Rewarding but let's talk about the challenges: using arts based methods in research with young mothers

Geraldine Brady and Geraldine Brown

Coventry University

Abstract

In this paper we highlight the way in which research around teenage pregnancy has been commissioned in relation to a specific agenda. The pervasive political discourse authoritatively places teenage parents' experiences outside of the norm, constructing teenage pregnancy as negative for young women, their children and wider society. Over several years we have worked with young mothers to produce visual resources including storyboards, story booklets and film which serve to challenge this dominant discourse. These resources have been used in training and cascaded to health and social care professionals to provide a more holistic picture of the lives of young parents which, in turn, has influenced changes in professional practice. We have found visual images to be a powerful way of encouraging practitioners, young people and wider society to question and reflect on stereotypes which permeate contemporary discourse relating to teenage parents. However, whilst using the arts has led to some very positive experiences for participants who have been able to utilise a range of art based mediums to express and share their lived reality with others, some methods - visual methods in particular - raise a number of ethical, moral and methodological issues. We suggest that whilst there is no doubt that arts based approaches to research and evaluation can be rewarding for both participants and researchers, our work with young mothers highlights tensions and challenges in utilising this approach.

Key words: Arts based methods, teenage pregnancy, young mothers, social change, representation, stigma

Introduction

The use of arts based approaches is growing amongst social researchers and increasingly arts based approaches are used in a range of ways - as a tool to gather data; as a way of engaging with participants and/or as a way of cascading and sharing findings. Such approaches have been referred to as 'found data, researcher-created data, respondent-created data and representations' (Wiles et al, 2012). However, simultaneously researchers have begun to question assumptions that arts based approaches are always participatory, inclusive, 'empowering' and that engaging in 'art' is inherently a good thing (Gallacher and Gallacher, 2005). On reflecting on our work, we have found the situation to be complex. Whilst using the arts has led to some very positive experiences for participants who have been able to utilise a range of art based mediums to express and share their lived reality with others, we are also aware that some methods - visual methods in particular - raise a number of ethical, moral and methodological issues for us as researchers and it is such issues that lay the foundation for this paper. We suggest that whilst there is no doubt that arts based approaches to research and evaluation can be rewarding for both participants and researchers, our work with young mothers forces us to recognise the potential tensions and challenges in utilising this approach.

Background: The construction of the problem of teenage motherhood

Over the past decade, reducing rates of teenage pregnancy in the UK became a national priority. Evidence for this can be seen in the launch of the previous UK government (New Labour) Teenage Pregnancy Strategy (TPS), set out in the Social Exclusion Report (1999) and the proliferation of policy and practice initiatives that ensued. A common feature that has dominated the political narrative is the linking of teenage pregnancy to a likelihood of social exclusion and to multiple negative risk factors. The report stated that teenage pregnancy is 'often a cause and a consequence of social exclusion (SEU, 1999:17) and accepted evidence that explicitly re-constructed and reaffirmed teenage pregnancy as a social and, more importantly, an economic time bomb if it was not addressed. Measures to address teenage pregnancy became key priorities for New Labour who set targets that required agencies to work in partnership, coordinated by Teenage Pregnancy Partnership Boards. Partnership working included providing funding for research, evaluation and training programmes to both prevent teenage pregnancy and to identify the support needs of teenage parents.

Insider voices: a form of resistance

In 2001 our research group, led by Gayle Letherby, began what is now over ten years of research and development projects with pregnant teenagers and young mothers. As feminist researchers a key goal of our approach was to carry out research that provided young women with an opportunity to have a 'voice' and for their voices to be heard. This was important as Anne Phoenix had long before drawn attention to the absence and/ or silencing of young women's voices in social research examining issues associated with teenage pregnancy. Phoenix (1988; 1991) argued that it was imperative to include the voices of pregnant teenagers and young mothers themselves in debates and discussions and in the construction of policies that impacted on their lives. Further, she drew attention to the importance of listening and learning directly from young mothers in order to gain a more holistic understanding of their experiences, which may lead to more effective policies and practice. Our approach to research has been to create a space where young women could offer an alternative narrative to the overwhelmingly dominant negative discourse that has increasingly characterised their experiences of pregnancy and motherhood. A need reflected in the work of others who have also questioned and challenged the continual negative representation that has dominated research, policy and practice (Bunting and McAuley, 2004; Arai 2007, 2009; Carabine, 2007; Graham and McDermott, 2005; Duncan et al, 2010).

