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Lessons from Photoelicitation: Encouraging Working Men to Speak.

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Lessons from Photoelicitation: Encouraging Working Men to Speak

Abstract

Purpose: This article explores the possibilities of incorporating such visual methods as photoelicitation and photovoice into qualitative research in order to retrieve something that, as a result of particular group socialisation, has been hidden, unspoken of or marginalised.

Design/methodology/approach: The research design combines 40 in-depth verbal interviews with male butchers with the use of photoelicitation and photovoice in order to increase participants' control of data generation.

Findings: Results suggest that photoelicitation enabled working class men to engage with themes which are rarely reflected on or discussed; which may sit uneasily with desired presentations of self; and which challenge traditional notions of gendered work. It prompted participants to elaborate and translate their daily experiences of physical labour into more expressive and detailed accounts. This provided room for the display of positive emotions and self-evaluation and the surfacing of the aesthetics and the pleasures of the trade – aspects that might otherwise have been concealed as a result of adherence to identity affirming norms. Photoelicitation also evoked powerful nostalgic themes about the past: a lament for the loss of skills; the passing of the time of closer communities and more traditional values.

Originality/value: The use of photovoice and photoelicitation in the exploration of a class and gendered 'habitus' has highlighted the power of visual methods to offer a closer look at what participants considered important, to open space for the emergence of unexpected topics and themes and to allow for more comprehensive and reflective elaboration on specificities of personal experiences and emotions.

Key words: photoelicitation, photovoice, dirty work, masculinity

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Introduction

This paper sets out to explore how photoelicitation can facilitate the production of data in the context of researched groups whose members might lack the competency and confidence to recount their experiences. The adequacy of linguistic representation depends upon the ability to articulate deep-rooted, sensual experiences of the world via linguistic practices and discursive resources. However, some groups might not be used to narrative disclosure and may have a circumscribed relation to the written and spoken word – and therefore fail to satisfy their expressive needs through the linguistic forms available to them (Charlesworth, 2000). Current research reveals that visually based research techniques can provide data that might otherwise be unavailable via language-centred procedures and approaches (Raggl and Schratz, 2004). This paper seeks to gain a more nuanced understanding of how the use of visual methods, in particular photoelicitation and photovoice, can help draw the expression of life experiences, facets of self-reflection and the discursive rendering of emotions, all of which were concealed or under-explored during a parallel set of verbal interviews.

At the most basic level, photoelicitation is a process of including a single picture or a set of photographs into a research interview (Harper, 2002). The technique typically involves inviting subjects variously to produce and/or react to images in relation to relevant social concerns and life experiences (Zenkov and Harmon, 2009). Drawing on a view that there can be important differences in how we react to different modes of symbolic representation – principally, between the visual and textual – this methodological approach emphasises the power of image in perceptive, interpretive and reflexive processes. The significance of this technique, and indeed, the ascendancy of visual methods more generally, are indicative of broader social changes. In contemporary Western societies, the visual domain has come to assume a hitherto unprecedented cultural centrality. Daily life is replete with a potentially endless stream of images and other visual messages: from the electronic and paper-based billboards of the street, to the TV and Internet feeds of the home. The visual has become imbued with a symbolic potency, a signifying power

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that seemingly eclipses that of all other sensory data. The cultural primacy of images and visual signs also affords them a central role in promoting and facilitating the formation, reflection, and inflection of what we 'take for granted' about the world (Sontag, 1977). Importantly, the method of photoelicitation calls attention to the fact that the visible does not just bring the world to us, we also use it to introduce ourselves to the world, to attach meanings and values to what we are and who we intend to be. In this way images provide a means for us to orientate ourselves to others, and 'our selves' to ourselves. Not only does contemporary culture demonstrate our reliance on images to comprehend the world and ourselves, our dependence upon images is also testament to an ongoing struggle and frequent frustration with the arbitrariness, constraints and limitations of any available linguistic forms.

This paper addresses a significant gap in the area of visual methods development. Following Parker's (2009) suggestion that the use of visual images can trigger a more vigorous exploration of a particular phenomenon and its context and challenge conventional wisdom or previously accepted stereotypes (Edwards, 2001, Parker, 2009), this paper illustrates the potentialities of the method to retrieve something that has been hidden, unspoken of or marginalised as a result of particular group socialisation or conventional understanding. It is driven by the belief that increased participation control of data generation through the production of visual images will help illuminate important aspects of lived experience that might otherwise have been overlooked (or ignored) by researchers. Drawing on the existing literature the first section of the paper examines the challenges and potentialities of photoelicitation as a methodological approach. Using the visual data collected during a recent research project on working class men doing 'dirty work' the paper then illustrates the possible use of photoelicitation as a way of developing, elaborating and particularizing participants' narrative accounts, and foregrounding concealed and under-explored dimensions of 'dirty work'. The central themes which are identified in the data are as follows: first, pride in the physicality of the job and in the development of physical skills and the importance of body knowledge, second, the intensification of nostalgic feelings about the past including the loss of skills and the passing of the time of closer communities and more traditional values; third, the revelation of hidden aesthetic pleasures and emotional enjoyment.

