

# Using Participatory and Visual Methods to Address Power and Identity in Research with Young People

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*Research with young people and children has developed over a number of years an argument for researching with, rather than on, younger participants (Thomson, 2008; Valentine, 1999). In qualitative research, the ways in which we carry out empirical research, the relationships that are developed between researchers and participants, the knowledge that is produced and the epistemological and theoretical foundations can be affected by how as powerful researchers we aim to observe and analyse. Where age, gender and ethnicity intersect in creating something of a “difference” between researcher and participants, these issues can need greater consideration. This paper presents some methodological background to the choices made concerning data production during a project in which a white, female, late-20s researcher with a feminist theoretical background investigated physical activity engagement by a diverse cohort of 13-14 year old students in an inner city secondary school in the Midlands, UK. By combining visual ethnography, interviews and collaborative photography, the project aimed to address concerns about student voice in research with young people on their school and sport experiences (O’Sullivan & MacPhaill, 2010). The paper considers some possibilities and challenges of using this methodology within school-based studies. Reflections from this project are offered on the ways in which participants retained power over content and meaning of their photographic contributions, and researcher relationships in the field. Visual methods are argued to offer an additional tool in tackling traditional power relations and encouraging participant investment.*

*Keywords: Participatory photography, Youth, Embodiment, Power, Ethnography.*

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Images can act as powerful indicators regarding the multiple meanings embedded within our cultures (Phoenix 2010, 93).

Young people’s low or decreasing participation in physical education (PE) and sport has been a longstanding concern both in

schools and in the academic field. Increasingly, academic research is looking to ideas of embodiment and the effect of bodily norms on identity to understand young people's disengagement or marginalisation in the subject (Azzarito & Sterling 2010; Oliver, et al. 2009; Wright 1995). Calls have been made to engage more deeply in investigations of students' embodied experiences of physical activity and sports (Armour 1999), which might be achieved through listening to young people's voices. At the same time, researchers have commonly used multiple methods, such as those employed within ethnography, and increasingly visual methods, in order to see as well as listen to those multiple meanings of which Cassandra Phoenix (2010) reminds us. Part of living embodied in society, for sighted individuals, involves negotiating the world visually, and images are constantly present in culture and society (Banks 2007; Knowles and Sweetman 2004). Experiences in school may be informed by engagements with physical and visual cultures (Kirk 1999). Images and ways of seeing have been key areas for research into the hidden curriculum, powerful because of their effects being unnoticed (Kenway and Bullen 2001; Prosser 2007). In qualitative research, the relationships that are developed between researchers and participants, the knowledge that is produced and the epistemological and theoretical foundations

can be affected by how, as powerful researchers, we aim to observe and analyse.

Within this field, I undertook a project aiming to explore how young people's constructions of bodies that have high status affected their own identities and engagement in PE and sport. Initially interested in gendered bodily norms, I became aware that a lack of intersectional research in the area meant the experiences of minority ethnic young people were being ignored and whiteness normalised (Flintoff et al. 2011). Engagement with visual cultural resources through sports media may inform students' participation in school PE. For instance, this is addressed by Joanne Hill and Laura Azzarito (2012) in examining ethnic minority girls' perceptions that sport is 'not for me' where they are surrounded at school by images of male, white, muscular sports stars. Working with a group of 13-14 year old students in an urban secondary school in the East Midlands, UK, I combined multiple methods including participant observation, researcher- and participant-produced photographs and group interviews. Fourteen boys and eleven girls consented to participate; approximately 80 per cent of them were British Indian<sup>1</sup>; others were white British, black African or of dual heritage. All took part in mixed ability, single-sex PE lessons for two hours a week. I engaged in observations of PE classes and created my own

photographic record of visual culture in the school, such as posters on noticeboards. Participants were interviewed in small groups about their constructions of bodies that have high status in PE and sport, then they were each loaned a digital camera to create photos that visualised their experiences in PE and sport and their perceptions of bodies that have status or are admired. After two weeks, cameras were collected back and prints of their photos were shared in a second round of group interviews in which participant-photographers were asked to explain their photos.