Much of our qualitative research has been commissioned by Teenage Pregnancy Partnership Boards and has focused on illuminating many of the contradictions that have underpinned the dominant discourse that surrounds the knowledge generated about teenage pregnancy. Our focus is driven by our research which continually points to how the stigma of being young and pregnant or a young mother is often detrimental to the health and well-being of pregnant teenagers, young mothers and their child/ren. Arguing for an 'insider perspective' offers an alternative way of understanding teenage pregnancy and young parenthood and challenges the somewhat simplistic understandings which have dominated public and political discourse (Letherby et al, 2002; Brown et al, 2009). Driven by an agenda for social change our approach has allowed us to link the personal and the political (Mills, 1959; Stanley and Wise, 1993). Further, it has paved the way for us to engage in a range of developmental work, developing and delivering training programmes built around young women's stories, and attempted to initiate change which is beneficial in extending the traditional parameters of social research (Letherby and Bywaters, 2007).

This approach has lent itself effectively to the use of innovative and arts based approaches. We have worked with several young mothers to produce a range of resources, including: storyboards (2004-2006; 2005, 2007) and storybooklets (2008), where young mothers share their experiences of pregnancy and motherhood. We have also written short scripts, based on interview transcripts, and turned them into scenarios and a discussion

based film (2004-2006). And, most recently, young mothers engaged in a series of drama based workshops and were invited to produce digital stories about their lives (2012). (Appendix I provides further detail of the training and development projects that we have developed, managed and delivered, in order to provide context to the issues we raise in this paper).

Participatory arts based approaches

There is now an increasing body of work that documents the effectiveness of using the arts or creative approaches when working with people, particularly in the field of health care. Creative activities and health are an integral element of government policy and health guidelines (Department of Health, Arts Council England, 2007; Social Exclusion Unit, 2004). The link between (arts) activity and health is well established through research (for example, Greaves & Farbus, 2006; Howells & Zelnik, 2009; Hampshire & Matthijsse, 2010; Stacey & Stickley, 2010). The arts are considered a means of opening up engagement in new ways of expression and enthusiasm and encourage young people to participate in ways that are exciting, fun and inclusive. The production of arts based resources and visual materials is often a response to a directive linked to policy or public service provision. Bragg (2011) notes that: 'visual material [...] created specifically for the purpose, can be used as a stimulus that not only provides a way into talking about particular topics but can also generate different kinds of talk and conversation' (Harper, 2002 cited in Bragg, 2011). Until fairly recently visual methods have been relatively neglected in understandings of social life (Harrison, 2002) yet we have found drawing on a range of arts based methods to be a powerful way of accessing personal experiences, of encouraging young women to collectively express and make sense of life events.

As Fink and Lomax (2011) argue, using visual methods can be effective in problematising understandings of 'inequality through the essentialising and stereotyping discourses by which welfare subjects are constituted' (2011:2). Knowledge of everyday experiences of inequality are generated through collaborative interpretation and negotiation between researchers and participants (Fink and Lomax, 2011:4). In our research, the visual has a direct relationship to the research question being addressed and images are not merely used as illustrations. Having said that, we do not claim to have previously theorised the visual as a topic in and of itself, visual methods have been used as a means to encourage participation and to create a resource. Visual culture studies or visual sociology are fields in their own right. In making sense of our research experience we have drawn from a range of methodological literature whilst reiterating that our use of the arts has been to encourage participation from young women, with a wider goal of influencing a change in practice and generating a wider understanding about teenage pregnancy.

As we have often been part of the activities within our projects our approach to analysis takes into account the intellectual and personal presence of the researcher within the process (Cotterill and Letherby, 1993). As Letherby has recently reminded us: 'Feminist researchers argue that we need to consider how the researcher as author is positioned in relation to the research process, and to ignore the personal involvement of the researcher within research is to downgrade the personal' (2013:81) We adopt a reflexive stance to consider the challenges and complexities of using arts based methods. Increasingly, and based on our lived experience of using such methods, we are exploring the value of visual or arts-based methods through a critical lens. As time has gone on and we have undertaken other similar projects we have begun to reflect on our approach and wish to contribute to debates which recognise that using visual methods can be challenging if researchers are committed to socially just research. As researchers we have learnt along the way and we feel strongly that we have a responsibility to share our experience, to talk about what has worked well, where we have not been so successful and where hindsight has afforded the opportunity to reflect.

We are conscious, and have previously written about, the reluctance of academics to reveal tensions associated with their work (Brady et al 2007; Brady et al, 2012), the need to do so is particularly important

when using an approach that seeks to diminish power differentials and to engage service users and or participants. Most recently we have reflected on the impact which our actions may have on those with whom we are directly engaged when researching groups identified as marginalised service users and the way that grounded or bottom up knowledge is produced, received and valued (Brady et al 2012; Wilson et al, under review) and here we want to unpick further the methods which serve to capture personal images, artefacts, art work, video footage, visual stories - for time immemorial.

