

Some Theoretical and Methodological Views on Photo-Elicitation

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INTRODUCTION – A CASE FOR PHOTO-ELICITATION¹

Photo-elicitation, the use of photographs during the interview process, was first described in a paper published by John Collier, Jr (1957), 'Photography in Anthropology: a Report on Two Experiments'. The method, which Collier called 'photo interviewing', was later described in greater detail in the chapter 'Interviewing with Photographs', in the book *Visual Anthropology: Photography as a Research Method* (Collier and Collier, 1986: 99–125), in which the authors offer a systematic survey of the visual techniques utilized in anthropology at the time. In this context photo-elicitation was, for the first time, described as a variation on open-ended interviewing (Harper, 1994: 410), a non-directive method that favored collaboration between researcher and respondent. This approach emerged from theoretical and methodological debates that questioned the tenets of classic structured interviews/surveys, the nature of the

researcher–respondent relationship, and any knowledge that this interaction was supposed to produce.

Open-ended methods see an interview as an exchange that, although initiated and guided by the interviewer, aims to grant to an interviewee greater space for personal interpretations and responses. In the photo-elicitation interview, this exchange is stimulated and guided by images. Typically these are images that the researcher has made of the subjects' world (Harper, 1987; Harper and Faccioli, 2000), or they are photographs that have been selected by the researcher because they are assumed to be meaningful to the interviewee (Lapenta, 2004; Epstein et al., 2006). The pictures, however, might also have been taken by the researcher, while accompanied by one or more informants who might suggest what to photograph and/or how (Pink, 2006). They can also be images that interviewees themselves have taken or selected for the specific aims of the interview, in an approach that has been referred to as

'reflexive photography' or 'auto-driven photo elicitation' (Harper, 1987; Clark, 1999).

A number of authors have described this approach theoretically (Grant and Fine, 1992; Banks, 2001; Van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2001; Harper, 2002) and it has been included among other established research methods and methodologies used in sociology (Wagner, 1979; Schwartz, 1989), anthropology (Rose, 2001; Pink, 2006), and cultural studies. The general consensus in this literature is that the use of images and/or film in the interview process elicits 'deep and interesting talk' (Harper, 2002: 23) on subjects otherwise too complex to explore (Rose, 2001; Pink, 2006). Photographs can convey contents that words can only approximately represent, and can represent subjects that might be invisible to the researcher but visible to the interviewee, triggering unforeseen meanings and interpretations (Schwartz, 1989). The nature of the method is also described as intrinsically collaborative (Banks, 2001; Pink, 2006). As originally noted by the Collier and Collier (1986), and later by others (Banks, 2001; Harper, 2002; Lapenta, 2004; Pink, 2006), interpreting the meanings of images can be explored in a conversation between the researcher and the respondent. Images can also be the response to a conversation, as when respondents are asked to photograph or film their own lives (Levy, 1991; Clark, 1999; Chalfen and Rich, 2004; Pink, 2006) to discuss their subjects and meanings later.² It is in these contexts that images can be hypothesized (Lapenta, 2004), using Gadamer's concept, as a path to a 'fusion of horizons' or broadening, of one's own horizon or knowledge. This is achieved through the opening up the interview to the content and communicative potential of images and the subjectively and linguistically negotiated interpretations, descriptions and meanings they invoke (Lapenta, 2004: 50).³

Although it remains fairly marginal to mainstream research, photo-elicitation has recently gained broader recognition for its heuristic and collaborative potential. Indeed, it is becoming an established element in the