As a white, female, late-20s researcher (and not a PE teacher), I had few commonalities of identity with the participant group as a whole. This invited a consideration of difference and identity in designing and producing social research across lines of gender, ethnicity and age. I consider how participatory visual methods can be used to see as well as listen to students' experiences and subsequently outline how thinking on power, agency and voice, in feminist, postcolonial and post-structural work, might invite uptake of visual methodologies. By reflecting on the data production in this project, alongside the claim that participant-produced images are more 'authentic' or empowering than other methods, I highlight some issues that arose in this project around power relations and participant voice. Rather than seeing

visual methods as a *solution* to the concerns of adult- or white-centred research, this paper sees visual methods as useful where power, embodied identity or visual media form part of the subject of research, and another tool in the box that can engage young people in the research process.

### **The Importance of the Visual in Ethnography**

Drawing on Chris Shilling's (2003) theories of embodiment, Sarah Pink (2009, 8) argues that ethnography, as 'a reflexive and experiential process through which understanding, knowing and (academic) knowledge are produced', is concerned with the relationship between bodies and their experiences of their environments. Contemplating Pink's (2009) methods of visual ethnography, becoming a temporary participant in some of the locations where young people engage with visual and physical cultures and learn to give meanings to their bodies and experiences, offers ways of 'imagining' the perceptions, selves, embodiment and emplacement of others. Elsewhere, Pink (2007, 22) recommends ethnography for the way in which researchers can become emplaced in the field, and hence considers ethnography as a process of creating knowledge based on researchers' experiences, but also as 'loyal as possible' to the context. If researchers want to see what participants see, ethnography may

provide opportunities for this. The researcher becomes a part of the social world, an embodied self who participates in the physical spaces of research, has a presence, and thus reflections on the embodied ethnographic process can increase understanding of how research is carried out (Coffey 1999).

Ethnography often incorporates multiple methods to gain richer understandings of a context and participants' worlds. It has been argued that the more methods we have available for producing data on complex and ever-changing human lives, the better the chance of understanding how lives are constructed (Fontana and Frey 2005: 722). Kimberley Oliver et al. (2009, 96) argue that 'although necessary, simply interviewing students several times for short periods of time is insufficient for understanding the complexities and nuances of their worlds'. In this field, some research has centred on surveillance of movements, appearances and interactions, indicating that a visual approach to studying PE classes and young people's embodied experiences is important (Cockburn and Clarke 2002; Fiset 2011; Gard and Meyenn 2000; Wright 1995). Likewise, ethnographic studies with prolonged engagement in a PE context have become common (Enright and O'Sullivan 2011; Fitzpatrick 2011) for their 'capacity ... to capture a sense of the relationship between individuals, differences be-

tween them, and their perceptions of the discourses and practices that occur in different social fields' (Hills 2006, 544).

Three strands have developed in the use of visual methods: researcher-created or collected images; participant-created, existing images; and participant and researcher collaboration in the creation of images (Banks 2007), and it is the latter with which this project is concerned. Ethnographic work has benefitted from the use of photography, 'as the aim is often to explain and depict forms of life, and the inclusion of photographs aids the creation of "thick description"' (Gibson and Brown 2009, 81). Images have long been used in interviews through photo elicitation, which 'enlarges the possibilities of conventional empirical research' (Harper 2002: 13), because asking a participant to process visual as well as verbal information can produce different data (Schwartz 1989). 'Auto-driven' photo elicitation, where participants' own photographs or images are the objects (Clark 1999), can offer a 'rich perspective about the complexity of ... children's lives', particularly outside of school, where the researcher cannot have access (Clark-Ibáñez 2007, 168-9). Within the PE and youth sport field, photo-elicitation increasingly from photographs created in collaboration between researchers and participants (Enright and O'Sullivan 2011; Krane et al. 2010) has offered alternative

ways of engaging young people in sharing non-verbal embodied experiences.

