

A Preliminary Exploration on Methodology of Image-Based Narrative

Cheng-Pin Lai, Fu Jen Catholic University, Taiwan
Kuan-I Li, Fu Jen Catholic University, Taiwan
Shih-Ming Chen, Taipei Medical University, Taiwan

The Asian Conference on the Social Sciences 2024
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

In the realms of community and social work, photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997) is widely recognized as a participatory approach in action research, designed to empower individuals and specific groups by enabling them to articulate their experiences. This study adapts photovoice methods to conduct image-based narrative groups with depressed adolescents, utilizing the social practice process as research material to explore the core function of narrative in transforming depression. The findings indicate that the concept of "folds interpretation" effectively elucidates the core function of image narratives. Cristal Huang (2010) integrates Paul Ricoeur's theory of time and narrative with Gilles Deleuze's concept of folds, offering an alternative framework for image research. In this framework, images are perceived as unfolding folds, where every object within an image can be employed by the protagonist to represent and overlap with their life and current circumstances. Through this process, the protagonist unfolds "imaginary" internal folds using time and narrative. Images are thus seen as objects with folds and traces, and each narrator reveals their history and memories through their narrative. This theoretical approach intertwines time, narrative, and life, providing a platform for rewriting the future. It aligns with Fred Newman's (1991) critical perspective that "Nothing is lost here in history. All kinds of things are lost in society, but nothing is lost in history," and the notion that "history cures depression." Therefore, this study posits that image-based narrative in therapeutic work can be situated within an interpretive, social therapeutic, and praxis-oriented methodology, distinct from the photovoice approach.

Keywords: Image-Based Narrative, Methodology, Photovoice

iafor

The International Academic Forum
www.iafor.org

Introduction

In the fields of community work and social work, the technique widely employed is known as "photovoice". The origin of photovoice can be traced back to a participatory research project initiated by Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris in rural areas of Yunnan Province, China, in 1992, funded by the Ford Foundation. In 1997, the term "photovoice" was officially coined, distinguishing it from traditional "photo storytelling". While photo storytelling typically emphasizes using photos to tell stories, photovoice emphasizes three main aspects: first, participants use cameras to capture what they perceive as both the strengths and concerns within their communities; second, through group discussions based on these photos, awareness of important community issues is promoted along with critical dialogue; third, the voices emerging from these discussions are publicly disseminated, thereby influencing policy-making (Wang & Burris, 1997). In short, photovoice aims to "give voice" to individuals and specific groups, empowering them and fostering social reform. Photovoice is built on a three-legged theoretical stool: (a) feminisms; (b) Freire's approaches to education; and (c) participatory documentary photography (Latz, 2017). Methodologically, it is considered a participatory action research approach (Jarldorn, 2019; Taylor, 2022).

While participatory action research can be categorized within the critical paradigm, but still different from this study. This study is adjacent to the narrative and praxis (Lai, 2004) approach. By conducting research on "adolescent depression image-based Narrative", it re-engages with the critical practice orientation of methodology, and can even be traced back to Deleuze's "fold" theory and Leibniz's "monad" theory, becoming the foundation of image-based Narrative ontology and epistemology.

The purpose of this study is to distinguish the methodological differences between "photovoice" and "image-based narrative".

The Practice of Depressed Adolescents' Image-Based Narratives

By having teenagers capture images depicting their depressive experiences in the realms of family, school, and community, a reconstruction of diverse depressive expressions takes place. This study conducts the "adolescent depression image-based Narrative" research on a practice-oriented approach. Findings indicate that teenagers, in the process of reconstructing their narratives of depression, experience the following stages:

1. **Undifferentiated Negative Emotion:** Adolescents initially perceive depression as a chaotic amalgamation of unidentifiable life experiences and emotions.
2. **Naming the Experience:** Identifying and naming their experiences allows adolescents to move beyond the chaotic state.
3. **Linking Emotions and Life Experiences:** Establishing connections between their emotions and life experiences fosters autonomy and a sense of liberation from helplessness.
4. **Social Stigma and Core Life Experiences:** Core life experiences are often burdened by social stigma, which encumbers them with layers of complex vocabulary and peripheral events.
5. **Collective Narrative Empowerment:** When adolescents collectively present their redefined

depressive narratives through curation, they gain narrative energy. Interestingly, the most profound impact on parents comes not from their own children, but from the stories of other teenagers.

Case A is one of the subjects. His "Tree hollow" visual assignment was presented through a computer. Using the photo-elicitation interview to "contextualize" (How do the photos fit into the participants' lives?) (Tinkler, 2013) the picture, we get the following narrative:

He says his life is very simple; besides meeting basic physiological needs, his computer is his main companion, connecting him to the outside world and fulfilling his needs for knowledge and emotional interaction. He rarely goes out and seldom attends school because he suffers from insomnia and has a reversed sleep schedule.

This feeling of "disgust" refined through group interactions related to a childhood scene at his old home in Hualien. A describes this family scene: "Watching a boring TV with Grandpa and Grandma, Grandpa holding my little brother, the screen is completely blank, I don't know what's on TV, and my mind is empty. I'm not in the picture."