methodological toolbox of the visual anthropologist or sociologist and is increasingly popular in a range of interdisciplinary research studies. Photo-elicitation has been used in a widening range of research designs and anthropological subjects such as studies of social class or organization, family, community and historical ethnography, or identity and cultural studies (Collier and Collier, 1986; Harper, 2002). For example, photo-elicitation has been used to study ethnic identification (Gold, 1986), farming communities (Schwartz, 1989), change in a town (Chiozzi, 1989), gentrification (Suchar and Rotenberg, 1994), memories of a steel town (Modell and Brodsky, 1994) and children's experience of place (Smith and Barker, 2000; Rasmussen, 2004). Photo-elicitation has also increasingly expanded to other disciplines (Hurworth, 2003; Epstein et al., 2006), such as in healthcare as a tool for nursing, medical or gerontological research (Hagedorn, 1996; Riley and Manias, 2003), in individual and family therapy (Entin, 1979; Wessels, 1985) and to enhance memory retrieval (Aschermann et al., 1998), in social work (Weinger, 1998), child psychology (Salmon, 2001) and in education as a way to teach students (Killion, 2001) or talk about abstract concepts (Bender et al., 2001).

This variety of research areas, applications and topics has remained strongly grounded in the interpretations and theoretical tenets described in 1986 by Collier and Collier (herein referred to as 'the Colliers'). In what follows I will describe, and then depart from, their accounts of photo-elicitation and elaborate on more contemporary interpretations and applications.

PHOTO-ELICITATION: THE COLLIERS' (1986) FOUNDING THEORETICAL TENETS

In this section I will describe the Colliers' original analyses of the photo-interviewing process. They described a number of direct experiences with photo-elicited interviewing

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in the chapter 'Interviewing with Photographs' (Collier and Collier, 1986: 99–115), and then went on to discuss psychological implications that can be available to the researcher using photographs in projective interviewing (117–132). While describing the contexts and subjects of their research, they developed a case for photo-elicitation as a method that seemed to meet, almost 'spontaneously', the aims of a qualitatively informed open-ended interview. Collaboration between interviewer and interviewee, non-directivity of the discourse, and a higher level of engagement by interviewees with the themes and subjects of the interview emerged as the recurring qualities described by authors that have used or described the method since then (Schwartz, 1989; Banks, 2001; Harper, 2002; Pink, 2006; 2003).

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The Colliers discussed the *why* and *how* of the use of photographs in interviews. How are these communicative elements used? How do they affect the interaction and discourse structure? Do they achieve the greater collaboration between the researcher and the interviewee promised? They described photographs as tools, useful for obtaining knowledge 'above and beyond' what might be obtained by the analysis of the photographs themselves. As they wrote:

When native eyes interpret and enlarge upon the photographic content, through interviewing with photographs, the potential range of data enlarges beyond that contained in the photographs themselves.... [becoming] communication bridges between strangers... [and] pathways into unfamiliar, unforeseen environments and subjects (Collier and Collier, 1986: 99).

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What is now termed the 'polysemic quality' (Harper, 2002: 15; Margolis, 2007) of images creates the possibility for different observers to interpret their contents according to their identity of views, native knowledge and ethos, and to actively discuss and exchange the personal values and meanings that these subjects might have for them (Collier and Collier, 1986: 103–108). Photographs, in their interpretation, have two relevant informational values for the researcher: The first,

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or encyclopedic value, is produced by the photograph's immediate character of realistic reconstruction, which is best defined as the potential for survey offered to the researchers by the photographs' capacity to visually record objects, persons, and physical and social circumstances. The second, or projective interviewing, goes beyond this mere capacity to record objects, persons and situations. When eliciting individual interpretations and responses, images can acquire multiple and unpredictable meanings. The Colliers explain that, below their 'surface content', strongly descriptive photographs can become charged with highly subjective meanings and values that can ultimately be opened up only through '*the projective interpretation by the native*' [italics in original] (Collier and Collier, 1986: 108).

The combination of these two informational characteristics of the image constitute the *intrinsic potential* of the photo-elicited interview as a tool to pursue the researchers' aims to gain an enriched knowledge of other people's lives, opinions, knowledge and behaviors. The Colliers found that photographs not only operated as a projective tool to constitute a communicative path into the lives and worlds of the observers, but also created a new communicative situation in which the report between subjects was reshaped and refocused. Images, they explained, 'invited people to take the lead in the inquiry, making full use of their expertise', and they readily 'invited open expression while maintaining concrete and explicit reference points' (Collier and Collier, 1986: 105) in a way that verbal interviewing could not. Photographs may offer an opportunity for developing a sense of self-expression for respondents who are identifying and explaining the image's contents by 'tell[ing] their own stories', and allowing for joint discovery of the 'realities of the photographs... [by] exploring the photographs together' with the researcher (Collier and Collier, 1986: 105).

