ABSTRACT

DANIELS, MEGAN. A Picture is Worth A Thousand Negotiated Meanings: Conversations with Women Regarding Credible, Still Photographs. (Under the direction of Colleen Aalsburg Wiessner)

The purpose of this qualitative study has been to determine how and why adult women make meaning of credible, still photographs without the accompaniment of text. Still photographs that are used in the field of visual sociology are credible when they “contribute valuable evidence of how people want to be seen by others…aspects related to the real world that reflect or arbitrarily invent questions we care about,” according to University of California - Davis Professor Wagner (2004, p.1478).

Based on Freire’s theories concepts of generative themes, the conceptual framework of the study was designed from several questions based on a review of current adult education and visual sociology literature. Meaning making is a broad term and to narrow the field, I referenced adult education theorists Knowles, Lindeman, Merriam and Caffarella, Meizrow, Taylor, and Freire.

Four women, currently attending four different community colleges and living very different lives, discussed twelve black and white still photographs, shared practical perspectives based on their lived experiences, and demonstrated developmental stages bolstered by Freire’s concept of generative themes. While the professional literature tended to emphasize the importance of visual media and still photography, its impact on adult consumers in society, and the multi-faceted associations with children’s learning, none focused on how adults make meaning from credible, still photographs according to their personal experiences. In this study, the women formed stories in order to draw
parallels between their lives and the people’s lives featured in the photographs. They made the unfamiliar, familiar. Their unconscious feelings became conscious emotions, triggered by a moment represented in a photograph. Reflection brought inquiry, which in turn brought discourse. Through dialogue with the researcher, each of the four women negotiated personal meanings of the photographs according to their souls. Finally, by viewing, decoding, interpreting, and discussing the photographs the women began to make meaning of credible still photographs of midwifery and homebirth. The meaning making process that occurred within the women demonstrated the facets of Freire’s lifelong work with generative themes.
A Picture is Worth A Thousand Negotiated Meanings:
Conversations with Women Regarding Credible, Still Photographs

By
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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of North Carolina State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science

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Approved By:

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**BIOGRAPHY**

Megan Q. Daniels was born in Geneva, New York in 1975. She graduated from The Rochester Institute of Technology in 1997 with a Bachelor’s Degree in Photojournalism and then moved to Raleigh, North Carolina to work as a freelance photographer specializing in documentary, sports and portraiture. She began taking graduate courses at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and Duke University to begin her pursuit of a Master’s Degree. Finally, she entered North Carolina State University in 2003 as a full-time student to finish her studies in Adult and Community College Education with the hope of teaching photography at the community college level.

She was inspired to become a photographer when she took her first basic photography course at a community college in New York at the age of 13 and hopes to inspire students at a community college in North Carolina to consider photography as a professional career.

Currently, Megan resides in Pittsboro, North Carolina, with her husband Matthew and their two Labrador Retrievers, Spencer and Hurley. Her freelance photography clientele is always growing and she has found a passion for documenting the practice of home births and midwifery.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are too many people to thank so to avoid forgetting someone, I will simply acknowledge two people; first, this research project is for Dr. Valerie-Lee Chapman, my red-haired, fiery, passionate, caring, humorous, dedicated mentor who left this world well before her time. I will never forget that day I walked into her office for our initial meeting – I believe I called my husband immediately after we chatted and told him that I was definitely going to go as a full-time student to North Carolina State University because “…my delegated Chair has her nose pierced!”

We miss you, Valerie. Your compassion to the field of Adult Education has inspired us all more than you will ever know.

I wish to thank my husband, Matt, for supporting me these last four years. No words can explain his unconditional love, encouragement, and financial contributions as I worked to achieve this personal goal. I love you Matt, thank you for your devotion.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Images are here to stay. In the 21st Century, we are bombarded every day with visual imagery, whether we are sitting in our living rooms watching television or reading billboards while driving on the expressway. Visual images - still photographs, animated graphics, streaming video, and other media – are funneled through various media to inform and educate the public on topics like health issues, foreign cultures, Third World countries, American trends, politics, history, psychology, birth, and death. Because our societies are saturated with images adult consumers can no longer ignore them; they are constantly bombarded with information through venues like magazines, billboards, newspapers, television, pamphlets, and brochures.

But what is it about visual imagery that is so attractive to advertisers, documentary photographers, magazine editors or educators? Visual imagery educates adult societies and has for decades. Adult consumers are flooded with a constant stream of visual images and are forced to make meaning of them. Images evoke emotion and leave a lasting impression on people staying with audiences long after the initial viewing.

In the field of visual sociology, photographs are used to explain, evaluate, condemn, or praise aspects of society and they do so in order to convey a mood or stimulate a particular emotion. Through vivid colors, black and white tones, composition, and context, photographers generate information that can appeal or appall a viewer. In the field of adult education, images have a potential that is not yet fully recognized.

Without the authoritative voice of text, the viewer is free to decipher and make meaning of images daily according to his or her life-long experiences. The viewer
consumes connotative and denotative\(^1\) meanings; some photographs can be easily understood just by looking at them and others can also be altered if the viewer is unfamiliar with the culture in which the photograph or series of photographs were made.

That is the foundation of this research project. This study was needed to understand how adults make meaning of constant visual stimuli, in particular adult women. If so, how do they make meaning of credible still photographs and do these types of images evoke specific emotions resulting in a different perspective of the world? Do still photographs have the potential to be emancipatory when used in adult education? If adult learners are given the opportunity to view images in formal or informal educational settings, can they decipher meanings without accompanying text? Do images encourage viewers to construct or reconstruct meanings and influence the world with new knowledge?

Over the last few decades, leaders in the field of visual sociology have researched the impact of visual stimulation on human beings and learning; in particular, credible still photographs. These types of images add an extra dimension to adult meaning-making because of the wide-ranging interpretations, diverse metaphors, symbols, and representations they hold for viewers. Credible still photographs that are used in the field of visual sociology face challenges, according to University of California - Davis professor Wagner, in order to be considered credible. Wagner, past President of the International Visual Sociology Association and the founding image editor for *Contexts* Magazine, has researched visual imagery and adult learning. According to Wagner (2004) visual sociologists and social documentary photographers consider still

\(^{1}\) Connotative meanings are derived from receivers’ lived experiences whereas denotative meanings are literal and descriptive in nature (Sturken and Cartwright, 2001).
photographs credible when they “contribute valuable evidence of how people want to be
seen by others…aspects related to the real world that reflect or arbitrarily invent
questions we care about,” (p.1478). Wagner (2004) also stated credible images utilized as
part of social inquiry make “an effort to generate new knowledge of culture and social
life through the systematic collection and analysis of sensory evidence and other forms of
real-world data,” (p. 1479).

The Characteristics of a Credible Photograph

As a professional documentary photographer and producer of social photographs,
I felt it necessary to build from that definition of credible still photographs and elaborate
on the types of photographs that are used in visual sociology. The basic aesthetics of a
photograph are the backbone of what makes an image (or series of images) credible or
merely a recording of subject matter, remaining interpretatively or evaluatively neutral.
For purposes of this paper, the aesthetics are considered to be the content, subject matter
(people or objects in the photograph), composition, and light source (or sources) that
came together in one decisive moment, thus creating a documentation of an exact second
in time.

A few examples of such photographs in which aesthetics are not crucial to the
creation of the image would be medical X-rays, surveillance images, NASA exploration
photographs, identification photographs, and reproductions of photographs (Barrett,
1990). These types of photographs are produced to be accurately descriptive and record
subject matter; therefore, the creator(s) take painstaking measures to remain objective
when creating the image and do not worry about a specific light source(s), compositional
elements, emotional revelations, or personal expression. A specific example of this type
of photograph is an identification photograph. The photograph attempts neither to express the sitter’s personality nor to flatter the sitter’s appearance but rather to accurately describe the sitter so that someone can match the photograph to the person (Barrett, 1990).

Credible photographs, however, do the exact opposite and seek to explain how things are, attempting to offer scientific explanations and personal interpretations of the world. Subjectivity on behalf of the creator and the viewer is inevitable. They are politically engaged, usually passionate, candid moments used to move society to indignation and action (Barrett, 1990). Reflecting on the important projects and credible photographs created by such documentaries from the early 20th Century like Jacob Riis, Dorthea Lange, Hansel Mieth, Walker Evans, Margaret Bourke-White, and many others, it is apparent these photographers wanted to illustrate the world and it’s ethnic upheavals, and the positive and negative characteristics of cultural movements (Barrett, 1990; Light, 2000). In doing so, these documentaries supplied numerous, worldwide magazines, newspapers, grassroots social groups, book publishers, and many other venues with aesthetically evaluative credible photographs which communicated a story to the viewers and educated adult consumers about the world around them. Unable to ignore the images, adults made meaning of the photographs, inspiring emotion, action, reflection, and change.

Landscapes, portraiture, and still-life photographs also fall within the realm of credible photographs used for educational purposes. These images may be posed and directed on behalf of the photographer but they serve as informative, evaluative, educational records for adult consumers. Still-life photographs, for example, provide
several purposes one being observation. Educational institutions like the Smithsonian
Institute depend on photographers to record archeological discoveries that are then
presented to the public in educational broadcasts and submitted to educational magazines.
For these types of photo shoots, photographers may carefully arrange objects on a table
and within the frame, meticulously light the objects in a specific way from a specific
direction, and select cameras and lenses in order to capture a desired effect. These
photographers provide detailed two-dimensional renditions of these objects to magazines,
newspapers, or television agencies that use them to educate adult consumers.

The advertising industry is another venue that uses credible photographs for
educational and informative purposes. Agencies invest billions of dollars in landscape
photography and portraiture in order to sell products or ideas. Photographers servicing
advertisers capture landscapes, portraits of famous people and every-day citizens, or
products giving formal elegance to the simplest and most ordinary objects with careful
organization, compositional considerations, and light sources (Barrett, 1990).

Still photographs convey information; therefore they must be credible when used
in fields containing visual research. According to Wagner (2001),

Both social researchers and lay readers typically find images of culture and social
life to be more credible when they are based on extensive and detailed
observation in an appropriate array of natural settings, backed up by other data,
and presented in ways that invite analysis (p.1479).

There are differences between family snapshots, amateur, and professional photographs
and the distinctions are important. Pink (2001) clarified the difference between such
images: “…each implies different types of knowledge and intentionality for the
photographer…some criticisms of the value of photography have suggested that it is…”mere vacation photography…or less relevant as ‘representation’ than images produced by professionals” (p. 28). If still photographs are to be taken seriously as contributions to visual research, the photographs must be credible or risk being considered merely “vacation photography” and tossed aside.

Conceptual Framework of the Research

The primary purpose of this qualitative study was to determine whether four adult female community college students, varying in age, cultural background, geographical location, and life-long experiences, could make meaning of a series of twelve credible black and white photographs without accompanying, authoritative text. Two areas that are addressed in this project are 1) adult meaning-making in the field of adult education and 2) the impact of credible still photography within the field of adult education.

Meaning-making is a very broad term with more than one applicable definition and in order to arrive at a workable definition of meaning-making for this research project, I turned to Freire’s (1973) theories of generative themes in order to understand how adults make meaning of the world, Knowles’ (1973) concepts of andragogy, which are rooted in Lindeman’s early 20th century systematic theories about adult learning, Merriam and Caffarella’s (1999) text outlining learning in adulthood, Meizrow’s (1991) concepts regarding meaning-making and finally, Taylor’s (2002) implications associated with the use of still photography in research.

Meaning-making: A Broad Term Refined

For this component of the study, I turned to Freire and his work with Brazilian peasants. Freire has (1973) creatively implemented adult learning techniques in Brazil
through reflective action, critical theorizing, and hand-drawn representations of social realities to enhance the literacy standards, allowing oppressed Brazilian participants to “…codify[ing] total reality into symbols which can generate critical consciousness and empower them to alter their relations with nature and social forces”, (p. ix). This central message was critical to my research; Freire’s research with illiterate adults directly related to how adults were able to make meaning of visual images.

Although Freire’s (1970) studies involved hand-drawn pictures, posters, newspapers, recorded interviews, slides, and other forms of visual stimuli representing societal situations, the premise was similar and applicable to my research. The crux of his work was based on the notion that the world is constructed by human beings through dialogue, by being receptive to the validity of old explanations and new ones, and allowing adult learners to identify generative themes. According to Freire (1970), generative themes, or codes, in the broadest and deepest sense, occur in a complex universe based on a Marxist or Gramscian notion of dialectics. The themes are never isolated, independent, disconnected, or static; they are always interacting dialectically with their opposites. The process is developmental, one that the learner can experience under varying circumstances; generative themes can be located in concentric circles, moving from the general to the particular (p.86-87).

Lindeman laid the foundation for a systematic theory about adult learning within the artistic stream of inquiry\(^2\) in 1926 (Knowles, 1973). Lindeman’s work was crucial to the field of adult learning because he was one of the first researchers to point out

\(^2\) Two streams of inquiry are discernible beginning with the founding of the American Association for Adult Education in 1926. One stream is called the artistic stream; the other is the scientific stream. The scientific stream will not be discussed here. The artistic stream, which seeks to discover new knowledge through intuition and the analysis of experience, was concerned with how adults learn.
“…adults possess[ed] interests and abilities that were different from those of children…the resource of highest value in adult education is the learner’s experience. If education is life, than life is also education” (p.28). From Lindeman’s work came new ways of thinking about adult learning, in particular, the discovery of new knowledge through intuition and the analysis of experience that was concerned with how adults learn. Lindeman’s research was grounded in the fact that adults make meaning of their daily activities. Simple needs and interests act as motivational factors for learning; everyday experiences entice adults to make meaning of the world around them and incorporating these experiences into the realm of adult education is valuable. With this foundation, theorists like Knowles developed these novel ideas further.

Knowles, a prominent adult educator in the 1960s who has studied, researched, and written on the subject of adult education, was exposed to the term “andragogy” while attending a summer workshop at Boston University. Andragogy, according to Knowles means “the art and science of helping adults learn” and he used this concept to devise the andragogical model (1973). Knowles’ model is based on several assumptions: 1) the need to know, 2) the learners’ self-concept, 3) the role of the learners’ experience, 4) the readiness to learn, 5) orientation to learning, and 6) motivation (1973, p.55-61). For this research project it is the third assumption - “the role of the learners’ experience” - that is of particular interest and will be discussed further in the literature review.

Like Knowles, Merriam and Caffarella’s theories on meaning-making were equally important. These two theorists are interested in how adults made meaning of experiences and applied them to future experiences. Merriam and Caffarella discovered adults must be willing to “…engage themselves cognitively, affectively, and even
physically with the experience and be given time and support...in doing so, space is created whereby the self can be defined or restructured” (p. 108-109) As I began compiling the literature for this research project, I found Merriam and Caffarella’s work explained the connection between meaning-making, dialogue, and reflection that correlated well with my research questions pertaining to still photography and its contribution to meaning-making in adulthood.

Meizrow is well known for his work with transformational adult learning; his theory about adults’ ways of seeing and understanding was important to this research. According to Meizrow (1991), adults “…discover a need to acquire new perspectives in order to gain a more complete understanding of changing events and a higher degree of control over their lives” (p.3). Meizrow’s (1991) theory builds on Freire’s work and useful to my study (1973): “…in order to be free we must be able to ‘name’ our reality, to know it divorced from what has been taken for granted, to speak with our own voice” (p.3).

Taylor (2002) researched the concept of meaning-making when he conducted an exploratory study on how still photography can elicit often hidden beliefs about teaching (p.123). Taylor claims that because beliefs can occur on a tacit or subconscious level, participants in research studies might experience difficulty trying to articulate personal beliefs, thought processes, and classroom techniques. Still photography offers the participant an outlet for expressing these views. Although his study was beneficial to the field of adult education and useful for my research project, he did not provide a concrete definition for the term meaning-making.
Finally, the work of Lutz and Collins, two respected visual sociologists, guided me in formulating some research questions for this project. In Lutz and Collins’ (1993) research on how audiences “read” National Geographic Magazine, commentators Debord (1983) and Ewen (1988), state, “…the image is central to contemporary society, that photograph and film have taken over from written texts and the role of primary educator” (p.4). From this statement questions for my research evolved: (1) could the women discover evolutionary chronicles entrenched in the photographs, (2) did they respond to the photographic elements themselves, (3) were they able to make meaning of the photographs without the authoritative voice of the caption, and (4) how did the participants respond once the photographic series was explained?

