

PARTICIPATORY

VISUAL

METHODOLOGIES

SOCIAL CHANGE,  
COMMUNITY  
AND POLICY

Claudia Mitchell

Naydene de Lange

Relebohile Moletsane

 SAGE

Los Angeles | London | New Delhi  
Singapore | Washington DC | Melbourne



Los Angeles | London | New Delhi  
Singapore | Washington DC | Melbourne

SAGE Publications Ltd  
1 Oliver's Yard  
55 City Road  
London EC1Y 1SP

SAGE Publications Inc.  
2455 Teller Road  
Thousand Oaks, California 91320

SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd  
B 1/I 1 Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area  
Mathura Road  
New Delhi 110 044

SAGE Publications Asia-Pacific Pte Ltd  
3 Church Street  
#10-04 Samsung Hub  
Singapore 049483

---

Editor: Jai Seaman  
Assistant Editor: Alysha Owen  
Production editor: Sushant Nailwal  
Copyeditor: Rosemary Morlin  
Proofreader: Derek Markham  
Indexer: Authors  
Marketing manager: Susheel Gokarakonda  
Cover design: Shaun Mercier  
Typeset by: C&M Digital (P) Ltd, Chennai, India  
Printed in the UK

© Claudia Mitchell, Naydene de Lange and Relebohile Moletsane 2017

First published 2017

Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes of research or private study, or criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form, or by any means, only with the prior permission in writing of the publishers, or in the case of reprographic reproduction, in accordance with the terms of licences issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside those terms should be sent to the publishers.

**Library of Congress Control Number: 2017933485**

**British Library Cataloguing in Publication data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-4739-4730-6  
ISBN 978-1-4739-4731-3 (pbk)

At SAGE we take sustainability seriously. Most of our products are printed in the UK using FSC papers and boards. When we print overseas we ensure sustainable papers are used as measured by the PREPS grading system. We undertake an annual audit to monitor our sustainability.

In memory of Marianne Adam

22/06/1955 – 06/11/2016



# CONTENTS

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <i>List of Figures</i>   | xi        |
| <i>About the Authors</i>   | xiii      |
| <i>Acknowledgements</i>  | xv        |
| <br>   |           |
| <b>1 Introduction: A Framework for Social Change through Participatory Visual Research</b> | <b>1</b>  |
| Introduction   | 2         |
| Policy, Policy, Policy   | 3         |
| Community and Policy Dialogue  | 4         |
| Critical Audience Engagement   | 6         |
| Overview of the Book   | 16        |
| Key Points of the Chapter  | 18        |
| <br>   |           |
| <b>2 Project Design: Beginning with the End in Mind</b>                                    | <b>19</b> |
| Introduction   | 20        |
| Research Design for Social Change  | 21        |
| Participatory Visual Methods   | 23        |
| A Case Study: Addressing Campus-based Sexual Violence                                      | 38        |
| Conclusion   | 44        |
| Key Points of the Chapter  | 45        |
| <br>   |           |
| <b>3 Speaking Back as Method</b>   | <b>47</b> |
| Introduction   | 48        |
| Defining Speaking Back   | 48        |
| On Using Speaking Back as Method   | 50        |
| Features of Speaking Back as Method  | 66        |
| Conclusion   | 69        |
| Key Points of the Chapter  | 70        |
| <br>   |           |
| <b>4 Pictures at an Exhibition</b>   | <b>71</b> |
| Introduction   | 72        |
| Community-Based Exhibitions  | 72        |
| Processes in Curating  | 76        |

## PARTICIPATORY VISUAL METHODOLOGIES

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| Studying Exhibiting   | 77         |
| One Set of Photos, Multiple Showings  | 77         |
| Method: Studying Audience Engagement  | 79         |
| Studying Audiences through Exhibiting   | 84         |
| Exhibition Catalogues   | 85         |
| Creating an Exhibition Catalogue  | 90         |
| Drawings: Collections and Catalogues  | 93         |
| Conclusion  | 94         |
| Key Points of the Chapter   | 94         |
| <b>5 The Pedagogy of Screenings</b>   | <b>95</b>  |
| Introduction  | 96         |
| Why a Pedagogy of Screenings?   | 98         |
| Methodologies for Screening   | 99         |
| Researchers Screening their Own Productions                                       | 100        |
| Researchers Screening Videos Made by Participants                                 | 104        |
| Participants Screening their Own Work   | 106        |
| Online Platforms and Screenings   | 112        |
| Discussion  | 116        |
| Conclusion  | 118        |
| Key Points of the Chapter   | 119        |
| <b>6 Digital Artefacts: Researcher-Led Tools for Dialogue</b>                     | <b>121</b> |
| Introduction  | 122        |
| Researcher-Produced Digital Productions: A Brief History                          | 122        |
| Researcher-Produced Digital Dialogue Tools: Three Cases                           | 125        |
| A Co-Production: Researchers and Teachers Working Together on a<br>'Re-mix' Video | 134        |
| Digital Artefacts: Issues to Consider   | 140        |
| Researcher Reflexivity/Discussion   | 144        |
| Conclusion  | 145        |
| Key Points of the Chapter   | 145        |
| <b>7 Engaging Policy Makers</b>   | <b>147</b> |
| Introduction  | 148        |
| Participant-led Tools for Engaging Policy Makers                                  | 151        |
| Taking Research to Policy Makers  | 159        |
| Using Participatory Video and Digital Story-telling to Engage Policy Makers       | 163        |
| Studying Pathways to Impact   | 166        |
| Conclusion  | 167        |
| Key Points of the Chapter   | 168        |

CONTENTS

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <b>8 What Difference Does This Make?</b> | <b>171</b> |
| Introduction                             | 172        |
| Theories of Change                       | 173        |
| Tracking Change                          | 176        |
| Interpretive and Ethnographic Approaches | 183        |
| Conclusion                               | 191        |
| Key Points of the Chapter                | 193        |
| <br>                                     |            |
| <i>References</i>                        | 195        |
| <i>Index</i>                             | 221        |

