My Photo, My Voice: Reducing Self-Stigma of Felons & Drug Addicts through the use of Storytelling and Photographs

Jordan Ferrick
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My Photo, My Voice: Reducing Self-Stigma of Felons & Drug Addicts through the use of Storytelling and Photographs

Jordan J. Ferrick

PIM 77

Seminar Date: May 6th-10th 2019

Advisor: Dr. Kelly Teamey

Author Note

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Student Name: Jordan Ferrick

Date: May 11th, 2019
Acknowledgements

This capstone would not have been possible without the support and encouragement from many individuals. I could not have completed this project without you all, and I am so thankful for all of the help along the way.

First, I want to thank all of the men at Phoenix Rise House in Bellows Falls, VT, for being a part of this project and always treating me with utmost respect. Their openness, vulnerability, and resilience will forever inspire me. They are the heart of this project and without them this project would not have been possible.

I am forever indebted to my director, professor, and most importantly mentor, Susie Belleci, as well as the entire team at the Greater Falls Community Justice Center. Thank you for taking a chance on me, believing in me, and supporting me in all the work that we do at the GFCJC. This research project would not have been possible without them all: Susie Belleci, Mike Malick, Samia Abbass, and Fabio Ayala. So much love.

I am extremely thankful and have an immense amount of gratitude for my advisor and mentor, Dr. Kelly Teamey, who has taught me more about research and my own learning processes than I ever could have imagined. The high caliber of this project would not have been possible without her.

In addition, I extend my unwavering appreciation to my parents. I am so lucky and thankful to have had two loving and supportive parents consistently exemplify strength, kindness, and empathy to both self and others.

And finally, with infinite love and gratitude, I thank my D5 family, Fadia Thabet, Fabio Ayala, and Olivia Clark, for always holding me accountable, making me laugh whenever I thought laughter was not possible, picking me up when I fell down (literally), and always believing in me. I am forever grateful.

Thank you.
Jordan Ferrick
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Abstract

In the United States, when we talk about addiction and incarceration, what are the stories that are usually told and from whose perspective? This project assembled a multi-method approach incorporating photovoice and a semi-participatory action research (PAR) methodology to establish community connections and facilitate healing through personal storytelling and listening. Working with Phoenix Rise House in Bellows Falls, VT, a transitional house for (12) men who are formerly incarcerated and/or recovering addicts, this research addresses the question: How can internalized stigma, of felons and addicts, be reduced with photo storytelling? Underpinning the semi-PAR methodological approach is a theoretical framework incorporating aspects from critical theory, radical humanism, and Freire’s praxis of critical consciousness, aiming to do the following: amplify the voices that tend to be ignored, encourage greater participation in the healing process, and address power-relations and active citizenship. This project primarily involved a grounded theory analysis to unearth key themes of that emerged through the research process using a focus group, group circle sessions, one-on-one interviews, a survey, and my personal reflective journals. The findings and conclusions of this study demonstrate the complexity of and around stigma and how it affects everyone from individuals to the larger community. Themes that emerged from the findings include systemic challenges, identity, healing, relationships, and humanizing. While the study focused on the reduction of internalized stigma, the data also offered insights into the connections between identity, relationships, and self-worth. I suggest that future research incorporate different demographics and include a final community exhibit to showcase participants’ work. All too often, addicts and felons are seen through a single lens, but in reality, they too are much more complicated. To truly understand their situations, one must look at them holistically.

Keywords: Addiction, incarceration, stigma, storytelling, circle processes, photovoice, healing, identity
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviations</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Alcoholics Anonymous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BF</td>
<td>Bellows Falls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COSA</td>
<td>Circles of Support and Accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOC</td>
<td>Department of Corrections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GFCJC</td>
<td>Greater Falls Community Justice Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Narcotics Anonymous</td>
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<tr>
<td>NFL</td>
<td>National Football League</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAR</td>
<td>Participatory Action Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phoenix Rise House</td>
<td>Bellows Falls Transitional House</td>
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<td>RJ</td>
<td>Restorative Justice</td>
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<td>RP</td>
<td>Restorative Practices</td>
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<td>VAHS</td>
<td>Vermont Agency of Human Services</td>
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<td>VDH</td>
<td>Vermont Department of Health</td>
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<td>VT</td>
<td>Vermont</td>
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## Conceptual Prelude

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sustainable Communities</th>
<th>Communities that will not only survive into the future, but also thrive by providing alternatives for bad behavior and other negative actions that cause harm to the community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stigma</strong></td>
<td>A mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person (<em>Merriam-Webster dictionary</em>, 2019). Or simply, stereotype awareness. There are two types: public (or external) stigma such as the general population endorsing prejudice that manifests discrimination toward people holding the trait that is being stigmatized; Self-stigma, or internalized stigma, that creates experiences of diminished self-esteem and self-efficacy (<em>Corrigan, Watson, and Barr</em>, 2006 p 875).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Systems</strong></td>
<td>An interconnected set of elements that is coherently organized in a way that achieves something (<em>Meadows</em>, 2008 p 11). Systems do not function in a linear process or individually, but instead they are constantly in flux and changing as overlapping systems interact and are at play within our societies, with each system having different purposes and understandings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Systems Thinking</strong></td>
<td>A set of synergistic analytic skills used to improve the capability of identifying and understanding systems, predicting their behaviors, and devising modifications to them in order to produce desired effects (<em>Arnold &amp; Wade</em>, 2015 p 675) The way systems intersect can often cause conflict as the purpose or function of the systems might be in opposition. Our social systems, government systems, school systems, employment systems, and many others are constantly overlapping and impacting one another. The effects that these impacts have on individuals can differ in immense ways depending on the various systems that individuals are embedded in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transformation</strong></td>
<td>An individual and community’s increased capacity to resolve differences and forge solutions in different ways. This can take place in people, systems, relationships, and more (<em>Pranis et al.</em>, 2003).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section I: Introduction

In the United States, when we talk about addiction and incarceration, what are the stories that are usually told and from whose perspective? In looking at issues of addiction and incarceration, the questions related to who creates these stories and whose voices are or are not being heard, are particularly important. This is particularly true when trying to understand and implement programs that get at the core issues being confronted by the people dealing with these problems. We must also ask ourselves the difficult questions of how many times we ourselves have looked at an addict, or someone who has a felony record, and thought about or even acted upon all of the stereotypes that come along with those labels; that they are selfish, dangerous, violent, and even reckless. I personally have met addicts and people who were formerly incarcerated and have seen them only as their “single story” instead of looking deeper into who they are beyond those labels of “addict” or “felon”. As a researcher and local community member, I designed and developed this study to examine appropriate methods around how to create safe spaces for those who have been systematically “othered.” My aim has been to provide a platform for those ‘othered’ to share their personal narratives and experiences directly, instead of what is too often the norm of having others within society speak for them.

Community resilience, relationship building, and self-empowerment are core features within the field of Sustainable Development (Callaghan & Colton, 2008). I argue that, in the pursuit of creating sustainable communities, focusing on repairing harmed individuals, families, and communities must be a fundamental goal if sustainability is to be achieved and maintained. However, this goal is often overlooked and instead, putting a stop to direct violence, i.e. physical and visible violence, is what is customarily seen as the ultimate goal (Galtung, 1990). While this is critical to the process of building sustainable communities, it is only a step in the right direction towards sustainability. For the purpose of this Capstone, I define sustainable communities as communities that will not only survive into the future, but also thrive by providing alternatives for bad behavior and other negative actions that cause harm to the community. By addressing wrongs committed by community members, i.e. by focusing on the harm, impact, and needs of those involved, community members become more resilient, and therefore, can build on creating a stronger, more sustainable, society (Boyes-
Watson (2008); Galtung (1990); Jurkowski, Rivera, & Hammel (2009); Linabary, Krishna, & Connaughton (2017); Little and Froggett (2009); Rappaport (1995); Senehi (2009) Schumacher (2014)).

In looking at the creation of sustainable communities, the current opioid epidemic and problems with the criminal justice system, have left visible marks of pain and destruction on communities across the country. The opioid crisis is an excellent example of systems, choices, and behaviors that cause great harm to not only the individuals engaged in this behavior, but also to their communities as a whole. According to the National Institute for Drug Abuse, in 2016, there were 101 opioid-related overdose deaths in Vermont—a rate of 18 deaths per 100,000 persons and more than the national rate of 13 deaths per 100,000 persons (NIDA, 2018).

My work at the Greater Falls Community Justice Center (GFCJC), a not-for-profit organization located in Southern Vermont in the town of Bellows Falls, is focused on providing alternatives to punitive justice. In comparison to the rest of Vermont, Windham County (where Bellows Falls is located) is disproportionately negatively affected by economic inequalities, the opioid crisis, and crime. With a population of only 43,000 (and only 3,000 in Bellows Falls), Windham County, one of fourteen counties in Vermont, is the sixth most populated county in the state. According to statistics published by the Vermont Agency of Human Services (2016), Bellows Falls, VT ranks amongst the worst in the state in indicators related to victims of crime and victims of systemic oppression.

At its most active and prosperous, Bellows Falls before the Great Depression, boasted of more than 40 mills and factories lining the Connecticut River, with steam locomotives belching out smoke at one of New England’s major rail yards. However, because of the severe loss of all of these businesses and industries, the town has been in a long, swift decline and there are some serious problems left in their wake (McGauley, 2017).

In Southern Vermont, intergenerational poverty has been a cause of trauma, addiction, and incarceration, leaving many families broken and struggling to make ends meet. Due to the closing of its once prosperous mills, residents of Bellows Falls have seen employment opportunities fade and generational poverty wearing down their community. In a report published by the Vermont Department of Health (2018), Windham county has some of the highest rates of poverty, as well as substance and domestic abuse in the entire state. It is in reaction to these statistics that this research project was created; as a small, localized method to work on breaking down these destructive issues with the people and communities most effected. Through more
constructive interactions with one another, community members can collaborate around how to address the issues most affecting them. The people in this community can begin to deal with these damaging issues with the goal of working towards both individual and community healing, so that all involved can be a part of ending these cycles of violence.

The GFCJC was started in 2011 by two local former parole officers and is driven by the mission to serve the needs of residents of Bellows Falls and the surrounding towns by promoting Restorative Justice (RJ) and Restorative Practices (RP) to address conflict and crime. The Center engages citizens through education and involvement in RJ and RP practices to restore relationships, repair past harms, and build community connections (“About Us,” n.d. para. 8). The GFCJC believes that there is potential for any citizen of the community to live in harmony with their neighbors, the local police, and other state agencies, and to contribute to the civility and well-being of the community (“About Us,” n.d. para. 10).

From my work at the GFCJC, my observations of how different RJ practices are used (such as circle processes), and my reflections on how the drug epidemic has affected the Bellows Falls community, I realized how much stigma surrounds drug addiction and incarceration. The strong stigma surrounding drug addiction and incarceration has dramatic effects anywhere, but I believe particularly in small, rural communities because everything and everyone is so interconnected. I decided that I wanted my research to focus on steps that could be taken to help tackle these enormous problems related to addiction and incarceration that are impacting this small community of Bellows Falls and, arguably, communities all over the world.

After doing some initial literature research, the idea of using photos to help start a conversation and spark an individual’s and communities’ desire to share and listen to someone’s story captured my attention and interest. As part of my job at GFCJC, I work with a transitional house called Phoenix Rise House, also in BF. The house can hold up to fifteen men who have recently been released from prison or from a drug rehabilitation facility. My job, since August 2018 until today, is to work with this client base and help them to identify sober activities that they might enjoy. My job is also to help them connect more effectively with the community in which they are living. This task of building bridges with the community provided a great opportunity to set up a semi-participatory action research project using a method known as photovoice.
Photovoice is a methodological approach that uses photography to promote positive social change (PhotoVoice, Vision & Mission, pp1). Each week, we, took photos of things that we each believed represented a word related to the stigma of addiction and incarceration. By using photovoice’s approach to my research, participants were given the opportunity to represent themselves and tell their own stories in their own voices.

The men at Phoenix Rise struggle with various symptoms of being ostracized within their communities due to their past actions and labels that have been imprinted on their reputations. One commonly held struggle between them, that they all openly discussed, is the deep internalized stigma that they are constantly battling with around their committed crimes and drug use. The aim of my research was to address these stigmas in order to give participants a sense of agency over their identities and reconnect individuals with society by using circle processes and the particular storytelling method of photovoice. This method began with the participants first taking photos around a theme they believed related to stigma and then secondly, sharing their story around that photo.

I believe that using the power of storytelling can be a way to tackle the various issues these stigmas create and continue to have reverberating effects on the community at large. Circle processes and photovoice, and their impacts on healing; both for the individual and the larger community, I believe have huge grassroots potential for transformation. I define transformation as an individual and community’s increased capacity to resolve differences and forge solutions in different ways (Pranis et al., 2003). A primary tool used in restorative practices are circle processes and the sharing of one’s own personal story and truth. Circle processes draw from the tradition of the Talking Circle, common among First Nation cultures in North America (Pranis, 2005). While this practice is still common among many indigenous and First Nations peoples around the world, it has been appropriated into a practice and inspiration for many current, non-indigenous Western cultures. Circles bring a sense of safety that is grounded in trust, confidentiality, not feeling alone, and not being judged, which leads to a freedom to express genuine emotions; and increased empathy and compassion (Schumacher, 2014 p 4). This way of sharing, listening, and reflecting has helped many within the community of Bellows Falls turn their lives around from only being focused on the negatives to having perspectives that guide them towards
a brighter future. While it is only a small step, each community member that is supported by these circles has the potential to support another community member through the same process.

As the drug epidemic continues to plague this small rural town and crime rates continue to rise (VAHS, 2016), there is a greater need for restorative justice practices. The aim of this project is to propose and test ways in which circle processes can be used to address these problems and move towards creating a more restorative and supportive community. The work of RJ and RP processes is to change the negative dialogue around stigma into one that is more positive and helps both the individual and her/his community to heal and move forward. Working with the men at Phoenix Rise, my research aims to address the following question:

_How can internalized stigma, of felons and addicts, be reduced with photo storytelling?_

I was interested in exploring how these stigmas affect those labeled as felons and addicts and the implications that those effects have on the wider community.

Sub questions include:

1. _How does storytelling through circle processes create a space for healing?_

2. _In what ways do personal storytelling and photovoice provide an opportunity for participatory action research to be applied to the research process?_

Everyone has a story to tell. The process of sitting in a space and taking time to deeply listen to others’ stories, as well as have the opportunity to speak your truth without worrying of interruption, disagreement, or hostility, is an experience that does not happen often in our busy, everyday lives. This project proposes a method to create community connections and facilitate healing through personal storytelling and listening.

This paper begins with a literature review in section II that provides an overview of the research that has been done around storytelling, photovoice, circle processes, stigma, and healing that provided a foundation for the creation of this project. Section III provides detailed information on the methodological processes and methods utilized throughout this project. Section IV reveals the findings collected and the reflections I made throughout the research process. And finally, this paper finishes with section V, challenges and opportunities, where I discuss the gaps in the research and provide insight into what I believe future research could expand on and add to the information and knowledge gained from this project.
Section II: Literature Review

The goal of this literature review is to present an overview of research that has been done around personal narratives in group settings using circles, in order to understand how storytelling processes can contribute to empathy building, stigma reduction, and healing. In the process of reconstructing and reconciling from past trauma and violence, the hope is that through empathy building, stigma reduction, and healing, the cycle of violence can be broken. The review of literature that follows, includes a selection of journal articles, peer reviewed articles, and books, addresses several themes associated with narrative storytelling as related to stigma and self-identity.

The following sections of this literature review will examine narrative storytelling as it relates to one’s sense of self and highlight some common themes between different literature sources. The scope of this review is wide, therefore not all existing literature could be included and analyzed. Sources that were chosen, highlight the foundation of the study’s design and demonstrate how the themes of storytelling, circle processes, photovoice, stigma, and healing intersect and results that come from those intersections. Connecting these themes has the ability to be transformative, leading to better and stronger communities. With the potential of transformation underpinning this research project and methodology, each theme and theory supports and identifies how transformation can emerge and the reasons this is so important.

Below is an analysis highlighting the prominent themes of storytelling processes within the spectrum of literature that has been examined. The themes that were particularly prominent and those that contributed most significantly to my research included: storytelling, circle processes, photovoice, stigma, and healing. While the themes of storytelling, circle processes, and photovoice were specifically investigated because they were methods that would be used in the research, the themes of stigma and healing emerged from the literature and through the nature of the work that I have been doing at the GFCJC. Through my examination of the literature, as well as my experience in the field, I found stigma as a main theme in my research around, and especially pertinent to, understanding the issues that personally affect those who are recovering from drug addiction and incarceration (Chase (2005); Corrigan, Watson & Barr (2006); Dessel & Rogge (2008); Little & Froggett (2009); Martin-Baro, (1994); Yanos, Roe, & Lysaker (2011)). For the purposes of this review, I define
stigma, both internalized and externalized stigma, as a mark of shame or dishonor that is a connected to a particular experience, quality, or person.

This literature review begins with an explanation of the methodology in order to offer more clarity into the process of how the literature was discovered and selected. Next, storytelling is defined and then followed by a description of different forms of narrative storytelling that also address the how and why these different forms are used in healing processes. Finally, the impacts of storytelling through these forms are discussed. The literature review concludes with a section discussing the gaps within this scope of research as well as mention suggestions for further work.

Methodology

The approach to this analysis of the relevant literature addressing stigma through storytelling, circle processes, and photovoice is to identify common themes across different fields of study and practice. My approach to selecting, reviewing, and analyzing the literature was to identify prominent themes that were related to narrative storytelling in relation to drug addiction, incarceration, and community development while also looking into the intersectionality of these matters. How these processes and issues overlap is the core of this research project.

