Making the familiar strange: can visual research methods render the familiar setting more perceptible?

DAWN MANNAY
Cardiff University, UK

ABSTRACT The centrality of the researcher and their position in relation to the research setting has been subject to controversy and long standing debates threaded with the narratives of insider and outsider myths. Insiders are often charged with the tendency to present their group in an unrealistically favourable light, and their work is often considered to be overshadowed by the enclosed, self-contained world of common understanding. This article draws upon data generated by six participants from a research project, which aimed to explore and represent the everyday experiences of working-class mothers and daughters residing on a peripheral social housing estate. The article describes how I, as an indigenous researcher, employed visual methods of data production in order to suspend my preconceptions of familiar territory, and facilitate an understanding of the unique viewpoints of mothers and daughters on the margins of contemporary Britain. The article focuses the usefulness of the approach for making the familiar strange when the researchers own experience mirrors that of their participants.

KEYWORDS: *Britain, collages, daughters, familiarity, mothers, participatory methods, photographs, visual methods*

Introduction

The response to Gillian Evans's (2007) book, *Educational Failure and Working Class White Children in Britain*, summed up in the UK press as 'how dare a middle-class person write about working-class people' (Butler, 2006), illustrates the enduring and volatile nature of insider and outsider myths. Outsider myths assert that only researchers who possess the necessary objectivity and emotional distance from the field are able to conduct valid research on a given group. Conversely, according to insider myths, the attributes of objectivity and emotional distance render outsiders inherently incapable of appreciating the true character of a group's life. However, as Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) argue, these myths are not empirical generalizations; rather they are elements

in a moral narrative, which seek to claim exclusive research legitimacy for a particular group.

Epistemic privilege

Clear insider/outsider boundaries have traditionally been drawn for groups of respondents who are structurally marginalized in respect of class, ethnicity, sexuality and gender (Hodkinson, 2005). For example, epistemic privilege can be found in the expression of feminist standpoint theory. The product of an age when women were claiming universal subjugation to establish their place on an academic agenda, feminist standpoint theory held that the experience of oppression engenders particular knowledges (Pilcher and Whelehan, 2004).

Accordingly only those who have the appropriate experience of oppression are capable of researching and representing the experience. Paradoxically, this means that feminist standpoint theory aligns itself within the tradition of positivist science, which it sought to critique, as it 'grants an authority and hierarchy to certain groups and silences others' (Skeggs, 1997: 26). Similarly, culturally sensitive research approaches have raised questions of who should conduct research in African-American communities and whose knowledge should be privileged (Tillman, 2002).

Such discourses of epistemic privilege can be dangerous because they produce a false binary, which silences the multifaceted nature of identities, lifestyles and perspectives. Oakley (1981) illustrates a deceptively simple notion of identity with the claim that feminist interviewing of women was automatically a privileged knowledge because of the shared gender, which secured 'insider' definition. This assumption has since been criticized for discounting crucial differences between women such as class and ethnicity (Skeggs, 2004) and much research is now concerned to recognize complexities and intricacies of the research relationship.

For example, Song and Parker (1995) emphasize that their experiences of interviewing Chinese British young people as Korean American and Chinese British researchers were defined by a highly complex set of research relationships. The nuances and intricacies of their proximity in the research process led them to conclude that:

> Dichotomised rubrics such as 'black/white' or 'insider/outsider' are inadequate to capture the complex and multi-faceted experiences of some researchers such as ourselves, who find themselves neither total 'insiders' nor 'outsiders' in relation to the individuals they interview. (Song and Parker, 1995: 243)

The notion of being an insider or an outsider, then, is inadequate in an absolute sense. However, to ignore questions of proximity is to assume that knowledge comes from nowhere allowing researchers to become an abstract concept rather than a site of accountability. It may be misguided to privilege a particular type of knowledge but it is imperative to acknowledge that 'perspective is always premised upon access to knowledge' (Skeggs, 2004: 14).

Thus, inside/outsider discourses are important because they place the researcher at the centre of the production of knowledge.

Therefore, despite the inadequacy of the insider/outsider binary in absolute terms the concept retains methodological usefulness. For example, Hodkinson's (2005) exploration of the Goth scene, a sub-culture centering around music and dress, discusses levels of group identity, commitment and distinctiveness, which reduce the level of ambiguity in respect to whether the researcher should regard themselves as an insider. This study resonates with my own location as a researcher where the proximity to my participants is characterized by a distinctive set of unifying characteristics.

As well as sharing the participant's primary status of white woman I also share spatial containment. The mothers in the study are in my age group, we all had our children in our late teens and early twenties and we all have daughters. Beyond the pen and paper statistics; all of the mothers live within 15 minutes walk of my own home, our families have shared weddings, birthdays, football matches as well as fallouts, accidents and misfortunes. Our children have shared playgroups, schools, and packets of crisps.

The level of familiarity between the participants and myself varies but the relationship suggests a relatively clear position as researcher operating as an insider. Of course, it is true that outsiders and insiders may have immediate access to different kinds of information but they are also exposed to different kinds of methodological dangers. Positioning myself as an insider therefore made it important to explore and acknowledge both the benefits and draw-backs of being 'researcher near'.

Researcher near

It is suggested that researchers working on familiar territory can elicit greater understanding because cultural and linguistic barriers do not have to be negotiated and that participants may be more open and less likely to obscure aspects of their lives (Aguilar, 1981; Atkinson et al., 2003; Henry, 2001). Additionally, shared knowledge and shared understanding can counter the severe imbalance with regard to intimacy and distance between interviewer and interviewee, which is often common in research interviews (Rogan and de Kock, 2005).

