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'It's Coming from the Heart': Exploring a Student's Experiences of 'Home' Using Participatory Visual Methodologies

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This introductory study explores the meanings and images of 'home' for a student living in student accommodation within the United Kingdom. It makes a case for the use of visual methodologies, as well as outlining their contribution to theorising the geographies of space, gender, and the home. In addition to furthering debates about the meanings of 'home', it establishes the visual as a valid form of sociological knowledge, ethnography, and representation, and adds to critiques of visual methodologies more broadly. Employing a combination of auto-photography and photo-elicitation methods, this study forms a collaborative effort between research participant and researcher, to create and interpret the visual images of 'home'. The setting of the 'home' – regarded as one of the most familiar places for its occupants – is defamiliarised and made strange and interesting again through the medium of photography. This study positions itself within this research gap and dilemma by building on existing work which has sought to 'make the familiar strange' through creative methodologies.

Keywords: Home, Participatory, Visual Methodologies, Auto-photography, Photo-elicitation

Introduction

This paper explores the use of auto-photography[1] and photo-elicitation[2] as participatory visual methodologies for understanding the geographies of home for a student living in student accommodation. In this study, I invited the participant to utilise a disposable camera to take photographs as part of the research process, and discussed these photographs in a follow-up photo-elicitation interview. Students are an interesting group due to the nature of their housing experiences: it is often the first time they have lived away from the family home; they are in flux between student and parental homes, between dependence and independence (Lincoln

2012). As Siân Lincoln (2012, 133) posits, 'going to university opens up new "private" spaces of identity for young people, outside many constraints of the parental home'. It is worthwhile exploring how this facet of identity might influence understandings of 'home'. How 'home' is felt ties into debates in human geography concerning the domestic as a locus of identity, so that people who are differently positioned according to gender, class, age, sexuality and ethnicity may have differential experiences of 'home' (Brickell 2012). Being aware of existing feminist critiques of 'home', the significant connections between gender and 'home', and the idea that 'home' can be a place within which gender relations may be reinforced, re-negotiated or deeply embedded, directed me towards a study which focuses on gender and student status. Although identity is a complex phenomenon and cannot be bundled into neat categories, I am aware that privileging any one of the other identity dimensions would also prove fruitful for future studies. In terms of identity, 'people accommodate to and adapt to … identities to varying degrees, but are not totally bound by them' (Green 2004, 57). While the participant's identity as a student and a woman may have some bearing, they must not be considered the only influences (Bijoux and Myers 2006). I see gender as a performative category (Butler 1990), a structure which need not be seen

as deterministic. With the exception of Liz Kenyon (1999) and Lincoln (2012), little work to date has focused on meanings of home for students; most emphasis is placed upon young people's experiences within the family home (Lincoln 2012: 64). Kenyon (1999) explores the experiences of students who leave their parental homes to live in university accommodation, and concludes that neither this temporary home nor their parents' residence is viewed as an acceptable long-term home. Students invested more promise in their imagined future home; in this case, 'home' was more of an aspiration than a current fixed space. This study seeks to expand upon Kenyon's claim to ask how the student home can be experienced beyond the bricks and mortar of the house.

This paper also establishes the visual as a valid form of sociological knowledge and adds to critiques of visual methodologies. I attempt to involve the participant at several stages of the research: inviting the participant to create images and trusting her to make her own interpretations. Visual methodologies offer promising alternatives to traditional social scientific research approaches, which have tended to over-rely on language as the means of accessing interpretations. These traditional approaches have come under fire from feminist scholars (Reinharz 1992; Letherby 2003) on the grounds that they use

participants as mere 'suppliers' of data. One of the starting points for employing visual methodologies is their emphasis on participation. I was aware of the potential of auto-photography to promote engage-ment (Robinson 2011), necessary for a subject area which has often neglected women's (and students') voices in accounts of home.

Over the last few decades, schol-ars across a range of disciplines have contributed to debates about what constitutes 'home' (Parsell 2012). The deconstruction of home can be seen as taking place against a backdrop of geographical enquiry into the concept of 'place', no longer conceptualised as being 'coherent, bounded and settled' (Massey 1992: 54). The 'place' of the home can be expanded to mean much more than the bricks and mortar of the 'house', to a 'socio-spatial entity', a 'psycho-spatial entity' and an 'emotional warehouse' (Easthope 2004: 134). Iris Young (1997) argues for the imaginative and affective geogra-phies of home, referring to feelings and objects that evoke memories of people and places. The home is opened beyond its tangible sense to that which can be experienced emotionally and psychologically. If 'home' does not simply refer to the bricks and mortar of the house, but reflects social and emotional attrib-utes (Moyle 1997), it follows that methodological tools must adapt to accommodate these multi-sensory geographies.

Scholars who seek to understand the everyday geographies of place are often confronted by the chal-lenge of 'making the familiar strange and interesting again' (Erickson 1986, 121). Since the 'home' is re-garded as one of the most familiar places for its occupants (Bachelard 1994), this seems methodologically challenging. This study situates it-self within this research gap and di-lemma – that of 'fighting familiarity' (Delamont and Atkinson 1995) – by building on existing work which has sought to 'make the familiar strange' (Erickson 1986, 121) through crea-tive methodologies. In this case, the domestic setting is placed within the frame of enquiry, following Sarah Pink's (2004) call for methods which engage with the 'pluri-sensory' char-acter of the home. Researchers are increasingly utilising innovative vis-ual research methodologies, such as auto-photography, video diaries, drawing, and participatory map-ping[3] as tools of defamiliarisation. One study by Rosy Martin (1999) confronted the familiarity of her childhood home by taking macro, 'close-up' photographs, rendering common-place objects strange and acting as a second glance by forc-ing the viewer to look at everyday objects through new lights, unusual perspectives and different lenses. Dawn Mannay (2010, 107) address-es the difficulties of conducting field-work in a familiar cultural setting by adopting visual methods, which she argues, act to 'counter the tacit and

normalising effect of knowledge'. For Julie Kaomea (2003), the use of children's artwork, as a method of data production, rendered 'strange' the familiar spaces of the classroom and the educational system. Visual methodologies, therefore, offer the opportunity to de-familiarise the setting of the home, not only in terms of objects, but processes and events that may otherwise be considered trivial. I employ the participant-directed visual method of auto-photography as an instrument for making the familiar 'home' strange and interesting again.

