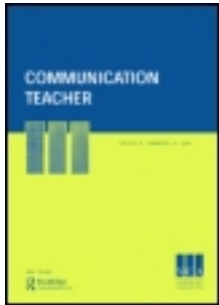


This article was downloaded by: [Maggie Quinlan]

On: 23 October 2012, At: 13:04

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Communication Teacher

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rcmt20>

## Sensing Gender by Coupling Visual and Verbal Storytelling

Margaret M. Quinlan, Stephanie M. Ruhl, Amanda Torrens & Lynn M. Harter

Version of record first published: 23 Oct 2012.

To cite this article: Margaret M. Quinlan, Stephanie M. Ruhl, Amanda Torrens & Lynn M. Harter (): Sensing Gender by Coupling Visual and Verbal Storytelling, *Communication Teacher*, DOI:10.1080/17404622.2012.737925

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17404622.2012.737925>



PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

# Sensing Gender by Coupling Visual and Verbal Storytelling

Margaret M. Quinlan, Stephanie M. Ruhl,  
Amanda Torrens & Lynn M. Harter

**Courses:** *Gender Communication, Interpersonal Communication, Health Communication*

**Objectives:** *After completing this activity, students will be able to: (1) use communication theory to understand gendered experiences; (2) draw on multiple senses to explore gendered lives in various contexts; and (3) visually and verbally articulate gender from their unique standpoints.*

## Introduction and Rationale

Communication teacher scholars have traditionally focused attention on the power of language in written or spoken narratives as situated in particular contexts (see critiques by Quinlan, 2010). Increasingly, however, scholars are espousing a vision-based epistemology that recognizes the relationship between *seeing* and *knowing*, and in doing so foreground the political relationship between seeing and the seen. Individuals develop self-awareness in part by “seeing themselves” in images in their surroundings. Images activate and articulate social knowledge and provide inventional resources for identity construction. As such, images can function as counter-narratives to dominant scripts that work to (de)legitimate particular subjectivities (Lindemann-Nelson, 2001). This assignment asks students to keep a journal that both visually and verbally reflects their growing understanding of gendered lives as lived in various social, organizational, familial, and public/private settings. From the beginning of the term until the end, students use their cameras and notebooks along with their theoretical sensibilities (as developed through the course) to capture

---

Margaret M. Quinlan, Assistant Professor of Communication, Core Faculty, Health Psychology Ph.D. Program, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Department of Communication Studies, Colvard Hall 5003, 9201 University City Blvd, Charlotte, North Carolina 28223, USA. Email: quinlan.margaret@gmail.com. Stephanie M. Ruhl, Ohio University, Athens, Ohio 45701, USA. Email: sr129210@ohio.edu. Amanda Torrens, Ohio University, Athens, Ohio 45701, USA. Email: at611411@ohio.edu. Lynn M. Harter, School of Communication Studies, Ohio University, Lasher Hall, 43 West Union Street, Athens, Ohio 45701, USA. Email: harter@ohio.edu

what gender looks like and feels like, as well as moments in which it is contested. This assignment expands pedagogical scope to include more visual information and celebrate multiple learning styles in the classroom.

### **The Activity**

The photographic journal is a semester-long articulation of gender from students' standpoints – including their experiences, feelings, and insights as evolving gendered beings. Inspired by Freirean (1970) techniques of participatory communication, we turn over the means of production to students and ask them to capture salient dimensions of their gendered lives through visual and verbal storytelling. Known variously as “photo voice,” “talking pictures,” or “visual voices,” participatory photography puts cameras in the hands of students or research participants to document and co-share their realities through photos (Novak, 2010; Wang, 1999). Sensitized to the importance of participatory pedagogy, our primary goal is to create space in the form of photographic journals for students to *narrate* their world by drawing on and developing multiple senses.

The journal consists of weekly entries containing both photos and written components. The journal can take the form of a notebook, scrapbook, PowerPoint, or any other form that allows students creatively and theoretically to structure, compile, and articulate their learning journey. At a minimum, we ask students to include two or three photos per journal entry. With a camera in hand,<sup>1</sup> we encourage students to articulate their understanding of gender visually as they encounter new topics each week through course materials and discussions (e.g., gender discrimination, gender in the media, gendered violence). Throughout the semester, we provide general questions to prompt students' reflections including:

- How can you visually articulate your experiences of gender?
- Where do you find gender?
- In what moments or spaces are dominant understandings of gender contested or solidified?
- Where do people learn about gendered roles?
- What do gender and violence look and feel like?
- How do you understand gendered experiences of labor/work?

Following Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol, students on our campuses can take photos of people in public places for pedagogical purposes. However, if they take a photo of someone in a space considered private (e.g., home), students must have written permission to use the photo. Beyond these general parameters, we also asked students to follow the “60 Minutes” rule of thumb – do not turn in any photos that would not be permissible on the evening news.

