Beyond the illustration of research data:
Using professionally facilitated image making techniques to enable participants to describe, enhance and extend data originally captured using traditional text-based methods of research

Julie Mooney-Somers1 & Kris Smith2

1 Centre for Values, Ethics and the Law in Medicine, University of Sydney, 2 School of Creative Arts, University of Newcastle

The Growing Up with Cancer project design
• Young people’s experiences of dealing with cancer, its treatment and long terms consequences at the same time as they are growing up
• 19 young people aged 16-29 years who were diagnosed with cancer between the ages of 11-22 years
• Interviewed about their experiences of growing up with cancer
• Created self-portraits about their experiences of growing up with cancer
• Interviewed after completed self-portrait

How we supported the creative process
• Work in any medium
• Regular workshops with Kris (artist) and Julie (researcher) to develop ideas, develop technical skills, try things out
• Work with artist one-on-one in person, by phone or online (with screen-sharing)
• Access high end digital camera and video recorder, laptop, post-production software

The different ways young people worked
• Worked entirely alone
• Used workshop to generate ideas then worked alone
• Reworked creative works, post-production work by artist
• Produced SP in single workshop using brought materials and images taken on the day; post-production by artist
• Worked closely with artist for extended period
• Not everyone finished a self-portrait

What we produced
• 21 mixed media, graphic, photographic, and musical self-portraits
• Printed catalogue of 21 self-portraits plus artist statements
• Exhibition toured 8 venues across Australia, and now internationally
• Project website to share self-portraits, exhibition photos, videos of young artists talking at exhibition launches

The benefits of a creative process for a research project
• Different to a ‘hit and run’ single interview
• Process provided an extended opportunity – and for some, multiple opportunities – to reflect on their experiences
• Created different way to think about self and experience
• Young people decided what they wanted to represent and how – not all the portraits are simply about cancer
• Creative process more than a catalyst for a subsequent interview
• Self-portraits engage research audiences in different way to traditional research outputs

Want to know more?
See the self-portraits in the exhibition hall
Project website www.sydney.edu.au/GUWC
Email GUWC.research@sydney.edu.au