Let’s do this together: an integration of photovoice and mobile interviewing in empowering and listening to LGBTQ+ youths in context

Enoch Leung and Tara Flanagan

Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology, McGill University, Montreal, Canada

**ABSTRACT**
Evidence from a meta-analysis suggested that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) youth experience elevated levels of victimization in schools as compared to their heterosexual peers, and that victimization was shown to be persistent and lasting, indicating that school environments are hostile. These findings point to the need to better understand youths’ own efforts in becoming more aware and engaged in impacting systemic inequities. Photovoice and mobile interviewing, two relatively novel qualitative methodologies in the field of LGBTQ research, are methodologies that involve the participants by 1) taking photos of interest as a means of critical discussion, and 2) moving alongside the researcher in a participant-chosen area and have critical discussions highlighted by the visual cues. The goal of this paper is to highlight ways of listening to opinions of LGBTQ youth that are contextualized in the environments in which they are victimized.

**ARTICLE HISTORY**
Received 24 September 2018
Accepted 20 November 2018

**KEYWORDS**
Schools; youth; participatory action research; empowerment; ethnography; gender

**Current literature on LGBTQ youth development specific to the empowerment approach**

Many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer-identified (LGBTQ) youth face discrimination and marginalization under the social systems that serve them (Wagaman, 2016). Positive youth development and sociopolitical development theorists have critiqued approaches designed to equip LGBTQ youth with skills to cope with or adapt to their environment by arguing that these approaches do not empower youth to change the systemic causes of negative outcomes. Evidence from a meta-analysis suggested that LGBTQ youth experience elevated levels of victimization in schools relative to their heterosexual peers, and this victimization was demonstrated to be persistent (Toomey & Russell, 2016). These findings indicate the necessity to better understand youths’ own efforts to become more aware and engaged in addressing these systemic inequities, including harassment at school, which results in poor academic outcomes and a higher probability of dropping out (Wagaman, 2016).

Toomey and Russell (2016) state that much of the research on sexual minority youth describes risks that this population encounters or identifies factors in reducing their victimization; however, they assert that it is also important to address how they can act as agents of change in their school environments by challenging the dominant discourse and the culture of heteronormativity. Past research has understood physical environments as neutral containers, empty and void of any social relation and power. This idea of an empty, neutral environment has been argued against, stating that physical environments cannot be neutral and objective for every individual. On the other
hand, physical environments are interacting with individuals’ social relation, power, identity, consequently creating dominant and inequitable groups and cultures, contributing to social injustices (Allen, 2017). Allen (2017) further recognizes the spatial and environmental dimensions in schools, that there is a certain unofficial school culture about sexuality in informal spaces in schools, such as schoolyards, corridors, washrooms, physical spaces that are less policed by adults. Additionally, Caroline Fusco, a professor at University of Toronto, has been conducting a project on a specific space, locker rooms, called the ‘Change Room Project’, exploring themes of inclusion and safety for LGBTQ students participating in physical activity and sport. Locker rooms or changing rooms are often spaces where voices of students from the LGBTQ community become erased and invisible, and face higher rates of harassment and exclusion (Kennedy & Iancovich, 2015). Although many LGBTQ youth frequently experience hostility in these settings, many also play a critical role in advocating for safer school environments and resisting heteronormative expectations (Russell, Muraco, Subramaniam, & Laub, 2009). Therefore, future research is necessary to examine the relationship between these youths’ advocacy and their experiences with victimization to complement the literature regarding their risks (Toomey & Russell, 2016).

Traditional literature regarding LGBTQ youth typically includes research on programs and interventions serving youth who face such barriers (Craig, 2013) and is generally based on either large-scale sampling through quantitative surveys (Poteat et al., 2015; Taylor et al., 2016) or secondary data analysis of larger datasets, such as those from national surveys (Kosciw, Palmer, Kull, & Greytak, 2013; Poteat, Calzo, & Yoshikawa, 2016). Large population-based surveys offer benefits in understanding the risks and protective factors from a macro-level perspective. Conversely, common qualitative paradigms in this field primarily involve focus groups or individual stationary interviews (Snapp, Burdge, Licona, Moody, & Russell, 2015), which aim to acquire the interviewee’s concrete descriptions rather than abstract reflections, theorizations, and descriptions of how interviewees experience their world (Margolis & Zunjarwad, 2018). Some of the frequently-neglected power characteristics of a typical stationary interview situation illustrate the shortcomings of an unreflective qualitative ethicism (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). This includes the asymmetrical power relation of the interview, in which the interviewer possesses scientific competence, defines the interview situation, initiates the interview, determines the interview topic, poses the questions, and terminates the conversation. In addition, a standard stationary interview is a one-way dialogue, in which the role of the interviewer is to ask, and the role of the interviewee is to answer. Finally, a typical stationary interview is an instrumental dialogue in which the interview is no longer an end in itself or a joint search for truth, but is instead a means serving the researcher’s ends, providing the researcher with descriptions, narratives, and texts (Brinkmann, 2018).

However, several novel qualitative methodologies in the field of LGBTQ research may be particularly useful with this population, because they can be used to understand the reasons, thoughts, behaviours, and feelings that the youth experience (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Both photovoice and mobile interviewing can mitigate the power relations and enable a more dynamic dialogue, as opposed to the standard one-way dialogue. Like all methodologies, both of these qualitative methodologies operate within the limitations typical of qualitative inquiries, which include purposive sampling, logistical issues, and accessibility issues pertaining to technology and mobility (Bergeron et al., 2014). However, these two qualitative methodologies can provide the benefit of a different lens of approaching interviewing. Photovoice and mobile interviewing, are not new, since they originated from community-based fields and ethnographic fields in sociology and anthropology (Margolis & Zunjarwad, 2018).

