

A Guide to Conducting Participatory Collage Consumer Research

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A Guide to Conducting Participatory Collage Consumer Research

Abstract

This chapter provides guidance on how to conduct participatory visual research. Drawing on the researchers' experiences of using the arts-based technique of collage, the chapter outlines the power of collage and collage elicitation interviews to access consumers' inner thoughts and feelings. An illustrative example of how the research method was used to explore the complex identity negotiations of second and third generation British South Asians is used to provide pragmatic guidance on how to undertake participatory data collection, interpretation and analysis. Immersing participants in interpreting and analysing the data empowers them and provides researchers with rich insight into complex and fluid constructs.

Introduction

Images are 'everywhere'. They permeate our academic work and everyday lives. They inhabit and inspire our imaginations, technologies, texts and conversations.

- Pink (2013, p.1)

In today's hyper-visual world, where consumers are accustomed to responding to visual cues, researchers should look to visual research methods to reflect this reality when designing research (Belk et al., 2003; Rose, 2014). Visual methods can allow researchers to collect complex consumer narratives, capturing rich and valuable insight into consumers' experiences and lived realities whilst allowing for the situational context and temporal nature of consumer behaviour (Denzin and Lincoln, 2008; Rohani et al., 2014). Visual research methods are capable of disrupting long established narratives and generating innovative insight into consumers' lived realities (Reavey, 2020). In setting out to develop a methodology capable of exploring the complexities of consumer identity, visual research methods were therefore a critical method for us to draw upon to further understand contemporary consumer identity negotiations.

In this chapter, we draw on our experiences of visual research, focussing predominately on collage. We focus on how we design and conduct participatory research, an area we have found there to be scarce pragmatic guidance on (see Dekel-Dachs and Moorlock, 2020). This pragmatic guidance is put forward through the sharing of our experiences in developing a collaborative visual research method to explore consumer identity negotiations. Our method utilises collage assemblage, collage elicitation interviews and participatory data interpretation and analysis to explore the complex identity negotiations of second and third generation British South Asians. The chapter provides pragmatic guide for researchers looking to utilise collage and/or collage elicitation interviews as a participatory research method. For researchers not wanting to use collage, the guidance regarding participatory visual research put forward in this chapter can be used with other visual research methods, such as video diaries or the creation of artwork such as drawing, graffiti, painting, sculpting and/or cartoon strips. The chapter now proceeds with a discussion of the importance of collage as a data collection tool and introduces the concept of participatory research, before

providing guidance on collecting, analysing and presenting collage data before concluding with ethical considerations.

Why collage?

Collage is an arts-based data collection technique that stems from the French word *coller*, meaning to stick (Butler-Kisber, 2010). Garoian and Gaudelius (2008), Kilgard, (2009) and Vaughan (2005) define collage as the composition of images created using a range of sources and formats, such as photographs, magazine cuttings, artefacts, natural objects, words, textiles and drawings. When the images are placed on the collage, they are often taken out of context and thus acquire new meaning(s) in light of the relationship and co-existence with other images on the collage. When assembling the collage, participants are often actively encouraged to go into a liminal space to create new meaning from the bricolage of materials they have collected (Given, 2008; Neilsen, 2002). Collage, as a visual interpretative tool, has been used in a broad range of disciplines to facilitate researchers in understanding participants' conscious and unconscious thoughts, helping them in articulating and expressing ideas and thoughts that otherwise might not be accessible to the researcher (Dzyabura and Peres, 2021; Plakoyiannaki and Stavrakaki, 2018).

In consumer research collage has been drawn on to explore topics such as participants' desire for consumption, for example, Belk et al. (2003) asked participants to create collages from magazine cut-outs to express the concept of desire before writing down their interpretation of their collage. Chaplin and Roedder (2005) also utilised collage in their research on self-identity where participants created collages on "What makes me happy?", using researcher provided materials, with a researcher-driven approach then taken to interpreting the data. In a study on gambling, Cotte and Latour (2008) asked participants to bring images to an interview that reflected what gambling meant to them. At the end of this interview participants assembled a collage with the images and their personal annotations. In exploring children's consumption constellations, Chaplin and Lowrey (2010) also asked participants to build a collage by choosing amongst a set of predetermined images and labels that reflected, "When I think of a cool kid I think this person would ____.", with participants then asked to connect elements on their collage. Collages can also be collaboratively co-created with others (see Bröckerhoff and Seregina, 2022). Bröckerhoff and Seregina still emphasise however that collective collage creation still requires an individual aspect in relation to image selection, with new meaning then brought to images through the collective assemblage of the collage itself. The above examples demonstrate that collage, as a data collection method is inherently participatory and reflective in nature (see also Vacchelli, 2018). Our method sought to build on this and take the participatory nature one step further through immersing the participant not only in the data collection but also in the interpretation and analysis of the data, which will be considered further in the next section on participatory visual research.

