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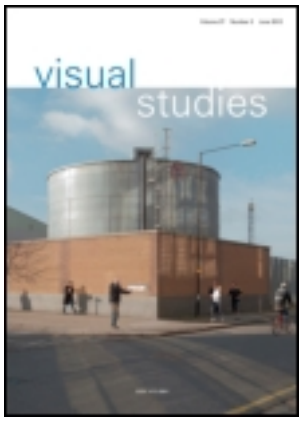

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'Who put that on there … why why why?' Power games and participatory techniques of visual data production

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'Who put that on there . . . why why why?' Power games and participatory techniques of visual data production

DAWN MANNAY

The use of participant-led visual data production is often seen as advantageous because data can be directed, constructed and created away from the influence of the researcher. The case for employing the visual to engender participatory research, and specifically to limit the intrusive presence of the researcher, is well versed and in vogue within the field of social science; however, although participatory techniques offer an opportunity to disrupt power relations, they are unable to transcend familial practices. Drawing from a study in which mother/daughter dyads produced photographs, collages, maps and stories to communicate their everyday lives and ideas of the future, this paper examines the wider role of 'intrusive presence'. The paper documents incidents of external physical interference where visual data was amended, the influence of outside suggestion in the creative process, and the restrictions placed by the imagined reactions of the viewer. The paper argues that when the 'intrusive presence' of the researcher steps out of the site of visual data production this leaves a space that is often filled by the 'intrusive presence' of significant others.

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INTRODUCTION

Visual images are widely recognised as having the potential to evoke emphatic understanding of the ways in which other people experience their worlds (Pink 2004; Belin 2005; Mizen 2005; Rose 2010). Furthermore, the case for limiting the intrusive presence of the researcher, extending the restrictions set by the linearity of verbal narrative and gaining a more nuanced understanding of the lives of others through visual techniques has been upheld by a large body of academic work (Harper 2002; Dodman 2003; Mason 2005; Twine 2006; Packard 2008; Woodward 2008).

As I have discussed in detail elsewhere (Mannay 2010), methods of visual data production also have the potential both to 'fight familiarity' (Delamont and Atkinson 1995) and engender participatory practice. However, the idea of an easy marriage between the visual and the participatory has been challenged by a number of researchers. For example, Luttrell and Chalfen (2010) comment that the explosion of participatory media projects has not resolved the goal of 'giving voice', and that a recurring and unresolved issue for researchers is that of whose voice is being spoken and, simultaneously, whose voice is being heard; particularly when research participants are children.

Large comparative research studies often involve cultural assumptions that are symptomatic of 'what children are and what children should be'; and participatory visual methods have become an important theme in a sociology of childhood where the voice of the child is prioritised. Nevertheless, as Lomax et al. (2011) argue, there is a danger in linking the visual with the participatory; not least because visual outputs cannot speak for themselves. For even where children are involved in planning, filming and editing, films and photographs are still produced through dynamic relationships; for Lomax et al., the children's (unequal) relationships with each other, the researchers and the residents on their estate.

Participatory visual approaches that make central the premise of giving voice need, therefore, to address the power relations that construct not only the research relationship but also, importantly, the wider social context. For example, conducting research in the classroom, Gallagher (2008) notes the impact of existing power relations between the pupils on the data production process in situations where he attempted to step back and displace the intrusive voice of the researcher. Data produced was often a reflection of the views of the more dominant children, to the neglect of the views of children who were lower down in the classroom hierarchy. Children did not necessarily engage in an equitable form and Gallagher acknowledges that the participatory ideal of the design did not manifest in the actuality of the fieldwork. Therefore, although creative methods of data production are popular in participatory projects, these techniques are not participatory in themselves; and although they may displace the intrusive voice of the researcher, they are ill equipped to eradicate existing power relations in the field.

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I recognised the dynamic relationship between the researcher and the researched in the conception of my own research design; I sought out the visual as a tool of participatory practice when working with children and marginalised groups (Mannay 2010). However, artefacts do not exist in a vacuum; they are based on the background experiences and feelings of the person that created them and, importantly, on the power relations that surround them; and I was not the only intrusive presence. Joanou (2009) suggests that researchers should continually reassess their research practices and this paper engages with the call for reassessment.

