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Auto-Photography as Research Practice: Identity and Self-Esteem Research

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Abstract

This paper explores auto-photography as a form of research practice in the area of identity and self-esteem research. It allows researchers to capture and articulate the ways identity guides human action and thought. It involves the generation and examination of the static images that participants themselves believe best represent them. Auto-photography is an important tool for building bridges with marginalized groups in the research process, since it offers researchers a way to let participants speak for themselves. Furthermore, by using this method researchers can avoid exclusive reliance on survey questionnaires and other such research instruments that may be culturally biased. I present two research projects using auto-photography: one involving adolescent Latina girls and one involving Indian women. Based on the experience of these projects, I discuss auto-photography's importance in identity and self-esteem research. Finally, I discuss some of the benefits and challenges of working with this method.

Keywords: auto-photography; qualitative research; quantitative research; case study

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1. Introduction

Recently, there has been a trend in social research to make the research process more authentic for both researchers and participants. This authenticity should enable research to represent participant experiences better, while achieving the robust representation that builds on and enriches a body of scientific knowledge. Auto-photography is one such trend.

In auto-photography participants take photographs, choosing images and representations of themselves. It allows researchers to capture and articulate the ways identity guides human action and thought. It can generate more authentic data because it enables researchers to look at the participants' world through the participants' eyes. Auto-photography does this because participants themselves select and record the static images they feel represent them the best. This is a particularly critical issue for those who conduct research on the experiences of marginalized groups. Because auto-photography provides participants a chance to speak for themselves, it helps researchers to avoid exclusive reliance on potentially culturally biased research instruments.

I have used this form of research practice in two research projects. This article describes these projects, using them as case studies to explore the potential of auto-photography as a form of research practice. Both research projects focus on marginalized females. One explores a group of Latina teenage girls living in inner city Los Angeles. The other studies a group of South Asian immigrant women living in a small town in the Midwest of the US.

2. Auto-Photography

A brief history of auto-photography as well its relevance in identity and self-esteem research are discussed here. There are a number of academic journals, including *Visual Anthropology* and *Studies in Visual Communication,* which feature research involving photography; however, auto-photography is an approach that has been seldom seen in identity research and promises to provide researchers with a unique view into the formation and enactment of identity (Ziller, 1990). Traditional approaches to identity have not allowed participants the freedom to articulate their self-concepts (McGuire, 1984). Many traditional researchers tend to conceptualize and operationalize the salient dimensions of the self for their participants (Ziller, 1990; Ziller & Rorer, 1985).

The major obstacle confronting self-esteem research has been the almost exclusive reliance on "paper and pencil" measures by the vast majority of researchers (McGuire, 1984). Although these measures are valuable, there is a problem when researchers rely exclusively on such techniques. As seen in Case Study #1, auto-photography can be used in conjunction with paper and pencil tests to build greater understanding. In most paper and pencil tests (normally in the classroom or laboratory), subjects are asked to rate how they feel about particular statements generated by researchers, for reasons that might or might not be tied to how individuals construct their sense of self. The use of these limited measures is particularly problematic for minorities, who may face culturally biased instruments (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990).

Ideally, participants should be free to display their own notions of self, rather than constrained by categories generated by the researcher. Juhasz and Munshi (1990) summarize the pressing need for new techniques for the study of self-esteem: "Theory suggests that any attempt to obtain valid measures of children's self-esteem should actively involve the actual participants not only in the self-measurement but also in the

content selection and test methodology" (p. 691). Clearly, measures and instruments that allow participants to play more active roles in defining themselves should foster a better understanding of the construction of identity. One way to achieve this goal is by using subject-friendly instruments that maximize the participants' ability to describe themselves.

Worth and Adair (see Ziller & Rorer, 1985) pioneered auto-photography in a project where they gave movie cameras to a group of Navajo Indians and asked them to film and edit images depicting who they were and how they saw themselves. Ziller and his colleagues (Combs & Ziller, 1977; Ziller, 1988, 1990; Ziller & Lewis, 1981; Ziller, Martel, & Morrison, 1977; Ziller & Okura, 1986; Ziller & Rorer, 1985; Ziller, Vern, & Santgoya, 1989) extended this technique to the use of instamatic cameras. In various studies they instructed participants to take 12 pictures of items in their environment that best described them.