This research informed part of a pilot study for my PhD project, which aimed to explore the potential of auto-photography and photo-elicitation in capturing the complexities of the representation of meanings of home and identities. My research participant, Katy, is a 21-year-old undergraduate student at a UK university, who was recruited to take part in this study in 2012, when she was in her second year of study. Katy describes herself as a white, middle-class, heterosexual female. She grew up in Yorkshire, living with her parents, younger brother, and pets. She has lived in the same house since birth, only moving away to study at university. Her father runs his own accountancy firm, and her mother works part-time as a teaching assistant at a local primary school. I asked Katy to participate in this study for a number of reasons: I was aware of her interest in arts,

crafts, and photography, and thought this project might be appealing to her. Second, given the limited time and resources available to complete this pilot project, it was practical to select a participant with whom access would not prove to be problematic; and knowing Katy's pathway from her family home in Yorkshire to student accommodation located almost 100 miles away, I thought this physical distance between both 'homes' might prove interesting to explore. The sample was comprised of a single case study of one participant. I believed it was possible to gain a greater depth of understanding through the richness of visual data as produced through auto-photographic and photo-elicitation methods. As Sarah Johnsen et al. (2008, 205) posit, auto-photography is 'a powerful heuristic tool that can enhance understanding in new and nuanced ways'.

I share a number of characteristics with the research participant; we are both white, heterosexual women in our twenties who possess similar educational backgrounds, and grew up within a few miles of each other. Although I consider myself to come from a relatively working-class background, having since entered academia as a PhD student, I straddle the boundaries of working-class and middle-class. However, not so long ago, I experienced life as an undergraduate student living away from my parental home for the first time. I also knew

Katy for a number of years before I conducted this study. This level of familiarity with the research participant and her experiences positions me as an 'intimate insider' (Taylor 2011, 6), a term used to describe researchers 'whose pre-existing friendships (close, distant, casual or otherwise) evolve into informant relationships – friend-informants'. Although insider/outsider debates have been critiqued as 'inadequate in an absolute sense' (Mannay 2010, 92), exploring the complexities of the research relationship and questions of proximity is still methodologically useful. Shared knowledge and experiences can help towards decentring the imbalances of power between researcher and participant, commonly a feature of research encounters (Rogan and Kock 2005). Furthermore, as Jodie Taylor (2011) notes, data gathered from friend-informants can be significantly richer in volume and depth. Common ground can facilitate 'a relaxed, open atmosphere' in the interview context (Mannay 2010, 94). For all its advantages in terms of power and rapport, the status of 'insider' carries with it potential dangers which must equally be considered. My assumption of understanding the participant's experiences may inflict what Mannay (2010, 94) describes as a 'deadening effect' on the interview process, or what Taylor (2011, 9) terms 'insider blindness'. The issue then becomes one of attempting to see

through the fog of familiarity to the insightful aspects of everyday life that I might take for granted. Among the range of techniques adopted by several researchers, 'to make the familiar strange and interesting again' (Erikson 1986, 121), participant-directed visual methods prove desirable (Delamont and Atkinson 1995) and 'provide a gateway to destinations that lay beyond my repertoire of preconceived understandings' (Mannay 2010, 96). I therefore decided to employ auto-photography, a method which promotes participant autonomy, attempts to 'defamiliarise' (Shklovsky 1917/1965) taken-for-granted perspectives, and goes beyond the constraints of preconceived understandings in the standard research interview.

The following research question is explored, after having been identified as a relevant research gap, emerging from the reviewed literature: how might the student home be experienced and expressed beyond its 'bricks and mortar'? The paper begins by situating the study in a wider research and historical context, and focusing on debates around the geographies of space, gender and home. It then moves to consider the methodological implications of auto-photography and photo-elicitation. I attempt to suggest subjective meanings of the participant's images, based on a captioning-exercise[4] and reflections on the photographs in the photo-elicitation interview[5]. While I pose

some outstanding questions regarding the interpretation and power dynamics of participatory visual methodologies, these are acknowledged in order to further develop and make full use of the potential of such approaches. I endeavour to propose the usefulness of auto-photography as another lens through which geographies of the everyday, such as the home, can be better interrogated.

Geographies of Space, Gender and Home

The paper will now focus on current geographical debates around space, gender and home to illustrate broad themes in the literature. The concept of home has been an increasingly popular focus of geographical inquiry since the mid-1990s, particularly among critical geographers. The burgeoning interest across a range of disciplines, which focuses on people's experiences and understandings of home (May 2000) is no doubt a reflection of an increasing awareness of the concept's significance which has taken place alongside the emergence of the 'cultural turn' within the discipline of geography. To echo Peter Somerville (1989, 115), the home is significant because it is the locale through which 'key kinship ties are reinforced'; it is also constructed as important by various social actors, politicians, the mass media, and the everyday public; idioms about home ('Home is Where the Heart Is'; 'There's No Place Like Home') are ingrained in language and culture, so that home becomes 'both an imposed ideal and a potent cultural and individual ideal' (Kellett and Moore 2003, 128). This developing academic debate has led to a proliferation of ideas, understandings and definitions, which – while muddying the waters – has opened up the term 'home' to alternative conceptualisations. The major point to understand is that home cannot be regarded as a neutral space; its doors have been opened to highly differentiated meanings, meanings which are rich with emotion, memory and affect.

