'Scrapbooks' as a resource in media research with young people

Book Chapter

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This article explores the use of media 'scrapbooks' in research with young people. In the research project discussed here, participants created a mix of found-image collage and personal annotation or comment about their views of sexual media content. The article explains the evolution, rationale and implementation of the method, comments on the form and content of the scrapbooks produced, and how we approached the task of interpretation. It also describes how the method was subsequently adapted for classroom teaching, as a tool to promote reflective learning in sex and relationship education.

'Scrapbooks' in the context of research: aims and methodological issues

The visual research methods discussed in this article evolved in the context of a research project entitled 'Children, Media and Personal Relationships', directed by David Buckingham at the London Institute of Education in 2001-3 (see Buckingham and Bragg, 2003, 2004). The research had quantitative elements, but was intended as primarily qualitative. It aimed to explore young people's responses to the portrayal of love, sex and relationships in the media and thereby to intervene in public debates (or moral panics) about youth and sexual media. Commentators on these issues too often assume that young people are passive victims of the media and depict the media as corrupting their innocence by introducing them to sex too young, or as distorting their sexuality by commercialising it. In such debates young people's own perspectives are rarely heard, and the research hoped to amplify their voices and enable them to carry greater weight than they normally do. The research therefore needed to investigate young people's own understandings and perspectives, their media competences and practices of media consumption, and how they negotiated their way through an increasingly sexualised mainstream media culture. It took as its starting point a view of the media as more diverse and contradictory than public debate admits, serving therefore as one set of cultural resources amongst others on which young people could draw to learn about sex and relationships, to make sense of their lives and to construct their identities, including their gender and sexuality. The research was commissioned and funded by a consortium of media regulators led by the Broadcasting Standards Commission. This meant

that it needed to address the public service remit of these organisations and consider how to help develop young people's media coping strategies, in a contemporary context of deregulation where they can potentially access (perhaps more easily than in the past) sexual material deemed inappropriate for their age group. There were also a number of key ethical dilemmas raised specifically by working on both the topic and the age group: for instance, research should not introduce inappropriate sexual material, and it should not be intrusive. The research therefore needed to allow young people to find their own level of response and to have some control over what information they were prepared to share.

The methodology emerged in response to these aims and issues. We wanted to go beyond responses to surveys, which would be limited and address questions already identified by researchers rather than new ones raised by young people themselves. We also rejected the 'effects' agenda of much previous psychological research, which sought evidence of the media's (usually negative) effects on young people's values, attitudes or behaviour (Bragg and Buckingham, 2002). However, we did not want to rely only on interviews, which might provide limited access to the emotional and symbolic aspects of young people's experiences or their media-related modes of expression. David Buckingham's earlier research (for instance 1993) had shown how group interviews often became dominated by interpersonal dynamics rather than the substantive issues in which we were particularly interested in this project. David Buckingham's earlier research (for instance 1993) had shown how group interviews often became dominated by interpersonal dynamics rather than the substantive issues in which we were particularly interested in this project. While this can be very interesting and revealing in itself, the challenge here was to find other visual or multi-modal methods, which could shift the balance away from the written or spoken word and provide a way to explore broader dimensions of young people's engagement with the media, as well as to put their voices and experiences at the centre of our concerns. Nonetheless, as we explain below, we are sceptical about some of the claims made about how far any approaches enable young people to 'speak for themselves', which is by no means a simple and direct process.

The eventual shape of the study involved working with 120 young people aged 9-17 (equal numbers of male and female participants), in two primary and two secondary schools in socio-economically contrasting areas. Participants were asked to complete the scrapbooks first, then interviewed in friendship pairs about them. This was followed by group interviews: a first round dealt with a two hour video of extracts that we compiled and that participants had watched beforehand, and with advertisements that had been the subject of complaints to one of our funders, the Advertising Standards Agency. A second round of interviews with the 12 and 14 year olds only considered tabloid newspapers and teenage magazines. We also conducted focus groups with around 60 parents. This was followed by a survey of nearly 800 young people aged 10-14, conducted in the same schools.