# 1

## INTRODUCTION: A FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIAL CHANGE THROUGH PARTICIPATORY VISUAL RESEARCH

---

### CHAPTER CONTENTS

---

|                               |    |
|-------------------------------|----|
| INTRODUCTION                  | 2  |
| POLICY, POLICY, POLICY        | 3  |
| COMMUNITY AND POLICY DIALOGUE | 4  |
| CRITICAL AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT  | 6  |
| OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK          | 16 |
| KEY POINTS OF THE CHAPTER     | 18 |

---



## INTRODUCTION

There is a story behind every book and many books tell a story or a set of stories. We make every attempt in this book to tell the story of how participatory visual methodologies invoke stories which in turn can contribute, potentially, to changing stories and narratives in communities and at the policy table. Our own story – or the story behind this book – has a history that dates back to 2003 and even earlier, but 2003 is when the three of us started to work together as researchers attached to a university in South Africa. As a threesome, we more or less met over a typical academic exercise – a deadline for a grant application – except that it did not feel like a typical academic exercise. Even though none of us was really that familiar at the time with the term academic activists, we more or less saw our task of writing an academic research proposal as an act of activists. The time in South Africa was fraught given the AIDS pandemic. While it remains so 13 years later, in 2003 activists were calling for an ARV roll out, access to locally patented drugs, and, within the world of the social and educational, a recognition that schools had to be doing more. Young people were dying at an alarming rate. For example, the highest mortality rates were estimated to be among the 30–39 year age group (16.2%) during the period 2006 to 2010 (Skingsley, Takuva, Brown, Delpech, & Puren, 2014).

When we met as a trio, Relebohile had just been involved in a local conference convened by the medical faculty to address HIV and AIDS and education, except that she was the only person in Education at the conference, and worse, nobody there seemed to think there was anything unusual about the absence of educationalists at the conference. Claudia had just been involved in working with a group of young people in Khayelitsha, a township in Cape Town, who had been active in the Treatment Action Campaign and who were now keen to do something in schools. For them it was clear that doing something about HIV and AIDS meant producing something, creating something, making something – posters, videos, poetry books. Somehow, when the three of us connected it seemed as though we already had a multi-pronged agenda. All three of us in our work as teacher educators in an education faculty were indignant about how educators and educational researchers were being left out of school-based interventions and discussions about HIV and AIDS, and at the same time we were also outraged that so much of the work related to adolescents (and especially what was even then already referred to as ‘AIDS fatigue’), seemed not to involve adolescents at all. It had been just a year earlier at the International AIDS conference in Barcelona that there were banners and placards asking ‘Where are the youth?’ So if you take out the teachers and you take out young people in designing and implementing what needs to happen in schools, who is left? Our first project together – the proposal, participatory and visual, that we were writing when we met in March 2003 – was perhaps a leap of faith, but it was based on a fundamental recognition that people who need to be talking together were not talking to each other. The project, *Learning Together*, was a modest study. All we wanted to do was see what would happen if teachers and community health-care workers all dealing with young people would learn together. To do this we built on tools and methods such as drawing and photovoice, and even before we started working with teachers and community health workers, we learned together

ourselves by bringing together 20 or more colleagues and postgraduate students who were willing to try out drawing and photovoice as research methods. What we lacked in sophistication we made up for in enthusiasm and a good strong dose of what Low, Brushwood, Salvio, and Palacios (2012) refer to as celebration. It was hard not to be enthusiastic when people who never talk to each other – indeed had never met even professionally, though they lived down the road from each other—actually started listening and started viewing each other's work. What we found but did not know exactly what to do with, was a tremendous amount of goodwill and excitement, and although we knew it was not enough to change the world, it was enough to convince us and a few others around us that we needed to do even more of this kind of work and to broaden it into tools and methods such as participatory video, digital story-telling, and cellphilmimg.

Thirteen years later it would be wonderful to be able to offer the pat expression the rest is history and claim that we have somehow solved the world's problems through photovoice, drawing, participatory video, and digital story-telling, but of course we have not. What these methods have done is put into practice what visual theorists like Susan Sontag (2003) have said about the power of images to haunt us as we have seen in the types of images that are seen in humanitarian crises. Notwithstanding the controversies surrounding the use of provocative images in public settings as Batchen, Gidley, Miller, and Prosser (2012) explore in *Picturing Atrocity: Photography in Crisis*, these methods have pushed to the front of the line the vast inequalities and injustices in research. In participatory visual research these inequalities are highly visible: Who owns the images? Who sees the images? What happens to the images? Who decides? As a community of scholars we have become attuned to making sure that we talk about these things – often they are the whole point of a conference presentation or article or book or series of books and journals. But more importantly, they are the starting point for this work. In this book, we seek to shift the conversation towards outcomes and the ever-present question 'What difference does this make?' What possibilities are there for dialogue – community dialogue and policy dialogue?

## POLICY, POLICY, POLICY

Everyone, it seems, in the social research community, wants to influence policy. It is a legitimate aspiration given the need to challenge inequities in schools, health care, agriculture, and other community settings, and particularly in relation to such persistent concerns as sexual violence, bullying, safety and security in housing, water and sanitation, food insecurity, environmental issues, HIV and AIDS, and related health and social issues. However, as Ray Rist (2003) observes:

There is no broad-based and sustained tradition within contemporary social science of focusing qualitative work specifically on policy issues, especially given the real time constraints that the policy process necessitates. Yet it is also clear that the opportunities are multiple for such contributions to be made. (p. 641)

