why is that important?" Sometimes I get really stuck on these little things that irritate me and I think that sometimes happens to people in the community and its creating this division because you're harping on those things that you see but don't understand and so then it's almost like "Oh I don't want them... They do this or that..." In this case it's not even just refugees it's just... You know when you just start creating assumptions I guess. At least for me I don't realize I'm doing it. Then I hear the story of someone's

past [...]. In-depth stories about an individual and then it reframes and I feel really good. It's not that big of a deal. [...] I guess actually the city councilmen are trying to push the refugees out. [...] It might represent a feeling that the people in the community might have, like they're representing how people feel, but the answer isn't to push people out, but to come up with a solution. [...] So something like this [Photovoice project] is good because it at least creates a conversation.

While several project participants described gaining an increased appreciation for and understanding of at times conflicting perspectives and behaviors in the community, Chloe (African American) discovered for herself that differences in perception were often not race- or nationality-based and found unexpected commonalities with people of different backgrounds:

[The project] affected me in a great way because there were certain times where demographics didn't necessarily [...] mean that you had the same ideals. [...] There were times where I may have agreed with someone who was way on the other side of the spectrum than me demographically but we still had similar ideals. There were times where people that had the same demographics that I did... They couldn't have said it better. There was always just really interesting dialogue and the depth of insight, the privilege to be able to express my thoughts and then hearing the thoughts and perspectives of other people in reflecting on that. Which I think broadened my horizons as a person.

This impression was echoed by Amita, who found that "there are fundamental things that people care about across age, race, and income," and by Tigist, who found that "there are many similar views on the pros and cons of the community."

One of the most frequently mentioned insights on the questionnaires and in the interviews was the role of the city administration and police in shaping communal dynamics, and the fact that all resident groups felt negatively affected by them. During his follow-up interview, John

(Caucasian American) discussed how he had realized during the project that all people regardless of origin, race, or class had been challenged by negative experiences with the police. To further elaborate, he stated:

What's impressed me is that [the issues with the police are] so universal. Even middle-class African-Americans, professional people living in the community see the same thing, [have] the same experience. It is not just refugees. [...] It was just really interesting to see it. It was a clear consensus that this is an issue. It was not limited to... [...] It is just very interesting to see [...] it's in the community. It's everywhere. That's my sense from the project.

John's impression was echoed by many of the other participants. For instance, Kelile (Ethiopian) stated that he had not previously known how pervasive these issues were in the community and how much they affected everybody, not just refugees as he had previously assumed. His daughter Tigist stated that, in preparation for the second assignment on the negative aspects of the community, she "talked to adults to learn more about the administration and police" and that she was "now more aware of what [was] really going on." Amita (Indian American) found that "the City of Clarkston - some administrators - may actually be creating an unintentional divide among residents in the city" and that "the stuff about the police harassment [...] was very eye-opening." Brad (Caucasian American) said that he now understood that and why "there is an abundance of distrust within the community in regards to government and the city council." Haben (Eritrean) determined that "the City of Clarkston needs a revamp in administration" and that the residents needed to "pay close attention to the administration in Clarkston during election terms." John synthesized from these comments that, while many individuals and groups in the community had legitimate grievances, they should look for the root-causes of the divisions they were experiencing and the inequalities they were sensing: "With every issue, don't assume it's

about personalities; look for structural factors at work.” This synthesis pointed to the need for comprehensive conflict engagement that does not only transform relationships but also the societal structures into which they are embedded.

Several project participants described a newfound knowledge and/or understanding of the structural factors that led many African American residents to feel marginalized in Clarkston, especially those who had been long-term residents of the city, as John (Caucasian American) keenly observed. After it had been mentioned in the group that this inequity was the result of the funding structure of many of the non-profit organizations in Clarkston, whose funding was specifically designated for supporting refugees, Carroll (African American) had commented on John’s picture of the Refugee Family Services offices as follows in week two:

It is a wonderful thing that a woman had a vision to start Refugee Family Services. That she took the initiative to start a service and fill the need is great. I do not want her to be penalized of sorts because her service model is lacking in the African American community. A woman or man with a similar vision for this population could accomplish the same thing. In fact, there are low-income white Americans in Clarkston as well, and I am sure they would like the access to the services as well. When refugees come to the United States, they have an opportunity to start from scratch. People and services are attracted to that spirit of the underdog. Generational poverty is not attractive and people do not flock to aid people caught in this cycle.

These comments resonated and left a lasting impression with many of the participants as indicated by the comments on the questionnaires and in the follow-up interviews. Lynn (African American) stated that the discussion had made her realize that “there is still a lot of dividing of people here in GA or Clarkston. There are a lot of stereotypes of people of different races.” Amita (Indian American) indicated taking away from the discussion that “issues like class

(income) and race may create division and inequity to access [and that] the approach to helping low-income refugees vs. low-income African Americans is different; mindfulness of generational poverty is very important.” John commented on his post-session questionnaire that he had taken away from the session that the debilitating effects of slavery were “real, cultures and families were destroyed; the effects are felt today.” Chloe (African American) was inspired and encouraged by John’s concern for a group of people of whom he, as a white man, was not a member. She stated that his pointing out that many of the services available to refugees were not available to African Americans facing many of the same challenges had “affect[ed her] thinking because [she wanted] to know what [was] not [there] and how it [could] be formalized in an out of the box way to have the greatest impact on eradicating poverty and promoting social justice.” The issue of marginalization among the marginalized was brought to the forefront of many participants’ minds as part of the project, greater sensitivity towards the plight of economically disadvantaged African Americans resulted, and a sense of urgency around identifying support structures for this demographic emerged.

Reflecting on what he had learned during the Photovoice project and what could be done to promote a stronger sense of togetherness, commonality, and connectedness within the community, Brad (Caucasian American) questioned how people in Clarkston were supposed to work together and help one another while trying to fight for their respective communal groups to survive. “Cultures both divide and bring people together. In a community where cultures are ‘fighting’ to survive, collaboration may not be a concern.” While this had been a harsh realization for Brad, he stated that he was hopeful that he could “perhaps contribute to helping this matter through art.” Diagnosing a lack of connections as the root cause of many problems in Clarkston, John also had suggestions for remedying the situation:

A lack of connections underlies all other issues, it is the fundamental problem. Many people do not have the time or energy to devote to the effort required to make connections. There are many things that could draw people together – sports, food, music, art, children, their welfare might be the most powerful.

This statement suggests that there is awareness among some individuals in the community of the types of activities that can function as communal connectors. The potential connectors John listed were also the ones that had emerged during the first dialogue session on communal dynamics that unite the Clarkston community.

This section contained evidence of the cognitive developments within the group, especially an increased awareness and understanding of the communal dynamics that affected the community as a whole and of the challenges faced by particular sub-groups. This increased awareness included an understanding of divisions among different refugee groups, the multitude of perspectives in the Clarkston community, the influence of past experiences on present perceptions, the fact that all population groups shared negative experiences with the city administration and police, the systemic challenges posed by the social structure, and avenues for promoting togetherness. The following sections include data indicating that emotional and relational transformations resulted from participation in the project as well.

Connectedness and appreciation. A newly emerged sense of connectedness and appreciation was shared by most of the participants. Amita (Indian American) discovered that “we have more in common than we often realize” and that “connecting with people can be really rewarding.” As a result, she found that “the [Photovoice] experience [made her] feel more connected with [and a part of] the Clarkston community.” She anticipated that, six months after the project, she would remember “how connected we can feel with others with a simple

conversation.” Chloe (African American) shared Amita’s appreciation of the commonalities that emerged during the project:

What this [project] did was to further affirm the fact that we have more in common than we have differences on. If we work to[wards] those commonalities, whatever the differences may be, those differences can be okay as long as we know the commonalities. [...] To me that’s where the power lies, when the people come together and recognize that we have more in common than we do apart when we have differences.

While for some, the discovery of commonalities created a sense of connectedness, others connected on an emotional level. Lynn (African American) shared that she had felt a particularly strong connection with Kelile (Ethiopian), whose feelings of “joy” and “upset [...] touched [her] a lot. [She] was always interested in [his point of view and] listening to what he had to say.” Haben (Eritrean) and her determination to get an education, which put many American students’ attitudes towards schooling into perspective, had “caught [her] attention,” too:

[Haben] was really into her education and school, the way she was talking about her going to school and some of the hurdles that she had to overcome for her even to be able to go to school. You know it makes you think about our kids today how they’re given an education and you can’t even get them to get up and go to school and here you have this child coming in from another country and had to do so much and go through so much just to be able to have a chance to go to school. It was really interesting how you could tell education is really, really, really important, you could tell how important it is, just not something that you throw away. Yes she was really passionate about her college and her school and she went to school and you could tell she didn’t get caught up in all that worldly stuff, she kept her feet on the ground. That’s good to see.

Lynn concluded that participating in the project had raised her awareness and appreciation of all that Clarkston had to offer and given her “more passion and more understanding” for the community. Similarly, Haben (Eritrean) stated on her exit questionnaire that the project had taught her about the power and importance of compassion:

Compassion: When you show compassion to others, [they] will return the favor. People respond to kindness and that kindness can make a big impact. Give a hand to those in need, [listen,] be compassionate, and understand. Take the time to understand one another and find a resolution that can benefit you and them and as a whole the community.

Carroll (African American) shared that she would always remember the people she had met and their stories, adding that “the wonderful people in the room [made her] be willing to be open” and excited to hear their thoughts every week. Similarly, Tigist (Ethiopian) stated that she would “remember how people in the group had positive thoughts and how they were very open and sharing. The people in the group were very interesting and I’m very fortunate to have met them.” For some of the project participants, these emotional connections had a positive impact on their psycho-emotional well-being.

“Therapeutic” impact. Six of the project participants stated in the follow-up interviews that the project had had a “therapeutic” effect on them. I am adopting this term because it was used by several participants, but recognize that a de facto therapeutic impact in the psycho-therapeutic sense will need to be further investigated. This will be discussed in chapter 7.

Lynn (African American), who had been suffering from breast cancer and who was leading a rather isolated life, stated that “it was therapy for [her] to be able to get out [and learn] a lot about Clarkston that [she] didn’t know.” Gargaaro (Somali) stated that participating in the group had “felt like a release” and that it had made her “feel comfortable because [she had] somebody who [wanted] to know what [she] was suffering in Clarkston.” Carroll (African

American) expressed repeatedly how good participating in the process had made her feel and how it had “enriched [her] life.” She concluded that she “really [had] a hard time expressing fully just how much this project was a good thing. It was at a perfect time.” Chloe (African American) attributed a therapeutic impact to the experience of looking at issues from a multitude of perspectives and reaching a point of mutual understanding:

When we learned about the different angles and taking those angles, talking with people, it was just really therapeutic for me. I think that’s a good word. It was wonderful to see what other people thought the story was about before sharing. [...] I love that because it speaks to my philosophy about facts [being] subject to change based on where you’re standing, based on people’s experiences and their perspectives. You know... They saw it differently and then when I explained how I saw it, they could see that too and that was great. It was just a really great experience.

Kelile (Ethiopian) shared that the project had helped him and his family “to break out [from] loneliness and communicate and interact with the people in Clarkston.” He also stated: “It was good for me. I made some friends, good friends.” Similarly, Brad (Caucasian American) explained that, prior to the Photovoice project, he had been “going through a lot of issues, that [he] thought [he] needed to connect more with people in general [because he had] felt disconnected.” He credited his “way to recovery out of depression” in part to his participation in the project and the sense of connectedness that resulted from it. Brad found that he was “probably in the best place ever” after engaging in the process. He explained this as follows:

I guess just connecting with people and [...] for us to tell stories about your life and where you came from and delve into your positive and negative experiences that may be painful or may be... Just gives you a sense of cultivating friendship I guess.

Haben (Eritrean) went a step further in expressing the impact the project had on her when she stated “You know, I didn’t really make new friends in this project. I feel like I made a new family.” While not everybody may have ended up feeling like family by the end of the Photovoice project, most of the participants expressed that they felt hopeful and encouraged to work together across national, racial, and ethnic boundaries to make a positive difference in the community.

Hope and encouragement to work together for change. Several project participants explicitly expressed a new sense of hope for change in Clarkston and enthusiasm about working in diverse groups to bring forth such transformations. For instance, Kelile (Ethiopian) noted taking away from the project that “even though we all came from different origins, we can understand and work together as a group.” Realizing that “others are willing to come and help out in Clarkston” gave him hope that “the city of Clarkston will be a favorable place to live for everyone.” Similarly, Lynn (African American) found that “working together can bring change in a good way.” A consistent champion for positivity, Carroll (African American) stated that the project gave her “hope for a better Clarkston as a result of this process” and that she was “excited to see how this project [would] turn out and [could] be a catalyst for positive change in the community.” The realization that “others share[d her] hope for a positive Clarkston experience” was particularly encouraging for her. The same insight struck Tigist (Ethiopian), who took away from the project an appreciation for “the positive that is in everyone’s thoughts and how we all want change for Clarkston.” This gave her faith in “how a lot can come out of something that a few people can do.”

On her exit questionnaire, Haben (Eritrean) noted three main take-aways from the project, which included compassion (see above), focus on the community as a whole, and proactivity in the interest of all. She explained the latter two as follows:

Focus: Focus on the objective of the community as a whole, what can I do, or we do collectively to make it a better community and a better city for the current residents and future prospect residents.

Proactive: Be proactive, within the community. Communicate with those outside your culture or boundaries. Be attentive to their needs and be an active member in the community even if you do not want your name in the papers, you still have the voice and ability to make the change.

These reflections are evidence of a shift that had occurred over time in the group discussions. In the first two sessions, the participants had focused more narrowly on their own or their identity groups' perceptions, needs, and concerns. By the fourth session, they demonstrated a broader understanding and appreciation of the needs and concerns of the greater community, combined with a sense of encouragement to work together to affect change in the interest of all.

Voice, empowerment, and participants' reach outside the project. To examine the utility of Photovoice as a conflict engagement strategy, I looked for attitudinal, emotional, and behavioral changes among the project participants. In the previous sections, I presented the data that reflects such changes on an interpersonal and intergroup level, showing how their actions, emotions, and behaviors changed towards each other. Some of these transformations also occurred internally, leading the participants to recognize or more openly assert their own voices and take agency in sharing their insights with their networks. This section presents the data indicative of such empowerment.

As quoted in the previous section, Haben (Eritrean), an introverted and rather quiet project participant, stated on her exit questionnaire that “even if you do not want your name in the papers, you still have the voice and ability to make the change.” She was not the only one who expressed such a sense of empowerment. For instance, Lynn (African American) stated that “the

Photovoice project gives you a voice in Clarkston.” In his follow-up interview, Kelile (Ethiopian) reflected on the importance of actively engaging in the community and making his own and his family’s voices heard:

I did not participate in the community before the project, not even in voting because I am not a citizen yet. But once I get my citizenship, maybe I will. Sometimes I show up for the things [Tigist] does. Now, after the project, I will try to participate. [...] If I participate more, I can get many things from the community and I can give what I have. If I just keep myself outside, it’s not good for the community. The project has changed me. I am more active, more involved. [...] My family, we have to participate. We have to contribute to the community. [How we feel] must go forward into the community.