The appeal of shared identity and shared experience, therefore, needs to be acknowledged. However, the status of indigenous observer has the ability to confer disadvantage as well as advantage. For instance, Vrasidas (2001) reports that by entering the research setting with preconceptions about the topic he may have been unable to notice that which is often taken for granted. The researcher, then, can never renounce their prior knowledge and the disadvantages of preconceived understandings were experienced in my earlier unpublished research, which formed an undergraduate dissertation as illustrated below:

> In the case of the third interview there was a small amount of vacillation because my own children attend the same school as those of the participant. Consequently, there was an element of my questions being unnecessary because I already knew the answers. (Mannay, 2006: 21)

There was then, a two-way taken-for-granted cultural competence as I entered the interview with preconceived knowledge and the participant communicated an assumption that I already understood her experience. Thus, conducting research in a culture in which I was habituated had a deadening effect on the interview process in this case. However, although there was a small amount of vacillation in the interview, overall the elements of shared understanding and common ground contributed to a relaxed open atmosphere, which was reflected in the quantity and quality of the data. The experience of my undergraduate dissertation influenced the decision to select a sample from my own community. However, I felt that it was important to address the taken-for-granted cultural competence inherent to my insider status and to consider processes of making the familiar strange.

Making the familiar strange

Interpretive research aims to investigate the invisibility of everyday life but when a researcher is working in familiar territory there is a danger that their findings will be overshadowed by the enclosed, self-contained world of common understanding. As Sikes (2003) recalls when she was taught by outside 'experts' about working-class homes:

> Those people who, we were told, spoke in restricted codes, bought their children the wrong sort of toys, were not able to defer gratification, lacked cultural capital and didn't have dinner parties, were our friends, neighbours, families, our mums and dads, aunties and uncles, brothers and sisters. (Sikes, 2003: 244)

Sikes acknowledged such outsider accounts as partial but was surprised to find that when she began her own research in working-class settings it was easy to assume commonalities. Sikes made a deliberate cognitive effort to question her taken for granted assumptions and learnt that much of what she had thought familiar was really very different.

Of course, the problem of familiarity can be a challenge for all researchers as sites of investigation can throw up a range of knowledges based on first-hand experience. As Geer (1964: 337) discloses, 'I was bored by the thought of studying undergraduates ... I had memories of my own college days in which I appeared as a child'. Correspondingly, Becker (1971: 10) laments educational researchers' inability to 'stop seeing only the things that are conventionally "there" to be seen' attributing the failure to the familiarity of the classroom setting and the researchers lack of will and imagination.

The challenge of making the familiar strange in educational settings was taken up by Delamont and Atkinson (1995) who offer a range of strategies for

fighting familiarity including adopting ethnomethodology, focusing on gender and studying unusual sites within the school setting. Similarly, Thorne (1993) attempts to make 'the child' strange by centering on the geography of gender and the culture of play in the classroom and the schoolyard. The success of such approaches can be seen in studies, which have contributed something new to the field, providing a deeper insight to educational settings by both focusing on gender and by researching within the somewhat neglected site of the school playground (Mellor, 2006; Renold, 2005).

Nevertheless, researchers still struggle with the practice of making the familiar strange and it remains fundamental to 'make strange social context that we assume to understand by virtue of taken for granted cultural competence' (Atkinson et al., 2003: 47). Thus, interpretive research needs to employ techniques, which allow the researcher 'to make the familiar strange and interesting again' (Erikson, 1986: 121). This desire to make the familiar strange has 'almost the status of a mantra among ethnographers' (Sikes, 2006: 538) and the premise is evident across disciplines and paradigms.

Fighting familiarity with creativity

For Deleuze (2000), making the strange familiar could be facilitated by abandoning the constraints inherent to language and adopting the stance of a nomadic thinker who is free to create new connections and open up experience. Creativity is also seen as a method of making the familiar strange in the field of engineering education, where Stouffer et al. (2004) suggest that stepping out of dominant paradigms may suspend taken for granted understandings and open up the possibility of a creative and critical research to understand the other.

In order to expose that which is veiled by a web of taken for granted meanings the researcher may then find it advantageous to employ techniques of 'defamiliarization'. The concept of defamiliarization was introduced by the Russian formalist Shklovsky who believed that over time our perceptions of familiar, everyday situations become stale but that art can address this automization by forcing us to slow down our perception, to linger and to notice (Gurevitch, 1998).

Utilizing children's drawings, Kaomea (2003) borrows defamiliarizing analytical tools from literacy and critical theory to peel back familiar, dominant appearances and expose previously silenced accounts of the educational programme in postcolonial Hawaii. Kaomea uses the artwork of children to refresh her habitual responses to the educational system and to render the familiar setting more perceptible. Introducing a visual element to the process of data collection, then, can potentially provide different ways of knowing and understanding (Gauntlett, 2007). Art, therefore, may be an element that can overcome the confines of language, open up experience and make the familiar strange.

Thus, as I was conducting research within my own cultural milieu, in combination with earlier strategies for fighting familiarity, I selected visual methods of data production to specifically address the difficulties of insider research. Asking participants to independently record their own visual impressions and interpretations of their environment prior to interview, therefore, was seen as less problematic than a conventional interview design where the researcher is experience near. The adoption of participant-directed visual methods of data production, then, aimed to act as an instrument for making the familiar strange and provide a gateway to destinations that lay beyond my repertoire of preconceived understandings of place and space.

