“I came, I saw, I conquered”: reflections on participating in a PhotoVoice project

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Abstract

Purpose – *The purpose of this paper is to provide first-hand reflective narratives from participants of their involvement in the overall process, with particular reference to the benefits and challenges of engagement.*

Design/methodology/approach – *Five participants agreed to write a reflective piece of approximately 500 words on their involvement in the PhotoVoice project.*

Findings – *The reflective narratives in this paper demonstrate the personal and professional benefits of sustained and meaningful engagement, while challenges such as power imbalances, identity management, time and cost commitments are discussed.*

Practical implications – *PhotoVoice is a methodology that has the potential to democratise knowledge production and dissemination.*

Originality/value – *There are scant examples in the PhotoVoice literature of the inclusion of participants involvement in dissemination activities. The reflective narratives in this paper demonstrate the personal and professional benefits of sustained and meaningful engagement, while challenges such as power imbalances, identity management, time and cost commitments are discussed.*

Keywords *Mental health, Advocacy, Alternative interventions, PhotoVoice, Service user engagement, Public and patient involvement*

Paper type *Case study*

Patient or Public Contribution: Service users and family members contributed their reflective narratives to this paper, assisted in drafting and editing the paper and are named as co-authors.

Introduction

A participatory action research methodology, PhotoVoice is a creative, engaging and visually provocative way in which to communicate the experiences of minoritised groups to wider society (Wang, 1999). The tenets of PhotoVoice are centered around collaboration, empowerment, advocacy and partnership (Wang *et al.*, 2004). Through photography, members of marginalised communities visually depict the strengths and challenges they encounter within their lives, communities and wider social contexts (Wang *et al.*, 2004). The objective is to take photographs that raise important societal questions to effect meaningful and long-lasting change (Wang *et al.*, 2004). Common to all PhotoVoice projects is that participants take photographs that represent their lived experiences with accompanying written narratives and thereby, learn to advocate for themselves and others. In the field of mental health, PhotoVoice has been used to address a myriad of challenges that individuals experiencing mental health difficulties face, from isolation and stigmatisation, to illuminating the barriers individuals encounter when accessing and engaging with mental health services (Mizock *et al.*, 2015).

Received 29 July 2020
Revised 5 January 2021
Accepted 9 March 2021

Funding statement: The project was funded by the Knowledge Exchange and Dissemination Scheme (KEDS) award from the Health Research Board Ireland [KEDS-2018–014].
Ethics approval statement: Ethical approval was granted by the university’s Research Ethics Committee.
The authors thank all those who participated in the project. They would also like to thank the Health Research Board Ireland who funded the project.
Disclosure statement: The authors have no other conflicts of interest to declare.

DOI 10.1108/JMHTEP-07-2020-0052

From a methodological perspective, PhotoVoice differs from more traditional forms of research, in that it acknowledges the value of "experts by experience", unlike traditional methodologies which tend to prioritise researchers as experts (Wang and Burris, 1994). Therefore, PhotoVoice is intrinsically participant-centric rather than researcher-centric (Han and Oliffe, 2016). To this extent, PhotoVoice is aligned with the Public and Patient Involvement (PPI) movement, a movement that grew out of a democratic ideal and belief that those affected by research had a right to have a say in the process. To this end, PPI researchers aim to involve service users as co-researchers and collaborators to enhance the relevance, utility and outcomes of the research (Black *et al.*, 2018; Jennings *et al.*, 2018). Both PhotoVoice and PPI can be argued to produce similar benefits for participants, such as increased self-worth, feeling empowered, learning a new skill set and developing reflective practices (Burles and Thomas, 2014; Ashcroft *et al.*, 2016; Tang *et al.*, 2016; Blackburn *et al.*, 2018). While PhotoVoice is inherently participatory and so by its very nature, overcomes some of the challenges faced by researchers who endeavour to incorporate PPI into their work, PhotoVoice is not without its challenges. These include deciding at what stage of the project are service users included, how to address the time and cost commitment of a PhotoVoice project, and issues of consent and power dynamics (Han and Oliffe, 2016; Wang and Burris, 1997; Green and Johns, 2019).

