Photovoice: Beyond Visual Anthropology

Caroline Wang, DrPH, Program Director
Public Health Institute, Berkley, California USA
And
Virginia C. Li, Phd, MPH
Professor of Community Health Sciences
University of California School of Public Health
Los Angeles, CA. USA

Virginia Li - Photovoice - 10 Nov 2008
Visual Voices
100 Photographs of Village China by the Women of Yunnan Province
Photovoice is a research tool that integrates key principles of community-based research. The partnership intends to:

- recognize the community as a unit of identity
- build on strengths and resources within the community
- facilitate collaborative partnerships in all phases of the research
- integrate knowledge and action for mutual benefit of all partners
- promote a co-learning and empowering process that facilitates the reciprocal transfer of knowledge, skills, capacity, and power
- address health from a model that emphasizes physical, mental, and social well-being, and biomedical, social, economic, and cultural factors as health determinants
- engage policy makers to enhance change

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Photovoice Is A Participatory Methodology

Photovoice differs from documentary photography and visual anthropology in that the ultimate goal of photovoice is to promote grassroots expertise and action with results.
A critical element in the methodology is recruiting policy makers and leaders to:

- serve as an audience at a forum where participants findings;
- engage in discussion with participants to brainstorm intervention strategies to address identified needs;
- work in collaboration with other influential players in developing interventions that address identified needs;
- use their power and influence to support the implementation of these interventions.
Training of participants focuses on photovoice concept and method:

- an overview of the project plan and structure
- a discussion of cameras, ethics, and power; use of the camera in community-based settings
- ways of seeing photographs;
- a philosophy of giving photographs back to community members
- how photographs and narratives may be used to reach and inform policy makers
Engage participants in a 3-stage process of analysis based on Paulo Freire’s concept of education to promote critical consciousness

**Stage 1**

- **Selecting** Participants choose the photographs, and, by doing so, define the course of discussion.
Engage participants in a 3-stage process of analysis based on Paulo Freire’s concept of education to promote critical consciousness

**Stage 2**

- **Contextualizing**  Participants will stories and define the meaning of their photographs during group discussions to identify the problem or the asset, critically discuss the roots of the situation, and name ways to change the situation:

  - What do you See here?
  - What’s really Happening here?
  - How does this relate to Our lives?
  - Why does this Problem or this strength exist?
  - What can we Do about this?
Engage participants in a 3-stage process of analysis based on Paulo Freire’s concept of education to promote critical consciousness

**Stage 3**

- **Codifying** Participants identify the issues, themes, or theories that emerge.
  - Audiotape group discussions to facilitate documentation of participants’ stories, perspectives, and recommendations.
  - Participants write down their stories.
  - In this approach, the participants as potential interviewees become narrators.
Women’s Reproductive Health and Development Program -- Yunnan, China

- 62 village women representing over 50 natural villages used photovoice to conduct a participatory needs assessment
- Used the visual image to document the community’s problems, concerns, and hopes
- Demonstrated that community people have expertise and insight regarding their own communities that professionals and outsiders may lack.
- Communicate these issues with policy makers and influenced policy decisions about important issues -- such as day care, midwifery, and girls’ education -- vital to women’s health but otherwise invisible to male policy makers