Both visual and ethnographic methods had their appeal for my project. However, as I will also argue, the ways these methods can be carried out are not without problems. Ethnography is at times recognised as an imperfect methodology particularly where power is concerned. Before considering how multiple methods, specifically visual, can be used as part of ethnographic projects with young people, I outline issues of power in researching across 'differences' of gender, race and age that provide some arguments for a visual approach.

### **Power Relations in Research Crossing Gender, Ethnicity and Age**

There was an imperative in this project for an epistemology that recognises the multiple and contradictory ways in which participants' voices may be heard and interpreted in co-creating data and knowledge through participation. My situated knowledge (Haraway 1988) as a white, feminist, adult researcher prompted a reflection on what power I would have in relationships with young participants in their secondary school, and what alternatives might be possible. It could be said that all research is framed by power relations. Recognition of fluid experiences, identities and differences has led feminist research (amongst

others) to destabilise the objective, distant researcher, situate the researcher as well as the participants subjectively in socio-historical context, and problematise perspectives, experiences and explanations. The effect on social research is to create 'pressure to transform questions about what exists into multiple deconstructions of how people think about what exists' (Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002: 123). Knowledge can then be seen as a specific social production. With the concept of 'situated knowledges' (Haraway, 1988), that is, knowledge as partial and as historically and spatially located, researchers can understand that they do not see everything, but see some things from one or several places. The researcher's ways of knowing influence the making of meaning from the participants' words and images, in particular across constructed age, gender and ethnic 'difference'; issues of 'who and what is heard, what is listened to and how it is listened to' (Haw 2008, 202) must complicate and problematise knowledge resulting from research. Multiple 'truths' 'within different ways of knowing ... provide varied ways of making sense of the world' (Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002, 55). Researchers need to look at how we produce knowledge about difference and how this knowledge is caught up in power relations (Gunaratnam 2003). Social research with minority ethnic people, although it may help to address mar-

ginalisation, risks problematising difference and normalising whiteness or race neutrality (Maynard 1994). As long as explorations of gendered embodiment remain embedded in whiteness, the ways in which ethnic minority students make sense of adolescence, bodies and physical activity will remain invisible. Given the circumstances and locations within which this research is carried out, to ignore this point would be to reproduce white privilege and normativity.

Age, race and gender are often, though not always, tangible visible identity markers contributing to multiple identifications possible in research relations (Raby 2007). Although socially created, identifications have material effects. It has been argued that white women researchers are unable to fully generate meaning in data with minority ethnic participants, because they cannot share their cultural understandings (Archer 2002). 'Ethnic matching' of interviewers to participants has been called for, to enable greater understanding and rapport in interviews (Papadoupoulos and Lee 2002; Bhopal 2010). Relationships between researcher and participants are created through talk; therefore, race and gender commonalities will not necessarily produce shared positions, because they are produced in interaction (Phoenix 1994).

Ageism has been less examined than sexism and racism, although a growing range of methodological texts on adult-child research rela-

tionships enables us to critique assumptions about young people's interests, experiences and voices. As feminist and postcolonial research debates the impact of cross-gender and -racial interviewing, so research with children and young people recognises the ethics and power dynamics of generation in social research. Power relations between researcher and researched may be particularly compounded by broader societal notions of power between adults and younger people. The ethnography of youth has worked from the ontological position that young people are the insiders of distinctive cultures while the researcher is the outsider (Corsaro and Molinari 2000) and in possession of a low power/knowledge status (Gallagher 2009). Yet, Pam Alldred (1998) argues that some research on children's cultures exoticises those cultures compared to adult norms, constructing children and young people as Other. To paraphrase, adults hear young people based on what we understand as the social construction of youth. Research with children and young people has not always added their voices, understandings and circumstances (Oakley 1994). As Sheila Greene and Malcolm Hill (2005, 18) point out:

for too long we have assumed that children have nothing of interest or importance to tell us about their lives and that we adults under-



stand much better than they what is good for them and how events impact on them.