The objective of this paper is to highlight methods of listening, within a qualitative framework, to LGBTQ youths’ opinions that are contextualized in the environments in which they are victimized (Porta et al., 2017). Specifically, I will highlight the benefits of qualitative research for studying LGBTQ youth and will examine LGBTQ youth through an empowerment approach to create positive outcomes. I will discuss the advantages of integrating photovoice and mobile interviewing when working with LGBTQ youths. I contend that these two qualitative
Methodologies are beneficial for increasing student agency, conducting research through a more equitable lens, and providing an opportunity to empower students in their school environments. Lastly, I describe the opportunities to empower youth and to foster positive youth development through such methodologies.

**Using an empowerment approach in LGBTQ research: from risk to activism**

As previously noted, much of the research has addressed the risk factors that LGBTQ youth experience (Toomey & Russell, 2016). This focus creates a perception that these youths passively experience victimization and other risks in their communities and schools. On the other hand, it is becoming more commonly understood that many LGBTQ youths actively resist and attempt to change their environments (Craig, McInroy, McCready, & Alaggia, 2015; Harper, Brodsky, & Bruce, 2012). This transformation in perspective, from risk to activism, can provide researchers with opportunities to work with youths to understand barriers they may encounter when they attempt to create a Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA), or when they wish to enforce gender neutral policies and such. Consequently, when applied together, these two methodologies can provide a tool to investigate and collaborate with these youths in fostering change in their environments (McGlashan & Fitzpatrick, 2018; Prilleltensky, 2003).

The effect of the broader community and environment on LGBTQ youths, and on their perspectives and voices, has been explored only to a limited extent. It is understood that, over the past several decades, LGBTQ youths have consistently identified their connection with the broader LGBTQ community as important (Nesmith, Burton, & Cosgrove, 1999; Wagaman, 2014). A sense of connection to the larger LGBTQ community has been associated with increased self-esteem (Detrie & Lease, 2007) and positive social identity development (McCallum & McLaren, 2010) in lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth.

Much of the literature on youth in general has focused on how the social and political context impacts them, as opposed to how young people affect those domains (Christens & Peterson, 2012). As a result, programs and interventions designed to target youth rarely focus on structural inequities, or how young people can become more aware and engaged in efforts to challenge these inequities and the systems that underlie or reinforce them. Research on LGBTQ youths have often focused too narrowly on specific individual-level negative outcomes. Consequently, risk is interpreted as an individual characteristic of the young person rather than a result of the person’s experiences or circumstances. Researchers rarely account for the context or identify the mechanisms that underlie the risk outcomes. The politics of youth programs and educational funding have often encouraged a focus on risk to justify resources and programs (Russell, 2005). However, it is already widely known that LGBTQ youths face an increased risk. Research has gradually focused more on understanding the positives as opposed to risks; this enables researchers to ascertain what the youths do in their environments to protect themselves from such risks, and to work with the youths to establish a supportive educational environment and community for all young people (Russell, 2005).

Evidence indicates that LGBTQ youth are challenging and resisting their environments daily (Wagaman, 2014, 2016; Wernick, Dessel, Kulick, & Graham, 2013) in their community-based organizations, schools, and other surrounding environments. However, little is known about the impact of these activities on LGBTQ youth and their well-being. Consequently, researcher’s unique assets and their greater knowledge of how LGBTQ youths challenge and change their environments can allow researchers to collaborate with the youths; they can therefore help establish an outlet for youths to foster change in their environments.

Regarding the oppression and marginalization that LGBTQ youths face, scholars often focus on the intersections between the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and social or collective experiences of discrimination (Mullaly, 2002). The oppression that they face can impact a young person’s sense of self-worth and their interactions with other LGBTQ people. The positive experiences and actions
LGBTQ youths who are engaged in their environments may also be investigated through the lens of a liberative approach, rather than through the lens of marginalization and oppression (Prilleltensky, 2003).

This liberative approach, through a positivistic and resilience perspective, can also be identified at the intersection between three theoretical levels of empowerment: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and collective (Gutiérrez, 1990; Gutiérrez, DeLois, & GlenMaye, 1995); these align with research on LGBTQ youths’ perceptions of empowerment (Russell et al., 2009). Empowerment may promote general well-being among youth. Although it has been defined in various ways, if it is perceived through a critical theory perspective (Jennings, Parra-Medina, Hilfinger-Messias, & McLoughlin, 2006), it may be an important outcome for LGBTQ youth because it promotes both individual well-being and community-level impact. This is particularly important because of the context of victimization in which LGBTQ youth live.

This conceptual paper is theoretically grounded in the research of scholars who examine the positive development of youth through an empowerment-oriented framework. More specifically, LGBTQ youths are unique from other sub-populations of young people, particularly those on whom empowerment research has been conducted. However, based on knowledge of the experiences of LGBTQ youth, positive youth development theorists and others have challenged traditional approaches to working with youth because these approaches do not acknowledge youths’ power to change the systems that often cause their negative outcomes (Watts & Flanagan, 2007).

Applying an empowerment approach can specifically allow LGBTQ youths to exert increased control and awareness over their lives, by encouraging them to focus on promoting their strengths and resources, and to be critical when analyzing their physical, social, and political environments. All youths challenge and change their school environment, however, LGBTQ youth are more likely than heterosexual youth to constantly challenge their school environment, partly due to the lack of support from administrators and educators in schools. Challenges that LGBTQ youth consistently confront in their school environment include assumptions and norms, such as curriculum, school environments, and behaviours that can be oppressive and perceived as unsafe due to their sexual or gender identity (Meyer, 2008; Snapp et al., 2015). Thus, the students must be aware and attempt to transform schools by creating safe spaces and increasing awareness about LGBTQ issues (Wernick, Kulick, Dessel, & Graham, 2016). The empowerment approach has the capacity to deal directly with issues of oppression for all groups of youth who endure marginalization (Wagaman, 2016). Photovoice and mobile interviewing are two qualitative methodologies that incorporate empowerment elements; they can therefore counter the oppression youths experience by fostering positive youth development.

