

# Picturing the Underserved Audience: Photovoice as Method in Applied Communication Research

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## **Abstract**

The use of photographs in sociology and anthropology has grown over the last half of the 20th century, leading to various photo-based research methods that are intended to aid in building and enriching participant narratives. One specific photo-based method, known as photovoice, was developed for the purposes of enabling community members to capture photographs themselves in order to gain a deeper understanding of participant culture. In addition, it has the ability to visually portray and share experiences and knowledge about issues that otherwise would be difficult to explain through in-depth interviews alone. This professional development paper demonstrates the value of incorporating photovoice into a multi-method research project in the field of applied communications for the purposes of gaining valuable insights into the lived experiences of underserved audiences. Drawing from a larger study examining the culture of participants within the Extension-led Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), the results and discussion demonstrate that photovoice helps to function as a checkpoint in knowledge production and ways of knowing on behalf of the researcher. In addition, photovoice as method demonstrates an effort that can improve and diversify the field of applied communication research, especially as it relates to the National Research Agenda's priority of addressing vibrant and resilient communities.

## **Keywords**

Photovoice, underserved audiences, qualitative researcher, culture, cross-disciplinary understanding

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# Picturing the Underserved Audience: Photovoice as Method in Applied Communication Research

Abigail S. Borron

## Abstract

The use of photographs in sociology and anthropology has grown over the last half of the 20th century, leading to various photo-based research methods that are intended to aid in building and enriching participant narratives. One specific photo-based method, known as photovoice, was developed for the purposes of enabling community members to capture photographs themselves in order to gain a deeper understanding of participant culture. In addition, it has the ability to visually portray and share experiences and knowledge about issues that otherwise would be difficult to explain through in-depth interviews alone. This professional development paper demonstrates the value of incorporating photovoice into a multi-method research project in the field of applied communications for the purposes of gaining valuable insights into the lived experiences of underserved audiences. Drawing from a larger study examining the culture of participants within the Extension-led Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP), the results and discussion demonstrate that photovoice helps to function as a checkpoint in knowledge production and ways of knowing on behalf of the researcher. In addition, photovoice as method demonstrates an effort that can improve and diversify the field of applied communication research, especially as it relates to the National Research Agenda's priority of addressing vibrant and resilient communities.

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## Introduction

Photography in the early 20th century played a significant role in deepening the understanding of select marginalized groups within mainstream society. For instance, documentary photography captured some of the powerful imagery of rural poverty and land erosion in the West during the Great Depression. Through the establishment of the Historical Section of the Resettlement Administration during the Roosevelt administration in 1935, photographers such as Dorothea Lange captured timeless and symbolic images of suffering in the face of adversity (Curtis, 1986). These images brought meaning and a reality to those back East who, through previously shared stories and news accounts, could not have imagined the actual state of affairs depicted in the photos. As a result, these photographs functioned as a powerful reform tool and were largely responsible for the development of public services to help migrant families (Huff, 1998).

Since then, the use of photography found a place in contemporary qualitative research approaches, especially as they relate to considering the narratives of research participants (Rodriguez & Bjel-

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land, 2008). Taking the initiative to move beyond just spectator or researcher interpretation, Freire (1970) recognized the value of predetermined line drawings or photographs to alternatively engage community members and critically examine their community through means other than written or stated questions. The use of images as method has taken on a number of titles and references, including photo-elicitation, photo ethnography, photo interviewing, and photofeedback (Rodriguez & Bjelland, 2008). All of these methods employ photos as a tool to collect data. Ruby (1991) used the term “photovoice” for “the possibility of perceiving the world from the viewpoint of the people who lead lives that are different from those traditionally in control of the means for imaging the world” (p. 50). Further, Wang and Burris (1997) claimed “photovoice” in an effort to enhance research in public health promotion, and modified it to go one step further by enabling community members to create the images themselves. In considering marginalized communities, Dutta (2008) incorporated photovoice in a multi-method approach to health communication research in an effort to bring together the silenced voices of marginalized communities and foster change through coalition-building at the grassroots level.

