

Educational Research for Social Change (ERSC)

Volume 10 No. 2 September 2021

pp. 178-180

ersc.nmmu.ac.za

ISSN: 2221-4070

Book Review

Ethical practice in participatory visual research with girls: Transnational approaches, edited by Relebohile Moletsane, Lisa Wiebesiek, Astrid Treffry-Goatley, and April Mandrona

New York: Berghahn Books, 2021. 240 pp.

ISBN 978-1-80073-033-5 hardback

ISBN 978-1-80073-034-2 e-book

Mathabo Khau, Nelson Mandela University, South Africa

Mathabo.khau@mandela.ac.za

This new edited volume, *Ethical Practice in Participatory Visual Research With Girls: Transnational Approaches*, responds to questions regarding ethical practice with vulnerable and marginalised groups. It delves deeply into the ethical considerations of doing participatory visual research, especially with girls and young women. While focussing on participatory visual fieldwork with young women in Indigenous and rural contexts of Canada and South Africa, this book also contains chapters of work done in Cameroon, Kenya, and other sites in Canada that are not necessarily related to Indigeneity. It offers a critical insight into how researchers grapple with questions of methods and tools related to participatory and visual research while placing importance on the lived experiences and agency of girls and women who are often marginalised in their communities.

The work presented in this volume focuses on sexual and gender-based violence (GBV) which are skewed against girls and women across the world. Despite the numerous protective international treaties that support gender equity and address GBV, the phenomenon continues globally, with girls and young women living in Indigenous and rural communities being especially vulnerable to various forms of GBV. This has resulted in university Research Ethics Committees (RECs) being particularly stringent when researchers propose to work with these so-called vulnerable populations. Although these measures are necessary, they tend to discourage scholars wishing to work with young women, thus hindering much-needed research. There is, therefore, an urgent need for a balance between recognising the complex challenges faced by girls and young women in different contexts, and acknowledging their voice and agency. Specifically, there is need for studies that focus on understanding girls and young women's needs and being directly informed by their perspectives.

There is a growing interest in academic circles and communities regarding the different forms of participatory visual research. This book draws on the idea of building connections between the academic RECs that regulate research and the real-life worlds of ethical practice in participatory visual research and argues for the need to foreground concerns on levels of participation, data production,

ownership, and usage in research as part of regulated ethical practice. Despite being mandated with ensuring that researchers working with communities follow structured university research ethics evaluation protocols, such protocols barely cover most of the ethical concerns raised in this book.

While research ethics protocols place emphasis on protecting vulnerable and marginalised groups, they never reference the unique situation of girls and women—or the special circumstances of engaging with rurality or Indigenous groupings using visual data. This timely volume reminds us that there is need for special attention to the situated and relational nature of ethical issues and the promotion of thoughtful and reflexive research practice around such concerns. The chapters of the book foreground the notion of informed consent when working with girls and women as producers of knowledge addressing sexual and gender-based violence using visual methods, and the challenges of gaining approval from RECs. They highlight the issue of ongoing negotiated consent in research participation and the usage of produced visual data.

In her foreword, Claudia Mitchell² praises the editors and contributors of this volume regarding the production of complex work that “lays the foundation for deepening an understanding of what the global pandemic can teach us about transnationalism and ethical practice in working with girls and young women” (p. xi).

The book focuses on four central themes, namely, ethical practice, Indigeneity, rurality, and transnationalism. The first three chapters focus on the ethics of using participatory visual methodologies (PVM) with girls in different rural contexts. Naydene de Lange uses examples from her participatory visual work with young women in South Africa, in Chapter 1, to explore the questions: “Who is going public?” and “Who allows the going public?” She argues for university RECs to rethink what counts, and should count, as ethical practice in various forms of research, especially pertaining to participants sharing their visual work in public. Chapter 2 focuses on the challenges involved in seeking ethical approval for a research project aiming to create cellphilms with young people from rural areas who are non-binary. Casey Burkholder acknowledges the difficulty of claiming ethical practice in research conducted in Indigenous lands. Along the same lines, in Chapter 3, Astrid Treffry-Goatley, Lisa Wiebesiek, Naydene de Lange, and Relebohile Moletsane draw on their experience of working with girls in rural communities to reflect on how PVM facilitated transnational connections between girls living in Canada and South Africa in ways that did not put them at risk of harm. They suggest that PVM can offer traditionally marginalised participants opportunities to engage directly in research and produce visual media about their localised experiences despite their presumed vulnerability and systemic marginalisation.

