

Why study power in digital spaces anyway? Considering power and participatory visual methods

Casey Burkholder, Mona Makramalla, Ehaab Abdou, Nazeeha Khoja, and Fatima Khan

In this article, we interrogate notions of power in relation to three participatory visual methods: drawing, photovoice, and making cellfilms (videos made on cell phones). In particular, we address power from the perspectives of Foucault, Freire, Giroux, and hooks in a consideration of the power structures operating in and around participatory visual research. We seek to understand the power dynamics that operate in participatory visual research—particularly in relation to digital media. In so doing, we foreground the notion of power in a discussion of a workshop on participatory visual methodologies that we conducted as part of a graduate student conference. Since participatory visual research artifacts can be both created and disseminated through digital spaces, this work offers implications for researchers working in this field. We conclude that more theoretical work needs to be done to enable us to articulate more fully the power dynamics at play in participatory visual research.

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Introduction

Participatory visual researchers put both participation and the visual at the centre of their inquiry. While participatory visual methods are often promoted as being democratic, particularly in relation to foregrounding marginalised voices in the

Casey Burkholder
McGill University
Faculty of Education
Department of Integrated
Studies in Education
casey.burkholder@mail.mcgill.ca

Mona Makramalla
McGill University
Faculty of Education
Department of Integrated Studies
in Education
mona.makramalla@mail.mcgill.ca

Ehaab Abdou
McGill University
Faculty of Education
Department of Integrated
Studies in Education
ehaab.abdou@mail.mcgill.ca

Nazeeha Khoja
McGill University
Faculty of Education
Department of Integrated
Studies in Education
nazeeha.khoja@mail.mcgill.ca

Fatima Khan
McGill University
Faculty of Education
Department of Integrated
Studies in Education
fatima.khan2@mail.mcgill.ca

research, there is a critical need to investigate the ways in which power operates in research practice. Important issues such as researcher-reflexivity in the context of such participatory visual methodologies as drawing, photovoice, and cellphilms have been extensively discussed (see Colombo, 2003; Mitchell, 2011; Milne, Mitchell & De Lange, 2012). Other important topics such as visual ethics have evolved into sub-fields within participatory visual research (Mitchell, 2011). While these sub-fields bring power into practice explicitly, we are interested in the ways in which the theorising of power could provide a more comprehensive approach in relation to what might be termed digital spaces. What could be gained by making the workings of power more explicit? How might interrogating theories of power contribute to critical and reflexive research practice?

We explore some of the challenges in dissemination across digital spaces by using the perspectives of theorists Michel Foucault, Paulo Freire, Henry Giroux, and bell hooks who address power and who themselves have considered the significance of the visual to frame the article. In order to promote praxis in this work, we reflect on our own experiences as a research team of PhD students who organised a workshop on participatory visual methodologies as part of a graduate student conference. In so doing, we interrogate power in relation to three methods associated with the visual and working with digital data: drawing and talking (Literat, 2013), photovoice (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001), and cellphilms (Mitchell & De Lange, 2013). Drawings—as Weber (2008) has articulated—can be used to account for, and illustrate elusive meanings that empower participants. Photovoice is based on Freirean notions of critical education, as well as feminist theory, and brings the previously unheard issues and images of communities to public audiences (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). Cellphilms—as their name implies—use cellphone technology to engage participants in participatory video research (Dockney & Tomaselli, 2009). By grounding our workshop experiences in the work of influential theorists, we argue that for participatory visual research to be effective in advancing social change, researchers need to account for power dynamics within the research process itself. In this article, we inquire about the power dynamics at play in participatory visual research, particularly as we think about research creation and dissemination in digital spaces.