Recognising the scarcity of innovative research methods capable of dealing with the complexities of consumers' lives (Kerrigan and Hart, 2016), we sought to develop a research method protocol capable of capturing the complex and dynamic nature of consumers' everyday lived realities. Taking inspiration from outside of consumer research, we were influenced by Harper's (2002) work on image elicitation interview - the method of drawing on visual images during an interview to elicit insight from participants and to evoke and access inner elements of participants' consciousness (Richard and Lahman, 2015). There are

two variations of image elicitation: *researcher-generated* and *participant-generated* (Richard and Lahman, 2015). In a *researcher-generated* approach the participant is asked to select images (or materials) from a repository provided by the researcher (e.g. Dzyabura and Peres, 2021). In a *participant-generated* approach the participant has the freedom to select images, which is an approach that has gained momentum with researchers questioning if their choice in images reflects what a participant would choose (Deal and Fox, 2006). The immersive and participatory nature of our research meant that we took a participant-generated approach, viewing and discussing images collaboratively with participants to allow new insight and meaning to emerge that the researchers could not develop on their own (Heisley and Levy, 1991; van House, 2006).

Participatory Visual Research

In participatory research, participants are active collaborators who are committed to generating a thorough account of the research topic (Reason and Bradbury, 2001). To understand 'how individuals present themselves, understand their own life story, and connect with the social world' (Gauntlett, 2007, p.3), participants must collaborate with the researcher in the interpretation and analysis of the data (Given, 2008). This was therefore a leading factor in designing our research method protocol. It is also important when taking a participatory approach that the researcher(s) carefully consider their roles, authority and power. Historically, authority and power are associated with the researcher (Given, 2008). In that it is the researcher who sets the agenda, determines what data to collect and when, then how to analyse and interpret the data. Coad (2012) and Mayall (1994) argue that this leads to data that reflects the researcher's pre-determined ideas, with data analysis being where power differentials are most likely to be experienced. We drew on participatory research in our research to effectively produce robust and meaningful data in view of the culture being explored being different to the researchers' own (Pain and Francis, 2003). It was therefore critical that we took a fully participatory approach in the research, with participants being involved in the data collection, interpretation and analysis.

In taking a participatory approach to research there are a number of benefits and limitations. The research was designed to ensure that each participant collaborated and co-created knowledge with the researcher. This has the benefit of giving voice to the participants and ensuring that their voice is not only heard but is accurately reflected in the research findings, thus offering credibility and trustworthiness to the findings (Given, 2008). The participatory nature of the research also meant that participants were invested in the research, with many reflecting on how therapeutic they had found interpreting and analysing their data. When developing the research protocol, the researchers were concerned with participant retention given the time and long-term commitment required from each participant. When taking a participatory approach, we recommend that future researchers consider what to do if participants drop-out during the research. For example, if a participant only assembles a collage or is not able to take part in the data interpretation and analysis. Given the time intensive nature of our research we allowed for additional time to recruit participants in the event that earlier participants dropped out as the data interpretation and analysis steps were critical to achieving the objectives of our research and to avoid researcher bias when interpreting the data. For any participants who had not participated in the data analysis and interpretation we therefore decided that their data would not be included in the research. We retained all participants in the research outlined

in this chapter, which we considered to be due to a number of factors, including being upfront in recruitment about the requirements of each stage in terms of what was required and the time intensity of the research, we offered small incentives at each stage as a thank you and finally we offered flexibility to each participant on when each session took place. In that all meetings with each participant took place at a time and location convenient to them.

Designing and Collecting Collage Data

In this section we talk through how to create a research team before providing guidance on how to design, pilot, refine and carry out data collection using our participatory collage research method.

