



# Photo-Elicitation for Inclusive Research on Sensitive Topics

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## Sexual Dysfunction and Malay Women

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**Abstract**

Research into sensitive issues such as sexuality requires inclusive research methods if the experiences of women from diverse sociocultural backgrounds are to be included. Photo-elicitation is one of the visual methods adopted by the social and health sciences, particularly in research involving phenomena related to children and young adults, suitable for inclusive approaches as it offers opportunities for the inclusion of sensitive topics and/or vulnerable populations. This chapter uses a research study to explore sexuality issues among Malay women as a case study to show how photo-elicitation can be adopted. The aim of the research was to understand the meanings heterosexual Malay women attach to sexuality and their experiences of living with sexual dysfunction. In this case study, photo-elicitation facilitated data collection with photographs provided by the researchers. Photo-elicitation enabled participant experiences to be visualized and to be understood in ways that showed how the women perceived their problems and their impact. Communication on a topic that is strictly socially taboo was enhanced through the use of the photo-elicitation method. The chapter explains why participants preferred photo-elicitation over other visual methods and concludes with a summary of the strengths of photo elicitation as a method, implications for practice, and recommendations for further use.

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**Keywords**

Drawing · Female sexual dysfunction · Inclusive method · Photo-elicitation · Photovoice · Visual method

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## 1 Introduction

Researching sensitive issues such as female sexual dysfunction (FSD) can be challenging, especially in conservative communities, where such matters are strictly socially taboo. Sensitive research topics commonly involve people who are already vulnerable, and researchers need to consider how they can encourage participants to talk openly about their intimate experiences. For some people, such as women with sexual dysfunction, who may already feel embarrassed and/or distressed about their situation, involvement in any research study may raise concerns about exacerbating their psychological risk (Liamputtong 2020; Seidman 2013).

Three main methodological challenges are raised for researching sensitive topics. First, the sensitive nature of the topic could lead to difficulties obtaining ethical approval. Second, reluctance to participate could affect study recruitment. Third, there could be problems getting participants to talk openly about their experiences, which could have implications for data collection (Liamputtong 2020). Consideration of these challenges is clearly important when thinking about how to approach this type of research.

The focus of this chapter is data collection, with particular attention on inclusive approaches. In-depth interviews are frequently used to explore sensitive topics.

Interviews are a well-established method for gathering rich data, for revealing complex issues, and for exploring participant perspectives of personal feelings, opinions, and experiences (Serry and Liamputtong 2022; Liamputtong 2020). In-depth interviews can facilitate discovery of sociocultural effects, encourage participant cooperation, and highlight the lived experiences of health and illness and can be especially valuable for collecting data from those who are disempowered by their illness (Creswell and Poth 2018; Liamputtong 2020). Inclusive methods are approaches explicitly designed to support those who feel particularly vulnerable to the disclosure of intimate information in in-depth interviews (Eder and Fingerson 2002; Liamputtong 2007, 2020) and have particular value for those population groups whose voices are often silent in research. For example, research exploring sexual dysfunction in women commonly uses in-depth interviews, but studies have tended to be conducted among mostly educated and busy working women in the urban areas of Malaysia (Muhamad et al. 2019).

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## 2 Why Visual and Inclusive Methods in Data Collection?

Visual methods and drawing are two inclusive strategies that have been used to encourage discussion of difficult topics during interviews (Rose 2012; Wagner 2011; Guillemain and Westall 2008). These methods are used either as adjunct strategies in initial interviews or introduced in follow-up interview sessions to reinforce what has been shared in the first interview (Meo 2010).

Visual methods involve including photographs to prompt or enhance discussion during the interviews. The photographs can be either provided by the researcher or generated by the research participants themselves. In the latter situation, participants are invited to take photographs prior to the interview that depict their situation (Liamputtong 2020; Reavey 2011; Rose 2012; Wagner 2011). The two popular types of visual method are photovoice and photo-elicitation.

Drawing is another image-elicitation method suitable for researching sensitive issues such as sexuality (Liamputtong 2020). It involves the use of any instrument, such as multicolored pencils, crayons or pastel colors, or even pencils or pens, by study participants to illustrate their experiences or to enable disclosure of difficult issues they find hard to verbalize. Drawing was first used in research on children, and with adults to explore their understanding of their illness (Liamputtong and Fernandez 2015; Morgan et al. 2009; Westall and Liamputtong 2011; Joseph et al. 2019).

### 2.1 Types of Inclusive Methods

**Photovoice** involves participants identifying images that represent their problems in a way they believe their community would understand (Wang and Burris 1997). As these images act as records of their feelings and experiences, they become potential catalysts for change by conveying feelings and experiences to the community. In effect, the image, or photo, becomes a voice to the community.