**Research Limitations**

As with any research project, there were limitations. (1) The data was limited by the small sample size, (2) the short-term nature of the study did not allow for follow-up questions, interviews, and dialogue, (3) the participants were purposefully nominated, (4) and finally, all of the women selected happened to be Anglo-American so the study lacked ethnic diversity.

What was not expected was the richness of the dialogue that ensued as each woman viewed, interpreted, decoded, and made meaning of the photographs. Pulling from Freire’s matrix of critical awareness, the dialogue that occurred between the researcher and the participant was horizontal in nature, based on trust, empathy, and a joint search for meaning. Through horizontal one-on-one dialogue with the researcher, they were able to communicate profound emotions, personal desires, political resentment, expectations for the future of midwifery, and enter new levels of critical consciousness.
The Organizational Structure of the Project

This paper is divided into six chapters with Chapter One as the Introductory Chapter. Chapter Two provides a summary of the professional literature on the evolution of credible, still photographs, visual sociology, and a synthesis of the six adult education theorists referenced for this research project.

Chapter Three describes the methodology used in this study while Chapter Four presents the findings that emerged during the data coding process. Chapter Five discusses the findings, connecting the women’s experiences with the literature. The conclusion and suggestions for future research are addressed in Chapter Six.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

In this literature review, I present adult learning theories related to adult meaning-making and visual sociology. I begin with adult meaning-making, presenting and synthesizing five adult education theorists’ perspectives. I end with a synopsis of the visual sociology literature.

The Adult Learning Theorists

As an adult learning theorist working in Brazil in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Freire’s (1973) basic components of literacy were extensive. The majority of his life was spent researching the political and economic constituents of oppressed Brazilian societies. As an adult educator, he knew the rigid authoritarian state was in control and did not allow adults to think critically for themselves or participate in larger spheres of social relationships (p.19).

Freire’s (1970) early writings focused on generative themes. The use of generative themes in adult learning was complex, requiring Freire and his researchers to conduct the adult education study in stages. The themes had to be identified first and then coded to represent situations that were familiar to the individuals participating in the research. The codes were presented back to the participants whose thematics were being examined in easily recognizable situations; thus allowing them to identifying their personal relation to the situations (p. 94-100). He used familiar situations to enable participants to compare and identify with their own daily lives (as a dialectical process) yet Freire required that the codes remain simple (Barndt, 1998). The prolonged study took years but over a period of time and constant dialogue, Freire’s (1973, p.9)
participants “…learn[ed] how to read in relation to the wakening of their consciousness…perceive[ed] the old themes anew and grasp[ed] the tasks of their time….” The elements of his literacy projects were complex and not all applicable to this research.

For purposes of this project, I will focus on four elements related to Freire’s theories of meaning-making that evolved out of his life-long work with adult learners: 1) visual images which stimulate people “submerged” in the culture of silence to “emerge” as conscious makers of the own “culture”, 2) generative themes that honor students’ multiple perspectives on a subject, resulting from his or her social situation, 3) inviting students to name their own connection to the theme, and 4) the decodification by a “culture circle” under the self-effacing stimulus of a coordinator who is not a “teacher” in the conventional sense but who has become an educator-educatee in dialogue (p. viii).

Freire (1968) stressed the importance of dialogue throughout his research, focusing on critical thinking, communication, and “true” education. “Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication and without communication there can be no true education,” (p. 81). Freire, according to Barndt (1998), proposed that the adult educator participating in dialogical education should avoid non-communicative “deposits” through lecture and instead, “represent that [sic] universe to the people for whom first received it and ‘represent’ it not as a lecture, but as a problem,” (p.63).

Freire’s theory of generative themes reinforced this research project. Just as Freire had conducted research with oppressed Brazilian peasants, I was curious if adults could make meaning of a series of still photographs on the culture of midwifery. Although
Freire’s work was dangerous, he made his participants feel safe; therefore, the learners discoursed with the researcher after viewing a still photograph. They could verbally respond or remain silent; personal stories were told, comments about the photograph occurred. The learners were invited to verbally evaluate every aspect of the visual stimuli as well as the experience of viewing it. It is this dialogue where the adult viewers begin to think critically about a still photograph, in relation to Freire (1968), true education transpires.

In Freire’s work, the adult viewers defined and redefined visual stimuli according to their situation in the world and made meaning by communicating their thoughts in dialogue format. Therefore, human beings can partake in the construction and reconstruction of the world according to how they see it, allowing each of them the opportunity to influence the society in which they live.

In 1926, Lindeman published *The Meaning of Adult Education* and provided the field of adult education with innovative concepts. Lindeman’s statement regarding the significance of adult’s personal experiences related to this research project: “adult education is a process through which learners become aware of significant experience. Recognition of significance leads to evaluation. Meanings accompany experience when we know what is happening and what importance the event includes for our personalities,” (in Knowles, 1973, p.30). Lindeman’s work promoted new ways of thinking about adult learning, in particular, the discovery of new knowledge through intuition and the analysis of experience that was concerned with *how* adults learn. In his text, Knowles (1973) states that Lindeman’s research was grounded in the fact that adults make meaning of their daily situations, their professional lives, their family and
community life, their recreational activities and so forth. Because adults have a need to be self-directing these daily activities promote adult learning (p. 29). Simple needs and interests act as motivational factors for learning; everyday experiences entice adults to make meaning of the world around them and incorporating these experiences into the realm of adult education is more valuable than memorizing textbooks or listening to lectures. Lindeman was also one of the first to highlight the importance of group discussion.

Following Lindeman’s work in the field of adult education was Knowles’. Working from Lindeman’s theory, Knowles added to the field by integrating his adult learning theory into common practice (Knowles, 1973). Originally, Knowles (1973) organized his ideas around the notion that adults learn best in comfortable, flexible, informal, non-threatening environments (p.52). While attending a summer workshop at Boston University a Yugoslavian educator exposed Knowles to the term “andragogy” and Knowles found it to be an adequate concept for his personal life’s work that spanned three decades.

In his andragogical model Knowles (1973) emphasizes the importance of the learners’ experience. The concept states:

It [experience] has to do with the learners’ self-identity. Young children derive their self-identity largely from external definers…their parents, brothers, sister, and extended families…as they mature, they increasingly define themselves in terms of the experiences they have had. To children, experience is something that happens to them; to adults, their experience is *who they are* (p. 58).
Like Lindeman, Knowles (1973) grounded his work in the idea that adults have unique learning characteristics based on their learning experiences. His ideas are organized around the idea that adults learn best in informal, non-threatening, comfortable environments. Unlike children, adults make meaning from life experiences and have a need to be self-directed (p.53). As adults age, they begin to question why they need to know something and want to understand the benefits they will gain from learning before investing the energy in the learning process. By the simple fact that an adult has lived longer than a child, he or she has a greater breadth and quality of knowledge. Adults accumulate more experiences as time passes and each adult differs in terms of experiences guided by his or her culture, childhood rearing, needs, personal goals, motivational tactics, and learning styles; over time, learners’ personal identities are defined according to their experiences (p. 58). This concept leads me to the work of Merriam and Caffarella.

Merriam and Caffarella (1999) discussed meaning-making throughout their text as they examined how adults learn from life experiences. In taking on the challenge of learning and meaning-making, adults must be willing to “engage themselves cognitively, affectively, and even physically with the experience and be given time and support…in doing so, space is created whereby the self can be defined or restructured” (p. 108-109). This type of reflection is crucial to the meaning-making process even if meaning-making goes unnoticed at first and the importance of the experience is not recognized until the reflection process. Merriam and Caffarella referenced the work Knowles, Lindeman, and others in their research. In synthesizing their work, Merriam and Caffarella view meaning-making as a series of transitions, some of the transitions may be anticipated and
others unanticipated but adults deal with every transition as they encounter an experience. The transitions may be precipitate by a single event or non-event and lead to growth but decline is also a possible outcome (p.105). Merriam and Caffarella frequently referenced Meizrow in their work; therefore I will discuss the importance of his work next.

Various dimensions of meaning-making were discovered in the adult education literature in areas where the theorist’s life work focused on perspectives different from predominant approaches to adult education; Meizrow is one such example. Meizrow’s work in the area of transformational learning was pioneering and his thoughts on meaning-making correlated to this project. Like Freire, Lindeman, Knowles, and Merriam and Caffarella, Meizrow (1968) considered the process of meaning-making to be an interactive process, “Meaning is an interpretation and to make meaning is to construe or interpret experience – in other words, to give it coherence,” (p.4).

Meizrow’s premise (1991) is bolstered by the adult learner’s capability to speak with “one’s own voice…[when] negotiating meanings, purposes, and values critically, reflectively, and rationally…”, (p.3). This premise was also a valuable building block for this research project. Meizrow claimed that adults must learn to question assumptions reflect on experiences; reflection is crucial to the transformational process of learning. Because Meizrow’s work is grounded in the notion that adults make meaning from reflection, he emphasizes the importance of reflecting critically on one’s thoughts, particularly those occurring cognitive processes that contemporary adult meaning-making occurs. It was Meizrow’s cognitive facet that was most useful to this research project.

The cognitive elements of Meizrow’s work raised my curiosity and lead me to review an adult educator that has researched the impact still photography can have on
participant during the interview process. That took me to Taylor’s (2002) work with still photography, how imagery dredges the conscious and subconscious (p. 124), and meaning-making. Similar to Meizrow, Taylor investigated two specific methodologies of using still photography in research; one is applicable to this project.

Taylor’s article provided two in-depth explanations between auto-photography and photo-elicitation. Auto-photography, according to Ziller (1990, p. 124; in Taylor, 2002) gives the “participant control of the camera and is responsible for taking photographs. This approach permits the others to view the world from the view of the observed persons. Photo-elicitation, on the other hand, is a technique that involves using still photographs to stimulate the interview process (Harper, 1994, in Taylor, 2002). Photo-elicitation can trigger emotional occurrences in participants because still photographs, according to Taylor (2002), “dredge the consciousness and subconsciousness [sic] of the informant and in an exploratory fashion reveals significance triggered by the photographic subject matter” (p.127). It was this second methodology, photo-elicitation that interested me.

In reviewing these theorists’ work, I found common themes: meaning-making and adult education are understood to be rooted in communication; it is dialogue that allows adults to make meaning of the societies around them and partake in on-going cultural negotiations of the world. Reflection is a component of contemporary adult education and necessary for understanding meanings or confronting power. Through discourse, adults are given the opportunity to apply life-changing experiences to the situation and discover new perspectives in order to gain a more complete understanding of their role in society.

The Value of Visual Imagery
In this next section, I will look through the lens of adult meaning-making and its relationship to visual imagery.

Visual imagery has saturated societies worldwide but because micro-cultures exist within each society, each image carries a multitude of connotations, denotations, expressions, power structures, semiotics, and values depending upon the culture, social roles, economic status, and prior learning experiences of the viewer. We are constantly “looking” at the world we inhabit, making or attempting to make, meaning of the influx of visual stimulation that has permeated our street corners, our televisions, our magazines, and our personal space – our culture in all its complex detail.

Over the last two centuries, Western culture has come to be dominated by visual rather than oral or textural media (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). Images carry significant content and prominent media such as computers, television, and newspapers depend on them to bolster other facets of sensory stimulation such as auditory communication or printed text. According to visual sociologists Sturken and Cartwright, 

Through looking, we negotiate social relationships and meanings. Looking is a practice much like speaking, writing, or signing. Looking involves learning to interpret and like other practices, looking involves relationships of power…there are both conscious and unconscious levels of looking (p.10).

The notion that images generate myriad meanings is not a new concept. Producers create images with a dominant, preferred meaning in mind; yet the images may generate dissimilar meanings depending upon the viewer interpreting them. When a viewer looks at an image, there are complex social relationship filters that the images must pass
through the instant the image is viewed. This process involves two elements: (1) how viewers interpret or experience the image and (2) the context in which the image is seen.

For this literature review, the resources were synthesized categorically and a heading was delegated to each category. First, I begin with an historical overview of photography and social research. Second, I outline the applications of still photography in the social sciences; in the third category I link visual symbolism with emotional responses. The fourth category describes the power dynamics and negotiated meanings within images that can have an impact on the Self, society, and adult consumers. And the final category delves into the absence of andragogical meaning-making in relation to still photography.

Still Photography and Social Science Research: Historical Overview

Historical analyses, especially those concerned with deconstructing the historical sociopolitical relations of photographs, have made important contributions to historical perceptions within anthropology and sociology (Geary, 1988; Corbey, 1989; Theye, 1989; Edwards 1992). With the invention of photography in 1837 by Louis Daguerre (Rosenblum, 1989) and its infiltration into United States societies, viewers’ concepts of sciences, philosophies, and theories changed dramatically. The Daguerreotype as it was so named by its founder, Daguerre, provided the world with a relatively inexpensive, mobile form of communicating information visually. As photography evolved, the camera became a tool for clarifying and modifying human understanding; people were no longer forced to rely on printed text or auditory communication to obtain information and they were being given the opportunity to see and interpret information in the form of a single, black and white, two-dimensional image. As the nineteenth century ended and the
twentieth century dawned, images became integral for disseminating messages in many areas, including scientific professions, evidence-gathering, and social documentation (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001).

Photography exploded through the mid of the 19th Century and various styles within the field began to flourish. For example, portraiture became popular in America around 1839 when itinerant daguerreotypists charged little enough – from 25 cents to one dollar – to enable a broad sector of the populace to afford a portrait (Rosenblum, 1989). Medical photography entered the psychiatry field in 1856 when it was used for diagnoses, treatments, and administrative identification of patients (Rosenblum, 1989).

However, for purposes of this research, the particular style of photography of interest is social documentation. With the invention of the camera and growing interest in documenting society, men and women used these newfound techniques to record the world. Photojournalists, as they were being called, began to create significant visual accounts of society which then allowed audiences to re-construct schematic reality and form concepts that changed social thinking dramatically (Collier & Collier, 1992). The photographs the photojournalists created could be considered an early form of adult education. Unbeknownst at the time, documentary photographers began educating adult consumers on topics like the World Wars, the Depression, child labor occurring in factories, and other industrial settings, through magazines and newspapers. It was well known in the photographic community that hundreds of dedicated photojournalists worked hard to reveal all facets of society; a few good examples of these photojournalists are Matthew Brady, Margaret Bourke White, Jacob Riis, and Lewis Hine (Rosenblum, 1989).
Matthew Brady, commissioned by Abraham Lincoln, was among the first to photograph war. He revealed fallen bodies, burnt wreckage of buildings, the faces of the maimed, and the devastating effects of war, not just the preparatory events leading up to war (Collier & Collier, 1992). Jacob Riis, a police reporter in New York City, used photography to present slum conditions in homes and schools. These early recordings of urban life helped establish the first building codes and apartment regulations (Collier & Collier, 1992). Margaret Bourke White and Dorothea Lange created iconic images exposing the catastrophic conditions of the Great Depression for the Farm Security Administration (Rosenblum, 1989), while sociological photographer Lewis Hine recorded the entry of immigrants through Ellis Island, paying particular attention to preserving the original look of Europeans before acculturation into American life (Rosenblum, 1989). Hine also photographed children, exposing factory owners by revealing the long, grueling hours and unhealthy conditions children were enduring in factories. His images were influential in passing the first child labor laws (Newhall 1949; Collier & Collier, 1992, Rosenblum, 1989).

