



Photo Credit
March 18
2013
Millie Boyd

Photovoice Project in Fayetteville, NC: A photobook

by Logan D. A. Williams

Featuring blind and low vision participatory
research photographers from the Vision Re-
source Center

May 11, 2013

Blind and low vision participatory research photographers from the Vision Resource Center in Fayetteville, NC include:

“Al Pacino”, Alvinia or “Bunny”, Bruce, Joe Bledsoe, Mildred Boyd, “Faith”, Levon Harris, Victoria Johnson, Philbert Samuel, Eather Lean King, Stevie Sanders, Willie J. Smith, Timmie, and Sherry Young.

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This photovoice project was conducted with 10+ blind and low vision people from the Vision Resource Center over 10 consecutive days in Fayetteville, NC in March 2013. It is unique because it is both a sensory photography project and a participatory action research project.

The expected minimum outcome was 10 photo narratives, where each photograph has a caption explaining how it represents the participant's day-to-day experience as a blind or low vision person, including any technological obstacles and aids. An additional outcome was an open memo, with a few policy suggestions for the government of the U.S., Cumberland Country Social Services, City of Fayetteville, eye units in local and affiliated hospitals, and other institutions to consider. Many photographs were taken by the blind and low vision participatory photographers. Photos for the exhibit (and this photobook) were chosen based upon the clarity with which they demonstrated an individual's or the collective group's day-to-day experiences with technological obstacles and aids.

The photovoice exhibit occurred on Wednesday, May 8, 2013 from 1130 am - 130 pm at Marquis Market (116 Person St, Fayetteville, NC 28301). A light lunch was served. Before lunch, Logan briefly discussed the details of the project and showed the video documentary rough cut created by EIPic Productions, LLC. The photovoice exhibit was curated jointly by Logan Williams, Lisette Young and Norma Stitt. The photovoice photobook audio description was narrated by Reverend Gwendolyn A. Logan.

What is Photovoice?

Photovoice is a qualitative research methodology (from the tradition of participatory action research) where participants help to design the research problem and the end result is a set of photo-narratives. It was originally pioneered by Dr. Wang when she was a professor at the University of Michigan School of Public Health (Wang and Burris 1994). More recently, it has been used successfully to empower patients suffering from traumatic brain injury and to determine the strengths and problems with their health care (see Lorenz and Kolb 2009 and Lorenz 2010). Please note: In the UK "PhotoVoice" is the name of a registered

charity that uses (and further develops) the methodology pioneered by Professor Wang, see www.photovoice.org.

What is Sensory Photography?

Sensory photography uses other senses besides sight to take photos (e.g. the sensation of heat, or the feeling of touch). When blind and low vision people participate in a photovoice project, they learn how to take photographs through this technique.

For examples of prior work using sensory photography, please see how blind British and Mexican individuals have been empowered through participating in photovoice projects through the UK organization PhotoVoice on this website: <http://www.photovoice.org/html/methodology4sp/>.

References

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“[Photovoice]”

Photo Credit
March 18 2013
Millie Boyd

Theme: Appropriating Technology

Photo-Narrative

Millie (a woman with low vision) mentioned that formerly she was a shutterbug. This project gives her the opportunity to do something she enjoyed doing before losing much of her sight. This picture is important because it captures the main components of this participatory research project: blind and low vision participants; ethical action-based research; and photography.



“[Shaving]”

Photo Credit
March 19 2013
Stevie Sanders

Theme: Fun/ Independence/ Challenge

Photo-Narrative

Before Stevie was diagnosed with glaucoma, he had a good job in a kennel working with rescued animals. Afterwards things changed. Now he takes medication to stop his vision from further deteriorating. With low vision, shaving is a challenge. He learned to use a special mirror to enlarge his face and also an electronic razor (a gift from his family) to successfully shave.



“[Light and shadow]”

Photo Credit
March 26 2013
Sherry Young

Theme: Degrees of Sight

Photo-Narrative

Sherry (a widow with low vision) describes how—when she first started losing her sight—she was no longer able to meet her husband's standards of household cleanliness satisfactorily. As an intervention, some educators gave him some glasses to wear with Vaseline spread across the lenses. This mirror spread with shaving cream recreates this visual metaphor for the sighted.



“[A sense of loss]”

Photo Credit
March 25 2013
Millie Boyd

Theme: Fun/Independence/ Challenge

Photo-Narrative

Before Millie was diagnosed with macular degeneration, she used to have a good job as a laboratory technician. She took this photo as a visual metaphor to represent the sense of loss she feels. As a low vision individual, she believes that she no longer can travel independently as she did in the past. The left side of the refrigerator door will never be completely filled.



**“My first picture
blue”**

Photo Credit
March 15 2013
Bunny Melvin

Theme: Degrees of Sight

Photo-Narrative

Bunny has low vision. When this picture was described to her, she categorized it as “Friends” because being with her friends at the Vision Resource Center is important. Like many other first pictures, it was focused downwards. However Bunny’s senses are typically focused outwards. Similar to many other people with blindness or low vision, she knows who is nearby by their voices.



“The wonder”

Photo Credit
March 20 2013
Levon Harris

Theme: Fun/ Independence/ Challenge

Photo-Narrative

Levon has been blind all of his life. When he first started photovoice, he did not believe that he could take pictures. As a photovoice participant he feels triumphant. This time series of pictures he took in the bowling alley he describes as “pretty good” and “the wonder” because he was able to capture as a memory all the fun that he and his friends from the Vision Resource Center were having.



"[Self-defense class]"

Photo Credit
March 25 2013
"Faith"

Theme: Appropriating Technology

Photo-Narrative

Faith has been blind most of her life. As a photovoice participant she says, "I feel as if I did it— you don't have to be sighted to take a picture." In her photo, blind and low vision people are in a class at the Vision Resource Center. With staffs they are practicing how they might use their white canes to defend themselves. This is a reinterpretation of the white cane as a symbol.



“[My dinner party]”

Photo Credit
March 22 2013

Victoria Johnson (with her daughter)

Theme: Fun/ Independence/ Challenge

Photo-Narrative

At one point, Vicki (who has been blind for a few years) proudly stated that she does not let her visual impairment stop her from being as independent as possible. She discusses tips she learned from the school for the blind in Michigan with any Vision Resource Center friend who asks. In this time series you see her preparing for a dinner party and cleaning up afterwards.



“[He must play alone]”

Photo Credit
March 26 2013
Sherry Young

Theme: Degrees of Sight

Photo-Narrative

Sherry has a rare disease of the retina that causes low vision. Her son has Asperger's syndrome and her daughter is blind. When her son says, "Mom, come watch me play this video game!" they both become frustrated. She wishes that the video games were designed with optional audio description so that she [and her daughter] could enjoy her son's play.



"[Transportation]"

Photo Credit
March 27 2013
"Faith"

Theme: Technology Struggles

Photo-Narrative

Faith (a blind woman) took this picture of the Vision Resource Center bus. Many of the photovoice participants discussed their struggles with transportation: learning the Fayetteville Area System Transit (FAST) schedule, jurisdictional issues with FAST pick-ups, late pick-ups or no-shows in the cold of winter, confusing descriptions of places of "arrival".