For the Colliers, these uses of photographs were helpful in building a level of trust that would allow for the interactional dynamics

of the interview and provide increased access to information. Rapport and trust, they reminded us, remain 'a major focus of concern' for the researcher who 'struggles to define a genuine functional relationship' (Collier and Collier, 1986: 105) with respondents. 'Psychologically, the photographs performed as a third party in the interview session (Collier and Collier, 1986: 105), since, in their experience, '(t)he use of photographs tempered many of these difficulties' (Collier and Collier, 1986: 105) encountered while forming such relationships:

We are asking questions of the photographs, and the informants became our assistants in discovering the answers in the realities of the photographs' (Collier and Collier, 1986: 105).

Schwartz also noted that interviewees respond to photographs without hesitation (Schwartz, 1989: 151–152). By providing informants with a task similar to viewing a family album, the strangeness of the interview situation was averted. In the Colliers' experiences, as related throughout these chapters, this effect is a direct outcome of the specific communicative qualities of photographs. While questions asked during strictly verbal exchanges bear meaning in themselves, photographs represent the possibility for the researcher to acquire a specific meaning through participant interpretation and verbal description. The understanding of this interpretation is that participants, through the confrontation of their respective interpretations and points of view, use words to define a photograph's meaning in the interview. Both participant and researcher have to collaborate to focus their interpretative attempt (Collier and Collier, 1986: 99–132).

The approach and theoretical support described by the Colliers and adopted by most researchers following their approach has some theoretical limits which I discussed in detail in my doctoral dissertation (Lapenta, 2004). Yet their contribution has been fruitful in describing ways of recasting traditional open-ended interviews. The Colliers' descriptions delineated a communicative interaction

characterized by a changing in the relationships between the interviewer, the interviewee, and the stimuli (the photograph), and they described what were, at that time, novel possibilities for the social dynamics of interviewing. An initial implication of such uses of photographs during the interview process was to break down the unidimensional linguistic structure of the interview discourse by adding a second, relevant, communicative element. This shift in the nature of the stimuli has two associated effects. First, the use of photographs supplements the dialogue with new visual informational elements and symbols that verbal communication cannot deliver (Collier and Collier, 1986: 105). Secondly, the introduction of a non-verbal element in the interaction transforms the question-and-answer dynamics of the verbal interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee (Lapenta, 2004). This is no small achievement for an interaction whose primary purpose is to elicit a rich exchange of information.

FOUR APPROACHES TO PHOTO-ELICITATION

At a very basic level, researchers who decide to use photo-elicitation must make key decisions that will affect the research structure and the actual application of the method. These key decisions can be synthesized, according to Epstein et al. (2006), into three basic questions:

- Who is going to make or select the images to be used in the interviews?
- What is the content of the images going to be?
- Where are the images going to be used, and how?

It is methodologically significant who makes or selects certain images over others from the pool used in the interview process. Images used in photo-elicitation can generally be categorized into one of three sources: researcher-produced images that they have taken or acquired, for example from

historical archives or from collectors; participant-produced images taken for the purpose of the research or 'found', as in family albums;⁴ and images co-produced during the study by the researcher and the research participants.

As noted by Epstein et al. (2006), photo-elicitation, faithful to its original description and applications, has mainly been adopted in interviews as an 'ice breaker' activity to create a comfortable space for discussion, and as a tool to 'invoke comments, memory, and discussion in the course of a semi-structured interview' (Banks, 2001: 87, as cited by Epstein et al., 2006). And, despite the diversity of fields and applications (for example, see Chapters 9 and 12), photo-elicitation has, until recently, often involved the use of pictures taken and/or selected by the researcher. This decision, however, is characterized by different levels of feasibility and organizational complexity, and, more importantly, each approach entails different methodological strengths and weaknesses. Sometimes it might be not possible for the researcher to directly take appropriate photographs, or it might be impossible for the researcher to ask respondents to make or select their own pictures. These circumstances will shape practical applications of photo-elicitation in a given research context.