When designing research, importance must first be placed on selecting the right research team. The research team should reflect on their connection with the research topic and what they bring to the project in relation to their capabilities, expertise, potential liabilities and biases, current and life experiences to ensure robustness (Wallerstein et al., 2006). In developing our protocol, we took inspiration from Cheruvelil et al. (2014) and Robinson et al. (1997) who put forward that an effective team should be diverse and offer different skills and perspectives. Ofer Dekel-Dachs brought a wealth of experience of psychological research, and first-hand experience of immigrating to England and raising a family within a minority community with a different national culture. Ofer was cautious to conduct the research in another community rather than his own to avoid biasing the data. Emily Moorlock brought a different viewpoint, having grown up in a predominately Caucasian community in England, she brought the perspective of the host society and commercial experience of developing research methodologies.

When establishing the research team, based on our experiences, we recommend that the researcher(s) consider the following questions:

- What skills and expertise do the research team require?
- What does each member bring to the research team?
 - Are there any skills or expertise required that are missing from this research team?
 - What role will each researcher have in the research?
- Is there potential bias within the research team?
 - Yes, are actions required to mitigate or overcome the bias?

To put these questions into context, if researchers are building a research team to explore how teenagers perceive social media to influence their friendships through participatory collage, they firstly need to reflect on the attributes and skills the research team need to have, which might include aspects such as safeguarding expertise, subject knowledge or experience in working with teenagers. If not, there are two options, to review whether there a current member can gain the necessary skills such as through training, or alternatively to recruit another team member with the required attributes and/or skills. Each team member should have a clearly defined role to ensure harmony within the research team; however, each team member can take on multiple (or even one member all roles) within the team. The potential of the research team to bias the data must also be considered. For example, if one research team member is a parent of a teenager who has had an extremely negative or positive experience with their friendship group and they attribute this to social media, this must be reflected on throughout all stages of the

research, including the research design and dissemination of research findings. It should also be reflected on whether this potential bias outweighs the strengths they could bring to the project.

Once the research team is assembled, the next stage is to clearly define and refine the scope of the research project. The topic on which participants will assemble the collage then needs to be determined to ensure that it answers the research question(s) and will provide sufficient data to address the research aim and objectives. Researchers must ensure that the topic of the collage is not so broad that participants struggle to know what to include and conversely, depending on the nature of enquiry, that the topic is not too narrow and specific that it inhibits participants from having the freedom to interpret and consider avenues that the researchers hadn't previously considered.

In designing our participatory research, we conducted a pilot study (n = 72) to ensure clarity of the brief and to refine the method. The large scale was due to testing and refining the protocol over time with male and female undergraduate and postgraduate university students from a diverse range of ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. The participant brief and research design itself evolved over the course of this pilot study due to our learnings. This led to the development of a robust and user-friendly visual research method that we share in this chapter. We would recommend that future researchers pilot the topic of their collage on a small sample to ensure that the collages assembled are in line with the scope of the research.

Participant Recruitment and Briefing

The recruitment of participants needs to be carefully considered in participatory visual research. Where research involves participants taking part in multiple phases of data collection, interpretation and analysis, recruitment must ensure participants are aware of the time commitments involved in the research from the onset to ensure participant retention (Patel et al., 2003). To overcome this, we took steps, some of which we outlined earlier, and in addition we also offered participants food, drink and covered all expenses incurred due to the research, such as travel and materials for creating the collage (Singh et al., 2018). It was also made clear to participants on the participant information sheet and in the initial briefing, what participating in the research required, including expected timings for each stage. This managed participants' expectations and ensured that participants were informed and committed to each stage of the research process. We also found that the participants became absorbed in the research, feeling empowered with analysing and interpreting their own data.

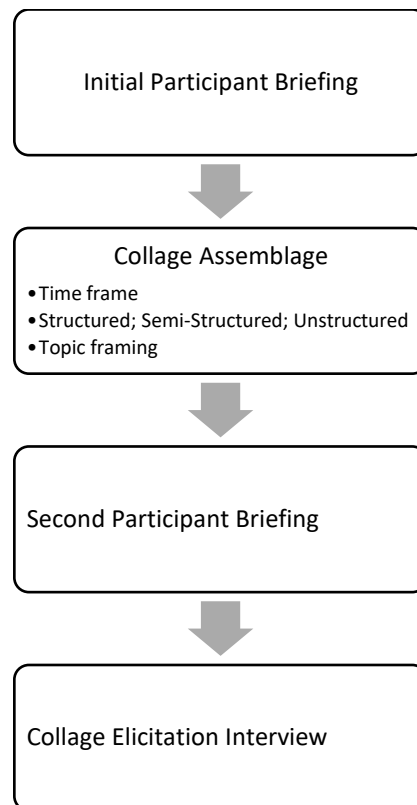
The research briefing to participants is critical in collage research. Participants particularly require a well-defined brief on the requirements for creating the collage, including a clear topic on which to assemble the collage, details on what materials and objects to include (and what not to include) along with aspects such as the size of the collage and whether the collage produced should be physical and/or digital. A clear statement on how the collage and collage elicitation data will be used during and after the research should also be provided to participants in the participant information sheet and again reemphasised in the first briefing (Sim and Waterfield, 2019; Wiles et al. 2008).

