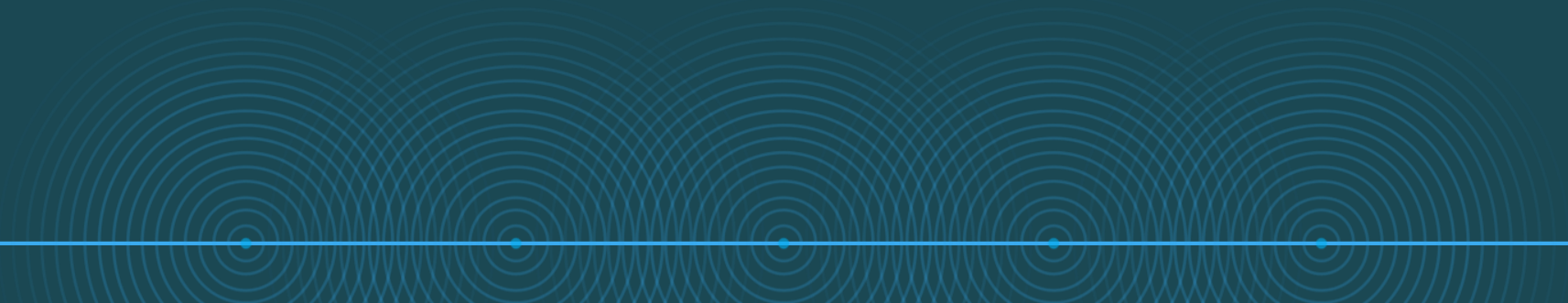# How to Build Empathy in Research

Techniques to generate empathy in qualitative research

Brenda Reginatto, Sunetra Bane and Susie Donnelly

23 July 2020

In this webinar, we'll cover:

- What is empathy?
- Defining your research question
- Interviewing
- Journey-mapping
- Photovoice
- Additional readings

What is Empathy?

"the unique capacity of the human being to feel the experiences, needs, aspirations, frustrations, sorrows, joys, anxieties, hurt, or hunger of others as if they were his/her own."

(Clark, 1980: 187)

Empathic Research in Practice

Why is it important?

- Gives us the ability to see and feel the world from another's perspective
- Associated with improved critical thinking, creativity, imagination, motivation

  (Gallo, 1989, Grant & Berry 2011)

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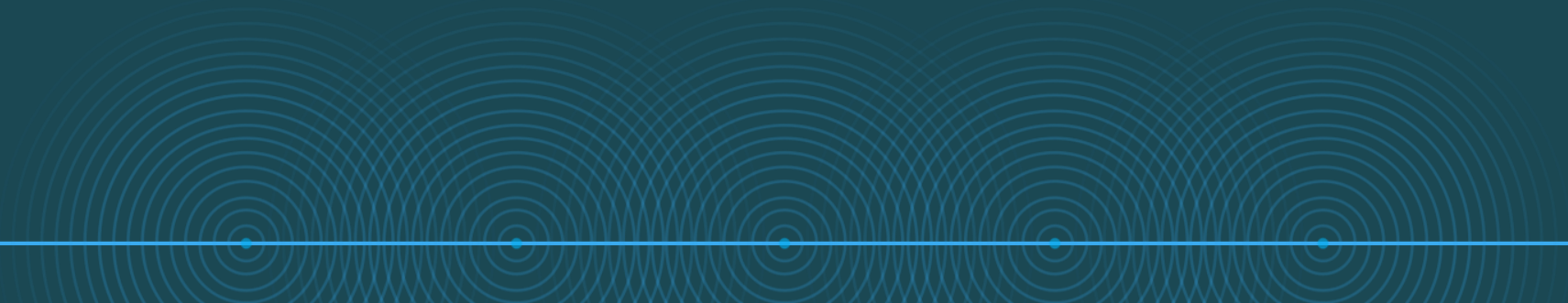- Associated with improved critical thinking, creativity, imagination, motivation

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Can it be trained?