As discussed, Gallagher (2008) recognises the dynamic inequalities in classroom relationships, whilst Lomax et al. (2011) problematise the participatory/visual marriage in community-based research. However, in addition to school and community based projects, 'voice' can also be facilitated and promoted in participatory visual studies that take an individualistic or case-by-case approach (Mizen 2005; Twine 2006; Jorgenson and Sullivan 2009; Rose 2010). In the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded research study from which this paper was drawn, there was also a focus on individual lives and subjective experience; and participants produced photographs, collages, maps and stories in their own home. This practice was employed as a participatory tool; however, returning to the home as a site of visual data production forces recognition of an inherent difficulty. When the intrusive presence of the researcher steps out, this leaves a space that is often filled by the intrusive presence of significant others: siblings, partners, parents and friends.[1]

METHODOLOGY

Places and Spaces: The Research Site

The research study took place in a marginalised housing area in urbanised south Wales, United Kingdom.[2] Morrison and Wilkinson (1995) argue that polarisation has a spatial dimension that is illustrated in the creation of new ghettos of prosperity and poverty that now dominate the Welsh socio-economic terrain. The authors term this division the 'Los Angelization' of socio-economic terrain to draw parallels with the inequalities found in American cities; these ghettos are evident across Wales. This separation means that poverty can easily be overlooked by those with more resources who will rarely encounter those on low incomes.

According to the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (2008), Hystryd ranks as one of the most deprived communities in Wales.[3] Hystryd is a predominately white area in urban south Wales, which has become the epitome of the classically disadvantaged council estate. The poverty yardsticks applied to the estate include high unemployment, high rates of teenage pregnancy, high numbers of lone-parent families and high take-up of state-subsidised school meals. The estate, then, shares the characteristics of the type of place that forms the spatial core of disadvantage in Britain today. Such statistics are a useful starting point but, as Fink (2012) argues, statistics diminish people's lives by treating them as figures; this paper is interested in the individual within the shadow of similarities.

Participants

As Rawlins (2006) maintains, by considering intergenerational relationships, it is possible to gain a greater depth of understanding, since one can compare different versions of the same story. Similarly, Pilcher (1995) illustrates the ways in which age is a social category that acts as an important basis for the distribution of status, and access to power, space and time in contemporary British society. Thus, the wider study, from which this data is drawn, was interested in considering the views of both mothers and their daughters.

Data presented here was drawn from a research project that explored the everyday experiences of nine mothers and their nine daughters, residing in Hystryd. The research focused on the ways in which the boundaries of the immediate culture and memories of the past mediated their educational and employment histories and futures. Of particular interest was the complex set of emotional challenges inherent in working-class upward social mobility. The analysis of data took a psychoanalytically informed psychosocial approach to illustrate the ways in which residence and education permeate individual and intergenerational biographies, and can contribute to more fragmented, contradictory and unresolved identities (Mannay 2013a).

It has become commonplace within academia, particularly the social sciences, to discuss the importance of allowing the voices of marginalised communities to speak for themselves. Yet as Barrera (2011, 5) contends, this statement 'masks the awkward question of how it was those voices were silenced in the first place'. It is, then, imperative that institutions, policymakers and practitioners have an understanding of barriers at the affective level; otherwise, responses are designed solely from an inadequate, surface understanding of class. The wider research project from which this paper is drawn explored the complex spatial, structural, social, cultural, economic, psychological and patriarchal processes, in which marginalised women and girls continue to

struggle to be agents of their own destiny; aiming to inform policy and practice about life in an economically deprived area of south Wales.

In this paper, I focus on data produced with three of the daughters in the research sample: Nicole and Bryony aged between 8 and 10 at the time of data production, and Roxanne aged 18 at the time of data production.[4] I have focused on these specific daughters as the presence of intrusive others was more apparent in their visual and narrative data production; however, I will also make a general point about data produced by the mothers when discussing the idea of imagined audiences.

Research Relationships

The relationship between researcher and researched is key to the collection of reliable data (Pole 2007). Therefore, it is important to explicate the position of the researcher. The notion of being an insider or an outsider is inadequate in an absolute sense (Song and Parker 1995); however, to ignore questions of proximity is to assume that knowledge comes from nowhere, allowing researchers to become an abstract concept rather than a site of accountability (Mannay 2010, 2011).

It is misguided, although still apparent in the field of social science, to privilege a particular type of knowledge but it is imperative to acknowledge that 'perspective is always premised upon access to knowledge' (Skeggs 2004, 14). Thus, insider/outsider discourses are important because they place the researcher at the centre of the production of knowledge. Although this paper does not intend to engage with debating insider and outsider dichotomies, I previously lived in Hystryd and, as a consequence, there remains the concern that I am 'experience near' (Anderson 2002, 23).