Photovoice creates an opportunity to visually portray and share experiences and knowledge about issues that otherwise would be difficult to explain through in-depth interviews alone (Nykiforuk, Vallianatos, & Nieuwendyk, 2011). In addition, it represents a commitment on behalf of the researchers to bring to the forefront the visual voices of participants in an effort to stimulate critical dialogue among policymakers (Wang & Burris, 1997).

With a basis in sociology and anthropology, photovoice has a functional place in strands of scholarship throughout the social sciences including health behavior and education (Wang & Burris, 1997), and health communication research (Dutta, 2008, 2010). For instance, photovoice has also been used in various forms of constructivist research, including community-based participatory research (Stedman-Smith, McGovern, Peden-McAlpine, Kingery, & Dreager, 2012), which places a priority on the sharing of knowledge and valuable experiences in order to reduce the disparity between scientists and communities (Schensul, 1985; Viswanathan, et al., 2004). It has also been incorporated into the culture-centered approach (CCA), which deliberately sets aside ways of understanding the marginalized community from the dominant structure point of view and, rather, privileges the narratives that emerge through conversations with members of marginalized communities (Dutta, 2008).

### **Purpose and Justification**

The purpose of this professional development article is to illustrate how the inclusion of photovoice in agricultural communication research can foster a richer understanding of target audiences and enhance community engagement efforts. In order to demonstrate the value of photovoice as method, this paper first describes a larger multi-method project and the way in which photovoice was incorporated into the process of data collection among members of an underserved audience. The selected project results shared in this paper are derived from the participants taking part in the photovoice activity. These results enabled a co-construction of participant narratives, which allowed themes to emerge that would not have developed had photovoice not been incorporated into the project.

A number of developments in the field of agricultural communication point to the need of this type of work. Conducting a 10-year examination of the common themes and methodologies used in one of agricultural communication’s major journals (*Journal of Applied Communications*), Edgar, Ruth-



erford, and Briers (2009) recommended that research methodologies in agricultural communication be improved, while at the same time striving to add depth, richness, and impact to overall research. In addition, the *National Research Agenda for the American Association for Agricultural Education's Research Priority Areas for 2011-2015* took into consideration a variety of societal needs, including the need to address food insecurity, and the importance of strong and resilient individuals, families, and communities (Doerfert, 2011). As a result, the agenda adopted a research priority (recognized as Priority #6) that specifically addresses vibrant and resilient communities and recognizes the need "to evaluate the capacity of a local community to lead positive change, and identify the factors that exert significant influence on change processes and outcomes" (Doerfert, 2011, p. 10).

Addressing the recommendation that agricultural communication research methods need to be improved (Edgar et al., 2009) and community evaluation needs to examine change processes and outcomes (Doerfert, 2011), this paper concludes by discussing how agricultural communication scholarship can benefit from the inclusion of methods, such as photovoice, to further scholarship in the areas of applied communication, theory building, education, engagement, and outreach.

## Background

The project on which this paper is based was focused on the held meanings of health and nutrition of low-income families targeted by the Extension-led Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP). Health and nutrition were used as the entry points with participants, for the purposes of ultimately developing and offering recommendations for land-grant university engagement efforts through educational programs. Two of the five project objectives were tied to photovoice. These objective were as follows: (1) To gain a deeper understanding of the culture of EFNEP participants, as it relates to their held meanings and practices of nutrition and food insecurity, and their negotiation of the structure in which they are situated; and (2) to demonstrate the ongoing and dynamic nature of structure, culture and agency as it relates to the EFNEP participants and university engagement efforts.

Using CCA (Dutta, 2008, 2010) as the methodological framework, photovoice was used with four other qualitative methodologies in the project—semi-structured, in-depth interviews; field observation; reflexive journaling; and two workgroups plus a community forum. All data collection took place from November 2011 to May 2012. The in-depth interviews and community forum targeted three groups: EFNEP participants, EFNEP paraprofessionals and EFNEP administrators.

