Visualising the invisible: children on the streets of Lima, Peru, realise the self through photographs

Jamie Patrice Joanou

To cite this article: Jamie Patrice Joanou (2017) Visualising the invisible: children on the streets of Lima, Peru, realise the self through photographs, Visual Studies, 32:2, 133-147, DOI: 10.1080/1472586X.2017.1322917

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1472586X.2017.1322917

Published online: 25 May 2017.
Visualising the invisible: children on the streets of Lima, Peru, realise the self through photographs

JAMIE PATRICE JOANOU

This article presents findings from a photographic project conducted with six adolescent boys living and working on the streets of Lima, Peru. In this article, I examine how photographs provided the boys with a means by which to express themselves and served to humanise these participants who exist at the most extreme margins of society. Drawing parallels between the participants’ use of photographs and the roles that photographs play for families, I examine how the ability to record and document their childhood provided the boys in this study the opportunity for critical engagement in the creation of their own histories.

INTRODUCTION

Children on the Street

Children living and working on the streets of Lima, Peru, can be found in most areas of the city selling candies, performing acrobatics, shining shoes, playing music, or simply begging for limosna (alms). The occurrence of children trying to make their living on the street varies throughout the day, season, and year, with more children out and about during summer months, and at night and on weekends. Poverty is believed to be one of the major forces driving children to the streets (Bar-On 1997; Dewees and Klees 1995; Karabanow 2003; Mickelson 2000), though familial abuse, neglect, maternal or paternal absence, overcrowded home environments, and rapid migration rates from rural to urban areas are also cited as contributing factors to the street child phenomenon (Beazley 2000; Fílho and Neder 2001; IPE 1999; Lusk 1989; Moran and Castro March 1997; Trussel 1999).

It is clear that difficulties exist in categorising the diverse and varied young people who live and work on the street (ADM 2001; Bar-On 1997; De Moura 2002; Hecht 1998; LeRoux and Smith 1998a; Panter-Brick 2002; Tierney 1997), and the children in Lima serve as a useful reminder of this challenge. The children and adolescents who make their lives on the streets of Lima do so in an environment of instability and frequent transitioning as they move or are moved between the street, home, casa-hogar (home for street children), and preventivo (juvenile detention centre) (Joanou 2014). Children who make their ways on the streets may do so for short or long periods of time and experience varied life trajectories (Panter-Brick 2002); some return to their families, others find work in an attempt to transition out of street life, while still others go to prison, or like Alexis, one of the participants from this study,1 die from communicable diseases like tuberculosis.

This variability further underscores the limitations of the term street child as it subsumes an extremely diverse population of children and adolescents into a narrow and problematic category, focusing on one aspect of their identity (Schibotto, 1990, as cited in Villaroel). The term also positions children as belonging to the street, thus allowing for their dismissal, while perpetuating a deficit perspective by normalising the home child and creating an inherently abnormal street child (Hecht 1998; Invernizzi 2003; Scheper-Hughes and Hoffman 1998). Children on the street are vulnerable citizens that exist on the most extreme margins of society. They suffer various human rights abuses (Godoy 1999; Huggins and Mesquita 2000; Seitles 1998; Tierney 1997; Trussel 1999), experience restrictions in their mobility and in their use of public space (Mayers 2001; Scheper-Hughes and Hoffman 1998), and are often dehumanised by society and the media (Diversi 2006; Göthe 2016).

Furthermore, children who spend a significant portion of their childhood on the streets contradict western, middle-class notions of childhood, and because of their presence in urban centres, they impact how the urban landscape is understood while this environment similarly informs their individual and collective identities (Beazley 2002; Evans 2006; Joanou 2014; Van Blerk 2005). Though drug use is a frequent occurrence for children living and working on the street (Hecht 1998; Le Roux and Smith 1998b; Ordóñez et al. 1995; Trussel 1999), generating income consumes much of

Jamie Patrice Joanou is an Assistant Professor in the School of Education at Westminster College in Salt Lake City. She has a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies and an M.A. in the Social and Philosophical Foundations of Education. Dr. Joanou has an extensive amount of experience in qualitative research, including participatory research methods. Her dissertation examined the distinctive interplay between the urban landscape, children living on the street, and outreach organisations in the downtown area of Lima, Peru. Her continued research interests focus on issues of identity development and space among marginalised populations and her areas of specialisation include qualitative research methods, the social foundations of education, and children living on the street in Latin America.
their time, with activities ranging from shining shoes, guarding cars, washing car windows, carrying water and packages, selling items such as candies, flowers, bags of fruit, newspapers or cigarettes (Bravo and Piazza 2001; IIPE UNESCO 1999; Mickelson 2000; Zucchetti Canevaro 1990), or, in the case of the participants in this study, playing music on local buses.