Kelile further described the Photovoice project more broadly as a vehicle for sharing the residents’ voices with city officials:

The city of Clarkston must try to create a platform to get all the people in the city to participate. If they do that, they will be successful. I think they can get this information from the Photovoice project. They will get good information about the community.

Similarly, Carroll (African American) emphasized on multiple occasions that “people need to be heard” and appreciated the opportunity provided by the project to exchange views and let everyone be heard. She was well-aware of her role as “a co-researcher in the group” and found pleasure in this status and the responsibility it brought. She also shared that the project made her more outwardly political, acknowledging that she was “always surprised by [her] political thoughts [since she didn’t] usually express political opinions.” During her follow-up interview, she further reflected on the ways she had been affected by participating in the Photovoice project.

Not being afraid of my voice. When it comes to political things you know... normally I don't really like conflict. I do things I have to do. I follow the rules whatever but I'm not really one... I just like to look for positive things and if it's negative... it's like not staying on how that's negative [...]. I'm a [the glass is] half-full person, but [I am no longer] afraid and [...] I wrote something about getting involved in a community. [...] I really think it's a gift for you. I don't think it's mine to keep. I really think it's for you so I'll read it for you if you want.

Carroll then read her poem to me, in which she creatively and impressively expressed her personal transformation from someone who did not want to be bothered with issues in the community to an empowered individual who recognized the ill-effects of structural disparities as manifested in racism, sexism, injustice, inequitable pay for performance, ineffective school systems, corrupt politicians, and crime. She described taking off her blinders and making a conscious decision to no longer sit idly by but to be bothered, become active in the community, and lend her voice to those without advocates.⁵¹

While Carroll chose the lyrical route to raise her voice, other project participants chose different avenues for taking the initiative to spread their insights from the project into the community. For instance, John (Caucasian American) got increasingly involved at the Somali Mall and made new connections in the Bhutanese community as a result of his participation in the project. Lynn, Carroll, Chloe (African Americans), Kelile, and Tigist (Ethiopians) told their friends and families about the project. Chloe also told the administrators at the Clarkston Community Center about it, and Gargaaro (Somali) stated in her follow-up interview that she had told “many people” about the project, including a “council woman,” and had alerted them to my forthcoming “book” based on the project outcomes. Brad (Caucasian American) reported on

⁵¹ Carroll intends to publish the poem and has a copyright pending. To avoid any future potential copyright infringements, I have decided not to include it in this dissertation despite her specific permission to do so.

having had conversations with individuals working at a variety of organizations around Clarkston as well as his wish to create an ongoing art installation at a central and visible place in Clarkston that could be launched based on the outcomes of the Photovoice project and expanded upon by residents over time.

Tigist (Ethiopian) shared that participating in the project gave her a reason and a “chance to talk to people [outside of the project] and hear the common problems they are witnessing in the community.” She called the Photovoice project “another resource to learn more about the community and listen to things and to bring them back to the other groups that [she was] involved in.” In her interview, she stated:

I have gained new information and a new perspective that may make me view things differently. People’s reflections on topics and experiences have given me a new outlook. I try to share this with other people and it has given me ideas about how issues are experienced by different people. Being a part of different groups I am a resource and I can always go back to the Photovoice group for help because they all want Clarkston to be a better community.

Going into more detail, Tigist described “shar[ing] what [she had] learned in [her groups]:”

I have shared it with a few CYI [Clarkston Youth Initiative] kids. [...] I have taken it back to [the youth coordinator] at the CCC, suggested a cleanup day to her for youth. People come to the CCC to talk about things that could be done and I have talked to [its director] about Photovoice. Through the project, I have also gotten more contact with the mayor and access to the police.

Frank, a member of the city government, also reported on having shared with fellow administrators, the police, and local agencies some of the concerns raised by the project participants.

The participants' accounts show how their involvement in the Photovoice process not only made them recognize and confidently assert their voices, but also how they took the initiative to share the insights derived from the project with others in their respective micro- and exosystems, consequently functioning as mesosystemic linkages.

The power of photography. Ascertaining the usability and utility of Photovoice as a comprehensive conflict engagement strategy required an examination of attitudinal, emotional, and behavioral transformations among the participants over the course of the project, and collecting their feedback on practical aspects of the Photovoice process. This included feedback on the use of cameras. These data are included in this and the following sub-section.

In their project feedback, several participants discussed the power of photography and its utility in fostering mutual understanding within the group and making their voices heard beyond the confines of the project. While Wang and Burris (1997) created the Photovoice methodology to help non-native speakers of English and other marginalized populations like the illiterate to express themselves and their views, the feedback from the participants in this project showed that they experienced photography as a powerful communication tool regardless of their language or literacy backgrounds. Kelile (Ethiopian) shared that:

Photos can explain better than words can. [...] I like being photographer in the community. I learn a lot from the project. [...] I want to use the digital camera again. I used to do that in my country, I enjoyed taking pictures, but here I learn a lot about *how* to use a camera, so I really want to develop my photography to help the community.

Similarly, Lynn (African American) found that “people see things in a way only they can and [that] pictures can relay this.” In the specific context of this project, Gargaaro (Somali) considered photography a vehicle for speaking “the truth” about Clarkston and people’s suffering, and for sharing this truth with “America [...] and all over the world.” Haben (Eritrean)

described the Photovoice process in general as one in which “you *see* what they’re trying to say and you *see* what I’m trying to say. So we are on the same page.” Inspired to dig deeper into photography, she further reflected on the power and utility of photography in her follow-up interview:

Photography is more than just an image on a paper or posted on a wall, it’s a powerful or light-hearted message that conveys the message the photographer wants the audience to see through [his or her] lenses. Photovoice has taught me that images are more powerful “voice” tools rather than just arguing or not finding the right words to send your message across. In the click of a button and a flash of light an image is produced to express that message and even more in a powerful way. Photovoice has given me the courage and opened my eyes to the beauty in the Clarkston community and also the harsh reality that the residents face.

Haben (Eritrean), Tigist (Ethiopian), Amita (Indian American), and Carroll (African American) all highlighted that the need to take pictures as part of the assignments made them pay more attention to their surroundings, think more deeply and critically about what they really wanted to say, and listen more carefully when they had the responsibility to represent somebody else’s life with their camera. Brad (Caucasian American) added that the photo assignments fulfilled a dual purpose by holding him accountable and giving him an outlet for his ideas:

I liked [being a photographer in the community] from the aspect it was a class and I was held accountable to take pictures that week of something I could reflect on about Clarkston. I had often thought about these different things that go on in the community and this kind of gave me a channel or outlet to actually go out and take pictures of them. And then really sit down and tell the story and draw meaning from them.

Brad, who particularly enjoyed the expressive nature and story-telling aspect of photography, saw photography as a “wonderful tool [with] very different impacts based on scale.” As an artist, he had several ideas for expanding upon the seed that had been sowed by the Photovoice project and getting more community members involved in documenting their lives and displaying their art prominently in the community so it would be accessible for everyone and a starting point for a larger-scale dialogue. On a more individualized level, John (Caucasian American) also considered photography as a connector between the photographer and a variety of people in the community:

You know photography is going to connect you with different people. I would love to be able to sit in a barbershop down there for an afternoon or morning sometime and just be able to take photos and put little captions to go with the photos.

Upon completion of the Photovoice project, most of the participants stated that they wanted to carry a camera again and get more proficient in using photography as an expressive and documentary tool, many of them with the explicit intent to drive positive change in their respective ecosystems.

Structural Impact of the Photovoice Project

As discussed in the literature review, the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954) fails to explain in what ways individual attitude changes affect collective processes because it singularly attributes changing intergroup relations to interpersonal interactions (Forbes, 1997; Hewstone & Swart, 2011). While Allport’s (1954) hypothesis takes into account the internal and relational bases of social conflict, it does not consider the systemic or structural factors that affect individuals’ constitution and interpersonal / intergroup relations (Galtung, 1969; Hewstone & Swart, 2011; Kriesberg & Dayton, 2012). For this reason and following Stoecker’s (2005) best

practices for tracing impact in community engagement, I have tracked any external impacts of the Photovoice project that imply the possibility of future structural changes and include them below.

While the participation in the Photovoice project itself targeted two of the three social bases of conflict (Kriesberg & Dayton, 2012) - the internal and relational ones - sharing its output with members and leaders from the surrounding community and stakeholders with the power to promote systemic changes also targeted the structural basis of conflict (Kriesberg & Dayton, 2012). Early on in the project, I was contacted by a journalist at the local DeKalb Champ newspaper who had heard about what we were doing, requesting an interview. The resulting publication introduced the Photovoice project and its underpinnings to a broader local audience. Gargaaro (Somali) shared that one of the city council members had shown her the article, documenting that its reach included some of those individuals who had local decision-making power. Furthermore, a report was requested by several local non-profit agencies and the Regional Office of Refugee Resettlement. This report was in the works at the time of writing this.

To further expand the reach of the Photovoice project and in conjunction with the participants' own efforts to spread the word by tapping into their own groups and networks, the participants' images and collages were exhibited on two occasions for World Refugee Day 2014 - first in conjunction with a CDF-sponsored film screening at a church in the Inman Park neighborhood in Atlanta, and second at the Clarkston Community Center for a celebration sponsored by the Georgia State Refugee Program. Several community leaders, local and regional decision-makers, as well as members of the DeKalb County police force attended these events, viewed the captioned Photovoice images, and entered into conversations with the project participants and me to discuss what they had seen. The Photovoice images were also shown at the August 2014 opening of Kennesaw State University's Zuckerman Museum of Art and for the

subsequent first two months of the museum's existence before all framed images were returned to me so they could be exhibited elsewhere in the future.

In the fall of 2014, The Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta requested for the exhibition to be reinstalled again at First Baptist Church in Clarkston for the foundation's donor tour. The donors, whose identities were kept confidential by the Community Foundation, were individuals with the financial resources to facilitate structural changes in Clarkston. They had heard about the Photovoice project and requested to see the outcomes for themselves. Sharing the participants' work with the donors at their request before they decided how to allocate their funds was an unexpected yet welcome opportunity to raise awareness of the project participants' concerns. Due to the confidentiality agreements made between the donors and the Community Foundation, I was unable to follow up with them after their tour. However, given that these financially resourceful individuals asked to see the exhibition before allocating their donations, it is likely that the Photovoice project influenced the direction of resources, which in turn is linked to structural impacts. One of the participants volunteered as an attendant at the exhibition, which gave him additional exposure and the opportunity to impress the matters the group had agreed upon on the donors.

In the summer of 2015, the David J. Sencer CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) Museum included the collages that had resulted from the Photovoice project in its *Resettling in America: Georgia's Refugee Communities* exhibition in Atlanta, which was set to remain open through the rest of the year. The prominent display of the participants' captioned collages as the opener to the exhibition gave the project renewed exposure to an interested and well-networked audience. These exhibits have given the project participants an opportunity to personally engage the visitors in dialogues about their perspectives on life and communal dynamics in Clarkston, and to be recognized for their work. Exposing the captioned images to

diverse audiences expanded the reach of the Photovoice project beyond those who participated and laid the foundation for potential future structural changes.⁵²

Other interested parties could also view a selection of the captioned images and collages on the www.PhotovoiceClarkston.com website. This website was linked to a Google Analytics account, which indicated that as of November 1, 2015, the page had been viewed 12,252 times since its inception. 2,226 of these visits originated from the United States; 1,529 from Russia; 411 from Brazil; 178 from China; 118 from Germany and Japan, 91 from the United Kingdom, 88 from Italy, as well as multiple visits from Canada, France, Australia, and 108 other countries including Barbados, Sri Lanka, Croatia, Libya, Rwanda, and Vanuatu.

An example of the broader structural impact that having an online presence can have came from the Deputy Director of Welcoming America, a “national, grassroots-driven collaborative that works to promote mutual respect and cooperation between foreign-born and U.S.-born Americans [with the goal of creating] a welcoming atmosphere in which immigrants are more likely to integrate into the social fabric of their adopted hometowns” (Welcoming America, 2015). I had met her in Clarkston at a Welcoming America-sponsored meeting during fieldwork and shared with her my plans for the project, in which she showed an immediate interest. After the project had finished and highlights of its output had been uploaded on the website, I invited the Deputy Director to view the images online. In response, she sent me an email in which she stated: “The photos and especially the stories that accompany them are really powerful, and tell a much more complete picture of Clarkston than anything I’ve read before.” At the time of writing, Welcoming America was growing its involvement in Clarkston, and if it took

⁵² To examine the depth and longevity of the impressions the captioned images left with the different audiences more systematically, an online survey was developed and disseminated. As discussed with the committee during the dissertation proposal defense, the analysis and presentation of this response data goes beyond the scope of this dissertation and will constitute the next step in my research agenda upon graduation.

into consideration the “much more complete picture of Clarkston” that the project had provided, there was the potential for the participants’ voices to help shape this involvement.

The Photovoice project also prompted conversations with the mayor of Clarkston as well as the city manager.⁵³ The conversation with the mayor of Clarkston happened spontaneously during my community engagement at a meeting convened by the Welcoming America organizers, after the World Refugee Day exhibitions. The mayor asked me what, based on the Photovoice project, would be some recommendations for improving communal dynamics in Clarkston. I relayed to him that there was a need for improved police-resident relationships. Gargaaro (Somali), who had also attended the meeting, overheard this and joined the conversation. Because we had had a chance to get to know each other during the project, she was able to provide examples of her first-hand experiences to illustrate my point. Based on the Photovoice discussions and my previous experience as a community mediator in Los Angeles, I suggested that it might be a worthy investment for the city to hire a community policing officer who was not perceived as a threat by the residents, but as someone who was genuinely there to help and serve. The mayor was intrigued by the idea and started calculations for how much such a hire would cost the city. At the time of writing, no decision had been made in this matter, but it was evident that the Photovoice project resulted in open ears among local policy makers and created new avenues of conversation.

The meeting with the city manager was scheduled and more structured in nature. He had been able to review the images the project participants had taken to document the poor physical condition of many rental properties around town, and read the captions that explained not only the conflicts between landlords and tenants, but also between landlords and neighboring property

⁵³ Clarkston has a “weak mayor” system, which means that the city manager and the city council hold more executive power than the mayor. Weak mayors are the elected spokespeople of the citizens, but they have no authority to appoint or replace officials or to veto city council votes. Weak mayors’ influence is based on their personality and ability to convince others of their goals (Saffell & Basehart, 2008).

owners. These accounts had made it obvious to him that there was a need for change in this area. In collaboration with my community partner CDF and my dissertation chair, who had organized a landlord-tenant mediation clinic at his previous university, we entered talks to discuss the inception of a landlord-tenant-property owner conflict resolution program in Clarkston. Such a program was considered mutually beneficial for the city and Kennesaw State University, exemplifying the concept of mutually beneficial community engaged research, teaching, and learning (Hayes, 2011). The Master's of Science in Conflict Management program graduates young conflict professionals every year who need to complete one-semester-long internships as part of their curriculum. The idea was to exchange free services to the community for experience that the students could use towards their course requirements and for their resumes. This project was also intended to solidify for the long-term the collaboration between Kennesaw State University, CDF, and the city of Clarkston. At the time of writing, the visioning and planning process was still underway.

