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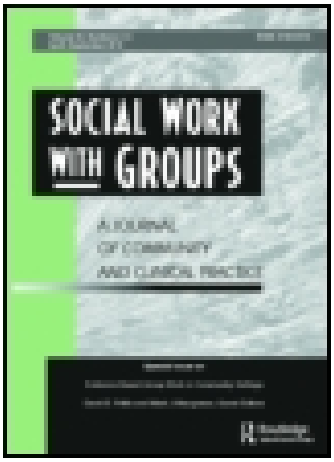

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Using Audio Documentary to Engage Young People Experiencing Homelessness in Strengths-Based Group Work

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Using Audio Documentary to Engage Young People Experiencing Homelessness in Strengths-Based Group Work

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Little information exists on the use of audio-based activities in groups as a means to engage young people's strengths. This article presents findings from a study that employed a coconstructed audio documentary group to explore homeless youths' experiences in a music studio, their attached meaning, and whether studio and group involvement engaged youths' strengths. Four young people and the author met over the course of 12 sessions to collaboratively develop, record, and produce an audio documentary. Young people successfully produced a coconstructed audio documentary and their involvement in the studio and the group engaged their strengths.

KEYWORDS strengths-based group work, young people, music-based activities, audio documentary

INTRODUCTION

Social work has a historical relationship with the recreation and group work movements of the 20th century, both of which incorporated the use of recreational, art, and music-based activities in their service structure (Andrews, 2001). Recreation workers of the late-19th and early-20th century noted the usefulness of recreational activities in curbing juvenile delinquency (Meyer, 1934; Pangburn, 1924). Documents from the Hull House archives demonstrate a clear commitment to the use of recreational, art, and music-based activities to engage community members from the late 19th century

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through the late 1960s (Hull House Publishers, 1907, 1910, 1921, 1933, 1934, 1936, 1949, 1969). These activities included recreational facilities for young men and women as well as visual arts studios and galleries for ceramics, painting, sculpture, and woodwork. In addition, Hull House provided a short-lived nickelodeon for young people in the community, several studios and rehearsal spaces for the performance arts, and a theatre for dance, music, and drama performances and recitals.

Breton (1990) argued for the need to highlight these historical relationships and for the inclusion of recreational, art, and music-based activities in current social work practice. Delgado (2000) extended this argument calling for the development of more recreational, art, and music-based programs and interventions in community-based social work practice with urban youth. Group work researchers and practitioners have reported on the successful use of recreational and arts-based activities with young people, including photography with adolescent girls (Darrow & Lynch, 1983) and in community engagement efforts with emerging adults (Gant et al., 2009), video production in promoting health literacy campaigns with indigenous young people (Stewart, Riecken, Scott, Tanaka, & Riecken, 2008), theatre and drama techniques in preteen development (Dutton, 2001) and in assisting refugee and recently arrived immigrant young people with social adjustment (Rousseau et al., 2007), as well as the use of poetry and video production groups in school-based youth–adult partnerships that seek to give young people authentic and meaningful voices in school-based teacher/administrator–student relationships (Mitra, 2009).

Lietz (2007) noted the importance of incorporating the strengths perspective in group work practice and its potential to increase important factors related to group cohesion, such as members' negative attitude toward the group as well as low and/or inconsistent attendance. Malekoff (2006) utilized poetry groups with young children as way to engage their strengths and facilitate their ownership of the group. In his text on group work with adolescents, Malekoff (2004) promoted a strengths-based approach to group work with young people by outlining seven principles:

1. Form groups based on members' felt needs and wants, not diagnoses
2. Structure groups to welcome the whole person, not just the troubled parts
3. Integrate verbal and nonverbal activities
4. Develop alliances with relevant other people in group members' lives
5. Decentralize authority and turn control over to group members
6. Maintain a dual focus on individual change and social reform
7. Understand and respect group development as a key to promoting change (pp. 36–37).

Malekoff (2004) framed the use of recreational and art-based activities in group work with young people as a way to invite the whole young person into the group work process and as a means to engage their strengths.