Some believe that it is from pictures that the construction of the self can be best illuminated (Combs & Ziller, 1977; Ziller & Lewis, 1981). Auto-photography allows participants the freedom to use their actual surroundings, to pick and choose the people who are important to their self-concepts, and to decide what issues and what objects are the most salient to their construction of self. It is this freedom which the camera gives to participants that distinguishes it from traditional paper and pencil tests.

Lorraine (1990) argues that "self-representations are ideas we have about who we are that guide our thinking and behavior. They change over time as our goals change, but they are static in the sense that they are images we refer to rather than active processes" (p. 16). Photographs are static images, a slice of a person's perception at one place and one moment in time, as Berger explains in these words:

> An image is a sight, which has been recreated or reproduced. It is an appearance, or a set of appearances, which has been detached from the place and time in which it first made its appearance and preserved--for a few moments or a few centuries. Every image embodies a way of seeing. Even a photograph. For photographs are not, as often assumed, a mechanical record. Every time we look at a photograph, we are aware, however slightly, of the photographer selecting that sight from an infinity of other possible sights... The photographer's way of seeing is reflected in his choice of subject. (Berger, 1972, pp. 9–10)

Indeed, photographs are much more than mechanical records. They require thought and choice on the part of the photographer, especially when he or she is asked by a third party to photograph representations of the photographer's self.

In general, the research method of auto-photography involves giving participants a camera and asking them to select and photograph items from their environment that are important to them. There are a number of methods by which researchers can interpret the

photos. In almost all cases, the photographs are returned to the participants and they are asked to describe the photograph and what that photograph means to them. Often in research projects involving quantitative analysis, photographs are coded and analyzed by researchers; however, in qualitative analysis, researchers use participants' descriptions of the photographs as data. This process is described in detail in Case Study #1. In qualitative analysis, the participants can be interviewed about the photographs, as demonstrated in Case Study #2.

Therefore, in projects involving qualitative analysis, the photographs are developed and an interview session is held, using the photographs to prompt interview responses. Such use of photographs is called *photo-elicitation* (Harper, 1986). Collier and Collier (1986) describe the photo-elicitation method as an interview in which the informants and the interviewer discuss the photographs together. They write, "[W]e were asking questions of the photographs and the informants became our assistants in discovering the answers to these questions in the realities of the photographs" (Collier & Collier, 1986, p. 105). Furthermore, these authors claim that photo-elicitation relieves the stress of being the subject that many informants feel. "Instead their role can be one of expert guides leading the fieldworker through the content of the pictures" (Collier & Collier, 1986, p. 106), allowing them to tell stories spontaneously. By doing this, participants can explain what the objects in the photograph mean and their origins, as well as what elements may be missing (Harper, 1986). One major benefit of using photographs in the interview is that they can partially detach people from the process. As Collier and Collier explain, "[P]hotographic interviewing offers a detachment that allows the maximum free association possible within structured interviewing" (Collier & Collier, 1986, p. 107). This may help ease some of the tension participants might feel about being interviewed about the personal subject of identity. While photographs can provide more free association than other methods in interviewing, there are limitations to this practice as discussed within the two case studies presented here.

Indeed, in many academic settings there is a growing acceptance of photography and other more advanced video technologies in research. For example, Shrum, Duque, and Brown (2005) recently explored the use of digital video as research practice rather than a medium for recording social behavior in an interview in Chile.

However, there are potential shortcomings in the use of auto-photography. The use of photographs as data is debated in some academic circles. Tagg (1988) and Sontag (1977) claim that photography is "virtually useless as a way of objectively knowing because it distorts that which it claims to illuminate" (cited in Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 141). Perhaps this is true, but in some cases, illumination may involve making a form of distortion visible and discussable, for example, distortions associated with individual ways of seeing and experiencing. As Berger (1972) claims, a photograph embodies a way of seeing. Furthermore, photographs are used as tools to help identify what people value, what images they prefer, how they define their world, and how they picture others. Photographs can represent the photographer's own view of what is important and thus are

visual rhetoric. Using photographs this way may also reveal what "people take for granted or what they assume is unquestionable" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 145).

