The role of the visual in narratives of violence: co-creating fissures.

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When visual approaches are used in the social sciences, the distinction between researcher and researched becomes destabilized, due to a greater transference of autonomy and narrative authority over to the participant who creates, organizes and analyses data in partnership with the researcher. 'Showing a world' is more agentic perhaps than the traditional format of 'telling a world', where participants inevitably have to respond to the researcher's agenda. In this chapter we argue that one of the reasons for the productive ambiguity over authorship and participation within this methodological process is due to the facilitation of affect, embodiment and space within the visual research agenda. We argue here, using examples from an empirical project on black women's experiences of violence that visual methods open channels that encourage the surfacing of emotional ruptures in rehearsed biographical narratives (Reavey, 2011). 'Seeing' a moment from one's life (through personal photographs or video etc) can register on an affective level, because the image can reignite an affective-biographical moment in greater specificity than a spoken narrative. 'Seeing' also constructs a context that enables the person to make comparisons and therefore consider any changes between feelings in the past and present. Similarly, when participants engage with imagistic representations of themselves, their embodied states emerge at the forefront of their engagements with themselves as subjects. We would argue these shifts towards affect and embodiment in the use of visual images in qualitative research create a different mode of ownership and creative responsibility over the data. This transferring of responsibility can create the potential for marginalized groups to 'show' and speak through their experiences with greater authorial confidence than traditional social science methods. In showing how feelings and bodies move within certain spaces, in all their specificity, participants may be better able to indicate in a more contextualized fashion how their own creative engagements with their worlds have facilitated movement and change. This should not discourage a more traditional reading of the relationship between marginalization and power, but should point to the ambiguities between people's ability to engage creatively and agentically, even at times of disempowerment.

Here we argue that visual methods may offer the possibility of enabling participants to show the researcher their lives and in so doing the research process becomes transformative both

for the participant and the researcher and extends what constitutes the data that is produced. In this chapter we will be examining the nature of this transformation and how it relates to the variety of ways in which we understand the 'impact agenda'.

(Whose?) participation in the research process

Like many other researchers somewhat disillusioned with the idea that academic research should involve only 'objective' and 'removed' forms of data collection, we would argue that awareness of how participants engage with the research process, should start at recruitment, and continue beyond to the analysis and even write up and dissemination phases (Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2009). We are writing this from within psychology also, which has traditionally shunned approaches that acknowledge the subjective and experiential components of research, in favour of a neutral and distant observer and observed relationships between researcher and participant (Willig & Stainton Rogers, 2008).This approach is similar in that respect to Participatory approaches in the social sciences, that acknowledge from the onset that 'giving voice' to participants is not just a matter of providing participants with the opportunity to tell their stories at interview (often in response to researcher defined questions), but involves a genuine exchange between researcher and participant (collaborative knowledge) and a capacity within that relationship for personal transformation to occur (for both the participant and the researcher). However, when we acknowledge the potential for collaboration and co-participation from the public we engage with in the research process, we must also acknowledge that this process is far from straight forward or linear; it is emotional, embodied and the outcomes we find do not necessarily fit into neat thematic categories, which many academic institutions favour, as a way of publishing 'results' and 'findings'. Our work, in a great many respects is informed by feminist approaches concerned with dispelling the myth of the objective neutral researcher and bringing into view the identity, personal history, positionality of the researcher, just as much as the participant, to examine and reflect upon knowledge production (Ramazonoglu & Holland, 2003). Of course, this process can be painful, confusing and may involve us a researchers in a form of silencing of our own emotional/affective engagements with participants stories (Lewis, 2009)– and in the case of visual research – distancing ourselves from the images participants present to us, as a way of protecting ourselves from feeling

overwhelmed, or even harmed by the difficult and traumatic experiences participants talk to us about (Reavey, 1997; Reavey, 2011).

However, we would argue, along with other feminist researchers that our reflections, emotions and the spaces we occupy with participants become useful tools through which to interpret data and provide meaningful reflection on the entire research praxis, and not just the 'findings' that emerge (Ryan-Flood & Gill, 2009). We have argued elsewhere that visual approaches in the social sciences have a role to play in disrupting the traditional ways in which we engage with participants in the research process, such that personal narratives become more ruptured, uneven, but nonetheless emotionally charged and insightful (see Reavey, 2011, for an extensive discussion of this). Here, we detail several of these points of relevance in applying visual approaches to the empirical study we examine in more detail below.