Young people have been considered to be social actors in interdependence with adults and capable of constructing and negotiating themselves and social worlds (Corsaro 1997). Eimear Enright and Mary O'Sullivan (2011) have identified that it is important for participants to be able to construct themselves as producing legitimate accounts. Additionally, different researcher roles with young people have been suggested, including 'non-authoritarian adult', 'unusual adult', friend, or 'least-adult' as well as detached observer (Damon 1977; Mandell 1991, Christensen 2004). Yet, Kay Tisdall et al. (2009) remind us that 'adult' and 'child' are not straightforward roles or static identities, but are performed in interaction. For instance, when entering a school as an adult and not as a teacher, my position as researcher had to allow me to create relationships with both teachers and students.

The dilemma in researching 'others' may be reconsidered through complicating the meaning and use of 'difference.' Relations between the researcher and the participants should not be seen in terms of 'essential, unchanging differences' (Gunaratnam 2003, 89) that homogenise communities and group experiences. Yet, social categories may remain significant, because

they have a real effect on people and their interactions. Avtar Brah (1996) suggests the possibility of spaces opening up where experiences can lead to connectivity, if not commonality. Instead of searching for a shared identity, or relying on stereotypical similarities or differences when we carry out research, hybridity is called for, which might be thought of as 'a family of resemblances with a continuum of similarities' (Tuana 1993, 283). Neither difference nor hybridity can, however, be assumed (Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002). To offer an unsatisfying answer, 'in practice we often do not know what it is that makes a difference' (Brownlie 2009, 708). In terms of ethnography, Beverley Skeggs (2001) advocates reflexivity whereby feminist researchers are vigilant of the power they exercise in their choices of topic and participants, gaining access and making interpretations and representations:

When we enter ethnography we enter it with all our economic and cultural baggage, our discursive access and the traces of positioning and history that we embody. We cannot easily disinvest of these (Skeggs 2001, 434).

My research aimed to position adolescent participants as a diverse group of social agents, as people able to construct and reflect on their lives and worlds. To *attempt* to counter power issues and bring partici-

pants further into the process: this was important for it to be a participatory, two-way process of data generation in interaction between the researcher and the participants. It was important to develop research *with*, not *on*, young people, producing relationships in which young people wanted to participate and in which they had some control (Valentine 1999). Epistemologically, we may co-produce knowledge of participants' lives through the prolonged interaction of ethnography, but the conclusions drawn are contingent to that group as well as to the researcher, as proposed by Donna Haraway's (1988) notion of 'situated knowledges'. This is one reason why an ethnographic methodology is useful, but it may also suggest alternative ways of producing data, such as participatory visual methods. As noted above, young people's perspectives on images and visual cultures have been considered necessary to deprivilege adult understandings of the body, provide insights into corporeal meanings, and make visible the norms and values of the hidden curriculum (Prosser 2007).

Into this epistemological consideration of power and difference, a participatory, visual and ethnographic project had appeal for the apparent shift in authority, participant investment and relevance to research on the body. Research processes have then been recognised as needing to create non-exploitative relationships

among researcher and participants, with participatory methods coming to be seen as useful for positioning participants assertively in the research, to enable participants to 'define their own reality and challenge imposed knowledge' (Veale 2005, 254). Pia Christensen and Allison James (2000, 165) argue that one of the most valuable aspects of using visual tools in research with young people and children is 'that they work to mediate the communication between the researcher and the children'. The following section addresses some of these seemingly emancipatory claims in the context of my own project. Participatory visual and ethnographic methods were chosen to capitalise on this identified link between bodies and visual culture, to enable prolonged interaction and to retain consideration of power and 'difference'. There are certainly convincing motivations for taking up visual methods in work with young people, that might address some of the concerns about an objective, distanced and different researcher taking the data they wish *from* participants. The next section answers what, in a practical sense, these methodological choices meant for my research relationships and data production.