CCA uses grounded theory to explore the interactions among culture, structure and agency that ultimately create circumstances of marginality (Dutta, 2008, 2010). In the current project, the CCA framework served to give voice to the underserved community members—EFNEP participants—through a series of interactions with them, which entailed all five forms of data collection. By including photovoice, the researcher's intent was to reveal held meanings of health and nutrition that may, otherwise, not surface during the in-depth interviews. In addition, photovoice becomes a key component to the co-constructed dialogue between participant and researcher—visually portraying that the ownership of issues belongs to the community members and not the researcher.

Targeting 15 to 20 current or recently graduated EFNEP participants to take part in the study, flyers were posted in the local Cooperative Extension office located in a large metropolitan city in the Midwest. Those who volunteered to be part of the in-depth interviews also had the option to be part of the photovoice, workgroups, and community forum portions of the project. As it relates to recommended sizes for focus groups, which is how the workgroups were structured, the target number of

participation was eight (Tang, 1995). Therefore, to secure eight participants in the workgroups, it was determined that the first 10 interviews resulting in the participant volunteering to continue with the study would be considered sufficient.

As one of five research methods used, photovoice was a critical component of the workgroups and community forum. Participants who volunteered to take part in the photovoice project were expected to attend all three gatherings. The combination of all methods was intended to provide rich data and triangulation of findings. Triangulation helps validate findings through the comparison of various data collected (Lindlof & Taylor, 2010). Because CCA relies on grounded theory, these data collection modes were administered in a way that allowed for a continual building, analyzing and reflection of the data (Figure 1).

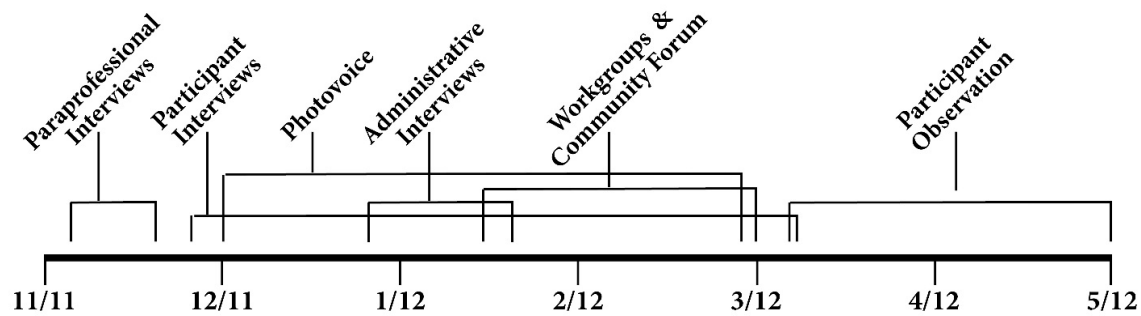


Figure 1: Participants' Involvement in Research Process and Timetable of Methods

In the photovoice component, the 10 participants who committed to the workgroup series were provided a 27-exposure disposable camera and asked to capture images they felt described their experience as it relates to good health and nutrition. In explaining the photo project, the researcher described example subject areas to consider such as challenges feeding the family, experiences in grocery shopping, and other areas potentially influencing health and nutrition. Therefore, the images captured might range from a prepared meal for their family, an empty milk jug, price comparisons when shopping, or the quality of food they purchased. In addition to choosing the content of the photographs, participants were asked to determine their location and timing. The participants had the cameras for three weeks, starting December 17, 2011. They were instructed to take pictures until the camera was spent, and before the first workgroup meeting.

During the first workgroup, participants turned in their cameras and the researcher shared with the participants the major topics based in health and nutrition that had surfaced during the in-depth interviews with the participants. The second workgroup built upon discussion and collective ideas from the first workgroup that could be organized into talking points the group felt best described their lived experiences as it relates to health and nutrition, and that they felt were important to share in the forthcoming community forum. In addition, the participants were provided their respective photos in 4-by-6 prints; a total of 153 photos were captured. Taking turns, each participant shared and talked about their photos with the group. Then, as a group, participants selected 30 photos they felt best captured and described their meanings of good health and nutrition, along with the challenges of achieving good health and nutrition. Issues brought up in the group discussions were led by the participants, while the researcher functioned as a facilitator. During the two workgroups and photovoice portion of the project, collected data included audio recordings of the workgroup sessions, along with the researcher's captured notes regarding the participants' level of emotion and