Despite PhotoVoice being used across disciplines and contexts, there are relatively few accounts of participants reflections following involvement (Burles and Thomas, 2014; Tang *et al.*, 2016; Foster-Fishman *et al.*, 2005; Bryant *et al.*, 2019). Where participants are asked retrospectively to take part in semi-structured interviews about the impact of taking part in a PhotoVoice project, these accounts are usually analysed and reported by the researchers (Burles and Thomas, 2014). Consequently, participants do not remain collaborative partners, rather they become the subjects of research, answering research questions that have been determined and framed by the researcher, as opposed to letting the ideas and issues emerge from participants.

There is a growing criticism about the technocratic and instrumental rationales for conducting PPI with Williams *et al.* (2020) arguing that current enactments of PPI research continue to reinstate traditional research practices and systems, with few examples demonstrating democratic values or emancipatory outcomes for service user contributors. A principle structural barrier to achieving the egalitarian values of PPI is the entrenched systems of knowledge production and knowledge dissemination, which privileges knowledge produced through traditional empirical ideas and methods. In so doing alternative "knowledges" are delegitimised and silenced, perpetuating epistemic injustice (Williams *et al.*, 2020; Fricker, 2007). Despite the participatory zeitgeist in health-care research (Palmer, 2020), Rose and Kalathil (2019, p. 2) argue that the privileging of particular forms of knowledge production and the policing of what counts as knowledge is an "intrinsic part of the difficulty in shifting power relations" within co-production.

In this paper, keeping with the collaborative and participant-centric philosophy of PhotoVoice and in an effort to shift the traditional assumptions around what counts as knowledge, we use personal reflections written by some of the participants and authors of the paper, to highlight the added value of participation in the project to peoples' personal and professional lives, as well as forming the backdrop to a discussion on issues in relation to the process and methodology. To set the paper in context the first part briefly describes the EOLAS PhotoVoice project and the genesis of this paper.

The EOLAS PhotoVoice project

The PhotoVoice project was a collaborative endeavour that brought together service users, family members and researchers to explore, through photography, the impact of participating in a mental health education intervention called the EOLAS programmes (EOLAS is the Irish word for knowledge). The EOLAS education programmes are designed to provide information and understanding to individuals with experience of psychosis and to their family members and supporters (Higgins *et al.*, 2017a; Higgins *et al.*, 2017b). What makes the EOLAS programmes unique is that not only were they co-designed with service users, family members and clinicians, but they are co-facilitated by service users, family members and clinicians. Similar to that of PhotoVoice, the principles underpinning the EOLAS programmes are empowerment, collaboration and advocacy. While the EOLAS programmes have undergone evaluation, using both traditional quantitative and qualitative methods, with EOLAS service users and family members being interviewed at every stage of evaluation (Higgins *et al.*, 2018; Higgins *et al.*, 2019a; Higgins *et al.*, 2019b), it was important to the EOLAS team that the inclusion of service users and family members extend beyond that of being research participants, to become collaborators in the research process. Thus, it was envisaged that the PhotoVoice methodology would facilitate a greater collaborative and empowering relationship between both the EOLAS researchers and participants.

For the PhotoVoice aspect of the project, which was funded by the Irish Health Research Board (HRB) (www.hrb.ie/), nine EOLAS facilitators (service users and family members) including two EOLAS researchers were trained in the PhotoVoice methodology. Following the training sessions, an exhibition curator facilitated a workshop during which time all PhotoVoice participants came together to plan the design, layout, themes and overall exhibition called “EOLAS: The Road we Travel”. Ethical approval for the project was granted from the University Ethics Committee. The complete methodology underpinning the EOLAS PhotoVoice project is published elsewhere (Barry *et al.*, 2020).

Genesis of the paper

Following the writing of the methodology paper, all participants including the curator and researchers were invited to contribute to this paper. Those who expressed an interest were asked to write approximately 500 words on any aspect of their involvement. The decision on the word count was taken in consultation with the group and based on a desire to reduce the magnitude of the writing task. In total, five people submitted a reflection: two facilitators (service user and family member), two researchers (one a peer researcher) and one curator. All contributers were female except for one. The reflections remain largely unedited, except for some minor typographical and syntax changes made by the contributors as part of the drafting phase of the paper. Once the reflections were received, they were reviewed by all the authors and key emerging issues for the discussion part of the paper were identified.