In the spring of 2015, the Director of Leadership and Community Engaged Learning at Emory University invited me, joined by the Photovoice participants, to deliver two guest lectures to teach their students about the Photovoice methodology and lessons learned in Clarkston so they could design their own projects. Such collaboration between local universities is consistent with the goals and ideals of community engaged research, teaching, and learning as promoted by Hayes (2011).

The data presented in this chapter suggest that Photovoice, when modified according to the CCEM, is both useable and useful as a conflict engagement strategy. It produced greater awareness and understanding of the communal dynamics affecting intergroup relationships in Clarkston among the participants and interested stake-holders in their ecosystem, including but not limited to social service providers, local administrators, and policy makers. It also built new

or strengthened pre-existing relationships based on compassion and a realization of common needs and concerns among the project participants. Furthermore, it encouraged them to assert their voices outside of the project and work together for change in Clarkston.

Summary

Chapter 6 explored the use and utility of Photovoice as a practical conflict engagement tool. The first part of this chapter focused on the internal and relational impact of the project on its participants, beginning with a presentation of the data collected as part of the newly-devised fourth assignment. It demonstrated the cognitive, emotional, and relational development the participants experienced as they spent time with each other outside of the project and shared with one another what they had learned about their project partners when they reconvened for the subsequent dialogue session.

The second part included data that were collected in the post-session and exit questionnaires as well as follow-up interviews in order to evaluate the overall impact of the process. This section included evidence of increased awareness, perspective-taking, bonding, connectedness and appreciation, hope for future cooperative relationships, empowerment and self-assertion as a result of project participation. It also contained the participants' feedback on the methodological benefits and challenges of the Photovoice process from their perspectives.

The third part documented the outcomes of sharing the captioned photographs and collages with policy makers, service providers, and the surrounding community to explore if and how structural changes can be facilitated through Photovoice. It included the conversations, projects, and exposure that have resulted from the process. The data presented in this chapter will be further discussed in chapter 7.

Chapter 7: Discussion & Conclusions

“A lot can come out of something that a few people can do. I will remember how people in the group had positive thoughts and how they were very open and sharing. The people in the group were very interesting and I’m very fortunate to have met them.” (Tigist, participant)

This project was designed for a dual purpose. First, it aimed to generate data on residents’ perspectives on the communal dynamics in refugee resettlement communities like Clarkston that unite or divide the population in order to share this information with policy makers to promote better-informed decision-making that matches on-the-ground realities. Second, it was designed to examine the use and utility of the Comprehensive Conflict Engagement Model (CCEM) applied through the Photovoice methodology in constructed and other diverse and divided communities. The results of this study highlight the intersection of research and practice and demonstrate how the Comprehensive Conflict Engagement Model bridges the gap between conflict theory and practice (Coleman, 2011; Hayes, 2011). Because I approached this project from the perspective of a scholar-practitioner with the intent of bridging the two, I have written this discussion in accordance with how the project was conceived rather than splitting insights for scholars from those for practitioners. A reader who is only interested in one but not the other may look in the appropriate sections of interest below.

This chapter is divided into five parts. First, I will apply the theoretical framework developed in chapter 2 to the data on communal dynamics presented in chapters 4 and 5 in order to reach a more systematic understanding of the dynamic interplay among the ecological systems within Clarkston and discuss the extent to which the data support the referenced theories. Second, I will use the framework to analyze the data presented in chapter 6 to examine the applicability of the CCEM and the role Photovoice projects can play in comprehensively engaging communal conflicts. This part of the analysis demonstrates the way that this project helped bridge the gap between theories of conflict and the practices of comprehensive conflict

engagement. Third, I will discuss the implications for researchers and practitioners who consider using Photovoice as a data collection and/or comprehensive conflict engagement strategy.

Fourth, I will review the limitations of this research and provide suggestions for process adjustments and best practices based on the experiences with this project. In conclusion, I will suggest avenues for future research and discuss implications and key lessons learned.

Communal Dynamics

The theoretical framework developed in chapter 2 linked multiple theories from the social and behavioral sciences, which provided the foundation for suggesting that, through several modifications based on the CCEM, Photovoice could be used as both an effective community engaged research method and a comprehensive conflict engagement strategy. In order to provide explanatory mechanisms for both the complexity of the interactions and the structural marginalization in these communities, two of the primary theories used were Galtung's (1969) structural violence theory and the bioecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, 2006), an extension of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory.

Galtung. The first cornerstone on which the theoretical framework supporting this project was built is Galtung's (1969) structural violence theory. According to Galtung (1969), structural violence occurs more frequently than direct violence. It is systematically built into the social fabric and prevents entire segments of society from meeting their basic needs and reaching their maximum potential. It is characterized by the sole presence or combination of any of the following four pathologies rooted in the deep culture and manifested in the deep structure: penetration, segmentation, fragmentation, and marginalization (Galtung 1996; 2000; Graf et al., 2007).

The Photovoice participants gave few accounts of direct violence in Clarkston; most of the challenges they discussed were the result of indirect violence rooted in the existing deep structure and deep culture of the United States and the local area (Galtung, 1996; Graf et al., 2007). While the most prevalent structural pathologies evidenced in Clarkston were fragmentation and marginalization, some indications of segmentation and penetration manifested as well. Many of the conflicts described by the participants coincided with perceived or actual relative deprivation, structural inequalities, and resource competition.

Fragmentation. Fragmentation was evident in the lack of meaningful interaction and cooperation between the least powerful segments of Clarkston's population: refugees, who despite common perceptions are not a homogeneous, but an internally fragmented "group," immigrants, and economically disadvantaged African Americans. As in other constructed communities, where residents are brought together by external forces rather than by personal choice, the diverse groups of people in Clarkston lead 'parallel lives' with little or no meaningful interaction despite their coexistence in close physical proximity (Cantle, 2005). Notwithstanding the notable exceptions fondly described by the Photovoice participants, "organic or intrinsic relationships [and] mutual interdependence" (Mijuskovic, 1992, p. 147) between disenfranchised groups are rare. Most contact is not particularly meaningful or collaborative; instead, it remains at the surface of quotidian interactions. As long as refugees, immigrants, and economically disadvantaged African Americans remain ignorant of each other's plight, they cannot begin to see the complete and common picture of the structural violence that shapes their daily lives (segmentation), and they are more likely to accept it and try to simply survive within its parameters (penetration), as discussed during the project by Brad and John (Caucasian Americans, see chapter 6). As long as these disempowered groups remain fragmented, and as long as they compete with each other over the sparse resources available, whether in the form of

social services or employment at the chicken factories, they cannot join forces and consolidate power in numbers to seriously challenge the status quo.

The collected data suggest that through modification of the method according to the CCEM, Photovoice can be used to build bridges between isolated segments of society to increase mutual understanding and awareness of the structural impediments to positive peace. Beyond that, however, Photovoice also results in a tangible product (a collection of captioned photographs) that can be used to raise awareness in the community and reach local decision-makers with the power to impact the structure.

Marginalization. Multiple layers of marginalization are prevalent in Clarkston. Clarkston as a town is marginalized in DeKalb County and the metropolitan Atlanta area. By comparison to other cities in DeKalb County, the Photovoice participants felt that the residents of Clarkston were being underserved by their city government and police force, as well as the Clarkston area public schools. They did not believe that residents had the political leverage, i.e. power, to improve the status quo, which they in part attributed to illogical city limits and hostile city council members.

As discussed by the project participants, many refugees, immigrants, and African Americans caught in the cycle of generational poverty are kept from actively participating in civic life because they need to work long hours in low-paying jobs to support their families. Thus, little time or energy is left at the end of the day to “develop their solidarity with others in distress” (Galtung, 2000, p. 7), organize, and play an active role in shaping society.

While newly arrived refugees are eligible for support services to help them make a new start, individuals in the project group as well as others interviewed in the community bemoaned that little similar aid was available to equally needy African Americans stuck in a cycle of generational poverty. They are marginalized among the marginalized, a structural pathology

rooted in aspects of mainstream U.S. American deep culture, especially that in the South. As Carroll (African American) pointed out during one of the sessions:

When refugees come to the United States, they have an opportunity to start from scratch. People and services are attracted to that spirit of the underdog. Generational poverty [as prevalent in the African American community] is not attractive and people do not flock to aid people caught in this cycle. What can be done and what people are willing to do are two very different things. [...]

What this represents is the double-standard of the deep culture that seems to tell people on the margins of society that “we love the underdog unless the underdog is an underdog that we do not love.” As reflected in Carroll’s comment, there is a perception that some underprivileged groups are more accepted by mainstream culture than others, and that society is willing to do more for some than others. As Chloe (African American) stated repeatedly, there seems to be little empathy for African Americans stuck in generational poverty and little public recognition of the long-term detrimental effects of slavery. There is an expectation of “Americans” to “pull themselves up by the bootstraps.” At the same time, there is little acknowledgement of the barriers to success for certain groups within society and even less consensus of how many opportunities a group should be allowed before mainstream society further marginalizes them. This phenomenon of marginalization among the marginalized remains to be explored further.⁵⁴

While understanding marginalization within marginalized communities is important, it is also worth remembering that the Clarkston community as a whole is marginalized in the greater context of American society. Without access to good schools, without the power to shape policy, without freedom from oppressive policing tactics, and without access to well-paying employment that allows for an escape from poverty and a healthy work-life balance that would enable them to

⁵⁴ See the “Avenues for Future Research” section for more details.

actively participate in civic life, properly look after their children, and build supportive friendships in the community, many Clarkston residents experience structural violence and have “unequal life chances” (Galtung, 1969, p. 171).

Bronfenbrenner. The second cornerstone on which the theoretical framework supporting this project was built is the bioecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, 2006), an extension of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory, which suggests that individuals interact in five environmental systems that impact their development and relationships. The micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-, and chrono-systems range from the family unit to the culture and political system of one’s country, to the century into which one is born (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; see figure 1, chapter 2). Individuals interact with these different layers of the ecosystem via proximal processes, i.e. regularly recurring, reciprocal interactions with other people, objects, and symbols in their immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, 2006).

The data collected in this research reflect all of the levels of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory and elucidate the interplay in relationships between Clarkston community members and their physical, social, and symbolic environments.⁵⁵ Of particular note are the importance participants placed on their respective microsystems, mesosystemic linkages, and the everyday challenges presented by exosystemic and macrosystemic influences.

Microsystems. Most of the positive communal dynamics discussed were part of the participants’ microsystems, driven by the proximal processes within those systems. The participants placed great importance on the value of reciprocal interactions with specific individuals in their environment. These included family members and friends with whom they

⁵⁵ For a complete description of these data, please see chapters 4 and 5.

mastered daily life and enjoyed shared recreational activities, as well as particularly engaged community members. They also associated positive experiences with institutions in the community that could be characterized as “people,” “objects,” and “symbols” in their environment according to the bioecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, 2006). These included the Community Center and its employees, who sought to provide resources and opportunities for all, as well as local businesses that catered to their needs and provided safe spaces to congregate. Several participants discussed the tangible and symbolic importance of their respective religious communities in their lives. Not only did their local churches provide them with basic necessities in situations of need, but they also represented an important connection back to the cultural macrosystems from which they had come.

Exosystem and macrosystem. While some of the participants’ concerns were part of their respective microsystems, including the sustenance of their families, the (lacking) quality of children’s schooling and the poor physical condition of their schools, and inadequate access to health services, these concerns were often rooted in or attributable to conflicts in the exosystem. For instance, their grievances traced back to local politics, especially the role of the City of Clarkston administration, the predominance of public deterioration and neglect, as well as perceivably hostile police-resident relationships. Many neighbor-to-neighbor relationships were also tense, above all those in conflicts between landlords, tenants, and neighboring property owners.

The exosystem is not only shaped by the societal and cultural values, beliefs, and ideologies prevalent in the macrosystem (what Galtung would refer to as the deep structure and deep culture of a society), but it also represents the transmission of these values back into the meso- and microsystems. This can explain why social service agencies like Refugee Family

Services were seen positively and critically at once. Social service providers are part of the exosystem. As such, they are not only shaped by the societal and cultural values, beliefs, and ideologies prevalent in the macrosystem, but they also represent the transmission of these values back into the meso- and microsystems. The accessibility of social services thus depends on the values prevalent in the macrosystem. While the project participants generally recognized the importance of the support these organizations were providing to refugees, they also criticized that their services were available exclusively to newly arrived refugees, and that no similar support was offered to other groups in need, especially economically disadvantaged African Americans, the largest demographic group in Clarkston. As Carroll's (African American) statement regarding unequal access to aid for different demographic groups⁵⁶ suggests, members of the community feel like the (non-) availability of social support services carries an implicit message regarding the value attributed to particular demographic groups in society. In other words, these institutions represent the values of the dominant culture (macrosystem), and they send a message to underserved, marginalized populations that they do not belong.

The lack of qualified or professional employment opportunities and competition for employment under improper conditions in the chicken processing industry were another source of conflict. As with the (non-)availability of social services discussed above, these exosystemic conflicts were seen particularly negatively because they were perceived as carrying implicit meta-messages about people's value in U.S. society and mainstream culture, i.e. the macrosystem. The reciprocal interactions with the people, objects, and symbols in their environment, which included the disrespectful treatment by some city administrators and the police, the poor physical condition of the environment and many apartment complexes and

⁵⁶ See the "Poverty and Marginalization among the Marginalized" section in chapter 5.

schools, the non-recognition of foreign degrees and the apparent assumption that a land surveyor or a nurse from a foreign country would be “okay” working at a chicken factory or as a valet driver, made people feel like they were considered and treated as inferior to members of mainstream American culture. These are instances of macrosystemic impediments to refugees’, immigrants’, and impoverished African Americans’ pursuit of happiness on a daily basis. This demonstrates how the theories overlap within the multidisciplinary framework underlying the CCEM model because these macrosystemic impediments are what Galtung (1969, 1990) calls structural violence legitimized by cultural violence, as discussed above.

Uniting Bronfenbrenner and Galtung: Photovoice as a positive mesosystemic linkage to build positive peace. Although the Photovoice participants identified few occurrences of physical violence in Clarkston, a lower incidence of such direct violence does not equate positive peace as long as structural violence persists (Galtung, 1996). As stated in chapter 2, Galtung (1996) has defined positive peace as a combination of “verbal and physical kindness, [satisfaction of] basic needs, survival, well-being, freedom[,] identity [...], equity [...], dialogue [...], integration [...], solidarity [...], participation instead of marginalization [and] building a positive peace culture [where individuals open themselves to] several human inclinations and capabilities” (p. 32). While the project participants identified individuals and small groups who made great efforts to contribute to the community in such peaceable ways through public dialogues, ethnic celebrations, providing for and standing in solidarity with those in need, those individuals and small groups stood out from the rest of the community because they were the exception, not the rule.

Based on the CCEM, this Photovoice project was designed with the intent to promote positive peace in two ways: On the one hand, using Photovoice to bring together diverse members of conflicting groups was aimed at fostering dialogue and understanding to effect

positive internal and interpersonal transformations (Kriesberg & Dayton, 2012). On the other hand, it was also intended to promote structural transformations by sharing the project participants' captioned images with local and regional service providers and policy makers as well as the surrounding community.