In the development of our collage participants were asked to create a physical collage that was either A1 or A2 in size. Recognising that not all participants would have access to appropriate materials we gave each participant the option of buying the A1/A2 paper and then the researchers refunding the participant or where logistically possible the researchers provided the participants with the paper. In hindsight, as we will reflect on in more detail later, due to problems with logistics regarding participants transporting the collage to the interview venue and the researchers securely storing the collages, we would have perhaps asked participants to create a digital collage on software to which they are familiar, such as Microsoft PowerPoint. The size of the collage in our research was however important, in that we needed to ensure that the paper provided enough space for participants to create a collage that included all the materials to address the brief. In the pilot study, for example, we trialled collages assembled on A3 paper; this size, for the nature of our topic, was insufficient to include a breadth of images to provide rich insight during the collage elicitation interview. Participants also fed back that they had struggled to fit everything required onto A3 paper.

The first brief developed for the pilot study was a written brief that outlined the requirements for creating the collage. This brief was very open to interpretation, with participants simply asked to create a collage that reflected “who am I?”. This led to some participants going off brief and creating a collage, and in one instance a paper mâché sculpture, that did not address the research questions and was difficult to have an in-depth conversation about during the collage elicitation interview. This led to the development of a more structured brief and more detail on how to create the collage and what to include, which is outlined in more detail in the following section. We also ensured that a conversation was had with all participants (either via video or audio call or in-person) before the collage creation exercise. This ensured participants understood the brief and what was required and provided the opportunity to put participants at ease about the research and address any questions they had at this stage. Participants were also provided with a written copy of the brief to reinforce the points raised in the conversation, which included details on how to create the collage and ideas for what to include on the collage (such as photographs, magazine cuttings, drawings, words and/or phrases). The subject on which the participants were creating the collage, self-identity, was also expressed and reemphasised in the participant information sheet, initial briefing conversation and again in a follow-up email to each participant. Following the initial briefing, participants were then asked to assemble their collage. The steps of data collection are outlined in Figure 6.1.

Following the pilot study, 13 participants were recruited to take part in the research project using snowball sampling technique due to the participants not being easily accessible through other sampling strategies (Spren, 1992). Three initial participants, who identified as second and third British South Asians were initially recruited and were then asked to use their social networks to recommend other potential research participants (Parker et al., 2019). The final sample was made up of seven female and six male participants, aged between 20 and 30 years old.

Figure 6.1 – Steps in Data Collection



Collage Assemblage

In our pilot study, as previously discussed, the initial participants were provided with an unstructured and open brief for assembling their self-identity collage. Initially, the content of the participants' collages was left open to each participant to interpret what to include (and exclude). This lack of guidance led to some participants struggling to know where to start in assembling their collages and led to large variations in the collage elicitation interviews. In that, where participants' collages were packed full of images and content this led to the collection of data that were often repetitive and shallow. Conversely, where participants included very few images, the data lacked depth, with the collage elicitation conversations being short and somewhat superficial. This led to the refinement of the brief, taking a more structured approach to ensure the insight gained was rich and meaningful.

When refining the collage brief, we took inspiration from narrative psychology and Raggatt's (2000) taxonomy on the dialogical self, which was adapted to guide participants on what and how many images to include on the collage (see Table 6.1). Each participant was instructed to include one or two images for each category on the taxonomy, capturing participants' life concerns across three categories: *people*; *objects*; and *life events*. The fourth category from Raggatt's taxonomy, *body orientations* was initially included, however, this was excluded after all participants in the second stage expressed confusion over what to include under this heading that they had not included in other categories. One participant also mentioned feeling uncomfortable over what images to include in this category. In eliminating this category from the taxonomy in the third and final round of the pilot study we found that this had no impact on the quality of the data. Participants were also reassured participants in the initial briefing that there was no wrong answer and that we were interested in their individual interpretation of the brief. This meant that the collages

assembled allowed for the collection of rich and meaningful data with participants feeling comfortable on what to include when assembling their collage. The fourth category is relevant for future researchers who are looking to explore concepts where body orientations are critical to the research. For example, if researchers are exploring body image and associated concepts such as body enhancement, then the category of *body orientations* will be important to furthering understanding of how consumers' physical endowments, such as their height, weight, body shape, features, hair colour and so on act as cues for how consumers position themselves and others.