Children on the street have historically been positioned as a problem to be resolved (Scheper-Hughes and Hoffman 1998; Hecht 1998), and non-profit organisations abound intending to provide alternative environments for these children. As organisations and researchers alike aim to assist and engage with children living on the street, I position photography as a useful research tool serving to humanise these vulnerable citizens. The findings I present in this article stem from a larger year-long ethnographic study where I examined the relationship between children on the street, the urban landscape, and outreach organisations in Lima, Peru. The findings from the larger study convey that while children may come to the street for a variety of reasons, the street provides a space within which they simultaneously exercise agency and resistance and thus contributes to their persistence within it (Joanou 2014). Here, I relay findings from a photovoice project that I completed with a small group of six boys, ages 14–18, living and working on the streets. Providing the young research participants with cameras offered me an opportunity to explore their socio-spatial environments, while also allowed for the research to be conducted with my participants, rather than about them (Mizen and O offenses 2007; Young and Barret 2001). Furthermore, photography provided for an easier introduction to my intentions as a researcher, as I found that simply telling the boys that I was there to investigate their lives did not make a great deal of sense to them. Yet more importantly, as the findings presented here demonstrate, photographs offered the boys the ability to record and document their childhood and the opportunity for the engagement in the creation of their own histories, an outcome of participatory photography that has only been minimally explored in the literature (Johnson 2006; Wang and Burris 1997). Since its inception, photovoice has been considered an important tool in helping participants to ‘catalyze change in their communities,’ which is held in direct opposition to the passivity attributed to subjects in traditional documentary photography (Wang and Burris 1997, 370).

For many researchers, this method has proven useful in balancing power between the researcher and researched, creating a sense of ownership among participants, building rapport and fostering trust, generating and analysing data, and understanding the experiences and perspectives of participants (Bolton, Pole, and Mizen 2001; Castelden, Garvin, and First Nation 2008; Gold 2004; Harper 2002; Harper 1998; Johnson 2011; Karlsson 2001; Matthews and Limb 1999; Nowell et al. 2006; Ross 2004; Young and Barret 2001). In particular, photovoice has been lauded for the significant benefits to participants and their communities, including creating awareness (Rhodes and Hergenrather 2007), fostering deep reflection, enabling participants to become experts on their own lives and communities (Johnson 2011; Gavin 2003; Foster-Fishman et al. 2005), and for providing opportunities for developing personal and social identities and building social competency (Stack, Magill, and McDonagh 2004). For marginalised populations like street children, photovoice has been useful in challenging stereotypical representations (Ataöv and Haider 2006; Campos Montiero and Dollinger 1998; Gavin 2003). It is important to note, however, that when employed with vulnerable children, photographs have the potential to both contradict stereotypical representations while simultaneously reifying them (Joanou 2014; Kessi 2011), demonstrating the complexity of visual methodologies. Thus, photovoice, which emphasises the narrative that accompanies the photographs, proves a useful tool to counter stereotypical and limited representations of children living on the street.

With a growing trend in conducting research with children, it is essential that the perspectives of young research participants are foregrounded (Vanderbeck and Dunkley 2005). Participatory methods like photovoice provide for greater understanding of how children (both housed and unhoused) conceptualise and interpret their socio-spatial environment in ways that are not adult-centred (Matthews and Limb 1999; Ross 2004; Young and Barret 2001). Additionally, Young and Barret (2001) assert that photographic methods allowed for the researchers to ‘re-create street children’s daily life processes and spatial patterns’ when their positionality as adult women prevented them from becoming full

Understanding the Roots of Photovoice and Its Uses

Photovoice is a term used to describe a particular participatory research method where participants are provided cameras as a means of data collection. Participants and researcher then discuss the contents of the photographs, the meanings behind them, and their importance in open-ended interviews (Nowell et al. 2008). Since its inception, photovoice has been considered an important tool in helping participants to ‘catalyze change in their communities,’ which is held in direct opposition to the passivity attributed to subjects in traditional documentary photography (Wang and Burris 1997, 370). For many researchers, this method has proven useful in balancing power between the researcher and researched, creating a sense of ownership among participants, building rapport and fostering trust, generating and analysing data, and understanding the experiences and perspectives of participants (Bolton, Pole, and Mizen 2001; Castelden, Garvin, and First Nation 2008; Gold 2004; Harper 2002; Harper 1998; Johnson 2011; Karlsson 2001; Matthews and Limb 1999; Nowell et al. 2006; Ross 2004; Young and Barret 2001). In particular, photovoice has been lauded for the significant benefits to participants and their communities, including creating awareness (Rhodes and Hergenrather 2007), fostering deep reflection, enabling participants to become experts on their own lives and communities (Johnson 2011; Gavin 2003; Foster-Fishman et al. 2005), and for providing opportunities for developing personal and social identities and building social competency (Stack, Magill, and McDonagh 2004). For marginalised populations like street children, photovoice has been useful in challenging stereotypical representations (Ataöv and Haider 2006; Campos Montiero and Dollinger 1998; Gavin 2003). It is important to note, however, that when employed with vulnerable children, photographs have the potential to both contradict stereotypical representations while simultaneously reifying them (Joanou 2014; Kessi 2011), demonstrating the complexity of visual methodologies. Thus, photovoice, which emphasises the narrative that accompanies the photographs, proves a useful tool to counter stereotypical and limited representations of children living on the street.