There is evidence supporting the use of photovoice in research involving sensitive issues (Wilkin and Liamputtong 2010; Harley and Hunn 2015; Teti et al. 2020; Ussher et al. 2021). However, the literature also reveals that some researchers using photovoice have experienced technical difficulties (Asniar and Wironpanich 2011). The photovoice was also found to be time-consuming especially when interviews involved different categories of participants and need to inform the results to the authorities. For example, in researching health and environmental issues among Indigenous people (Huu-ay-aht First Nation) in Canada, photovoice was used in combination with the community-based participatory research (CBPR) method involving three categories of participants which included 40 community members, three advisory committee members, and two community researchers. The result has been informed to the community using posters in five potluck community dinners (Castleden et al. 2008).

**Photo-elicitation** also uses photographs in the interview process, but these are provided by the researcher, and are used in the same way that texts are sometimes used (Harper 2002). Photo-elicitation interviews are popular in disciplines such as anthropology, and sociology, but are slowly emerging in areas such as psychology (Bates et al. 2017) and public health (Muhamad et al. 2019).

There are several reasons for using photo-elicitation in interviews. It is an easy and flexible method that can capture richer data than an in-depth interviewing method (IDI) alone (Hugh-Jones and Gibson 2012). When a photograph is added to an interview, it activates different parts of the human mind that respond and process visual information than that which processes verbal information causing it to become a longer conversation but a more interesting interview (Harper 2002; Meo 2010). This type of response is not limited to photographs but extends to all forms of images including photovoice, drawings, works of art, cartoon strips and caricatures, public advertisements and even graffiti, collage, sculpture, film, video (Glaw et al. 2017; Harper 2002), and even cave drawings, etchings, woodcuts, and lithographs (Loizos 2001).

Photographic images have become one of the foremost means of representation and communication in contemporary societies. Ndione and Remy (2018) believe that the fast diffusing culture of smartphones has aided the use of photography in daily communication into the research. Smartphones have facilitated an explosion in the range of photographs that can be used in research using photo-elicitation.

The wide range of images available were described as a continuum by Harper (2002, pp. 13–14) that can be divided into three areas. At one end are images that can be defined as *scientific* which include objects, people, and artifacts as visual inventories and are common in anthropology. The middle range of the continuum comprises images depicting *collective or institutional histories or events* related to work, study, and other institutional experiences relevant to an interviewee's past. The other extreme of the continuum is *personal and social*. It includes intimate images that convey an individual's body, family, and other intimate social groups.

The range of photographs that can be used means that photo-elicitation interview provides a way for individuals to connect through images to influences surrounding them – societal, cultural, and historical – and use these visual narratives to find

meaning (Bauman 1988, p. 790). Apart from the ability of photo-elicitation to capture details in a different way, this type of visual method can enrich the data by revealing extra layers of meaning, by validating existing data, and, in doing so, create new insights and knowledge (Glaw et al. 2017, p. 1). For these reasons, photo elicitation interviews are often seen as not simply an interview process that elicits more information, but rather a process that evokes different kinds of information.

## 2.2 Uses of Photo-Elicitation

Photo-elicitation interviews have been used widely among researchers who seek to understand women's experiencing of "motherhood," including parenting an infant or children with a particular medical condition (Murray et al. 2015); during the postpartum period and while breast-feeding (Nash 2015); among different migrant groups (Benza and Liamputtong 2017); and how women feed their families and make food choices (Johnson et al. 2010). Photo-elicitation has also been used to explore understanding of: perceptions of illness and care among women with chronic diseases (Che Ya et al. 2021; Fritz and Lysack 2014); identity of homeless women (Bareham et al. 2013); and those involved in crime and deviant behaviours (Copes et al. 2018).

In sexual health research, a field dominated by the study of sensitive issues, photo-elicitation interviews can be important to understanding the complexity of sexual activities and their interaction with sociocultural issues in detail. Using photo-elicitation also has the potential to identify solutions. For instance, Smith (2015) used photo-elicitation interviews to understand how female sex workers in Australia deal with stigmatization, and Nguyen et al. (2018) used photo-elicitation to illustrate sexual and reproductive experiences of physical disabilities among the Vietnamese community. Allen (2011) employed photo-elicitation in interviews with adolescents in New Zealand secondary schools to garner their experiences of sexuality.

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## 3 A Case Study of Photo-Elicitation: Sexual Dysfunction and Malay Women

In-depth interviews were conducted with 26 heterosexual Malay women in Malaysia to explore their experiences of female sexual dysfunction (Muhamad et al. 2019). Participants' experiences, the consequences of sexual dysfunction, and the coping strategies Malay women employed were aimed to be understood. Data were collected over a 1-year period.

Participating women completed a brief sociodemographic questionnaire, which included socio-demographic information (age, educational status, and economic status; marital and sexual function background such as duration of the marriage, and types of sexual difficulties).

During the initial in-depth interview, the women were asked if they were interested in a second adjunct interview using visual methods or drawing; 23 women (88%) opted for a second interview and all chose the photo-elicitation method.

### 3.1 Practical Issues for Inclusive Visual Methods

All 26 women were offered 3 inclusive visual methods after completing their in-depth interview. The three options offered to them are photo-elicitation, photo-voice, and drawing methods.