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Some group work researchers and practitioners have reported on the successful use of music-based activities, including facilitating music groups with chemically dependent adults (Buino & Simon, 2011), applying music therapy techniques in groups with teenagers (McFerran-Skwews, 2005), combining poetry and music with groups of young people to promote therapeutic dialogues (Olson-McBride & Page, 2012), and using rap music in group therapy to promote young people's prosocial skill development (DeCarlo & Hockman, 2004). Based on reviews of the literature, little information exists on the use of audio and music-based activities in group work with young people as a means to engage and promote their strengths. Delgado (2000) argued that music-based activities offer an opportunity to approach social work with young people from a strengths perspective. He contends that "the use of music as an activity holds much promise for engaging and teaching urban youths a variety of skills from production, composition, and actual performance" (Delgado, 2000, pp. 119–120), highlighting the importance of rap and hip hop music in the lives of urban young people of color as a vehicle to voice their resistance to oppression.

Based on this gap in the literature, I developed an ethnographic study that explored a music studio in a transitional living program for young people experiencing homelessness as a potential site for strengths-based social work practice. The study focused on (1) the processes involved in promoting and developing a music studio in a transitional living program for young people experiencing homelessness, (2) young people's experiences while engaging in the music studio, and (3) the meanings they attached to their experiences. In addition to traditional ethnographic data collection techniques, such as participant observation and semistructured interviews, I invited a group of young people I observed and interviewed to develop a coconstructed audio documentary that aurally explored their experiences in the music studio and the meanings they attached to their experiences. The developmental process of the coconstructed audio documentary is described in greater detail in the Method section.

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AUDIO DOCUMENTARY

In discussing documentary studies, Coles (1997) stated that documentaries "attempt to portray a particular kind of life realistically" and offer "authentication of what is otherwise speculation" (p. 5). He noted that through the tape recorder and other documentary mediums (e.g., film and archival data), "a growing accuracy with respect to a situation, a place, a person, or a group of people begins to be assembled" (p. 5). Makagon and Neumann (2009) contended that audio documentary presents researchers and scholars with a unique opportunity to highlight the sonic world of the research experience for the listener. In doing so the researcher adds "sensorial depth to qualitative studies that has been missing from written accounts" (Makagon & Neumann,

2009, p. 26). They position audio documentary as a "premiere form of qualitative research" (p. ix) that responds to calls for increased representational and collaborative approaches to qualitative research.

In addition, they note the potential of audio documentary to present research findings that are normally consumed by a smaller academic audience to larger, more popular audiences through mediums such as public radio and related podcasts (Makagon & Neumann, 2009). National Public Radio's *Morning Edition* and *All Things Considered* make extensive use of audio documentary and audio essays in their news stories and in providing editorial commentary. Chicago Public Radio's *This American Life* also uses audio documentary and audio essays in their weekly program to explore themes developed around the lived experience of the producers and authors who submit their work (Abel & Glass, 1999). In a recent episode, audio documentarians explored the high level of young person on young person violence affecting Chicago's South Side (Glass, 2013a, 2013b). In interviews, young people describe participation in after school extracurricular activities (e.g., recreational, art, and music-based activities) as a means of staying safe by staying off the streets and out of trouble.

For the purposes of this study I was interested in developing a coconstructed audio documentary with a group of young people for several reasons. First, given the sonic nature of the research site (i.e., the music studio), it seemed particularly useful in providing an aural representation of the research findings. Second, it provided a means to incorporate young people's original music productions and spoken word work that would be otherwise impossible with a solely written account. In other words, the reader may listen to the music and spoken word work the young people created instead of just reading a description about or a transcription of it. Third, it provided an opportunity to engage young people and their talents, strengths, and interests in the research process (e.g., production and engineering skills, rap freestyle, spoken word, and writing skills). Finally, it brought a socially just, activist dimension to the project by creating opportunities for young people to expand their relationship with media production and collaboratively tell their stories of strength and resilience in and beyond the music studio.