The idea of using scrapbooks – which we also called 'media diaries' - came from a number of sources. There is a growing literature on the use of visual media in sociological and anthropological research (Banks, 2001; Pink, 2001; Rose, 2006). However, given our backgrounds as media educators, recent school pedagogies – informed by Cultural Studies perspectives on media audiences - may have been equally relevant a factor (Buckingham, 2003; Buckingham and Sefton-Green, 1994). In studying the concept of 'audience' in Media Studies formal curricula, for example, students are encouraged to reflect on themselves as media audiences as well as studying others. This might involve logging their own media consumption or constructing 'media autobiographies', comparing these with others in the class, or developing surveys of friends and family members' media usage. The aim of this is to explore different research methods, to challenge easy assumptions about media 'effects' (which young people tend to attribute more easily to others than to themselves) and to achieve 'social self-understanding' – a socially located understanding of their own media consumption practices in the context of broader cultural and social relationships (Buckingham, 2003; Richards, 1998). In addition, there is a considerable body of research on young people's creative production, in both formal and informal settings, which suggests its potential in enabling 'identity work' and critical reflection, as well as more public forms of communication that have been seen as 'empowering' for young people (de Block and Buckingham, 2007: Chapter 7).

Media education practices had then already suggested the utility of approaches such as media diaries, and that they might be to some extent familiar to some of the older students with whom we were working. We hoped they might provide a different means for us as researchers to gain access to young people's perspectives and experiences, to achieve a more privileged 'inside' view than might be possible using other methods. There were further reasons why they seemed to suit our purposes in this context. Some were *topic-specific*: in our culture, sex is popularly constructed and understood as a personal, private matter. The scrapbooks therefore enabled a more 'private' and individual form of communication than interviews, a form which would be less structured by their knowledge of (or guesswork about) us as researchers, could be carried out in their own time and allow young people to talk to us in ways they chose, about what they saw as important, relatively free from the peer pressure that a group task might involve. We hoped that the technique could also allow some access to responses that might be hard to articulate fully, especially where they dealt with emotions and the 'non-rational', or where participants lacked a fully developed vocabulary to discuss issues. However, the scrapbooks were intended not to be unduly personal or intrusive. The project was not about young people's own sex lives, and we rejected simplistic causal hypotheses about, for instance, the relation between certain forms of media consumption and sexual activity, which might have necessitated gathering data on the latter. The idea of a media scrapbook meant the focus would be more clearly on young people's relation to the media than on personal revelations. Finally, we wanted young people to teach us, especially

where we were not familiar with the media materials they might be encountering. The scrapbook meant they could include examples of advertisements, magazines, newspaper articles, and so on, allowing us to gain insights into their actual media experience.

There were also *project-related* reasons for using scrapbooks. The research took place in schools, as these were the most convenient site through which to reach a large group of young people. We did not want participants to produce only the kinds of responses that they thought would be appropriate in an academic context (such as, censorious ones). Although this remained an issue, as we explain below, we wanted to offer young people a range of ways to engage with media images. The scrapbooks potentially allowed them to play with ideas and different identities, to express pleasures in the media as well as to critique them, to produce both a record and reflection, thus bringing their voices into the project in more diverse ways.