We also took inspiration from Harper (2002), who in the context of photo education interviews, highlights the importance of framing the interview from the onset to ensure participants are in a reflective state of mind. Participants were therefore asked to start the collage by placing an image of themselves in the centre of the collage and to then place images and annotations around this image to frame their story.

Table 6.1 – Taxonomy of Attachments of the Dialogical Self

People	Objects	Life Events
Liked associate	Important possessions (x 2)	Childhood – positive experience
Liked public figure	Symbolic object	Childhood – negative experience
Disliked public figure	Place in the world (x 2)	Adolescent – positive experience
Other important associate (x 2)	Clothing, costume, work of art or imagination (x 2)	Adolescent – negative experience
		Adult - positive experience
		Adult - negative experience

Adapted from Raggatt (2000, p.72)

The time participants are given to assemble the collage also needs careful consideration. In the pilot study, we explored different time periods over which participants created their collage. Allowing too little time (e.g. less than a week) led to participants not having enough time to reflect on the topic, and, conversely, allowing too much time (e.g. over a month) meant that many participants forgot what was required. The time researchers should allow for collage assemblage will vary depending on the nature of the research topic. For our topic, we found that two weeks for participants to assemble their collage before the collage elicitation interview was sufficient.

Earlier we highlighted how the participants in our research were asked to create a physical collage (see Figure 6.2 for examples). Early in the pilot study it was noted that participants preferred the canvas (A1/A2 paper) on which the collage was to be assembled to be provided, rather than participants being reimbursed. Due to geographic locations, however, this was not always feasible. We would advise researchers to consider this when designing collage research, such as through asking participants to create digital collages which would negate the issues of resource constraints and secure storage of large physical collages. An alternative option would be to brief participants that they will create a collage in two weeks' time, ask them to gather appropriate materials to include on the collage and then provide

them with the resources (materials, space and time) to complete this immediately before the collage elicitation interview.

Figure 6.2 – Examples of Collages



Collage Elicitation Interviews

After each participant had created their collage, they were invited to a second participant briefing. This briefing focussed on the second part of our data collection method, the participative collage elicitation interview. This briefing took place before the interview and was conducted by phone call (video or audio). The aim of this briefing was to inform participants what the collage elicitation interview entailed, and to prepare the participant for talking around their collage. The briefing also offered participants the opportunity to ask questions and to raise any concerns that they had about the research. In this briefing the time and location for the collage elicitation interview was also arranged.

The collage elicitation interview then took place in a private location where both the researcher and the participant felt safe and comfortable, these were predominately conducted on a university campus but also took place in participants' homes, a private room at a participants' office and in a mosque. The interviews typically lasted for between two and three hours, with participants offered regular breaks and refreshments. The participant was asked to sit beside the researcher so that they had the same view of the collage. The researcher then asked each participant to talk through the photograph of themselves that they had included on the collage and to explain why they chose this photograph. This eased participants into the conversation, with participants then deciding where to take the conversation next. The role of the researcher was to ask probing questions to reveal deeper insight and ensure the research questions were addressed and that the conversation didn't go off topic. Following the guidance of Bates et al. (2017), in their participant-driven open approach to elicitation interviews, probing questions were asked such as 'tell me about x on your collage', 'can you explain why you chose to include X [pointing to image] on your collage?' and 'why is [pointing to image on collage] important to you?'. The interview concluded with participants asked if there was anything else about their life experiences and self-identity that they felt was not depicted on the collage or discussed during the interview. Interviews were recorded (audio and video) and then transcribed. The rationale for video recording was to ensure the researchers could see the images being referred to, which enabled this to be captured in the transcription process, where applicable. The camera was placed next to the researcher facing the table where the collage was laid out