- Individuals vary in their level of empathy; but it can be *trained*

 (Clark, 1980: 187)

- Reflexive processes (e.g. discussion, writing, drawing) that widen our perspectives can generate empathy

 (Rockwell et al. 2019, Everhart 2016)

The Research Question

Defining your research question

- Clear, focused, concise, complex and arguable
- States the research purpose and guides its process
- Helps determine the most appropriate research methods
  (Matthews & Ross 2010)
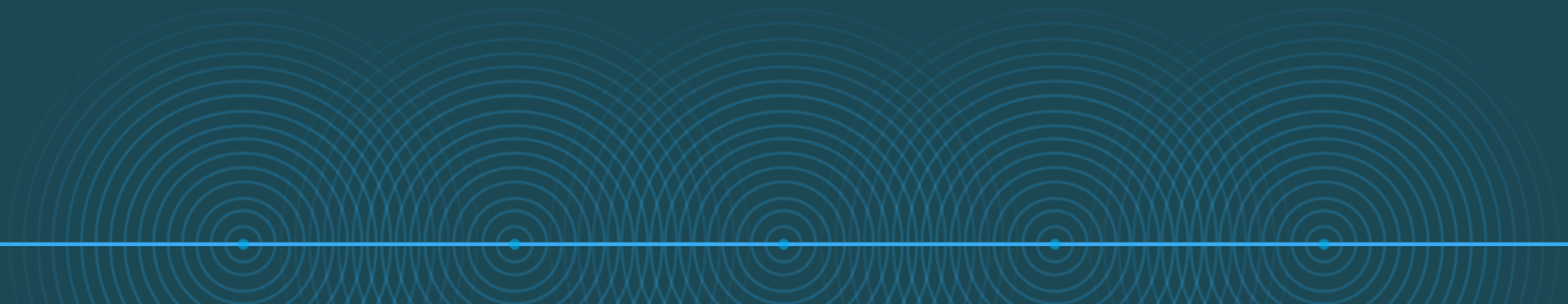
Our Research Question

What is the experience of people with type 2 diabetes when managing their illness in the workplace?
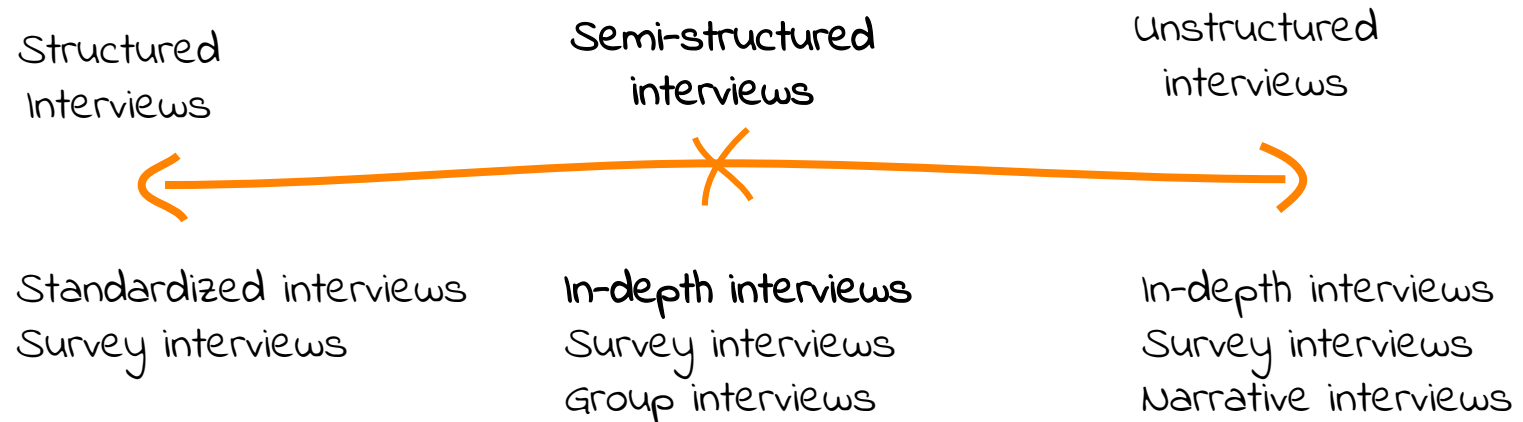
Interviewing

Brenda Reginatto

Product Strategist, Digital Health

In-depth interviews

What are in-depth interviews?