demeanor when sharing and talking about their photos and experiences. Other collected data via the researcher's notes included any connections or references participants made to key topics or issues discussed as a group in the first workgroup relating to good nutrition and health. Collected data did not include names or any other identifying information. Both workgroups sessions lasted 60 to 90 minutes. Because the photovoice and workgroup project segments were limited to the first 10 EFNEP participants to volunteer, the workgroup sessions took place at a transitional apartment complex located downtown. This complex happened to be the residence of all 10 participants.

The goal of the community forum was to bring together EFNEP participants, paraprofessionals and administrators into a single meeting space. The intent was for the participants to share with the rest of the group priority issues that they collectively determined in the first two workgroups. Prior to the community forum, the researcher reprinted the 30 photos that the participants had selected and mounted them on black poster board so they could be displayed on easels for the community forum. The photos were reprinted into larger sizes – 5-by-7 and 8-by-10 formats – to enhance their visibility and appearance for discussion. The EFNEP paraprofessionals and administrators previously interviewed for the larger study were invited to the community forum to listen to what the participants had prepared in terms of talking points and displayed photos (Figure 2). Including the eight EFNEP participants, a total of 24 people attended the forum.

During the course of the community forum, the EFNEP participants shared their stories, voiced concerns, and displayed and talked about their photo exhibits. In addition, university paraprofessionals and administrators present at the discussion had the opportunity to answer questions, clarify program goals and objectives, and further collaborate in the discussion of solutions. Throughout the duration of the 60-minute community forum, the researcher functioned solely as facilitator. At the completion of the community forum workgroup, participants were given a cash incentive and the option to keep the photos they took.

Each workgroup session was audio recorded with permission from all participants, and transcribed verbatim. Participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms. Using grounded theory processes, analytic interpretations began using open coding, followed by focused coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Selective coding begins to configure the developed constructs into sets of constructs, which examines how they are related to each other. From these relationships comes the development of constructivist interpretations resulting in co-constructed meanings and themes (Charmaz, 2006).

### **Photovoice Results**

Of the 10 participants who volunteered to take part in the photovoice, workgroups and community forum, eight completed these phases of the study. Five were African Americans, and the remaining three were Caucasian; two were male. All eight participants were residents of a downtown transitional housing apartment complex. In order to be a resident of this complex, individuals had to be homeless prior to moving in. All participants had one to six children, aged 3 months to 18 years. None of the participants was employed. Reasons for unemployment, according to the participants, were emotional or physical disability, the need to care for small children, or lack of transportation. All received food stamps; six of the eight participants had diabetes or lived with someone who had diabetes.

Ongoing analysis throughout the duration of the study revealed that nutrition is often situated within the context of a larger discussion that involves substantial barriers to EFNEP participants' adoption of recommended nutritional practices. Amidst the complex social dynamics and evidence





Figure 2. Two of the four display boards showcasing photos participants selected to be displayed at the community forum

of personal issues that lie just beneath the surface, two themes eventually emerged that were direct results of the photovoice exercise within the workgroup: (1) Frustrations in a downtown food desert, and (2) skewed meanings and ownership of issues.

### **Frustrations in a Downtown Food Desert**

When participants were asked to share and discuss the photos they took, Vivian held up a photo of a cereal aisle (Figure 3) at “The Store” (a pseudonym for a grocery store chain that happened to be the only store within walking distance of the apartment complex). She explained how The Store

had asked to her to stop taking photos of the shelved food items. When asked why she thought they asked her to stop, she said she was not certain, but assumed it was because they didn't want people to know how high their food prices were.



