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RUNNING HEAD: PHOTO-ELICITATION AND TIME-LINING

Photo-elicitation and time-lining to enhance the research interview: Exploring the quarterlife crisis of young adults in India and the UK

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN PSYCHOLOGY

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to convey our experience of using photo-elicitation along with time-lining to enhance the research interview. We reflect on a study on the 'quarterlife crisis' in India and the UK. Participants were aged 22-30 years and self-defined as having experienced difficulties 'finding their place in the world.' There were 16 British (8 women, 8 men) and 8 Indian participants (4 women; 4 men). First, we consider how photo-elicitation proved highly compatible with our method of analysis – interpretative phenomenological analysis – through affording a deep connection with participant experience. Second, we explore how participants engaged with photo-elicitation and time-lining, providing examples of image content (events and feelings), image form (literal and symbolic), and creative use of timelines. Third, we reflect on how photo-elicitation and time-lining appeared to enhance participant agency, and to have a therapeutic value for participants, as well as providing particularly rich material for analysis.

Keywords: lived experience, phenomenology, visual methods, young adult, qualitative methods, interviewing, photo-elicitation, timelines

Photo-elicitation and time-lining to enhance the research interview: Exploring the quarterlife crisis of young adults in India and the UK

1. Introduction

Qualitative research aims to generate rich understanding of a phenomenon. Often, the focus is on the nature of experience around significant events or periods of time and how people assign these meaning. This helps us to understand a multitude of things, such as people's behaviour, choices, attitudes, values, feelings and motivation (Atieno, 2009). However, generating in-depth accounts can be challenging, particularly for people unaccustomed to talking about experience, and/or where the substantive issue is not one that is easily expressed. Furthermore, whether the narratively-driven semi-structured interview is indeed the best available means of generating data on experience has also gone largely untested. The aim of this article is to convey our experience of using photo-elicitation in combination with time-lining to enhance the research interview. We argue that photo-elicitation interviewing is a stimulating and effective alternative to word-only interviews, with particular advantages relating to the reprioritising of a participant-led approach, capitalising on the power of images.

Whilst photo-elicitation is well established in disciplines such as sociology and anthropology, its use in psychology is emergent. To complement recent work mapping practical steps using this method (e.g., Bates et al., 2017), and to examine whether the claims about the potential of photo-elicitation are defensible, we showcase the use of photo-elicitation in a psychological, cross-cultural study of the 'quarterlife crisis'. Specifically, we report how photo-elicitation can be combined with time-lining to support exploration of complex, temporally-shaped experiences to generate valuable data for research. In time-lining, relevant events in the participant's biography are identified by the participant and charted systematically in the order in

which they occurred (Adriansen, 2012; Bagnoli, 2009), at the same time giving the space to revisit information in the process of interview.

Images are thought to predate written language and have been fundamental to the representation of personal and cultural identities, values and visions (Barthes, 1964). This persist in contemporary culture where there is a move towards image-mediated communication (e.g., SnapChat, Instagram) and the re-purposing of images to chronicle, authenticate, and communicate our lives in connection with others (Ibrahim, 2015). Photographs in particular have been studied for their function as everyday objects which construct family ideologies, class, gender, power and identity (Bourdieu & Bourdieu, 2004; Van House, 2011). Meaning is embedded in their content but also by their display and the stories told about them. Coined 'the Kodak Culture' by Chalfen (1987), photographs have become a platform for sharing life stories and co-constructing narratives (Van House, 2011). Thus, the sharing of images can be considered a collaborative performance through which the concrete becomes symbolic of what has been experienced (Battarbee, 2003).

Photo-elicitation invites participants to take a short period of time (e.g., 7-14 days) to generate or collate photographs or images which they feel represents the experience or story they want to convey to the researcher (Morrow, 2001). Typically, the researcher defines the broad subject of interest, but this can be collaborative with participants. Discussion of the collated photographs/images, in terms of their importance to the participant and how they convey experience, is then the primary purpose of a scheduled 'interview' (Hatten, Forin & Adams, 2013). The researcher explores with the participant the meaning and intention of the chosen images and, where appropriate, other implicated or related aspects of experience. Being participant- and image-led, arguably researcher meanings are less likely to pervade the data.

Some researchers have described this as 'breaking the frame': i.e., challenging their own assumptions about experience and meaning (e.g., Samuels, 2004).

Photo-elicitation can be used alone or in combination with other supporting tools, such as time-lining. Time lining is particularly well suited to phenomenological research, in which the 'lifeworld' (Husserl, 1954) is often conveyed through stories of important events. In these stories, "(t)ime and narrative are inextricably woven together, in that narrative almost always involves time and requires a temporal component to be meaningful" (Sheridan, Chamberlain & Dupuis, 2011, p. 554). Physically created, and hence externalised, timelines can help the researcher to follow complex narratives within the interview, to see where potentially important events require elucidation, and to understand how the participant creates meaning through the way they unfold their experiences (Kolar, Ahmad, Chan & Erickson, 2015; Rhodes & Fitzgerald, 2006).

We opted to employ photo-elicitation and time-lining in combination with the semi-structured interview commensurate with a growing emphasis in the social sciences to approach young people as social actors, to seek information from, rather than, about them (Drew, Duncan & Sawyer, 2010), and to design research "in ways that offer young people more opportunities to critically examine their conditions of possibility" (Allen, 2008, p. 575). Transition to adulthood implicates a specific phase of life likely involving a complex series of inter-related events. We therefore considered it appropriate to include time-lining to assist our understanding of our participants' trajectory.

