Therapeutic photography: fostering posttraumatic growth in Shan adolescent refugees in northern Thailand

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Recent reviews of therapeutic photography have identified the technique's unique ability to transcend culture and language, both essential characteristics of international trauma therapy. This article describes a process, through which youth identified changes in self-perception after a photojournalism workshop, using an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach and conducted in a Shan migrant community centre in northern Thailand. The authors (a) provide a broad overview of a form of therapeutic photography utilised within a humanitarian aid context, (b) examine the concept of posttraumatic growth (PTG) within a traumatised adolescent population on the Thai/Burma border and, (c) suggest the potential for a new domain of growth as it relates to the application of Tedeshi & Calhoun's conceptual foundation of PTG (1995), within a Southeast Asian context. Results suggest that perceptions of self, and one's role in the community, did improve within the context of this project. A discussion of the limits and merits of this approach is also presented.

Keywords: posttraumatic growth (PTG), Shan migrants, therapeutic photography, trauma informed project development

Introduction

Wiang Wai is a small village in the north western region of Thailand and is comprised wholly of refugees from Shan State, in neighbouring Burma. They have come hoping to find work and a better life, away from the persecution and other human rights abuses suffered in Burma due to the military junta's decision to eradicate all minorities from the country. As a result of this displacement, the Shan have faced a number of new challenges in their host country (Amnesty International, 2005). For example, they are not recognised by the UN High Commission of Refugees, nor given legal status as asylum seekers by the Thai government. As a result, these new arrivals quickly find themselves among the most vulnerable and marginalised groups in the country, without safe refuge or humanitarian assistance. Unlike the Karen, another displaced Burmese group residing in and around Mai Sot in Thailand, there are no official refugee camps along the Thai/Burma border for the Shan. Therefore, they are forced to either live in hiding as '*illegal*' persons on the border, or to seek work as migrant workers in low paid, low skilled, and often, unsafe jobs (Refugees International, 2005). These migrant workers tend to work on agricultural plantations and construction sites, as transient or '*illegal*' workers, and are therefore at constant risk of arrest, abuse and exploitation (Refugees International, 2005). So, in addition to living a marginalised existence in Thailand, they

also live in constant fear of deportation back to Burma, as there they would face ongoing persecution, torture, rape and death (Human Rights Watch, 1998). It is this persecution and other human rights abuses that are responsible for increasing the flow of the Shan into Thailand over the past 15 years (Human Rights Watch, 1998).

In addition, because of their experience of oppression, abuse and violence in Shan State before coming to Thailand, many arrive with unresolved/undiagnosed and/or untreated mental health issues. They often describe these conditions as hurt and sadness being *'stuck in the mind'* or *'buried in the heart'*. Additionally, pressures and stress of living in poverty, having no rights or legal standing, often lead to an increase of alcohol/drug abuse, domestic violence, child abuse, depression, anxiety, and (potentially) suicide.

The significance of therapeutic photography
Doug Stewart (1979) cites that photography was first used to treat patients in a mental hospital in the 1850 s, only 11 years after Louis Daguerre brought the camera into the public domain for the first time. Since then, the concept of using photography as a tool for psychosocial therapy has flourished worldwide, specifically in Europe, Canada, and the UK. Many different methods exist for implementing the use of photography in therapeutic settings, including *PhotoTherapy* and therapeutic photography (Weiser, 2012), *Photovoice*, and digital storytelling. All of these methods and projects differ slightly in technique and implementation, target population and intended outcomes. It was not until 2005, when the film *Born Into Brothels* won an Academy Award, and over 15 international awards, that the idea of using photography as a means of healing for individuals affected by violence gained international attention. Since then, dozens of humanitarian photo documentary projects with youth have flooded media outlets with raw, yet playful, imagery of slums, streets, jungles, housing projects, and schools around the world.