Places and spaces: the research site

One of the largest social housing estates in Europe, the geographical space that is home to the participants has become the epitome of the classically disadvantaged social housing estate. One of the local co-educational state secondary schools has been twice classified as a failing school by national educational standards, community facilities are scarce and the area has been condemned in the media for the prevalence of anti-social behaviour. Thus, in common with other large estates, the residents are often parodied in a Beggars' Opera of modern grotesques, which bears little resemblance to their actual experience (Toynbee, 2003).

The poverty yardsticks applied to the estate include high unemployment; high rates of teenage pregnancy; high numbers of lone-parent families and high take-up of state subsidized school meals. The estate, then, shares the characteristics of the type of place that forms the spatial core of disadvantage in Britain today. There is a stigma associated with these estates as 'types of places' inhabited by 'types of people' (Haylett, 2003). Through metaphors of 'waste, refuse and rejection' these estates become 'demonised' (Reay, 2004) and working-class children often have no choice but to attend the 'demonised' schools and play in the available spaces that the vast majority of middle-class parents and children shun.

However, against this background of the uneven educational and occupational playing field stands an interlinking network of friends, family and familiarity. As Williamson (2004) comments 'on a sunny day, it doesn't look so bad, for Milltown' and the same can be said of this estate (Williamson, 2004: 1). There is an evident culture of solidarity and loyalty among many of the 30,000 residents, for after all, this place is their world, and this is home.

Mothers, daughters and the research process

As Rawlins (2006) maintains, by considering intergenerational relationships it is possible to gain a greater depth of understanding since one can compare

different versions of the same story. Similarly, Pilcher (1995) illustrates the ways in which age is a social category that acts as an important basis for the distribution of status, and access to power, space and time in contemporary British society. Thus, the study was interested in considering the views of both mothers and their daughters and the sample comprised three mother and daughter pairs who I have known for a number of years.

In order to preclude 'place-centrism' (Jessop et al., 2008) it was also important to explore notions of territory by comparing the accounts of those residing in council properties in the heart of the estate with those living on the borderlines in privately owned homes. Tina[1] and her nine-year-old daughter Chantelle reside in state housing on a well-known street in the heart of the council estate. Juliet and her daughter Suzie, aged 13, and Caroline and her 15-year-old daughter Sophie reside on the periphery of the estate in privately owned homes. All of the mothers have lived in the research area and been educated locally, and have remained in the locality while their daughters progress through the education system.

Data was generated in three distinct yet overlapping participatory methodological techniques: photo-elicitation, mapping and collage production. Mother and daughter pairs were assigned one of these methods of data production within the theme of representing their worlds inside and outside of the home.

PHOTO-ELICITATION

Photography has long been seen as advantageous in social science research (Becker, 1974) and the techniques of self-directed photography and photo-elicitation, or 'photo-voice' as it is sometimes called, have been used successfully in a range of research studies. I was drawn to the method as data production is directed, constructed and created away from the influence of the researcher (Plummer, 2001). As the study was concerned with the participants' impressions and interpretations of their local environment I was drawn to research that recognizes the potential of photographic images to evoke emphatic understanding of the ways in which other people experience their worlds (Pink, 2004).

For example, Belin (2005) found that employing photo-elicitation in landscape sociology resulted in the photographs rather than the researcher's questions being the focus of the discussion. Furthermore, the presence of the photographs was seen to provide an opportunity to explore previously 'taken-for-granted' understandings held by both researcher and participants. Similarly, Mizen (2005) employed photo-diary techniques to gain an understanding of children's paid work and found that photo-self-elicitation proved invaluable because the children had 'expanded on the context and detail of their jobs in ways that their words had never quite conveyed, or which familiarity had rendered inconsequential to interview, discussion or written diary' (Mizen, 2005: 129)

The case for limiting the intrusive presence of the researcher, extending the restrictions set by the linearity of verbal narrative and gaining a more nuanced understanding of the lives of others through techniques of photo-elicitation has been upheld by the work of many other researchers (Dodman, 2003; Harper, 2002; Mason, 2005; Newman et al., 2006; Twine, 2006). These characteristics of the photo-elicitation technique have resonated with the requirements of the present study. Thus, Caroline and Sophie were each given their own camera and asked to take a series of photographs depicting meaningful places, spaces and activities. The photographs then formed the basis of an interview where I engaged in a tape-recorded discussion with each participant following the method of 'Photovoice' (Darbyshire et al., 2005: 422).

MAPPING

There is relationship between ideas and visible materials in much of social science research where drawings are used to refine theory and disseminate findings (Meyer, 1991). Acknowledging this use of flow charts, tables and the maps of ecologists, demographers and geographers can lead to a deeper understanding of how images and meanings are connected in the lives of those we study. Thus, offering an opportunity for participants to metaphorically describe their social and physical environments could lead to a more complete and thorough understanding of a given phenomenon or culture (Radnofsky, 1996).

Nossiter and Biberman's (1990) pilot study of organizational culture suggests that drawing focused participants' responses so that they concentrated on the most salient features of their organization. Furthermore, the researchers propose that putting forward the unusual request for creativity acted as a tool to motivate respondents to analyse their organization. Drawing exercises have also proved valuable in previous studies of children's perceptions of their environment (Darbyshire et al., 2005; Mitchell, 2006; Ross, 2005).

