

## **Annual Report (2014)**

### **BSA Visual Methods Study Group**

Professor Janet Fink, Professor Helen Lomax and Dr Dawn Mannay

**Please Note:** Janet Fink and Helen Lomax have taken new positions since October 2014

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**Date Reporting** – 25<sup>th</sup> February 2015

**Date Group Passed to new conveners** – October 2014

**Account Balance on transference** - £49.15

### **Aims of Study Group**

- To provide an organizational context in which to bring together academics and researchers from a number of areas within sociology who have an interest in the visual;
- To provide a forum to allow for the critical development, building and elaboration of visual sociological theorizing and related discourses;
- To develop new and refine existing visual sociological methodologies;
- To develop professional practice protocols for the ethics of visual sociological research;
- To create a context in which professional networking and constructive interdisciplinary communication can take place;
- To seek a professional interaction with the International Visual Sociology Association (IVSA); its intellectual explorations and its established hub for visual sociologists.

### **Current Events**

Helen Lomax is Co-I for 'Advancing Image-Elicitation Methods in the Social Sciences' (ESRC grant no. ES/M005941/1) <http://www.open.ac.uk/students/research/aiem>. The project is funded for a period of 3 years (2014-17), funding commenced in October 2014. The funding is for the training of doctoral and early career researchers through the development and delivery of three online methods training modules on advanced aspects of visual research methods: image-elicitation. The overall objective is to advance the quality of the use of IEMs among UK researchers. It will achieve this by focusing in-depth on three areas currently underdeveloped in the provision of research training about IEMs. It will produce and deliver three online modules, each of which addresses one of those areas. Each module will develop advanced understanding by bringing those methods into dialogue with other literatures and practices, in a structured online environment facilitated by an expert tutor. The three modules are:

1. Using image-elicitation methods when working with vulnerable participants

2. 'You will participate': complicating the rhetoric of participation
3. The future of image-elicitation methods

Each of these modules has their own, specific objectives and learning outcomes. Each module also delivers skills in online, synchronous and asynchronous, collaborative learning. Module 1 is fully subscribed and is currently being delivered by Helen Lomax (Feb-March 2015) to 22 international postgraduate and early career researchers working within sociology and the social sciences. The modules will be repeated in 2016 and 2017.

### **Forthcoming Events - Confirmed**

Cardiff University Childhood and Youth Research Group CPD Workshop Series – 21<sup>st</sup> March 2015

Title: **Creative and Participatory Research Methods with Children and Young People**

Presenter – Dawn Mannay

Abstract: This day will introduce and provide hands on opportunity to critically explore the opportunities and challenges of creative and participatory approaches to research with children and young people. These will include a range of ethnographic visual methods including drawing, collaging, and photo-elicitation; and will explore the potential of creative and participatory methods for researching everyday lives, fighting familiarity and engendering participant directed research. The day will also reflect on the ethical considerations of employing participatory and visual techniques with children and young people.

BSA Annual Conference - April 2015

Panel Session - Methodological Innovations Stream

Title: ***Scissors, Sand and the Cutting Room Floor: Employing Visual and Creative Methods Ethically with Marginalised Communities***

Presenters – Dawn Mannay and Helen Lomax

Abstract: In our visually saturated culture there is a growing recognition that visual images have the potential to evoke emphatic understanding of the ways in which other people experience their worlds.

There has been an increasing shift towards employing techniques of visual data production with participants, which is often seen as a panacea for the problems of power hierarchies, representation and voice in sociological research. However, the easy marriage between the visual and the participatory needs to be questioned when we are working with marginalised groups and communities. This panel session introduces three presentations that explore both the opportunities, and the ethical and practical difficulties, raised by visual research approaches. Drawing on studies that employed the techniques of sandboxing, collaging and film making, the panel considers the visual as a vehicle for participatory research whilst acknowledging the power relations inherent in the processes of design, production and dissemination. Each presentation focuses on one of these three aspects of the research process.

#### Northumbria University Visual Sociology Competition – 11<sup>th</sup> May 2015

Dawn Mannay has been invited to represent the BSA Visual Methods Study Group as one of the judging panel and to attend the exhibition event and present at the awards ceremony. The BSA will fund the costs related to attending the judging and awards event and the BSA are an official supporter of the event. Draft details of the competition marketing as follows;

#### ***Seeing Sociologically: A competition for sociologists***

Sick of reading and writing? Here's a chance to communicate in images instead! We invite you to create visual representations of sociological issues. Submit images to this competition and you could win an ipad! Submissions should comprise of a single photo or a set of photos (max 5) you have taken, which capture a sociological view, or represent a sociological idea or a way of seeing sociologically, accompanied by up to 1 A4 page of text which explains what the image means to you. The idea is that you present an image or a set of images about any aspect of society which reflect/s your sociological imagination. There are different ways to approach this. You might see something that interests you, take a photo and then reflect sociologically on the image you've created, thinking about what the image represents or reflects about society. Or you might think about your studies and the sociological concepts and topics you've studied, as well as contemporary issues around the globe, and identify how you can capture them visually and then create the image/s.

We expect the winning entries to:

- present striking, memorable, compelling image/s

- be well –presented
- include engaging and well-written text (up to 1 page of A4) which helps the viewer make sense of the image

The competition is open to all 3 undergraduate year groups of students on the Sociology and Sociology & Criminology degree programmes. Resources for presenting your submission (large sheets of card, glue etc.) will be provided at a half-day workshop on Wed 22 April. Submissions must be submitted by 4pm on Fri 24 April. The submissions will be considered by a panel of judges. First prize of an iPad will be awarded to the overall best submission, as well as prizes for the best submission in the following categories:

- Best black and white
- Funniest
- Most intriguing

All submissions will be exhibited at an end of semester exhibition in Gallery North, to which all students and staff will be invited, and winning submissions will be posted on departmental website and publicity.