With a growing trend in conducting research with children, it is essential that the perspectives of young research participants are foregrounded (Vanderbeck and Dunkley 2005). Participatory methods like photovoice provide for greater understanding of how children (both housed and unhoused) conceptualise and interpret their socio-spatial environment in ways that are not adult-centred (Matthews and Limb 1999; Ross 2004; Young and Barret 2001). Additionally, Young and Barret (2001) assert that photographic methods allowed for the researchers to ‘re-create street children’s daily life processes and spatial patterns’ when their positionality as adult women prevented them from becoming full
METHODS AND PARTICIPANTS

The findings presented in this article stem from a year-long ethnographic study, in which I engaged in participant observations on the streets of downtown Lima, in a casa-hogar (group home), and in a drop-in centre for youth living on the street. During this year, I also utilised photovoice as a means for understanding the lives of adolescents living on the streets of Lima, Peru. The participants for this photovoice project included six boys, ages 14–18 who lived on (and off) the streets of downtown Lima, known as Lima Centro. These boys frequently rented a room on a nightly basis from an older adult male who also grew up on the streets. Each of the boy’s experiences on the street and with street life was unique, some having lived on the street for years and others only for a few months. This group of boys was connected in that each of them frequently paid to sleep in the small room just off a main thoroughfare in downtown Lima, rather than take refuge on the streets, in a group home, or an abandoned building. I was initially able to gain access to the boys through a local NGO that engaged in outreach with children living and working on the streets of Lima. The NGO ceased operations early on my fieldwork, and thus, I maintained a relationship with the participants on my own, interacting with them on the street, outside of the room they rented, playing soccer with them, and periodically taking them to lunch individually or as a group.

The boys were provided single use, analogue film cameras on five different occasions; while during each iteration, they were offered a week to take the photographs, the cameras were typically returned within a few days. Once the film was developed, the contents of the pictures taken were discussed in semi-structured informal interviews. During the interviews, I inquired into their rationale for taking each of the pictures, what each one meant to them, and what the images conveyed to them and to other potential viewers. The participants were provided with copies of their photos after each interview, and at the end of the project, the boys were offered the opportunity to compile their photographs in annotated albums created through an online programme. The photography project lasted approximately 6 months.

Ethical Considerations

Visual methodologies carry with them a unique set of ethical dilemmas (Clark 2012), and ethics are of particular concern when engaging in research with vulnerable populations. I have discussed at length the ethical implications of this particular photographic project, outlining the potential intrusiveness of this method, the problematics in its use with a population known to be drug dependent, and the possibility for re-exploitation (Joanou 2009). It is important to revisit, some of these ethical concerns here, however, particularly with respect to the publishing of images of children living and working on the street. The Internet is saturated with pictures of street children, and these images typically demonstrate a narrow and stereotypical view of children on the street, including images of children huffing glue and sleeping on the streets. As a researcher, I maintain an ethical commitment to the participants in this study, and thus, the images that I have included in this article depict a different, more complex story. The photographs portray young people making their living, engaging in work that is both meaningful and sustaining, spending time with their friends, and capturing self-portraits. I have purposefully excluded photographs of the boys drugged or using drugs as these images only reproduce stereotypical conceptions of their lives and relationships with each other and the street.
THE HUMANISING EFFECTS OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Each time I gave the boys a camera, I provided them with simple instructions that included asking them to take pictures of the spaces throughout the city that were important to them or document a 24-h period in their lives. In most instances, however, the boys instead took pictures of what they deemed important: themselves and their friends. For the boys, having the ability to record and re-member their own histories was vital, and yet, much of the literature on photovoice fails to recognise this crucial contribution.

The boys desired to use cameras in the way that so many other people do: to prove events having taken place, to document their histories, and to tell the stories of their lives. When I asked Manuel, a 15-year-old participant who had been on and off the streets since he was 11, in our fifth and final interview why he took the photograph in front of us, he responded, ‘I told you already, (author’s name), I just take pictures to have memories, nothing more’ (see Figure 1). This photograph showed Manuel playing the charango (a small Andean stringed instrument), and a friend playing the zampona (a flute made of reeds of various lengths) and güiro (a percussion instrument) on a bus in attempt to earn money. Music was an extremely important part of Manuel’s life and identity, and the image reflects this. I then asked him to elaborate on his answer: ‘I know, I know,’ I responded. ‘You have said this before. But what is so important about having these as recuerdos (mementos)?’ Manuel then explained that these pictures offered him a way to remember this very time in his life:

In a couple of years I will have a girlfriend and we will have our own room. Music will not pay for this, so I will have to get a different job … with the pictures I will be able to remember how things were now, how things were when I was young.