- Researcher follows an interview guide or topic map while having the flexibility to deviate from or probe into specific topics

Structured
Interviews

Semi-structured
interviews

Unstructured
interviews

Standardized interviews
Survey interviews

In-depth interviews
Survey interviews
Group interviews

In-depth interviews
Survey interviews
Narrative interviews

Adapted from Matthews & Ross 2010

In-depth interviews

Why use in-depth interviews?

- To understand a person's workflow, problems, decision making process, priorities, motivations and feelings
- Flexible method (i.e. length, setting, analysis strategy)

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Limitations

- becoming a good interviewer takes practice!
- common researcher and participant biases (Shah, 2019)
  - Leading questions and wording bias
  - Friendliness or acquiescence or bias
  - Social desirability or acceptability bias

Interviewing Top Tips

1) Define the focus of the interview

● Prioritize the 3 most important questions you need to answer

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Research Question: What is the experience of people with type 2 diabetes when managing their illness in the workplace?

Interviewing Top Tips

1) **Define the focus of the interview**
● Prioritize the 3 most important questions you need to answer

Research Question: *What is the experience of people with type 2 diabetes when managing their illness in the workplace?*

● *How do people monitor their glucose levels in the workplace?*
● *What works well in this process?*
● *What are the main pain points in this process?*

Interviewing Top Tips

1) **Define the focus of the interview**
● Prioritize the 3 most important questions you need to answer

2) **Ask questions about specific situations in the past**
● Avoid generic questions in the past or hypothetical questions about the future

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workflow

   ● *Talk me through the last time you checked your glucose levels at work*

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workflow

  ● *Talk me through the last time you checked your glucose levels at work*
  ● *What worked well?*   *values and pain points*
  ● *What didn't work so well?*

Interviewing Top Tips

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  workflow

  - *Talk me through the last time you checked your glucose levels at work*
  - *What worked well?*
  - *What didn't work so well?* ← *values and pain points*
  - *What are the implications of that?*
  - *What else have you tried?* ← *How much does it matter?*

Interviewing Top Tips

1) Define the focus of the interview

● Prioritize the 3 most important questions you need to answer

2) Ask questions about specific situations in the past

● Avoid generic questions in the past or hypothetical questions about the future

3) Avoid priming by talking about your idea / research / product

● After you mention your idea / research / product, most people feel compelled to agree with you / say it is a great idea

Journey-mapping

Sunetra Bane, MPH

Design Researcher and Strategist
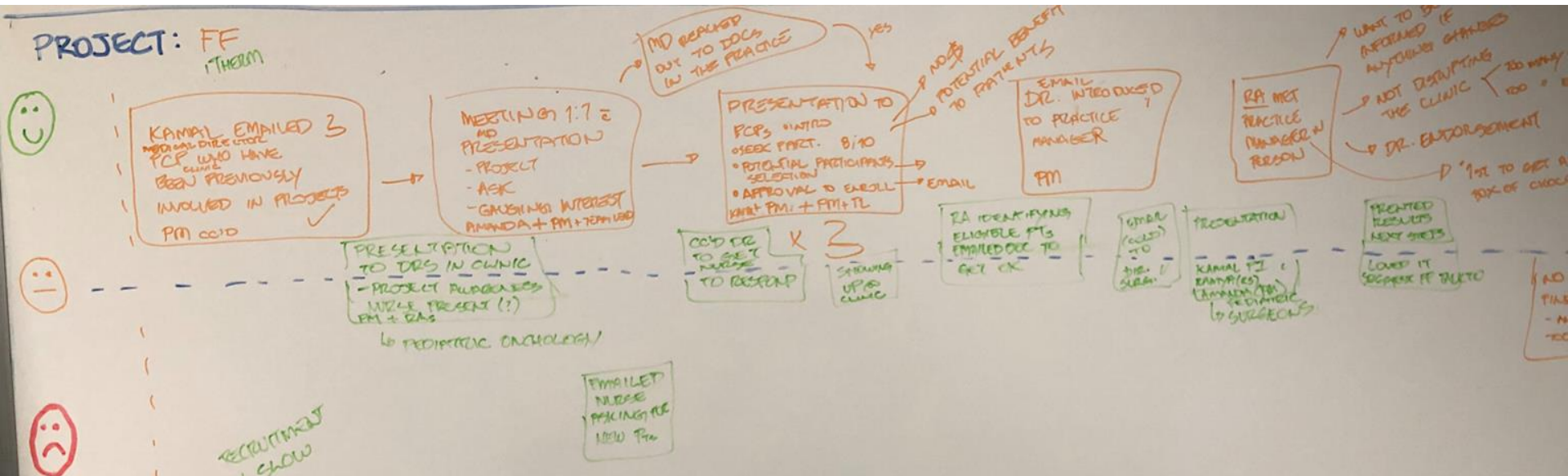
What is a journey-map?