Many photographs contain images that represent a part of people's everyday lives. Nevertheless, many people do not recognize these images because they take them for granted as part of the background of their daily lives. Drawing attention to such images and asking questions about them may bring these images from background experience into the conscious realm. Even though a picture may be worth a thousand words, it is only worth a thousand words when subject to proper analysis (Hall, 1986).

3. Case Study #1: Studying Self-Esteem of Adolescent Girls: Combining Auto-Photography and a Self-Esteem Scale

Noland and Jones (1998) presented this case study at the National Communication Association Convention, New York City. Since the goal of presenting this case study is to highlight how auto-photography can be used from a quantitative approach, I have limited the discussion of the results of the study. The purpose of this study was to understand and evaluate adolescent girls' levels of self-esteem and to identify significant variables that explain these levels of self-esteem.

Participants in this study were 50 seventh and eighth grade female students from two middle schools in south-central Los Angeles. All of the participants identified themselves as Latina, meaning they were born in Latin America or of Latin American descent. Most spoke Spanish as their first language. In addition most of the subjects participated in the Neighborhood Academic Initiative (NAI) program. The NAI is an early educational intervention program in Los Angeles that is sponsored by the University of Southern California. This program targets at-risk youth. The purpose of the program is to recruit seventh and eight grade students into a program of scholarship. There were three phases of data collection and analysis using auto-photography.

Phase 1 took place during one class period. Researchers gave the participants' teachers a booklet containing three dependent measures. The dependent measures were assessed using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1965, 1989)--a 10-item, 4-point scale (1=strongly agree, 4=strongly disagree) that measures global self-esteem. The Rosenberg scale is widely used and is a reliable estimator of global self-esteem (Robinson & Shaver, 1973) containing only one underlying factor (Marsh, 1996). The instructions on the cover sheet for the dependent measures assured the subjects of confidentiality and anonymity. The instructions also clarified that there were no right or wrong answers, that we were interested in their opinions, and that their teacher(s) would not evaluate or grade their responses. The teachers who administered the dependent measure read the instructions to the class. The teachers collected the booklets at the end of the class period.

Phase 2 began the following class period. Researchers gave participants disposable cameras and the instructions for this phase (see Appendix A). Students had one week to

use their entire 24 exposures on the roll of film, then researchers collected the cameras, and processed the pictures.

In Phase 3, the next class period after the photographs were processed, researchers gave each participant a manila envelope with the receiver's name on it and thanked the students for their participation. The envelope contained instructions (see Appendix A) and copies of the pictures they had taken, for them to keep.

3.1. Coding

Together three researchers organized the photos into analyzable variables. Based on the previous auto-photographic schemes employed by Ziller and his colleagues (Combs & Ziller, 1977; Ziller, 1988, 1990; Ziller & Lewis, 1981, Ziller, Martel, & Morrison, 1977; Ziller & Okura, 1986; Ziller & Rorer, 1985; Ziller, Vern, & Santgoya, 1989), the researchers examined the photographs and created enough categories so that each photo could be assigned to one category. This exercise generated 33 categories (see Appendix B, presented as a frequencies table). Most of these categories have been employed in other auto-photographic studies. For example, Dollinger and Clancy (1993) and Dollinger, Preston, O'Brien, and DiLalla (1996) also used achievement, pets, sports, religion, television, family, possessions, and interests as categories.

Three research associates, unaware of the purposes of the project, were used to code the photos. They coded each picture based on what it represented. They were asked "What does this picture refer to?" and were given 33 categories from which to choose. They were allowed only one category per photo. They were told to select the category that best represented the references in the picture. The coders also coded the photo according to whether or not it referred to the "me" or "not me" dimensions--the participants, who previously coded their pictures according to whether the images represented them or did not represent them, generated this dimension.

3.2. Data Analysis

The results of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale were analyzed using t-tests and ANOVAs. Summary scores, where higher scores indicated higher levels of global self-esteem, were used. To obtain a usable statistic from the photo categories, a summary score was calculated from the percentage of times that a particular photo category was mentioned. To calculate that statistic, the number of mentions of any particular category by any individual subject was divided by the total number of mentions for all categories, which yielded the summary score for each category, which would total 100%.