Moreover, the project was a relatively short-term one, where we would meet young people only a few times. Funding restrictions meant it did not involve long-term participant observation, with its potential for deepening relationships with those we were researching, as might be the case in a more ethnographic project, or participatory approaches in which we could adapt our methods collaboratively in response to their comments. Instead, we worked in settings that were relatively unfamiliar for us, for intensive periods of a week at a time. Although we had contacted them through schools, they had to complete the 'tasks' we set them in their spare time, which also meant they had to do so on their own, as it would have been difficult to organise collective activities. We appreciated that there might be limits to young people's motivation in being involved in such a project (we relied primarily on the incentive of small cash payments and the promise of making their views known to 'the people who run the media'). The effect this might have on our methods became clearer when, in a piloting phase, we gave young people cameras and asked them to take photos of sexualised media around them, such as advertising hoardings on their routes around their neighbourhood, of their bedroom walls or of their family watching television at home. Although this approach has been used successfully in other contexts, here it did not produce worthwhile results; participants seemed unclear as to what pictures to take, and we were not available for them to clarify this with us. They may also have felt that such documenting of their lives for strangers was too intrusive. Since in any case we were interested in young people as consumers of media, it was as appropriate for them to reflect on found material as to create their own; and the scrapbook was a more familiar and thus 'safer' form. That is, whilst it could be used in longer-term projects, it also addressed the exigencies of our particular, short-term and focused aims.

Thirdly, there were *age-related* reasons for using scrapbooks, which also addressed potential ethical dilemmas. The project aimed to elicit views from children as young as nine, to 17 year olds, across a spectrum of academic achievement. It therefore had to enable them to participate at a range of levels. We stressed when we introduced the idea to participants that they should focus on the media

that they regularly encounter in their own lives. In this way, we hoped that the content would reflect actual media usage rather than encourage young people deliberately to access more 'adult' material in a way that might cause concern to parents and teachers. We also hoped that the scrapbooks did not over-emphasise the need to be sophisticatedly literate or creative, since they involved cutting and pasting with annotations or drawings.

The young people were recruited with the help of teachers in the schools we chose. Most volunteered after seeing a flyer distributed during tutor group time, no doubt attracted partly by the offer of cash; however, in some cases teachers actively encouraged particular students to be involved in order to make up numbers. Each young person had first to obtain parental consent for their involvement, and to sign a consent form themselves. Sara then visited schools to introduce the idea to participants and to answer initial questions, meeting them in their year groups (twelve young people at a time) and distributing the scrapbooks. We had, after much hunting and experimenting during the pilot phase, sourced an affordable blank, black-covered A4-size art book, which we hoped would be neither too gendered nor too intimidating in terms of the amount of pages provided. Participants were given a page of instructions that gave them some structure for the task. It asked them to keep the diary or scrapbook, over a period of around a fortnight, in their own time, focusing on 'your views about how the media shows love, sex and relationships' and we gave a broad definition of the media. They were asked to include a page or so about themselves, their families, their media access and tastes. They were then to write either in the form of a daily account over about a week of 'anything that they saw in the media' that related to the theme of love, sex and relationships, or to write in general about their views, in both cases including relevant images where available. They were also given assurances about privacy and confidentiality (although we should admit that we fell down on some of this; for instance, we said that we would ask their teachers not to look at them when they collected them for us, yet it turned out that some did nonetheless, provoking justified complaints). We then collected them from the schools to read before discussing them with their makers in pair interviews (with a nominated friend).

Outcomes from the scrapbooks: a range of 'voices'

From this initial outline of our approach, it should be clear that we ended up with a wealth of material. The most immediate use of the scrapbooks was to provide a stimulus or prompt for our first interview with them. Having read them in advance, we were able to prepare a general set of questions about the process of making them, and some specific follow up questions about elements we had found interesting, or to ask for clarification and further details. Even where some participants were unconfident about their opinions on sexual media, most were nonetheless able to complete a page about themselves, their families and their media preferences, which provided alternative starting points for the interviews. Unsurprisingly, in some cases, the voices that emerged through the scrapbooks were very

different to those in interview – some wrote extensively in their scrapbooks but were shy in interviews, and vice versa. We would not claim that any version of the self our participants presented was more authentic than any other, but would instead see this as evidence that the methods gave us access to a wider range of voices than might have been obtained through interviews alone.

