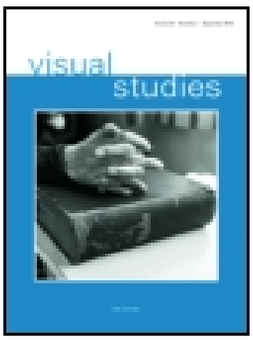

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Questions of process in participant-generated visual methodologies

MARILYS GUILLEMIN and SARAH DREW

There is an increasing literature on visual methodologies in which images are generated by participants as part of the research, as distinct from the analysis of existing images or images taken by the researcher. Although there are growing numbers of publications that present frameworks for analysing images and their meaning, this is an area requiring further deliberation and consolidation. Our contribution is to give serious attention to the processes of image production in participant-generated visual methodologies. We examine methodological and ethical considerations that arise before, during and after image production. Our work is in health research and we focus specifically on two methods: first, a combination of photovoice and photo-elicitation, in particular with young people; and second, drawings as research method. Based on examples using these two methods, we pose questions of process for image production and submit this for interrogation for reasons of methodological, analytical and ethical rigour.

INTRODUCTION

With the growth of visual studies, there is now a considerable literature devoted to the analysis and interpretation of visual images (Mirzoeff 1999; Evans and Hall 1999; Emmison and Smith 2000; Banks 2001; van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2001; Sturken and Cartwright 2001; Rose 2007). Visual methodologies have primarily involved the analysis of existing visual images or artefacts, or the study of images taken by the researcher at the study site. There has been less research conducted that involves the study of images generated by participants as part of the research. This is the focus of our interest: research where participants are asked by the researcher to produce photographs, video, drawings and other types of visual images as research data. In this research, the participant is actively engaged in the process of production and interpretation of the visual image as data. What does this engagement entail and what are its consequences for the participant, the researcher and the research?

To organise our discussion, we have framed this paper around the three stages of image production: before, during, and after. We examine methodological, epistemological and ethical issues in the processes of image production. Although the points we discuss do not necessarily pertain to only one particular stage of image production, this chronological schema may be useful, particularly for those entering the field of visual methodologies and looking for methodological guidance. Our empirical work is in health research and we draw on this to illustrate our points. We concentrate specifically on two methods: first, Drew's use of photovoice and photo-elicitation, in particular with young people who have chronic illnesses; and second, Guillemin's use of drawings to explore illness experiences. Although we acknowledge that each of these methods has its own particular considerations, we believe that they have enough in common for them to be discussed in parallel; where relevant, we point to specificities and differences.

We begin with an introduction to the use of participant-generated visual methodologies in health research. Using our chronological schema, we argue that we need to give as much attention to the processes of image production as to the image itself. In the 'before' stage, we examine the processes of involving participants in image production. The 'during' stage examines the meaning of data in visual methodologies, what participants do during image production, and the role of the audience. In the 'after' stage, the processes of interpretation and analysis are examined. As with any other research methodology, image production is not a neutral exercise. We need to consider how undertaking this process of image production and interpretation may result in the participant reconsidering their understanding of the research in ways that they may not have anticipated or necessarily be comfortable with. This is particularly relevant if the images are to be disseminated or published in public. To ensure research that is both rich

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and rigorous, it is important to give attention more fully to the processes of image production.

PARTICIPANT-GENERATED VISUAL METHODOLOGIES

Over the last decade, there has been a growing interest in the use of research participant-generated visual methodologies. Key methodologies involving research participants have included video diaries, still photographs and photovoice, and drawings. Although we do not discuss video diaries in detail here, this methodology has generated considerable interest as a means of exploring lived experiences of research participants (Holliday 2000; Pink 2004; Patashnick and Rich 2005). We focus here on participant-generated photo techniques of photovoice and photo-elicitation, and drawings.

Photovoice and Photo-elicitation

Participant-generated photography, or what Wagner (1979) called 'native image-making' methods, are an increasing feature of social science and health research. Variously described as photovoice, photo-elicitation, photo-novellas and visual narratives, these approaches share the starting-point of being participatory methods. Photovoice was originally conceptualised as a group-based participatory health promotion strategy (Wang and Burris 1997; Wang et al. 1998). It drew on principles for fostering critical consciousness and empowerment, as well as feminist theory and a community-based approach to photography (Wang and Redwood-Jones 2001). There are now many examples of studies using photovoice (Wang, Cash and Powers 2000; Wang and Redwood-Jones 2001; Streng et al. 2004). Participants are provided with a camera and asked to create an image-based account of their experiences and/or those things that are important to them in a particular context. These projects share the assumption that increased participant control of data generation through production of visual images will help to illuminate important aspects of lived experience that might otherwise have been overlooked or ignored by researchers – perhaps even been invisible. Beyond that, methodological imperatives and project goals are diverse, with consequentially different outcomes for the position, voice and authorship role of the photographer and researcher.