Paralleling those urban studies was the work of Edward S. Curtis. An active photographer and amateur descriptive ethnologist, Curtis recorded history with extensive coverage of American Indian culture, recording native life from the Arctic to the Southwest (Rosenblum, 1999; Collier & Collier, 1992).

As the 20\textsuperscript{th} century progressed, researchers within the fields of anthropology and sociology began to share the commonality of the camera, a tool which allowed “us” to see “them.”
Anthropology, according to Banks (in Prosser, 1998), is an exercise in cross-cultural translation and interpretation that seeks to understand other cultural thought and action in its own terms before going on to render these in terms accessible to a (largely) Euro-American audience… if anthropology takes long-term participant observation and local language proficiency as axiomatic prerequisites for ethnographic investigation, then visual studies must engage with this if they wish to be taken seriously (p.11).

Photography appeared in the two fields of anthropology and sociology for several different reasons.

First, it was used as a recording device because the camera’s machinery allowed researchers to review moments captured in the field, the notebooks were replaced by film; and the reliability of film allowed for comparable observations – the first exposure being just as detailed as the last (Collier & Collier, 1992). The camera could accurately record the world exactly as it was happening, unlike the process of writing descriptive information in a notebook. When a researcher recorded a scene on paper as it was happening, it required the human body to convert visual stimuli into words. That process, although almost instantaneous, required several steps: the initial sensory stimulation, the process of meaning-making, a neurological translation, personal interpretation of the scene, and the physical component of writing the word. The camera and film skipped those steps and recorded a scene as it was unfolding.

Second, photographs became “visual documents” of both social behaviors and material culture which were verified through conventional concepts of culture and realism (Edwards, 1997). The traditional view has been that the photographic methods of
early anthropologists were constrained by the theoretical paradigms that they adhered to and by the power relations of 19th century colonialism and 20th century modernism. There is evidence to support the view that in particular cases images were constructed to fit a particular scientific paradigm or interpretative agenda (Banks & Morphy, 1997). In the early to mid 1940’s, two well-known researchers, Gregory Bateson & Margaret Mead, completed notable social visual research in another culture, the results of which were published in *Balinese Character* (Collier & Collier, 1992; Rosenblum, 1989). Following this work, Mead continued to use photography to explore the concerns of child development, and Bateson focused on nonverbal communication (Ruesch & Kees 1956, as quoted in Collier & Collier 1992; Rosenblum, 1989).

In the mid-1970s, professional photographer and amateur anthropologist Paul Byer combined his skills and worked toward a clearer understanding of photography as a three-way process of communication involving photographer, subject, and the viewer, each in an active and expandable role (Mead, 1963; Byers & Byers, 1972, as quoted in Collier & Collier, 1992). Throughout the last three decades, several other social researchers and fieldworkers have followed suit, experimenting in film, video, and digital imaging, drawing, painting, sculpting, and numerous other media as they sought to uncover and learn from multifaceted cultures that exist in humanity.

*Applications of Still Photography in the Social Sciences*

Still photography, when used in social science research, can be a vital tool for capturing abstract, visual phenomena embedded within cultures. Credible images can provide researchers insight into complex, theoretical data that may not have otherwise been comprehensible. Images, regardless of contexts in which they are viewed, can be
aesthetically composed visual aids that embody people, places, or objects in a non-
textual, non-audible format.

The literature applicable to this category emphasized various uses of still
photography in ethnographies, documentaries, and scientific investigations. Ethnography
and documentary photography as means of visual data gathering were prevalent topics
and therefore will be interconnected with this research more so than scientific
investigative work. This is not to say they are not as important – they most certainly are –
but the aspect of using scientific photographs in research surely merits a separate paper.
The literature pertaining to scientific investigations focused on quantitative research and
this particular project is qualitative in nature therefore, I did not include it in this review.

Although there were several resources that fell into this category, the research of
(2001) was of particular interest to me. The underlying theme of these researchers was
twofold: first, they all contained theses regarding the relationship of theory to practice
that encompassed use of images in research and second, the crucial role that visual
imagery plays in practices of representation, interpretation of cultural lifestyles, and
comprehension of social relations and individual experiences.

For example, Pink (1999), Prosser and Schwartz (1998), and Pauwels (2000),
focused on how visual ethnographers and photographers utilize photographs as means of
decoding, exploring, and refining established relationships, traditions, paradigms, and
heritage of the culture or society they were interested in. They also stressed that
photographs are arbitrary and subjective, depending on who is doing the looking.
Bolton, Mizen and Pole (2001) discussed how photographs “…act as more than mere illustrations of sociological endeavor…it offers the sociologist an opportunity to gain not just more but different insights into social phenomena” (p.502). Their claimed that still photographs provide sociological and anthropological researchers with data incomparable to aural or written material. To bolster their argument, Bolton, Mizen, and Pole provide research about metaphorical images of well-known social photographers, discussing composition and aesthetics, which revealed hardships of historical events like the Great Depression and homeless men on the move in the United States in the 1930s.

Ball’s chapter (1998) and Becker’s article (1995) outlined similar theories while they integrated the relationships between still photographs and the actual methodologies used to gather and analyze the data.

Drucker (2003) concentrated on how visual imagery of various media establishes cultural identity and authority especially when she discussed assessment or “looking” phase, which takes place when someone views an image. She stressed “heightened awareness of the need for visual fluency, including critical skills…visuality is a primary mode of understanding, but also of our production as social and cultural beings” (Banks & Morphy, 1997).

A photo-elicitation process involving school children was the prominent research query of Clark-Ibanez (2004). Similar in ethnographic theory to the other themes that appeared in this category, photo-elicitation, (also known as photo interviewing) is a qualitative methodology that introduces photographs into the interview context which can then be used as a tool to expand on questions (Clark-Ibanez, 2004; see also Buchanan, 2001; Pink, 2001). Clark-Ibanez focused on the pedagogical aspect of this process by
interviewing school-age children but it lacked an andragogical component and
contributed to my research question.

*Visual Symbolism and Emotional Response*

Imagery, in particular still photographs, is crammed with heavy semiotic
meanings left to individual viewer interpretation. It is also laden with various meanings:
those intended by the producer, the portrayed meaning, and the way the audience actually
experiences the meaning. According to Sturken and Cartwright (2001), semiotics is a “
theory of signs…concerned with the ways in which things (words, images, and objects)
are vehicles for meaning. Semiotics is a tool for analyzing the signs of a particular culture
and how meaning is produced within a particular cultural context” (p.366).

Images can trigger intellectual and emotional responses where the viewer
transforms the static image into an intellectual or emotional experience (Zijlmans, 2002;
Buchanan, 2001). Every characteristic of a still photograph is significant. For example,
the size, color (or lack of color), light source, composition and context in which it is
viewed, physical relationship to other images, and so forth, influence the intended
meanings, portrayed meanings, and the experienced meanings. Producers of images, such
as photographers, create them with a preferred meaning in mind and strive to ensure that
that meaning is relayed to the audience through carefully selected contexts or media.
Sturken and Cartwright (2001) provided this statement regarding the premise behind
intended and experienced meanings:

> Audiences often see an image differently from how it is intended either because
> they bring experiences and associations to a particular image that were not
anticipated by its producer or because the meanings they derive are informed by
the context in which an image is seen (p.46).

Still photographs have infinite ways of being interpreted, regardless of the producer’s
intentions, and much of that depends upon the observer. That is not to say that the
observer ineffectively reads an image; rather the observer has a realm of possibilities in
which to make meaning of the image.

Images posit different ways of expressing culture visually, incorporating the
metaphorical, allegorical, and expressive (Edwards, in Banks & Morphy, 1997). So
compound in subjective renderings, for which both producer and viewer are responsible,
cultural images contain sociopolitical ambiguities left to be discovered by the audience. It
is at that point when the audience is without textual guidance that one’s socio-economic
status, cultural background, and prior life experiences formulate the observer’s depiction
of an image. Within the realm of social sciences, a photograph should extend factual
information so as to unveil the complexities of a society instead of defining one
(Edwards, in Banks & Morphy, 1997); no one photographic representation of a society or
culture is authoritative, for each producer and audience brings their own sociopolitical
accounts of humanity to the image(s).

The most important value in an image is the meaning that the creator is attempting
to convey. However, many audience members will not read the image the way it was
intended because of the personal interpretations they bring to the viewing process (Lantz,
1995). Each object or person in a photograph is “given meaning” by the particular culture
and society in which the viewer exists. Western culture photographers have
communicated various messages (whether those were symbolic depended upon the
photographer) to audiences which, over time and in some cases, molded societal viewpoints about the objects or people in the photographs.

Symbolism has been a crucial component of still photographs since published documentary photography made its debut in the 1850s (Rosenblum, 1989). Lewis Hine produced a well-known series of photographs that employed heavy symbolism as he began recording notable sociological movements in the United States in the early 20th century (Rosenblum, 1989). He is celebrated for a series he did for the National Child Labor Committee from 1907-1917 on children working in mines, mills, canneries, fields, and on the streets (Rosenblum, 1989). At the time, it was common to send young children to work in dangerous, hazardous places. Parents depended on their wages; for employers, they were cheap labor, physically smaller than adults (for purposes of getting into small spaces where adults could not), and usually did not have full-time schooling obligations. Because of the well-known use of symbolism in the photographic composition and aesthetics, viewers formed unyielding opinions as they experienced his work. Hine’s photographs became incontrovertible evidence (both material and symbolic) that was used in reform campaigns that resulted in notable amendments of child labor laws (Rosenblum, 1989).

Shock photography, a topic worthy of a separate research study, utilizes facets of symbolism and the ubiquity of imagery to inform viewers, much like documentary photography did in the early late 19th and early 20th centuries. Although not the primary topic of this literature review, but worth mentioning, shock photography was frequently noted in the course of this literature review.
To understand shock photography, one must delve into advertising campaigns and public service messages (Barndt, 1997; Goldberg, 1992; Sontag, 2003). These publications use still photographs as arsenal according to Dahl, Frankenberger, and Manchanda (2003), “to gain attention, encourage cognitive processing, and have an immediate impact on behavior, e.g., drinking and driving, or condom usage” (p. 268). Shock photography is used to inform the public and present material that encourages meaning-making similar to that of still photographs used in educational, symbolic, or social education (Goldberg, 1992). Unlike most credible, educational, still photographs, shocking advertising images breach the rules that societal groups define as acceptable to “get noticed” or “get people’s attention” (Baron & Byrne, 1977; Vagnoni, 1999; Dahl, Frankenberger, & Manchanda, 2003). The first tactic that many campaign designers use is to incorporate disgusting images, sexual references, or religious taboos (as well as many other textual forms to verbally shock) into their ads in order to get into viewers’ collective memory (Goldberg, 1992; Dahl, Frankenberger, & Manchanda, 2003).

Secondly, a popular strategy is to identify and order logic and metaphoric relations between existing concepts in order to clarify the premise of the ad (Barndt, 1997).

This type of imagery could be considered educational in nature but for purposes of this research project, and the necessity to separate shock photography from other types of still photographs in the social sciences realm, will not be discussed further.

*Power Dynamics and Negotiated Meanings: The Impact of Images on the Self and Society*

The power of imagery to affect the subconscious and conscious mind is not a new theory to the social sciences but there is always new terrain to be explored. Rice (2004),
Becker (1986), Kress (2003), and Chaplin (1994) were pioneers in writing on the subject of how initial perception and visual stimuli – composition, aesthetics, materials, context, and prior personal life experiences – emphasize the centrality of power relations and identities. Yet the initial perception of content does not stand alone. Following the initial observation, the connotative and denotative meaning-making process within the individual begins (Chaplin, 1994; Morley & Robins; 1995; and Rice, 2004).

An important finding among these resources was the multidimensional, esoteric paradigm of power dynamics in still photographs. Feminism theory and practice, coalesced with postmodernism, social conflicts, visual experience, and cultural representation, governed the remaining literature. This portion of the literature was very dense and because of the cross sectioning that occurred during literature categorization, many aspects of visual representation, cultural aspects, and meaning-making correlating to education were intertwined in this section. Due to the complexity of these topics and their connection to the research question, it is not by mistake that they have been amalgamated and presented as the final category.

Sturken and Cartwright have been cited frequently thus far but it was necessary to include their incorporation of French Marxist theorist Louis Althusser’s concept of ideology and the link to visual studies (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). Althusser’s theory of ideology, when connected to visual images, represented the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence:

It is the case that without ideology we would have no means of thinking about or experiencing that thing we call ‘reality’. Ideology is the necessary representational means through which we come to experience and make sense of
reality...[ideology] is a set of beliefs, shaped through the *unconscious*, in relationship to other social forces, such as the economy and institutions (p. 52).

When related to this research, Althusser’s theory affirmed the existence of power situated in still photographs. The “unconscious” power is first *created* by the maker of the image and *ascertained* by the viewer, which may (or may not) summon the viewer’s personal beliefs during the interpretation, meaning-making, and later reflection of the image (Chaplin, 1994; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001; Wagner, 2004).

The term hegemony, introduced by Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci and alluded to throughout the development of education, has played a central role in how people create and make meaning of photographs (Kohl, 1992; Merriam & Caffarella, 1991; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). Gramsci developed two concepts of hegemony: (1) dominant ideologies are presented as “common sense” and (2) dominant ideologies are in tension with other forces and in constant flux (Kohl, 1992; Sturken & Cartwright, 2001). This theory is applicable to visual imagery because of the component of persuasion. As noted throughout this review, when viewers decode still photographs, they identify with the maker’s position, negotiate the interpretation, or oppose the position altogether. Hegemony, therefore, is interconnected to the production of, emotional response to, and meaning-making process that occurs when society and visual imagery come together.

Not surprisingly, Wagner (2004) has recently embraced the issue of “credible” images in the social sciences throughout his published works. Wagner addressed two key challenges when utilizing still photographs in social inquiry: (1) he exposed the “taken-for-granted” social research photographs and the actual value they contribute to empirical, social research and (2) the importance of visual inquiry in education,
community development, and public discourse. Wagner also compared and contrasted three social documentary photography projects – which used “credible” still photographs - to that of rigorous well-organized textual research articles produced in the social sciences. In order to be successful and empirically sound bodies of work, these photographers and researchers had to produce high quality images which were “comparable [to that of textual projects], empirically sound information, experienced field researchers recognize that they may need to alter a line of questioning from one informant to another. Along the same lines, it might be necessary to use different vantage points, lenses, or image-making strategies in one setting than in another,” (p.1486).

Rose (2001) and Lutz and Collins’ (1993) have tackled visual vehicles, in particular National Geographic magazine and its contribution to “shaping American understandings of, and responses to, the world outside the United States” (p. xii) These three feminist authors use psychoanalysis to interpret visual works, human beings’ natural tendency to be subjective, and the infiltration communication process that occurs between the conscious and unconscious mind when viewing images.

In their research, Lutz and Collins (1993), commentators Debord (1983) and Ewen (1988), state, “…the image is central to contemporary society, that photograph and film have taken over from written texts and the role of primary educator” (p.4). Rose, Lutz and Collins provided sound structures for the design of this research project. First, Rose described in detail the essence of the emotional response – both consciously and unconsciously – when viewing visual images. Second, she dissected the semiotics as well as the aesthetics, verified the sharp contrast between “reading” and interpreting visual
images (still photographs, in particular) and text, and the Freudian relationships between conscious and unconscious renderings that can occur within viewers.

Lutz and Collins took all of these ideas into consideration when they wrote their book on *Reading National Geographic*. They explain their methodology which included interviews of 55 people, all volunteers, about how they “read” *National Geographic*. What helped formulate the purpose of this current research project was the interest they took in the participants’ reaction to the social, documentary, still photographs. Lutz and Collins requested that each participant view a series of photographs, without the accompanying caption, in order to better understand if or how text can influence one’s reading of a photograph (1993).