A visualization of the process that a person goes through in order to accomplish a goal.

- Compile a series of user actions into a timeline

- Populate with user thoughts and emotions in order to create a narrative

- Condense and polish into a visualization of a person's journey.

Using journey-maps

How can you use them?

- In-depth interviews
- Observational research
- In person or remotely
- DIgitally or in physical mediums

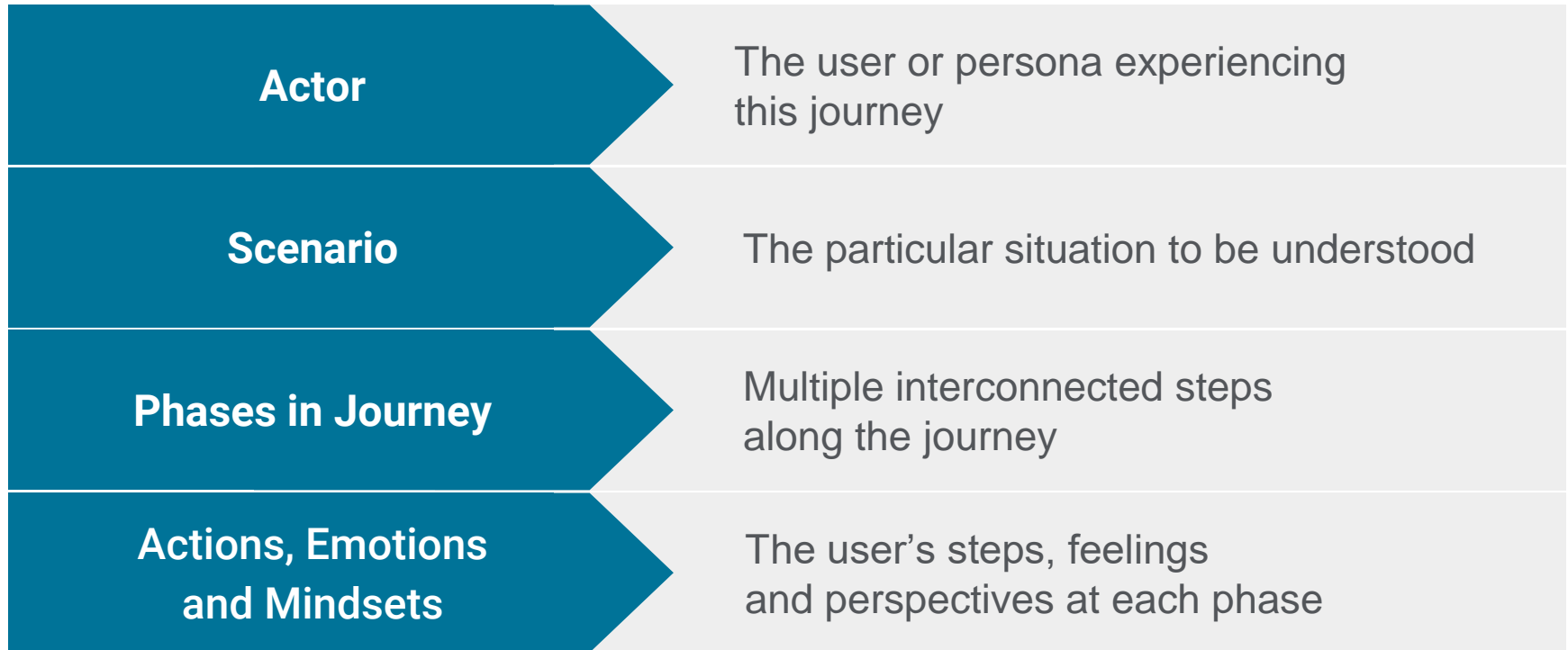## When to use them?