Participatory visual research is an area of research where, quite clearly, there are contributions to be made in order to influence policy dialogue. The use of photography in photovoice, participatory video (including the use of mobile phone devices), digital story-telling and drawing and mapping have all been shown to be effective in engaging community participants, and especially in altering some of the typical power dynamics related to the researched/researcher, and to ensuring spaces for marginalized populations to both speak about and then speak back through interactive workshop sessions to social conditions. The products – photo exhibitions, video productions (live screenings and postings on YouTube) – are ideally suited to be seen. While there are hefty debates about process versus product, and the sometimes exaggerated claims that are often made for the overall effectiveness of such methods, especially as seen in what Low et al. (2012) refer to as celebratory writing, there are few who would argue against the power of the visual to engage multiple audiences. This book takes up the issue of ways of ensuring that visual data reaches critical audiences, providing new entry points for social change. Gubrium and Harper's (2013) book, *Participatory Visual and Digital Methods*, also calls for more explicit work in this area. One book that takes up some of the critical issues of beyond engagement is Laverack's (2013) *Health Activism: Foundations and Strategies*. However, it has a very specific activist agenda that is broader, and that has a narrower, albeit critical, policy focus in the area of health. It is clear, therefore, that much more is needed. In conference presentations, the issue of participatory research-into-policy change is one of the areas where we are bombarded with variations of the question, 'So what?'

Despite the popularity of terms such as youth-led policy-making or participant-led change, there remains a paucity of critical (and practical) work that maps out fully what this means in relation to influencing (and documenting) social change. While events and changes can happen without the intervention of researchers thinking of what happens beyond engagement, this type of change typically does not just happen as can be seen in an emerging field within participatory research that seeks to study, critique, and enhance possibilities for change. The concern is not with the generative possibilities for engaging participants in representing the issues through participatory visual methods; these possibilities are covered well in many books and articles on the use of the visual. Rather, this book seeks to offer perspectives, tools, and methods that can take us into the space beyond engagement with the overall aim of influencing community dialogue and the policy-making process. At the same time it also seeks to contribute to creating new pathways for participatory visual arts-based methods in policy-making as a field of study in itself.

## COMMUNITY AND POLICY DIALOGUE

An overarching concern of this book relates to the impact of participatory visual research on community and policy dialogue. Often the most we see on impact are a few lines that appear at the end of the book, thesis, chapter, or article calling for action or suggesting

implications for policy or policy dialogue. This is changing as we see in collections such as Gubrium, Harper, and Otañez's (2015) *Participatory Visual and Digital Research in Action*, in which strategies for taking action are highlighted. However, it is also important to recognize that the idea of social change is multi-faceted and so are the appropriate audiences. Sometimes the audience for the visual productions, as we highlight in Chapter 3 on speaking back, are the participants themselves. At other points the audiences may be community members or various policy makers, and often a combination of both. There may be many legitimate reasons for the fact that there is less documentation on the engagement process, not the least of which is the fact that community dialogue is not typically a once off affair (and when does it begin and end?), and policy dialogue and policy-making are seldom overnight activities. As we know from the rich body of work on policy cycles (see Bowe, Ball, & Gold, 1992), the task of policy uptake work often extends long beyond a project and, in the case of funded research, often beyond the life of the funding. In addition, there may be many intervening circumstances such as elections, a change of government or administration, or critical events that take place in the community or country. While the focus of the work of participation using visual media is commonly on the actual production process, increasingly there is also an interest in the images themselves (e.g. photos, videos, vlogs, and cellfilms) as a way of developing an understanding of the phenomenon under study, and the influence of power relations among those involved. There is also an increased emphasis on the idea of knowledge-production. This is something we see in the body of work on youth as knowledge producers, or work with community health-care workers as cultural producers and so on. A central premise of this chapter – and indeed, of the book as a whole – is the idea that the meaningful engagement of the various social groups who participate in participatory visual research necessitates an understanding of the meaningful engagement of communities and various stakeholders as audiences in relation to this work. As such, we argue that if we are to take seriously participatory visual research and the potential of this work to influence social change, we are obliged to go full circle to study the idea of engaging audiences.

Paradoxically, much less has been written in the area of participatory visual research about engaging audiences or the impact of participatory visual work on various communities and stakeholders. It is worth noting that in an analysis of a decade of articles in *Visual Studies*, the *Journal of Visual Culture* and *Visual Communication*, relatively few articles take up the idea of audience in an explicit way although, of course, audiences are often implicit.<sup>1</sup> Our analysis started with a keyword search using terms such as *audience*, *reception*, and *viewers/ship*. In the *Journal of Visual Culture*, a search for the term *audience* called up 201 entries, with only one including the term in the main title of the article (Chalfen, Sherman, & Rich, 2010). The keyword *reception* called up 157 entries, but was never located within the title of the publications. Finally, the term *viewers* or *viewership* located 337 and 1 entries respectively, with both terms combined within the same article only

<sup>1</sup>We acknowledge the assistance of Lukas Labacher in carrying out this keyword analysis.

## PARTICIPATORY VISUAL METHODOLOGIES

once (Luce, 2011). Of those that cited *viewers*, only two (Halasz, 2010; Luce, 2011) included the term in the title of the article. Together, where *audience*, *reception*, *community engagement*, and *viewers/ship* were referenced in the journal *Visual Studies*, a combined 837 times located within book reviews, editorials, and primary journal articles, only five entries (0.005%) included the identifying terms in the titles of the works. In a second keyword search in the *Journal of Visual Culture*, *audience* located 177 entries, *reception* located 88, *community AND engagement* found 51, and *viewers* or *viewership* located 177 entries. Surprisingly, no entries from 493 initially located within an all-fields search had these keywords in the title of the entries. Finally, in the journal *Visual Communication*, a search for *audience*, *reception*, *community AND engagement*, and *viewers/ship* located 1/156 (Lobinger & Brantner, 2015), 1/51 (Bucher & Niemann, 2012), 0/56, and 1/156 (Lick, 2015) entries published between January 2005 and December 2015.