The literature was expansive and in an attempt to categorize all supplemental resources, some topics warranted more description than others because of the profound material the authors presented. Although some image-based research topics were merely hinted at, others were covered fully, and each one added fundamental components to the research that follows. Yet there were some significant aspects missing from the literature. *What Was Missing: The Absence of Andragogical Meaning-making in Relation to Still Photography*

In summary, Freire (1973) is known for emphasizing critical thinking, communication, and dialogue in order to achieve “true education”; Lindeman (1926) valued the significance of adult’s personal experiences; Knowles (1973) coined and introduced the term “andragogy” (the art and science of helping adults learn) to the field of adult education in relation to his theory that adults learn best in a comfortable, non-threatening environment (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Merriam and Caffarella (1999)
grounded their work in Knowles'; presenting the idea that adults must be willing to engage in the learning process cognitively, affectively, and physically. If adult learners are provided with a safe place to dialogue, the self can be defined or restructured. Finally, Meizrow’s (1968) premise regarding meaning: “Meaning is an interpretation and to make meaning is to construe or interpret experience – in other words, to give it coherence,” (p.4).

Summarizing this literature review, it was obvious that my research questions warranted further study. The theory that adults can make meaning from credible, still photographs without the accompaniment of text was missing from the professional literature. Only one text written by Lutz and Collins (1993) came close to referencing adults’ learning experiences with still photographs. Therefore, this research project could be an essential addition to the body of knowledge in the field.

In the following chapter, Chapter Three, I provide a description of the methodology used for this study, background information about the four participants, the instruments used, the data collection procedures, the research design, and the research credibility.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Participant Recruitment

This study involved interviewing four female community college students in the states of North Carolina and New York. Two women were students at a community college located in upstate New York and the other two were from different community colleges in North Carolina. Because this study was qualitative and exploratory in nature, I wanted to find participants willing to provide candid, detailed information in the open-ended-question interview that followed a viewing of twelve 8”x10” black and white photographs. I presented this request to the professors that helped me in the participant recruitment process and in turn, they nominated female students who would volunteer such information.

The gender was limited to females because of the cultural content of the photographs – the tradition of home birth and midwifery – and the prevalence of prior life experiences. Professors at their community colleges nominated the women and I did not know them prior to our interview sessions. I recruited the four participants from community colleges because of my future career goals; I want to teach photography at the community college level and I am particularly interested how adult women make meaning from visual images. The photographs contained feminist characteristics; this also contributed to my research interests of how and why women make meaning of midwifery photographs.
Age was a factor as well. Because adult education was a primary focus, the participants had to be 18 years of age and enrolled in a community college program. The program they were in was not relative.

Lutz and Collins (1993) conducted a similar study as reported in *Reading National Geographic*, by presenting their interviewees with photographs without their original captions. However, they did not limit their study to female, adult community college students. Their study consisted of fifty-five people who responded to newspaper advertisements and were selected to represent a range of social experiences (Lutz & Collins, 1993:223). This premise was taken into consideration during the selection process. For the current study, however, the participants had to be *women* with various social experiences because of the feministic component of the still photographs and my interest in studying adult women.

*The Participants, Their Backgrounds, and Current Knowledge of Midwifery*

*Cindy*. Cindy is a 50-year-old, divorced, Anglo-American woman. She is currently unemployed because of a recent lay-off from an international computer software company and has returned to a community college to pursue an Associate’s Degree in Early Childhood Education. Cindy started as a full-time student in May 2004.

A native of a small Midwestern town, Cindy enlisted in the Air Force in 1973 where she was trained to perform secretarial work because “it was still a ‘man’s Air Force and women were just getting into the logistical, physical aspects of it.’” She spent her days at a desk; upon finishing her tour of duty, she was married. After traveling the country and having two children she was unable to pursue a college degree until this
point. For the last twenty years Cindy has resided in the southeast and now is the proud grandmother of four grandchildren.

Cindy’s knowledge of midwifery is limited. She gave birth to her two children in a hospital and was present when her four grandchildren were born in hospitals. She has no personal experience with midwifery.

Naomi. Naomi is a 25-year-old Anglo-American woman living in a suburb of upstate New York. A native of upstate New York, Naomi has two biological children and two stepchildren. She has never been married. Her current fiancé owns an air-conditioning business and Naomi has become the administrative assistant as well as enrolling as a full-time student in the Administrative Assistant program at a community college in order to fulfill her dreams of completing a college degree. Like Cindy, Naomi did not have the opportunity to pursue a college education after graduating from high school; instead she chose to take on the managerial duties at the family’s restaurant, as well as motherhood, at the age of eighteen.

Her current knowledge of midwifery is also limited. She gave birth to her two children in traditional hospital settings.

Becky. 43-year-old Becky is an Anglo-American married (although not currently living with her husband) woman living in small town in upstate New York. She has three biological children and one stepdaughter, a full-time job as a waitress and is starting her fourth semester as a part-time student at a community college in the Business Administration program. Becky is originally from the New England area but grew up in Pennsylvania. Upon moving back to New York twelve years ago, she started her family and returned to the local community college.
Although not extensive, Becky has some knowledge of midwifery through friends’ experiences. Obstetricians and clinical nurses were present at all four of her births but since then, her friends have introduced her to a midwife and she has had numerous conversations with both her friends and the midwife regarding the historic tradition.

Erin. Erin is a 37-year old Anglo-American who resides a rural town in southern North Carolina. Although she didn’t grow up there, she is a native of North Carolina, spending her childhood and adolescent years on the coast. She has been happily married to her husband for eight years has two cats and no children.

Erin started her career in Emergency Services in 1988, received Paramedic status in 1996 (after intense on-the-job and classroom training two nights a week), and got her Associate’s Degree in Emergency Medicine in 2000 from her local community college in North Carolina. Just recently she decided to merge her emergency medicine training with photography and follow a career path in forensics. She enrolled full-time in the Bio-Medical photography program at a community college in Asheboro, North Carolina and will graduate with an Associate’s Degree in August 2005.

Erin has extensive experience in the emergency medical field but does not have much knowledge of midwifery. She has seen several births but they have occurred during emergent, dangerous situations of which Erin had to act quickly in order to save the mother and baby.

Instruments

The participants were volunteers and prior to our interview, each signed an informed consent form. Ten introductory, semi-structured questions (Appendix A) were
designed to elicit general background information regarding each participants’ age, current marital status, and number of children (if any), city and state of primary residence, college name, and program information, prior experience(s) with college education (if any), childbirth experience(s) (if any), and knowledge of midwifery (if any). These first ten questions were answered orally.

Immediately following the introductory questions, the participants were informed that they were going to view twelve black and white photographs (Appendix B) pertaining to the topic of midwifery and would then be asked six questions (Appendix C) related to the photographs. Again they responded to these questions orally and the researcher took written notes and recorded their answers on a digital recorder. The photographs were placed on a table (facing the participant) and were approximately eight inches by ten inches in size, had a matte surface, and had the corresponding numbers one through twelve beneath them. They were shown without their captions because of the influential nature of text. The questions were intended to provoke participants’ ideas, opinions, and emotions regarding the content of the photographs.

First, participants were asked whether they were attracted to any particular photo and, if so, why. Second, the researcher asked them if they had had an emotional response to any particular photo, and if so, what was it and why did they think they experienced it. Third, they were asked if they took any information away from the photo essay. Fourth, they were questioned about their opinion of the subject matter and, if they did, they were asked to provide a brief explanation of this opinion.

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3 A photo essay can be but is not limited to a series of photographs that relate to each another in some way. For the purposes of this research, the photo essay was a series of documentary photographs that told a chronological story about one family’s experience with the culture of midwifery.
Questions three and four were designed to discover if viewing the photographs had stimulated a meaning-making process. The fifth question asked if the experience of viewing the photos had been meaningful and if so, how. The final question probed them about the aesthetics of the photograph; if the photos had been in color instead of black and white, would that have changed their experience?

Research Design

I will divide this section into three parts: 1) the data collection procedures, 2) an analysis of the data, and 3) the credibility of the research.

Data Collection Procedures. Three faculty members from the three community colleges provided student recommendations according to the appropriateness of the study and their students’ willingness to participate in this research project: a department chair, an English professor, and a Dean. Students were then selected at random, emailed a brief synopsis of the project, and asked if they would be interested in volunteering their time. At the beginning of each interview, the informed consent form was reviewed; the general premise of the study and sequence of events were described again (they were initially notified in email format prior to each interview), and confidentiality information was explained. Follow-up contact information was exchanged and they were advised that a question (or questions) might arise once the researcher had reflected on the interview process.

Aware that they were going to be viewing photographs of home births and midwifery, the researcher explained that the purpose of the interview was to observe adult females viewing and “reading” a series of twelve black and white photographs without accompanying text and then be asked six questions pertaining to the photographs.
Participants were told that they could take as much time as needed and could handle the photographs but the researcher was not allowed to answer specific contextual, compositional, or content-related questions about the photographs until the initial six questions were asked and answered. At that point, open discourse could occur and questions could be answered or redirected; the recorder would remain on and note taking would continue. Once the interview was completed, each participant was asked if follow-up discussions would be possible and they individually agreed future discourse by phone or email would be welcomed.

The four interviews were conducted in four different facilities due to participants’ location and availability. One participant, Naomi, began her interview in one location and moved to another because the background noise was distracting for the participant and researcher.

**Data Analysis.** Each interview was recorded (with the exception of Erin’s due to technical difficulties) and fully transcribed. Virtually all words are included, even certain vocalizations, such as ‘er’ and ‘um’. Laughing, pauses, and other audible noises (such as the clearing of the throat, noises of frustration, ) are parenthetically noted (see example of transcription pages in Appendix D). All interviewer’s comments, questions, and audible acknowledgements are also included. Names of participants, their hometowns, the towns they in which they currently reside, places of employment, and colleges were changed for purposes of anonymity. The focal themes of each interview were summarized based on the tape recording and transcriptions. The written versions were then sent to each participant, as email attachments, to verify that they had been understood correctly. For each interview, open coding was used, evaluated, and the following themes emerged: (a)
gender issues, in particular, reoccurring themes of feminism, (b) identifiable social realities, (c) the cognizant process that transpired before, during, and after each participant viewed the photographs, (d) adult meaning-making, (e) generative themes and recognizable tactics associated with Freire’s conscientization theory, (f) the aesthetic framework, (g) Western culture, and finally, (h) the subject matter (midwifery) of the photographs. The coding process began with the evaluation of participants’ responses, in-vivo, to the six questions contained in the interview instrument, which were fairly specific (e.g. do you think the process of viewing these photographs has been meaningful to you?). Particular phrases from their responses were categorized under one (sometimes two) of the seven theme titles. They were also analyzed for themes that were stressed by more than one participant.

Research Credibility

To verify research credibility I followed Creswell’s (1998) eight procedural recommendations. Five of the eight techniques were demonstrated in this research project: 1) prolonged engagement and persistent observation, 2) debriefing, 3) clarifying researcher bias, 4) member checks, and 5) rich, thick description.

Prolonged engagement and persistent observation. This category requires the researcher to establish trust with the participants, learn the culture, and check for misinformation stemming from distortions introduced by the researcher or informants (Ely, 1991; Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; in Creswell, 1998) I established communication with the four women early in the research process and continued to talk with them on a weekly basis for several months following the initial point of contact. Trust was established with
Cindy, Naomi, Erin, and Becky when I explained my research intentions, demonstrated respect for their personal lives, provided each participant with an informed consent form which clarified the research procedures, and accommodated their daily schedules. During the interviews, I provided them personal my background information, made them feel comfortable by requesting permission to use a tape recorder, and encouraged them to speak freely throughout the process.

The photographs that were used for the interviews were about the culture of midwifery. I have been photographing this culture for the last two years; therefore, I have had prolonged engagement and observation in order to learn about the techniques, legislative guidelines, psychological aspects, and health procedures that accompany this tradition. I have been presented with several opportunities to observe midwives alone and with their clients, attend educational seminars, partake in dialogue during midwifery group meetings, and review literature resources on the topic.

Regarding misinformation pitfalls, I held weekly meetings with my research advisor, Colleen Wiessner, in order to avoid possible distortions stemming from the informants or myself.

*Debriefing.* External checks of the research process were conducted with the research advisor, Dr. Colleen Aalsburg Wiessner, as well as two other professionals in the field who acted as secondary advisors on the research committee. According to Creswell (1998), the debriefer is “an individual who keeps the researcher honest, asks hard questions about the methods, meanings, and interpretations, and provides the researcher with the opportunity for catharsis by sympathetically listening to the researcher’s feelings,” (p. 202).
Clarifying researcher bias. Creswell (1998) states that the researcher must “comment on past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that have likely shaped the interpretation and approach to the study,” (p.202). To satisfy this procedure I informed the women, prior to the start of the interview, that I would not answer questions pertaining to the photographs until the initial observation had ended and the six interview questions had been asked and answered.

Member checks. Creswell (1998) considers his technique “to be the most critical technique for establishing credibility…and involves taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account,” (p. 203). The four women were provided with electronic versions of the interview transcriptions and asked to judge and verify their accuracy.

Rich, thick description. The researcher describes in detail the participants or setting under study. This enables readers to transfer information to other settings and to determine whether the findings can be transferred because of “shared characteristics,” (Erlandson et al., 1993, p.32 in Creswell, 1998).

In conclusion, Chapter Three provided details about the participants, the setting under study, the instruments used to gather the women’s commentary, and the process by which research credibility standards were maintained. What follows in Chapter Four are the women’s personal feelings, “in-vivo”; embedded in the text are block quotes taken directly from the interview transcriptions for the reader’s review.
CHAPTER FOUR
DESCRIPTION OF FINDINGS

I was able to obtain the cooperation of four people who were enthusiastic about my research. I was able to gather valuable data and realized that photographs could produce multi-faceted reactions and comments from each individual. For these participants, the focus shifted among eight different themes, each one affecting and shaping the other in a continuous evolution of their understanding of the photographs and themselves. The women experienced moments of self-reflection and self-realization, expressed deep-rooted values based on cultural rearing, revealed fears and humorous stories, shared their uncertainties, and even delved into the physical attributes, like the aesthetics and composition of the images.

Eight themes emerged in the coding process: (a) gender issues, in particular, reoccurring themes of feminism the women discussed when making meaning of the photographs; (b) identifiable social realities; (c) dominant Western culture; (d) adult meaning-making; (e) the cognizant process that transpired before, during, and after each participant viewed the photographs; and (f) generative themes and recognizable tactics associated with Freire’s conscientization theory, (g) the aesthetic framework of the photographs and, (h) the subject matter (midwifery) of the photographs. Two were referenced most often: the aesthetic framework of the photographs and the subject matter of the photographs.

When the coding process ended and the data reviewed it was apparent from the number of statements listed under the eight themes that the cognition component and the subject matter of the photographs contained the highest frequency of comments.
Viewing photographs without the inclusion of text is not a simple exchange of information but rather a complex compilation of social realizations, cognitive meaning-making, and thematic relationships. For these participants, several of these social realizations or meaning-making occurrences happened simultaneously or independently as a result of or in conjunction with their emotions and responses to the photographs. Naomi, for example, articulated her uncertainties and curiosities to me even before the six-question interview process began: “I am trying to figure out if this is, like, maybe them starting to talk together before the birth…she looks happy here.” She had already begun trying to make sense of the content of the photographs. On the other hand, Becky, Erin, and Cindy waited for me to acknowledge that they had finished viewing the photographs in order to begin the series of questions.

Throughout the rest of this chapter and into Chapter Five, I will analyze the participants’ responses and their association to the eight themes that emerged during the coding process.

*Gender Issues and Reoccurring Themes of Feminism*

All four women communicated, both consciously and unconsciously through gestures, comments, body language, and direct statements, genuine reactions concerning gender (male and female) and feministic perspectives. But even before I began the series of questions, I observed and noted each participant’s body language as they viewed the images before them. Two of the women, Naomi and Erin, held Photographs Six through Twelve for a few seconds before returning them to their spot on the table. All four women stood over the photographs rather than remaining in a seated position; once I told them to begin, all four of them laughed at Photograph #10. For specific photos, Becky
and Naomi would look at the photo, set it down, pick up the next photo (in the series),
and then refer back to the previous photo before moving on. Erin commented on the type
of paper the images were printed on, cleared her throat, and made eye contact with me as
she completed the task. Upon completing the exercise, Cindy asked me what she was
supposed to do once she had viewed the entire series.