Personal reflections

Personal reflection one

Being someone with a mental health diagnosis, it is very hard to get someone to see the world through my eyes. The PhotoVoice project gave me the chance to portray some of the ways I see things. From the day I arrived I was quite unsure if I should have even been there. I take photos but would not class myself as photographer, so this was really out of my comfort zone. Entering the room, I was put at ease straight away. Getting to see the lives of others through their lens was emotional and inspirational. Sometimes the person who took the photo did not know what they were trying to say about what they saw in that picture, so as a group we helped support that person convey the message they wanted. There was so much I took away from the project. It gave me confidence, hope and insight into my life and the lives of others living with a mental health challenge, not just for me to see but for anyone who sees the photos. One of the things about the PhotoVoice project was that I and the other participants were able to be part of it from the beginning to the end. From delivering the EOLAS programmes, to being a participant of the PhotoVoice programme, taking photos, to putting the exhibition together, being at the exhibition launch and being asked to co-deliver a presentation in an international conference. I came, I saw, I conquered.

The PhotoVoice project was a very interesting and unique concept, which allowed those that have experienced mental health challenges either personally or as a family member/carer to express what it is like to live everyday with these challenges. As they say a picture speaks a thousand words. I really enjoy facilitating the EOLAS programmes and to be given the opportunity to be able to progress with the project and be able to take part in the PhotoVoice project. I received an email with an expression of interest about the project. We initially met in Dublin, where we spent three days. Hotel, meals and travel costs were covered in the project, there was no expense for participants. We met with the PhotoVoice trainer, and we were given digital cameras and shown how to use them. We were given group tasks during the day, and in the evening, we were asked to take photos of different topics, such as what it is like to experience mental health and then to describe why we had taken those specific pictures and what we saw when we were taking those photos. We were given the cameras to take home with us for the next few months and then came back to Dublin to meet with the PhotoVoice trainer for a one-to-one session and selected the photos that we wanted in the exhibition. We came back to Dublin again as a group where we could see the hard copies of the photos. We picked the themes, the flow of the exhibition and the title. I really enjoyed being part of the initiative. Being part of a project is often daunting, but we were made so comfortable and relaxed from the very beginning. Having experienced the project from start to finish was very different to any other initiatives I have been involved in, which is what makes EOLAS completely unique.

Personal reflection two

I was delighted to be asked to be part of EOLAS PhotoVoice. I had never heard of PhotoVoice but when the information came through from the researchers of what it would entail, I knew instinctively that this would be something I really wanted to be part of. I came into mental health services as a peer support facilitator and had my first introduction to EOLAS as a co-facilitator. EOLAS does not expose you, it invites you to participate, and it is this ethos that gave me the space to explore all my pre-conceived beliefs about both myself and others and for me to question for the first time my diagnosis (I was a very compliant service user!!!). EOLAS PhotoVoice was an extension to this ethos. The detail with which this was set up was a testament to the meaningful engagement from the researchers and the fact that they too were active participants, added a true co-productive quality, for me the evidence is always in the doing.

The process was not always easy. I am often never sure where I fit in these forums, I always seem to have a very different view from others. I compare myself to those who have been advocating in services for years and are well known and respected. I trot along doing things in a quiet non-exposed kind of way and then feel frustrated that there is not another narrative around how we view mental health.

I am much better when I am processing about myself, and this was both revealing and humorous through PhotoVoice. I am task orientated, I like order and lists. When we were given tasks, I adhered to the rules, e.g. take five photos, I took five photos, while others took 55. I had to look at how rigid I can be with rules and tasks, all things that stifle the creative process. Over the course of training, we could all laugh at our very different personality types, my organisational skills were praised while I envied peoples' carefree approach. By the end we all had a very different collection of photos, poems and phrases that represented all of us as a collective but also as an individuals. Yes, I even wrote poetry and took a few more carefree photos that were not on the list!!!