The photo-elicitation approach can involve researcher- or participant-generated photographs (Collier 1967; Harper 2002). Photographs are introduced to the context of the research interview based on 'assumptions about the role and utility of photographs in promoting reflections that words alone cannot' (Clark-Ibañez 2007, 171). Participant-generated photo-elicitation, also known as autodriven photo-elicitation (Samuels 2007, 198), emphasises the participant's role in shaping the creation of visual images. This methodology is promoted for expanding efforts at data generation beyond those available through more traditional avenues such as language-based interviewing (Clark-Ibañez 2007; Harper 2002). Samuels (2007, 199) stresses the value of the technique for 'bridging the culturally distinct worlds of the researcher and the researched'. Many studies have used photo-elicitation to explore the perspectives of children (Clark 1999; Gabhainn and Sixsmith 2006; Punch 2002; Rasmussen 2004). Increasingly, photo-elicitation methods have also been conducted with adults (Radley and Taylor 2003; Oliffe and Bottorff 2007; Packard 2008).

Drew's contribution to the use of participant-generated photographic approaches relates to two studies examining the experiences of young people with chronic health conditions. The first project is the *Optimising Pathways* study exploring the development of self-management practices by young people with chronic conditions, namely asthma, diabetes, cystic fibrosis or leukaemia (Sawyer, Drew, and Duncan 2007); the second project is the *Keeping Connected* (Yates et al. 2010) study of the relationship for young people between chronic illness, identity development, social connectivity and educational experiences (White, Drew, and Hay 2009). The approach to visual research used in both these projects draws on a combination of photovoice and photo-elicitation principles. As with Oliffe and Bottorff (2007, 850), the focus on photovoice highlights participants as the authors of the photographs, and the focus on photo-elicitation delineates the way photographs later form an integral part of individual research interviews.

In each of these project designs, image production was used in conjunction with individual interviews. Individual interviews were conducted after participants had produced a series of images around a broadly specified topic (using disposable film-based cameras in the *Optimising Pathways* project, and digital cameras in the *Keeping Connected* project). During the interviews participants talked about their images: why they had made them, how they were taken, as well as explaining what was being conveyed within individual images or in their image series as a whole.

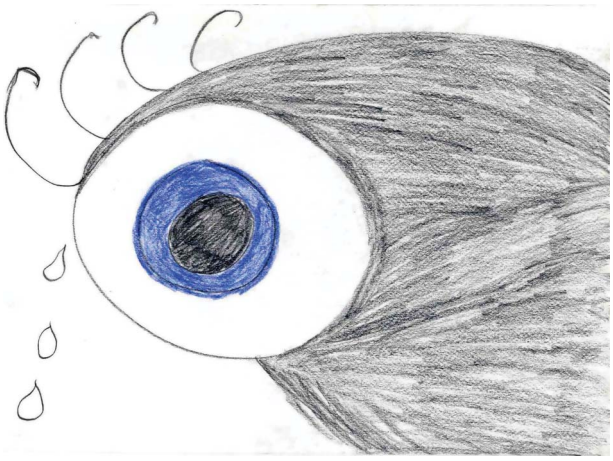

FIGURE 1. A participant's drawing of postnatal depression: 'no light, it's an eye with tears, helpless, me looking at black'.

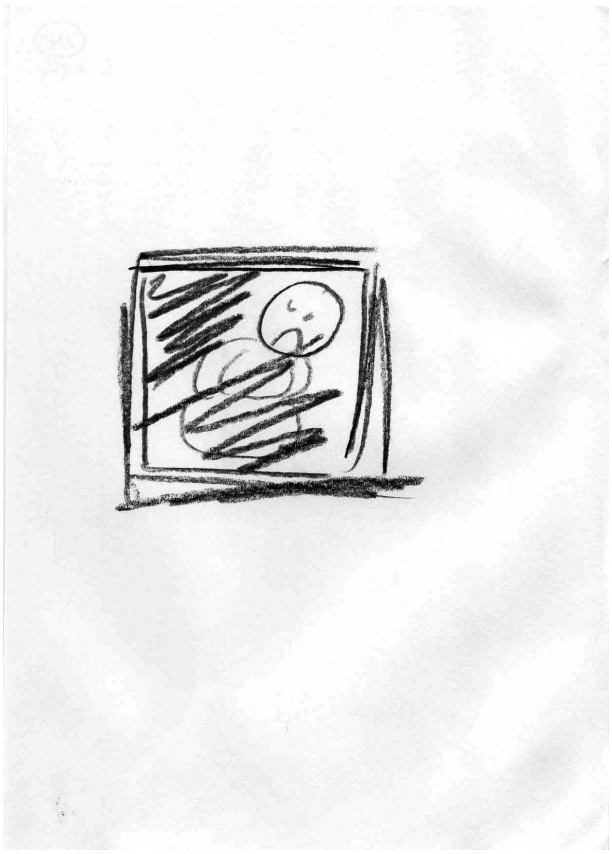

FIGURE 2. A participant's drawing of postnatal depression: 'I'm in a box, and I'm alone'.

Drawings

The second area of participant-generated visual methodology we focus on is drawings. Much of the work on drawings as a visual methodology has been limited to children as research participants. An example is research of children's drawings as representations of themselves and their social world (Herth 1998; Driessnack 2006; Mercier, Barron, and O'Connor 2006), in addition to research of children's understandings of health and illness (Oakley et al. 1995; Bendelow, Oakley, and Williams 1996; Williams and Bendelow 2000). Research with adult participants includes the important ethnographic work of Martin (1994) where she asked participants to draw their immune system; since then, there have been a number of other studies with adult participants (Victora and Knauth 2001; Broadbent et al. 2004; Cross, Kabel, and Lysack 2006).