To date, we have used the resources developed by young mothers in training programmes, sharing them with health and social care professionals, and in our work with young people within schools as a means of working towards providing a more holistic and nuanced understanding of the lives of young mothers and their children. Reflecting on our experience up until this point is of interest because we have worked with many young mothers to create these visual mediums and had a positive response from young women who have participated in the projects. We have also had a very positive response from professionals who have been trained by young mothers, using visual material generated by young mothers and from wider audiences. Our own professional and personal fulfilment from working in this way has also been important, we have learnt more about the lives of young mothers than had we used only traditional qualitative methods.

However, our work raises a number of important questions for us, associated with both the process and the legacy of the projects, in relation to issues of anonymity, confidentiality and informed consent and the role of the researcher in the production of knowledge, which we feel it is important to consider. In drawing attention to these issues we necessarily need to include examples of the images created in order to demonstrate our argument. We recognise the somewhat contradictory nature of our position here, however, it poignantly and powerfully illustrates the points which we are making.

Anonymity, confidentiality and Informed consent

During each of the projects the workshops provided a space for young mothers to interpret, give meaning to and make sense of their personal experiences. At the same time, our aim was to locate this experience within a social and political context. We talked about teenage pregnancy policy, the role of services and barriers to accessing services, portrayals of teenage pregnancy in the media and societal attitudes and perceptions. The activities were purposeful and politically driven by our aim of addressing inequality and injustice. Storyboards, booklets, DVD's, scenarios were deployed to provide those participating in our training courses with bottom up, first hand, knowledge of teenage pregnancy in order to increase understanding. Although this was respondent created material it was not for the purpose of a research project, to be analysed, but as a resource to be shared with practitioner/professional trainees. As such, the resources were not treated as data, as they would have been if part of a research project. Each of the resources created uses real names, and some include the names of children or other family members, agencies and organisations of support and the young woman and her child's own personal and very much identifiable image.

FIGURE 1: An example of a storyboard designed and developed by Kerryann, which provides an insight to her life as a young mother:

Being a Young Parent

A Challenging start

My name is Kerryann and this is my daughter Maikydah. I was 17 years old when I became pregnant. This is my Storyboard.

Most people think that young parents sit at home all day on benefits, but this is far from the truth. I have turned my experience of becoming a young mum into a positive one.

A busy time

I run or take part in a lot of projects with young people within connexions. I've just started a fast track course NVQ 2 in Youth Work and will be attending university in September studying Youth and Community Work

My daughter the motivator

I wouldn't change having my daughter for the world. If anything she motivates me to achieve more for her.

Leicester City
Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood Partnership

Coventry University

FIGURE 2: Example pages from a storybooklet created by Anne-Marie

My name is Anne-Marie and I am 19 years old, I have a daughter called Emily who is 5 years old and another baby due in November 2008. I have been with my partner for 3 years now and we rent a house together. He works full time and I finished working full time back in March, when I found out I was pregnant again.

I fell pregnant with my daughter when I was 13 years old from my 'first time'. Everyone thinks it won't happen to you but it did, to me. The father didn't want to know. My family didn't find out until was 5 months pregnant. It was very tough but I didn't want to give up my baby or my schooling so managed to have both. I went back to school when Emily was 4 months old and completed my GCSE's, coming out with 10 A-Cs.

I moved in with my partr after my GCSE's but I st continued at sixth form and gained 3 A levels and AS level whilst running a house and looking after r family. This enabled me t start working for a high street bank.

Coventry University

The inclusion of names and photographs was necessary to tell the biographical story of each teenage parent and bring to life the more generalised picture of teenage pregnancy often presented in policy and the media. Sharing such life stories with those we have been training has been powerful and emotive responses have been

illicited on a number of occasions from professionals and practitioners that may have begun our training programme with fairly fixed views, often regarding teenage pregnancy in the UK as problematic. Seeing the 'backstory' to the statistics encourages professionals to stop and to think that each of these 'teenage pregnancies' is a person, young mothers are a diverse group, each young family's circumstances are different.

Having used such methods for some years now and having co-created a range of materials we have begun to question the lack of anonymity afforded the young mothers and their family members. Wiles' et al's research (2010) on ethical regulation found visual researchers' views were on a continuum, with strong views either for or against anonymity being expressed at either end. Those who argued against felt it important to protect participants' identity whilst those in favour of not anonymising images supported the idea that participants were both seen and heard. Wiles et al note that this issue is a source of contention and conflict for visual researchers and remains unresolved. Whilst we were passionate about defending the right of young mothers to have a voice and to tell their story in order to challenge the stereotypical view we also tried to make it clear what the participants were agreeing to. We focused on reminding them that they would be exposing personal details to representatives from organisations that would be taking part in the training programme, we highlighted that we would encourage trainees to take the resources back to their organisations and share them with colleagues. We emphasised that their words and pictures would be in public places for a range of people to see.