Nicholas Moyle (1997) recognizes the affective geographies of home; the home does not necessarily just refer to bricks and mortar, but also reflects social and emotional attributes. For instance, the imagined and culturally imposed notion of the 'ideal home' has an important influence on present living situations. Despite its imaginary state, the spectre of the ideal home is very real. The ideal home is held in tension with lived experiences and has a significant effect on sense of self and home (Bennett 2004). The recent British representation of the 'ideal home' is summed up by Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling (2006) as a detached, owner-occupied suburban house containing heterosexual, middle-class, white nuclear families. In a society which privileges home-ownership (Gurney 1997), the state and the media vilify those who do

not fit into normalised categories. Such strategies clearly seep into lives and home-making practices, affecting how home is experienced.

While an ideal home is conceptualised as a paradise (Somerville 1989), a private space where one can 'be oneself' away from the gaze of others (Saunders 1990), this has been contested from a feminist angle. Linda McDowell (1983) posits that the ideals of family and privacy can work in conflict, emphasising a form of 'togetherness, intimacy, and interest in each other's business' (Johnston and Valentine 1995, 89) which may deny this privacy. A consequence of prioritising an ideal of privacy is its implications for domestic violence; the home can be seen as a private realm in which the state should not intervene (Malos and Hague 1997). Feminist critiques (Wardhaugh 1999; Bell 1991; Peled and Muzicant 2008) have unpacked these normative ideals by arguing that they embody patriarchal values of heterosexuality and the white, middle-class, nuclear family. What for some might be an ideal home, may be a prison (Wardhaugh 1999), a place of violence (Tomas and Dittmar 1995), and a site of intrusion and violation (Johnston and Valentine 1995) for potentially excluded others. Much of the literature focuses on women as such excluded others (Wardhaugh 1999; Tomas and Dittmar 1995) asserting that the experiences of home are different for men and women

(Gurney 1997; Somerville 1989). This has included studies on how home can take on different meanings for homosexuals, transsexuals, or bisexuals who share a house with heterosexual family members and find it constraining to be under the 'parental gaze' (Bell 1991); studies on how homeless women have come to represent the 'unaccommodated woman' (Wardhaugh 1999) because the street is seen as a risky, male space in contrast to the security, order, and 'femaleness' of the home; and studies which have examined the meaning of home for homeless women revealing that many became homeless due to violence within their 'home' (Peled and Muzicant 2008). Einat Peled and Amit Muzicant (2008) argue that home as a place of domesticity and family life reinforces expectations of women to raise a family and maintain a perfect home, distinct from the outside, masculine world.

The gendering of home stems back to the mid-twentieth century when women in the west were primarily associated with the domestic realm (Morley, 2000). David Morley (2000) contends that it is still the case that at a simple, material level, women in the UK are even now much more subsumed in the home than are men. Modern culture frequently portrayed men in the role of the *flâneur*[6], or the stranger with the freedom to wander the public sphere of the city. It is this historical connection with home that ar-

guably gives home a unique and more complex set of meanings for women. Peter Saunders (in Gurney 1997, 374) suggests that 'the orthodox feminist image of the home as an oppressive institution simply does not square with what women themselves say about it …' This view has since been deemed unreliable on methodological grounds by Craig Gurney (1997). A major critique of Saunders' work was that it adhered to malestream positivism (Gurney 1997, 382), resulting in women's voices being absent from the study. As Gurney states, assertions that there is a lack of evidence to supporting a view of the home as an oppressive place for women reveals more about the limitations of malestream positivism than feminist scholarship per se. Consequently, studies emerging from the fields of urban sociology and housing studies (Gurney 1997) have rejected Saunders' conclusions on methodological and theoretical grounds and have sought to place women's voices back into accounts of home. Gurney (1997) explored the meanings of home for men and women in St. George, in Bristol. He found that gender was indeed an important factor in accounting for the ways in which men and women felt about and explained home, with women expressing much more complex accounts of meaning when compared with male respondents. For instance, housework was simultaneously referred to as a source of

pride as well as a source of much resentment and boredom (Gurney 1997, 375).

Normative conceptions of 'home' have developed as ultimately associated with happy (nuclear, heterosexual) family values taking place within a physical structure (ideally, an owner-occupied, detached house in the suburbs). This has had implications for those who feel excluded if they do not fit with such conventions. The darker side of home (the *unheimlich*[7]) is largely missing from these traditional accounts of home and remains to be elaborated. It can be asserted that the home is much more complicated than such constructions imply, and rather functions as a complex, fluid, socially-constructed, and often contradictory term. As a brief review of the diverse body of literature on 'home' has demonstrated, it is the porosity of the concept which must be adhered to, expanding the home outwards, beyond its meaning as a bounded unit, towards the wider neighbourhood, the mobile world and the realm of imaginative geographies to redefine how such meanings may alter over time and for different people. In order to conduct research that takes the embodied, sensory and emotional aspects of home seriously, a 'methodological re-framing is in order' (Latham 2003, 2000). It is with this desire to capture the nuanced and personal meanings of home that I chose to employ the method of auto-photography.

Opening up the Home to Visual Methodologies

In 1967, John Collier established photography as a legitimate research method in anthropology. Douglas Harper (1998) and Howard Becker (1974) recognised the contributions that photography could make to sociological research, illustrating their articles with photographs. While David Gauntlett (2007, 106) recognises the indebtedness we have towards these earlier visual ethnographic studies, he also notes their reluctance to 'hand over the camera'. Recent years have seen a growing emphasis on participatory production. Respondent-generated visual data avoids some methodological issues which occur within researcher-created images, which may be seen as intrusive, a step towards photographing the 'other', or a retreat to ethnography's dark past.