Kingston University - July 13<sup>th</sup> 2015

Summer School: Doing and Communicating Qualitative Research

Workshop title: **Reading, generating and communicating the visual**

Presenters - Helen Lomax and Janet Fink

This workshop will draw upon the creative and visual methods that Helen Lomax and Janet Fink have used to work participatively with ‘vulnerable and hard to reach’ communities and individuals in research focused on wellbeing, relationships and poverty. It will introduce participants to the theoretical and methodological approaches underpinning reading, generating and communicating visual material as well as providing hands-on-skills for working across these dimensions.

Creative Research Methods in the Social Sciences, Social Research Association - May 8<sup>th</sup> 2015

Paper title - **Image making in the frame: the moral complexities of communicating children's visual research**

Presenter – Helen Lomax

Abstract: The last decade or so has seen a rapid increase in the use of participatory visual methods for working with 'seldom heard' groups. Such methods, it is argued, enable participants to work with researchers using methods of their choosing, offering richer understandings of their lives. However, alongside these possibilities have arisen challenges. The paper considers the social and moral complexities of undertaking visual research with children and the possibilities and limitations of visual data as a means of representing and disseminating experience.

Conference - Qualitative Research: Beyond the Fractured Future - Neuchâtel, Switzerland - July 15th-17th 2015

Paper Title - **Constructions of morality and parenthood: the place of everyday visual artefacts in exploring intergenerational infant-feeding practices with mothers and grandmothers**

Presenter – Dawn Mannay

Abstract: Breastfeeding has a range of benefits for mother and baby, however, breastfeeding rates in Wales, UK are very low, with only one per cent of Welsh women exclusively breastfeeding their babies for six months, in line with World Health Organisation guidance. The increased political prioritisation of breastfeeding has rendered infant feeding a site of ethical and interactional discord, in which both mothers who breastfeed and those who use formula feeds must navigate pervasive moral frameworks; and engage in discursive work to justify their status as acceptable caregivers. Mother's choices in relation to feeding practices are complex and draw on multiple factors that are social, psychological and physiological. This study was situated in marginalised areas in south Wales and it drew on the intergenerational accounts of new mothers and grandmothers. The paper explores the ways in which governmental policies on infant feeding collide with mothers' embodied, cultural and domestic experiences and beliefs about what is appropriate in the context of family life and their wider social milieu. The moral landscape and the affective nature of the research focus meant that traditional forms of question and answer interviews were incongruous. Consequently, the study employed everyday

visual artefacts as the vehicle for discussions, to allow participants to explain their subjective experiences of negotiating the positions of 'good mother' and 'good grandmother'. Participants photographed objects to symbolise their journeys through the moral maze of motherhood and provided the researchers an insight into their mediation of the challenges associated with infant feeding. The paper argues that introducing a visual element to the data production process allowed participants to tell their stories from their own perspectives; and engendered a space to consider the practices, troubles and tensions of contemporary motherhood.

European Sociological Association - August 2015

**Title - Child poverty in the cultural imaginary: digital photographs, dominant stereotypes and the media**

Presenters - Janet Fink and Helen Lomax

Abstract - This paper examines the nature and currency of digital images of child poverty in contemporary Britain and explores how particular stereotypes of, for example, blighted urban landscapes and 'broken families' have come to dominate depictions of disadvantage in online media reportage. Our argument is situated in a context of rising social inequality across Europe and increasingly punitive and derogatory discourses around poorer people's lives in the media. The aim of the paper, however, is to consider not only the significance of context for reading images of child poverty but also the value of different theoretical approaches for interrogating processes of interpretation and meaning making. In this we suggest how the language and method of social semiotics (Jewitt and Oyama, 2001) offer useful tools through which to articulate how images of child poverty might provoke particular readings. At the same time, we identify how images are always in internal dialogue with the texts in which they are embedded and in external dialogue with their times (Trachtenberg, 1989). By illustrating the insights to be gained by holding these two approaches in tension within analyses of 'found' images, the paper seeks to extend an often neglected theoretical field in the sociology of childhood literature and to encourage more critical reflection on practices of image based research with children and young people.

**Title: Visual methodologies, sand and psychoanalysis: Exploring creative participatory techniques to engage with subjective experiences through ‘the world technique’**

Presenter – Dawn Mannay

Abstract: This paper focuses on a visual data production approach developed drawing on ‘the world technique’ in which participants create three-dimensional scenes, pictures or abstract designs in a tray filled with sand and a range of miniature, realistic and fantasy, figures and everyday objects as part of a psychoanalytical therapy session. Although there have been objections to taking psychoanalysis outside of the clinical situation of the ‘consulting room’, the method proved useful in engaging participants at an affective level and the data production drew upon a psychoanalytical sensibility; which was psychoanalytically informed rather than psychoanalytical. Visual data production was facilitated on a one-to-one basis and participants were asked to talk through their visual sandbox scenes with the researcher. The elicitation process was characterised by a largely uninterrupted flow of talk with an attentive listener whose role it was to try and understand what is being said, so that the psychoanalytical paradigm became relevant and practical in the context of qualitative social science research. This paper argues that psychoanalytically informed techniques can be applied ethically and effectively as a research tool in qualitative inquiry; and open new windows to the subjectivities of participants.

### **Forthcoming Events – Planned**

Visual Methods Study Group Annual Conference

The Visual Methods Study Group will hold its annual conference in London in September 2015. This will be an all-day event, combining plenary speakers, film screenings, poster presentations and panel sessions on different aspects of the socio-cultural, political and ethical dimensions of visual methods research. Details about the conference and the call for contributions will be circulated to Study Group members in March 2015.