For Manuel, and for the other boys in the project, the photographs offered them a way of concretising memory, of documenting a time in their lives they knew to be fleeting. Furthermore, Manuel’s demonstration of his understanding of the ephemeral nature of street life clearly contradicts much of the literature on street and working children, further problematising the term street child.

This notion that photographs house our memories is not unique to Manuel or the other boys in this project. For many people, photographs serve as important documentation or as proof of life having happened. Families, for example, are devastated when all of their memories (read photographs) are destroyed in a house fire; without them, they fear they would be left with no memories at all. When photographs are lost, whether cellulose or digital, memories are lost along with them. We look to our family photographs to tell us about who our relatives are or were, to offer truths about their lives and their histories (Hirsch 1997). We believe photographs to be markers in our own personal histories, recording who and how we were at the various ages and junctures in our lives. We do not question their truthfulness or their validity (Hirsch 1997). Given their marginalisation and limited access to cameras, it is not hard to understand why the boys in this study would be drawn to photographs and desire for them to operate much in the same way that they do for families: as documentation and as record of past events. Though family photographs are no less subjective than any other mediated image, for the boys in this study, photographs became an instrument of self-knowledge, and a ‘means by which family memory would be continued and perpetuated,’ regardless of the truths they do or do not tell (Hirsch 1997, 6). In other words, the photographs functioned as evidence of their lives and their adolescence, regardless of its transitory nature.

Hirsch (1997) argues that family photographs provide continuity, or at least the illusion of continuity over time and space, and tell stories. Having access to a camera, to the means of memory production, provided the boys in this study an opportunity to see themselves and to begin to develop a sense of continuity over their adolescence. While the photographs taken in this project served several purposes, including providing me a window into the lives and experiences of the boys in this study in particular, and of children and adolescents on the streets of Lima in general (Karlsson 2001; Young and Barret 2001), providing the boys access to an act that they would otherwise have difficulty in accessing (Wang, Cash, and Powers 2000), and offering me a better understanding of the nuanced and intertwined lives of
the boys and other individuals in the urban landscape, the more meaningful purpose of the photographs proved to be the creation of these ‘recuerdos’ (memories) of their youth. At the very end of the photovoice project, Manuel concluded, ‘what I liked most is taking pictures of myself to give to my friends who respect me – to have photos of myself, to have memories.’ As the boys were provided with copies of their photographs, they were able to use these images as they deemed appropriate. In this case, Manuel would often gift them to his friends actively participating in the construction of his history. The photographs served as a means of memory-making and meaning-making surrounding a period in their lives where they found themselves in frequently unstable and transitional spaces.

Membership to New Social Arenas

The boys desire to realise themselves within the photographic image became abundantly clear early on in the photovoice project. I originally attributed this desire to the excitement and novelty of having a camera to use at their discretion. After several attempts at providing guidance, I realised the abundance of photographs taken of themselves and of each other could not be credited to novelty alone. When I discussed this phenomenon with them, they expressed that they wanted to take pictures of their lives and their friends so as to have ‘recuerdos’ (mementos/memories) of their youth. Each of the boys indicated that they had either never had access to a camera or to photographs in the past, or if they did, they had no photos of themselves or their families. It was important for the boys to have these mementos and to participate in their own history making.

While they may not have had adequate access to cameras, the boys did in fact have significant access to visual images and to various forms of technology. Internet is readily available throughout Lima in public Internet cafes and is relatively inexpensive. Many children and adolescents on the street in Lima, including the boys in this study, would spend time on the Internet chatting with friends on MSN messenger or Facebook.com, playing video games, or surfing Youtube.com. Some computer monitors were even equipped with cameras and children and adolescents would snap pictures of themselves to upload to their profiles on messenger, Hi5.com (a social networking site), or Facebook.com. Although Chalfen (2002) noted ‘anthropologists and others are acknowledging the fact that while half the world’s population has yet to make a telephone call, peoples from virtually all parts of the world are either making or collecting personal photographic records of themselves’ (p. 143), for children on the streets in Lima, access to home media, like photography, remains limited. Their access to Internet and digital imagery, however, is abundant. Similarly, the adolescents I observed were marked by significant contact with foreign volunteers. These volunteers brought with them cameras and utilised these to document their adventures as volunteers, the relationships that they forged with the children, and their travels while in the host country. The children would become quite excited about the prospect of seeing themselves on film, and with the advent of digital cameras, this desire was easily appeased by the volunteers.