Guillemin's work in the use of drawings as visual methodology comprises several studies examining participants' illness experiences; first, a study of women's experiences of menopause (Guillemin 1999); second, an analysis of drawings of heart disease by mid age women with heart disease (Guillemin 2004a); and third, research on women recovering from postnatal depression (Guillemin and Westall 2008). The aim of these studies was to explore participants' experiences and understanding of the illness in question. In each of these studies, it is important to note that drawings were used together with individual interviews, and not as a sole method (Guillemin 2004b). Individual interviews were conducted, following which the participants were asked to draw. Participants were provided with a blank card and coloured felt pens and asked to draw how they understood their illness. In the study of postnatal depression, participants were in the process of recovering from the condition and were asked to draw first, what it was like for them during the illness, and second, what it was like for them now. Importantly, in all these studies, the participants were then asked to discuss their drawing and explain what they had drawn and why.

Enabling and Empowering Methodologies

Participant-generated visual methodologies such as photo-elicitation and drawings offer benefits for the researcher and the research in terms of broadening the scope of data access, and therefore opening up the complexities of the phenomenon being researched. However, participant-generated visual methodologies are beneficial not only to researchers, but potentially also to participants. Image-based methodologies can foster a sense of participation, particularly for those groups who are often reluctant to participate in research, such as young people. By fostering participation, these methodologies can be empowering, giving voice to those who may not otherwise be heard. We suggest that visual methodologies offer a different approach that takes

seriously participants as knowers. In addition, visual methodologies provide participants with the opportunity to produce an image that allows them to portray what is often difficult to express in words. This can have the effect of being enabling, and for some, to be therapeutic.

A key parameter in committing to photo-elicitation was putting young people more in charge of the research process. As a consequence of using cameras and participant-informed commentary about the photographs, young people have been able to take a greater role in shaping the research processes and dissemination of findings. In the *Optimising Pathways* project in particular, evaluation questions posed to young people at the end of the research interview showed that the experience often had a positive consciousness-raising effect for participants. Contemplating and carrying out the photo-generation task provided these individuals with legitimised time and space to seriously consider what it meant for them to be a young person living with a chronic condition. Many of these participants stated they had not thought about this in any depth prior to participating in the project, and stated that they felt they had gained something personally important from their participation. None of the participants reported negative emotional consequences of being asked to consider such a sensitive issue. We acknowledge that not all participants may find the research experience positive or transformative. However, we suggest that this is the case with any research methodology, and indeed any experience depending on the readiness of the participant and their level of engagement.

Using visual methodologies provides participants not only with the opportunity of documenting what is meaningful to them, but allows participants to express the unsayable. To illustrate this point, women participating in the research on postnatal depression were sometimes able to draw their acute sense of helplessness and vulnerability, but were bereft of the words to describe this (Guillemin and Westall 2008). For example, one of the participants drew a simple yet evocative image of herself reduced to a tearful eye, faced with blackness (Figure 1). All this participant could say of the image was that it was: 'no light, it's an eye with tears, helpless, me looking at black'. Another participant produced a drawing drawn entirely in black of herself looking sad and helpless, totally enclosed in a sealed box (Figure 2). In discussing her drawing, this participant could only say: 'I'm in a box, and I'm alone'.

We suggest that when the experiences we are investigating in our research are difficult and confronting, words are sometimes not available for participants to express the raw emotions and feelings experienced. Using visual methodologies provides an avenue to access these experiences and understandings. As Gauntlett and Holzwarth (2006) suggest:

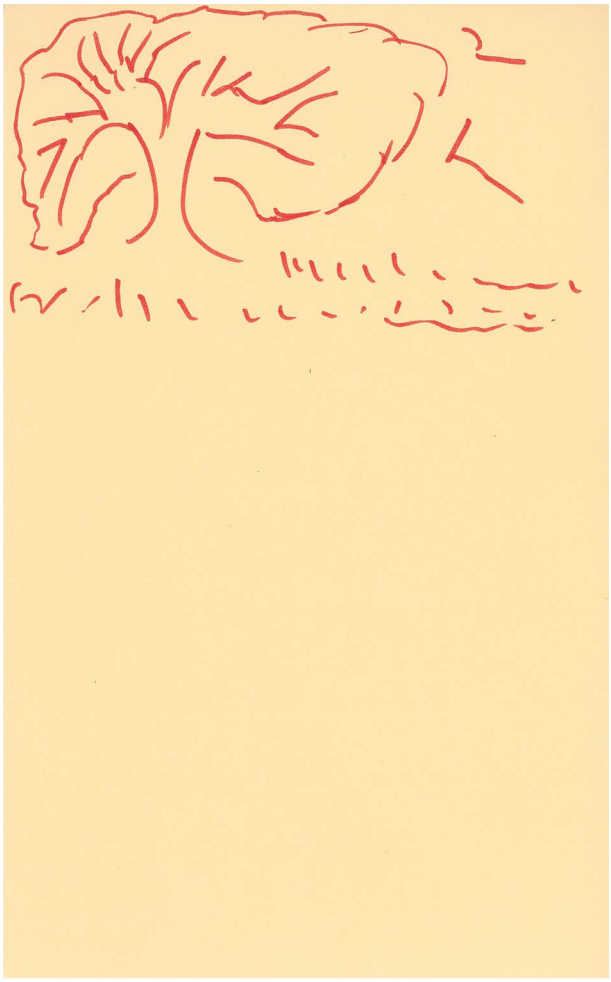

FIGURE 3. A participant's drawing of menopause, depicting a tree.

