

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

**Rural youth and emotional geographies: How photovoice and words-alone methods tell different stories of place**

Nicole Gerarda Power, Moss E. Norman, and Kathryne Dupré

**Abstract**

In this paper we discuss how photovoice and words-alone methods used in a study with young people living in communities on the west coast of Newfoundland, Canada helped tell different stories of rurality. Instead of the dominant narrative of rural decline in the focus groups and interviews with youth, through photovoice young people talked more positively about their home places. Drawing on recent work on emotional geographies and combining realist and constructionist frameworks, we argue that the photographs represent culturally accepted and appropriate ways of thinking, talking and feeling about place, and that these shared affective practices provide a sense of community and continuity in a context of uncertainty in fisheries communities. It is our contention that such shared practices offer a strategy to deal with, indeed to heal, the damaging impact of the near extinction of fisheries stocks by maintaining a stable sense of self and place.

**Keywords:** photovoice, youth, rural, emotional geographies, fisheries

## **Introduction**

There is an emerging body of literature that maps the connections between rural places and emotion. Like rural studies more generally, the literature examining rural emotional geographies has tended to focus on adults (Leyshon 2008, Nairn *et al.* 2003). In this paper we discuss the qualitative findings of a mixed methods study with young people living in rural communities on Newfoundland's west coast that examined, among other things, their emotional connections to place. In particular, we wish to highlight how photovoice, a visual method that combines participant-generated photography and photo-elicitation, emphasized discourses that were largely marginal in the talk-alone methods, focus groups and interviews. The photovoice study highlighted the importance of nature, the outdoors and fisheries in structuring the feeling of their community (Williams 1977) – discourses that remained largely absent or were obfuscated in focus groups and interviews with a researcher-driven agenda. Furthermore, we argue that the photographs represent shared 'practices of speaking and silence' (Walkerdine 2010, p. 108) that tie people together or contain people and provide a sense of community and continuity, affectively if not economically, in a context of industrial restructuring and environmental crisis in fisheries communities. It has been argued that in contrast to more conventional types of methods, photovoice allows the researcher to tap into, on the one hand, content that may be missed by researcher-led questions (Guillemin and Drew 2010, p. 176) and on the other hand, a different *kind* of data (Harper, 2002, p.22). These reasons likely make the inclusion of photovoice or other visual methods particularly fruitful when examining the affective dimensions of place.

## **Emotional geographies**

Recent work on the affective dimensions of rural places has focused on the emotional lives of people as emplaced and how a sense of place and feelings of belonging (and exclusion) reflect and reproduce local power relations (Bryant and Pini 2011, Convery *et al.* 2005; Little *et al.* 2005; Panelli *et al.* 2004; Pini *et al.* 2010). Other work has focused on how imaginings of places (e.g., the countryside, farming communities, industrial towns) are emotionally charged (Panelli *et al.* 2004, Pini *et al.* 2010, Walkerdine 2010). These imaginings construct rural places on the one hand as idyllic -- safe, free, close to nature, peaceful, innocent and healthy communities (Valentine 1997) and on the other hand, as dull and regressive (Rye 2006), even empty and dying (Kenway *et al.* 2006).

A small but emerging literature illustrates the salience of emotional geographies in times of environmental or industrial crisis (Convery *et al.* 2005, Pini *et al.* 2010, Walkerdine 2010). In their work in rural Cumbria, Convery *et al.* (2005) document the emotional responses of farmers and non-farmers to the mass killing of non-human animals to contain the risk of spreading foot and mouth disease, and contrast these to the ways in which government and industry framed the crisis primarily in economic and sectoral terms. Similarly, Pini *et al.*'s work (2010) juxtaposes the devastating emotional impact of the closure of a nickel mine in Western Australia on the workers and community members to the dominant representation of the closure as primarily an economic issue. Pini *et al.*'s work (2010: 571) also shows how emotional responses to the mine closure were regulated, on the one hand, by a 'discourse of resilience and recovery' that is linked to rurality and on the other hand, by the mining company in its classed representation of workers' emotional responses as excessive and lacking professionalism.

In her research in a South Wales working-class community following the closure of a steelworks, Walkerdine (2010, p.108) argues that over time communities – especially communities that are organised around a single industry -- develop shared ‘practices of speaking and silence’ that act as a kind of emotional self-protection of the place and its people. The affective protection provided by the sense of community rhythm was disrupted when the steelworks closed, in turn rupturing ‘a sense of the community’s continuity of being in a catastrophic way’ (Walkerdine 2010, p.93). According to Walkerdine, narratives of better, safer, happier times gone by are more than simply nostalgic memories; instead they must be understood as affective ‘practices of speaking and silence’ that provide continuity, that keep the community alive – not economically, but through affect.

