"Two People in Every Picture"
The Benefits of Using Participatory Visual Methods in LIS Research

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Participatory visual methods have the potential to capture the best possible data by highlighting the experience, as Ansel Adams puts it, of the two people that exist in every picture: the photographer and the viewer.

Advantages

1. Elicits rich, comprehensive descriptions
2. Photos serve as a communication bridge between strangers
3. Photography makes it easier to represent situations
4. Represents a complex expression of photographer's relation to the world
5. Explanations of photos encourage expression of feelings
6. Access to deeper elements of human consciousness
7. Reveals excellent descriptions of people's experiences
8. Provides insight into how people understand context
9. Effective for use with diverse populations (different age groups, cultures, genders, literacy levels)
10. Promotes critical dialogue about important community issues through individual, and large/small group discussion
11. Records and reflects a community's assets, concerns
12. Produces multiple data types, allowing for triangulation

Disadvantages

1. Photography is an inherently political act, and those individuals who participate may face uncertain or unpredictable outcomes, especially when combined with audio-recorded interviews
2. Personal judgments are inherent to the process (for example, who received/used the camera, the instructions given for how/what to photograph, what the user photographed or what they chose not to photograph, who selected the photograph to discuss, who recorded thoughts and descriptions)
3. Control of resources may reinforce social inequalities— participants take photos, but money, authority, editorial rights determine evaluation
4. Photovoice data can often be easily collected in great quantities, but it is complex, difficult and time consuming to analyze

"The pictures elicited longer and more comprehensive interviews but at the same time helped subjects overcome the fatigue and repetition of conventional interviews...This was its compelling effect upon the informant, its ability to prod latent memory, to stimulate and release emotional statements about the informant's life..."

(John Collier, 1957, *Photography in Anthropology*, p. 858)

Sample Data

Words to Live By:
How Experience Shapes our Information World at Work, Play and in Everyday Life

Photo-elicitation:
A photo of the town's main street taken from Flickr was shown to participants to generate discussion of how tourists view residents.

Picture-voice:
Participant shared a photo of mittens that represented learning to spin wool by hand and knit from an eld-

Salvage:
Photograph of a participant's army portrait in 1943 when he was 20 years old, taken from participants' existing personal collection.

Visual Methods	Participatory Visual Methods
Visual methods of data collection use imagery (photographs, film, drawings, sculpture etc.) to represent material, social, scientific and political realities of the item under study.	Participatory visual methods use *participant-generated* imagery to represent the realities of the item under study. They are often intended to empower individual and community action for change.
The mechanical device that 'not only sees everything, but remembers everything' (aka the camera) was invented in 1839 by Louis Daguerre, thus beginning the struggle between photography as art vs. science, and the metaphor of camera as 'eye'.	Pioneered in anthropology by John Collier Jr. (circa 1957), and inspired in part by the works of Paulo Freire (1921-1997)
Photography, videography, filmography *Data Collection Method:* Researcher takes photographic (or videographic) inventory of objects, people or locations during data collection for later analysis. The goal of collecting visuals is to turn them into data.	**Photovoice/picturevoice** *Data Collection Method, Reporting Method:* Participants take photographs that tell a story, followed by discussion of photos during the interview. Variations include paintvoice (using paintings) or comicvoice (using comics).
Hartel, J. K. (2006). Information activities and resources in an episode of gourmet cooking. *Information Research, 12*(1).	Collier, J., & Collier, M. (1986). *Visual anthropology :Photography as a research method.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.
Documentary film/photography *Reporting Method:* Researcher uses photographs/videos and narrative descriptions to deliver a story, often to a lay audience. The purpose is to draw attention to an interesting or noteworthy situation.	**Photo-elicitation, graphic-elicitation, film-elicitation** *Data Collection Method:* Inserting photographs or images into the interview process. Photos can be taken by different players, and from different sources, including existing collections.
Ewald, W. (Ed.). (1979). *Appalachia, a self-portrait.* Kentucky: Gnoman Press.	Wang, C., Burris, M. A., & Ping, X. Y. (1996). Chinese village women as visual anthropologists. *Social Science & Medicine, 42*(10).
Photo novel, photo novellla, photo essay, and photo-narrative *Reporting Method:* Researcher (often a photographer) takes photographs to tell a story or draw attention to a cause or condition.	**Reflexive photography, auto-driving** *Data Collection Method:* Participant takes photographs then participates in a reflexive interview (or alternately, 'drives' the interview process).
Adams, A. (2006). In Turnage W. (Ed.), *The Sierra Nevada: The John Muir Trail* (2nd ed.). Nevada: Ansel Adams.	Hubbard, J. (1991). *Shooting back: A photographic view of life by homeless children.* San Francisco: Chronicle Books.
Salvage photography *Data Collection Method, Reporting Method:* Researcher collects pre-existing photographs to capture 'the way things were'. Visuals can be analyzed for data, or arranged to tell a story. Goal is to collect data or to preserve memories for posterity.	**Other image-based methods** *Data Collection Method, Reporting Method:* Participants engage in the process of generating data through creating art (for example, drawing, sculpting, painting).
Harper, D. A. (2001). *Changing works: Visions of a lost agriculture.* Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press.	Cross, K., Kabel, A., & Lysack, C. (2006). Images of self and spinal cord injury: Exploring drawing as a visual method in disability research. *Visual Studies, 21*(2)183-193.