This limited and peripheral contact with the camera and photographs coupled with their abundant access to visual images, particularly on social networking sites, confirmed and exacerbated the realisation that for many other people around the world, photographs are an important part of the human experience. This knowledge served as a constant reminder of their marginalisation. As Chalfen (2002) contends, missing personal pictures can contribute to a sense of guilt and alienation; everyone else has childhood photographs – what’s the matter with me? Questions of belonging and even authenticity may develop from a longing for evidence of the past – once again confirming the need for symbolic support systems of various dimensions. (146)

The physical possession of a camera also provided participants with the opportunity to feel important and several of the boys took pictures of people who doubted their ability to obtain a camera. For example, as we looked at a picture Alexis took of a man sharpening a knife in front of a restaurant3 (see Figure 2), he explained, ‘I told him to smile for the camera, but he laughed and did not believe I could take a picture or that I had a camera. So I pulled it out of my pocket and

FIGURE 2. Man sharpening knife.
snapped a picture of him to prove it! Through the taking of this photograph, Alexis was able to prove his worth as a documentarian and demonstrate to the man and to himself his importance.

Cameras, Banks (1998) asserts, are ‘socially located and see from a socially constructed viewpoint’ (18), so rather than ‘documenting,’ they serve to ‘create’ memories and our understandings of events. Additionally, Freire (1970) indicates that when persons are denied their right to take part in the creation of history, ‘to participate in history as Subjects,’ they become both alienated and dominated, relegating the oppressed to the role of object (111). As the boys snapped pictures of themselves and their friends, they played an active role in the creation of their own histories. Furthermore, in contexts like Lima, where home photography is reserved for the middle and upper classes, those who can afford to purchase cameras and print pictures, the youth in this study gained access to an act that is reserved for the elite, gaining entry into an arena they are typically prohibited from entering, bringing them in, however slight, from the margins.

Yo Existo (I Exist)

Chalfen (2002) argues that there is a ‘human desire and need for pictorial evidence’ and maintains that people often take and use pictures in order to ‘reaffirm a sense of “being there”’ and as proof that events took place (147). Accordingly, as people use pictures to provide evidence of having been there, I assert that pictures can similarly be used to provide evidence of being. While the notion of pictures as documentation, truth, or objective reflections of reality has been accurately problematised (Banks 1998; Solomon Godeau 1991; Rosler 1993; Warren 2002, 2005), lay people continue to attribute truth to photographs (Chalfen 2002). Therefore, for the participants in this study, being in the picture served to prove to themselves and to the world that they exist, at least for ‘the time it took to make the exposure’ (Becker 1974, 5). As they expressed excitement at the opportunity to ‘record,’ ‘document,’ and create artefacts of what life was like at this point in their lives, the boys conceptualised the images they captured as reflections of reality. Furthermore, ‘photographing is an act which renders some things visible, and therefore important, and other things invisible and less important’ (Packard 2008). Having asked a friend to take a picture of him, Figure 3 shows Jordan posing for the camera, smiling. This is but one of the many images of Jordan posing for the camera. Similarly, Figure 4 depicts Manuel turning the camera on himself and Alexis documenting their work on the street playing music. By being in the picture, Jordan, Alexis, and the other boys felt important, worthy, and deserving of being documented. They were able to author their own histories and be present within them. This desire to feel important is further evidenced by the boys’ engagement with outreach organisations. Through the act of seeking out children on the street with whom to interact, outreach workers contributed to the creation of a space within the urban landscape where street children found themselves to be both desired and sought after (Joanou 2014).

Expressing and Developing the ‘Self’

Part of the desire to ‘see themselves in pictures’ can be attributed to the need to realise and recognise themselves individuals. Labelled as ‘niños de la calle’ (children of the street), ‘niños en situación de calle’ (children living on the street), ‘niños callejeros’ (street children), and more pejoratively ‘pirañas’ (piranhas) or ‘pirañitas’ (little piranhas), children and adolescents living on the street are frequently categorised by these limiting descriptors and become locked within an outsider-imposed identity. With photographs, the boys began to create and develop their own identities and construct how they viewed themselves and others within
the frame. Each of the boys participating in the project would frequently turn the camera on themselves and capture self-portraits in a variety of contexts. Figures 5 and 6 are two examples of Alexis doing just this on two separate occasions. Moreover, Manuel would hand back nearly entire rolls of film in which he turned the camera on himself and snapped pictures or posed in front of the camera while a friend took pictures of him and Figures 7–10 offer a sample of this behaviour. Berger (1972) argues, ‘the photographer’s way of seeing is reflected in his [sic] choice of subject’ (10); the people, spaces, and places shot by the boys in this study can tell us a lot about how they view the world and themselves within it. Similarly, Warren (2002) asserts

the photograph probably reveals more about the life-world of the photographer than those of the subjects he or she photographs. Of course this is an advantage when asking
respondents to make their own photographs since the photographs may quite literally act as a lens through which to explore these life-worlds. (237)

When a photographer takes a picture of an object, the photograph may or may not reflect reality or truthfulness of the object, but it does speak to the 'intangible and ineffable experiences of the photographer' (Warren 2002, 200, 233). In this sense, when the boys take pictures of themselves, the photograph conveys information about their motivation for wanting to appear in the picture.