This is not to say that participatory research is somehow power-neutral (Waite and Conn 2011). The researcher still holds ultimate control of initiating research questions, writing-up and theorising data. David Buckingham (2009) argues that participatory methods and researchers need to exercise reflexivity. One tenet of feminist ethnography is the recognition of positionality; we are situated in economic, social, and cultural relations. Theories bear the marks of their makers (Skeggs 1997). Reflexivity connotes a '... kind of self-awareness and self-scrutiny, [it] asks that

researchers consider their own position in the research process, as well as investigating the position of their respondents' (Holliday 2004, 55). This highlights that we can only ever produce partial knowledge (Skeggs 1994). Helen Longino (2010) asks if this means abandoning the central goal and concept of epistemology, which she defines as 'truth'. Rather than seeing this as a hindrance, Donna Haraway and Sandra Harding (in Skeggs 1994) argue that acknowledging partial perspective heightens vision and the opposite, 'unlocatable knowledge' (Haraway in Skeggs 1994: 79), is that which is 'irresponsible'. Haraway (in Skeggs 2001) maintains it is better to take responsibility for the reproduction of power than trying to claim equality of power with the respondent. As Les Back (2004, 134) posits, photographs are not 'views from nowhere'. The recognition of researcher and respondent positionality means that taking a reflexive stance is a far cry from the supposed value-neutrality of traditional academic enquiry and has a lot to commend it.

Auto-photography

Auto-photography refers to photography carried out by the research participant as opposed to the researcher as part of a research project (Lombard 2012). The method has roots in psychological explorations of self-identity (Ziller and Rorer 1985) but has more re-

cently been taken up by sociology, social science, geography, and anthropology. Studies from geography have included Johnsen et al.'s (2008) research with the street homeless which concluded that auto-photography helped in highlighting hidden spaces, otherwise inaccessible to the researcher; and David Dodman's (2003) auto-photographic exploration of the urban environment in Kingston, Jamaica. Sociology has also witnessed increasing use of visual methods. Steven Gold's (2004) work demonstrated the importance of photography in developing the understanding of migrant communities. Scholars across these disciplines cite several advantages of auto-photography, including its participatory nature and its potential to construct knowledge with the participant as 'expert' (Meth and McClymont 2009), and its geographic potential to emphasise the multiple meanings that places can hold (Lombard 2012). I was drawn to visual methods because of their 'novelty factor' (Richards 2011, 2), their ability to keep people engaged in the research process for longer. In opting for auto-photography, I was aware of its accessibility compared to other visual methods (such as drawing or mapping) which require some prior requisite of artistic skill. As Melanie Lombard (2012) posits, the element of fun is central to auto-photography.

I conducted a prior meeting to ensure that the participant felt confident about the task, as well as the manual operation of the camera. A disposable camera was handed to the participant, which she kept for however long was deemed preferable, or until she felt she had taken enough photographs (a fortnight). The participant was asked to take photographs of anything that made up her 'home environment', which I stipulated could be positive or negative, inside or outside, or anything about 'home' she wished to comment on. The aim was to provide encouragement without seeming overbearing. The camera was returned by post and photographs were developed with two copies made. The photographs were numbered to make transcription and analysis more straightforward. A challenge that was borne in mind was how the social conventions of photography might constrain the participant's choice of photographic subjects. To attempt to resolve this issue, explicit permission was granted to the participant to photograph 'the good, the bad, and the ugly' (Guillemin and Drew 2010, 180).

Auto-photography allows participants to show their life worlds as well as to interpret them. It has the potential to promote engagement (Robinson 2011), necessary for a subject area which has so often neglected women's voices. Use of auto-photography complements feminist theory by attempting to confront power relations through sharing information. As David Gauntlett

and Peter Holzwarth (2006) posit, the approach is trusting of people's ability to generate interesting observations themselves. Engaging the individual in the research, and allowing them to actually produce an artefact, communicates their feelings, meanings and understandings. Auto-photography is committed to the co-production of knowledge between researchers and researched, allowing active engagement of people as 'meaning-producing beings' (Holloway and Valentine in Waite and Conn 2011, 116).

Photo-Elicitation

Photo-elicitation is 'the use of photographs in conjunction with qualitative interviewing [and] is a long-established method in visual sociology' (Newbury 2005, 2). In many studies, auto-photography is used as part of a mixed methods approach (Lombard 2012), commonly combined with a face-to-face interview after the photographs have been taken and developed. Usually the follow-up interview discusses why the particular photographs were taken, and the meanings within each photograph for the participant. Harper (2002, 14) attributes its origins to Collier's (1957) work which examined mental health in changing communities in Canada: 'The technique was put to use in research when the Cornell team used photo elicitation to examine how families adapted to residence among ethnically different people,

and to new forms of work in urban factories'. The researchers found that the photographs triggered participants' memories and reduced areas of misunderstanding. Since Collier, sociologists and anthropologists have employed photo-elicitation in a range of ways. France Winddance Twine (2006) used photo-elicitation interviews, using family photographs, in a longitudinal ethnographic study on race and intimacy. Harper (1984) and Gold (1986) used photographs taken by the researcher in their work on dairy farmers in a rural New York state (Harper 1984) and research with two sub-populations of Vietnamese refugees (Gold 1986) respectively.

The photo-elicitation interview in this study involved a discussion of the participant's images for the participant to further articulate and reflect on their meanings. The topic guide ensured that the very basics were ascertained, including what the photograph depicted; why the participant had chosen to take the photograph; what the participant felt about the subject depicted; which photograph most summed up 'home' for the participant; what the participant felt they could not convey through images; and how the participant found the exercise. The participant was asked to add captions to each photograph to allow for additional reflection; she was also asked if there were any photographs which she wished to exclude from the research. The representa-

tion of photographs by the participant in the interview and captioning exercise informed analysis. A significant motivation in opting for photo-elicitation was how it can enable participants to interpret visual material themselves instead of simply taking the researcher's interpretation as gospel. It has been argued that such practices prove motivating for participants if they help to prompt memories or emotional responses (Buckingham 2009). Underpinning photo-elicitation is a notion of *sharing* – arriving at understandings together. This goes some way to redressing imbalances of power between researcher and participant, often cited as a major methodological obstacle in feminist research. These visual methods hope to allow for a process of 'reflection' by allowing the participant time to think about what she wishes to express; to be able to do this creatively; and to express what may be difficult to express in words alone (Guillemin and Drew 2010). Images offer avenues that go beyond the spoken word, allowing the participant to say things that may be difficult to express verbally (Hogan and Pink 2010): to *show* their world as well as speak it.