We are all individuals with our own experiences, and while EOLAS brings together a group of people with similar experiences, we all experience things differently and with many different perspectives. This did prove an unsuspected challenge for me, and I certainly did not expect to be triggered by some of the language in the room. It is one thing to talk about the process of co-production and equal stakeholders, it is quite another thing to be able to truly listen and hear everybody's perspectives and learn to acknowledge where your judgements lie and come to a place where you can be truly empathetic to the experiences of others.

This was probably the most revealing part of the process for me, as someone with lived experience you can get caught up very easily in the whole "this is happening to me not you" mindset, but mental illness effects everyone close to you, and for me, it was difficult to be up close and personal to the stories and experiences of family members. I felt a bit defensive and had to recognise my own story and history that all contributed to how I heard this and realise this was not my story this was theirs and their experiences that had to be validated, heard and understood exactly the same as mine.

We hear regularly all the buzz words circulating in mental health at the moment from equal stakeholders, service user engagement, recovery orientated practise, co-production the list seems exhaustive. EOLAS PhotoVoice of itself was not what embodied all this, it was the participation, communication and consultation process at every step from the researchers that made me feel that this was mine, that I was part of something that had meaning, and it was not a one-off engagement.

The promotion of equal partnerships through EOLAS PhotoVoice has given me the opportunity to be me in it. I feel accepted, valued and understood. I feel less afraid of exposing my vulnerability and realise I have something to give and that is my strength. I needed the acknowledgement and more importantly to feel nurtured through this journey, that for me was difficult and certainly did not come naturally. I needed to hear that I was enough, what I had to say was important and to feel that I wasn't rallied to create a narrative that didn't sit with me and my views.

Personal reflection three

In February 2019, I was invited to do a photography project for the EOLAS programme. The aim of the programme was to give my perspective as an EOLAS facilitator. However, the best part was that we could go in whatever direction we wanted to, which gave us a lot of freedom to fully express our feelings and opinions on the project and the wider issues of the mental health system we deal with on a daily basis in Ireland.

For my photos, I wanted to primarily use a family member as my subject. For so many years, I have gone through so many ups and downs with my family member's diagnosis and the majority of the downs had to do with the mental health system here in Ireland. Like many other families who have a loved one who suffers from a mental illness, we are the main advocates for them. We see the distress, the pain and the desperation in them as we try help them through the toughest times in their lives.

My family member at the time of the project was in a psychiatric ward, which gave me the perfect opportunity to document the distress my family member, along with other family members, have to endure. The lack of resources was the main aim I wanted to communicate. The blank walls, empty uncharacteristic rooms and the silence you feel upon entering the area are distressing. I documented that the only "activity" my family member has are cigarettes, the only thing to pass the time throughout the day.

Another avenue I looked at was the impact of social media and mental health. Lately, I have been finding there is a lack of empathy for people with mental health issues on various social platforms. There is no privacy for people suffering, who are publicly abused and bullied from videos and pictures online. My family along with many other families have been impacted by these pictures and videos too. I feel this is a major issue facing all societies in these times.

I was thrilled to be given a platform to show my side of these problems that affect me and my loved ones. So, I jumped at the chance to publicly show these sites that are guilty of these daily exposures on all social media platforms. It gave me the voice to speak up on these issues, and with my knowledge and skills I have learned through the photo project I hope to continue my photo journey.

Personal reflection four

My engagement with the EOLAS PhotoVoice project involved multiple roles, from being one of the researchers organising the project to a participant of the project. For me, the EOLAS PhotoVoice project represented an opportunity to work collaboratively with service users and family members in working alongside them to depict through photography our diverse experiences and engagement with EOLAS.

It was decided early on that myself and one other EOLAS researcher would take part in the project, not only as researchers but as participants. As both an EOLAS researcher and a participant, I initially found myself questioning where I fit in. This question arose for me during the training phase of the project. On the first day of training, I became acutely aware that I did not share some of the experiences that the other participants had in common. I found myself wanting to belong to the group but having not shared the experiences the group had in common, I felt somewhat like an outsider. Additionally, as I was employed as a researcher on the EOLAS project, I struggled with the extent to which I could be honest and open about my experiences, both the benefits and challenges.