> By inviting participants to create things as part of the research process, it's *a different way into* a research question. . . . It's a different way in, and engages the brain in a different way, drawing a different kind of response. (Gauntlett and Holzwarth 2006, 84; italics in original)

This is particularly so with young people, because photographs act as a kind of communicative bridge for conceptualising and articulating aspects of their personal circumstances that they may not previously have considered in any depth; or they may not have the maturity of cognition or expression with which to formulate discussion and explanation of complex experiences and ideas. In presenting participants with a 'different way in', we also enable a different kind of

response. We concur with the description of Gauntlett and Holzwarth (2006, 84) that visual methodologies are 'enabling'. The images evoked by participants in response to our inquiry are often powerful and meaning-laden, and enable expression when words – as a starting-point – often may not be possible. Having outlined what we consider to be the benefits of using visual methodologies such as photo-elicitation and drawings, we turn to our questions of process of image production, using a chronological schema to organise the discussion.

QUESTIONS OF PROCESS: BEFORE IMAGE PRODUCTION

Tools of Production

In designing research, the decision to use visual methodologies is largely shaped by the research question. However, beyond that are decisions as to which visual methods to use, and furthermore what tools of visual production to employ. These choices may be based on pragmatic and/or epistemological factors (such as cost and accessibility of digital cameras), as distinct from ensuring that participants are as empowered as possible during the process. In these considerations, familiarity of participants with the tools of production is important, together with provision of training where relevant. In choosing to use drawings with adult participants, Guillemin was conscious of the association of drawings with children: drawing images is often perceived as the domain of young children who do not have sufficiently sophisticated verbal communication to express themselves. However, the aim of using drawings in the study of illness was to allow the opportunity for diverse understandings of illness to be explored which ranged beyond the dominant biomedical paradigm. To illustrate, in the menopause study all participants were being managed within a biomedical model and were taking hormone therapy. Despite this, when asked to draw their understanding of menopause, no participants drew biomedical representations. The most common drawing was that of trees, which the women explained as moving to a change of life or seasonal change (Figure 3). The use of drawings provided a 'different way in', using a technology that was very familiar to all participants and which did not require any sophisticated equipment or training.

In many countries, sophisticated cameras are now standard features of mobile phones; being able to take a photo anywhere, anytime is now often taken for granted. However, this does not apply to all participants, in particular those from marginalised groups. Provision of training needs to be considered. Wang and Burris (1997) discuss in detail the importance of training in developing the photovoice strategy. Worth and Adair (1972) discuss the processes of teaching filmmaking to Navajo Indians to enable them to portray their traditional customs and practices. Packard (2008, 71), in his work with homeless men, illustrates how technical incompetence in one participant's use of the camera not only resulted in obscured images, but more significantly, feelings of shame and embarrassment that inhibited his ability to communicate his standpoint.

The provision of training in the chronic illness photograph projects involved making sure that participants were familiar with how specific cameras functioned. Regardless of socioeconomic background, many of these young people were more familiar with photography than the researchers. Many had completed photography courses and projects as part of their school assessment, and often had knowledge about photographic composition as well as competence in practical handling of camera equipment. While these participant groups required minimal instruction in terms of how to approach the image-production tasks, this may not always be the case. Young people from less advantaged backgrounds may encounter the use of, and responsibility for, a camera as a more unfamiliar experience. Similarly, for older adults, the use of cameras to record day-to-day activities may be a much more novel and possibly daunting activity. Researchers need to assess participant training needs on both a project-by-project and a person-by-person basis.

Involving Participants and Granting Permission

For many participants, being asked to produce images as part of a research project may appear strange. With the drawing projects, despite being informed explicitly before agreeing to take part in the research that they would be asked to draw, participants nonetheless appeared surprised when asked to do so during the research encounter. In anticipation of this, the request to draw came at the end of the interview, to allow the researcher to build sufficient rapport with the participant. However, when asked to draw, participants most commonly responded with 'I can't draw', in an embarrassed manner; despite this, most did produce a drawing. Giving participants time to reflect was important here, as was the researcher remaining silent, or offering encouragement. This served to give participants time and space to reflect and allow a different kind of engagement than is typical in (for example) an interview setting.

With the photograph projects, participants' familiarity with photography as part of their everyday lives meant they were perhaps overly confident about a perceived simplicity in using the cameras in the context of these research projects. While some participants completed the associated image-generation task with ease, more commonly participants found it more challenging than they expected and required some ongoing coaching and support from research staff to facilitate their reflection and decision-making. A key influence on the number and type of pictures produced by participants was the degree to which participants were given 'permission' to create something other than 'happy snaps'. One 15-year-old participant in the *Keeping Connected* project verbally described her daily physical and emotional struggles and isolation from school, friends, and peers, as a result of living with chronic fatigue syndrome. Yet her photographs contained numerous examples of her 'dressed up' for social outings and special occasions. Tellingly, her parting comment after the interview was:

> Of course I didn't take pictures of me on any of my really bad days – I didn't think you'd be ready for that. I wanted to look active, interesting. Maybe next time you give me the camera I'll take pictures that show you what it's really like.