We first provide some background to our example study: understanding the 'quarterlife crisis.' We then consider the general compatibility of the method of analysis used in this example study – interpretative phenomenological analysis – with visual methods. This is followed by

exploration of our participants' engagement with photo-elicitation and time-lining, some reflections of what we have learned with regard to the use of photo-elicitation and time-lining to enhance the research interview, before ending the article with our conclusions.

2. Example Study: Understanding the Quarterlife Crisis

The term 'quarterlife crisis' was coined by two journalists, Alexandra Robbins and Abby Wilner (2001), who defined it as a crisis experienced by 'twentysomethings' characterized by "a response to overwhelming instability, constant change, too many choices, and a panicked sense of helplessness" (Robbins & Wilner, 2001, p. 3). Although the term 'quarterlife crisis' has gained popularity in magazine and newspaper articles, songs and drama, there has been little research on the phenomenon in relation to young people, nor on the extent to which their experiences may be shaped by educational, social, and cultural backgrounds. The aim of our study, therefore, was to understand the nature of young people's experience when they identified as having difficulties 'finding their place in the world': a hypothesised characteristic of the quarterlife crisis (see Robbins & Wilner, 2001). Given the strong socio- cultural influence on developmental transitions, we were particularly interested in cultural differences and therefore recruited participants in both the UK and India.

There are a several ethical issues to consider when undertaking photo-elicitation and, as these have been well summarised by Bates et al. (2017), will not be revisited here. Ethical approval was obtained from the ethics committee of the university department in which the research was conducted (No. 15-0020). Recruitment commenced on the basis of opportunity sampling and progressed to purposive sampling to obtain diversity in terms of nationality, gender, and educational achievement. To be eligible for the study, a person needed to be between 22-30 years old, self-define as having experienced difficulties 'finding their place in the world',

and be a British national (when recruited in the UK) or Indian national (when recruited in India). The sample consists of 16 British (8 women, 8 men) and 8 Indian participants (4 women; 4 men). Twelve of the British and five of the Indian participants are university educated while the others had not attended university. The mean age is 24.25 years.

----------INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE----------

Following consent, the researcher explained the photo-elicitation task to each participant in a face-to-face meeting, supported by written guidance. Participants were asked to take about two weeks to generate new, or collate existing, photographs or images (e.g., drawings or downloads from the internet) that represented 'things that are/were significant to you in relation to your crisis and coping.' They were asked to avoid collecting photographs of illegal activities, of children under 16 years old, and, if not already in the public domain, to obtain verbal consent from people before taking their photograph for the study. Consent was obtained from participants to use their photographs/images and created timelines in research outputs on the condition that identifying material would be masked. Participants were asked to email digital images and/or digital photographs of hard-copy images, to the researcher in advance of the interview for printing.

The interview commenced by asking the participant to create a timeline of their 'transition to adulthood' on a large sheet of paper. The instruction was: 'As and when you talk about your experience of crisis in your transition to adulthood, you can mark relevant age or events in the timeline and place your photos on it while you speak about your experiences over time.' As participants did this, the interviewer supported the narrative via questions like: 'Can you tell me more about this photo?' and 'What does this image mean to you in relation to your experience?' This activity was recorded using a video camera focused on the timeline so that

analysis of the narrative could be contextualised in terms of the specific image and/or time point being discussed. Interview duration ranged from 28-105 minutes (mean 65.7 minutes). Table 1 shows participant demographics, method of recruitment, interview length, and the number of photographs brought. The verbal data were transcribed verbatim, with gestures towards the images and timeline indicated, and analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA: Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

The timelines and photographs were included in the analysis to add depth and nuance to the researchers' understandings. As the initial step in analysing the images, a three-column table was created involving: first the photograph itself; second a descriptive summary of the photograph based on the participant's discussion of the image with respect to its position in their timeline; and third, analytical interpretation of the description involving categories and higher-level themes. The themes generated in this process were useful in understanding what participants were communicating through the photographs in the context of the verbal interaction and timeline.

3. IPA and its Compatibility with Visual Methods

IPA is one of a cluster of thematic forms of qualitative analysis (Madill & Gough, 2008) and there is no prima facie reason why another such method could not have been used in this study. In fact, a special issue on visual methods of the journal Qualitative Research in Psychology (2005:2) provides examples of thematic, but also discursive, approaches to analysing research data involving different kinds of visual material. However, we selected IPA because, commensurate with its stated position (Smith et al., 2009), we wanted to understand the lived experience of quarterlife crisis from the perspective of the young people themselves, within the context in which these experiences are set, while giving weight to interpretation over description.

Although we have separated the methods of data collection and data analysis in order to provide a reflective commentary on their use, Madill and Gough (2008) note that "it is not easy to separate data collection and analysis within what we have termed collaborative methods of data collection" (p. 257) and, in many respects, our use of photo-elicitation and time-lining to enhance the research interview was a collaboration between participant and researcher. In particular, participants actively engaged in the process of analysing their experiences through their collection of images and then the creation of the timeline in discussion with the researcher. This is highly compatible with the theory of interpretation employed by IPA called the double hermeneutic whereby the researcher is tasked with making sense of the ways in which participants appear to be making sense of their world (Smith et al., 2009).