All four women constructed, through prior experiences or as a result of the
photographs, opinions on gender issues which alluded to representations of feminism,
offering opinions regarding the right to choose where to birth, the camaraderie among
women and their newborns and women and their midwives, and a sense of pride that only
women can birth, thus creating an unspoken bond among women. Although three of the
four women discussed the excitement that comes with childbirth, Erin also commented
about the fear and physical strain women endure during and after childbirth.

The women also questioned the involvement (or lack thereof) of men in the
homebirth process referring to the content of the photographs. Cindy was curious if there
was “a husband present at the birth” and Erin mentioned that Mary-Ann (name of woman
who was pregnant and gave birth in the photographs) was not wearing a wedding ring,
which prompted her to ask me if it was a single-family household. When I queried her on
this particular topic, she hesitated at first and said, “I can relate ‘cause I grew up in a
single family home…I, umm, don’t see any Dads in the photos and I came to that
conclusion because there is just Mom and child and newborn in all of these. I don’t see
any elements of fathers”.

Since the respondents were women and three had given birth in hospitals, Naomi
and Becky expressed desires (after viewing the photographs) to relive their birthing
experiences, implying that if they could do it over again, they would have chosen to birth at home. Naomi, Becky, and Cindy felt, when they began the labor process, that they didn’t have birthing options; they “had” to go to their local hospitals. According to Cindy, “My family was always so worried about something going wrong….I had no choice”. Like Cindy, Becky also commented on her prior experiences of hospital births, yet by the third child, she mentioned that she felt more in control of the labor and delivery:

When I was giving birth to my daughter Elyse, I was five centimeters dilated and they [obstetrician and nurses] wanted to induce me and I wouldn’t let them. So I went home and came back only when I knew it was time to deliver and I had a textbook delivery. I would’ve had them at home but my husband was nervous about being so far from a medical facility…the hospital was an hour from our home.

Finally, Erin and Naomi commented on gender roles they have witnessed in Western culture: the tradition of male protecting and caring for the female. The two women mentioned that Jeff, the little boy shown in Photo #3, is “protecting his mother” as Nicole (the midwife) performs a routine exam. The women were drawn to that particular photograph not only because it was humorous (a three-year-old “protecting his mother”) but also because it contained a familiar custom between man and woman.

Social Realities

Some of the women’s perceptions related to this category as well as the gender issues and feminism category; some were categorized under both themes. For example,
the interconnectedness within these three themes occurred when Cindy began explaining her reasons for choosing a hospital birth:

The technology and options have changed since I gave birth. As I said, everyone in my family was too nervous and the hospital was really the only option at the time…it is more well known [sic] in my circle of people to go to a hospital to have a baby. This [midwifery] is a great alternative and if it were more well known [sic], especially with the cost of health care…you know, it is soaring and more and more people can’t afford to have babies in hospitals.

Erin, on the other hand, questioned the adequacy of the North Carolina Health Care system and state legislators, wondering if it there were a better system in place, more women would choose home birth.

I don’t think we have a good system for it here to have a midwife, you know, places like California, it’s as common as hospital births but we don’t have a good, umm, system in North Carolina. It would be a good option. I don’t even know any midwives.

These two women touched on the social characteristics of midwifery and although their prior knowledge of the subject varied (Cindy had no prior knowledge and Erin had some), they began to draw parallels between their social knowledge and the implications related to the social status of midwifery in North Carolina. The photographs sometimes provoked evolutionary comparisons to the limited or absent knowledge of midwifery to that of their “social” knowledge spawning from conversations and hearsay occurring within their social cliques and gatherings.
Societal issues related to Corporate America arose for Cindy as we discussed her prior employer and the legality of midwifery in North Carolina. She was recently laid off by her employer which, she felt, is what forced her to finally obtain a college degree.

“RLD outsourced and it was a big lie. They said that they were going to outsource some jobs and hold on to some but they outsourced all of them and Satine took us all on. Now we all have to re-group,” she said. Then, she acted surprised when I told her that certain types of midwifery were illegal in North Carolina, one being Direct Entry Midwifery. I explained to her that the midwife in the photographs was legally certified; Nicole Hardy, had both a Bachelor’s Degree in Nursing and a Master’s of Science and was considered a Certified Nurse Midwife under state law. Cindy said, “Hmm, I have never heard it pronounced that way…these [photographs] just brought out the subject matter [midwifery] which I don’t think about too much, really.” The way I pronounced the word midwifery was foreign to her which indicated that until the interview, she had little exposure to this culture.

As we neared the end of the interview, I asked Cindy if she had anything else to add and she offered me this:

I don’t know if this really has anything to do with it but, umm, it is amazing to see how much medical control society has over women’s bodies. It makes me see how politics influence our lives, even when having a child…we should have more freedom, the power to choose your own ways; we’re a free country and there is so

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4 Direct Entry midwives are not required to be nurses and they have obtained their education from apprenticing with other midwives. At this time, North Carolina does not recognize or license traditional midwives.
much red tape (pause); we all do what we think is right and this is right [points to photographs] but no one allows it to be…it’s wonderful.

Western Traditions and Culture

Although there were not as many participant comments related to this topic, some were quite powerful. As with the two prior categories, there were overlapping responses that could have been placed in the Social Realities or Gender Issues sections.

Erin’s thoughts on the physical aspects of pregnancy produced particularly significant emotions. At the very beginning of the interview, one of the first things she said when I asked her if she had an emotional response to any of the photographs was “Yuck.” I asked her to elaborate on her feelings and this was her response:

Stretch marks freak me out. Don’t want ‘em, don’t want to get near ‘em. There is a little fear of pregnancy there….I don’t want something that big [makes gesture with her hands to represent large and small sizes] comin’ out of me. I’m sorry….I’m terrified of having children. I am terrified of lookin’ like that [points to Photo #7, Mary-Ann’s stomach].

Cindy touched on the tradition of childbirth with this: “…it’s the way it [childbirth] has always been done like in the colonial days so I mean it has just been changed because of the technological advances over the last 75 to 100 years. Women used to have babies by themselves with no help”. She also referred to the element of trust throughout our conversation, “…trusting someone with your child….”, “…trusting them with your most precious cargo….”, “…you have to trust someone with your child and that is there in these photographs, trust….” Cindy gave birth to her children 25 years ago and trust was something that was evidently very important to her, especially when it
came to her experiences with labor, delivery, and child rearing; this was a cultural tradition she was familiar with and the photographs triggered this emotional response.

Finally, Naomi, Erin, and Becky mentioned that they were “…looking for rings on fingers,” a Western tradition signifying marriage. The photographs prompted Erin to question if the story was about a single Mom, raising two children alone, because of the absence of wedding bands.

The Aesthetic Framework and Subject Matter of the Photographs

Without being prompted, the women talked about aesthetic aspects of the photographs. Becky and Erin talked about the “soft moments” and the “looks on peoples’ faces.” Erin was attracted to the photographs because “…black and whites are always best because they carry an emotional level that color doesn’t always have…they [the photographs] spark more emotion like sympathy, you know. Color is distracting to me. Black and white has more of a sadness or a depression than color does.” Becky pointed out that the “baby looks very bright” and she “related to the content” of the photographs.

I went into each interview uncertain of how the women would discuss the photographs. I expected Erin might have some thoughts because of her current course work at the community college but I did not think the other three would talk about the physical components of the photographs. As I was coding the women’s statements, I realized that all four offered comments about the aesthetics; therefore, this category emerged and was added during the coding process.

Interpretations, Learning, and Meaning-Making

As stated in the introductory chapter, the conceptual framework of my research resides in the questions of how adults make meaning of credible, still photographs
without the accompaniment of written text. In the next three sections of coded data, I began to see the results of my inquiry unfold.

The women had a lot to say as they made meaning of the twelve photographs. The caption information had been purposefully removed so as to allow the women the freedom to express their feelings and emotions without the authoritative voice of text. Question numbers three, four, and five were devised with the research questions in mind.

Naomi mentioned that she was going to leave the interview with valuable information regarding homebirth and the interview experience was very meaningful to her. Throughout our conversations, she noted the elder sibling’s involvement and from the discourse, she came to recognize that Nicole’s tactic is to include siblings as much as possible during the nine-month gestational period. Naomi stated that Nicole’s choice to include siblings in the birth reduced the stress on the mother and the older sibling(s).

Regarding her personal experiences with birth, Naomi referenced the birth of her first daughter throughout the interview, most notably when she came to Photo #8:

Right up until we…were sleepin’ with the baby, I mean that is just the best feeling in the world. It is one of the biggest miracles in the world. I would’ve loved to have done it at home though; more comfortable, you are in your own surrounding; ‘cause no matter how many children you have, you’re scared, you want to be in a comfortable well known area and the hospital just has that smell and that mentality and…very uncomforting.

Cindy was also capable of making meaning of the images and stated that: “…it has been interesting for me, being a participant, and I feel that I found out about myself. Having a child leaves an imprint on you and it changes you”. She, like Naomi, reflected
on her personal experience creating parallels between the practice of midwifery and hospital birth. When I asked her about her birth experience, Cindy added this: “Well, I can relate to a mother giving birth and to being a woman who has just given birth. It is an experience you don’t forget. Of course your first child changes you the most, I think, because it is such a new experience and then it becomes a lot easier,”

At the conclusion of the interview, Cindy and I then talked openly about her opinion of the culture of midwifery. I asked her how she felt about it at the beginning the interview and then again during our open dialogue; she offered this:

These [photographs] just brought out the subject matter which I don’t think about too much, really. It is more, well, known in my circle of people to go to a hospital to have a baby… I guess it has made me more in touch with my softer side, my human side with children and childbirth.

Becky offered comments similar to Naomi and Cindy’s but it took her some time to formulate responses relating to interpretations and meaning-making. When asked if she had taken information away from the photo essay and her opinion of the subject matter, she was uncertain how to respond. After a few moments, she responded with this:

I think I took away a pleasant response, I guess. It’s nice to see midwifery documented in a positive light because I do know a little about the practice…I don’t know too much about it but I had friends that did have one [a homebirth] and I know a midwife. I think it’s a natural approach to childbirth, a comfy, natural approach.

Erin, on the other hand, has never experienced birth so her meaning-making process was different from the other three. Unlike Naomi, Cindy, and Becky, Erin
negotiated meaning of the photographs based on her educational and professional experiences. For example, she paralleled labor and delivery with her fieldwork as a Paramedic.

The fear goes back to the first time I saw a delivery; it is weird to me and I know it’s normal; I have seen how unhappy people can get afterwards not necessarily because of the kids…but the women…they loose their figure, they loose a part of who they are and that kinda thing…they [the women she has seen give birth] may or may not be thrilled with the experience because of the fact that they did loose their figure…I think what really stands out for me is the medical aspect which I can relate to.

Although Erin discussed the culture of midwifery differently, she was still able to decipher, interpret, and make meaning of the topic. When reading the photographs, she discussed her personal experiences with birth as emergent, sometimes even life threatening. Erin claimed she has witnessed women having negative, physically challenging, overwhelming labor and deliveries and it has affected her, so much so that it has impacted her decision not to have children at this point in her life.

As stated in the beginning of this chapter, eight themes emerged as a result of the data coding process. The themes were a result of the women’s thoughts on the culture of midwifery and open dialogue with me at the end of the interview. As I have shown through block quotes and quotes embedded in the text, each one offered very different opinions, stories, and emotions as they viewed the still photographs.

In Chapter Five I will discuss the shared characteristics between this project and the literature, as well as other studies conducted in the fields of visual sociology and adult
education. Finally, as adult educator and professional photographer I will unite adult meaning-making with Freire’s theory of generative themes, demonstrating how the combination of credible, still photographs, open dialogue, and a safe learning environment allows adults to make meaning of photographs without the accompaniment of authoritative text.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

As adult education became a recognized, professional field laden with synthesized layers of meaning-making, so too the method of visual learning came to be. Prior to the 20th century, research within world of visual sociology focused on the pedagogical implications. It was not until the mid-1930-40s, through the work of social documentary photographers like Gregory Bateson, Lewis Hine, and Margaret Mead, that sociologists like Collier and Collier (1986) were able to correlate the importance of visual imagery to sociology and adult education. Unbeknownst to Bateson, Hine, and Mead, the documentary projects they created for the world became visual means for educating adult societies. It was another thirty years before educators like Freire evaluated and created theories regarding the societal impact of visual imagery on adult learners.

Visual ethnographies grew out of this amalgamation because of the professional work done by ethnographer Pink (2001), Lutz and Collins (1993), Rose (2001), and Sturken and Cartwright (2001). The heightened awareness of adult learning occurred throughout the late 1980’s and into the early part of the 21st Century but has not been directly related to how adults make meaning of visual stimuli, in particular still photographs, until now.

Taylor (2002) and Quan (1979) have done limited research on how still photography has impacted adult education. Taylor’s (2002) work focused on photography as a research tool within the field of adult education, utilizing photo-elicitation and auto-photography to explore teaching beliefs. Quan’s (1979) research concentrated on “the use of photography as a tool which can be used in the creation of meaning and a medium
which enables inquiry into the world of public and private experiences,” (p.4). I will now discuss the two theorists’ work in relation to this research project.

Taylor’s (2002) article, while relevant to this project, was limited. His research focused on two research methodologies using still photography as a research tool: 1) auto-photography, which gives the participant control of the camera and responsibility for taking photographs, and 2) photo-elicitation. Photo-elicitation is a technique that involves using still photographs to stimulate the interview process (p.127; see also: Harper, 1994; Tucker & Dempsey, 1991).

According to Taylor (2002), photographs can be a stimulating medium for discussion (p. 127). This tactic was considered when the six research questions were designed. Once the interviews commenced, it was apparent that Taylor’s description of photo-elicitation was similar to the process that was used in this study; the twelve photographs stimulated emotions and triggered memories as the women negotiated group dynamics and cultures. However, what was not addressed was how this process fostered meaning-making for adult consumers. The article failed to examine critical consciousness and adult meaning-making in relation to non-textual, credible, still photography.

Quan’s (1979) work is situated in different types of photographic inquiry. He discusses three types of photography that can be used as modes of photographic inquiry: 1) the anthropological view, 2) the normative view, and 3) the intitutive view. In summary, the anthropological view serves as documentation about a particular subject matter or particular events; the normative view concentrates on the rituals and mythologies within our own system; and finally, the intitutive view serves to reveal the visions of an individual photographer (p.6).
Compared to this study, these three methodologies could be substantiated when reviewing the women’s comments, particularly the anthropological view. The anthropological view entices viewers to analyze social relationships, if the content of the photograph contains people, therefore, encouraging adult viewers to reflect on personal experiences within their sociocultural relationships in order to make meaning of the content. All four women used similar comparative techniques as they viewed and interpreted the twelve photographs. As stated in previous chapters, the women discussed nuances, mannerisms, surroundings, and cultural characteristics specific to each photograph; thus demonstrating the anthropological view methodology.

This article failed to connect how adults make meaning of still photographs based on prior experiences. Quan (1979) did not address the process adults encounter as they view, interpret, construct, and reconstruct the content of a photograph in relation to their cultural backgrounds. Quan’s review of the three types of photographic inquiry were valid to my research but needed further exploration of the relationship between these types of inquiry and meaning-making in the 21st century.

While the professional literature is extremely comprehensive in the field of visual sociology, there was no apparent correlation between adults and how they make meaning of the world around them through credible, still photographs. Much of the work done today has concentrated on the validity of social, visual research and how to implement it, the subjectivity of embedded messages in images, the status of the photographic credibility chosen to represent sociocultural realities, and the processes of using photographs to elicit information from interview participants.
The data produced in the four interviews were rich and related to the literature in several ways. Seven categories emerged in the coding process and each category had one, if not several, direct associations to the literature.