Shared ‘practices of speaking and silence’ and a rural ‘discourse of resilience and recovery’ may very well maintain a sense of community but also serve to exclude those who fail to play by the rules, and to erase or deny the heterogeneity within rural places through the production of a common narrative or identity. In a study focusing on young people in remote and rural places in the UK, Leyshon (2008, p.14) found that youth drew on the trope of the rural idyll to produce a shared rural identity as a way to distinguish themselves from their urban counterparts, and they did so despite diverse and contradictory experiences of place that reflect inequalities based on class, gender, and sexuality. Leyshon (2008, p. 5) suggests that while it is important to recognise that identities and places are socially and historically contingent, fluid and changing, individuals locate themselves firmly in historical time and fixed places to ensure a sense of emotional wellbeing and belonging and ‘to cope with the contingencies of existence.’

Leyshon's work (2008) is particularly relevant for our study because it uses visual methods to investigate young people's relationship to rural places (for other examples of visual methodologies with rural youth, see Nairn and Panelli 2009, Nairn *et al.* 2003, Panelli *et al.* 2002). Moreover, Leyshon's work emphasizes the role of emotion in rural youth's experience of place. Although research on childhood and youth often overlooks the role of emotion (Robson *et al.* 2007), there is an emergent body of work within rural scholarship examining young peoples' sense of rural (not) belonging and attachment to place using an emotional lens (see Ansell and van Blerk 2007, Kenway et al. 2006, Leyshon 2008, Ni Laoire *et al.* 2011). In particular, this work challenges the reductive binary categories that are often deployed in conceptualizing rural youth's sense of belonging and community (e.g. rural/urban, inclusion/exclusion) (see Nairn *et al.* 2003) by highlighting the complex and contradictory affective relationships young people have with their rural communities. For example, Leyshon (2008, p.2) writes that attachments to place are 'characterized by conflicting feelings of belonging, longing, ambivalence and abhorrence'. In this way, a focus on emotions allows researchers to compliment material considerations of place (e.g., the economy, the built environment) with an examination of those more fleeting, but still crucial, 'emotional, cultural, and imaginative ties to place' (Ansell and van Blerk 2007, p. 18) that powerfully shape how young people form their social relationships and social identities (Robson *et al.* 2007). Given that much of what we know about rurality, including the relationship between rural-based industrial or environmental crisis and emotion, is based on studies with adults, methods like photovoice that allow youth to direct the research can produce findings that challenge dominant understandings of the rural (Nairn *et al.* 2003, p. 12), and in this case, highlight affective dimensions of rurality.

### **Photovoice: epistemological tensions**

While still underutilized as a method, photovoice has tended to be used in the areas of health promotion and public health, especially with disenfranchised, vulnerable or marginalized groups (see Catalani and Minkler 2009 for a review of the health literature employing photovoice). As a tool for community-based participatory action research, Wang and colleagues (see Wang and Redwood-Jones 2001, Wang, 1999, Wang et al. 1998, Wang and Burris, 1997, 1994) argue that photovoice can empower participants through their participation in a dialogical research process that aims to develop critical consciousness and create social change. Participants direct the focus of research through their decisions about the content of the photographs and discussion of their meaning or significance with the researcher. Not all researchers, however, use visual methods as a means to empower participants and facilitate social change (Olliffe and Bottorff 2007, p.857, note 1). The power of participant-generated photography arguably is in its production of a different kind of data from those generated using researcher-led methods. It allows for the inclusion of data ‘that might otherwise have been overlooked or ignored by researchers – perhaps even been invisible’ (Guillemin and Drew 2010, p.176). Moreover, photo-elicitation does more than clarify the content of the photographs; visual aids tap into ‘a different part of human consciousness than do words-alone interviews’ and trigger a different quality of response from verbal cues (Harper 2002, p.22).

It has been argued that photovoice is an especially effective method to use with individuals who may be less able or willing to engage in ‘words-alone’ methods. In the case of children and youth, photovoice may be a means to make research interesting (Drew *et al.* 2010, Guillemin and Drew 2010), to challenge adultist research agendas (Darbyshire *et al.* 2005), and to empower

youth (Strack *et al.* 2004). For Strack *et al.* (2004, p. 56), the empowerment of youth is dependent in part on building competencies to use cameras and take photographs that expose their social circumstances. Instruction on how to take photographs and interpret them was necessary in their study, they argue, because ‘many of the youth were more interested in taking pictures of friends and families than of community assets and deficits’ (Strack *et al.* 2004, p.52, see also Wilson *et al.* 2007, Guillemin and Drew 2010). Similar arguments have been made about instruction for other vulnerable groups (Wang and Burris 1997, Wang, 2006). Allen (2008, p.566) argues that research designs that use visual methods are likely to ‘offer more moments of participant agency’ for young research participants.

Others (Packard 2008, Pauwels 2010, Prins 2010) have called into question the assumed empowering and democratising effects of such instruction, suggesting instead that instruction skews the data toward the researcher’s agenda. For example, Packard (2008) explains the difference in the findings between his photovoice study with homeless people and those documented by Wang *et al.* (2000) in terms of the degree of instruction and training given to participants. Comparing his work to the Wang *et al.* study (2000), Packard (2008, p.75) writes:

Not only did they teach them how to use the cameras, but they also taught them how to ‘see’ and produce images. No doubt the ultimate decision of form and content was left up to the photographer, but this approach accomplishes different things than this project. While they are able to offer compelling evidence about what life is like on the streets, the data presented here focus more on the nature of homelessness as a status in American society.