The shared sense of precedent geography positioned me as 'researcher near' and influenced the design of the study. Consequently, it was important to address my position as an indigenous researcher and make a deliberate cognitive effort to question my taken for granted assumptions of that which I had thought familiar (Mannay 2010); and to select data production techniques that recognised the ways in which indigenous research has the ability to confer disadvantage as well as advantage, particularly the propensity to enter the research setting with preconceptions that cloud the ability to notice that which is often taken for granted, the mundane and the everyday (Vrasidas 2001).

In combination with earlier strategies (Delamont and Atkinson 1995), I was influenced by research that employed participants' visual data to render the familiar setting more perceptible (Kaomea 2003; Gauntlet and Holzwarth 2006). Participant-directed visual data production techniques were selected to promote subject-led dialogue and to attempt to limit the propensity for participant's accounts to be overshadowed by the enclosed, self-contained world of common understanding. Participants used the data production techniques of photo-elicitation,[5] mapping,[6] collage[7] and narrative[8] to express their perceptions of their social and physical environments, their everyday lives, reflections of their pasts, and aspirations and fears for the future. Visual and narrative data was then discussed in individual elicitation interviews privileging the interpretative model of auteur theory (Rose 2001).

The notion that the most salient aspect in understanding a visual image is what the maker intended to show is often referred to as auteur theory (Rose 2001). Auteur theory can be required on a practical level because the interpretation of the audience is not necessarily the same as the narrative the image-maker wanted to communicate; indeed, it can often be markedly different. The practice of asking participants to explain the visual images that they create has become a common feature of social science research (Newman et al. 2006; Twine 2006; Woodward 2008; Rose 2010). Elicitation was employed comprehensively in this study, not least to counter the risk of erroneous interpretation; for, as Reiger (2011, 145) comments, 'pictures alone . . . are hazardous to interpret without the reinforcement of other information gathered'.

These techniques proved useful within a participatory methodology to some extent; and illustrated a potential for making the familiar strange (Mannay 2010). However, as Chalfen (2011) notes, the term 'participant visual methods' covers a diverse range of approaches, and projects have different end points. Arguably, the approach employed in this research considered the underlying assumptions and common principles of inclusive practice (Walmsley and Johnson 2003) in two transparent ways. First, in attempting to make the familiar strange I was actively reflecting on my position in relation that of my participants. Second, I was attempting to centralise the views and experiences of my participants and engender an approach resonant with the aims of 'giving voice'.

One principal objective of such research, then, is to eliminate the conceptual and practical filters applied both literally and metaphorically by researchers, and to engender access to more authentic views. As Thompson (2008) contends, children and young people are capable of providing expert testimony about their experiences, associations and lifestyles. In 'giving voice', there was a

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recognition in the study that children and young people are competent 'beings' and 'political selves' (Kallio 2008) whose views, actions and choices are of value. For this reason, with all of the participants, mothers and daughters, it was important that their involvement was not 'exploitative or frivolous', a charge that has been directed towards earlier research with marginalised groups (Hart 1992, 4).

In terms of the ethics of working with families and, in particular, the engagement with visual methods of data production, I was careful to engage with examples of best practice (Thompson and Holland 2005; Clarke 2006; Wiles et al. 2008; Wiles, Clarke, and Prosser 2011; Joanou 2009). I was mindful of the ongoing process of informed consent, anonymity and the visual, and the lasting effects of participation in research studies. The research was interested in participants' perspectives; nevertheless, as Chalfen (2011) comments, there is always some form of assignment in participatory work. Although participants were primarily concerned with constructing their own visual production, in terms of ownership, there was, of course, an element of guidance. The research design aspired to minimal instruction but even asking participants to create data to reflect their everyday lives implied some form of assignment at the point of data production; and this assignment necessarily guided data analysis.

The research design carefully considered the researcher/researched relationship as I have documented in detail elsewhere (Mannay 2010, 2011); however, beyond this relationship, 'the importance of voice, whose story is being told and for whose benefit, looms large' (Walmsley and Johnson 2003, 41). For this reason, the current paper is concerned with presenting data around wider research relationships with participant's siblings, parents and partners that were not fully appreciated or adequately contemplated at the outset of the study. As the research was interested in intergenerational perspectives, on the one hand, including other individuals who are of importance to the participant could be viewed as beneficial. On the other hand, the presence of these knowledgeable others at the site of data production could be viewed as an implicit silencer of the participants' voices. The following sections explore this tension and the associated methodological outcomes and concerns, and the relationship with the ideology of participatory practice.