In considering how to interpret and read the scrapbooks, we explored their content, their form and their mode of address, or sense of audience. Some media obviously lend themselves better to the scrapbook idea than others. It worked well for print media such as magazines, advertisements, newspapers. It was less amenable to television, although many participants made creative use of listings magazines for images from soap operas, and in any case the programmes being discussed tended to be ones with which we were already familiar. It was less useful for films, music, computer games and the Internet, although some young people did download and print out images to illustrate all of these. Overall, however, it did give us a better impression of the kinds of texts young people were encountering in their daily lives. It also helped them communicate in a range of ways, not only in written form. For instance, some included their own drawings; the style of writing could also convey meaning, for instance in terms of what was highlighted, in capitals or in different colours. (One 12 year old girl wittily encapsulated her response to a 'sexy' image of the pop star Robbie Williams by placing an orange sticker with 'ugh' written on it over his groin area, and writing 'put it away!' next to it). The collage element of the task often conveyed rich and complex meanings: for instance, one 14 year old girl cut out a teenage magazine picture of attractive young men headlined 'Lush Lads Ahoy!', and wrote underneath about her own dilemmas over having an older boyfriend, juxtaposing the celebratory approach of youth media and her more ambivalent feelings to add poignancy to each.

In analysing the voices that emerged, we had to take into account that such voices are multiple and shifting, shaped by how people are asked to speak, by whom, by what means, and in what context – which often involves a context of unequal power relations. People can occupy different identities or subject positions, according to these contexts. We therefore explored how voice was coded generically in the scrapbooks; that is, how our participants drew on the codes and conventions of forms (genres) that were familiar to them. We could identify a number of 'genres' through which young people responded to the task, which in turn gave us a sense of wider cultural repertoires and textual styles available to the young people who participated.

For instance, some students treated the scrapbooks as a school project, marked by the use of an 'essay-like' approach in which, for instance, they would address each of the concepts (love, sex and relationships) separately, as if it were an essay title they were 'breaking down' into its various components, as teachers often exhort students to do. Occasionally they would apologise for poor presentation or spelling, addressing us as disapproving teachers rather than friends. They also adopted the kind of tone they thought would be deemed appropriate – often one that was distant and moralistic,

involving a language of 'critique' that mobilised media-negative concepts such as 'stereotyping' or the idea that 'sex sells'. For instance, Lori (14) handed in a meticulous and well-presented book, writing at the end, 'well before I started this project I was really quite naïve as to how the media portrays love, I didn't really think about it at all', before going on to explain that she has now 'learnt a lot' and looks at the media in a far more 'critical' way. Rather than taking this account at face value, we read it as a prime example of the 'school genre', in its narrative of enlightenment and progress through study of a topic. Such responses may be the product of the implicit demands of the research and school context, rather than telling us about young people's everyday media experiences. They were often at odds with the more pleasurable engagements with the media that young people then described in interviews.

Glenn (17) offered a variation on the 'school' voice, constructing well observed cameos of family viewing, in which he spoke as a researcher or anthropologist: '*Sitting in the living room watching Bad Girls with my mum, little brother and sister. There are two sex scenes … when that comes on, the two siblings look away and start doing something else, one asking me a question involving music and the other playing with his phone'*. A similar scenario was offered by a 12 year old girl, who described going to a local newsagents and seeing a group of young boys gathered round the 'top shelf' magazines and laughing. Both accounts showed the potential for positioning young people as researchers, and they anticipated our own interview questions, some of which revolved around the contexts of media consumption in the family or the social functions of sexual media. They also rewarded closer textual analysis. When Glenn discussed what seems to be pornography (and was in fact the 'documentary' TV programme *Club Reps*), for example, he wrote: '*Clips of nudity. I am watching it with my brother upstairs in my bedroom and he [dad] walks in and catches you watching it … and teases you for the rest of the week… I blame my brother and when dad tells the two little siblings that he caught him watching porn, they tease him and I join in'*. The uncomfortable shifts between 'you' and 'I' have the effect of partially disavowing his own involvement, defending himself both against his family's teasing and the moral judgements made on the consumers of pornography, and thereby demonstrate the ambivalence attached to such consumption.