- In exploratory research
- To validate primary or secondary research findings
- In design-thinking workshops

Why use journey-maps?

- Understand and empathize with each phase, associated pain points and

  sentiments in a user's journey

- Engage the user in the co-creation of knowledge, empower patients to own their

  stories and take control of their narrative, work through memories and engage in

  deeper reflection

- Facilitate conversation and an aligned mental model for the project team, provide

  a basis for decision making as the team moves forward

- Communicate an understanding of your user or service to all involved in a way

  that is memorable and concise, creating a shared vision

Components of a journey-map

Actor	The user or persona experiencing this journey
Scenario	The particular situation to be understood
Phases in Journey	Multiple interconnected steps along the journey
Actions, Emotions and Mindsets	The user's steps, feelings and perspectives at each phase

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Actions, Emotions and Mindsets	The user's steps, feelings and perspectives at each phase
Opportunity Areas	Unmet needs or pain points to be addressed by potential solutions
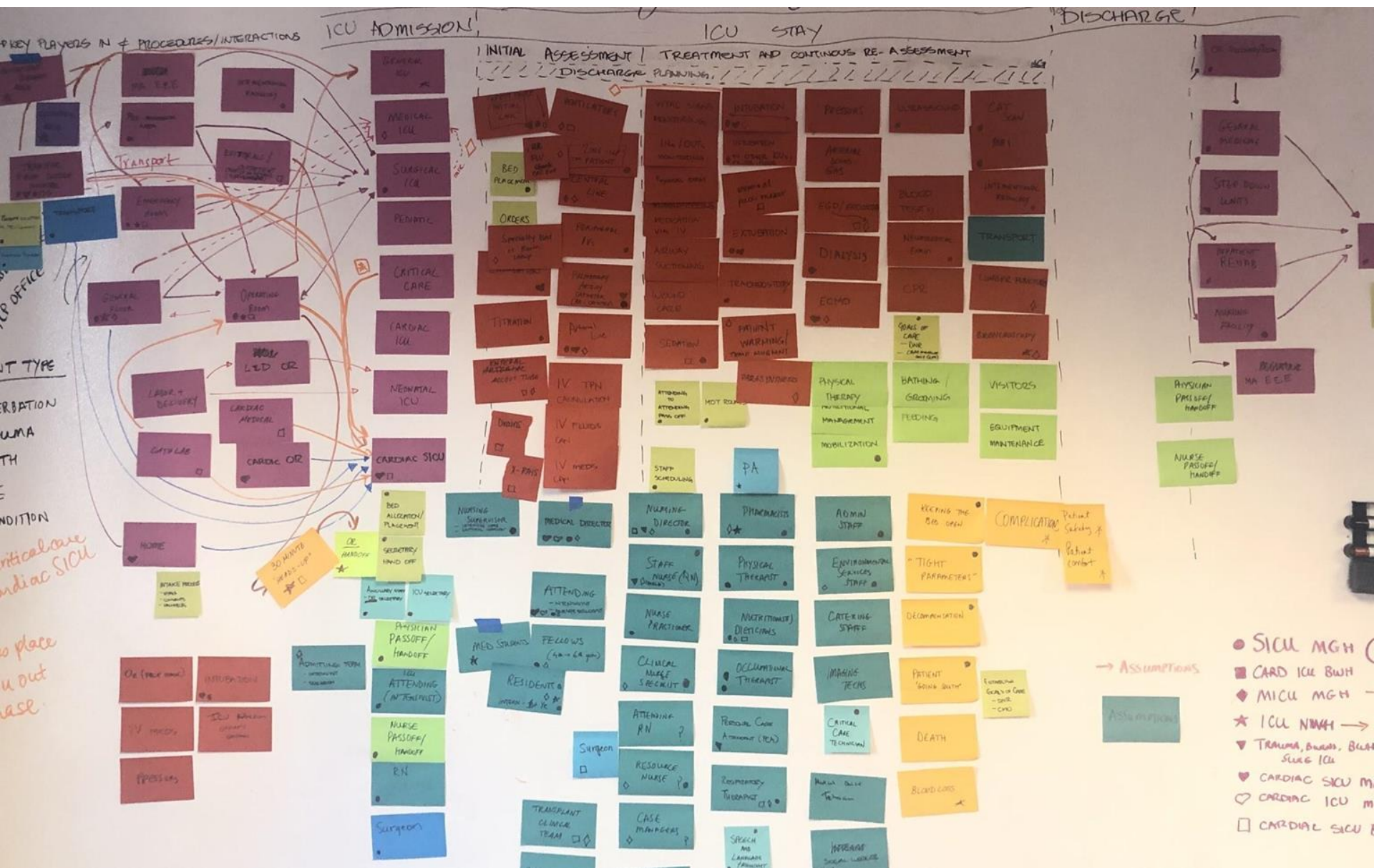
Journey-mapping in action (ICU Patient journey)