In our analysis it appears that notions of audience, community engagement, reception, and viewership are similarly hidden from the main titles of articles that, on a deeper analysis, do sometimes present a discussion on these topics. Surprisingly, the study of online audiences in these journals does not fare much better. While online work on audiences reveals terminology that suggests a much more nuanced notion of the interplay of uses, producers, and audiences, there still remains relatively little known about online audiences. As Carpentier, Schröder, and Hallett (2013) observe:

... paradoxically, when user, producer and audience become more conflated, the user component dominates the chain of equivalence, and all audiences become articulated as passive participants. (As cited in de Ridder et al., 2016, p. 131)

At the same time, as Lunt and Livingstone (2013) point out, the idea of public sphere, is one that has become prominent in media studies as they found in an analysis of references to public sphere – a term which implies audience – in the journal *Media, Culture and Society*. Similarly, the idea of a public sociology located within the notion of ‘Engaging Tactics’ as it is termed at Goldsmith’s College in the UK<sup>2</sup> brings with it a rich sense of audience, dialogue and engagement, and as such points to the possibilities for a stronger sense of audience in participatory visual research.

## CRITICAL AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

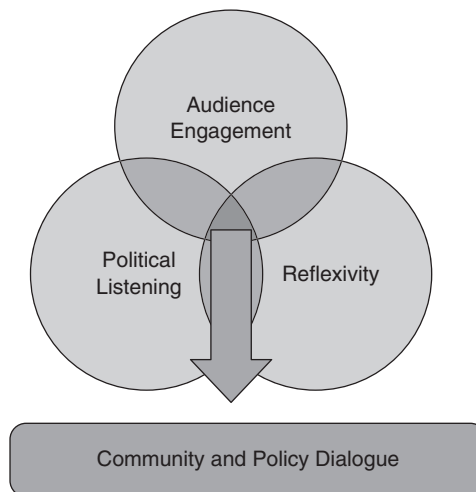
In this section we embark upon mapping out a framework for what we term Critical Audience Engagement. In developing this we are strongly influenced by Gillian Rose’s framework for a Critical Visual Methodology which, as a critical approach to interpreting visual images includes: (1) the idea of taking images seriously; (2) consideration of the

---

<sup>2</sup><https://engagingtactics.wordpress.com/>

social conditions and effects of visual objects; and (3) a level of reflexivity on the part of the researcher which ‘considers [their] own ways of looking at images’ (Rose, 2001, p. 16). We take as an entry point the work of the French sociologist, Robert Escarpit (1958), well known for his formulation in the sociology of literature, ‘Who reads what, why, how, and with what effect?’ to develop a new extended question: ‘Who looks at what, where, when, why, how and with what effect?’ To respond to Escarpit, we have identified several bodies of literature and studies of visual practices that, while typically taken to be very separate (and that arise out of different disciplinary areas), have great potential to be complementary in contributing to a deeper understanding of the issues of engagement and impact in participatory visual studies. These include: (1) audience engagement research, as an area to which we have already alluded in reference to Rose’s work, and as a research area that encompasses work across visual studies, media, and digital studies; (2) political listening as an important area of inquiry for studying policy dialogue; and (3) literature on reflexivity both in relation to researchers but also participants. Emerging from the interaction among these three elements is community engagement and dialogue which enhance opportunities for social change (see Figure 1.1).

Our work takes as a starting point the idea that the populations who typically are involved in participatory visual research occupy a marginal position and so their visual productions may also be marginalized. Darcy Alexandra (2015) in her compelling essay, *Are We Listening Yet? Participatory Knowledge-Production through Media Practices; Encounters of Political Listening*, draws on the work of well-known media theorist, Jean Burgess: ‘The question that we ask about “democratic” media participation can no longer be limited to “Who gets to speak?” We must also ask “Who is heard and to what end?”’ (Burgess, 2006, as cited



**Figure 1.1** Framework for critical audience engagement and dialogue for social change  
Diagram developed by Claudia Mitchell

in Alexandra, 2015, p. 43). Extensive work in the areas of childhood and youth studies, for example, draws attention to the fact that young people may not have a voice even in a project that sets out to give them voice. Researching and testing out the material and social conditions that are necessary for ensuring that community members or policy makers respond meaningfully to video productions or digital stories produced by homeless young people, young women who have been victims of gender violence, women farmers, or children in an informal settlement in Nairobi, are what make this work critical.

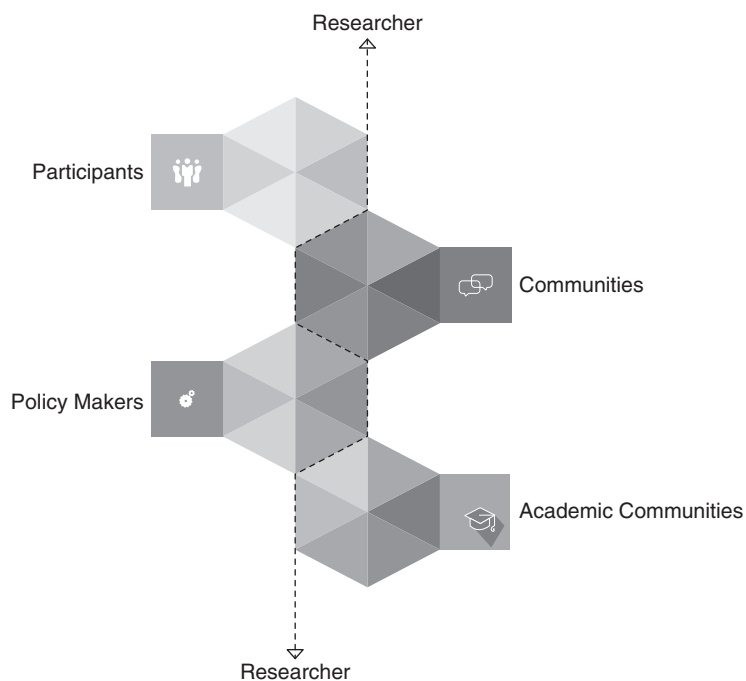
As a second key point, the viewers themselves for this work may also occupy varying positions that challenge conventional notions of audience. What does it mean to be a community member viewing the images produced by other community members who occupy the same status? Participatory work can both disrupt the idea of who is an artist, film maker, or photographer but also who and how audiences are meant to view the work. Participating in community exhibitions or screenings is a very context-specific social activity. This is highlighted by Mitchell's (2016) discussion of an exhibition in a community centre in the middle of an informal settlement in Nairobi, where community members arrive at the community centre but are uncertain about what they should do next. There is no obvious beginning. Should they sit down as they typically do for a community consultation and wait for events to start? But most of the benches have been removed to maximize viewing space. It is not just about how to look at the actual photos, but the idea of walking around freely in a public building and looking at things on the walls. Is it even allowed?