The process of finding key literature took several forms. I used strategic terms in Google Scholar, JStor, and SIT’s online library reserve as the main sources. The strategy in searching started out by using words that were crucial to the project: “storytelling”, “incarceration”, “addiction”, “circle processes”. From there common themes emerged from the readings and further terms developed. These strategic terms included “stigma + storytelling”, “photovoice + storytelling”, “internalized stigma + drug addiction + incarceration”, “crime + stigma”, “first-person storytelling + healing”, “circle processes + community empowerment”, “forgiveness + circles”. I decided to use these terms since they examine various aspects of storytelling, storytelling processes, and healing with the intention of determining what different researchers and institutions have found to be successful as well as some of the key challenges. In addition, I looked at reference lists from core documents (such as Arai (2018); Boyes-Watson (2008); Dessel and Rogge (2008); Galtung (1990); Pranis et al. (2003); Senehi (2002); Wang & Burris (1997); Zehr (2002)) that contained poignant and strong arguments
that helped push my research in a particular direction, i.e. towards the emerging themes. Methodologically, while most are from a qualitative research perspective, there were a few studies that took on a quantitative analysis, and several took on a mixed methods approach where they included quantitative aspects within the research presented.

As relevant literature was examined, distinct themes emerged. However, while the literature emphasized the themes in different ways, further analysis of the content demonstrated that they overlapped in various ways. While there is extensive literature that was not included, the discussion below outlines the literature that directed the path of my research.

**Storytelling**

Storytelling has been a form of communication for hundreds of thousands of years. Before written language, oral storytelling was how people passed on knowledge, experience, and wisdom to future generations. Today, storytelling is often considered a child’s pastime, a way for children to connect with lessons and virtues that their culture deems essential to their growing up to become mature members of their society. However, storytelling is not just for children. For example, lawyers use stories to connect the jury with their clients to prove guilt or innocence, and Hollywood is a billion-dollar industry because of people’s affinity for stories. Also, news reporters use stories to connect people to what is going on around the world. Stories are a part of our everyday lives, through entertainment, the legal system, media, etc. They are at the heart of how our society, and societies all around the world, function.

Storytelling can take many forms, but for the purpose of this study, I will focus my research around first-person storytelling, or personal narratives. The reason for focusing on first-person storytelling is because this project uses first-person storytelling as a tool for engagement during the group sessions using photovoice and circles. The main sources I have relied on are a mixture of scholarly articles, research studies, and books that discuss how storytelling activities can be used as a form of community intervention and as way to develop authentic representation of both individual and community voices from Little and Froggett (2009), Boyes-Watson (2005 & 2008), and Senehi (2002).
Little and Froggett (2009), describe narrative storytelling as a mental process of organizing experiences in a meaning driven and reciprocal relationship with culture; it is central to how people construct and understand their experiences (p 459). Their research is based on a comparison study of the use of storytelling as a participatory art form within a community development project and a community and healthy living center in the United Kingdom. Their research examines storytelling processes and the methodological implications of researching storytelling (p 458). The relationship between identity and culture plays a huge role in how we see ourselves in the world and how we understand our personal experiences. It is through storytelling, Little and Frogget explain, that we can learn more critically about our own culture and also how culture constructs our perceptions and experiences of the world. For example, the same experience can be told in different ways, depending on who tells the story and how they experienced it. Cultures emphasize emotions and therefore aspects of personal identity are also emphasized and looked at differently. Similarly, Yanos, Roe, and Lysaker (2011) also emphasize the relationship between narrative and identity, highlighting that a person’s experience with his or her identity is not merely a matter of a set of particular beliefs about oneself, but is fundamentally experienced as a series of meaningful events arranged in a storied manner (p 581). Their research focuses on developing a new group-based approach to the treatment of internalized stigma of those with severe mental illness, which is based around storytelling and cognitive therapy. As we craft our identities throughout our lives, our narratives are also changing. In the same way, as our narratives change, our identities are also transformed.

Bruner (1987), argues similarly that personal identity is inextricably bound within the stories we tell about ourselves to others, to those we cherish and when we review these stories with ourselves in private moments. Bruner’s piece takes on a theoretical exploratory study around narrative and the relationship between our lives and the narratives we tell. The telling of one’s own story can have numerous implications on one’s own feelings as well on those who are witnessing and listening to the story. How we share our stories can reveal a lot about who we are and what we are going through. In the same way, the stories that we tell ourselves can also impact the way we view ourselves in the world and how we develop relationships. In a book on their work using circle processes, at a community center outside of Boston (Roca), Boyes-Watson (2008) argues
that the act of putting a wordless experience into a story and telling that story to others, who open their hearts to the emotional truth of that narrative in all of its horror, repossesses and redefines that experience (p 154).

On the other hand, Smith (1981), whose literature focuses on the theory behind narrative, simply defines narrative as someone telling someone else that something happened. For Smith, there is no relationship or reciprocity needed. There is less of a relationship seen here, and instead just actions and events are highlighted. Smith does not stress feelings and emotions as critical to storytelling. Additional literature, such as all the other sources mentioned in this review, argues that this is not the case, and that storytelling is in fact, much more than just a transfer of words from one person to another. I would add, that this source of literature is close to 40 years old and perhaps perceptions and understandings have changed.

As the literature briefly outlined above demonstrates, there is a wide spectrum of how storytelling can be defined. For the purposes of my research, I am focusing on the relationship of storytelling to self-identity, healing, and stigma. While Smith may define narrative solely as something being told to someone, further literature (Boyces-Watson (2008); Bruner (1987); Dessel and Rogge (2008); Galtung (1990); Little and Froggett (2009); Pranis et al. (2003); Senehi (2002); Wang & Burris (1997); Yanos, Roe, and Lysaker (2011); Zehr (2002)) argues that personal storytelling can be so much more, with links to identity, self-reflection, and conflict resolution, to name a few.

Senehi (2002) focuses on a sub-type of narration; the relating of narratives in person, orally, to an audience of at least one (p 44). In her critical exploratory review on the role of cultural production in the process of social conflicts and their transformation, Senehi (2002) states that storytelling is a direct interpersonal interaction and can generate and sustain person-to-person relationships in immediate and dynamic ways; narrative is a methodology for both apprehending and presenting knowledge (p 44). Senehi emphasizes the power of narrative, both negative and positive. Depending on the knowledge being presented, narratives can bring up a range of emotions that create either positive or negative reactions. If a negative emotion, stereotype, or stigma gets brought up, and it connects with those that are listening, storytelling can deepen and support those negative emotions and messages. In addition, when interpreting storytelling, there is also a danger of "misinterpretation" by those outside of the “cultural” context. It is for these reasons that Senehi
invites relationships people own elaborates, circle the schools, and approaches contemporary instance, in contexts. Circle Processes internalized following healing the community and relationship building.

The literature around storytelling for transformation was prioritized because storytelling processes are the basis for this research project. Out of this literature the themes of circle processes, photovoice, stigma, and healing all stemmed from practices of sharing personal narratives and listening to others share theirs. The following sections outline how these themes connect to storytelling and how they can facilitate a reduction of internalized stigma.

**Circle Processes**

As briefly depicted above, storytelling can take many forms and can be used in many different contexts. One way of facilitating personal narrative storytelling is through the use of circle processes. As stated in the introduction, circle processes are drawn from indigenous traditions of the Talking Circle, common, for instance, among First Nations cultures in North America (Pranis, 2005). "Circles" offer an alternative to contemporary meeting processes that often rely on hierarchical, win-lose positioning, and victim/rescuer approaches to relationships and problem-solving (Pranis et al, 2003). In their book, Pranis et al combine theory and practice to outline the structures and nature that make up circle processes as they are used in communities, schools, correctional settings, and in healing various forms of harm.

Salvail (2015), in their qualitative study on experiences of storytelling and restorative justice, adds that the safety that is allowed in circle translates into an ability to feel comfortable when speaking. Sitting in a circle and following the process, allows for more coordinated and participatory storytelling. Salvail (2015) elaborates, stating stories [in circle processes] allow listeners to become active participants in considering their own stories, and in some cases, taking action to change for the better (p 62). Circles bring together different people in a different way to talk about (through personal narratives) different topics; they help create new relationships between co-workers, clients, supervisors, colleagues, and community. This new way of “seeing” invites people to think, speak, and act differently (Boyes-Watson, 2008 p 174).
Different researchers and practitioners use different terms for seemingly similar approaches. Schumacher (2014), for example, uses the term Talking Circles in their qualitative research study on a restorative practices program in an urban high school. Adding that talking circles were created on the premise that people are “hardwired to connect” (Commission on Children at Risk, 2003) and that personal growth occurs in connection through mutual empathy and mutual empowerment (Jordan et al., 1991) (p 9). Pearce et al. (2017), on the other hand, uses the term circles of support in their research, exploring alternative notions of resilience through reflection, dialogue, and action using photovoice, adds that circles represent a continuous cycle of giving and receiving, a mutual reciprocity that promotes resiliency. Boyes-Watson (2008) uses the term peacemaking circles in their book, describing a youth development program that serves high risk young people in one of the densest, impoverished, ethnically diverse and troubled communities in the U.S. They discuss how circles can be used as a way towards justice and accountability. As Boyes-Watson describes, it is often through entering and participating in a circle that participants leave with a sense of having experienced a deep feeling of justice; the justice of being heard, the justice of being respected, the justice of hearing others speak from their hearts, and the justice of working things out in ways that honor the needs of everyone involved (p 3-4).

While there are a multitude of different names for the process of participating in a circle, the concept and values remain the same- to speak and listen from the heart. Boyes-Watson (2008) reflect on peacemaking circles, stating that circles create a growing awareness that, despite all of our profound differences, we are also, as human beings, one and the same (p 14). In a different article, but using the same organization and circle processes, Roca, Boyes-Watson (2005) describe how peacemaking circles provide a consistent structure for open and democratic communication that enhance the formation of positive relationships in families, communities, and systems. In this article, the authors introduce the theory and practice behind peacemaking circles, suggest ways to implement circles within organizations, and outline challenges and lessons of doing so, specifically within the context of child welfare.

Circles provide a space for story sharing and story listening. It is through these processes that transformation can begin to develop. The literature presented in this section is comprised of mostly scholarly
books (Boyes-Watson (2008); Pranis (2005); & Pranis et al (2003)) and research studies (Pearce et al. (2017); Salvail (2015); & Schumacher (2014)) that emphasize the method of using circles to address issues ranging from conflict to personal growth to community change. Literature was chosen that focused both on the origins of circles and on how circles have been adapted to meet specific needs. It is clear from the literature presented, that circles are a powerful and versatile tool for building sustainable communities. It was Boyes-Watson’s book on Peacemaking Circles that impacted my research and spoke most directly to what I wanted to achieve. The work that Roca is doing in their community combines each of the themes that this project aimed to address with the goal of transformation in mind. Much of this project was based on the work that Roca is doing.

**Photovoice**

Another form of storytelling is through a practice known as photovoice. The practice is arguably simple; it is a process that puts cameras into the hands of participants in the research project, to enable them to act as recorders, and potential catalysts for change, in their own communities (Wang & Burris, 1997 p 369) – and therefore giving them a voice through the use of photography. Participants then contextualize their photos through personal storytelling. The literature surrounding photovoice, captures how the approach was started and how it has been modified through different projects, needs, and audiences. The literature on photovoice is comprised of mostly scholarly articles and studies that use photovoice as a Participatory Action Research method. Using photovoice as a PAR method, researchers have developed projects that seek to address a wide variety of needs. I was interested in how these different needs and outcomes compared to each other in an attempt to understand how using photovoice could be applied and adapted to this research project and the specific community in which I would be working in for the GFCJC (Bellows Falls, VT).

Since its origin in 1992, the use of photovoice has increased and become widely known throughout the sustainable development community and research world, due to its potentially transformative and participatory nature. Photovoice was developed as a Participatory Action Research (PAR) method by Wang and Burris in their research of Chinese village women to get an idea of their everyday health and work lives (Wang & Burris, 1997). PAR is intent on grounding knowledge making in community realities, needs, and expertise (Liebenberg, 2018 p 1). PAR is the underpinning theory for photovoice as it emphasizes collaboration
on all levels that, when used intentionally, create networks established for especially silenced and marginalized members of communities and societies to meaningfully add their voices to discussions of policy and resource allocation (Liebenberg, 2018 p 7). Wang and Burris founded photovoice as a PAR method after being influenced by documentary photography, feminist theory, and Paulo Freire’s methods, specifically *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and critical consciousness or *conscientização* in Portuguese. Freire, whose work was focused on alternative approaches to education, wanted to have students and teachers work as equals to collaboratively co-create knowledge through a process of collective introspection and dialogue. His goal was to facilitate a new awareness of self-in-context that could inform social change (Liebenberg, 2018 p 3). Freire (2017) stressed the use of visual images as a way to enable people to think critically about their community, and to start a dialogue around the social and political powers that impact their lives.

For Wang & Burris (1997), the over-arching goal was to create a practice that encouraged health education and critical consciousness in order to promote grassroots action and change (Wang & Burris, 1997). The photovoice practice is powerful because it recognizes that people often have an expertise and insight into their own communities and worlds that professionals and outsiders lack (Wang & Burris, 1997 p 370). In their study, Wang & Burris (1997) noted that photovoice gave the women a tool for directly observing and documenting their community’s native strengths as well as its problems. This tool allowed the group to analyze critically many of the relations and conditions within their own community, which in turn, encouraged collective action.

In addition to the process briefly outlined above, photovoice can also be described as having three goals: (1) to enable people to record and reflect their community’s strengths and concerns, (2) to promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issues through large and small group discussion of photographs, and (3) to reach policymakers (Wang & Burris, 1997 p 369) (see appendix P for infographic). With community-based participatory research principles in mind, photovoice stresses empowerment with an emphasis on individual and community strengths, co-learning, community capacity building, and balancing research and action (Israel et al., 1998).
Over the last twenty years throughout the literature, the value, importance, and method of photovoice have been persistently documented across disciplines with examples that include: water rights with First Nations People in Canada (Bradford, Zagozewski, & Bharadwaj, 2016), drug prevention with rural Hawaiian youth (Helm et al., 2015), urban food justice in the United States (Harper et al., 2017), critical consciousness (Carlson, Engebretson, & Chamberlain, 2006), and rural health in the United States (Royse & Dignan, 2008) (Bowers, 2017 p 2). In another example, in their community-based participatory research that Carlson et al. (2006) conducted on the use of photovoice as a research methodology, they analyzed that their photovoice project was able to generate a social process of critical consciousness and active grassroots participation, thereby, facilitating empowerment of participants by providing multiple opportunities for reflection, critical thinking, and then active engagement (p 836). Wang et al. (2000) furthers this statement by adding that photovoice can create an opportunity for society’s most vulnerable members to speak from their own experience and can change the quality of discussion among themselves and those who advocate their well-being (p 88).

The process of sharing and reflecting creates a space to have critical dialogues regarding how problems are defined (Langhout et al., 2015 p 82). Photovoice takes the process of sharing and listening to personal stories to another level by encouraging social action. This process can be applied in a variety of different settings, with various populations, for a diverse array of reasons. It is for this reason that photovoice has the potential to bring communities together in ways that few other research or action-based methodologies can (Langhout et al., 2015). While it can be seen as another form of storytelling, the intentionality and drive behind photovoice creates a platform for change, empowerment, and action.

It is because this method is so useful for visualizing complex issues, self-empowerment, creating a groundwork for community change, and transformation that I have chosen to use photovoice as the primary research methodology and foundation of this project. This project takes place in the small, rural town of Bellows Falls, Vt where men recovering from addiction and recently released from prison are considered to be one of the more vulnerable populations. By using photos to demonstrate their struggles, I hope to be able to
start a critical dialogue amongst the participants and eventually within the larger community on the impacts of stigma—both on themselves and the people around them.

**Stigma**

Whether physical violence occurs or other forms of violence, such as emotional, systemic, or cultural take place, the creation of stereotypes and the treatment of “outgroups” can generate deep wounds and have devastating effects among individuals and their communities. As Dessel and Rogge (2008) explain, whether based in prejudice, social identity, emotions, ideology, values, communication styles, or resources, human beings tend to be attached to their beliefs (p 199). Humans are inclined to categorize and stereotype others into “outgroups,” and dominate others in a way that frequently leads to violence. It is often the stories that we tell ourselves, and others, that contribute to the perpetuation of these stereotypes and stigma development.

Stigma was a theme that came out of the research, but, at first glance, it did not seem to be as obviously connected to storytelling as the other themes. However, after extensively searching for literature that focused on defining stigma and then addressing its impacts, personal storytelling and story-listening were often methods of data collection in many of the research studies. The literature from Little and Froggett (2009), Corrigan, Watson, and Barr (2006), Carlson et al. (2006), and Yanos, Roe, and Lysaker (2011) were all research studies engaging with inquiries surrounding stigma and its impact on individuals and communities at large. Each of these studies used a form of narrative storytelling as a mode to explore the effects of stigma and how to overcome the negative impacts that stigma creates.

Stigma is one aspect that influences how people construct, remember, and understand their experiences. Narratives can either perpetuate or break down stigma depending on how the narrative is told, what voices are brought into the conversations, and whether or not narratives with differing views are given the space they need to be understood. Bruner (1987) describes personal narratives as personal identity that is inextricably bound within the stories, we tell about ourselves to others, to those we cherish, and to ourselves when we think about our stories in private moments. As discussed in the above sections, identity and how we share our stories are reciprocal. Little and Froggett (2009) expand, arguing that narratives are central to how people construct and understand their experiences (p 459). From their own empirical research and PAR work,
Carlson et al. (2006) suggests the use of participatory action methods, and more specifically photovoice, is the necessary first step in changing dysfunctional patterns of beliefs and behaviors that are destructive to a healthy and sustainable communal life (p 850). Active facilitation of a photovoice project provides a context for continuous examination of intrapersonal and interpersonal power dynamics, allowing for the group to collectively learn to perceive, to interpret, and to behave differently (p 850).

