
Constructing Youth: Reflecting on Defining Youth and Impact on Methods

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In diverse fields focused on youth, researchers define and position youth as subjects differently. Debates within these disciplines can be informative. This paper engages a current debate on how youth are engaged in and isolated from the research process while still being subjects of the research. This paper is a reflection on whether we are doing research “on” youth, or rather “with” youth, and why this distinction matters. It reflects on previous dissertation research to consider how issues of definition, consent, and power impacted methodological choices and suggests ways the field might consider these debates when engaging in research..

Introduction

School libraries serve both the youth - the students who attend the school, and adults - the teachers who work there. Research on issues that impact school libraries therefore can focus on a variety of contexts, including the school librarian, the teachers, the resources, and the students. This paper addresses specifically issues regarding research that focuses on youth, and at its core is a reflection on whether we are doing research “on” youth, or rather “with” youth, and why this distinction matters. I explore the issues that impact research involving youth participants by making use of my research experience with youth information practices and trans disciplinary arguments regarding how we construct youth as a category, how memory impacts both our definition of youth and our research design, and how power structures can influence data collection and analysis.

LIS as a Transdisciplinary Field

One of the strengths of library and information science (LIS) would seem to be the inherently transdisciplinary nature of information studies and of the avenues of inquiry that lend themselves to this particular field. Lankes (2011) maintains that the mission of librarians is to facilitate knowledge creation within their communities and that this mission is interdisciplinary. In the process of facilitating this knowledge, LIS naturally draws on the knowledge and language of other disciplines. On the other hand, this lack of a clear scope for the discipline can problematize the theory, methodology, and impact of LIS research. Thus, Bernier (2013) contends that LIS has “borrowed and applied variously and uncritically” (p. xiii) from other disciplines, in particular in regard to how we construct youth. He urges a more critical approach to how we engage with these disciplines. The celebration of and suspicion regarding the transdisciplinary nature of LIS

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are not entirely opposed positions, but rather build upon one another. Positioning LIS as a transdisciplinary field makes it incumbent upon those who work in it to understand knowledge from other fields in order to critically apply it to their own work. Awareness of issues and debates in outside fields can contribute to one's own research through a consideration of unfamiliar theories, perspectives, and findings. It is, however, necessary to consider carefully how the discourses of other disciplines are understood and applied.

This paper explores how theories, methodologies, and research in critical youth studies, feminist studies, and library and information science impacted how I approached my dissertation, and how my understanding of these disciplines impacts my research agenda as I look to future research projects. I suggest that a critical examination of how LIS researchers develop their understanding of youth can have a positive impact on data collection and analysis. Since youth are a marginalized population in research, researchers have a responsibility to them, a responsibility to work, as alluded to above, "with" rather "on" youth. Consideration of this distinction will help to open up space for further discussion within LIS, specifically regarding school library research, about how the concerns of critical youth studies with youth agency may impact our own work.

Defining Youth

Youth adopt many different identities: daughter-son, sibling, child, teen, peer, friend, student, and so on. Each of these identities has impacts on how we construct our understanding of participants in research on youth. For school librarians and school library researchers, the familiar youth-as-student identity needs to be unpacked in order to examine the assumptions therein.

Defining Youth and Life Stages

For those working in schools, and specifically researching school libraries, definitions of such concepts as youth, adolescence, and childhood appear on the surface to be uncomplicated. Thus we often group young people according to grade level or age. This seemingly solid basis for understanding youth is problematized in youth studies research and occasionally within in LIS (Bernier, 2013). Discourses, the narratives accepted in research, and the popular imagination about youth impact how institutions and adults position themselves in relation to youth (Rothbauer, 2013). These narratives evolve over time, but come to be accepted as "truths," although a critical reader recognizes their deficiencies. For perspective, it will be useful to consider the three historical movements defined by Talburt and Lesko (2014): Pastoral Power (1880s-1890s), during which time Hall's metaphor of youth and evolution gives rise to the idea of adolescence as a time of "storm and stress"; Teenage Markets (1950s-1960s), which romanticized youth as the best years of an individual's life, and Youth Sub-cultures (1970s-1980s), which positioned youth as disruptive. Today's established norms embed aspects of these historical movements.