While the participant could assign copyright to the images, an issue arose regarding people who may appear in them. I briefed the participant about seeking permission prior to taking images of others. It was considered good practice to ask for

written consent from the individual portrayed via the research participant, and a separate consent form was signed. An information sheet and consent form, which clearly outlined the purpose, potential risks and hoped-for benefits of the research and withdrawal procedures, was distributed to the participant. The subsequent sections of this paper will explore the themes that were drawn from the project, summarised under the categories of: *familiarity, comfort and routine; 'make it yours'; relationships; nostalgia or 'I used to make them with my mum';* and the *'un-home-like'*.

Familiarity, Comfort and Routine

A prominent theme seems to resonate with the normative 'house as haven' thesis, echoing several scholars' assertions that 'home' has been discursively positioned as a romanticised site of existence, 'a metaphor for experiences of joy and protection' (Brickell 2012: 225). The themes of comfort through things

which were familiar ('particularly the basil plant … we've got one at home and I bought my own to sort of create a home away from home … just trying to create a similar atmosphere') and routine came through as prominent in the interview and

photographs. The participant spoke of, '… that physical sense of comfort I always associate with home because … moving away is quite disorientating'. This corresponds to the normative Western, largely middle-class meaning of home which stems back to its association with a physical structure, providing rootedness, comfort, security, and stability: 'A place, region, or state to which one properly belongs, in which one's affections centre, or where one finds refuge, rest, or satisfaction' (Oxford English Dictionary 2007).

This came through in the photographs depicting a bed with a patchwork duvet and cushions, cookbooks, and a house plant. The bed was identified as the most poignant image of home. After moving in, making her bed was the first thing Katy did to make it feel like she was 'at home again':

… because the bed is kind of like the first thing that I did to make this feel like I was at home again when I moved in to make me feel a little bit more comfortable. I made the bed up and set it as I wanted it. And obviously it's something that you're in contact with every day when you go to sleep and it's a familiar routine in that that's where you will go to sleep tonight. So you've got that routine which I think is nice.

Home, or the idea of home, becomes imbued in objects. This re-

sounds with literature around 'affective geographies of home' (Young 1997): 'home' is not simply a place where people reside but an emotional and imaginative space. The bed became 'home' itself; a comfortable sanctuary, or a 'physical space where you can just sort of lie down, relax, and be incredibly comfortable', which 'you're in contact with every day' and 'where you will go to sleep tonight'. It is physically comfortable, but comfortable in the sense of being familiar too. The association of *comfort* with 'home' was repeated in the participant's reflections on the basil plant and cookbooks: 'I do really … enjoy cooking…doing familiar recipes and that idea of *comfort* food', and 'It [local produce] just … brings everything a bit nearer, feels a little bit more natural'. The idea of home was referred to as something permanent: '… that idea of permanence is something for me that is quite homely'. Permanence, the familiar, routine, and comfortable are placed in contrast to the short-termism and temporary nature of the student dwelling, and the disorientation of moving – a frequent event for students. Elements of 'home' were transferred to meaningful possessions and objects that made Katy feel comfortable through their familiarity or warmth. Student houses, described as being 'plain', are insufficient in themselves to provide homeliness; this is achieved through personal objects: '… the physical space I don't think is mine but when you look at it with everything in, it feels like it'.

The symbols of home recounted here perhaps restate the most popular and oft-cited of discourses. Associations of the home with belonging and rootedness are relics of the 'house as haven' thesis; but these ideals are recreated through objects by the student in her replication of homeliness in the student home. In this sense, 'home' is something which is inside the bricks and mortar of the house, constituting the house rather than being the house itself.

'Make it yours'

The 'house as haven' thesis has faced considerable critique from a feminist perspective (Carter 1995; Johnston and Valentine 1993; Bennett 2004). Instead of a simplistic haven for the self, the domestic has been conceptualised as a potential site of struggle and a 'continuous process of negotiations, contracts, [and] renegotiations'

flect something of [the] self'. Of importance here is the idea of 'home' as *negotiation*, something that has to be worked on: more of a process or achievement than a static state or space.

Interrelated with this notion of making the house a home was the theme of control, in terms of a sense of ownership and possession: control over making the home feel like a place of your own, negotiating the limitations placed on students and private renters to exercise this control completely in a property which they do not technically 'own'. This stamp of ownership and identity was particularly important because of the many people who have lived in the house previously:

It's how they've sort of personalised the door that's been somebody else's door before theirs and before theirs and before that and before that … this is quite a long-established student area. You know, there's like at least six people who have had this room as *their* room and that door as *their* door … so when you put something on there, even if it is only hanging your coat up on the back of the door, it makes it feel like it's yours … because you've put your stamp on it.

'Putting your stamp' on your room was also seen as important because of the standardised, institution-like university 'halls' accommodation, which students are forbidden to alter dramatically. This assertion is picked up particularly well in

(Brickell 2012, 226). These images elicited responses around having to *make* the house a home. Home is often talked about as something which is 'created' by the participant. The vase of daffodils ('it's not something you need, it's not integral to your living') acted as a luxury item which created a 'pretty atmosphere' against the stark walls of university accommodation; the personalised name signs provided a way of 'putting your stamp on' the doors; the colourful, imperfect rug was a way of 'injecting colour' and 'trying to re-

Lincoln's (2012) work on youth culture and private space, which sees the bedroom as a place of 'escapism' from the chaos of family life; a space over which young people have some sense of ownership; a canvas on which to display their identities. Despite this small grasp on autonomy, young people's spaces are still subject to varying levels of control, invasion, and interventions. In the family home, this control usually comes from parents or guardians. In Lincoln's (2012) study, one participant spoke of her father's control, which manifested itself in aspects of her social and cultural life, including the use of her bedroom; curfews, restrictions on her choice of wall paint, curtains, carpets, and other furnishings were all recounted as limiting her ownership over that space. Likewise, brothers and sisters are nearly always invading that 'private space' (Lincoln 2012:83). While students living in student accommodation for the first time have the chance to exercise more independence away from the control and curfews of the family home, there is only so much they can alter. But, at least Katy could express her agency, and demonstrate to herself that she has a capacity for change through creativity:

> I didn't go out and pick the furniture that's in here. Like at home, obviously, even if you took my items out, it's my room because I picked certain things that are in

there – from the wall colour to the carpet and the different pieces of furniture. Because even when the bed frame is left blank in here, I didn't pick that, it's not there for me; it's been there for countless other people.
> … that room … was my room, even though there were I think a hundred and something identical rooms to that, like other people's rooms … but mine was mine because of the things in it … like the bunting that's on the wall here sort of went across the ceiling last year. And even taking that down last year made it less mine.