In the creation or selection of images, all three methods asked the women to consider: their feelings about their day; their feelings about living with sexual difficulties; the experiences they found pleasurable; and their relationship with their husband.

All adjunct interviews focused on the selected images and involved exploring each image one-by-one. To obtain insight into women’s experiences and their understandings on sexuality, a two-stage enquiry process was used. In the first stage, women were asked five general questions that sought to understand how they interpreted the image (see Table 1), and in the second stage, the women were invited to explain how the photo linked to their experiences and how they saw its meaning (see Table 2) (Hatten et al. 2013).

#### 3.1.1 Photovoice

Our plans for photovoice were to ask the women to capture eight photographs illustrating responses to the three key/focus questions: their feelings about their day about living with sexual difficulties; about pleasurable experiences in the day; and that portrayed their relationship with their husband. It was planned to lend digital cameras to those who did not have one of their own and discussed the logistic issues

**Table 1** General questions used for visual methods

No	Questions
1	What do you see in this picture?
2	What is happening in this picture?
3	What connection does it have with your life?
4	Why this photo has been chosen?
5	What can be done for it?

**Table 2** A visual guide

INSTRUCTION FOR PARTICIPANTS	
Please choose any provided photographs up to eight photos, with regard to:	
PHOTOS	QUESTIONS
First photo	Your thought about meanings of sexuality or sexuality learning experience you had gone through
Second photo	Your feeling of living with sexual difficulties in day-to-day life
Third photo	Your feelings with the relationship and any pleasure with your husband

of camera use in terms of what or who could be photographed, by consent. The photographs needed to be suitable to share with policy makers and depict community issues. The women could take photographs of any objects, spaces, places, or people (as long as they sought written consent from people appearing in photos for the photograph to be used, and to appear in research), and print the photographs. It was estimated that it would take participants approximately 1–2 h to complete these tasks over a 2-week period.

### **3.1.2 Photo-Elicitation**

For photo-elicitation, the women were able to choose eight photographs from the researchers' photo-library containing 35 photographs at the start of the second interview. The women were asked to choose images that addressed the three key/focus questions. After making their selection, the interview proceeded in the same way as that planned for photovoice. No preinterview preparation was required by the women for the photo-elicitation method.

The number and type of photographs to use required careful consideration. Supplying too many photographs may confuse participants. Thus, conducting pilot study is crucial, not only for reviewing the clarity of the semistructured questions, obtaining the appropriate recruitment strategies and the appropriate methods to be utilized, but also for determining what type of photographs and how many photographs need to be prepared. At least two to three photographs for every subtheme emerged from the pilot study were shown to be enough (Muhamad et al. 2016). The photo-library was created by selecting 35 free public domain photographs from the Internet. As these photographs originated mostly from Western countries, new photos were taken, or images redrawn more appropriate for Malay cultural norms. The photos were arranged on the table, and the participants were asked to make a choice after reading and analyzing the questions given. Participants were given sufficient time to make their selection.

Some women had difficulties choosing because a single photograph at times as the available images only portrayed part of their experience. To address this possibility, the women were purposefully instructed to select two photographs to ensure a comprehensive visualization. At the completion of the study, only two-thirds of images in the photo-library were used.

### **3.1.3 Drawing**

For the drawing method, six sheets of A5 paper and some multicolored pencils were prepared for the women to take with them. They were to be encouraged to use any type of coloring product, such as crayons or pastels, or even just pencil or pen for black and white drawings. The instructions given by Cross et al. in their study (2006), as shown in Appendix A, were adopted and modified.

## **3.2 Data Analysis**

The data collected from interviews using visual methods are the narratives generated by the discussions about each photograph. Transcripts from the adjunct interviews were included with the initial in-depth interview data and analyzed using thematic analysis.

### 3.3 Ethical Issues

The use of inclusive methods carries ethical considerations related to study procedure that involve choice of method, consent and copyright related to the photos taken, and emotional risk.

#### 3.3.1 Choice of Visual Methods

All 23 women in this study who agreed to a second interview preferred to use the photo-elicitation method; none of the women chose photovoice or drawing (Table 3). Three women decided not to have a second interview. Among the common reasons for not joining the second interview and these inclusive methods other than photo-elicitation was lack of time for busy women although they were given 1–2 weeks to complete the task by producing eight photographs to answer three questions (Copes et al. 2018). Generally, women choose photo-elicitation because they felt it did not have the same difficulties as photovoice or drawing.

Time was a big consideration in the use of inclusive methods for all women. Several women indicated that they could not commit to a second interview unless it occurred on the same day, to minimize the time involved. To overcome these problems, the protocol was amended to allow this option, which reduced the inclusive method choices to either drawing or using photo-elicitation. All participants chose the photo-elicitation method over drawing as they saw it as much easier.