In regard to the youth-as-student identity, current thinking has its roots in the concepts of life stages and biological and cognitive developmentalism that inform how life, and in particular schooling, is ordered in Western societies. Much of how we interpret this narrative is guided by the developmental stages defined by Piaget (Pulaski, 1980) as the sensorimotor stage ages 0-2, the pre-operational ages 2-7, concrete operational ages 7-11, and formal operational ages 11- 16+, suggesting a set cognitive development. These cognitive stages guide how we order curriculum development, how public institutions organize themselves, and how teacher education and pedagogical instruction is designed. This way of linking chronological age and biological development ignores the impact of culture on knowledge and individuals' capacities (Woo, 2012).

Developmental theory has coalesced into a “‘blueprint’ for both designing research, and explaining behavior” (Raby, 2007, p. 41). In other words developmentalism, that of Piaget and others, shapes how we design our research and how we present our results. In approaching youth as a biologically determined life stage, we assume biological and cognitive differences, a body on the way to “becoming adult,” and an individual in transition (Seaton, 2012). By approaching youth as being in the position of “becoming,” we risk failing to understand youth in their own right as people in the present (Raby, 2007; Tyskå & Côté, 2015; Woo, 2012).

Critical youth studies has argued that we have long made assumptions based on developmental theory, and leading to the formulation of disciplinary narratives that are limiting (Ibrahim & Steinberg, 2014; Kelly & Kamp, 2014). Feminist researchers studying girlhood offer the same critique: when we position girls as “becoming,” we limit our understanding of their lived experiences (Driscoll, 2002). This consideration raises several questions. Are we presuming a cognitive capacity based on developmental theory? Is this presumption shaping our research questions and designs? Are we assuming a singular, discrete life stage as universal to experience, yet without cross-generational implications? And is this assumption warranted, or is there another way of understanding the experience of youth?

For school library researchers working with youth, the uncritical adoption of biological determinism suggesting that everyone develops in the same ways has an impact on how the youth experience of being a student is approached. There remains a need to engage seriously with questions regarding how the ways that youth and adults construct the category of “student” affect institutions. Otherwise, discourses tied to developmental stages or deficit (“at risk”) behaviors may continue to guide how we determine research questions, enact data collection, and present analyses as we focus on students as achievers as limited by current definitions of achievement, grades and test scores. School library researchers, whether they are focused on youth or institutions, should examine their own understanding of biological determinism and consider how it is impacting their approach to research, rather than uncritically accepting a definition of youth based on developmental models (Smyth, 2014; Willis, 2014).

Reflections and Application

In order to contextualize the above critiques, I would like to reflect on my own work and the process through which I developed a more nuanced understanding of how I construct youth and the implication of this intellectual journey on my past and current research projects.

My original research question regarding how youth become information literate in Web 2.0 applications derived from my daily work as a teacher-librarian. As a K-12 educator, I trained in the context of a long history of education and rhetoric rooted in developmental theory, both the original and the updated version represented by Bloom’s taxonomies (Anderson, Krathwohl, & Bloom, 2001; Bloom, 1956) and educational discourses built on Piaget’s cognitive developmental stages (Pulaski, 1980). I soon found that Piaget’s stages and Bloom’s taxonomies conflicted with my own understanding of how people come to know and understand their worlds. In considering the theoretical framework for my research question and design, I positioned myself in the tradition of social constructionism, in the belief that the construction of meaning is social and cultural and that knowledge is generated and transmitted collectively (Crotty, 2003). From this perspective, developmental stages ignore (in my mind) the impact of culture, specifically the fact of their own development within a particular Western culture. Additionally, these stages only focus on the cognitive aspect of being, rather than recognizing the whole person, and thus position youth as unformed adults who need to develop cognitive skills in order to become fully formed. Piaget is

not the only developmental psychologist who positions youth as “becoming” in this way; affective development also takes this position (Costa & Kallick, 2001; Driscoll, 2002; Havighurst, 1953). Youth as “becoming” was, however, fundamentally at odds with both how I believed that knowledge is generated and with my own desire to value youth experience.

