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Turnbull, Sarah (2019) The uses and limits of Photovoice in research on life after immigration detention and deportation. In: Deflem, M. and Silva, D.M.D. (eds.) *Methods of Criminology and Criminal Justice Research. Sociology of Crime, Law, and Deviance* 24. Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing. ISBN 9781787698666. (In Press)

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# THE USES AND LIMITS OF PHOTOVOICE IN RESEARCH ON LIFE AFTER IMMIGRATION DETENTION AND DEPORTATION

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## ABSTRACT

*Purpose – This paper critically reflects on the author’s failed attempt to incorporate visual methods in follow-up research on immigration detention and deportation in Britain. In particular, it considers the uses and limits of participant-generated visuals, and the specific method of photovoice, which were originally conceived as a means to explore themes of home, identity, and belonging in and through practices of detention and release or expulsion.*

*Methodology/Approach – This paper discusses the visual method of photovoice to consider the uses and limits of participant-generated visuals.*

*Findings – Drawing on the notion of research ‘failure’, this paper highlights the challenges and limitations of photovoice in follow-up research with individuals who were detained and/or deported, pointing to various methodological, logistical, ethical, and political issues pertaining to the method itself and the use of the visual in criminological research.*

*Originality/Value – Criminologists are increasingly considering the visual and the power of photographic images within criminological research, both as objects of study and through the use of visual methodologies. This shift towards the examination, as well as integration, of images raises a number of important methodological, ethical, and political questions worthy of consideration, including instances where visual methods like photovoice are unsuccessful in a research project.*

**Keywords:** Photovoice; immigration detention; deportation; visual criminology; research failure

## INTRODUCTION

This is an article written from a sense of failure. (Rose, 1997, p. 305)

In 2013, I began a mostly qualitative research project on the lived experiences of immigration detention and deportation in the United Kingdom (UK), with specific focus on the themes of identity, home, and belonging. The project commenced with a multi-sited ethnography of four immigration removal centres (IRCs) over one year and included formal interviews, focus groups, and a survey. The second phase of the project involved following up with participants

who had been released into the British community or deported to other countries to explore what life was like after detention and/or deportation. As part of this follow-up research, I attempted to integrate a visual component in which participants would be given digital cameras to document their lives after detention or deportation. Known as photovoice, the aim of incorporating this approach was to enable participants to record and showcase their own lives in ways that words alone could not, while also generating images that could be used in formal interviews as per the method of photo-elicitation.

I imagined at the beginning of the project that the photovoice component would generate a wealth of visual data on participants' lived experience of release to the British community or life after deportation and lead to enriched formal interviews. I expected that the method of photovoice would work in a particular way, along the lines of what I had read about in other studies utilising the method, to reveal something novel about participants' lived experiences of border control. However, for a variety of reasons, utilising the method of photovoice in this research project was, ultimately, unsuccessful.

The purpose of this chapter is to offer a critical reflection and discussion of where and how this methodological approach went 'wrong', highlighting the tensions between research fantasy (as in expectations) and failure. It provides a situated account of methods in practice by speaking to the gap that emerged between the carefully planned research project and the use of methods in the field, which generated feelings of ambivalence and raised important questions about the ethics and politics of the visual in the context of the study and in criminological research more generally. In this chapter, I consider the uses and limits of participant-generated visuals and photovoice in particular, arguing that it is necessary to take account of our research failures as a means to contribute to and advance methodological discussions in criminology.

Criminologists have tended not to discuss the messiness of their research or what happens when projects do not go according to plan—or 'succeed'—although this is changing. Indeed, 'many accounts of research practice (not least guidelines to "research ethics") reproduce an idealistic vision of research' (Horton, 2008, p. 378). Drawing on Rose (1997), Horton (2008, p. 365) observes that 'the acknowledgement of "failure" and uncertainty can often be revelatory and productive' (see also Ross & Call-Cummings, 2019; Vaswani, 2018). It is along this vein that this chapter was inspired and is intended to contribute to this special collection on methods of criminology and criminal justice.

