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SELF-REPRESENTATION IN PARTICIPATORY VIDEO RESEARCH: ETHICS AND LESSONS LEARNT

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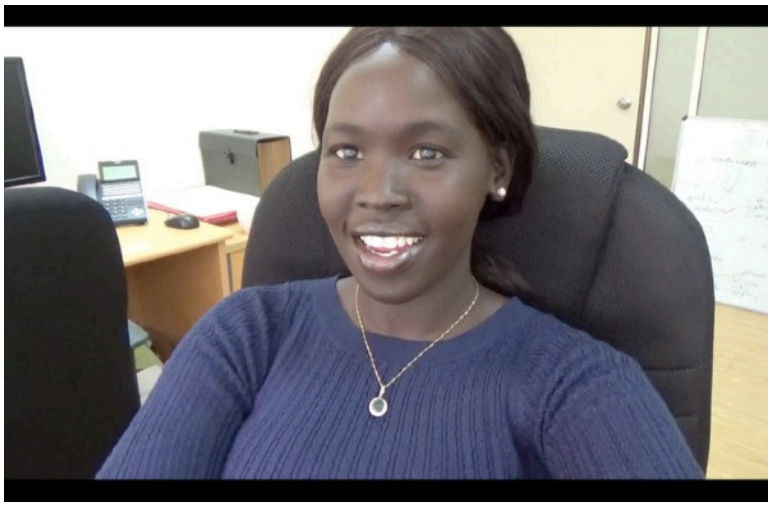
Abstract: Participatory video involves co-researchers using digital or video cameras to create their own videos and present issues according to their sense of what is important. In 2018, the authors—including three co-researchers from refugee backgrounds—collaborated through participatory video research to document views on better access and participation in higher education. Here, we reflect on key ethical issues encountered and share lessons learnt from our project. Our aim is not to discredit this methodology but to contribute new discussions on how participatory video can be used effectively as a form of self-representation to target wide audiences and effect social and policy change. This way, debates on the social and political potentialities of arts-based methods such as participatory video can be expanded. Since deploying participatory video in forced migration research is a relatively novel approach, there is much scope to expand the contours of knowledge on its potential to reach diverse audiences and open up new opportunities for social and political impact.

Keywords: participatory research; collaborative research; agency; ethical decision-making; protagonists-filmmakers

"I think it's really important that we do raise some of the issues that we face, and, hopefully, that, you know, these are some of the issues that the university can consider, and be able to change some of the issues that might come up"
(Anyier, co-researcher in participatory video project, 2018)

Figure 1

Screenshot from Anyier's video on what can be done to better support students from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds at university.



When academic and community-based co-researchers use arts-based methods, they usually aim to have an impact on audience perception, awareness, or knowledge of specific issues to stimulate new thinking (Degarrod, 2013). Such methods are usually used collaboratively and provide opportunities for co-researchers with lived experiences to have greater input into meaningful research processes (Lenette, 2019). Dissemination of arts-based research outcomes can then "extend the impact of research evidence" (Rieger & Schultz, 2014, p. 134) given the potential to reach wider and more diverse audiences and generate social and political change.

This paper is concerned with privileging subjective perspectives via the method of participatory video. As Anyier's quote above exemplifies, while there can be a large body of literature dominated by outsider perspectives on topics like widening participation at university, engaging in creative audio-visual processes to convey first-hand experiences can open up new opportunities to understand complex issues from different angles. We reflect here on the key ethical issues that emerged from a small participatory video research project involving three co-researchers from

refugee backgrounds (Anyier, Arash, and Hayatullah) who documented their views on access to and participation in higher education (see https://www.unescoinaustralia.com/news/2019/2/3/young-people-from-refugee-backgrounds-present-short-films).

We outline lessons learnt from our project's strengths and challenges to contribute to discussions on how the method can be used effectively as a form of self-representation. We aim to contribute to debates on the social and political potentialities of effecting change using arts-based methods such as participatory video, given its growing use in research across disciplines.

Participatory Video

Grounded in the artistic and social sciences traditions of recording people's narratives via audio-visual means to create videos (Harris, 2016), methods like participatory video are increasingly used in forced migration research to engage with co-researchers with lived experiences in collaborative and meaningful ways, and to share their perspectives (Lenette, 2019; Haaken & O'Neill, 2014). Participatory video involves co-researchers using digital or video cameras to create their own narratives and present issues according to their sense of what is important. The research method can convey important narratives from new angles, and document perspectives that may otherwise be missed using traditional forms of 'question-asking' methods (Harris, 2016; Plush, 2015). The research value of participatory video lies in both the creative output produced (i.e. the content as data) and the process used (i.e. the process as data).