Mapping out power

We start with Foucault's question, "Do we need a theory of power?" While theory does not need to be the underlying basis of an analytical study, a study "cannot proceed without an ongoing conceptualization [of power]. And this conceptualization implies critical thought—a constant checking" (1982: 778). Power, therefore, must be theorised so that participatory visual methods can undergo such a "constant checking." We suggest that power dynamics are at play on at least four specific levels of participatory visual research. We argue that the first level of power refers to the participants and society. The second level is that of the power relations between

the researcher and the researched; the third is related to the power dynamics that are at play among the research participants themselves; and the fourth level, power and dissemination, refers to the ethics of dissemination of the various participatory visual products such as photos and videos, most notably in digital spaces. We ask how participatory visual methodologies can navigate these power dynamics, and how we can use visual methodologies to address unequal notions of power.

The theorists mentioned above have recognised the influential role that the visual plays in constructing and deconstructing narratives. Foucault brought the visual to his work on power through drawings. Rajchman suggests that “a frequent device in Foucault’s writing is before-and-after pictures. One is shown a picture from one period and then one from another. Thus the question of how one passed from one system of thought to another is visualized” (1988: 90).

Freire believed in the power of codifications—visual and/or audible representations of situations that would be familiar to people. This codification, which could take the form of an image, video, or audio recording, allows participants to examine closely a seemingly normal situation without being submerged in it. Freire describes codification as being both powerful and cathartic, enabling people to “externalize a series of sentiments and opinions about themselves, the world and others that they perhaps would not express under different circumstances” (2010:118). Moreover, Freire also believes that “the people must be challenged to discover their historical existence through the critical analysis of their cultural production: their art and their music” (cited in Hall, 2005: 7). Giroux suggests that narratives are often visual. Modern culture, he says, is largely “photocentric” (1992: 219) since people are constantly exposed to different media including photography, television, and the digital realm, all of which contribute to shaping their understandings and identities (1994). Additionally, hooks (1995) recognizes the power of visual artifacts since they are produced and consumed through the political lenses of gender, race and class (amongst other intersectional categories). Inspired by Freire, hooks (1995), in writing about the ways in which marginalised people experience art, argues that only when the marginalised are empowered to question the meanings of aesthetic norms, can art come to play a transformative role in liberating themselves and others.

Participants and society in participatory visual research

Criticality

In research that uses participatory visual methods, participants are encouraged to examine their own reality in relation to their surroundings, communities, and societies. They are encouraged to problematise the status quo. Freire (2010) states that the oppressors—those in power—subjugate marginalised populations by treating them as sub-human, and by teaching them hegemonic myths so as to further their marginalisation. Freire suggests that the oppressed can liberate themselves by reflecting critically on their reality, engaging in dialogue, discovering the sources of

their problems, and acting to transform their worlds. Thus, for him, the oppressed must actively produce the counter knowledge that only they can produce.

Along the same lines, Giroux encourages an interrogation of the “omissions and tensions that exist between the master narratives and hegemonic discourses” (1992: 33). Further, he argues that a border pedagogy is needed to enable “border crossers” on both sides of the power dynamic to understand and question their power positions in relation to each other, and to the larger society. This starts with defining the borders, and in recognising where “existing borders forged in domination can be challenged and redefined” (28).

In discussing African American marginalisation, hooks argues that education has been used to colonise marginalised masses by distorting history and literature to instill an “internalized self-hatred” (2010: 30). She recognises the importance of resistance that takes place when one self-consciously engages with dominant discourses in order to reconstruct them. In some cases, the very simple act of acknowledging a personal experience is an important step in and of itself. Rendering an individual’s narrative invisible, in the classroom or beyond, and, we would add, in the research arena, could be more damaging to their self-esteem than a “full-frontal attack” (123) on it.

Connecting with participatory research

In an effort to connect the views of these theorists to those of activist-researchers, we point to Walsh’s (2012) argument that participatory visual methodologies need to be situated in an understanding of power, and in the political realities in which the research is undertaken in order to advocate for, and perhaps instigate, real social change outside of the research conditions.