### LGBTQ youth experiences

During the past seventy years (Savin-Williams, 2005), an increasing number of youths have ‘come out’ at progressively younger ages. Unfortunately, many LGBTQ youths endure hostility at home, school, and within their communities, partly due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. Potential struggles may be caused by unsupportive parents, teachers, and bullying peers. At least half of LGBTQ youths experience negative reactions from family members upon ‘coming out,’ and approximately thirty percent experience physical abuse, situating LGBTQ youths as experiencing heightened risk of possible abuse and suicidality, compared to youth who have not ‘come out’ (Durso & Gates, 2012; Katz-Wise, Rosario, & Tsappis, 2016; Sullivan, Sommer, & Moff, 2001). Many family members report a sense of loss and devastation when they learn that their child is gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer, and some even compare it to mourning a death or feel that their child has become estranged (Fedders, 2006). LGBTQ youths of all ethnicities tend to experience isolation from their families (Fedders, 2006). Some families actively seek to change their children’s sexual orientation or gender identity by subjecting them to conversion therapy. Other families abuse, neglect, or abandon their LGBTQ
children. Across many different studies, LGBTQ youths consistently report higher rates of substance abuse (Resnick et al., 1997), homelessness (Cochran, Stewart, Ginzler, & Cauce, 2002; Fedders, 2006; O’Connor & Molloy, 2001; Sullivan et al., 2001), discrimination, marginalization (Kosciw, 2003), depression, suicidal ideation, and suicidal acts (Russell & Fish, 2016). LGBTQ youths are also vulnerable in schools where they endure homophobia (Kosciw, 2003; Russell & Fish, 2016) from both peers and faculty (Kosciw, 2003), unsafe spaces (Kosciw, 2003), and physical and verbal assault (Clark et al., 2014; Kosciw, 2003). Studies investigating the cumulative effects have demonstrated that youths who experience numerous risk factors such as discrimination, marginalization, and rejection are at an increased risk for anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation (Kelleher, 2009).

Positive youth development

The positive youth development framework is a related developmental framework that encompasses the methodologies and their underlying empowerment approach. John Dewey (1938) states that the purpose of development is to enable an individual to continue to develop. Development focuses on identifying factors of growth and progress rather than on measurable behaviours and outcomes (Kohlberg & Mayer, 1972). The Committee on Community-Level Programs for Youth produced a list of factors that promote youth development. These include: 1) physical and psychological safety, 2) appropriate structure, 3) supportive relationships, 4) opportunities to belong, 5) positive social norms, 6) support for efficacy, 7) opportunities for skill-building, and 8) integration of family, school, and community efforts. As such, positive youth development (PYD) is an intentional, prosocial approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a constructive manner. PYD also recognizes, utilizes, and enhances young people’s strengths by promoting positive outcomes for young people through providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support necessary to strengthen their leadership strengths. This framework originated in the field of prevention, and the framework illuminates four key principles: 1) assets, 2) agency, 3) contribution, and 4) enabling environment (Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008). Assets refer to youths’ possession of the necessary resources, skills, and competencies to achieve desired outcomes. Research has demonstrated that the more assets youths possess, the more likely they are to engage in positive behaviours and the less likely they are to engage in negative behaviours. In a developmental growth framework, such assets enable youths to adopt a positive approach that embraces the importance of healthy relationships and the ever-evolving challenges that youths endure; this allows youths to participate in their own development rather than merely being passive recipients. Agency refers to the importance of youth as active agents in their environment, that they are encouraged and valued throughout the process of their development. In participating in their environments, youths are not passive but rather active agents in changing their environments. In the PYD framework, contribution refers to youth being a key piece in contributing to their environment, such as their school and their surrounding community. An ‘enabling environment’ is one that fosters the development of youths’ assets, agency, access to services, and opportunities. It also strengthens their ability to avoid risks and to stay safe, be protected, and live without fear of violence or retribution. The term ‘environment,’ in the PYD framework, is interpreted broadly and encompasses social, normative, structural, and physical environments. Ultimately, the PYD framework puts youths in the center as active agents who have assets that they can contribute to enable and foster a positive environment for their development. This framework also asserts that the ideal means of solving problems is to develop youths’ strengths or resilience; children who are resilient when confronted with serious problems often thrive in spite of their circumstances (Hamilton, Hamilton, & Pittman, 2004).

Positive youth development encompasses more than helping one youth at a time, but also involves establishing the setting and context which can foster positive youth development; the
ideal system is inclusive and enduring, and incorporates a sense of connection between community, family, and school spheres (Hamilton et al., 2004).

Both photovoice and mobile interviewing are methodologies that involve all four key principles of positive youth development. The following sections will describe how, through photovoice and mobile interviewing, researchers can understand: (1) the assets that LGBTQ youths may possess in certain schools and communities; (2) the agency that LGBTQ youths exert; (3) whether they are currently striving for positive change; (4) and how their environment supports their assets, agency, and opportunities to contribute (Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008).

**Photovoice**

Photovoice is a methodology in which participants are provided cameras and asked to photograph their daily experiences; this encourages them to document and share their reality through photography (Singhal, Harter, Chitnis, & Sharma, 2007; Wang, 1999, 2006; Wang & Burris, 1997). It aims to enable and validate participants’ reflections on their communities, facilitate critical dialogue regarding community issues, and reach policymakers through exhibitions of the photographs (Holtby, Klein, Cook, & Travers, 2015; Sitter, 2017). Many participants, including both queer and transgender youth, find the opportunity to choose how to represent themselves to be a highly empowering experience and consider photography a novel mode of self-expression (Holtby et al., 2015). This form of visual methodology allows both LGBTQ youths and researchers to visualize the situation, environment, and research questions of interest more meaningfully, since the LGBTQ youths are rendered experts in their own lives and are offered a platform to share with the public.

This methodology benefits from rapidly-advancing technology in the field of visual recording and sharing, which can enable dissemination of knowledge beyond academic settings. Photovoice engages LGBTQ youths as active participants in research, which can foster a co-learning process in which youths, policymakers, and researchers contribute to and learn from one another’s expertise and share critical reflections regarding the process. This empowering process allows for a balance between research, action, and evaluation. Photovoice offers flexibility, such as enabling participants to photograph community issues of greatest concern to them; participants may also be provided specific themes or suggestions upon which to focus when capturing photographs, such as spaces where they may have been victimized or spaces where they can find support. The former strategy facilitates youth participation in an overall community assessment, and the latter approach may be applied when funding or program requirements dictate a specific area focus (Anderson, 2013), such as victimization, school dropouts, or other specific topics.