Chalfen's (1987, 99) commentary on 'our photographic versions of life' suggests that most people's everyday photographic images:

> acknowledge a conformity to certain cultural ideals such as living a comfortable life, maintaining a happy growing family, and living in social contexts where people get along with one another. Illness, depression, painful experiences, interpersonal conflicts, personal disappointments, social failures and dreary settings have no place in this construction of life.

In order to subvert these social conventions of photography, we suggest it is important to provide explicit permission to participants that they can photograph 'the good, the bad and the ugly' of their lives. Giving due consideration to how to involve participants and granting 'permission' to participants is a necessary part of the preparation before image production can occur. For example, researchers might outline verbally and/or in an information sheet that they have an interest in learning about positive as well as more challenging aspects of a participant's life. The degree of openness achieved will clearly relate to the level of rapport and trust between participant and researcher – a reason to consider a longitudinal approach for researching particularly sensitive topics. Being clear during early stages of the research about how visual research material may be used in the future is also important, as are discussions about how the participant might maintain some control and ownership of the visual material they contribute.

Privacy and Ownership

Issues of privacy and ownership of participant-generated images are highly complex. There is often little consideration given beforehand as to who owns the image produced, and what this ownership means. With relation to ownership issues, the decision was taken in both the *Optimising Pathways* and *Keeping Connected* projects to provide the young participants with a set of their images to keep for themselves. A second set was kept by the researcher as part of the project data. Participants were informed of this during recruitment. This process helped to establish the concept of shared ownership of these images; that is, the images belonged to both the participants and the researchers. It also established a situation wherein the young people potentially were taking photographs both for themselves and for the researchers. This is an important consideration in terms of the perceived role of the audience in image production, as we go on to discuss in more depth.

In order to further establish research ownership, participants were also informed during recruitment that a detailed authorisation document would be incorporated into the conclusion of the research interview process. In this document, participants were asked to indicate whether or not they were comfortable for the images they had produced to be used in particular contexts, including academic publications, research reports and a variety of visual presentations such as those at conferences and in public photographic displays. However, once photographs containing the faces of participants and other individuals form part of the research data, it is necessary to think even more carefully about aspects of permissions around image generation and use. These issues were also discussed with participants prior to them taking photographs.

At the conclusion of the research interview, participants (and a parent/guardian if under 18 years) had the opportunity during discussion of the authorisation document to highlight any images they would not like to have displayed publicly. The document also provided written assurance that images containing the faces of

people other than the participants themselves would not be displayed without either: (1) further permissions being received from those individuals; or (2) non-participant faces being obscured prior to display. Although discussions of ownership and privacy may be seen to disrupt the creative side of the process, it is essential that these are discussed explicitly to ensure that ownership is understood and that privacy of participants and others included in the images is respected.

The young woman in Figure 4 granted full permission for this photograph (and all her other photographs) to be reproduced in a variety of academic contexts. Indeed, Heaven felt so strongly about wanting other people to know about her experiences that she declined the opportunity to choose a pseudonym and was adamant that her own name be used. Her guardian also granted permission for the images to be reproduced and for her real name to be used. As much as possible, these permissions were sought within a context of informed ownership. However, as with the notion of informed consent, there are potential limitations in how 'informed' a lay person's decision might actually be. When making their decisions here, both were encouraged to consider any implications over time; it was discussed with Heaven how she might feel once her images and quotes were made public without her being de-identified. In spite of this discussion, Heaven remained adamant about their usage; and her guardian was keen to support her decision. Although Heaven is aware that she can alter her decision regarding future usage of the images at any time, it will not be possible to recall any material that has already been made public. Additionally, while visual researchers may be careful to use research material ethically and respectfully, they cannot always predict how material may be taken up and used by others. Once material is put out into the world, it does have the potential to take on a life of its own.

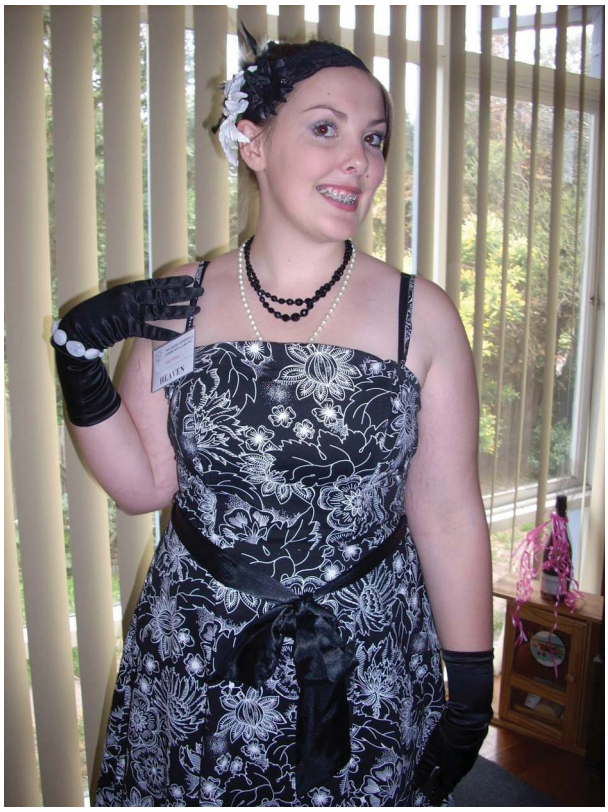

FIGURE 4. Although this young participant verbally described her daily physical and emotional struggles of living with chronic fatigue syndrome, she chose photographs depicting herself 'to look active, interesting' . . . and not 'what it's really like'.