The role of visual methods in promoting co-participation
Visual researchers, especially those interested in examining 'experience' have found merit in using visual methods to access 'hard to reach' issues, such as the environmental spaces that individuals experientially inhabit and the emotional and embodied elements of experience that are always present, but rarely directly acknowledged in qualitative research (Brown, Reavey, Cromby, Harper & Johnson, 2008). In visual research (using painting, drawing, photography and film) on topics ranging from mental health, space, embodiment, memory and ageing, we have also found that the visual can successfully act to disrupt well-rehearsed present narratives on a topic (Gillies et al, 2005; Brookfield, Brown & Reavey, 2008; Reavey, 2008; Silver & Reavey, 2010). When using a photograph from the past, for example, a participant is able to *imagine* the emotions or their embodied states *from that time*, such that the past enters the present and creates a new narrative, or more complex account (especially if the re-emergence of the past collides with narratives of the present). This is not to say that somehow the visual fools participants into admitting and then telling the 'truth', but nevertheless a combination of visual and verbal accounting can serve to provide a more complex and layered account, and one that is more seeped in emotional resonances and reminders, and one in which the setting (the actual place) of the experience is brought into sharper view.

Other researchers note that visual data can alter the emotional tone of the interview and

engage the senses more powerfully than conversation alone. A photo-elicitation study by Kunimoto (2004), with Japanese-Canadians interned during the second-world war, revealed how different kinds of memories and emotions emerged through the use of domestic photographs from that time. The photographs evoked more emotional memories that were rich and enlivened and shifted the conversational tone, from formal to more casual during the course of the interview. Silver and Reavey (2010) also found in a study on 'Body Dysmorphic Disorder' (BDD - a form of mental distress characterised by individuals fixated on 'faulty' facial or bodily characteristics)that inviting participants to bring to interview photographs from different periods in their lives, enabled them to move away from traditional diagnostic discourses on BDD and present an intensely emotional account of their idealisation of their childhood self, on which present judgements about facial disfigurement were grounded. The photographs were particularly powerful in the way they provoked an emotionally led discussion about the discrepancies that existed between their beautiful, innocent and ideal childhood self and their present deteriorating and flawed self (Silver & Reavey, 2010). This emotional connection between past and present in the clinical literature on BDD was absent; photographs were a useful way of accessing and exploring this connection because participants had ready to hand a visible portrait of the self physically and emotionally changing over time.

Bringing emotionality and embodiment into sharper view within the research process is partly due to the emphasis visual researchers place upon *participation* and *agency* within this process. In many visual studies, participants are actively encouraged to make their own choices about the photographs they take or select to discuss during the research process (Mitchell, 2005; Radley & Taylor, 2003b). *What* is seen, as well as *how* the images are used in the research process are majorly directed by the participants, in collaboration with the researcher. This practice can enable participants to focus on images that have emotional resonancy (Reavey & Prosser, 2012). And yet, the emotional resonancy of images may lead to active avoidance by the participant, especially in times of loss or grief. It becomes necessary then not to assume in advance that images will *necessarily* evoke articulable emotional narratives; and if they do, we cannot assume individuals will want to talk about, or engage with them during the research process.

Increasing participation?

A further argument for using visual research within qualitative research is the potential for

increased *participation* in the generation and organisation of data, thus allowing the participant to shape the context out of which personal stories are told. If participants are given the opportunity to 'show' their experiences and lives, rather than 'narrate' them only, they are able to expand their story to show where and when their experiences occur, with greater freedom. This also brings into view the spaces and places that provide a grounding for experiences – a move that broadens the field of analysis, from the individual to their wider geographical and hence socio-political situatedness (see Reavey, 2010; 2011 for further discussion). One could say that in some sense this process invites the reader and researcher to begin from the position of bearing witness to the participant's "world-making" (to borrow a Heideggerian phrase from Radley, 2009), rather than acting from the position of detached observer of a person's verbal narrative only (see Radley, 2009 for an extended discussion of narrative, art and testimony). Many researchers using photographs, for example, involve participants in organising images for further discussion within an interview or focus group. This provides greater space for participants to order the material and speak to issues in a particular sequence that make more sense to them (Radley & Taylor, 2003b). As a result, participants find they have more time to reflect on their experiences when they are given the opportunity to be more in charge of the data collecting and organising process.

For some visual researchers, involving participants in data organisation as well as collection is central to the aim of further democratising the research process. Although this is a far from straightforward process and not always successful, there are numerous examples of greater participant agency, at least in terms of defining the parameters of the research activity, and providing a space to challenge dominant cultural and social labels and representations that are usually taken for granted (see Howarth, 2011 for a discussion of 'race' identities). We will now turn to some examples taken from a study of black women's experiences of violence.