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Photoelicitation: its challenges and promise

Photoelicitation as a methodological and analytical tool has principally been developed within the disciplines of anthropology and sociology, but has more recently been adopted by researchers from within such diverse fields as cultural geography, queer studies, health psychology, and organizational and management research (Banks, 2001; Clark-Ibanez, 2007; Harper, 2002; Pink, 2004, Warren, 2008, Davison and Warren, 2009), and increasingly discussed in a number of dedicated visual research journals (i.e. *Visual Studies* and *Visual Anthropology*). Photoelicitation has also been widely used in the studies of social class (Barndt, 1990, Steiger, 1995), social identities through biographical and autobiographical research (Clark, 1999, Smith and Woodward, 1999, Spence, 1986), organizational environment through visual ethnographies (Pink, 2001, Warren, 2002), in cultural studies (Faccioli and Zuccheri, 1998), in the investigation of communities and in the development of historical ethnographies (Harper, 2001). Being initially conceptualized as a group-based participatory health promotion strategy (Wang and Burris, 1997) photoelicitation has been an increasing feature of health research (Guillemin and Drew, 2010) and research involving vulnerable groups (Clark, 1999; Gabhainn and Sixsmith, 2006; Punch, 2002). It has been employed in the studies attending to the experiences of young people with chronic illnesses (Guillemin and Drew, 2010). Recently, it has received growing attention in the management field including the area of accounting and accountability (Davison and Warren, 2009). The latest special issue on imag(in)ing accounting and accountability has demonstrated that using visual methods and artefacts opens an entire new domain of understanding and communication in the area of business and financial management (Davison and Warren, 2009).

Photoelicitation is regularly adopted by scholars as part of research strategies which aim to bridge the social and cultural distance between the life worlds of researchers and research subjects (Harper and Faccioli, 2000; Wagner, 1979), often highlighting dynamics and insights not otherwise found through alternative methodological approaches (Clark-Ibanez, 2004, p. 1524). However, the readings of the term 'elicitation' in the context of visual methodologies remains an object of wide debate, with one perspective

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holding that images can be used as 'tools' in the research process in order to help researchers obtain

knowledge by eliciting an 'admission' or 'answer' from an informant, effectively 'teasing out' the 'facts' that

are otherwise hidden in the visual data. Another suggestion is that elicitation is better conceived as a

collaboration between researcher and informant to develop multiple interpretations and perceptions. As

such, this does not generate simply more information, but different kinds of information facilitating a

dialogue that spans the life-worlds of interviewees and ethnographers (Pink 2001). In this paper, we are

effectively drawing from both traditions through recognising, on the one hand, that photoelicitation does

not simply involve the 'recounting' of 'recovered fragments of the real world' and that meanings are as

much produced as reproduced in research encounters. Nonetheless, through our methodological

comparisons we are able to show how photoelicitation permits the collaborative production of

interpretations which have greater adequacy as 'discursive vehicles of experience' than those contained in

the data gleaned from verbal interviews alone (Pink, 2001).

The type of photographs and images used by researchers varies widely in terms of how formal and

informal, personal and collective, memorable and casual they are. Photoelicitation might involve using a

single picture or a set of photographs within a research interview to help facilitate collaborative discussion.

Previous research has made use of existing images for elicitation: including visual inventories of objects and

artefacts, historical images of collective and institutional pasts, family portraits and personal images, plus a

range of newly generated images created solely for the purposes of interview (Harper, 2002). The approach

also differs in terms of whether photos are researcher- or participant -generated (Harper, 2003). The

decision on who takes the photographs can be informed by a number of different factors. These include:

individual abilities, participants' familiarity with technology, their willingness to be photographed, research

context and practical constraints presented by the environment in which the photographs are to be taken.

Researcher-produced photographs can be more conducive to theory-driven research in as much as

researchers themselves can choose objects or themes which might have been omitted or otherwise

dismissed (Clark-Ibanez, 2004; Pink, 2001). Participant-generated photoelicitation, also known, as auto

driven photoelicitation (Samuels, 2007, p.198), emphasises a participant's role in shaping the selection

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process and creation of visual images. This approach greatly augments a participant's involvement in the generation of data to be interpreted, and enhances the participants' familiarity with the images used for the purposes of research. Auto driven photoelicitation is characteristically employed to prompt alternative views from participants, unveil hidden or disregarded attitudes, beliefs or meanings, or to investigate group dynamics.

