

Growing up with Addiction

Overview: Many of Ohio's towns and cities are stereotyped as being havens for drug abuse. But youth growing up in these cities defy these descriptions in important ways. In this activity, we use two poems written by high school students in Portsmouth Ohio to explore the experience of growing up in a city heavily affected by opioid abuse and the motivation to make positive change in the next generation.

Tags: youth, schools, change, stereotypes, stigma

Theme: Challenging Assumptions

Time: 60 minutes

Materials: paper, pens, participant handouts

Participants: 3-25

Room Configuration: Flexible

Activity

Introduction: Initial Questions (5-10 Minutes)

1. Provide the participants with an overview of the sessions. Ask if there are any initial thoughts, questions, or concerns.

Engagement: Picture Prompt (20-30 Minutes)

1. Give participants a copy of the two Molloy photos. Ask participants to respond to each of the following questions and write down their responses:
 - a. In no more than three words, how would you describe the people in these pictures?
 - b. What does the body language of these people convey to you?
 - c. What about the imagery behind the people, do you notice any distinct geographic features? If so, what role do you think they play in the photograph?
 - d. Think about how color and shade is used in these photos. What do you think this represents?
2. Once participants have finished writing down their responses, read both the passages *What it Means to be A Woman* & *What it Means to be A Man*. Depending on room size, this could be done as a group or read individually.
3. After participants have finished reading the poems, ask the participants to refer back to their initial impressions of the photos. Using their initial impressions, ask the following questions to the participants:

- a. Do you think your descriptions, which you wrote prior to reading the poems, accurately captured these people's situation? If so, why? If not, why?
 - b. After reading the poems, what perceptions do you have about their body language? Did this change from your initial thoughts?
 - c. Initially, were you able to identify Portsmouth from the photo? If not, what did the background imagery represent to you?
 - d. After reading the poems, do you believe the authors specifically chose the way photos used color and shading? What message do you believe they were trying to convey?
4. At this point the facilitator should explain to the group how the images were created. As the creator, Traci Molloy, explains:

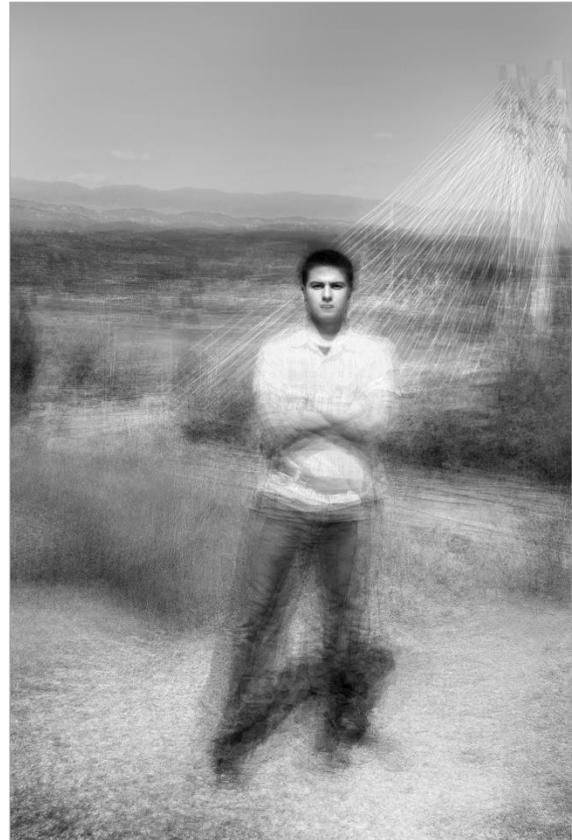
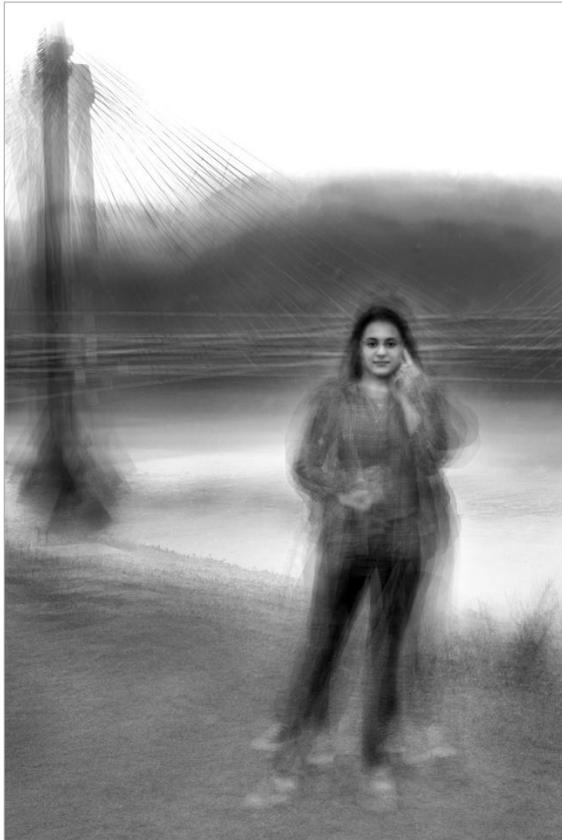
"The photos that accompany the text are composite portraits of each respective group of students. I photographed every student in the same location and pose and then layered the photos on top of each other to create a singular prototype—the outcome is a representation of what a boy or girl from Portsmouth looks like. The students determined the pose and location for the composite. The boys wanted their pose to reflect determination and strength. They have one foot slightly in front of the other to show they are taking a step forward toward their future. The girls also wanted their pose to reflect strength, as well as intelligence. They have one hand clenched in a fist by their waist, while the second is pointing to their mind. Both groups chose to include the bridge that spans the Ohio River, connecting Portsmouth to Kentucky, in their photo. This bridge, one of the signature landmarks in town, is also the main artery for the drug trade. The boys' image, taken from Kentucky, features Portsmouth in the background. The girls' image, taken in Portsmouth, shows the Kentucky mountains in the background."