Power relations between the researcher and the researched

Researcher’s role

To address properly the dynamics of the second level of power between the researched and the researchers, it is important for participatory visual researchers to understand their role. Freire tells educators that “it is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours” (2010: 96). Bartlett (2005) reminds us that Freire recommended that educators team up with individuals from the local community to investigate the themes that were most relevant to adult students so that they could be incorporated into a particular community’s literacy program. We believe that it is clear from this that Freire believed that educators should also be participatory researchers or, as Bartlett puts it, ethnographic researchers. Foucault (1980) also advises those working towards social action in a community not to get overly attached to pre-existing assumptions and the belief that there is one true or best way. Instead, as Jardine explains, he suggests attempting

to understand, contextualise and pay attention to those who are the “object of... undesirable practice...and support how and why they are resisting the practice” (2005: 34). In addition, hooks calls for the practice of “radical openness” (2010:10) in which educators, and, we suggest, researchers, too, are open to new ideas and invested in challenging their own ways of knowing. Providing a practical way to operationalise such “radical openness”, Giroux proposes “emancipatory authority” that allows those with emancipatory visions to be aware of their own authority and open to situating it within a discourse in which it is made visible, recognised, and questioned as an “ethical, political, and social construction” (1994:163).

The empowerment directive

Participatory researchers supposedly seek to empower participants while working in partnership with them, but we are critical of the notion that participatory researchers necessarily empower participants. As Freire argues, it is the role of the educator—and, we argue, of the researcher too—to encourage marginalised participants to “objectify” their world and its realities in order to then “understand it and transform it” (2010: 125). Thus, a researcher needs to embrace a “permanently critical attitude” (hooks, 2010: 187) through which she or he recognises that people are “co-investigators” (Freire, 2010: 106), not objects. For this ideal relationship between researcher and researched to be realised, all those involved in such research need to recognise the subtle ways in which power dynamics operate and permeate different facets of interaction. As hooks asserts, the dominant groups exhibit attitudes that are empowered by, and work to enforce the “controlling apparatus in structures of domination” (1994: 81). These coercive power dynamics at play are what Giroux insists should be resisted and challenged. If the ideological practices of the dominant culture were to be made visible—rather than normalised and invisible—the dominant group might indeed come to realise that their “own identities are beyond neither ethnicity, history, privilege, nor struggle” (1994: 91). Only through full disclosure of power relations about the process of research, and a radically different interaction between researcher and participants, can participatory visual research achieve its emancipatory objectives.

Participants as co-researchers

Participatory visual researchers typically seek to transform the binary researcher-researched power dynamic into one in which both actors see themselves as co-researchers. After all, it is the participants who best know their realities and their worlds. Freire (2010) insists on recruiting local community members to be part of the investigative teams that determine the issues that are crucial to social transformation. He reiterates the objective of transformative research as being about “the people themselves and not the advancement of science” (1982: 34). Freire would commend participatory researchers for believing that “people have the universal right to participate in the production of knowledge,” seeing in this process “an authentic power for liberation that ultimately destroys a passive waiting of fate” (1997: xi).

In subscribing to praxis and the need for a dialogic relationship between theory, research and action, and in calling for theories that connect to participants' lived experiences, hooks argues that "personal testimony, personal experience, is ... fertile ground for the production of liberatory feminist theory" (1994: 70). Theory, in this case, is an attempt to make sense of the world by critically reflecting on it and envisioning different solutions. Thus, for her, the act of solving problems in our daily lives could lead to engaging in a "critical process of theorizing" (1994:71) that empowers people by building resistance to unquestioned dominant narratives. Within the scope of "engaged pedagogy", hooks (2010) argues that all learners bring valuable contributions to their learning processes that can be addressed only through the full participation of both learners' and teachers' lived experiences. We argue that the same point applies to researchers and participants. Turning hooks's point to our advantage we believe that social change is encouraged when researchers are willing to share power with their participants. This begins to be possible only when the researcher problematises the existing researcher-researched power discrepancies that so often echo those between teacher and learner.