Background to the study

There is a notable gap in empirical studies on black women's lived experiences in the UK in general and of violence in particular. Previous research carried out both in the UK and in the USA on violence has found that black women in these contexts can be subject to the many racially pathologising societal discourses about their hypersexuality and unrapeability and their presumed strength and resilience, which when internalised can act as barriers to seeking help for violence (see Kanyeredzi, 2012, in press, for review). Historically, black women's

willingness to be part of empirical studies has been with cautious suspicion (Henry-Waring, 2004) as black people in general have been subject to the pathologising consequences of studies based on racial differences in intelligence (Eysenck, 1971), and the family composition of single matriarchal households (Phoenix, 1987) that allegedly emasculate black men (Moynihan, 1965) produce poorer educational outcomes for black children (Swann Report, 1985) or in more contemporary discourses, produce young black male criminals (see Mama, 1995; Phoenix & Hussain, 2007; Reynolds, 2005). So how did we engage women in a research process, which aimed to explore incidences of violence in their lives, without recourse to some of these difficulties?

Recruiting women into the research process

Given the background of empirical research with members from this social group, the visual approach adopted here, aided the recruitment process through the use of images depicting black women of African and Caribbean heritage (who could be read as from either or both heritages). The images on the posters bypassed the use of potentially racially reductive categories and the interviews offered the women a space to self-define and engage in a discussion about their racial or ethnic heritage. To depict an everywoman image of violence and abuse, the photographs were of women who also varied in age, complexion, hairstyle and facial expressions. This was based on research showing that violence in women's lives is as ubiquitous as it is invisible (Walby, 2009) and as such there is no straight forward way of seeing a woman's experience of violence, by simply looking at her. During the interviews, the women were given some autonomy to choose how to show their life experiences using personal photographs and those created by them during the research process. It could be argued that the visual methods encouraged creative insights from the women, or as some of the women reported, the creative tasks attracted them to participate, because they were being asked to do more than talk and tick boxes.

We will now discuss how nine women who were interviewed over a two or three-stage life history process, used old photographs (photo elicitation) to share their experiences of violence and photographs they created as part of the research process (photo production) to discuss the places, spaces and objects of importance to them. All of the women described having had experiences of emotional abuse. Four women had been sexually molested as children; two were raped as children, one was malnourished and severely beaten as a child,

and two had had experiences of violence in the context of intimate partner relationships. For the women who were molested as children, they were also severely neglected and described feelings of abandonment. One woman had experienced multiple forms of violence across her life course and three women also described experiences of societal racism.

Inter-reflexivity in the research process

Using photographs as part of the research process enabled what can be likened to the making of a patchwork quilt. Each woman created a show, stitch and tell where she chose where to begin, where to pause and where to continue. The women used the photographs they created to re-focus the researcher's attention to earlier points in their narratives that might have been either too painful, clumsy or required further explication. Once the women took the researcher back to that point in the story, they used the photographs to stitch in the details. The women discussed embodied affect; how they felt in the spaces and the places where they had experienced violence/abuse and how they feel in the spaces they chose to photograph as important to them. This approach brought focus to the individuals, spaces, places and objects that contributed to their narratives. These combined visual and narrative explorations gave the researcher a sense of having walked alongside each woman for a brief moment pursuing ideas and themes that might have been closed off by the narrative alone. For example the discussion below is between Evelyn and the researcher (Ava) and is about the photograph she took of a pond.
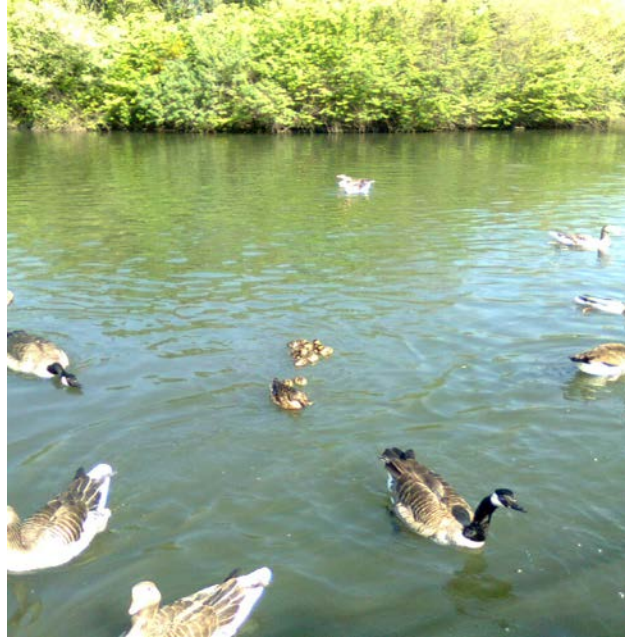
(Ava) …and it also sounds like a little bit like, in the places and the spaces where you go to feel peace, that it is also about you as an individual (Evelyn) uh-huh (Ava) and nothing else (Evelyn) yeah and I think sometimes, remember I said about standing on the inside and feeling on the outside? (Ava) yeah (Evelyn) at the same time, I think those spaces makes it quite validating, the fact that even though I do feel alone and on the outside, how those spaces balance me out and nourish me is that (…….) I get quite involved in relationships from the beginning, so I actually need those spaces to get back to me, because even if I was just alone and I don't have anyone say, that maybe kind of a defence system to say, but it's not, it's actually kind of a balancing act (laughs) (Ava) so you go there to get nourishment? (Evelyn) yeah

