

Research Note

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Photography and Children: Auto-driven Photo-elicitation

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Introduction

Visual research methods, such as using photography, are gaining acceptance in tourism studies. But there is scope to further extend their application to actively involve children in the research process. When photographs are inserted into a research interview, it is commonly known in the social sciences as photo-elicitation, and auto-driven photo-elicitation incorporates photographs that informants have taken themselves (Harper 2002). This research note explores auto-driven photo-elicitation's application to provide greater insight into children's tourist behaviour within a family group. We present findings of a multi-stage whole-family study looking at the social experiences and meanings of family holidays over time (Schänzel 2010). Research participants were asked to take photographs of their personal experiences, with children supplied with disposable cameras. Self-selected photographs were then used as projective stimuli in post-holiday interviews. Ethical and methodological implications of conducting research with children are discussed.

Justification for the Use of Auto-driven Photo-elicitation

Photo-interviewing, which has become known as photo-elicitation, has three main approaches: auto driving, reflexive photography, and photo voice/photo novella (Hurworth 2003). The three variations are all similar in their technique with photographs used as stimulus to gather a deep understanding of the interviewee, either by auto-driving the interview, reflecting on the images presented, or creating a picture story. Auto-driven photo-elicitation indicates the "interview is 'driven' by informants who are seeing their own behaviour" (Heisley and Levy 1991: 260), and is advocated because images evoke deeper elements of human experiences than do words-alone interviews (Harper 2002). The epistemological implications are that the researcher

listens as the participants interpret their own photographs (Botterill and Crompton 1987) making research more collaborative (Loeffler 2004).

The use of auto-driven photo-elicitation is especially valuable in tourism research given the strong conceptual relationship that researchers have identified between the practices of tourism and photography (Garlick 2002; Haldrup and Larsen 2003; Urry 1996). Travel is considered a strategy for accumulating photographs (Sontag 1977), and photography a strategy for recording and reliving holidays. However, in tourism research visitor- or volunteer-employed photography has mainly applied content analysis (e.g., Garrod 2008; MacKay and Couldwell 2004; Markwell 1997). Few tourism studies have used visual data that have been generated by tourists themselves as prompts in interviews (e.g., Andersson-Cederholm 2004; Loeffler 2004; Westwood et al. 2006; Zainuddin 2009) or have been taken by residents (Cahyanto et al. 2010).

The Use of Photographs in Research with Families and Children

Photographs have been used in family tourism research, with family holiday photographs becoming souvenirs of quality family time (Hallman et al. 2007). This relates to 'the family gaze' which stresses sociality, reflexivity and embodied performances (Haldrup and Larsen 2003; Larsen 2005). These studies have employed content analysis of publicly available or private family photographs, or analysed photographs of families on holiday taken by the researcher. Family holiday photographs have been used in auto-driven photo-elicitation interviews by Decrop (2005) and Gram (2005). However, the photographs were taken by the parents and neither of these studies gave children ownership in the production or discussion of photographs.

Auto-driven photo-elicitation has been used in children's research in other social sciences (e.g., Clark 1999; Grant 2006). The value of auto-driven photo-elicitation in tourism research with children fits with a shift within the social sciences that repositions children as the subjects rather than objects of research (Farrell 2005). This draws attention to the need to understand children from their own perspective and recognizes that they may gain different experiences than adults. Rather than assuming that children know less than adults, it is suggested that they know something else (Matthews et al. 1998). Such an approach requires more inclusive and participatory child-centred methodologies and ethical considerations.

Interviewing children can be especially problematic due to children's level of linguistic communication, their cognitive development, the question-and-answer setting, and the power dynamics between the adult and the child (Clark 1999). The use of their own photographs addresses some of these issues (Clark-Ibáñez 2004) in that combining techniques enable the data generation process to be more interesting and fun for children (Punch 2002). In order to recognize that children have a status in their own right (Stafford et al. 2003) it is necessary to ask separately for their consent. According to Moscardo (2010) there has been little discussion of research ethics in the tourism literature. Research ethics, however, should not just be about informed consent and autonomy of participants but also about the choices made with regard to research design, such as making the research process more engaging to children.

Application Within a Family Tourism Study

These considerations led to the inclusion of auto-driven photo-elicitation in a study of social experiences and meanings of family holidays that captured the perspectives of all family members (20 parents and 20 children) within 10 New Zealand families. Data were gathered before, straight after, and half a year after a domestic summer holiday to represent the holiday experience as a three-phase realization of journey experiences (anticipation and short- and longer-term recollection). The children ranged in age between 6–16 years, as it is widely regarded that five/six is the youngest age at which interviews can be conducted (Matthews et al. 1998). Consent was sought from all participating family members. A subjectivist epistemology within the interpretive paradigm was assumed for this study to understand the complex world of lived experience from the perspective of those who live it (Denzin and Lincoln 2000).