Summary scores from the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale were then correlated with the percentage of mentions for each photo category. To develop models of the Latina girls' esteem, the variable esteem was regressed on each of the auto-photographic mention variables determined by the three researchers. We discarded insignificant predictors that

accounted for little or no variance. The goal was to maximize variance while retaining significance, achieved only by including two of the 33 original variables.

Sixteen out of 33 variables were negative predictors of self-esteem. However, only two of the variables were significant at an alpha level of .05: gender, and cares and concerns. Gender was negatively correlated with self-esteem. The more girls mentioned their gender, the lower their self-esteem. For example, one girl took a photograph of a baseball game and wrote, "I like baseball even though my brother says baseball is just for boys." Often gender was displayed in the chores and family category with photo descriptions such as "I like to cook because I am a girl."

While the cares and concerns category is relatively novel in the research arena, it is clearly important here. This category describes images and representations about the future, the environment, and other issues that are positive predictors of self-esteem, such as caring for family members. Latino families tend to situate females into the caregiver roles (Albos, 1993; Blea, 1992). As caregivers, girls nurture their family and care about their family's environment. If there is a positive aspect to the patriarchal notion of female care giving, it is that it inspires care for the environment and promotes a relational, communal, and giving philosophy. The simple fact that the girls are thinking about the future is a positive indication of self-esteem. The photographs also indicate that the girls can imagine themselves making an impact on the future, especially in terms of the environment. The lack of previous research in this area indicates it may be a valuable topic of study.

4. Case Study #2: Studying Identity of Indian Women: Combining Auto-Photography and Traditional Interviewing

The data presented in this case study were part of a doctoral dissertation (Noland, 2000). This case study involves qualitative analysis. Participants were given a camera and asked to take 12 pictures that say "This is me" and 12 pictures that say "This is not me." This has been done in a few previous research projects on identity (Combs & Ziller, 1977; Noland & Jones, 1998; Ziller & Lewis, 1981). But in previous situations where auto-photography was used, researchers themselves categorized and interpreted the pictures. This project aimed to lend even more voice to participants, enabling them to categorize, interpret, and explain the photographs in their own words. As the researcher, I developed the photos and then scheduled an interview session with the participants. At this interview session I showed them the pictures, asking them to explain what the photos meant to them.

Participants in this study live in a small college town in Ohio. A snowball sampling technique was used to contact them. I recruited women over the age of 18 who had immigrated to the US from India, become residents of the US, and would be interested in participating in this study. I visited various community leaders and attended cultural events and through the word of mouth generated by these visits, over 40 potential participants contacted me and indicated an interest in the project. I formulated criteria to

obtain a smaller, yet diverse sample. Due to the distinct nature of student life, I chose not to interview Indian women who were currently enrolled full time at the local university. Many students at this college live in dormitories and often do not interact with the wider community. Additionally, this study focuses on immigration and identity; even if students intend to remain in the US, often they are on H-1 visas and must return to their home countries after graduation.

I collected some preliminary demographic information, including age, number of years in the US, home state in India, marital status, number and ages of children, and the occupation of potential participants. In the end, 12 women with diverse experiences and backgrounds participated in the project.

I had at least three meetings with each participant. First, I met individually with the women to give them the cameras and the general instructions. I gave each a sheet of paper with the instructions and my phone number. The instructions were similar to the instructions in Case Study #1 (see Appendix C). After the participants completed the photographs, I picked up the camera and had the photographs developed. I set up a third meeting time to interview them about the photographs.

4.1. Coding

I opened the discussion by spreading the photographs out on a table or couch. I asked the women to tell me about the photographs. The interview protocol I favored was unstructured, although most women started at the beginning of the photographs and went through them one at a time. A few women had kept a list of the photographs they had taken. They used their list to categorize their photographs and to structure the interview. I tried to avoid asking any direct questions, other than "Tell me about this, please." I met with the women wherever they chose. Although I made my home available as an option, participants preferred to be interviewed in their own territory.

It is unnecessary to separate the interpretation of narratives and photographs. They are both guided by interpretive methodology. However, it is necessary to approach the interpretation of photographs carefully as this is a seldom-used method in many fields of inquiry, and there are not universally accepted approaches to this method in other areas of research.