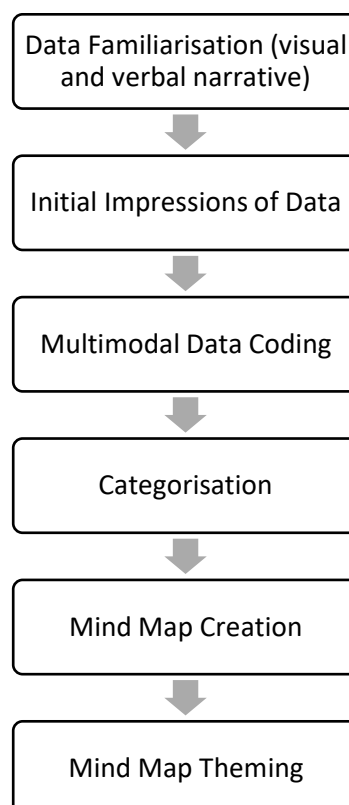
with the researcher ensuring that the collage and the images on the collage were clearly visible in the video recording but not the participant.

The collage was a rich source of data that helped to structure the conversation and meant that participants came to the interview ready to talk about the topic. At the end of the interview the participants were also asked to reflect on the data collection method. Participants revealed how therapeutic they found the research methodology, with mentioning that the collage creation and collage elicitation interview had brought up thoughts that they had not previously struggled to articulate. This demonstrates the power of collage for empowering consumers and exploring complex and dynamic concepts like self-identity. Participants were then debriefed, with the next steps of the research that they would be involved with highlighted.

Analysing Collage Data

Having collected the data, the next stage was analysis. The collages and collage elicitation interviews meant that verbal, written and visual data needed to be analysed. Existing consumer research provides little guidance on how to combine and analyse multimodal data. That is data in multiple formats, including verbal, visual and written data. We used thematic analysis, as set out by Braun and Clarke (2006), to analyse the visual and written data from the collages and verbal data from the collage elicitation interviews. This approach was capable of dealing with the complex and overlapping themes. The steps we took to analyse the data are illustrated in Figure 6.3, with the remainder of this section providing more detail on each step.

Figure 6.3 – Steps in Analysing Multimodal Data



Data Familiarisation

Our first step in data analysis was data familiarisation, as inspired by the first stage of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis and Lieblich et al.'s (1998) advice to read the data for holistic content before data analysis. This involved the researchers acquainting (and reacquainting) themselves with the multimodal data - looking at the collage, reading the collage elicitation interview transcript and watching the collage elicitation interview recording. Once familiar with the data, both researchers, independently, noted down their initial impressions of the data, recording their emerging impressions of the data in memos. This involved noting down aspects of interest in the data that were relevant to the research topic, that the researchers felt might form the basis of themes at a later stage or areas to explore further (Nowell et al., 2017). For example, this involved making memos of metaphorical representations, contradictions between verbal and visual data and unusual features in the data that could be explored with the participant during the data interpretation and analysis stage.

Data Coding

The next stage is to code the data. In our research, inspired by Corbin and Straus (2015), we used open coding to label concepts within the data and to define and develop categories that addressed the research aim, objectives and questions. The collage elicitation interview data were coded first, then the collage data. The researchers coded the collage elicitation interview data first due to the participatory nature of the topic, in that the researchers wanted to understand the participants' interpretations of their collage first. The collages were then coded by applying Liebenberg et al.'s (2012) advice that image-based data, like collages, should be coded differently to verbal narrative interview data. In that, following line-by-line coding is not feasible when working with visual data. Instead, we drew on visual segment coding to allow us to distil themes from the data, whereby we drew out "chunks" of visual data that addressed the research question, as shown in Figure 6.4. As previously highlighted, the nature of data collected in our collage elicitation interviews was multimodal. The coding therefore needed to be multimodal to understand the 'dynamics, emotions, and emphases across data formats' (Craig et al., 2021, p.1). Craig et al. note that the analysis of visual data adds to the complexities of data analysis, however, it can provide 'a more precise representation of the data as it was collected while retaining the richness of what was said and how it was said' than verbal narrative data alone is incapable of. To code each collage a digital image was taken of the collage. The researchers then grouped the images using segment codes, which were then shown to participants at a later stage of the research (see Figure 6.4) to check understanding and interpretation.

Competitive Sport

The collage for 'Competitive Sport' features a variety of images. At the top left is a soccer player in a white kit. Next to it is a poster of Tupac Shakur with the text 'TUPAC BATTLE FOR COMFORT'. Below the poster is a soccer ball with the text 'Play more Football!!'. To the right of the soccer ball is a photo of a person in a red and white outfit. Further right is a photo of a person in a blue jacket. Below the soccer ball is a photo of a person in a white shirt. To the right of the person in the white shirt is a photo of a person in a blue shirt. At the bottom right is a photo of a person in a blue shirt.