Photovoice is based on the concept that images teach and influence policy, and that community members ought to participate in creating and defining the images that shape healthful public policy (Wang, 1999). The photovoice methodology facilitates partnerships between youths and adults, in which each group may gain insights into each others’ private worlds. Youths benefit from participating in the design and critique of policies and programs that directly affect their lives. Adults benefit by recognizing young people’s expertise and contributions to policies and programs that are relevant and appropriate to their needs and implementation of programs. The process of taking a photograph helps to develop a story that may have previously been rejected, silenced or overlooked (Singhal & Rattine-Flaherty, 2006). The photographs captured by these people supplement the narratives they share with their communities; this enables them to further reflect on, discuss, and analyze the issues that confront them (Lykes, 1997; Wang, 2006). This method has been adopted to understand how the design of a deprived neighborhood affects physical activity (Oliver et al., 2011). Children and adolescents living in deprived neighborhoods are at higher risk of decreased independent mobility and physical activity. This method shed light on the voices of these children and adolescents; they were able to propose suggestions to improve their neighborhood to make it more suitable for physical activities. Moreover, it helped assess how children perceive their built environment and whether this environment promotes or hinders physical
activity (Oliver et al., 2011). Therefore, by applying this method, the researcher can examine individuals’ experiences, interactions, and interpretations within their environment.

Researchers can understand participant’s lived experiences through the photograph’s three goals: 1) storytelling; 2) community discussion; 3) and action. This methodology enables participants to record and reflect on their communities’ strengths and concerns; promote critical dialogue and knowledge about important issues through both large and small group discussions concerning photographs; and reach policymakers, health planners, and community leaders, with the purpose of potentially mobilizing change through these groups of individuals (Wang, Cash, & Powers, 2000). Photovoice requires a coding and analysis process. In this process, participants identify themes by analyzing and codifying the photographs, often guided by the acronym SHOWeD (i.e., What do you See here? How does this relate to Our Lives? Why does this problem, concern, or strength exist? What can we Do about it?) (Wang et al., 2000). Subsequently, the researchers and participants work together to plan for the images to be displayed in public venues to raise community awareness of the topics and issues (Wang, 1999; Wang & Pies, 2004; Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). This can be related to Freire’s (2013) notion of critical consciousness and the concept of empowerment, which can both foster positive youth development through the documentary of photographs (Wang, 1999; Wang et al., 2000)

Photovoice has often been used in research with other marginalized populations (Wang, 1999; Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang & Pies, 2004). Studies in which photovoice is the central research method have focused on topics such as the health of Aboriginal women (Brooks, Poudrier, & Thomas-MacLean, 2008). The project with First Nations women was effective in empowering these women to visually share their needs and personal narratives, thereby privileging indigenous knowledge, validating the diversity of the participants, and evoking accounts of difficult experiences and unidentified needs. The photos captured positive health indicators and displayed strength and resiliency among their families and community. This collaboration between participants, researchers, and community partners fostered a new understanding of the supports and necessities which First Nation women survivors require and may be lacking. In these research projects, photovoice allowed individuals to engage in storytelling and critical dialogue, and provided a forum for the community to acquire insights and recommend future actions. In addition, this methodology can allow participants to bond and provide support for each other during group discussions. For example, outside of the photovoice sessions, researchers have observed participants walking together, bonding, and establishing their own peer support group for problem-solving and teamwork (Wang et al., 2000). As a result of the photovoice process, participants report feeling better about their lives and more confident about their own power and abilities. Therefore, participants engaging in photovoice experience an increase in their overall self-esteem, improved rapport and trust with the group and the community, and greater critical consciousness (Wang et al., 2000).

The benefits for these other populations can be similarly applied to the field of LGBTQ youth research; these youths can experience similar benefits from the opportunity to tell their story, engage in critical dialogue, and enact action and change in their community.

**Mobile interviewing**

Mobile interviewing is a methodology in which the researcher follows the participant to collect information. Mobile interviewing facilitates contextualized understanding by posing interview questions while navigating the participant’s selected spaces. The participant and the researcher both physically and virtually explore perceptions of physical, social, and environmental factors, including barriers, risks, and assets. This methodology transcends the constraints of stationary techniques and expands the applications of open-ended interviewing, while also increasing youth agency in the data collection process (Porta et al., 2017). For example, Porta et al. (2017) found that this methodology was effective in obtaining environment-related information from LGBTQ youths,
facilitating firsthand observations, and evoking recalled memories. Mobile interviewing combines the observations of everyday activities (as practiced in participant observation) with the reflections that respondents reveal in interviews.

Mobile interview techniques often involve researchers and participants moving through social environments while engaging in interview-inspired conversations. It allows researchers to observe participants’ spatial practices in situ and ascertain their experiences and interpretations simultaneously (Brown & Durrheim, 2009; Hein, Evans, & Jones, 2008). Often, participants direct the movement during mobile interviewing (Brown & Durrheim, 2009). Therefore, mobile methods capture complex interrelations between social actors in space and the interdependency between the movements of researchers and participants.

Mobile interviews allow researchers to better understand and perceive respondents’ daily interactions in local contexts (Kusenbach, 2003). According to Kusenbach (2003), mobile interviews are appropriate for exploring and examining: (a) informants’ knowledge, perceptions, and values guiding their experiences and interactions in social and physical environments; (b) spatial practices and the ways people engage with their lived environment; (c) the relationship between biography and place; (d) social architecture of natural settings and how individuals situate themselves in various social settings; and (e) social realms and how physical settings pattern and mediate social interactions. Mobile interviews allow observation and interaction between researchers and participants in higher educational landscapes, since thoughts, behaviours, perceptions, intentions, and social interactions are mediated by particular institutional spaces. As Carpiano (2009, p. 267) states, ‘given that the respondent serves as a “tour guide” for the researcher, mobile interviews help to reduce typical power dynamics that exist between the interviewer and interviewee.’ Other studies have demonstrated that mobile interviewing fosters learning and effectively mitigates power dynamics (related to education and race), allowing for a deeper collaboration among community members (Hein et al., 2008; Trell & Van Hoven, 2010).