The qualitative research method, *Photovoice*, is one such technique that has gained international recognition for its ability to assist in rehabilitating communities in areas of armed conflict (Green & Kloos, 2009; Moletsane et al., 2007). These projects are concerned with empowering individuals and communities to own their strengths, promote community dialogue on sensitive issues, and stimulate wider policy changes (Denov, Doucet & Kamara, 2012). Stevens & Spears (2009) outline other similar international projects that fall under the umbrella of *'rehabilitation through photography'* (RTP), aiming to promote emotional and social healing among the participants. The methodology used in this study, referred to as therapeutic photography, is similar in that it includes a desire to achieve the objectives stated above, while at the same time be used to encourage individual posttraumatic growth (PTG) (see below). Therefore, this project aims to expand the traditional methods of *Photovoice* and RTP in areas of armed conflict as a means for healing, at both the macro and micro levels.

Posttraumatic growth
Although traumatic childhood experiences have been associated with poorer psychological wellbeing and adjustment problems later in life, many adult survivors of childhood abuses also evidence high levels of positive change and growth. This process is called posttraumatic growth (PTG) (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995, 2004; 2006).

'Posttraumatic growth describes the experi-
ence of individuals whose development,
at least in some areas, has surpassed what
was present before the struggle with crises
occurred. . . Posttraumatic growth, then, has
a quality of transformation, or a qualitative
change in functioning, unlike the apparently
similar concepts of resilience, sense of coher-
ence, optimism, and hardiness' (Tedeschi
& Calhoun, 2004).

Tedeschi & Calhoun differentiate between
their concept of PTG and other concepts,
such as resilience, by stating that resilience
is a personal characteristic that allows
people to manage adversity well, and to
move on after a hardship. Whereas with
PTG, it is not a personal trait or ability to
cope that is measured, but an actual change
in attitude that occurs as a result of
struggling with the material residue of a
traumatic event, leading the individual to
a new, more positive, paradigm. Tedeschi
& Calhoun make it clear that PTG requires
that the individual 'consciously and systemati-
cally intends to make meaning out of trauma or to
benefit from it' (2004).
The existent PTG literature on adolescents
(Kryger & Lindgren, 2011; Taku et al.,
2012) led to the assumption that traumatic
experiences survived could also yet provide
a unique opportunity for growth. This study
was conducted among such youth on the
Thai/Burma border, with the goal of explor-
ing the presence of PTG following reloca-
tion and participation in a therapeutic
photography workshop.

Research study and project objectives

The aim of this project was to extend
Tedeschi & Calhoun's (1996; 2004; 2006)
model of PTG to Shan adolescents, who
had all experienced significant trauma
events inside Burma and during their
resettlement journey, by exploring the con-
struct among their artist statements and
captions relating to their photos.
The objectives for this study were twofold:
(1) therapeutic photography and its ability
to link visual awareness to self-awareness
was examined; and (2) indicators of PTG
and the various forms they embody were
investigated. Ultimately, a group case study
framework was utilised to do qualitative
descriptive work.
The overall goal of this project was to give
Shan migrant youth the ability to under-
stand their traumatic past as part of their
history, rather than a somatically charged
daily reality. This was accomplished by
giving them a tool to articulate their
individual stories. In the end, the authors
hoped to facilitate a process where the
students would have mastery over their
stories (Richman, 2006). This study was
done in collaboration with two organis-
ations: SalusWorld and Fortune.

Partnering organisations
SalusWorld is a nongovernmental organis-
ation (NGO) working on the mental health
needs of the displaced Shan since 2008.
SalusWorld's model is based on experiential
training, and matching skilled psychologists
and clinical social workers with local coun-
sellor trainees from the communities they
service.
Since 2009, SalusWorld has been working
with an implementing partner, Fortune,
a community based organisation (CBO)
founded to also attend to the mental health
needs of the Shan population in Northern
Thailand. Fortune provides peer counsel-
ling and training to teachers, monks,
medics, traditional healers, and other com-
munity leaders. This study was conducted

at a Fortune community centre in Waing Wai, Thailand.

Setting and sample

A purposeful convenience sampling was conducted by selecting individuals identified to have rich case studies, and who were available for in-depth study (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Participants were recruited from a group of youth community members that community centre counsellors were working with, clinically, in large group activities or academically in after school programmes. The selection criteria for inclusion were: the participant was 16 years or older, had reported distress, had been connected to Fortune for more than 3 months, and in the judgement of the community counsellors, were able to participate and follow the data collection methods used (see *Methods* below).