Closely related to the points noted above, there is still the researcher – I/we – and we might need to continue to think about the question 'Where are we in the picture?' Notwithstanding a consideration of the emerging body of work in participatory visual research on such issues as power and ownership, there is sometimes too much of researcher reflexivity and not enough of the participants' reflexivity. At the same time, this is typically not DIY work, and researchers are implicated. As Delgado (2015) reminds us in his comprehensive review of photovoice work with urban youth, we may be implicated in not doing enough or not being sufficiently strategic. As he observes, 'Having an exhibition boycotted because of its controversial content, or, even worse, simply ignored, with minimal attendance and no media coverage, can have a long lasting impact on the participants' (p. 99). Perhaps the most compelling point is one that he shares from the work of Haw (2008) and the idea that the opposite of having a voice is being silenced. Failure (on the part of researchers) to come up with a way for photos or other visual images and productions to reach appropriate audiences is part of that silencing.

## Audience Research

Audience research is a legitimate area of study in Television Studies, Cultural Studies, and Communication Studies and indeed, in the context of digital and social media has become increasingly diversified and more complex. This is highlighted in several new collections

(Carpentier et al., 2013; Zeller, Ponte, & O'Neill, 2014) alongside relatively new journals such as *Participations: The Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*. To date, however, audience research in participatory visual research has not received in-depth attention. There are two notable exceptions, the work of visual theorist Gillian Rose and the work of media and cultural studies theorist John Fiske, although in both cases, the work has not been adapted to talk about audiencing in participatory visual research. Fiske and Rose have produced work that has important overlaps. In his work in critical television studies, Fiske maps out a triangle of the primary text (the television show or series), the producer text (based on all the levels of production), and the audience text. Fiske argues that meaning is somewhere in the middle of these three layers of textuality and that these three layers leak into each other. The producers then create the text taking into consideration particular viewers. Viewers may find many ways to insert themselves into this production text in everything from fandom to other critical reception activities. Various researchers have adapted Fiske's work to the production of cellphilm and participatory video (Doyon, 2009; MacEntee, 2016a; Mitchell, 2011; Yang, 2012). In these studies, the primary text is typically the image (cellphilm, photo, digital story, exhibition), the producers are the participants in the study; and the viewers would be the various audiences (participants viewing each other's work, community members, peers, academic audiences, policy makers) (see Figure 1.2).



**Figure 1.2** Engaging audiences

Diagram developed by Claudia Mitchell



Drawing on Fiske's work on audiencing (1994), Rose (2001) developed a critical visual framework in which she identified three overlapping sites in visual research: (1) the site of the image; (2) the site of producing the image; and (3) the site of audiencing. A particularly useful aspect of Rose's work is that it offers a set of questions for each site. Of particular relevance to this discussion, she includes 19 questions related to audiencing, eight of which we offer here as indicative of the rich possibilities for studying audience interactions:

Who were the original audience for this image? Where and how would the text have been displayed originally? How is it circulated? How is it stored? How is it redisplayed? Who are the more recent audiences for this text? Where is the spectator positioned in relation to the components of the image? What relation does this produce between the image and the viewers? Is the image one of a series...? (2001, pp. 189–190)

Rose notes that the questions are in no particular order of significance and that some will be more applicable to a situation than others. They are not questions that rule out application to participatory visual research. It is also clear that both Fiske's and Rose's frameworks are useful to studying audiencing in participatory visual studies.

## Political Listening

Our journey to considering the idea of political listening comes out of Darcy Alexandra's (2015) work with asylum seekers in Ireland in which she considers the tensions in a longitudinal digital story-telling project. As she notes:

The practice of producing stories unfolds within a field of diverse and, at times, conflicting interests. Participants, facilitators, researchers, and collaborating and funding agencies have different ideas about which stories to tell, who is best positioned to tell them, how they 'should' and 'should not' be told and what is at stake. Within this nexus of interdependent yet unequal relationships, a methodological attention to the politics of listening offers conceptual inroad into addressing the power asymmetries inherent in participatory knowledge projection through media practice. (p. 43)

Taking into consideration the almost invariable power differentials that might exist between and among participants, communities and policy makers and the various tensions (and sometimes silences) that we were seeing in many of the participatory visual projects in which we have been involved, we became interested in building political listening/political viewing into our work. We have long argued that one of the strengths of the visual is that it is what might be described as right there such that it is difficult for

audiences to look away. But of course, as we know from a vast range of work with media and art, it is not at all difficult to look away or to see only what we want to see. Our example in Chapter 4 of a college dean who willingly viewed a photo exhibition produced by his students and interpreted a photograph of a half-eaten meal placed on a chair in the cafeteria as a transgression on the part of the students who should just clean up the mess is a good example of this. The idea of political listening/viewing at least takes into account the obvious tensions that are likely to exist. Citing Bickford as the person who coined the term political listening, Alexandra observes:

Political listening is not primarily a caring or amicable practice, and I emphasize this at the outset because ‘listening’ tends immediately to evoke ideas of empathy and compassion. We cannot suppose that political actors are sympathetic towards one another in a conflictual context, yet is it precisely the presence of conflict and differences that makes communicative interaction necessary. This communicative interaction – speaking and listening together – does not necessarily resolve or do away with the conflicts that arise from uncertainty, inequality or identity. Rather it enables political actors to decide democratically how to act in the face of conflict, and to clarify the nature of the conflict at hand. (Bickford, 1996, as cited in Alexandra, 2015, p. 44)

The asylum seekers about whom Alexandra writes, report concern about whether their digital stories would be believed, ‘repeatedly asking if their story was “okay”, if they could “really” tell it’ (p. 45). There was some question on the part of the participants about whether they could tell anything but positive stories and whether they ought to express their gratitude to Ireland. There was also a concern about whether the story happened to the storyteller directly or whether he or she could narrate the story of someone else. Again there is a concern: ‘Did that really happen?’ Alexandra suggests the need for different questions: ‘Instead of asking “Is it truth?” we might ask instead: In what ways is it true? What does the story mean to the storyteller and the viewer? What does the story do?’ (p. 48). Typically the images, and related captions, curatorial statements, policy posters, and other artefacts produced by participants are in response to conditions that frame their views of social conditions and what needs to happen. While not all images produced in digital stories, videos, cellphilm, drawings and photos are of atrocities, some of the images may be ones that are not easy for the target audiences (especially policy makers) to look at since the images are typically a critique of social inequalities. Indeed, our own work and many of the studies we report on in this book are ones that are often directed at ‘a public that disbelieves’ (Alexandra, 2015, p. 45) and who might ask ‘did that really happen?’ We are reminded here of a project in South Africa involving children’s drawings of sexual violence. As we explore further in Chapter 7, many of the policy makers who viewed the images wondered if these violations really happened to the young artists. We are also reminded of one of the first ‘feeling safe/feeling not so safe’ photovoice projects we carried out with seventh grade students in Swaziland (Mitchell, 2009). Responding to the images of unsafe toilets produced by the girls, several of the teachers

commented that the girls shouldn't have taken such pictures and why didn't they take pictures of something nicer. At the same time, as McNay (2009) also reminds us, images can have an afterlife, particularly the kind of images that are produced in participatory visual studies. In our own archive of what we regard as provocative and disturbing photos, some of which we have written about elsewhere, we think of the photovoice image produced by a group of Grade 9 boys in a rural school in South Africa on stigma in which they stage a hanging (see Mitchell, 2011; Moletsane, Mitchell, De Lange, Stuart, Buthelezi & Taylor, 2009), or the drawing produced by a girl in Rwanda of an unwanted baby dropped into a toilet pit (Mitchell, 2008), or the various videos of gender violence produced by secondary school students (De Lange & Mitchell, 2014; Moletsane, Mitchell, Smith & Chisholm, 2008). The idea is not to just tell positive stories, but rather to create an environment in which participants and audiences can listen to each other. Not all occasions will be perfect arenas for this. We are aware, for example, that the image of the boys who staged the hanging scene may be very disturbing. In the same way that there is a context (the boy who seems to be hanging is standing on a chair), there also needs to be a broader context for viewing images produced by children in an era of AIDS. As Bickford (1996) observes, we may need to 'decide democratically how to act in the face of conflict' (p. 2).

## Reflexivity

'There's nothing wrong with standing back and thinking', writes Susan Sontag (2003, p. 118). It is with this in mind that, in this section, we explore the links between participatory visual research and reflexivity. As an underpinning to the various aspects of spectatorship, listening/viewing, following, looking, visiting, reception, and audiencing in participatory visual studies, we consider the cross-cutting role of reflexivity, particularly in relation to the participants, audiences, and researchers. Most of the scholarship in the field of participatory visual research emphasizes the need for reflexivity on the part of the researchers, if indeed we are concerned about democratizing the research space so as to optimize participant engagement throughout the process. However, less is written about maximizing researcher, participant, and audience reflexivity, an element we view as key in ensuring that the work involves the full participation of all stakeholders and promotes continuous dialogue and reflection for social change. Thus, we take as our entry point the notion that using such methods as participatory video, cellfilms, digital story-telling, and photovoice, enables researcher and participant reflexivity, geared towards confronting 'existing power dynamics prior to the initiation of research and encouraging the constant questioning and re-evaluating of the ways in which a more equitable balance of power can be achieved' (Darroch & Giles, 2014, p. 30). Participatory visual research encourages 'reflexivity on the part of the participants to learn about their own [lives, as well as] a more reflexive understanding of research practices' on the part of researchers (Whiting, Symon, Roby, & Chamakiotis, 2016, p. 19).

Specifically, the questions that inform reflexivity in participatory visual research include those that guide the producer: What am I trying to do? What do I want to say and to

whom? What will move this audience to questions that guide the viewer/audience? What is it about these images and captions that are so provocative? What do I take away from this screening or exhibition? Sometimes, as we highlight in many of the chapters in this book, we as researchers might plant some of these questions as we see in speaking back activities, for example, but ultimately it is up to the producers and viewers to engage with the questions. Often, as researchers we are one of the first audiences alongside the participants to produce, watch, and respond to cellphilms, photos, and digital stories. As Alexandra (2015, p. 45) observes, often the questions about a story revolve around the question: 'Is it okay to tell this story?' and as facilitators or researchers we may advertently or inadvertently play a role in determining which stories get told.

To illustrate, almost a decade ago the three of us were involved in a series of participatory video workshops with young people in rural schools in South Africa. What was remarkable about the workshops, as we have explored elsewhere, is that almost all the young people, working in small groups, independently chose to produce videos about some aspect of sexual violence. One group of boys decided that they needed the participation of a girl from one of the other groups so that they could film a gang rape scene. As a team involved in facilitating, researching, and making sure that all the equipment would work for screening the videos as soon as each group finished, it was only when it was time to screen the video at the end of the day that we saw what had been produced. The girl is depicted lying down on a large sheet of paper on the cement floor of the classroom. One by one each boy in the group makes the motions of raping the girl, but unlike other groups who chose to have a rape scene take place behind closed doors, this group films the work graphically. Nothing is left to the imagination of the audience.