As Oliffe and Bottorff (2007) have argued, methods of research using photographic imagery can be powerful tools in giving voice to marginalised groups (see also, Harper, 2002). Here they distinguish between *photovoice* to acknowledge participants as authors of the photographs and *photoelicitation* to describe the process by which the photographs are subsequently discussed. These methods, as they suggest, can help yield 'fascinating', 'rich' empirical data and 'unique insights' into phenomena as well as 'empowering and emancipating participants by making their experiences visible' (Oliffe and Bottorff, 2007, p. 850). They refer in particular to research that has, through photovoice, helped surface meanings and experiences that might otherwise be hidden or silenced such as conceptualisations of safety among battered women (Frohmann, 2005), the impact of children's chronic illness on mothers and families (Hagedorn, 1990) and girls' sense of a gendered self (Bloustein and Baker, 2003). This project has incorporated both strategies, firstly, by providing participants with the opportunity to highlight their experiences and to voice their concerns through the images taken by them personally and, secondly, later by using created images to elicit thoughts and discussion points that could not have been otherwise revealed.

Research project

In this article we draw on a recent research project on working class men doing 'dirty work' (tasks or roles seen as disgusting, 'distasteful', degrading or otherwise 'tainted' in key respects) (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999) to highlight how autophotography and photoelicitation can surface hidden meanings and experiences. Jobs that entail physical taint (i.e. where there is direct involvement with dirt or danger) are commonly associated with working class men (Ackroyd and Crowdy, 1990; Ashforth and Kriener, 1999; Tracy

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and Scott, 2006) and, given the negative meanings associated with dirt, can pose ongoing identity threats in terms of maintaining dignity and respect (Skeggs, 2004; Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999; Lamont, 2000; Simpson *et al.*, 2012). As Mac an Ghaill (1994) has argued, men as research subjects have been simultaneously at the centre of analysis and overlooked – their dominance and universality supposedly precluding the need for further analysis. This situation is exacerbated with respect to working class men, arguably marginalised in both policy discourse and in academia and where their status as men has potentially diminished any interest in their experiences as members of a disadvantaged group (McDowell, 2003).

Our study concerned a working class trade. Specifically, it explored the meanings that butchers give to their work and how they manage the 'dirty' nature of the job. In the context of butchery, the daily contact with the 'powerful pollutant' of dead meat can create, from Ackroyd (2007), a "defilement" that is difficult to assuage. Butchers must routinely deal with potentially unpleasant sights, smells and sensations: blood stains their clothing and lodges under fingernails; offal is malodorous and offensive to the touch; skills such as cutting and filleting and implements such as knives and grinders are potentially dangerous and put men's bodies at risk. In butchery men have been found to form strong occupational cultures based on aggressive realism and traditional notions of masculinity (Ackroyd and Crowdy, 1990). For example, slaughtermen found esteem through activities relating to strength, dominance and differentiation from women. As Meara (1974) highlighted in a study of Turkish meat cutters, honour could be found in bodily fortitude and bravery – as well as in the use of knives and the ability to withstand the cold and the daily contact with blood and meat.

The project raised issues about how to research a group whose members, influenced by conventional notions of gender, characteristically understand themselves as non-emotional and self-restrained (Kerfoot and Knights, 1998; Lewis and Simpson, 2007), and which may not be accustomed to talk centring on self-disclosure. Paradoxically, as referred to above, men's voices can be silenced by assumptions of patriarchy and by their powerful cultural and social positioning. There is consequently a tendency to listen more to women (or other disadvantaged groups). However, men can also be marginalised and often have difficulty discussing 'private' matters that involve disclosure and/or engagement with emotions

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(MacDowell, 2003; Lewis and Simpson, 2007). From this perspective, Oliffe and Bottorff (2007) highlight how methods of photovoice and photoelicitation enable men's active and thoughtful engagement with the interview material. They suggest that such methods can do several things: help facilitate subsequent discussions as photographs become key talking (and action) points – surfacing what respondents choose to share; assist in self -disclosure through story-telling while at the same time allowing distance (for instance, through use of the third person in the stories told); allow 'hidden' aspects of lives to become more visible and help surface alternative meanings and interpretations.