In positioning youth as “becoming,” as moving towards an idealized adulthood, I felt, the experience of being a teen is not appreciated as a phenomenon in and of itself, and such a perspective would lead me to focus on deficiencies in students’ information literacy skills. To proceed in this way would, I felt, ignore the fact that the experience of using information to learn, create, and share may be enacted in a variety of ways, no one of which is necessarily better than another. I also wanted to question the assumption that youth enact information literacy skills differently than adults do. In fact, the communities that I investigated were cross-generational, and observation suggested that many practices are the same regardless of age. While defining the scope of the research question requires this type of narrowing, I feel that this focus is also a weakness, since the cross-generational elements of the communities in which the youth live are not given sufficient attention. Had I more carefully examined the assumptions of both youth as “becoming” and youth as students earlier in my work, I might have altered the research design to focus on a community rather than the age of participants in the community.

Throughout my research, I struggled with conceptualizing youth, often using rhetoric that belied this struggle. For instance, in 2008 I wrote, “This is a broad age range with a wide variety of experience, emotional needs, and physical changes.” While I wouldn’t disagree with this assessment now, I do question the need for defining youth in this way. Tyskå and Côté (2015) argue that “there is a need to develop ways of talking about young people that do not assume youth is merely an ‘in-between stage’ or a ‘process of becoming’, but a form of personhood requiring research in its own right” (p. 593). I am now engaging more deeply with this consideration in my research agenda by exploring youth learning in multiple contextual spaces and by proceeding without the assumption that all youth have the same needs and experiences that are based on biology. I think that the definition of youth is something that every youth researcher must consider in order to engage with current debates in youth studies generally.

Accessing Youth

Gatekeepers

The recruitment of participants may require the involvement of such adult gatekeepers as youth workers, teachers, or school administrators, so a researcher must enter into relationships with these adults in order to negotiate access to youth. As Leonard (2007) points out, the “dominant discourses surrounding childhood have increasingly positioned children as under threat from adults and have facilitated a move towards more and more protectionism” (p. 137). I also suggest that protectionism and concern is further complicated by a media narrative about failing public schools that can make schools wary of outsiders. Administrators may be concerned to ensure that their school is not portrayed negatively, and so may view researchers as a threat. Navigating adult gatekeepers requires an extra level of relationship building and consent. On the other hand, gatekeepers can also be significant supporters of research, possessed as they are of knowledge about their communities that can lead to participants whom one might not otherwise have been able to access.

The theoretical, but very real, struggle that presents itself in regard to gatekeepers such as IRB boards, institutions, and adults is one facet of the larger question that concerns this study, that

of whether we are doing research “on youth” or rather “with youth.” A popular response to these issues has been to design participant action research. “Participant action research represents a collaboration between researchers and participants in order to identify a problem and an intervention” (Bryman, 2008, p. 690). Despite the claims by those who engage in action research that their work includes youth in research questions and designs, IRBs and gatekeepers may in fact be imposing significant limitations (Dadich, Kelly, & Kamp, 2015). When the research question or interest is arrived at independently and both IRBs and institutions must approve the design, the question remains as to how much, or how little, power the participants exercise in the research process.