Photo-elicitation proved highly compatible with IPA in other ways, notably how images afforded a deepening connection with participant experience, but without the need for extensive technical analysis of the visual. Interpretation was enhanced by lingering on images to 'inhabit' the experience conveyed by the participant. This multimodal data set (i.e., visual and linguistic) is experientially different for the researcher compared to a data set with one communication mode. Analysis was also supported through using the concept of 'punctum' (Barthes, 1981). Punctum is a detail within a photograph that causes a disturbance to the viewer or 'pricks' their attention in a new way. Punctum can be used alongside the narrative, moving from the verbal to the visual to extend interpretation.

Photo-elicitation was also well aligned with IPA in that participants drew upon metaphorical imagery. Metaphors are a tool for communicating experience, argued to be an expression of the structure of thought (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), to vividly present even apparently familiar phenomena in a new light (Carpenter, 2008) and/or to aid articulation of

complex experience. Metaphors in narrative form are often attended to in IPA as a means to deepen interpretation (Smith et al. 2009; Shinebourne & Smith, 2010) and have been described as 'gems' demanding analytic attention (Smith, 2011). Our study shows that metaphor in visual form can constitute similarly useful 'gems' for IPA. For example, Denver used a photograph of a chain with a broken link to portray the position he perceived himself to inhabit in his family. He said: "when it comes to the family it makes me feel weak (places photograph in Figure 1). It *makes me like feel like I'm not doing what I should be doing to help them out because it's* different".

----------INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE----------

Denver's 'gem' added depth to understanding his experience of crisis through invoking the metaphor of the 'weakest link' to convey a painful self-evaluation.

Our analysis allowed us to balance understandings at both an idiographic and nomothetic level. And, while prioritising the experience of the individual, IPA is increasingly utilised to explore how the world appears to be for groups of people with seemingly similar experiences (Smith, 2004). Each timeline represented a unique trajectory through a challenging phase of life and the analysis was first focused on individual life stories (idiographic) but we also used a sampling strategy which allowed us to examine patterns across cultural, educational, and socio-economic background (nomothetic). In this way, visual methods helped us to link micro- and macro-context in what Mills (1959) refers to as the sociological imagination. For example, as Jack placed a picture representing his self-image (see Figure 2) in his timeline he said: "*I didn't* real*ly go to school for the last two years. That's what the next picture's for. Like it's 'Hardcore* Pawn[1]*'."*

[1] Name of a television series

----------INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE----------

Hence, we can see how Jack's disengagement from education was used as a way to craft and communicate an outsider identity which profoundly influenced his transition to adulthood.

The hermeneutics of faith (Josselson, 2004) take priority in IPA in that the method accepts participants as experts in their own experience. However, this is balanced with judicious use of the hermeneutic of suspicion whereby the researcher engages in a critical analysis of the data to suggest interpretations of which the participant may not be cognisant (Smith, 2004). For example, Andrew experienced a period of stagnancy during which he was unable to get a job equal to his qualifications and he placed two photographs - one of his graduation and one of the grocery store where he worked – next to each other on his timeline (see circle in Figure 3). Although Andrew talked about the photographs separately during his interview, their positioning and incongruence was noted and interpreted by the researcher during the process of analysis. As this example illustrates, we did make some use of the visual material in our analysis, but there is the potential for the photographs and timelines to extend qualitative analysis much further.

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4. Participant Engagement with Photo-Elicitation and Time-Lining

The invitation to undertake photo-elicitation was not attractive to all potential participants. Four withdrew when they realized they would be asked to bring photographs to the interview and the researcher did not always get the opportunity to address their doubts or explain how the use of photographs and the timeline could be adapted to their needs. Of the 24 people who took part, some reported initial concern over how creative they might be, but felt this subsidised once the activity was underway, as Andrew explained: "Collecting the photos was hard because I just *didn't know what to do. Like I was very much like studying your sheet like about the particular*

life events that I could use but once I'd done it and I started doing it I was very much 'Oh yeah. These are the things' because I haven't really thought about all this stuff for a while". Notably, Andrew commented that the task enabled him to identify "the things" that were important, and having time to do the task was helpful as he needed that opportunity to bring his experiences back into awareness. It is thus likely that the task prepares people in a unique way to share their accounts with a researcher.

To be helpful, participants were advised that between 5 and 20 photographs and/or images would be appropriate for the study and, in practice, they brought between 5 and 33 (mean=10.42; median=8.5). Those who brought a relatively small number still showed good variety of content and richness of meaning. Those who brought many photographs, like Hannah (33) and Ravi (28), took some extra time at the beginning of the interview to sort them and remind themselves what each referenced and, in this way, incorporated them into the interview without much difficulty. Most brought a combination of: (a) images downloaded from the internet (e.g., Figure 4); (b) photographs from participants' existing personal collection (e.g., Figure 5); and (c) images generated purposefully for the study (e.g., Figures 6).

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Our reflection on the type of images brought is below divided into photograph content (i.e., events and feelings) and photograph form (i.e., literal and symbolic). This is followed by a consideration of participants' use of timelines.

4.1 Photograph content: Events and feelings

The following are the themes, generated through this type of analysis, that participants collectively represented in their photographs as aspects of their experience of a quarterlife crisis: Comparison with Others, Coping, Family, Friendship, Helplessness, Inspiration, Maintaining Optimism, Romantic Relationships, and Self-Portrayal. Thus, the images spoke to nine topics that spanned broad areas such as relationships, career goals, and self-image. These could be further divided into images that: (a) marked an event and facilitated reflection on that event; and (b) portrayed feelings and allowed exploration of the contexts associated with those feeling.