The next three chapters focus on Indigeneity by exploring the ethical dilemmas arising from working with rural and Indigenous young women. Anna Chadwick, in Chapter 4, engages with the ethical and theoretical foundations of researching with Indigenous girls in northern Canada about sexualised violence. She reflects on using arts-based workshops with Indigenous girls and the ethical problems she encountered as a racialised diasporic researcher in a settler colonial country. Chapter 5 presents how the authors, Katie MacEntee, Jennifer Altenberg, Sarah Flicker, and Kari-Dawn Wuttunee, analysed the negotiation of consent during a project using cellphilm to explore young Indigenous women’s perceptions and responses to GBV. These authors draw attention to the importance of ethical conduct for research with young people and Indigenous communities. They conclude that allowing for the negotiation of terms of involvement in research by young women and their guardians

² Mitchell is a Distinguished James McGill Professor in the Faculty of Education, McGill University where she is Director of the Institute for Human Development and Well-being, founder and director of the Participatory Cultures Lab, and co-founder and Editor-in-Chief of the award-winning journal *Girlhood Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*.

could develop an ethical PVM practice. In Chapter 6, Tamlynn Jefferis and Sadiyya Haffejee reflect on disseminating their findings of research with black adolescent girls in rural South Africa and the ethical challenges that arose in this endeavour. They draw attention to the need for RECs to reevaluate their policies to incorporate PVM research processes in their principles. They argue for prioritising young women's voices in dissemination and social change agendas, and for negotiating anonymity with young women while foregrounding their voices.

Chapter 7 presents Milka Nyariro's negotiation of ethical tensions in a photovoice project with young mothers in Kenya and argues that RECs should consider the contextual differences between individual projects and acknowledge that ethical practice in research is not a linear process but a series of ongoing negotiations, reflections, interpretations, and experimentations. On the other hand, Jennifer Thompson, in Chapter 8, brings our attention to the complexities of using PVM in multilingual contexts. She draws on her photovoice and participatory video work with young women in Southwest Cameroon, exploring the power relations between researcher and participant by focussing on the politics of language. She concludes that little research has been done to investigate the ethical and methodological implications of language in participatory visual research. Hayley Crooks, in Chapter 9, reflects on the ethical issues of participatory video workshops with young people living in Montreal, Canada. Crooks draws attention to the impact of GBV on young people living in an urban community in Canada by uniquely focusing on the issue of cyberviolence, a form of GBV that affects young women in diverse transnational contexts.

A coda, which concludes the book, highlights the motivation for this volume on the ethical issues encountered by participatory visual researchers and the strategies they adopt to address them. It invites readers and researchers to consciously reflect and think about the ethics of doing participatory visual research with young women in rural and other marginalised communities. An important message that runs through the book is that researchers should recognise all participants in their projects as coresearchers, and cocreators and owners of knowledge.

This book is an important addition to girlhood studies, which is a growing field of study aimed at understanding and transforming the long-standing and paternalistic assumption that girls and young women are passive, incompetent, and inherently vulnerable research subjects (Clark & Moss, 2011) by working directly with them as both producers of knowledge and agents of change in their lives.

Ethical Practice in Participatory Visual Research with Girls: Transnational Approaches contributes to creating knowledge about ethical research practice and will be of interest to both emerging and experienced researchers investigating marginalised spaces and people. The book successfully shows readers different possibilities for working ethically and inclusively to bring about communal, individual, organisational, and professional change. Clearly, the authors and editors are promoters of ethical participatory community engagement for social change.

References

Clark, A., & Moss, P. (2011). *Listening to young children: The mosaic approach* (2nd ed.). National Children's Bureau.