Participatory video has been deployed in the social sciences to explore a range of topics. For instance, co-researchers can use participatory video to document and discuss complex social or personal issues and address community concerns like social isolation and loneliness, sexual and gender-based violence, or environmental degradation (Haynes & Tanner, 2015; Kindon, 2003; Mitchell et al., 2012). The process involves more than 'telling stories' and explicitly aims to address socio-economic inequities through meaningful and person-centred approaches (Haynes & Tanner, 2015; Plush, 2012). Regardless of levels of literacy or education, participatory video can be deployed to convey protagonists' experiences, concerns, and solutions from their perspectives and in culturally appropriate ways (Mistry et al., 2016; Molony et al., 2007).

Participatory research more broadly is understood as a process whereby people with lived experiences of the research topic are co-creators of knowledge, and can be involved in research design, data collection, analysis, and reporting (Lenette et al., 2019). When participatory methods are deployed, it is not always possible to anticipate all potential opportunities or difficulties that may arise. The time and effort required to develop meaningful relationships of trust, align aims and strategies for achieving social justice outcomes, and respond to shifting socio-political and cultural contexts can be significant (Lenette et al., 2019). However, a commitment to using a collaborative and ethical decision-making process well before projects begin—beyond getting institutional approval—through to the conclusion and sharing of outcomes via arts-based research can reduce the likelihood of tokenistic or even harmful outcomes for co-researchers with lived experiences.

The possibilities for protagonists' counter-narratives to be distributed widely to large audiences and foster different forms of social encounters gives participatory video a "populist appeal" (Rahn, 2008, p. 304). When protagonists are positioned as filmmakers who share first-hand experiences with diverse audiences, they can view themselves as agents of social change who take initiatives, make decisions and share opinions as counter-narratives to dominant portrayals of passive, vulnerable, and helpless victims (Lenette, 2019). Audiences in arts-based research are usually more diverse than scholarly ones; they comprise a mix of intended and unintended audiences who engage first-hand or indirectly with artwork including co-researchers and their loved ones, policy-makers, or the general public (Guillemin & Cox, 2017).

However, Plush (2015) cautions that the implications of using participatory video have been consistently oversimplified, with little regard for the contexts that frame co-researchers' engagement with the method, as well as audiences' responses to their videos. Other critiques of this method are rare but emerging (see, for instance, Milne, 2016).

Visual Autoethnography

When co-researchers turn the camera lens on themselves to share their perspectives, they engage in an autoethnographic process. Autoethnography is a reflexive method that seeks meaning from unique life experiences, to identify the sociocultural elements that shape those experiences (Holman, Jones & Adams, 2016). It implies depth, detail, and reflection, and can uncover a range of feelings ranging from joy and pride, to sadness and pain (Custer, 2014). As Friedwald (1996, p. 126) contends, autoethnography is "the kind [of art] that takes you deeper inside

yourself and ultimately out again," which requires a level of vulnerability that few methods favour (Custer, 2014). Recent examples of autoethnographic work in refugee studies include Mupenzi et al.'s (2019) exploration of the first author's educational journey as a man who is a former refugee, and Kodwani's (2019) perspective of growing up in a refugee camp in post-partition India.

A recurring critique of autoethnography is a perceived disproportionate emphasis on individualised, subjective perspectives, and the lack of opportunity to generalise socio-culturally defined experiences, leading to the approach being labelled by some as narcissistic and self-indulgent (Blomfield & Lenette, 2018). However, autoethnography is not concerned with generalisation, as it is intended to understand one person's story in the way that they want to tell it. Often in the written form, this method can generate a wealth of information that is not accessible or uncovered otherwise. For the person telling their story, autoethnography can be a transformative process that re-values their knowledge, emotions, and ideas (Custer, 2014).