**Table 3** Type of data collection methods and women's response to them

Collection method type	Description	Women's response	Uptake numbers
Photovoice	Take up to eight photographs suitable to show policy makers that illustrated perspectives reflecting community issues over a 1/2-week period in a 1–2-week period that related to any of the following: thoughts of sexuality learning experiences; feelings of living with FSD; and experiences of sexual pleasure	Already busy with daily life, too time-consuming as compared to photo-elicitation interview that can be done on one setting, reluctant to take photographs, and afraid of raising awareness of their FSD with others	0
Drawing	Use six A5 sheets and multicolored pencils to illustrate feelings and experiences of living with FSD	Not good at drawing Do not know how to express their feeling through drawing	0
Photo-elicitation	Choose from 35 provided photos (related to feelings and impact of sexual dysfunction) to illustrate personal perspectives	Easiest task among all other visual methods Do not have to prepare the photos and can be done on the same setting after adequate rest in between	23
None	Join in-depth interview alone	No time to involve in second interview using visual methods	3



However, there was a cost to the same-day approach. There was limited new information gathered in the second interview, which were much shorter than those that were delayed (30 min compared with an hour or more). Second interviews that were deferred for 2 weeks to a month provided much more information to researchers. One participant, Zaini, for example, spent more than 1 h in the second interview adding information that had not been covered in her first interview. She had time to reflect on the questions posed at that time and looked more confident and was more forthcoming and less timid in sharing her experience. Rapport with the researcher was also increased, particularly when compared with those women who requested a same day second interview.

Photovoice was considered difficult because it required a lot of mental work. The women realized that they would need to think about, find, and take photographs that could portray their experiences. They felt that this would be an additional burden to their already busy daily activities. Some women were reluctant to take photographs because it might raise awareness of their condition with their husband and friends. Several women had not informed their spouse about joining the study, largely because their sexual problems had already had a negative impact on their relationship. Drawing was rejected as an option despite they were reassured that drawing skills were not needed and that any drawings would only be seen by the researchers, who would use them as a way of understanding their experiences. The women claimed that they could not draw nicely and the high value that Malay culture places on shyness meant that the women were reluctant to share or show anything considered impolite to exhibit publicly (Goddard 1997, 2000; Hamdan and Radzi 2014).

### 3.3.2 Consent and Copyright

Like all research, inclusive methods require appropriate consent forms to be completed by participants. In this study, ethical approval required all participants to sign consent for both in-depth interviews (primary interviews) and the inclusive method interviews (adjunct or second interviews). See Appendix B.

Initially, only two forms – consent to participate and a withdrawal form – were prepared. However, after consideration by five different institutional ethics committees, two other forms were added, both related to photovoice: one for publication consent from people who appeared in photographs (Appendix C) and another for an agreement to loan a study camera for participants (Appendix D).

Preparing photographs for photo-elicitation interview can involve the issue of copyright if photographs are taken directly from the Internet unless it clearly stated that it is available under public domain (Seth 2020). Images can require permission from their owner if they are to be reproduced or published at some stage. Another issue for this study was the acceptability of some of the images to Malay culture; for example, some women during pilot study commented that photographs showing “foreplay” were not suitable as they felt embarrassed seeing such images. To address potential problems with copyright and cultural acceptability, the creative unit in the university was engaged to develop similar images embedded with Malay culture and sought appropriate photographs of Malay couples through social networks.

All consent forms, photos, and research materials were stored securely and only shared by encrypted e-mails between the researchers using separate folders.

### 3.3.3 Psychological Risk

Studies associated with sensitive topics can involve emotional risks, both negative and positive, for participants (Liamputtong 2007, 2020). Researchers who empathize with the experiences they are investigating can also be affected (Copes et al. 2018). For example, during photo-elicitation interviews with women with sexual dysfunction, there was a high probability that they would experience discomfort or emotional distress from the questions asked, or from raising unpleasant experiences they had had, which included marital problems, sexual abuse, or domestic violence. When this happens, participants can stop responding, and episodes of temporary distress have been reported in research studies after participants reflected on their previous devastating histories (Campbell et al. 2010). When this occurs, researchers need to discontinue the conversation, stop any audiotapes, and offer a break or end the interview. Explanation of the possibility of such risks must occur before starting any interview. Risks about potential psychological risks need to be clearly stated in participant information sheets and given to participants before an interview begins.

In this study, some women cried during the photo-elicitation interview when talking about their experiences, feelings, and needs. A few women paused the interview, but none withdrew from the study. One participant contacted the primary researcher a few weeks after her interview because she had started to think aloud about it. After many years of sexless marriage, hating sex and feeling so disgusted with it, she felt something was not right with her responsibility as a wife and for her own sake to feel pleasure out of it. She was feeling depressed and needed help. She agreed to seek treatment from a recommended nearby clinic. Information about available counseling support and referral to the free government counseling services in a convenient area was provided at the interview and included local specialists and clinics with their relevant charges.

Positive consequences are also possible from photo-elicitation interviews as they provide opportunity for self-reflection. For example, in this study, women were able to think, discuss, and express their expectation about sexuality in the interviews, a topic that is usually taboo in their home country (Copes et al. 2018; Muhamad et al. 2019). The inclusion of images in the interviews enabled women to communicate when they had been unable to find words to express themselves or felt too inhibited to speak out loud.