Evelyn had previously discussed feeling quite left out of family activities as a result of experiencing childhood sexual abuse and her mother frequently cutting her hair as a child. This she felt especially because she couldn't take part in the sisterly bonding occasions of getting her hair braided. She refocused the researcher's attention to that earlier discussion to develop the theme by saying 'remember I said about standing on the inside and feeling on the outside?' Evelyn further explained how she can also feel alienated from herself when she gets 'quite involved in relationships from the beginning'. Evelyn weaves the theme of social alienation to self-alienation to indicate how she uses the space in the photograph 'to get back to me'. Through the use of her photo, Evelyn explores how she feels like an outsider in her

family, but is able to go inside herself in the outside space of the pond, where she feels less alienated, via the calming nature of the space.

Recollecting experiences of abuse and violence is a memorial task which includes forgetting. In their unfolding, recollections are neither chronological nor linear. Current concerns are also infused in the process of conversing with the researcher, generating a "reasonable" and "recognisable" discourse on the past (Middleton and Brown, 2005). The women used the photographs to help the researcher to see. Looking creates affect, new ways of understanding for the participant and for the researcher. Looking at photographs prompted the women to further recollect details about their stories, offer new reflections about the recollection, or in many cases disclose another story of abuse or violence and its legacies, inviting the researcher to explore these avenues further. The women used the photographs of the past and those they created to stitch together the nuances of the present, past and future directions of their quilts that could be likened to what Maggie O'Neill (2012) terms a 'visual conversation'. An example of this is in Evelyn's above extract where the researcher offers 'it also sounds like a little bit like, in the places and the spaces where you go to feel peace, that it is also about you as an individual' and then summarise with the question '…so you go there to get nourishment?'. The image of the pond and the ducks is also affectively calming for the researcher, which helps her to relate to the emotional function of the space for Evelyn. Therefore, what is then produced from the research process is what we have termed a visually contextualised, inter-reflexive, embodied narrative.

We will now turn to how using visual methods offer routes into difficult terrains such as racism or marginalisation, opens up these terrains to evoke affect and embodiment and ruptures rehearsed biographical narratives (Reavey, 2011).

Biographical ruptures: affect and embodiment

The two/three stage life history interview process was intended to give the women a measure of reflexive freedom to build trust with the researcher (Jordan, 2008) to bear witness (Elsberg and Heise, 2000) to their stories, disclose with the freedom of an interim period to reflect on what they had said, clarify points and use the visual to further explicate their experience of abuse/violence. What was found is that the women wanted to share the worst part of their stories first. There was a real embodied tension in how the women either held the posters

with their annotated ticks next to the forms of violence with at times, nervous laughter. Some were unable to maintain eye contact while narrating both the parts of their stories that they later disclosed felt shameful to them. The tension was also noticeable in the way in which the women watched the researcher for facial reactions or judgements (Campbell et al 2009) as their stories unfolded. At the second/third stage interviews, the women were asked how they had felt after the first interview and in the interim. Some reported feeling very nervous, anxious, unsure of how the researcher would hear their stories of abuse/violence and shortly after disclosing, feeling a bit low in affect because of the recollection. Having photos to assist with discussing violence/abuse experiences appeared to enable the women to bring more of the context of their lives into the discussion, not just the incidents of abuse/violence and thus loosen some of the tension. They also reported at the beginning or end of the second/third stage interviews, where they brought in photos that they had created to the research process feeling better, lighter, less anxious. Affectively, using visual methods may have created some narrative distance between the women and their experiences of violence, offering them a space to reflect on the material, emotional, and relational contexts of their lives. Thus they were able to gain new insights on previous interpretations of their past (Reavey, 2011).

Some of the women brought photographs of themselves as children in spaces and places before, during or around the time of their abuse, to the interviews. The use of photographs always called the past into present inspection and reflection. For most of the women who had experienced child sexual abuse, they chose to discuss and critique the dominant narrative (Haaken, 1999) of the age of innocence of childhood and for most, this was an image of them as a child between the ages of three and eight. This enabled them to use that image, to see what they looked like and this was an emotive moment for the women who chose these childhood images. The photos of the past were mostly introduced after the women had shared the incidence(s) of abuse or violence, where the photos were used to clarify aspects of the narrative. For confidentiality reasons, the photos are represented by brief descriptions.

