Recording and recognising the experiences of estranged students in higher education

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Recording and recognising

Background and purpose
Recruiting participants
Project participation
Photo elicitation
Findings
Conclusions and recommendations
What happened next?
References
Background and purpose

Job role

*Stand Alone*

Wannabe sociologist

Opportunity

Challenge stigma and taboo

Raise awareness

Contribute to institutional knowledge and help shape support
Photo elicitation

Taking and using photographs as the basis for focus group interviews with the participants

Provide structure to the interview, produce richer data and help create a better balance in power dynamics (Bates et al., 2017)
Recruiting Participants

One institution
Email to entire student body
Used the term ‘estranged’
Asked for volunteers
Participants self-selecting
Financial incentive

Image from: http://enjoyphone.blogspot.com/dd text
Project participation #1

Individual one-to-one meetings
Eight students took part
Semi-structured interview schedule
Shared images on paper handouts
Two focus groups and an interview
Anonymity
Findings: Recording estrangement

Students took 49 images in total

“Visual inventories of objects, people and artefacts” and the “intimate dimensions of the social” (Harper 2002, p.13).

Images depicting the institutional experience of university e.g. buildings on campus

Images of the social e.g. friends, pets and 'selfies'
Recognising estrangement

This is probably the first instance that I’ve heard of estrangement being mentioned by the university which is sort of heartening for me [S8]
I felt really good. To get away from the university was actually really nice... I went to London, I’ve never done that before, go to London [S2]
Finance

Student finance came in after my deposit was due, for example, so that was a really hard time, because there was that gap where obviously I was quite reliant on finding funds myself [S5]
Accommodation

On the first day the parents of my flatmates would ask me where my parents were so they could meet them... And I was like ‘Erm’. You’re almost pushed straightaway to be like ‘They’re not here’ [S6]
Wellbeing

I felt kind of isolated as well to be honest

[S3]
Support
It made me appreciate a lot more what I have regarding friends… they’re not my blood family, but they are kind of like my family and it just makes me so happy to have them in my life, that I can fall back on [S2]
So it was nice knowing, as somebody said they’d got the email from you, there must be other people then in the same situation… Because like you said, it’s nice to know that people are in the same position and, like, they deal with the same kind of things. So it’s not like I’m on my own against this sort of thing [S6]
Conclusions and Recommendations

Complexity of family and familial estrangement
Risk for the researcher and the researched
Challenging assumptions about 'what students do' during vacations
Personal strength and resistances (Taylor and Costa, 2019)
Acknowledgement from the university
Opportunity to access tailored support
One year later...

Life writing online research: lncn.ac/9s
Acknowledgements

It is so powerful to stop and listen to the voices of estranged students themselves
[Becca Bland, CEO of Stand Alone, 2016]

Thank you to the eight estranged students who let me listen to their voices.
References


