

## **R1.4 Beaumaris Lounge Friday 7 December 9.00-11.00**

*“I’m not really sure why I took that!” Exploring the everyday and the unexpected through photo-elicitation (0223)*

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Recent years have seen an increase in research on LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer/questioning) lives and experiences. Within higher education studies, discussions have explored LGBTQ experience across countries (e.g. (Valentine, Wood and Plummer 2009, Munyuki and Vincent 2017), subject (Cech and Waidzunus 2012, Stout and Wright 2016), and across campus locations including classrooms (Pryor 2015) and university accommodation (Taulke Johnson 2010). While such developments have added to knowledge of LGBTQ lives, they do not always reflect the diversity of LGBTQ experiences and the variety of issues, contexts and influences which impact on these experiences.

Influenced by Seidman’s (2005) recognition of the importance of the informal in discussions of sexual citizenship, and in the light of existing discussions of institutional heteronormativity within educational institutions (Ferfolja 2007, Vega et al 2012), as well as recognizing the potential shortcomings of a focus on the LGBTQ ‘umbrella’ for the recognition of diverse lives, this project sought to access and reflect upon the day-to-day experiences of bi- and trans-identifying students. The project asked 15 trans- or bi-identifying undergraduate students from universities across England to take up to 20 photographs using their mobile phones. Students were asked to take photos which represented specific experiences during the time they were engaged with the project, their sense of place within the university community, or previous influential experiences or interactions. These photos were then the focus for a subsequent face-to-face interview.

This paper reflects on the usefulness of this application of photo-elicitation as a method to access and explore students’ everyday experiences, and reflects upon the importance and influence of these oft missed/under-researched experiences. The paper illustrates how the process of photographing everyday life takes the form of diarying, allowing access to diverse insights, perspectives and areas of reflection.

With reference to photos taken for the project, the paper will reflect on the relevance of photo-elicitation in a number of ways including - as a ‘can-opener’ method (Leonard and McKnight 2015) which uses the photograph as a starting point to open related discussion, as a way of accessing and reflecting upon everyday experience, and as a means of accessing and engaging with the unexpected. The paper then reflects upon the importance of these insights by illustrating the ways such everyday experiences and ‘mundane’ interactions impact on students’ wider university experiences and feelings of belonging with reference to the discussion of microaggressions (Nadal et al 2011) and institutional heteronormativity.