Harper favors the method of photo-elicitation because it "provides a way in which the interview can move from the concrete (a cataloguing of the objects in the photograph) to the socially abstract (what the objects in the photograph mean to the interviewee)" (Harper, 1986, p. 25). Remarkably, Harper states the goal of the photographer is to "photograph the culture through the eyes of the informant" (Harper, 1986, p. 26). In this research project women were given cameras and took their own photographs. By having the informants themselves take the photographs, the problems derived from seeking sensational or culturally biased photographs was solved. One thing that was stressed to the informants was that they ought to resist the urge to take photographs that are "visually

arresting." Harper warns that this urge must be overcome because it is the more mundane that can serve to unlock the subjects' interpretations of their social existence, or in this case identity.

4.2. Data Analysis

There is no recipe for the analysis of photo-elicitation data (Harper, 1986). I discovered what the photographs meant to women by asking them. Narratives accompanied most photographs. I tape recorded each interview and numbered the photographs so that corresponding taped stories could be linked to each photograph. After the interviews, I organized the photographs into general categories that emerged from speaking with the women. In this way, I was able to understand the narratives through interpretive analysis. I arranged second interviews with some participants who volunteered to review and respond to my photographic categories and narrative interpretation. I labeled the photographs to begin data analysis. I was able to label the data by using the answers that women reported to such questions as "What is this?" In the same way, I attempted to analyze the data by finding pertinent images. Next, I looked for categories by grouping concepts that seem to pertain to the same phenomena. Next, I named "the categories and developed the categories in terms of their properties and dimensions" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 69).

I performed a thematic analysis of the data, finding a number of themes to explain the interplay of identity and communication when examining the process of migration and settling in a foreign country. Three umbrella themes were created: (a) living in-between addressed difficulties being a part of both US and Indian culture and, yet, somehow not fitting into either, (b) formation of boundaries when dealing with such categories as woman, immigrant, India, foreigner (other), and US citizen, and (c) images of home, marriage, and children.

5. Discussion

The method employed in these research projects was innovative. Traditional approaches to auto-photography and identity research were challenged and modified to include more participant voice. These case studies have demonstrated the use of auto-photography in studying identity and other dimensions of culture and self. Participants found symbols of their identity in their environment and took photographs of those representations; this demanded time and thoughtfulness on the participants' part. It required each woman to contemplate her identity and think about how she wanted to represent it. The participants carefully selected each image. This fact alone separates the work in this auto-photography study from other studies that use straightforward interviews. Identities are complex and very difficult to understand. The space and time afforded to participants enabled them to think about how they wanted to represent themselves, rather than having to come up with on-the-spot answers.

For Case Study #2, interview sessions allowed participants more input in data analysis. Rather than participants simply labeling the photographs, they engaged in an in-depth discussion about each one. This way, participants could explain what each photograph meant to them, rather than having researchers interpret labels for them. Through discussion, different layers of meaning could be unveiled. Participants selected the images they wanted to photograph, which also gave them the freedom to choose what they wanted to talk about in the interview. I feel this made the participants more relaxed when we met because they both understood and had reflected upon the contents of the discussion. Evidence of this is clear. Initially, participants were concerned with what I was going to ask in the interview. They repeatedly asked my contact person such questions as "What is she going to ask about?" and "Can you tell me some of the questions now so I can think about them?" despite the fact that I had provided my contact with photocopies of a summary sheet of the project for the participants. When I decided on photography I was able to tell the participants that we were just going to talk about the photographs, nothing else. They seemed much more relaxed and even looked forward to the interview sessions. It allowed the participants to be more in control of the interview and the discussion topics. In addition, the participants were able to choose the order in which we discussed the photographs, giving them the power to guide me in the interview.

Moreover, using photographs as the basis for the interviews afforded women more personal space when discussing the intimate topic of identity. By this I mean the photographs allowed the discussion to be less invasive on a personal level. For instance, women could talk about the photographs in the third person and use general terms instead of specific references.