At this point, several questions confronted us as researchers. We have written about the scene, and we have discussed the scene many times among ourselves. The questions that concerned us included: Do we interact with the girl? Do we find out if she is okay? How might we have reflexively addressed these issues? One approach would be to re-consider Linda Finlay's (2002) framework for reflexivity in research, published in an essay, titled, *Negotiating the Swamp: The Opportunity and Challenge of Reflexivity in Research Practice* (see also Pillow, 2002). First, as researchers we engaged in what Finlay (2002) referred to as 'reflexivity as introspection', which involves 'self-dialogue and discovery' and our 'own reflecting, intuiting and thinking [were] used as primary evidence' (p. 213). Beyond this, we screened the video on occasion to talk about some of the risks and ethical considerations in participatory visual research. But one question continued to bother us: Could we talk about ethical issues and risk without ever screening this particular video?

Thus, going back to Rose's (2001) notion of researcher reflexivity which 'considers your own ways of looking at images' (p. 16) and watching participatory videos and digital stories, we recognize that we are seldom in the position of looking at images in participatory visual projects without being in a particularized and highly contextualized position of audience. As Sultana (2007) argues, if we are to conduct ethical research, as participatory visual scholars we must pay particular attention to our own and our participants' positionality, as well as to 'reflexivity, the production of knowledge and the power relations that

are inherent in research processes' (p. 382). According to her, informed by an understanding that positionality and subjectivity change with changing time and space, such a process of reflection has to be continuous throughout the research process and beyond and has to involve both the researchers and the participants. However, we do not uncritically claim that to acknowledge 'positionality, reflexivity, identity, and representation [will] necessarily result in politically engaged research and writing, or in destabilizing existing power relations...' (Sultana, 2007, p. 383). Instead, we believe that if we engage in a continuous process of reflexivity, negotiated and re-negotiated with our participants, ethical relations within the research context are enhanced and the research process itself is democratized.

Second, if, indeed, we were co-constructing knowledge with the participants, including the producers of this video (as participatory visual research demands), what was their role in deciding what stories could be made public and therefore, which videos could audiences outside the research setting see? What was our responsibility in engaging in what Finlay (2002) called 'reflexivity as intersubjective reflection' in which we might 'explore the mutual meanings emerging within the research relationship' (p. 215), for example, with the producers of the video and other participants? In particular, informed by the work of Sartre (1969), Finlay cautions us that this form of reflexivity goes beyond reflection and instead, 'radical self-reflective consciousness is sought where the self-in-relation-to-others becomes both the aim and object of focus' (p. 216).

Third, linked to the notion of participants in participatory visual research as co-researchers and therefore as capable of reflexivity, like Finlay, we might then engage in reflexivity as mutual collaboration, involving participants in continuous dialogue about their productions, from planning, creating and speaking back to their videos. Fourth, in most of the literature, reflexivity is seen as a tool for acknowledging and indeed confronting the unequal power imbalances between researchers and participants, and to some extent, between participants and external audiences such as policy makers. Finlay suggests that this form of reflexivity functions as social critique, where unequal power relations concerning such identity markers as social class, gender, and race and others, can be acknowledged, confronted, and addressed throughout the research process. For example, what role does our positionality as middle-class university professors doing research with young people in a poor rural community play in influencing the research process and the content of what is produced in the form of videos such as the one described above? How might we take the reflexivity and dialogue to the community and to policy makers?

## Community Engagement

Emerging from the interaction among the three elements discussed above – audience engagement, political listening, and reflexivity – is community engagement and dialogue which enhance opportunities for social change. The term community engagement might conjure up heart-warming images of community elders sitting in a circle pondering the

concerns of a group of earnest children who have just produced a photo exhibition about some aspect of social change, or a group of citizens taking action to clean a polluted pond. The reality may be quite different with angry protesters on a picket line or blocking a highway. Social change rarely comes without a struggle and without someone giving up something, re-allocating resources or ceding power. There are few participatory visual projects that we can think of that do not link directly or indirectly to social injustices, and while not all may appear, at least on the surface, to be life-and-death situations, they are inevitably about changing something in the lives of individuals and groups in communities. Few participatory visual studies deal with issues that are supposedly solved simply by carrying out a photovoice project or having a group of people make a video. Rather, they call for buy-in, mobilization, and all the various activities and strategies that might lead to change, and through various community members – the school community, health-care personnel, the municipality or town council. For some researchers working in the area of engagement, this work is about resistance, and we see, for example, in the work of Tuck and Yang (2014a), the significance of youth resistance research and theories of change. For others it is about ‘learning from the ground up’ (Choudry & Kapoor, 2010, p. 1) with the idea that knowledge-production at a grassroots level is at the centre of change.

Linked to the fact that most of our work focuses on participatory visual research, which privileges the meaningful participation of community members most affected by the phenomenon under study, it is important for us to consider the significance of community-based participatory research (CBPR) in this work. In a scoping study focusing on ethical issues in community-based participatory research, the Durham Community Research Team (2011) defines CBPR first in terms of community-based research which refers to investigations that focus on ‘issues relevant to people belonging to, or with interests in, a community of place, interest or identity...’ (p. 4). Thus CBPR involves researchers and the community (largely through the participants) most affected by the phenomenon being studied as partners in the research process, often with a focus on identifying and/or developing strategies for change (Horowitz, Robinson, & Seifer, 2009). This way, the community has ownership, in relation to identifying the research issue, developing the research approach, and co-constructing knowledge, usually with researchers from outside the community (Durham Community Research Team, 2011). We see participatory visual research methods, including photovoice, drawing, participatory video, cellfilms, and digital story-telling as key to putting CBPR into action.