Thus, in order to create the opportunity for the participants in this study to express their own perceptions of place and space mapping, methods of data production were introduced. In previous research drawing has proven to be much more popular with seven to 11 year olds than with teenagers, which is why I selected the youngest child for this research activity (Barker and Weller, 2003). Tina and Chantelle were asked to draw maps of their social and physical environments. The maps then formed the basis of an interview where I engaged in a tape-recorded discussion with each participant.

COLLAGE PRODUCTION

There is an apparent dearth in the academic literature in regard to 'collage production'.[2] However, as I had produced a collage to explain my own life several years ago as part of a lifelong learning course, I felt that this would be a suitable activity to introduce. In common with mapping and photographs, then, introducing the visual element of collage production to the process of data collection could provide the potential of different ways of knowing and

understanding. Additionally, the collage invites a wider scope of choice for participants for as well as photographs or drawings there is an opportunity to include a wide range of representations and memorabilia.

Sharing many of the attributes of the collage is the biographical research tool the 'memory book' designed to combine diary and scrapbook style. Thomson and Holland (2005) document the potential of introducing visual dimensions of the memory book into a method generally dominated by text and discourse. The model was piloted by the researchers, who created their own memory books, evoking their own memories from the time when they were the same age as the participants. The researchers found to their surprise 'and in some cases horror' that the identities implicit in the memory books were often at odds with the kinds of identities that they would have presented more self-consciously in a narrative of self (Thomson and Holland, 2005: 204).

The researchers suggest that the memory book method enabled an approach that was less driven by the research agenda and more by the participants. The completed memory books were regarded as a successful mechanism to disrupt a purely narrative presentation of the self and the researchers found that they provided fascinating insights into the cultural resources and technologies that underpin young people's projects of the self.

The relative participant autonomy, reflection and enjoyment associated with such self-conscious repositories of memorabilia led me to introduce the collage project. Collage production presented an opportunity for participants to create a visual representation of their worlds using pictures, photographs and words from various sources, including magazines, newspapers, and the internet. Juliet and Suzie completed a collage each. The collages then formed the basis of an interview where I engaged in a tape-recorded discussion with each participant.

Elucidating images

One criticism of the inclusion of such visual images in social science research is that such visual materials are under analysed, 'serving as little more than illustrative devices' (Ball and Smith, 1992: 12). There is a need, therefore, to seek to provide a descriptive and nuanced analysis of films, photographs and drawings. However, although images render the world in visual terms they can never be transparent windows on the world as there is a distinction between vision and visuality.

Vision simply refers to the physiological capabilities of the human eye, while visuality accounts for the complex ways in which vision is constructed. Thus, visuality and the overlapping term scopic regime, refer to the ways in which audiences bring their own ways of seeing and other knowledges to bear on an image (Rose, 2001). The audience, then, actively make their own meanings from an image. Yet, if the research is interested in the ways in which people assign meanings to pictures, the study of images alone, as data whose meaning is intrinsic, is a mistaken method (Banks, 2001).

Images have no inherent or structural association, other than that which is 'the audience is educated to expect by convention' (Banks, 2001: 10). The reading of visual images then suggests that the message lies within the visual image and that analysis provides the opportunity for the image to speak. However, the sense that viewers make of images depends upon cultural assumptions, personal knowledge and the context in which the picture is presented. In order to gain an understanding of the internal narrative of the image, then, it is imperative to acknowledge the role of the image-maker.

The notion that the most salient aspect in understanding a visual image is what the maker intended to show is often referred to as *auteur* theory (Rose, 2001). Auteur theory is required on a practical level because the interpretation of the audience is not necessarily the same as the narrative the image-maker wanted to communicate; indeed it can often be markedly different (Kearney and Hyle, 2004). The practice of asking participants to explain the visual images that they create has become a common feature of social science research (Belin, 2005; Darbyshire et al., 2005; Morrow, 2001). Thus, in order to present the everyday experiences of working-class mothers and daughters it was vital that I apply auteur theory to ascertain the participants' own reasons for creating visual images, rather than giving my own interpretations and assumptions to the pictures.

By employing the technique of self-directed visual data production and auteur theory I was able to gain a more nuanced understanding of the mothers and daughters' worlds. Participants provided comprehensive and thoughtful accounts of their lives and their relationship with their immediate locality, offering vivid, eloquent and amusing descriptions alongside candid appraisals of their everyday lives. However, this article is concerned with the usefulness of enabling participants to collate their own visual data as a technique for making the familiar strange, rather than the exploration of place, space and identity.

Windows to new worlds

Researchers are often apprehensive about entering a familiar research setting, where their experience with the subject matter, sets up a range of preconceptions about the topic, and I was also concerned that the findings would be overshadowed by the enclosed, self-contained world of common understanding. If I had devised an interview schedule the questions would have been constrained by my prior knowledge and the answers in turn would be constrained by these questions.

Therefore, I needed to find a method that promoted subject-led dialogue and as discussed employing self-directed visual data production techniques achieved this goal. The participants were not controlled by a pre-determined schedule and they entered the interview setting with their own ideas. This gave me the opportunity to observe and learn about elements of our shared environment and aspects of the participants themselves that I would not necessarily have enquired about.

Figure 1   *The night sky*

The participants' visual data provided an opportunity to observe unseen or forgotten elements of the physical environment such as Tina's representation of the night.