In terms of marking events, for example, Avril brought a photograph of a friend's house (Figure 7) and another of friends who are a couple and who have a baby (Figure 8). She placed them next to each other on her timeline and said: "*she got married and then they've just had this* house built (points to figure 7) and like all my friends seem to be having babies at the moment *and this is just like (points to figure 8) like one of my gay couple friends and they've had a baby as well and it's just like 'oh my god even my gay friends are having babies'*". The sharing of these images helped the researcher to see how Avril understands her life – the 'actual' house, and her 'actual' friends - presented by Avril as powerful documentation of her perceived reality that, without mortgages or children, her anticipated progression to adulthood was 'delayed' in Comparison to Others (one of the nine key topics and dominant feature of the crisis experience) alongside a wide spectrum of emotions such as fear, sadness and envy.

----------INSERT FIGURE 7 ABOUT HERE----------

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In fact, images appeared very useful in the portrayal of feelings, indicating participants' motivation and choice to foreground emotion as a key feature of their crisis experience. For example, to convey Helplessness, Aman brought a photograph of a sketch he had made when

living alone in a foreign country and feeling extremely unhappy (Figure 9). Whilst placing the photograph on his timeline, he said: "because there I was alone. I had no one to make happy. There I got in touch with myself and got to know how sad I am. I always used to make paintings like these (points to two photographs including that in figure 9). Like the guy by the seaside throwing- *this is actually a story. Like you see he's clenching a stone. It's like going to the sea* and just screaming out taking out the frustration. Finally tired just lying down and let the sea calm you down". Figure 9 is an excellent example of how authoritative an image can be in conveying experience, and particularly emotion. Aman's decision to select this image from his archive indicated the priority he placed on this time, and these feelings, in shaping his crisis. Notably, the re-purposing of the sketching for the study permitted understanding of how Aman attempted to explore and manage his own emotions during his crisis and showcases how lingering on the image assists in generating "phenomenological sense" (Harper, 1986, p. 23).

----------INSERT FIGURE 9 ABOUT HERE----------

Although Niti brought only five photographs, she nonetheless utilised these to represent both events and emotion. For example, a photograph of a picnic (Figure 10) allowed her to talk in depth about how she came to feel depressed and lonely: "This was the last picnic (points to photograph in figure 10). We enjoyed a lot. When I leave the office I will miss it all. Here no one is of the same age. Some are younger. Some are older (smiles). Some are of a very young age. *Like really young. Nineteen years girl but still my friend (giggles). So that's* what I felt that- now I think that if I thought like this before- *many years I spent alone. I didn't have to spend alone*".

----------INSERT FIGURE 10 ABOUT HERE----------

The photograph of the picnic allowed Niti to reflect back, recall and express all the thoughts and emotions associated with the time she spent with her colleagues which, in turn, helped develop a significant comparison to her past.

4.2 Photograph form: Literal and symbolic

As a vehicle for exploring important events and feelings, both literal and symbolic images were brought by participants. Many images were literal. For example, some brought photographs of people who had helped them. Sarah brought a photograph of her mother, Hannah of her friends, and Avril of her partner. One participant – Mary - brought an image of a map showing a change in geographical location that led to major changes in her life. Other literal images were used to represent how other people seemed to be living the 'ideal' life. Harry, for example, brought a photograph (Figure 11) of his friend with his partner, placed it in the timeline, and said: "this is a picture of [names a friend] *(points to the photograph in Figure 11) who's my best friend*- one of my best friends f*rom primary school. So I've known him for a lot of years and he met a girl called [name] who he was over the moon with and is still. He's been with her two years now and he's so chuffed with her that I was finding it quite frustrating that I was seeing the* kind of- my friends around me getting so much kind of positive feeling from like meeting that right person. They were kind of building their lives together. Moving in. You know getting in the right jobs. They were moving in together and going away on holidays while I was still dealing with all this (gestures with his hand to the timeline)".

----------INSERT FIGURE 11 ABOUT HERE----------

Other images were symbolic, indicating how some participants worked hard to find photographs to convey complex experiences. Some of these symbolic images drew upon simile. For example, as discussed earlier, Jack brought a powerful picture to convey how he had become

like ‘Hardcore Pawn’ (Figure 2), representing his feelings of being taken for granted, oppressed, and then his rising defiance against ‘the system’: “*I didn’t really go to school for the last two years. That’s what the next picture’s for, like it’s ‘Hardcore Pawn’ but as in a chess pawn not* like – *Yeah, so ‘cos you know, I didn’t really like being told what to do and stuff. I’ve always been annoyed by people presuming that I’m either not intelligent enough to understand why I’m* being told to do something or not intelligent enough to do it and they just - *they don’t* explain anything. They just demand that you do things. So I kind of broke out a little bit and was a bit - I *say ‘a bit’. I was a lot rebellious in quotation marks*”. This image both communicated directly on, and supported participant elaboration of, complex issues that mattered to him, namely, class marginalisation and anger.

As well as the use of simile, some participants brought metaphorical images. For example, Isha included a picture of an empty chair (Figure 12) and broken windows (Figure 13) to represent her sense of being adrift without a partner: “For whom will you live? Okay. You will need someone to live for. Then I felt that- okay. Is it that? Then I have to think and when that thing came to my mind then I looked at this chair and then I felt that this chair is empty. There is *a void there. So far I didn’t let - I didn’t feel that void but now I’m feeling it*”.