Reflections and Application

The context for my dissertation research was the youth I encountered or who knew of me at the school where I worked at as a teacher-librarian. Early in my dissertation research, I still maintained my name recognition among the teens at my school, and as a recognizable person it proved easier to arrange consent with teens and their parents. Gatekeepers also found it easier to arrange introductions and early consent with teens under these circumstances. On the other hand, when I conducted research at a school for which I did not work, teachers were wary and reluctant to inform the students about what I was trying to do. Teachers articulated this reticence in terms of protecting students from exploitation, implying that even though I had IRB approval, I might use social media information in a manner that would expose students to breaches of privacy. In the end, I was unable to build a rapport with the teachers at the school, which compelled me to investigate other avenues of participant recruitment. This challenge proved instructive for my understanding of how to build relationships with gatekeepers, specifically in encouraging me to identify my purpose and research design more concretely.

There were a number of other concerns regarding youth’s use of social media when I began my participant recruitment in 2008 (Bauerlein, 2008; Dretzin & Maggio, 2008; Flinders, 2008; Kenty-Drane, 2008; Livingstone, 2008). These concerns were common in popular media as well as research. Teens, parents, and teachers were wary of the idea that I was conducting research in social media communities, even with a focus on sharing artistic content, rather than social content. Teens were wary of the observation and possible breaches of confidentiality, whereas administrators and teachers were more concerned about the representation of the students in their communities and potential criticism of the school curriculum, and parents were simply wary of me. I negotiated these relationships continually in order to access participants for my study. In responding to the concerns of adults, I found myself being positioned to shape the research design to meet their needs, rather than collaborating with youth on the design.

I chose grounded theory for my dissertation because it provides a framework for youth input into theory construction. Charmaz’ (2006) version of grounded theory urges researchers to co-construct emergent theory with participants through observation, interviews, and theoretical sampling. While I had a broad interest, I refined my research question through interviews with youth. As I interviewed them and observed their community, I developed an interim model of information practices that I could share with the participants for comment and feedback. This approach allowed me to honor their voice in the research process and to be more collaborative in my approach, while at the same time shaping the design and analysis by my own interests and research question. Only insofar as they were interested enough to participate, can I honestly suggest that I researched “with youth.”

As I no longer work in high schools or in geographical areas where I conduct my research, the need to work with gatekeepers introduces a level of difficulty in accessing participants, particularly because I am interested in independent learning. Put another way, as my identity shifts from teacher to researcher, I find that access and consent issues impact my work more significantly as ongoing challenges to my desire to engage in research “with” rather than “on” youth.

Power: Theory, Relationships, Place, and Memory

At In designing research “with youth,” it is essential to consider and negotiate issues of power and their impact on the process. By its very nature, the formal research process in which adult researchers study youth can be considered “studying down,” or making the “relatively powerless even more visible to observation” (Sprague, 2005, p. 11). The adult researcher controls the question, the method of data collection, and quite often the analysis. Rarely do we see articles co-authored with our youth participants (Dadich et al., 2015). Despite our best intentions, we may fail to examine closely the role of power and its impact on research design, though this is an essential issue.

Theory

There are different epistemological stances that inform research and impact approaches to research “with youth.” As researchers, we can, on the one hand, claim objectivity and present findings as objective truth, which is more common when one assumes a positivist stance. Alternatively, however, we can recognize our own subjectivity and its impact on our analysis. Thus, from an interpretivist position, researchers qualify their gaze by attempting to bracket their own beliefs and understandings by acknowledging and documenting those beliefs and/or using them to guide their research design and analysis (Bryman, 2008). These stances are embedded in the methodologies that we use to guide research design, and may also guide the selection of methods. Dillabough (2009) suggests that readers “fail to realize... the power of the theory to guide our readings of young people or the ways in which the theory impacts on the formation of knowledge about young people” (p. 224). This consideration indicates how important it is that the researcher at least engages with how theory might impact the design and findings of a research project, if not explicate this engagement for the reader. Since researchers adopt a theoretical position using it to guide research design theory contributes to researcher power in the process.