Journey-mapping in action

Actor	Person with Type 2 diabetes taking lunch-time insulin dose	**Scenario**	Self-managing their illness in the workplace

Phases	Arrive at work	→	Morning work	→	Lunch break

Actions	Place insulin pen in kitchen fridge	Mid-morning blood glucose measurement	Take insulin dose prior to meal
Emotions/ Mindsets	Fear of stigma and judgment	Shame of taking measurements at desk	Frustration at delay in eating lunch
Opportunity Areas	Diabetes kits that blend in with meal boxes	Education campaign to address stigma	Reminders to block off time to take insulin dose

Limitations

- Need focused moderating to probe for experiences, points in time, associated actors and emotions

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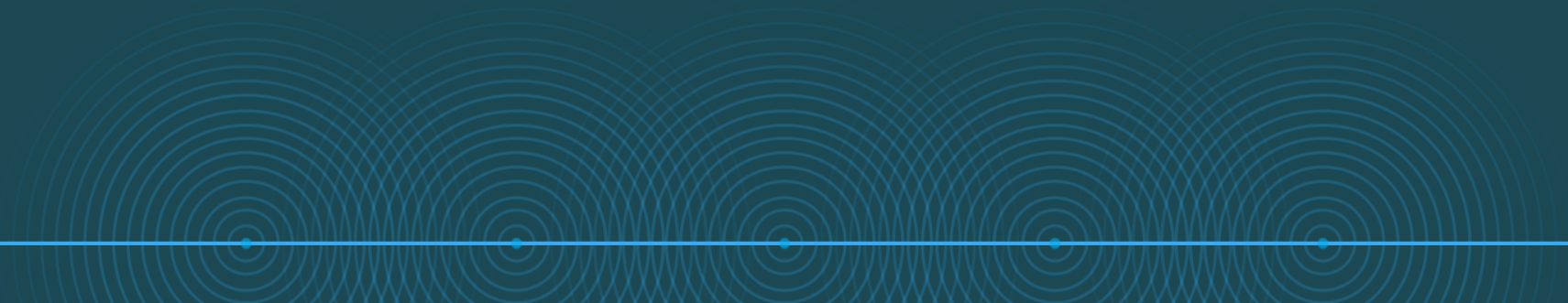
Limitations

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- Difficult to use alone; best used in complement with other methods

- Can be challenging to create an aggregate journey-map without losing individual experience

Photovoice

Dr Susie Donnelly

Social Researcher

What is Photovoice?
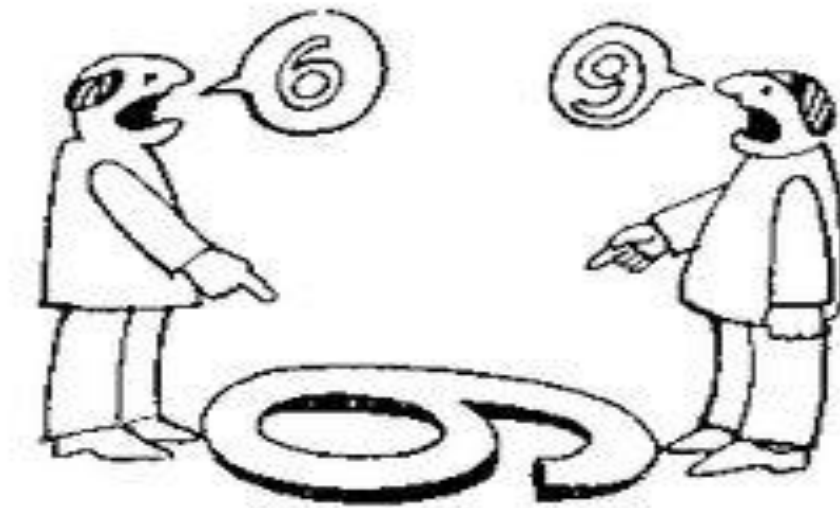
A 'process by which people can identify, represent and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique'

(Wang & Burris 1997: 369)

What does it do?