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METHOD

Teen Living Programs and the Music Studio

The coconstructed audio documentary group met at Teen Living Programs (TLP) Belfort House, a transitional living program for young people experiencing homelessness located in the Bronzeville neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago, IL. Funded by the Reconnecting Homeless Youth Act, TLP provides transitional housing and services for young people between age 18 to 21 for up to 2 years. The majority of young people enter the agency

after an experience of homelessness, though some young people enter prior to experiencing homelessness (e.g., aging out of foster care without placement or experiencing family conflict). The agency provides young people with their own furnished bedroom and offers them a variety of services including medical, behavioral, and supportive services, such as vocational, educational, and recreational programming.

As a part of their recreational programming, TLP built an onsite music studio for young people to engage in various audio and music-based activities, including music and spoken word production. The studio developed out of an organizational commitment to a model of positive youth development that explicitly promotes the inclusion of young people's voices as well as their talents, strengths, and interests in program development. In addition, musically enthusiastic staff members have advocated for the studio on behalf of the young people. All residents are eligible to use the studio following an orientation session. Staff with a background in audio production train young people on how to use the studio equipment and provide them with additional technical support as needed. Although staff members do spend some time in the studio with young people when their schedules permit, they do not supervise the youth, instead preferring to allow young people to function autonomously in the studio. The studio is equipped with of an Apple IMac Desktop computer running Logic Studio audio production software. Logic Studio is an audio production software suite, which includes Logic Pro and Soundtrack Pro, the latter of which was young people's preferred method for editing and producing the audio documentary.

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Selection and Sampling

Selection and sampling for the coconstructed audio documentary group evolved out of the nonprobability purposive and homogenous sampling procedures used in the larger ethnographic study. For the purposes of participant observation and in-depth semistructured interviews, I was interested in observing and interviewing all English speaking young people who engaged in the TLP music studio, with *engagement* operationally defined as those young people working on music production and supporting the music production process. Selection and sampling for the coconstructed audio documentary group continued the use of a nonprobability purposive and homogenous sampling strategy, albeit with an intensified focus. Intensity sampling purposefully selects "information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon intensely, but not extremely" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 28). I employed an intensity sampling strategy for the coconstructed audio documentary group as I was interested in working with the young people who were most engaged with the music studio (i.e., those young people who spent the most time in the studio working on music production and supporting the music production process).

Procedures

While conducting in-depth semistructured interviews with young people, I invited those most engaged in the studio to join the coconstructed audio documentary group. I explained the purpose and nature of the audio documentary and assessed their interest and willingness to engage in the process. In total, four young people ($N = 4$, three young men, one young woman) consented to participate. Once consented, we met as a group to develop a plan of action that outlined the purpose of the coconstructed audio documentary, methods we would use to meet our purpose, and descriptions of what tasks we would accomplish during weekly work sessions.

The agreed-upon purpose of the group was to collaboratively develop an audio documentary that aurally explored the young people's experiences in the music studio and the meaning they attach to their experiences. To do so I provided each young person with a Zoom H1 digital audio recording device that they used to create field recordings. Field recording scenarios included their work in the studio and other environments or situations that they felt were related to their experiences in the studio and their attached meanings. Young people also discussed including their own music and spoken-word productions in the audio documentary. We unanimously agreed that this would be an excellent additional resource for the audio documentary, providing another layer of context to their narrative. In discussing the tasks we would accomplish during weekly sessions, we developed a work plan that outlined tasks for the beginning, middle, and ending phases of the development of the audio documentary. These tasks are described in greater detail in the Findings section. All study procedures complied with the University of Illinois at Chicago Institutional Review Board.

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Analysis

The group analyzed field recordings, original music, and spoken-word productions during our weekly meetings. We listened to and discussed which recordings best embodied and represented young people's experiences in the music studio and their attached meanings. As these recordings emerged, we considered their audio quality. In addition we worked toward equitable representation of young people's voices, including music, in the audio documentary. Throughout this process, we engaged in a democratic decision-making process. When dissension arose, we entered a dialogical process exploring conflict in an effort to reach consensus. In these moments, rather than providing guidance and/or feedback on which recordings I felt best demonstrated or embodied these criteria in an effort to move the project along, I sought to facilitate a process that empowered the young

people to make their own decisions as a group to strengthen the collaborative nature of the audio documentary. Once recordings were selected, we loaded them into Soundtrack Pro and created a session file where they were saved. Once loaded and saved, we began to explore ways to coconstruct the audio documentary, remaining open to a collaborative and democratic process by allowing the recordings that best represented young people's experiences and their attached meanings to guide the production process.