In Bronfenbrenner's (1979) terms, it can be observed that the participants' positive experiences in their microsystems were due to connections they shared with others, whereas their negative experiences were due to a lack of connections, mostly in their exo- and macrosystems. This CCEM-based adaptation of a Photovoice project exemplified one way of creating such connections. It built relationships among the diverse project participants. Relationships are mesosystemic linkages, i.e. interconnections between the microsystems, without which people lead isolated lives (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Tudge et al., 2009). Communities are mesosystems in which several microsystems are interrelated. This means that through the establishment of mesosystemic linkages between microsystems, an actual sense of community in terms of belongingness and cooperation can be created. The Photovoice project brought together individuals who belonged to different microsystems and became its own microsystem. Due to its diverse composition and general mirroring of the Clarkston population, the discussions in the group led to learning about the mesosystem ("the Clarkston community"). Once these mesosystemic linkages had been established, the project participants showed increasingly high levels of sensitivity towards the cultural diversity in Clarkston and the relationship between the macrosystems from which people had come and the one in which they now had to function on a daily basis. There was also growing recognition that the macrosystems individuals had come from, and their psycho-socio-cultural and demographic characteristics, affected their perceptions of the status quo.

The participants' increasing sense of empowerment and the development of their own ideas for becoming community change agents were signs of growing autonomy rather than penetration (Galtung 1996; 2000; Graf et al., 2007). Their increased awareness, perspective-taking, understanding, and discovery of commonalities reflected a move towards integration and away from segmentation. The participants' resolve to work together to jointly make a positive difference in the community was indicative of growing solidarity instead of fragmentation. Finally, the fact that refugees, immigrants, and African Americans were actively involved in these pursuits showed that marginalization could be overcome and participation was possible. Autonomy, integration, solidarity, and participation are the counterpart to the PSFM syndrome and the basis for a peaceful deep structure, for positive peace (Galtung, 1996; Graf et al., 2007). The data collected in this project suggest that Photovoice is a method that can be used to implement the CCEM and that can thereby contribute to building such positive peace.

Creation of additional mesosystemic linkages to build positive peace. In order to grow a sense of community not only among the Photovoice participants, but among the residents of Clarkston or any other town facing similar challenges, more opportunities for creating mesosystemic linkages between microsystems need to be created. Organizations that already offer shared recreational opportunities and regularly form action committees should be supported and their programs widely publicized to increase awareness of what is available. The creation of additional opportunities, if possible spearheaded by community members themselves, should also be encouraged and supported. The collaboratively painted community murals are exemplars of resident-led initiatives that brought together diverse groups of people who worked together harmoniously and productively regardless of their backgrounds, age, or English linguistic ability. Seeking funds to support additional arts projects could not only result in the growth of

mesosystemic linkages between people, but also in the beautification of Clarkston, whose physical appearance leaves much room for improvement.

Joint efforts like these can create mesosystemic linkages between microsystems, promote a sense of community, and contribute to building positive peace. In the development of such programming, it is however important to keep in mind what several of the Photovoice participants pointed out: members of the community are only able to engage in shared activities to the extent that they have the necessary free time. Because they need to work long hours in low-paying jobs to sustain their families, many residents are unable to get actively involved in community affairs.⁵⁷ As Chloe (African American) mentioned in one of her comments referencing Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943), as long as the most basic of needs for food, shelter, and safety are not being met, concerns of belongingness and self-actualization are secondary. To the same effect, Kelile (Ethiopian) highlighted the importance of providing safe spaces for children so that adults can congregate without worry or fear for their offspring. These comments emphasize the importance of engaging conflicts comprehensively by advocating structural transformations at the same time as building a sense of community and belongingness. The structure into which communal relations are embedded needs to lend itself to the development of supportive, collaborative, peaceful relationships.

Synthesis. As discussed above, it became clear over the course of the Photovoice project that the participants were mostly comfortable in their respective microsystems, and that tension and conflict were mainly rooted in the exo- and macrosystems. In other words, they were generally satisfied with the systems on which they had an impact, in which there was a bi-directional, reciprocal relationship. They were dissatisfied with institutions, objects, and symbols where they felt they were being impacted uni-directionally, without a reciprocal relationship in

⁵⁷ See Rankin and Quane (2000) for a multi-level analysis that supports the negative impact of neighborhood poverty on organizational participation.

which they had the power to actively shape what was happening to them. Even when they had not been fully aware of the structural nature of some of their conflicts, the issues they brought up for discussion were often exemplars of manifestations of structural violence. For example, while the participants had interactions with the police, they felt like they had no control over those situations and were at the mercy of arbitrary decisions made by the officers with whom they were interacting. They felt like the police could impact them, mostly negatively so, but they had no power to impact the police. The desire for a bi-directional, reciprocal relationship is a desire for empowerment, which is what the Photovoice methodology was created to facilitate (Wang & Burris, 1997). According to Galtung (2000), “Empowerment is the key, and the PFSM syndrome is the lock that has to be unlocked through empowerment” (p. 7). In other words, there is an inverse relationship between empowerment and structural violence. The more empowered a population group becomes, the less it can be oppressed through structural violence. The establishment of such empowering mesosystemic linkages between microsystems and the exo- and macrosystems will require advocacy to raise awareness of the challenges experienced on the ground and to promote policy adjustments that will facilitate improved quality of life and positive peace.

The Comprehensive Conflict Engagement Model Applied through Photovoice

The third cornerstone of the theoretical framework on which this Photovoice project was built is the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954). Facilitated small group dialogue processes, one of the staple tools in conflict management, were designed based on the contact hypothesis, which suggests that convening members of conflicting groups reduces intergroup prejudice and hostility by allowing the parties to discover their commonalities, increase mutual understanding, build trust, and deconstruct negative stereotypes of each other (Allport, 1954; Fisher 2007). These processes have been found to be most successful when participants are of equal status, cooperate

to reach common goals, and are institutionally supported (Allport, 1954; Cuhadar & Dayton, 2001; Hewstone & Swart, 2011; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Processes based on the contact hypothesis alone have fallen short of their conflict transformative goals because they only target internal and relational sources, but fail to impact the structure within which those relationships exist (Galtung, 1969; Hewstone & Swart, 2011; Kriesberg & Dayton, 2012). If social change is a desired goal, more attention needs to be devoted to the “structural inequalities and power differences between groups, and factors that inhibit, or encourage, mass mobilization and collective action as legitimate forms of social protest” (Hewstone & Swart, 2011, p. 379). Pursuant to the conceptualization of the comprehensive conflict engagement framework laid out here, conflict engagement cannot rely on improved relationships alone. In order to be comprehensive, it needs to concurrently work towards a reduction in structural violence as well (Galtung, 1969). Applying the CCEM, I modified the traditional Photovoice method in service of concurrently promoting conflict transformation at the internal, relational, and structural levels.

The goal of making local government officials and social service providers aware of the project since its developmental phase and involving individual representatives in the process was to create an open ear for the participants’ voices and generate interest in the project outcomes. The idea was that while Photovoice is another form of a small group dialogue process, it is a visually enhanced one since it is not solely based on dialogue, but also on pictures. As such, it helps individuals express themselves more easily and enables the other group members *see* what they are talking about, thus availing itself to multiple learning styles. It also produces a “visual information package” that can be shared with policy makers and social service providers after the project has ended. It is one thing to enter a conversation with a local administrator and to anecdotally re-tell people’s stories, and it is another to document the status quo by presenting

their captioned images and letting them speak for themselves. Based on this rationale, I theorized that Photovoice, modified according to the CCEM, would prove useful and effective as a comprehensive conflict engagement strategy and target all three bases of social conflict (Kriesberg & Dayton, 2012).

The data presented in chapter 6 suggest that the Photovoice participants developed cognitively, emotionally, and relationally over the course of the project. This includes evidence of increased awareness, perspective-taking, bonding and connectedness, hope for future cooperative relationships, empowerment, and self-assertion as a result of project participation. The perspective-taking partner assignment, which modified the Photovoice method in accordance with the CCEM to function as a relationship-building and constructive conflict engagement tool, proved to be particularly powerful in triggering the described internal and relational growth. Chapter 6 also documents the conversations, projects, and exposure that have resulted from the process. Finally, it presents the outcomes of sharing the captioned photographs and collages with policy makers, service providers, and the surrounding community to explore if and how structural changes can be facilitated through Photovoice.

Internal and relational impact. The data presented in chapter 6 suggest that the internal and relational impact of this Photovoice project were comparable to those of other small group dialogue processes based on the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954; Azar, 2002; Fisher, 1994, 2007; Fisher & Keashly, 1991; Kaufman, 2002; Lieberfeld, 2002; Mitchell, 1993; Rouhana & Kelman, 1994): the participants' comments indicated that they became increasingly able to look at issues from multiple perspectives, discovered commonalities, and built relationships within the group. As indicated above, I had previously anticipated that the photographs would be useful first in helping others *see* what the photographer was trying to express and address, and second in

sharing the insights derived from the process with power-holders and decision-makers outside of it. Both of these functions are supported by the data presented in chapter 6.

In addition, two other benefits of the Photovoice process stood out: First, the responsibility to take pictures made the participants listen more carefully and reflect more critically. Tigist (Ethiopian), Amita (Indian American), Carroll (African American), and Haben (Eritrean) all stated explicitly that knowing they had to take pictures as part of the assignments made them look more closely at their surroundings, think more deeply and critically about what they really wanted to say, and listen more carefully when they had the responsibility to visually represent somebody else's life.⁵⁸ Second, the photo-accompanied re-telling of another group member's story did not only foster a closer bond between the project partners, which was witnessed by all, but it also brought the entire group closer together. By listening to the often emotional exchanges between the individual project partners, everybody, including myself, my research assistant, and the support staff from my community partner organization, got to know everyone else better. Several participants reported on feeling more connected to the entire group as a result of this experience.⁵⁹

The results of this research are consistent with Allport's (1954) hypothesis that bringing together members of conflicting groups reduces intergroup prejudice and hostility through the discovery of commonalities, development of mutual understanding, establishment of trust, and deconstruction of stereotypes - at least among those individuals who are directly involved in the

⁵⁸ This effect was also described by a participant in a Photovoice workshop that I conducted at the Humanitarian Intervention Project 2015 conference at the University of Oxford. In this instructional workshop, the attendees participated in an abbreviated Photovoice simulation and were asked to engage in a modified version of the partner assignment. After spending ten minutes with another workshop participant whom they had not previously known, the attendees were asked to take a picture to document their partner's experience and self-perceived role as humanitarian intervention professionals. This particular participant, a fellow facilitator of dialogues and trained active listener, approached me after the workshop and pointed out how much more intently he had listened to his partner during the exercise knowing that he would have to take and explain a picture to responsibly represent that person afterwards.

⁵⁹ See chapter 6 for participant quotes to this effect.

process. The longevity of such transformations remains to be examined. At the time of the follow-up interviews, which were conducted several weeks after the last group session, all of the participants said that they were looking forward to seeing and spending time with the others again. However, while many of them had had unplanned encounters around town and stopped for brief conversations, only a few of them had already spent extended periods of time with each other in intentional ways. Among them were Haben (Eritrean) and Carroll (African American), who had invited Haben to her house for her favorite dessert.

Chloe (African American) and Brad (Caucasian American) both told stories of Gargaaro (Somali) enlisting them to give her rides across town to help one person or another in need. Brad shared:

[Gargaaro] had called me for some reason to come to Thrift Town. She wanted me to be an advocate for what she was campaigning for and then I had to drop her camera off. She is always introducing me to her twelve new friends.

Brad's and Chloe's accounts were indicative of new rudimentary networks that had been created through Photovoice.

Although most of the interactions between the participants since the project had been brief, they had all been positive and indicative of an overall openness to furthering their contact and relationships. During the interviews, I probed to find out why they had not spent more time with each other despite their mutual interest in doing so. Brad gave the following response:

I would say not enough interaction and also just the daily routines and rigors of everyday life. [They] kind of... Take you away from it. That being said, if there were something implemented as a daily activity through a meeting or a group that would be formed, I think that would be great. Almost like a book group only it could be a photo group. Then you have that continuance of the experience.

Creating opportunities for such a continuance of experience is central to fostering lasting relationships among project participants. While it is desirable that they take the initiative for creating such opportunities themselves, it may be necessary for the facilitators of Photovoice projects as comprehensive conflict engagement strategies to take a more active role in getting them started. Brad insightfully reflected on challenges to the development of lasting relationships among the participants and commented that “this experience was all channeled through [...] the facilitator. It was all guided and there was not much dialogue outside of these meetings.” In the fourth week, during which the participants did the partner assignment, this was different because they “had to” spend time with each other between sessions. Their feedback on that assignment suggests that they had all enjoyed spending time together and felt closer to each other as a result. This supports Brad’s inclination that contact between facilitated sessions is important, and that, as the anchor of the project, the facilitator should provide initial impetuses for such informal contact so relationships can develop further before the project comes to an end and the participants are responsible for the continuance of their relationships.

As discussed above, it is necessary to go beyond the small group dialogue process itself and trigger positive changes at the systemic level as well in order to comprehensively engage conflicts. To effect such social change, it is imperative to address systemic inequalities and reduce structural violence by encouraging collective action (Hewstone & Swart, 2011) and creating mesosystemic linkages (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) between the affected individuals and the decision-makers who control the social structure in which they live.

Structural impact. No project can be designed to address all the elements of structural violence at once; no individual project can single-handedly change an entire social structure. Nevertheless, by strategically involving power-holders, it is possible to raise awareness and make a contribution to sowing the seeds for such systemic transformations (Kenney, 2009; Wang,

1999; Wang, Burris, Xiang, 1996; Wang et al., 2004). By creating channels through which community members can get the attention of those who make the policies that shape their daily lives, it is possible to create mesosystemic linkages (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) that make their voices heard and considered (Kenney, 2009; Wang, 1999; Wang, Burris, Xiang, 1996; Wang et al., 2004). This project generated interest in its outcomes among the mayor, city manager, and several council members of Clarkston. When discussing what change they were hoping to bring to Clarkston, the participants had agreed that they wanted the police and administration “to work with the residents, business owners, complex managers, and tenants [in a culturally sensitive way] to bring a greater sense of a safe and secure community” for all residents, regardless of their backgrounds. Concrete ideas for implementing the project findings into tangible action, such as hiring a community policing officer and instituting a landlord-tenant mediation clinic, were generated and well-received by the mayor and city manager of Clarkston.

The Photovoice project was supported and its results followed by local (e.g. CDF) and national (e.g. International Rescue Committee, Welcoming America) non-profit agencies, and the local representative of the Office of Refugee Services asked for a report on its findings. The Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta included the Photovoice exhibition in its donor tour following the donors’ request to see it so they could take the participants’ voices into consideration before allocating their funds. While confidentiality agreements precluded me from following up with the donors after their tour, considering that they initiated this viewing, it is likely that the Photovoice project influenced how they directed their resources, the allocation of which is linked to structural impacts. Furthermore, the CDC, which is located in close proximity to Clarkston and has focused its efforts on refugee health and humanitarian emergencies as a core component of its work for decades, included the thematic collages that resulted from the project

as the opening piece of its “Resettling in America: Georgia’s Refugee Communities” exhibition (David J. Sencer CDC Museum, 2015).