----------INSERT FIGURE 12 ABOUT HERE----------

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Being questioned about her future, Isha started to think about her life differently and decided that she wanted to find a partner, but was faced with further disappointments: “I find an- an empty me sitting somewhere (places photograph, Figure 12, on her timeline). I find the *windows broken (places photograph, Figure 13, on her timeline). […] The windows through* which I tried to see a new world. The world which I had always ignored. The world towards

wh*ich I didn't want to*- I had never wanted to see. Okay for the first time I felt like opening the windows. Looking at that- at that new world. Every time I only found that the window is broken". Here, Isha exploits many aspects of the images - from the spatial connections to voids and seeing new horizons, to a sense of brokenness - to reveal the many struggles and tensions she had experienced. Expression of such complex experiences were supported and facilitated by images, which may not be easily accessible through traditional interviews. Thus, participants appeared willing and able to generate or collate various visual forms - literal and symbolic - and to use these in differing ways as a platform to convey experiences.

4.3 Participants' Use of Timelines

We consider three features of the participants' use of timelines: (a) how it portrayed their life trajectory; (b) the flexibility it afforded the (re)location of photographs during interview; and (c) the extent to which they afforded participant influence in the research process.

First, participants used their timeline to portray the trajectory of their lifeworld in different ways. Although the research was about the distinct period of quarterlife crisis, some created timelines that reached back into the past and/or forward into the future. Hence, some used the first part of their timeline to convey the context leading-up to their challenging transition to adulthood, typically economic conditions, family relationships, and/or events at school. For example, Ishita used the first part of her timeline to convey images, such as significant people, relevant to her background (indicated by a box in Figure 14).

----------INSERT FIGURE 14 ABOUT HERE----------

In the first photograph in the box (Figure 15), Ishita captured the nature of her upbringing. She said: "the reason why I selected this pic- (points to photograph in figure 15) because this exactly portrays my life. I would see Father Joseph as my father and Mother Mary as my mother and

baby Jesus as myself. I have always had them. It not only includes my mom and dad but also my family".

----------INSERT FIGURE 15 ABOUT HERE----------

On the other hand, other participants, such as Denver, created timelines that reached forward into the future (indicated by oval in Figure 16) to depict hopes, possibilities, and a positive outlook, meaning that the interview was not solely about negative experiences (see also Kolar et al., 2015). Interestingly, the photograph he placed at the end of his timeline was the one he used as the wallpaper on his laptop and represented positive childhood experiences. When asked what the photograph meant to him, he said: "*it just relates to what inspires me […] When I* was little I wanted to be an architect because I think buildings and all that- that provides- like if I see a nice building or see a nice city I take inspiration from that. When I was little all I wanted *to be was an architect I used to draw buildings all the time […] When I was doing all that* drawing- *I know you're naive when you're a kid but I'd have been like "Yeah. Definitely. I can do that. That's easy." So perhaps as I've got older I've become more pessimistic and that has* changed my- *changed which way I'm heading*".

----------INSERT FIGURE 16 ABOUT HERE----------

Thus, photographs used along with the timeline provided a useful platform in which participants could connect the dots between their past, present and the future and at the same time reveal strong emotional connection to these various times in their life. Time-lining can, hence, magnify the way in which photo-elicitation can support participants to make realisations about their lifeworld and their place within it (Richard & Lahman, 2015).

Time-lining has been critiqued for implying a linear trajectory and, in this way, lacking sensitivity to experiences such as repetition, stagnation, or digression (e.g., Bagnoli, 2009). For

example, Sylvia found it hard to convey the repeating themes of her life on her timeline: "it was difficult on the timeline because it felt like there were two distinct periods. So it was like the time when I was in London (gestures towards the first half of her timeline) and then the time when I was unemployed (gestures towards the second half of her timeline) and they were all kind of *similar themes but for different reasons like. So it's kind of diffi*cult to place them on a timeline". However, many of our participants did find ways of depicting complex experiences of time. For example, Denver's use of a photograph to depict an association between his past and anticipated future (Figure 16) can be understood as an attempt to use his timeline to portray non-linear experiences.

Other participants asked if they could 'move back and forward in time' over the course of the interview to make sure that they did not miss out important information.

Second, some participants utilised the flexibility to move their photographs around their timeline during interview as a way to explore 'what ifs' and alternative outcomes. For example, Bill moved the fourth photograph in his timeline (Figure 17) to help express his regret about making what he perceived to be the wrong career decision: "*I'd have picked the mathematics* routes- *if I'd have taken that all the way there (sliding the fourth photograph to the point in the* timeline where the second photograph was placed) that would have looked a lot different. But *because I didn't (taking the fourth photograph back to where it had been) it is what it is*".

----------INSERT FIGURE 17 ABOUT HERE----------

Another way in which participants moved photographs was to shift them along their timeline to demonstrate the importance of what it signified in different phases of their quarterlife crisis. For example, Sarah slid the photograph of her mother across her timeline while discussing how she coped at different crisis points to show the way in which her mother had been a

consistent source of support. Thus, for some participants, the images were not static objects, but were used as tools in the construction of their narrative during interview, facilitated by the use of the timeline.

Third, some participants made particularly creative use of the timeline to steer the process of research to meet their needs. For example, Amrita decided to plot-out her timeline in the course of the interview but, on the other hand, only to collect relevant photographs post-interview. Her interview was one of the longest and she made extensive use of her timeline, discussing in detail the milestones of her transition to adulthood. She then sent the researcher photographs along with information about what each meant to her – predominantly feeling states - in the context of the events in her timeline. This is a nice example of the way the participant took up the offered space, whereby her priorities led the research process.