In addressing these issues, we highlight how visuality can bring to the surface hidden dimensions that might, through verbal text alone, remain concealed. Thus, while butchers were often constrained in discussions of some of their experiences at work, through the photographs they had taken they engaged in the interview protocol more freely. We accordingly present an argument for auto-photography as a method for enabling discussion, reflection and experiential revelation among research populations characterized by low levels of self-disclosure. More specifically, we provide a useful illustration of how photoelicitation and photovoice can facilitate communication between two groups that do not share taken-for-granted cultural backgrounds (Harper, 2002) in order to 'give voice' to a group (working class men) that are less used to 'open talk' (Oliffe and Bottorff, 2007) or reflectivity – helping to foreground and privilege their accounts. In so doing, this paper offers more detailed insights into how photovoice and photoelicitation help expand the areas of discussion, engage with more complex and involved narrative accounts and shift some aspects of control to the participants (e.g. through facilitating a role of 'expert'). This more active role can arguably be seen as a less threatening approach for men where the passive role of respondent can conflict with the dominant notions of masculinity. Thus, the use of photoelicitation and photovoice was warranted by the need to establish both the conditions and the environment that would allow researchers to capture insights otherwise left unarticulated and to understand some of the processes that make individuals unable to speak of their own lives (Charlesworth, 2000).

From the above, this method can have particular potential in accessing meanings and experiences

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of working class men, a group who are often neglected in terms of policy discourse and practice, and who may be less used to 'open talk'. Accordingly, we sought to explore the potential benefits to be secured from the use of a more 'pro-active forum for dialogue' (Oliffe and Bottorff, 2007). Our sample of butchers can be understood to be 'working class men' in the sense that they had limited education and social mobility, were at relatively low income levels and were engaged in a trade that is variously described as 'routine manual' or 'skilled manual' in standard occupational classifications. We recognize that there are limitations to the shorthand working definitions of class that we offer in this context. However, a full discussion of the complexities relating to this concept lies outside this scope of this paper. Our research sought to explore the values and attitudes butchers hold towards their work through discussions of their experiences. We accordingly asked questions that concerned occupational journeys and job choice; perception and experiences of the physicality of the job; the orientation of families and friends to the work; and those elements that gave pleasure as well as those that were challenging or a source of discomfort and pain. The research relied initially on interviews which took place in cafes, bars and occasionally at the back of the shop.

After the first few meetings, we were aware of the problems that reliance on the interview method imposed. Some butchers were uncomfortable with the interview situation: they confessed to being nervous and were accordingly constrained. For most, as they informed us, this was the first time that anyone had shown an interest in their working lives or in their trade. Many were simply unused to this kind of talk and some found the session, however informal its orientation (for instance, a conversation in the pub over a pint of beer), a source of stress and anxiety. No doubt, some of these characteristics were inadvertently produced as a result of the perceived differences between researchers and participants, perhaps relating to respondent anxieties that their answers to the interviewers' questions would 'fall short' or be insufficient (despite assurances to the contrary). Respondents were often particularly reticent when conversations turned to other, more personal, subjects. For example, accounts of occupational journeys or reflections on job choice were characteristically brief – a process Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2001) refer to as 'minimisation' i.e. where answers are terse and little is revealed. One sentence often contained the whole 'story' and

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butchers rarely engaged in detailed telling and retelling of their lives. Different questioning strategies were employed in our attempts to counter these emergent discursive tendencies at interview. For example, attempts were made to shift the initial ground first to areas that were likely to be non-threatening such as descriptions of their working day. Nonetheless, responses were often self deprecatory and cursory statements such as "it's all I've ever done" were characteristic in this respect. This led us to reconsider our approach at more fundamental level.

We accordingly asked five participants to capture photographically what they considered to be key aspects of their work and their environment. They were given digital cameras and asked to choose four or five 'frames' that signified, for them, what the job entailed. At this stage, the researchers acknowledged that there may be risk involved in taking pictures and photographing people (Walsh *et al.*, 2008). These concerns were discussed with participants who were asked to obtain consent when photographing people and to consider issues of privacy and dignity (Walsh *et al.*, 2008). The researchers made sure that participants understood their role in both taking and discussing visual images (McDonnell, 2009). An arrangement was then made to meet to conduct the interview. The photographs were loaded onto a laptop computer at the interview site (in all cases, the local pub) and, after some preliminary questions and discussion points, the photographs were shown and discussed (the same photographs were used later in the discussions with other participants). As Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2001) argue, this affords interviewees greater influence and control over the content and form of discussion –and may therefore facilitate talk by them. Here, rather than responding to questions posed, butchers took on a role of expert, more in tune with notions of traditional masculinity, as they explained what each photograph conveyed. This helped to 'break the ice' and, further, uncovered meanings that might otherwise have been concealed.