Many avenues of potential changes had just started flourishing at the time of writing and follow-up research should examine the long-term results of Photovoice when applied as a comprehensive conflict engagement strategy as suggested by the CCEM. Nevertheless, chapter 6 has documented the rudiments of such possibilities. Transformations do not happen overnight; rather, they are the result of the relentless efforts of persistent individuals who refuse to give up. As is often the case with community engaged researchers (Hayes, 2011), I ended up wishing at the end of the project that I had more time and energy to dedicate to helping the project participants implement their own ideas.⁶⁰ I also would have liked to develop additional strategies for disseminating the gathered information and more aggressively promoting programs and local policy changes that could have a positive impact on life in Clarkston and other refugee resettlement sites across the United States. This would have entailed advocating more consistently on behalf of the residents of Clarkston, growing wider networks among decision-makers and power-holders, and persistently following-up with local administrators and social service agencies to help implement previously generated plans and ideas. To do these goals any justice, full-time dedication is necessary. This experience reinforces the importance of long-term involvement, which is reflected in the community engagement paradigm (Hayes, 2011). By building closer relationships among the Photovoice participants, by lending them a megaphone and ensuring that their voices would reach open ears, and by committing to long-term engagement, a basis has been created for positively influencing communal dynamics and building a more positive peace in Clarkston. The experience with this project has re-confirmed that it is the responsibility of scholar-practitioners to continue their work long-term to maximize and

⁶⁰ For details, please see the “The project is over, now what?” section below.

comprehensively document the impact of their interventions in order to develop best practices for how grassroots-level processes like Photovoice can contribute to bringing about greater social change in refugee resettlement sites and similar constructed communities.

Methodological / Practical Considerations for Applying the Comprehensive Conflict Engagement Model through Photovoice

Through the development of the Comprehensive Conflict Engagement Model and its application through Photovoice, this project introduced the Photovoice method to the conflict management field and explored its use and utility as a comprehensive conflict engagement strategy. As described in chapter 3, this project was generally based on Wang and Burris' (1997) Photovoice protocol, yet several new components were designed to use and evaluate the utility of the method as a comprehensive conflict engagement tool and to technologically advance its application: the inclusion of diverse project participants from conflicting groups, the use of an associative exercise and the discussion of optical illusions to prime the interested individuals for project participation, the mixed use of cell phone and digital cameras, the development of a website for the purpose of collecting and disseminating the participants' images, the self-reflective and relational third and fourth assignments, and the examination of project impact on the participants via questionnaires and retrospective interviews. This section will discuss the utility of these innovations, examine limitations and suggest further adjustments to the process, and close with reflections on my role as the project facilitator and a few remarks regarding the post-project exhibition process.

Discussion of implemented process innovations. In chapters 2 and 3, I explained how I devised the Comprehensive Conflict Engagement Model and adapted the Photovoice process for use as a comprehensive conflict engagement strategy. I will review the utility of each of these innovations in the following sections.

Use of Photovoice with diverse and conflicting groups. The presented data have shown that it is both possible and useful to bring together a group of diverse individuals to constructively engage with the conflicts shaping everyday life in a refugee resettlement town like Clarkston. Regardless of their backgrounds, all participants found the use of documentary photography helpful both in expressing their views and understanding those of others. Therefore, the use of the Photovoice methodology with diverse and conflicting groups is both feasible and beneficial.

Use of associative exercises during recruitment sessions. During the associative exercises used in the recruitment sessions, potential project participants were asked to reflect on the meanings they associated with the words Clarkston, community, diversity, and culture. In doing this exercise, the participants practiced the kind of reflective thinking they would later need to do in order to complete the project assignments. In the discussion of images that were optical illusions and could be interpreted several different ways, they rehearsed perspective-taking and explaining what they saw, which became essential during the actual project in order to understand conflicting views and their origins. Together, these exercises gave prospective participants an idea of what to expect during the Photovoice project and they proved to be quite useful. Several of the individuals who ended up joining the project stated at the end of the recruitment sessions that the exercises had, indeed, helped them decide to participate. Furthermore, a few of them referred back to the optical illusions during the actual project to emphasize how the same thing could look different from diverse angles and viewpoints. Therefore, I recommend the inclusion of these or similar exercises in the preparation for future Photovoice projects.

Mixed use of digital and cell phone cameras. The mixed use of digital and cell phone cameras and the upload of the resulting images to the www.PhotovoiceClarkston.com website were central to this project. Previous projects had mainly relied on disposable and digital

cameras, so the incorporation of cell phone cameras in this project added a new dimension to the Photovoice methodology. The decision to include the option of using cell phone cameras was the result of the observation during fieldwork that many people had camera phones in Clarkston. Giving the participants the option to use the devices with which they were most familiar and with which they felt most comfortable was intended to prevent an overload with too much new technology. A third of the participants opted to use their cell phones to take pictures, the others used either their own or the provided digital cameras. Those who used their cell phone cameras were quite proficient in their use and enhanced their images with special settings and effects. A few of the resulting pictures impressed some of the other participants, who thought the pictures had been taken with DSLRs and retouched with photo editing software. The image of a bird sitting on the side view mirror of a car that Brad had taken to represent Gargaaro's life experience⁶¹ was recognized as an exemplar of an innovative human-centered approach to humanitarian intervention and publicly displayed at the Humanitarian Innovation Project 2015 conference at the University of Oxford in Great Britain. These results suggest that giving project participants the option to choose the medium with which they are most familiar and most comfortable is advisable.

Giving the participants the option of using their cell phone cameras also reduced the number of cameras that I needed to provide. Since I did not have the funds to purchase digital cameras for this project, I asked friends to lend / donate to the project any cameras that they did not need any more. I explained that my intent was to return the cameras to them at the end of the project, but that there was a risk that they might not get them back and that they should only give what they could do without. One of the borrowed cameras did disappear during the project, so it

⁶¹ Photograph 43 in the "Brad and Gargaaro" section in chapter 6.

is prudent and worthwhile to warn prospective donors of this possibility to avoid any conflicts later on, or to expect such losses if the funds for purchasing cameras are available.

Use of restricted access online portal and public website. Incorporating online technology into the Photovoice process constituted a major innovation in this project. The www.PhotovoiceClarkston.com website was created to fulfill four purposes: first, to facilitate the collection of captioned participant photographs over the course of the week; second, to give the participants a chance to view, reflect, and comment on each other's images before the following discussion session; third, to collect the participants' ideas for action strategies to address the challenges they identified over the course of the project; fourth, to disseminate the project outcomes to a wider audience outside of the project. The website proved useful for all four purposes, with one caveat: despite the website usage training and the step-by-step guidelines that had been handed out at the end of the training session, not all participants had the necessary computer skills or equipment to download their photos onto a computer and then upload them to the website. Writing the captions was also challenging for two of them. Seeing how some participants needed additional help with this process, I met them where they were – literally and metaphorically – and guided them through the process. After the first week, three of the participants, who were familiar with the technology, also assisted those who were struggling. This dynamic became an additional opportunity for the participants to build supportive relationships and community among themselves. Nevertheless, the need to help with the technical aspects of the project has to be anticipated and worked into any facilitator's schedule.

Using the website to collect the photos, review captions, and share ideas for action steps prior to the following session streamlined the process and made it possible for everyone involved to come to the next meeting prepared. The participants had a chance to think about the others' submissions prior to "being put on the spot" and being asked to discuss them. This opportunity

was especially helpful for those individuals struggling with the English language as they could formulate in their heads what they wanted to say prior to saying it. Being able to view and comment on the images online was also useful for participants who had to miss a session. By uploading their own pictures and commenting on those of others, they could indirectly participate in the discussion rather than missing it entirely due to their absence.

As the dialogue facilitator, I also benefitted from the online submissions since they gave me a chance to identify themes and prepare PowerPoints ahead of time to guide the upcoming sessions. The ability to plan ahead in this way made it possible for the group to immediately start the discussion when they got together, which enhanced the efficiency of the weekly meetings.

Use of self-reflective and relational perspective-taking assignments. While the data presented in chapter 6 and earlier segments of this discussion have delineated in depth the power of the fourth, newly-devised partner assignment, the experimental third assignment did not work the way it was intended. It had been designed to encourage self-reflection and explore what aspects of their identities were the most important to the participants, what mattered most to them in Clarkston based on those sub-identities, and which of their sub-identities commonly conflicted. There was a disconnect between the way the instructions were conceptualized and the way that they were implemented by the participants.

The instructions had two key-components: first, to identify three salient sub-identities, and second, to reflect on what dynamics in the Clarkston community were most important to the participants based on each of those sub-identities.⁶² Although we jointly discussed the prompt and its intent, and despite the fact that my research assistant and I both modeled it, most of the participants' picture submissions and the subsequent discussion session showed that this assignment would need to be revised or replaced in future Photovoice projects. Few connections

⁶² See the "Photovoice instrument" section in chapter 3 for exact phrasing of the assignment.

were made between identity and needs or wants as they pertained to life in Clarkston. For instance, one participant submitted a picture of a fence with the following caption: “There was a hole in the fence that got fixed now and children will not be hurt playing there. This is good for Clarkston it will help cut down on crime also.” Another participant submitted a collage that showed a train crossing and a hotel in downtown Atlanta, captioned “Travel bug since I was eight.” A third image of a telephone post was submitted with the following caption:

This image is a bit on the conceptual side. I tend to fantasize about the future of technology and its subtle integration into human form. This image of an aging telephone pole is juxtaposed against a vast sky. To me this image reflects the contrast between old technology (telephone pole) and one masked by a blue sky.

While these and other contributions that week were interesting in their own right, they were too thematically scattered and, in several instances, did not establish a clear enough link between identity and needs, wants, and perceptions of life in Clarkston to provide a basis for a lively discussion as intended by the assignment. Nevertheless, some of the submissions and the discussions that emerged around them provided additional insight into the communal dynamics that unite and divide the population and could be integrated into the previous results chapters.

Seeing how the participants demonstrated increased awareness of communal dynamics and understanding of diverse perspectives and developed new or deepened relationships over the course of the project, the third assignment may have been superfluous after all. Instead of creating another assignment in its place, it may be more beneficial to devote more group sessions to the other prompts instead in order to fully exhaust their potential. Project participants should also be encouraged and supported to think deeply about any ideas for realistic action steps, solutions to identified challenges, or recommendations for further interventions they may have. With sufficient interest among the group, additional time should be spent on fully developing and

fleshing out these ideas. I was able to draw these conclusions upon review of the results of the evaluative tools in the form of post-session and exit questionnaires as well as follow-up interviews.

Use of post-session questionnaires, exit questionnaires, and retrospective interviews to examine project impact. The effectiveness of Photovoice as a data collection and empowerment tool has been documented in a variety of studies over the past twenty years (e.g. Duffy, 2011; Gant et al., 2009; Green & Kloos, 2009; Hergenrather, Rhodes, Cowan, Bardhoshi, & Pula, 2009; Kessi, 2011; Novak, 2010; Nykiforuk, 2011; Pritzker, LaChapelle, & Tatum, 2012; Rush, Murphy, & Kozak, 2012; Smith, 2012; Teti, Murray, Johnson, & Binson, 2012; Wang, 1999, 2006; Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang, Burris, Xiang, 1996; Wang, Cash, & Powers, 2000; Wang et al., 2004; Wilkin & Liamputtong, 2010). To explore its application as a comprehensive conflict engagement strategy, the inclusion of evaluative tools was indispensable. The qualitative aspects of the post-session and exit questionnaires, in which the participants were asked to indicate any take-aways from the respective sessions, were useful in determining if any attitudinal, emotional, or behavioral impact had resulted. However, many of the participants did not fill out the Likert-scales that were part of the post-session questionnaires, or filled them in indiscriminately as evidenced, for instance, by all check marks consistently being placed in the same column or in a repetitive pattern. With the exception of one questionnaire, no comments were provided to explain the participants' rationales behind their ratings. Because the Likert-scale data did not provide insightful information and since it is unclear if their purpose was properly understood, I have not presented them. My experience with these instruments was that they contributed no additional value to the insights derived from this project and it is questionable if such an approach to scientific inquiry is useful in this type of context. As Stoecker (2005) has noted, researchers are trained to select their research methods based on their research questions. In

order to design research that will be useful for the community under study, it is however important to also “use methods that make sense to people” (Stoecker, 2005, p. 31). The participants’ responses suggested that this criterion was not met by the Likert-scales that I included in the post-session questionnaires.

In contrast to the Likert-scales, the follow-up interviews generated rich data that provided insight into the ways that the Photovoice participants made sense of the project and how it affected them. They contextualized their experiences with the process by sharing information about their backgrounds and previous involvement in the community, elaborated on the comments they had made on the questionnaires, discussed specific interactions during the dialogue sessions, pondered on images or comments that had particularly touched them, shared their impressions of the other participants, reflected on their own transformations, and gave feedback regarding the practical aspects of the project and its implementation. As a result, I was able to assess the project impact more comprehensively than I could have without these follow-up interviews. Furthermore, giving the participants this opportunity to express themselves freely was consistent with the general philosophy underlying Photovoice projects. These semi-structured interviews provided another platform for the participants to make their voices heard in a way they could not in the questionnaires. Consequently, follow-up interviews in particular and project evaluative tools in general are important components of Photovoice projects and other new methodologies, whether they are conducted as research or as practical interventions, so their effectiveness can be evaluated and their quality controlled.

Process appeal, limitations, and suggestions for adjustments. In order to help determine if Photovoice is both useable and useful as a conflict engagement strategy, I administered an exit questionnaire to the participants to get their views on this as co-researchers in the project. Since their experience, comfort level, and satisfaction with the process are equally

as important as my own evaluation of it, this section reflects their feedback as well as my own assessment.

Process appeal. In the exit questionnaire, the participants were asked if they would again join a similar Photovoice project, if they would recommend participating to others, if they thought that the Photovoice process could be used to bring diverse communities together, and if they had any suggestions for making adjustments to the process. Nine of them filled out the exit questionnaire. Out of the nine, eight said they would participate again, nine said they would recommend it to somebody else, and seven said that they thought the process could be used to bring together diverse communities. John and Brad (Caucasian Americans)⁶³ answered the question about bringing diverse communities together through Photovoice with “maybe,” explaining that “as with most projects [in Clarkston]” there were some “transition problems” (Brad) and that the IRB requirements were frustrating and too restrictive to fully bring people together (John). Grace (Congolese) was the only person who did not check the questionnaire box indicating that she would participate in a future Photovoice project. However, when asked if she would do anything differently, she wrote: “Yes, my own participation. I would do better in the workshop and with the homework exercises.” This may have been in reference to her spotty attendance due to her mental health challenges and her forced hospitalization mid-project.

Limitations and strategies for mitigating them. While all of the Photovoice participants stated that they were overall satisfied with the project, they took their roles as co-researchers seriously, pointed out some limitations, and had several suggestions for future adjustments to maximize the effectiveness of the process.

Language barriers. Language posed a dual challenge to this study. On the one hand, the selection of participants was limited by the requirement that they at least speak basic English.

⁶³ I told the participants that providing their names on the exit questionnaires was optional and that they could give their feedback anonymously if they preferred. All of them opted to identify themselves.

This eliminated a lot of potential participants and may have affected the findings of the study. From fieldwork I know that the expectation of refugees to speak English within a few months of arrival in the United States poses a challenge for many. Insufficient or improper translations of official documents have also been found problematic. These issues did not come up in the Photovoice project, but they could have had the group included individuals who did not speak any English at all.