QUESTIONS OF PROCESS: DURING IMAGE PRODUCTION

Producing the Image

Unlike many social research approaches where participants are asked for an immediate response, these forms of visual methodology allow (and perhaps require) time to reflect before responding. With the use of drawings, for most participants there was thoughtful consideration of what to draw – sometimes eliciting immediate knowing of the image, sometimes requiring time to consider. There was also careful deliberation over choice of colour . With some participants, drawing was done in silence; others articulated their thought processes as they drew. Once drawing was completed, some participants expressed surprise at the image they had produced, while others declared satisfaction at having been able to convey their thoughts and feelings in this creative and reflective manner.

This process of reflection is important, as we believe that it elicits a different kind of response. As Gauntlett and Holzwarth (2006) suggest, visual and other non-word-based research methodologies do not require an immediate response; they allow time for reflection, resulting in different kinds of data. With the *Optimising Pathways* and *Keeping Connected* projects, it was originally envisaged that the young people would have the cameras from between two to four weeks. This time-frame was felt to be important in terms of allowing participants to contemplate and plan for completion of the task, as well as providing adequate time for young people to have the opportunity to create images in a range of circumstances and contexts. Some participants were ready to return their images within a week, while many others took much longer than the four weeks

originally made available to them. This extension in time with the camera appears to have been related as much to the busy nature of teenage and family lives as it was to participants needing additional time to contemplate and complete the task.

With both the drawings and photographs, some participants were concerned about not being sufficiently proficient in producing images that would portray what they wanted to convey. Giving appropriate support and encouragement to participants without being directive is often a tricky balance to achieve. Clearly, the production of images requires time and effort on the part of the participants. In some cases, the process of image production may itself lead to potential risks. For example, one photograph in the *Optimising Pathways* project related to an adolescent's comment about the financial costs related to managing his diabetes and coeliac disease. The image he presented contained a pile of notes and coins on a table approaching AU$1000 (Figure 5). Other images suggested his family was not wealthy. The act of setting up that image required a significant amount of forethought, planning and effort. Did the production of this image cause the young man to put himself in a potentially complicated or dangerous position in relation to the money photographed? With the benefit of hindsight, it would have been interesting to have asked the participant the following: Whose money was it? Was it usual for that much cash to be in the house? If not, who went to the effort of going to the bank to get the money? What happened to the money afterwards?

With any participant, and particularly with young people, this issue of potential risks is worth discussing when first giving instructions on producing images. While ethics approval processes for these photo-based projects required that an explanation be given to participants about the potential issues that could arise if they photographed illegal activities, there was no requirement in terms of 'cautioning' young people about putting themselves in problematic situations in order to generate a desired image.

FIGURE 5. A participant's photograph about the financial costs related to managing his diabetes and coeliac disease.

Relationship with Audience

One of the strengths of photovoice and photo-elicitation is that image production occurs independently from the researcher. In contrast, with the drawing projects, the researcher was present while participants drew. Although the researcher was mostly silent during the drawing time, it is interesting to consider how the presence of the researcher influenced, or not, the image produced. We suggest that this is a question about the role of the researcher in the process, and whether the researcher is perceived as part of the audience in the process of image production. Following Rose (2007), this leads us to ask: Who is the (original) audience for this image, and what is the role of the audience? This is a relatively unexplored, yet significant, area in visual methodologies. As Harrison (2002, 864) states: 'the idea of "audience" remains the most underdeveloped and problematic area for the visual sociologist'.

With drawings and photographs, who is the audience – and is the image produced with the audience in mind? The answer to these questions is not clear. However, in reflecting on our observations of participants' comments in this work, it is common for participants during the process of research interviews of illness experiences to ask: 'Is this what you want to know?' or 'Is this right?'. This presumes that the audience in these interviews is the researcher, while also revealing that participants believe there must be some kind of 'right' response. In contrast, when the same participants are drawing their experiences, we have never been asked questions of this kind.

Although it may appear that the prime audience for the drawings and photo-elicitation images is the researcher as the instigator for the image production, we argue that the images are equally being generated for the participants themselves, and potentially other viewers as well. In the process of production of the image, we suggest that there is an audience (or multiple audiences) in mind, and this relationship with self and others – as audience/s – is important for both the process and the image produced. The process of reflection during image production – the consideration of what image to produce, what to include, and what to exclude – is shaped by the

explicitly or implicitly envisaged audience/s and by associated perceptions about the role of the audience/s. This relationship with the audience/s may not necessarily be a conscious one, but it is nonetheless significant and warrants further exploration in interview discussions with participants about their image generation.

Image as Data

An important question is: What constitutes data within visual methodologies? When participants are asked to draw or take photographs, how is the resulting drawing seen as data and not just doodling, or the ensuing photograph perceived as data and not just a 'happy snap'? Bolton, Pole, and Mizen (2001, 506) are helpful in clarifying what constitutes data with visual methodologies:

> [T]he important distinction is that the images have been created as part of a sociological investigation; the visual element has been part of an active process of seeking and hopefully reaching understanding, rather than merely illustrating findings arrived at by other means. Consequently, the sociologist who takes a few photographs at the end of their research to illustrate and support what they have learned by non-visual methods is generally to be disqualified.