For the written portion of each journal entry, we ask students to narrate their photos. Their writing can include but is not limited to quotes from course readings, class dialogues, or other related inspirations. In their written entries, students story

their photos by explaining why they took them, what they mean to them, and what they intend to convey to others. Importantly, students must use course materials to engage in sensemaking about their visual images, bringing in the objective to “use communication theory to understand gendered experiences.”

### Debriefing

Students took their gendered lenses (literally and figuratively) and examined their campus, their attitudes and beliefs, and their relationships to capture visceral experiences of living as gendered beings. Students’ journal entries visually and verbally explored the places they shop, where and how they pray, the homes they grew up in, and those “homes” they create with friends.

We now offer some specific examples of journal entries as students visually and verbally articulated gender from their unique standpoints. Samantha took a photo of batteries sold during breast cancer awareness month (see Figure 1). In her analysis, she moved between course readings on the commodification of breast cancer (e.g., King, 2010) and her personal experiences to question whose interests are served by social marketing campaigns.

Jessica envisioned the route she must walk at night through campus – over hills, across streets, and through a parking garage. In her photographs, spaces are both



**Figure 1** Who are the primary stakeholders of *pink movements*?

luminous and distorted, darkness protrudes just beyond the light, and long shadows stretch across her path. Her verbal entry to accompany these images confided, “I now carry mace in my purse everywhere I go.” Echoing themes of (questioning) violence, a visual entry Jill chose to include was a photo of the war memorial on the campus green, and Megan questioned in a verbal entry: “What is the shape of silence – when we don’t speak up or against violence?” These examples reveal the extent to which many students involved themselves in this project, addressing provocative and thoughtful questions.

The journal project culminated with presentations at the end of the semester. Students were encouraged to present their *most compelling* thoughts and/or experiences verbally and visually; in response, Akane crafted a website, Abby did a poster presentation of conversations, Curtis created a video, Josh told a story, and many creatively infused PowerPoint presentations with visual images they had constructed.

### **Appraisal**

This project sought to stretch students’ imaginative capacities in articulating their gendered experiences in new ways. Many students struggled with the ambiguity innately present in matters of creativity. We worked to renegotiate parameters when necessary and developed a 40-point grading scale that would both applaud creativity and assess the “depth” of photos, reflection, and topics with which they engaged (see Appendix A for sample rubric). This assignment also can be tailored to other courses. One of the authors used the photographic journal as an assignment in a health communication course.

Additionally, the photos can be re-purposed after the course in the form of an art installation. Three of the authors organized a “traveling” art exhibit composed of photos taken during a gender communication. Contemplators confronted images of men in high heels trying to “walk a mile in her shoes,” birth control pills coupled with questions about reproductive responsibility, and various commodities sold during breast cancer awareness month including laundry detergent, batteries, and light bulbs.

Overall, as students engage in sense making about why they took certain pictures, they “see themselves” and how their own gendered identities have been constructed, how they have contributed to those constructions, and how they feel about those constructions. When this is coupled with course concepts about how identities are constructed through communication, students then have the necessary knowledge to decide if they want to change anything about these identities.

### **Note**

- [1] If students do not have access to a 35-mm camera or digital camera, we provide them with a disposable camera and voucher for photo development.

**References and Suggestes Readings**

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (M. B. Ramos, Trans.). New York, NY: Herder and Herder.

King, S. (2010). Pink diplomacy: On the uses and abuses of breast cancer. *Health Communication*, 25, 286–289. doi:10.1080/10410231003698960

Lindemann-Nelson, H. (2001). *Damaged identities, narrative repair*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Novak, D. R. (2010). Democratizing qualitative research: Photovoice and the study of human communication. *Communication Methods and Measures*, 4, 291–310. doi:10.1080/19312458.2010.527870

Quinlan, M. M. (2010). Fostering connections among diverse individuals through multi-sensorial storytelling. *Health Communication*, 25, 91–93. doi:10.1080/10410230903474035

Wang, C. (1999). Photovoice: A participatory action research strategy to applied women’s health. *Journal of Women’s Health*, 8, 185–192. doi:10.1089/jwh.1999.8.185

**Appendix A**

One of the authors used the following criteria to evaluate the journals:

*Photo Activity Evaluation*

1. *Format*. Appropriate number of entries and images. Creative and organized display of images and journal entries. Entries are at least one page, and have at least one reference in APA style. All entries are typed. (\_\_\_/20 points)

	Need Improvement	Meet Expectations	Exceptional
Grading Criteria	F, D	C	B, A
Points	0–10 F, 11–12 D	13–14 C	15–17 B, 18–20 A

2. *Content*. Draw on multiple senses to explore gender in various contexts. Evidence of a variety and depth of photo context and particular feel, sound, texture to photos that is linked with gender. Creative, thoughtful, and insightful. Didn’t just give a picture for each course reading, instead gave a feel for how he or she understands gender from his/her perspective. Connections between photos and course readings. (\_\_\_/20 points)

	Need Improvement	Meet Expectations	Exceptional
Grading Criteria	F, D	C	B, A
Points	0–10 F, 11–12 D	13–14 C	15–17 B, 18–20 A