Perhaps more importantly, as discussed in the existing literature, each practical method is also associated with specific methodological tenets. For example, scholars interested in exploring social spaces and contexts, or exploring theoretical concepts, have tended to use photographs selected by the researcher in order to map spaces, objects or subjects of interest, and to focus respondents' attention on these researcher-selected themes and subjects (Harper, 1982; 1984; 2000; Schwartz, 1989; Weinger, 1998). An advantage of this approach is that it allows a set of selected photographs to function as a consistent and structured, yet flexibly organized, tableau of images. These can be used to assess respondents' differing levels of understanding and perception given the same pictures and

subjects. The approach can be used to test specific research hypotheses with a large sample of respondents, and to compare research results and interpretations against other interviews or studies that may have used the same or similar images. Researcher-produced sets of photographs can generate descriptions and meanings that may illuminate subjects initially invisible to the researcher but visible to interviewees (Schwartz, 1989), thus enabling the researcher to develop new hypotheses and interpretations. If necessary, additional images can be acquired to further the analysis. Such image collections can also help to 'break the frame' by showing familiar things in unfamiliar ways to respondents who may critically and reflexively observe their own lives (Harper, 2002: 20).

The epistemological quandary of this classic approach to photo-elicitation arises from questions surrounding *whose* knowledge did selected pictures actually represent? For whom were those pictures really made? Whose subjects of interest, discourses and aesthetics do they represent (Pink, 2006: 110)?

As a consequence of the theoretical questions generated by the use of researcher-produced images, a range of alternative approaches have been developed that employ respondents' self- or collaboratively-produced images, or a mix of both. The main alternatives to 'classic' photo-elicitation have been categorized by Hurworth (2003) as: 'Auto Driving', 'Reflexive Photography', and 'Photo Voice (or Photo Novella)', and they reflect methodological differences in the researchers' use of photographs.⁵

Considering the use of images made collaboratively, i.e. those selected or made by the respondents themselves or those produced by the researcher in collaboration with respondents, addresses pivotal theoretical distinctions between images of different origins. Each collaborative approach typically involves asking respondents to photograph places and subjects that are meaningful to them in some way (Clark, 1999; Clark-Ibanez, 2004; Epstein et al., 2006),

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or to take photographs together with the researcher while participating in private or social events and environments (Bryant, 1985). These alternative approaches aim to empower respondents by allowing them to show to researchers the respondents' worlds from their own point of view. In the following sections I will describe these different approaches and their methodological tenets in greater detail.

REFLEXIVE PHOTOGRAPHY: RESPONDENT-GENERATED IMAGE PRODUCTION

The idea of reflexive photography was originally introduced by Harper (1988a), who hypothesized that:

in the reflexive photographic method, the subject shares in the definition of the meaning; thus, the definitions are said to 'reflect back' from the subject (Harper, 1988a: 64–65).

In common with other forms of photo-elicitation, this method uses photos to enhance informants' engagement in the interview; however, respondents are not presented with photos taken by the researcher but, rather, are encouraged to elaborate on the content and meaning of photographs they produce themselves. Termed 'Auto-driving' by Heisley and Levy (1991) in marketing research, the informant's responses to research questions would be driven by stimuli drawn directly from photographs taken by respondents. An advantage of this approach is its capacity to reduce the researcher bias embedded in the selection of specific images, subjects and themes used in the interviews. In this form of photo-elicitation, 'the interview is "driven" by informants who are seeing their own behavior' through the process of selection, observation and interpretation of their own photos (Heisley and Levy, 1991: 261). This not only allows researcher and informants to negotiate interpretations of the photographs but also provides a means for informants to

have increased voice and authority in interpreting their own lives, social contexts, and a 'perspective of action' that helps make their life-views and social systems meaningful to outsiders (Gould, 1974: 25). Photographs allow people to 'view' themselves from a distance, outside their everyday lives. This distance can help informants to interpret the selected photographs and perhaps 'see familiar data in unfamiliar ways' (Heisley and Levy, 1991: 257). This motivation can be used to enhance informants' involvement and elicit a qualitatively-enriched body of information concerning events as informants perceived them (Heisley and Levy, 1991).