### **Using Participatory Visual Ethnography**

When investigating youth cultures and the discourses that inform or are produced by them, the use



of photography can provide a much greater source for documentation than written and spoken words alone. Images can provide insights into meanings that young people create about bodies and their worth, especially photographs created or collated by the participants themselves. By listening to participants' own interpretations, authority is shifted, as Douglas Harper (2002) argues, from the researcher to the subject. Giving more control over the data to the participant-researchers, by asking them to photograph their worlds and the bodies that they consider to be high status or admired, I intended to encourage their active involvement in the research.

This project was concerned with young people's meanings of high status in PE and school: a process that is closely tied to young people's embodied learning through engagement with visual media. The research took place over three school terms, with the participatory photography taking one month to complete. Analysis was of both the photos' content and of elicited explanations in interview transcripts. Some of the decisions behind this research design aimed to address the power issues presented in this paper, by inviting participants to share with me and with each other their visual and verbal stories of PE experiences and constructions of high status bodies. Digital cameras were loaned to the participants, enabling them to have control over flash, colour, zoom, fo-

cus, size or quality, and to delete images, vetting the content and thus sharing with me images with which they felt comfortable. Each photo set was a task produced as a result of a set of instructions given by the researcher and followed to a greater or lesser extent by the participants. I received photos of empty spaces, classmates engaged in PE, posters on bedroom walls, self-portraits and friends posing, and some photos of downloaded internet images. On average, participants produced 23 photos. Sense had to be made of these visual stories and how the participant-photographers used them to answer the instructions they were given. Given my prolonged engagement in the school, I had come to know certain aspects of my participants' lives through our interviews and observing their PE classes. This aided me in interpreting their photos and recreating their stories into appropriate research output. My time in the field also lent itself to a consideration of relationships and data production, as I reflected on whether I had succeeded with the visual ethnography in crossing those lines of difference to create a collaborative work on embodiment. In the remainder of this paper, I will illuminate some of my reflections on conducting the project and producing data with young participants.

#### **Choosing What to Photograph.**

The participants used their voices in different ways; some created more

than 50 photos and spent significant parts of their interviews explaining each one, while others created fewer than five, and preferred to talk abstractedly rather than about the specific images. With the opportunity to see and discuss each other's photos, peer interactions led to some encouragement and some auditing of others' photo choices, potentially discouraging some from speaking. Photo elicitation techniques enabled probing for explanations, asking participants to tell the story behind this photo or that; in any interview, this will mean the interviewer is making decisions and retaining some power. Stories were shared of their sport engagements outside of school, which I could not access, and the diversity of, for instance, the local boxing club could be seen, in contrast to the whiteness of a favourite elite football team. By viewing the bodies that had high status in the participants' eyes, things that might be left unasked or unanswered in an interview could be shown instead. Photographs of their favourite sports stars, pop stars or admired family members brought their lives and cultural engagements into the interview space in school.

Spaces are often dominated by adult discourses around acceptable behaviour, where children or young people negotiate disciplinary surveillance, for instance, by teachers. For some people being filmed or photographed can be associated with danger, control and surveillance

(Banks 2007). The issue of increasing surveillance through a photography project about bodies, which ultimately aims to critique dominant ways of seeing and valuing, should not be lost. With this in mind, it was less surprising to me to count that a quarter of the participants' photos were of empty spaces, objects or pets. Not being seen in photos may be a reclaiming of power (Fisette 2011; Sánchez de Serdio Martín and Vidiella 2011). One highly active participant, Richard, who played county-level hockey, was keen to construct himself as both active and ambitious about his hockey training, repeatedly saying that he practiced '24/7' in order to reach the standard he desired. None of his photos showed him playing or practicing; only a photo of his two 'best' hockey sticks (Figure 1) and a photo of his hockey shirt (Figure 2) indicate his status in hockey, while he is absent. Without the interviews, Richard's photos would not demonstrate the amount of effort that he put into his hockey training nor his levels of fitness and competence.

