

**BPS Qualitative Methods in Psychology Section Conference 2015**

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**Symposium: Visual methods in qualitative research: Four case studies of what happens when you do more than a semi-structured interview**

**Low income men as self- researchers: can photo-elicitation promote engagement, visibility and meaning-making?**

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**Purpose:** This paper examines claims about photo-elicitation interviewing by exploring its use with low income men. Of interest here is the accessibility of the method with a typically hard-to-reach group and its capacity to access areas of lives that might typically not become visible in talk-only interview.

**Background:** Low income men have a life expectancy seven years less than high income men. Supported by the rhetoric of 'men's health in crisis', health research with men has overwhelmingly focused on excessive drinking, eating and smoking and on too little exercise, whilst the unique ways in which men *do* look after their health has been sorely overlooked. We know little about how low income men seek to fulfil a personal health agenda, and this study sought to address this gap. However, low income men are traditionally hard to recruit and reticent in interviews, and are often the recipients of health information, not generators. Thus, this study attempted to do research with men differently through a particular use of photo-elicitation: participants were positioned as experts and

directors in researching, documenting and making known what health means to them, and what health behaviours matter, and are possible, in their unique contexts.

**Methods:** Nine White British low income men over the age of eighteen were loaned a digital camera and asked to photograph concrete or symbolic representations of health and wellbeing in their lives. They were asked to talk through their images in a participant-led interview two weeks later.

## **Conclusions**

The average interview was 78 minutes, supporting the claim that photo-elicitation can facilitate long interviews, and from a group traditionally reticent in interviews. Issues that were made known by the men included: mental health, positive relationships, personal physical problems, drug addiction, alcoholism and a suicide attempt, indicating that the method supported the telling of both difficult and positive experiences. Little contribution was made by the 'interviewer' in the form of interrogative questions, and the data produced is thus highly participant-led. It could be argued that photo-elicitation therefore subverts the risk of studies being limited by, or re-producing, stale or under-critiqued research agendas. Challenges are that the interpretative activity in the analysis stage must be alert to the potential to be influenced by hegemonic ideas about men's health. Methodologically, photo-elicitation appears an effective way to gain insight and meaning about men's health.