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Concerning the Cover

Dawn Mannay

A Beautiful Moment of Possibility - Photography by Kat Hristova, Katka Photography

The front cover of Visual Studies is an exciting space, and the covers of my collection of previous issues of Visual Studies make their contents intriguing in ways that conventional text based covers are unable to accomplish. Therefore, I was privileged to be invited to provide an image and commentary concerning this cover.

The photograph was untitled, and I am grateful to John Grady who on receiving this suggestion said that for him the image 'captures such a beautiful moment of possibility'. The photograph was taken by the talented Katerina Hristova at Katka Photography, so I have no claims to the aesthetics of the image or the technical skills of its production. Yet, the photograph has personal significance.

The subject of this photograph is my granddaughter, Taya, who was then aged four, and is presently eleven, having journeyed through, and now continuing to, travel moments of possibility. However, the image is not simply a family photograph but one that came from a commissioned project to create representations of childhood to be considered for a book cover.

The book was one that I edited with Alyson Rees and Louise Roberts (2018) that focused on the accounts of care experienced children and young people. The children and young people in the associated studies could not feature on the cover because of the need to assure anonymity; but the cover would house their stories, and it needed to be carefully considered.

There is a tendency in the visual economy of the media to stigmatise and sensationalise to increase clicks, viewers or sales, and care experienced communities are often 'portrayed as either sad, bad, mad or all three' (Bishop 2018). We did not want the cover of the book to reproduce this trope, and young people had told us '*I shouldn't be labelled or underestimated just because I am 'looked after'. I am not just a number, I am me*' (Mannay et al. 2018, p. 227).

We wanted the book cover to convey children simply as children being children, not an orchestrated representation of an unfounded and harmful stereotype. Katrina took many captivating photographs and one featuring four children was selected for the book cover.

The cover for this journal is a photograph that did not feature in the book. But it is a salient reminder that there are many beautiful moments of possibility. As visual researchers we can guard against sensationalism, stigma and misrepresentation by providing alternative narratives to visualise the lived experiences of communities that generously share their stories.

Essentially, beautiful moments of possibility can engender opportunities for change.

References

Bishop, K. (2018) *Children and Young People who have Experienced Care are Relentlessly Portrayed as either Sad, Bad, Mad or all Three: It's Time for the Adults to End the Stigma*. Vulnerability 360. Available at: <https://www.vulnerability360.org.uk/children-and-young-people-who-have-experienced-care-are-relentlessly-portrayed-as-either-sad-bad-mad-or-all-three-its-time-for-the-adults-to-end-the-stigma/>

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