For a project interested in understanding participants' interpretations of bodies with status, photographs that did not contain any bodies were admittedly frustrating. With photo elicitation however, participants were able to develop the mental images that the photos prompted. Additionally, in the interviews participants described scenes which they were unable to photograph, such as

their swimming lessons, because of the inconvenience or lack of consent. As Lucy explained, she did not take photos of her Army Cadets meetings because 'I was too busy. Cos I'm Lance Corporal, it's quite hard. [Also] just cos not many people want their pictures taken, so I just didn't.' Although creative methods may 'prove more engaging and enjoyable' (Buckingham 2009, 646), the single medium on offer (photography) may not have appealed to all participants, who may have wished not to express themselves through photographs, but through talk, drawing, film, or story-writing, for example. The level of status that can be afforded to photos as 'windows into participants' lives' (Croghan et al. 2008, 348) depends on the extent to which the participants can be said to have engaged with the task.

**Creating Meanings.** William Gibson and Andrew Brown (2009, 82-3) have claimed that by using both researcher- and participant-produced and -collated images, 'the notion of a researcher's privileged position is firmly deconstructed ... as research knowledge comes to be seen as a negotiated creation rather than a researcher's discovery'. At times, participants created photos of the same visual objects around the school that I had added to my own photographic records. This enabled a collaborative process of photo elicitation (Harper 2002), as participants and I worked together to cre-



Figure 1: Richard's photo of his hockey sticks



Figure 2: Richard's Number 9 hockey shirt

ate a shared meaning for the posters on the walls and their impact on bodily knowledge. Discussing her photos of two posters, of netballers and a gymnast, side by side on a wall near the girls' changing room, Ayesha explained that:

people have different abilities and you also have different inspirations or passions towards sports so ... I think the school tries to show everyone, um, is different but at the same time everyone is equal ... When I walk past that poster [of the gymnast], I'm like, 'oh I wish I could do that'. Because it looks quite cool.

The girls selected these posters to photograph, offering a nuanced interpretation of different feminini-

ties performed by netballers and gymnasts. This provided me with more information on how to interpret the photos and the posters themselves, where the meanings were coming from the participants.

Ethnography was useful for observing students' actions in PE, as well as hearing them speak about it: to learn more about their friendships, interactions, and everyday speech while in PE, all relating to their decisions about how or whether to participate. Photographs of fellow students could be reclassified as photographs of friends or teammates. Coupled with the photography, the ethnographic project was able to generate data from beyond school as well as within it, to move towards a richer picture of how cultures outside of school affected students within school. Photography alone would not have achieved this; those photos that tell a story or represent a hypothetical event, rather than record a real occurrence, are a key example of why photo elicitation is necessary. Figure 3 offers a striking example of a visual narrative whose meaning was obscured until I interviewed the participant-photographer, Mitesh. He explained that this photo was a representation of what discouraged him from being active:

[It's] someone laughing at me. When I can't do sport. When I'm trying hard it will look either funny or I just don't know how to do



Figure 3: Mitesh covers his face with his hands



it ... It's because like if people think that I'm doing it wrong, why should I do it? Whereas if I genuinely can't do it, then I'll quit.

It was not possible for me to know this visual narrative without interviewing to learn more about Mitesh's meanings and his reasons for creating this photo. Like other forms of data, visual methods should not be automatically celebrated; images need to be analysed rigorously, not left to speak for themselves.

Some participants interpreted the project as a way to have a say in improvements in PE lessons:

Ayesha: You're ... actually taking [our opinions] forward. No one's ever listened to our opinions, maybe the teachers have, but you're probably going to take it to other teachers and probably change the way they do PE for other students now and make them happier at least.