Making the home feel like a 'place of your own' comes back to the idea of 'trying to reflect something of the self'. Of note here is the connection between 'home' and identity, or as Tony Whincup (2004) phrases it, the home and material objects within the home reflect and 'give shape to the self'. Katherine Brickell (2012, 226) similarly recognises the 'home as a locus of personality'. It is the things within the room which make it yours, and once these are taken down that sense of ownership comes down with them. Home can be understood as a means to display aspects of our identities (Belk 1988); possessions become imbued with meaning. This theme arose quite often:

> … you can kind of say something about you through your room. Because … I don't know … when

someone comes into your room and says, 'Oh, your room's very you'… you know that kind of idea where your room expresses a kind of identity.

… like there's posters strategically dotted around my room … they kind of cover every corner … they try and show a little bit of me.

The participant felt that the colourful rug reflected her personality to an extent:

I think it sums me up quite well … all of the clashing of the colours and things. Because not all of it strictly goes together but it all sort of comes together and it's not perfect. And there's bits that sort of stick out a bit and I quite like that …

If 'home' is expressive of aspects of one's identity, and identity is understood as a matter of learning, a repetition of acts (Butler 1990), then 'home' may be an on-going construction intertwined with the construction and performance of the 'self'.

'It's all about relationships'

Home has been theorised as a site which plays host to social relations, from the loving to the oppressive. Relationships can determine what makes a dwelling a 'home' or a 'prison': from dodging the watchful gaze of the neighbour and various forms of surveillance, to living in a situation of domestic violence. In this sense, 'home' does not have to be restricted to physical structures but can be defined by social networks, connections, and people who take care of one another, a meaning of home which is often held by some people without housing (May 2000; Kidd and Evans 2011).

Here, relationships emerged as an integral element of 'home': '… for me, it's all about relationships and closeness'. Home was defined by people who take care of one another, and in this sense, goes beyond the physical structure:

I think when you're with someone that you're really comfortable with – and obviously people mean a lot – it makes you feel more sort of homely because you're with people that you kind of associate home with, sort of caring and intimacy and friendships and things.

Different types of relationships were acknowledged: keeping in touch with old friends via letters and mobile phones; displaying pictures of friends; and re-creating a familial structure amongst university 'house-mates':

I sort of ended up just sat on a bench, outside of my actual apartment, just reading [the letter] and felt really comfortable and really at home sat on the bench, just because I had a little bit of a friend from home in my hand.

And I've got – this sounds really sad – I've got saved voicemails on my phone of my mum's voice and my dad's voice. Just because … which sounds really sad but sometimes it's nice just to call it and hear it. They don't know … they're like nonsense messages … like 'Can you call me back please?', but you know, it's there if you ever want it, if you want to hear them.

Many of these relationships were nostalgic or bittersweet ('you feel like you're on the phone to that person and it brings you closer'), and were used prominently in the decoration of the home; others were in the present. The participant spoke of how she has taken on the parental role of 'Flat Mum', the mature figure people go to with their problems. This also brings with it a fair share of domestic tasks, spoken of both positively and negatively:

… in a way it's kind of bittersweet because you're being nurturing in that you're looking after people by

keeping the area clean for them to be in. But at the same time obviously you're creating an extra workload which should really be split. And I think that that really only does come about because I've got this title of 'Flat Mum'.

Being 'Flat Mum' also demands a certain way of performing (and not performing), suggesting that the home is not simply a space for a presentation of a 'real' self but a 'complex arrangement of spaces for the presentation of a miniaturised array of variable domestic selves' (Hepworth 1999, 19):

> … it also makes you feel like you have to be a certain way then as well. I probably change my behaviour for Sarah, in that I'm very mature and she can come and talk to me and I'll sort of make sure her head's screwed on … rather than being too giggly … girly. I don't talk to her about my problems because I'm Flat Mum.

This complicates the version of 'domestic bliss' and echoes Gurney's (1997) study within which women simultaneously referred to housework and their domestic roles both as sources of pride and as sources of resentment. The participant attempts to transform the image of the 'ideal' home, of domestic harmony and haven, into reality. Even within the student home, the gendered norms of domesticity and

the expectations of women to maintain a perfect home take shape, though it is far more complex and contradictory than past studies have suggested. After all, not all women in Katy's household are taking up this role; rather it is one which Katy performs for them via her adopted status as 'Flat Mum'.

'I used to make them with my mum …'

These images show how the participant recollected her parental home in a nostalgic sense. The scones elicited memories from childhood, baking with her mother. The home-made cushion brought to mind '… sitting down in the living room with my mum'. The money jar was a chance to save up for day-trips … 'like when I was at home'. 'Home' is almost always referred to as the parental home where the participant grew up: 'Like that cushion cover, that's something I made at home'; '… baking is something that I do quite a lot at home, and I used to make them with my mum when I was younger'; '… these are letters from home, from my best friends'. Home, in this sense, is something which is looked back on, a selectively recalled and presented past. Michael Jackson (in Mallett 2004) writes of 'home' from a phenomenological perspective, holding the ideas of the 'real' and 'ideal' homes in tension, as mutually defining. This is reinforced by Nigel Rapport and Andrea Dawson (1998, 8) who argue that

'home brings together memory and longing'*.* In this sense, home was referred to as the place where the participant grew up: 'When some-one says "are you going home?" you say "yes", but they say "are you going *home* home?"' It is nothing new to suggest that the home is a sphere shaped by memories (Blunt 2005), but this may be intensified given the temporary and fleeting nature of the student dwelling. This recalled set of practices and expec-tations, associated with the paren-tal home, are repeated to make the student home more *homely*. Rather than understanding the meaning of home as inherent and fixed, this approach takes its meaning to be performative – whether home is a performance for others or a perfor-mance of home-making rituals in-herited from the parental home.