Mobile interviews offer key advantages over traditional interviews because they encourage a focus on the person-place relationship (Blewett & Hanlon, 2016). They also provide a means for identifying processes of disablement and able-bodied privilege. Within the person-place relationship, people must find means of fitting into particular sites and navigating their environments. Mobile interviews may therefore allow disabled persons to reveal processes of disablement, barriers embedded in constructed environments, and how policies and practices shape exclusionary social realms (Blewett & Hanlon, 2016).

LGBTQ youths specifically reported satisfaction with these interviews, and some reported highly positive experiences: ‘It was very good. I felt like I was in control of it, which is I think what you were going for. Yeah, I felt open to discuss...I think you’re going to be able to help a lot of kids express what they weren’t able to with other people...wow, this interview has been really empowering’ (Porta et al., 2017, p. 9). Mobile interviewing has been proven to provide additional opportunities to experience empowerment and control, since LGBTQ youths exert control over the study and can choose whether to share information. Therefore, LGBTQ youths influence not only what is said, but also where it is said (Porta et al., 2017). In Porta et al’s research (2017), LGBTQ youths commented on many physical aspects of community spaces, such as posters; these insights may not have been expressed if they had not been moving through their environment during the interview. LGBTQ youths also commented on many resources that were not necessarily LGBTQ-specific and may not have been addressed by the questions. Therefore, the resulting interview encapsulated a broad perspective and provided rich insights into the experiences of LGBTQ youths in the community.

Researchers employ mobile interviews to build rapport, convey interest and respect, and achieve legitimacy with community gatekeepers and residents. It also promotes an egalitarian connection and provides a natural forum for sharing thoughts (Carpiano, 2009). Since the participant is in control, they can decide what is said and when. When conducting a mobile interview, visual cues prompt the participant to speak freely; this differs from a typical face-to-face interview.
These visual cues can help ethnographers reconstruct personal experiences of social and physical environments in everyday life (Kusenbach, 2003). For example, during mobile interviews with members of the LGBTQ community, the participants described specific visual triggers, such as posters or park green space, which might not have surfaced in their minds if they had not walked or driven past those places. Therefore, an important reason to use this method is because it incorporates visual cues that would have been missed if another type of interview has been conducted.

Combining photovoice and mobile interviewing

Both photovoice and mobile interviewing have been demonstrated to increase the capacity of participants to respond to visual triggers, which may be unaccounted for in a physically-confined, stationary interview (Porta et al., 2017). Since photovoice and mobile interviewing are both ethnographic types of methodologies, such methodologies are utilized less often with the LGBTQ population; methodologies applied more often with the LGBTQ population involve analyzing behaviours, attitudes, traits, and experiences at the population level. The combination of these two methodologies can provide more insightful, specific context about the LGBTQ youths to support them in their community. This is because both methodologies empower them and instill higher self-esteem by allowing their voices to be heard, and by fostering their will to change their community into a safer space. This combination may enable LGBTQ youths to establish a more complete narrative through the use of photos and environmental cues (Bergeron, Paquette, & Poullalouec-Gonidec, 2014).

Currently, there are few studies that have combined both qualitative methodologies. For example, Pink (2013) have brought up several studies that utilized the combination of both qualitative methodologies, with her term as ‘walking interview’ and ‘focusing on the idea of photographing and viewing people as moving through and in and as part of environments’ (p. 81). This additionally brings up the question of whether the combination of the two methodologies require its own term to standardize across research. Regardless, such progressive qualitative methodologies have been popularized in sociological and anthropological research but not much with LGBTQ youth research. However, there are an increasing number of recent qualitative studies that examine LGBTQ youths’ concerns. Many of the population-based studies analyzing LGBTQ youths have concluded the important role qualitative methodologies play in filling gaps in the knowledge. Therefore, a novel and comprehensive approach is provided by combining photovoice and mobile interviewing. These two methodologies, when applied in tandem, serve a twofold purpose in advancing the field of LGBTQ youth research and other research concerning marginalized populations: 1) to fill gaps in the knowledge, such as the gaps regarding the significant risk factors that LGBTQ youth population encounter relative to the heterosexual youth population, and 2) to empower these marginalized populations and understand the experiences of each individual within their community, including how these individuals themselves believe circumstances could change positively and how their school can foster a more inclusive and positive school climate. Population-level analyses provide clear statistics illustrating the risks faced by LGBTQ youths.

‘I was surprised to see that there was a rainbow sticker at the church. It was the first time I’ve ever seen a rainbow sticker at a church. I felt really unsure if I was going to be accepted here, until the second time I started going, and I was like, “oh, people here are really accepting”’ (Wolowic, Heston, Saewyc, Porta, & Eisenberg, 2017).

‘I wanted to talk about visibility and invisibility. . .I just kind of wanted to talk about being seen and not seen. . .I just like felt that I’m never really seen for who I am’ (Jessie – referring to a photograph featuring empty clothing in the shape of a human body arranged in public places; Holtby et al., 2015).

The first LGBTQ youth recognized the benefits of a safe space sticker at the church. Nevertheless, the youth voiced skepticism because of the relationship associated between churches (or other specific religious spaces) and the LGBTQ population. Therefore, the youth
presented ambivalence and caution regarding whether the specific church was certainly a safe space and accepting (Wolowic et al., 2017). The second LGBTQ youth described her ubiquitous experience of feeling invisible, describing herself as not being seen for who they truly are, and the lack of recognizing her identity (Holtby et al., 2015).

Both youths’ voices illuminate the importance of their responses being shared with their surrounding community. By modifying the physical environment to enable the inclusion of LGBTQ youths, this can then foster positive youth development. Through the act of opening up, understanding, and working as a collaborative team with LGBTQ youths, both photovoice and mobile interviewing can allow youths to engage in such community research and foster development, touching upon the four factors of PYD. Photovoice and mobile interviewing provide answers and solutions through a bottom-up approach, by incorporating youth voices to address how youths attempt to combat their heightened risks and experiences of oppression in their community.