Autoethnographic principles have permeated visual research through methods like photo-voice (where co-researchers photograph different aspects of their lives) and digital storytelling (an audio-visual output where co-researchers narrate their story). Such methods are increasingly used in refugee studies, for instance with resettled refugee women who discuss health and wellbeing in Australia (Lenette, 2019); or with people seeking asylum who document what it is like to live in direct provision (immigration detention) in Ireland (Alexandra, 2017). The benefits of using methods influenced by autoethnographic principles are that co-researchers have greater input into defining research outcomes, and broader opportunities to share their perspectives with an academic or general audience.

Participatory video is a tool that can be used to privilege an autoethnographic lens. The focus is solely on each co-researcher's story, perspectives and solutions, producing a rich and unique narrative that speaks to the sociocultural determinants of lived experiences. The processes used in participatory video projects encourage co-researchers to reflect on the past and present, and look towards the future, which are key facets of autoethnography (Custer, 2014).

Political Potential

Like a number of arts-based research methods, deploying participatory video can have broader political potential (Blomfield & Lenette, 2019; Lenette, 2019). For

instance, Alexandra (2008, p. 101) points out that "[i]ndividually selecting a story and collaboratively producing the audio-visual expression of that tale presents new possibilities concerning the politics and ethics of storytelling" in forced migration scholarship. This approach contributes to creating counter-narratives that challenge the hegemony (see for instance, Lenette et al., 2015). Harris (2016) agrees that, because of the attention paid to how audiences will engage with audio-visual outputs when using video as a research method (see for instance, Wolfe, 2017), there is much scope to expand the political possibilities of video research—not just in terms of how videos can be used in awareness raising and advocacy, but also because of the opportunity to document protagonists' political activism as the central story (Harris, 2016).

The "Changing Lives one Degree at a Time" Project

Caroline made a number of unsuccessful attempts since 2014 to secure funding for a participatory video project in collaboration with refugee-background university students . As a proponent of arts-based methods in refugee studies, she saw value in deploying this method to explore a topic that is still dominated by outsider perspectives that lack the depth that lived experience brings. But given the limited understanding of this relatively novel and innovative research approach, she was met with scepticism about the value of this project and the proposed method.

In 2017, Caroline applied for a small grant from the Australian National Commission for UNESCO Grants Scheme and was successful. She then invited Isobel to bring her documentary filmmaking expertise to the research, and once ethics was granted (after a long process of clarifying the methodology), Anyier, Arash, and Hayatullah accepted to join the project as co-researchers.

The participatory video research aimed to explore co-researchers' views on improving support for university students from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds, based on their own experiences. The aim was to generate new ideas on the topic using an audio-visual method to complement written-based data from the project. The three co-researchers were refugee-background young people who were university students, community leaders and international refugee advocates. They received digital video cameras to record, over several months, their experiences of navigating difficulties and opportunities as university students with lived experiences. They were seen as the protagonists-filmmakers. Isobel, a documentary filmmaker and emerging scholar in refugee film studies, edited the footage into three short videos based on their feedback, so that these videos could

be used in future advocacy efforts across several fields like resettlement, education, gender and youth issues.

In this project, exercising agency by recording videos on gender-specific experiences of higher education was a form of self-representation, a key concern in refugee research and advocacy, which refers to meaningful participation in decision-making processes that affect their lives (Global Summit of Refugees Steering Committee, 2018). Self-representation via audio-visual means is increasingly widespread in popular culture especially through social media platforms. While participatory video offers a number of advantages, it is a relatively novel tool for self-representation in refugee research and advocacy. As such, this is one of the first projects to explore the relevance and potential impact of the method in the context of refugee research especially, although the ethical concerns and lessons learnt extend to other disciplines with considerable overlap like migration, gender, youth, and critical disability studies.

While we focus here on the method of participatory video, we also contributed new perspectives on enabling pathways for students from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds in higher education in resettlement countries. Despite the large body of research on the topic in countries like Australia (see for instance Baker et al. 2019; King & Owens, 2018; Naidoo et al., 2018), the lack of understanding that lived experiences are central rather than peripheral concerns, continues to plague this area of research. Recent scholarship has begun to actively challenge such entrenched assumptions. For example, the 2019 Special Issue of the *Widening Participation and Lifelong Learning* on supporting students from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds privileged co-authorship with people with lived experiences as forced migrants, and narrative analysis of how personal, historical and spiritual considerations directly impact on educational aspirations. We wanted to add to this emerging body of work that (re)values the perspectives of co-researchers from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds, using a creative method.

