

Helping to Transform Community Identity with Public Art: An Asset-Based Strategy for Healing and Renewal of Marginalized Neighborhoods

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at community renewal and how public art might play a constructive role. Based on the premise that “the poor” are people struggling fundamentally with destructive shame (debilitating feelings of dependency, deficiency, and self-disdain), guidelines for creating public art that may help in countering this shame are proposed. In countering it, public art may assist in a long process of transforming the identity of a marginalized community from one of shame to one of dignity (constructive feelings of autonomy, sufficiency, and self-respect).

Key words: Community Development, Public art, Asset-based strategy, Shame, Marginalized neighborhoods

INTRODUCTION

This paper poses one way public art might play a constructive role in community renewal. Based on the premise that “the poor” are people struggling fundamentally with *destructive shame* (debilitating feelings of dependency, deficiency, and self-disdain), guidelines for creating public art that may help counter this shame are proposed. In countering it, public art may contribute to transforming the identity of a marginalized community from one of shame toward one of *dignity* (constructive feelings of autonomy, sufficiency, and self-respect), a long process of healing and renewal.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

These guidelines are an outcome of conceptual research that relates three areas of study: (1) psychology of shame and related psychotherapy, (2) community planning, and (3) public art. By drawing on concepts and principles from these areas, three relevant sets of factors are considered. Respectively they are (1) the individual, who experiences shame, and ways to resolve shame; (2) the group/society/context and theories of community development; and (3) the object/subject–concepts of public art and related strategies for creating it.

First, the problem of marginalized communities is described with respect to “shame,” in the destructive sense of the word. Second, different strategies for community renewal are