A comparison of Packard's and Wang *et al.*'s (2000) work reveals an important epistemological tension in photovoice methodology; that is, is the photograph the focus of analysis or is the process involved in producing the photograph the focus? The former case suggests a realist approach focusing on the observable content of the photograph; the latter shifts focus to the social and cultural construction of the photograph as read from, for example, its form and style (Joanou 2009, p. 216-7, Pauwels 2010, p.557-8). Packard (2008, p.69-72) points out that photography is a political process in deciding what to make and what not to make visible and a cultural process in that institutionalized conventions which differ by genre (consider, for example, tourist or family photography) guide the form and content across time and space. The photographer relies on the audience to interpret the form and content by drawing on appropriate, culturally shared photographic tropes. In the case of photovoice, participants produce photographs for a specific audience – researchers, and in some cases, community members and policy makers. It seems unlikely that choices about content and form can be understood as existing outside this social relationship (Joanou 2009, Guillemin and Drew 2010).

While the methodological and epistemological underpinnings of photovoice are contested, rather than seeing constructionist and realist positions as inherently oppositional, we suggest that photovoice offers a lens to examine the content of the photographs and their meanings for the participants, as well as to consider how these are socially produced. .



## **The study and methods**

In this article we describe and offer an interpretation of the findings of the Rural Youth and Recovery (RYR) photovoice study conducted with eleven young people ages 12 to 24 living in coastal communities in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada. The RYR project<sup>1</sup> was a subcomponent of the Community-University Research for Recovery Alliance (CURRA) initiative at Memorial University of Newfoundland. The main objective of the CURRA was to identify strategies for the recovery of fishery communities along Newfoundland's west coast by adopting a multidisciplinary, collaborative and participatory research program. Since the early 1990s, fisheries communities have been hard hit by fish stock collapses and subsequent downsizing of the harvesting and processing sectors. Limited employment options and population declines due to outmigration, especially among youth (Canadian Policy Research Networks 2009), have been widely identified as pressing social problems impacting the health of these communities. The RYR project aimed to understand young people's connection to community and the availability and quality of employment and recreation opportunities. The RYR project used a mixed methods approach, including focus groups, one-on-one interviews, a photovoice study and a province-wide online survey with youth in the province. In this paper we consider how data produced using the photovoice method compare to those generated using the other qualitative methods, interviews and focus groups, in our examination of the emotional geographies of youth. While the generation of strategies for sustainability was a goal of the larger CURRA project, our photovoice study was primarily concerned with the possibility of generating new insights using participant-generated photography.

The focus group participants were recruited using our community partner, the Port aux Basques Community Youth Network, a provincially funded program facilitating educational and recreational opportunities for youth, and the Western District School Board of Newfoundland and Labrador. In total 18 focus groups with 91 young people between the ages 12 and 24 were completed (38 male, 53 female). In the focus groups, we asked questions about the availability and quality of jobs for young people in their communities; their experiences of work, family and community; their intentions to migrate for work or education; and their thoughts on what makes an ideal place to live and work for young people.

The interview participants were recruited primarily through the Western District School Board of Newfoundland and Labrador and were purposively selected on the basis of age and gender. In total 13 (eight male, five female) one-on-one qualitative interviews were completed. Interviews focused on young people's leisure and recreation opportunities and experiences in their rural communities.

Finally, the photovoice participants were purposively selected from the focus group participants, on the basis of age and gender. In the end eleven young people participated; however, due to scheduling difficulties, we were able to conduct photo-elicitation discussions with only seven (six female and one male). At the time of the study, four were between the ages of 12 and 15, two between the ages of 16 and 18, and one between the ages of 19 and 24. The group produced a total of 292 images. The participants were given digital cameras (one participant used her own camera) and instructed to take pictures of the places, spaces, events, activities, and people that matter to them. The only other instruction focused on etiquette in taking pictures that included

people. For example, participants were asked to seek verbal permission to take one's picture where possible and to respect the discretion of those who may be included in an image where risk is high (e.g., a party with underage drinking), even if the location is public. Following Packard (2008) and others (see Pauwals, 2010; Prins, 2010), we opted to give the participants minimal instructions so as not to impose our agenda onto the participants' emplacing practices or their stories and pictures. Thus, we did not instruct participants on how to take 'good' pictures, how many pictures to take, or what to take pictures of, instructions that we felt may have shaped how the participants saw and represented their communities.

In the photo-elicitation part of the study, the researcher met with the participants in small groups to discuss their photographs. Participants were asked in turn to describe the photos they took, why they took those photos, and what those places, spaces, events, activities, and people mean to them. Although participants generally reflected on their own pictures, specific images evoked group discussions. Like other photovoice projects (see Guillemin and Drew 2010), at times we encountered difficulties making sense of who took which photographs. For example, one pair of participants (who admitted to being best friends) took their photographs together. In other cases, participants asked a mother or a friend to take their photograph. This limitation is tempered by our analytic approach whereby we interrogate the social and cultural processes of constructing the photographs, in addition to realist interpretations of the observable content of the photographs (see Nykiforuk *et al.* 2011 for a discussion of the limitations of photovoice methods in the realist tradition).