This chapter is divided into two parts. First, I offer an overview of the research project and discuss its methodological approach, including the photovoice method. In the second section, I explore some of the methodological, ethical, and political challenges I encountered when attempting to draw on and incorporate the visual method of photovoice, reflecting on my failure with this approach. I then conclude with some reflections on the methodological contribution of thinking about research failure in the context of criminological research.

### **PICTURING LIFE AFTER DETENTION**

As introduced above, photovoice was one of the methods used as part of a larger research project exploring migrants' experiences of immigration detention and deportation in Britain, with specific analytic attention paid to how ideas about home, identity, and belonging in (post)colonial, multicultural Britain shape experiences of detention and what happens when individuals are released into the community or deported. The research sought to explore the following questions: Who are the people detained at immigration removal centres and where is (or are) their 'home(s)'? Where do they 'belong' and why? How do immigration detention and deportation make and remake the British homeland? How are Britain, Britishness, and ideas about 'difference' constituted and reconstituted through practices of immigration detention and deportation? How do the experiences of immigration detention and deportation shape and reshape detainees' sense of identity, where they belong, and where or what 'home' is? These questions and the broader project were informed by my background and training in criminology and commitment to an anti-racist feminist ethic.

The project had two main phases—although the timing of these overlapped—and involved a combination of research methods. The first phase was a multi-sited ethnography of four IRCs (Campsfield House, Yarl's Wood, Colnbrook, and Dover) between September 2013 and August 2014 with the aim to understand daily life in these detention centres. This ethnography included observation and interaction, along with formal interviews and focus groups with detainees as well as formal interviews with IRC staff (see Turnbull, 2016, 2017, 2018a; Turnbull & Hasselberg, 2017). I also administered the Measuring the Quality of Life in Immigration Detention (MQLD) survey across the four field sites (see Bosworth & Kellezi, 2015).

Undertaken primarily between January 2014 to December 2015, phase two of the study consisted of follow-up fieldwork with participants who had been released into the British community (e.g., on immigration bail, temporary admission, or leave to enter or remain) or

subject to administrative removal or deportation. To carry out the follow-up fieldwork, I kept in contact with participants through a variety of means (e.g., email, text message, telephone, Facebook, LinkedIn) once I concluded the fieldwork in the IRCs, as well as recruited additional participants through snowballing sampling. I conducted post-release interviews, both in-person (for participants in Britain) and via telephone or Skype (for participants who had been deported) (see Turnbull, 2018b, 2018c). It was during phase two of this study that I attempted to incorporate the method of photovoice.

### *What is Photovoice?*

The method of photovoice was originally developed by Wang and Burgess in the 1990s ‘to enable Chinese village women to photograph their everyday health and work realities’ (Wang, 1999, p. 185). Wang (1999, p. 185) defines photovoice as ‘an innovative participatory action research (PAR) method based on health promotion principles and the theoretical literature on education for critical consciousness, feminist theory, and nontraditional approaches to documentary photograph.’ The method involves providing participants with cameras so they can ‘identify, represent, and enhance’ their communities and perceived realities (Wang, 1999, p. 185). Photography thus provides a medium through which participants can ‘lend significance to their lived experiences’ (Walsh, Rutherford, & Kuzmak, 2009, p. 303).

Although initially developed within the field of health promotion, photovoice has been used in research with diverse populations including homeless people (Miller, 2006; Walsh et al., 2009; Wang, Cash, & Powers, 2000), formerly incarcerated women (Fortune & Arai, 2014), women migrants (Pearce, McMurray, Walsh, & Malek, 2017), young migrants (Fassetta, 2016), young adults (Rania, Migliorini, Cardinali, & Rebor, 2015), students (Call-Cummings & Martinez, 2016; Stack & Wang, 2018), drug users (Copes, Tchoula, Brookman, & Ragland, 2018; Fitzgibbon & Healy, 2017), women under community supervision (Fitzgibbon & Healy, 2017; Fitzgibbon & Stengel, 2017), indigenous peoples (Brooks & Poudrier, 2014), and displaced persons (Weber, 2018). As Call-Cummings and Martinez (2016, p. 798) observe, photovoice ‘is a critical approach to empowering or “unsilencing” groups often unheard by hegemonic research processes and powerful policy circles’, which helps to explain why the method is particularly prevalent in research with marginalised or vulnerable groups.