Another particularly creative use of the timeline was provided by Aman who used the space at the end to draw concentric circles to represent significant people in his life (indicated by a box in Figure 18). This, again, illustrates the way some participants felt free to break out of the (albeit loosely defined) research task to tell their story their own way.

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5. Reflections on Photo-Elicitation and Time-Lining to Enhance the Research Interview

Our reflections on the use of photo-elicitation and time-lining to enhance the research interview is divided into two sections: (a) facilitating participant agency and (b) therapeutic value for participants.

5.1 Facilitating participant agency

Our description of the ways in which participants used photographs and the timeline within their interview provides evidence of the value of these combined methods to facilitate participant

agency and ownership over the generation of data (see also Adriansen, 2012; Sheridan et al., 2011). Photo-elicitation using participant-generated photographs places considerable responsibility on participants to prepare, and time-lining places more than usual responsibility on them to direct the process of interview. The study information sheet stated only that: 'I will ask you to place your photos on a timeline of events that we will create and discuss in the interview' and, although some participants needed no further instruction, others valued more guidance from the researcher (e.g., that they could place their photographs on the timeline as and when they spoke about relevant events). However, as has been shown in other photo-elicitation studies (Allen, 2008; Drew et al., 2010), our participants took up this 'responsibility' with clarity, creativity and purpose.

Our examples discussed above illustrate that our combination of methods provided participants substantial control over the focus, direction and procedure of the interview (see also Kolar et al., 2015). Specifically, collecting photographs gave participants the freedom to decide what was important to them, and time-lining allowed them to convey their trajectory in creative and often non-linear ways. Specifically, that the methods successfully conveyed to participants our desire for a truly collaborative, participant-led approach, was evidenced in the way one of the participants – Amrita (see above) - felt able to modify the procedure of the interview: something almost impossible within a traditional interview.

Our observation of enhanced participant agency confirms that of Allen (2008) and Drew et al. (2010) who also used visual methods in research with young people. First, studying sexuality, Allen (2008) found that visual methods promoted a balance of power between participant and researcher in that the young people taking part engaged actively in negotiating the types of photographs to be used. Second, exploring the use of photo-elicitation with

adolescents in the context of chronic disease self-management, Drew et al. (2010) found that the method allowed young people to decide on what to focus and generated "rich data through which young people's voices and perspectives are heard loudly and clearly" (p. 1686). Our study goes even further to propose that photo-elicitation taps into participants' desire and capacity to shape how they are researched. This poses both opportunities and challenges to many traditional paradigms in psychology where there is often a power imbalance between the researcher and the participant (Allen, 2008).

5.2 Therapeutic value for participants

At the end of the interview, each participant was asked to share their experience of taking part in the research. Twelve of the 24 participants stated that taking part had been therapeutic because it had: (a) provided an '*opportunity to speak'* (quote from Denver) to someone about their problems; and (b) led to helpful self-reflection.

Most of the participants who found the research therapeutic considered it a good opportunity to speak and get 'things off [their] chest' (quote from Denver). For example, Isha said: "*I'm finding someone to share these things so in*- such a detailed manner. Even in my- even *with my bestie I don't deal with* things in details because they have been a part of my life. So I *don't narrate everything from first to last*". To avoid influencing participants, or over-stepping the boundaries of her role, the interviewer maintained an empathic, yet neutral, position, made no judgements, and suggested no solutions to issues and problems raised (Madill, 2012). However, it seems the act of listening to their story, while supporting the creation of their timeline, could have therapeutic value.

Second, some participants found the research to be therapeutic because it gave them scope for self-reflection. From the very beginning, the task of collecting relevant images in

preparation for interview could start the process of life review. For example, Vikram said: "I felt good collecting photos. While collecting photos I kept recalling the past. Like making scenarios in mind. It felt good". Specifically, during interview, placing the photographs on the timeline allowed some to gain perspective and consider how they had changed over time. For example, Erica said: "*I mean like I'd just forgotten the photos of this and these ones. So it was kind of like* nice to go through and think about what they actually represent and how I felt about myself during all these different times". In fact, the process of time-lining itself could have a therapeutic value as Bill explained: "this has helped me in a way (points to the timeline) because I can sort *of picture that now and sort of see it as you know as like a physical thing. That they're not jus*t sort of abstract concepts going round in my head. That they sort of do manifest themselves and *that there is a sort of you know direction to them. That they're ordered. So yeah I suppose sort of* cutting through all that is a- you know valuable thing. So yeah and it does really really help to talk about it". Bill appears to describe the benefits to him of externalising, here giving '*physical'* form, to his thoughts and, moreover, demonstrating that his experiences have meaning: in his words, have a 'direct*ion to them'*. The timeline helped him to reflect on his past and he moved his photographs around his timeline to illustrate when he had had regrets and other times when he felt relatively sure of his progress.

There are several concepts which might help us understand the therapeutic value of photo-elicitation and time-lining in tandem with the research interview: the therapeutic or working alliance, externalisation, and the transitional object.

First, Bordin's (1979) theory of the working alliance posits that key to positive outcome is that the patient and therapist develop a bond in working together within a shared understanding of the goal of therapy and of the tasks involved (see also Dryden, 2008).

Preparing participants to collect photographs for interview may provide a foundation for the participant and interviewer to develop a bond around a shared understanding of this task designed to promote the goal of generating a rich interview. Bonds are likely developed further within the interview as the participant engages with the task of placing their photographs on their time-line with the goal of conveying their experiences in-depth to the interviewer. Moreover, the agency afforded participants in this process is highly compatible with the emphasis in Bordin's theory of the shared nature of task, goals, and bonds, particularly since both participant and interviewer were engaged in constructing the timeline.

