The Art of Resilience: Photo-stories of Inspiration and Strength among People with HIV/AIDS

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**INTRODUCTION**
- HIV is a lifelong and serious illness that can affect physical and mental health.
- To empower and support people living with HIV (PLH), we conducted a photo-voice project.
- The objective of this analysis is to explore how photo-voice – a participatory method that utilizes photography to engage people in group and individual dialogue about their experiences – helped participants express their strength and resilience through photography and art.

**METHODS**
Participants: We recruited men and women from HIV clinics in 3 cities in the Midwest, U.S.

Procedures: Participants took pictures, met to discuss them in three group sessions, planned and attended a community photo exhibit, and took part in a follow-up interview. (Figure 1)

Analysis: We analyzed transcripts of group photo discussions and interviews for key themes using strategies of thematic and narrative analysis.

**RESULTS**
Summary: Participants’ (see Table 1) narratives revealed that the project supported PWH by facilitating:
- Enhanced inspiration and insight
- Acquiring a new artistic “hobby”
- Seeing beauty in their surroundings
- A creative way to express strengths and resilience

Table 1. Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/ethnicity</td>
<td>66% Black</td>
<td>87% White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (mean)</td>
<td>45 years</td>
<td>36 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV (mean)</td>
<td>11 years</td>
<td>11 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual income:</td>
<td>$55K-$10K</td>
<td>$37K-$10K</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**QUOTES AND PICTURES**

Figure 2: LOST MUSE: This participant indicated that, “I used to paint all of the time. Then I just lost interest and I still haven’t gotten back into it…”

The project was helping him to express himself with photos, such as figure out how to disclose to his mom.

Figure 3: NEED TO TALK: “My mom is very religious and after 15 years, thinks I’m just going through a phase, being gay. One of her fears when I first told her was that I would get HIV. Telling her would be like her telling me, ‘I told you so.’”

But I want to tell her.

Figure 5: NOT THE FACE OF HIV: “HIV does not have a face. It doesn’t have a body. You can’t look at somebody and tell that they have it.”

Participant (Fig. 5) indicated that the project brought out her creative side: “[The project showed] How creative I was and that I see life in a different light now. In the past I was very depressed and suicidal. Now I’m not so much as suicidal or depressed at all. It’s like I’ve got something else to do, a hobby, and it takes away from the depression.”

**CONCLUSIONS**
- Arts-based interventions can inspire creativity, and help PLH see their lives differently.
- Creativity and insight can help PLH build and express resilience.
- Offering photography as a form of expression is a potentially simple way to foster strength and consequently, improve the lives of PLH.
- Participants enjoy using the camera and expressing themselves visually – they develop new hobbies, skills, and ways of interacting with their worlds and others.

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