Relationships

In working with youth, the power differential takes on specific cultural dimensions. For instance, North American teens are often positioned as separate from adult culture and even constructed as somehow foreign (Raby, 2007). This dichotomy positions the researcher or adult as the outsider; while at the same time positions the teen participant as being in some sense of a lower status. Teens’ “dependence, low social status, lack of access to institutional resources, and different social skills” (Raby, 2007, p. 57) may endow researchers with power, but they should work to mitigate these differentials. One way in which participants can share in the control of the research process is through disclosure, that is, by being selective in choosing what information to share (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Sprague, 2005). This kind of disclosure has an impact both on quantitative and qualitative methods, however, so that active dissent and control of information on the part of participants may be more visible in qualitative research through body language, refusal to answer

questions, or differences in words and observable actions. Researchers should give attention to these considerations, particularly in the context of institutional research, where consent is often presumed.

Place

Of particular interest to school library researchers with regard to the implications of adult/youth structures of power should be the consideration of place in regard to where and how data is collected. As an institution, a school has particular rules and structures. Youth in this environment are constructed as learners, and there exist certain expectations of how both they and adults are to behave in these spaces (Hadley, 2007; Pascoe, 2007; Willis, 2014). For instance, in this paper I chose to use “students” rather than “youth” at certain points in order to draw attention to a particular aspect of identity.

As students, youth may take on different literacy identities, and may position themselves as being “in school” as opposed to “in out of school” (Trace, 2008). School researchers may be placed on the other side of the youth/adult divide. Students may think that researchers wield the same power that the teachers and administrators exercise in regard to control and discipline (Leonard, 2007). This belief may cause difficulties in developing a rapport with youth, or may lead participants to control the flow of information. While doing so provides them with influence over the process, researchers need to be attuned to how and why students may be holding back. Issues of concern for their privacy occupy much of this negotiation, as well as mutual role expectations regarding adults and youth-as-students. On the other hand, developing relationships with youth that challenge the status quo of adult/ youth-as-student relationships within the institution can lead to distrust and difficulties with the teachers and administrators (Leonard, 2007).

Memory

An additional aspect of the relationship between adult researchers and youth participants is the role of memory, which also impacts how we define youth. Memory of our own experiences can influence how we shape a research question or our how we collect data, as we seek out what we expect to see. In researching youth, adults have their own experiences of having once been young. Biklen (2007) points out that “when we research youth we engage a group that is familiar in the experiential sense but that is historically and, hence, significantly different” (p. 252). In other words, researchers have a responsibility to distance themselves from expectations based on their own memories that can shape research questions.

Other factors, including socioeconomic differences and geography, may also be significant in shaping experiences of the youth participants in ways that differ from researchers’ own experiences of youth. This idea is consistent with feminist standpoint theory, according to which “all knowledge is constructed in a matrix of physical location, history, culture, and interests, and ... these matrices change in configuration from one location to another” (Sprague, 2005, p. 41). This is not a new idea for researchers; but what it means in practice is a methodological choice between bracketing one’s experience and assumptions in an effort not allow them to impact design and analysis, or acknowledging those experiences and assumptions and exploring them with participants in an effort to construct a common definition of “teen.” I suggest that ignoring how one manages the memory of experience in this situation would challenge the validity of one’s findings.

Issues of memory also impact the relationship between researcher and youth in regard to power structures. On the one hand, researchers often wish to make visible the narratives,

phenomena, and experiences of those who are less visible in a culture, and this is true of much youth research. Those of us studying youth naturally want to value their voices. On the other hand, one criticism of honoring participants' voices in discussion and analysis is that it "can be reduced to letting those speak with whom the researchers agrees" (Sprague, 2005, p. 171). There are potentially positive outcomes from sharing one's own experience of being a teenager. Such sharing may assist in developing a rapport between researcher and participant, and facilitate the access of narrative (Raby, 2007). However, a researcher may find that memory has a negative impact on data collection and analysis (Raby, 2007). Therefore, when researchers fail to analyze and acknowledge their own experiential memory and its impact on their bias and privilege, they risk either speaking for the participants or unconsciously valuing their own experience in analyzing the phenomenon. For instance, we may pay attention only to those whose experience mirrors our own expectations. Research design allows us to address this potential problem, but only if we engage consciously with these issues.