Second, the therapeutic value of photo-elicitation and time-lining may be related to the way in which these activities ask participants to represent in externalised form a challenging period in their life. This may be similar to narrative therapy which is based on the premise that separating one's story from oneself can promote change through the development of a new, more functional, narrative (White & Epson, 1990). Similarly, Spera, Buhrfeind and Pennebaker (1994) argue that expressive writing in the context of traumatic events can help attain "closure on the loss, thus achieving a new perspective" (p. 731). Moreover, through the use of visual methods, some of our participants reported getting a 'picture' (quote from Bill) of their overall experience which could provide them a new outlook. Externalisation is also a potent feature of art therapy which can be particularly beneficial for young people resistant to interventions perceived as more therapist-led (Mercer, Warson & Zhao, 2010). For example, Riley (2001) demonstrated that young people could feel comfortable using art as a channel of expression, especially if they retained control over the process and the therapist avoids making interpretations. By externalizing negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviour in art, the young people in Riley's study

could start to reflect on it productively at the same time offering the therapist an in-depth understanding of their experiences through the work and what they chose to say about it.

Third, there may be conceptual similarities between the use of participant-brought photographs in a research interview and the spontaneous use of a transitional object (Winnicott, 1953). This concept captures the way in which objects in the outer world, through providing them concrete form, are used "in the service of projects originating in the inner world" (Jones, 1992, p. 225). Central to its efficacy is that the person retains control over the object and that it does not change. Typically, the service to which a transitional object is put relates to managing separation anxiety, loss, and absence of a significant other. Although Winnicott first identified the use of transitional objects in children, he perceived a parallel with artistic endeavours in adulthood and, increasingly, the use of transitional objects is accepted as relevant throughout life. In fact, in adults, transitional objects may extend to managing difficult emotions such as shame and help to develop a new sense of self (Arthern & Madill, 2002). In a study of the spontaneous use by adults of transitional objects in therapy (Arthern & Madill, 1999), therapists posited that the object functioned as a focus of intersubjectivity within the therapeutic relationship. Of the six therapists interviewed, transitional objects they remembered clients using included greeting cards, postcards, and a photograph of the therapist: that is, the kinds of item brought to interview by our participants.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this article is to convey our experience of using photo-elicitation in combination with time-lining to enhance the research interview. To do so we reflected on a study we conducted on the experience of quarterlife crisis in India and in the UK. Capturing the unique experiences of

young people from different social, cultural and economic backgrounds was central to this study and photo-elicitation and time-timing facilitated the generation of rich interview material.

Our example study found that the crux of the ‘quarterlife crisis’ experience is the difficulty some young people encounter in dealing with the discrepancy between expectations and the realities of transition to adulthood. This gap was depicted visually in most of the participants’ collection of images brought to interview and facilitated understanding of cultural differences. For example, while many British participants brought photographs conveying the emotional turmoil associated with unfulfilled expectations, the standards of which were based on the milestone achievements of peers, none of the Indian participants did so but, rather, focused on family expectations in relation to their crisis. Moreover, importantly, photo-elicitation and time-lining alongside the research interview appeared to enhance the experience of participants through facilitating their agency and offering some therapeutic value.

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Table 1: Participant demographic, interview length, and number of photographs

Pseudonym	**Sex**	**Age (yrs)**	**Nationality**	**Highest qualification#**	**Interview (mins)**	**Photographs**
Mary	F	25	British	Currently PhD	46	7
Hannah	F	27	British	BSc	80	33
Olivia	F	23	British	BA	54	10
Avril	F	28	British	BA (Hons)	48	9
Erica	F	24	British	Currently BSc	74	13
Silvia	F	25	British	Currently PhD	37	7
Sarah	F	23	British	Diploma	39	9
Amy	F	26	British	GCSE	140	14
Bill	M	23	British	BA (Hons)	73	5
Andrew	M	22	British	MA	128	6
Max	M	25	British	MA	70	5
Denver	M	22	British	Currently BA	49	5
Alex	M	23	British	Currently Masters	36	8
Harry	M	26	British	BA	59	11
Aran	M	25	British	GCSE	54	5
Jack	M	22	British	GCSE	52	18
Ishita	F	26	Indian	MSc	28	10
Amrita	F	30	Indian	MA	103	6
Isha	F	26	Indian	MA	79	6
Niti	F	28	Indian	A-levels	48	5

Aman	M	29	Indian	MA	88	10
Ravi	M	25	Indian	Currently BA	111	28
Raj	M	24	Indian	A-levels	41	8
Vikram	M	30	Indian	A-levels	39	12

#Note: Abbreviations, PhD (Doctorate), BA (Bachelor of Arts), BSc (Bachelor of Science), GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education), MA (Master of Arts), MSc (Master of Science)

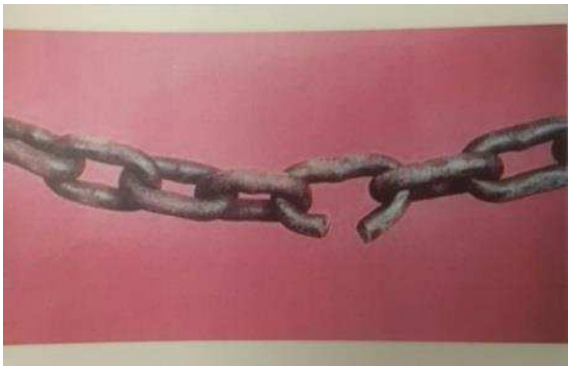

Figure 1. Denver's 'gem': 'It makes me feel weak'