COVERT PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Gallagher (2008) writes that his attempts to introduce participatory methods to children were circumscribed by the pre-existing landscape of power within the school, charting the ways in which the more dominant children in the classroom thwarted his attempts to intervene in these power relations. Similarly, although I attempted to introduce participatory techniques and remove myself from the physical site of data production I was unable to circumvent processes of power and control inherent in the complex sets of relations that constitute the field of that data production, namely mothers and daughters' homes.

In my attempt to empower participants by stepping back from the site of data production, rather than radically reconfiguring adult/child power relations I have, in some cases, provoked a reconfiguring of those power relations where the mother or another family member steps in as the powerful adult. This was evident when I interviewed Nicole about her 'possible selves' narrative.

Prior to the interview Nicole mentions that there were other things that she had wanted to write in her stories of possible selves but that her mother, Tina, had advised her not to include this information. This was not because the content was indicative of any family secret but simply because Tina interpreted these themes as diverting from the purpose of the research. In response, I gave Nicole the opportunity to add to her story at my home prior to the interview, which led to the creation of a new section of the narrative including the following section concentrating on lost possible selves:

> Excerpt from Nicole's Possible Selves Narrative
> *When I was younger I wanted to be a singer. But now I want to be a teacher. Because I am good at science, history, maths, art, English. I wanted to be a number, like an artist, doctor, nurse, scientist a make-up artist. But because I wanted to be a scientist, girls always used to laugh at me because it was a boy's job.*

Tina's intervention in Nicole's story led to the omission of data, which may appear irrelevant to Tina but is of interest to me as a researcher. Therefore, as in earlier qualitative research with children, family dynamics of power and authority are seen to affect the child's ability to tell their own story (Clark-Ibanez 2004). Although the production of visual and narrative representations was specifically set as an individual task to be completed by the participant there was often some form of collusion or interference; and, realistically, research with children cannot be conducted, either practically or ethically, in the family home without parental or family involvement. Intervening at the point of interview offered an insight into the contrasting intergenerational conceptions of what counts as relevant knowledge; however, Nicole's story could well have been erased and made inaccessible