Of course, for some who have experienced the parental home in a different way – as a prison (Wardhaugh 1999), a place of vio-lence (Tomas and Dittmar 1995), or a site of intrusion and violation (Johnston and Valentine 1995) – performances of 'home' are likely to take on different and contradic-tory meanings, where normative 'homely' practices are challenged or subverted (Johnston and Valentine 1995). Lynda Johnston and Gill

Valentine (1995) found that lesbians occupying a home built on traditional cultural symbols often subverted them by making structural changes to the house, or creating different ways of living in order to express a non-heterosexual identity. Yet, even in Johnston and Valentine's study, remnants of the parental home still appeared in the present home, producing 'discordant spaces and odd juxtapositions' (Johnston and Valentine 1995, 92) of lesbian identities as well as identities of 'the child' and 'the daughter'. This is a reminder that performances of the home space can take different forms, and while some may be repetitions of 'happy memories', others may subvert more oppressive hauntings of the parental home.

The 'un-home-like'

A negative point related to the view from the window (looking onto the bins), and the noise that comes with the flat's central location. Katy recalled feeling under surveillance by strangers who could gaze up to her window, leading to her closing the curtains when sitting at her desk. Such elements were referred to as 'un-home-like', making the participant feel 'less-at-home'. This contrasted to her parental home in a quiet, rural area. Rurality in England is bound up with notions of the peaceful idyll, with a home in the country being 'a much sought after commodity' in a space 'distant from the perceived threats posed by city living' (Cloke, Milbourne and Widdowfield 2000, 79–80). For some, the reality of rural life can be quite different, characterised by isolation, a lack of services, affordable housing, jobs, transport and amenities (Cloke, Milbourne and Widdowfield 2000). At times, Katy's student home became the 'unfamiliar' or the 'unheimlich': 'It's uncomfortable because you're not familiar with having to deal with the noise'. Such sentiments might be encouraged when notions of the 'ideal home' are held in tension with lived experiences. This contrast might be starker given Katy's comfortable parental home, so that what appears

'un-homely' is influenced by class background. Although this idea cannot be explored in depth within the remit of this paper, exploring further how class might influence what is considered 'un-homely' may be worth pursuing in future studies. Comparisons can be made with Katy Bennett's (2011) work on the concept of feeling 'homeless at home'. The ideal home is that which exists in another place and time: 'At home, I've got a really nice view of a field and it's … really picturesque and pastoral, and then you've got this … waste'. This is an 'external myth' (Miller 2010: 98) that is held in tension with the actual ordinary home, which betrays a different set of characteristics and relationships.

While the parental home is held in a nostalgic place, it also becomes the source of feelings of unsettlement when situations arise in the student home that are less than this 'ideal'. Additional responses indicated other insufficiencies: not being allowed pets ('I think that would definitely make you feel more at home'); and the lack of a dining table ('… which doesn't totally for me feel very homely … It's not very sociable in the kitchen'). According to Bowlby's interpretation of Freud (in Morley 2000), the underbelly of 'homeliness' is the 'unheimlich': the unfamiliar which besets the tranquil vision of home as a place of harmony. The harmony of the student home is undermined by 'intruding forces … untimely and dislocated hauntings of other times and places' (Bowlby in Morley 2000: 19).

Conclusions

This study set out to explore the student home and how it might be experienced beyond its 'bricks and mortar'. It can be stated that the home is not simply a physical place where sleeping, eating, and domestic labour occurs, but a complex space of emotion; an anchor for senses of nostalgia and comfort; a field for playing out social relations; and a site for performing selfhood. This concurs with literature which positions the 'home' beyond its materiality (Easthope 2004). While this study focused on the meanings of a 'student' home for a young, white, undergraduate female student, it understands that identity is highly fragmented, as are meanings of home that follow from this. This particular home was multiple (existing in the past, present and future), reflecting the temporality of the term-time home. This case study suggests opportunities for future research, focusing perhaps, on other strands of identity (class, ethnicity, sexuality, age) and how they interact with understandings of 'home'. Future research would also benefit by exploring how 'home' and the 'un-homely' are understood by other groups: people with experiences of homelessness or domestic violence, for instance.

This paper also aimed to comment on the suitability of visual

methods for reducing the interference of the researcher and attempting to give 'voice' to the participant. Analysis followed Gauntlett and Holzwarth (2006, 86): '… you can do an analysis of the whole but you shouldn't be trying to analyse each creative artefact because that is better done by the person who made it'. I valued first and foremost the interpretation by the participant before considering theory. The analysis process began with the captioning exercise which enabled the participant to add textual explanations to each photograph. However, to give no consideration to the role of myself, as researcher, in presenting and analysing the visual material would be naïve. As Dianne Millen (1997, 3) posits, '… the idea that the research relationship should or ever can be equal in any sense is an illusion'. Regardless of the interpretation placed on the artefact by the participant, the power rests in the hands of the researcher; when writing up the final interpretation, there is a 'double interpretation … the researcher is providing the interpretation of others' interpretations' (Bryman 2001, 15). This issue remains an unresolved puzzle for researchers employing participatory visual methodologies.