The young women's investment in the projects was such that they were passionate about telling their story to people who needed to know. We took a more cautious approach and checked and double checked that they were comfortable with how the resources would be used. We questioned whether we were being over-protective to the point of denying agency or whether, as experienced researchers, we should be prepared to make some difficult decisions. In writing this paper the process of selecting images to demonstrate our point was not straightforward and led to much discussion. We agreed on which storyboard we wanted to incude and decided that we would not use the visual image or link the text to the young woman's name. However, we agreed to share a quote from the storyboard in order to illustrate our dilemma:

> 'I am 18 and I have a daughter of 17 months...It wasn't a planned pregnancy and I wasn't using contraception at the time, just alcohol... Her dad wasn't pleased and wanted me to have an abortion... I think it was because he was much older and didn't want to tell his parents... looking back I can see how he took advantage because I was young, I was only 16. I think it is important to include this in my story because people need to know how men are and that not all pregnancies are just a mistake due to not using contraception. He used to pretend he was my friend and ply me with vodka and whisky. He was 32 then. I met him at a bus stop. I was at the bus stop with my friend and he was in a window opposite waving. His mate came out and said 'you can have his number'.

This extract touches on a number of issues, including what might be termed coercive sex, issues of power and control and a strong desire from the young woman for others to learn from her personal experience. Power, control and abuse are often hidden features of young mothers' relationships (Brown et al, 2011) and can remain invisible as much public focus is on the behaviour of young women, rather than the fathers of their babies. Highlighting this issue is therefore important, however, in essence, the dilemma for us as researchers here is that when sensitive or personal issues are disclosed it is difficult to control who will see the storyboard, where it is seen and for how long following the close of the project. Whilst our aim in using such methods is participatory and could be said to be emancipatory, creative methods can be used in the service of quite different methodologies, epistemologies and ontologies (Gallacher, 2009) Without the wider context of the project for which the resources were created, this young mother could be negatively viewed as a victim or as

irresponsible and, unlike in an interview where her quote would be anonymised with the use of a pseudonym, not only her name but her photograph and that of her child are available for all to see.

Our team have reflected on and discussed the criteria that we use in selecting when to use our visual resources in teaching, training, presenting and in writing. Making the decision when to use them is often based on a number of factors, including the context, the audience and the response that we hope to elicit. In our position as researchers, although impossible to predict, we need to consider the long term implications of resources which include personal images and details of the lives of young mothers. This leads us to question what 'informed consent' really means. As with any kind of qualitative project we regarded it important to gain the consent of the young women taking part in interviews, discussions or workshops to develop resources and materials. For each project we devised a Participant Information sheet and consent form and also verbally talked through the information in order to check that participants understood their role. Consent forms also made reference to the use of images as well as words and a separate box was to be ticked to grant this consent. In hindsight, we recognise that we could have been clearer about how such resources might survive beyond the life of the particular project but we had not considered this ourselves at the time (particularly in the earlier projects).

So questions raised for us include: are the 'young' (some of them are no longer young) mothers aware that their images may still be being used? How would they feel if they knew? Should we be treating such materials or artefacts as data, and consider destroying them after the requisite number of years? We have also considered whether we, the researchers, may feel more strongly than the young women do? Are they still proud of their involvement in the project and the materials they created? At the time they often spoke of a sense of pride in sharing with their friends and families what they were contributing. If participants are happy to take part and to tell their story in order to challenge the stigma that they face do they have the right to be seen and heard? Or, as researchers who may be more aware of the long term implications of words and image being made public should we have considered the long term implications and advised against involvement in some cases? We would not wish to deny a young woman's agency and have always been clear that we would not feel comfortable in anonymising images (as with pixels); to us, this would be akin to erasing identity. As in the example given above, this young mother insisted that others need to know that not all teenage pregnancies come about from consensual sex. All of the above draws attention to the importance of the role of the researcher in the production of knowledge.

Role of the researcher in the production of knowledge: Good intentions, positive outcomes?

The use of participatory methods is often equated with enabling the exercise of agency as children/young people become involved in the construction of knowledge about themselves. But crucial to a just endeavour is the way in which researchers engage; being honest and open about what they aim to achieve and prioritising a discussion of 'the messy contingencies of research encounters' (Gallacher and Gallacher, 2005:8). In Thomson and Holland's use of memory books (2005) they found that the approach allowed for participants to drive the project, rather that the research agenda to drive it. We have had varying success with this, given that all of the projects referred to here were commissioned pieces of research or training. Whilst we have allowed for creativity and new ideas we have also at times been constrained by time and resources (Brady et al 2012) and not always been able to fulfil the expectations of the young women.