Connecting with participatory action research

in looking at the power dynamics between the researcher and researched, Hall problematises the role of academics in participatory research in the global South, and challenges the "positivist research paradigms [that are] carried out largely by university-based researchers" (2005:14), arguing that academics should not monopolise the doing of research. He also highlights the failure of participatory research to adequately address race. Choudry (2012) points to the significance of the knowledge produced by activists working on the ground, a knowledge that often leads to action. Prins (2010) also stresses the importance of researchers' awareness of the context-specific sociocultural norms with regard to the use of visual technologies in their participatory research projects. We look to these practitioners who bring power to participatory action research, and keep their critiques in mind as we theorise three participatory visual methodologies: drawing, photovoice, and cellphilms.

Power dynamics between participants

Resisting the oppressor within

the shifting power relations between research participants must also be theorised. We argue that existing social conditions, dominant social attitudes, and values must be recognised for individuals to be able to begin to address oppression, resist it, and transform the situation. Freire (2010) cautions against the tendency of marginalised actors and groups to internalise and exhibit the traits of their oppressors. In similar vein, hooks discusses the need to decolonise minds, a challenging task since most individuals are fully immersed in the "dominator culture" (2010: 27). Freire warns that marginalised groups often "feel an irresistible attraction to oppressors and their way of life" (2010: 62) and may try to emulate these unequal relations. He points

out that transforming social conditions is possible only through the recognition of existing power.

Jordan (2003) complicates the notion of participation in participatory research. He calls attention to power issues, and questions the possibility of participatory methodologies to be co-opted by those invested in upholding the status quo. Rooted in Freirean philosophy, Robert Chambers—a key figure in the field of participatory rural appraisal techniques—reminds us that at the heart of the whole research process are the marginalised who should have a say in how the data they generate is being analysed and interpreted. Chambers argues that the “poor and exploited people can and should be enabled to analyse their own reality” (1997:106).

The collective effort

There is also an important collective element to participatory visual research. As Freire notes, actors need to be united and fully engaged in the pursuit of their own emancipation. For him, “we cannot say that in the process of revolution someone liberates someone else, but rather that human beings in communion, liberate each other” (2010: 133). As hooks (1994) argues, any change requires a collective effort and cannot be achieved by a single individual. In effecting social change collective effort may well serve to help lessen or even do away with unequal power relations.

Power and dissemination

the theorists on whom we draw have helped us articulate questions for consideration with regard to the ethics of dissemination. Assuming that the researcher and participants have been able to question their positions of power successfully, what is the status of the participant-generated data? Who owns the research data produced in visual participatory projects? Do the researchers have the right to speak on behalf of the participants whether in academic settings or in those of international development or policy-making? Who should have the right to access, use, and disseminate visual products? As Mitchell (2011) asks, should there be digital community archives, and if so, how should they be maintained?

We believe, of course, that ethics should govern all aspects of participatory visual research but the ethics involved in deciding how to disseminate its findings, in particular, are worth further consideration. Scholars have analysed the different visual research products, as well as their means of dissemination, including mass media and culture (Giroux, 1994). The ethics of disseminating visual products has also been examined in publications aimed at international donors and policy-makers (Nguyen & Mitchell, 2012). In these contexts, an aspect of power relates to what is being communicated, and for what purposes. Nguyen and Mitchell (2012) warn that researchers and policy-makers need to be aware of the messages they hope to convey, and to consider carefully which images they choose to convey those messages, especially in influential texts such as reports for policy-makers and international agencies. In analysing some images selected by international agencies

that depict childhood in developing countries, they argue that these published and disseminated images serve, for example, to reinforce stigma which, in turn, works to maintain unequal power structures and cement ill-informed worldviews. It is imperative that participants be included in the selection process of material to be disseminated, and be enabled to give their informed consent. This would necessitate the return of the researcher(s) to the communities from which the visual data has been generated so as to share opinions and establish the appropriateness of the material for dissemination. Only in this way can the (perhaps unavoidable) inequities of power between the researcher and the researched begin to be addressed ethically in relation to the dissemination process.