At other times, young people used a 'fan' voice – for instance, Tania (10), wrote on the cover of her notebook 'the media is heavy phat cool wicked fab brill!'. Some voices were 'participative' in media culture rather than distanced and reflective, commenting emotively on celebrities ('Britney, who's gorgeous…'). Such voices are relatively unlikely to be heard in the context of the school, which 'disapproves' of such responses. Indeed, in some cases the scrapbooks appeared to be a 'return of the repressed', with young people gleefully using pages of topless models from tabloid newspapers such as *The Sun* as if aware that they were taboo in school. Others drew on media formats to play with identities; for instance, they would introduce themselves through the magazine interview format, listing favourite activities, music, ambitions and so on, as if they were a celebrity being quizzed. Krystal (14) drew on the

conventions of teenage magazines, constructing a layout of short 'soundbites' (often raising questions rather than providing answers: 'why are girls mainly the softer sex?') interspersed with icons of hearts and flowers and doodles, using colour to highlight key statements and a conversational, informal tone to capture 'how we really talk'. By engaging her friends in writing contributions, Krystal also demonstrated how media texts can be used in group interactions, in social rather than solitary ways. This 'youth magazine' style may have enabled her to explore a range of contradictory feelings and views without enforcing closure. Such media genres gave young people rather different speaking positions than the scholastic 'voice of critique', voices that were noticeably less moralistic and more self-conscious, reflective and open; they thereby helped us understand how the media act as a resource in identity construction and in thinking about issues such as the conduct of personal life.

We also identified 'child' and 'adult' voices, which were dialogic, responding to imagined interlocutors. Young people showed an acute awareness of the public debate about their relationship to sexual media, which shaped the narratives and presentations of self they offered in the scrapbooks (as well as in interviews). Since they are aware that they are positioned as innocent, as especially vulnerable, or as media-incompetent, both in the domain of public debate (and media regulation) and often in the family, their response is often to emphasise their knowingness, be it about sex or the media, and thereby to construct a (powerful) counter-position to the (powerless) one that is marked out for them. Thus they presented themselves as both 'media-savvy' (MacKeogh, 2001) and often 'sex-savvy' as well. For example, Lysa (10) anticipated adult responses when she cut out a problem page to include in her scrapbook and announced emphatically 'I want you to know that the page below does not make me feel uncomfortable in any way, it's excellent!'. Others wrote in a tone of disgust and rejection about the sexual images around them, a 'childhood' approach to sexuality that Kehily has suggested might provide a refuge from more threatening 'adult' approaches (Kehily, 2002: 120). Ten-year-old Will merged the child and adult voice when he included in his scrapbook an article about an advertisement for Carlsberg lager using the model Helena Christenson, headlined 'Probably the sexiest advert in the world'. He wrote underneath it, '*I think I should know about it but not right now because I think I am too young to understand*'. His reflective self-awareness, in which he comments on his own youth, but in a mature and distanced way, offered insights into young people's dilemmas in contemporary society. It suggests that the media may indeed be creating new ways of being a child – not that they are corrupting them, as critics argue, but that they are confronting young people with choices about whether to 'remain' a child or whether and when to enter into the 'adult' world of sexual media.