Nine potential participants consented to the project and committed to attend a five week photojournalism project, whereby students would be given cameras and training to become proficient in photojournalism skills, and to produce work for a local gallery showing. The participants in this study included four young men and five young women, ranging in age from 16 to 19 years. The subjects' first names have been changed, but the age, gender, and identified struggles remain unaltered in the results. All of the participants had experienced a traumatic, forced migration from their home in Shan State to their new home in Wiang Wai. This migration occurred while they were young (ages: 4–12 years) and was violent. Events included seeing their homes burned, fleeing from Burmese troops, hiding in forests, being smuggled across the border, and finally resettling in a place where youth are forced to decide between identifying with their elderly relatives as Shan, or identifying with their young classmates as Thai.

Methods

This project used an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), a methodology that allows room for the participants to assist in interpreting their experience of an event. (Chapman & Smith, 2002; Brocki & Wearden, 2006). Therefore, IPA allowed learning about the subjective experience of individuals, while at the same time allowing those individuals to interpret their own imagery (Denov et al., 2012). The photography project took place over five weeks in July and August 2010. One of the authors, a trained photojournalist, explained the study to potential participants and obtained informed consent (i.e. participant rights were explained, and they were also told that not participating would not have an adverse effect on their well-being).

Photography workshops took place one day a week, for consecutive weeks, in the community schoolhouse after school. A translator from the Fortune staff allowed the classes to be taught by an English speaking photojournalist. Each week, a new photography technique was introduced, a new disposable camera was provided and the previous week's photographs were developed for each student. The focus on photography techniques, such as lighting, angles, and composition provided a safe distraction from the intense work of looking at their own traumatic stories. This was intentional, so that the students could ease into the process of self-analysis. Photography assignments were given, not only to reinforce classroom lessons, but also to encourage students to examine their own stories. A few examples are listed below.

- Use 10 frames (photos) to photograph something about living in Thailand that you truly love and another 10 to photograph what you truly hate. Use the remaining frames for anything you wish.
- Take pictures of *'Things that Make Me Angry or Depressed'*, remembering the rules of composition.
- Take pictures of *'Things that Make Me Feel Relieved'*, remembering the rules of composition.

Students and the facilitator conducted a peer based critique of each student's favourite photographs, in order to give constructive feedback. The discussion of each photograph started on a technical level and moved into a deeper discussion of the manifest content (the picture and how it was photographed). The photo's latent content was also discussed (the deeper meaning behind the photo, i.e. the meaning that photographer placed there). Students would then spend time writing captions, or explaining captions, that they had written for their images. The result was a large body of visual and written work that was presented to the community in the local temple school at the end of the project. Students invited family and friends to attend, certificates were handed out, refreshments were served, and photographs were taken. Following the end of the project, Fortune staff members received training on how to continue this therapeutic photography work after the photojournalist left Thailand. They were trained in specific techniques on how to have therapeutic conversations with students, using the photographs they had taken as a focal point for the discussions.

Data analysis
The second author, a clinical psychologist, followed the students a year later to determine the amount of PTG (if any) that had occurred as a result of their participation in the project. This determination was based on a thematic analysis of the participant's responses to a series of questions about their life and overall functioning. This data collection took place in October 2011, and included informal interviews with the participants, which were then translated and documented on a Likert scale (a scale frequently used in research employing questionnaires, see Figure 1). Worksheets also included short answer questions. Six of the nine original students were available to provide this data.

In addition, IPA was used in a content analysis of the artist statements and photo captions. Themes were identified based on the prevalence of the narrative content. If a theme recurred in a majority of narrative statements, the authors attributed meaning to the significance of those statements.