## **Mapping emotional geographies using interview and focus group methods**

Before we conducted the photovoice study, we carried out focus group discussions and interviews with youth. The focus groups and interviews document young people's ambivalent connection to place and the diversity of experience of rural places among young people.

Participants described their communities simultaneously as safe, free, supportive, communal, and family-oriented, *and* as backward looking, in decline, lacking in job and recreational opportunities, 'nosey', and not oriented towards youth. Youth talked about their community as 'a great place to raise a family' and as a supportive environment for children where 'everybody knows everybody.' At the same time, they complained about adult surveillance and a lack of community space for youth.

All the same, the prevailing tone of the discussions with youth was decidedly negative, dominated by constructions of their contemporary communities as empty or 'dead' spaces, where there was 'nothing to do' and 'nowhere to go'. Youth defined their communities in terms of loss (e.g. loss of jobs, business, sites of recreation, government services and people) or in relation to the absences of recognizable global retail forms normally found in urban locations. In the focus groups, young people talked about communities being in decline and a lack of (good) employment options for youth (and adults) in their community. This negative construction was made in relation to, on the one hand, a largely imagined and nostalgic memory of the past and on the other, the endless possibilities for consumption promised by the neoliberal 'global imaginary' (Gibson-Graham 2003).

Participants rarely discussed the fishing industry without prompting and then tended to contrast the contemporary struggle to get by with a nostalgic memory of their communities as vibrant and thriving prior to the fisheries collapses in the 1990s. While many of them were not yet born, they referenced the ‘old days’ when the fish processing plant was still operating at full capacity, and there were more people living in rural Newfoundland coastal communities and ‘more things to do’.

Well more than a few years ago, there was a lot of people around here, it was perfect.

But the fish plant closed. (Female, Focus Group Participant, age 19-24)

I know back in the day, like 20 years ago or so, like bartenders that used to work in the bar tell me that the bar was goin’ at least five nights a week. They had at least two bartenders on downstairs and three or four dances upstairs because there were so many people because of the fishery. All the fishermen would come in and they would go to the bars. Like, there was so much work they would have trouble keeping bartenders on hand. But now, like they, they won’t hire anymore. They can’t because there’s not enough work for everybody. (Female, Focus Group participant, age 19-24)

While many of the youth engaged in romanticized constructions of a golden past, they nonetheless felt that this history was not theirs, suggesting that these stories rightfully belonged to older generations: ‘Yeah, it’s not in our generation ... Fishing, that was my pop’s time, that’s

my dad's time' (Female, Focus Group participant, age 19-24). Most saw little opportunity for a future career in the fishing industry.

The focus group discussions and interviews about work and play also highlighted some important gender differences in how rural places are experienced, reflecting recent changes in the kinds of work available to men and women in their rural communities. These rural communities seem to offer boys spaces (e.g., the woods) to play and be free, while at the same time men's jobs in traditional fisheries are disappearing or becoming less attractive. The shift in local economies from extraction to service and tourist industries offers employment opportunities to young (and older) women, albeit in low paying, highly seasonal and part time work in the service sector. This shift in the local economy has impacted the emotional geographies of youth. The 'tourist gaze' (Urry 2002) was central to structuring the participants' affective connections to place, as several youth appropriated the outsiders' perspective in characterizing their community as empty or disconnected from the globalized flow of commodities.

And, well, those people [tourists] who do come off the boat [provincial ferry to the island], Craig gets them all the time [at the tourist bureau], they're like 'Where's your McDonald's <sup>TM</sup>? You don't have one!' (Female, Focus Group participant, age 16-18)

Seeing little opportunity for future employment and interpreting their communities as lacking, participants talked about leaving their rural communities. As has been found in other studies on youth living in rural contexts (see Leyshon 2008), the discussions about leaving their community

were emotionally charged, with youth indicating anxiety, ambivalence and excitement about the possibility. Outmigration of youth (and adults) has become a common feature of rural life in Newfoundland, and our older participants in particular talked about the negative impact of the loss of friends through outmigration on their lives in the community. Encouraged by family, educators and friends, participants described a kind of inevitability about leaving to pursue further education and employment. Those opting to stay behind risked being labelled failures or old fashioned. Yet, despite all of this, youth were conflicted in their individual choices to stay or leave. As one young man said in a focus group:

My father keeps telling me to go out east, or west, to work there just because of the money, but I don't really want to do that ... (Focus Group, ages 19-24)

Participants felt a strong sense of belonging to place and were hesitant to leave communities that offered a sense of togetherness, freedom and security. This dilemma in part helps make sense of the narrative about rural communities in the photovoice data.

