PROJECT DETAILS

Project Title
Voices from behind closed doors: participatory film-making inside a refuge for domestic abuse survivors

Project Summary

Rationale: Approximately two people are killed by their current or former partner each week in England and Wales. The police receive one domestic violence call every minute of every day. However, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary Report 2015 concluded there are ‘alarming and unacceptable weaknesses in core policing activity around domestic abuse, meaning that victims are put at unnecessary risk’. Police training remains a key action plan, therefore this research is particularly timely and the results of this research will aim to play a vital part in future police training.

Research Questions: How do women living in safe refuges construct and interpret their experience of domestic violence, in particular coercive control, and their rationale and motivation for seeking help? What have been the experiences of those women who have sought help from the police?

Aims: The aim of this study is to research the experiences and everyday lives of women seeking help in a refuge through the methods of 'participatory filmmaking'. The PhD will critique and develop the techniques of visual ethnography to research the life experiences of abuse survivors, in particular those who have been subjected to coercive control. In collaboration with several refuges, a cross-section of residents will be given the opportunity to film and record their stories using narratives to explore their personal journeys to taking up refuge accommodation. Exploratory questions would include their reasons for staying in, and returning to, abusive relationships and turning points that made them eventually leave and what they might wish to tell 'outsiders' about coercive control as well as any accounts of seeking the help of law-enforcement and consequences. Finally, research questions will focus on how participants identify their own circumstances and their needs. Their footage will be edited so that the film remains focused on answering the research questions.

Previous scholarly work on domestic abuse has researched why some women find it hard to leave violent relationships (Burman and Chantler, 2005) and why some that do, then decide not to testify against their abuser (Robinson and Cook, 2006). This project will build on this existing knowledge by allowing ‘real voices’ to communicate the complexities and contradictions present in domestic abuse. ‘Images present multiple ways of knowing...multiple perspectives and interpretations’ (Parker, 2005:4).

Methodology: Employing participatory visual research methods democratises the research relationship through the process of mutual discovery and refinement of the research agenda. Ceding power to research participants serves to create a more ethical research situation and generate new forms of knowledge which cannot be developed in any other way (Pink 2001, Chaplin 1994). Working with the PhD student, the research participants will use small HD video cameras to film and make video diary accounts while the researcher will, at times, film them while they do this to contextualise their contributions. The research participants will play an active part in the editing of their own stories and, through being given ‘a voice’, be empowered and gain new skills. Participatory filmmaking is ‘a tool of empowerment, enabling those with little money, power or status to communicate’ (Hurworth, 2005).

Outcomes: Results from this project will make a major contribution to our understanding of coercive control through a research process that also aims to be a cathartic experience for the participants themselves. Previous studies have highlighted the need for police forces to take allegations of abuse more seriously; emotional testimonies from survivors will have a more direct impact on this audience and can unpick the conflict of emotions that sometimes surround this crime. This research will therefore help the police improve their response to domestic abuse.

Furthermore, this cross-discipline study will allow academics from the Centre for Film and Television Research and
the FHSS Department of Social Science and Social Work to work together, for the first time.

References


Academic Impact

The research (film and accompanying thesis) will provide an innovative contribution to, and impact upon, the literature and research in the field of participatory visual ethnography and social policy on domestic abuse. Understanding the impact of domestic violence on people's lives, and the complexities for professionals involved in effectively working with this form of abuse, is key to police training and policy change.

We aim to assist the student in publishing the findings in high impact journals appropriate to these cross-discipline areas, e.g. the Journal of Media Practice, Visual Ethnography, the Journal of Social Policy, Sociological Research online.

The project will consolidate Bournemouth's position as leading academic research centres into participatory filmmaking methods and social policy research. The proposed research topic will establish close collaborative links between research groups in FMC and FHSS. It is envisaged that this collaboration may lead to the development of a REF 2021 impact case study around domestic abuse and aligns with emerging criminology and sociological research strands in FHSS.

Societal Impact

This research will give a voice to those who have been domestically abused and help with training police personnel who work with survivors of this crime, to further understand the issues surrounding domestic violence and the needs of the service users going forward. The three main groups who will experience the impact of this research are as follows:

1. The participants themselves who will have the opportunity to tell their stories, create impact via research collaboration, and develop new co-creation skills.
2. Officers working in Domestic Violence Units in police forces throughout the UK.
3. Local authority and charity sector service providers who assist survivors through outreach work and the provision of refuges.

Training Opportunities

The PhD candidate will ideally have previous experience of working in sensitive situations with vulnerable people, possess strong 'people skills' and have a genuine interest in social science qualitative research. They will also ideally have experience of using video cameras and editing software and a keen interest in participatory filmmaking though this is not necessary as they will be able to learn/refresh their technical skills through online courses that are
already available to our BA/MA cohorts. In addition, they will attend a range of relevant courses from the comprehensive list offered by The Doctoral College.

SUPERVISORY TEAM

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<tr>
<th>First Supervisor</th>
<th>Dr Sue Sudbury</th>
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<tr>
<td>Additional Supervisors</td>
<td>Professor Lee-Ann Fenge</td>
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Recent publications by supervisors relevant to this project

- Sudbury, S. 2017. Hunger by the Sea. Participatory research film (nominated for the AHRC Research in Film Innovation Award 2017)
- Sudbury, S. 2015. Village Tales. Participatory research film (winner AHRC Research in Film Innovation Award 2016)

INFORMAL ENQUIRIES

smsudbury@bournemouth.ac.uk

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

The PhD Studentships are open to UK, EU and International students. Candidates for a PhD Studentship should demonstrate outstanding qualities and be motivated to complete a PhD in 4 years and must demonstrate:

• outstanding academic potential as measured by either a 1st class honours degree or a Master’s degree with distinction or equivalent Grade Point Average (GPA)
• an IELTS (Academic) score of 6.5 minimum (with a minimum 6.0 in each component) for candidates for whom English is not their first language which must be evidence at application

In addition to satisfying minimum entry criteria, BU will look closely at the qualities, skills and background of each candidate and what they can bring to their chosen research project in order to ensure successful completion.

Applicants will be asked to submit an online application form and a proposal (c. 1500 words) outlining their understanding of the project for which they are applying, the approach they would envisage taking and what qualities they will bring to the research community.

Please note:

• Current BU Doctoral students are not eligible to apply for a Studentship
- Current MRes/MPhil students can apply, subject to satisfactory completion of their Research Degree prior to being able to take up the award
- PhD Studentships cannot be used to support BU staff to complete doctoral programmes

**ADDITIONAL ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA**

Strong inter-personal skills are required and previous experience of working in sensitive situations with vulnerable people is desirable.

**HOW TO APPLY**

Please complete the online application form by 12th May, 2019. Further information on the application process can be found at: [www.bournemouth.ac.uk/studentships](http://www.bournemouth.ac.uk/studentships)