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Elaborating physicality

Figure 1

The three pictures taken by John in *Figure 1* attest to the physicality of the trade highlighting different

physical aspects of the job – the visceral materiality of their product with all the (often unpleasant) sights,

smells and sensations that are involved, working in cold, refrigerated conditions, lifting and carrying heavy

weights and drawing on skills such as cutting and filleting and on implements such as knives and grinders

that put their bodies at risk. In the first picture there are several whole pork carcasses (most hidden by the

first) hanging by a metal rail in the large fridge area, located at the back of the shop. Two small legs of lamb

can also be seen. Some boxes containing large meat cuts are piled up in the far left corner of the

photograph. The area is clean but uninviting and cold. Though there are no butchers in the first picture, the

space itself offers an insight into the demands of the job (e.g. the size and weight of carcasses) and working

conditions. The second picture in the series highlights one of the most prominent aspects of the job – the

need to lift and carry heavy weights. The picture shows a butcher moving a quarter of beef from the large

cold area into a cutting area. Both cutting tables are surprisingly clean, almost sterilized; however, the

overalls that the butcher is wearing are covered with blood stains reminding us of the dirty nature of their

work. He appears to carry the weight with ease. The picture also contains many signs of new regulations –

the requirement to wear a helmet in the fridge area, for example. The third picture in the series is the most

revealing of the skilful demands of the job – a young butcher hacking the carcass of pork. Again the action is

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taking place in the cold area. The carcass has not been removed from the rail. The butcher in the picture is

chopping the pork carcass by striking it with short repeated blows using an axe. His whole body is involved

in the very act of hacking. He is bent over, probably attending to the final blow.

In the course of the interviews, butchers engaged relatively unproblematically, with the physical

demands of the job in terms of bodily endurance and skills required - often describing them as a source of

pride and pleasure. Butchers routinely raced each other in terms of how long it took to break down a

carcass – referring to both the weights carried and the time taken with considerable precision. However, a

more detailed discussion of the level of respondents' expertise, the importance of hands-on experience and

a more nuanced understanding of their trade emerged as a result of the conversation held in relation to the

three pictures taken by John. Examining carcasses hung in the photographs prompted a greater degree of

elaboration with reference to the necessary skills and required experience.

> *"If you are lifting beef, there is a technique to it as opposed to brute strength...Some of the smallest*
>
> *people can lift more than I can…"*

> *"There are points on the animal where the weight would be balanced, naturally the shape of the quarter*
>
> *of beef differs, and it is tapered and things so you have to know where to carry it and there are points*
>
> *where you just naturally know where to grab for, it's something again… It's hands on training, it's not*
>
> *something you can write in a textbook, you know…"*

Wolkowitz (2006) and Sennett (2008) stress the importance of the body knowledge acquired 'on the job'

through practice. According to Wolkowitz (2006) the body knowledge encompasses the proper use of tools, the

feel for the material, the astute use of physical strength, and the learning and maintenance of manual dexterity.

Moreover, stamina and endurance come from the long-term development of physical skills and follow the logic

based on practice, repetition, and learning from repetition (Sennett, 2008). The photo-images in *Figure 1*

unsurprising provoked an engaged discussion regarding the importance of hands-on experience, intuitive

knowledge and the 'feel' that one could only acquire as a result of extensive involvement in the trade. What

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surfaced here was the need for correct posture and body movement in relation to the weight and shape of the

carcass – knowledge and experience that could not be replaced or substituted by 'textbook teaching'. The images

therefore acted as a prompt for a more reflective account of these embodied skills and proficiencies:

> *"If you are not carrying it right, you just know it, you get the weight and you think 'oh that's not quite*
>
> *right' and then you change the position and then you hold it and then you can carry, put it on the hook*
>
> *and just let it fall…"*

As Shilling (2005) points out, physical competence not only provides the basis for a living wage in manual

work, but is also prized within the norms and values of masculinity, helping to give meanings to work

through dignity and respect. The ready and positive engagement with aspects of bodily skill and effort in

this first set of pictures may reflect their potential for conferring personal value. As Adams (1990) suggests,

meanings around meat capture masculine imagery through its symbolic association with male dominance

and male strength. Butchering as a trade therefore reflects gendered meanings attached to meat and its

production with a primary capitalization on the discourses of skills, physical strength, stamina and

endurance. These visual images enabled the participants to expand and to particularize their narratives,

thus showing the real depth of knowledge and understanding of the skills required. The participants were

presented with an opportunity to demonstrate their competence and authority in the area by sharing very

detailed narratives with researchers who were unfamiliar with the trade.

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Intensifying nostalgic feelings

Figure 2

The picture in Figure 2, taken by Bill, shows a butcher's shop that has recently gone out of business. The shutters are pulled down and there is no hint of any activities. The only evidence of its former existence is the sign over the door. However, the sign 'to let' reminds every onlooker that this business is a matter of the past and it will probably never return. This elicited a discussion with Bill, as well as with other butchers who were shown this image, of the pressures that high street butchers are currently facing, and opened space for them to reveal their feelings around change. In this respect, competition from supermarkets, which often have their own meat counters, has reduced the number of high street butchers (the above shop in Figure 2 a possible victim of this trend). Thus, in 1980 there were 23,000 butchers' premises in the UK employing an estimated 101,000+ persons. In 2007 there were 6,872, employing 37,000 workers; estimated numbers have continued to decline to 6,400 in 2008 (www.meatinfo.co.uk). At the same time, the meat trade has been subject to a series of regulations, in the wake of BSE, to 'clean up' work practices: regulations now cover the daily cleaning and temperature monitoring of fridges, the handling of meat and where it can be displayed, and its tracking and traceability.