Participants in research studies have been found to derive greater benefit from participation in studies that provided opportunity to reflect and to talk about an issue important to them. Researchers who were nonjudgmental and empathetic facilitated perceived participant benefit (Wolgemuth et al. 2015). In our study, we also found that women used the opportunity of the photo-elicitation interview to seek advice, and that the second interview seemed to be important to developing rapport and trust. At the end of the photo-elicitation session, one woman simply asked the following, *“What would be your immediate advice?”* while others sought reassurance and hope: *“Actually what is my problem? Is it real?”* and *“What should I do?”*

## 4 How Did Photo-Elicitation Enhance Findings?

The 23 Malay women who shared their stories, views, and understandings of their sexuality and lived-experiences with sexual difficulties and dysfunction in photo-elicitation interviews ranged from young to middle-aged. They differed in socioeconomic and educational status as well as in the type of sexual difficulties or dysfunction they experienced. Most came from diverse socioeconomic groups. It suited most participants (17 out of 23 women) for the photo-elicitation interviews to take place on the same day. These interviews were usually shorter and yielded less data than those photo-elicitation interviews that were deferred till later in the month (30–45 min compared with 45–60 min duration).

This chapter demonstrates the strength of photo-elicitation interviews by showing how five of the women in the study were able to use this approach to explain their experiences of sexuality, something that they had found difficult to express with words only.

### 4.1 Meanings of Sexuality and Its Changes

For most women in this study, sexuality meant sexual intercourse and the physicality of the sex act (Muhamad et al. 2016, 2019). The women tended to use polite words to describe sexuality such as “*bersama*” (together) and “*buat tu*” (doing that) when describing sexual intercourse (SI). Describing their choice of photographs required the women to “think aloud” and so helped them to explain things more clearly. This process empowered the participants to take charge of their experiences and at the same time gave them control of their interview (Bates et al. 2017). The use of photographs also helped them to make the researcher understand what they really meant.

Many women chose this photograph (Photo 1) to elucidate sexual intercourse and physical intimacy, but their descriptions were unique to their own experience.

**Photo 1** Sexual intimacy/  
intercourse



#### 4.1.1 Participant 1: Aisya

Aisya told that only this photo (among the 35 photos provided) could explain well how she saw sexuality when she recalled an intimate memory with her husband,

Sexuality means the sexual relationship between a man and a woman... kind of intimate relationship or special relationship. A loving relationship. You can see the husband and wife in this photo looks intimate, like when I look at my husband with loving gaze, we communicate lovingly... such in romantic peaceful situation that most of the time leads to intercourse.

#### 4.1.2 Participant 2: Linda

For Linda, who in her early 40s started to have very low sexual desire and difficulties in achieving orgasm, the photograph helped to explain how her meanings of sexuality had extended according to her marital needs and goal of life. Unfortunately, she lost interest in sexual intercourse due to physically and mentally tiring work in her office and at home while concurrently pursuing tertiary study. She defined sexuality from her own experience with confidence although she knew she was unable to achieve it.

Sexuality is what we need just like eating rice. Our need for sex... our need for satisfaction and offspring. This is the ultimate goal of my relationship with my husband in this marriage. It is good for both of us —physically and emotionally.

The beauty of the photo-elicitation method is that it allows for broader visual representation by participants and permits them to raise more issues than might be expected from Asian women who live in a shy female culture. Suria is a 44-year-old teacher who self-reported as having total loss of desire and arousal that started when her husband began to focus on his high-level studies, lab work, and work performance. She described it as not a “happy year” when there was hardly any sexual intercourse. Sexuality for her was happy years together as Suria shared her story in the first in-depth interview:

We do it (sexual intercourse) all the time, every day, any time we need. I mean the sexual activities are always leads to intercourse. To prove we are actively doing that, we do not shy talking about that. We are not shy doing it all the time. Seriously, I never think sex is a responsibility. Meaning that we enjoy it together without anyone forcing us. It is just like human basic instinct and needs.

In the second interview using the photo-elicitation method, Suria chose Photo 2 to expand her argument. Photo-elicitation empowered her to actively engage in her experience and allowed the researcher to see her perspective and make it real. It is believed she had a broad meaning of sexuality that was increasing her frustration with her current situation as the sexual responses of both partners did not work in the same way that they had before.

Full of happiness. Friendship is part of it. Perhaps to other people, it is not something special, but we feel “Wow.” Sometimes we just ‘let loose’ as you can see here. We just feel happy about it. We do not think about what other people say, right or wrong. Having sex, yeah, something pleasurable, and intimacy as well. Only both of us know, the whole world does not know.