Perspective-taking ⟷ **Empathy**

Research + Action = Social Change

Hoeing Corn Photograph by Li Qiong Fen, Chengjiang County farmer, age 37
(Source: Wang and Burris, 1994)

Chinese village women as visual anthropologists 1395

Fig. 2. Women displaying their photographs for policymakers, media and visitors at the opening exhibition in Chengjiang County. Photograph by Li Tai Hang, *China Daily*.

PHOTOVOICE STAGES

PHOTOVOICE STAGES

Conceptualise the challenge

Define goals & objectives

Recruit participants / audience

Devise theme for photo assignment

Photovoice training

Take pictures

Group Dialogue

Document, validate and share the stories

Critical reflection

Select photos for discussion

Contextualise and storytell

Codify issues, themes, theories

Reach stakeholders who may be mobilised to create change

Bad Sidewalks. 66 year old person with diabetes

"Walking is a good form of exercise almost anyone can do. However, a lack of a sidewalk on a very busy stretch of road can severely inhibit the ability of a person with diabetes to get exercise if you don't live in a nicer neighborhood"

(Yankeelov et al, 2015)

Not today! © **MaryAnne**

More info: https://www.ucd.ie/car/research/selfmanagement/

Why should I use PV?

Limitations

- Time-consuming
- Ethical dilemmas
- Technical issues

Why should I use PV?

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Strengths

Early morning swims with my local swimmers group helps me feel strong physically and mentally. Out at sea, whilst moving through the waves, listening to the seagulls and watching out for jellyfish; I'm taken away from terrestrial problems of aches and pains, and wonderfully I get to carry an element of this buoyancy through the day. © **Roísín**

More info: https://www.ucd.ie/car/research/selfmanagement/
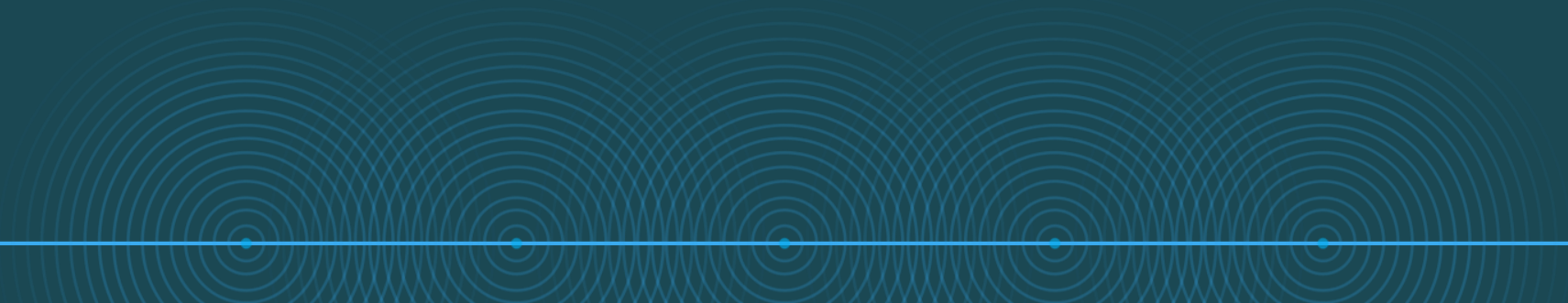
Why should I use PV?

Limitations

- Time-consuming
- Ethical dilemmas
- Technical issues

Strengths

- Rewarding for participant
- Rewarding for researcher
- Addresses power imbalances
  – Accessible, collaborative
- Immediate, far-reaching impact
- Social change

Takeaways

Empathy in research can…

- Developed through *reflexive,* in-depth qualitative techniques
- Produce deep knowledge to identify and implement *meaningful* solutions (e.g. devices, interventions, programmes)
- Raise awareness and understanding
- Affect change!

Thank you!

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https://www.linkedin.com/in/susiedonnelly/

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Thank you.

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