On the other hand, the fact that three of the participants spoke limited English sometimes got in the way of their ability to fully express themselves, or of others to understand them. Brad (Caucasian American) expressed his concern with language barriers in his feedback and recommended the use of a translator to help refugees “communicate their ideas cohesively.” Hiring translators for any project is a matter of financial resources. With the necessary funds available, hiring an interpreter would be an important consideration to make. However, my experience with collaborative meetings in Clarkston during which interpreters were present has shown that there is a risk of getting lost in translation and of prolonging the sessions by more than half, which commonly results in a loss of focus among those in attendance. Thus, if given the option to have interpreters present, I would opt to have them attend the session, but to only translate when all other communication fails and the participants reach an impasse that hinders mutual understanding.

Group size and composition. A total of 13 participants contributed to this Photovoice project. During her follow-up interview, Amita (Indian American) reflected:

A bigger group may be more ideal. We often heard the same point made multiple times by the same people. [...] Also including more people who currently don't have a “voice.” A lot of people in the group seem very active with the city council, community trust meetings, etc. It would be nice to include more people who aren't currently as engaged.

Amita's desire for convening a larger group to hear more voices and expand the reach of Photovoice is understandable. However, based on previous experiences with the process, Wang (2006) and Kenney (2009) have described a group of seven to ten individuals as ideal because this group size allows for "practical ease and in-depth discussion" (Wang, 2006, p. 149) and generates sufficient but manageable data for analysis (Kenney, 2009; Wang, 2006). From a conflict engagement perspective, a small group size also maintains the intimate face-to-face character of small group dialogue processes that allows for the development of collaborative relationships (e.g. Fisher, 1994; Lieberfeld, 2002; Rouhana & Kelman, 1994). My experience facilitating this project was consistent with the theories and evidence-based best practices underlying its design. Although it had thirteen participants total, most sessions were attended by nine or ten of them and each session took roughly three hours, at which point the participants started showing signs of fatigue and restlessness like yawning, looking at their phones, or physical shifting. With more people submitting pictures, sharing their stories, and responding to each other, the sessions would have lasted even longer at the risk of losing the participants' focus and attention. Since the theory and evidence-based thinking underlying the project design were not explained to the participants, they were unaware of the reasons for maintaining a relatively small group size. Nevertheless, there may be ways that Amita's wish for more individuals involved in the process could be satisfied in a way that would capture a broader range of perspectives and expand the reach of the project while also meeting the inclusivity and representativeness criteria that Fung (2006) has highlighted in the context of promoting democratic legitimacy.⁶⁴

With the necessary funding, co-facilitators, and support staff available, a future project could be designed to run several groups concurrently. As Kenney (2009) has discussed, it is rare

⁶⁴ For details, please see the "Participant recruitment" section in chapter 3.

for Photovoice researchers to use a probability sample due to the intensive time and energy commitment a project requires from its participants. Nevertheless, if enough awareness and interest in a project could be generated up front, it might be possible to purposefully recruit members from most if not all the major resident groups in town. In order to maintain the intergroup relationship-building aspect as put forth in the CCEM, several small yet diverse project groups should be formed from the recruited individuals. At set intervals, these groups could meet to exchange ideas and introduce “new” viewpoints into the discussion, either in a joint activity between sessions, or in a large meeting facilitated with the help of technology following the model of the 21st Century Town Meeting that AmericaSpeaks used to engage large groups in public deliberation processes (Goldman, 2004).⁶⁵ If the diverse project groups all ended up expressing overlapping concerns and hopes, eventually a point of saturation would be reached and local policy makers and service providers would have reason to believe that these are legitimate concerns shared by many in the community, not just a small sub-set of the population.

This coincides with Amita’s request for the inclusion of more individuals who were not as involved in the community already and whose voices were not already being heard. Having completed this first project including fieldwork and exhibitions, I have made the necessary connections to be able to recruit such individuals and would do so for future projects. The first time around, however, it was necessary to work with those who were willing to volunteer their time and energy (Kenney, 2009), and as described in chapter 3, the present group did in fact consist of a mix of more and less involved members of the community. The benefit of having several more engaged individuals involved was that they could spread the word and raise awareness of the project among their various networks.

⁶⁵ Format selection should depend on the prioritized project outcomes – if relationship-building is of central concern, the joint activities between sessions may be more useful, whereas if democratic participation and public deliberation were the focus, the large group meeting would be more suitable.

Haben (Eritrean) commented in her feedback that higher representation of local leaders within the group would have increased the impact of the process. She thought it would be helpful to “have more local leaders as participants, so they can really understand the needs of the community and have a greater effect to implement policies that will really make a difference in their lives.” I agree with this assessment. I had initially recruited two members of the city administration to participate in the project. However, one of them had to withdraw right before the training due to a conflicting work commitment. While it was positive that we had at least one member of the city government directly involved in the process, he was only present for half of the sessions and thus the participants’ immediate and direct access to power-holders was limited. With more decision-makers involved, a more direct transfer of concerns and ideas is created, and the likelihood of implementing policies that meet the needs of the population is increased (Kenney, 2009; Wang, 1999, 2006; Wang, Burris, Xiang, 1996; Wang, Cash, & Powers, 2000; Wang et al., 2004). Ensuring that these individuals are fully committed to the process and to attending every session is imperative in order to achieve this goal. Without sufficient direct involvement, the establishment of indirect contact through the sharing of the captioned images becomes ever more important.

Another limitation in the group composition context is the fact that all the non-native participants were from African countries. I included non-African individuals in my recruitment efforts and had several prospective participants from Iraq, Burma, and Bhutan, but individuals from different African countries were the ones who made the final commitment to the project. My community partners commented that it was not unusual for the African community members to be more open and engaged than others, and that the Bhutanese and Burmese populations were particularly tight-knit and hard to access. The absence of their voices limits the findings of this study and it is my hope that, having heard about this project and having a better idea of what to

expect from the process, harder to reach populations from other parts of the world would be more interested in participating in future Photovoice projects. Anybody who considers applying the CCEM, be it through Photovoice or another method, should plan to facilitate multiple groups and stay involved long-term in order to get a comprehensive picture of the communal dynamics and reach a broad range of population groups.

IRB requirements. More than anybody else, John (Caucasian American) was frustrated with the restrictions on taking photographs of human subjects imposed by the IRB. Although we talked about the story-telling power of abstract photography, John had an affinity for documentary photography and felt that the IRB restrictions impeded his ability to powerfully and convincingly tell stories about the community. During the photo training, others expressed a concern with a perceived contradiction between pre-photo consent and the authenticity of a photograph. I explained to them the sacrifices that needed to be made in order to uphold the highest ethics standards and protect the individuals whose images were being taken (see chapter 3). Nevertheless, it stands to be recognized that the IRB requirements did result in a limitation of the kinds of pictures that could be submitted.

Time between sessions. John was passionate about education and wanted to document the diversity at Clarkston area schools. Getting the necessary permissions from school officials and parents required more time than he had between the weekly sessions, so he submitted his photographs on the topic later. It is in this context that he suggested being given more than a week between assignments:

I would have been better able to take photos addressing the issues and the possibilities I see if I had had the assignments much earlier. It takes time to plan, to explain the project, to get permission, to arrange to get the pictures.

More time between assignments might have also helped Tigist (Ethiopian), who said that, in another project, she “would use [her] time more wisely and spend more time exploring with the picture-taking in order to have a full effect from it.”

I agree with the assessment that it would be beneficial to have more time between assignments so the participants can fully conceptualize their photographs, get the necessary consent prior to taking them, take the time to write well-thought out captions, and reflect on each other’s online submissions before the next dialogue session. Therefore, I recommend meeting bi-weekly rather than weekly. There are two additional benefits of having an additional week between sessions: First, meeting every other week may facilitate project participation by individuals who cannot commit to a weekly schedule. Although none of the Photovoice participants listed the time commitment as a concern on their evaluations of this project, they had discussed during the second dialogue session that many residents were unable to get actively involved in community affairs because they had to work long hours in low-paying jobs to sustain their families or look after their children. It is therefore likely that the necessary time commitment excluded potential participants from this project, which may have affected its results and may be combatted in the future by adopting a less intensive schedule and providing childcare.⁶⁶

Second, having an additional week between sessions allows the facilitator to allocate more time to helping the participants with the uploading process as needed, and training them more intensively so they can eventually become self-sufficient in this regard. Accomplishing this in a week’s time was stressful both for the participants and me. I often did not receive their submissions until the last minute, and gathering all materials on time to prepare for the upcoming session frequently required multiple follow-up calls. Any researcher facilitating a Photovoice

⁶⁶ CDF provided childcare during its Community Trust sessions and many parents made use of this opportunity to get involved.

project relinquishes some control and becomes dependent on the active participation of community members as non-expert co-researchers (Kenney, 2009; Novak, 2010). This is a conscious trade that is made in exchange for rich data to which the researcher and the public would not otherwise have access (Novak, 2010). Allowing all parties involved an additional week between sessions alleviates some of the strain resulting from this shift in responsibility and control without letting too much time go by and risking that the participants forget about the project, especially if additional opportunities for contact between sessions are created.

The project is over, now what? During the follow-up session two months after the final prompt-based dialogue, the participants discussed their ideas for practical action steps to address the challenges they had identified over the course of the project and for taking a proactive role in making a positive difference in Clarkston. As mentioned in chapter 3, the ideas were not as plentiful and the discussion not as lively as I had hoped. I can only speculate as to why the project participants were not more enthusiastic about this step in the process. Fung (2006) offers a possible explanation in stating that “In many (perhaps most) participatory venues, the typical participant has little or no expectation of influencing policy or action. Instead, he or she participates to derive the personal benefits of edification or perhaps to fulfill a sense of civic obligation” (p. 69). Follow-up research should investigate if the same applies for individuals involved in participatory action research. Such research should also examine if participants are more eager to develop their own ideas when a larger number of local policy makers is directly involved in the group, or if a *formal* link between dialogues and political decision-making is established (Fung, 2006). Formal upfront commitments have not been a typical feature of traditional Photovoice projects and would constitute an additional process innovation.

Although the number of generated ideas was limited, the participants did make several suggestions. Desiring to share the process with others, John (Caucasian American) felt strongly

that flyers should be disseminated around town so that those who were unable to visit the exhibitions or project website could be informed of the insights derived from the project. So that others could learn from the Photovoice Clarkston project and be inspired to conduct similar projects elsewhere, Chloe (African American) suggested making a DVD. Brad (Caucasian American) and Tigist (Ethiopian) expressed an interest in expanding the use of the website as a community board where the group and other interested community members could share and discuss pictures of anything they were noticing around town. Carroll (African American) suggested creating a “Living Photovoice Exhibit” to be shown at the Community Center, which she envisioned as a community bulletin board to which interested residents could contribute, submit ideas, or leave suggestions in a nearby comments box. Brad, who described himself as “a big advocate of not having a book on the shelf to go grab or watching a video at the community center or partaking that way” was “really big on having things in the public’s view.” He had ideas for making the project photos “into banners that would revolve and give a reflection of what’s going on in the community on a regular basis [to tell] the story on a continuing basis.” He thought that in order to keep people’s attention, the banners should highlight transitions and document progress that has been made to improve the city rather than merely focusing on grievances:

For instance, if the apartment started to clean up and you showed that timeline and the production towards success as opposed to [saying] “That apartment has been like that for years.” That is stifling. That could have a negative effect. [...] I feel like if it’s in the public... If people drive through here, they ask the question “Why aren’t people doing anything about this?” so it sort of creates a level of responsibility that’s out there. [...] You can see these photos and they were documented in such a way that this is still happening.

Finally, Carroll and Chloe (African American) suggested that mediation trainings be facilitated for interested residents, so the Clarkston community could become more self-sufficient and able to resolve its conflicts from within.

This feedback is reflective of the empowering nature of the Comprehensive Conflict Engagement Model applied through Photovoice. It created new mesosystemic linkages by having people interact in a safe space, gave the impetus for them to jointly think about ways that they could make a difference in their own community, and encouraged them to propose practical adjustments to the Photovoice method for use in this context. As discussed in the section on “Structural impact,” the greatest limitation to the realization of these ideas is time. If the primary purpose of conducting a Photovoice project is research, a few months in the field may suffice. But if Photovoice is primarily conducted as a practical comprehensive conflict engagement strategy, long-term and full-time dedication is necessary to support the project participants and other interested parties in the community to implement the generated ideas, be a catalyst for change, and pursue positive peace.

Reflections on the role of project facilitator. As Brad stated during his follow-up interview, the Photovoice participants’ experience is channeled through the facilitator. This statement highlighted the importance of reflective practice for conflict scholar-practitioners (Deutsch, 2006; Kressel, 1997, 2006). Since this project required both research and practice skills, I will reflect on both in the following sub-sections.

Applying conflict resolution skills in the research context. Reviewing the skills needed to conduct qualitative research, Greenwood and Levin (2007, p. 129) have stated that:

In the realm of qualitative research, [engaging] in deeper ethnographic research requires [...] relating to people in their life contexts. [This] is impossible [...] without the skills of empathy, without the ability to listen and to engage the interviewee in a reflection process.

In ethnographic work as in [action research], the need for social skills to engage [...] with local people is even higher. [...]

My training and eight years of experience as a mediator and intergroup dialogue facilitator prepared me for the complexity of this project by equipping me with the ability to listen actively, engage the project participants in critical reflection, and make them feel understood and appreciated. These are equally important features of conflict resolution practice and of qualitative research, especially community engaged action research. Drawing on these skills was necessary in order to ensure that not only the louder voices in the group were heard, but the quieter ones as well. Although some individuals in the group were more outspoken than others, I paid attention to those who were attentive but quiet and offered them repeated opportunities to get actively involved in the discussion. I also made an effort to encourage Kelile, who was self-conscious about his English, to share his thoughts by affirming that we were all well-able to understand him and interested in his perspectives. For instance, when Kelile was talking about how the local radio programming provided great insight into the concerns of particular groups in Clarkston, the following exchange occurred:

Kelile: If you got a chance to someone express to you about that radio, about... I don't know how you can understand me.

Others: Yea.

[...]

Kelile: [...] To explain this problem as community, not this is personal, yea. We express our problems, the problems in personal. But they try to face these problems as a group.

Birthe: [...] So as a larger... I see what you're saying. Not interpersonal but intergroup.

Kelile: Yeah! Sorry about that.

Birthe: No, no, no, it's a very valid point. [...] And actually, [Kelile], I'm gonna keep giving that [metaphorical] microphone to you.

Another of these instances occurred when Kelile was describing John's experience in Clarkston, following the partner assignment:

Kelile: [...] He has good thinking. I don't know how, but I want to express him as he is, but my English is not enough.

Birthe: You are doing a very good job. We all understand it.

Brad: Yea, the way that you are saying it expresses it.

Whenever Kelile got this kind of affirmation, whether it came from the other participants or me, his face showed signs of relief or gratitude and he continued sharing his thoughts. This confirmed the importance of being aware of the participants' needs in conversation and helping them feel comfortable in the group.

While the participants generally interacted politely, there were a few instances in which the discussion got heated and there was open disagreement and frustration in the room. My conflict resolution training helped me reframe what had been said and guide the conflicting participants back onto a path of constructive dialogue. One situation occurred in the first week, when the group was supposed to discuss positive aspects of the Clarkston community. What had started as a discussion of positives that people associated with the Clarkston Village ended in negative comments regarding the Family Dollar that had been built across the street and perceptions among some of the participants that the city was purposely trying to drive out refugees.