Influenced by our career journeys – which began in a research group entitled the Centre for Social Justice, led by Gayle Letherby and Paul Bywaters - research, for us, is inalienably and inevitably political and involves three intersecting interests: those of researchers, of research participants and those of individual, groups and institutions with the power to influence research priorities through funding, policy-making and other processes. Key to our overarching approach to research has been an attempt to extend the parameters of social

research. In this, we are not claiming that our approach is new or unique, but that a key question we consider, at the planning stage of our work, is how can research be more effectively used to influence policy making and practice through the process of 'knowledge transfer or through strengthening a more accessible 'evidence base – the idea that social research should grapple with issue of relevance, applicability and impact (Letherby and Bywaters, 2007).

A key aspect of our philosophy is that involvement with the research community does not end at the presentation of the findings (Letherby, Brady and Brown, 2007) or delivery of a training programme. Our orientation to producing change has led us to become increasingly involved in the application and implementation of findings in our projects. Alongside our interest in understanding the issue of teenage pregnancy has come an emphasis on action. This entails an appreciation of the 'impact' on others of the products produced through engagement in research and the 'impact' of all of those involved in the research process.

In our most recent project, tasked with developing a film to be used in Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) lessons within schools young mothers strongly influenced the idea of the resource they wished to create. They wanted to create and produce a digital story (a short form of digital film making which allows people to share aspects of their life story) which would be used to reach a wide audience of young people and professionals. This was achieved through discussing issues related to their first hand experiences of becoming pregnant as a teenager. The films consisted of an audio recorded interview which formed the basis for the artistic development of the final version of the digital story. The film maker used artefacts, graphics and animation alongside the oral narrative, young women had the opportunity to listen to their recording and approve it in advance. They had less control over the final editing process, preferring to leave that to the film maker, but importantly they trusted him with their stories. Drawing on photographs and text individual digital stories were created in order to provide school aged young people and professionals with an insight into their lives. The individuality of each story challenged the overwhelmingly negative image of 'the teenage mum' whilst giving a realistic picture of sex, relationships and parenting. The participants commented on the making of the digital stories, based on their own experiences:

> 'I am hoping to educate other young people, how it really is being a parent. It's not like it is
> on television or you see in magazines because they make it look really easy and it is really
> hard…I am not going to say it is terrible being a mum but it is hard.'

It was acknowledged by all that the young women invested heavily in the project and were keen to stay involved until the next phase of the project – piloting the RSE lessons in schools. They wanted to see how the resource that they had created was going to be responded to by young people within schools:

> 'Umm to get out of the project I would like other people... to see... that it's not all bad... being
> a parent, being young because obviously most of the people are stereotypical [stutters]. We're
> put in one box and we're all bad, we're all hoodlums, hoodlums, whatever you call it. We all
> wear hoodies and we are all bad people and all bad parents because we are young, but we are
> not.'

An emerging theme in the evaluation of the Creative Gymnasium project, discussed at length elsewhere (Letherby et al, 2002; 2007; Brown et al 2009; Brady et al 2012) was that the young mothers were living with a sense of social stigma, which impacted on their identity as mothers. Using the arts to work through life events over a period of time allowed for expression of such feelings:

> 'It's made me realise, I knew before but it's made me realise even more because I had stick
> for being pregnant at sixteen for it, from my mum, my sister, umm my brothers weren't really

too bothered, they're boys and don't really care normally. And it's just made me realise I didn't do a bad thing pregnant at sixteen. Yeah it was bad to some people but to me, she saved me you know. I wouldn't be the person I am today if I didn't have her, it's as simple at that , I really wouldn't, it made me realise how much I actually do love her. You know what I mean, how nice it is for me to have her in my life.'

This stigma of being a young mother has been likened to a 'social death' (Whitehead, 2001, cited by Arai, 2009) and this sense of stigmatisation endures, often into grandparenthood (Formby, Hirst and Owen, 2010). Young mothers' own experiences of being marginalised makes challenging this all the more difficult. Although young mothers may resist aspects of the dominant negative discourse they accept and aspire to other aspects, thus the insider perspective is not a simple rejection of the outsider view but a complex mixture of acceptance and resistance' (Bailey et al, 2002). So whilst involving young people in research and development has the potential to open up opportunities for people it also has the potential to reinforce certain ideas which can potentially be disempowering, and this is not often talked about openly (Brady et al, 2012). The film made by four young mothers goes some way to addressing this:

FIGURE 3: I love you 10 much mummy - https://vimeo.com/48154686 (Belgrade Theatre Community and Education Company, 2012)