Cultural Conflict

The collage for 'Cultural Conflict' has a yellow background with the text 'MIX AND CULTURE SHOCK'. Below the text are several images: a photo of a person in a green dress, a photo of a person in a green dress, and a photo of a person in a green dress. There is also a photo of a person in a green dress.

Data Categorisation

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asked to comment on the extracts and open codes, and to highlight where they agreed or disagreed with the researchers' data categorisations. The purpose of this form was for the researcher to start to break down the data for participants to then interpret prior to and during the second meeting. We found an appropriate number of categories for participants to synthesise was 30-40, with this then sent to participants one week before the second meeting.

Mind Mapping

In the second participant meeting, the participant and researcher used the categorisation form, once reviewed by the participant to co-create a mind map (see Figure 6.5). The mind map allows for visualisation of the relationship between the codes and connections and relationships between categories and codes to be made. This map was created on a laptop computer with the participant directing the researcher on what to put where (and where/what direction to put the arrows in). The categorisation form played a pivotal role in compiling the mind map, allowing the participant to visualise the categories and codes from the form in a way that was meaningful to them. After the mind map was compiled, participants were then asked to synthesise the data on their collage by refining it into smaller themes that addressed the research question. Figure 6.6 demonstrates this synthesis of voices from the initial codes (shown in the background) to the self-narrative themes for one participant.