Corrigan, Watson, and Barr (2006) define stigma as stereotype awareness but highlight that there are different categories of stigma such as public stigma and self-stigma. They describe public stigma as the general population endorsing prejudice that manifests discrimination toward people holding the trait that is being stigmatized (p 875). They define self-stigma as internalized stigma that creates experiences of diminished self-esteem and self-efficacy (p 875). When these negative stereotypes become internalized, and we begin to believe them, our self-esteem drops. It is challenging to have a sense of well-being in American society with low self-esteem because low self-esteem can be linked to low productivity and relationship building. When you do not feel good about yourself, it is difficult to build relationships and, therefore, community. Stigma creates barriers between people and against community-building efforts. Through this project, I intend to highlight the impacts of internalized stigma that recovering addicts and formerly incarcerated individuals face and the impressions that makes on the larger community.

Yanos, Roe, and Lysaker (2011) also differentiate between public and self-stigma, but instead refer to self-stigma as internalized stigma. They suggest internalized stigma plays a major role in creating a negative change in identity, especially for those with mental illness. As stated above, identity and narrative are linked. If internalized stigma creates a negative change in identity, it also must have a negative change in the ways personal narratives are shared. Drug addiction is often linked with mental illness, either a source for the use of drugs or the use of drugs is a cause for mental illness. Negative stigma is plentiful surrounding drug abuse and incarceration. If those with histories of drug addiction and incarceration internalize these negative stories, it is likely that they will also experience negative changes in their own identities, which impacts the way they share and live their personal stories.
Little and Froggett (2009), further suggest that personal storytelling may allow non-Western narratives to be articulated and can be used to generate greater understanding of how the relationship between self and society is conceived in non-Western cultures (p 461). Stigma is different in each culture, but storytelling is accessible for all. Personal storytelling allows a person who is sharing their story to express their feelings and views around what they are discussing. If discussing stigma, personal storytelling can provide the space to bring in differing ideas and experiences from the norm. Chase (2005), suggests narrative storytelling can give voice to people who are regularly marginalized, and challenge popular beliefs so as to transform oppressive relationships, both within the storyteller and for those who are the story-listeners, to more positive interactions.

Taking this a step further as suggested above, photovoice is another strategy for addressing stigma. Since photovoice allows people to use photography as a tool for their own stories, it provides a space for careful examination of reality that can open up a decolonial space, allowing people to systematically confront “the Social Lie,” or stories authored by dominant groups that blame subordinated groups for their condition(s), i.e. stigma (Martin-Baro, 1994).

While encouraging narrative storytelling to be used for peace-making and conflict transformation, Senehi (2002) also warns of the potential harms of storytelling. Senehi (2002) states that cultural narratives encode the knowledge that everyone in the group buys into. This knowledge and these narratives are what can operate in the world and get results (p 43). Stigma can be deeply woven into cultural narratives. Those who generate narratives, i.e. the storytellers, are in a position of relative control in the process of social construction of meaning, which can have a huge impact on stereotype creation and how stigma is formed. As stated above, the telling of one’s own story can have numerous implications on one’s own feelings as well on those who are witnessing and listening to the story. If only the people in power are given the space and opportunities to share their story, then those who have been silenced will remain in silence. If stigma is to be reduced, those struggling with both the public stigma and personal stigma must be given a safe space and opportunity to share their story. Through the use of photographs that are taken by the participants themselves, photovoice can help generate dialogue and communication with others who might have differences in social statues and, consequently, work toward building community (Carlson et al., 2006). The depersonalization that often happens in the process of
sharing a photograph allows an individual to share an experience in a way that feels safe because the person might choose to share it as a first-or third-person account (Langhout et al., 2015 p 84). This means that it is critical for the researcher and facilitator(s) to take steps towards getting varied voices into the storytelling space to allow for stigma to be addressed and potentially challenged.

Stigma can adversely affect a person’s life both from the public and within themselves. The prejudice that stigma can produce may rob people of the opportunities that define a quality life: good jobs, safe housing, satisfactory health care, and affiliation with a diverse group of people (Corrigan, Watson, and Barr, 2006). This research project seeks to unpack some prejudices put on those who are formerly incarcerated and recovering drug addicts. By using the above-mentioned methods (storytelling, circle processes, and photovoice), the following section will explore the idea of healing (based on studies by Bruner (1987); Boyes-Watson (2008); Chase (2005); Little and Froggett (2009); Pranis (2005); Salvail (2015); Schumacher (2014); Senehi (2002); Yanos, Roe, and Lysaker (2011); Zehr (2002)) and overcoming these, often incapacitating, labels of stigma and what that means for community. In the work that Boyes-Watson (2008) produce, relationships and community are often at the center. In looking at their work being done using peacemaking circles with urban youth, as well as the work done by Pranis (2005) and Zehr (2002) on circle processes and restorative justice, I was fascinated with the idea of combining these processes to address issues affecting the marginalized groups within the community of Bellows Falls.

**Healing**

Each of these core themes (stigma, narrative storytelling, photovoice, and circle processes) led to the theme of healing from both my assumptions and the literature. Healing is a positive outcome emphasized in many of the research studies (Bruner (1987); Boyes-Watson (2008); Chase (2005); Little and Froggett (2009); Rappaport (1995), Senehi (2002); Yanos, Roe, and Lysaker (2011); Zehr (2002)) and a goal that many circle processes aim to encounter (Boytes-Watson (2008); Pranis (2005); Salvail (2015); Schumacher (2014); Jordan et al. (1991)). As stated above, stigma as defined in the dictionary is a mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person. Being associated with stigma can bring up feelings of pain, anger, shame, and humiliation. Experiences that create the association with stigma can also be painful, traumatic, and
cut deep. These intense emotions linked to stigma and the creation of stigma do not just go away and their affect can be lasting and catastrophic. It is because of this process of linking stigma to a traumatic experience (or experiences), that discovering ways to heal and recover from debilitating labels is critical for self-improvement, relationship building, community building, and transformation. Storytelling, in its many forms, has the power to heal. Personal narratives, as a form of storytelling, is one tool that can be used to help in the healing process and was prominent within the literature that is being analyzed. One tool that is particularly powerful in the pursuit of storytelling for healing, is circle processes as mentioned above.

Schumacher (2014) suggests that Talking Circles provide a microcosm where participants can be themselves and where, unobstructed by judgment and fear, they can tap into the very essence of what it means to be human; to care, to listen, to be heard, but most of all, to be authentic (p 11). The Circle can be a place for healing wounds that run deep in the fabric of a community. When people share their stories in a setting where they are respectfully heard, they and others begin to heal (Boyes-Watson, 2008 p 146).

In addition to circle processes, photovoice can be a tool for healing and stigma reduction. Rappaport (1995) emphasizes that photovoice provides a way for participants to take control of an important psychological resource, stories about them, and use alternative narratives to shape civic life and discourses that (dis)empower them (as cited in Chase, 2005 p 82). Photovoice includes structured conversations designed to move dialogue from individual experiences to collective struggles to structural issues (Wang & Burris, 1994). Furthermore, it facilitates social action by linking people’s stories to broader structural issues embedded in systems of power (Jurkowski, Rivera, & Hammel, 2009). Photovoice takes the process of storytelling and deepens the experience by providing a purposeful direction with a goal towards social action related to a specific community and their needs.

Senehi (2002) emphasizes the need for post-storytelling dialogue among storyteller and listeners so that the power relationship between narrator and audience is more in balance and allows for the possibility of a collaborative process of meaning-making. The concept of circles is not just for one person to tell their story, but also for others to listen. There are many parts to the circle process, and each part is critical to the creation of transformation. Boyes-Watson (2008) adds that telling one’s story in community is a gift both to oneself
and to others. Being in a space that is safe enough to speak one’s truth in the presence of others who are truly listening carries great healing power (p 168). Circles are a method of bringing people together to heal and grow stronger as a community.

In linking storytelling to stigma, Yanos, Roe, and Lysaker (2011) emphasize the need to develop methods to combat self-stigma. Corrigan, Watson, and Barr’s (2006) research showed that self-stigma was a significant problem leading to diminished self-esteem and that self-stigma may also interfere with the pursuit of such rehabilitation goals, especially for people with mental illness, such as living independently and obtaining competitive employment (p 876). Senehi (2002), states that personal narratives, told in a safe place, create a space where people are no longer objects, but rather can regain their “humanness” and engage in subject-object dialogue in order to comment upon, interpret, strategize about, and heal from their difficulties (p 53). Stigma often reduces someone to a single action, event, or choice that keeps them in a negative light. Personal storytelling is a tool that can be used to reclaim one’s identity as a whole human, and not just be seen, or see themselves, as solely that stigma.

The sharing of and listening to personal narratives can be empowering for all involved. It can be a tool for transformation. However, while storytelling can be a source of comfort and hope, helping to facilitate the development of community and used as a tool for social change, storytelling can also be destructive to healing and progress. Senehi (2002), emphasizes that powerful narratives can also make ideology appear natural in order to rationalize social injustice (p 53). Galtung (1990) argues that cultural violence is that which justifies structural and direct violence. Johan Galtung describes violence in three different categories that make up a triangle. The points of the triangle include direct violence, structural violence, and cultural violence. Direct violence refers to physical violence, where bodily harm occurs. It suggests a subject-object relationship where there is an identifiable harmful effect. Structural violence refers to institutionalized denial of access to resources and opportunities (Arai, 2018 p 4). And, cultural violence symbolizes aspects of culture such as religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics), that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence (Galtung, 1990). While storytelling can be used to combat these forms of violence, the stories being told can also justify the violence that is being done.
The narrator of a story holds a lot of power as stories have the potential to create empathy and empower those who have previously been voiceless. It is critical that those who are given the space to share their story are not silencing others in the process. Senehi (2002) states that stories may glorify and or justify violence and highlights the need to push for constructive storytelling, used as a means of facing history and healing in the aftermath of violence instead of as a destructive discourse where narratives justify violent interventions by drawing on memories of past humiliations (p 52). When trauma is not addressed, mistrust is deepened, so the process of healing and moving forward becomes much more difficult. Zehr (2002) stresses that the key is not in silencing the pain, building walls and posting guards but in giving voice to our pain, telling our truths (p. 30).

One major challenge with being formerly incarcerated and staying sober after being addicted to drugs is dealing with the guilt and shame that one feels about their past convictions and actions. Evidence suggest that roughly one-third of people with mental illness or severe addiction show elevated internalized stigma and that it is linked to compromised outcomes in both subjective and objective aspects of recovery (Yanos, Roe, and Lysaker, 2011 p 577). Participating in a circle, creating a space of safety and honesty, creates a path towards humanization of a person (Boyse-Watson, 2008). It allows for those participating in the process to see each other as more than just their past actions mistakes. This project combines these varying approaches at bringing people together in order to explore further how stigma, and especially internalized stigma, can be approached and broken down. In my opinion, the dehumanization of individuals, especially within small communities is having lasting and harmful effects. It is through this project that I hope to demonstrate the importance of relationship building, self-empowerment, and community support and how they relate to the creation of sustainable communities.

Gaps & Limitations

There has been extensive research and documentation surrounding storytelling, circle processes, and photovoice. Much of this research connects these methods to personal and community growth, healing, and reconciliation. These methods are well-regarded in participatory action research and have been proven tools
for empowerment in areas of education, research, public health, development, and more. However, gaps in research and analysis remain in the overlap of these methodologies, methods and practices.

Since its first implementation in 1992, a key goal of photovoice has been to reach beyond facilitating discussions for community needs, toward a place of local social action and justice where policy can be affected and eventually changed. While photovoice is based on a combination of three theoretical frameworks: empowerment education, feminist theory, and documentary photography (all of which emphasize community participation for the purpose of social action). However, there remain gaps in the research at the stage of sharing the photos and telling the stories. Much of the research jumps from the taking of photos to the community impact, while the process of sitting amongst the other participants and sharing personal narratives is disregarded (Carlson et al. (2006); Jurkowski, Rivera, & Hammel (2009); Langhout et al. (2015); Wang & Burris (1997)). This gap is critical because this is where a lot of the personal transformation occurs. There are research gaps in examining how circle processes intersect with photovoice practices, and how that intersection is impacted within different demographics and cultural contexts. Does the empowerment only come from sharing with the community? How does photovoice impact a Circle and is it a catalyst for deeper storytelling within that Circle? These are questions that could (and, I argue, should) be further explored in future research because it is through combining these varied methods that I believe intersectionality can be addressed. This project explores some of these gaps, but further research is suggested in order to address the multitude of different issues and ways this method can be used in research and for community development purposes.

There has been extensive research on the impacts of narrative storytelling within marginalized communities including wide-ranging research into mental health. While there have been studies done with urban underserved communities, there are gaps in the research of rural men, struggling with recovering from addiction and incarceration, and overcoming stigma through narrative storytelling and photovoice. These gaps are important to research because these men represent the people that have been marginalized and pushed to the edges of society due to their stigmatization, the impacts of the opioid crisis on small communities, and the tools that can be used to address these concerns. That is why this project is necessary. While many of these aspects have been researched, the combination of these demographics, from my extensive review, has not been
previously examined. This project uses what has been previously researched, and combines approaches in order to look at alternative, or strengthened, approaches to addressing stigma with populations that have been pigeonholed and ostracized by their communities.

And finally, there are research gaps in examining the mechanism for healing within the specific population and demographic that my research prioritizes. This has led me to ask: *If policy change is not the ultimate goal, can healing still occur? Does photovoice impact the community more than the individual, or vice versa? How do circle processes enrich the dialogue and healing process?* My research aims to address these questions and to fill in some of the gaps in existing literature, while bringing up additional questions for future research.

**Conclusion**

This review highlights the versatility of storytelling and the impacts that can come from using storytelling for transformation. The power of storytelling and listening to someone’s personal narrative continues to be used in fields ranging from medicine, science, conflict-transformation, education, and many more. Combining participatory action research methods of photovoice and circle processes to address issues of stigma, opens up a greater opportunity for healing and community resilience. The literature analyzed shows that narrative storytelling allows people to use their own words to share their own experiences and gives them the choice in how and what they share.

This review points out that if not used properly, storytelling can also have negative consequences or effects. Like all research, it is critical that the researcher should look at what stories are being told, who is telling them, and those that are being excluded or not being heard. The literature analyzed above shows the diversity of situations that storytelling can be used to address. Storytelling can be used to tackle difficult emotions and a wide array of conflicts. This analysis shows that storytelling has the power to be participatory and give voice to those in society that have been silenced. As Zora Neale Hurston (1984) said, there is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you. This research project will continue to analyze how telling and listening to personal narratives address self-stigma and lead toward healing and community building in a participatory action way.
Section III: Research Design of Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to explore ways of reducing internalized stigma of felons and addicts through the use of photovoice and circle processes. Its focus is on how men, who have committed felonies and struggle with drug addiction, view themselves in relation to their stigmas and how that affects the way they live their day-to-day lives and interact with society. Taking on a semi-participatory action research methodology, the data was co-created with myself and 12 men through the taking of photos, participation in focus groups, circle sessions, one-on-one interviews, and through a survey. This was not a complete PAR project because I paired it with an ethnographic perspective. My own observations and personal journals helped identify themes I saw continuously emerge which connected with the literature. Grounded in critical theory, radical humanism, and Freire’s praxis of critical consciousness, this study served to create an open and trusting environment where these men could explore aspects of their identity in relation to their stigma in order to have a sense of agency around their own self-worth and who they are. A semi-participatory action research methodology was chosen for the sole purpose of having the research be done completely for and by the participants. I did not want them to feel like research subjects and that I was there only to extract data from their lived experiences. The influence of my own observations and conclusions makes this semi-participatory instead of fully participatory. This project is not looking to fix the causes of the creation of stigma or create policy change, but instead it looks into processes to humanize and self-heal. This project focused on answering the following questions:

Main Question:

*How can internalized stigma, of felons and addicts, be reduced with photo storytelling?*

Sub Questions:

3. *How does storytelling through circle processes create a space for healing?*

4. *In what ways does personal storytelling and photovoice provide an opportunity for participatory action research to be applied to the research process?*

To answer these questions, 12 male residents of Phoenix Rise Transition House, aged 25-65, were recruited to take part in eight 30 min - 1-hour circle sessions using photovoice as the method for the sessions. Starting with
a focus group and then transitioning into weekly circle sessions, participants met at their residency at Phoenix Rise House in Bellows Falls, VT. The opening focus group was conducted in order to gauge participants’ interest in the project and begin to co-create themes that the photovoice assignments and stories would engage with (see appendix O for complete list of themes chosen). These themes would set the stage for exploring qualities of self, related to both their stigma and other aspects of themselves that impacted their lives.

As stated above, this project was designed through a semi-Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology using photovoice as its primary method. I chose to pursue this project through the epistemological framework of PAR because this approach aims at shifting the power from being completely in the researcher’s control to it being in the command of the participants (Langhout et al., 2016). PAR connects science to society, as it is concerned with the democratization of knowledge development as a component of social justice (Liebenberg, 2018 p 1). This happens when theory is informed by bringing together action and research in order to successfully support community advocacy for change (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). PAR is comprised of four essential elements: participation, action, research, and social change for social justice (see Figure 1) (Liebenberg, 2018). These elements converge through the involvement of participants in a process aimed at the advancement of knowledge through a systematic research process that results in action for social change carried out by the participants (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013). A balance of responsibility and engagement within the team (of researchers and participants) is critical.