*Social Science Research, Aesthetics, and Western Culture: The Power Dynamics in Visual Sociology*

An historical timeline of still photography and its adaptation into social science research was thoroughly discussed in the Collier and Collier (1986) and Banks texts (1997) but Rosenblum (1989) explained the general history of the craft most efficiently, starting with the invention of the first, rudimentary camera in the early 1900’s up through the late 20th Century and the complex profession of photojournalism. For the cultural component, relating to sociology, anthropology, and visual rhetoric, I pulled from the Morley and Robins (1995), Chaplin (1994), Rice (2004), and Becker (1986) articles. Although these are not the only resources I relied on (there were parts from other texts and articles), they contained a wealth of information necessary for the categories pertaining to aesthetics and Western culture.

*The Aesthetic Framework and the Women.* There are several significant elements that contribute to the skeleton of a still photograph. Besides the film (or digital image) and medium chosen for display, the composition, context, and content define the very fundamentals of an image even before the ubiquitous feature of subjectivity is factored in.

The aesthetics consist of the creator’s theories behind the creation of the photograph, the appearance of the image. The content is the physical details, events, people, objects, and information captured by the photographer, the subject matter. Composition is the content arranged accordingly (or haphazardly, depending upon the
photographer’s style and intent) within the frame of the photograph. Lastly, the context of the photograph(s) is the interrelated conditions in which they exist or occur; for example, a slide show of digital images being displayed on a computer screen, large 12’x14’ color prints hanging in a gallery, or a photo album could all be considered contextual elements of a photograph.

With that in mind, I delegated a section of the coded data to the content, composition, and context as the women commented on the physical traits of the photographs.

*The Structure of the Photographs.* Naomi didn’t make mention of these components but Cindy, Becky, and Erin did. The final question in the six-question series was designed to investigate the importance of the photographs’ aesthetics, in particular, color versus black and white photographs. It asked, “The photographs you viewed were in black and white. Do you think you would’ve had a different experience had they been in color?” All four women agreed. Cindy stated:

Black and white did not allow me to discriminate with colors of clothes or colors of hair…it allowed me to form my own opinions…I wasn’t drawn to a photograph because of its color, necessarily. It seems that your close-up pictures are the ones I was most drawn to; like the one of the ladies sitting on the porch and the one of her petting the dog….

Becky and Erin talked about the “soft moments” and the “looks on peoples’ faces.” Erin was attracted to the photographs because “…black and whites are always best because they carry an emotional level that color doesn’t always have…they [the photographs] spark more emotion like sympathy, you know. Color is distracting to me.
Black and white has more of a sadness or a depression than color does.” Becky pointed out that the “baby looks very bright” and she “related to the content” of the photographs.

As demonstrated, the aesthetics, content, composition, and context of still photographs can relay pertinent information, confuse or amuse a viewer, or bolster the photographer’s intent, producing varied reactions and emotions, according to the individual viewer. They contribute to the negotiated meanings as they decode, interpret, and make meaning of a still photograph.

*The subject matter.* Just as the aesthetics, content, composition, and context of a photograph are significant so, too, is the subject matter. The subject matter can serve a multitude of purposes, the roles of the photograph(s) multiple, complex, and diverse. The subject matter can span the social realms of popular culture, news, advertising, and art and can convey a variety of meanings, depict renditions of the world, and express abstract concepts and feelings. All four women demonstrated, in four different ways, that they were aware of the subject matter presented by the twelve photographs.

One common theme that all four women discussed was the bond between mother and child, and it was noted relatively early in the interview process. Because three of the women have given birth and one has not, I was curious if Erin, the one who does not have children, was going to mention it as the other three did. To my surprise, she did but only briefly at the beginning of the interview. The other three, however, referenced the mother-child bond at different times throughout the entire interview. Naomi, especially, had a lot to offer:

Mom is having a new baby and she [the midwife] is doing her best to involve the little one…there is kinda like a little bond thing there and I just look at her face…I
don’t know, I go back to the bond thing again…after the birth, you are stuck in
this hospital room; you can get a bond with your child but it’s not like the way the
woman does in photo #9…these are the first images I have seen of
midwifery…the other child [older sibling] doesn’t feel left out because they don’t
understand, exactly.

Becky and Cindy focused on the practice of midwifery, delving into the emotional
aspects of the culture. Both women noted that it “seemed very natural”, that there was an
element of “trust” in the photographs, trust between the midwife and expecting mother as
well as between the photographer and the subjects being photographed. All four women
noted a sense of comfort in the homebirth process as well as the older sibling’s
involvement, stating that it was “an excellent way to include the other child”, “helps
him/her understand a little bit more about the [birthing] process”, and “other child doesn’t
feel left out”.

Due to her current college studies and long-time medical profession, Erin was
able to bring to my attention that some of the photographs represented midwifery to her
and she was able to connect to the medical component being displayed in the
photographs. When I asked her what they represented, she said, “[The photographs]
represent home health, midwifery, feelings of pride, a respected tradition, and the element
of family.” The other three women did not mention these characteristics.

How the Women Made Meaning

As stated in the introductory chapter, the conceptual framework of my research is
based on Freire’s theories of generative themes and is grounded by the question of how
adults make meaning of credible, still photographs without the accompaniment of written
text. In the next three sections of coded data, I began to see the results of my inquiry and research unfold.

The women had a lot to say as they made meaning of the twelve photographs. The caption information had been purposefully removed so as to allow the women the freedom to express their feelings and emotions without the authoritative voice of text. Question numbers three, four, and five were devised with the research questions in mind.

For the participants, the twelve photographs had been imbued with personal, cultural, and historical meanings. As discussed in the previous chapter, Naomi referenced the birth of her first daughter on several occasions throughout the interview; her unconscious emotions infiltrated her conscious mind as she relived her hospital birth. Unbeknownst to her, Naomi had crossed the boundary between her conscious and unconscious through gestures by revealing the “uncomforting” olfactory sensations of the hospital and even shivered as she talked about Photo #8 and how it did not compare to her hospital birth experience. Here, I noticed a process that Freire describes as part of the learning experience; Naomi was establishing and organizing her view of her hospital birth experience. Through reflection, she was beginning to understand the difference between homebirth and hospital birth.

Recognizing a similarity between homebirth and hospital birth, Cindy made meaning as she too, embraced the cultural differences, mentioning that home birth and hospital birth produce the same emotions for a new mom. Cindy moved from the abstract to the concrete, another component of Freire’s learning theory. In viewing the photographs, Cindy moved from the part to the whole and back to the parts again, recognizing herself in the photographs but also in conversation with the researcher.
Becky recognized the power relationship within the photographs and herself as a woman, a different perspective than Naomi and Cindy offered. During our conversation, she discussed the feeling of pride connected to the birth of a child, comparing the similarities between midwifery and her personal experience with the hospital birth of her daughters:

I appreciate the camaraderie of women and the nurturing environment…when my nurse did it with my two girls; there was a wonderful feeling of womanhood in the delivery room, at least for me. I was very touched by those actions and now that I reflect on the experience, I feel a certain pride for women…I think these images will stay with me; I will have them in my mind.

Becky coded her daily experiences of power and authority through reflection and oral dialogue with me, expressing a sense of pride and ownership of her womanhood. The photographs tapped into her emotions, memories, and feelings associated with feminism. Because she felt safe in the interview environment, Becky was invited to speak freely on the topic of birth and feminism for the first time, making meaning of midwifery, feminism, and her role in the world; all of this occurring throughout the interview. She personalized feminism in a way that she had not before. In reflecting on her experience in conjunction with discourse, she decoded the photographs’ meanings and interpreted them in a way that made sense to her.

As stated in the Findings Chapter, all four women mentioned the composition, content, and context; from my undergraduate and professional studies of the craft of photography, they were discussing the photographer’s creation: the use of frame, the choice of film, the use of foreground and background, depth of field, the arrangement (or
purposeful lack of arrangement) of the people and objects, the incorporation of light and light source, and the use of shapes and graphical components. I was able to make direct connections among their comments and the photography resources I reviewed as well as the experiential knowledge I have obtained as a working professional in the field of photojournalism.

The women’s comments related to the historical, factual information presented in the photography texts, articles, and my working knowledge. Throughout the interviews, the women discussed basic photographic composition, content, aesthetics, and relevant techniques for viewing photographs; their comments emulated the facts presented in the resources. The educational and professional knowledge I have obtained in the field of photography also coincided with the women’s statements and the literature. After receiving a degree in photography, I worked at a daily Gannett newspaper, executing daily photographic assignments; currently, I am a freelance photographer and continue to use these techniques. Among other things, photographic assignments require knowledge of the “photographic basics”: the use of frame, the choice of film, use of foreground and background, or anything else related to photojournalism. Therefore, I have worked intimately - and continue to work intimately - with these techniques and understand their relevance to this research project.

It was plain to see that they were particularly attracted to a specific aspect of a photograph; for example, Erin was moved by the black and white elements, Cindy was attracted to “close-ups” (purposely used to draw a viewer’s attention to a certain part of a photograph; background is out of focus and subject is sharp), Naomi and Becky reacted to Photo #10 because McKenzie’s face was so close to the camera yet the background
was still readable, a popular technique used by photographers to create layers in an image; also known as depth of field. These are all examples of some but not all of the aesthetics of a photograph.

*Western Culture and Power Dynamics*

Morley and Robins (1995) was useful in this series of coded data because their thesis revolved around how the media influences and is influenced by Western culture and traditions. Morley and Robins discussed how viewers are active in their consumption and interpretation of images, but each individual does so under the dynamics of cultural and societal power. As I listened to Cindy, Becky, Erin, and Naomi, it was evident that their responses were based their perceptions of society and their cultural backgrounds.

Erin made connections to the photographs by making the strange seem familiar. For example, she wondered if Mary-Ann was a single parent experiencing the birth of her second child alone. Erin commented on this because she did not see a male present in the photographs. As she explained her thought process, Erin revealed that she and her sister were raised in a single-family home under the care of her mother. This is a good example of how adults make meaning of still photographs; she made the unfamiliar content familiar. This domestic theme was threaded into our conversation about the photographs and her childhood.

Erin was raised in single parent home; her father was not part of her life as a child or as a teenager. Because Erin did not grow up with her father, she examined the photographs through a different cultural lens. While viewing and interpreting the photographs, she translated the absence of Mary-Ann’s husband from the photographs to that of a single mom (like her mother) giving birth without a husband.
Similar to Morley and Robbins’s (1995) theories on the consumption and interpretation of images was the Rice (2004) article. Rice focused on the visual rhetoric that contains a postmodern feel and clarified how “visual representations are subjective choices; they are subjective and rely on much framing as well as personalization” (p.65). This was helpful in realizing that the women were making sense of the perceived content and formulating stories in order to gain some sort of organizational semblance to their lives.

Becker (1986 & 1995) contributed this study because he inadvertently presents the premise of how photographic essays educated adult consumers from the 1920s until the present. In his text he dissects the sociological elements of visual research by describing photographic essays and portraits of well-known documentary photographs that have impacted society and educated adult consumers living in the early 20th century. Personal attitudes, evaluations, and other components of one’s life will ultimately be exposed when discussing photographs. According to Becker (1995), as viewers make sense of images or photographic essays, they might convey an attitude, through discourse, of respect, dislike, or even neutrality for the people portrayed in the photographs.

Finally, in Western culture, especially in the advertising industry in North American, women are bombarded with messages at a young age, telling them that thinness, soft, blemish-free skin, and dyed hair are the key to beauty, normalcy, and better lives. Ads present figures of glamour, bodies that are perfect, models who appear to be happy, and well-known celebrities as people for consumers to envy; even celebrity pregnancies are idealized. At 38, Erin has been exposed to several decades of these
sophisticated ads, which, unbeknownst to her, may have had some impact on her decision not to have children.

Although not always stated directly, Erin, Becky, Naomi, and Cindy mentioned various female stereotypes, created by the media, advertising industries, and marketing professionals, existing in 21st century Western culture. For example, Erin responded in distaste about stretch marks on Mary-Becky’s stomach. Naomi, however, did not make any direct statements like Erin but she indirectly showed respect for Nicole (the midwife), “…in these photos, you can see that aren’t just a number to Nicole, I mean, she develops a relationship with you [sic] and will probably continue that relationship with these women. That is so amazing to me”.

Chaplin’s (1994) research was used to analyze the data pertaining to the power dynamics of social relations within the field of visual research. In reviewing the coded data, I could see how the photographs played a crucial role in the women’s negotiated meanings of power. Each one had different experiences in society, politics, socioeconomic status, marital relationships, cultural beliefs, and family values. The women applied various hierarchical combinations when they viewed and interpreted the photographs depending upon their prior cultural experiences. All four of them held various characteristics in close proximity to their life-long rationales.

Feminism, Gender Issues, and Emotional Responses to Visual Symbolism

Chaplin’s (1994) research was also used for evaluating this category. Although the majority of this chapter described the founding of The Pavilion at Leeds (only women’s photography center in 1983) and the visual images that were produced and displayed there over several decades, she revealed some significant findings that were a
direct result of The Pavilion: visual artists that displayed work there had massive responses to their work; minority groups show images that spoke of the complexity of their concerns and at the same time, viewers could relate to the content and subject matter. Thus, a non-threatening atmosphere was created which attracted viewers who could negotiate issues in an interactive setting (p.199-120). But with the “open” atmosphere came contention and criticism and women had to talk through some of the exhibitions in order to address political issues. This is what intrigued me most and subtly connected to my research. What women do is often hidden.

In all four interviews, the women were encouraged to respond freely, without scrutiny or reservation. In doing so, issues of gender and feminism materialized, were interpreted, developed, and discussed. Through constant discourse, we deconstructed the photographs. An example of Chaplin’s research was demonstrated when Becky discussed women being able to give birth where men cannot creating an unwritten camaraderie among women, pride, a woman’s right to choose where and when to give birth, and the experience Becky had when her third child, a daughter, was born. Becky discussed the “special moment” that occurred between her female nurse, herself, and her newborn, stating that the three of them shared a special bond, something men cannot experience. This dialogue ensued because Becky was in a non-threatening environment and felt safe enough to talk about her innermost feelings. Unaware that it was happening, Becky was moving within Freire’s matrix, making connections to herself as a woman, a mother, and a feminist.

Also in this category, I explored the work of Pettersson (1994), who worked with secondary school-age children and their teachers in deciphering the coded messages
embedded in images. His thesis revolved around still photographs’ denotations (primary meanings), connotations (implied meanings), and the meanings viewers bring to and take from a photograph (negotiated meanings). Although his work was quantitative in nature and focused on the pedagogical perspectives, his work was influential in my research in two ways: (1) could these theories be transferred to adults, and (2) I was intrigued by his statement about the “gap” between the sender’s intention (creator of the image) and the receiver’s understanding of it could be diminished “by presenting the picture with interesting verbal comments and/or explanatory text” (p. 144). It is this last comment that inspired me to create my research question. I will discuss further these relationships in the concluding chapter but for now, I will turn to the portion of subject matter and how it fashioned emotional responses in Naomi, Becky, Cindy, and Erin.

For this next section, I used the research done by Sturken and Cartwright (2001), Rose (1993), Lutz and Collins (1993) to understand how adult viewers analyze visual images and the application of a qualitative study using adult consumers of National Geographic.

The crux of Sturken and Cartwright’s text (2001) pinpointed the substantial range of theories regarding how viewers understand “visual media…how images are used to express ourselves, communicate, to experience pleasure, and to learn” (p. 2). Several of the concepts they presented were applicable to my research. For example, when I created a category specifically for the women’s comments on the subject matter of midwifery, I referred to this text for the psychological emotions that happened in response to the photographs. Sturken and Cartwright (2001) analyzed a specific mode to responding to
visuality: how viewers regard, interpret, react to, and use the subject matter of photographs.