Results
The presence of posttraumatic growth
The narrative excerpts (highlighted below) show the six recurring themes that surfaced in the analysis, highlighting healthy coping and adjustment to traumatic experiences. The themes identified were: 1) *An Appreciation of Life*; 2) *The Importance of Intimate Relationships;* 3) *Identifying Personal Strengths;* 4) *Spiritual Strength;* 5) *New Possibilities;* and 6) *The Ability to Articulate the Social Narrative.* The first five themes mirrored what Tedeschi & Calhoun (1996) identified as factors or domains of PTG: 1) *Greater Appreciation of Life;* 2) *More Intimate Relationships;* 3) *A Greater Sense of Personal Strength;* 4) *Recognition of New Possibilities;* and 5) *Spiritual Development.*
The one noteworthy cultural difference that was discovered, between this group of respondents and what other authors

	Scale						
Strongly Disagree	-	-	-	-	-	-	Strongly agree
1. Learning about photography was helpful	1 0%	2 0%	3 0%	4 16.6%	5 33.3%	6 33.3%	7 16.6%
2. My role in the community has changed over the past year	1 0%	2 0%	3 0%	4 33.3%	5 66.6%	6 0%	7 0%
3. I see the world in a new way since learning about photography	1 0%	2 0%	3 16.6%	4 50%	5 0%	6 16.6%	7 16.6%
4. The training helped me tell my story to others	1 0%	2 0%	3 16.6%	4 0%	5 16.6%	6 33.3%	7 33.3%
5. The training helped me to ask others about their stories	1 0%	2 16.6%	3 0%	4 0%	5 0%	6 83.3%	7 0%
6. My influence on the community has changed over the past year	1 33.3%	2 16.6%	3 16.6%	4 33.3%	5 0%	6 0%	7 0%

Figure 1: Data from follow-up interviews.

(i.e., Cryder et al., 2006; Tedeshi & Calhoun, 2006) have found with Western responders, is that the Shan adolescents consistently focused on what was titled the *Ability to Articulate the Social Narrative*. This theme will be explained further in the discussion section.

What follows are qualitative representations of the domains of PTG, as found in the participants' written captions and artist statements. These statements were derived from an in-class and homework assignment to write about a selected group of pictures every week that tell a story. These captions were displayed in conjunction with the photographs at the gallery exhibition. The authors analysed each written statement (N = 75) for the presence of a PTG theme. PTG themes were observed in the following percentages of total statements that the students provided: *Appreciation of Life* (12%); *The Importance of Intimate Relationships* (12%); *Identifying Personal Strengths* (8%); *Spiritual Strength* (13%); *New Possibilities* (5%); and the *Ability to Articulate the Social Narrative* (45%). An additional 5% of the written statements did not fall into any PTG category.

Appreciation of Life (12%)

The most preliminary glimpse of PTG in our students is seen in their *'General Appreciation of Life'* and the ability to have an improved appreciation of life as a result of trauma exposure (Jordan, 2000, in Tedeshi & Calhoun, 2004). Many of them photographed items or places in their lives (computers, ping pong tables, motorbikes, and above all, cats) that were important or precious to them. A pretrauma test for appreciation of life would have indicated if a significant change had taken place. Without such pre-measurements, the authors cannot report significant correlation, regardless of the predominance of photographs that depicted positive appreciation for life.

Photo 1: I like this cat so much because he is a member of our family. I play with him all the time. Whenever I feel sad, he makes me smile.

Photo 2: My cute little motorbike

Now-a-days motorbikes are really important to everyone. It is our transportation and the other thing is, when we get sick, we can use it to go and see a doctor.
Hsur Kai Kham, 18

Photo 3: I like computers because computers are a very new technology. They help people to get new knowledge and to search for new information. By using the computer, we can also search for something about the history of Burma.
Heng Hsur Tai, 17

The Importance of Intimate Relationships (12%)

We find evidence of the importance of intimate relationships through photographs and captions that focus on friendship.

Photo 4: My lovely friend
All people should have friends. If we don't have friends we will be so isolated. Friends! Whenever we are in trouble, we don't leave each other and we help each other.
Hsur Kai Kham, 18

Photo 5: This is a photo of my friends. I like this photo so much because when I go to school I have so much fun and so many friends.