![Figure 1. Four components of participatory action research.](Taken from Liebenberg (2018))
This PAR approach gives the participants control over the entire research process, from the brainstorming of themes to the creation and presentation of the community event at the end, as well as any action that is developed throughout or after the process. This approach was also used to help with my observations and insights as I was able to have the participants confirm, expand on, or challenge what I had noted in my journals and observations throughout the process. It is a way to make sure my research approach, questions, observations and conclusions were relevant, appropriate, and inclusive (Wang, 1999). This framework drove the research process and helped further inform the themes of the group circles, the questions asked in the interviews, and the choice to not put on a community engagement event. The goal with this approach was to make sure that my research was not conducted solely for my intent, but instead, to help meet the needs and wants of the participants (Wang, 1999).

Coinciding with a PAR approach, the participants and I came up with weekly themes that addressed aspects of self-stigma. The group, including myself, then had the task of taking photos of things they believe represent the themes and that have personal meaning to them. Using photovoice’s approach to research by using photos to give participants the opportunity to represent themselves and tell their story, the participants’ photos were then used to share personal stories around the focused theme of the week. Participants had full control over what they chose to capture in their photos. The only conditions were that photos could not contain frontal face shots or be taken without the consent of those in the photo. This was to ensure the privacy and safety of not only the participants in the research, but also those involved in the taking of the photos. These photos were used as a catalyst for storytelling and as a tool for community building. These photos are part of the ‘action’ aspect of participatory action research. They can be seen as a visual aid to address a key problem (self-stigma) that is affecting the Bellows Falls community and the push to create positive change. Photos were used for this portion of the research for the following reasons:

1. Photography is a highly flexible tool that crosses cultural and linguistic barriers and can be adapted to all abilities. Its power lies in its dual role as both art form and way to record facts.

2. It provides an accessible way to describe realities, communicate perspectives, and raise awareness of social and global issues (PhotoVoice, Vision & Mission, pp 3-4).
While this approach has many benefits that include the ability to be multidisciplinary and multiform, no one perspective can claim authority or authenticity (Reason & Bradbury, 2001 p 31), and therefore it also has its limitations. Although this approach aims to shift dynamics from researcher to participants, it does not look at power from participant to participant, a dynamic which may be embedded within the community structure and culture of Bellows Falls. This is where I hope that circle processes acted as a tool to give voice to those who may not otherwise have a voice at Rise House or among their peers. Circle processes acted as a tool to not only shift the power from the researcher to the participants, but also shifted the power from participant to participant. By setting up this initiative, I situated myself as a catalyst, to generate a participatory process that taps into and engages local knowledge producers to facilitate their developing their own emancipatory practices (Given, 2008 p 110).

Systems are also mentioned throughout this Capstone paper. Simply put, a system is an interconnected set of elements that is coherently organized in a way that achieves something (Meadows, 2008 p 11). Systems do not function in a linear process or individually, but instead they are constantly in flux and changing as overlapping systems interact and are at play within our societies, with each system having different purposes and understandings. Engaging with this definition I must also define the term systems thinking as it is a necessary term to know when engaging critically with the systems that affect our society. For the purposes of this paper, I use Arnold & Wade’s (2015) definition of systems thinking to analyze how the participants are affected by the systems in which they are embedded in. Arnold & Wade (2015) define systems thinking as a set of synergistic analytic skills used to improve the capability of identifying and understanding systems, predicting their behaviors, and devising modifications to them in order to produce desired effects (p 675). The way systems intersect can often cause conflict as the purpose or function of the systems might be in opposition. Our social systems, government systems, school systems, employment systems, and many others are constantly overlapping and impacting one another. The effects that these impacts have on individuals can differ in immense ways depending on the various systems that individuals are embedded in.

In addition, this project was looked at from a critical theory and radical humanism epistemological framework. Critical theory considers knowledge as a constructed resource within social, historic, political, and
economic structures (Langhout et al., 2016 p 83). Within this paradigm, social positioning is significant because the societal systems in place treat people differently based on their race, social class, gender, sexuality, citizenship status, mental health status, and so on and therefore, grant access to different privileges and information. As stated in the literature review, photovoice links people’s stories to broader structural issues embedded in systems of power (Jurkowski, Rivera, & Hammel, 2009). The systems this study’s participants are caught in are plentiful and have far-reaching implications on their lives. For instance, they range from issues dealing with the Department of Corrections, to parole and furlough, to Economic Services and other government service requirements and classes. These all impact the participants having a sense of agency and self-worth that are less than ideal. The numerous systems that the participants are tied to and consistently judged by, I believe, incites further internalization of the stigma that they all live with.

Critical humanism refers to a set of research practices that focus on the difficult task of understanding human cultural differences as an expression of an underlying human nature (Noonan, 2008). This methodology was chosen because this research was approached in a semi-participatory way where the participants and I engaged with each other to mold the direction of the research. This research also keeps Freire’s praxis of critical consciousness (conscientização) in mind throughout; the idea that a process of critical self-inquiry and self-learning, and of, thereby, developing the confidence and capability to find answers to questions on one’s own is just as critical to the research as the data collected from the participants (Rahman, 2004 p 18). Freire believed that through a collective process of reflection, introspection, and discussion of images, communities would be able to uncover the social and political constructions that maintain their marginalization (Liebenberg, 2018 p 3). This means that I, as the researcher, played a critical role in the research and the research process because I was also part of the collective. While the transformational and action research came from the participants taking an active role in the process, I must acknowledge my role in the push for change.

Some of the information collected includes quantitative data. However, the majority of the primary sources of information that were collected were extracted from lived experiences shared by the participants. The overall research project, therefore, is a qualitative research project, focused on analyzing information from people’s experiences and the feelings that come from those experiences.
This project relied primarily on the following sources:

1. Interviews with participants, residents of Phoenix Rise House in Bellows Falls, VT, who are recovering addicts, have been previously incarcerated, or are struggling veterans;

2. Focus groups with participants, same as stated above;

3. A review of literature that addresses the issues around storytelling, circle processes, photovoice, internalized stigma, and healing;

4. Photos taken by the participants that were used as tools for personal storytelling: photos did not include faces or other people who have not given recorded consent. Explanations and discussions of the photos during the circle sessions were also recorded in my journaling.

5. My personal journal: throughout the research process, I kept a personal journal and documented my observations and experiences. This gave my research an ethnographic perspective. The information in the journal was only read by the researcher (myself) and any information used from this journal excluded any personal identifying information of the participants.

**Sources of Data**

Data used in this study was collected through semi-participatory research processes, with participants attending an initial focus group, circle group sessions, in-person interviews and completing a survey. This data is accompanied by my personal journals and observations. The gathering of data was driven by contributing literature and outside information.

**Restorative Circles**

While circles have been used as a tool to replace punitive forms of discipline and as a way to restoratively address harm and impact, within this research context it served as a data collection tool and as a way to proactively build relationships among participants and myself, the researcher. The structure that circle processes offers allowed for each participant to fully express their thoughts and feelings and know that their experiences were being actively listened to by their peers and contained in a safe space. Applying this data collection tool to my research allowed me as an observer of this process to gain a much fuller understanding of the experiences of each participant and observe their process of exploring the way that they are affected by
self-stigma through the use of circle processes. Each circle was facilitated by me, lasted about 30 minutes and was followed by a 10-15 minute debrief. I added to my journal after each session, taking notes on my personal take-aways, feelings, and key points from the session.

**Photovoice**

Using photovoice’s approach, the participants’ photos were used to share personal stories around the focused theme of the week. Participants were asked to participate in a weekly circle process where they were asked to bring a photo that they had taken over the past week of something that relates to a theme they were given the previous week (something that makes them laugh, something that they are grateful for, something that makes them angry, something that makes them feel shame, etc.). These themes all related to what they associate with self-stigma around being formerly incarcerated and/or a recovering addict. The group collectively came up with the weekly themes. We then talked about why they took these photos, each taking a turn to tell their stories. After 8 weeks of this process, the goal was to hold a community gathering at a local café, where the participants would have the opportunity to share their photos and connect with local community members around their stories. While this project did not reach that goal in the time projected, it is still an ongoing process and a goal for the future.

**Interviews**

Three of the participants, men who live in Phoenix Rise House in Bellows Falls, VT, participated in one-on-one interviews with me at the end of the research process. The men chosen were those who had participated consistently in the photo storytelling from the beginning. Interviews were semi-structured (Bergold & Thomas, 2012) and lasted around 30 minutes.

The interview sample included participants who had participated in all (or most) of the photo storytelling sessions. The sample attempted to include men with different convictions and reasons as to why they were at Rise House in order to get an idea of how this process affects different types of stigma and personalities.

Recruitment of these interviews came from my personal connection with the men during my time working with them on the photo storytelling process. Interviews were completely optional and full consent
was granted before any questioning occurred. Complete anonymity was guaranteed to the interviewees in the use of the information that was collected during their interview.

**Evaluation Surveys**

A post-evaluation survey was given to all of the participants that focused on their own internalized stigma and how it impacted and still impacts their lives, how they have built and still build relationships, and how they interacted and still interact with their community. Themes that the survey focused on included: self-devaluation, fear of enacted stigma, stigma avoidance, and values disengagement.

**Journaling**

Throughout this process, I journaled and documented my observations and experiences. My journal began by taking an ethnographic perspective (Bradbury et al., 2008) where I was observing and reflecting on the men that I was working with (Coghlan & Shani, 2008): *What were their interests? What motivated and inspired them? What annoyed them? Who are they and what drove them?* These questions and perspective helped me reflect on the themes that the participants chose for their weekly photographs and how they focused their stories. This enabled me to set up a foundation for my research and facilitated my own relationship building with the participants. I journaled throughout the process, using it as ethnographic research, but also to reflect on my own process and transformation (Schein, 2007).

The information gathered from my observations was then used in the later part of the research. This part of the research was ethnographic, as I made observations of the research and the participants. However, it was more from an ethnographic perspective rather than a formal ethnography because I did not attempt to be unbiased or remove myself from the research. I took my early observations to the focus group at the end, where the participants expanded on my insights helping to deepen my research and make more connections between theory and real-world.

**Data Analysis Methods**

Based on the literature review, I pulled out themes that I predicted would be prominent in the group sessions, interviews, and survey. Following each group session, I added information to my personal journal, since the group sessions were not recorded. After the interviews had been conducted, they were transcribed.
From these transcriptions and journal notes, I identified common themes that would influence the research process.

The final product of this research project was intended to be a pro-social event at a local café where the participants’ photos would be on display. However, due to emphasis on relationship building, trust, and setup of the participant sampling (Rise House residents constantly coming and going) this event was not able to take place after only 8 weeks of meetings. The event was intended to be a way for the community to come and see the photos, as well as to start conversations with the participants around what their photos mean to them. The photographs alone do not tell a story, but they act as a tool to engage with one another.

Section IV: Findings

This section presents the results of the data collected during this research study and offers a critical discussion of the findings presented through the research. The data collected was manually coded and organized into prominent themes based on constructivist grounded theory. Constructivist grounded theory emphasizes developing theoretical frameworks from a close, ground-level examination of data, as opposed to interpreting data by testing a set of a priori hypotheses (Jason & Glenwick, 2016 p 3). This process acknowledges the reconstruction of the participants’ stories by the researcher and the fulfillment of their obligation to “give voice—albeit in the context of their own inevitable interpretations” (Strauss & Corbin, 1994 p 281). Codes were developed from this theory using axial and selective coding. These coding methods include a process of connecting codes (categories and concepts) to each other and were grounded within the participants’ voices and the collected data (Allen, 2017) (see figure 2 below). I utilized a semi-participatory action research design that was grounded in critical theory, radical humanism, and Freire’s praxis of critical consciousness, that is, conscientização [conscientization]. Throughout this section, I discuss these theories and the ways in which they support (or do not support) the data that was collected for the purposes of this study.

The main research question driving this study was: how can internalized stigma, of felons and addicts, be reduced with photo storytelling? The findings are organized into five thematic sections: systemic challenges, healing, relationships, humanization, and identity. Each section includes key arguments that
emerged during the data collection phases. In addition, I present the results of this data through the sub-questions: How does storytelling through circle processes create a space for healing? And, in what ways does personal storytelling and photovoice provide an opportunity for participatory action research to be applied to the research process? I then provided my overall conclusion on the results of this project. The following thematic sections and discussions build upon information and knowledge collected from key informant interviews, my personal group session journals, a post session survey, a focus group, and personal reflective observations.

As explained in more detail below, I cannot claim that there was a reduction in internalized stigma from the participants. However, I would argue that this project, using the same methodological approaches and processes, could be used as another method, in combination with other efforts, to help reduce stigma over a longer period of time. In addition, there were ample responses that revealed many other findings. It is because of this further information that I realized in retrospect and critical reflection, that my research question should have likely been reframed. I found that the findings instead, critically engaged with the question: What was the impact of photovoice and narrative storytelling on the stigma of felons and addicts? The following sections

Fig. 2 Charmaz, K. (2006)
discuss how the outcomes emerging through this study answered this question more concretely than the original research question. While there were findings that addressed the original question, there were not enough to completely answer it. Instead, I found the findings better matched this reframed question.

**Systemic Challenges**

I discovered that the participants involved in this study were locked into many overlapping systems that continually stigmatize them in their everyday lives. For example, they were forced to attend a variety of weekly groups including AA, NA, Better Parenting, Safe Drivers, etc. These groups, while often crucial to their recovery, are also a constant reminder of the mistakes they have made and the continued obstacles they have to face. One participant stated:

*It's just, it's hard to listen to people talk about their drinking. Cause it kind of like makes you think damn, that sounds good. I want to go get one, but I don't, but it's just that's how it makes me feel sometimes* (speaker 2, 07:14 – 3/6/19 GFCJC).

The systems that the participants are locked into are often stigma enhancing and prevent those caught up in those systems from ever moving on from their past mistakes and choices, due to legal and policy system frameworks, i.e. the prison industrial complex (Davis, 2000). Some of these systems include, but are not limited to: the requirements of Phoenix Rise House, the Department of Corrections (DOC) including parole and furlough, other government systems that have strict regulations, as well as complicated family and social systems that have played a key role in their choices to engage with drugs and crime.

“Almost there” the fence and the sign symbolize oppression, like prison or other institutions, but the gate is opening, and freedom is just a few steps away (speaker 1, session 5, Rise House)
Due to the “up and down” nature of recovery, addiction and living with a felony record, participants engaged in a healing process require on-going, long-term treatment and reflection. The numerous subsystems and players that contribute to rampant drug addiction and crime within our society also creates barriers for recovery. Some of these subsystems include our economic system of capitalism and the need to make money, governments that make harmful substances illegal and use police power to enforce their use, pharmaceutical companies pushing for opioid distribution, and nonaddicts who are more interested in protecting themselves than in encouraging recovery of addicts, as well as social determinants that lock people into cycles of poverty which push them into drug use (Meadows, 2008 p 15). Therefore, I cannot claim that this project helps reduce their internalized stigma. At times this might be true, but other times it might be immensely false. These notions are supported through Freire’s theory of critical consciousness that highlights the problems of institutionalization of systems that routinely oppress and marginalize groups of people. Freire emphasizes the need for grassroots social action efforts that have the aim of advancing collective self-reflected awareness and action (Rahman, 2008). Micro-level interactions between individuals through conversations and group meetings (such as this project) can be seen as small-scale steps towards creating social change.

The participants of this study are so locked into systems that constantly capitalize on their marginalization, that it is almost impossible for them to overcome or reduce their internalized stigma around addiction or incarceration. This brings to mind the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu who introduced the concept of symbolic power. Symbolic power refers to implicit, even unconscious, behaviors of cultural or social domination by the structures and people in power, over people who do not hold the power, in order to maintain or enforce hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1979). The discipline used against an individual to cement that individual’s position in a social hierarchy though systemic institutions (i.e. the criminal justice system, the education system, government support systems, etc.) can be described as symbolic power. This dominance can be seen through subtle and non-subtle forms of discrimination, such as systemic racism and sexism (Krais, 1993). The participants in this project have faced these forms of discrimination their whole lives through classism and education discrimination and face further discrimination now, based on their stigma around addiction and/or having been incarcerated.
Identity

As discussed in the literature review on storytelling, personal identity is intricately connected within the stories we tell about ourselves both internally and to others (Bruner, 1987). A person’s experience with his or her identity is more than just a set of particular beliefs about oneself, but instead is based on the connection between self and their experiences (Yanos, Roe, and Lysaker, 2011). Examining the research with this perspective in mind, the information collected highlighted the diversity of participants’ identities. In so doing, the results also revealed insight into the stigma that felons and addicts face, both internally and externally. When asked what characteristics they believed society assumed felons and addicts to embody, *disloyal* was a word that all of the participants could agree on. However, many of them were quickly defensive stating:

*Some of the most loyal men I have ever met were the men I met in prison.* (speaker 4, session 1, Rise House).

The collective all nodded their heads and started sharing stories about the people that showed this perspective and how to them, this demonstrated true loyalty both in and out of prison.

*Society thinks we are these hardened criminals with no conscience or empathy, but most of us are not like that, or at least not trying to be.* (speaker 5, session 4, Rise House).

While many participants shared their frustrations around being judged based on their stigma in various situations (job interviews, government assistance, police and parole officer treatment), many still highlighted,
in the survey, that they believed if someone were to find out about their history of substance use and incarceration, that person would expect them to be weak-willed and doubt their character, further enforcing the internalization of their identity. Identity and the expansion of one’s identity was not a prominent theme that emerged within the literature or in my predictions. However, upon critical reflection, I feel I was not looking at stigma in as dynamic of a way as I should have been. Rather I was perceiving stigma as a label placed upon people rather than as a self-imposed identity. I explain further below the connection between identity and stigma and the impact this connection had on the participants.