Participation Incentives

Group members received $10 in cash for each weekly meeting they attended as compensation for their time. The stipend was given to members at the beginning of each meeting, prior to engaging in our work. In addition, young people were invited to keep the digital field recorders used for their fieldwork. In doing so, it was my hope that they might be compelled to use audio documentary and related methods and technologies to tell additional stories of strength and resilience.

FINDINGS

The coconstructed audio documentary group met for a total of 12 sessions during the spring and summer of 2012. Session length varied from 2 to 3 hours, often depending on the tasks to be accomplished during each session. Table 1 presents a summary of tasks conceptualized from a stages of group development lens, specifically the beginning, middle, and end phases of the group (Toseland & Rivas, 2012). Table 2 introduces the group members and provides self-reported demographic information.

The rest of this section is dedicated to presenting the findings of the group's work, which are best embodied in the coconstructed audio documentary titled *Superman in the Smallest Space: The Teen Living Programs Music Studio*. A full transcript of the audio documentary follows. Whenever possible, the transcriber utilized a verbatim transcription technique to prioritize young people's voices and language. Readers are encouraged to listen to the documentary as it is truly meant to be aurally experienced. Readers may stream the audio documentary at the following URL: https://soundcloud.com/brianlkelly/tlp-audio-doc-mastered-1

Listeners will note that some of the crossfades, cuts/edits, and production quality in the final mix may not be up to professional audio production standards. In discussing these technical issues and in keeping with the democratic decision-making process described in the Analysis section, the group ultimately decided to keep these portions "as is" in an effort to remain true to the developmental process of the production of audio documentary.

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TABLE 1 Summary of Tasks Completed in the Beginning, Middle, and End Phases of the Coconstructed Audio Documentary Group

Sessions 1–4: Beginning phase
- Facilitator provided equipment overview and training
- Facilitator assisted with troubleshooting any equipment problems
- Group listened to and engaged with examples of audio documentary to expose the young people to the method
- Group developed questions for exploration (e.g., What does the studio mean to me? What challenges do I face in the studio? What lessons have I learned in the studio?)
- Facilitator encouraged young people to begin field recording
- Group listened to initial field recordings and facilitator provided technical feedback, specifically ways to improve the sound quality of field recordings

Sessions 5–8: Middle phase
- Young people continued to engage in field recordings
- Group began to collaboratively select field recordings as well as original music and spoken word productions that best fit the group's purpose
- Group began producing the audio documentary
- Facilitator continued to troubleshoot technical problems and offer technical feedback

Sessions 9–12: End phase
- Group continued to collaboratively select recordings that best fit the group's purpose and continued to produce the audio documentary
- Group completed audio documentary production
- Group edited and mastered the final audio documentary
- Group evaluated it's work and process
- Group premiered the documentary at an all agency meeting

TABLE 2 Group Members' Self-Reported Race and/or Ethnicity, Gender, and Age[a]

Young Person	Identity
Marcus	African American male, age 19 years
Outlaw	African American male, age 20 years
Smurf	African American female, age 20 years
Theo	African American male, age 18 years

a. The group members' names are pseudonyms. They formally consented to pursuing publication of the audio documentary, which includes their work.

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Superman in the Smallest Space: The Teen Living Programs Music Studio

MUSIC: TRACK 1, BY THEO

Smurf: This audio documentary explores a music studio space in a transitional living program for young people experiencing homelessness and other forms of unstable housing. Located in the Bronzeville neighborhood on Chicago's South Side, TLP Belfort House has provided a music studio space for its youth residents since 2006. The studio has been a hub of activity and creativity since that time.

Brian: In the spring of 2012, a researcher from a local university and four youth residents engaged in collaborative, audio-based fieldwork exploring young peoples' experiences while working in the music studio and the meaning they attach to their experiences. Following fieldwork we met as a team to coconstruct an audio documentary that aurally explores these questions and incorporates young peoples' music compositions and spoken word work. Check it out!

Smurf: I mean music is the majority part of my day, like seriously you will not catch me without headphones on, unless I don't have them. It's just like—it's a part of my daily living.