Positionality is crucial here. Caroline and Isobel have never experienced forced migration (and are unlikely to). Caroline is a first generation migrant and a middle-class academic in a well-resourced institution. Isobel identifies as a young, white, queer, middle-class, Australian-born woman. They are conscious about their own social positioning in this process, especially as they reflected on the increasing criticism of outsiders speaking for others (rife in refugee studies), as “one cannot assume an ability to transcend one’s location’ or social identity” (Alcoff, 1991, pp. 6–

7). We engage in collaborative refugee research because of our commitment to social justice, political activism and decolonising sites of knowledge.

We also recognise that our leading this project as privileged scholars perpetuates the very structures we seek to disrupt. We have discussed in our previous writing (Blomfield & Lenette, 2018; 2019) that we are committed to research approaches that challenge the dominance of scholarly work from people who have not experienced forced migration. We have acknowledged that due to our privilege as people who do not experience visa uncertainty or fear for our safety in Australia, we can always identify ourselves in our publications and presentations, whereas protagonists-filmmakers may not be in a position to do so (see Blomfield & Lenette, 2019 for such an example).

While we are still reflecting on how best to address this imbalance in knowledge production and dissemination, we have found that collaborative or participatory research goes some way towards challenging established ways of knowing, by offering novel perspectives that may otherwise be left or kept at the margins. Our positionality has shaped the nature of our contributions on ethical tensions outlined below.

Relevance to Refugee Studies

We did not want to add to a long tradition of (mainly observational) filming in refugee studies, rooted in western ethnography and anthropology, that favours voyeurism and imposes predetermined sociocultural norms and research agendas (Blomfield & Lenette, 2018). Given our collective commitment to self-representation in research, we felt that participatory video would be an excellent way of challenging outsider-imposed notions, and contribute to redressing some of the power differentials inherent to colonialist-infused research methodologies.

The growing popularity and use of participatory video raise distinct ethical concerns, such as the potential to misrepresent protagonists-filmmakers' views when editing; imbalances in power among stakeholders involved; or socio-technical considerations (Lenette, 2019). While sparse, the examples of participatory video research in refugee studies suggest that the method is especially suitable for projects with a focus on gendered experiences of seeking asylum and settlement. For instance, O'Neill (2018) used participatory video as part of a suite of arts-based methods to uncover the experiences of women seeking asylum in the UK. The inclusion of a video *Searching for Asylum* contributed to the women achieving a

sense of justice, recognition, determination, and solidarity. These positive outcomes through participatory video countered their sense of isolation and humiliation generated by depersonalising asylum-seeking policies that defined the women's everyday realities.

In another example, Harris (2010) collaborated with 15 Sudanese young women on a research project entitled *Cross-Marked: Sudanese Australian Young Women Talk Education* to create seven short videos on their educational experiences. The videos produced were gender-specific counter-narratives to romanticised 'refugee stories' of Sudanese young people (especially young men's outsider-imposed label of 'lost boys') dominated by the from-lost-to-found narrative arc. The young women focused instead on the complex everyday social and personal challenges and opportunities they navigated; almost all of them had children or were about to become mothers while trying to complete their education. This example highlights the kinds of gendered narratives that can emerge when protagonist-filmmakers decide how to represent their stories and what the research should focus on. They also show that the potential of video-based research as a broader approach is yet to be fully realised, especially as new forms of video-making emerge in popular culture (Lenette, 2019).

Sharing our Experiences

We approached this project with excitement and trepidation. None of us had undertaken a project like this before, and it is fair to say that there were times when we did not know how to proceed. We communicated openly about our difficulties and resolved them through dialogue. We all concurred that using participatory video was a beneficial research approach, and that there were important lessons we could share with a wide academic, practitioner and artist-based audience, hence why we decided to co-author this paper. There is much scope to expand the contours of knowledge on participatory video as a method, given its potential to reach wider audiences and open up new opportunities for social and political impact.

The feedback from co-researchers discussed here align with reported benefits in the literature. We suggest that participatory video can be used to achieve social and political change on a range of issues and concerns in refugee studies and other disciplines that favour co-research with socially marginalised people. The method provides an excellent platform for self-representation to contribute rich perspectives to scholarly discussions on topics that are important to the protagonist-filmmakers. For example, Anyier said: "*Using the video to record my experience was absolutely*

an engaging process for me because it did not require me to write down my thoughts, it gave me a flexibility to record myself accordingly whenever I felt like it." This is one way arts-based methods can facilitate the exploration of complex or sensitive topics from different angles, which more traditional 'question-asking' methods (that are more akin to 'data mining') can often disregard.