The image evoked powerful nostalgic themes about the past: a lament for the loss of skills; the passing of the time of closer communities and more traditional values. They prompted firstly expressions of changes in terms of a decline in the trade, loss of traditional ways of living and of communities:

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"Sales are not what they would have been 10 years ago, I mean…We don't have the trade that we have done in the past…they [customers] going to the supermarkets which is money…If they feel the supermarket up the road, we lose our trade, we go…"

"I mean basically when you go back years, I mean not too many wives, mums worked….so they actually had time to prepare things."

"I think some places are lucky…our more sort villages closer to towns where you're five minutes to the town I think that's where your rural shops and communities are gone…"

The image also prompted, as a further theme, regret over changes in work practices and erosion of skill – mainly originating in increased regulation of the trade. Together with a consolidation of slaughtering houses, such regulation has altered some of the skills required in that much of the 'heavy' (and dirty) work on carcasses - and of course the killing of the animals - have already been done prior to the meat's arrival at the shop. Figure 2 surfaced strong feelings of nostalgia and regret over changed work practices and loss of skills:

"'The beef used to hang on rails and the blood dripped on the sawdust…because it's aged for so long, it was much better flavour, more tender but supermarkets they don't, because the volume they put into the shops…While it's hanging, it is actually losing weight more as it hangs… they can't afford to have all this stuff…"

"We used to bring it [a beef carcass] back on the van and that was hard work and it wasn't very… it was a low van, sometimes you had to lift it, oh my, you know, but those days are all gone now, so it all comes packed nicely."

"its' a shame if people aren't trained because obviously people aren't going to know how to do it

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especially because Bill that works here has no idea, you know, he worked in [large supermarket] and that I

think he said, and obviously but he just worked on the counter and all boxed for you...so he never did

it...So he's just learnt the cuts through selling rather than through actually cutting it up."

As discussed above, butchers often took pride in the physicality of the job and in the development of physical

skills. Their erosion is thus a potential source of threat, as Sennett (2008) has highlighted elsewhere, to a working

class masculine identity. As he points out, tradesmen's skills and physical capacities ingrained in the human body

are always closely intertwined. Routine, repetitive, physical acts of dealing with meat and hands-on experience

enabled butchers to develop skill from within, a different, more embodied level of knowledge and a body

language that guided physical actions. The physical and the skilful were seen by participants as a unified source of

power, pride and dignity. Thus the regret was expressed over the loss of lasting ownership of the skill and its

evolution.

A third and related theme to surface from Figure 2 concerned a strong sense of protectiveness towards

traditional practices that were a source of differentiation from more modern supermarkets:

> *"...we're very much you know a traditional butchers in that I don't put on fancy displays, I put quality*
>
> *meat in the window, people can see it's good quality."*

> *"If you go to the supermarket, it's literally...it's killed one day and it's in the cabinet the next day.*
>
> *Now we try and hang our beef for 28 days, four weeks, how it used to be..."*

However, nostalgic themes addressed by butchers were not necessarily wedded to the realm of specifics.

Bonnett (2010) reminds us that nostalgic feelings entail a process of transference, in which our emotions, in

particular positive emotions, are placed elsewhere - another time or another place. Respondents' more

positive feelings (e.g. of satisfaction and pride) were often placed in the past, in a time in which they felt

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more was required and their skills more valued. In total, butchers' elaboration on the image above offered a

more abstract sense of loss and displacement. This was expressed in relation to perceptions of 'lost' ways of

living and of work practices. The image accordingly surfaced feelings of nostalgia, loss and regret. The

narratives around the image, particularly those pertaining to a changing landscape, the coming and going of

particular stores and of altered work processes, demonstrated that these feelings had become an integral

part of butchers' occupational journeys. The technique of photoelicitation, in this case, facilitated

remembering and opening a discursive space for retrieving something that had been deemed to have

disappeared or which belonged to another time, thus permitting a greater level of personal reflexivity and