We understand this to mean a recognition and acknowledgement of visual methodologies in the integral design and the undertaking of the research, and acceptance of the visual images as a primary data source, rather than a quirky addition to the research after the main act is over. We emphasise that with both the drawings and photograph projects, participants were asked to discuss and explain the images they produced. In relation to the *Optimising Pathways* and *Keeping Connected* projects, it was important to note what young people did to produce their photographs, and indeed to note what other family members may have contributed to the production process. For example, comments such as 'Mum thought that would be good to photograph' were not unusual. This is particularly pertinent during analysis, when considering questions of who had control over the camera and the image-making moment, and whose understanding or experience is being represented in the image; the commentary of participants is crucial in understanding this element of construction of the visual story.

As a way of increasing the control of the young person in the *Optimising Pathways* and *Keeping Connected* research encounters, each interview began by exploring the young person's images. During this process, the young person discussed how they thought each image should be interpreted. Punch (2002, 333) stresses the 'importance of children describing their own reasons for taking photographs'. This is because the young person may spontaneously take a picture in a particular moment because it is an exciting thing to photograph, yet in terms of overall meaning and personal significance, the researcher may inaccurately assess the importance of the image if they view it in isolation from any commentary from the young person. Figure 6 is a participant's photograph of an emergency helicopter, the kind used to transport unwell or injured people to hospital from non-metropolitan areas. There is a tendency among people who view this image in isolation from the young person's explanation to assume that it represents a moment of personal crisis for the research participant who supplied the image. However, the young person's commentary reveals that this was a moment of drama and excitement about a fellow student who was injured at school, and unrelated to her own health.

In both the photo-based and drawing approaches outlined here, participant explanations, in concert with the images, were the primary data, which were then subject to analysis. However, this still leaves unanswered the important question raised by Mair and Kierans (2007) of how we deal with the relative weighting between the image and the participant's description as data. Given the already discussed contingencies of participants' lack of technical proficiency and confidence, which may affect the resulting image, this remains an important consideration for all visual methodologies.

QUESTIONS OF PROCESS: AFTER IMAGE PRODUCTION

Analysis and Interpretation of Image

Following image production, we turn to questions of analysis and interpretation. A whole range of publications demonstrate frameworks that pertain to analysing participant-generated images (Collier and Collier 1986; Banks 2001; Killon 2001; van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2001; Knowles and Sweetman 2004; Lopez et al. 2005; Oliffe et al. 2008). However, there remains room for further deliberation and consolidation in this literature, particularly in discussions of how to conduct detailed examination of image content. Our reflections on the process of image analysis are concerned especially with the role of the participant in this process, and asking

FIGURE 6. A participant's photograph of an emergency helicopter. Without the young person's commentary, this photograph could be mistakenly perceived to be about the young person themselves, rather than about a fellow student who was injured at school.

how this relates to the role of researcher as analyst. In addressing Mair and Kierans' (2007) point about relative weighting of image and description in the analysis, in both the photographs and drawings projects neither the interview data nor the images produced were seen to occupy an elevated position as the more 'valuable' data. Images and interview data are seen as inextricably linked, requiring simultaneous and not separate analysis.

This aligns with what has been described as a reflexive methodological position, one that supports integrative techniques that incorporate interviews or participants' own images (Stanczak 2007, 11). In the context of visual research, reflexive epistemologies 'hold that the meaning of the images resides most significantly in the ways that participants interpret those images, rather than as some inherent property of the images themselves' (ibid., 7). However, we acknowledge that our confidence and familiarity as researchers in dealing with written text may mean that despite our advocacy for visual images in research, in the end we remain overly reliant on words to convey our research findings.

In this relationship between the participant, researcher and the image, it is important to ask: who is the analyst? If we are asking the participant to interpret and give meaning to the image they have produced, is the researcher therefore relegated to a mere recorder of participants' interpretations? We suggest that participants as producers of the image are the most relevant and appropriate persons to give meaning to the image they have generated. As Gauntlett and Holzwarth (2006, 86) state: 'the interpretation has to come from the person who made the artefact. My own guesses or speculation [as researcher] about someone else's meanings are just that – guesses and speculations'.

However, this does not mean that the researcher has no role to play. The researcher brings to the research their expertise, their ability to theorise, to see patterns, and to maintain distance from the data generated. Because of this, the researcher is the best placed to provide overall analysis to the research, including the images. Although the researcher is reliant on the participant to interpret their own image, the researcher is best able to undertake the overall analysis and interpret the data within the context of the other data and the overall theoretical frame. As Gauntlett and Holzwarth (2006, 87) claim:

> If we rely on the maker's own interpretations, that doesn't mean that the social scientist is redundant or just recording what people say; on the contrary, they have a central role in the *overall* analysis, and in the production and articulation of theory that stems from the research. So it's not that the researcher can have nothing to say, but rather that they need to *listen* to what is said overall and then come back in at the end and develop conclusions and theory, based on an overview of all that has been created and recorded. So, to put it simply, you can do an analysis of the whole but you shouldn't be trying to analyse each creative artefact because that is better done by the person who made it. (italics in original)

To summarise, both participant and researcher have a role in the analysis of the image. The participant plays a reflexive role in both generating and interpreting their image. As the person who produces the image, it is the participant's interpretation of their own image that is most significant. However, in terms of overall interpretation and analysis, particularly in a large body of research data, it is the researcher who is key. In terms of methods for the analysis of visual data, we have found Rose's (2007) critical visual methodology to be particularly useful. Not only does this methodology ask pertinent questions about the image and its composition, but – of relevance to participant-generated visual methodologies – Rose asks us to consider what knowledges are being deployed in, and whose knowledges are excluded from, the representation. This allows an interrogation that comprises the interpretations of both participant and researcher.