After considerable self-reflection, which I engaged with through discussions with the research team, reading literature on the topic and reflective journaling, I concluded that I occupied a “space between” (Bryce, 2012). The “space between” has been used in the literature to represent the subjective experience of not belonging to any one particular group but rather oscillating between one and the other (Bryce, 2012). In this project, I felt somewhat torn by the multiple identities that I possessed during the project: researcher, participant, project organiser and a person with lived experience of a mental health issue, which I ultimately decided not to disclose to the group. As such, I questioned what aspects of my own experiences should or even could I draw on when depicting my experiences of EOLAS. As I was familiar with the principles underpinning the project, I was able to draw on the principle of collaboration in particular and use it as a starting point for the types of photographs I wanted to take. However, from speaking to other participants of the project, I soon came to realise that I was not alone in feeling that I didn’t fully belong. Each participant held multiple identities and for each of us the question of what aspects of ourselves we wanted to disclose and represent, appeared to be a common question we all reflected on at one stage or another. Overall, in being able to acknowledge and recognise the position that I subjectively occupied within the project, I felt a greater sense of self-worth, esteem and empowerment.

During the planning phase of the photography exhibition, it was suggested by one of the researchers that during the exhibition itself, we could hold a People”*s* Choice Awards. This essentially meant that the public who attended the exhibition would vote on their favourite photograph and the participant who took that photograph would then be awarded with a People”*s* Choice Award. This suggestion led to a discussion among the researchers as to whether it was appropriate to introduce this idea so late in the project timeline and without forewarning to the participants. Ultimately, we agreed that to introduce a People’*s* Choice Awards could introduce an element of competition between the participants, which would defeat the collaborative ethos of the project. In addition, we concluded that by giving the public an opportunity to rate their preference of photographs and by extension, the personal experiences of participants, there was the potential to inadvertently communicate to participants that some of their experiences might be somehow ranked as less valuable or less valid than those of others, which was not the case. Ultimately, we decided not to introduce a People's Choice Awards.

I have chosen this particular example because it represents my experience of occupying the "space between". I was not in favour of introducing a People's Choice Awards, and I believe the reason being is because I was able to move between my participant and researcher roles in the project. From the perspective of being a participant, I questioned whether I would like my work to be evaluated or critiqued in such a public forum and what the result would communicate to me about how I chose to illustrate my experience. By occupying the "space between" I was able to develop my own voice and engage with the project in a more authentic way.

Personal reflection five

As an outsider coming into the project to advise and support the curation of the final exhibition, I was introduced to the principles of the PhotoVoice methodology and the goals that organisers hoped to achieve. I became immediately aware of the unique nature of the project. The exhibition was about creating a threefold entity: a photographic exhibition that could be appreciated for its visual merits; a collection of stories conveying deep and personal experiences and meaning of the project's contributors; all the while focusing it as an informational tool, which could be accessible to the public. In dealing with the subject of mental illness and support services, there was a sensitivity required in how to make the subject accessible. It was about humanising it through shared experiences and the knowledge of the contributors. As individuals with lived experiences, group facilitators, family members of those living with a mental illness, or those with professional experiences in research and/or patient care there was a sympathy and understanding beyond the surface of the images and their stories.

Maintaining the project's core participatory methodology was the key goal expressed in the earliest discussions surrounding the organisation and development of this exhibition, and collaboration immediately became the route in which we would travel. The project contributors' involvement in this planning process was vital. To create a narrative that conveyed the personal experiences, interpretations and views of the contributors, we needed an approach which relied wholly on their voices, as the guides navigating the exhibition and the shapers of the desired message. This meant my job was to introduce the basic principles of how to construct an exhibition and narrative, keeping in mind audiences and perceived message. My role was to facilitate and focus discussions, rather than impose my own views and interpretations of what I thought the exhibition should be. This was a challenging but rewarding process as collaboration unearthed a depth of expression that we as organisers could have only hoped for.