Tina (Chantelle's mother) dedicates 200 words to describing the importance that the night sky holds in her life. Tina describes the aesthetic pleasure of watching the stars, the contrast of the peace of the night compared with the pressure of the day, the space to think and the comfort that there is a window to the people that she loves in the heavens. Tina, then, places a high value on the night sky but, as Tina suggests, it was not a subject that I would have broached without the direction of the map.

Tina: You probably would have mentioned the college and the driving … and my Mum's house obviously but you wouldn't have known anything about the way I feel about the night.

Thus, even though I am an indigenous researcher Tina offers me an insight into aspects of her world that I would not have considered salient and reveals a subjective relationship with the night sky that I have no prior knowledge of.

Self-assessments and discoveries of the self

The participants also described the visual data production, as a process in which their own lives were reconsidered, re-evaluated and made strange.
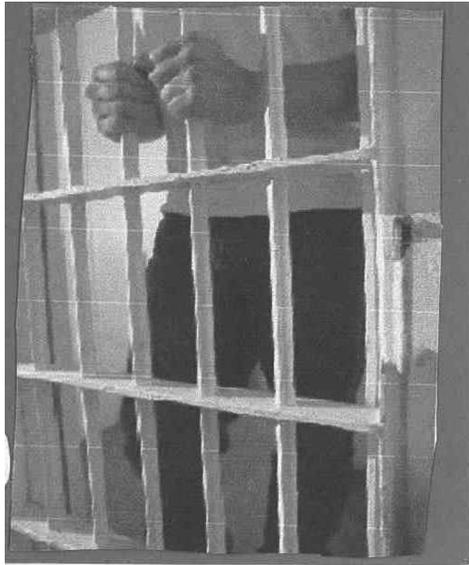
FIGURE 2   *'I feel like I'm in jail because I'm never allowed out'*

The collection of images required a lot of thought over an extended period of time and participants had to actively assess their sense of place, space and self. Suzie (Juliet's daughter) commented on how the process of data production, using magazines, photographs and the internet, generated new ideas that she included in the finished collage such as the image representing her home as a jail (Figure 2).

Similarly, Tina describes how drawing her two daughters acted to clarify aspects of the maternal relationship. When I looked at the picture I assumed that Chantelle had been presented as bigger than Louise simply because she is older and taller. However, Tina made clear that this was not the case and I could only understand the intended meaning of the image, illustrated in Figure 3, with Tina's interpretation.

Tina: Louise she's small and if you look at that she ain't even in line with Chantelle because she's in the background and in my drawing I did that because sometimes I feel like Chantelle takes all the attention away from Louise.

In order to gain an understanding of the internal narrative of the image, then, it was imperative to acknowledge the role of the image-maker. My own interpretation of the visual data would have been inadequate for, both literally and metaphorically, it is human beings who speak to one another and the lone image is an inadequate tool for understanding other people's worlds

F I G U R E 3   *Tina's daughters – Chantelle and Louise*

(Banks, 2001). The practice of creating visual data, then, presented an opportunity for Tina to transcend the visible and actual physical difference by distorting generalities of alignment. My singular interpretation was still veiled by a web of taken for granted meanings but the combination of Tina's creativity and explanation contributed to a more nuanced understanding for both the researcher and the researched.

It was important to consider the consequence of such discoveries of the self and of the other. In the same way that I embarked on analysing the data, the creators of the data would inevitably draw inferences about their own lives and find new meanings and connections. For example, improving narratives were related to many aspects of participant's lives as they were involved in improving their appearance; their bodies; their mind; their homes; their relationships; their future as illustrated in the extract from Juliet's (Suzie's mother) interview below;

Juliet: Yeah it's made me think really what my life is all about and you know how I can sort of (.) get it better or what I think that I want to get better.
I: Mmm.
Juliet: And the things that I want to get rid of.

Similarly, Tina talks about how her drawings have made her reflect upon the emotional cost of what Lucey et al. (2003) refer to as hybridity.

F I G U R E 4   *'I love magazines'*

Tina: Because this is my house and I love everything in it and that but like this part here has been sad thinking about things from the past ... Yeah that's what I mean that's why I feel a bit of grief because it's like I got ... I got to let go of my family as well d'you know what I mean.

Tina's transformation from 'stay at home mum' to college student revealed tensions in family relationships, which have been apparent in other studies of working-class upward social mobility (Lucey et al., 2003).

The creation of the visual data elicited a range of conflicting emotions and although I was unable to prevent feelings of disquiet, for participants, I was sensitive to the issue and tried to retain awareness throughout the interviews and attempt to limit any distress caused by letting participants discuss such issues during and after the interview.

The daughters' interviewed also spoke about their own anxieties. The desire for the perfect figure then was pitched against the love of forbidden foods such as chocolate and Suzie (Juliet's daughter) and Sophie (Caroline's daughter) both featured their favourite foods in their visual data. When I ask Sophie why she worries about her weight she answers:

Sophie: I don't know why I just I don't know I just think it's probably natural for girls to just think ah like I look fat in this but that's because I hang round with my one friend she always says it.

Sophie, then, may be influenced by her peers and by the idea that image anxiety is a social norm for girls, but there is a wider influence in the form of media images as Sophie tells me that she loves magazines (Figure 4). This is followed by an account the world of celebrity and the 'stars' that Sophie likes and dislikes. Suzie has an array of celebrities in her collage and her plans for cosmetic surgery are seen as a necessary step if she wishes to achieve the same level of fame, wealth and success.