Upon completion of the group sessions, it was clear that participants still believed stigma was a part of their self-identity, but they also believe that these stigmas were only a fraction of who they really are. In the initial meeting, before photovoice had been introduced, the participants were asked to come up with words that they associated with addiction and incarceration. The words that they came up with were words and feelings that arguably everyone experiences regularly throughout their lives. The words most commonly talked about and that participants could most connect with when thinking about what to photograph included: anger, shame, anxiety, fear, loneliness, and temptation (See appendix K for the complete list). As the sessions progressed, the stories that were told around these words often had nothing to do with incarceration or addiction, and when they did, they also included other aspects of themselves. While the stigma around incarceration and addiction were where these words were drawn from, the participants used those words to highlight other parts of themselves including, but not limited to: their hobbies, important relationships, environmental factors that trigger them to want to use again, behaviors that motivate them to stay clean and obey all their rules and regulations, activities that makes them laugh, as well as other situations and experiences that they struggle with in life. When given the task to take photos around the theme of loneliness one participant took a photo of a metal fence where you could see the river flowing beyond the bars. When asked what the photo meant to him, he stated:

It represents me looking outside of the prison bars. When you are in prison and you can see the world moving on around you as you are stuck inside, it can feel like torture. That is the worst form of loneliness and the motivation for me to never go back. (speaker 1, session 3, Rise House).

Another participant took a picture of a photo of his ex-girlfriend and shared with the group:
This is my ex-girlfriend who overdosed on heroin two years ago. I took this photo because when I think about her, I miss her and I also think of all of the other people that I have lost because of these drugs. This photo also represents my motivation to stay clean so that I can be around my daughter and show her the man that I have become, that I can be a good father. (speaker 6, session 6, Rise House).

When discussing the themes of restlessness and temptation, hobbies and nature were two common topics brought up amongst the group. One participant stated:

*When I am feeling restless and like I want to use, I have to go outside and be active. I love hunting and fishing. The problem though, is that those activities used to also include drinking and using drugs. I have to learn to do the things I love without adding in drinking and using drugs. Those things still make me happy though and they help distract me from the urge to go back to my old lifestyle of using and abusing.* (speaker 6, session 5, Rise House).

The stigmas they live with are never ignored, but instead it is seen as just one part of how they see themselves (See appendix Q for infographic explanation). Many of the participants often brought up viewing themselves as hard working and willing to take on any job if given the chance. This is again connected to the systems they are embedded in and their need for capital, with them often owing thousands of dollars in fines and government fees from being incarcerated. Frustration with having to deal with these systems that have opposing requirements (group meetings, checking in with parole, etc. that take up time while at the same time needing an income and a job) was a common topic of discussion. The significance of their stigmas (such as being selfish, unpredictable, angry, and dishonest) changed from day to day and situation to situation. On good days, when they were surrounded by support and stability, forms of stigma might not seem so important. However, due to the systems that require constant disclosing of information, on days when they might have to apply for jobs, government assistance, etc. their stigma could really affect how they felt about themselves and the world around them at that moment. When asked what they do to get through the day, one participant stated,

*Every day is a struggle, we are constantly surrounded by temptation and there is nothing that really gets rid of or stops that temptation. People judge us for what we have done and our inability to control. So, I just have to ‘white-knuckle it’ every day and tell myself I have so much to lose if I give in.* (speaker 7, session 4, Rise House).
Addicts are told (and tell themselves) over and over not to use and resort to their old habits, yet are constantly surrounded by temptation (either through legal substances or through social ties that connect them to other substances) and other oppressive experiences that bring up the desire to relieve their stress through using.

Another participant stated:

_I am learning to live a new life, away from many of the people I used to surround myself, doing things differently than I used. Living a sober life is like learning how to live all over again, just without the blanket of drugs and alcohol._ (speaker 7, session 3, Rise House)

Resilience: Recovery is a never-ending mission, but new beginnings are possible. I will not be defined by my past demons and convictions.

(speaker 1, session 8, Rise House)
Many of the participants discussed how it was that the people around them, family members and friends, who made it difficult to stay sober and change their habits. Several participants talked about their choice to distance or even sever ties with people who had been close to them because they could not adapt to their new lifestyle choices.

This project provided another way for participants to further explore the complexities of their overall identity and relate to others going through the same process. Using photovoice, participants could show other sides to themselves and connect with other participants over shared interests, relationships, and struggles. The photos helped them to start conversations and articulate sometimes vague concepts. I also found that photos helped participants “come out of their shell” and speak when they might otherwise stay silent.

Healing

A major theme that emerged from the circle process was the notion of healing. Storytelling and story listening, performed in a safe and open space, can allow for significant healing for all those involved in the storytelling process (Boyse-Watson (2008); Senehi (2002)). Adding photovoice and circle processes enabled participants to be able to address specific issues more concretely. Healing was often a topic of conversation in the group sessions and in the interviews. When asked during an interview how a participant was impacted by the storytelling process, he stated:

Getting it [my story] out definitely helps. When people know [what I’ve been through and what I’ve done] instead of keeping it hidden and then making up lies. The lies always make things worse and spiraling out of control becomes so much more likely. (speaker 9, 04:13- 4/6/19, GFCJC).

Several participants discussed, in both the group sessions and in the one-on-one interviews, how sharing their story helped them to relieve some of the internal tensions that are so common among addicts and those who have major regrets from their past (Randles & Tracy, 2013). Shame is a common, powerful emotion attached to addiction and incarceration and was mentioned as a trigger by many participants. Triggers are social, environmental or emotional situations that remind people in recovery of their past drug or alcohol use. These reminders can bring about urges that may lead to a relapse (Tagliareni, 2018 pp 1).
Story listening was also mentioned as a positive experience of the group meetings. Story listening can be described as deep and respectful listening. It means taking the time to develop relationships, listening to stories, to what is said and what is not said, and to deeply understand what is contained within the silences and spaces (Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity, 2015). When one participant talked about things they were struggling with, or goals they had, the group would quickly make gestures and sounds of approval. In attempts to not interrupt or talk over each other, we discussed ways to show support and agreement through snaps, nods of approval, and other body language to relay approval and connection.

During one session, a participant shared what they do when they are facing temptation to reoffend, go back to using, or anything else that would get them into trouble and produce low self-esteem. Another participant followed by stating that they had never tried those tactics and would add those to his “tool belt” when he was feeling down. This group support and sharing was common throughout each of the sessions. In one of the semi-structured interviews I held after the circle processes, one of the participants stated:

*It makes me feel better to talk to people about certain things. I just don't like talking to a bunch of people. If there's a lot of people around I can't talk. If it's just like one on one or with the guys here, I can, because I'm so used to these guys here.* (speaker 10, 00:46-4/11/19, GFCJC)

In a different interview, another participant added:

*If you open up to people, you have a better chance of making it, you know? Just because someone does stuff when they were a kid doesn't mean that they're a bad person now. So maybe I can help people see that. Not with just me. I mean with everybody that comes out of jail, there are people that can change.* (speaker 9, 01:09-4/6/19, GFCJC)

A common discussion around healing came with wanting to not only help themselves but hoping that their stories could help others. Connecting with others and sharing their experiences in hopes of helping someone else not make the same mistakes they made, was a common desire among the group.

An example of this desire to help more broadly is when I broke my ankle and was in a cast during several of the sessions. During this time, the group quickly became protective of me and advised me on being aware of my medications and to be even overly careful on taking the drugs the hospital gave me. As described in the methodology section, I also took on an ethnographic perspective toward my study. This meant that as I was observing the group, I also saw myself as part of the data. Coinciding with a PAR methodological approach, I was a part of the research process, just as much as the participants were. This was utilized throughout the
project through my use of personal reflective journals. After each session, I would reflect on what happened in the group settings and how that related to my personal experiences as well as the literature that I had been researching. In combining different methodological approaches, I was able to access information from different perspectives and include a variety of voices.

The topic of positive and harmful healing was discussed during several of the group sessions. This emerged, again through my injury. Using drugs to ease pain, both mentally and physically is much easier than confronting difficult emotions and building strength through relationships and hard work. Healing from deep wounds created from past mistakes, trauma, and other harmful behaviors is different than using drugs and alcohol to cover up the problems and escape from the pain. The participants realized that using is not actual healing. One participant explained:

*I have a new understanding of how my actions and the things that happened in my life affect other people. I want to give back to other people, there's a desire in me to share my story because I think that it can help others.*  (speaker 11, 08:46- 4/6/19, GFCJC).

Overall, this project provided a space and process for some aspects of healing to occur. While I do not believe that “fully” healing from systemic oppression and structural violence is ever really possible, this project addressed the idea of not merely dressing the wounds of harm and violence, but also by undoing the capacity and desire to inflict them again (Amster, 2011). Healing does not have to mean burying or replacing the pain, it can also mean learning how to own and live with it.

**Relationships**

Throughout the group sessions and interviews, relationships were a significant topic of discussion. Children and families were common subjects in the photos that the participants took. The positive relationships in their lives were brought into the discussion through many of the word themes for the week. This include words such as *pride* (they are proud of their children), *shame* (they are ashamed of how they treated their families when they were using and incarcerated), or *anxiety* (they are anxious about receiving, or not receiving, their parental rights back) to name a few.

The relationships participants developed between themselves and with me (over the course of the circle processes offered within this research study) helped in creating a safe space for them to share and discuss
issues. These issues that they mentioned in their photovoice assignments helped reveal the importance of connections. Connections are crucial to them in both recovery and in their creating a sense of being able to survive the systems in which they are embedded due to their incarceration and previous experiences and choices. Isolation and loneliness also have enormous effects on drug addiction and alcoholism (Meadows, 2018). Several of the participants stated during the group sessions that their positive relationships helped prevent those feelings from taking over their lives and pushing them back towards their addictions. Positive relationships with family, including children and partners, working relationships, and community connections were often the subjects that participants indicated as motivators in helping them to stay sober, fulfil their obligations with the DOC, and continue working towards changing their lives for the better.

One participant shared a photo of his work truck, stating:

*I am so lucky to have the job that I have now and a boss that treats me with respect. It didn’t matter that I was incarcerated when he hired me, I just had to prove that I am a hard worker. He is a huge support system for me and helps keep my head on straight.* (speaker 9, 09:12- 4/6/19, GFCJC)

Another participant followed that by showing a photo of himself with his daughter, saying:

*I just want to be a good father. I don’t want to do anything that will take me away from her again.* (speaker 7, session 5, Rise House).

Determination: I am determined to stay clean for my daughter and my family. I have too much to lose not to. (speaker 7, session 5, Rise House)
Negative relationships were also a topic for discussion. Many of the participants talked about various relationships that caused them harm, which were critical to their making choices to abuse drugs and alcohol. During a group session, one participant stated:

*Everyone I grew up with and spent time with was (and still is) using drugs. I was introduced to drugs by my father. I can’t spend time in my old town anymore, cause if I do, I will just go back to using cause I would be constantly surrounded by drugs and drug users.* (speaker 7, session 3, Rise House)

Participants then indicated that these types of negative relationships were examples of why they needed to evaluate whether the people they encountered in these settings should (or could) remain in their lives if they were to be successful in their desperate search to try and improve their lives. This association with relationships can be related to PAR, which recognizes that research should be done with each other, rather than on or about someone. In a more immediate human sense, the critical, systemic, and social constructionist perspectives emphasize a shift from the individual to relationships in which we all participate in (Reason & Bradbury, 2001 p 9). Instead of looking at participants as ‘subjects’, PAR encourages a shift towards co-researchers, where participation asserts people’s right and ability to have a say in decisions which affect them and claim to generate knowledge about them (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). The findings collected during the circle processes showed that relationships can have a huge impact on self-worth, self-esteem, and the ability to cope with difficult situations and experiences. One participant explained:

*I'm at a crossroads in my life where I think that, you know, having a selfish attitude is detrimental to not just me but everyone around me. Those that are close to me, in particular my son. That's what and who I'm thinking of when I talk about that.* (speaker 11, 014:01- 4/6/19, GFCJC)

Another participant, when asked about the impact of sharing their stories and listening to others’ stories, stated:

*I walk away feeling uplifted, usually like I served a purpose. It's a good feeling. I get that from AA meetings as well. I also see that after community events where community members volunteered their time to create something for each other. I can kind of see the euphoria emanating from each and every one of them because they know that they served a purpose and they did something that's valued, needed, and necessary to change the current state of affairs that are affecting themselves and their fellow community members.* (speaker 11, 05:21- 4/6/19, GFCJC)

Findings from this project emphasized the significance of relationships in our lives and the critical need for connection and support when looking into creating sustainable communities. When asked, how do we cope when everything we know is changing or turns on us, many of the participants responded that it was a reliance
on the positive connections they had with individuals and organizations in their community that got them through the tough times. This relates to the field of sustainable development and the need to create sustainable communities. Positive connections and relationships among community members help develop a web of support for one another. This is also the foundation of restorative justice, where community members hold each other accountable for their actions, while at the same time show support for one another through both good and hard times.

**Humanizing**

As discussed in the literature review, negative social views that create stigma can be internalized to shift one’s internal dialogue about oneself into a negative discourse so that one continuously thinks of oneself in negative ways (Mullett, 2008). For many, their stigma of being an addict or having been incarcerated is seen as their central identity, and all other parts of them are pushed into the background. The findings from this project revealed that all of the participants live with the stigma that comes from being an addict and incarcerated and that these are at the forefront of their thoughts at all times. They have internalized the negative social labels that society has placed upon them. As stated above, this project allowed for those participating in the process to see each other as more than just their mistakes and actions of the past- to see each other as complex and dynamic human beings.

Photovoice provided an opportunity to discuss the impacts that this internalization has had on the participants and society in general. Again, the findings highlighted the diversity of participants’ external and internal identities. The photos taken by the participants gave a glimpse into the participants’ lives, expanding the narrative into more than just a single story around their stigma and identity.
Using photos to discuss themes related to their stigmas provided a visual for others to understand what they were talking about. Combining photos with storytelling provided a space to talk and listen to not only their problems, but also their successes. Photos gave the participants something to show to the group, something tangible that could represent what they were proud of, what they were working towards, and dreams they had for the future. When asked how a participant felt about listening to other people tell their stories during the group sessions, he stated:

*Sometimes I feel a little bad [listening to their stories] because I know they don’t like telling their stories and sharing their feelings. And, they get sad sometimes, so, I feel bad. Then some of them show their kids and they’re wicked happy. So, I like that. It shows me more of who they are.*

(speaker 9, 04:32-4/6/19, GFCJC)

Another participant stated:

*Even if I can’t identify [with their story], I can empathize. You know, and then I can pay it forward, because I’m not going to identify with everyone. But I can listen and try to feel what they are feeling or understand what they went through… I think [this process] has the potential to be nurturing and healing. And um, recuperative for guys like myself coming out of the institutions.*

(speaker 11, 11:16-4/6/19, GFCJC)
As part of the research process, I found myself sharing my personal stories. I found that my injury (a badly broken ankle) played an important, unexpected role in our conversations. My injury was a prime example of how quickly life can get flipped upside down, a concept all of the participants were well accustomed to. My inability to drive, move very easily, or do much of anything on my own really helped me connect with the group. In addition, although my injury was physical, it created economic challenges for me as well due to my inability to work or get around. While under very different circumstances, the shared experiences of feeling helpless and powerless acted as a bonding agent that led to deeper conversations around experiencing these types of challenges. I believe this helped all of us see each other as humans, people who have both dark and light days, and that no matter who you are, life is never always perfect. This is reflective of the PAR and ethnographic perspectives that I took on throughout this project.

This theme of humanizing and giving participants a space to have their voice heard aligns with the theory of radical humanism, what Rahman and Freire emphasize as critical in participatory research. Rahman (2008) states that through their own social processes people establish their own collectives and their own verification systems, which sets the foundation for a transformational process (Lykes & Mallona, 2008 p 110). In coming together to share stories, see visual representations, and discuss both the struggles and the successes within people’s lives, this project provided a space where participants could step out from the social constraints that their stigma placed upon them, limiting their potential. This project created a foundation for allowing the group to see each other not solely as addicts and felons, but as human beings, who have made mistakes and that they are trying so anxiously to overcome.

**Tangible Outcomes**

The findings and conclusions of this study clearly show that stigma, both internalized and external, affects everyone from individuals to the larger community in complex and dynamic ways. Doing this research in a participatory way, working with the men at Phoenix Rise House, and reading about stigma and processes to address it, was invaluable for me as I think about tools, groups, and strategies to be used when working with marginalized and vulnerable communities. Combining the different approaches of circle processes and photovoice, used with restorative techniques and design, allowed for different voices to be heard and the group
to collectively create discussions around issues that were impacting all of them. In a setting where they all felt comfortable, they were able to both talk and show (through their photos) what they were thinking and feeling. This type of “safe” space is not often provided for the people in these communities.

In addition to the findings discussed above, I was able to reach several other conclusions. First, as stated above, this project created a tool for looking at one’s identity in order to see stigma as just one point in one’s identity; i.e. I am (stigma) AND I am _______. As discussed above, hobbies, important relationships, what motivates them to obey all their rules and regulations, what makes them laugh, and other situations and experiences that they struggle with in life were discussed during our group circle sessions. It was not uncommon for the participants to show a photo of themselves with their children and significant other, or even employer, stressing their motivation to not resort to their old habits for fear of destroying those relationships. It was clear that through those photos and stories that, while they were still an addict and had been incarcerated, they were also a father, a boyfriend, a loyal and hard-working employee.

Second, I found that this is a slow, ongoing process with ups and downs. You do not just “get over” addiction or having a felony record. This research project was only eight sessions long. I found through working with vulnerable populations, who have been used, abused, and let down countless times, that time is a crucial component in getting results. Trust, relationship building, and consistency are not established overnight; these take time and effort. Eight weeks was not enough time to see lasting results, but I do believe, and predict, that with more time, these results could be achieved.