MUSIC: NEVER GIVE UP, MUSIC BY THEO, VOCALS BY TLP YOUTH

You better never ever, ever give up, never
Never give up, no
You better never ever, ever give up, never
Never give up, no
You better never ever, ever give up, ever
Never give up, no
You better never ever, ever give up, never
Never give up, no
I turned them papers in
They say they ain't hiring
I need some airs
And pop's retiring
My block is poor
But we should stop the violence
All I hear is sirens
(Music fades out)

Outlaw: What the studio means to me is . . . freedom. It's like I can go many places in the world and have to worry about rules and regulations and I have to worry about how my actions affects the next man. It's like when I'm in the studio it's just like I can, I can be me, I can be free and I can really let loose and you know and say the things and be the things and create the things I like to create, create. So the studio for me is a place of creativity and freedom.

Outlaw: Initiation to Juliet is basically about Juliet's initiation into a higher learning. So the poem is just about her comin' into that higher consciousness. When I'm in the studio it's like a higher learning for me because it's learnin' how my words affect others. You know it's basically I know that my actions has an immediate effect on my surroundings.

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Music: Bring Me to Life, by Marcus

Outlaw: Initiation of Juliet, by Outlaw.

Come here Juliet
I have the secret to tell you.
Deeper than the abyss itself.
Wise is the soul that remembers thy self.
Lies are the lies of those drunk on the material wealth.
From the assemblies above to the utterance below.
What is the love so deep that it should be feared?
And what is the fear so essential that it should be loved?
(Music fades out)

Smurf: When I am in the studio, to me it's like being in a parallel world or a different world. And I say this because (sighs) when you are in the studio you can be as free as you want to be. There's nobody else around you unless you're recording with a friend or something like that, but most of the time you are in there by yourself making beats or laying down a track, spittn' spoken word. It's just a whole different place to be. You don't gotta put on for nobody. You just in there doing you, being creative. You don't have nobody telling you, "Don't put that there" or "this don't sound right." You get to figure it out on your own. You not being stifled by anybody else, you're just going with the flow, you know. And just in the studio it's – it's like being at peace with yourself. Your mind is totally at ease. It's a whole 'nother place.

Music: Raw Beat, by Marcus

Brian: That's good. I like that a lot. I would definitely like to that have be in the audio documentary.

Smurf: Untitled, by Smurf

She loves me
She love me not
Perp got me seein' flashing lights and polka dots
I'm hot like an oven pre-heated to 350
I think I'm kind of cool
I think I'm kind of nift
But tricky
It's gets a little sticky walking around in my mind
So many lights you will come out blinded

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By knowledge
This journey is epic
A onetime adventure
I'm polygripped to the roof of your thoughts just call me dentures
Chewing you all up in this game
Won three awards now I'm ready for my name to be in the hall of fame
Big dreamin'
My mind is like a locomotive
Cause this thing is always steamin'
I'm beamin'
Up toward the sky sittin' high on my paper plane
Kite surfin' with clouds as my waves
I'm hangin' ten
I'm a half-pint so I'm not trying to go off the deep end
Again
What a spin that was
I had a little magic
Now I'm feeling kind of buzzed
She loves me
She loves me not
Let's just hope my heart didn't just get got
Again

Brian: So, what is this piece about?

Smurf: Well this piece was, I was sittin' outside one day and I was playing with the flower. And then I was doing the, "She loves me, she loves me not," playin' with the flower. And like, I've been going through some stuff with my girlfriend lately. And it's like, I just been thinkin' about a lot of stuff, so my head just been really clouded, but through the cloud it's like I see a lot of good stuff. I'm like, "I'm hot like an oven preheated to 350," 'cause right now my name is kind of everywhere. So, it's like, I'm really on and it's like I won three awards so I'm ready for some 'mo. I wanna be big time. See, and it's like, and at the end when I say, "I hope my heart didn't just get got again," it's like with relationships and they're not my thing. And it's always the other person who be the problem (laughs). So it's like, ok, let's just hope I'm not going through a repeat of what I've been through already.

Brian: Can I ask you one more question?