*Figure 3. A photo of a cereal aisle at The Store represents Vivian's experiences of dealing with high prices and unfair "big sales" at the end of the month.*

If triple coupons were promoted, and subsequently honored at The Store, Vivian explained that it was not until closer to the end of the month, when everyone had exhausted their allocated monthly food stamps. "After you spend your stamps, then they've got all these big sales. Cuz [The Store] will have really nice deals around the 18th to the 22nd... and then they jack the prices up right before the first." Such a statement roused the group, with each individual confirming Vivian's statement and offering their personal complaints and experiences to the perceived unjustified acts of The Store.

This also led into a discussion of food stamps, in terms of monthly allotments and the struggle to have enough. Richard offered his own personal experience for the last few years:

Plus, they keep dropping my stamps for some reason. They'll take \$6 one month, and six months later they take \$3 more, then they take four more dollars, and now I only get like \$187 for two people. Where, I was getting \$310 a couple years ago. Now I'm down to \$187. But, it's cuz I get social security now. But, still I've got bills to pay, so I have to be on kinda like a C-Ration, you know what I mean? It ain't plentiful. So, I gotta do what I gotta do to try and pay the bills.

Sara supported Richard's statement, saying, "As long as babies drink formula or as long as kids drink milk, you ain't never going to have enough stamps." She also followed up her statement with a discussion of the high prices of food in general, even identifying that there are often certain unaf-



fordable foods. “All that healthy stuff is more expensive. It’s rich people’s food. The only time I get fresh stuff is when I get \$10 on WIC per month for fresh fruits and vegetables.”

Sara’s comment regarding fruits and vegetables sparked yet an additional conversation about personal eating habits and preferences, all tying back to Vivian’s picture depicting the perceived high prices found in The Store and the challenge of purchasing healthy and nutritious food. Richard commented, “Anything downtown is high... My sister takes me to the store once a month, faithfully. So, I kinda got me a list of what I want. Ain’t very many vegetables on it, you can count on that. Now, I usually get about 10 or 20 canned goods a month. [My son] will eat it, but I kinda have to make him eat it.” He added to that, admitting that he did not care for vegetables and tried to get what he needed nutritiously by drinking canned vegetable juice.

Viewing the researcher as a representative of EFNEP, Diane followed Richard’s statement by asking, “Have you ever thought about giving coupons or something? Because a lot of that healthy stuff is expensive. Like yogurt. I like yogurt. It’s expensive.” Penny immediately followed Diane with her own experience with yogurt, saying, “Yeah, I know what she’s saying because I go out to Wal-Mart and get like 10 for \$6 and that is kinda high.”

Through the first two workgroup discussions, as participants shared their experiences, and the others confirmed or validated such experiences, the group began to collectively accept its limited agency within the structure—participants perceived few options for food they needed and could afford. Specifically relating to The Store, each participant agreed that it was not a good option for monthly shopping, but, unless they had access to transportation and could physically use it, then they did not feel they had other options. Participant thus had resolved themselves to accepting the circumstances and dealing with it the best they could. Diane was the first in the discussion to propose the solution of providing coupons for healthier food, such as yogurt.

### **Skewed Meanings and Ownership of Issues**

Diane was another participant asked to share and describe her photos with the group. The majority of her photos were taken of restaurant storefronts in the downtown area, portraying a variety of cuisine and ethnic options. Prior to the second workgroup, the researcher had spent some time examining each participant’s photos and, through reflexive journaling, captured initial impressions and assumptions regarding the intended meaning among the photos, followed by a juxtaposition of what was shared during the workgroup:

To me, my conclusions were quite plausible and, in fact, I would have been comfortable prior to the workgroup discussions to create reasonable explanations that could be shared with the dominant structure for the purposes of developing a deeper understanding of the participants in this study. Therefore, my conclusion from Diane’s photos was that these were restaurants situated all around them in close proximity, but were not accessible to them due to high prices. Much to my surprise, my conclusion was far from the truth. As Diane began to share and describe each photo (Figure 4), she revealed that these were restaurants she and her family believe are good and healthy choices, and that they enjoy eating at often. Her response went completely against my assumption of her photos, revealing to me a need for heightened caution and responsibility in interpreting collected data.