### **Disrupting the emotional narrative of rural loss using photovoice**

In the photovoice data a different sense of place emerged, a more positive sense of place. Unlike other photovoice studies that report youth's preoccupation with taking photographs of friends and family (see, for example, Strack *et al.* 2004), in this study youth overwhelmingly photographed the outdoors. The overwhelming majority of photographs can be classified as outdoor shots (no=264/292, 90%), focusing predominantly on landscapes, seascapes and other

aspects of the natural environment; community buildings and other structures; and to a lesser degree on pets and people in outdoor spaces. The interior spaces photographed include homes, sheds, cars, and barns. People shots (indoors and outdoors) make up 18% (no=52) of all of the images. The focus on outdoor spaces is somewhat surprising given that one of the major themes in the focus groups and interviews is that their communities offered little to do for youth, and youth reported spending a lot of time inside playing video games or using a computer.

Photovoice participants made similar claims about how they spend their time: 'Usually I stay at home and play video games n' stuff' (PV2). Yet, there are no photographs of youth hanging out playing video games. The following exchange took place when the researcher asked about this apparent incongruence:

Interviewer: So ... one thing that I find interesting ... when we met before you talked a lot about spending time inside on the computer, but almost all of your pictures are outside, why is that?

PV participant #6: I dunno.

PV participant #5: It's like a really big part of ...

PV participant #6: We spend a lot of time inside too, but it's like Friday night, we were inside. We were in [name of friend]'s basement, but a lot of times, when it is nice we do go outside, if there is something to do. In the winter time it's freezing, so it's like hard to get out. There's really no point in freezing your butt off.

Interviewer: So weather determines what you do?

PV participant #6: Yeah, a lot, a big part of it.



Interviewer: So if you had a choice, you would rather be outside with your friends, is that true, would you say?

PV participant #5: Um, it kind of depends, like sometimes I would just rather be in my basement with a couple of people.

PV participant #6: Yeah, 'cause her basement -- we should have taken a picture of that.

PV participant #5: My basement's like all done up now. So there's couches and TV and I have my Wii™ down there and stuff. So like every couple of weekends, almost every weekend, my friend comes up with us and we just watch TV and movies and stuff.

This exchange seems to indicate a disconnect between what young people do on a day-to-day basis in their rural communities and how they documented their lives using photography. We suggest that it may also mark an epistemological tension between realist and constructionist readings of the photographs. The photographs do tell us something about youth's experiences of place, and specifically of rurality, documenting, for example, what they 'see' in their everyday lives. However, the photographs in this study (and perhaps this is true for most photography) were created for an audience, the researcher, which undoubtedly shape their content and form. Both the photographs and the verbal elicitation invoke the 'rural as idyllic' trope, focusing on the 'authentic' beauty of the local scenery. In turn, it is expected that the audience will read the images using the appropriate photographic trope; they are supposed to elicit a positive emotional response that is linked to health and well-being, and just in case the audience (i.e., the researcher)

did not receive the intended message from the photographs alone (see Figure 1), participants were very clear in their verbal accounts:

We go there for bonfires and when it's a nice day like today, me and my friend ... we're just gonna go over to the beach and go for a walk. Just the scenery ... like [that] was the most important thing that I was trying to tell you that I love about this spot so much, [it's] the scenery. Like take advantage of it sometimes. Like I don't care what anybody says, this is one of the nicest places in Newfoundland. (PV participant #7)



Figure 1. The beach

We can read the photographs then as both documenting the materiality of rural contexts, as well as providing insight into the rural discourses that guide or regulate ways of thinking, talking and feeling about place (Pini *et al.* 2010). Many of the photovoice images resemble tourist photography meant to capture something ‘authentic’ about the place – in this case its ‘natural beauty’ and the way of life of its people, their connection to the land and sea. Writing about tourist photography, Larson (2005) suggests that we must understand photography as both performative *and* performed. Tourist photography is performative in that it is a choreographed discursive practice and at the same time the photographer is a co-producer of tourist places, ‘producing rather than consuming geographies and identities’ (Larsen 2005, p. 422). Similarly, the young participants’ photographs are framed by and (re)produce shared ‘practices of speaking and silence’ that inscribe value and health and wellbeing to land- sea- and fishing-scapes. These shared practices suggest a sense of belonging that make decisions about leaving their home communities difficult. Some participants expressed a felt sense of pride at the notion of others travelling long distances at considerable costs to see and experience the land- and seascapes that are part of everyday coastal Newfoundland (see Figure 2):

PV participant #6: ... The landscape is like a big tourist attraction around here.

People come look at it. ... there’s tourists coming from places like Florida and they look at it and they pay money to come here and look at that and you look at that every day ...

Interviewer: Scenery is important to you then, eh?

PV participant #6: Absolutely. 'Cause the scenery's the biggest tourist attraction around here, basically. So, it's what matters a lot 'cause tourists is a lot of the income that the town gets, right?



Figure 2. Scenery for tourists.

At the same time, these and similar photographs represent visually a dynamic material rural context, which is marked by a shift from industries of resource extraction (i.e., the fishery) to industries of consumption (e.g., service sector) and industries of attraction (e.g., tourism), where the fishery now attracts tourists to coastal communities to consume not just the fish, but the authentic experience of the place. The value of coastal life was in part understood in terms of this contribution to the local economy.