John: One other thing... [...] There have been periods where the businesses have felt that the city was harassing them and trying to drive them out by, you know, using the code

arbitrarily to, you know, make things difficult for them. [...] I think it's related to the [...], Family Dollar.

Marjorie: That is exactly right. I will speak openly as far as the city. That was done by the city officials and there is a lot that has happened. There is no reason to have a Family Dollar.

[...]

Carroll: But today we are talking about positive things in Clarkston. It's kind of disintegrating. I mean, just in my opinion, I thought I'd just put that out there since everybody is feeling free to speak. [...]

Birthe [to Carroll]: Thank you. And you know, you were saying we need to stay on the positive and I appreciate that, that's true... This week we are talking about positive aspects. Next week, that's going to be a different story.

Birthe [to Marjorie and John]: But you were saying a lot of positive things actually, like [Marjorie] was saying that the business owners know all kinds of people, they greet you and I'm sure you're not the only person whom they greet.

Marjorie: Right, they remember faces, they remember names.

Birthe [to Marjorie]: Yea, so those were positive aspects.

Birthe [to Carroll]: So you caught it early on.

Carroll: Just like the politics, I just wanna... people driving people out. It was like ugh...

Birthe: Yes, we will talk about that next week.

Chloe: One other thing I love about Kathmandu... [...]

After Chloe's positive remarks about Kathmandu, John, who had looked upset at having been reined in, returned to the previous disagreement. He used an example I had given during training to introduce his concern:

John: So this is a comment more about the project than the topic of the day. Last week [during training] we saw that photo from [...] Uganda where the guy's head was cut off [by the framing of the picture] ... and you talked about how people saw it one way and some people saw it another way. And I ask what do you do in that case? You said both will be represented.

Birthe: And they will be; I am taking notes on everything.

John: I hope that our discussions will not be required to adhere to a theme each week.

Birthe: No, the thing is that there are certain things that a lot of people feel very strongly about that might be negative, and I purposely started with the positive, because I think that once we start looking at the things that might not be going so well, it's very difficult to start seeing the positive again. So I think it's important that we start with the positive and acknowledge the positive so that we have it as something to ground us and then we will look at the things that are problematic. Everything will be acknowledged. That's why I'm audio recording and taking notes and having [my research assistant] take notes, so that all of it does get heard. And actually, I'm glad you bring it up again, [...] because it is a group process and because you are co-researchers in this, I want to make sure that you have confidence in that I have no agenda as to what I am going to tell. I am trying to really gather your stories and share them. Okay?

After he had vented his frustration, and after I had explained transparently why it was important not to let the negative overshadow the positive during the first session and reassured the group that I was taking note of everything that was being said, John returned to participating collaboratively in the session.

Since I brought together people who were members of conflicting groups with the goal of empowering the participants and promoting comprehensive conflict engagement, my strategy was

to take a stance of omni-partiality instead of keeping up a semblance of neutrality and impartiality (Astor, 2007; Cloke & Goldsmith, 2000; Mulcahy, 2001; Ulrich, 2013). An omni-partial approach requires conflict practitioners to recognize the validity of all perspectives and to be “fully empathetic and deeply honest” (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2000, p. 63). As a result, omni-partiality has been found to “create an atmosphere of openness, trust, learning, and growth” (Ulrich, 2013, p. 58; also Cloke & Goldsmith, 2000). Since I was asking the participants to take each other’s perspectives and empathize with each other, it was philosophically consistent to adopt the same approach and lead by example.

Taking this empathetic and transparent approach⁶⁷ to foster openness and trust in the group was also important in terms of treating the participants as co-researchers and the actual experts on life in Clarkston. Approaching this project with that perspective gave the participants room to start *seeing themselves* as co-researchers and experts as well. I regularly emphasized that they were not there to please *me*, but that instead they had a responsibility towards the Clarkston community, so their openness and honesty were of prime importance. Their candid feedback on the post-session and exit questionnaires as well as the follow-up interviews suggest that they took this role seriously and saw themselves as equal contributors to the project. One example from the post-session feedback was: “It is very cool to be a co-researcher in a group. I have hope for a better Clarkston as a result of this process. I am thankful to have had this opportunity” (Carroll). Using my conflict resolution skills allowed me to create an atmosphere of candor, shared responsibility, and trust that made me feel confident that the participants were as free from social desirability and acquiescence bias as they could be in any social research (Eck, 2011).

Self-reflection. As discussed in chapter 3, I kept a self-reflective journal and systematically wrote many pages of notes after each session, evaluating and critiquing my own

⁶⁷ See example above.

performance (Bernard, 2006; Kressel, 2006; Rubin & Babbie, 2005; Seligmann, 2005). I furthermore debriefed every session with my assistant and discussed with him what I might need to revisit or do differently during the next session (Kressel, 2006). In a few cases, I also solicited the participants' feedback when trying to decide how to proceed or in what direction to go. After I had had difficulty devising a solid discussion structure upon review of the participants' images for the third assignment, I stated the following at the beginning of the session:

Birthe: I will check in first and tell you, for me, this week was a little more difficult in figuring out the themes because I gave you a very broad assignment and I thought of different ways of doing today's session. I thought I could just let you pick out the themes, or I could try to pick them out myself. I ended up trying to pick out some myself, simply for the reason that I need to facilitate the session somehow and I can't just not have any structure, but I ask you all to say if you saw any other themes because that is entirely possible since you are the ones who took the pictures and had thoughts behind the pictures. I only could see what you wrote and some of you write really great captions that help me understand what you're thinking, and some of you keep them rather short and I'm not sure what you're thinking, so this will be an opportunity for you to say "I see that a lot of us seemed to care about *that*" and I just didn't get it. That's entirely possible.

In the subsequent discussion, I learned from the participants what they had liked and found challenging about the assignment, and we jointly found a way of using the time to discuss what they had had in mind when they took the pictures that they submitted. Debriefing in this way helped me think about how I would change the assignment if I were to use it again. At the same time, this approach created a collaborative environment where we helped each other make sense of the pictures while I was also collecting meaningful data about people's experiences in Clarkston.

The “planning vs spontaneity nexus.” Despite the fact that this project was designed for participants to be equal partners in decision-making and consensus-building, there were instances in which they were reluctant to take the lead and I had to be prepared to provide direction when necessary in order to keep the process moving forward.⁶⁸ This is one example of me reaching the “planning vs spontaneity nexus.” Greenwood and Levin (2007) have cautioned that while precise preparation is of great importance in action research in order to be ready for a variety of turns the research may take, plans rarely match the actual unfolding of the process and researchers have to be flexible enough to “adjust to this on the fly” (p. 129). When making decisions on the spot, “the sense making and the creation of good responses is mainly built out of tacit knowing and skillful improvisation” (Greenwood & Levin, 2007, p. 130). I had many ideals influenced by the literature on community engaged or participatory action research (e.g. Greenwood & Levin, 2007; Hayes, 2011; Stoecker, 2005; Stringer, 2007) and was intent on letting the participants be the drivers of the metaphorical car, yet when they did not grab the steering wheel, I had to be able to take over and steer while they were giving me the directions to their desired destination.

Another example of the “planning vs spontaneity nexus” occurred when Chloe lost the camera that I had lent her for the duration of the project. The participants knew that I had borrowed the cameras from friends and Chloe was visibly upset and embarrassed when she admitted that the camera she had borrowed had disappeared. I had planned for this possibility and had told anybody lending their cameras to the project that there was a chance that they might not get them back so they would only give what they could do without. Having planned for this eventuality gave me the flexibility to prioritize Chloe’s sticking with the project over her feeling ashamed and risking for her to drop out. While I did try to help her remember where she might

⁶⁸ For details, please see the “Lending a Megaphone to the Participants’ Voices” section in chapter 3.

have left it, I could also provide her with a different camera and refocus our interaction on the next steps in the project instead of spending all our energy on retrieving the first camera.

Time-management. One of the greatest challenges in facilitating this project was time-management during the sessions. I took seriously my responsibility to ensure that participation in the project was a positive experience worth the participants' time. For every session, I created a timetable, which I posted on the walls and discussed with the participants at the beginning of each session so we could all take responsibility for adhering to the schedule. I quickly learned that we would not start any sessions on time, regardless of how much I emphasized the importance of all of us respecting each other's time and starting punctually so we could also finish on time. Because people's tardiness was predictable, I could plan for it. What was harder to manage was the fact that the people who needed us to leave on time were the same individuals who sometimes spoke at length and always had something else to add. It took some internal conflict management on my part to avoid getting too frustrated with this.

Most sessions went approximately 30 minutes longer than planned and I conferred with the group to check if they could stay and ascertain that there was consensus that it would be time well-spent. I tried my best to properly assess how long each discussion round would take and to keep the group on schedule, yet regardless of how much additional time I planned from week to week, the participants always had more to say. Since I would have stayed for as long as it took to hear everybody's contributions, I needed to find a compromise between my own interests and those of the participants, who were spending their Saturday mornings in the group instead of pursuing their usual weekend activities. To address this situation, I worked with my research assistant to keep us on track, always obtained the participants' consent to stay longer, and stated explicitly that I understood if anybody had to leave at the end time we had previously agreed upon. In retrospect, after comparing my own impressions to conversations I had with individual

group members after the project had ended, I realized that nobody had been as worried about time as I had been. Meeting on a bi-weekly rather than weekly basis and sharing the time-keeping responsibility with the group may reduce the stress involved with managing everybody's time.

Reflections on post-project exhibitions. For anyone considering conducting a Photovoice project and intending to exhibit its results afterwards, I have two sets of recommendations. The first pertains to carefully selecting partners for the exhibitions. The second is about sustainability.

Careful partner selection. At the time of writing, the images that resulted from the Photovoice Clarkston project had been exhibited five times.⁶⁹ From these experiences I have learned that it is important to strategically work with partners who fully understand the purpose of Photovoice as an empowerment and voice-sharing tool, who care about the people whose voices are being represented, and who have a connection to the community in order to increase the likelihood of generating structural impact by exposing local decision-makers to the captioned images. Further removed exhibition opportunities may be worthwhile in terms of generating exposure for the Photovoice methodology and raising general awareness of life in refugee resettlement communities. However, if fostering local change is a desired outcome, closer ties between exhibition sites and the community are more conducive to reaching that goal.

If museums or other exhibition venues have a primarily artistic or historical focus, it may be difficult for the curators to understand the importance of *voice* in Photovoice and the pictures could be mainly treated as either art or artifacts, open for interpretation although specific meaning was assigned by the project participants. For this reason, it is important not to let others co-opt the output of the Photovoice project and to keep control of the narrative to preserve the authenticity of the work. This may mean passing up individual opportunities, but my experience

⁶⁹ See appendix II.

has shown that it is more important to pick the right opportunities than to take them all. The same is true for other outlets like newspaper articles, documentaries, or books; to respect the philosophical underpinnings of Photovoice and the project participants themselves, it is necessary to see to it that their voices are represented unaltered and uncropped.

Sustainability. In order to retain control of the captioned Photovoice images and prevent any potential misappropriation in the future, facilitators should ask to retrieve them once an exhibition closes. In my experience, exhibition partners at established museums were willing and able to print, frame, professionally display, and return to me the images that they had exhibited. It is important to negotiate such arrangements so that subsequent exhibitions in marginalized communities and in collaboration with less resourceful partners become sustainable.

Avenues for Future Research

As described in chapter 6, most avenues of potential structural impact had just started flourishing at the time of writing and follow-up research should examine the overall long-term results of Photovoice when applied as a comprehensive conflict engagement strategy. Specifically, such follow-up research should include investigating the patterns and extent to which a transfer of ideas and insights occurred from the project participants into their networks and the larger community. The participants provided some examples of such exchanges in their follow-up interviews,⁷⁰ but additional research would generate insight into what proximal processes within the participants' micro-, meso-, and exosystems resulted in the greatest transfer of ideas and insights. Based on this knowledge, participants of future projects could be supported in intentionally facilitating such transfers.

Follow-up research should also be conducted to assess to what extent local policy makers and social service providers were affected in their decision-making as a result of their exposure to

⁷⁰ For details, please see the "Voice, empowerment, and participants' reach outside the project" section in chapter 6.

the Photovoice participants' views and voices. The longevity and sustainability of any resulting transformations should also be investigated. As discussed in the "The project is over, now what?" section, it remains to be examined what discourages and motivates project participants in terms of developing concrete action steps to address the concerns they identified. Such research should also investigate if participants are more eager to develop their own ideas when a larger number of local policy makers is directly involved in the group and ready to listen to their suggestions, or if a *formal* link between dialogues and socio-political decision-making is established (Fung, 2006). Based on this knowledge, effective strategies and mechanisms for supporting the participants in taking action can be developed.

As stated in chapter 5, this project has only begun to uncover the issue of marginalization among the marginalized and it remains to be further explored. The presented data suggest that there may be a difference in experience and perception between African Americans in Clarkston who are long-time residents and have experienced its demographic shifts over time and those African American Americans who have moved to Clarkston in recent years. I expect that bringing together a group of older, long-term residents to document and discuss their experiences will yield greater insight into the phenomenon of marginalization among the marginalized. In a subsequent project, they could be brought together with other members of the community to build bridges across the divide. Furthermore, multiple requests have been made for Photovoice projects with the deaf community and with Clarkston youth. Efforts should be made to include individuals from a greater variety of countries, also non-African ones, in future projects. Finally, bringing together city administrators, police, and residents for a Photovoice process could prove helpful in increasing mutual understanding and improving civic relations. In this context, the fear police can generate for people who have histories of trauma and life in oppressive regimes where human rights violations are often perpetrated by security forces will require particular sensitivity

and care in order to minimize the risk of retraumatization (Duckworth & Follette, 2012). Having made the necessary connections to get access and convene such groups, these are necessary next steps to more fully understand the structural impediments to positive peace in Clarkston.

As described in chapter 6, several participants ascribed to the Photovoice process a “therapeutic impact.” Transformative mediation and therapeutic family mediation are other dialogue processes to which therapeutic qualities have been credited (Alexander, 2008; Hallevy, 2011; Irving & Benjamin, 2002; Smyth & Moloney, 2003; Wemmers & Cyr, 2005). Investigating a de facto psycho-therapeutic impact of Photovoice when used as a comprehensive conflict engagement strategy is another avenue for future research that should be conducted in collaboration between conflict management scholar-practitioners and psychologists.

Beyond the Clarkston city limits and the United States borders, a “refugee crisis” (“10 moving photos”, 2015; Ashraf, 2015; Boehler & Peçanha, 2015; Kingsley, Rice-Oxley, & Nardelli, 2015) is ongoing in Europe. The city of Hamburg, a metropolis in Northern Germany with approximately two million inhabitants, has turned its exposition halls into a temporary refugee camp that houses 1,200 people (“Diese Zelte,” 2015; “Mehr als 1.000 Flüchtlinge,” 2015). Residents of the surrounding neighborhoods Karoviertel and St. Pauli have organized themselves into a group called Refugees Welcome - Karoviertel (Refugees Welcome - Karoviertel, 2015a). Other residents of Hamburg have joined their efforts to make refugees feel like they are not alone and abandoned in a foreign land (“Anwohner helfen,” 2015; “Großes Hallo,” 2015). Refugees Welcome and their allies collect clothes and donations, host BBQs and soccer games, and organize local tours, celebrations, and trips to the beach (“Welcome Refugees,” 2015; Refugees Welcome - Karoviertel, 2015b). The group also advocates for refugees’ right to permanent residence and decentralized apartments instead of mass shelters, so people can feel truly welcome and integrated into society.