*Figure 4. A photo of a downtown restaurant storefront represents Diane's enjoyment of eating at such restaurants for their good and healthy options.*

As the conversation turned back to The Store through the continuation of photo sharing, and how it served to be a constant source of frustration and limitation to them, the researcher asked, "Do you guys think you have the ability to change things at [The Store]?" The question was immediately met with a collective, "No!" Again, there was a pause, with only a couple of group members quietly saying something to themselves. The researcher then said, "I actually believe you do." As a result, someone in the group alluded to the fact that, because they receive government assistance, they did not have a right to complain and ultimately encourage change. A couple of participants spoke up with varying responses.

Sara said, "If a big group of people get together and have the same complaints about the same store, a lot of times they take it to the store and identify false advertising." Diane followed with, "Get a group of people together... you can try... if somebody don't say something, it's always going to stay just like it is now."

Later, during the course of another discussion, Vivian asked the researcher, "So, you think we can... that you can make some changes in here?" Her question suggested that she had continued thinking about it, contemplating it several moments after the initial statement was made. But, what it also suggested was that she had still not placed the ability on her or the others in the group. Rather she corrected herself mid-question and redirected the responsibility on the researcher, asking "So, you think we can... that you can...?"

Shortly after Vivian's question, it was suggested to the group that a reporter from the local newspaper be invited to the final meeting (the community forum) in order to hear about their plight and struggles with The Store. Group members instantly became very wary of this suggestion because of the fear they had of being seen or connected with speaking negatively of the grocery store. The following is a segment of the dialogue that followed:



- Vivian: “Like I said, if that guy come, and our face is on there, they probably treat you different down there.”
- Richard: “They’ll bar you from over there, too.”
- Penny: “This is a free country. They can’t stop us from speaking.”
- Richard: “I tell you, they can bar you from coming in their store.”
- Penny: “So! You ain’t stole nothing... But, people will do... I’ve seen it before. If you piss people off, they will find a way to remove you.”

In summary, while the group recognized the benefit of collectively standing up against unfair services, they did not believe that they were a collective that could successfully do it without repercussions.

## Discussion

The photovoice methodology employed in this project was used in combination with other conventional social science methods. As a result, photovoice helped reveal and illuminate some of the key issues facing the group. By placing cameras in the hands of EFNEP participants, photovoice exemplified a participatory action research method so that the lived experiences of these participants could be visually represented to internal and external stakeholders of the program (Dutta, 2008). As a result, the participants used the photos to build narratives of their lives that otherwise would have been invisible to the social scientist trying to build an understanding.

Prior to the photovoice portion of the project, The Store had not surfaced as a significant issue influencing health and nutrition choices. It was not until Vivian shared and described her photo of the cereal aisle at The Store that the implications of living in the transitional housing apartment complex began to be revealed. Because The Store was located within walking distance from the apartment complex, participants did not technically live in a food desert, which is defined as an area devoid of a supermarket (Walker, Keane, & Burke, 2010). However, their lack of perceived agency in negotiating various obstacles related to The Store created food desert-like qualities.

This finding became relevant when it was juxtaposed with the overall outreach and engagement on behalf of EFNEP. The reason is because, while the lessons on and demonstrations of practicing good nutrition may be well-received by the participants (as the in-depth interviews had revealed), their ability to acquire the recommended resources is inhibited by the perceived injustices of The Store as described and shared by the participants. Photovoice, as an included methodology lead to the discussion of The Store, which ultimately brought it into the discussion that took place in the community forum. As a result, these experiences were shared with EFNEP paraprofessionals and administrators, most of whom were unaware of such specific struggles, but exhibited concern and a sense of compassion through responses that indicated a desire to help make changes. This finding came to light as a direct result of the participants’ voices being heard through their shared narratives and pictures, and their overall lived experiences.

By bringing to the discussion issues such as a monthly decrease in food stamps, limited resources to acquire healthy foods, a fear of stepping up and speaking out against their identified perceived injustices at The Store, and sharing a collective perception of lacking the ability to make a difference, photovoice more clearly revealed the perceived lack of agency within this group of participants. Not only that, but it revealed to the researcher, the essential need to continually step out of the dominant-based epistemology, and set aside presumptive conclusions on what is initially seen or suggested, such

as with Diane's explanation of her restaurant storefront photos, or the participants' fear of speaking up and losing access to the limited resources by being pictured in the newspaper.