Another advantage of respondent-based collections of images resides in the fact that the image sample can also be employed as a tool 'to reinforce and elaborate on findings typically revealed through standard quantitative approaches such as... surveys' (Heisley and Levy, 1991: 257). Or they can be deployed as part of other modes of qualitative inquiry, such as focus groups. One example of research based on the use of reflexive photography is the study conducted by Harrington and Schibik (2003) of the freshman year experience (FYE). In their project, students were asked to take pictures during their first 6 weeks on campus. Students were asked to '(t)ake pictures that will illustrate your impression of the university or that will help you describe your impressions.' (Harrington and Schibik, 2003: 30). The aim was to capture early impressions of college life in order to gain an understanding of different issues affecting student perceptions of their FYE. They were also asked to record their thoughts and feelings about ways that each photograph was illustrative of those early college experiences. Students were then interviewed, first in individual photo-elicitation interviews, and later in focus-group interviews in which they could discuss the photographs, as a group, in light of their experiences and common perceptions and themes. The research approach helped to reveal themes that included 'perceptions about the university's physical environment,... interactions with faculty, interactions with other students, student support

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services, and career counseling' (Harrington and Schibik, 2003: 25). It provided insight into students' 'impressions of the institution', their perceptions of the relative importance of certain collegiate experiences and expectations, and descriptions of what 'expectations were unreal or unreasonable' (15). The use of reflexive photography provided specific and concrete examples of freshman experiences on campus that were not highlighted by other, more general, survey instruments, by capturing both by students' words and their pictures (Harrington and Schibik, 2003).

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PHOTOVOICE: COMMUNITY-BASED IMAGE PRODUCTION

Further enriching the spectrum of image-based interviewing methods, *Photovoice* adds additional potentials for respondent-based image production and analysis. Originally described as 'photo novella' by Wang and Burris (1994), the method is now largely referred to as 'photovoice' (Wang and Burris, 1997; Wang, 1999, 2001, 2005). As Hurworth (2003) described the process, photovoice is a participatory action research approach that asks interviewees to take photographs that they feel portray their daily routines, common events or community life. They subsequently talk about the significance and meaning of these images with other members of the community, and the researcher.

Photovoice, as initially conceived, had three main goals:

- 1 To enable people to record and reflect their community's strengths and concerns.
- 2 To promote critical dialogue and knowledge about personal and community issues through large- and small-group discussion of their photographs.
- 3 To reach policymakers (Wang, 1997: 370).

Wang presented different stages involved in the process that moves from a general conceptualization, to the definition of broader goals and objectives, the devising of the

initial themes for taking pictures, and the final critical evaluation and group discussions of the photographs. She described important stages of this process (Wang, 1997), four of which are as follows:

Photovoice training begins with a discussion of cameras, ethics, and power; ways of seeing photographs; and a philosophy of giving photographs back to community members to express appreciation, respect, or camaraderie. It may also engage with the description of mechanical aspects of camera use (Wang, 1997: 378).

These considerations are by no means unique to photovoice; other authors, including Pink, Harper and Heisley and Levy, similarly describe an ethically informed research practice that interprets the use of photographs as both an opportunity to empower respondents and voice their interpretations and by that create an opportunity to give back to the research participants. Photovoice is unique in that following a similarly participatory approach engages all the 'members of the community [to] select those photographs that most accurately reflect their concerns and assets. These might include those they consider most significant, or simply like best' (Wang, 1997: 380).

The participatory approach then generates a second stage of contextualizing or storytelling. This occurs in the process of group discussion, suggested by the acronym VOICE, Voicing Our Individual and Collective Experience. [...] People describe the meaning of their images in small and large group discussions (Wang, 1997: 381).