the expression and articulation of more intensified and distilled emotions.
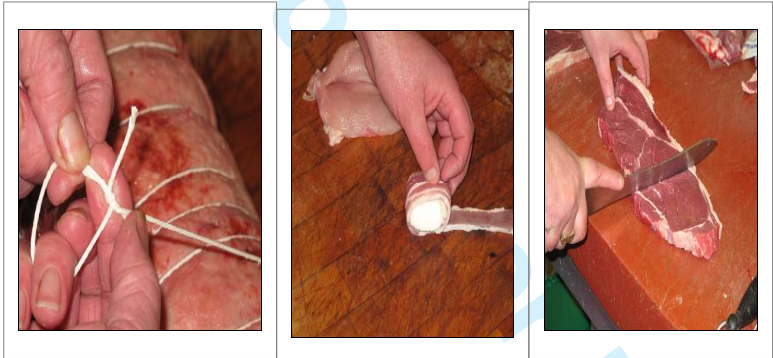
Revealing the Aesthetics of Meat

Figure 3

Figure 3 above shows three photographs taken by Paul. Each one illustrates the (sometimes elaborate)

preparations of meat and highlighted, unexpectedly, some of the aesthetic dimensions of the butcher trade.

In the first, a roll of sirloin is being tied by a fellow worker in preparation for sale. In the second, mozzarella

cheese is being wrapped in bacon – which is then to be inserted into a chicken breast. Both tasks appear

intricate, demanding skill and patience. The third photograph shows a piece of beef on a wooden slab that

is being trimmed (fat removed) and cut. The pictures enabled a discussion of the skills required in the

preparation of joints and how meat should be presented. This included the need to have proper tension in

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the string and the correct fastening method to keep the roll in place, the need to make meat attractive and, relatedly, the importance of the visual display. The photographs provided a prompt for Paul to describe how to transform meat from a material that may be considered visually offensive, i.e. bloody, sinewy and fatty, into a 'cleansed' and attractive - in his terms "*pretty*" - product for sale. For example, unsightly fat is routinely removed (even though, from his account, this reduces the flavour of the meat).

In response to queries from the interviewer, and prompted by the images displayed, concerning the need to make meat look good (*"The look of the meat is important isn't it? The customers must appreciate that?"*), Paul described the skill required and the pride he gained from a nice-looking display. He referred to the pleasure from cutting, which he described as "*strangely fascinating*" and from the feel of meat:

"*Yes - I had a customer and she often asks me to do a rack of lamb and she said 'you do it beautifully, just with a knife and you take it out and it looks really nice'*"

"*I still enjoy cutting a piece of meat and finding that knife going through really smoothly, cutting a piece of steak and making it look good. French trimmed racks of lamb and making them look pretty.*"

Paul draws on a language of aesthetics (beautifully, nice, pretty), conveying an ease with knife work and the almost sensual pleasure (the smoothness) of cutting through the material of meat. He takes pride in the performance of masculine skill (to an appreciative female audience) while also referring, in more 'feminine' terms, to a concern for an attractive appearance and highlighting through the photographs the need for skills of manual dexterity.

Doug's photographs showed, in a similar manner, the display of meat at his shop (Figure 4), one of which is reproduced below.

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Figure 4

Here, the practices and methods of creating a 'good counter' were carefully described. 'Setting out' often took up to two hours at the start of the working day and, as with Paul, considerable pride was taken in the presentation. Expressed in the third person – and perhaps in Oliffe and Bottorff's (2007) terms, enabling a distance to be created from the subject matter – Doug sees aesthetic principles involving detailed care as endemic in the trade.

> *"Those who still enjoy the job actually do like turning out a well-presented joint or a well presented tied up piece of meat or a tray where all the chops are the same thickness…and they've been trimmed and laid out neatly."*

He later expressed the same sentiment in more personal terms:

> *"I do enjoy the basic job of cutting meat and doing a good job and making something look nice. You know I can stand back, after I've put my counter on in the morning. I'll go round the other side and have a look as a customer would look."*

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Doug highlights the attention to detail - where chops are the same thickness, neatly trimmed and carefully

displayed. As an artist might stand back from his or her easel, he appraises his 'exhibit' through his

customers' eyes, taking (implicitly) pleasure from what he views. Taken together, these practices and

concerns highlight an essential part of the butchers' work in terms of the time involved and the effort

required. However, these are removed from the physical demands of the job that were, from previous

accounts, presented in singular terms as characteristic of the trade. Instead, the photographs surfaced the

aesthetics and the pleasures that are accordingly gained. The photographs were thus meaningful at two

levels: they were illustrative of and helped surface key subjective experiences and values (photovoice) *and*

they formed the basis for dialogue and discussion (photoelicitation) through which 'marginalized meanings'

could be conveyed.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper set out to explore how photoelicitation and photovoice can facilitate the production of data in

the context of researched groups whose members might lack 'status-generated' confidence (Bourdieu,

1984) which is experienced through discomfort or constraints of verbal engagement of the interview

process. According to Sennett (2008), awkwardness in terms of appropriation of discursive tools does not

necessarily indicate the lack of expressive means caused, but rather the inaccessibility of legitimate

discursive resources (Charlesworth, 2000); it more often suggests that there is a realm of skill, knowledge or

emotions that does not easily lend itself to verbal descriptions and often lies beyond human verbal

capacities. Moreover, there is a limit to what extent human language capacities can adequately express the

embodied nature of physical practices (Sennett, 2008).