Implications for future research

Both photovoice and mobile interviewing are novel methodologies in the field of LGBTQ youth studies. They have advanced the field by promoting understanding, through the lens of risk factors, of individual LGBTQ youths’ activities and envisioned activities within their communities. Researchers in the field of LGBTQ youth studies should incorporate both methodologies when planning a research design that is focused on listening to youths’ experiences at both the individual and community level. By increasing the number of studies utilizing photovoice (Anderson, 2013) and mobile interviewing with LGBTQ youths (Porta et al., 2017; Wolowic et al., 2017), researchers and LGBTQ youths can collaborate on more equal grounds, which can allow the researchers to achieve greater insights and enable the participants to share their previously-silenced stories, engage in critical dialogue, and support each other. The use of these two methodologies together can create a more dynamic and comprehensive method of understanding LGBTQ youths’ environment through photographs that encapsulate their unique experiences and through conducting interviews in the youths’ physical environments. The youths’ dissemination of their photographs and the mobile interviews can evoke greater insight for all parties involved (researchers, stakeholders, and participants). LGBTQ youths will attain the opportunity to be heard through public displays of their experiences and through navigating their chosen environment to explain to the researcher what specific places mean to them; this will uncover important information that would have otherwise been silenced.

Similar to a common analogy but modified to some extent, ‘instead of offering youths fish to survive for a day; teach youths to fish to learn the skills to survive for a lifetime’, these methodologies provide an opportunity for LGBTQ youths to engage in dialogue and action in their community. Instead of offering youths fish to ensure their survival, working collaboratively by educating and empowering youth guarantee many more benefits for both the researchers and youths. Eventually, researchers can leave the community, after providing the youths with the knowledge to catch their own fish, and they can continue to autonomously develop and change their community. This grants these youths an opportunity to be empowered, embrace their identities and strengths, tackle their problems, and ultimately thrive. In the face of the variety of struggles they encounter, such as discrimination and harassment on the bus, on the streets, or in their school vicinity, LGBTQ youths can enhance their development through these methodologies by establish a setting that is more inclusive and that fosters a sense of community within their community, family, and school.

In conclusion, both photovoice and mobile interviewing are each relatively well-established qualitative methodologies in their respective fields of sociology and anthropology. In this paper, these two methodologies were examined through the lens of empowerment and through a developmental perspective, positive youth development. While there have been several studies
conducted with LGBTQ youths involving photovoice or mobile interviewing, current research does not indicate that studies have been performed using both of these qualitative empowerment-based methodologies in conjunction. Therefore, future studies interested in working with LGBTQ youths and understanding their perspectives regarding their school climate could utilize both mobile interviewing and photovoice to grant them an opportunity to be agents in their environments, ultimately fostering positive youth development. Evidently, the combination of these methodologies can empower LGBTQ youths and enable collaborations with them to advance research concerning this population. It can accomplish this by allowing them share their own voices and actions in answering critical research questions and by empowering them to promote of a positive and healthy school climate, which is a major concern for these students.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

**Notes on contributors**

**Enoch Leung** is a PhD candidate of Human Development, under the Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology at McGill University. His work focuses primarily in the area of LGBTQ+ research in educational settings and the methodologies and interventions that may impact and support the well-being of LGBTQ+ students. His philosophical understanding and belief in his research is informed by an ecological systems view, grounded in the lens that different ecosystems interacting between the LGBTQ student can contribute, collaborate, and promote their well-being.

**Tara Flanagan** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology at McGill University. She is the Chair of the Joint-Board Senate Subcommittee on Persons with Disabilities that is comprised of a wide array of students, faculty, and staff across McGill who are invested in recommending university policy and in promoting a more inclusive environment at McGill. She is also the Director of SPARC (Social Policy, Advocacy, Research, Community), a research team whose mandate is to promote social inclusion among individuals with disabilities by emphasizing self-determination, community, and a shared responsibility for successful outcomes. Her scholarly interests and research grants are in the areas of social inclusion, transition from school to the community, self-determination, and quality of life among individuals with various types of disabilities and among other equity-seeking groups.

**ORCID**

Enoch Leung [http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6849-8007](http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6849-8007)

**References**

Allen, L. (2017). *Schooling sexual cultures: Sexuality education and visual research*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Anderson, J. D. (2013). *Sticks & stones: Using photovoice to examine LGBTQ youths’ experiences with bullying* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). California State University, Northridge.

Bergeron, J., Paquette, S., & Poullaouec-Gonidec, P. (2014). Uncovering landscape values and micro-geographies of meanings with the go-along method. *Landscape and Urban Planning*, 122(1), 108–121.

Blewett, J., & Hanlon, N. (2016). Disablement as inveterate condition: Living with habitual ableism in Prince George, British Columbia. *The Canadian Geographer*, 60(1), 46–55.

Brinkmann, S. (2018). The interview. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln’s (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 576–599). California, CA: SAGE Publications.

Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2015). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (3rd ed.). California, CA: SAGE Publications.

Brooks, C., Poudrier, J., & Thomas-MacLean, R. (2008). Creating collaborative visions with Aboriginal women: A photovoice project. In P. Liampitong (Ed.), *Doing cross-cultural research* (pp. 193–211). Springer: Dordrecht.

Brown, L., & Durrheim, K. (2009). Different kinds of knowing: Generating qualitative data through mobile interviewing. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 15(5), 911–930.
Carpiano, R. M. (2009). Come take a walk with me: The “go-along” interview as a novel method for studying the implications of place for health and well-being. *Health Place*, 15(1), 263–272.

Christens, B. D., & Peterson, N. A. (2012). The role of empowerment in youth development: A study of sociopolitical control as mediator of ecological systems’ influence on developmental outcomes. *Journal of Youth Adolescence*, 41(5), 623–635.