This approach distinctly separates photovoice from other methods in that it conceives the photographs as catalysts of participatory 'stories' that emerge from the composed 'voices', meanings and interpretations elaborated by the members of a small or large group, thus framing the fourth participatory stage of the method: 'codifying':

Here participants may identify three dimensions that arise from the dialogue process: issues, themes, or theories. They codify issues when the concerns targeted for action are pragmatic, immediate, and tangible. This is the most direct

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application of the analysis. They may also codify themes and patterns, or develop theories that are grounded in data that have been systematically gathered and analyzed in collective discussion (Wang, 1997: 381).

A key component of photovoice is then characterized by its aim to elicit dialogue among participants through the use of photographs taken by the participants and employed in an open discussion about their broader significance and meaning. This grounding of the images in a shared interpretation of the real and personal experience of the members of the group has the potential to be a valuable tool to empower marginalized groups to articulate and 'voice' their opinions to researchers or policymakers. Of course it also has the potential to be harnessed in consumer research, as we have seen with 'auto-driving.' Photo-elicitation-based interaction not only enables the researcher to observe and participate in the discussion but also may provide a useful collective photographic representation drawn from the participants' consensus regarding photos that depict how they view their own lives and community. As Wang pointed out:

Such an approach avoids the distortion of fitting data into a predetermined paradigm; through it we hear and understand how people make meaning themselves, or construct what matters to them (Wang, 1997: 382).

COLLABORATIVE OR PARTICIPATORY IMAGE PRODUCTION

Another participatory approach involves images generated by the researcher 'together' with respondents as 'collaborative representation', which serves to remove barriers between the observer and the observed (Banks, 1995). Banks later argued that, to some degree, all research efforts are collaborative (Banks, 2001: 119), concluding that the researcher's very presence when using a camera among a group of people is necessarily (by today's ethical standards) the result of

a series of earlier contacts and negotiations. In collaborative research, then, negotiations with respondents emerge as a methodological dilemma: the researcher has to decide how much information to share with respondents about the research agenda.

While the approach to these negotiations and disclosure practices, and their resolution, differs between projects, in some cases the very process of negotiation becomes fundamental to the research methodology. In her description of reflexive ethnographic visual research, for example, Pink (2006) described how negotiations around the use of a camera can become a process through which informants and researchers negotiate and select what they would and would not like the images to show, and how they would like to be represented (Pink, 2006: 102). The process of informant selection and guidance offer opportunities for the researcher to learn about existing conventions and local visual cultures. The experience of photographing or filming together provides opportunities to discuss how the researcher sees, what s/he photographs, and how informants interpret the researcher's photographs. These interactions can bring researchers closer 'to understanding their visual knowledge' and provide 'criteria for evaluating' what researchers and respondents see differently (Pink, 2006: 102). This reflexive process can be used 'as part of the process of learning to see as others do, in a directed way'. By 'collaboratively representing everyday experiences', researchers empower respondents to produce 'shared understandings of their past experiences and current practices' (Pink, 2006: 107) and the images and audio-visual materials provide data 'that informants can... comment on to produce a further layer of knowledge'. Parker (2009), who followed Pink's and Banks' methods, concluded that:

collaboration with interviewees in producing photographs (or videos) entails the interviewees recognizing both aspects of the research study that they wish to highlight and discuss, as well as their interpretation of what may be relevant and useful to the researcher (Parker, 2009: 8).

She then explained how collaborative image production offers a number of opportunities:

It can reveal how interviewees 'see' their world and their past, as well as how they wish themselves and their own roles to be visually represented, perceived and understood (Parker, 2009: 8).