In the context of criminological research and visual criminology specifically, photovoice has been used recently by Fitzgibbon and Healy (2017) in research with individuals on community supervision in England and Ireland based on the rationale that ‘images could

provide a window onto the experience of supervision for those subject to it and also for the wider public for whom supervision is often invisible' (Fitzgibbon & Healy, 2017, p. 4). The authors note that images offer the greater potential to convey emotion, allowing audiences to feel what it would be like to be under community supervision. The study also involved photographic exhibitions to showcase the photographs taken and selected by participants (Fitzgibbon & Healy, 2017). Relatedly, Fitzgibbon and Stengel (2017, p. 3) bring together two projects, the first involving women on community supervision in England and the second related to women injection drug users in Hungary, using photovoice to 'provide an in-depth understanding of participants' realities'. The authors conclude that 'methodological strength of photovoice is that participants hold the power to take photographs of whatever they choose, and these images ultimately guide the generation of materials and analysis of the photovoice research' (Fitzgibbon & Stengel, 2017, p. 17). In this sense, the goal is to have participants be co-researchers, thus shifting the traditional relationship and power imbalance between researcher and researched.

Indeed, as Carrabine (2012) has observed, criminologists are increasingly considering the visual and the power of photographic images within criminological and sociolegal research, both as objects of study and through the use of visual methodologies. This shift towards the examination, as well as integration, of images raises a number of important questions—and cautions—for criminological researchers and the field of visual criminology itself (Brown, 2014; Carrabine, 2014; Schept, 2014; Young, 2014). Importantly, Fitzgibbon and Stengel (2017) caution that a method like photovoice does not magically remove power differentials in research nor inherently bring about social change.

#### *Why Use Photovoice in this Study?*

The integration of visual research methods into the research project was based on the idea that images can help convey experiences of life after detention—and for some, life after deportation—in ways that words alone could not. During the initial planning of the study, images were seen as being able to evoke or speak to the richer 'textures' of people's lived experiences in relation to the main project themes—home, belonging, and identity—than those conveyed solely through ethnography, interviews, or focus groups. The goal with photovoice, and the related method of photo-elicitation, was offer further insight into how detention impacts individuals upon their return 'home'—whether this is in the UK or in another country. Visual images, I originally thought, would enrich and complement the textual data I had collected.

A second rationale was that as a method, photovoice is more a participatory-oriented approach to research in which participants can take, select, and contribute their own images (Call-Cummings & Martinez, 2016; Fitzgibbon & Stengel, 2017; Fortune & Arai, 2014) to express what is going on in their post-detention lives. Indeed, one of the broader goals of incorporating images in this project was to help make visible the daily lived experiences of border control that go beyond the sensational or extreme that often dominate media and public discourses (Gilligan & Marley, 2010; Lenette & Miskovic, 2016), to the more intimate and every-day from the perspectives of those who live it. By giving participants cameras once they left detention or after they had been deported, the aim was that they may photograph or otherwise record their lives after detention and then select and comment on the images that had the most meaning to them.

The methodological approach I utilised first involved recruiting a sample of study participants who I had met in one of the four IRCs in which I conducted ethnographic fieldwork to remain involved with the project through the practice of photography. This was a small convenience sample of individuals with whom I had developed a rapport during the fieldwork (and most of whom I formally interviewed inside the IRCs) and who were interested in keeping in touch for follow-up interviews. To recruit potential participants, I explained the idea of the visual component of the project as an opportunity for them to document their ‘homes’, notions of identity and belonging, and experiences of life after detention in the British community or after deportation. I told potential participants that they would be given a digital camera that was theirs to keep and that regardless of receiving the camera, they could stop participating in the research at any time. In total, I was only able to recruit six individuals—one woman and five men—who agreed (initially) to participate in the photovoice component.