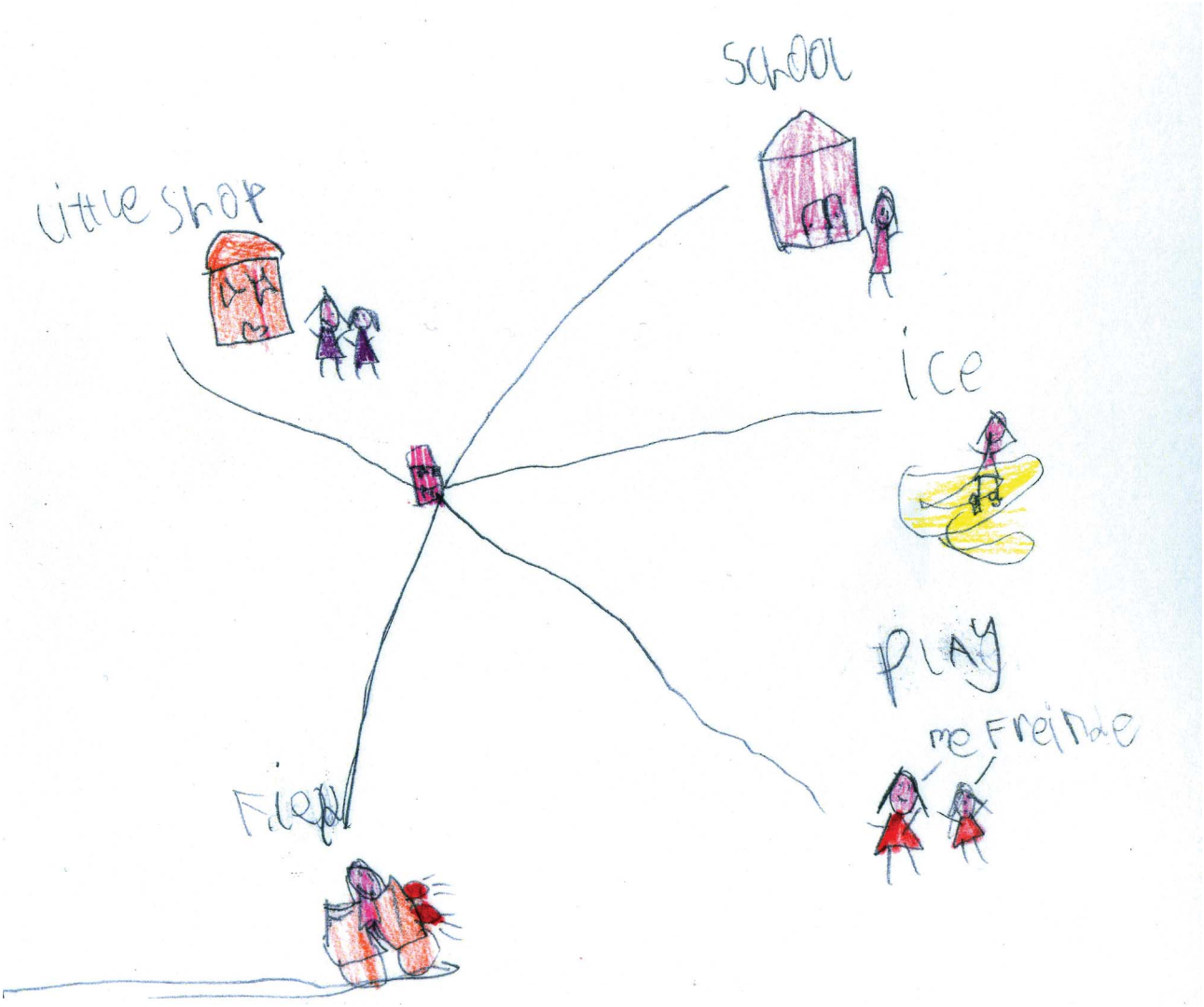

FIGURE 1. Bryony: Place and space map.

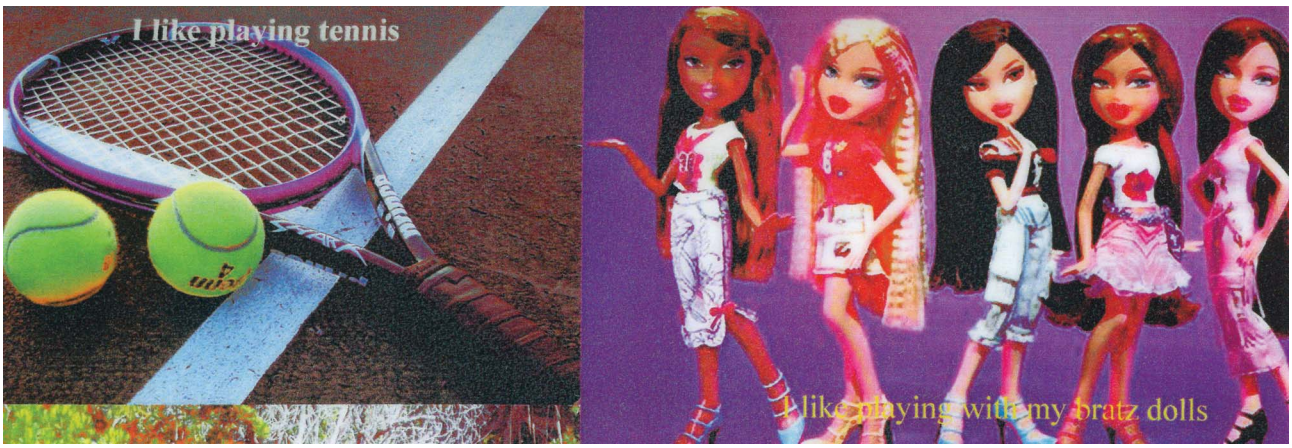

FIGURE 2. Bryony: 'I like . . . '

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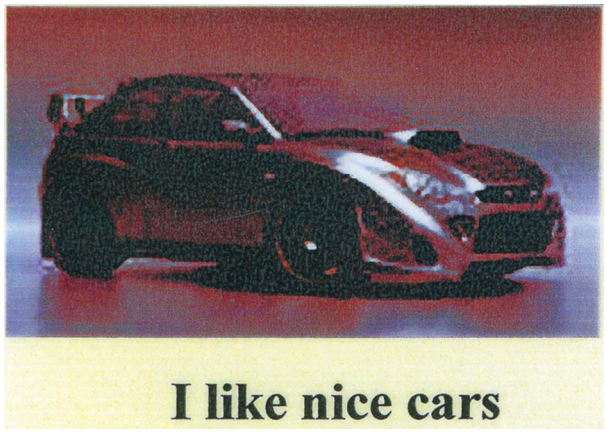

FIGURE 3. Bryony: 'I like nice cars'?

because of her mother's interpretation of the assigned research task. As researchers we need to find strategies that can 'give voice' to such silences.

