

and technology using photo-elicitation techniques in an East Houston neighborhood.

Untangling Misunderstandings

By Jerome Crowder, Swati Laroia, Esperanza Vredenburg and Jessica Wilson (U Houston)

In May 2006 we began to investigate how residents in an East Houston neighborhood respond to, use and think about technology, especially in its relationship with health. Our findings would be used in the deployment of a wireless medical device better enabling those with chronic heart disease to manage their illness. Although our research originates with healthcare, the themes discussed reflect the worldviews of the residents themselves, rather than their relationships with the medical device.

We initiated photo-elicitation, offering residents a choice between film and digital cameras, and asked them to take snapshots of those things important to them and those things they would like to change in their neighborhood. We found that the type of camera they chose correlated to their comfort level with technology. The resulting images (or lack thereof) reveal several social issues within the neighborhood. Specifically they highlight a lack of communication and understanding among the residents regarding expectations for the community.

The photographs we collected were taken by the most active participants in our project, who either live or work in the area and have different ethnic and economic backgrounds. The general themes of trust, order, environment, subsistence and health reflected in the images are similar to issues other residents spoke to, although not necessarily through photography. Our most active informants include "Truman," "Anh," "Isaac" and "Andrea."

Truman is a 68-year-old Navy veteran and retired high school drama and speech instructor. He has lived in the neighborhood for 28 years and has witnessed a gradual change from it being comprised of mostly older Anglo-Americans to a younger generation of Latin Americans. Anh is a 64-year-old retired Vietnamese refugee who relocated to the United States with her husband and three young boys in 1979. While in the process of taking photos, Anh feared that she was going to break the camera, a view she holds towards most technology. Isaac is a 17-year-old high school student. He and the other youth in the neighborhood are more familiar with technology than their parents, and use cameras, cell phones and other devices on a regular basis. Andrea is a 27-year-old medical assistant, who does not live in the neighborhood, but works at the Shalom



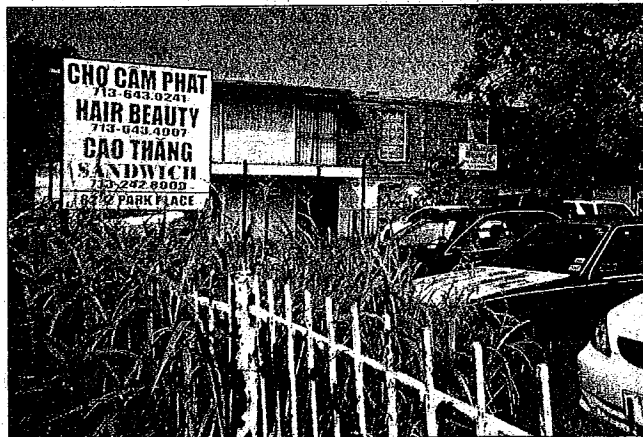
"Who cut off the water?" Photo courtesy Truman

Health Clinic. Because her only interaction with people is from within the walls of the clinic, it is not surprising that a majority of her photos are taken from inside her car. Andrea admits placing little trust in her working environment or the people she serves.

Most notably, the photos highlight the underlying social divisions within the neighborhood, illustrating differing levels of trust that the participants place in the community. The two photographs taken by participants that are shown here are visual depictions of opposing opinions about the living conditions in the neighborhood. Truman conveys a great deal of disdain for his neglectful neighbors while Anh depicts a building complex (also in disrepair) as one of her preferred shopping areas.

Our research presents residents' own images, which effectively portray their diverse worldviews in relation to each other and their urban neighborhood environment. Several recurring themes reflect a socially divided neighborhood, contested ideas about community and a technologically savvy youth who share little of their knowledge with the elders who would be ideal candidates for the medical monitoring device.

Research, news, comments, questions and ideas for future columns may be sent via email to Wendy Dickinson (wdickins@ringling.edu), or mailed c/o Ringling College of Art and Design, 2700 North Tamiami Trail, Sarasota, Florida 34239.



"Shopping Center" Photo courtesy Anh

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