And finally, this project also led to positive connections with Phoenix Rise House and the Greater Falls Community Justice Center. While several of the men knew of the GFCJC and were a part of COSA, many of them had never met me or would consider reaching out to the GFCJC as a resource. It was because of this project and my involvement with the participants that one participant is now a volunteer at the GFCJC and is on the way to becoming a community board member. Another participant regularly walks over to the Center to speak to any one of our staff when he is feeling down or feeling like he wants to use. These connections show the value of community and community organizations. I observed that through this project, relationships between these stigmatized individuals and community organizations and resource centers began to develop.
and pathways for communication opened up. While this was not an outcome that was anticipated, I believe that this was a critical finding.

These findings are important because they not only relate to this project and specific community, but they also apply to the wider field of sustainable development in general. A community cannot be developed, or sustained, through isolation and total individualism. Instead, this project provided a space to explore and celebrate one’s individuality while also creating a collective for support and accountability. I believe that the use of PAR and group processes cultivated a sense of ownership that is rarely felt by these participants.

Section V: Challenges & Opportunities: Concluding Statement

This research study included up to 12 participants per session, telling stories and discussing themes related to the stigma attached to incarceration and addiction. The experiences of these 12 people could not possibly represent the experiences of everyone who has been attached to the labels of addict and felon and had to live with the stigma surrounding those labels. While this study has many strengths, there were also challenges along the way, and limitations that have left room, and need, for further research.

In examining the sample that was used for this study, there are several limiting characteristics that should be highlighted. When considering how this research can be applied to more than just the participants that contributed to this project, demographics and sample size must be discussed. The participants were not randomly selected, but instead, all of the participants were residents at Phoenix Rise House, the transitional house in Bellows Falls, VT. Due to the nature of the house and the social, economic, and racial environment of the community, this means that all of the participants were male identifying, because Rise House only houses men, and all of the men were of lower economic status, as Rise House is designed for men in need of economic assistance upon their release from prison and/or rehabilitation. Furthermore, there are only 15 beds in the house, so at most, the sample size could reach 15, but during this study, there were never more than 12 beds occupied. This limited the sample size to no more than 12 participants. In addition, according to the World Population Review (2018), Vermont is considered one of the least racially diverse states in the country, with over 90% of its residents classified as White. This statistic is evident in Bellows Falls and therefore, also Phoenix Rise House, with only two of the participants having identified as non-white. While these
characteristics were not necessarily problematic for the purpose of the research inquiries pursued, the findings that emerged should arguably be analyzed and contextualized before being used to generalize across different demographics and groups. Further research could be designed and carried out using the same methodological processes to address stigma, but I would recommend the inclusion of more diverse voices from people of color, women, and participants with a variety of different economic means.

Due to the setting, length of the sessions, and lack of a formal circle process, I would argue that healing was not achieved to the extent that it could have been if a few things were changed in the design of the project. The healing potential was not realized due to the systems in place and the pressures put on the participants by those systems (DOC requirements, parole and furlough, and the general criminal justice system), although outside my control of the project. Because of these realities, it was difficult to push the participants into sharing and engaging in personal reflections except at a surface level. To get them to go deeper, was problematic and at times was an impasse. These challenges of opening up on a deeper level is reminiscent of what is written around critical theory and Freire’s conscientization, as discussed in the methodology section.

The idea of using self-reflection to apply a critical analysis of power and privilege to the systems that have been holding these participants down, is key for any researcher to consider when designing research encompassing and directly involving marginalized groups. In order to have larger impacts, this is where I believe photovoice, as an effective method for engagement of participants in their healing processes, should be used much more widely and for a longer period of time, such as three to six months or more. While this project did not seek to create policy change, it did help participants articulate their frustrations with the systems (Phoenix Rise House, the DOC including parole and furlough, Economic Services and other government entities) in which they are embedded. For example, one participant was motivated, through the group sessions, to take on a leadership role within the Phoenix Rise house as well as to get more involved in the GFCJC in hopes of contributing to positive systems changes. In a one-on-one semi-structured interview, this participant stressed the need to change the way that Phoenix Rise House is operated, including how the various groups (recovery and support groups) are run with participation enforced. He discussed how this project has given him a sense of wanting to “give back” and create change in order to help more men coming into the house who
are just like who he used to be. He stressed the importance of giving back to the community by living his life in a less selfish way than he used to when he was much younger and using. This project connected him with the GFCJC and opened his eyes to restorative justice as a way to deal with conflict and community.

Outside of the sample pool, the set-up of the sessions included several limitations, as well as strengths. A primary limitation that I identified, similar to several of the participants during their one-on-one interview, was the space that the group sessions were held. The storytelling sessions were held at Phoenix Rise House, the home of all of the participants. This proved to be both a strength and a limitation. It was a strength in that it allowed participants to feel comfortable and less formal than other group settings. It was my attempt to “meet them where they were at”. This also meant that they did not have to worry about getting transportation or figure out how to get to a location outside of their home, where they were already required to be before our sessions due to a mandatory weekly house meeting. The limitation, however, came from it being almost too informal. While a circle processes was used, there was no talking stick used, interruptions were allowed, and it became more of a conversation and discussion, creating a limiting factor for deep listening and deep storytelling, where the storyteller had all the attention without worry of disruption. Again, this can be seen as both a strength and limitation. A common question I asked myself several times throughout the project, in my reflective journals, was how I could encourage the participants to shift from surface level opinions and experiences, to more intimate stories that reflected their inner thoughts and feelings. How could I continue to build trust within the group? How could I appeal to their needs and not make this another “sob-story group” while also creating a space for deeper storytelling? These were questions that I often reflected on and still do not have concrete answers to, so see this as a point for further exploration.

The informal nature of the group sessions allowed for meetings to feel less like another “group” (like AA, NA, counseling, etc.) that they were required to attend each week (often against their own wishes), and more like a time for them to relax and talk with their peers, who they feel comfortable around, and discuss issues that are affecting them all. The idea of incorporating something formal, such as a talking piece, to such an informal setting felt like it could be disruptive and interfere with the conversation. This comfortable and
informal set-up also provided an opportunity for myself, the researcher, to develop a trusting relationship with each of the participants.

Whether it was through the criminal justice system, coming from intergenerational poverty, being addicted to drugs or alcohol, or some other challenge, each of the participants had admitted to having been let down enough times in their lives to have developed significant trust issues. One of my challenges and goals, therefore, was developing a strong enough relationship with each of the participants so that they could trust that I was not meeting with them just for my research purposes. Rather, I wanted them to feel that they were the main focus and that they had power to influence and control the direction of the project and the purpose of the group sessions. Overall, I would recommend that this is a good place to start. Meeting the participants at their home and in their community provided a space for relationship and trust building. The limitation, however, was that it did not provide an ideal space for deep sharing. Since this research project is ongoing, I will suggest that the group change locations and work to develop more formal circle processes in order to facilitate deeper storytelling and story listening.

Another gap in the research was in the use of photovoice. Photovoice was originally, and traditionally, used as a participatory method pursuing policy change. Using the photos taken by the participants and presenting them in a community forum, traditionally has a goal of attracting policy makers to take a closer look at their situations in order to influence policy change. This project, while hoping to still be transformative, did not start with a goal for social transformation through policy change. Instead, this project looked at transformation through changes in internalized dialogue of individuals impacted by their stigma around addiction and incarceration. Again, this can be looked at as both a strength and a limitation. This project had a goal of addressing internalized stigma of being an addict and/or formerly incarcerated, in order to help individuals (the participants) see themselves as humans who have made mistakes but are more than those single examples. This was considered as a first step in addressing how stigma around addiction and incarceration effect a community. It can also be looked at as a way of looking at how to break down these barriers that living with stigma create, in order to facilitate healing and resiliency in the creation of sustainable communities.
Photovoice has been implemented in various ways within different research projects. Some researchers (Hergenrather et al. (2009); Wang & Burris (1997)), argue that a necessary step is including a photo tutorial at the start of the project. Others (Carlson et al. (2006); Langhout et al. (2015)) argue that this takes away the creative license of the participants. For this research project, because the photos were not the main focus, but instead were to be used as tools for deeper storytelling, I chose not to add any direction on how they should take their photos. Once again, this can be seen as both a limitation and a strength. I would argue that it was a strength because the participants could use their own creativity, experience, and motivations to come up with photos for the group sessions and interpret those photos in any way they saw fit. On the other hand, it was a limitation because, many had little experience taking photos for the purpose of representing thoughts and concepts. Some participants, therefore, struggled with coming up with ideas as to what photos they should take and sometimes showed up to the group sessions without having taken any photographs.

In future research that utilizes photovoice, I would suggest setting up further guidelines (such as taking photos in your own community and daily life and not taking photos of images you find online) but still leave out a photo tutorial since this is not meant as a professional photo group and should not create power differences by highlighting different technologies and abilities for taking photos. I would instead suggest a storytelling tutorial connected to the photos that participants took. To do this, I would recommend that the researcher start the first couple of sessions by showing the process of viewing a photo and telling a personal story attached to the photo. I believe that this would facilitate deeper storytelling at a faster pace.

Finally, a piece of the research that was missing from the project was having a community forum at the end of the group sessions. This is a crucial piece for connecting the work that is done during the group sessions to the larger community. As stated above in the methodology section, there were several reasons for not having a community event during this research project. As discussed throughout this paper, relationship building, creating trust, and therefore safety, is at the core of this project and are the components most needed for transformation and healing. It is for these reasons that the community forum did not take place. The participants in this study have been let down uncountable times and struggle with trusting people. Therefore, eight sessions did not allow for enough time to develop adequate trust as a group to feel comfortable putting
ourselves and this project in front of their community to share their most vulnerable inner thoughts and feelings. When working with vulnerable and marginalized populations, I have found that time, being open and honest, and being dependable are some of the most helpful and critical features to bring to the work. While a community event was not held during this project, I would still recommend an event with the community still be a goal for future projects because that is where this project can connect individual to community.

The project aimed to combine varied approaches to research, restorative practices, and community building in order to look at the complicated effects of addiction and incarceration within individuals and their larger communities. While aspects of this were addressed, there is still a great deal of room for future research. For example, taking this project a step further by really emphasizing circle processes and deep personal storytelling, I believe, could get closer to answering my research question. I also believe that looking at how these practices are conducted within other cultures and within sectors of societies that have different world views would help inform the work done in this research setting as well as within the larger restorative justice milieu. This project provided a framework as to how to begin answering this question, but further research is needed in order to come up with a more specific curriculum to address these complicated issues and deep-rooted stigmas effecting communities around the world.

This project proposes a method to establish community connections and facilitate healing through personal storytelling and listening. This paper aimed to answer the question: *How can internalized stigma, of felons and addicts, be reduced with photo storytelling?* Although this question was not able to be fully answered, it did provide a foundation for a project that provided a space for people to reflect on the stigma that society has placed upon them and that they have internalized and placed upon themselves as well. While the findings did not reveal an indisputable way of addressing the impacts of stigma on felons and addicts, they did provide insight into the connections between identity, relationships, self-worth, and systemic challenges.

This project presents a localized means of conducting research and empowering individuals to have their voices heard within their communities. Photovoice, implemented within a PAR framework, can create a platform for exploration into the lived experiences of those who have been pushed to the edges of their communities. Additionally, photovoice paired with storytelling and circle processes, has the ability to facilitate
important reflection on the positioning of personal experiences within larger social, political, and historical structures (Liebenberg, 2018 p 7). This self-reflection can be tied back to the creation of sustainable communities, where sustainability means addressing the impact of harm on communities so that they can thrive into the future.

Throughout this research, I have learned that stories play a crucial role in all of our lives. They influence the way we view and interact with the world. The internal stories that we tell ourselves develop our self-esteem, self-worth, and control the choices we make. I feel that this research has personally impacted me by making me more aware of my own internalized stigmas. Using photographs to share stories makes it easier to describe the often-chaotic thoughts that are running through our heads. It is through this research that I am reminded that we are all so much more than a single story, that the labels placed upon us do not define us.
References


Salvail, D. J. (2015). "We can't just tell the good stories": Reflections on Experiences of Storytelling and Restorative Justice (Doctoral dissertation, Arts & Social Sciences: School of Criminology).


Appendices

Appendix A: HSR Application

School for International Training
@ World Learning

Human Subjects Review Application

The researcher has the primary responsibility to ensure safe research design and to protect human participants from all types of harm. Research that exposes human subjects to the risk of unreasonable harm shall not be conducted. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) has the primary responsibility for determining whether the proposed research design exposes subjects to risk of harm.

All materials must be typed; handwritten materials will be returned.

**DO NOT** begin contacting potential project participants or data collection until the IRB notifies you that your project has been approved.

**DO NOT** leave a question blank in Section III; write "N/A" if a question does not apply to the application. Unsigned or incomplete applications will be returned for resubmission.

**Section I**
Researcher: Jordan Ferrick
E-mail: jordan.ferrick@mail.sit.edu  Phone: (608) 628-3749
Graduate student [ ] Faculty [X] Staff [ ] SIT Research Abroad student [ ]
Advisor: Dr. Kelly Teamey
Type of Project: Capstone [X] IPP [ ] Independent Research [ ] Faculty research [ ] PI Paper [ ]
Project Title: Reducing Self-Stigma of Felons and Drug Addicts through the use of Storytelling and Photographs
Project Site(s): Bellows Falls, VT
Practicum/Project Site Supervisory Organization: Greater Falls Community Justice Center (GFCJC)
Proposed project dates: from December 20, 2018 to February 28th, 2019

**Section II**
Read and check all appropriate boxes.

My research does not need IRB review because it

[ ] Does not involve the participation of human subjects.

If you checked the box above, make sure none of the elements under Exempt apply. Go to the end of the form, sign, have your advisor sign (digital signature), attach your proposal and submit to irb@sit.edu
My research design may be EXEMPT because the research:

- ☐ Involves the observation of public behavior
- ☐ Is conducted in an educational setting (classroom) involving normal educational practices such as evaluating tests procedures, curricula, or lessons and does not identify subjects or pose any risk
- ☐ Involves surveying or interviewing public officials
- ☐ Uses anonymous surveys, interviews, or observations of adults and poses no risks

If you checked any of the EXEMPT boxes, please be sure none of the elements under Expedited and Full apply to your research. Go to the end of this form, sign, have your advisor sign (digital signature is fine), and attach your proposal, consent form, interview, survey or focus group questions and other relevant documents. Submit as one document to irb@sit.edu

My research design may require an EXPEDITED review because the research:

- ☐ Does not involve children or other vulnerable participants. Vulnerable participants are children, the economically or educationally disadvantaged, prisoners, refugees and others vulnerable in the local research context.
- ☐ Involves individual or group contact in no risk/minimal risk circumstances and with non-sensitive topics.
- ☐ Involves collecting data from voice, video, digital or image recordings made for research purposes.
- ☒ Concerns individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior.)
- ☐ Uses surveys, interviews, oral histories, focus groups, program evaluations, human factors evaluations, or quality assurance methodologies in which subjects are or can be identified directly or indirectly
- ☐ Was approved under 12 months ago, minor changes to the research design have been made and additional research will be conducted.

If you checked any of the EXPEDITED boxes in section above, please read the next section on full review, determine if none of those factors applies, and continue to Section III, Question 1

My research design may require a FULL REVIEW because:

- ☒ Children or vulnerable groups are involved (e.g. prisoners, educationally disadvantaged persons, cognitively impaired persons, trauma survivors, or populations considered vulnerable in local social situations or cultural contexts).
- ☐ Research involves the intentional deception of subjects, such that misleading or untruthful information will be provided to participants. Participants includes people being observed or interviewed as well as supervisors of those participants
- ☒ Projects use procedures that are personally intrusive, stressful, or potentially traumatic (stress can be physical, psychological, social, financial, or legal)
Research concerns sensitive subjects such as sexual attitudes, preferences, or practices; the use of alcohol, drugs, or other addictive products; activities that may be illegal, or likely to offend prevailing standards of ethical practice for a given country context. Research may collect information that, if released, could reasonably be damaging to an individual's financial standing, employability, or reputation within the community; that, if disclosed, could reasonably lead to social stigmatization or discrimination; pertains to an individual's psychological well-being or mental health; that, if released would put the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability in other categories that may be considered sensitive because of specific cultural or other factors.

Section III
All questions must be completed. If the question does not apply to your research please mark N/A. Please do not leave any questions blank. Incomplete applications will be returned and resubmission will be required.

1. Briefly describe the proposed project including the research question and objectives:

The purpose of my project is to address the stigma surrounding felons and addicts in Bellows Falls, VT. Ever since the opioid crisis has drastically hit this small town, much of the town’s reputation has revolved around the increase in crime, drug use, drug abuse, and drug related deaths. Working with Phoenix Rise House (a transitional housing unit), my research aims to address the following question: how can internalized stigma, of felons and addicts, be reduced with photovoice? It is clear that having a felony record and being attached to the term “addict” has huge implications in terms of stigma and how these identities are treated in society. I am interested in exploring how these stigmas effect those labeled as felons and addicts and the implications that those effects have on the wider community. These men struggle with so many things- but one common struggle is the deep internalized stigma that they are constantly battling with around their committed crimes and drug use. My research aims to address these stigmas by using photovoice and circle processes where the participants will first start by taking photos around a theme they believe relates to stigma and then sharing their story around that photo.

The objectives of this study include:
To understand the historical foundations of narrative storytelling as part of the restorative justice process;
To understand how a semi-participatory research approach using photovoice photographs can be used as a catalyst for building relationships and developing community;
To familiarize myself with existing frameworks previously used within restorative justice models that seek to measure various components relevant to community building through storytelling;
To begin to develop a list of best practices for constructive storytelling; and
To understand the negative implications of using storytelling as a tool for community building and how to dissuade these implications from happening.