Photo 6: Whenever I saw the swings, I would miss my friends so much. We used to play together, but now there are only broken swings left and that made me so upset. . .as if our communication and relationship are already broken, like these swings. Hsai Nam Hsei, 17

The students were also found to be in need of lessons on the difference between a snapshot and a photograph, because so many of them were taking fast, carefree images of their friends posing and smiling. The photojournalist taught the students to differentiate by saying that snapshots were something you give to a friend and photographs were something you give to an art gallery. It was so natural for them to focus their cameras on their relationships, that they were neglecting the other features of their lives.

Identifying Personal Strengths (8%)
Another domain of PTG is identifying personal strengths (Cryder, et. al., 2006). The workshop encouraged this by asking each student to write an artist's statement. This statement identifies the unique features of the artist's work, but also was a statement of what the artist believes about his/her photography. An analysis of the statements revealed that the participants were able to not only articulate their strengths, but to also internalise a compassionate 'other'.

'These photos are very meaningful. So, I want everyone to think about them carefully and keep them.'
Song Seng, 17

'I love and am really happy while taking a photo. No one may be interested or see the beauty of my photos, but I wish everyone to look at it very carefully, or if not please read my expressions that come from my heart.'
Seng Lao, 18

'I am so happy that I have an opportunity to join with the photo training. It gives me self-confidence to act out and not to be afraid to give a speech in public. In the past, when I studied in my homeland, I had never had a chance to be in front of people. So, when I have to come out, I feel excited and a little bit shy. However, I believe in the future I will be able to do better than now.'
Mwe Noom Korn, 17

Spiritual Strength (13%)
In addition to understanding the strengths and importance of their work for an audience, the students were also able to draw a spiritual strength from the process, another domain of PTG.

'Taking a photo makes me feel steady and at peace. It makes me really happy. So, in the future I hope to go take the photos of our Shan State and make everybody know the beauty of our Land.'
Hsur Kai Kham, 18

'I am very happy that I have a chance to take photos and to join in the photo training. Whenever I take a photo, I have nothing to think about and it seems like mediation.'
Heng Hsur Tai, 17

New Possibilities (5%)
Tedeschi & Calhoun's PTG domain of *Recognition of New Possibilities* was also found in the longitudinal aspect of the study. The follow-up interviews indicated the presence of PTG in the way that participants saw new possibilities as artists. In the short answer responses, reported below, students indicated that their lives held new possibilities because they had improved their English, felt happy and confident, and were asking new questions about the world. Additionally, these students seemed to have disproportionately risen into leadership roles, or applied for and were accepted into, advanced education programmes. Four out of six of the respondents indicated a positive feeling for how their role in the community had changed (Figure 1).

'When we started, I was very different. In the past when I took a photo, I didn't think about anything. I took it because I liked it. After the training, it made me think a lot and now I think more. We need to think what kind of tree this is and how the tree connects to our life. Why people put things where they put them. Why there are rich people and poor people, and this is how I changed. I think more and I ask more questions.'
Hsur Kai Kham, 18

Others have indicated a lasting pride in their work as artists. When asked how students remember feeling as a photographer, all of them remarked on positive attributes about themselves:

'I felt very smart and confident in myself.'

'I felt like I am happy when I take a photo and when someone else comes and look at it, and will know what I am thinking and feeling.'

'I was happy when I took the photos and had very good concentration.'

'. . .When I took some [photos], it made my heart alive.'

In addition to still holding new positive outlooks a year after the workshops, three of the students have moved into leadership roles in their community as travelling medics or community outreach workers, and five were accepted to study at an elite school focused on community development. These students have been trained by other Shan community leaders to use basic medical knowledge to counsel individuals who are sick, and to educate the community on preventative health. In addition, they are working to educate the community about HIV and HIV prevention.

Ability to Articulate the Social Narrative (45%)
The final and most unique aspect of PTG discovered in this population was their collective ability to articulate the social narrative of the Shan People. Ultimately, PTG was observed in the students' desire for mastery of the story of their people. This was evident in their quick and apt desire to educate their audience on the plight of Shan migrants. There was not one mention of a personal narrative, but all stories were

in the context of the larger plight. Many photographs and captions were presented as educational material for outsiders.