While we do not focus here on the impact of participatory video on audiences (other than anecdotal evidence), we acknowledge and value the transformational potential among audience members who bring tacit knowledge in their engagement with arts-based findings (Guillemin & Cox, 2017; Rieger & Schultz, 2014). When research has an emancipatory agenda, notions of social inclusion and democratic decision-making feature highly in our vision of the audiences we *want* to see engage with arts-based dissemination (see Mahony & Stephansen, 2017). However, although audiences are part of the social and political change process itself, opportunities to think about the ethics of engaging with audience reactions have been limited thus far (Guillemin & Cox, 2017). Importantly, when short movies from participatory video projects are disseminated widely via online platforms for instance, it is not always possible to trace viewer reactions or the videos' broader impacts.

Thus, we focus here on the *process* of creating short movies using collaborative research approaches, and acknowledge from the outset that we need better models to trace the longer-term social impact of outcomes from participatory video research. At the conclusion of the video-making process, Caroline asked Anyier and Arash to record their reflections on their experiences of participating, focussing on the ethics of the methodology (Hayatullah was not able to complete this task). Some of their quotes are included below.

During the writing process, Anyier and Caroline presented on the methodology and the co-research model we used at a university seminar. Anyier spoke candidly about some of the issues raised below to an audience of health academics and postgraduate students. Our aim was to continue to implement the principles of co-research in the dissemination phase. It was important that we co-presented and occupied an academic space together, in an effort to challenge the enduring elitist and colonialist approach to research that excludes people from minority groups.

Strengths

Challenging labels. The protagonist-filmmakers used this opportunity to focus on positive outcomes of their engagement in higher education. As Anyier, Arash, and Hayatullah were active national and international youth advocates, they saw value in documenting first-hand views on education and day-to-day issues for wide audiences. The videos showcased their strategies for achieving successful outcomes as role models for other (aspiring) students and for their communities. Their video narratives challenged the deficit-based 'refugee' label that dominates public perceptions through negative media depictions.

On this point, Arash shared that: "[the project] *made me think about how far I have come at university and things that I have overcome while studying and working.*" He felt that his engagement in collaborative research created a space to reflect on his past experiences and acknowledge his strengths and ability to develop strategies to overcome the obstacles he encountered: "*Using the video to record my challenges and experience in university was something totally new and amazing process for me because I could capture some of my experiences and the things I have been through which without it I would never think about.*"

Anyier also felt that this research was worthwhile: "*I was able to explain my university experience and some of the complex social and economic issues that many refugee students like myself experience.*" She identified a benefit of using participatory video as a research tool: "*I think using the video to create my own story created a sense of comfort and confidence.*" Her university trajectory was an important aspect of her life as someone who arrived in Australia with no formal education. This was the first opportunity to document her views for herself and for others.

Sense of agency. Participatory video involves a higher degree of control by protagonist-filmmakers than more common styles of filming (and qualitative research more broadly). This is especially important in research that embraces principles of self-representation and favours models of collaborative research where protagonist-filmmakers decide for themselves what they wish to share with audiences. They are supported and thus more likely to drive the research and advocacy agendas in meaningful ways. Anyier, Arash, and Hayatullah exercised agency by recording themselves to create their own narratives. Even though there were times when they struggled to figure out how to get started or how to record what they wanted to say, they appreciated the approach whereby there was minimal intervention from Caroline and Isobel to "direct" how they should frame their story.

Importantly, they were free to decide whether they wanted to be identified in the videos, or whether they should conceal their identity (which none of them did). This approach contrasts with dominant assumptions that all audio-visuals involving people from refugee backgrounds should be anonymised—even when there are no safety or privacy concerns. Respecting the protagonist-filmmakers' wishes to appear in their own videos represents an ethical approach to collaborative research. Arash commented: "*I was unsure about this part [whether to be identified] but I knew whatever I say is my personal experiences and nothing untrue. Also, because maybe it could help some other students to not go through the same challenges or even making universities to adjust their support made me do it."*

Anyier shared her decision-making process on whether or not she should be identified in the video: "*I was not sure if I was comfortable about my name or me physically being in a research video. But after three days of thinking about it, I felt students would be able to relate more from someone who has experienced some of the challenges.*" Similarly, Arash appreciated the independence of deciding what to record: "*The flexibility of the research, that I didn't have someone to check on what I was recording all the time was ethical.*" These aspects of the research collaboration were crucial considerations to maintain the integrity of the participatory model, and challenge research approaches that are too rigid and impose outsider-defined processed on co-researchers.