[Photo of herself as a child, photo of a Bible[1]]

(Tamara) Well I think it's a picture (…) well when you said it (…) explained to me about the reason I should select the picture, I wasn't really (…) I need to have another look at it really, why I selected the picture. Erm, erm so that's it, that picture makes

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[1] Due to the ethical issues around displaying photographs, which depict others, we have taken the decision not to display certain images and offer a brief thumbnail description instead.

me laugh (…) well I think for me looking at the picture, because it's weird (…) it's just (…) the one where I was a child, it's a picture of myself…I never actually looked back at myself as a child and was just looking at my [social network] picture and I thought let me see and I thought o:kay…and it's weird because I was looking at myself, seeing myself as an adult, looking at myself as a child thinking, I can't believe someone would do anything like that to me and then I thought oh I was probably looking much older as you kinda do and I thought I would use that picture because it (…) it's what that person was seeing, what I'm seeing now, a child. A child. So it's kind of like (…) I thought, it's kind of weird actually thinking that that person was seeing the same thing that I'm seeing now. (Ava) and is there anything, just thinking along those lines, is there anything, in terms of how you see yourself, do you then see that person differently, that you'd seen them before? (Tamara) yep, yep (crying) yeh I do (crying). It just made me think like, how could a person do that to me, when I look at this picture (crying)? (Ava) Do you want me to stop the tape for a little bit? (Tamara) no (crying) but yeh, I picked that one and the other one is a Bible, it's just kind of erm (crying] it shows the church (crying) because he was in the church as well (crying) and everybody used to like him. He was in the church so (sobs) I was in the church as well so it just reminds me (crying) of that bit of my life so that bit of my life that goes around in my head sometimes, that's why I chose the Bible to take a picture.…

Tamara hadn't looked at her childhood photos for a while and when she did so as part of the research process, was stunned to tears on seeing how she looked and that she did look like a child, almost as if she had been carrying an image of herself as mature for her age and therefore somehow to blame for her grandfather abusing her. Looking back now as an adult, she can see herself as a child and she can see what he saw; '[a] child'. Furthermore, the photo materialises her grandfather's accountability for his actions; the smallness of her body as evidenced in the photo, settles once and for all his intentions and responsibility. This was one of the most affectively heart-wrenching moments of recognition facilitated by the visual.

Evelyn in the extract below is superimposing her present day self on to her childhood image attempting to make sense of what has happened to her, making connections, and comparisons with how she coped then and now.

[black and white photo of Evelyn as a small child]

(Evelyn) I think at this stage, this was a picture of two other sisters, but I cut them out of it (laughs) (…) erm I think I might have been about five there erm (..) and every time I look at this picture and I try to identify more (…) see if I could get a feeling of myself at that age sometimes I do and sometimes I don't, I do at the moment, but when I've looked at this picture, one of my first impressions was (…) I was quite pretty really. When I was growing up the focus was on a lack of hair, so because of that I grew up thinking I was quite (….) ugly, but I actually had a really nice face and when I look at my eyes, sometimes I wish I could just, go back in time and give that side of me a great big hug (…..) yeah I even have a dream of doing that, yeh, maybe (…) that's what I think, but in one of my eyes I can see it's quite (…) it's quite sad, it looks upset, like it's about to have tears. I think sometimes even when I look in the mirror today I think, there is one side that is quite a coper then there's another side that holds the emotions yeh (looks at picture) but this is a little girl who (…) has been just left to get on with it on her own and all things considered, she has done quite well (….) yeh (looks at picture)

Evelyn also used her present day conceptions to challenge how she has thought of herself as a child when she says 'I grew up thinking I was quite (….) ugly, but I actually had a really nice face and when I look at my eyes, sometimes I wish I could just, go back in time and give that side of me a great big hug'. She also relates her present day sense of self to her childhood photo 'I think, there is one side that is quite a coper then there's another side that holds the emotions'. The photograph facilitates a 'going back' and an appraisal of how past experiences are both about the past as well as the present. Evelyn's extract also suggests that looking at old photographs may be something that she does periodically outside of the research process. Looking at an old photograph then acts as some measurement of how Evelyn is living with the presence of her past.

Conversely, not looking at photographs from the past can serve to distract the attention away from the painful emotions associated with the experiences. An illustration of this is the affect left by reflecting on the past for Tamara who had not looked at her childhood photograph for a while, but when she did was transported back to that period where she experienced abuse. However, looking at old photographs may also enable a reappraisal of past experiences, with new insights anchored to current concerns and the context of recollections, which in this case was the research process.

Scenes and spaces contributing to biographical ruptures

The photographs also enabled the women to show scenes from their lives. Here Tracy and later, Ellen engage in a critique of the innocence of childhood.