Legacy of creative materials

It is well known that schools often have RSE resources and continue to use them long after they have become dated. One of the authors has personal experience of this. In the 1980's Geraldine Brady's mother featured in a pro-life video, which was screened at the school that she attended. It was rather embarrassing at the time but had long been forgotten about it until Geraldine's daughter, who later attended the same school, came home and said that a film about abortion was shown in Religious Education and her friends had all shouted 'Ha ha! That's your Nan talking!' whilst watching it. As Geraldine's mother was no longer involved in the pro-life/anti-abortion organisation any memory of her role in being part of the film had long faded so the recounting of this incident took everyone involved by surprise. In drawing a parallel, the digital stories made by the young mothers associated with the project above could well be shown within school in fourteen years time in the presence of the women's daughters or sons; this warrants thinking through the implications for hearing that their mother considered an abortion when pregnant or had first sex when aged 12 or was not treated well by her parents. Such examples have led us to seriously consider whether the resources we help to create should almost have a 'shelf life' as there is no control over who might access them and for how long. Communicating this to stakeholders and partners in research projects is important too, in projects which utilise arts based or visual methods a continual process of negotiation, discussion and reflection should be applied to issues around consent, confidentiality and anonymity. Any discussion should include the ethical handling of data or project outputs and their use and availability beyond the lifetime of the study (Brady and Brown, unpublished; Savin-Baden et al, 2013).

A number of issues are raised in a practical sense - situations change, relationships may come to an end, people who are captured in the images may even die. These are all notes of caution, however, for us the more crucial question has become this: in our attempt to problematise the stereotypes relating to teenage pregnancy and parenting are we in some way prolonging the stigma and reinforcing it through the creation of visual mediums which exist long beyond the duration of a research or training project? This is an issue that has been raised in other areas of research, but in our quite specific case the passage of time will actually mean that the 'teenage parent' will no longer be a 'teenage parent'. We have become concerned that we may be assigning a fixed identity to the young mothers who have worked alongside us to produce these visual materials. In our own lives and in our own writings we all acknowledge growth, development and change; we also recognise

that our identity changes and there are aspects which we choose to emphasise or play down. We ask whether the existence of these visual resources is preventing the participants from being able to do this – their teenage/young mother identity is their primary identity in our work. Allan (2012) urges researchers to – 'recognise the particular knowledges, subjectivities and truths that are constituted as a result' of using visual methods (Allan, 2012). Whilst such methods can be an opportunity for young people to express their views, to represent themselves and to counteract stereotypes researchers 'need to closely examine the ways in which our relationships with our participants and our methods may lead to the production of particular knowledges, truths and subjectivities' (Allan, 2012:5), such methods are not simply about 'Giving young people a voice'.

This draws attention to the lack of control that those who contribute to research through creative methods may have over the way in which their stories will be used, and with what surrounding narrative they might be presented. For instance, we may present their story in a balanced or positive light whilst someone else may choose to use it to prevent teenage pregnancy by emphasising the hardships involved in being a young mother. Visual methods are not keys to the truth but the tools that create them (Back, 2007 – in Allan 2012). Researchers too lack control over their outputs at times, in drawing on our own experience we recall that some time ago we were approached to write a positive account of our research and training for a midwifery practitioner publication, which we did. However, when we received our copy of the magazine we were unimpressed with the front cover picture which made reference to our article next to a very stereotypical image of a pregnant teenager.

Reflections

In this paper we have explored some of the strengths and challenges of visual and arts based methods and asked whether such methods are of value in addressing inequality and challenging negative assumptions made about young mothers. Policy seeks to define appropriate sexuality, motherhood and family forms; our aim in encouraging young mothers to give their own accounts is to influence policy making and practice and to have a positive impact on the lives of young parents. As Letherby and Bywaters (2007) argue, many social researchers adopt methods and approaches arising from principles of social justice and aim to provide individuals and groups with both a voice and some control over the research process. Attention to the process of research as well as the outcome or output is essential when aiming to firstly influence social change and secondly behave both ethically and responsibly. We should always regard the process and the journey as important as the resource or output and by that we mean the extended process, past the life of the research project.