While tendencies towards self-admiration, egocentrism, and self-absorption might be dismissed as a normal part of adolescence (Elkind 1967), for the boys in this study, the presence of these characteristics can be better explained as a consequence or by-product of their marginalisation. For example, of the 46 pictures placed in the album created by Manuel, 32 of the pictures were of him, 24 of him alone, and the remaining of him with friends. Of the 48 pictures chosen by Jordan for his album, 27 were of him, 17 of those of him alone, and the remaining of him with friends. The presence of so many photographs of themselves demonstrates both their fascination with seeing themselves in photographs and the need to realise and express themselves as unique individuals.

Beneath the photos he chose for his album, Manuel wrote ‘Hola mi nombre es Manuel’ (hello, my name is Manuel) in a total of 8 out of 17 captions in a 24-page book. He said, ‘I like who I am’ three times and talked about what he likes including his love for music and fútbol on four occasions. In the album, it was Manuel who was in charge of presenting himself to the world and repeatedly introducing himself draws attention to the fact that, concerned mostly with day-to-day survival, Manuel had not had the opportunity for much introspection and therefore had not spent a lot of time thinking about ‘who’ he is and what he likes. Manuel does, however, assert and own his identity by saying this is who I am and I like who I am, which underscores the importance of the boys’ desire to document their lives and author their own histories through photographs.

In addition to being self-absorbed, Elkind (1967) asserts that adolescents are self-critical because they believe...
others to be critical of them as well, though this has no basis in reality. Yet, the children in this study ‘worry about’ what other people think’ and ‘assume that other people are as obsessed with them as they are with themselves’ because there are genuine consequences at stake (Bell and Bromnick 2003, 205–206). It is important to understand that children and adolescents on the streets of Lima receive high levels of criticism on a daily basis; this criticism comes from outreach organisations, from police officers and city security, and from other people living within the confines of the city. They are critiqued for their lifestyle and reminded daily that there are better and healthier options (at least from an adult perspective); outsiders cannot understand why anyone would ‘want’ to be in the street and view their lives as wholly negative, hopeless, and not respectable. Children are reminded of this perception by parents, psychologists employed at group homes, and clergy who run homes for street youth, and this perception was frequently conveyed to me.

Children and adolescents on the streets are also chastised for their drug use, for their appearance, and are commonly viewed as undesirable creatures that leech off of society and soil the urban landscape known as pirañas (piranha). This term is used as a descriptor of the street child population in Lima and, despite intentions, carries with it negative connotations. In describing for people the boys with whom I was working, many would clarify by asking if I was referring to los pirañas. Outreach workers would say ‘no seas piraña (don’t be a piranha)’ when chastising children for undesirable behaviours, or within the context of the group home, reminding children that they are no longer pirañas while interned within it. This was done both in congratulating them for leaving their street lifestyle behind, but also as a way of reminding them what behaviours are appropriate for someone who is not on the street.

During observations, as I attempted to board buses with participants, musical instruments in hand, the young boys were frequently refused entry. Within the city, public transportation on combis (mini vans or small buses) or buses serves as one of the primary ways of moving from one place to the next, and individuals board the buses in a constant stream throughout the day attempting to make a living by selling candies, cookies, or other snacks; selling pens, toothbrushes, needles and thread, wallets, key chains; playing music; selling ice-cream in the summer; recounting stories of sick family members as they show doctors’ reports and X-rays as proof of their condition; and a few even do magic tricks. While many of the boys in this study did admit to participating in illegal behaviour like stealing and drug use, each of them worked playing music aboard buses to produce the majority of their daily earnings. Interestingly, I only once observed a bus driver refuse entry to an adult who worked in this manner. The refusal to let the boys board the bus happened, in part, because of the preconceived ideas about street children.

Accordingly, the participants’ self-perception was significantly influenced by how they were viewed by the outside world. In the year I spent in the field, it became very evident that the boys were aware of how they were viewed by society. On several occasions participants expressed discomfort because of their appearance and the dirtiness and disrepair of their clothing. This discomfort and awareness became particularly evident when the boys expressed interest in looking at schools where they might study but preferred to wait until they had an opportunity to wash themselves and their clothing, or when we took Manuel for an ice-cream cone after an informal interview discussing the photographs he took, and he preferred not to enter out of embarrassment. When I inquired as to why the boys chose to work only in certain areas of Lima Centro and not wealthier tourist areas where moneymaking
opportunities might be greater, they responded that their appearance would cause problems for them. Faced with so much external criticism, the development of a positive self-concept becomes crucial, and Manuel’s assertion ‘I like who I am’ can be seen as a defensive response to the outside assumption of the impossibility that he might like anything about himself or his lifestyle.