"Contextualize" couldn't do more here. Now, using the Deleuzian idea of "fold" (Huang, 2010), which involves folding one scene over another to produce a new result. From a hermeneutic perspective, we can use discourse to fold two parts of the overall image together, creating a fold that signifies the potential meanings embedded within it. The two parts form two signifiers, but through the agency of the viewer, these signifiers are encompassed by a segment of the whole represented by the fold. The act of folding connects different parts into a cohesive fold, presenting an interdependent whole through their shared interface. The "disgust" family scene is folded to another family image "waiting for mom". He endured the boring family activities while waiting for his mother to pick him up. However, in his consciousness, he couldn't accept that he longed so much for his mother to come. This moment of "waiting" needs to be understood within the context of an actual mother-son relationship, a perspective that can be considered using Deleuze's concept of "the interaction flow between virtual images and actual images."

In the layers of the mother-son relationship at that time, it was filled with the husband-wife relationship between his parents who worked outside and the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship between his mother and grandmother. This complex set of internal family relationships erupted during a homework fright due to the tension between his learning disabilities and the school system. The grandmother's slap following his refusal to do homework seemed to be linked to his future wandering and the scattering of family relationships. A blamed himself, and this history got lost.

Case A's core experience of depression was the inability to present images that connect emotions and life experiences, thus preventing liberation from a sense of helplessness. Case A's core process of transformation in his experience of depression was not about "voicing" subjectivity and engaging in public participation but rather about engaging in a dialogue with his own "history," gradually delving into his historical context and gaining freedom.

Conclusion and Discussion

Based on Rose's (2001) research, the methods of interpreting visual objects can be categorized into six major directions: compositional interpretation, content analysis,

semiology, psychoanalysis, discourse analysis, and mixing methods research. Among these, discourse analysis views images as discourse, aiming to explore the processes of social construction and production of discourse. The depression experienced by adolescents is manifested in the images they create. These images form a clustered, yet-to-be-analyzed discourse that needs to be understood within the context of the adolescents' social (family) context and life history to be "unfolded". The "unfolded interpretation theory" aptly explains the core role of image-based Narrative found in this study. Huang (2010), combining Paul Ricoeur's theory of time and narrative with Gilles Deleuze's fold theory, suggests that if human memory is viewed as a series of images, it can be seen as texts. Each object in the image can be used by the protagonist to represent their own life and the overlap between their life and the current image. This theory interweaves time, narrative, and life to rewrite the future.

It intersects with the critical view of Fred Newman (1991) that "Nothing is lost here in history. All kinds of things are lost in society, but nothing is lost in history," and "history cure depression." Therefore, this study suggests that image-based narrative in therapeutic work can be situated within an interpretive, social therapeutic, and praxis-oriented methodology, distinct from the photovoice approach.

In Deleuze's universe, quoted from Cheng (2007), "different series (the Hume-series, the Bergson-series, the Leibniz-series, the Nietzsche-Foucault-series, and the Nietzsche-Klossowski-series) interact and interpenetrate one another. Once the nostalgia for a substantial, core self-fades away, the choreography between the subject and the world dazzles us with its infinite enfolding and unfolding". Deleuze (1985) believes that images are the driving force of thought, where images become the action of dynamic thinking. Images are no longer just phenomena but rather manifestations of material phenomena and thinking actions within a specific "episteme" context. Thus, the ontology and epistemology of image-based Narrative can be distinguished from photovoice, providing a new theoretical basis for social work.

References

- Cheng, C. J. Y. (2007). On Subjectivity in Deleuze's *The Fold*. *NTU Studies in Language and Literature*, (17), 79-100. <https://doi.org/10.6153/2007.17.03>
- Deleuze, G. (1985). *Cinéma 2: L'image-temps*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit.
- Deleuze, G. (1988). *Le pli - Leibniz et le baroque*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit.
- Huang, C. (2010). From time and narrative to the openness of fold of image. *Universitas: Monthly Review of Philosophy and Culture*, 37(4). doi:10.7065/MRPC.201004.0073
- Jarldorn, M. (2019). *Photovoice handbook for social workers: Method, practicalities and possibilities for social change*. Springer International Publishing: Imprint: Palgrave Pivot.
- Lai, C.-P. (2004). *Zi wo xu shuo tan jiu yu sheng ming zhuan hua—Fa sheng zai Lu Di she da de xue xi gu shi [Self-narrative inquiry and life transformation—Learning stories from Lu Di Community University]* (Doctoral dissertation, Fu Jen Catholic University). Taiwan Thesis and Dissertation Knowledge Value-Added System.
- Latz, A. O. (2017). *Photovoice research in education and beyond: A practical guide from theory to exhibition*. Routledge.
- Newman, F. (1991). *The myth of psychology*. New York: Castillo International.
- Nykiforuk, C. I., Vallianatos, H., & Nieuwendyk, L. M. (2011). Photovoice as a Method for Revealing Community Perceptions of the Built and Social Environment. *International journal of qualitative methods*, 10(2), 103–124.
- Rose, G. (2001). *Visual methodologies*. India: SAGE Publications.
- Taylor, P. (2022). Enduring and distancing: A grounded theory and photovoice study about women's help-seeking for suicidality in the wake of intimate partner violence. *Journal of Family Violence*. Advance online publication.
- Tinkler, P. (2013). *Using photographs in social and historical research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Wang, C., & Burris, M. A. (1997). Photovoice: concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment. *Health education & behavior: the official publication of the Society for Public Health Education*, 24(3), 369–387.

Contact emails: davidstuedu@gmail.com
canleelee@gmail.com