While CBPR is often regarded by many as inherently ‘ethically good’ compared to ‘traditional’ research, like any research, it is prone to the influence of unequal power relations, particularly resulting in ‘ethical challenges relating to developing/maintaining partnerships, difficulties in maintaining anonymity and blurred boundaries between researcher and researched (e.g. community researchers researching their own communities)’ (Durham Community Research Team, 2011, p. 6). For example, what would it mean, ethically, for the young people who produced the rape video described

above to screen it at their school or to their community, including their parents and other adult community members? How would they (and us) respond to the likely negative responses of the various audiences to the production?

## OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

This book is concerned with the role of participatory visual research in deepening our understanding of social issues, as well as in facilitating community and policy dialogue around the issues and possible strategies for social change. Our aim is to provide both theoretical and practice-based work that offers researchers and practitioners ways of seeing how the very compelling data coming out of participatory visual research can influence social change (new conversations and dialogue, altered perspectives of participants to take action, policy debates, and actual policy development). The book frames social change within the use of participatory visual methodologies such as photovoice, participatory video, and digital story-telling in relation to such policy areas as gender violence, safety and security in housing, food security, gender and agriculture, water and sanitation, environmental issues, teacher education, bullying, and HIV and AIDS.

Chapter 1 has provided a context for the focus of the book, both in relation to the historical and the political, and as such will be a useful reference point for scholars working in the area of participatory visual research who want to understand fully the question 'Why participation in relation to social change?' It builds on Luc Pauwels' (2002) observation that visual research has the potential to draw more effectively on the use of the visual *at all levels* of the research, from research design through to the research process and communication. The chapter offers a framework for going 'beyond engagement' to include community and policy dialogue, in the context of research that seeks to contribute to social change. Within this context, the chapter explores the notion of critical community engagement and dialogue, and political listening as key elements of participatory visual research for social change.

Chapter 2 sub-titled *Beginning with the End in Mind*, focuses on what participatory visual research design might look like when right from the beginning the aim is not only to understand the issues, but is also about influencing social change. What would happen if our decision-making as researchers is informed by a concern not only for community participation in the research itself, but also for how that research might be used to engage the community, and beyond it, the policy makers in dialogue? The chapter explores the features of the various participatory visual methods, including drawing, photovoice, participatory video, and digital story-telling, and how each might be used to engage communities and policy makers in dialogue towards social change. In the chapter we offer a case study based on our work over a three-year period with a group of young women on a South African university campus who are addressing sexual violence.

At the heart of the book are tools and strategies for engaging participants as audiences, along with various community members. Chapter 3 asks how visual researchers might

provide opportunities for research participants to engage in speaking back to, or critiquing their own productions (including photographs, participatory videos, cellfilms, digital stories. Even though many visual researchers would probably say reflection is an inherent feature of the various methods and their resultant productions it is in the process of working with the productions ‘over and over’ that we have found that participants get the opportunity to critique and revise their productions.

Chapter 4, *Pictures at an Exhibition: Taking Visual Images into Public Setting* focuses on the politics of and procedures for mounting exhibitions, using photovoice and other visual methods to illustrate how these kinds of productions can be made public and reach different audiences in a variety of community and policy contexts through exhibitions. We are interested in how exhibitions offer opportunities for learning, including deepening the audiences’ understanding of the issues, as well as of potential strategies for addressing them. The chapter explores questions such as: What are the ethical issues in relation to the question ‘who should see this exhibition’? What are some examples of how audiences have engaged with the visual material and what have been the policy outcomes?

Chapter 5, *On the Pedagogy of Screenings* responds most directly to work with participatory video (including cellfilms) and digital story-telling. Building on work in media studies, communication, participatory visual research and edutainment, the chapter takes what often appears to be the simple act of screening a video before a live audience into the realm of the pedagogy of celebration and the pedagogy of discomfort. It seeks to explore the ways in which the design, implementation, and follow-up to a screening can be its own form of participatory community dialogue.

Chapter 6 focuses on the creation and use of visual artefacts to build stakeholders’ (including participants and community members) understanding of the issues, as well as to stimulate dialogue that seeks solutions to the identified issues. The chapter highlights and contributes to the emerging body of literature and practices that makes the production process (and not just the actual production) and the screening of such productions the focus. At the heart of the chapter is a consideration of the development and use of various ‘digital dialogue tools’ as we term them, short digital productions (combining sound and image) that draw together and organize visual data for the purposes of engaging participants and various audiences (communities, policy makers).

Chapter 7, *Engaging Policy Makers* explores the various approaches participatory visual researchers have used to engage policy makers. Often, policy-making and the role of policy makers as audiences of research are left to the end and even then, their role is reduced to some fleeting musings about what they might learn from the research. The chapter addresses questions of what impact our participatory visual research might have on policy dialogue, what policy it might lead to, and which policy makers it should target.

In the final chapter, *What Difference Does this Make?* we draw on a variety of approaches to addressing change. How might we frame our work within theories of change, but also what kinds of tools might we use to document change? We conclude the book with a consideration of interpretative and ethnographic approaches.



Taken as a whole, the book will be, we hope, a useful resource to the broad community of researchers interested in participatory visual research, working across such areas as Education, Sociology, Social Work, and Public Health. At the same time, the book is also meant to frame what we see as a next step (for our own research and the work of others) in advancing the study of participatory visual research in relation to Critical Audience Engagement.

## KEY POINTS OF THE CHAPTER

- It is critical to consider the significance and methods for exploring the question of what difference participatory research makes.
- Policy and community dialogue are important in thinking about impact.
- Audience research offers an important link to deepening an understanding of community and policy dialogue.
- It is useful to have a framework for studying Critical Audience Engagement in participatory visual research.
- Political listening offers a new angle on working with communities and policy makers.
- A strength of participatory visual methodologies is their support for reflexivity of (producers, audiences and researchers).