The cases of Clarkston and Hamburg could not be any more different in terms of the size and demographics of the cities, the ratio of refugees to locals, the laws, regulations, legal status, and rights of refugees, and the underlying social structure and welfare regulations in both countries. Nevertheless, locals of both cities seem to intuitively share ideas of how to build community - through joint activities, meal sharing, and the creation of other opportunities to interact. A comparative analysis of CCEM-based projects in which refugees and locals alike come together and exchange their views and experiences through Photovoice promises to yield greater insight into similarities and contrasts, challenges and solutions in refugee resettlement around the world. The results of such projects could not only be disseminated among policy makers and social service providers, but also between the participants of both projects and their surrounding communities. This could expand Refugees Welcome's motto of assuring refugees that they are not alone and create a sense of connection and possible collaboration between the residents, refugees and locals alike, of two cities a world apart.

Photovoice used as a comprehensive conflict engagement strategy is but one possible practical application of the Comprehensive Conflict Engagement Model. It works because Photovoice used in this way creates opportunities for proximal processes and mesosystemic linkages at all levels of the ecosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, 2006) and concurrently targets social conflict at the internal, relational, and structural levels (Kriesberg & Dayton, 2012). The data from this research have demonstrated that through the creation of a long-lasting visual product that authentically documents challenges and opportunities in constructed communities, this application of the CCEM built relationships among the participants involved in the process at the same time as opening avenues for reaching decision-makers with the ability to affect structural change. The photos make the participants' views and voices transportable through space and time, thus

creating a proximal process between the community and those with the power to affect their daily lives (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, 2006). Based on this understanding of the CCEM, it is a challenge for future conflict scholar-practitioners to devise additional methodologies that integrate conflict engagement at the internal, relational, and structural levels. This could include combinations of existing methods like small group dialogue processes, oral histories, documentary videography, art, and theatric production as long as a long-lasting visual product that is transportable through time and space and lends a megaphone to the muted by authentically representing their views and voices is created.

Implications and Key Lessons Learned

Photovoice is a relatively new participatory action research method that Wang and Burris (1997) created for public health researchers to collect data and empower marginalized populations through documentary photography and dialogue. Based on the herein developed multidisciplinary theoretical framework, I devised the Comprehensive Conflict Engagement Model and explored the use and utility of Photovoice not only as a data collection and empowerment tool, but also as a comprehensive conflict engagement strategy for practitioners operating at the community level. Both the theoretical framework and the utility of the CCEM are supported by the results of this project.

Based on this first-time application of Photovoice as a practical conflict intervention tool, avenues for further refining the methodology and the underlying theoretical framework have emerged. As a result of this, a feedback loop between conflict theory and practice that resembles Galtung's (1996) Diagnosis-Prognosis-Therapy triangle has been established and a methodological bridge over the gap between theory and practice has been built (Coleman, 2011; Hayes, 2011).

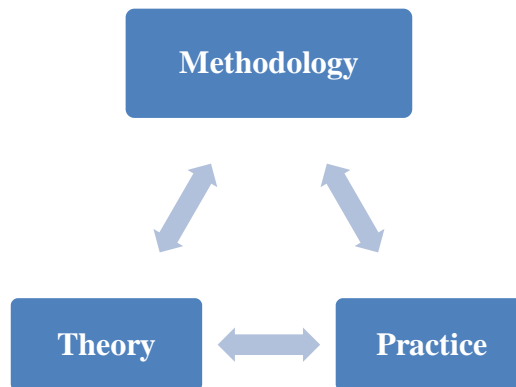


Figure 7. Conflict theory-methodology-practice feedback loop

The Comprehensive Conflict Engagement Model created in this project is an exemplary model for concurrently engaging conflicts at internal, relational, and structural levels in constructed and other diverse communities strained by intercultural tensions. The accordingly modified Photovoice method supersedes traditional small group dialogue processes because it yields a visual product that can be used strategically to reach decision-makers with the power to implement structural changes.

The CCEM is transferable to a variety of conflicts, settings, and methodologies. While the specific findings of this study may not be generalizable, the underlying theoretical framework is applicable to research and practice in other constructed and otherwise diverse and divided communities. Based on this theoretical framework, similar dynamics are expected to manifest in other communities, and the same principles of simultaneously engaging conflicts at the internal, relational, and structural levels are applicable. It is my hope that this example will provide for other scholar-practitioners a roadmap and encouragement for developing additional integrated methodologies that unite analysis and intervention in order to comprehensively engage conflicts and build further bridges across the conflict theory-practice gap. The key lessons learned from this project are:

1. Refugees do not exist in isolation. Once resettled, they are embedded in local communities with their own histories and conflicts. Through the resettlement process, conflicts that started abroad are imported, and new ones emerge as refugees and locals need to find ways of coexisting in their new constructed community despite economic struggles and cultural differences. Therefore, interventions should not singularly focus on refugees, but also include members of the broader community.

2. Galtung's (1969, 1990, 1996) structural and cultural violence theories and later expansions thereof help scholar-practitioners identify different forms of violence and assess the overall "health" of a society. They identify "what" is happening. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, the subsequent Process-Person-Context-Time model, and the concept of proximal processes explain the mechanisms by which the different types of violence manifest and how they are perpetuated. They explain "how" violent patterns and conflicts persist and how they are experienced. Comprehensive conflict engagement strategies based on the CCEM integrate conflict analysis and intervention into one tool that can be used to intentionally set in motion proximal processes and create mesosystemic linkages that promote empowerment and positive peace.

3. In order to find fair, sustainable solutions to conflicts, it is necessary to bring into the consciousness of all parties the deeper dimensions, i.e. the deep structure and the deep culture - or the macrosystem - that underlie their conflicts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Galtung, 2000, 2004; Graf et al., 2007). Once these deeper dimensions have been uncovered and addressed in facilitated dialogues, attitudes and behaviors can be transformed, new goals and strategies developed, and conflicts transcended (Galtung, 2000, 2004; Graf et al., 2007).

The combination of documentary photography and dialogue in the Photovoice methodology lends itself to uncovering the symbolic meanings that parties in conflict attach to a

variety of interactions, objects, and institutions in their environment. The data collected in this project show that the CCEM-based Photovoice adaptation stimulates critical self-reflection and fosters conscientization, i.e. the development of “consciousness of social and political forces that limit people’s potential” (Kenney, 2009, p. 97). As John recognized in one of the group sessions, “With every issue, don’t assume it’s about personalities; look for structural factors at work.” This project showed that once such an expanded level of consciousness has been reached and a shift in thinking has occurred, people start noticing things – commonalities and shared challenges – to which they were previously oblivious, and the “other” can be re-humanized (Freire, 1970). At this point, people can see presenting conflicts as shared problems and join forces to solve them together instead of fighting battles against each other that will not cease until the structure is changed.

4. Comprehensive conflict engagement has to be understood as a marathon, not a sprint. If the primary purpose of conducting a Photovoice project is research, a few months in the field may suffice. But if Photovoice is primarily conducted as a practical comprehensive conflict engagement strategy, long-term and full-time dedication is necessary to support the project participants and other interested parties in the community to implement the generated ideas, be catalysts for change, and pursue positive peace. To this end, intentional contact among the participants between the dialogue sessions is important. As the anchor of the project, the facilitator should provide initial impetuses for such informal contact so relationships can grow and reach maturity before the project comes to an end and the participants are responsible for the continuance of their relationships.

5. In the 21st century, an array of technological advancements is available to be integrated into our work to maximize its efficiency and reach. The www.PhotovoiceClarkston.com website proved to be an invaluable aid in gathering the participants’ photographs and ideas for action

strategies, preparing for the group sessions, ensuring contribution to the discussions even in cases of physical absence, and disseminating the project outcomes to a broad audience. Sharing visual imagery over the Internet has become a widespread habit on social media that spans the continents and I recommend the development of an online presence to colleagues interested in using any form of documentary photography in the interest of peacebuilding.

6. The emphasis on the importance of promoting positive structural changes as a component of comprehensive conflict engagement is not intended to overshadow the key roles individuals play in community contexts. The way the Photovoice participants thought about life in Clarkston was innately detailed, personal, and specific. No story could be told without somebody asking for clarification as to the exact location of a particular venue or the identity of a person. People mattered, and individual people stood out for their efforts in making Clarkston a better place to live for all of its residents.

Any peacebuilding effort at the community level should not only identify positive and uniting dynamics that already exist and upon which they can build, but also recognize the individuals who already play important connecting roles. They bring with them a wealth of connections and networks, experiences, knowledge about the communal dynamics, and social capital that no scholar or practitioner can develop in a short period of time. When peacebuilding involves all groups of people who coexist in constructed communities, works in symbiosis with those who have long been engaged in efforts to promote positive peace, and lends a megaphone to the muted, communities can become empowered to build sustainable peace from within.

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Appendix I: Questionnaires & Interview Guide

Weekly Post-Session Questionnaire

Your Experiences this Week

Name: _____ Date: _____

a) Please list up to three points that you are taking away from today's meeting:

1)

2)

3)

Please respond to the following questions in relation to the points above about **the Clarkston community**.

	Very likely	Somewhat likely	Somewha t unlikely	Very unlikely	Not sure / not applicable
Will the first point affect your <i>thinking</i> ?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Will the first point affect your <i>feelings</i> ?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Will the first point affect your <i>actions</i> ?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Will the second point affect your <i>thinking</i> ?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Will the second point affect your <i>feelings</i> ?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Will the second point affect your <i>actions</i> ?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Will the third point affect your <i>thinking</i> ?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Will the third point affect your <i>feelings</i> ?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Will the third point affect your <i>actions</i> ?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Optional comments:

b) Did anything noteworthy happen while you were taking pictures this week? If so, what was it?

Please check if you would prefer to answer these questions over the phone or if you would like to elaborate in a phone conversation. If so, please provide a phone number and some days and times on which you can be reached:

Exit Questionnaire**Your Photovoice Experiences****Name:** _____

1. Please list at least 3 things that you have learned over the course of the Photovoice project.

2. Please list 3 things that you have shared with the other project participants that they might not have known before.

3. Over the course of the project, did you go to any places that you had not been to before?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

4. Over the course of the project, did you meet any people whom you had not met before?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

5. If yes, did you meet new people: (SKIP IF NO)
 - a. In the group
 - b. While taking pictures in the community
 - c. Both

6. If there was another Photovoice project like this in Clarkston, would you:
 - a. Participate
 - b. Recommend it to somebody else
 - c. Both

7. Six months from now, what will you remember about the Photovoice experience?

8. Do you think that the Photovoice process can be used to bring diverse communities together?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

9. Would you do anything differently?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No

10. If yes, what would you do differently? (SKIP IF NO)

Follow-up Interview Guide

As well as we have gotten to know each other, I realize there are a few basic things that I don't know about you:

- a) Where were you born and what year were you born?
 - b) What is your highest level of education?
 - c) What do you do?
 - d) How long have you lived/ worked/ been involved in Clarkston?
 - e) Where did you live before that / where do you live now?
1. What made you decide to participate in the project?
 2. What was it like to be a Photovoice photographer?
 3. What was it like to talk about your photos with other people from your group?
 4. I need a sense of what you were doing in the community before this project in order to see if participating in Photovoice has made any difference. Knowing that there are no right or wrong answers, can you tell me about your involvement in the community before the project?
 4. Has participating in this project affected you in any way? If so, how?
 5. Has the project changed how you see your community? If so, how?
 6. Has Photovoice changed how you act in the community, how you relate to others in the community? If so, in what ways? If not, why not? Do you have any plans to do anything differently?
 7. Have you spent any time with anybody from the group since the last session? If so, who and what did you do?
 8. Is there anything that you expected me to ask that I did not ask or was there anything that you wanted to share with me that you did not feel comfortable sharing in the group?

Appendix II: Photovoice Exhibitions

Inman Park



Photograph 51.
Inman Park Exhibition I



Photograph 52.
Inman Park Exhibition II

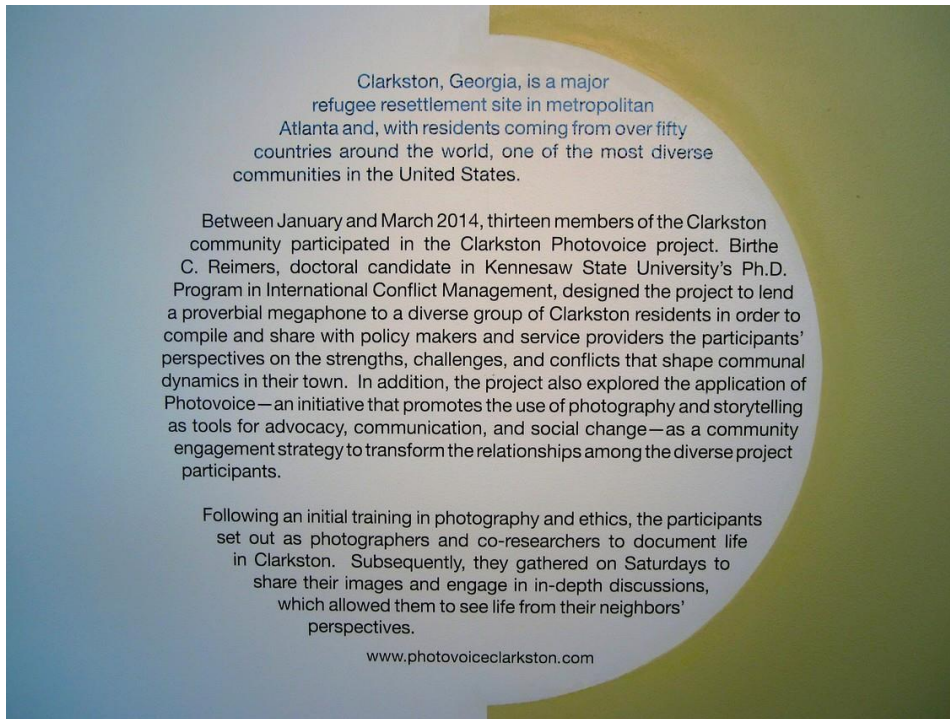
World Refugee Day



Photograph 53.
World Refugee Day Exhibition I



Photograph 54.
World Refugee Day Exhibition II

Zuckerman Museum of Art: “Hearsay”*Photograph 55.*

Zuckerman Museum of Art: “Hearsay” Exhibition I

*Photograph 56.*

Zuckerman Museum of Art: “Hearsay” Exhibition II

The Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta Donor Tour



Photograph 57.
The Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta Donor Tour Display

David J. Sencer CDC Museum: “Resettling in America: Georgia’s Refugee Communities”



Photograph 58.
David J. Sencer CDC Museum: “Resettling in America: Georgia’s Refugee Communities” Exhibition I



Photograph 59.
David J. Sencer CDC Museum: “Resettling in America: Georgia’s Refugee Communities” Exhibition II