> (Tracy) that was taken in [year] when I was [number] years old and that was taken at school, outside the playground, with my class and I've chosen this picture because (…..) this is erm you know…this is a representation of innocence, of a little girl. To me this is a representation of (….) how, you know (…) how erm (…) how erm how-how things were for me before I even learnt…before I even evolved…you know I didn't understand anything at all, I was without (….) knowledge and nothing…you know…anything specifically hadn't erm happened to me. I mean at the time there was a lot of things that were happening, but they weren't directly affecting me at all (….) there was the whole erm conflict between my mother and her (…) mother and they never (….) affected me, erm (…) what can I say about this photograph? I would say, what a pity I don't have a smile on my face at all (laughs) and (…) I erm (….) I was very erm…I was very shy, I didn't talk, never talked at all, I did not speak at all, never erm (….) this girl here (points to a girl in the photo) used to pick on me [laughs]… so I would say this picture is a picture of innocence and it's black and white so (giggles) it's er heart-warming.

Tracy introduced her home life as far from ordinary and paints a picture of pornographic material lying around, and her mother's partner calling women 'whores'. However, although she recognises that she was somewhat affected by this, 'I mean at the time there was a lot of things that were happening, but they weren't directly affecting me at all'. However, the situation became worse when her new siblings were born. She describes the photo as a representation of a purer picture of childhood, before the sexual abuse had begun,' you know I didn't understand anything at all, I was without (….) knowledge and nothing…you know…anything specifically hadn't erm happened to me.' Her lack of knowledge here relates to knowledge of the sexual abuse that was to come. From her extract, it was clear that she understood some of the relational dissonances, particularly 'the whole erm conflict between my mother and her (…) mother'. Tracy later shared how she treated her body after having been abused and blamed by her family after she had disclosed. She had taken naked images of herself and has had naked, glamour or pornographic images taken by 'a group of dirty white men'. Her whole narrative was about her struggle, as she is now a Christian, to come to

terms with what she now views as a defilement of her body. The naked photographs of her thus form a part of this shaming or what she terms 'the big embarrassment'. Tracy responded to her feelings of alienation by treating her body with little respect and 'dabbling' with the 'dark arts' or witchcraft. The photo described above, is a reminder that she was once sexually innocent. Her focus on the features of innocence depicted in the photograph; a group of children in a playground, surrounding their teacher, serves to home in on this message, '…it's black and white so (giggles) it's er heart-warming.'

Below is an extract from Ellen's interview, who like Tracy was blamed by members of her family for the sexual abuse she had experienced. Ellen also recalled a period in her life where she did not respect her body.

> **[photo of her as a toddler sitting at a table, smiling into the camera, underneath a paper cut-out poster of a monkey]**
>
> (Ava) mm-hm (Ellen) that was…that picture for me illustrates innocence, I believe we we're living in [place] [road] we lived not far from [park] and mum had not long got together with [name] the man that would turn out to be her first husband was good (…) then, but it was in that house there was the first time that (…) I witnessed (….) violence between the two of em, but (…) it was my mum that instigated it (Ava) right (Ellen) but when I say violence…she threw summink at him, so er like putting her hand on him and I witnessed it, erm that was my first bit of exposure, but my earliest memories as a child all stem from that (…) house there, erm I remember being in my…I remember waking up and being in my cot, in that house. I remember he [stepdad who abused her] used to visit us at that house and it was (….) they were nice times.

Tracy and Ellen in their use of their childhood photos disrupted both the grand narratives of experiencing abuse as a wholly destructive childhood and notions of the innocence of childhood, as they were astutely aware of their relational surroundings. Ellen had witnessed her first act of violence 'her first bit of exposure' and Tracy had already recognised that 'other things were happening' in her home. They used the photos to show how their spaces were invaded, how the men who had abused them came into their lives. They shared the photos to discuss the complex relational processes that were taking place within their homes, some of which they understood and felt, but they'd also felt a sense of happiness, or at least

of being left alone sexually. Both Tracy and Ellen had recalled periods in their lives where they were either promiscuous, or 'defiled my body' and or displayed a lack of bodily respect and this was attributed to experiences of abuse. Finding and discussing a photograph which shows them as innocent, countered their narratives of being blamed for what had happened to them and the photos acted as confirmatory evidence of their innocence.

Remembering past experiences of violence/abuse is also associated with the material spaces where these experiences took place. In the process of recollecting the material spaces of abuse, women are also able to view not only their agency, but their material constraints and the power relations in place within those spaces at the time (Reavey, 2010). The women were also asked to photograph spaces, places and objects to facilitate this process of contextual remembering.

In the extract that follows, Tracy disrupts the narrative of the library she photographed as simply a space for reading and learning when she describes it as a space of safety from her home that was no longer safe.