OVERT PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

Bryony is perhaps the participant whose production was most susceptible to familial influence. Initially Bryony completed her 'space and place' maps using pencil crayons (Figure 1) and without overt interference. In the following interviews, Bryony had a clear foundation on which to communicate her experience of home and the immediate locality. However, at the second stage of data collection – 'possible future selves' – Bryony's stepfather became enthusiastic about the project and wanted to take part. I explained that I was only collecting data from mothers and daughters but this did not dampen his enthusiasm to 'help'. While Bryony's maps were handmade, the collage was produced collaboratively utilising computer graphic software; and rather than being a representation of Bryony's ideas of her future self it was a contemporary representation of favourable pastimes with the label 'I like . . . ', as demonstrated in an extract from her collage (Figure 2).

The technical standard of the collage implies adult assistance, though it could be argued that the selection of images was based upon Bryony's preferences, suggesting collaboration rather than control. However, the following quotation, and a related image (Figure 3), suggests that Bryony was not in agreement or even completely aware of all of the image-based and textual additions to her data production activity.

> Bryony (reading from the collage): I like nice cars, who put that on there, I know I like nice cars but, I don't really really really like them (pause) I don't watch Top Gear, I don't watch anything about cars.

The elicitation interviews around this collage were not as embedded in Bryony's data. Bryony did not direct our conversation around the collection of images in the way that I would have expected from our previous interview with her map. In this way, the collage was unable to provide such an emotive basis for discussion as the initial hand drawn map, where Bryony was eager to talk through the images that she had created. There seemed to be a lack of ownership and engagement with the collage and, as a researcher, I felt that the production was not so much a reflection of Bryony. Rather, the images presented here, and in other pictures of idyllic holidays and consumer lifestyles, were an idealised form, a presentation of what a young girl in a caring, successful and secure family should both 'like' and 'have'.

Nicole's mother, Tina, restricted her daughter's narrative because she interpreted these themes as diverting from the purpose of the research: as 'not what the researcher wanted'. The 'intrusive other' in Bryony's collage, her stepfather, did not consider the activity instructions and, as a result, I was presented with a collage that neither met the requirements of the research, nor interested Bryony as a self that could be shared. The visual data production activity seems to have travelled beyond assistance and interaction, to some extent expected with younger participants (Clark-Ibanez 2004), to one of adult control. Again, arguably, the collage offers some insight into a central adult's performance of family but in a study interested in the views of mothers and daughters, where voices of participants themselves are placed centre stage as the 'knowers' and 'tellers' of their own stories and experiences, Bryony's opportunity to narrate her ideas about her possible future self was diminished.

SIBLING SUGGESTIONS

I am not suggesting that power is solely wielded by adults. Children and young people too, with their actions, and in some cases their mere presence, can restrict, dictate or influence the content of their mother's and siblings visual and narrative data production. For example, the following extract from Roxanne's positive possible self-narrative was a line that her younger brother added in while she was away from the computer.

> I have a lovely brother which comes round the house now and then and chills with (boyfriend) and kids.

The added line was left intact by Roxanne and led to conversations around the sibling relationship and also the relationship between her boyfriend and her brother. Arguably, without the additional line our conversation may have taken the same direction. Roxanne did not

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write about her brother specifically, although she mentioned family, but neither did she omit his inclusion or contradict its meaning in her/their future selves. For this reason, we can see the individual account set out by Roxanne as different but not necessarily truer or fuller; and perhaps the collaborative account is more naturalistic.

Yates (2010) conducted photo-elicitation research with young people whose lives had been disrupted by chronic illness, which raised similar concerns about the complete exclusion of family members. Initially, both our thinking relegated familial interference as a constraint on participants to speak freely and a contamination of participants' data. However, for Yates (2010, 285), the 'banishing the parents' perspective and involvement' was not viewed as a natural or appropriate way to proceed by either the parent or the young person. In some cases, perhaps, discussion with other family members can be advantageous, allowing participants to explore more fully their sense of self, checking their own ideas and understandings with others who know them well but from a different subjective perspective, and arguably building a fuller picture.

This idea of assistance and collaboration may be particularly useful in research exploring 'possible selves' of the future. Adulthood does not occupy a 'grown-up' static state and neither does childhood; rather, there is a constant and continual state of fluidity in an ever-changing landscape of who we might have been and who we might still become. A continuous fluidity that Renold and Ringrose (2011) argue is intensified in the lives of girls and women. Thus, inevitably, some possible selves will come to be, permanently or temporarily, whilst others will be lost along the way but sometimes recovered (King and Hicks 2007). It is important to explore the idea of 'lost' and 'recovered' possible selves, and here the family and their ability to remind, refocus and reboot our sense of selfhood raises some concerns about 'banishing the parents' (Yates 2010, 285) to engender access to a true, clear and singular self.