5. Use the responses from these questions to facilitate a discussion based on the content from both the *What it Means to be A Woman* & *What it Means to be a Man* poems and images.

Conclusion: Wrap-Up and Next Steps (15 Minutes)

1. Announce that 15-minutes remain for the session.
2. Summarize the main points of the discussion. What were some of the key takeaways? Were there any differences in opinions? Any controversies? Based on the dialogue, what will you be thinking about after your leave?
3. Wrap up the session by speaking about the manuscript, further efforts, additional resources, etc. Exchange contact information and continue further conversations if needed.

Pictures:



Student Composite Photo, Girls. Credit: Traci Molloy.
Student Composite Photo, Boys. Credit: Traci Molloy.

Readings:

What it Means to Be a Woman

What it means to be a woman is important to the balance of the world

Being a woman in Portsmouth is like a merry-go-round
Or should I say see-saw because it's full of ups and downs

This town full of addiction, bad intention, and temptation
Sadly, paving the way for the rest of the nation

A river community once full of industrialization
Now rusty and dusty, people with no occupations

A place that everybody hates, but nobody seems to be able to escape
Sometimes it feels like a black hole that you've been sucked into

Small town, big dreams. Will I succeed?

Despair beyond repair, with only your mother there.
A daughter without a father: he never truly cared.
In his eyes, I was unwanted

Now, I look in the mirror and see nothing but imperfection
Ashamed of myself as I gaze at my reflection.

Not too rich, but way too poor
We are oppressed, suppressed, and depressed, but at least we are, well, dressed

There are drugs, prostitution, and young pregnancies.
Girls disappearing. Mothers, sisters, daughters overdosing daily.

To men, we are inferior objects to please, something to catcall, play around with, and tease.
No matter where you go, you never feel safe – you're watched and harassed
"Just wait until you're eighteen" – they don't even ask

Being a woman means you are compliant. To men, we are a client
We are silenced, and God forbid, we are defiant

A woman who is resilient is a woman who is brilliant
We are beautiful and powerful, intelligent and strong
and don't you dare tell me that I'm wrong.

Though the work is never done, together we are one
We are warriors because of the battles we take on

Why do they set our throne to low - discriminate and walk all over us?
Little do they know – we are more.
We are the creators.

Authors: Hannah Adkins, Janayah Dickey, Alleria Dorsey, Allison Douthat, Grace Emnett, Alyson Ferrara, Aiden Fields, Brooklyn Greene, Sharia Kearns, Skyilynn Kidder, Rylee Moorhead, Jenny Perryman, Lynsey Shipley, Emleigh Smith, Lyda Spencer, and Andrea Thomas. Facilitators: Traci Molloy and Tayler Zempter.

What it Means to Be a Man

What it means to be a man is important to the balance of the world.

Growing up male in Portsmouth is hard.
A man has to climb steep obstacles and overcome challenges.

Who needs skyscrapers when you have mountains
Though kids can't play in polluted fountains.

Walking down the streets you see plenty of poverty.
Boarded-up windows and doors on every other property.

Roaches, drugs, lice, and famine envelop the homes.
Hidden everywhere, between each tooth of the comb.

Full of fear, scared to go out at night.
Vulnerability will attack like a wild animal.

It clings to you without your knowing.

I'm not so worried about dying young
I'm more afraid of not getting out and becoming someone.

You have to live day by day.
But don't live in the past – live each day like it's your last.

Who will teach me what it means to be a man?
Who will help me interpret life's ever-changing plan?

Here, life can get rough.
Here, you have to be tough.

Cracks and calluses on hard working hands.
The hills whisper his name.
A name given by his father, the same.

A man needs to stand steady and strong, present and proud.
He needs to protect his family from harm and the growing crowd.

But where I come from, you rarely see this type of man
Instead, you see men abusing and mistreating, addicted and gone.

These are not men - they are cowards.

I will not be this kind of man.

I'm just a hard-working kid looking for his glory.
Single mom, same old story.

I go for a drive to clear my mind. Everything is drenched in bleach.
Crying about the past. Tears latch on like a leech.

You laugh and tell me to get over it.

But that's okay.
Because I've come a long way from where I was to where I am today.

Authors: Broc Bumgardner, Adam Earley, Anthony Ferrara, Jadan Josey, Isaac Kelly, Zack Kinney, Wesley Mullet, DJ Pearsall, Kendal Reynolds, and Adrian Soard. Facilitators: Traci Molloy and Noah Fannin.

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