The 'tourist gaze' (Urry 2002) proved to be integral to how the participants understood, experienced and related to their communities and these experiences of place shaped how the participants photographically represented (and did not represent) their rural communities. Thus, in many cases photovoice appeared to elicit 'positive,' for lack of a better word, representations of place (e.g. beautiful scenery), with such notions of worthiness being arrived at through their commercial exchange value (e.g. tourism), whereas with conventional research methods absences or negatives were also highlighted (e.g. 'nothing to do', 'nowhere to go,' dearth of global commodity forms). Interestingly, the photovoice method was less successful at capturing absences or those places, signs and commodity forms that the youth identified as important, but unavailable within their own communities. Photography perhaps skewed the focus to what is there in place, whereas the focus groups and interviews tended to highlight exclusions and absences. However, the photographs also helped to reveal those largely obscured, deep-seated affective connections the youth have to their communities, moving past the global imaginary that constructs rurality as 'dead'.

While relatively absent in focus group and interview discussions, the fishery emerged as a theme in the photovoice study in both content and elicitation. Of the 292 images 35 contain fisheries-related content including fish processing plants, wharves, fishing vessels, fisheries iconography and museums. When asked to comment on their inclusion, one participant responded by saying that 'fishing is a big part of around here'. Another participant explained that fishing 'symbolises everyday' in her community (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Docked fishing vessel.

Using photographs, participants constructed fisheries as a community strength, relevant to their lives, and as a symbol of something more than just jobs. This construction diverges from the narrative in the focus groups that positioned fisheries as evidence of a community in decline, belonging to the past, and not offering viable employment opportunities for young people. In this respect, if we just listened to the focus group and interview data we would get an image of communities defined almost entirely by loss and we would miss alternative stories of strength

and resiliency, stories that help shed light on the emotional dilemma faced by youth in their decisions to stay or leave home communities. Many of these communities came into being because of fishing and the photographs highlight the relationship between the ways in which place gives rise to certain kinds of work (e.g. coastal places next to waters once teeming with cod fish), and the way place-based work recursively constitutes a way of life and place-based identities. There is no denying that fisheries work organized the time and space of local people, producing a 'rhythmical and comforting quality' (Walkerdine 2010, p.102) and the photographs document the material imprint of fisheries work on place, past and present. There are photographs of wharves and vacant fish plants, as well as fisheries-related museums and murals that tell this story of their community. One reading of the photographs is that young people are documenting a way of life that no longer exists, reinforcing the narrative of decline told in the focus groups. An alternative reading is that the photographs represent shared 'practices of speaking and silence' that tie people together or 'contain' people and provide a sense of community and continuity, affectively if not economically, in a context of environmental crisis and industrial restructuring. These 'practices of speaking and silence' reproduce a story of place and work that is profoundly gendered and classed in its focus on the work and public spaces that have traditionally belonged to men (Power 2005). The ways in which space and work have been and continue to be gendered were recognized by participants in our study (e.g. 'Yeah, it's a stage. That's where a lot of the older, like the older men hang out.'). That it is young women (mostly) in our photovoice study who are telling this story may speak to the strength of the symbolism of fisheries to serve as a kind of emotional protective mechanism against disrupting forces of change. It may also reflect the strength of the rural discourse of resiliency

that regulates ways of thinking, talking and feeling (Pini *et al.* 2010) that serves some better than others.

Tellingly, the photovoice portion of the research revealed fishing-related spaces (e.g. fish plants, wharves, boats) as important places of play in rural contexts that the participants otherwise described in the focus groups and interviews as offering ‘nothing to do’ and ‘nowhere to go’. Although during one of the interviews a participant (13 year old male) talked about the importance of the fish processing plant as a place of play (‘Like myself, I usually goes up to the fish plant during the summer and jump off the top of the roof of the boats, just go swimming’ ‘cause it’s fun’), the affective community connections formed through fishing-related places were more thoroughly revealed in the photovoice portion of the research. Vacant fish-related purpose built structures were transformed and re-imagined by the youth into contemporary places of recreation and play (see Figure 4).

PV participant #3: That’s a picture of the plant. People hang out down there.

Interviewer: The fish plant?

PV participant #3: Yep, ‘cause it’s an old, closed down one.

IN: So, when you say ‘hang out,’ do youth hang out down there?

PV participant #3: Ah, a lot of kids do and stuff, especially in the winter [...] They usually just go in there and hang out, especially in the winter ‘cause like there’s no where down there for the kids to go. [...] So they usually go in there and stuff, get shelter from the cold.





Figure 4. Fish processing plant no longer in operation.

The play that occurs within these fish-related places of work -- whether operational or not -- serve as important rem(a)inders of the fishing legacy of coastal Newfoundland communities and further molds the ‘structure of feeling’ (Williams 1977) the rural youth have about their communities. These spaces presented somewhere for youth to ‘hang out’ while seeking shelter from inclement conditions as well as refuge from what the youth characterized as the surveilling gaze of adults (see Norman *et al.* 2011). In this way, photovoice provided nuanced, contextually relevant information that was not otherwise conjured from conventional research methods,

revealing both the importance of fishing cultures to the participants sense of place and, importantly, shedding light on the resourcefulness of these youth in carving out spaces of recreation, play and social vitality in rural contexts that were dominantly constructed as offering 'nothing to do'.