Similarly, Clendon (2006) discusses the benefits of intergenerational perspectives in exploration of mother's and daughter's thoughts around why they have kept their baby health books. Clendon employed joint elicitation interviews around these books and argued that the dyad format is more naturalistic as it acknowledges that women traditionally communicate with one another within the referents of family; and that this format elicited a greater depth of interview material. For Clendon, interaction between mothers and daughters in her study enabled a richer perspective on intergenerational differences to be uncovered. However, she concedes that in some dyads the dialogue was more restrained and in these cases she moved to a more participatory style of interviewing where her input as a woman and as a mother were obvious and the interview became a construction between the researcher and the participants.

I also adopted this approach in the interviews where I would share my own similar experiences in the manner of a conversation about mutual topics of interest rather than rely on traditional question and answer technique. In this way, rather than trying to engender a 'true' account, and employing participatory methods to elicit a singular perspective or 'give voice' to an individual participant, the 'intrusive presence' of significant others, both family members and the researcher, could potentially offer more nuance and differentiated accounts.

IMAGINED AUDIENCES

In his seminal chapter on the history of social psychology, Allport (1954, 5) provided a definition for the sub-discipline stating that 'Social psychology is the attempt to understand and explain how the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of other human beings'. The definition retains centrality in contemporary social psychology but the concept of imagined audiences can be viewed as relevant across the discipline of social sciences. For example, in the present study it is worth noting that where adult participants, mothers, created data single-handedly with no overt manipulation, in some cases there were still images and words that were not included because of the risk that data could be viewed by family members.

As Luttrell and Chalfen (2010, 199) contend, 'imagined audiences can change and play important roles in what is said or left unsaid'; a reminder that visual research should always be interested in not just that which can be seen but with what is hidden, erased (Kaomea 2003) and absent. In mothers' accounts this was specifically salient in terms of data that presented the darker side of family life and explored the 'affective landscapes of trust, confidentiality, silence, and the unintended consequences that encroach upon, and beyond, research relationships in indigenous qualitative inquiry' (Mannay 2011, 962).

In many of the interviews I conducted with mothers their visual data was not simply a collection of images but, rather, resonating with the 'turn to practice' in social theory, a set of social practices (Reckwitz 2002). Focusing on social practices, Rose (2010) drew on the

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disciplines of anthropology, geography and material culture studies to explore not what photographs are but what photographs do. Rose (2010) interviewed women in their own homes to gain a sense of the domestic space and the encounters between object and practice in family photography. Rose (2010) argues that family photographs can be seen as part of women's traditional responsibility for domestic order, and a way for women to negotiate a feminised subjectivity of acceptable motherhood and enact family togetherness.

This enactment of family togetherness was a process touched upon earlier in the paper when I discussed the idealised form of Bryony's life presented by Bryony's stepfather. In this way, the meaning of images is only part of their story because their presentation can be employed to engender a particular kind of intimate viewing public. Arguably, there is always some form of presentation of self (Goffman 1959); however, in the accounts of mothers, it was often omissions rather than additions that were active in the practice of the maintenance of a happy family life. When stories are troubling, in the form of domestic and familial abuse, especially when the participant has remained with an abusive partner or is worried about her children accessing and interpreting symbolic meanings of visual data, omissions serve a protective and necessary purpose, but also silence subjective truths.

The focus of the study was not domestic abuse; however, the prime ethnographic maxim is that one cannot know what one is exploring until it has been explored (Rock 2007, 33); and the academic work and consultations on violence against women supports the ongoing and pervasive nature of abuse in the UK (Jarvinen, Kail, and Miller 2008; Barter et al. 2009; Rights of Women 2010; Women's National Coalition 2010; Mannay 2013b, 2013c). This suggests that researchers need always to be aware of and sensitive to these related silences, even, and perhaps especially, when the focus of the research is removed from discourses of abuse and data is unexpected.