Creating Understandings of Events, People and Places

Photographs contribute to understandings of events and the meanings attributed to the people and places within the photographic image. When the boys in this study snapped photographs of themselves and their social networks, they created and performed identities for the camera’s lens, often portraying personas they wished they could be. Sometimes these personas were purposeful and contrived, and sometimes they were not. Jorge, for example, took several pictures of himself playing the charango (see Figure 11 for an example), a popular Peruvian instrument played by several of the boys in the study. This was not yet a skill that Jorge possessed, however. These photographs he took conveyed otherwise, portraying a more hopeful version of self.

In her exploration of family photographs, Hirsch (1997) argues, ‘photographs can more easily show us what we wish our family to be, and therefore what, most frequently, it is not’ (8).

Many of the photographs taken by the boys depict them grouped together, posing for the camera’s lens. Huddled together, looking tough, laughing, but rarely smiling, the pictures reflect a familial unit: a group of friends enjoying their youth and experiencing the joys of adolescence. Figures 12–14 are a few examples of these ‘family portraits.’ While the boys in this study did have fun and friendships were forged, these friendships were typically fleeting and shallow, and the boys frequently confided about the solitary nature of street life.

The cuarto (room) in which the participants stayed served as a landing place for many children and adolescents on the street who would come and stay enticed by the comfort and freedom that four walls offered. My observations, however, revealed the transient nature of this room and of their lives as boys would come and then go, pulled away by family, friends, or by their own desire to get off the street and off drugs. Others were pushed away by inhabitants of either the cuarto or the building. Alexis, for example, fled from the room for more than a month because he punched Ernesto, the room’s principal adult renter, after Ernesto attempted to violate him sexually. The images the boys captured of Ernesto certainly do not speak to the predatory nature of his relationship with them. Jorge, on the other hand, fled in fear of being assaulted because he offered terokal4 to the younger sister of a prominent figure within the building. The pictures, however, do not depict the precariousness of their relationships and the fragile space they occupied but served to create memories that often contradicted reality. Viewed on
their own, the photographs taken by the boys in this study potentially present a nostalgic and two-dimensional view of street life, one that is in direct contrast to the lived experiences of the participants.

The Evidentiary Claims of Photographs

In his research of family home media and of family photographs in particular, Chalfen (2002) reported, ‘instances of pointed objects having been used to scratch out people’s eyes and faces or scissors having been used to cut people out photographs all together, seemingly in an attempt to eliminate people’s identity, existence or association’ (146). The participants in this study similarly would destroy, return, or reject photographs that were not pleasing to them. For example, Andre, upon viewing pictures of him using terokal, became agitated and upset and returned those particular pictures to me. He indicated, ‘I don’t want them, you can have them’ and when I asked why, he replied that they ‘brought back bad memories.’ This is particularly important as Andre had thus far maintained that he did not use terokal and had not been witnessed to do so by myself or any of the outreach workers that I had contact with. By relinquishing the photographs over to me, Andre did not have to be ‘reminded’ of moments in time that were unpleasing to him, or of this version of self that contradicted with the version that he preferred to show the outside world. In this sense, if the photographs no longer existed, it was as if the events captured within them never actually occurred. Similarly, Alexis, after entering a casa-hogar (group home), returned several photographs to me that depicted him and his friends on the street, in the cuarto (room) inhaling terokal, or just hanging out. When I asked Alexis why he did not want the photographs, he responded, ‘me empilan’ (they provoke me). Not seeing the images would enable Alexis to ‘forget’ his time on the street and therefore remain in the group home. For Alexis, as well as for Andre, the photographs provide ‘evidence’ of a time and space they preferred not to acknowledge.

There is a ‘presumed sense of naïveté and untampered truth accorded home media’ as we view it ‘in some very real sense, the heart of good evidence’ (Chalfen, 147). The photographs taken by the boys in this study can be viewed in a similar light as the home media to which Chalfen refers. For these boys, their photographs are ‘the heart of good evidence’ (147). Within them, however, ‘we can also find occasional breaks in this evidential veneer’ when we hear examples of ‘image management’ (144), like those cited above. In addition to the management exercised by Alexis and Andre, Manuel would often return photographs of himself where he did not like the way he looked, usually citing his hair looking odd or funny.

