

Photovoice

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Photovoice is a methodology mostly used in the field of community development, public health, and education which combines photography with grassroots social action. Participants are asked to represent their community or point of view by taking photographs, discussing them together, developing narratives to go with their photos, and conducting outreach or other action. It is often used among marginalized people, and is intended to give insight into how they conceptualize their circumstances and their hopes for the future. As a form of community consultation, photovoice attempts to bring the perspectives of those "who lead lives that are different from those traditionally in control of the means for imaging the world" into the policy-making process. It is also a response to issues raised over the authorship of representation of communities.

Background

It was developed by Caroline C. Wang of the University of Michigan, and Mary Ann Burris, research associate of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London. In 1992, Wang and Burris created "Photo Novella," what is now known as Photovoice, as a way to enable rural women of Yunnan Province, China, to influence the policies and programs that affected them. They report being strongly influenced by the efforts of Nina Wallerstein and Edward Bernstein who had adapted the ideas of Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed to health promotion and education. It has since been used among homeless adults in Ann Arbor, Michigan and among community health workers and teachers in rural South Africa and by Dr. Claudia Mitchell et al., and with brain injury survivors by Dr. Laura S. Lorenz. of the Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University.

The concept owes a debt to Paulo Freire, to critical consciousness, feminist theory and empowerment.

Variants

Photovoice is considered a subtype of "participatory visual methods" - known as Picturevoice - which is all methodologies involving the use of visual arts to capture individual perspectives, including photo-elicitation, digital storytelling, and other methods in which research participants create visuals as part of the research process. Two other forms of Picturevoice include Paintvoice, stemming from the work of Michael Yonas; and Comicvoice, which has been pioneered by John Baird's Create a Comic Project since 2008 and to a lesser extent Michael Bitz's Comic Book Project.