At the pre-holiday interview, all family members were asked to take photographs on holiday that related to positive and negative experiences. Parents largely used their own

camera but children were given disposable cameras. After the holiday, the researcher organized film processing. Participants were asked to select five or six photographs featuring memorable experiences. Respondents could select their own and/or other family member's photographs to reflect the dynamics of family holidays as mainly a collective endeavour. Photographs were not subject to content analysis; rather, at the two post-holiday interviews, the photographs were used to stoke memories and drive discussion. This proved valuable given the longitudinal nature of the study. The photographs also represented data collected 'on-holiday' and included private events that the researcher would otherwise not have access to.

Illustration of Auto-driven Photo-elicitation with Children

The disposable camera and developed photographs offered participants a tangible reward and children displayed a sense of achievement and emotional connection when talking about the photographs they took or were taken of them. Photography provided children with an alternative way of expressing their feelings and becoming engaged with the research process. Photographs served as visual stimuli and became a catalyst for remembering holiday events and people. For example, a reticent 8-year-old boy could relate to an image of himself with his new friend (Figure 1):

Fishing not a lot but I was with my friend and we took a photo of me fishing and I caught a kahawai.



Figure 1. Photograph taken and selected by an 8-year-old boy

Most chosen photographs were about emotional attachments formed to extended family members, friends made, animals discovered, and interests pursued. Plate 1 illustrates both social connection (new friend) and interest (fishing). Choosing a photograph (Figure 2), an 11-year-old boy highlights his interest:

My favourite was probably the farm because of the motorbike and riding around on all the paddocks



Figure 2. Photograph taken and selected by 11-year-old boy

Photographs could also include negative experiences, something not usually captured in family tourism research. Choosing two photographs (Figure 3), a 10-year-old girl said:

The two bad things was [younger sister] going into our stuff and messing it up and going shopping to the supermarket."

Children also selected photographs, especially in the final interview, that portrayed enjoyable moments:

Most of these [photographs] are just fun times with the family, doing fun stuff.

(14-year-old girl)

Memories for the children, thus, often perpetuated the image of holidays as fun, something less-evident in parental perspectives on family holidays (Schänzel, 2008).

Advantages and Drawbacks of Auto-driven Photo-elicitation with Children

The main advantages of auto-driven photo-elicitation, as demonstrated in this study, confirm Clark (1999) and Clark-Ibáñez (2004). The interview experience was improved by providing children with prompts to refresh their memory, photographs introduced children's own content area, and auto-driven photo-elicitation eased rapport between researcher and child. Thus, when children's emotional

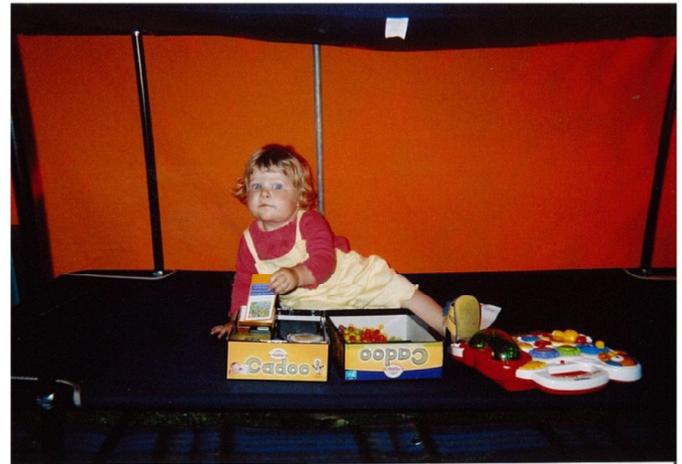


Figure 3. Photographs taken and selected by 10-year-old girl

worlds were opened up, it gave children opportunities to actively interpret their own experiences, and ensured that the interview included topics relevant to the child. It also empowered children to discuss their own positive and negative experiences away from the collective family holiday activities not necessarily captured otherwise. Disposable cameras are easy to use and relatively inexpensive.

Nevertheless, there were logistical challenges regarding the time to collect, process, and return cameras and photographs. Research with children require special ethical considerations. Consent (either written or verbal depending on age) was sought from children and their parents and permission was sought for individual photographs to be included in research outputs. In this study, children were taking photographs and discussing them within a family situation. Using photography with children away from protective group environments may require additional direction on what the research boundaries are, and privacy

is an issue. Digital cameras and photo-capable mobile phones could also be used to collect on-holiday photographs, particularly from older children. However, having tangible photographs at the time of interviewing, in this instance hard-copies, was crucial to the success of auto-driven photo-elicitation in this study. Within a family interview, it was the viewing and sharing of the actual photographs around the group and with the researcher that enabled the images to be used effectively.

Conclusion

The use of the children's own photographs is a

powerful qualitative method in providing visual stimulation and engaging children in the interview process. Auto-driven photo-elicitation created a reward for participation; active involvement of the children in the collection of holiday experiences and affective interpretation of them; breaking down of barriers between interviewer and interviewees; a creative outlet rather than purely language-based interaction; and a different perspective on family holiday meanings. Overall, participants reported positive experiences from the use of auto-driven photo-elicitations. It empowered children and gave a voice to all family members and has potential for wider application in tourism research.

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