In conjunction with the Sturken and Cartwright text, Lutz and Collins’ work (1993) was predominantly useful for interconnecting the theories presented by Sturken and Cartwright and demonstrating how their theories can be implemented in a study. Lutz and Collins (1993) conducted qualitative research on *National Geographic* readers, the social acculturation from which they existed, and how their values and traditions applied to their “reading” of the subject matter in the magazine’s photographs. With these two texts, I amalgamated their theses into workable information useful in coding Cindy, Becky, Naomi, and Erin’s interviews. These two texts were vital to the purpose of my research.

A third text that was valuable to my research was Rose’s (2001). A professor and social scientist of graduate studies Rose set out to bridge the gap between the academic publications that merely touched on visual sociology with the guides that lacked adequate explanations of the methods for interpreting and using the visual. I reflected on her five aspects (p. 10-14) of visual culture as I created the six interview questions for the four women. One precise aspect I found to be especially practical for my work was the type of response a viewer may have to the subject matter, the inclusion and exclusion of information as well as the hierarchies that it naturalizes, which can vary according to his/her vision of class, gender, sexuality, race, and so on.

A good example of the interrelation between this piece of literature and my coded data are the answers that resulted from my interview with Cindy. When I asked Cindy her opinion of the subject matter, she replied: “Umm, different strokes for different folks.”
Some feel like they want to give birth at home and I don’t see anything wrong with that and some people feel better in a hospital…Just depends on how you want to live I guess.” Cindy continued by stating that she was familiar with hospital births because “…that is what is known within my circle of friends….” Just as Rose (2001) pointed out in her research, Cindy’s circle of friends had taught her that hospital births were “the norm” so she felt it necessary to give birth there as opposed to choosing home birth.

Wagner’s (2004), Liben and Szechter’s (2002), and Dahl, Frankenberger, and Manchanda’s (2003) articles supplied illustrations of how types of subject matter can impact adult viewers. Wagner’s (2004) work with credible still photographs contributed to this category as well as the work by Dahl, Frankenberger, and Manchanda’s (2003). Their research on shock photography was useful in understanding how adult consumers making meaning and can be educated by types of visual media, not just still photographs. Liben and Szechter (2002) have done experimental research using photo interviews so their work paralleled to this category.

Wagner’s (2004) key points were threefold: (1) visual researchers rely on visual data but the images created for research must be empirically credible, (2) empirical data should highlight new knowledge, and (3) the visual elements must challenge existing social data. Liben and Szechter inadvertently designed a study which tested some of these theories. They hoped to reveal ways in which people respond to photographs as a “…function of ontogenetic development and educational experience” (2002, p. 386), the latter premise being directly related to my research question.

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5 Due to the chronological time frame –Wagner published his piece in 2003 and Liben and Szechter created this study in 2002.
Dahl, Frankenberger, and Manchanda’s (2003) article about shock photography and how it is used in advertising content was used to evaluate this category. Although their quantitative study incorporated images that contained disgusting or offensive images, their findings were interesting and contributed to my literature review. They were interested in public service messages contained in posters, pamphlets, television, magazine ads, and other types of publications, within the advertising industry. It was one of the few references that focused on the subject matter of photographs and not strictly the methodology that goes into viewing, interpreting, decoding, and making sense of images. Some of their examples related to documentary photography. They revealed in their findings, “…communications can have positive effects on attention, memory, and behavior” (2003, p. 278).

Photography: Can it Lead to Cognizance and Generative Themes?

Freire’s (1973) theory behind generative themes bridged the gap between the adult education components of experiential learning and reflection and the realizations that transpired when the women viewed the photographs. His text was crucial to the premise of this study.

Freire spent the better part of his life studying the educational, sociological impact of a “…special oppression masked by the forms of democratic ‘freedom’ or civil ‘liberty’…” that has occurred in rural, underrepresented, marginalized societies of Brazil (p.x). He thoroughly investigated how people’s relationships with the world are defined and redefined through discourse. Freire’s extensive work helped adult educators make strides in the field and became the pillar of this research project.
What fascinated me was the societal research he did with the oppressed groups of people in which he discovered his participants dominated “…reading and writing techniques…in terms of consciousness; to understand what one reads and to write what one understands” (1973, p. 48) through the use of images, created codifications, and generative themes. Although the premise of his work was based in adult literacy, his theory of generative themes and meaning-making targeted the societal element of cognizance that captivated me. Until I began coding my data and investigated his work more thoroughly, I did not realize how applicable his theories were.

The four women in my study constantly created and re-created worlds, based on their prior life-long experiences, as they viewed, decoded, interpreted, and used the photographs, asking simple questions in dialogue. Through discussion, the participants arrived at a distinction between two cultures, that of midwifery and hospital birth. They analyzed relationships based on their personal knowledge and experiences with relationships: the relationship between woman and midwife, between unborn child and mother, between sibling and midwife, between nurse and newborn, between themselves and the woman about to give birth, between themselves and the midwife, and so on. Interpersonal communication evolved and retreated; they debated with themselves. The women revealed unfettered emotions and became aware of their perceptions; they acknowledged prior (if any) experiences with the culture of midwifery. A combination of black and white photographs coupled with dialogue, triggered meaning-making allowing the women to merge old perceptions with new ones. The women began with an abstract view of midwifery and moved to a definite opinion of homebirth. The information they obtained from the photographs and the dialogue encouraged them to move to a different
level of awareness, constructing and reconstructing the newfound knowledge of midwifery according to their personal experiences.

Photographs encouraged this manifestation and although there was some resistance at first, all four engaged in acts of communication, through verbal speech, audible sounds, facial expressions, and body language, allowing them to move from what Freire calls semi-intransitive\textsuperscript{6} consciousness to critical awareness. The critical awareness increased their ability to enter into dialogue and become engaged in their existence, their place in the world. Naomi, Cindy, Becky, and Erin were open to dialogue that revised their initial perceptions, were receptive to the “contemporary” culture of midwifery without simply rejecting the “preferred” culture of hospital births, and were capable of accepting the validity of both cultures.

\textit{Watching Cognizance Unfurl.} According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, \textit{cognizance} is defined as “awareness” or “knowledge.” With the work of Meizrow, Merriam and Caffarella, and Freire in mind, I began to sort through the women’s statements and realized that one common theme frequently reoccurred: all four of them formed stories relating to their prior experiences. For example, Cindy drew on her prior experiences of childbirth to explain Photo #7 but shortly after telling me her personal story, she formulated a possible scenario by incorporating familiar, cultural content, in an attempt to understand the practice of homebirth. When asked if she had any comments about the photographs, she said, “Well, it looks like they sort of tell a story. Hmmm. I suppose it could be that the baby was born at a center or a home, umm, but it all seems very natural but perhaps it is a center where the baby was born, I am not sure”.

\textsuperscript{6} Semi-intransitive consciousness means that his sphere of perception is limited, that he is impermeable to challenges situated outside the sphere of biological necessity.
Becky began to relate her prior experiences by questioning the content based on her personal memories as well as forming stories; she, too, picked up the photographs and brought them to her face, studying them closely:

I was trying to decide if the baby had been born yet at this point. In Photo #6, she [points to Mary-Ann] looks really scared, nervous…The woman who I am assuming is the midwife is possibly giving her some bad news…this one really brings back memories. I love the little hands [points to Photo #7]; I remember that feeling….”

This process allowed her to interconnect a social context, which she was indecisive about, to her own identity as a woman and mother. An intercultural relationship formed unconsciously in her mind which allowed for legitimate association while viewing the photographs. Becky perceived, received, read the photographs, and added her prior ambiguities and limited knowledge of the practice of homebirth. Like Naomi, she had participated in dialogue and reconstructed the world using her new knowledge of midwifery.

Naomi’s interview was also filled with layered responses similar to those offered by Becky and Cindy. From the beginning of our discussion and before I began asking her the six interview questions, Naomi was questioning the subject matter of the photographs. She was curious about Photo #3 and Photo #7 and began a dialogue about them, “I am trying to figure out if this is this person [gestured between the two photographs] but I wanna say no because there’s no ring…on her left and no watch. I am trying to figure out if this is, like, maybe them starting to talk together before the birth….” I let her talk and did not interfere because prior to the interviews, I told the women that I could not answer
specific questions pertaining to content, subject matter, or anything else, until the six
questions had been asked and answered.

Like Becky, Naomi frequently handled the photographs, bringing them closer to
her; occasionally, she would review a prior photograph while going through the series.
Naomi informed me that she was a kinesthetic learner and frequently used other senses to
make sense of new information. “I had to pick up the photographs in order to see them. I
have to touch, look, write it down…”, she stated. When Naomi finished viewing the
photographs, she began to verbalize her thoughts even though I did not respond; I
wondered if talking about it helped her make meaning of the photographs. It appeared to
me that she was attempting to comprehend the series of photographs as an entity, a
complete story; maybe she was creating a timeline for herself, creating parallels between
her prior birth experiences with that of Mary-Ann’s experience as it unfolded in the
photographs.

Telling stories and reflecting on her childbirth experiences was something that
Naomi felt very comfortable doing. As we finished the six-question series, Naomi and I
began to discuss the premise of the research; she became very interested in how other
women, who have not yet given birth, would respond to the images. She asked me a very
interesting question: “Now that I have gone through the whole birthing process, that is
my question. Would someone else who has gone through the birthing process see the
same story that I saw when I went through these photos…because they would have a
different story than I do, I am sure.” That intrigued me. Even I, the researcher, have a
different perspective because I have not had children yet. Naomi was able to identify with
her experience as well as Mary-Ann’s but I was not, simply because I have not given
birth at this point. She recognized that I would have a different perception of childbirth; the meaning-making method that she utilized had correlated to my research question.

And then there was Erin. Erin’s thought process was very different from the other three women primarily because she has not given birth. As I reflected on her initial reaction to my second question, I recall that she replied with intense distaste regarding Mary-Ann’s stretch marks. At first, she did not continue; she did not appear to want to offer any explanation for her answer. As I probed her, she laughed and offered me the answer pertaining to her apparent dislike of the physical changes a woman goes through during pregnancy: Erin’s uncensored remark about stretch marks caught me off guard; I remember thinking that her answer seemed shallow and synonymous to the dominant Western social viewpoint of beauty that I discussed earlier. But then I remembered that she has seen stretch marks before, in person, but not on her stomach. Erin was reacting to a stimulus based on the combination of her past and present, to which she has been subjected. Since she is a Paramedic and has delivered babies in emergent situations, she has seen Erin was drawing from her experiences in a different way; she offered me a contradictory position to pregnancy, delivery, and motherhood based on her professional life.

Just as Cindy, Becky, and Naomi relived their prior experiences as they viewed the photographs, Erin did, too. Erin has had to administer life-saving techniques to women in emergent situations, some times even life threatening ones. Her current opinion of pregnancy is that of fear, fear of the physical elements as well as the emotional turmoil she has witnessed. As stated earlier, Erin mentioned that her career as a Paramedic has
definitely impacted her opinion of pregnancy and motherhood. She has observed women – terrified, possibly in danger of dying, and screaming in agony – give birth to a child.

As our conversation progressed and I informed her about the series of photographs and the current legislative state of midwifery in North Carolina, she told me, “I do think it’s a great idea and I wish it was viewed more, umm, highly in North Carolina because I think it is a good option, umm, if it was, I would even consider it”.

The fact that Erin felt very adamant about not wanting to experience pregnancy and childbirth at the beginning of the interview and then “considering it” if she were allowed, by law to give birth at home, brought me back to the fundamental premise of this research. Through photographs and discourse, Erin began to entertain new thoughts; she suspended her prior judgment about the cultural implications, social struggle, and negative associations that she had had with childbirth and entertained other scenarios.

Towards the end of our conversation, Erin’s realizations of different social realities lead her to reconstruct her beliefs; therefore reconstructing her personal world.

*Adult Meaning-making: How it Connects to Visual Sociology*

The final category, although producing a smaller number of comments, generated an imperative theoretical connection to Freire’s (1973) theory of generative themes to that of visual sociology. The core of my research emerged, as did future project ideas to be discussed in the last chapter.

As explained in the literature review, Freire based his conceptions of consciousness on how people create and re-create historical epochs through constant dialogue supported by mutual trust, hope, and love; and within these epochs, there will be themed “… concrete aspirations, concerns, and values as well as the obstacles to their
fulfillment…which indicate tasks to be carried out,” (1973, p. 5). With this in mind, I turned back to the transcriptions and began to see evidence of Freire’s theory in the women’s interviews.

As demonstrated with block and pull quotes in the previous six categories, Becky, Cindy, Naomi, and Erin participated in cooperative dialogue about the photographs and practice of midwifery with me, the researcher that liberated them to some extent. Over the course of our conversations, we co-investigated a common visual reality, the practice of midwifery represented by the twelve photographs that was central to both of our sociocultural lives. All four women achieved a deeper awareness of a sociocultural reality that impacted their lives as they viewed, interpreted, discussed, questioned, reflected, and engaged in the photographic interview.

Beginning with Cindy, I noticed that she appeared uncertain of herself, through her body language, facial expressions, and direct statements. As I asked her to look at the photographs, she stated, “I am not sure what I am supposed to do”. Since she had no prior knowledge of midwifery, I was curious about her reactions to the photographs and if she was going to be able to from the abstract to the concrete. As we moved through the six questions, she was hesitant with her answers, as though feeling me out, trying to find out if her answers were “right” or “wrong”. When I had completed the questionnaire and began dialogue with Cindy, she found her sense of self and talked freely about her prior experiences with hospital births and the fact that she “had no choice” when her time had come to give birth (as if she had to succumb to authoritative figures and could not decide when and where to have her babies). She opened up about her opinions of legislative laws concerning homebirths and that women should have the option of homebirth or hospital
birth; all of this precipitated by still photographs and dialogue. At the beginning of the interview she had been presented with the unfamiliar culture of midwifery. Throughout our conversation, I encouraged her to compare and identify with her own personal situations and experiences. By the end of the interview, Cindy had demonstrated a familiarity to homebirths and was able to relate to the culture itself.

Becky, on the other hand, had limited experience and knowledge of midwifery and homebirth. Her answers came freely and without hesitation. When she spoke, Becky conveyed an air of matriarch, in control of her family and her life. But when I asked her about the experience of delivering her first child, her matriarchal voice diminished stating she gave in to her husband’s fears of delivering anywhere other than a hospital. Like Cindy, she was uncertain, which caused her to succumb to the authoritative, patriarchal voice of her husband. As Becky continued to have babies, she became “good at it” and when her last child was born, she told the doctors that she was not going to be induced and preferred to return to the comfort of her home until she decided it was time to return to the hospital; the matriarchal voice returning as Becky and I concluded our interview.

With the help of still photographs and discourse, she was constantly expanding and renewing the content and her relationship with it. Becky moved from having some knowledge of the culture of midwifery to a higher level of awareness and newfound sense of feminism.

Naomi began questioning the content of the photographs before I even started the questionnaire. I feel that she had a slightly higher awareness of herself than both Cindy and Becky. Although younger than Becky and Cindy, Naomi demonstrated high cognitive levels simply because of her life experiences. Naomi grew up quickly, taking
on the heavy responsibility of motherhood at a young age while at the same time, managing a business for her parents. Naomi’s life experiences seem to have affected her current perspectives of the subject of midwifery. Twice in conversation, she stated that she “wished she had done it [given birth] at home”. Naomi’s limited knowledge of midwifery moved from a curiosity-driven conversation to a conflicting personal opinion regarding her choice to birth in a hospital. Because she was aware of her beliefs and values early on in the interview, Naomi acquired new information and reconstructed her prior beliefs of hospital birth and midwifery as we concluded.