It has been argued that ethical regulation poses challenges for researchers who use visual methods (Wiles 2012), to the point that ethical governance could lead some research to be impossible to carry out (Wiles et al, 2010). Critical reflection by researchers is fundamental. Throughout our research and development projects ethical considerations are on-going, we see consent as more than a one off process. We still strongly feel that using the arts in the way that we have helps to enhance understanding. We are also keen to claim that our findings have been made more accessible to people outside academia than research reports and academic journal papers and hope that we have reached a wider, or certainly a different, audience than we would have by using traditional methods and more traditional forms of cascading findings. As Mannay reminds us: '[...] we need to disseminate our findings in ways that not only contribute to policy debates, offer innovative methodological techniques and further theoretical dialogue, but also connect with readers at an affective level (Mannay, forthcoming:p 9)

This paper has particularly highlighted outputs and the moral and ethical implications of their longevity. Whilst a range of visual and personal images may be accessible on publicly created websites this is not an argument for a more casual approach to the use of images by researchers; fundamental to the

researched/researcher relationship is an issue of power, so we advise that researchers are clear about their aims and objectives in designing such projects. As researchers we need to bear in mind that the knowledge produced can be perceived and interpreted differently by different audiences, in time, place, context (Harrison 2002; Lomax and Fink 2010; Rose 2007). Audiences actively make sense of visual media, they do not simply passively absorb but experience a lived engagement with the visual (Lomax and Fink, 2010). We would like the legacy of our development work to be evidence of change in attitude and practice amongst not just those we have trained but all those that have come into contact with the stories of the lives of young mothers.

Acknowledgements:

References:

Allan, A. (2012) Power, participation and privilege – methodological lessons from using visual methods in research with Young people, *Sociological Research Online*, 17 (3): 8

Arai , L. (2007) Peer and neighbourhood influences on teenage pregnancy and fertility: qualitative findings from research in English communities, *Health and Place*, 13 (1): 87-98

Arai, L. (2009) *Teenage Pregnancy: the making and unmaking of a problem*. Bristol: Policy Press

Bailey, N., Brown, G., Letherby, G. and Wilson, C. (2002) The Baby Brigade in *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering*, Spring/Summer 2002 Vol.4:No1

Back, L. (2007) The Art of Listening. Oxford: Berg cited in A. Allan (2012) Power, participation and privilege – methodological lessons from using visual methods in research with Young people, *Sociological Research Online*, 17 (3): 8

Belgrade Theatre Community and Education Company (2012) 'Under Pressure' – I love you 10 much mummy digital story, part of 'Creative Gymnasium' project. Filmmaker Chris Bradley. Funder: Esmee Fairbairn Foundation.

Brady, G., Bywaters, P., Knyspel, M., Letherby, G. and Steventon, G. (2007) 'Outcomes' in G. Letherby and P. Bywaters (eds) *Extending Social Research: application, implementation and publication*. Buckingham: Open University Press

Brady, G., Brown, G. 'The relevance of visual media in influencing social change', unpublished conference paper presented in workshop at ESRC Visual Methods Seminar Series 'Visual Dialogues': new agendas in inequalities research, Open University, October 2010

Brady, G. Brown, G. and Wilson, C. (2012) Young mothers' experiential knowledge and the research process in M. Barnes and P. Cotterell (eds*) Critical Perspectives on User Involvement*. Bristol: Policy Press

Bragg, S. (2011). "Now it's up to us to interpret it": 'youth voice' and visual methods in P. Thomson and J. Sefton-Green (eds) *Researching Creative Learning: Methods and Issues.* London and New York: Routledge

Brown, G., Brady, G., Wilson, C. and Letherby, G. (2009) Teenage pregnancy and young parenthood: questioning the inevitability of 'risk', lone motherhood and social exclusion in N. Johns and A. Barton (eds) *Evaluating the political achievement of New Labour since 1997: social policy and the public trust*. Ceridigion: Edwin Mellen

Brown, G. Brady, G. and Letherby,G. (2011) 'Young mothers experiences of power, control and violence within intimate and familial relationships' *Child Care in Practice Special Issue: Effective interventions with children and families exposed to domestic violence* Volume 17, Issue 4, p359-374

Bunting, L. and McCauley, C. (2004) Research review: teenage pregnancy and motherhood – the construction of support. *Child and Family Social Work*, 9, (2): 207-215

Carabine, J. (2007) New Labour's Teenage Pregnancy Strategy, *Cultural Studies*, 21, (6):952-973

Cotterill, P. and Letherby, G. (1993) Weaving stories: personal auto/biographies in feminist research, *Sociology* 27 (1) 67-80

Coppock, V. (2011) Children as peer researchers: reflections on a journey of mutual discovery, *Children and Society*, 25, (6): 435-446;

Department of Health, Arts Council England (2007) A prospectus for Arts and Health, http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication_archive/a-prospectus-for-rts-and-health (accessed 8.3.12)

Duncan, S., Edwards, R. and Alexander, C (eds) (2009) *Teenage parenthood: what's the problem?* Tuffnell Press: London

Fink, J. and Lomax, H. (2011) Introduction: Inequalities, Images and Insights for policy and research. *Critical Social Policy*, 6 December 2011