Gendered narratives. We aimed for gender balance among participants so that gender-specific concerns relating to higher education that may otherwise be overlooked could emerge (another young woman started the project but was unable to complete it because of multiple competing responsibilities; this in itself raises questions about barriers to participation for women). We wanted to challenge the assumption that women and men experience access to and participation in higher education in the same way, and offer diverse forms of self-representation. It may be that protagonist-filmmakers raise similar issues, but drawing attention to the fact that there may be gender-specific barriers and strategies identified in the videos means that these cannot be overlooked. An ongoing issue in refugee studies (and in many disciplines) is that projects are still largely gender-blind, with an assumption of homogeneity of experiences (Lenette, 2019). Attention to gender extends to the dissemination of research outcomes. In this project, Anyier was actively involved in sharing her video to academic and community-based audiences in 2018 and 2019, as a platform to include and promote women's perspectives in public debates on issues that concern them directly.

Collaborative editing. Isobel went through the protagonist-filmmakers video clips, taking notes on major themes to capture all the main points. Anyier, Arash, and Hayatullah provided feedback on the 'rough cuts' of short videos via online platforms, so that they were completely happy with how their narratives were framed once finalised. This ethical approach to collaborative editing when using participatory video can contribute to achieving the emancipatory aims of self-representation. Protagonist-filmmakers can choose the degree to which they want to be involved in the editing process, given how time consuming this process can be.

Importantly, a collaborative editing approach reflects two key principles of participatory research: (i) an ongoing consent process, with multiple opportunities to contribute to and agree on how narratives are framed or withdraw participation, and (ii) a strong sense of ownership of the videos as narratives that reflect their views at a specific point in time. This means that protagonist-filmmakers can exercise more agency in the research process, which in turn reduces the likelihood of misrepresenting their ideas (Lenette, 2019). This approach challenges outsider-imposed editing processes where there may be fewer opportunities to express disagreement about how people's stories are framed.

Influencing policy. Project funds included costs for each protagonist-filmmaker to attend a forum of their choice in Australia or overseas in 2019 to promote their short videos and reach broader audiences. This not only ensures that the topic of access to and participation in higher education remains on the agenda at relevant fora, but also acknowledges that advocacy and dissemination efforts require time and money. A key aim was to impact decision- and policy-making in higher education, as the digital narratives contain key information towards the development of better support infrastructure for students from refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds. We developed vignettes based on their contributions for reporting that target institutional decision-makers and support the work of advocates with/out lived experiences. We merged our reporting strategy with other efforts led by academics with a similar commitment to access and equity issues in higher education (e.g., Baker et al., 2019). These outcomes speak to the broader political potentialities of this approach.

Opportunities for response. Recognition of and response to their audio-visual narratives are crucial to realise the potential of self-representation (Plush, 2015) and achieve broader social justice outcomes. Initial reactions from sharing the videos publicly are promising. Anyier and Arash's videos were launched at a UNSW Sydney event in November 2018 on improving access and support for students from

refugee and asylum seeker backgrounds in higher education. They received excellent feedback from the audience including a key decision-maker who actively supports them to realise their tertiary education aspirations (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Anyier presenting her short movie to a key decision-maker at an event on higher education, Sydney, November 2018.

Challenges

Time commitment. Participatory video projects require flexibility as the method is time intensive, especially due to the cyclical editing process. The protagonist-filmmakers (who were busy students, community practitioners and international advocates) faced additional demands on their time for recording, and one participant could not complete the project. This presented an ethical dilemma because, to use the method well, we needed to be realistic about time commitments and conflicting schedules. One strategy to accommodate everyone's plans was to extend deadlines when needed. This was only possible to a certain extent in a 12 months-funded project, and in the end, we could not complete the fourth video as the protagonist-filmmaker had too many competing responsibilities to turn her attention to this project. It should be noted that the project experienced significant delays in securing ethics clearance, with three rounds of clarification required before the institutional ethics committee granted approval (see below).