Figure 6.5 – Example Mind Map

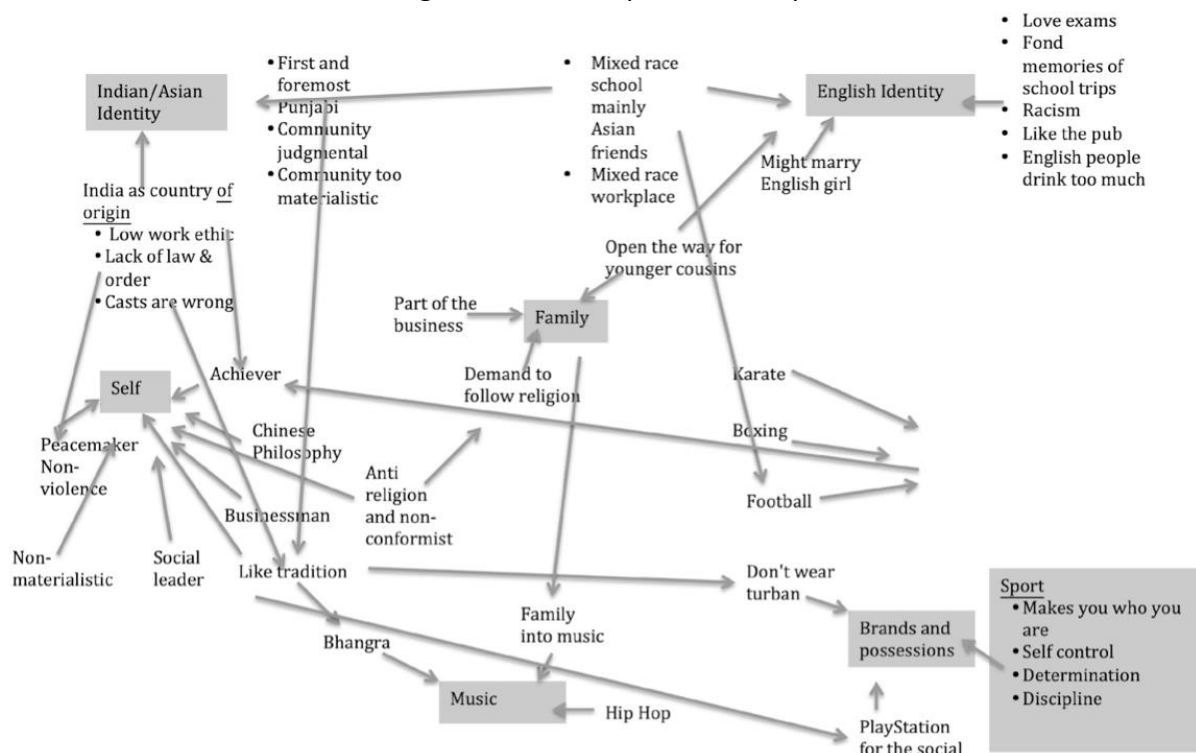


Figure 6.6 – Example of Collage Self-Narratives



Presenting Multimodal Data

When deciding on how to disseminate multimodal data, researchers must decide how to present the images and written narrative. This is an emerging field, with new methods emerging such as photo essays (Harris, 2017), where visuals are drawn on to tell a story. In consumer research publications, the volume of visual data included is often limited due to word count. For example, Chaplin and Roedder (2005) and Belk et al. (2003) include seven visual images in their papers. We tried to overcome this including 24 images in one publication by including multiple images in each figure (see Dekel-Dachs and Moorlock, 2020). Careful consideration must be paid to deciding how to share the verbal and visual narratives and the interconnectedness between these with the reader. Decisions need to be made, such as whether to take a case study approach where participants' data are considered in turn, or when presenting the key themes in the data to share snapshots from all participants.

Ethical considerations

A number of ethical considerations arose over the course of our research:

- *Copyrighted images.* Participants included cut out images from magazines, such as advertisements of brands or images where brand names and/or logos were clearly visible. To publish these images, some publications require permission of the brand, which for some global brands is not always feasible. We overcame this by blurring out brand logos and identifiable information in the images prior to publication.
- *Wider consent and anonymity.* In the creation of our self-identity collages, most participants choose to include at least one image of family and/or friends due to the nature of the research topic. The utilisation of identifiable images by participants raises

concerns around wider consent for the use of these images and also raises concerns on preserving the anonymity and confidentiality of the participant. We considered that the inclusion of such images on the collage made the participant identifiable to their community, posing concerns due to the sensitive and personal nature of the data participants provided in the collage and collage elicitation conversation. In some instances, this could compromise the participants' safety within their community (Griffith et al., 2017).

In the initial participant briefing, and on the participant information sheet, participants were told that the collage would be publicly available after the research, and where images on their collage included other people, they needed to obtain written consent from these individuals before using them on their collage. Despite this, most participants, in compiling their collage selected images with other individuals without obtaining written consent as it was not always feasible to do so. The researchers, with consent from the participants, took the decision to blur and, in some cases, completely cover parts of the collages when sharing the research outside of the research team to negate the risk of participants being identified.

- *Breaching confidentiality.* An ethical predicament faced during the research project was that the power of the research method meant that participants reflected deep and personal feelings with the researcher. For example, during the pilot study, one participant included an image of a pistol on their collage and during the collage elicitation conversation, when discussing the image, they mentioned that they had considered committing suicide. Appropriate safeguarding procedures had been put in place when designing the research, with these steps communicated to participants on the participant information sheet, consent form and in each briefing. It was highlighted that confidentiality and anonymity would be breached where researcher(s) had safeguarding concerns with participants aware that in exceptional circumstances their confidentiality might be breached, such as in this instance. Researchers looking to explore potentially sensitive topics or to employ our research method protocol must also be clear on the correct process to follow if such instances occur during data collection, consulting relevant institutional and ethical guidance on safeguarding prior to data collection.
- *Pseudonyms.* The researchers wanted to ensure participants felt safe in sharing their data. Pseudonyms were therefore selected by each participant with the researcher then confirming the suitability of the pseudonym. For example, the researchers conducted an online search to ensure the name wasn't unusual and/or traceable to an unconnected individual.
- *Damaging artefacts.* Participants may use original photographs of sentimental value in assembling their collage. It is therefore essential in the participant information sheet and in the initial briefing to advise participants not to use an original and meaningful artefact unless they have other copies. Instead, participants were advised to take a photograph of the image to include instead. We did not experience any problems with this. We were however prepared for the scenario of a participant asking to remove an image from their collage. In such an instance the researcher would take a photograph of the image to print out and include in its place. This issue could be overcome entirely through participants creating digital collages.

Conclusions

Our experiences of using participatory collage research were of the cathartic and empowerment that the method had on participants. Not only did the protocol afford rich understanding of the topic, but it also brought out subconscious feelings participants themselves had not been aware of. Those wanting to follow our guidance do need to be aware of the time intensity for the participant and researcher. The reward, however, is the powerful insight the protocol provides, with the collaborative approach of data interpretation and analysis giving space and time for hidden and silent voices to come to light.

Future researchers should look to use or adapt our participatory method to afford rich and fresh insight in the exploration of contemporary visual culture. For example, to improve understanding of the self-narratives of children and adolescents in their formative years or to compare consumption experiences across generations.

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