Seeing for ourselves: studying power in the use of participatory visual methods in practice

To address the way that power operates across participatory visual methodologies, we organised a 60-minute workshop at McGill University's 2014 Education Graduate Students' Society's Conference in order to study the participatory nature of visual methodologies, particularly the digital, and the way in which these methods promote reflection, transformation, and social action. We provided a space for researchers to practise drawing, photovoice, and making cellphilms for themselves; to view the products that we co-created; and to engage in a reflexive discussion about the place of power in this process. Recent research in the area of participatory visual methodologies has highlighted the potential for these methods to "provoke reflexivity amongst participants by prompting them to look back at their experiences in relation to others and in a broader social context" (Yang, 2013: 113). Framing the workshop in a larger discussion of power, we asked the eight workshop participants to examine ethical issues in relation to drawing, photovoice, and cellphilms. Following the workshop, we worked as a team to engage in reflexive inquiry about our workshop facilitation, and to consider what it might be like to have Foucault, Freire, Giroux or hooks looking over our shoulders as we asked questions about how each one of us understood the power operating in the workshop.

Workshop structure

We began the workshop by introducing the implications of using participatory visual methods in research, and provided three practical examples of our engagement with drawing, photovoice, and cellphilms. We examined these methods along with some points relating to the theories of power of Freire, Foucault, hooks, and Giroux. In the workshop, we briefly described how these theorists' notions of power applied to our practice in using participatory visual research.¹ After situating the ways in which power operates within our distinct research contexts, we provided specific prompts to enable the participants to examine power in the three methodologies.

Drawing

We first invited participants to draw a response to a particular prompt to examine the personal experiences that graduate students encounter during their first year at graduate school. We asked participants to draw-and-talk or draw-and-write about a positive experience that they had had during their first year in graduate school. We used the drawing exercise to facilitate a discussion (draw-and-talk) in a safe space to discuss their thoughts, feelings and experiences. Participants explored the method, and shared their drawings and stories with the group in a larger discussion.



Figure 1: Drawing on Collaboration

Each workshop participant took ten minutes to draw his or her response to the prompt. The participants then shared their drawings with the group, and explored the notion of power through the positive experience each had drawn. A goal of this method is to use the process of drawing and talking to facilitate thoughtful explanations and discussions. We offer in Image 1, Jenny's² drawing, which depicted herself and four other women with whom she worked to present a panel discussion on arts-based methodologies in educational research at the Comparative and International Education Society's annual conference. As she explained, rather than feeling overwhelmed about her first experience at this society's conference, presenting in a group made her feel comfortable. As a new researcher, she felt that being on a panel made her feel part of a community of graduate students and also of arts-based researchers.

Photovoice

In the *photovoice* activity, participants worked in two groups of four. Both groups were given approximately ten minutes to respond to the prompt to depict educational symbols of power and strength and/or weakness. Each of the groups represented its

response by taking a photograph which they then shared with the other participants. One group decided that spectacles (see Image 2) symbolise both power and weakness. Although participants agreed that glasses are traditionally viewed as symbols of intelligence and authority, they may also evoke the aging process. They may also suggest how people who need to wear glasses might feel in thinking themselves inferior to those who have better eyesight. As a result of their discussion, three group members chose to exhibit their glasses along with an open case. The surrounding items are relevant educational symbols—objects from the previous drawing activity as well as pictures of the theorists whose notions of power we discussed as a prelude to the activities. The red backpack holds significance in that it was considered an educational symbol of power, weakness, and vulnerability because of the sheer weight of what has to be loaded into it to carry out one’s academic life. Once the photo was printed, the group’s reflections on power and weakness were shared with other workshop participants.



Figure 2: On Educational Symbols of Power, Strength and/or Weakness

Cellphilms

In the cellphilms activity, we again had two groups of four whose members discussed ideas related to the prompt to show personal experiences of education and power. All participants were encouraged to present their ideas. Each group chose a concept that could be filmed, and worked together after brainstorming ideas and

then developing one of them into a cellphilm. One group filmed a scene between a healthcare provider, two employees, and their manager. The group used a storyboard to plan the scene before shooting it by dividing it into two shots so that they could film without editing. The group also practised making the cellphilm before filming the final version since the No Editing Required (NER) (Mitchell & De Lange, 2011) approach was used. In the first shot, the healthcare provider distributes brochures and speaks to two employees about the importance of getting the flu shot. The first employee agrees to get the flu vaccine since it had been recommended by her employer. The second employee questions the method and explains that she prefers to use a natural alternative. In the second shot, the manager contacts the second employee, who has stayed home because she has the flu, and criticises her refusal to get vaccinated.



