Visual Methods

These exercises have been developed by Sarah Dunlop, drawing on her own experience of the practice of visual research. They are intended to help participants to have a direct experience of the use of visual methods that can make them more aware of a range of methodological, practical and ethical issues that these methods raise. Reflecting on the process of each exercise is therefore an important final stage for each of these activities.

Exercise #1 [A]

Hands (15 mins)

This exercise gives the participant the opportunity to reflect upon personal religious belief through a visual medium, allowing them to engage first hand with the limitations and freedoms that this medium holds for this type of intuited, subjective concept.

1. Split the participants into groups of 3-6, giving each group one camera and one card.
2. One person volunteers (remaining anonymous to the wider group) to talk about their feelings/conceptions/associations regarding God and proposes a way to represent this through staging a photograph using human hands. The group then uses their hands and composes the photograph, with one person taking the photograph.
3. The volunteer leads the group in a discussion to name the photo and give it a caption or a quote (if desired), which is written on the card. The photographs, titles and quotes are collected for use later.

Exercise #1 [B]

Analysing visual data (25 mins)

This exercise can be done at the end of a training session with images and captions used in ‘Hands’ exercise. This gives the participants the opportunity to practice the analysis of photographs, and to explore the interplay of images and text within analysis.

1. Show the hands photos without titles or captions.
2. In groups discuss how the image might be analysed.
3. Then show them again with the text, discussing the analysis again for each photograph.
4. As a whole group, discuss the role that accompanying text plays in the analysis of visual data.
Exercise #2

Using archive images (10 mins)

This exercise allows the participants to have the experience of working with an image archive in the context of an interview. The archive consisted of 48 black and white prints from ‘Every Picture Tells A Story’ by Mark Oestreicher and published by Zondervan. ([http://openlibrary.org/books/OL9607552M/Every_Picture_Tells_a_Story](http://openlibrary.org/books/OL9607552M/Every_Picture_Tells_a_Story))

1. Form the group into pairs.
2. One person chooses one image that speaks to them about the hopes that they have for their future. (3 mins)
3. Partner interviews about the photo chosen. (7 mins)
4. If time allows, this can be repeated, with participants taking the opposite role.

Exercise #3

Photo elicitation with participant-generated images (25 mins)

This exercise gives the participants the opportunity to use images in an interview that the interviewee has provided themselves. This experience enables the participants to compare this method with working with an archive in the previous exercise. This relies upon the participants to have brought with them a photograph of a significant moment in their life (appropriate for discussion in this group context). This can be a print, or a digital image on a lap top or a phone.

1. The group is formed into new pairs.
2. Each participant spends some time thinking about interview questions. (5 mins)
3. One person interviews the other about their photo that represents a significant moment in their life. (5 mins)
4. They swap roles. (5 mins)
5. Feedback a critique of the methods in groups of 4 or more, then report to the entire group. (10 mins)