

Jean M. Breny and Shannon L. McMorrow. (2021). *Photovoice for Social Justice: Visual Representation in Action*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE. VitalSource, 101 pages. (ISBN 978-1-5443-5551-1)

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As one of the latest volumes in SAGE's Qualitative Research Methods Series (QRMS), *Photovoice for Social Justice* brings an additional voice into the field of qualitative social inquiry by highlighting the foundations and applications of a rather novel and exciting research method, which transcends academic disciplines. Co-written by two community-based researchers coming from the action-oriented field of public health, the book targets a diverse range of novice and veteran users across the social sciences. It aims to guide readers in developing and implementing a photovoice study while contributing to the epistemological project of documenting how participants as co-researchers construct and experience their social worlds and to the political enterprise of providing a space for diverse marginalized communities to have voice and agency in forging and contributing to a social justice agenda.

The authors expertly blend their social work experience, command of visual research methods literature, and extensive use of photovoice as a community-based participatory research (CBPR) method to offer a hands-on, deftly concise, and easy-to-grasp text. As most volumes in SAGE's QRMS, the book emphasizes on both a "why" and a "how-to" perspective, leading readers to understand the purpose and motivations behind photovoice, as well as the practical and technical aspects. In what follows, I present an overview of Breny and McMorrow's textbook, noting its numerous strengths and very few shortcomings.

The volume is structured into six chapters organized to follow a typical research project process. It begins by introducing readers to the method. The opening chapter explains how the use of photovoice, as conceptualized in [Wang and Burris's seminal article \(1997\)](#), is inherently rooted in three theoretical foundations: documentary photography, which shows history and experiences through visual means; empowerment education, which aims to develop critical consciousness of oppressive social forces; and feminist theory and research, which seeks to reduce and minimize power imbalances within society. Chapter 2 focuses on ethical implementation considerations, particularly when using the method with marginalized, traditionally under-represented, or oppressed populations. Considerations include informed consent, safety of co-researchers, privacy of co-researchers and people captured in photographs, and incentives and payments for participants.

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Chapters 3, 4, and 5 cover the step-by-step process of planning and conducting a photovoice research project. Chapter 3 presents initiation guidelines and options for formulating a management plan. It highlights important considerations of technology, such as choice of cameras, need for photography training, and options for photo storage and displaying. Chapter 4 is concerned with photovoice implementation and data collection through the iterative process of taking photographs and discussing them with co-researchers in a series of focus group meetings while using specific tools such as the SHOWeD technique of questioning. Chapter 5 walks readers through the academic approach for analyzing and presenting data and offers ideas for following through on the critical component of action to reach policy-makers and ultimately get results translated into policy or programming. Finally, Chapter 6 offers a broad overview of digital storytelling and videovoice as alternatives to or possibilities for pairing with photovoice. How to disseminate research and inspire action and advocacy through the use of social media is also briefly explored. An ample list of references concludes the volume.

A special feature are the curated examples that were carefully selected to demonstrate the method's critical potential. Drawing from a range of projects and disciplines, the text is enlivened with a hefty set of figures, case illustrations,¹ and sample tools. Readers will savor the photos presented with accompanying narrative data, as well as the "top ten" tips for conducting a photovoice project retrieved from [Breny, Lombardi, Smoyer, and Madden \(2017\)](#).

In a growing digital world, and in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, adapting qualitative research online has become a burgeoning topic. As such, it would have been useful had Breny and McMorrow included an additional chapter with novel insights on conducting photovoice studies entirely online. They point to a few hints in this regard in their SAGE Methodspace webinar with research methods specialist Janet Salmons.² However, I find [Ferlatte and Karmann's \(2022\)](#) article more useful, as it describes a full case of conducting virtual photovoice data collection while discussing three key challenges and how to navigate them: (a) managing technical difficulties relating to using online meeting technologies, (b) fostering and maintaining positive group dynamics, and (c) building and maintaining trust between both researchers and participants. In addition to that, the book could have provided more substantive guidance for using the results of a photovoice project to either concretely influence policy making and lead to significant policy shifts or make impactful changes on the participants themselves.³

Visual literacy has become an important research skill, and the literature base on visual research methods is growing. *Photovoice for Social Justice* certainly has an important place among the recent proliferation of books focused on the use of this cutting-edge approach within a variety of contexts and disciplines, such as youth studies ([Delgado, 2015](#)), education ([Latz, 2017](#)), social work ([Jarldorn, 2018](#)), and criminal justice ([Fitzgibbon, 2022](#)). I encourage any aspiring photovoice user to consider relying on this brief, accessible, and pragmatic text, particularly evaluators committed to conducting quality mixed methods evaluations with a transformative lens and the purpose of advancing social justice.

NOTES

- 1 Case illustrations in this book only cover some aspects of conducting a photovoice study. Readers can refer to [Saksena and McMorro \(2019\)](#) for a comprehensive case illustration covering each steps of the process.
- 2 Held on July 3, 2021; the recording is available on YouTube.
- 3 As noted by [Budig and Diez \(2018\)](#), the individual experience of participants involved in photovoice projects is seldom scrutinized. Yet, as they highlight it, the method can generate change in empowerment in vulnerable communities, mainly in terms of (a) gain in knowledge and skills, (b) change in self-perception, and (c) access to and use of resources.

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