It can also empower interviewees by granting them a role in the selection and framing of images, thereby uncovering their experiences, perspectives and histories.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND 'BEST PRACTICE'

While reflections on ethics inform all areas and methods of social research, these considerations acquire an extra layer of significance when dealing with image-based approaches. For visual researchers, Prosser et al. (2008) argued:

general ethics guidelines and codes of practice cover important principles'. [But being] 'visual' in orientation... brings its own set of methodological practices and its own distinct set of ethical conundrums that require resolving (Prosser et al., 2008: 28).⁶

The main ethical problems for photo elicitation-based research are twofold. First, interviews often may include images of other identifiable persons. Secondly, once photographs are removed from the original context of the interview in which they were discussed and used (for instance in publication or display), they may be understood in ways that misrepresent their subjects. Moreover, the problem with images produced by respondents for a sociological interview resides in their diversity of origin, and the complex social networks they may be embedded in.

Although most researchers are aware of ethical and legal issues such as copyright, informed consent, agreed conditions of publication, or status of confidentiality or anonymity, this is probably not the case with respondents. The diverse origins of the pictures, and the different relations between the author/s of the images, the subjects depicted

and the researcher, may mean it is not always possible to know when images selected by informants for discussion in interviews comply with ethical and legal considerations.⁷ Even when respondents have been trained, researchers should remain particularly vigilant to ensure that no visual representations made for the research are made public (accidentally, or by a participant's own exuberance to 'go public') without appropriate consent. A particularly telling example can be found in Darren Newbury's chapter (Chapter 34), where he comments on Joanou's decision not to publish photographs from her photovoice project.

In her discussion of ethics on the Photovoice website, Wang described a set of 'best practice' guidelines, both for the researchers and the respondents (Photovoice, 2005). These guidelines are not a checklist, guaranteed to solve ethical problems involved in research; rather, they should be interpreted as possible areas of discussion and evaluation when initiating research. While initially designed for the development of photovoice projects, these guidelines have also proved useful for other applications of participatory methods. Wang regarded general safety of the participants as primary:

Be aware of, and execute ways to minimize, participants' risks, including physical harm and loss of privacy to themselves or their community. Put another way, participants' safety and well-being are paramount (Photovoice, 2005).

She described the job of facilitators, as addressing the following:

- describe during group discussions the participants' responsibilities when they carry a camera to respect the privacy and rights of others;
- facilitate critical dialogue that yields specific suggestions and ways to respect others' privacy and rights; and
- emphasize that no picture is worth taking if it begets the photographer harm or ill will (Photovoice, 2005).

Wang suggested that researchers and respondents should discuss the responsibilities of the

photographer to respect the privacy and rights of others. She highlighted the need for written consent, including the importance of requiring participants to obtain written consent from people they themselves photograph, including, in the case of minors, those of parents or guardians. Wang noted:

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This has some drawbacks -- it sometimes yields stiff, less spontaneous pictures – but experience has shown that the drawbacks are outweighed by the advantages: preventing misunderstanding and building trust by giving participants an opportunity to describe the project and solicit the subjects' own insights about a community issue; establishing the possibility of a long-term relationship that may allow for future photographs and exchange of knowledge; and acquiring written consent to use the photographs to promote community well-being (Photovoice, 2005).

Wang concluded with a list of 'shared questions' that may be used to elicit discussion of these issues among the participants. The questions included:

- What is an acceptable way to approach someone to take their picture?
- Should someone take pictures of other people without their knowledge?
- What kind of responsibility does carrying a camera confer?
- What would you not want to be photographed doing?
- To whom might you wish to give photographs, and what might be the implications (Photovoice, 2005)?

CONSIDERATIONS FOR USE OF PHOTO-INTERVIEWING

Photo-elicitation does not eliminate all power relationships or sequential rules of discourse from research interviews. Images may lend themselves to different probing and communicative techniques, but they can obviously be manipulated by the researcher during discussions to imply themes or emphasize elements of their content: for example, in ordering or arrangement of the images chosen (Schegloff

and Sacks, 1973). Like all research methods, photo-elicitation techniques remain valuable as a participatory technique when one keeps these methodological challenges in mind.