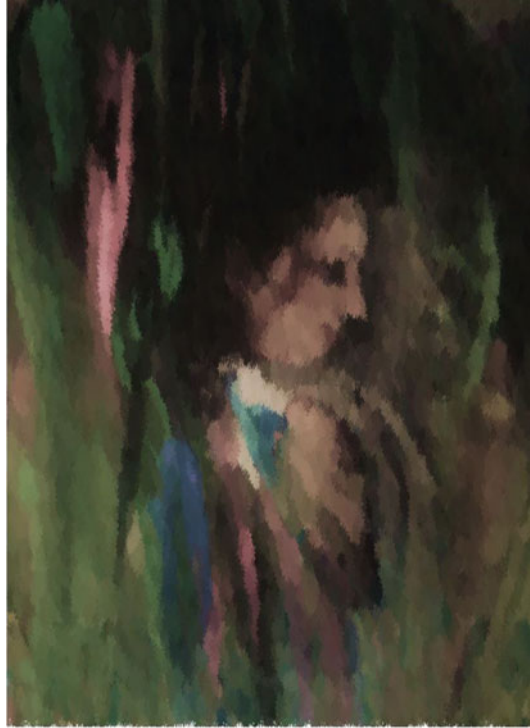
**Photo 2** Happiness together

However, this meaning of sexuality had changed for her since she had developed sexual dysfunction. She no longer experienced pleasure, and in the current phase, sexuality had become a responsibility rather than fun.

#### 4.1.3 Participant 3: Zaini

Zaini had developed vaginismus (a spasm of the muscles surrounding the vagina which leads to failure of penile penetration and painful sexual intercourse) as a result of past traumatic experiences. In her early 30s at the time of the interview, Zaini had worked as a teacher for almost 10 years. Vaginismus had been an incidental finding when Zaini presented to an infertility clinic after being unable to conceive following her happy marriage more than a year earlier. In the photo-elicitation interview, unlike other participants, Zaini chose to use abstract type of images rather than photographs depicting real people. These kinds of photos initiate her to recall more on her past experience and enable her to elaborate further on the meanings of her sexuality, the changes that occurred after marriage, and the complexity of explaining her feelings once she experienced sexual dysfunction. This strategy opened a compelling new avenue for the selection of the photos to be used in such research in the future especially when participants are dealing with bad experiences in the past that lead to current phenomena and generate moderate to severe emotional consequences.

Zaini spoke about her views on sexuality with tears in her eyes. In the first in-depth interview without photo-elicitation, she viewed sexuality as the physical intimacy between husband and wife. When she married, Zaini was very surprised to learn that she was expected to engage in sexual intercourse with her husband. She had understood sex as just involving touching and cuddling to show love to each other. While Zaini's knowledge of sex increased slowly, she still did not engage in intercourse. Zaini explained her situation well by choosing two photographs (Photos 3 and 4), which she said depicted herself. For Zaini, sexuality had become the darkness of her life. In one photograph (see Photo 3), Zaini saw herself surrounded

**Photo 3** Darkness

by colorful things that represented the pleasurable sensations that other women experience and that she does not. She said that she had failed even to give her husband the chance to penetrate her. Darkness has shaped her life until now; she assumed the same facial expression shown in the photograph.

To explain more about her condition and the link between the difficulties she experienced in her sex life and in seeking help for her vaginismus and infertility, Zaini chose another photo (Photo 4). Now she expressed darkness in a slightly different meaning apart from her sexuality experience. Bad people around her were one of those. She expressed as below:

Can you see me wondering in my own darkness? . . . And I am alone. The lights behind me are the ray of hope. . . My hope for the future. That is means I try to seek for lights . . . It just the lights are so far to be reached and the lights are very vague. . . while dark trees are people surround me whom I cannot trust.

This example demonstrates that a photograph can lead to a vivid recall of the past, especially if the photograph triggers a personal attachment to something or someone in an intimate way. Images can stimulate a person's memory in unexpected ways that give deeper insight than can be gained through an in-depth interview, such as in the first interview session with Zaini (Berger 1992).

**Photo 4** Find lights for life

## 4.2 Complex Feelings and Emotional Consequences

Malay women with sexual dysfunction or difficulties (FSD) experienced a variable intensity of emotional effects, which occurred according to their own degree of self-coping, and their husbands' acceptance and support. These women experienced painful feelings, repetitive thoughts, and a few negative reactions. Boredom set in if intercourse occurred frequently, mainly among those experiencing impaired sexual desire. Panic, and fear of polygamy or divorce, arose when they failed to satisfy their husbands sexually. What concerned them most was the failure to fulfil their religious role of serving their husbands sexually, causing them to feel guilt and distress.

Linda's experience with sexual dysfunction was dominated by her concern that the failure to fulfil her religious role of serving her husband sexually might lead to polygamy or divorce. Although the meanings of sexuality did change between the story she told in the in-depth interview and her photo-elicitation interview, the latter revealed richer data. Linda's lack of sexual desire limited her ability to meet her own high expectations in terms of serving her husband. She felt afraid. When asked further, she explained that she was afraid that her husband was not satisfied by their sexual relationship and was bored with it. However, it was only in the photo-elicitation interview that the extent of her fear was understood by the researcher. She chose a photograph (Photo 5) to show how every night she became like the woman in this photo.

**Photo 5** Afraid of sexual intimacy



Every night I feel phobia, “Does he want it again?” He wants me always to be prepared, to be like moths (giving services like prostitute) every night. How can I do this when I don’t have desire, I hate sex? One or two days is okay, but if it occurs every night, this is what happens to me.