## **Conclusion**

Our photovoice study with young people in Newfoundland coastal communities introduced different, more positive ways of representing and talking about their communities than those documented using focus group and interview methods. In contrast to the dominant narrative of rural decline in the focus groups, the photovoice data illustrate the centrality of the discourse of the rural idyll and the symbolism and materiality of fisheries communities to young people's understandings and ways of talking about place. Their photographs of dilapidated wharves and abandoned fish processing plants were accompanied by conversations about how through play they transformed these 'dead' spaces into spaces of social vitality and affect in a context that is typically constructed as offering 'nothing to do.' Through their photographs of land- and sea-scapes, the young participants invoked the rural idyll trope, focusing on the beauty of the local scenery and in so doing they distinguished their communities from other places and offered an account of rural life as emotionally containing (Walkerdine 2010). The different narrative introduced in the photovoice study is particularly striking given that the participants were recruited from the focus groups, suggesting that photovoice may produce a different kind of data from those produced using conventional methods and conjure a different kind of emotional memory or response.

In contrast to mainstream photovoice studies, we did not teach our participants to ‘see’ their communities. It makes sense then to consider how and why individual participants ended up with very similar sets of photographs, and in fact talked about their photographs in similarly affective ways. In doing so, we find it useful to combine both constructionist and realist approaches. It is our view that the photographs and corresponding verbal elicitation represent shared ‘practices of speaking and silence’ that tie people together and provide a sense of community and continuity. These affective practices cannot be separated from the material context of industrial restructuring and environmental crisis taking place in fisheries communities in Newfoundland, and in particular the shift from industries of extraction to industries of attraction, and the way in which this shift (re)inscribes value onto fisheries. Viewed this way, the photographs and the elicitation help the researcher ‘see’ the materiality of rural contexts and provide insight into the rural discourses that guide or regulate (Pini *et al.* 2010) ways of thinking, talking and feeling about place, and perhaps more importantly, how these intersect. It is our contention that such discourses offer a strategy to deal with, indeed to heal, the damaging impact of the near extinction of fisheries stocks by maintaining a stable sense of self and place. In making this argument, we are not suggesting that this strategy is not without costs (especially for those who do not take up the shared ways of thinking, doing and feeling). Rather, it is to highlight another story of rurality, one that may be concealed by the very methods researchers use.

## **Funding**

The Community-University Research for Recovery Alliance initiative is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada through its Community-University Research Alliance program (grant number 833-2007-1027) and by Memorial University of

Newfoundland, with additional financial and in-kind support from numerous community partners and groups. The Rural Youth subcomponent is also supported by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research [GTA92108].

## **Note**

1 The proposal for this research was approved by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy.

## **References**

Allen, L., 2008. Young people's 'agency' in sexuality research using visual methods. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 11 (6), 565-577.

Ansell, N. and L. van Blerk, 2007. Doing and belonging: Toward a more-than-representational account of young migrant identities in Lesotho and Malawi. In *Global Perspectives on Rural Childhood and Youth: Young Rural Lives*, eds. Panelli, R., S. Punch, and E. Robson, pp. 17-28. New York: Routledge.

Bolton, A., Pole, C. and Mizen, P., 2001. Picture this: researching child workers. *Sociology*, 35(2), 501-518.

Bryant, L. and Pini, B., 2011. *Gender and Rurality*. London: Routledge.

Canadian Policy Research Networks, 2009. Policy actions report: making Newfoundland and Labrador a province of choice for young people. St. John's: Canadian Policy Research Networks.

Catalani, C. and Minkler, M., 2010. Photovoice: a Review of the literature in health and public health. *Health Education and Behavior*, 37 (3), 424-51.

Convery, I., Bailey, C., Mort, M. and Baxter, J., 2005. Death in the wrong place? Emotional geographies of the UK 2001 foot and mouth disease epidemic. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 21, 99–109.

Darbyshire, P., MacDougall, C. and Schiller, W., 2005. Multiple methods in qualitative research with children: more insight or just more? *Qualitative Research*, 5(4), 417-436.

Drew, S.E., Duncan, R.E. and Sawyer, S.M., 2010. Visual storytelling: a beneficial but challenging method for health research with young people. *Qualitative Health Research*, 20(12), 1677–1688.

Guillemin, M. and Drew, S., 2010. Questions of process in participant-generated visual methodologies. *Visual Studies*, 25(2), 175-188.

Gibson-Graham, J.K., 2003. An ethics of the local. *Rethinking Marxism*, 15(1), 49-74.

Harper, D., 2002. Talking about pictures: a case for photo elicitation. *Visual Studies*, 17(1), 13-26.

Joanou, J.P., 2009. The bad and the ugly: ethical concerns in participatory photographic methods with children living and working on the streets of Lima, Peru. *Visual Studies*, 24(3), 214-223.

Kenway, J., Kraack, A. and Hickey-Moody, A., 2006. *Masculinity beyond the Metropolis*. England: Palgrave Macmillan.