When, at the start of the project, we sought parental consent for young people's involvement, we had been contacted by one parent who was concerned that there would be 'too much' emphasis on issues such as homosexuality. Whilst this was something we did want to explore, there were clearly sensitivities to be negotiated. It was therefore interesting to see not only how often lesbian and gay

issues were raised by young people themselves, but also that many participants expressed avowedly 'liberal' positions - for instance, being critical of 'compulsory heterosexuality' in the media, vocally asserting support for gay rights, and enthusing about the liberal treatments of gay relationships in some drama and comedy. When even one of the younger participants, Tanya aged 10, included in her scrapbook a newspaper image showing two women lovers, and remarked approvingly of it that *'I think these two women who are lovers are OK to be in a newspaper because they are happy and if they're happy they're happy'*, she helped point us towards what could be seen as a genuine shift in codes of ethics, away from predetermined moral teachings to questions of self-determination, honesty, happiness and personal freedom. The method therefore provided us with thought-provoking material on problematic issues, yet it was led by our contributors rather than by us.

Dilemmas in using scrapbooks in research

Although we would emphasise the potential richness of the scrapbook approach, it would be naïve to assume that young people simply used them (or indeed any visual media) as a means of self-expression or a way of 'making their voices heard'. They are not a neutral tool, but highly contingent. As our analysis makes clear, young people came to the task of making them with a history – of academic and media experience, of familiarity with different cultural forms and conventions – and different degrees of awareness of the institutional context of the research or of the audience for which they were writing. All these factors meant they produced recognisable 'genres' of response, rather than transparent or unmediated presentations of their viewpoints or experiences. (This is of course also true of interviews, where what participants say cannot be taken at face value as evidence of what they 'really' think or feel).

We have already discussed the influence of the school context on the shape many scrapbooks took. Describing the scrapbook as a 'diary' might also have had implications for how boys and girls responded to it. 'Diary' writing is a genre that has its own specific conventions; to the extent that the realm of feelings and the 'personal' mode of diary writing is coded as feminine, boys may have been more resistant to adopting it. Indeed, the girls' notebooks were on average longer in terms of page length than the boys, and more discursive. There may also have been a gender bias in access to media that lent themselves to the task, as boys were less likely to refer to magazines that contain the images and advertisements that proved such a rich resource for young women. We would argue that it is the nature of a research task, and how it is defined and presented, that has a significant bearing on outcomes, rather than those outcomes being the product of 'inherent' gender differences.

Additionally, qualitative research often claims an inherent moral dimension to its interest in subjectivity and personal narrative, in contrast to quantitative methods, which are seen to objectify by rendering the rich tapestry of human life as statistics. As we have seen, research with young people often claims also to 'empower' them by 'giving them a voice', as if this resolves difficult questions about the

power relationships between researchers and researched. However, a more sceptical interpretation might focus on researchers' own 'will to truth' in seeking access to more private areas of young people's experience. Our own qualitative approaches might be seen as reproducing a trend that has been identified as taking place in the media and in neo-liberal societies. Anita Harris has remarked that the media 'regulate interiority', inviting the display of the self and experiences (Harris, 2004). Nikolas Rose and others have argued that under neo-liberalism individuals are required to invent themselves as self-regulating and responsible individuals (Dean, 1999; Rose, 1999). To some extent, inviting our participants to produce a scrapbook might be read as disciplining them into current requirements for contemporary citizenship, regulating their interiority, with the scrapbook method as a technology serving to position young people as reflexive and 'opinionated' individuals, rather than enabling critique of such practices.

Finally, we were of course following our agenda rather than that of our participants. To some extent the project may have been self-selecting, in that young people who had no burning concerns about processes of sexualisation in the media may have opted not to be involved for that reason. And even amongst those who did participate, were some who had to explain, in answer to our questions about their feelings in relation to sexual images, that they were not really that interested in 'stuff like that'. And in interpretation, it is again our concerns (and those of our funders) that shaped at least some of the focus points of our analysis and thus the versions of young people's 'voices' we present.

Scrapbooks in the context of teaching

A follow-on project to the research, 'Media Relate', worked with the English and Media Centre in London to produce teaching materials about the media, sex and relationships for use in schools with 12-15 year olds (see www.mediarelate.org), encouraging teachers to use media education approaches within teaching about Citizenship and Sex and Relationship Education (Bragg, 2006). This project was mainly funded by the European Commission, so we also worked with partners in the Netherlands and Spain, although this aspect will not be discussed here. The teaching materials cover four modules about sex and relationships in different media forms: Research, Magazines, TV Drama, and Advertising. The modules were piloted as they were being developed, in a range of schools, mostly with Year 8 students aged 12-13.