Analyzing Erin’s data was much more difficult but I do think she acknowledged the diversity of birth options and honored multiple perspectives on the topic of midwifery. When I posed the first question, she provided a brief, censored answer similar to Cindy’s, as though she was uncertain how to respond, wondering if she was going to be “right” or “wrong”. As we continued with the second question, Erin’s directness told me she was exhibiting a level of control over her life, how it has been shaped, and an awareness of her beliefs and values. What was so interesting was one of her final comments, and it was here I saw her level of consciousness change. As we talked about the current status of midwifery in North Carolina, she appeared frustrated that it was not considered “acceptable” as an option for giving birth. It was as if the photographs and our dialogue had altered, ever so slightly, her knowledge of midwifery and her values regarding birth. Erin demonstrated that although the practice of giving birth (an example of what Freire considers “the world”) has been constructed by our societies - women “should” and do give birth in hospitals more so than at home - Erin decoded the “world” (birth) through an interpretation of new knowledge, participating in dialogue, and
meaning-making. She remained in control of her primary principles but allowed a new perspective to enter her belief system.

The four participants demonstrated Knowles’ concept of self-identity throughout the interview, telling stories about their personal experiences with childbirth and midwifery. As they viewed the photographs, the women explained to the researcher who they used to be, who they were at the time of the interview, and who they might become. It was evident the photographs independently triggered this meaning-making process.

Like Merriam and Caffarella suggested, the women were provided with the non-threatening environment that allowed them to engage in the still photographs cognitively and affectively allowing them to define or restructure the self. Regardless of the educational setting – formal or informal - meaning-making occurs when “…participants recognized that connecting to their emotions was [sic] essential in deciding what to believe, yet they were aware that this had to be balanced with rational reflection. Contextual knowers [sic] emphasized that dialogue…was required for developing beliefs” (p.149).

The Importance of Credible, Still Photographs in the Field of Adult Education

So why are credible, still photographs important to the process of adult meaning-making and adult education? Visual stimuli, in particular credible, still photographs, can offer educators unique insight into a learner’s world. Because photographs are open to interpretation, viewers are encouraged to look at, digest, and decode the content accordingly. The adult learner is given the freedom to construct and reconstruct contextual meanings according to prior personal experiences. This tool can be implemented in adult classrooms to further the educational experience, bridging gaps that

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may exist between the adult educator and the adult learner or between the adult learner and the course material.

Photographs contain vast amounts of information to be translated by the audience. Each individual viewer experiences a still photograph differently, bringing complex social relationships and personal interpretations to the image. In doing so, the viewer negotiates the dynamics of the photograph; thus constructing knowledge pertinent to his or her world.

As demonstrated by this research project, credible, still photographs and unassuming dialogue triggered meaning-making in four female adult learners; they were invited to tell stories related to their life-long experiences which promoted self-awareness and individual associations with the photographs. The women traveled from a naïve point of consciousness (having limited or no knowledge of midwifery) to a higher level of consciousness (recognition and construction of meaning about the culture of midwifery) when credible, still photographs and dialogue were utilized.

Fostering meaning-making with credible, still photographs can be implemented into an adult learning environment. If, for example, an adult learner was having a difficult time comprehending a particular culture, credible, still photographs and dialogue could be introduced into the learning environment to aid the adult in the learning process. It can also be used to help people identify their thinking or knowing on a topic.

In summary, the professional literature in the fields of adult education and visual sociology is extensive yet it fails to address how adults make meaning of credible, still photographs without the accompaniment of text. This research project produced rich, thick description and connected directly with the literature in several ways. As
demonstrated in this chapter, the four participants spoke freely of their lived experiences (because of the non-threatening, informal environment), reflected on life-changing events, and negotiated new meanings on the culture of midwifery. The women followed patterns and exhibited meaning-making events represented by the adult education theorists I reviewed for this project: Freire (1968), Lindeman (see Knowles, 1973) Knowles (1973), Merriam and Caffarella (1999), Meizrow (1968), and Taylor (2002).

Like the adult theorists, I examined the work of prominent visual sociologists referencing several authors; the most often being that of Pink (1999), Sturken and Cartwright (2001), Wagner (2004), Rose (2001) and Lutz and Collins (1993). Throughout the data coding process, I recognized the visual sociologists’ theories and concepts relating to visual images, credible still photographs, the dynamics of aesthetics and the subject matter, and the patterns of interpreting, decoding, and understanding black and white images, among other things.

As shown in this chapter, credible, still photographs, when coupled with inviting dialogue and a non-threatening, informal environment, can facilitate meaning-making in adults. The importance of credible, still photographs in the field of adult education is being recognized but there is research yet to be done. I will conclude with a synthesis of this research project and recommend future projects in the final chapter.
CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The context of learning and meaning-making is unique to adults, vastly different from the pedagogical practices commonly used in learning environments. An adult’s accumulated life experiences, for example, are a direct result from his/her personality and their sociocultural environment. How adults process information from this environment is based on the multiple perspectives he or she brings to the subject. Adult consumers are all different in how visual stimuli can trigger meaning-making; still photographs can foster meaning-making in adults, it just depends on how and when.

With this in mind, the purpose of this qualitative study was to determine if adults could make meaning of credible, still photographs without the accompaniment of text. What was not considered were the expansive generative themes that emerged or the complexity of the dialogue that ensued as each woman viewed, interpreted, decoded, and made meaning of the photographs. Drawing from Freire’s theories of generative themes, the dialogue that occurred between the researcher and the participants was horizontal in nature, based on trust, empathy, and a joint search for meaning. Through horizontal dialogue, we were able to communicate profound emotions, personal desires, political resentment, hopes for the future of midwifery, and new levels of understanding.

Although this study generated newfound knowledge, there were limitations which should be considered when conducting future research; (1) the short-term nature of the study did not allow for follow-up questions, interviews, and dialogue, (3) the participants were purposefully nominated, (4) and finally, all of the women selected happened to be Anglo-American so the study lacked ethnical diversity. It would be interesting to pursue a
study in which women of different countries and cultures were introduced into this project. Additionally, Freire’s matrix of critical consciousness should be implemented early on in future studies. Finally, more research could be conducted in the spirit of this study, looking at the dynamics of the cognitive and affective processes that occur when adults make meaning from still photographs. Work of this nature could open new venues for visual sociologists in search of understanding how visual stimuli plays a role in critical consciousness and adult meaning-making.

Adult educators might find this research methodology particularly useful. For example, it is particularly relevant to critical and feminist pedagogy in analyzing power relations, social dynamics, cultural boundaries, adult meaning-making, and so forth. Another example would be to use credible, still photographs, combined with dialogue, to break down cultural barriers between researcher and participant or facilitator and leaner. It was a valuable research method and could be useful when combined with other forms of data collection procedures in the fields of visual sociology and adult education. Photographs can be a stimulating medium for discussion in any educational learning environment.

It is apparent that these four women were able to make meaning of still photographs without accompanying text, but each individual used a distinctive method for doing so. These women had never crossed paths yet all four of them talked about similar components of the photographs, issues that were important to them, and experiences they had lived. Viewing pictures stimulated storytelling about their experiences. Reflection was evident in their thought processes and assisted in their meaning-making. However, each of the women demonstrated a decoding of generative
themes, inviting them to name their own connections to the world. This ensued because of the constant dialogue with the researcher allowing them to define and re-define their realities throughout the interview experience.

Freire’s theory of generative themes was the premise of this qualitative study. As demonstrated in this research project, the four women moved from an abstract sense of self and knowing to a concrete understanding of their knowledge of a culture and where it fits in their world. The participants experienced emotions, personal struggle, pride, and learning.

In concluding, I would like to recommend the use of credible, still photographs and dialogue as a technique for organizing students’ views of the world. When creating generative themes in a learning environment, the task of the educator is to represent those themes to the learners in ways the students can understand them, not in lecture format per say but as problem-solving activities that will foster meaning-making. It is a valuable method that honors multiple perspectives on a subject; those perspectives are based on the social situations encountered by the learners. Thus, the facilitator must recognize the adult’s life-long experiences and invite the students to name their own connections to the social situations presented in dialogue. The dialogue becomes the meeting point for reflection; therefore, the learner’s and the facilitator’s process of meaning-making is broadened and deepened.

Being an adult educator in the field of photography, I have adopted these adult theorists’ philosophies and hope to implement them into practice. I will encourage my learners to engage in critical, dialogical praxis. Learning is an ever-changing experience, an unfinished, continuous process. As each epoch unfolds, the learner must be prepared
to address each situation with a sense of identity, knowledge of society, and confidence to
reconstruct the world. In doing so, the learner will be free to make meaning and evolve as
a human being, the very premise of adult education.
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Appendix A

Semi-structured Introductory Questions
Used to Obtain Logistical and Background Information

1. What is your current age?
2. What is your marital status?
3. Do you have children and if so, how many?
4. Did you have a hospital birth?
5. Do you have any grandchildren?
6. Can you give me some of your childhood information? For example, where were you born, have you lived there all of your life?
7. What level of education have you received?
8. What is your current profession?
9. Why did you decide to return to a community college?
10. What do you plan to do once you receive your Associate’s Degree?
Appendix B
Twelve Black and White Photographs

Photo #1
Photo #7
Photo #12
Appendix C

Interview Questionnaire

This photographic exhibit is part of a research project. After viewing the photographs, please take a few moments to answer the following questions. Thank you for your time.

1. Were you attracted to any particular photo? Why?

2. Did you have an emotional response? What was it? Why did you experience it?

3. Did you take any information away from the photo essay?

4. What is your opinion of the subject matter – please provide a brief explanation of this opinion.

5. Has this experience of viewing these photos been meaningful to you?

6. The photo essays you viewed were black and white photographs. Do you think you would’ve had a different experience had they been in color?
Appendix D-1

B: Like I said, it evokes a pleasant response for me (pause). I think both…well, all people involved are relaxed and there is a camaraderie, you know, between woman and child and midwife…(pause) it's great to see the dog in the picture (gestures to photo #4) (pause). I appreciate the camaraderie of women and a nurturing environment (pause). The addition of the children into the birthing process is also nice.

M: Can you explain why you responding to the camaraderie component?

B: Umm, well (pause) (picked up photo #12). I love how she is observing the child. My nurse did it with my two daughters, you know, there was a wonderful feeling of womanhood in the delivery room, at least for me.

M: That's nice.

B: Yeah, it was. I was very touched by those actions and now that I reflect on the experience, I feel a certain pride for women (pause)…that it is only us (gestures between the two of us) that can give birth. We have a bond that I don't think men can ever experience (pause). A bond shared by women for women. I watched my nurse just observe my girls and just watching her observe my girls was really peaceful (trails off)…. 

M: That is very interesting, Becky.

(She picked up photo #1 again and studied it)

M: Do you think that this experience, viewing the photographs, I mean, has been meaningful to you?

B: Um, yeah, it was meaningful. I think it was a really good documentation of midwifery. I think the images will stay with me (pause). I will have them in my mind…I'll picture them (pause), I will bring them back, ya know?

M: Yes, I do.

(Long pause as I take notes)

M: Our last question, Becky. The photo essays you viewed were black and white photographs. Do you think you would've had a different experience had they been in color?

B: I don't really think so (pause). I think black and white is so dramatic…I don't think color would've added anything to the experience. (pause) Black and whites contain such a statement on their own, ya know?

M: I do and I tend to favor black and white photographs as well.

B: Me too.

M: Well, that concludes the six questions, Becky. Thank you for your heartfelt responses.

B: You're welcome (laughs). I hope they were heartfelt and useful.

M: Absolutely. I would like to do a little explaining now, if that is okay with you but I am going to keep the recorder going because sometimes more discussions occur that can be very interesting.

B: Sure, whatever you need to do is fine with me.

M: Okay, great. Well, to start (pause) this is Nancy (I point to photo #1), she is the midwife in this particular story - I have photographed two midwives thus far….

B: Okay.

M: And this is her office, it is a house and it is on her land because she has several acres of land of which she and her family own a farm called Sustenance Farm And these are her Doulas (pause), Nancy and Sarah, (pause) and umm…
N: I think it’s excellent. I think more people should do it, especially if they have a second or third birth, I mean, yes, there are always complications – well, not always, but there are chances of complications but it is so…very (pause), you don’t have… I mean with your check-ups… I think everyone should do it (laughs). I mean there are ambulances, hospitals, I think it is a great thing.
M: May I ask what you mean by “great”?
N: Umm, I think it’s…you’re more in your territory, it’s more comfortable. I mean, child birth is one of the most scary, most traumatic, confusing times of a woman’s life and you can’t think clear between the pain and everything else rushing through your head (pause)... I don’t think they (pause)... I think they would be more… what is the word I am lookin’ for, not comfortable… I think it would change… the whole (pause) situation by being at home. Again, and then afterwards, after the birth, you are stuck in this hospital room, you can get a bond with your child but it’s not like the way the woman does in photo #9. She is in her own home, there are no doctors coming in and out, I mean, in a hospital you have sets of different nurses coming in every hour, it is always somebody different, they poke at ya, prod at ya, you see how she just looks more peaceful in her home which is different than how a new mother looks in a hospital, I mean more peaceful, content…. (trails off).
M: Has this experience of viewing these photos been meaningful to you?
N: Absolutely.
M: May I ask why?
N: Now it makes me really wish I had done it at home (laughs). Again, it is not something I have had a personal experience with it, umm, or know anyone that has had it but now that I look at it, it looks easy. There are no machines anywhere, no blaring lights, very calm. These are the first images I have seen of midwifery so it’s been quite interesting. Not to mention she can still be home with her other child. It’s not (pause)... she is not away from her first child and umm, the other child doesn’t feel left out, Mommy doesn’t have to be away from the first child. That was the problem I had. I had to leave my son for a few days and it was tougher on me than him. I think I would’ve been a lot better if I had been able to include him, right there and then, been able to be with him, you know, talkin’ to him, like she is…(trails off). It gives the older child a better understanding of the whole process. You know they don’t understand, exactly, Mommy goes away and comes home with another kid, you know. They don’t understand that.
M: Okay. These are black and white photographs, do you think you would’ve had a different experience had they been in color.
N: YES. Umm, hmm. I don’t think the detail would’ve been there – the emotional detail. Color takes that away from pictures. With black and white, umm, you get more of a shadow to their faces, to their expressions, which I think really emphasizes them… (trails off). Yeah, I don’t think color would’ve done the same justice. I love the one of the kid lyin’ on Mommy’s foot, (points to photo #3), (laughs).
M: Why are you particularly attracted to that photo?
Appendix E

North Carolina State University

INFORMED CONSENT FORM for RESEARCH

Title of Study: Still photography: How do adults make meaning from credible, still photographs?

Principal Investigator: Megan Q. Daniels

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Colleen Aalsburg Wiessner

We are asking you to participate in a research study. The purpose of this qualitative study will be to determine whether adults, in particular women, experience emotional responses from credible, still, photographic images and if so, does this understanding contribute to their meaning-making process. If an emotional response does occur, does that stimulate critical reflection for the viewer? Does the viewer make meaning of the photograph according to prior experiences?

INFORMATION
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to view 12 black and white photographs and then answer questions pertaining to the photographs and the experience of viewing them.

RISKS
There may be some discomfort, pertaining to midwifery and childbirth, when viewing the photographs. At this point, I do not see any foreseeable risks involved to this study.

BENEFITS
The benefits of this research are two fold: one, I hope to discover how adults make meaning from visual stimulation, regardless of text, which may contribute to field of Adult Education; and two, I hope to demonstrate that credible, still photography can stimulate an emotional response in women.

CONFIDENTIALITY
The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. Data will be stored securely in folders in a locked filing cabinet or in a password-secure folder on a computer. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link you to the study.

CONTACT
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Megan Q. Daniels, at 500 Churchwood Lane, Pittsboro, NC 27312 or 919-542-1613. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Matthew Zingraff, Chair of the NCSU IRB for the Use of Human Subjects in Research Committee, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/513-1834) or Mr. Matthew Ronning, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Research Administration, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/513-2148)

PARTICIPATION
Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed at your request.

CONSENT
“I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study with the understanding that I may withdraw at any time.”

Subject's signature_______________________________________ Date _________________

Investigator's signature__________________________________ Date _________________