For example, one woman took a photograph of a microwave oven for the "this is not me" category. She stated that Indian men prefer fresh food, rather than frozen food or even reheated leftovers on a daily basis. She then proceeded with a story about how much time she spent cooking everyday and the fact that many Indian dishes are labor intensive. The way she told the story made it clear that in this case she was indeed speaking about her husband. In this instance, I inferred that not all Indian men prefer this; rather her husband preferred fresh food. This is particularly interesting in the light of the fact that none of the participants photographed her husband. It is clear that the participants were uncomfortable photographing their husbands or making direct references to their husbands. Throughout the interviews many participants said such things as "Indian men" instead of "my husband," even at times in cases where it was clear they were talking about their husbands. By using third person references, they could safely express their opinions and attitudes with a sort of critical distance. This does not imply that in all examples women who talked about "Indian men" specifically meant their own husbands; indeed, many genuine generalizations about Indian men (and Americans) were made.

As the interviews with participants regarding their photographs were audio recorded and transcribed, both auditory and visual data were collected in Case Study #2. These are different worlds; auditory data is more linear whereas the visual data is more holistic (Hall, 1986). Collier and Collier (1986) maintain,

> The auditory is coded language that can directly express mood, which is reinforced by the verbal signals of the listener. With discipline the eyes perceive the factual shapes of realism, but the ear must translate, for language is a set of abstract symbols. Regardless of this evident epistemology, Western people reverse this order and perceive the written word as reality and visual imagery as impression. (p. xii)

Berger (1972) believes that seeing comes prior to words; seeing "establishes our place in the surrounding world" (p. 7). Yet words can never wholly encompass what is seen. Rather, dialogue is often an attempt to verbalize what is seen, "an attempt to explain how, either metaphorically or literally, 'you see things,' and an attempt to discover how 'he sees things'" (Berger, 1972, p. 9). Both auditory and visual data are important to this research and, as demonstrated, they have unique properties.

While throughout this paper I have discussed the benefits of using photography as a form of research practice, there are disadvantages to employing this method. While, on the positive side, photography gave participants time to reflect on their identity, I did not expect them to take so much time taking the photographs in Case Study #2. On average each woman had the camera three months before completing the photographs.

Although the photographs gave women "space" to be less intimate, they also greatly reduced anonymity. There were some boundaries imposed by the nature of the photographs; the most notable example is the one mentioned earlier--women did not take pictures of their husbands. This made the use of photography limited in some ways.

In the majority of cases, a spouse has to be a significant part, negative or positive, of a married person's life. Given the fact that all of the participants were married, most moved to the US because of their husbands and in fact, were mostly stay-at-home intellectuals, I find it hard to believe they would not consider their husbands part of their world. I can draw no other conclusion except that there are cultural taboos and intimacy boundaries that could not be crossed by photographing their husbands. Perhaps the women felt that photographs are more permanent and tangible expressions than words and felt they did not want to be bound to contribute in that way.

I think the most challenging aspect of working with auto-photography in Case Study #2 was the fact that the participants had a difficult time with the concept. This probably contributed to the length of time each participant took with the camera. Only one participant in this second study was able to use the entire roll of film. The idea of using photographs to represent symbols of identity is a difficult concept to understand and an even more difficult task to complete. Most people outside of a group of academics who spend time contemplating such issues would have a hard time finding images to represent their identity when so instructed. Additionally, it could be that the concept of individual identity is uniquely Western.

Letting the participants set the agenda does limit the researcher's control in some ways. I struggled with the notion of "what was left out." When participants take photographs of "me" and "not me," it may not leave room for delicate issues that may be significant predictors of self-esteem or identity. There are numerous reasons that participants may not want to take photographs of certain things; however, in many instances participants managed to take photographs of symbolic representations of the "thing" that they could not or would not photograph. One example (for both case studies) would be sexual intercourse. Nobody took photographs of this, but many took photographs of representations of this. In fact, sexuality emerged as one of the main themes that women struggled with in the process of immigration (for a complete review of this theme, see Noland, 2005).

For Case Study #1, the process was accelerated by the quantitative nature of the study. Participants did not dwell on images as much as the older women from Case Study #2 did. They were given one week, and all the participants used the whole roll of film. In this process, a sense of objectivity was obtained by having the three research associates categorize the photographs for the girls. It would have been interesting, and perhaps valuable, to see how the participants themselves would have categorized the photographs. Given the age of the participants, this may have been a difficult task.