In terms of analysis, I followed the approach articulated by Gold (2004, 1552) which stipulates that images can be integrated with other forms of information to improve sociological work, even if analysis of the visual is not the central focus. In this case, I integrated the photographs with the participant's captions and interpretations from the interview. Following previous auto-photographic schemes employed by Robert Ziller (1988), I organised the photographs into categories that emerged from the discussion and performed a thematic analysis of the transcript alongside the photographs, guided by my research question. The images helped me to 'see' the social world which the participant inhabits, thus helping to generate themes and then, theoretical insights. The photo-elicitation interview helped to identify images with particularly strong meanings to the participant, which I ensured were included in the presentation of the case study. Although no system of classification can do justice to the levels of meaning in the photographs, the photo-elicitation exercise went some way in helping to take account of the images' complexity and provided the context for my theoretical analysis. An extended study could employ a more reflexive and collaborative method of analysis, enabling the participant to critique or challenge the themes that I had generated. While auto-photography does not completely equalise power relationships, it does go some way to providing tools for better communicating understandings. In the same way that reality is not fully 'knowable', images have no fixed meaning; we cannot expect

them to capture an objective reality (Pink 2001). A challenge to take on board with visual methodologies, as Buckingham (2009) maintains, is that researchers need to develop methods that deal with the visual dimensions of material, rather than falling back on participants' verbal accounts. This may be an analytical issue; the research process of this study was creative so drew different kinds of responses than if the participant was asked to express their views in an interview. The thinking, writing and talking was arguably more lucid because it was inspired by photographs. Since issues around analysis of images in the social sciences is relatively unexplored (Lombard 2012), perhaps future research needs to engage with this debate further: whether it is necessary to develop more robust analytical techniques which are inherently visual.

The visual approach was not without its logistical challenges. It proved to be a resource-intensive and time-consuming method: not such an issue for a small project, but it may have been difficult if replicated on a larger scale. The exercise required commitment by the participant. Seen in a more optimistic light, though, it is an 'enabling methodology' (Gauntlett and Holzwarth 2006, 84), which assumes people's creativity. Participation was sustained by the participant, in part, because of her interest in photography. One of the advantages of

auto-photography is its accessibility; the ease of pressing a camera shutter is notable when compared with other participatory visual methods which require greater skill. It is for this reason that auto-photography is a research method increasingly used with children and young people (Jorgenson and Sullivan 2009; Moreland and Cowie 2005; Young and Barrett 2001; Aitken and Wingate 1993). Marisol Clark-Ibanez (2004) successfully used auto-photography and photo-elicitation with children who had never taken a photograph before, but understood the basic instructions to operate a camera and required little supervision. If replicated on a larger scale, the researcher would likely have to employ strategies to maintain involvement for participants with less investment in photography. As Naomi Richards (2011, 4) suggests, the researcher could spend time at the start building confidence about the technicalities of the media (facilitated through workshops); offer a range of prompts if people are in need of stimulation for subject matter; and keep a close eye on people who may be struggling and suggest they try different media.

Katy gave positive feedback of the experience, in terms of allowing her time to consider understandings of 'home', away from judgement:

I think it was a good way of doing it, 'cause when you've got the camera you don't feel like you've

got to be careful of what you're taking pictures of 'cause if I was just to sit here and tell you everything that makes home for me I'd probably change it around a bit because obviously you might feel like it's something that's gonna be immediately judged.
I didn't realise I was going to be this … cheesy! [Laughs] It's coming from the heart!

The very acknowledgment of this 'cheesiness' – that the words were coming 'from the heart' – speaks volumes about the potential of auto-photography to allow people to share their feelings in ways that other methods do not. This study attempted to add to an existing body of work, which has employed visual methods as instruments of defamiliarisation; in this case, 'the bricks and mortar' of the home were made strange and interesting again. Given my insider status with student life, an expanded study into the meanings of home for students would best be approached using participant-directed visual methods. The core advantage of such methods is in allowing the participant to create original images and ideas, without the presence, influence and interference of the insider-researcher. I remain convinced that the auto-photography and photo-elicitation exercise succeeded in representing the 'common place as strange' (Martin 1999, 7), and emphasised day-to-day visual meanings of 'home' that

may have otherwise remained invisible. Nevertheless, an expanded study could tailor the particular visual tool to each participant, so they have more choice and control over their means of self-expression. Future research need not stop at the visual; there is considerable scope to further address Pink's (2004) call for 'pluri-sensory' methods in exploring the home. This opens up exciting new directions for future fieldwork within the home: engaging with its intangible smells and sounds as well its tangible sights.

Endnotes
1 Auto-photography, also called 'self-directed photography', refers to photography carried out by the research participant rather than the researcher as part of the research process.
2 Photo-elicitation is the notion of inserting a photograph into a research interview and entails the use of photographs to evoke discussion.
3 Auto-photography and video diaries are participatory visual methods which hand the control of the (video) camera over to the research participants. Other methods such as drawing and participatory mapping are interactive approaches utilising accessible visual methods in an individual or a group setting.
4 The participant was asked to add captions to each photograph to allow for further reflection on their meanings.
5 Seventeen photographs were produced, although I shall refer to only a few of them here – particularly those identified as important by the participant.
6 The figure of the *flâneur* originates from nineteenth-century Paris and was first characterised by the French poet, Charles Baudelaire (1964 [1863], 9–12). Baudelaire describes the *flâneur* as 'a

passionate spectator of the city', free to wander the streets and observe the crowds. Reflecting on the *flâneur*, Doreen Massey (1991, 47–48) writes how the role was 'irretrievably male', noting the impossibility of a *flâneuse*.

[7] The *unheimlich* or the 'Uncanny' is a Freudian concept for the familiar, yet strange, literally 'unhomely'. In his essay on the 'Uncanny', Freud (1919, 219) established a link between the *unheimlich* and concealment, referring to the 'Uncanny', or the *unheimlich*, as that which 'belongs to all that is terrible – to all that arouses dread and creeping horror'. Morley (2000) posits that while the *heimlich* can paradoxically be seen as the realm of homeliness, of the tame, of intimacy, friendliness and comfort, the second meaning of *heimlich* is that of concealment. *Heimlich* thus contains (or is the hidden core of*) unheimlich* because to conceal is the exact opposite of making familiar.

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