Ethical Considerations

Of prime importance within the regulatory framework of conducting research with humans is the protection of participants. In the use of visual methodologies, it is important to consider whether there is anything

distinctive about visual methodologies that would cause harm to participants, and as researchers what we can do about this. Prosser (2005) alerts us to the necessity for both participants and researchers to agree on ethical principles and practices in image-based research. Although not all images generated necessarily reflect difficult or harrowing experiences or feelings, in certain research areas, such as illness experiences, this is highly possible. For example, the research on postnatal depression generated numerous drawings by participants of despair, isolation and feeling trapped to the point of attempting to kill themselves or their baby. One participant drew her planned suicide in her parents' garage, and poignantly discussed how she had intended on ending her life through 'death by car exhaust' (Figure 7).

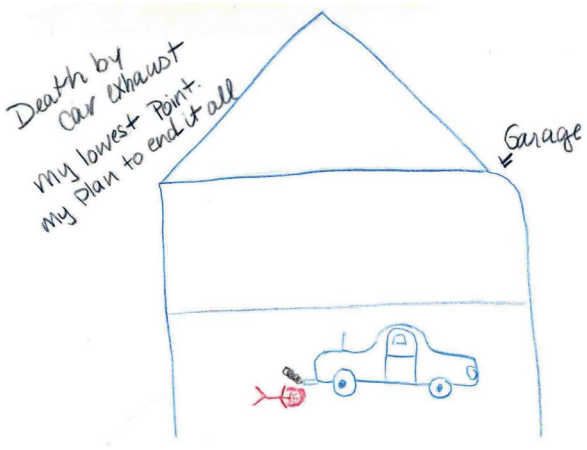

FIGURE 7. A participant's drawing of her planned suicide in her parents' garage while experiencing postnatal depression.

Without the inclusion of a visual component in the research, the feelings and experiences of some participants may not have been accessible to the researcher and therefore potentially deplete the richness of the research. But what about the consequences for participants in expressing what are clearly difficult or distressing experiences? Firstly, researchers need to expect that asking participants to produce visual material in some research areas, particularly health research, may result in images that portray emotionally difficult experiences. Although this is no different from word-based methods, it is significant in the sense that visual methodologies allow expression of feelings that may be otherwise unsayable. Researchers need to be aware of this and be pre-emptive of the possibilities of emotional harm.

Secondly, we recognise that producing images of distressing events and experiences may not necessarily produce harm but may be beneficial to participants. It is not unusual when conducting this kind of research to be told by participants at the conclusion of the research that the process had been surprisingly helpful for them. Participants commonly say that this was often the first time where someone had asked about their illness experience (as distinct to asking about their medical symptoms), and feeling that someone had truly listened to them. This of course will not be the case for all participants, and researchers have an ethical responsibility to ensure that appropriate strategies are in place if participants are overly distressed.

The third point refers to the role of the researcher in the research process. As with all social research, the researcher is not a neutral observer, but has both direct and indirect effects on the research and the participant. Posing particular questions to participants, asking them to consider certain situations, and to reflect on and produce images, will invariably shape the way that the participant thinks about the research subsequent to its completion. Reflexivity is required on the part of the researcher about their role in the research process, paying particular attention to the particularities of visual methodologies and the possible ethical risks involved.

CONCLUSION

Our aim in this paper is to focus attention on the processes of image production while reflecting on our experiences using photovoice and photo-elicitation, as well as drawings. The questions we raise here are framed chronologically around stages of image production, although we acknowledge that the issues we raise are not so simply delineated. Our experience is primarily in health research; however, the scope for visual methodologies far exceeds health, as others have shown.

Although we advocate the extended use and scope of visual methodologies, there is still considerable work that needs to be done in theorising and critically questioning this innovative methodological approach. The notion of the 'audience' requires more consideration. Questions such as: *Who is the intended audience in the process of image production? What is their role?* and *How does this shape the image produced?* are all important to explore. As with all methodological approaches, interpretation and analysis is a fraught area. Pertinent to participant-generated visual methodologies, the role of the researcher and participant in the analytical process is worthy of greater consideration. As we become more familiar with a wider range of visual methodologies, this will provide us with the opportunity of comparing different methods and exploring their particular benefits and challenges in various contexts.

Finally, as these methodologies become more common, it is inevitable that the field will become more riddled with ethical issues. Rather than seeing these as overburdening or a reason not to employ these methodologies, we suggest that ethical tensions provide the opportunity to delve deeper into the possibilities that these methodologies offer. We stress the necessity of paying attention to a range of issues involved in participant-generated visual research – those issues present before, during and after the image is generated by the participant. Visual methodologies are rich, compelling and participatory, and worthy of further investigation. To conclude, we underscore Gauntlett and Holzwarth's (2006) notion of visual methodologies as 'enabling', for both researchers and participants.

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