Hurworth provided a useful summary of the research potential of photo-elicitation in terms of its methodological strengths. Photo-elicitation can:

- be used at any stage of the research
- provide a means of 'getting inside' a program and its context
- bridge psychological and physical realities
- allow the combination of visual and verbal language
- assist with building trust and rapport
- produce unpredictable information
- promote longer, more detailed interviews in comparison with verbal interviews
- provide a component of multi-methods triangulation
- form a core technique to enhance collaborative/participatory research and needs assessments
- be preferable to conventional interviews for many participants (Hurworth, 2003: n.p.).

Bringing together verbal and visual communication systems creates variations within the typical discourse structure of a research interview that proves methodologically meaningful.⁸ The 'classic' verbal semi-structured interview is organized around an unbalanced 'question-answer' discourse structure. This turn-taking system is said to either create or reinforce an epistemological and social asymmetry between the interactants. Schegloff and Sacks (1973), and Drew and Heritage (1992) described this discursive asymmetry as a typical feature of many well-defined social identities, practices and institutional discourses (e.g. doctor-patient-hospital; judge-defendant-court, etc.) that are characterized by established power relations. While these epistemological asymmetries may be unproblematic, or even necessary, in many social contexts they raise crucial methodological issues for sociological inquiry. In the context of an interview, questions and answers, if not equally distributed among interactants, create unequal power relations and representation (Fairclough, 1989). Questions and answers, unlike many other forms of utterances, are 'sequential objects'

(Schegloff and Sacks, 1973), one leading to the other.⁹

The problem is that, in a discourse structured around an unbalanced Q and A turn-taking, the questioner has the authority to manage the discourse, imposed through choices of questions asked, in terms of the topics, subjects and themes of those questions, and in terms of interpretations drawn from participants' responses (Drew and Heritage, 1992), thereby removing participants from true partnership with the researcher. This poses the question: 'Who's knowledge does the interview's topics, themes and interpretations really represent?'

It is from this perspective that the use of photographs in the research interview can be a tool to break the directive nature of verbal questioning. Unlike verbally-delivered questions, images are not generally part of an established turn-taking system (and they do not represent a question per se). Importantly, images remain ambiguous (or polysemic) in their communicative function until embedded into the conversation. Moreover, they are not bound by the same criteria characteristic of established discourse genres (Bakhtin, 1986), and may remain available to negotiation and definition by interactants. Unlike verbal interaction, images do not necessarily follow a linear path. Since images can be rearranged, shown individually, or viewed as a group, they may not directly probe an interviewee in the same way that a verbal question does.

As Hurworth (2003) summarized, advantages of photo- elicitation are based on the method's ability to:

...challenge participants, provide nuances, trigger memories, lead to new perspectives and explanations, and help to avoid researcher misinterpretation. (Hurworth, 2003: n.p.)

Images, when used in a participatory approach between researcher and participants, can simultaneously allow a researcher to maintain a prespecified interview agenda and structure, while still leaving respondents to

prioritize what is selected and interpreted, leading to new insights and knowledge.

NOTES

1 This chapter refers exclusively to interview elicitation processes with still photographs. The possibilities of other kinds of 'image' elicitation and participation are discussed elsewhere in this volume: see Chapters 9 and 25.

2 See Chapter 9.

3 Language, in this theoretical framework, remains the means, in the sense of 'dimension' of this encounter, and the images become the 'tools' used to achieve a new synthesis of knowledge.

4 So called 'reflexive photographs' (Harper, 1987: 64–65).

5 One could add a fourth, 'Collaborative' or 'Participatory' Video (Pink, 2006), also referred to as collaborative image production, in which images or videos are taken by the researcher in collaboration with respondents who will later analyze and discuss them. Collaborative video is outside the discussion of this chapter (see Note 1).

6 See Chapter 36.

7 These issues are also discussed in Chapters 34 and 37.

8 What I call verbal–visual interdiscursive hybridity (Lapenta, 2004) .

9 In this volume, Knoblauch and Tuma (Chapter 22) provide ways of looking at visual and verbal sequences recorded on video and closely examined. One of their examples, an auction, demonstrates the question–answer format discussed here.

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