I first piloted the method using a disposable camera with Hussain (a pseudonym), the first participant I recruited for the photovoice aspect of the study. I then purchased Hussain and each subsequent participant a digital camera for roughly £50 along with two memory cards (worth approximately £10). The models were simple to use and came with instructions in multiple languages. The camera models I purchased offered participants the option to make videos as well. I gave Hussain and one other participant their cameras during follow-up interviews after they had been released from detention into the British community. For two participants who were still in detention, I ‘deposited’ the cameras into their personal belongings stored at the respective IRCs for when they were released (or deported). I also provided the above four participants with notepads to take ‘notes’ (e.g., thoughts or ideas) as a type of ‘photo

diary'. The remaining two participants had already been deported, so I posted their cameras to them via Royal Mail and tracked the deliveries.

Along with the cameras, I endeavoured to offer some guidance in terms of potential themes and feelings to explore, trying to make clear an idea that was arguably rather abstract. For Hussain, I handwrote him a list of 'photograph ideas' that I gave to him along with his disposable camera and notepad:

1. Photo journal (or video journal) – document a day: what you do, how you feel, where you go (or don't go) and take notes to explain.
2. Keep the camera with you and take a photo of something that makes you (a) feel you belong or don't belong to the community, UK, etc.; or (b) feel like you are home or homesick; or (c) feel hopeful or frustrated and take notes to explain.
3. Pick a theme or idea (e.g., 'waiting', 'boredom', etc.) and document this with images that capture how you feel.

I also provided technical instructions about how to submit the images, which typically involved the participant posting one of the memory cards to me so that they could continue to use the other memory card. In the one 'successful' case with Hussain, I gave him a self-addressed stamped envelope so he could post the memory card and his photo diary (i.e., notes) back to me. When discussing the 'instructions', I also revisited the issue of informed consent, including, for instance, the assurance to Hussain that he could stop participating at any time without having to return the camera. Further to the ethical imperative not to inadvertently cause pressure to participate, according to Mitchell et al. (2016, p. 1307), assuring participants that the camera was theirs to keep is viewed to increase 'ownership' of it so that it is better safeguarded and used.

As part of the methodology, a related aim was to then discuss the images participants submitted using photo-elicitation (see, e.g., Copes et al., 2018; Fitzgibbon & Stengel, 2017; Gariglio, 2016), an approach in which the images could be used as guides for participants' telling of their stories and experiences of life after detention. I developed a detailed consent form specifically for the visual images in which participants could select which materials (photographs or video) they agreed to contribute to the project as well as those that could be disseminated as part of communicating the findings. I conducted one follow-up interview with Hussain using photo-elicitation based on the first set of images he had taken during the pilot with the disposable camera. I developed two sets of the images, one to have in hard copy for



the interview and the other for Hussain to keep, which he declined, stating that he did not want to remember that ‘dark time’. We went through the images to discuss why he had taken them. During the interview, which was audio-recorded and transcribed, I also asked Hussain to indicate which images, if any, he gave permission to be used in the research. He stated that I could use all of them however I wanted, which was not an ‘ideal’ response in terms of the method and the idea that participants ought to select those images with meaning to them (Fitzgibbon & Stengel, 2017). As with other follow-up research interviews in this study, Hussain was given an honorarium of £15 for his time and expertise.

In the end, I was unable to ‘successfully’ utilise the method of photovoice in this research project. Only one participant, Hussain, was engaged for a time with taking and contributing images and discussing them with me. For example, he took photographs of his ‘no-choice’ asylum-seeker accommodation, what it was like to live off of £35 per week in asylum-seeker support, how he travelled to report to the Home Office, waiting for his asylum interview, and trying to keep busy. I originally published some of these images and his story (based on his notes and the follow-up interview) as a blog post with the aim to make visible the lived experiences of border control (Turnbull, 2014).

In the following section, I outline a number of challenges that I encountered while attempting to incorporate this method, how I tried to overcome them, and where and how I think I failed.