Photo 7: Hill tribe people
I would like to tell about Wa family life. This family lives together in a small hut (shelter). They only have one pot for cooking both rice and the meal. So they mix both rice and vegetables with each other, and then cook them. After cooking, they eat together, with no plate and no spoons. They use their hands to take food from pot and eat it. They use the bucket to carry water. When I ask them 'What do you use to clean this pail, because I didn't see any detergent powder or washing gel?' Then they told me; 'We use sand to clean it.'
Mwe Noom Korn, 17

Photo 8: This photo represents our Shan people who are far away from their country. Most of our Shan people have to migrate, because the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) and Burmese military punished us, so we have to seek asylum in

Thailand and have to work for Thai bosses right now.
Heng Hsur Tai, 17

Photo 9: Paddy fields are really important for our Shan people. We rely on them both for food and for daily life. We grow paddy for making a life since our ancient times. In our Shan State, every family has its own farm and can grow rice. They don't have to worry about food for the whole year, but for Shan migrants who migrant to another country, they have to worry about hunger. Who is the main person to cause this situation?
Mwe Noom Korn, 17

In these statements, the voices of young sociologists can be heard. The use of rhetorical questioning and bringing in the historical perspective only strengthens the argument that these individuals are moving into the role of educator. This can be seen as evidence of the success of the project, because students are capitalising on having an audience for their stories. The authors believe that they are moving from identifying as 'victims' to 'advocates' for their community. The story of their community is more important than their individual story. This information clearly emerged from the written statements during the photography project, but was also reflected in the follow up interviews. Data from the follow-up interviews (see Figure 1), suggest that the

students have an outward focus toward listening to the stories of others, and are becoming more involved in their community.

Another interesting aspect of this unique grasp of the social narrative came about when students began producing multiple photographs of the same exact object, from a very similar angle. The multiple photos were laid out on the table, showing the road to their school, the Buddha on the hill behind their school, the community temple, the paddy fields where they work, and the forest near their homes. The student were asked; *'why did everyone decide to take a photograph of the same thing?'* Their quick and simple answer was unanimous; *'because we have the same story'*.

Every other workshop the authors have given (in multiple countries and cultures) have been filled with students who are intensely individualistic, and concerned about *'standing out'*, or representing themselves in a unique way. For this reason, it came as a surprise that the Shan participants had no problem turning in nearly identical photographs. In fact, sometimes the authors would unintentionally mixed up their envelopes, and no one was alarmed. This attitude makes sense in light of what is known about Eastern cultural identification with the community, rather than the individual. This finding also echoes other studies that have shown the importance of a collective identity in the healing process (Hatoss, 2012). Likewise, developmental psychologists have chronicled the gradual emergence of narrative capacities in children, from the rudimentary attempts of two year olds to construct a meaningful *'landscape of action'* in their stories, to the insights of older children as they grasp the *'landscape of consciousness'*, reflected in the thoughts, feelings, and motivations of

different characters (Bruner, 1990; Nelson, 2003). However, little has been said about the importance of the culture these characters come from.

The present research project suggests that Shan adolescents appear to perceive the inclusion of cultural identity as just as important, if not slightly more important, than individual identity traits. Rather than focusing on their autobiographical accounts, they emphasised the means by which they were subtly and explicitly positioned as characters in the story of the *People from Shan State*. Further research could uncover the sociological reasoning behind this theme, and whether or not its location in the Shan community speaks of an Eastern tendency to identify with the collective, rather than the individual.

Discussion

This project demonstrates the merit of utilising therapeutic photography and investigating PTG among adolescent populations. It also provides preliminary support for the integration of therapeutic photography into psychosocial programmes for adolescent trauma survivors worldwide.

It has clearly been shown that the youth are interested in articulating the plight of their people, rather than their own individual plight. Every commentary on this plight is about resilience, and overcoming difficulty with strength. There is also an awareness of the trauma everyone has incurred, and in that awareness there is almost an audible sigh that says; *'this is what we do, and this is what we have been doing for decades. We need to begin to advocate for ourselves.'* Some of the statements we have discussed call for the world to notice the collective story of the Shan people.