Similar to the young women in Skeggs' (1997) study, Suzie and Sophie attempt to regulate their bodies. Then and now 'Fat signifies immovability; social mobility, they maintain is less likely in a fat body' (Skeggs, 1997: 83). Conceptions of self, then, are structured in all sorts of ways, both through the immediate locality and via broader social norms and power relations. The aspiration to stardom documents place and space in a wider sense, where identity is inexorably linked to multi-media discourses of acceptable femininity.

This dual influence of the backyard and the wider world was important because my own research agenda was confined to the immediate locality. The freedom offered by the self-directed visual data production method acted as a vehicle for Sophie and Suzie to demonstrate not just the influence of friends, family, peers and local environment but to introduce an array of cultural artefacts such as television; magazines; the internet and music. My proximity to the research site had blinded me to these wider images and their presentation acted as a salient reminder that it is impossible to compartmentalize life; for although we may be interested in the immediate locality this is just one factor to consider.

Deceptive assumptions of shared understanding

The danger that the study could be overshadowed by the enclosed, self-contained world of common understanding was not just restricted to the interpretation of the researcher. Chantelle (Tina's daughter), the youngest participant illustrates this point with a picture of her home.

Chantelle provided a visual representation of the outside of her house. The picture is interesting because it is the archetypal representation of a house common to children's drawings but it is not an accurate image of Chantelle's home, which is terraced with two windows at the front, no smoke coming out

FIGURE 5   *My House*

of the chimney and no flowers in the front garden. Similar to the majority of visual tools, Chantelle's drawing is not an unambiguous record of reality (Ball and Smith, 1992). When I take up the issue of the presence of the flowers in the picture with Chantelle she defends their inclusion.

I: So have you got flowers like this by your house? Did you just put them on or are they there?

Chantelle: Um we've got trees there but there are flowers outside my house but they're just starting, just starting to grow.

The picture of the house then is a popular version of a house rather than an accurate representation that could be recognized as Chantelle's house. In this case then I am able to recognize discrepancies; nevertheless, the drawing illustrates that participants visual images may not always be accurate, which must be kept in mind when utilizing visual data. When I have transcribed our conversation I speak with Chantelle again about these discrepancies. The structural incongruity is explained as necessary as there are two windows at the rear of the house, which Chantelle has moved to the front in her picture to take account of these rooms. Painting and sketching, then, as Damon (2000) maintains are always dependent on the artistic ability of the author.

However, there is no attempt to elucidate the presence of the flowers in the garden. The inclusion of the flowers could be explained as an illustration of the gendered nature of children's drawing where young girls aspire to make their drawings pretty. Chantelle's drawing of her local environment was edged with gold stars and such elaboration is normative within the school setting. A correspondence between drawings and school-based activities is suggested with the use of the term 'work' in Chantelle's description of generating the pictorial data.

Chantelle: I was happy when I did it (.) when I finished I was really happy because I was happy with my work [so] happy.

Alternatively, the archetypal representation of home could be linked with Chantelle's desire to move away from her street.

I: Do you like it on your street?

Chantelle: No I hate it.

Chantelle's aspiration to relocate is accompanied by descriptions of the preferred alternatives, which include large, detached houses whose gardens exhibit flowers and shrubbery. This could suggest that Chantelle's subjective representation of her home provides an insight to the intersection of the social and the psychic, a visual representation of fantasy, hope and longing. Perhaps, this is an analytical leap but in either case the drawing makes departures from actuality that Chantelle feels she does not need to justify or explain.

This departure is not problematic in itself for the research was interested in Chantelle's own subjective account of the lived specificities of classed location at a particular time and in a particular place. However, Chantelle's account becomes problematic when incredulous at my continued interest Chantelle informs me that it does not matter because I have been to her house and I know what it looks like. This is resonant of the two-way taken-for-granted cultural competence that I spoke of earlier in the article, a facet of my earlier research, which I hoped to suspend with a participatory methodology.

Akin to the participant in my undergraduate research, Chantelle communicated an assumption that I already understood her experience. Thus, the relative disadvantage inherent to my insider status remains and Chantelle may have drawn her maps with the proviso that I already 'know' the landscape of her subjective world. This illustrates an underlying and potentially deceptive assumption of shared understanding, which persists despite the adoption of self-directed visual methods.

Nevertheless, overall the method of self-directed visual data provided an opportunity for the participants to share their own experience of space. Experiences of space, which reflect the simultaneous multiplicity of spaces that exist for the social relations of space, are experienced differently and variously interpreted by those holding different positions as part of it (Massey, 1994). The technique provided an opportunity for mothers and daughters to create new connections and open up experiences, which I had not envisaged, even though in many ways my own existence echoes that of my participants.

Conclusion

This study was concerned with gaining an understanding of mothers and daughters' impressions and interpretations of their local environment and the analysis of the data revealed a range of feelings, thoughts and experiences from which these insights were drawn. The research methods adopted proved successful in enabling participants to exercise greater control in the data production process and employing auteur theory proved essential in gaining an understanding of the internal narrative of the image.

Thus, the use of participant-directed visual data production and the subsequent discussions tended to reveal far more than I would have expected using an entirely verbal approach for data production. The technique allowed time for the participants to reflect on their lives without the direction of an intrusive research voice. The value of self-directed visual data production is that images, thus ideas, are created without the influence of the researcher, which can be advantageous when the researcher is an insider who aspires to make the familiar strange.