### **THE CHALLENGES OF USING PHOTOVOICE**

The participants in this project occupied highly precarious and/or emotionally difficult positions. I first met them in the context of immigration detention in which they were confined within prison-like institutions while facing deportation for indeterminate periods of time. I then tried to follow-up with them once they were released and/or deported, which were situations also marked by (at minimum) great uncertainty, precarity, and emotional upset (Klein & Williams, 2012; Turnbull, 2018c). In sum, then, participants were dealing with some challenging life circumstances during the time in which I was attempting to engage them with the research study.

The particular research methodology utilised in this study was contingent on the development and maintenance of strong researcher-participant relationships that could withstand the emotional, logistical, and practical effects of detention, release, and/or

deportation. It often necessitated doing this across cultural, gender, and linguistic differences and over time, which presented a number of challenges (see Turnbull, 2018b). More generally, attempting to recruit participants in the context of immigration detention is especially difficult due to the highly uncertain, anxiety-provoking, distressing, and stressful nature of detention (see, e.g., Bosworth & Kellezi, 2017). A related issue was that due to the cost of the cameras and the finite budget, I felt the need to be careful about recruiting a sample of participants who I thought would be the most likely to engage in the photovoice method. I intuitively attempted to select individuals with whom I felt I had developed strong relationships that could pass the test of time and distance. It was, however, difficult to recruit participants. This difficulty was, in part, due to the challenges I experienced in clearly conveying to participants the aims and purposes of the photographic aspect of the research project. Despite trying to ‘sell’ the project as being interesting and potentially fun (because who doesn’t like to take photos?) and result in a free camera, I was unsuccessful in recruiting a sufficient number of participants to sustain the project if participants dropped off.

A second challenge, then, involved the attrition of participants. Five of the six participants who initially agreed to participate did not—as was their right—continue with the project. Three participants stopped responding to my attempts (via email, text message, and/or social media) to follow up with them and essentially dropped out of the study. For the remaining two participants, we kept in touch once they had been deported but one, as discussed below, did not receive his camera in the post and there was not scope in the project to send a new camera, while the other decided he did not want to participate after all. The issue of participant attrition is not unique to photovoice as a method, but rather relates to the broader challenge of following up with participants over time and across geographical space. Attending to the reasons why participants do not ‘fully’ participate or no longer stay involved in a research project, particularly involving a photographic element is, however, important (see Fassetta, 2016). According to Sharpe (2017, p. 240), ‘[r]efusal to participate in research can be interpreted as a self-protective strategy to avoid or minimize the potentially harmful emotional and material consequences of self-narration.’ Indeed, the request to photograph and otherwise document their lives may have been too great an intrusion on participants’ lives and privacy, particularly given the context in which their lives had been subject to intense scrutiny and censure by the Home Office.

Another challenge related to the logistical and technical barriers associated with getting the cameras to overseas participants and then retrieving the images. In relation to the first issue,

the method of posting the cameras to overseas participants proved to be challenging. In addition to being highly costly, with the postage ending up costing more than the price of the camera, the reliability of the postal service varied. For instance, one camera I posted to South Asia was simply lost, whereas another one sat undelivered at the post office in its North African destination and was only retrieved due to the participant's personal connections to his country's postal service. In relation to the second issue of getting participants' images back, this initially posed a logistical problem, although in the end did not matter for this particular project. For participants in developing countries, access to the internet or to mobile data through which to submit digital photos was either expensive or unavailable. Posting back the digital memory cards back to me was also not ideal as these could have been lost and also involved logistical challenges associated with pre-paying participants (e.g., through Western Union) for the postage costs so as not to burden them (e.g., through reimbursement).