Physical work has been found to affirm traditional notions of working class masculinity (Hughes,

1951; Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999) - where tasks involving dirt or danger have routinely been associated with

working class men and with manly values of strength, robustness, endurance and fortitude (Ackroyd and

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Crowdy, 1990; Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999). As other studies have found (for instance, Ackroyd and Crowdy, 1990; Meara, 1974), butchers accordingly expressed pride in their job by mobilising discourses of bodily resilience, even stoicism, through an emphasis on the skills of knife work, the ability to withstand the cold and in relation to the daily contact with dirt in the form of blood and meat. As Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2001) point out, men are more likely to engage readily with interview material that encourages a display of masculinity – and to be more reticent where the masculine self is under threat. In this project photoelicitation prompted working class men to elaborate, expand and translate their daily experiences of physical labour into more expressive and detailed accounts. The strength of these methods also concerned the uncovering of positive aspects of their jobs and providing room for displaying positive emotions and self-evaluation (pride in their knowledge and skills, stamina, endurance etc.). At the same time, images enabled discussion of feelings of regret over the erosion of the physical demands of the job and associated skills such as the loss of heavy lifting and cutting and boning skills. Photoelicitation provided a mechanism for participants to share these feelings with researchers (Lorenz and Kob, 2009). Thus, through the images conveyed, respondents engaged with sentiments of loss and regret that were not discussed via verbal interviews alone - perhaps, as a result of an unwillingness to talk about something that might seem unimportant or too 'emotional'.

The use of photoelicitation also served as a mechanism to elicit social concerns and evoke memories of the past. As Harper (2002) has argued, photographs can jolt subjects into new vision and understanding of their social existence and social environment – enabling, from Berger (1992), connections to be made between the past and the present. Our ability to reflect upon the past can be shaped by the prompts provided for recollection as well as the questions we ask (Jarvinen, 2004). Re-considering taken-for-granted experiences through photographic image might accordingly intensify particular emotions and feelings, offering occasion to enter a historical discourse (Rainford, 2009). In this respect, the image of the closed shop allowed butchers to retrieve something which belonged to another time, thus permitting a greater level of personal reflexivity and the expression and articulation of more intensified and distilled emotions such as those around loss and displacement. In this context, participant-generated visual

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methodologies are potentially beneficial for both researchers and participants, not just in the sense of

providing them with a voice but also with the means of making sense of their present and past experiences.

The third set of visual images (that showed the more intricate preparation of meat) demonstrated

some of the powerful effects of photoelicitation as 'sensual methodology' (Warren, 2008). The use of

photoelicitation and photovoice can help surface hidden dimensions and themes – themes that may,

arguably, be concealed through adherence to identity affirming gender norms. Thus, while butchers had

readily discussed the physical demands of the job, as conformant with traditional notions of working class

effort, they had not up to that point engaged with the pleasures from handling meat or from its aesthetic

display. There may be several reasons for this understatement and neglect. As Warren (2008) points out,

aesthetic experiences are sensory and embodied – causing difficulties in their communication. The 'fleeting'

and pleasurable sensation of a sharp knife passing smoothly through meat may be difficult, through

language alone, to convey. It is not surprising therefore that these aspects and meanings were not initially

foregrounded in men's accounts. Photoelicitation may accordingly enable working class men to engage with

themes that are rarely reflected on or discussed; that may sit uneasily with desired presentations of self;

that challenge traditional notions of gendered work - but that are pertinent and significant nevertheless.

Overall, the use of photovoice and photoelicitation in the exploration of a class and gendered

'habitus' has highlighted the power of visual methods to offer a closer look at what participants considered

important, to open space for the emergence of unexpected topics and themes and to allow more

comprehensive and reflective elaboration on specificities of personal experiences and emotions. It enabled

participants to record and highlight their occupation-based skills and aptitudes and allowed them to reflect

upon aspects of their jobs which, through familiarity, could otherwise be taken for granted and so difficult

to recognize (Sweetman, 2009). Further, it promoted more critical and involved discussion of issues relating

to their work that they found particularly emotional – e.g. a source of pleasure, joy or regret. Taken

together, by f capturing details that might have passed unnoticed (Dant, 2004) visual methods can be seen

to be of critical importance in investigating research areas that are not easily accessible through verbal and

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textual engagement alone.

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