Ayesha's comment raises something potentially uncomfortable for researchers choosing participatory visual methods for the alternative power relations they are perceived to offer. Where researchers' decisions over how to use the data they produce with young participants are motivated by social justice, Ayesha reminds us of the power this awards.

**The Embodied Researcher.** Other ways in which power re-

mained with me as researcher revealed themselves to me when as an adult in the school I was read as a teacher by many students, who would call me 'Miss'. The ways in which this affected conversations in interviews, or their choices over what to photograph, cannot truly be known. This identity as a teacher-like adult was not afforded to me by the teachers, however. In selecting outfits to wear on the days I would visit the school, I reflected on my own embodied identity and the 'image' I wanted to create. Conscious of the methodological literature on power that I reviewed earlier, I wanted to 'fit in' in some way. I found it difficult to feel confident that I could construct and negotiate a self which would offer me credible professionalism in the eyes of the teachers, and at the same time enable me to be someone with whom the students could feel comfortable discussing PE, activity and bodies. I felt this in the language I used to discuss the aims of the research with the teachers and students and also in the clothing I wore. While I understood that I was rarely read as teacher by the school staff and students, I desired to be read as adult and not as university student (an issue of both age and professional status), and took clothing inspiration from the non-PE staff. Some of the students' photographs (such as Figure 4, where I can be seen stood against the far wall) captured something of the peripheral, sometimes awkward, position I

took in the PE classroom. Indeed, it was I who was different or minority in this field, trying to negotiate the worlds of students and teachers. It was valuable to remember this as I listened and saw participants' own interpretations of bodies and physical activity.



Figure 4: Researcher's peripheral participation in a PE class

**Pedagogical Sites.** It certainly appears difficult for researchers using creative methods to claim to be uniquely empowering or 'giving voice' (Luttrell 2010; Yates 2010). All methods create a position from which it is possible to speak. Nevertheless, if the method should follow the object (Buckingham 2009), research on bodies greatly benefits from the use of visual methods, with appropriate use and analysis. For instance, some of the participants were able to use their

photographs of the high status, slender feminine body to critique media techniques that enhance perfection. Photographs acted as sites for them to add nuance to ideas of the good/bad or slim/fat body in relation to average girls' body possibilities:

Yasmin: Half the time the women that they show on TV, they don't actually look like that anyway.

Amandip: Yeah. Yeah do you know, who is it, Olay, that cream, it made you look clear but they showed that they edited it and all that.

Yasmin: They airbrushed it. Photoshopped them.

Amandip: Yeah.

Interviewer: Hm, what do you think about that then?

Amandip: I think you should just show your natural beauty, you don't need make up or whatever to look different.

Yasmin: And it makes people look fake as well. Like they're not normal, not natural.

As an aspect of critical inquiry, students' photos created opportunities to discuss inclusion and exclusion, normalisation and marginalisation around a subject that has both gendered and racialised implications for these girls. As it has been said elsewhere (Oliver 2001), young people are able to critique the messages they receive, and the interviews offered them a pedagogical site in which to do that.



## Conclusion

This paper has offered some methodological considerations from a project concerned with the meaning-making associated with young people's embodied experiences and has attempted to address a use for participatory visual ethnography that takes into account intersecting sources of power relations. From thoughts about recognising privilege and authority in researcher-researched relationships across gender, ethnicity and age, emerged the project's concern with involving students in co-creation, while gaining contextual knowledge through ethnographic methods. Seeing through photography was a powerful reminder of the body when researching physical activity and even 'minority' ethnic participants, avoiding disembodied interpretations of the experiences of young people in school and beyond.