Figure 3: Cellphilm Storyboard

Focusing on power and participatory visual research

engaging in the study of power through participatory visual methods with participants proved to be challenging both in relation to the theme of power and the actual doing of the workshop. This was particularly the case in the drawing activity since many participants noted that they were “not good at drawing.” Talking through this reticence can encourage participants to dialogue about the ways in which they can engage with a specific question or prompt despite the feeling that they believe themselves

to lack drawing skills because, after all, drawing as a methodology is about engaging with a visual text, rather than necessarily being proficient at drawing. Rather, the goal of the draw-and-talk method is to use the drawing to initiate a discussion while the draw-and-write method begins with drawing and includes the creation a piece of reflexive writing. Another challenge was that some participants felt uncomfortable about sharing their drawings.

In our reflections on the power of the drawing prompt, it was clear that the prompt itself directed the participants to experience power positively. Had we chosen a prompt that asked participants to examine any experience of power in their graduate school careers, we most probably would have been provided with different data. We need to ask if this clear direction towards depicting a positive experience of power could be perceived as a limitation of our workshop. Should we have left the choice of a positive or negative experience to the participants? However, noting the role that the slant, as it were, of the prompt played in influencing participant output provides useful insights into ways that a researcher can unintentionally shape the participants' experiences as well as the representation of such experiences in visual participatory research. In choosing a specific prompt that directed participants' experiences, we asked for specific kinds of knowledge to be represented. This is worth delving more deeply into in an examination of the role of the power the researcher has in formulating a prompt in relation to the participants, and the role it has in determining the artifacts that participants produce.

Unlike that used in the drawing activity, the prompt used in the cellfilm activity was broad, and this encouraged participants to share a variety of ideas and understandings. Also, because filming with cellphones was a familiar practice for most participants, there appeared to be a relative sense of ease amongst them in contrast to the hesitance they showed when asked to draw.

Nevertheless, manifestations of power became apparent when participants worked as a group to discuss ideas, and plan the cellfilms. We attempted to minimise the power imbalance between participants by giving each participant adequate time and space to share ideas. Brainstorming gave all the participants opportunities to share their thoughts and this had the potential to reduce the power imbalance between and amongst participants. Further, the joint planning of a storyboard and its creation played a role in making a cellfilm that reflected each group members' perspective. Yet, power still played a part in this cellfilm process. For example, the participant who was chosen to film the scene had control over what was filmed, included, and excluded. Further, since this activity was part of a workshop, participants had limited time to build a trusting relationship with each other and this might have influenced the distribution of power.

We wonder, too, if the power of the facilitator can ever be mitigated, or even more explicitly addressed in participatory visual work. How might this be accomplished? What might this look like? What effect might this have on the data produced?

What would the theorists say?

Through the use of drawings, photovoice, and the making of cellfilms, our workshop invited participants to reflect on different kinds of power in different contexts of participatory visual research. From a critical and reflexive standpoint, we observed how power was at play throughout the workshop. The challenges and limitations we faced reinforced our awareness of how power operates in participatory visual research and our recognition of the value of being able to theorise it. What implications does this have for other researchers working in the field? Because of the rapidly evolving nature and complexities of digital spaces, we, as researchers using participatory visual methodologies, need awareness of, and tools to enable us to address, the power dynamics that influence our collaboration with participants. Thus we look to bridge the gap between theory and practice, critically reflect on these power dynamics in visual research, and work collectively with participants to challenge and eliminate, or at least minimise, the workings of unequal power.