Feedback from the three protagonist-filmmakers confirmed that lack of time was by far the biggest issue they had to contend with. For example, Anyier shared: "*I*

think the timeframe should have been a bit longer. I did not anticipate the impact of the short time given until I handed in my participatory video. It was a bit challenging because I had to record in between personal or work schedules and I felt like I was under pressure at most times." She felt that with more time, she would have had a chance to frame her narrative differently, provide more detail, and perhaps discuss particular aspects she was unsure of with Caroline and Isobel.

Assumptions when editing. Caroline and Isobel decided not to offer guidance on how to illustrate key issues captured in the initial footage (i.e., when we discussed aesthetic considerations to make the videos visually engaging and impactful for audiences), even though it was at times tempting to do so. As Wolfe (20176) contends, the aesthetic is inherently political. Providing suggestions on recording style might have compromised the co-researcher model used, which was a major ethical consideration when adhering to principles of self-representation. In other words, we avoided imposing our own notions of what would 'look good' or be useful onto the process. Instead, we decided that using simple animations when finalising the videos—with each protagonist-filmmaker's approval—would improve the "flow" of the narratives and "fill gaps" wherever needed.

Isobel was keen to ensure that each video was easy to follow while promoting the main points raised and remaining faithful to the protagonist-filmmakers' wishes. Deciding what content to in/exclude, sometimes based on poor video or audio quality, inevitably influenced how each video was represented in its final form, which in turn was shaped by the assumptions we brought to the project as researchers. This was by far the most problematic ethical concern for Caroline and Isobel who discussed how to privilege the element of self-representation on several occasions to ensure that aesthetic concerns did not overpower the method's emancipatory aims. We were at times surprised at how easily it was to "fall back" to the default position of making assumptions on the protagonist-filmmakers' intentions and recording approach. One key strategy was to go back to Anyier, Arash, and Hayatullah and ask for their opinion about, for instance, simple animations as a strategy to piece their narratives together. This is where our reflections on positionality were especially useful.

Initial engagement. Caroline and Isobel found that students who lacked the advocacy presence and English skills that Anyier, Arash, and Hayatullah had, quickly declined to participate (unfortunately, there were no funds for interpreting). This raised ethical concerns about whose perspectives were left out of the conversation due to low confidence or misunderstanding about the purpose of the research

methodology. The gender representation among participants remains a key concern, as women tend to have more competing responsibilities to juggle, and are less likely to have time to engage in time-consuming participatory processes.

Unfamiliarity with methodology. Reticence to record oneself, paired with uncertainty about how videos "fit" in a research project, can be a barrier to participation. While appealing to some, recording oneself can also be intimidating for those who would prefer to receive guidance on what to talk about, especially when exploring sensitive topics. Participatory video has much potential as a creative tool for self-representation, but protagonist-filmmakers must have a clear understanding of project aims and objectives and recording strategies to make the most of the approach.

Anyier, who was the most confident using this method, still felt confused at times: "*3-4 weeks should have been about understanding the concept and the process of doing the video. Although I had enough and the right information to start recording myself, I found myself confused and not knowing where to begin the recording until two weeks into the first month. Sometime video recording can be confronting and particularly when you are recording yourself.*" Arash concurred that there was some uncertainty about the process, although there was also an opportunity to be creative: "*with the information provided, I was still confused about the way I should record the video and how to start, or things that I could cover but it leads to being creative a bit.*"

Lessons Learnt

Using participatory video in this project was more challenging that we initially anticipated. However, by regularly discussing the ethical implications of making collaborative decisions at each step of the way, the benefits eventually outweighed the problems. We were all committed to realising the aims of self-representation through participatory video research, and so we were determined to address any issues arising to make the most of this short-term funded opportunity.

While it is too early to track the impact of the videos on broader advocacy efforts, we have gathered anecdotal evidence of how audiences are responding to the participatory videos. As mentioned above, Anyier and Arash showed their videos at an event on supporting university students from refugee backgrounds, where a key decision-maker responded positively to the issues raised. Anyier has used her

video at a public speaking workshop for young women from her community in January 2019; she reported that the audience response was positive and they used the video to think about how they represent themselves to an audience, especially in terms of improving their public speaking skills. Arash showed his video at a peer education gathering to support young advocates and received similar feedback.