A further challenge relates to ethical issues associated with utilising this particular methodology. I encountered several situations where I felt it was unethical to go past a certain point of 'encouraging' participation. I often felt that it was too onerous a request to make of people who were leaving detention, some of whom faced deportation to places where their main concerns were for basic needs like shelter and food. Some participants suffered significant emotional and psychological distress due to their detention, and most encountered difficult situations once they were released from detention into the UK or returned to another country. I felt I could only make the opportunity available but could not press it further if there was no interest. As Sharpe (2017, pp. 237-238) observes, '[t]he methods of longitudinal qualitative research risk reproducing the everyday modes of surveillance experienced by' participants. Although this was not a longitudinal study, Sharpe's concern about the implications of 'sociological stalking' is indeed a cogent reminder of how marginalised and vulnerable populations can be subjected to similar practices of surveillance and scrutiny by researchers as they are by the state (e.g., the Home Office) and other agents (e.g., solicitors, third sector professionals, etc.). Receiving a request by me for a follow-up interview or a friendly enquiry as to how their photographing was going could have likely contributed to what was already a difficult daily existence. In particular, and following Sharpe (2017), my requests for participation could be seen as yet another demand from an external actor in addition to demands experienced by former detainees in the UK such as reporting to the Home Office, communicating with solicitors, managing strained family relationships, dealing with asylum seeker support, and so forth. For those who had been deported, my requests could have been

an unpleasant reminder of what had been experienced and potentially lost through detention and deportation, including their former lives in the UK.

Through this research project, I began to think that the model of photovoice I had been pursuing was ‘outdated’, particularly given the ubiquity of smart phones with cameras and many younger people’s familiarity with taking photos and sharing them through social media. In hindsight, my attempt to employ the photovoice method assumed particular levels of both technical competency and comfort with visual culture amongst participants. Researchers such as Yi-Frazier et al. (2015) have explored the feasibility of using the photo-sharing application Instagram to overcome the logistical challenges of implementing photovoice with adolescents, while others like DeBerry-Spence, Ekpo, and Hogan (2019) have considered the importance of using mobile phones to take photos as part of data collection. Although I was unable to ‘update’ the technical aspect of the method, I raise it as a consideration for future photovoice research to potentially assist with participant recruitment and overcome possible barriers with participants who are widely dispersed. However, the technical aspect aside, the potential underlying disjuncture around participants’ comfort level with taking photographs and the visual practice demanded by the method remain (see, e.g., Fassetta, 2016).

I also reached the conclusion that this method likely works best under certain conditions, in particular sites, and with specific populations. In the literature, researchers describe situations where the participants were located in a common geographic area and where the researchers could participate in the image-generating process, photo-elicitation focus groups, and public exhibitions (e.g., Fitzgibbon & Stengel, 2017). In my project, participants were diversely situated and located in disparate places. Had participant recruitment been successful, ideally, I would have had to have been creative in order to overcome the different time zones and technological resources to attempt a focus group via an online group video chat.

In attempting to utilise photovoice in this research project and receiving some photos from participants, important ethical and political questions started to emerge. I began thinking more deeply about the purpose of such images and what they could do to help us better understand the lived experiences of border control. At the outset, I admittedly did not think very carefully about how I would use the images contributed as part of the project; that is, how they would become ‘data’ to analyse, tools to elicit discussions or conversations (photo-elicitation), and part of the ‘outputs’ of the project in terms of images to share with wider audiences (e.g., my blog post, Turnbull, 2014). As the project progressed and the photovoice

method turned out to be unsuccessful, I became to feel increasingly ambivalent about this aspect of the project and what I ought to do with the ‘archive’ of images I had collected, including the contributions from Hussain.

The ethical and political implications of using images sent by participants were raised most profoundly when I received several photos via email from Dev (a pseudonym), one of the participants who had initially agreed to participate in the photographic component of the research but whose camera was lost in the post. Dev happened to be an avid photographer and after being deported to Bangladesh (see Turnbull, 2018c), he sent me a few photos of himself in his village, including swimming in a river and sitting on a riverboat. One image was of a beautiful sunset over the river and lush forest, framed by tree branches. I was first struck by the beauty of the images and of the sense of relief that Dev was at least ‘okay’ enough after experiencing the traumatic rupture of being deported from an IRC to get in touch with me once he arrived in his village. Although these photos were not contributed to the project ‘officially’ as part of the photovoice method, they gave me a sense of what I might have received if the method had worked.