Furthermore the "me" and "not me" dichotomy could impose a false dichotomy, as we know issues of self are much more complicated than this black and white contextualization may allow. Some women in the qualitative Case Study #2 did bring this up during the interview process. For example, some women took a photograph of the US flag as "not me," indicating that they were not American, but in the interview said that they were very American in many ways. In contrast, others used that same image to say "this is me": "I live here, my children were born here, I will die here, *but* others do not see me as American because of the way I look and speak." Unfortunately the girls in Case Study #1 did not have this opportunity, other than a few sentences on the back of the photograph, to express what the photographs meant.

The fact that most photographs were mundane was both good and bad. According to Harper (1986), mundane images are better representations of daily life and identity than dramatic images. Although mundane images get at more authentic representations of identity, they do not make for exciting photographs to display or to present in a report.

Future researchers would benefit by extending the auto-photographic approach in order to increase our understanding of how people construct their sense of self. This is particularly useful when working with marginalized groups. However, future researchers should also target more disparate subject pools in order to get a broader range of input. Both case studies used a narrowly defined participant pool. Table 1 summarizes some lessons learned from both case studies and some suggestions to overcome challenges in future research.

Table 1. *Lessons Learned and Suggestions for Future Research*

Lessons Learned from Case Study #1	**Lessons Learned from Case Study #2**
Photographs allowed participants to find images of their identity, overcoming some cultural and language barriers that may be present in other forms of self-esteem and identity research.	Auto-photography grants participants enough time to contemplate and choose representations of self, which are complex.
Paper and pencil tests, that measure esteem and have been found to be both reliable and valid, work well in conjunction with auto-photography.	Discussions around the photographs allowed participants more input in data analysis and therefore greater understanding of complex issues, which would not have been achieved through interview alone.
Methods of quantitative data analysis can be used with auto-photography.	Methods of qualitative data analysis can be used with auto-photography.
Data gathered were rich, providing valuable insight into both levels of self-esteem for the participant and the reasons why they have lower self-esteem.	What was not photographed (or said) was just as valuable as what was included in the photographs.
Auto-photography is useful (and fun) when working with adolescents, who are often struggling with self-esteem issues.	Auto-photography allowed for certain taboo topics to be discussed in a non-threatening manner.
Suggestions for Future Research (Based on Case Study #1)	**Suggestions for Future Research (Based on Case Study #2)**
Improvements could be made by working with adolescents to include more of their voice in the analysis--granting participants more power and increasing authenticity in the research process.	Rather than having no time limits, an appropriate time limit could be implemented.
Culturally sensitive paper-pencil tests for measurement should be used and may need to be modified to fit particular participant groups.	A follow-up interview discussing why certain images were not included in the photographs would add significantly to data analysis. This could also give the researcher more control over the project content.
Participants themselves could have categorized the photographs. It would have been interesting to compare with how the coders categorized the same photographs.	Experiments with digital photography could save time and money, and may yield interesting results. Differences between traditional photography and digital photography could be explored.

6. Conclusion

Two cases studies using auto-photography were presented. Auto-photography can be of benefit to those involved in identity and self-esteem research by circumventing obstacles involving language issues, marginalization, and age. Auto-photography is an improvement over traditional measures in that it allows those who may not be fluent the researchers' language (or the dominant language of the country) to express themselves with confidence and clarity. Those who are marginalized are afforded the same

opportunities, to avoid the sometimes biased traditional (and often Western) identity and self-esteem measures. Furthermore, young adults often do not have the maturity to answer difficult identity questions, where photography can give them a chance to think about who they are and express it through images. Although auto-photography is an excellent choice for those doing identity research, these three groups would particularly benefit from this research practice, if given enough time for proper reflection.

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APPENDIX A

Instructions for Case Study #1

Phase 2

This activity involves taking two different kinds of picture. For one kind of picture, we want you to describe yourself. To do this, we would like you to take 12 photographs that tell who you are. These photographs can be of anything, just as long as they tell something about who you are. These pictures should say, "This is Me!" For the other kind of picture, we want you to describe who you are not. To do this we would like you to take another 12 photographs. These photographs can be of anything as long as they say, "This is Not Me!" To help you keep track, we have put a label on top of the camera. When you take a picture of something that describes you, cross out a number under *Me* on the label. Similarly, when you take a picture that does not describe you, keep track by crossing out a number under *Not Me.* Remember, you are the only one who can take these pictures; so you cannot take any pictures of yourself.