The first unit, Research, draws on the idea of the scrapbook about their views on media images. Students are given instructions similar to those we had used in the research, that is, to explore the media they normally consumed for its depiction of love, sex and relationships, mostly as homework. The scrapbooks here, however, are much more explicit about positioning students as 'researchers', asking them to adopt an investigative approach. Media education has often had a particular awareness of identity in the classroom, which partly accounts for this mode of address (Buckingham, 2003).

However, this also brings the practice closer to other 'students as researcher' projects, in which young people themselves have carried out research (Fielding and Bragg, 2003).

The dilemmas in using scrapbooks in this educational context are rather different from those that arose in the research project. Rather than seeking a snapshot of children's views, the pedagogic aim is to move them on, to enable different understandings of their existing positions, and to develop new perspectives and insights. Thus the task is accompanied by extension activities, in which students are asked to read each others' work and then use it as the basis of a fictional radio debate about teens and sex in the media. Thinking about their peers' work, hearing the views of an 'audience' on what they themselves had produced, and articulating both in different contexts, aims to 'decentre' their own thinking and help them view it critically and reflectively.

There were a number of reasons for using the scrapbooks again. The idea echoed what young people in the research had told us about their preferred self-image and learning mode. Participants had consistently presented themselves as autonomous, self-regulating and in control of their own quest for knowledge, in relation both to sex and sexual media material. They wanted to make judgements about what they did or didn't 'need to know' and often resisted or rejected parents' attempts to decide on their behalf. The media were preferred as a source for learning about love, sex and relationships above school sex education or parents, partly because they could fit this model of learning, partly because they often addressed them as knowledgeable, mature and 'savvy', without predetermining outcomes or preaching to them. The challenge of our teaching approach was to address young people in the same way as do 'their' media texts, to extend and challenge rather than pre-judge or belittle students' existing knowledge of the media and of relationships.

In other words, we were also interested in good classroom control and relations, and the scrapbooks offered a more student-centred approach to learning. It did appear that the scrapbooks were popular - demonstrated not least by how willing students were to do the work outside class time - perhaps because they allowed children to take control of what they wrote about and how. Students commented for instance, that they liked 'expressing their views' or that '[the scrapbooks are] really good because we get to write down our thoughts… we can write about practically anything we want that's to do with love sex and relationships' (girl, 12). Similarly, they were able to draw on the discourse of 'savvy': for instance, one girl aged 12 described her scrapbook as showing 'how much more we know about love, sex and relationships', presumably in contrast to ignorant earlier generations.

Equally important, from our point of view, was the response from teachers who were 'pleasantly surprised' and even 'amazed' at the work students put into the scrapbooks, relating how diverse and challenging their ideas had been. They saw them as motivating for students, but from our point of view it was equally significant that they seemed to have helped teachers to understand more about the world their students inhabit outside school. It seems that many teachers, like adults generally, underestimate

young people's existing critical faculties and their ability to highlight contradictions and inconsistencies in the media's treatment of sex: the scrapbooks may help to develop different kinds of classroom dialogue about such issues.

Conclusion

The scrapbooks gave us access to young people's perspectives in ways that other methods might not, and provide insights into how young people use and interpret the media that are often ignored or oversimplified in other research; they therefore helped us understand young people's relationship to the media more sympathetically as well as to respond to the public debates about these issues. However, we should avoid being naïve or sentimental about how far they do this. No data speaks for itself; we are never absolved of our responsibility to interpret, and we did so in dialogue with more analytical work that has suggested avenues for how we might read and understand the significance of the data we generated.

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