The longer I reflected on these images from Dev, the more I was reminded of how ‘going home’ was often framed by Home Office employees, IRC staff, and private security personnel as a ‘return’ to various beautiful and ‘exotic’ countries of origin. During my multi-sited ethnography, I observed IRC staff occasionally ask detainees why they would want to be in Britain given its miserable weather when they could be in the sun and surf of their home countries. Moreover, in a follow-up interview, Beata (a pseudonym), who was deported from an IRC to Namibia, expressed her astonishment that she *‘was thrown on a plane by English immigration officers who regard coming here to deport Namibians as a holiday, and casually discuss how they are going to enjoy it.’* Although such comments about the British weather are cliché and working people often combine business trips with leisure opportunities, the problematic imagining of detainees’ post-deportation lives as sunny beach vacations minimises detained people’s own choices and aspirations as well as the reasons why they migrated in the first place and may not want to return. Moreover, such framings diminish the violence of detention and deportation and the numerous, long-lasting harms caused.

Although the potential for Dev’s photo of the sunset to be ‘read’ and consumed via a western touristic gaze seemed especially problematic to me, similar ethical and political questions exist around how Hussain’s photos of ‘no-choice’ asylum-seeker accommodation

could also be ‘read’ and understood by audiences. For instance, despite what looked to me as the apparent substandard accommodation provided to asylum-seekers like Hussain, the images could also be read into or by broader right-wing discourses of the British state providing housing and benefits to so-called undeserving non-citizens. However, despite the original framing of the photovoice method in this project as giving participants the opportunity to share their experiences and lives through photography, my own role in the process has become increasingly clear, particularly in the sense of strong feelings about which images were okay to show (i.e., Hussain’s photos) and those that were not (i.e., photos like those shared by Dev). Despite the goal of ‘empowering participants’ with a visual method like photovoice, Copes et al. (2018, p. 483) concede that ‘as researchers we acknowledge that it is also our job to synthesize the totality of the findings, analyze them, and interpret them’. Although images are multivocal and audiences will differently interpret them, there are risks involved with sharing images, particularly when it may inadvertently reproduce dominant narratives that counter the ethical or political aims of the research. Consequently, the images collected as part of this project remain archived.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided an account of some of the challenges and opportunities of using the visual research method of photovoice in the course of undertaking criminological research on life after immigration detention and deportation. In doing so, this reflective discussion has, in Horton (2008, p. 363) words, ‘entail[ed] owning up to a range of experiences and emotions—uncertainty, fallibility, nervousness, self-doubt—which (still) seem to sit uncomfortably with contemporary ideals about what make a “good researcher”’. Even as criminology as a discipline has tended not to delve into the ‘messiness’ of research practice, this chapter aims to encourage the dialogue forward, recognising the importance of speaking to research ‘failure’. Indeed, like Horton (2008, p. 364), I have long found methodological writing that ‘gestures towards imperfections, disappointments and angsts in/of others’ research practices’ to be the most useful to me as a researcher.

In the context of growing pressure by academic funders and institutions for researchers to be increasingly ‘creative’ by incorporating or utilising new or ‘innovative’ methods in the course of carrying out research, it may be useful to think about challenges of ‘innovating’. Successful grant applications often require methodological innovation and the turn to visual, arts-based, and participatory methodologies can look particularly appealing, especially in

relation to research impact—even if the research topics or contexts do not lend themselves easily to such methods.

In writing this conclusion, I have grappled with how to frame this experience and articulate what it contributes to methodological discussions. For instance, framing it simply as ‘lessons learned’ risks suggesting neat solutions to messy problems. On the other hand, too much focus on the failure risks returning to the idea that if I had only applied the method ‘correctly’ and not, for example, as an additional qualitative tool, that the project would have been ‘successful’. The primary contribution of this reflection is its attempt to come to terms with ‘failure’ in research. Attending to the ‘messiness’ of research necessitates a recognition that we navigate a variety of choices as researchers and often things do not go according to plan.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank the women and men who participated in the study and the IRC managers and Home Office for allowing research access. This study was generously supported by the European Research Council under Mary Bosworth’s Starting Grant (2012–2017) [no. 313362]. I am grateful to members of Birkbeck’s Criminology Research Group, and Tanya Serisier and Rachael Dobson in particular, for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter. Many thanks to editors Mathieu Deflem and Derek Silva for inviting this contribution.

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