Linda’s second photographic choice (Photo 6) was intended to show how perplexed she felt in her private space. A real problem for Linda was that she suffered in silence. The people around her were unaware of her problem. Her sexual dysfunction affected her psychologically, and the photograph she chose was able to portray her untold story visually in a way that her words could not.

I feel so muddled, only God knows it, the feeling as if I want to run away, because I was not able to give him the service, we actually want it. It is really fun. Where is our right for fun? It goes away. I feel blur. I do cry when perform my prayer. I release it by crying. This is my main concern. now.

#### 4.2.1 Participant 4: Suria

For Suria, the happiness of marriage she expressed when asked about the meaning of sexuality for her in the in-depth interview was changed by her experience of FSD. She had become sad with how it had affected her relationship with her husband. She was able to illustrate her emotional feelings by choosing a photograph in the photo-elicitation interview (Photo 7):

From one point of view, my relationship looks good. . . , like beautiful scenery. . . , meaning the rest are good. Only when it comes to sexual intercourse, it becomes dusk and dark . . . because I don’t get to enjoy it. My feelings are. . . didn’t he love me? It is like my husband is selfish, not helping me to gain it back. I feel I no longer beautiful. I hope it will shine again to make this land (sexual intercourse) beautiful again.

#### 4.2.2 Participant 5: Huda

In the last example, we share how photographs were able to convey Huda’s emotions, after experiencing loss of desire and arousal just after marriage. In the first interview, Huda was reluctant to explain her emotions, although her

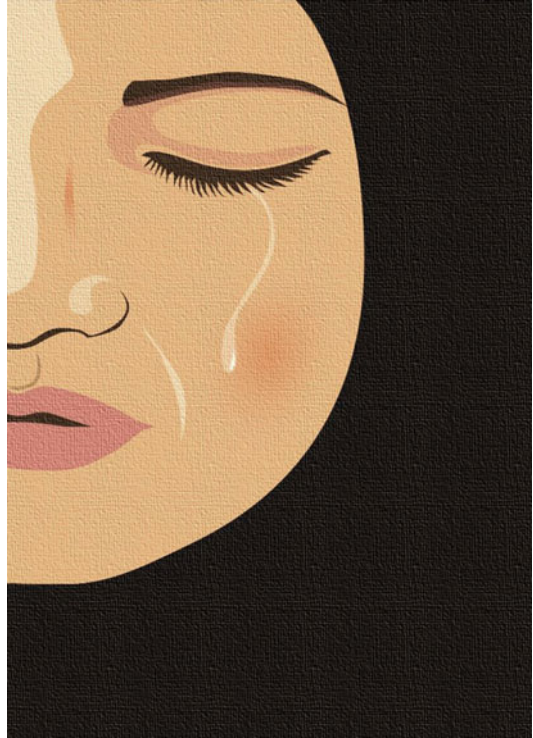
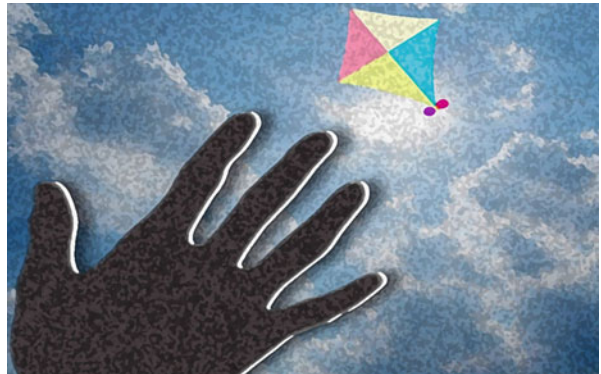


**Photo 6** Muddled feeling**Photo 7** Contrary story

difficulties in telling her story were apparent. She spoke little and tried to hide her emotions as much as possible. Fortunately, Huda agreed to take part in a photo-elicitation interview. She immediately chose two photographs to explain her sadness and what occupied her mind. She had tears in her eyes as she told how she had married a widower. In Malay culture, this may view her as taking someone else's husband. Huda was acutely aware of these views and at the same time concerned that her sexually experienced husband could compare her sexual performance with that of his first wife (Photo 8).

I am truly sad. Why am I the one who gets this illness? Sometimes it comes across my mind. All other women are okay, why do I not feel it? So unhappy. I feel like. . . despair. I don't know what to do. I always think why me? Why me? And why me? It occurs to me. . . thinking about . . .like prostitute, they can feel it, why not me? Our relationship is legal. I just don't know.

When talking about the second photograph she chose (Photo 9), she continued to give reasons for her feelings.

**Photo 8** Sadness**Photo 9** Unachievable

This is me. I really want that thing (pleasurable sex) but could not reach it. Unachievable. I want to be touched lovingly and hugged by him. But I don't feel anything right now in my sexual relationship. I dislike it. I feel bored. I really don't think of being together. My mind is sometimes empty, but most of the time the problem disturbs my mind. I'm sad.