To achieve this, I facilitated a group workshop and brainstorming session. This formed the basis of our collaborative curating approach. Our discussions over the course of the day were what shaped and developed the exhibition and the narrative that would become the final representation of the project. Each contributor's thoughts and views were encouraged and noted. They were also given the option to write these down on specially prepared worksheets to best capture their responses and how they would like to see the exhibition take shape. As this part of the process was done over the course of a single day, it was an intense experience for all involved. This was positive as it meant we used the time productively, and every response was natural and unrehearsed, the drawback was that there was a natural drop in energies as the day went on, and a real push to finish the entire discussion. I think, were we to do a similar project again, we would benefit from splitting the session over the course of a week, perhaps dealing with one to two theme developments per session. As reflection was a driving force within the overall discussion, both introspectively and in evaluating the collection of works, it would have been lovely to see how responses developed and changed when contributors were given time to mull them over. It would have been lovely to explore and develop these as further facets of the exhibition had time been permitting.

Contributors were responsible for creating the links between images, the themes and the overall narrative and title of the exhibition. Their thoughts and experiences are what informed the story and how the audience was asked to view their photographs. The result was an expressive and heartfelt journey through their very different experiences of what EOLAS does, and how it fits into their personal journeys. All the while, making it universally accessible by asking questions of its audience, making them wonder what would happen if it were them or someone they knew. I think, were we to redo this exhibition project the same overall approach would be used, though with some of the mentioned refinements in relation to the workshopping process. The knowledge and experiences of those involved provided the poignance, honesty and inclusivity represented in the end presentation, something that could not have been achieved without their level of engagement.

Discussion

While PhotoVoice as a collaborative methodology has been used by many disciplines and in numerous contexts, participants are seldom involved as active contributors in dissemination (Han and Oliffe, 2016) and their voices are often reframed and reanalysed by researchers. In keeping with the spirit of collaboration and in an attempt to democratise knowledge production, this paper uses largely unedited reflections. These reflections clearly demonstrate that despite the diversity within the EOLAS group, the primary objectives of the PhotoVoice method were achieved, and the process captured the multiplicity of experiences. The end product, in the form of an exhibition, reflected not just individual stories and lived experience but the collective story of the group.

The narratives included in this paper also highlight other benefits of engaging with PhotoVoice, not least because it does not presuppose any formal knowledge of photography and therefore is a very inclusive and accessible methodology for people without formal research experience to engage with (Wang and Burris, 1997). A common benefit that is echoed throughout the narratives, and in previous research (Mizock *et al.*, 2015; Burles and Thomas, 2014; Tang *et al.*, 2016), are the positive consequences that people experienced as a result of taking part in the project, such as increased self-confidence, a sense of hope and feeling valued and understood.

Equally, all contributors had creative license to express themselves through the medium of photography over which they had full ownership. Reflections one, two and three indicate that the ownership that participatory methodologies strive to achieve was accomplished. This is illustrated in the reflective accounts which speak of the amplification of voice, the acknowledgement of lived experience, and the taking of ownership over the direction, format and content of the project from beginning to end. Importantly this ownership extended to contributors having the opportunity to witness first-hand the impact and tangible outcome of their creative work in the form of the public photographic exhibition and co-presenting at international conferences (Wang and Burris, 1997). Unlike traditional research methodologies, PhotoVoice has the potential to democratise not only knowledge production but also its dissemination, as it moves away from elite or privileged spaces to public venues, such as local libraries.

The issue of power dynamics in relation to researchers and participants is widely reported in the literature on PPI (Black *et al.*, 2018; Trivedi and Wykes, 2002; Green and Johns, 2019). As highlighted in the reflections, the EOLAS team endeavoured to implement strategies to minimise potential power differentials within the group by: including researchers as active participants in the whole process; having an independent expert in

PhotoVoice train contributors; enlisting the help of a curator to help facilitate researcher and participants to co-produce the exhibition, including its title, format and production of a ephotobook; using unedited reflections on the process; and co-writing papers, including this one. Nonetheless, the reflective narratives do bring into sharp relief other issues in relation to power. Reflection four highlights power issues relating to identity management, in terms of who reveals or is expected to reveal a history of mental distress, especially if one is cast in the role of "researcher". This account reminds us how the binary divisions of researcher/participant or researcher/service user reinforces disparities of power, by creating expectations around disclosure. Those who are cast in the researcher role can enjoy the privilege of not revealing vulnerabilities and of managing their identities within the public sphere. Conversely, there is an expectation of disclosure amongst those in the service user role, whose right to control their own story and how it is revealed and appropriated by others, has the potential to be eroded. Reflection four also highlights issues in relation to the introduction of new aspects into a project after ethical approval has been received and people have consented to a project that did not include an element of competition. No doubt having a discussion with the wider group about the suggestion of a "People's Choice Award" would have been more collaborative and may have resulted in a different group decision. This example also highlights the importance of having input into the co-design of projects before they go for ethical approval, as well as the challenges of amending projects once ethical approval has been granted.