Having been made aware of such interference and omission in the interview situation, where appropriate, I asked about the process of production and if there were any other images or themes that participants thought of but did not include in their data. As Gabb (2008) argues, in empirical qualitative studies of family life, the researcher inevitably becomes embedded in the personal worlds of those being researched; the willingness of participants to share these accounts within the interview setting is testimony both to the centrality of violence in mother's and daughter's lives, and the strength of the research design, which engendered a high level of trust between researched and researcher. The interview does provide an opportunity to intervene in the complex sets of power relations that constitute the field of data production and elicit silenced accounts; but such an intervention is never a complete solution. Removing the researcher from the site of data production may be advantageous but, as Gallagher (2008, 147) maintains, 'participatory techniques may provide interesting ways to intervene in games of power . . . but they do not provide a way to transcend such games'.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Luttrell and Chalfen (2010, 200) contend that 'in the service of equality and social justice, we will continue to be pressed to ask how some voices continue to be unrepresented, muted, unheard, "voiced over" and silenced' and this paper makes visible the act of image and narrative production; in order to explore the ways in which data gains its meaning from the process through which it is produced. Although the intrusive presence of the researcher is routinely considered in contemporary social research, the influence of intrusive presence of others – friends, parents, adults – is less likely to be the focus of debate.

In this paper, such interaction has been seen to influence, restrict and control data that participants produce. However, arguably, interaction can also be viewed as a more naturalistic from of inquiry and a tool to promote the production of more reflective, nuanced and considered visual and narrative data. Parents, friends and family, the researcher and research aims, and wider social norms and values are a continuing and constant influence. Unless our participants are Harlow's monkeys (Miller 2011), cruelly separated from company and society, we need to expect, embrace and evaluate such influence, and appreciate the ways in which family involvement can enable a richer perspective on intergenerational differences to be uncovered (Clendon 2006; Yates 2010).

Participants' images around family were often about picturing happy moments, but the ongoing process of revisiting and sharing the images in the elicitation interviews provided an opportunity to explore the enactment of familial integration in ways that both supported and contradicted the visual data presented. The interviews also allowed for examination of the involvement of intrusive others, both present and imagined, in the construction of data that are not simply subjective and fixed but fluid and intersubjective.

More than looking at data, then, we need to look beyond data and consider how much assistance, guidance and

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interaction participants are party to in the creative process, and whether the 'intrusive presence' of significant others is a threat, a benefit or simply an inescapable facet of social science research, where meanings are always negotiated, revised and co-constructed. Returning to Allport (1954, 5), this paper has demonstrated how the 'thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of individuals are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of other human beings'. However, if social science serves as a prerequisite for a multiplicity of understandings of the complexities of lived experience, which are continuously configured, then family and family relations undoubtedly mediate individual identities and experiences. Rather than trying to exclude 'intrusive voices', perhaps it would be more useful to examine the ways in which they can act to further our understandings.

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NOTES

[1] The ideas presented in this article were initially presented at the Second International Visual Methods Conference, Open University, 13–15 September 2011; I would like to thank the organisers and audience for their comments and suggestions, which helped me to develop the paper.

[2] The doctoral research project from which this paper is drawn from was titled 'Mothers and daughters on the margins: Gender, generation and education' and was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. I would like to acknowledge Professor John Fitz, Dr Emma Renold and Dr Bella Dicks for their supervision of the study and ongoing support.

[3] Hystryd is a pseudonym chosen to maintain the anonymity of the area.

[4] Nicole, Bryony and Roxanne are pseudonyms chosen to maintain the participants' anonymity. I would like to thank and acknowledge these participants and their families who made the research for this paper possible.

[5] The techniques of self-directed photography and photo-elicitation, or 'photo-voice' as it is sometimes called, have been used successfully in a range of research studies. In this study, participants were each provided with a camera and asked to take a series of photographs depicting meaningful places, spaces and activities. The photographs then formed the basis of an interview where I engaged in a tape-recorded discussion with each participant.

[6] The technique of mapping is an activity when participants are asked to draw a representation of a specific geographical space of journey. In this study, participants were each provided with art materials and asked to make a series of maps depicting meaningful places, spaces and activities. The maps then formed the basis of an interview where I engaged in a tape-recorded discussion with each participant.

[7] The technique of collage is an activity when participants are asked to create a representation through images taken from existing sources such as magazines. In this study, participants were asked to find images and make a series of collages depicting meaningful places, spaces and activities. The collages then formed the basis of an interview where I engaged in a tape-recorded discussion with each participant. Further discussion of this activity and the other visual techniques applied can be found in Mannay (2010).

[8] In narrative approaches, stories provide an analytical frame for the study of mental life as well as the study of social conditions. In this study participants were asked to write narratives from the retrospective perspective of their childhood self, describing who they wanted to become, positive possible self, and who they feared becoming, negative possible self. This activity was repeated from the perspective of the present and participants again wrote a narrative of possible positive and negative selves.

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