(Tracy) this is a photo of [library name] I go there regularly mainly because there is a guy there that I fancy [giggles] (Ava) [laughs] (P) but anyway, enough said about that…I spend a lot of time in the library and I use the library to study, I use the library to read, I use the library to listen to…I use the library to erm (….) listen to sermon…listen to sort of erm (……) to get some sort of calm, some tranquillity and I would say, actually in hindsight, this library has actually saved…in the past, it's where I used to go as a safe haven away from a lot of the insanity that was happening inside

of…inside of my life, you know after…after I came out and told my family what had happened to me and social services got involved and (…) you know all hell broke loose, you know they didn't, you know want to believe and they just…you know things, relationships between myself and them broke down because it was really nasty and there was a lot of turmoil going on. People were very unpleasant, people were very unpleasant there. What I used to do…I used to erm, I used to leave my house early in the morning and go to…you know…most of the times I would go to my [relative's] house, or even go to the library and stay in there. I used to go to the library and I used to go in there and I used to read. I used to stay in the library and just read books, just read and read and wait until five o'clock…wait until five o'clock and then leave from there, the library shuts at five o'clock. I would then leave from there and erm stay outside with…stay outside my [relative's] house and wait for her to…wait, you know for her to arrive back from…wait for her to come back from work, because she used to do evenings and she used to do Saturday shifts as well.

At the beginning Tracy introduces the function of the space then takes the researcher back in time to how she used the library as a girl after she had disclosed to her family that a family friend had sexually molested her. The scene painted by Tracy using the photo gave the researcher a visceral sense of Tracy as a girl waiting for her relative to return from work, because she couldn't go home. While the symbolism of the library as a space for learning and safety is clear from the photo, Tracy's explanation of the importance of the space leaves a discomforting and terrifying taste of the neglect and sense of fear and abandonment that she felt as a girl. The symbolism of the library is extended by its association with Tracy's agency in accessing this space, opening up her imagined possibilities for a future by reading the books there, and the imminent return of her grandmother to make her feel safe, as well as the fear, the parental neglect, abuse and abandonment that compelled her to seek out a safe space.

Below, Jacinta and Tracy both use their photos to rupture the narrative of 'moving on' from violence and abuse. In both cases the women discuss their homely spaces, one that is inhabited by Jacinta and one that is yet to be inhabited by Tracy who also uses her photo as a metaphor for her challenge to feel at home in her body.

Jacinta discussed watching African films that reflect her experiences of violence and abuse. The actress Whoopi Goldberg in her depiction of Celie in the film *The Color Purple*, typified

in particular moving on from violence and abuse. Jacinta also describes how watching films distracts her from the intrusive noises her neighbours make.

(Jacinta)…and when I'm watching it [African film], some of it really gets to me, because of what they are showing, the topic in the film and sometimes I have to turn it off, or forward it, or rewind it and then I'm always thinking, why do people make these films? They must have made them for a reason. So when I'm not sleeping because the neighbours are like making noise like every night, so I turn my TV up really loud (?) so I can watch it. If I hear it all around me, then I'm okay and I enjoy it, it relaxes me and all that so that's when I'm getting all the noise in the middle of the night, or at two o'clock in the night or four o'clock in the morning, once I start to watch this, I feel a little bit together again, yeah…

The depictions of what Jacinta interprets as scenes from her life on celluloid, are both validating and painful '…I have to turn it off, or forward it, or rewind it'. This speaks to how the power of the visual, when combined with the aural, can be so overwhelming, that they compel the seer and listener to turn away in disgust. Jacinta's films also serve the function of shutting out her noisy neighbours and bringing her 'together again'. The sounds from the films amplified by Jacinta turning up the volume on the TV, envelope and enable her a desirous escape. Jacinta had been raped by a relative, was raped by multiple-perpetrators at knife-point while living in a hostel, had been strangled by her ex-husband and had been sexually abused by informal foster carers and members of their families. Thus, a sense of safety in material space was an ongoing challenge for her. Jacinta avoids going past the places where she was raped and even in some of the activities she finds pleasurable, such as amateur theatre she recounted that she was laughed at, at a performance. Unlike her favourite actress, Whoopi Goldberg, Jacinta had not overcome her material constraints over her life

course. Escape featured in how Jacinta's spaces of safety were imaginary, where she would take flight from her body, she rationalised that she must have been cursed, because of the numerous forms of violence that she had experienced and her sense of feeling systematically failed by statutory agencies because she hasn't 'moved on' from her abuse. Jacinta lives with depression and has attempted suicide in the past because of the feelings left over from the violence she has experienced. Her escape is constrained by her material circumstances; her unacceptable housing, noisy neighbours and as she explained above, the duration of the film that she is watching. Holding on to Whoopi Goldberg's photo hints hopefully to the direction Jacinta wishes for her future and is also a reminder of how much her life has not changed.

Tracy photographed a room to discuss her process of accepting and feeling at home in her body.