Some of the reflections in this paper also highlight the strength of participatory research to challenge positionalities and views. At each stage of the project, contributors' beliefs about their identity and mental health were re-evaluated, underscoring the fluid and dynamic nature of not only our identities, but the beliefs and assumptions we hold. Furthermore, as reflection three highlights, in some cases, it was the dynamic between the peer contributors, which challenged people to reconsider their views, strengthen their ability to accept divergent experiences and work collaboratively.

The reflections also provide insights into the importance of good curatorship and engagement with contributors to develop the narrative. Irrespective of background or experience, people came to the PhotoVoice process with great uncertainty. Working with that uncertainty not only required sensitivity but also an openness to new ideas. For example, engaging someone with expertise in curating an exhibition was not originally built-in to the project and in the context of the reflections, its omission would have left an incomplete project, in essence disempowering contributors. It was through the facilitated discussion around curation that the authentic representation of the contributors' thoughts, experiences and ownership of the work was achieved. As reflection five astutely identifies, time is integral to authentic collaborations, as it is only over an extended period of time that the level of trust required for genuine co-production is built. With less time constraints, the depth and quality of the PhotoVoice collaboration may have been strengthened. Nevertheless, the collaborative process did benefit somewhat from the contributors long established connection with the EOLAS programme and its co-production ethos. This prior relationship, albeit to the programme, provided a commonality of experience which benefited the PhotoVoice project.

The personal reflections also highlight the importance of removing barriers to participation arising from the financial cost and time commitment required. Both are issues, which often limit the extent to which people can be involved at every stage of the PhotoVoice process (Han and Oliffe, 2016; Wang and Burris, 1997; Latz and Mulvihill, 2017). Having the resources to cover contributors' expenses removes a key barrier to participation and enables people to fully engage without the added burden of incurring financial costs. It also enables researchers to have a greater degree of flexibility and creativity in maintaining collaboration throughout, including the planning of the photography exhibition and other dissemination activities. Although participants were not paid for their time, the team had enough funding to pay for the training, overnight accommodation, subsistence and travel for all participants, so they did not incur any financial expense due to their involvement.

While all contributors to the PhotoVoice project were invited to write a personal reflection piece and participate in the writing of this paper, not everyone took up the offer. Thus, not all contributors' experiences are reflected in this paper and as such could be critiqued using criteria such as sample size, representatives and replicability. It is of note however that not all academic pieces of work are mandated to speak to the goal of replication. Reflection on methodological processes, specifically on the process of inclusion within PPI focused projects and the extent to which that is felt and experienced by those traditionally exiled from academia, particularly within traditional routes of knowledge dissemination, is also considered of value (Rose and Kalathil, 2019).

It is also important to acknowledge that choosing to present our reflections in the format of written text in a traditional academic paper may have introduced a barrier to participation. On further consideration, having a discussion on alternative formats for contributor reflections, such as audio or video, may have strengthened the inclusivity of authorship and the breadth of experiences and ideas presented.

Conclusion

The goal of this paper was to introduce the reflective narratives of contributors who took part in a PhotoVoice project and by so doing, exemplify how the principle of collaboration, which is central to the PhotoVoice methodology, can be sustained through to the dissemination phases of such a project as well as highlighting some of the challenges. As a methodology, PhotoVoice not only provides a medium through which people can visually depict their lived experiences but also enables people to find their voices both in public and academic fora. PhotoVoice is also a methodology that is more in keeping with the democratic ideals of co-production and one that has the potential to expand our perspectives on "what counts as knowledge" and on "who can produce knowledge".

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