Figure 2. Jack's use of the simile of feeling like a hardcore pawn

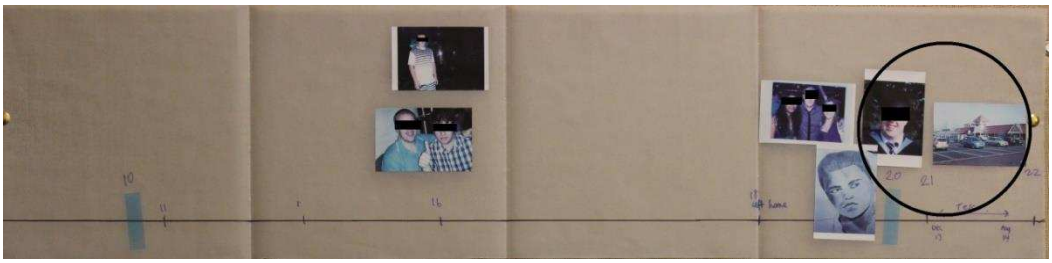

Figure 3. Andrew's close positioning of incongruent images on his timeline

Figure 4. Amrita's downloaded image

Figure 5. A Photograph from Sarah's Personal Collection

Figure 6. Max's Purposefully-generated Photograph

Figure 7. House built by Avril's friends post-wedding

Figure 8. Avril's friends had a baby

Figure 9. Aman's sketch of how he felt living alone in a foreign country

Figure 10. Niti's photograph of a work picnic she enjoyed

Figure 11. Harry's use of a literal photograph to represent ideal progression

Figure 12. Isha's metaphorical image of the empty chair

Figure 13. Isha's metaphorical image of the broken window

Figure 14. Ishita's timeline reaching back into the past

Figure 15. Ishita captures the nature of her upbringing

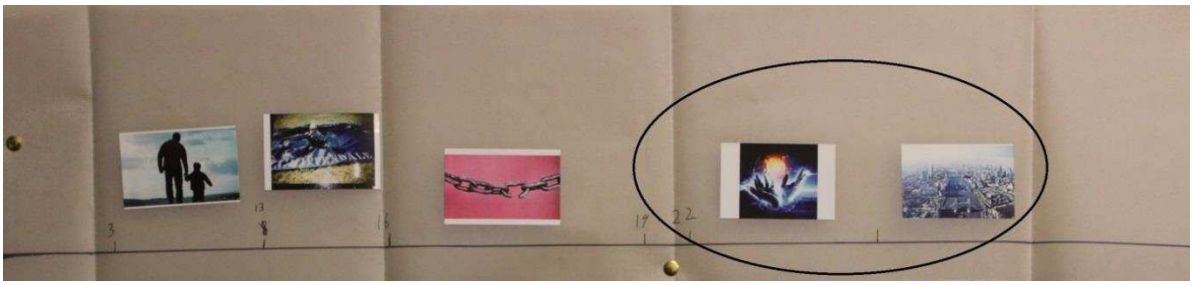

Figure 16. Denver's timeline reaching forward into the future

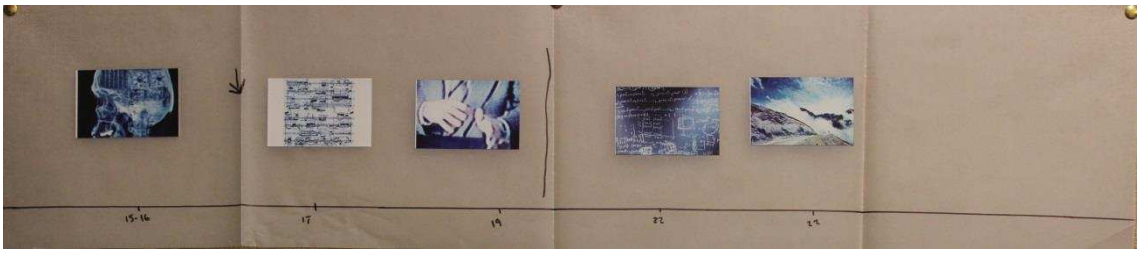

Figure 17. Bill's timeline on which he moved the fourth photograph

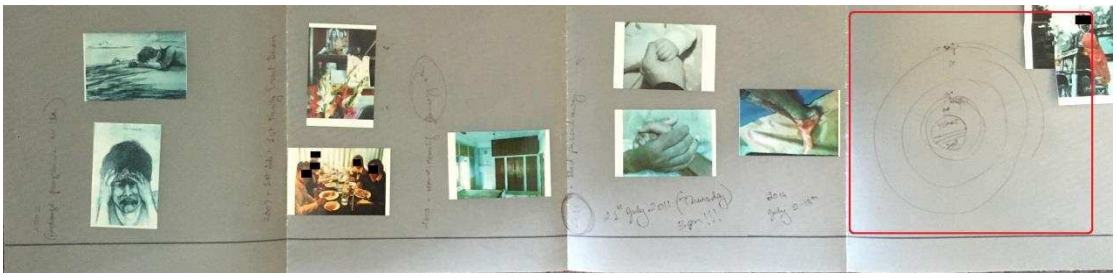

Figure 18. Aman's creative use of the space at the end of his timeline