In this project, photovoice was a valuable research method in developing a deeper and richer understanding of the EFNEP participant culture and the held meanings. Essentially, it revealed and confirmed that comprehensively understanding the impact of outreach and engagement through EFNEP goes beyond just pre- and post-test measured behavior change or retention of nutrition knowledge, but it also is deeply grounded in the dynamic culture that continually exists in contested intersections with structure and agency. New knowledge may be gained, but what limits or prohibits putting that knowledge into practice?

Of course, there are limitations to this study as it relates to the value of photovoice as an included methodology. First, findings from this project, which took place with a small group of EFNEP participants in a single city, cannot be generalized across the EFNEP organization or other similar outreach programs to low-income, marginalized audiences. Second, it cannot be assumed that the use of photovoice, as part of a multi-method study guided by CCA, is compatible with other theoretical frameworks used by applied communicators. However, it should be kept in mind that, while emerged data are not considered representative in a social scientific way, such building and continual analysis of data can become a reliable slice of a particular historical moment (Wang & Burris, 1997).

## Conclusions

In this professional development paper, the use of photovoice demonstrated the opportunity to add a level of depth and richness to the research project through shared experiences about issues that had not previously been shared in the in-depth interviews. In addition, photovoice continually challenged the researcher to set aside personal assumptions and conclusions and work more closely with participants to co-construct their lived experiences and narratives. It also challenged the researcher to set aside a personal agenda of what should be the priorities or next steps and simply listen to the participants and allow their stories to unfold.

In applying the methodology to public health promotion, Wang and Burris (1997) describe photovoice as a methodology that is:

...well suited to address... 'theory failure.' For example, we frequently encountered the assumption that lack of knowledge was the major problem facing rural women. But by using the photovoice method, the village women themselves documented the fact that their major problems included lack of water, lack of transportation, and lack of child care. As a means of participatory needs assessment, photovoice provides a community-based diagnostic tool to redress the inadequate theory on which programs may be based (p. 384).

This assertion was supported in the current project as photovoice repeatedly made clear that the lack of knowledge retention, low literacy rates and variable rates of behavior change—all, of which, have been common measurements of program evaluation in EFNEP audiences (Brink & Sobal, 1994; Dickin, Dollahite & Habicht, 2005; Hartman, McCarthy, Park, Schuster, & Kushi, 1997)—ultimately became peripheral issues to the participants' lack of transportation, claimed injustices at the only readily accessible store, and overall concern with losing already-limited access to available resources.

Photovoice provides another dimension of understanding the audiences that agricultural com-

munication researchers are often tasked to understand. Communicators have long recognized the value in allowing participants the opportunity to describe things in their own words. Photovoice accomplishes this goal in the research context by engaging participants in a way to identify and visually portray issues that may otherwise go unsaid. From a research methodology standpoint, it gives the participants a chance to capture a photo outside of the common researcher-participant interview environment, sharing the significance of an issue taking place organically in their everyday lives, when the researcher is not present. In addition, as a benefit to the researcher, newly revealed issues provides an entry point to return to the field and engage participants in additional in-depth interviews or other research methodologies in order to gain further insights.

Looking ahead in the area of applied communication research, photovoice represents an effort to improve and diversify the discipline. This is the case not only in methodologies employed, but also in the consideration of other disciplines, directly and indirectly related to agricultural communication. The larger project referenced in this paper utilized the culture-centered approach (CCA), which is a methodological framework commonly applied to health communication research. It would behoove agricultural communication scholarship to delve deeper into cross-disciplinary frameworks that challenge common epistemologies in order to strengthen the field and bolster the efforts and practices of communication research that need to be maintained and secured in the *National Research Agenda*.

### About the Author

Dr. Abigail Borron is an assistant professor of agricultural communication in the Department of Youth Development and Agricultural Education. Her research focuses on culture-centered communication with emphases in marginalized audiences and university engagement.

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