Formby, E., Hirst, J. and Owen, J. (2010) Pathways to adulthood: reflections from three generations of young mothers and fathers in S. Duncan, R. Edwards and C. Alexander (eds) *Teenage Parenthood: what's the problem?* London: the Tufnell Press

Greaves, C. J. and Farbus, L. (2006) Effects of creative and social activity on the health and well-being of socially isolated older people: outcomes from a multi-method observational study. *The Journal of the Royal Society for the Promotion of Health*, 126 (3): 134-142

Gallacher, M. and Gallacher, L. (2005) Participatory methods in research with children: a critique www.geos.ed.ac.uk/homes/s0453363/brunelpaperpdf

Gallacher, M. (2009) 'Data collection and analysis' in E. K. M. Tisdall, J. M. Davis and M. Gallacher. *Researching with Children and Young People*. London: Sage

Graham, H. and McDermott, E. (2005) Qualitative research and the evidence base of policy: insights from studies of teenage mothers in the UK, *Journal of Social Policy*, 35 (1):21-37

Hampshire, K. R. and Matthijsse, M. (2010) Can arts projects improve young people's wellbeing? A social capital approach. *Social Science and Medicine*, 71 (4): 708-716;

Harrison, B. (2002) Seeing health and illness worlds – using visual methodologies in a sociology of health and illness: a methodological review, *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 24 (6): 856-872

Howells, V. and Zelnik, T. (2009) Making art: a qualitative study of personal and group transformation in a community arts studio. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, 32 (3): 215-222

Letherby, G., Brown, G., DiMarco, H., and Wilson, C. (2002) *Pregnancy and postnatal experience of young women who become pregnant under the age of twenty years report*. Centre for Social Justice: Coventry University

Letherby, G. Brady, G. and Brown, G. (2007) Working with the community: research and action in C.J. Clay, M. Madden and L. Potts (eds) *Towards understanding community: people and places*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

Letherby, G. and Bywaters, P.(eds) (2007) *Extending Social Research: application, implementation and publication.* Buckingham: Open University Press

Letherby, G. (2013) 'Theorised Subjectivity' in Letherby, G., Scott, J. and Williams, M. *Objectivity and Subjectivity in Social Research*. London: Sage

Lomax, H. and Fink, J. (2010) Interpreting images of motherhood: the contexts and dynamics of collective viewing, *Sociological Research Online* 15 (3)

Mannay, D. (forthcoming) The visual, the narrative and the ethical: exploring landscapes of trust, confidentiality, silence; and the unintended consequences of ethnographic research in O. Jones, J Van Maanen and F Worthington (eds) *Challenges in Ethnography: political, ethical, practical*. Bingley: Emerald

Mills, C W (1959) *The Sociological Imagination*. London: Penguin

Phoenix, A. (1988) 'Narrow definitions of culture: the case of early motherhood' in S Westwood and P. Bachu (eds) *Enterprising women: ethnicity, economy and gender relations*. London: Routledge

Phoenix, A. (1991) Mothers under twenty: outsider and insider views in A. Phoenix, A. Woollett and E. Lloyd (eds) *Motherhood: meanings, practices and ideologies*. London: Sage Publications

Savin Baden, M. Brady, G. Wimpenny, K. and Brown, G. (2013) *Evaluation of the Belgrade Theatre's Creative Gymnasium project.* (Esmee Fairbairn Foundation). Learning Innovation Research Group/SURGE: Coventry University

Sinclair, R. (2004) Participation in practice: making it meaningful, effective and sustainable, *Children and Society*, 18:106-118

Social Exclusion Unit (1999) *Teenage Pregnancy*. London: The Stationery Office

Social Exclusion Unit (2004) *Mental health and social exclusion*: Social Exclusion Unit report

Stacey, G. and Stickley, T. (2010) The meaning of art to people who use mental health services. *Perspective in Public Health*. 130 (2): 70-77

Stanley, L. and Wise, S. (1993) *Breaking Out Again: Feminist ontology and epistemology*.   London:

Routledge

Thomson, R. and Holland, J. (2005) Thanks for the memory: memory books as a methodological resource in biographical research. *Qualitative Research*, 5 (2): 201-219

Whitehead, E. (2001) Teenage pregnancy: on the road to social death. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 38, (4): 437-446

Wiles, R. Coffey, A. Robison, J. and Heath, S. Anonymisation and visual images: issues of respect, 'voice' and protection. *NCRM working paper series* (2010) ESRC National Centre for Research Methods

Wiles, R., Coffey, A., Robison, J. and Prosser, J (2012) Ethical regulation and visual methods: making visual research impossible or developing good practice. *Sociological Research Online* 17 (1) 8

Wilson, C., Letherby, G., Brown, G. and Brady, G. (under review) Personal and political reflections on research with young parents *Sociological Research Online*