Knowledge

Researchers also are responsible for organizing and presenting knowledge. Our organization of knowledge with regard to our research questions is, of course, guided by what we know and what we learn in reviewing the relevant literature and collecting data. Depending on our methodological approach, and perhaps our epistemological position, our own knowledge necessarily plays a role in our analysis. We may co-construct our analysis with our participants, exploring how our constructions are similar and different in order to ensure that all of the parties involved honor the participants' experiences, but we also bring an analytical perspective to our findings that youth cannot provide. On the other hand, many methods, such as those involved in phenomenological research, require researchers to "bracket" their knowledge, bias, and experiences. While I personally question the ease of bracketing, acknowledging one's own experience, if only to set it aside, seems preferable to ignoring how that knowledge and experience impact the research design and analysis. This acknowledgement balances the relative positions of power to some extent.

Moreover, researchers control publication, not just with regard to where and how their work will appear, but also with regard to the representations of youth within their publications. Reporting research requires and relies on abstraction, which in turn reconstitutes the participants using an academic voice (Sprague, 2005, pp. 20-22). Such issues as the use of jargon may impede true access for youth when it comes actually to reading publications (p. 21). While jargon is common shorthand in academic discussions, it limits intellectual access to those outside the discipline, as do the norms of academic tone and structures of discourse. Academic culture and expectations guide publishing outlets, which may further impede the access of youth to research findings. The fact is that researchers control how youth are portrayed in their publications, so it is incumbent on them to be conscientious in representing the experience of the participants in their studies, who have difficulty challenging these portrayals given the absence of easy access to them. In discussing youth participatory action research, Dadich, Kelly and Kamp (2015) point out that youth are rarely included as authors on journal articles. This fact may be an outcome of the requirements for protecting the identity of participants, but it has the consequence of suggesting that what is being published is not collaborative research with youth, but is the property of the adult researcher. Suggestions for addressing the limitations inherent in publishing include sharing drafts with participants, involving participants in analysis, and seeking alternative narratives (Sprague, 2005, pp. 140-145).

Reflection and Application

Throughout the research process I was conscious of power relations with youth and how they might impact my data collection. However, as I improved as a researcher, my concerns in this regard deepened and shifted in surprising ways. One of the conceptual shifts I struggled with as I move from teacher to researcher is the way that my background knowledge establishes an unequal relationship between me and the participants in my research. Despite valuing their experiences, I still understand theory, complete with the academic language and I use this in analysis of youth description of their experiences. As a teacher, this distance was beneficial, since I was responsible to some extent for imparting knowledge, even if I was doing so by building skills for inquiry. As a researcher, I make choices about how to wield theoretical knowledge in a manner that respects the knowledge and understanding of participants and mitigates the power that I exercise in the situation.

Early on in my research, I learned that my understanding of youth subjectivity was located in sociocultural and historical positions and was incompatible with notions of a singular youth experience guided by biological determinism. This revelation did not impact my research question so much as my choice of data collection methods (semi-structured interviews) and methods of analysis (constructivist grounded theory). Semi-structured interviews allowed me to follow the paths in which the participants were interested, to explore common definitions of terms that are fundamental and important to the research, such as “information,” and to allow the participants to define themselves. Using constructivist grounded theory led me to “co-construct” (Charmaz, 2006) a theory with the participants, and so I returned to them with theory in hand and accepted their challenges to my analysis. This approach meant that I could allow for some youth control in regard to the phenomenon. I hoped to avoid the assumption that they constructed knowledge in the same way I did.