Larsen, J., 2005. Families seen sightseeing: performativity of tourist photography. *Space and Culture*, 8(4), 416-434.

Leyshon, M., 2008. The betweenness of being a rural youth: inclusive and exclusive lifestyles. *Social and Cultural Geography*, 9 (1), 1-26.

Little, J., Panelli, R. and Kraack, A., 2005. Women's fear of crime: a rural perspective. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 21, 151-163.

Nairn, K. and Panelli, R., 2009. Using fiction to make meaning in research with young people in rural New Zealand. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 15 (1), 96-112.

Nairn, K., Panelli, R. and McCormack, J., 2003. Destabilizing dualisms young people's experiences of rural and urban environments. *Childhood*, 10(1), 9–42.

Ni Laoire, C., Carpena-Mendez, F., Tyrell, N., and White, A., 2011. *Childhood and migration in Europe: Portraits of mobility, identity and belonging in contemporary Ireland*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company.

Nykiforuk, C., Vallianatos, H., Nieuwendyk, L., 2011. Photovoice as a Method for Revealing Community Perceptions of the Built and Social Environment. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 10(2), 103-124.

Oliffe, J.L. and Bottorff, J.L., 2007. Further than the eye can see? Photo elicitation and research with men. *Qualitative Health Research*, 17 (6), 850-858.

Norman, M.E, Power, N and K. Dupré. 2011. Playing in the woods: youth, leisure and the performance of gender relations in rural Newfoundland. *Annals of Leisure Research*, 14 (2-3), 155-175.

Packard, J., 2008. 'I'm gonna show you what it's really like out here': The power and limitation of participatory visual methods. *Visual Studies*, 23(1), 63-77.

Panelli, R., Nairn, K. and McCormack, J., 2002. 'We make our own fun': reading the politics of youth with(in) community. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 42, 15–39.

Panelli, R., Little, J. and Kraack, A., 2004. A community issue? Rural women's feelings of safety and fear in New Zealand. *Gender, Place and Culture*, 11 (3), 445-467.

Pauwels, L., 2010. Visual sociology reframed: An analytical synthesis and discussion of visual methods in social and cultural research. *Sociological Methods and Research*, 38(4), 545-581.

Pini, B., Mayes, R. and McDonald, P., 2010. The emotional geography of a mine closure: a study of the Ravensthorpe nickel mine in Western Australia. *Social and Cultural Geography*, 11(6), 559-574.

Power, N.G. 2005. *What Do They Call a Fisherman?: Men, Gender, and Restructuring in the Newfoundland Fishery*. St. John's: ISER.

Prins, E., 2010. Participatory photography: A tool for empowerment or surveillance? *Action Research*, 8(4), 426-443.

Robson, E., Panelli, R., and Punch, S., 2007. Conclusions and future directions for studying young rural lives. In *Global Perspectives on Rural Childhood and Youth: Young Rural Lives*, eds. Panelli, R., S. Punch, and E. Robson, pp. 219-228. .New York: Routledge.

Rye, J.F., 2006. 'Rural youths' images of the rural. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 22, 409-21.



Strack, R.W., Magill, C. and McDonagh, K., 2004. Engaging youth through photovoice. *Health Promotion Practice*, 5 (1), 49-58.

Urry, J., 2002. *The Tourist Gaze*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: Sage.

Valentine, G., 1997. A safe place to grow up? Parenting perceptions of children's safety and the rural idyll. *Journal of Rural Studies*, 13, 137-148.

Walkerdine, V., 2010. Communal beingness and affect: an exploration of trauma in an ex-industrial community. *Body and Society*, 16 (1), 91-116.

Wang, C. C., Yi, W. K., Tao, Z. W., and Carovano, K., 1998. Photovoice as a participatory health promotion strategy. *Health Promotion International*, 13(1), 75-86.

Wang, C.C., 1999. Photovoice: A participatory action research strategy applied to women's health. *Journal of Women's Health*, 8(2), 185-192.

Wang, C.C. and Burris, M., 1994. Empowerment through photo novella: portraits of participation. *Health Education Quarterly*, 21,171-186.

Wang, C.C. and Burris, M., 1997. Photovoice: concept, methodology, and use for participatory needs assessment. *Health Education and Behavior*, 24, 369-387.

Wang, C.C. and Redwood-Jones, Y., 2001. Photovoice ethics: perspectives from Flint Photovoice. *Health Education and Behavior*, 28(5), 560-572.

Wang, C.C., 2006. Youth participation in photovoice as a strategy for community change. *Journal of Community Practice*, 14 (1), 147- 161.

Wang, C.C., Cash, J. and Powers, L., 2000. Who knows the streets as well as the homeless? Promoting personal and community action through photovoice. *Health Promotion Practice*, 1(1), 81-9.

Williams, R., 1977. *Marxism and Literature: Marxist Introductions Series*. London: Oxford University Press.

Wilson, N., Dasho, S., Martin, A.C., Wallerstein, N., Wang, C.C., and Minkler, M., 2007. Engaging young adolescents in social action through photovoice: the youth empowerment strategies (YES!) project. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 27 (2), 241-226.