With photo-elicitation, Huda was able to get the researcher to walk in her shoes, to feel her pain, and to understand her hope.

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## 5 Conclusion and Future Directions

Photo elicitation has come a long way from the early days of cuneiform when visual images were used to represent data. Despite roots in the field of sociology where qualitative research dominates, photo elicitation offers much to empirical research in public health, especially in areas related to women that are culturally sensitive, such as sexual dysfunction. This is because photographs serve dual roles: They function as evidence of research undertaken and serve as a mediator between the researcher(s) and the experiences a participant shares, which can be preserved and relived.

This chapter has traced the history and previous usage of photo elicitation and shared a case study of research to illustrate how photo-elicitation was used, and ethical issues related to its use, and examples were provided to demonstrate how it enriched the study, which addressed a personal and culturally sensitive issue.

The changes brought by technology mean that people today construct meaning through multimodal visual communication, and so it is timely for researchers to adopt photo elicitation in their data collection tools. Photo-elicitation can reveal new insights into research data for researchers by enabling participants to express themselves more fully. Photo-elicitation can build bridges across cultures and gender perspectives in ways that show how personal narratives and realities coexist.

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## Appendix A

### Arts-Based Guide

*For drawing participants:*

- *The next section is a bit different from the one we have gone through. For this section, I will ask you to complete drawings (at least 3). Please know that you do not have to be an artist; all I ask is that you do the best you can. Just like the question in the interview in particular your experience living with sexual dysfunction. There are no right or wrong answers, or in this case images. Any image you create is simply an expression of your feelings and thoughts.*
  - *For the first image(s): Can you draw something in your mind, the sexuality-learning experience you have gone through?*
  - *Second image(s): Can you draw how sexual difficulty has made you feel in day-to-day life including experiencing sexual pleasure?*
  - *Third image(s): Can you draw how your relationship with your husband has made you feel in day-to-day life?*

## Appendix B

### Example of a Specific Consent Form

#### CONSENT FORM

Research topic:

Investigators:

A signed statement of agreement to participate, as follows:

I \_\_\_\_\_ have read (or, where appropriate, has been read to me) and understood the **participant information statement and consent form**, and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study (please ‘√’ one):

- In-depth interview alone
- In-depth interview and photovoice method
- In-depth interviews and photo-elicitation method
- In-depth interviews and drawing method

and also agree to :

- audio-recording
- note-taking

I understand that, even though I agree to take part in this project, I can withdraw from the study at anytime, up to within four weeks following the completion of my participation in the research. Further, in withdrawing from the study, I can request that no personal information of mine can be used. I agree that research data provided by me or with my permission during the project may be included in a thesis, presented at conferences, and published in journals, on the condition that neither my name nor any other identifying information is used.

**Name Of Participant (block letters):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name of Investigator (block letters):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C

### Example of a Publication Consent Form

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**Patient’s Material Publication Consent Form**  
**Signature Page**

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**Research Title:**

**Researcher’s Name:**

To become a part this study, you or your legal representative must sign this page.

By signing this page, I am confirming the following:

- I understood that my name will not appear on the materials published and there has been efforts to make sure that the privacy of my name is kept confidential although the confidentiality is not completely guaranteed due to unexpected circumstances.
- I have read the materials or general description of what the material contains and reviewed all photographs and figures in which I am included that could be published.
- I have been offered the opportunity to read the manuscript and to see all materials in which I am included but have waived my right to do so.
- All the published materials will be shared among the medical practitioners, scientists, and journalist worldwide.
- The materials will also be used in local publications, book publications and accessed by many local and international doctors worldwide.
- I hereby agree and allow the materials to be used in other publications required by other publishers with these conditions:
- The materials will not be used as advertisement purposes or as packaging materials.
- The materials will not be used out of context – i.e.: Sample pictures will not be used in an article which is unrelated subject to the picture.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Patient Name** (Print or type)

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Patient Initials or Number**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Patient I.C No.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Patient’s Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date** (dd/MM/yy)

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Name and Signature of Individual**  
Conducting Consent Discussion

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date** (dd/MM/yy)

Note: i) All subject/patients who are involved in this study will not be covered by insurance.

## Appendix D

### Example of a patient’s Agreement for Hiring the Camera Form

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**Patient’s Agreement for Hiring the Camera Form  
Signature Page**

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*Research Title:*

*Researcher’s Name:*

To become a part this study, you or your legal representative must sign this page if you chose to hire camera from the researcher for photographic method purposes.

By signing this page, I am confirming the following:

- The research digital camera has been lent to me from (start date): \_\_\_\_\_ to (end date): \_\_\_\_\_
- I hereby agree to take a good care of this camera throughout hiring period and return it in the good condition on the stated end date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Patient Name (Print or type)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Patient Initials or Number

\_\_\_\_\_  
Patient I.C No.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Patient’s Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date (dd/MM/yy)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name and Signature of Individual  
Conducting Consent Discussion

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date (dd/MM/yy)

Note: i) All subject/patients who are involved in this studey will not be covered by insurance.

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