Photo 10: Whenever you look at this photo, please think about how you can help the world and how we can help each other to maintain our forest. Hsur Kai Kham

'We should try hard to study in order to use our knowledge to fight the enemy, to get back our motherland, and in order to preserve our own literature, culture and tradition.' Mauk Korn Kawn

'So, in the future I hope to go to take the photos of our Shan State and make everybody know the beauty of our Land.' Hsur Kai Kham

The human penchant for creating meaning through the medium of storytelling and capturing these stories on film is both obvious and universal. On an interpersonal level, visual and auditory narration serves vital social and individual functions. Within a conversational medium, stories can be told to instruct, entertain, impress, implore, test, admonish, invite, or distance the listener, and occasionally several of these intentions can be compressed into a single telling (Neimeyer, 1995). In the context of greatest relevance to Tedeschi & Calhoun, the recounting of traumatic life narratives to others solicits validation of one's experience and provision of social support, both of which can facilitate healing and growth.

Within the extensive literature relevant to the phenomenon of PTG, those concerned with the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of narratives may be among the richest, but also least utilised. For the people of Shan State, this may be especially important given the level of oppression they feel, both in their home country of Burma and as migrant refugees in Thailand. In nether country are they allowed to fly their flag, teach history or speak their language openly and freely, without fear of reprisal.

Limitations and lessons learned

Although the current study revealed a pattern of results that was both consistent with, and expanded theory and research on, therapeutic photography and PTG, the limitations of the study must also be acknowledged.

In addition to practical limitations, such as the potential for miscommunication through the interpretation process, a small sample size, an even smaller follow-up sample size, researcher bias, and a short project time line, there was also the potential for assigning factors to the therapeutic photography intervention that may have been produced by other factors inherent in the process. For example, the presence of the CBO, Fortune, and the peer counsellors could have produced PTG in and of themselves, rather than the therapeutic photography intervention. A rigorous pre

and post test schedule could help isolate the factors involved. In other words, while these six domains can be clearly seen to be present in the participants' current psychology, there is no way to know if they were present before the photojournalism workshop. In addition, the IPA process should involve cross checking interpretation of the themes with the participants.

The addition of a sixth domain to the standard PTG, the *Ability to Articulate the Social Narrative*, should also be tested cross culturally to determine if indeed it is a by-product of Eastern cultural communalism, and if it truly does indicate healing has occurred or if it is also present in individuals who are still suffering through the early stages of integrating emotional distress. Further research should also be conducted to determine the validity of this sixth domain, based on the limitations of this sample and methodology.

Another development in this research could include an impact evaluation of international humanitarian photo projects to discover the methodology that is best practice in this field. As these projects are gaining popularity, clinical experts must carefully monitor them to ensure best practice is applied.

Lastly, the people of Shan State's history suggest that the issues of trauma and exploitation are extremely complex, and many factors need to be taken into consideration before making blanket statements about their impact.

Conclusions

When a migrant adolescent uses a photograph and story of chillies in a tray to illustrate the illusion of beauty with heat and spice inside, she is undeniably demonstrating a unique form of PTG.

Photo 11: When we look at the chilli we will think it's so beautiful, but it is so hot and spicy inside. My life is also like that. Everyone will think I am so happy, but in my mind I have to worry about everything…'
Seng Lao, 18

This student has been ushered to a safe place, where she can articulate her traumatic story. She has been given a camera, and therefore a tool, to move her through the stages of trauma recovery, into a place where a grasp of her new found competencies equals a grasp of her new found growth.

The authors found that this growth occurred unilaterally across the group of Shan adolescent participants, and allowed the inclusion of a new domain of PTG. The participants displayed an advanced ability to articulate the social narrative of Shan migrants and their traumatic past, and to believe that the photojournalistic process facilitated this ability. As a result of this study, the authors present new evidence that therapeutic photography can be used to facilitate rigorous PTG among adolescents.

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