As Ball and Smith (2001: 313) suggest 'the greater use of visual methods is not a panacea for all ethnography's ills nor is it the touchstone to startling ethnographic discoveries'. Nevertheless, the technique acted to counter the tacit and normalizing effect of knowledge, which operates by taking ones

group experiences and assuming these to be paradigmatic of all. Employing these methods, then, gave me a new insight into my participant's worlds; thus, the application of self-directed visual data production provided a gateway to destinations that lay beyond my repertoire of preconceived understandings of place and space; unravelling the diversity of urban experience and making the familiar strange and interesting again.

NOTES

1. All the names in this article are fictitious and were chosen by the participants to maintain their anonymity.
2. After I completed my fieldwork Fatima Awan submitted her 2007 PhD thesis, to Bournemouth University, titled 'Young People Identity and the Media: A Study of Conceptions of Self-Identity among Youth in Southern England', which she has made available online at http://www.artlab.org.uk. This thesis provides a comprehensive account of collage production as a visual data production technique.

REFERENCES

Aguilar, F. (1981) *Landlessness and Hired Labour in Philippine Rice Farms*. Norwich: Geo Books.

Atkinson, P., Coffey, A. and Delamont, S. (2003) *Key Themes in Qualitative Research*. Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira Press.

Ball, M.S. and Smith, G.W.H. (1992) *Analyzing Visual Data*. London: Sage.

Ball, M.S. and Smith, G.W.H. (2001) 'Technologies of Realism? Ethnographic Use of Photography and Film', in P. Atkinson, A. Coffey, S. Delamont, J. Lofland and L. Lofland (eds) *Handbook of Ethnography*, pp. 302–20. London: Sage.

Banks, M. (2001) *Visual Methods in Social Research*. London: Sage.

Barker, J. and Weller, S. (2003) 'Is it Fun? Developing Child Centered Research Methods', *The International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 23(1–2): 33–58.

Becker, H. (1971) 'Footnote', in M. Wax, S. Diamond and F. Gearing (eds) *Anthropological Perspectives on Education*, pp. 3–27. New York: Basic Books.

Becker, H. (1974) 'Photography and Sociology', *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication* 1: 3–26.

Belin, R. (2005) 'Photo-elicitation and the Agricultural Landscape: "Seeing" and "Telling" about Farming, Community and Place', *Visual Studies* 20(1): 56–68.

Butler, P. (2006) 'Down and Out in Bermondsey? Not at All', *Society Guardian*, 11 October.

Damon, F.H. (2000) 'To Restore the Events? On the Ethnography of Malinowski's Photography', *Visual Anthropology Review* 16(1): 71–7.

Darbyshire, P., MacDougall, C. and Schiller, W. (2005) 'Multiple Methods in Qualitative Research with Children: More Insight or Just More?', *Qualitative Research* 5(4): 417–36.

Delamont, S. and Atkinson, P. (1995) *Fighting Familiarity: Essays on Education and Ethnography*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Deleuze, G. (2000) *Proust and Signs* (R. Howard, trans.). London: Athlone.

Dodman, D.R. (2003) 'Shooting in the City: An Autobiographical Exploration of the Urban Environment in Kingston, Jamaica', *Area* 35(3): 293–304.

Erikson, F. (1986) 'Qualitative Methods in Research on Teaching', in M.C. Wittrock (ed.) *Handbook of Research on Teaching*, pp. 119–58. New York: Macmillan.

Evans, G. (2006) *Educational Failure and Working Class White Children in Britain*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gauntlett, D. (2007) *Creative Explorations: New Approaches to Identities and Audiences*. London: Routledge.

Geer, B. (1964) 'First Days in the Field', in P.E. Hammond (ed.) *Sociologists at Work*, pp. 372–98. New York: Basic Books.

Gurevitch, Z.D. (1998) 'The Other Side of Dialogue: On Making the Other Strange and the Experience of Otherness', *American Journal of Sociology* 93(5): 1179–99.

Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. (2007) *Ethnography: Principles in Practice* (3rd Edition). London: Routledge.

Harper, D. (2002) 'Talking About Pictures: A Case for Photo Elicitation', *Visual Studies* 17(1): 14–26.

Haylett, C. (2003) 'Culture, Class and Urban Policy: Reconsidering Equality', *Antipode* 35(1): 33–55.

Henry, A. (2001) 'Looking Two Ways: Identity, Research, and Praxis in the Caribbean Community', in B. Mercher and A. Ingram-Willis (eds) *Multiple and Intersecting Identities in Qualitative Research*, pp. 61–8. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Hodkinson, P. (2005) 'Insider Research in the Study of Youth Cultures', *Journal of Youth Studies* 8(2): 131–49.

Jessop, B., Brenner, N. and Jones, M. (2008) 'Theorizing Socio-Spatial Relations', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 26(3): 389–401.

Kaomea, J. (2003) 'Reading Erasures and Making the Familiar Strange: Defamiliarising Methods for Research in Formerly Colonized and Historically Oppressed Communities', *Educational Researcher* 32(2): 14–25.

Kearney, K.S. and Hyle, A.E. (2004) 'Drawing Out Emotions: The Use of Participant-produced Drawings in Qualitative Inquiry', *Qualitative Research* 4(3): 361–82.

Lucey, H., Melody, J. and Walkerdine, V. (2003) 'Uneasy Hybrids: Psychological Aspects of Becoming Educationally Successful for Working-class Young Women', *Gender and Education* 15(3): 285–99.