Phase 3

We would like you to open the big envelope with your name on it. Inside you should find the pictures you took and two smaller white envelopes--one labeled *Me* and one labeled *Not Me*. Place the white envelopes on the table in front of you. You can take out your pictures now and look at them. You will notice that each picture has a number on the back of it. Try to keep the pictures in order. You will see that there is a form in front of you that has your name on it. This form asks you to explain why each picture represents you or does not. Take the first picture in your pile, and check the back to be certain that it is picture #1. Go to the first question on your form. If the picture is one that describes who you are please circle "me" on question 1 and write a short sentence explaining how

the pictures describes you. If the picture describes who you are not, circle “not me” and write a short sentence explaining why the picture does not describe you.

When you have finished explaining the first picture, place it on the white envelope in front of you labeled *Me* if the picture describes you, or *Not Me* if the picture does not describe you. Follow the same procedures for all of your pictures.

After you have described all of your pictures, put all of your “me” pictures in a pile on the *Me* envelope and all of your “not me” pictures in a pile on the *Not Me* envelope. Now turn to the last page of the form. Please choose the three pictures that describe best who you are, and the three pictures that describe best who you are not. When you have decided which three pictures describe you best, write down the numbers of the pictures in the spaces underneath “me.” Follow the same procedures for the “not me” photos. Place of the “me” pictures in the *Me* envelope, and all of the “not me” pictures in the *Not Me* envelope. Now there is one final question. Please indicate which was easier, taking the “me” or taking the “not me” pictures in the space provided.

APPENDIX B

Frequency of Photo-Type Girls Used to Self-Identify (39 Girls)

Photo-Type	Frequency (No. of girls for each photo-type)	Frequency %
Photos Concerned with Name	39	100%
Photos Concerned with Sexual Identity	38	97.4%
Photos Concerned with Age	37	94.9%
Photos Concerned with intellectualism.	37	94.9%
Photos Concerned with Poverty	36	92.3%
Photos Concerned with Race	35	89.7%
Photos Concerned with Church	35	89.7%
Photos Concerned with Empathy	32	82.5%
Photos Concerned with Videogames	32	82.0%
Photos Concerned with Achievement	31	79.5%
Photos Concerned with Gender	31	79.5%
Photos Concerned with Friends	30	76.6%
Photos Concerned with Scholarship	30	76.6%
Photos Concerned with Cares and Concerns	28	71.8%
Photos Concerned with Chores	25	64.1%
Photos Concerned with Family	25	64.1%
Photos Concerned with TV/Movies	23	59%
Photos Concerned with Self-Presentation	23	59%
Photos Concerned with Communication	22	56.4%
Photos Concerned with Food	21	53.8%
Photos Concerned with Sports	21	53.8%
Photos Concerned with Occupation	20	51.3%
Photos Concerned with Reading	20	51.3%
Photos Concerned with Music/Dance	18	46.2%
Photos Concerned with Pets	16	41.0%
Photos Concerned with Nature	15	38.5%
Photos Concerned with Possessions	14	35.9%
Photos Concerned with Illegal Acts	12	30.8%
Photos Concerned with School	10	25.6%
Photos Concerned with Miscellaneous	8	20.5%
Photos Concerned with Hobbies	3	7.7%

APPENDIX C

Instructions for Case Study #2

Phase 1

This activity involves taking two different kinds of picture. For one kind of picture, I want you to describe yourself. To do this, I would like you to take 12 photographs that tell who you are. These photographs can be of anything, just as long as they reveal something about who you are. These pictures should say, "This is Me!" For the other kind of picture, I want you to describe who you are not. To do this I would like you to take 12 more photographs. These photographs can be of anything as long as they say, "This is Not Me!"

To help you keep track, I have labeled the camera. When you take a picture of something that describes you, cross out a number under *Me* on the label. Similarly, when you take a picture that does not describe you, keep track by crossing out a number under *Not Me*. When you are finished, you should have all the numbers under *Me* and *Not Me* crossed out. Remember that you are the only one who can take these pictures. When you are finished, please call me so I can pick up the camera and have the photographs developed. Also feel free to call any time you have a question. Everything you photograph and tell me will be anonymous, as I will change the names of the participants and the location of the study will not be divulged. You will receive a copy of all the photographs you take. Thank you.

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