As an emerging field, participatory visual methods can leave researchers to work out new ways of conducting data production. I used a number of methods in developing this project, as opportunities and limitations arose. While the literature on photo elicitation is well-developed, and ways of dealing with pre-existing photos draw from fields such as semiotics and discourse analysis (Rose 2012), ways of looking at and analysing participant-produced photos are not so common and develop through doing (Luttrell 2010). Thus, this paper leaves open

a number of questions. Are photos just fodder for photo elicitation in interviews? Or can new, participant-produced photos be treated as standalone artefacts which deserve interpretation and analysis techniques of their own? *How* can we interpret participant-produced photos in these ways?

If not a truly participatory project, for the participants did not contribute to designing the purpose and methods of the study, this project was collaborative in the sense of the participants bringing their own interpretations to the photography instruction sheet, being able to take cameras away and show their experiences in pictures as well as words. Reflecting on the use of long-term participatory visual methods with young people, Enright and O'Sullivan (2011) note the epistemological benefits of students' engagement in tasks that deviate from the privileging of written text in schools, and suggest students may believe that they can be more truthful through photography – or at least, not embellish their accounts to say what researchers want to hear. Participatory photography in ethnographic inquiry can constitute a less intrusive way of accessing something of the experiences that the researcher cannot see. Others have argued that the involvement of young people in the research process can be transformative, empowering or therapeutic for participants (Gauntlett and Holzwarth

2006) and photographs have been considered to 'inspire expression not normally encouraged in children' (Cappelo 2005, 171). Despite the apparent imperative to use visual methods in social research, David Buckingham (2009) offers warnings, in response to David Gauntlett and Peter Holzwarth's (2006) claims for the authenticity of visual participatory data, against seeing creative visual methods as particularly enabling stories or feelings that can really be accessed. Not all participants were able or willing to engage in creating photography that could consistently express their feelings. As Pink (2006) has pointed out, visual material cannot be used to record objective truth, but it can assist in creating new knowledge. As the aim in constructivist or post-structuralist research is not to reach 'inner attitudes', creative methods will not do better in reaching places that the interview alone cannot reach.

Photography or related tasks such as scrapbooking and poster-making can provide ways to begin conversations about young people's consumption of images, the meanings they give to different bodies, and how role models are formed and perceived (Krane et al. 2011; Oliver 2001). As research or curricular tasks within critical PE or media literacy, the production and discussion of photographs of the physical cultures of school, community and beyond can enable students and teachers to see others' ways

of seeing and being. This said, as this paper has endeavoured to demonstrate, we must be careful not to romanticise visual methods. Researchers cannot rely on being able to interpret photos as the participants desired, or allowing photos to speak for themselves (Phoenix 2010). However, a postmodern epistemology might consider that both the producer and the viewer of a photograph construct their own meanings of images based on their positions and interests (Pink 2007), suggesting that a researcher's ways of seeing are also valid. Visual methods potentially enable researchers to think differently about a topic – not more deeply or more truthfully, but differently (Enright and O'Sullivan 2011; Phoenix 2010). How we can produce and discuss participatory visual data, and what we can do with it, appears to remain complex. Through negotiating, on the one hand, worries over the problems of white-washing the experiences of minority ethnic participants, and on the other, celebration of the supposedly empowering and authentic possibilities of visual methods, I have here outlined a number of the practical issues that arose during a visual ethnographic project. This should add detail to conversations around how and why visual methodologies can have a place in social research. I concur with Buckingham (2009) that visual or creative methods do not achieve *more authentic* insights than other methods such

as interviewing alone. Participatory and visual methods may challenge traditional power relations, but they are not a panacea; instead, they provide an addition to methods toolboxes that can involve young people as experts in their own lives. With their choices in selecting and co-constructing data, participants were able to show some of the multiple and intersecting meanings for their embodied identities as students and sports players. Concluding on this project, it is my understanding that visual methods can offer a way to encourage participant investment in research, by creating data that offer insight into the particularly visual aspects of their lives.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The participants who self-identified as British Indian were born in the United Kingdom and typically of Punjabi or Gujarati heritage.

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