Mannay, D.I. (2006) 'Structural Constraints and School Choice: The Theory of Reasoned Action and the Theory of Planned Behaviour', Unpublished BA thesis. Cardiff: Cardiff University.

Mason, P. (2005) 'Visual Data in Applied Qualitative Research: Lessons from Experience', *Qualitative Research* 5(3): 325–46.

Massey, D. (1994) *Space, Place and Gender*. Cambridge: Polity.

Mellor, D.J. (2006) 'Playground Romance: An Ethnographic Study of Friendship and Romance in Children's Relationship Cultures', Unpublished PhD thesis, Cardiff University.

Meyer, A.D. (1991) 'Visual Data in Organizational Research', *Organization Science* 2(2): 218–36.

Mitchell, L.M. (2006) 'Child Centered? Thinking Critically about Children's Drawings as a Visual Research Method', *Visual Anthropology Review* 22(1): 60–73.

Mizen, P. (2005) 'A Little "Light Work"? Children's Images of their Labour', *Visual Studies* 20(2): 124–39.

Morrow, V. (2001) 'Using Qualitative Methods to Elicit Young People's Perspectives on their Environments: Some Ideas for Community Health Initiatives', *Health Education Research* 16(3): 255–68.

Newman, M., Woodcock, A. and Dunham, P. (2006) 'Playtime in the Borderlands: Children's Representations of School, Gender and Bullying through Photographs and Interviews', *Children's Geographies* 4(3): 289–302.

Nossiter, V. and Biberman, G. (1990) 'Projective Drawings and Metaphor: Analysis of Organisational Culture', *Journal of Management Psychology* 5(3): 13–16.

Oakley, A. (1981) *Subject Woman*. London: Martin Robertson.

Pilcher, J. (1995) *Age and Generation in Modern Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pilcher, J. and Whelehan, I. (2004) *Fifty Key Concepts in Gender Studies*. London: Sage.

Pink, S. (2004) 'Applied Visual Anthropology Social Intervention, Visual Methodologies and Anthropology Theory', *Visual Anthropology Review* 20(1): 3–16.

Plummer, K. (2001) *Documents of Life 2*. London: Sage.

Radnofsky, M.L. (1996) 'Qualitative Models: Visually Representing Complex Data in an Image/text Balance', *Qualitative Inquiry* 2(4): 385–410.

Rawlins, E. (2006) 'Mother Knows Best? Intergenerational Notions of Fashion and Identity', *Children's Geographies* 4(3): 359–77.

Reay, D. (2004) 'Mostly Roughs and Toughs': Social Class, Race and Representation in Inner City Schooling', *Sociology* 38(5): 1005–23.

Renold, E. (2005) *Girls, Boys and Junior Sexualities*. London: Routledge Falmer.

Rogan A.I. and de Kock, D.M. (2005) 'Chronicles from the Classroom: Making Sense of the Methodology and Methods of Narrative Analysis', *Qualitative Inquiry* 11(4): 628–49.

Rose, G. (2001) *Visual Methodologies*. London: Sage.

Ross, N.J. (2005) 'Children's Space', *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education* 14(4): 336–41.

Sikes, P. (2003) 'Making the Familiar Strange: A New Look at Inequality in Education', *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 24(2): 243–8.

Sikes, P. (2006) 'Travel Broadens the Mind or Making the Strange Familiar: The Story of a Visiting Academic', *Qualitative Inquiry* 12(3): 523–40.

Skeggs, B. (1997) *Formations of Class and Gender*. London: Sage.

Skeggs, B. (2004) *Class, Self and Culture*. London: Routledge.

Song, M. and Parker, D. (1995) 'Commonality, Difference and the Dynamics of Discourse in In-depth Interviewing', *Sociology* 29(2): 241–56.

Stouffer, W.B., Jeffrey, S. and Oliva, M.G. (2004) 'Making the Strange Familiar: Creativity and the Future of Engineering Education', in *Proceedings of the 2004 American Society for Engineering Education Annual Conference and Exposition*, Washington, DC: American Society for Engineering Education, Session 1615.

Thompson, R. and Holland, J. (2005) 'Thanks for the Memory: Memory Books as a Methodological Resource in Biographical Research', *Qualitative Research* 5(2): 201–19.

Thorne, B. (1993) *Gendered Play: Boys and Girls in School*. Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Tillman, L.C. (2002) 'Culturally Sensitive Research Approaches: An African-American Perspective', *Education Researcher* 31(9): 3–12.

Toynbee, P. (2003) *Hard Work – Life in Low-Pay Britain*. London: Bloomsbury.

Twine, F.W. (2006) 'Visual Ethnography and Racial Theory: Family Photographs as Archives of Interracial Intimacies', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 29(3): 487–511.

Vrasidas, C. (2001) 'Interpretivism and Symbolic Interactionism: "Making the Familiar Strange and Interesting Again" in Educational Technology Research', in W. Heinecke and J. Willis (eds) *Research Methods in Educational Technology*, pp. 81–99. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

Williamson, H. (2004) *The Milltown Boys Revisited*. Oxford: Berg.

DAWN MANNAY is an ESRC-funded doctoral student at Cardiff University and her current research is titled 'Mothers and daughters on the margins: gender, generation and education'. She completed her BA in Education and MSc in Social Science Research Methods at Cardiff University. Her research interests are in place, space, identity, education, inequality and participatory research methods. *Address*: School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University, Glamorgan Building, King Edward VII Avenue, Cardiff CF10 3WT, Wales, UK. [email: MannayDI@cardiff.ac.uk]