Photographs can also show us things that we do not want to see, things we are unwilling or unable to recognise, remember, or acknowledge. Hirsch (1997), in discussing the creation of her own family albums and the censorship that occurred in their making, as she selected which pictures were album worthy, recounts her
feelings about a picture of herself and her son that did not make it into the album. ‘This picture,’ she relates, ‘forces me to confront my own image not as I saw it, or wanted to see it, but as others did’ (186). When Manuel or Andre chose to return pictures to me, because they did not like the way they looked, or because they ‘brought back bad memories,’ it is because there was something about what the picture communicated that they did not like. Confronting these pictures would force the boys to modify the ways in which they viewed and understood themselves and the personal narratives that were constructing about their lives. These personal narratives might be as simple as believing oneself to look a certain way, and not wanting to confront pictures that remind us of our flaws, or as complicated as not wanting to recognise addiction or the precariousness of street life.

Conversely, as Chalfen (2002) argued that photographs provide ‘evidence’ of who and how people are, or are assumed to be, he also emphasises the ways in which photographs can reinforce assumptions. As the photographs taken by participants depict children inhaling glue, living in an unclean environment, or sleeping on the street, they can reinforce societal perceptions of whom and how street children are, perceptions that tend to be limiting and restrictive. As Steichen maintains, ‘photography can be a moving force in the world . . . it can lift individuals as subjects from the humdrum and turn them into symbols of universal humanity’ (as quoted in Hirsch 1997, 49). This universality can, however, be dangerous as we begin to assume that the people in the picture look just like these people in similar positions thousands of miles away (Hirsch 1997). Similarly, it might be assumed that the pictures taken by the boys in this study are representative of all children living on the streets of Lima. It is important to remember that the photographs taken in this study are unique to boys who took them. They show one fraction of one moment in time and cannot tell a complete story. And even still, while it is essential to question the truthfulness or representativeness of photographs (Solomon Godeau 1991), we cannot disregard the documentary relevance photographs served for the participants in this project.

**IMPLICATIONS**

For the boys in this study, the most valuable outcome offered by their participation was the ability to have ‘recuerdos’ (mementos/memories) of their adolescence. These mementos provided not only snapshots of the realities and fictions of their lives but also allowed them the opportunity to take an active role in the creation of their personal histories. For children who are continually stripped of both autonomy and agency by outreach organisations and the state, and who are dehumanised in the media, this authorship initiates a paradigm shift and is an important step in regaining agency. In recording their youth, the boys in this study were able to author their own histories and identities and create memories for themselves, memories that can shape how they view themselves and how they understand street life. The boys maintained copies of the images, often disseminating them among their inner circles, thus determining how the images would be used and controlling the visual story of their lives. Furthermore, participating in this photography project enabled them to occupy a new and otherwise unattainable social arena, and while this experience was but a brief mark on their adolescence and on their street careers, it is one that may cause reflection for years to come.

Steichen (1969) argues, ‘the mission of photography is to explain man to man and each to himself,’ (as quoted in Weinstein 1977). Seeing and reflecting on themselves within the photographic image provided participants with the opportunity to realise themselves individuals beyond the limiting and restrictive category of street child. Additionally, it served as a means of self-representation and a catalyst for identity development, in which children explored who they are, related their own histories, expressed their values, all in attempts to distance themselves from a period of development where they have been marginalised from school, home, and family. Moreover, through photography, they became active participants in the creation of history, constructing meanings and making memories, a crucial step in the interruption of oppression and in shifting their position from object to subject (Freire 1970).

The findings presented here also make an important contribution to the literature on visual methodologies, particularly photovoice. While photovoice has been lauded for its emancipatory qualities (Johnson 2011; Gavin 2003; Foster-Fishman et al. 2005; Wang and Burris 1997), this study demonstrates less glamorous and perhaps more important results in its connection to home photography. As the six participants turned the camera on themselves and their friends, they demonstrated their need and desire to participate in the documentation and creation of their own memories, an act that they had previously been disenfranchised from and that is an essential component of being human. Their faith in the photographic medium to be the catalyst through which they might engage in this authorship marks an important contribution to how researchers understand visual methods like photovoice.
NOTES
[1] Two participants in this study died the year following its conclusion. One of these participants was Alexis, who died from Tuberculosis. Another was DeSaul, who died in a mining accident. I think of them often and hope for better for those children who come to the street after them.
[2] The participants in this study were assigned pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality.
[3] Some people in Lima garner their living by offering travelling services such as knife sharpening to local restaurants and private residences.
[4] Terokal is a shoemaker’s glue used as an inhalant by many of the children and adolescents who occupy the streets of Lima and its surrounding areas.

REFERENCES
Göthe, R. 2016. “Public Perceptions of Street Children in Cairo: The Criminalization of Street Children and the
Role of the Public.” http://lup.lub.lu.se/student-papers/record/8890958