Smurf: Yeah.

Brian: Does the studio, play any role in any of that? The TLP music studio.

Smurf: Actually the studio is where I filmed the documentary (laughs). The studio space is where I filmed the documentary that won me these

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awards. Cause it was based around TLP. And we recorded here in this studio.

Outlaw: If I could place, any feelings of how I feel of when I am in the studio it'd probably be excitement because before I walk in and when I leave out, I'm just like, "Whoooo baby! Oh my God, thank the lord for this opportunity for putting me in this situation." Because it's kind a like I can do everything I wanna do. I mean I can make music. I can make you move. I can make you sad. I mean, man, I can make you wanna move on in life you know I can get you through those struggles. You know and relate my everyday struggles to you. And that's that's exciting because it's multiple ways that it can end up, you know. So hey I place excitement with it.

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Outlaw: Freestyle, by Outlaw

He gonna let it run and I'm gonna make your lighters burn
I'm gonna face the east cuz –

Nah. Nah I just. Alright, alright just let it run, just let it run. Let me just get a good topic on my head and try to go off of it . . . Ok, 'Law gonna do this free style. First time. It feel like I'm in a real studio. We got the good mic, you know. Feel good. It's a beautiful day out. I'm gonna go like this:

Today I got a lot going on
I'm something like the prince just lookin' for the thorn
Yeah I got a lot of knowledge to see through the storm
An' I'm like unique, way outta your norm
Way I perform
It's somethin' like a boss
Somthin' how you walk away from chances is just your loss
Yeah I'm something like Jesus sacrificin' but no nail to the cross
Yeah
And when I'm in the studio spittin' these bars
That's just the way that I release my energy
Dodgin' my enemies
These niggers is frenemies
How black everything?
(laughs)
Like nah . . .

Outlaw: The most challenges I have with the studio is learning how to deal with the equipment I have no knowledge of. I mean I'm more of a lyricist. I'm, I'm more, I mostly deal with words you know

and poetry, rappin' you know, laying 16ths, you know 32s, whole songs, things of that nature. So when it comes to certain equipment like mastering, and mixing and cutting and fading you know all that type of stuff. . . .

(Outlaw fades out, Music fades in)

Music: Untitled piano improvisation, by Theo

Brian: And so what lessons if any have you learned in the studio?

Theo: One of the most valuable things that I have learned working in the studio space is that teamwork is key. When you're doing a, a collaboration project you can't always be the, the frontrunner you have to you have to work together to get it accomplished or else it won't be the best product that it can be.
(Music fades in)

Music: R.I.P. Granddad, by Marcus

Theo: Um for me the greatest thing is, is being able to form so many positive relationships. It's not always a power struggle. It's, you know, when I can come and collaborate with others to produce a high quality product that many people will enjoy, that's the greatest thing for me 'cause I'm about pleasing my audience.

Smurf: It, it really gives me a place to go and be at peace with myself, you know. It's pretty much like my oasis. It's a place just for me. Even when I am working with somebody else I still feel like I have control over everything that goes on. Really, it's like the studio gives me power. It's like I'm superman in the smallest space. It's a small space, but it feels big. So, and by me being a small person and I have control over a big place in my mind, it pretty much makes me feel good. The studio makes me happy.

Outlaw: The greatest thing about the studio is the finished product. After spending all that time workin' on, brainstormin', critical thinkin' about what to lay down next, what to add, what type of synthesis, what type of audios, you gonna use mono . . . I just feel like when you when you get done with all that and you've got the final product and you look at what you've been workin' on and it's done that's the greatest thing about the studio.

Brian: How do you feel about this finished product? We're getting pretty close, what do you think?