2. Data Collection
Please indicate the number of participants by age and gender:
N/A Children (under 18 years of age): female: 0 male: 0 other: 0
8-15 Adults (over 18 years of age): female: 0 male: 8-15 other: 0

Does the research involve any vulnerable populations? Yes ☒ No ☐ If yes, please explain.
My research will be conducted with adult men who are living in a transitional house due to them being recently released from prison or a drug rehabilitation center. Many of them are recovering drug addicts.

What will participants be asked to do? (Append interview questions, focus group questions, survey instruments, and other relevant materials)
First participants will be asked to take a survey around self-stigma and public stigma that comes around being formerly incarcerated and/or a drug addict.
Second participants will be asked to participate in a weekly circle process where they will be asked to bring a photo that they have taken over the past week of something that relates to a theme they were given the previous week (something that makes them laugh, something that they are grateful for, something that makes them angry, something that makes them feel shame, etc.). These themes will all relate to what they associate with self-stigma around being formerly incarcerated and/or an addict. The group will collectively come up with the weekly themes. We will then talk about why they took these photos, each taking a turn to tell their stories. These meetings will not be recorded. I will ask participants if I can take notes and will keep their information anonymous.
After 4 weeks of this process, I will ask five of the participants if they are willing to have a one-on-one interview with me. If yes, I will set a time and interview them in person on their feelings and transformation (or lack of transformation) of the circle process around their views of their own self-stigma of being formerly incarcerated and/or a recovering drug addict.
After 4-6 weeks of this process, depending on schedules and willingness of the participants. We will hold a community gathering at a local café, where the participants will have the opportunity to share, and put on display, their photos and connect with local community members around their stories.
After the community gathering, I will hold a focus group with all of the men to discuss how this process went for them. This will be semi-structured with prepared questions but will be open to change as the conversation permits. The purpose for this focus group is to allow the participants to talk amongst themselves about how the process was for them individually and as a group. They will get to share their feelings and also listen to their peers.
Finally, I will give them the same survey that they were given in the beginning in order to measure how their feelings on their own self-stigma around being formerly incarcerated and/or a recovering drug addict have, or have not, changed. (see appendices for survey, interview, and focus group questions)

If participants are interviewed, will you conduct the interview yourself and, if not, who will? In what language(s) will participants be interviewed? Where will these interviews take place?
I will conduct the interviews myself, in person, in English. English is mine and all of the participants native language. The interviews will take place in Bellows Falls- either in the place that the participants reside (Rise House), my practicum organization (GFCJC) or at a local café.

How many meetings will you hold with participants and where will these meetings be held? (Will it become a burden to the participants of the research?)
I will hold 6-10 meetings with the participants, including a community gathering and photography exhibition. These meetings will be held at the house that the participants reside (Rise House). These meetings will not be a burden to the participants because they will happen immediately after their required house meeting where they reside. Participation will be fully optional. While these meetings will take time out of their personal time, many of the men have been asking for more pro-social (sober) activities for them to do, so this will be an option for them in the evening. Meetings will take place every Monday evening around 6pm, after their dinner and house meeting. Meetings will last 1 hour. The community gathering at the end of the research project will take around 2 hours, but participants will be allowed to leave early if they need.

How will participants be recruited?
Participants will be recruited through me attending one of their house meetings (at Rise House) and explaining the research project. I will be very clear that participation in this project is completely optional and that they may choose to stop participation at any point in the process.

Are participants compensated in some form? If yes, please describe. Yes ☐ No ☒

Explain your sampling protocol. What are the criteria for including or excluding participants? How will you select potential participants?
Criteria for including or excluding participants is dependent upon their residency at Rise House. If they are residents at Rise House and are interested and willing to participate in the research project, they will be included. My project is designed to include as few as three participants and as many as fifteen participants (the maximum number of beds and capacity of the house). In order to be a resident at Rise House, one must be recently released from jail/prison or a drug rehabilitation center. Therefore, any of the men at Rise House would qualify as viable candidates for my study.

How will you protect participants from feeling pressured to participate in the research due to any power differential? For instance, if there is a formal relationship between researcher and participants (teacher/student, aid worker/client) that might influence a participant’s ability to refuse to participate, identify alternative options to participation in the research. All participants will possess the ability to refuse participation or identify alternative options to participate. This project will be clearly stated that participants are participating only because they choose to do so, not because I or anyone else (such as the director of Rise House, anyone related to the DOC or GFCJC, etc.) has convinced, coerced, or given incentive for them to participate against their own wishes. This project will be set up as an optional pro-social activity that they can chose to participate in during their down time.

How might participation in this research benefit participants (there may be no benefit)? There are several benefits of this research for those that are participating. Some identified potential benefits for participation in this study include the following: A) an opportunity to share personal knowledge related to their struggles with stigma, B) potential to learn what others, facing the same types of stigma, have experienced and are feeling, C) co-creation of a shared idea of what self-stigma is and ideas of how to address these stigmas. There may also be some potential benefits if this idea of self-stigma is shared with community members. There may also be some indirect benefits stemming from the opportunity to reflect, share, and listen to others’ experiences of self-stigma. In their process of trying to return back to their communities, this study is an opportunity for the participants to reflect on some of the possible things preventing or supporting their return to
the outside world. In addition, due to the emerging nature of participatory action research, I predict that there will be unexpected benefits that will arise throughout the process.

Do participants risk any stress or harm by participating in this research? Yes ☒ No ☐ If yes, describe the risk or harm and the safeguards employed to minimize the risks. Participants will be asked to share personal stories about their lives, their feelings, and reflect on how those experiences are impacted by self and public stigma surrounding their identities of being formerly incarcerated and/or recovering from drug addiction. As is a risk with all discussions around personal experiences, there is a risk of stress. While participants will not be at risk of personal harm or asked to do anything that would put themselves in physical harm, they will be asked to open up about themselves and be honest about their feelings. In order to minimize the risk of stress or emotional harm, I will give the participants the option to stop participating, to take a break, or to walk away at any point throughout the process, with no penalty or negative feedback. In addition, I will be working with a recovery coach who will be able to be in contact with both myself and the participants at any point if that should ever happen. In addition, there are several staff at the GFCJC that are trained in conflict management, mediation, and restorative justice practices that could help with de-escalation and self-care if that should also be needed. This project is being framed and designed through a semi-participatory action research approach, so the participants will have control over what themes are discussed and what topics they collectively feel comfortable bringing into the room. Again, due to the emerging nature of participatory action research, I predict that there will be unexpected benefits, and pitfalls, that will arise throughout the process.

Will participants receive a summary of results? Yes ☒ No ☐ how will you disseminate the results to them?

I will give Rise House the results by email, as well as each participant the results in paper, in person. I will also give all the participants the option to talk with me about the results at any point following the research if they choose so.

Indicate what type of consent you will obtain and explain any waiver of written consent. For research with children you will need a minor assent and parental consent form N/A

☒ Written
☐ Electronic
☒ Oral

If your subjects are non-English speakers, explain how you will obtain consent/assent. N/A

(Append sample consent/assent language, including consent forms for each type of research participant)

3. How will the following be addressed?

Privacy: Protection of participant rights as a person to control access to oneself (intellectual, physical, and behavioral).

As discussed in question 2K, participants reserve the right to decline participation at any time during this process. Additionally, they can end the interview at any time and can refuse to answer any questions without consequence. They also may contact me at any time for questions, comments
and/or concerns. They also reserve the right to contact me to omit statements made during the interview. The focus group will be held in a private space (either at Rise House or at the GFCJC). In addition, the information gathered from participants will be protected. I will transcribe interviews and send final draft for interviewee’s approval. All names will be changed and/or removed to protect the participants from being identified.

Protection of participant information:
Anonymity (protecting names and other unique identifiers of participants): To maintain the anonymity of participants, names cannot be collected. Subjects cannot be identifiable in any way. To protect participants, several measures have been put into place to ensure that participants feel comfortable and all information/data is protected. Interviews will be conducted by myself alone and personally transcribed. Interview recordings will be deleted following full transcription and transcriptions will be converted to password protected Word documents. Participants and their workplaces will be identified with pseudonyms. Data from these interviews that will be coded via a qualitative software will utilize only pseudonyms and analysis will be done alone by the researcher. Findings will be transcribed and analyzed for themes and key discoveries.

Confidentiality (protecting data about participants): How is access to data protected? How will data be stored and for how long? Will it be used in the future and, if so, how will permission for further use be obtained? Will your data be accessible online? The intended use of the research data, as stated in the informed consent form, and the actual use of data by the researcher in practice must be consistent.

All information provided will be strictly confidential. The audio recordings will be destroyed after transcription. Participants will have the opportunity to ask, and have answered, all questions about this research during and after the group sessions, interviews, and focus group by emailing, calling, or talking in person to Jordan Ferrick. All inquiries are confidential. Secondly, the raw data and interview transcripts will only be seen by the researcher. The resulting analysis of the interviews will report findings without tying interview participants to any personally identifying information. The data will only be stored on the PI’s computer and storage drive and all analysis will be done using the researcher’s personal license on their personal computer. This data will not be accessible online and interview transcripts will be stored on the researcher’s computer until the finalization of the research project.

4. Does your research require approval from an external IRB in addition to the SIT IRB? Yes ☐ No ☒
If yes, please identify the institution as well as your plans for seeking approval: N/A

5. If necessary, please discuss other details or procedures of the research that should be known by the Institutional Review Board: N/A

By initialing below, I certify that all of the above information (and that attached) is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and that I agree to fully comply with all of the program’s ethical guidelines as noted above and as presented in the program and/or discussed elsewhere in program materials. I further acknowledge that I will not engage in research activities until my advisor has notified me that both my proposal and my Human Subjects Review application are approved.

Jordan Johnson Ferrick
Student’s full name (printed)

___ JF ________________________________
Student’s initials Date

November 27, 2018

ATTACHMENTS INCLUDED AS APPROPRIATE
(CHECK ALL THAT ARE ATTACHED):

☑ Proposal
☑ Recruitment letters or fliers
☑ Informed consent form,
☐ Minor consent form,
☐ Parental consent form
☐ Observation guide

☐ Interview guide
☐ Survey instrument
☐ Instructions to informants
☑ Organization(s) letter of support
☐ External IRB documents
☐ Other(s) (please specify): Focus Group sample questions

The faculty advisor’s initials confirms that the composition of this proposal has been supervised and approved for submission to the IRB for review.

___ KLT____ 11/27/18 ________
Advisor’s initials Date

Advisor’s name printed: Dr. Kelly Teamey

Submission Instructions: Please submit application AS ONE FILE to irb@sit.edu. Submission must come from your official SIT email with the following file name: last_first_type (example: Smith_Jane_expedited.docx; Nguyen_Viet_exempt.docx).
Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

Dear Participant:

I am a student at SIT Graduate Institute. As part of my final Capstone requirement, I am conducting a semi-participatory action research project titled “Reducing Self-Stigma of Felons and Drug Addicts through the use of Storytelling and Photographs”. As the Outreach & Advocacy Coordinator at the Greater Falls Community Justice Center, much of my work is focused around storytelling—specifically through the use of circle processes. Much of the circle work is focused on repairing harmed individuals, families, and communities. As a resident at Rise House, I hope to work with you in addressing some of the experiences you have had that have put you in the house and given you the title, and stigma that comes with that title, of addict and or felon.

The purpose of my project is to address the stigma surrounding felons and addicts in Bellows Falls, VT. Ever since the opioid crisis has drastically hit this small town, much of the town’s reputation has revolved around the increase in crime, drug use, drug abuse, and drug related deaths. Working with Rise House, my research aims to address the following question: How can internalized stigma of felons and addicts be reduced with photo storytelling? It is clear that having a felony record and being attached to the term “addict” has huge implications in terms of stigma and how these identities are treated in society. I am interested in exploring how these stigmas affect those labeled as felons and addicts and the implications that those effects have on the wider community.

You are invited to participate in a 6-8-week process of taking photos around themes of stigma, sharing your stories around those photos, and listening to others’ share their photos and stories. At the end, you will be asked to participate in an exhibit where your photos will be put on display and you will have the chance to tell your stories and interact with other community members. All is optional and completely voluntary.

Any risks to you are minimal however, as you will be asked to share personal stories about your experiences (although all participation is optional), there is a risk of emotional triggering. If absolutely needed, Sarah Chard, a Recovery Coach at Parks Place, is available to assist anyone who is feeling triggered. In addition, the staff at GFCJC are trained and experienced in conflict mediation and de-escalation processes. There will be no compensation of any kind available for your participation, which is completely voluntary. You may withdraw your participation at any point or skip any question you do not wish to answer without penalty.

I will keep the digital audio recording of our interview in a password protected computer accessible only by me. I may share part or all of this recording with my faculty advisor, Dr. Kelly Teamey, but no one else will hear it. Upon completion of the project, I will destroy the digital file. Photos used in the community exhibit will be kept or destroyed at your request.

As mentioned above, I will use your responses as resource material for my research paper on self-stigma reduction through the use of storytelling and photographs. At your request, I will provide you with a copy of the final draft. The paper will be read by my faculty advisor and I will make a presentation about it to my fellow peers. I may report your answers in my paper, but I will keep your identity confidential and not reveal any identifying information about you in my final paper and presentation.

If you have any questions about this project or your participation in it, you can call me at (802) 376-1849 (my work phone) or email me at outreach@gfcjc.org (my work email). The person to contact if you have questions concerning your rights as a research subject or experience problems as a result of your participation in this project is Udi Butler, IRB administrator at SIT Graduate Institute, 1 Kipling Rd, Brattleboro, VT. 05301; email udi.butler@sit.edu

Thank you for your participation and assistance!

Sincerely,

Jordan Ferrick
Appendix C: Participant Informed Consent Form

Title of the Research: Reducing Self-Stigma of Felons and Drug Addicts through the use of Storytelling and Photographs

Researcher: Jordan Ferrick

Introduction

You are invited to participate in a semi-participatory action research study focused on the reduction of self-stigma around being formerly incarcerated and/or in recovery of drug addiction with the use of storytelling and story listening. Data collection will stem from what the group decides is important and what themes need to be highlighted. You are invited to participate in a 6-8-week process of taking photos around themes of stigma, sharing your stories around those photos, and listening to others’ share their photos and stories. At the end, you will be asked to participate in an exhibit where your photos will be put on display and you will have the chance to tell your stories and interact with other community members. All is optional and completely voluntary. I kindly request you to read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in this semi-participatory research process.

Purpose of Research

This research seeks to address the stigma surrounding felons and addicts in Bellows Falls, VT. Ever since the opioid crisis has drastically hit this small town, much of the town’s reputation has revolved around the increase in crime, drug use, drug abuse, and drug related deaths. Working with Rise House, that houses men who are formerly incarcerated, recovering addicts, and veteran recovering addicts, my research aims to address the following question: how can internalized stigma, of felons and addicts, be reduced with photo storytelling? It is clear that having a felony record and being attached to the term “addict” has huge implications in terms of stigma and how these identities are treated in society. I am interested in exploring how these stigmas effect those labeled as felons and addicts and the implications that those effects have on the wider community.

Description of the Research Procedures

The research includes several data collection methods: a pre and post survey focused on your views and feelings around stigma, weekly photograph “assignments”, weekly group storytelling meetings (6-8 weeks) focused on a theme around stigma and the photo that you took representing that theme, a one-on-one in person interview, a final focus group, and a community photovoice sharing event where your photos will be on display. Therefore, if you agree to participate in this research, you might be requested to do an interview, however, at any point throughout the research process, you may choose to stop, take a break, or express concerns without any reprimand.

Risks/Discomforts of Being in this Research

Please be informed that this research does not involve any physical risks. However, there are risks surrounding emotional triggering. In discussing personal experiences, there is a risk of emotional triggering. You are not required to answer any questions I ask and may pass or end the interview, circle process session(s), focus group, or community photo sharing event, at any time. If distress or discomfort comes up for you during this process, you may pause or discontinue the interview or any other part of the research process.
Benefits of Being in the Research
This research is being conducted as an Independent Practitioner Inquiry Capstone Paper, a requirement for successful completion of my graduate program.

There are several benefits of this research for those that are participating. Some identified potential benefits for participation in this study include the following: A) an opportunity to share personal knowledge related to one’s struggles with stigma, B) potential to learn what others, facing the same types of stigma, have experienced and are feeling, C) co-creation of a shared idea of what self-stigma is and ideas of how to address these stigmas. There may also be some potential benefits if this idea of self-stigma is shared with community members. There may also be some indirect benefits stemming from the opportunity to reflect, share, and listen to others’ experiences of self-stigma. In their process of trying to return back to their communities, this study is an opportunity for the participants to reflect on some of the possible things preventing or supporting their return. In addition, there may be additional benefits that will likely emerge due to the participatory nature of the process, but those benefits will remain unknown until they are revealed through the process.

The planned community photo sharing event at the end of the process will provide an opportunity for you to engage in a positive way with the community. This event will give you an opportunity to share your experiences with stigma and show the community that you are more than your stigma. This is an opportunity for you to be humanized.

While I cannot compensate you for your time, your participation is voluntary and will be invaluable to this project as I seek to explore further how to reduce self-stigma around being formerly incarcerated and/or in recovery of drug addiction with the use of storytelling and story listening.

Confidentiality
All information provided will be strictly confidential. No identifiable information will be included in the data analysis or report; copies of the data will be stored on the PI’s personal computer. Any raw data and interview transcripts will only be seen by the researcher. After transcription, audio recordings will be securely deleted.

The results of this study will be published in the form of a capstone paper and permanently stored in the digital archives at SIT Graduate Institute. You will have the opportunity to ask, and have answered, all your questions about this research during and after the interviews by emailing or calling Jordan Ferrick, please see my contact information at the top of this letter. All inquiries are confidential. All photographs that will be taken will not include faces or other identifying information. Photographs will not be published or shared without yours, or anyone else in the photo’s consent. In addition, your story or your photos will not be shared at the community photo sharing event, without your participation in the event or consent.