It seems to us as we reflect on the experience of this workshop that there were some critical points that are worth noting in relation to the work of the theorists with which we began this article, and their ideas about power. For example, we encouraged the participants to engage in dialogue, and we provided space for them to explore their own notions of power, and in this way we might be described as Freirean. However, as facilitators, we still took up most of the space in the workshop. We provided participants with opportunities to share and to speak, but we most often mediated these conversations. What might Freire have thought about this? We were aware of our power, and we were interrogating notions of voice and representation, but at the same time we did most of the talking. Instead of encouraging the groups to come up with their own prompts about power and participatory visual methodologies, we brought these prompts to the workshop. While we did this in the interests of time management, we have to acknowledge that the prompts directed the types of responses the participants generated. Thus, the prompts directed what participants explored, and how they explored these issues. Did we encourage unequal power relations in the very structuring of the workshop?

Upon reflection, we realise that not only did we explore power primarily from the perspective of three male scholars (Foucault, Freire, Giroux) and only one female, who is also the only person of colour amongst these thinkers (hooks), we might even ask if we were maintaining and enforcing unequal power relations through our examination of primarily privileged male discussions of power. Did this affect our participants' experiences? In the workshop, the majority of participants were females who represented experiences with power through a discussion of age, lack of confidence, and feelings of marginalisation. However, we did not address racialised or gendered experiences of power. If we had made these discussions more apparent (or explicit) in our brief presentations on the notions of power of Foucault, Freire, Giroux and hooks, might the participants have explored power differently? Did we maintain oppressive structures even within a workshop on power?

Another power structure that we neglected to think about in our workshop is related to the politics of dissemination even though, as we note earlier, we identify this as a fourth level of power in relation to participatory visual research. Our participants created visual products or artifacts, but we limited the sharing to a few moments toward the end of the workshop and there was no dissemination beyond the workshop. We had not planned sufficient time for participants to create, view, and critically discuss their productions, and, perhaps, even exchange them with each other. How did our limiting the ways in which we could have disseminated the artifacts or the ideas behind them maintain unequal power relations? Overall then, although informed by theories of power, in practice, our participatory visual workshop did not necessarily subvert unequal power structures. Were we doing it badly or incorrectly? Should we have asked participants to create products that could be disseminated digitally beyond the workshop? Could it have made a difference in terms of the products that were produced? In writing and seeking to disseminate this reflexive piece about our workshop experience, are we assuming sole ownership of the data that emerged when in reality these productions are co-owned with the participants in the workshop? What might the theorists Foucault, Freire, Giroux, and hooks have to say about this?

Conclusion

As digital spaces in educational research have become more accessible and immediate, theories of power and its intricacies within participatory visual methodologies remain inadequately discussed and dismantled. Power dynamics can intentionally or unintentionally influence, alter, and/or transform the voices of marginalised people in researchers' attempts to effect social change—especially in the digital realm. Participatory visual research is often touted as being more democratic than traditional qualitative and quantitative methodologies, and the digital realm makes similar democratic claims about accessibility and freedom of expression. How might new publics take up the products of participatory visual research in the digital realm? How might the anonymity granted by the Internet maintain and undermine unequal power relations? How might we think about democracy, participation, the digital realm, and power? From our own reflections, and in thinking about the ways in which we maintained unequal power relations despite wanting to do the opposite, we suggest that participatory visual research—particularly in the digital realm—must be understood as having instances of power that need to be challenged. We continue to ask how our research can subvert unequal power relations.

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Endnotes

1. Mona Makramalla explores power and women's literacy practices in Egypt. Ehaab Abdou researches power, student identity formation, and historical consciousness through drawing in Egypt. Nazeeha Khoja examines kindergarten children's views on their education and power through photovoice in Saudi Arabia. Fatima Khan investigates children's understanding of power and ways of knowing through drawing in disaster zones in Pakistan. Casey Burkholder explores power and non-Chinese speaking young people's sense of self, belonging, and citizenship through cellphilms in Hong Kong.
2. This is a pseudonym.