Clark, T. C., Lucassen, M. F. G., Bullen, P., Denny, S. J., Fleming, T. M., Robinson, E. M., & Rossen, F. V. (2014). The health and well-being of transgender high school students: Results from the New Zealand adolescent health survey (youth’12). *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 55(1), 93–99.

Cochran, B. N., Stewart, A. J., Ginzer, J. A., & Cauce, A. M. (2002). Challenges faced by homeless sexual minorities: Comparison of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender homeless adolescents with their heterosexual counterparts. *American Journal of Public Health*, 92(5), 773–777.

Craig, S. L. (2013). Affirmative supportive safety and empowering talk (ASSET): Leveraging the strengths and resiliencies of sexual minority youth in school-based groups. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 7(4), 372–386.

Craig, S. L., McInroy, L., McCready, L. T., & Alaggia, R. (2015). Media: A catalyst for resilience in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 12(3), 254–275. doi:10.1080/19361653.2015.1040193

Detrie, P. M., & Lease, S. H. (2007). The relation of social support, connectedness, and collective self-esteem to the psychological well-being of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 53(4), 173–199.

Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. New York, NY: Collier.

Durso, L. E., & Gates, G. J. (2012). *Serving our youth: Findings from a national survey of service providers working with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless*. Los Angeles, LA: The Williams Institute with True Colors Fund and The Palette Fund.

Fedders, B. (2006). *Coming out for kids: Recognizing, respecting, and representing LGBTQ youth*. *Nevada Law Journal*, 6(3), 774–804.

Freire, P. (2013). *Education for Critical Consciousness*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Guerra, N. G., & Bradshaw, C. P. (2008). Linking the prevention of problem behaviors and positive youth development: Core competencies for positive youth development and risk prevention. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 122, 1–17.

Gutiérrez, L. (1990). Working with women of color: An empowerment perspective. *Social Work*, 35(2), 149–154.

Gutiérrez, L. M., DeLois, K. A., & GlenMaye, L. (1995). Understanding empowerment practice: Building on practitioner-based knowledge. *Families in Society*, 76(9), 534–542.

Hamilton, S. F., Hamilton, M. A., & Pittman, K. (2004). Principles for youth development. In S. F. Hamilton & M. A. Hamilton (Eds.), *The youth development handbook: Coming of age in American communities* (pp. 3–22). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Harper, G. W., Brodsky, A., & Bruce, D. (2012). What’s good about being gay? Perspectives from youth. *Journal of LGBT Youth*, 9(1), 22–41. doi:10.1080/19361653.2012.628230

Hein, J. R., Evans, J., & Jones, P. (2008). Mobile methodologies: Theory, technology and practice. *Geography Compass*, 2(5), 1266–1285.

Holtby, A., Klein, K., Cook, K., & Travers, R. (2015). To be seen or not to be seen: Photovoice, queer and trans youth, and the dilemma of representation. *Research Action*, 13(4), 317–335.

Jennings, L. B., Parra-Medina, D. M., Hillfinger-Messias, D. K., & McLoughlin, K. (2006). Toward a critical social theory of youth empowerment. *Journal of Community Practice*, 14(1–2), 31–55.

Katz-Wise, S. L., Rosario, M., & Tsappis, M. (2016). LGBT youth and family acceptance. *Pediatric Clinics of North America*, 63(6), 1011–1025.

Kelleher, C. (2009). Minority stress and health: Implications for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) young people. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly*, 22(4), 373–379.

Kennedy, M., & Iancovich, V. (2015). Toronto 2015 Pan Am/Parapan am games: The change room project. Retrieved in University of Toronto News from https://www.utoronto.ca/news/toronto-2015-pan-amparapan-am-games-change-room-project

Kohlberg, L., & Mayer, R. (1972). Development as the aim of education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 42(4), 449–496.

Kosciw, J. G. (2003). The 2003 national school climate survey: The school-related experiences of our nation’s lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth. Report retrieved by the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network from https://www.glSEN.org/sites/default/files/2003%20National%20School%20Climate%20Survey%20Full%20Report.pdf

Kosciw, J. G., Palmer, N. A., Kull, R. M., & Greytak, E. A. (2013). The effect of negative school climate on academic outcomes for LGBT youth and the role of in-school supports. *Journal of School Violence*, 12(1), 45–63.

Kusenbach, M. (2003). Street phenomenology: The go-along as ethnographic research tool. *Ethnography*, 4(3), 455–485.

Lykes, M. B. (1997). Activist participatory research among the Maya of Guatemala: Constructing meanings from situated knowledge. *Journal of Social Issues*, 53(4), 725–746. doi: 10.1111/0022-4537.00046

Margolis, E., & Junjarawd, R. (2018). Visual research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln’s (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 600–626). California, CA: SAGE Publications.
McCallum, C., & McLaren, S. (2010). Sense of belonging and depressive symptoms among GLB adolescents. *Journal of Homosexuality, 58*(1), 83–96.

McGlashan, H., & Fitzpatrick, K. (2018). ‘I use any pronouns, and I’m questioning everything else’: Transgender youth and the issue of gender pronouns. *Sex Education, 18*(3), 239–252.

Meyer, E. J. (2008). Gendered harassment in secondary schools: Understanding teachers’ (non)interventions. *Gender and Education, 20*(6), 555–570.

Mullaly, R. P. (2002). *Challenging oppression: A critical social work approach*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Nesmith, A. A., Burton, D. L., & Cosgrove, T. J. (1999). Gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth and young adults: Social support in their own words. *Journal of Homosexuality, 37*(1), 95–108.

O’Connor, W., & Molloy, D. (2001). ‘Hidden in plain sight’: Homelessness amongst lesbian and gay youth. London: National Centre for Social Research.

Oliver, M., Witten, K., Kearns, R. A., Mavo, S., Badland, H. M., Carroll, P., … Ergler, C. (2011). Kids in the city study: Research design and methodology. *BMC Public Health, 11*(S87), 1–12.