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Outlaw: Um, I think it's um, I feel pretty good about it, you know um, we've been workin', you know, it's been intense, you know. Um, just to see it finally done, now it's kind of like, yeah actually like we made this.
(Music fades out)

DISCUSSION

The coconstructed audio documentary group lent itself exceedingly well to an aural representation of young people's experiences in the music studio and the meaning they attach to their experiences. By combining young people's fieldwork with their original music and spoken-word productions, the group developed a rich and compelling narrative that is inaccessible through traditional ethnographic writing. In addition, the group engaged young people in the research process in several important ways. It provided them with an opportunity to develop and produce a story of their experiences in the studio and their attached meaning in their own language and voice. Several scholars have noted the ethical importance and complexity of the including participants' voices in the research process and product (Denzin 2003; Etherington, 2007; Harrison, MacGibbon, & Morton, 2001; Wahab, 2003). The coconstructed audio documentary group provided a unique opportunity to include members' literal and literary voices in the research and group process (e.g., developing questions and tasks) and product (e.g., young people's narration and production of the audio documentary).

In addition the group called on members to bring their talents, strengths, and interests to the research process, including music and spoken-word production, audio engineering, and project management skills, the latter being particularly important to staying on task and looking toward completion of the project. Lastly, the coconstructed audio documentary group brought a participatory, socially just, and activist dimension to the study by creating opportunities for young people to engage in data collection, analysis, and dissemination of study findings (e.g., premiering the audio documentary at the all agency meeting) and by expanding their relationship with media production and its potential to document and tell additional stories of strength and resilience.

The coconstructed audio documentary group proved particularly useful in engaging and promoting young people's strengths. By providing young people with resources (e.g., time and equipment), a group structure informed by Malekoff's (2004) principles of strengths-based group work (e.g., welcoming young people's talents, strengths, and interests and decentralizing authority), and general and technical support, members developed an audio documentary that demonstrates their talents, strengths, and interests. In listening to the audio documentary it is clear that members engaged existing

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compositional and production related talents, strengths, and interests and throughout the process learned new skills as well. Additionally, throughout the development of the audio documentary, young people demonstrated interpersonal and intrapersonal skills in negotiating decisions around story development, recording, production, and editing. Although some of these decisions ultimately affected the production quality of the final product (e.g., less-than-optimal microphone placement resulting in less than optimal field recordings, long or abrupt fades), in the end the product and the story were more importantly informed by their group process rather than professional audio production standards. This ultimately resulted in a compelling strengths-based narrative of what music and the music studio means to them.

The coconstructed audio documentary group also provided an opportunity for the development of a youth–adult partnership in the music studio between the young people and me. This partnership provided us with an opportunity to work collaboratively and experience each other's strengths in the process of developing the audio documentary. Young people commented on the importance of this partnership in completing the coconstructed audio documentary, noting that it was the first project any of them had completed in the studio, suggesting that both parties (i.e., the young people and me) were needed to realize the documentary.

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Limitations

Given the small sample size and specificity of the research methodology and site, these findings are not generalizable to all young people experiencing homelessness living in transitional living programs with access to a music studio. In addition, the findings are not generalizable to all young people who might engage in strengths-based, audio documentary informed group work. Finally, the findings presented in this article focus on the product of the coconstructed audio documentary group. Future research will analyze recordings of the coconstructed audio documentary group sessions in an effort to explore the relational and process-oriented components of the group. In doing so, I examine the potential relationship between youth–adult partnerships and opportunities for positive youth development.

Implications

This research has important implications for group work education, practice, and research. Group work educators may use this study as an example of strengths-based group work that employs audio and music-based activities as well as an example of participatory, strengths-based, and socially just group work with young people experiencing homelessness. Group work

practitioners may use this study as initial empirical support for the successful utilization of audio and music-based activities in group work with young people as a means to engage and promote their strengths. Finally, group work researchers will note that this study responds to calls in qualitative literature to establish new mediums for presenting research findings, as well drawing on interdisciplinary production techniques and technologies from the field of documentary studies and communications (Makagon & Neumann, 2009). In doing so, the audio documentary group has produced a product that is accessible to audiences beyond the academy and academic journal readership with the potential to have an impact on public perceptions and policy decisions.

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CONCLUSION

This article has presented findings from a coconstructed audio documentary group that aurally explores young people experiencing homelessness experiences in a music studio and the meanings they attach to their experiences. Findings suggest that young people's engagement in the studio as well as participation in the development of the co-constructed audio documentary group engaged and promoted their talents, strengths, and interests. Future research will continue to explore the use of music-based activities and audio documentary in group work with young people and the potential to use these activities as a means to engage and promote their strengths.

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