There was no time to show the short movies overseas although this was a project aim. However, there will be several opportunities for the protagonist-filmmakers to share their videos at international meetings and events, as all are well-known refugee advocates who travel to South-East Asia, the US, and Europe several times a year. This points to the potential for methods like participatory video at the research dissemination stage. There are more opportunities to show a short movie to engage with audiences, than distribute copies of reports and journal articles that only a few people might read.

On another note, the general tendency for ethics committees to insist on an "arms-lengths" approach was somewhat of a contradiction for the protagonist-filmmakers. Anyier and Arash both commented on the fact that knowing Caroline and her research approach was crucial to their decision to participate: "*importantly, what made it 'ethical' was that a meaningful relationship of trust was already formed and the researcher was not heavily involved during the process*" (Anyier); and "*I think knowing the person who is conducting the research was really important. That helped with the trust*" (Arash).

Additionally, research participants rarely have the opportunity of providing feedback on the research process itself (Lenette, 2019; Cox, 2016; Gillam, 2013). This is partly due to ethics committees' tendencies to focus on "what can/did go wrong" rather than appreciate the best-practices that yield excellent results in the field. However, such feedback would not only be useful to improve institutional processes overall, but also provide much-needed guidance to promptly resolve ethical issues in participatory research with people who are marginalised.

Our Recommendations

As a team, we came up with four recommendations as best-practice principles to arts-based research using audio-visual means like participatory video to increase the social and political potentialities of this and other film-based research methods. We target researchers, advocates, practitioners, and people with lived experiences who wish to embrace participatory video as a form of self-representation, to

document first-hand views on important topics for wider dissemination and social and policy impact. We hope that the points raised here will assist others to think further about how we can use the method ethically rather than adopt a tokenistic approach to self-representation.

1. *Recruitment:* Organise a workshop with potential participants to explain project aims and objectives, and offer training on basic recording. This will provide ample opportunity to understand their research priorities; discuss what the research project is about; workshop key concepts like self-representation and participatory research; agree on how the outcomes will be used in research, practice and policy contexts; explain recording techniques (e.g., using camera functions, choosing quiet locations, trouble-shooting, or respecting people's privacy). This is crucial to building trust with potential participants and set a clear direction for the project. Pay attention to and devise an explicit strategy to engage those who are not necessarily the most confident to volunteer for such projects. Consider key diversity factors like gender, age, sexual identity, disability or language issues.

2. *Question, question, question:* We recognised how easy it can be to fall into the trap of creating stories that reflect researchers' perspectives rather than what the protagonist-filmmakers might want to depict, especially when editing (Blomfield & Lenette, 2018; 2019). Besides negotiating a transparent editing process from the outset, it is important to continually question whose agenda drives the process in co-research and the impact of seemingly minor decision-making that can threaten the potential for participatory video to be an effective tool for genuine self-representation.

3. *Socio-technical concerns:* Participatory video can be quite complex to deploy and may not always be suitable, especially for short-term research projects. The amount of time and energy required to decide on and test the right (i.e., light-weight and user-friendly) cameras and accessories to ensure good image and sound quality in a range of settings should not be underestimated. Technical or filmmaking issues and emancipatory agendas need not be mutually exclusive. While the focus of participatory video should be on each person's narrative and exercising agency through this process, it is still important to capture high quality recordings to facilitate editing so that wider audiences can engage with the audio-visual elements easily.

4. *Knowledge translation:* The analysis of video footage should include a phase where co-researchers collaboratively "translate" findings into practical strategies,

to be distributed through short policy or practice briefs or reports. This is crucial in advocacy contexts. It would be naïve to assume that decision-makers will eventually come across our research findings and know what to make of it. Better still, involve decision-makers from the outset so that there is clear commitment on their part to use the findings from participatory video projects (see discussions on deliberative dialogue, Lenette, 2019). It is not enough (and can be unethical) to record just for the sake of recording, without a clear strategy on how the themes discussed will be useful for stakeholders, especially for protagonist-filmmakers. This might defeat the purpose of privileging self-representation as a key principle of participatory video research, and is potentially the most relevant recommendation on how this methodology can have wider social and political impact.

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ENDNOTES

i. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SjT5lENga_M

ii. See https://vimeo.com/album/3459242

iii. See report at https://apo.org.au/node/222161