Pink, S. (2013). *Doing visual ethnography*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

Porta, C. M., Corliss, H. L., Wolowic, J. M., Johnson, A. Z., Fogel, K. F., Gower, A. L., … Eisenberg, M. E. (2017). Go-along interviewing with LGBTQ youth in Canada and the United States. *Journal of LGBT Youth, 14*(1), 1–15.

Poteat, V. P., Calzo, J. P., & Yoshikawa, H. (2016). Promoting youth agency through dimensions of gay-straight alliance involvement and conditions that maximize associations. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 45*(7), 1438–1451.

Poteat, V. P., Yoshikawa, H., Calzo, J. P., Gray, M. L., DiGiovanni, C. D., Lipkin, A., … Shaw, M. P. (2015). Contextualizing gay-straight alliances: Student, advisor, and structural factors related to positive youth development among children. *Child Development, 86*(1), 176–193.

Prilleltensky, I. (2003). Understanding, resisting, and overcoming oppression: Toward psychopolitical validity. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 31*(1–2), 195–201.

Resnick, M. D., Bearman, P. S., Blum, R. W., Bauman, K. E., Harris, K. M., Jones, J., … Udry, J. R. (1997). Protecting adolescents from harm: Findings from the national longitudinal study on adolescent health. *Journal of the American Medical Association, 278*(1), 823–832.

Russell, S. T. (2005). Beyond risk: Resilience in the lives of sexual minority youth. *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Issues in Education, 2*(3), 5–18.

Russell, S. T., & Fish, J. N. (2016). Mental health in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology, 12*, 465–487.

Russell, S. T., Muraco, A., Subramaniam, A., & Laub, C. (2009). Youth empowerment and high school Gay Straight Alliances. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 38*(7), 891–903.

Savin-Williams, R. C. (2005). *The new gay teenager*. Massachusetts: First Harvard University Press.

Singhal, A., Harter, L. M., Chitnis, K., & Sharma, D. (2007). Participatory photography as theory, method and praxis: Analyzing an entertainment-education project in India. *Critical Arts: A Journal of South-North Cultural Studies, 21*(1), 212–227.

Singhal, A., & Rattine-Flaherty, E. (2006). Pencils and photos as tools of communicative research and praxis: Analyzing Minga Peru’s quest for social justice in the amazon. *International Communication Gazette, 68*(4), 313–330. doi: [10.1177/1740480506065764](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/1740480506065764)

Sitter, K. C. (2017). Taking a closer look at photovoice as a participatory action research method. *Journal of Progressive Human Services, 28*(1), 36–48.

Snapp, S. D., Burdge, H., Licona, A. C., Moody, R. L., & Russell, S. T. (2015). Students’ perspectives on LGBTQ-inclusive curriculum. *Equity and Excellence in Education, 49*(2), 1, 249–265.

Sullivan, C., Sommer, S., & Moff, J. (2001). Youth in the margins: A report on the unmet needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender adolescents in foster care. Retrieved from [http://www.nlfca.ca/siteupload/Youth%20in%20the%20Margins.pdf](http://www.nlfca.ca/siteupload/Youth%20in%20the%20Margins.pdf)

Sutton, J., & Austin, Z. (2015). Qualitative research: Data collection, analysis, and management. *The Canadian Journal of Hospital Pharmacy, 68*(3), 226–231.

Taylor, C. G., Meyer, E. J., Peter, T., Ristock, J., Short, D., & Campbell, C. (2016). Gaps between beliefs, perceptions, and practices: The every teacher project on LGBTQ-inclusive education in Canadian schools. *Journal of LGBT Youth, 13*(1–2), 112–140.

Toomey, R. B., & Russell, S. T. (2016). The role of sexual orientation in school-based victimization: A meta-analysis. *Youth and Society, 48*(2), 176–201.

Trell, E. M., & van Hoven, B. (2010). Making sense of place: Exploring creative and (inter)active research methods together with young people. *Fenna, 188*(1), 91–104.

Wagaman, M. A. (2014). Understanding service experiences of LGBTQ young people through an intersectional lens. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services, 26*(1), 111–145.

Wagaman, M. A. (2016). Promoting empowerment among LGBTQ youth: A social justice youth development approach. *Child Adolescent Social Work Journal, 33*(5), 395–405.

Wang, C. C. (1999). Photovoice: A participatory action research strategy applied to women’s health. *Journal of Women’s Health, 8*(2), 185–192.
Wang, C. C. (2006). Youth participation in photovoice as a strategy for community change. *Journal of Community Practice, 14*(1–2), 147–161.

Wang, C. C., & Burris, M. A. (1997). Photovoice: Concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment. *Health Education & Behavior, 24*(3), 369–387.

Wang, C. C., Cash, J. L., & Powers, L. S. (2000). Who knows the streets as well as the homeless? Promoting personal and community action through photovoice. *Health Promotion Practice, 1*(1), 81–89.

Wang, C. C., & Pies, C. A. (2004). Family, maternal, and child health through photovoice. *Maternal Child Health Journal, 8*(2), 95–102.

Wang, C. C., & Redwood-Jones, Y. A. (2001). Photovoice ethics: Perspectives from Flint photovoice. *Health Education and Behavior, 28*(5), 560–572.

Watts, R. J., & Flanagan, C. (2007). Pushing the envelope on youth civic engagement: A developmental and liberation psychology perspective. *Journal of Community Psychology, 35*(6), 779–792. doi: 10.1002/jcop.20178

Wernick, L. J., Dessel, A. B., Kulick, A., & Graham, L. F. (2013). LGBTQQ youth creating change: Developing allies against bullying through performance and dialogue. *Children and Youth Services Review, 35*(9), 1576–1586.

Wernick, L. J., Kulick, A., Dessel, A. B., & Graham, L. F. (2016). Theater and dialogue to increase youth’s intentions to advocate for LGBTQQ people. *Research on Social Work Practice, 26*(2), 189–202.

Wolowic, J. M., Heston, L. V., Saewyc, E. M., Porta, C., & Eisenberg, M. E. (2017). Chasing the rainbow: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer youth and pride semiotics. *Culture, Health & Sexuality, 19*(5), 557–571.