> (Tracy)…it represents the inside of my body, it's a work in progress and erm I'm
> still…I'm still working on how I feel inside, because (…) I'm okay with the physical

aspects, I'm learning to love the outside of my body, but the inside needs erm (…) the inside's got all its parts intact, just like…just like here [points to the photo] I mean every…I don't need to…I mean everything here is intact, it's got…I mean I've been to some places before and they had you know…they hadn't got a radiator, they haven't got…they haven't got all the parts together, but here all the parts are together, it's just that you need to put some(…) it's just that there needs, it's just that you need to decorate it (Ava) mm (P) so I've got in my body, I've got all my parts together (….) and you know I've got health. But I need to…I need to in some ways erm (……..) I need to some ways erm…paint…I need to paint over (….) all the erm (….) what can I say [?] all the…I need to (…..) here [photo] I need to decorate (…….) and I would say with my body decorate over the (…) old parts…all the parts…decorate it …and I would say the same thing with my body as well…my body as well…I need to…I need to (….) there are some parts…you know…I need to erm decorate, I need to erm revamp (…) the inside…I need to revamp inside, just as I need to revamp inside of the flat because, all the memories from the previous occupier are there (Ava) mm (Tracy) erm the nicotine on the walls, which is a lot (laughs) are all there, so I need to personalise it [the flat], just as I need to personalise…just as I need to erm personalise it…I need to make it into my own, I need to (….) take away all the things that I don't like, don't want that are nothing to do with me, that are not representative of me that have nothing to do with my body

Tracy uses the photo to provide a spatial metaphor of the body, which detaches her from her "inside" making her body a mere surface to be painted over to describe how unsettling it feels to live within her body. Likening the work she had to undertake to decorate her flat, with the work she had to undertake to feel at home in her body, reflected Tracy's struggle to come to terms with what had been done to her body by her abusers and what she had 'allowed' to be done to her body; being sexually exploited, having her naked body photographed, wanting to be a glamour model as a result of what she now considers an ungodly childhood. Inherent within how she frames her past, is the notion of blame and a gradual acceptance of her body. She now feels able to assert that those experiences of abuse and exploitation 'are not representative of me…have nothing to do with my body', but of course they are still part of her. Similar to Jacinta's image of Whoopi Goldberg, Tracy's photo of her undecorated flat is dually an image of hope as well as a reminder that 'moving on' from a past which includes

abuse might not describe how alienated Tracy feels from her body because of what happened in the past.

The work on self that the women undertook to make sense of the abuse/violence they have experienced, impacted on their self-esteem, sense of trust and sometimes sense of their own abilities. Living with the legacies of violence further burdened the women with this invisible 'violence work' (Kelly, 2009) or what Joy James (1999) terms 'shadow-boxing' enemies that no one else can see, with particular reference to black women, who also contend with the violence of racism in their everyday lives. This work is rarely acknowledged as part of victim-survivors' daily labour quota. The women used their photos to visualise this work in a way that was productive, as well as challenging to both them and the researcher (and others involved in the project), who at times was left with feeling overwhelmed by the power of the images.

Conclusion

We have described how visual methods create space that allows for different engagement with the research process for participants. In the study we have described, participants felt that although they were being asked to articulate enormously difficult and painful experiences, they were able to do so in a way that avoided the categories they expected researchers to use as frames. Participants were enthusiastic about both bringing existing images to the interviews (the photo-elicitation phase) and about subsequently making their images (the photo-production phase). The images allowed for a productive ambiguity that made it possible to 'get past' the brute facts of the violence they described and to reflect and work upon their experiences with the researcher.

But, as we stated in the introduction, there is another transformation that is at work in this process – that which is undertaken by the researcher. To engage with the kind of experiences that were made present through the images is challenging for the researcher. One of us described looking at the material co-produced in the study as feeling as though they had 'been smacked in the face'. Now clearly such experiences on the part of the researcher do not even begin to approach those recollected by the participants, but there is nevertheless the sense of being personally and analytically 'overwhelmed' by the material. These kinds of intense emotional experiences on the part of the researcher/analyst have been well described in many literatures (such as with the concept of 'counter-transference' in psychoanalytic practice) (Lewis, 2009).

We want to make a different connection. The 'impact agenda' encourages social scientists to lay claim to expertise in analysing social issues and to evidence how their expertise can be demonstrated to participants. As a consequence, participants become 'raw material' for constructing 'pathways to impact'. This is arguably a form of silencing, since what it at stake is demonstrating the researcher/analyst's expertise – the 'impact' they have on participants - rather than working to make visible the experiences that participants articulate. We argue that the converse ought to be treated as equally important: the 'impact' the participant has on the researcher. To be overwhelmed as an analyst is to find one's usual explanatory categories and procedures suspended, to find oneself 'not knowing what to say'. Everything then turns on what happens next. Research which simply re-asserts pre-existing explanatory categories erases both the anxiety and the problem. But research which takes this ambiguity as an impetus to work harder to understand and co-construct accounts with participants will, we argue, be creative and innovative in precisely the ways the 'impact agenda' intended to foster.

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