Right to Refuse or Withdraw
The decision to participate in this research is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the research at any time without affecting your relationship with the researcher. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely from the research at any point during the process; additionally, you have the right to request the researcher not to use any information you provide.
**Right to Ask Questions and Report Concerns**
You have the right to ask questions about this research and to have those questions answered by the researcher before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the research, at any time feel free to contact me via email or by telephone. If you like, a summary of the results of the research will be sent to you. If you have any other concerns about your rights as a research participant that have not been answered by the researchers, you may contact Dr. Kelly Teamey my capstone advisor.
If you have any problems or concerns that occur as a result of your participation, you can report them to Dr. Kelly Teamey at kelly.teamey@sit.edu

**Rights of Research Participants**
The SIT Review Board has reviewed my request for this project. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact SIT at 1 Kipling Rd, Brattleboro, VT 05301, University Institutional Board/IRB or at irb@sit.edu

**CONSENT**
Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this research, and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep, along with any other printed materials deemed necessary by the researchers.

I have read, and I understand the provided information and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research.

Participant's Name: ____________________________________________

Participant’s Signature: ___________________________ Date: __________

Researcher’s Signature: ___________________________ Date: __________
Appendix D: Verbal Consent Script

I am a researcher from SIT Graduate Institute who would like to learn more about your experiences with self-stigma and how storytelling can be used to address the issues around stigma of those who are formerly incarcerated and/or recovering from drug addiction. If you agree that I can ask you about your experiences and feelings relating to stigma and how sharing your story and listening to others’ stories impacted you, I would ask you a few questions. If there are any that you don't want to answer, then you can tell me to skip and we will proceed to the next question. You can tell me the interview is over at any time if you no longer want to continue. The questions that I will ask you should not embarrass you or require you to talk about anyone else if you do not feel comfortable or in need of doing so. I would just like to hear about your experiences with stigma and your experience throughout this storytelling process.

For the purpose of this study, I am also requesting to record our conversation. Anything you say during this interview will be confidential and this interview will be transcribed and then the audio file will be discarded. In the written transcription, I will also only identify you by the name you indicate and only record mention of your workplace if you indicate it is okay. If you are uncomfortable being recorded, we do not have to record, but I would ask your consent in allowing me to take some notes to record the gist of your responses.

Do you have any questions at this time? If not, please confirm your consent by answering the following questions:

1. Do you understand the nature of your participation in this interview?
2. Do you understand that participation is entirely voluntary and that you can skip a question or end the interview at any time?
3. Do I have your permission to record this interview?
4. What name would you like utilized as identification in the transcript?
5. What name would you prefer your workplace be utilized as identification in the transcript?
Appendix E: Letter Request for Organization’s Support (To GFCJC & Rise House)

November 20, 2018

Name: Jordan Ferrick
School: School for International Training
Major: Master of Arts in Sustainable Development
Class: Programs in Intercultural Management (PIM) 77
Address: 1 Kipling Road, Brattleboro, Vermont 05301

Dear Suzanne Belleci, Director of GFCJC
Dear Rebecca Trumpold Manager of Phoenix Rise House

As you know, I am currently a student at SIT Graduate Institute based in Vermont. I am presently in my Reflective Practice (Practicum) phase of my graduate work, working with the Greater Falls Community Justice Center (GFCJC), and I am currently working on my capstone research paper in order to graduate in May 2019.

I am researching the effects of internalized stigma, of felons and drug addicts, and how (or if) these stigmas can be reduced through photo storytelling. My research focuses on the impact of oral first-person storytelling as a participatory tool to address self-stigma. The research will explore the hypothesis that oral first-person storytelling (and story listening) can reduce self-stigma of felons and recovering drug addicts.

For my research, I want to utilize the same approaches that we use in our Restorative Justice work at GFCJC. A huge part of our work utilizes circle processes- with the idea that sharing personal narratives and deeply listening to others’ personal narratives has the power to transform. My plan is to hold weekly circles with the men at Rise House, focusing on themes related to self-stigma around felons and drug addicts. Each week they will share a photo of something they took that is related to the theme of the week related to self-stigma. From there, I would like to conduct semi-structured interviews with the men who have regularly (+80% of the sessions) attended the sessions to collect their feedback on the impact of narrative storytelling on their experiences and feelings around their own self-stigmas. After the final session, if the participants are willing and eager, I would like to host a community gathering at a local café, where the participants will have the opportunity to share their photos and connect with local community members around their stories. In addition, I will be holding a final focus group with the men to discuss their experiences with this project. The researcher (myself) will reach out with a consent form to receive permission from participants' to participate in this study.

Your approval to conduct this study would be greatly appreciated. For further questions, please contact me at jordan.ferrick@mail.sit.edu.

Thank you very much!

Jordan Ferrick
Master's Candidate in Sustainable Development
Appendix F: Organization’s Letter of Support GFCJC

Suzanne Belleci, Director
Greater Falls Community Justice Center
44 School Street,
Bellows Falls, VT 05101

Dear IRB Board of SIT Graduate Institute:

I write on behalf of the Greater Falls Community Justice Center (GFCJC) in support of Jordan Ferrick’s Capstone research proposal that will contribute to her work here at the GFCJC. Her project entitled, “Reducing Self-Stigma of Felons and Drug Addicts through the use of Storytelling and Photographs”, will contribute to our mission of reducing community harm and empowering locals to come together within this small community. I strongly support this project and the focus on reducing self-stigma among those working so hard at re-entering society after being incarcerated or entering into drug rehabilitation.

As an organization which mission is: addressing conflict and crime by promoting shared responsibility for a safe and healthy community by engaging citizens to restore relationships, repair past harms, and build community connections through education and involvement, this project falls into the work we are doing and the work that needs to be done.

Through this letter, I, and this organization, acknowledge specific roles and responsibilities we will fulfill in this partnership. In the event that this proposal is approved, I would expect my role in this project to include:

Supporting Jordan’s needs as a facilitator throughout the process. This could include brainstorming circle themes, further coaching on debriefing difficult conversations, steps to take moving forward, etc.

Assistance in organizing the community photo sharing gathering

The GFCJC will support Jordan’s research process including circle sessions, interviews, focus group, and community gathering.

We look forward to contributing to this project in any ways Jordan needs and to being able to use the results of the study for future work with Rise House and this community of Bellows Falls in addition to working to reduce the harm that self-stigma can bring to a community.

Sincerely,
Suzanne Belleci
Executive Director
Greater Falls Community Justice Center
 Appendix G: Organization’s Letter of Support Phoenix Rise House

Dear IRB Board of SIT Graduate Institute:

It is my pleasure to write a letter, on behalf of Phoenix Rise House, in support of Jordan Ferrick’s research proposal on “Reducing Self-Stigma of Felons and Drug Addicts through the use of Storytelling and Photographs”.

Phoenix Rise House has a history of working with the Greater Falls Community Justice Center (GFCJC). The GFCJC has regularly organized pro-social events and activities for the residents at Rise who are working on living their lives without drugs and alcohol. All of the residents are Rise House are formerly incarcerated and/or recovering from drug or alcohol addiction.

This research project appeals to this organization because it provides several benefits:

1. Gives the residents an opportunity to participate in a pro-social activity during their free time,
2. Gives the residents an opportunity to address their own self-stigma and feelings around their experiences of being a felon and/or drug addict,
3. Gives residents an opportunity to share personal knowledge related to their struggles with stigma,
4. Potential to learn what others, facing the same types of stigma, have experienced and are feeling, and
5. Participate in co-creating a shared idea of what self-stigma is and develop ideas of how to address these stigmas collectively

In conclusion, this organization fully supports the efforts of the GFCJC and Jordan Ferrick as they seek approval of this proposal to conduct research around reducing self-stigma through the use of storytelling and photographs. Any programs that can help our residents have an easier time in their process of re-entering society will benefit our residents, this house, and the community at large.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Trumpold
House Manager at Phoenix Rise House
11 Underhill Ave, Bellows Falls, VT 05101
## Appendix H: Post Survey Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>1 (NEVER)</th>
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<th>4 (ALWAYS)</th>
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<tr>
<td><em>(Self-Devaluation)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>1 I have the thought that a major reason for my problems with substances is my own poor character.</td>
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<td>2 I have the thought that I should be ashamed of myself.</td>
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<td>3 I have the thought that I deserve the bad things that have happened to me.</td>
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<td>4 I have the thought that I can’t be trusted.</td>
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<td>5 I feel inferior to people who have never had a problem with substances.</td>
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<td><em>(Fear of Enacted Stigma)</em></td>
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<td>6 People think I’m worthless if they know about my substance use history.</td>
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<td>7 A job interviewer wouldn’t hire me if I mentioned my substance history in a job interview.</td>
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<td>8 If someone were to find out about my history of substance use, they would expect me to be weak-willed.</td>
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<td>9 People would be scared of me if they knew about my substance abuse history.</td>
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<td>10 If someone were to find out about my history of substance use, they would doubt my character.</td>
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<td><em>(Stigma Avoidance)</em></td>
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<td>11 I would choose to avoid someone who seemed interested in my friendship if I knew they had never used substances</td>
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<td>12 I put a lot of effort into hiding my substance use history</td>
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<td>13 Shame gets in the way of how I want to live my life</td>
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<td>14 I avoid situations where another person might have to depend on me</td>
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<td>15 I avoid situations that make me feel different</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>(Values Disengagement)</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>16 I do things that are good for me, even if I feel like I don't deserve it.</td>
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<tr>
<td>17 I’m willing to be in situations where I might feel different from others</td>
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<tr>
<td>18 I am open about my substance use history with most people</td>
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<tr>
<td>19 I pursue important goals in life, even when I fear I might not follow through</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 If I didn’t have a job, I would still look for one, even if it felt hopeless</td>
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</table>
Appendix I: Preliminary Interview Questions

All interview questions and focus group questions are preliminary. Due to the participatory action research approach that my project is taking on, questions, themes, and direction of the work could change throughout the process.

1. When did you begin to feel ready to tell your story of your experiences of being formerly incarcerated and/or a recovering drug addict?
2. Tell me in your own words what you believe are the effects of opening up to others after going through difficult moments such as being incarcerated or being addicted to drugs or alcohol.
3. How do you think telling your story about your life during and after your incarceration and/or addiction has affected your way of living?
4. How, or did, the use of photography contribute to this project?
5. Would this process have been different without the use of photography? If yes, how so?
6. Are you able to see tangible benefits of sharing your stigma-related story with others? If yes, would you like to share some of those benefits?
7. Have you ever regretted having shared your story with someone? If yes, why?
8. How do you think telling your story about your life during and after these moments has helped you empower yourself?
9. Some people believe that telling your story and sharing your difficult experience with others is a key to healing and therefore to self-empowerment. What do you think are the remaining issues that cannot be solved through storytelling?
10. Has listening to others’ personal stories affected you? If so, how so?
11. How has telling your stories and listening to others’ stories affected the way you feel about yourself?
Appendix J: Video Consent Form

Greater Falls Community Justice Center
44 School St, Bellows Falls, VT 05101
(802) 38709837 director@gfcjc.org

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FOR VIDEO RECORDING

Title of Project: My Photo, My Voice: Video Recording for Presentation

I, ________________________, agree to participate in this video recording. By signing this consent form, I acknowledge that I have read and agreed with the statements below.

- I understand what the project is about, and what the results will be used for.
- I understand that what the researchers find out in this video and study may be shared with others but that my name will not be given to anyone in any written, audio, or visual material developed.
- I am fully aware of what I will have to do, and of any risks and benefits of the video and study.
- I know that I am choosing to take part in the video and that I can stop taking part in the video at any stage without giving any reason to the researcher.

This video involves visual and audio recording of the participants who participated in my capstone research project. Please tick the appropriate box below:

☐ I am aware that I will be recorded, and I agree to this. I agree to have my face and profile in view of the camera. However, should I feel uncomfortable at any time I can ask that the recording equipment be switched off. I know that I can ask for a copy of the recorded material, which will not include anybody’s name. I understand what will happen to the recordings once the study and presentation is finished.

☐ I agree to being recorded, but my face cannot be visible. My profile or back can be visible and my voice can be recorded.

☐ I do not agree to being recorded at all.

Releaser’s Signature _____________________________ Date ___________
Phoenix Rise House Resident of 11 Underhill Ave, Bellows Falls, Vermont, 05101

It is understood that this material will be used in a legitimate manner, both internally and outside the GFCJC and is not intended to cause any harm or undue embarrassment to the parties involved.

Researcher’s Signature _____________________________ Date ___________

If this release is obtained from a presenter classified as a minor, then the signature of that presenter’s parent or legal guardian is also required.

Parent’s Signature _____________________________ Date ___________
Video Release Form

I, _____________________________________, Phoenix Rise House resident, with a mailing address of 11 Underhill Ave, Bellows Falls, Vermont, 05101, hereby grant permission to Jordan Ferrick and the Greater Falls Community Justice Center, with a mailing address of 44 School St Extn., Bellows Falls, Vermont, 05101, the rights of my image, in video or still, and of the likeness and sound of my voice as recorded on audio or videotape without payment or other consideration. I understand that my image may be edited, copied, or exhibited and waive the right to inspect or approve the finished product wherein my likeness appears. Additionally, I waive any right to royalties or other compensation arising or related to the use of my image or recording. I also understand that this material may be used in diverse educational settings within an unrestricted geographic area. The video will be stored on Jordan Ferrick's personal, locked, computer and the public will not have access to it after it has been shared during the presentations.

Photographic, audio, or video recordings may be used for the following uses: courses and educational materials, presentations.

By signing this release, I understand this permission signifies that photographic or video recordings of me may be electronically displayed in public educational settings such as SIT's capstone presentation or other conference presentations.

I will be consulted about the use of the photographs or video recording for any purpose other than those listed above.

There is no time limit on the validity of this release nor is there any geographic limitation on where these materials may be distributed.

This release applies to photographic, audio or video recordings collected as part of the sessions listed on this document only.

By signing this release, I acknowledge that I have completely read and fully understand the above release and agree to be bound thereby. I hereby release any and all claims against any person or organization utilizing this material for educational purposes.

Releasor’s Signature ______________________________________ Date ________

Phoenix Rise House Resident of 11 Underhill Ave, Bellows Falls, Vermont, 05101

*It is understood that this material will be used in a legitimate manner, both internally and outside the GFCJC and is not intended to cause any harm or undue embarrassment to the parties involved*

If this release is obtained from a presenter classified as a minor, then the signature of that presenter's parent or legal guardian is also required.

Parent's Signature ______________________________________ Date ________
Appendix L: Preliminary Video Questions

Video Questions
1. What are words that you associate with addiction? When you think of addiction, what words do you use to describe that person?
2. What are words that society associates with addiction? When they think of addiction, what words do they use to describe that person?
3. What are words you associate with incarceration? When you think of incarceration, what words do you use to describe that person?
4. What are words that society associates with incarceration? When they think of incarceration, what words do they use to describe that person?
5. What are some of your most important identities?
6. How do you want your community to see you?
7. In a perfect world, what are words you would like society to associate with recovering from addiction?
8. In a perfect world, what are words you would like society to associate with formerly incarcerated?
Appendix M: Sample of systematic coding based on grounded theory
Appendix N: Co-created themes around the stigma of addiction and incarceration

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Appendix O: Themes Chosen for Each Session

**Weekly Group Meetings**

**Themes for Photos**

**Week 1:** Anxiety + Determination

**Week 2:** Fear + Pride

**Week 3:** Shame + Excitement

**Week 4:** Restlessness + Temptation

**Week 5:** Loneliness & Joy

**Week 6:** Loyalty & Integrity

**Week 7:** Overwhelmed & Happiness

**Week 8:** Motivation & Low Self Esteem
Appendix P: Sample photos of themes related to stigma
Appendix Q: Photovoice Process Infographic

**Photovoice Process**

- **Multiple reflective experiences**
  - Images prompt reflection on lived experiences

- **Taking photographs that represented themes related to stigma**

- **Collective interpretation:**
  - i.e., group session circles with narrative storytelling

- **Co-constructed meaning**
  - Reflective discussion, interpretations elaborated by collective

- **Themes & Theories**
  - Connecting collective work with theories, supporting the development of knowledge

- **Dissemination:**
  - Bringing findings and emerging knowledge to policy makers to promote social change

- **Issues & Resources**
  - Shared with policymakers to promote social change

**Catalyst for Change**
- Action combined with participation and research creates a platform for social change

- **Knowledge**
  - Emerging from reflection to be voiced & amplified

- **Action**
  - Voiced knowledge results in action for social change

*Figure adapted from Liebenberg (2018)*
Appendix R: Findings of Stigma + Identities Infographic

What I thought would happen through the process of photovoice and storytelling on each participant’s view of themselves:

What actually happened through the process of photovoice and storytelling on each participant’s view of themselves: stigma remained a major identity, but other identities also became more evident
Appendix S: Photovoice Examples

Strength: Like an addict, only the shell of this building remains of what once was, but the foundation still remains.

Adventure and Recovery: the path to recovery is a journey. At the end, there is a lot of hope. There is so much more out there then addiction and incarceration.
Anxiety: Living sober means facing the weight of all your problems without the use of drugs or alcohol.

Shame: I and everyone around me is constantly aware of my mistakes I can’t escape.
Excitement & Pride: I am finally able to save up and buy nice things. Now that I am not spending all my money on drugs, I can buy things that I am proud of. I can’t wait to be able to buy these sneakers!

Excitement’ recovery means new beginnings, a new horizon is in sight, change is coming
Freedom and Loneliness: The horizon is visible but crossing into it can be a lonely journey. The path to recovery can sometimes feel as if you have no one and you have to try to find your way on your own.

Safety: coming home, coming back to where you are going to be accepted, released from the chains of incarceration.