Power and space impact on data collection significantly. I used both semi-structured interviews and observation. Interviews provided the most insight into the implications of the researcher/participant, adult/youth, and (remembered) teacher/student dichotomies. In interviews I adopted a position of “deliberate naiveté” or “openness to new and unexpected phenomenon” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 48) with regard to my background knowledge on the topic gleaned through a review of the literature and observation. I attempted to treat participants as experts in their own process, if not the process as a whole, while employing sensitivity or knowledge about the topic positioned me not only as interested in participants’ stories but also as aware of their environments. Through observation, I explored the issue of divergence between what emerged in interviews and observations, but my observations were framed within the context of existing frameworks about which I had been reading and of which the participants were not aware. I was conscious that I for the most part directed the interviews, that I designed the interview schedule and guided the conversation, and that ultimately I was the adult with an academic understanding of the practices employed by the teens that impacted my analysis (even within grounded theory).

I attempted to attend to issues of power and knowledge in my research by sharing my analysis, often written in a more casual tone than required by academic publications, with my participants. This sharing actually strengthened my analysis, as I occasionally received useful criticism, and it led to the creation of a mid-range theory that I felt was more deeply co-constructed with the youth participants. Nevertheless, all of the publications have been credited to either myself or my research team, for the participants did not have the input that would justify authorial status. Given my background knowledge and study of the current state of the field, I feel that this apportionment of credit is appropriate, since the analysis is primarily my own. However, the researcher’s position should be acknowledged in any claims regarding research with youth and

youth agency. We need to establish the limitations of the analysis while also proving the validity of the findings. Perhaps the field needs to engage more directly with such questions as whether we should provide opportunities for co-authorship, or merely acknowledge participants' contributions to our analysis in our publications. Co-publishing with youth in non-academic venues is one way in which researchers such as myself, who consider such acknowledgement of great import, might visibly acknowledge the co-construction of our analyses.

While my research with youth called for me to interview teens about out-of-school activities, I interviewed half of the participants on a school campus. This setting introduced a teacher/student dynamic, and drew attention to the lack of power that youth have within their institutions. For instance, I had to be conscious not to interfere with class time. Additionally interruptions by teachers, who often entered the classroom I was using introduced shifts in the relationship with the participant. In reviewing the interviews recently, the slightly negative effect of the classroom setting on the interviews struck me: it took longer for participants to become comfortable, and they sometimes responded to interruptions with prolonged silences. It took longer to build rapport because of a normative expectation of adult/student relationship. By contrast, the after school space in which I interviewed other participants created a relaxed atmosphere in which participants showed a willingness to share more personally and did so earlier in the interview. This difference is one that I would explore more completely if I were to re-design my research methods. I am at any rate now conscious, when thinking of upcoming research, of how the arena for data collection impacts the negotiation of roles in the process.

My research agenda has shifted to focus on youth in rural towns with limited broadband access. I am aware that my own experience as a youth in a small town in a rural area impacts how I expect participants to respond. This awareness is helping to shape the initial interview schedule. In order to challenge my own assumptions through constructive feedback, I piloted the interview with a teenager acquaintance. There is an ongoing need for me to be reflexive, to ask myself how my own assumptions regarding geography and experience may impact how I shape interviews and carry out my analysis. This reflexivity is essential to a researcher, but assumptions are not always easily accessed.

Conclusion

The LIS research can learn from debates within other fields, such as social psychology, critical youth studies, and education, regarding issues of theoretical definitions, consent, and power. By asking ourselves whether we are researching "with youth," we can open up space for debates that will inevitably benefit LIS studies as a whole, and that can inform our own specific research. This can happen only if we are willing to engage with these debates and the questions they raise. When we examine our own assumptions and consider our own privilege as researchers and adults, we have an opportunity to challenge prevailing discourses in education and to produce thoughtful, critical research that benefits youth and our discipline's approach to youth.

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