

WE'RE HERE, YOU JUST DON'T KNOW HOW TO REACH US: A REFLEXIVE EXAMINATION OF RESEARCH WITH CITIZENS ON THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC MARGINS

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Abstract

Research that aims to trouble social, cultural, and economic disparities is usually conducted with the best of socially just intentions. Still, embedded in all research processes is the potential to disrupt and, simultaneously, reproduce mechanisms of power that enable inequalities. Hence, as Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) insists, such efforts require reflexive examination that involves an interrogation of practices and regulations guiding research. Drawing upon my own reflexive inquiry, I address in this article some of the methodological challenges that surfaced when I conducted ethnographic doctoral research with socially and economically disadvantaged young adults. I discuss participant recruitment, retention concerns, and ways to support participants' involvement in research. I aim to expose assumptions in research practices that may have inadvertently reproduced some of the inequalities that this research attempted to disturb and to suggest ways to address these challenges.

Résumé

La recherche qui aborde les disparités sociales, culturelles, et économiques est généralement effectuée avec les meilleures intentions socialement juste. Pourtant, intégrée dans tous les processus de recherche est le potentiel de perturber et, simultanément, de reproduire les mécanismes du pouvoir qui permettent aux inégalités. Ainsi, comme Bourdieu (Bourdieu et Wacquant, 1992) insiste, de tels efforts nécessitent un examen des pratiques et des règles régissant la recherche. Je m'adresse dans cet article les défis méthodologiques qui ont surgi lorsque j'ai effectué des recherches ethnographiques de doctorat avec des jeunes adultes qui sont socialement et économiquement défavorisés. Je discute le recrutement des participants, la rétention des préoccupations, et les moyens d'aider les participants à rester impliqués dans la recherche. Je vise à exposer des suppositions dans les pratiques de recherche qui peut reproduit les inégalités que cette recherche a tenté déranger et suggérer des moyens d'aborder ces défis.

Introduction

Research that aims to trouble existing social, cultural, and economic disparities is often conducted with the best of socially just intentions. Still, embedded in all research processes is the potential to trouble and, simultaneously, reproduce mechanisms of power that enable inequalities. Hence, such efforts require a reflexive examination—one that moves beyond researchers situating themselves in their work to an interrogation of the research practices and assumptions that guide their study (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Drawing upon my own reflexive inquiry, I address in this article some of the methodological challenges that surfaced when I conducted ethnographic doctoral research with socially and economically disadvantaged young adults. I begin with an overview of the doctoral study and elements of the theoretical framework that inform this article. Next, I focus on one aspect of the reflexive examination of the research process; namely, challenges I faced when conducting research with a hard-to-reach population of young adults. I aim to expose underlying assumptions in research practices that may have inadvertently reproduced some of the inequalities this research attempted to uncover. I also suggest possible ways to address these challenges.

Study Overview

The overarching goal of this study was to investigate how socially and economically disadvantaged young people living in a post-industrial Cape Breton community experience and perceive social and economic health. Social and economic health was defined as participants' sense of comfort, security, and certainty that their social and economic needs were and would continue to be met in their community.¹

Eastern Cape Breton is made up of a number of industrial and rural communities that were amalgamated in the mid 1990s. The municipality is best characterized as semi-rural—a region with rural and some urban characteristics—given its population and geographic size. The area has experienced the collapse of its natural resource-based and industrial economies. Attempts to reconfigure the economic landscape have yet to address the needs of the region's socially and economically disadvantaged young adults. These women and men strive for social and economic security amid globalized patterns of thinking that encroach upon their ways of life and contribute to the crippling of their local economies. Moreover, given many communities' working class histories, regional disparities are complicated by class disadvantage experienced by high proportions of local populations.

A resident with familial roots on the island, I work as a university and community educator in the fields of communication education and community development. I argue that community adult education grounded in local historic and social realities may contribute to the survival of economically disadvantaged regions vulnerable to globalized social change. Further, community sustainability is more likely if citizens are provided the resources needed to critically discuss, document, and act upon their accounts for a

1 In this context, *social* refers to the availability of and participants' access to formal and informal social support networks and community infrastructure.

sustainable future. Central to these discussions must be citizens, such as socially and economically disadvantaged young adults, who are often excluded from such dialogue. Hence, my doctoral research was intended to be a preliminary step toward such dialogical encounters.

A key objective of my study was to expose and challenge gender, class, and regional inequalities through an analysis of young adults' social and economic health experiences. Pierre Bourdieu's contributions to a sociological account of society (such as 1990a, 1990b, 2000, 2001) provided a central pillar for the theoretical framework that informed this work. In particular, his key concepts of *habitus*, *field*, and *symbolic domination* were used to begin to map out the tangled connections between young people, social stratification, and health. In addition, these concepts proved to be useful tools throughout the reflexive examination of the research process. They helped to expose potential meaning behind behaviours and attitudes exhibited by all parties in the research relationships. Accordingly, while the theoretical fabric comprised numerous theorists and concepts, for the purpose of this article I focus specifically on Bourdieu's contribution to the study's theoretical premise.

Bourdieu (1990a, 1990b, 2000) contends that all human beings embody patterns of dispositions he refers to as *habitus*. All of our actions, thoughts, choices, and attitudes are outward manifestations of our habitus. Although our behaviour cannot be predicted with exactness, it is always generated from within the boundaries of our habitus (Bourdieu, 1990a, 2000). Habitus is socially constructed through time (Bourdieu, 1990a, 1990b, 2000). The historical dimension of habitus helps explain the presence of deeply rooted traditional identities in the contemporary lives of young adults. As discussed later, embodied patterns of dispositions were also evident in participants' engagement and, at times, lack of engagement with the research process.

Closely linked to Bourdieu's concept of habitus is the notion of *field* (Bourdieu, 2000). Fields are more than the structural contexts that influence behaviours and attitudes of individuals and institutions. They are also arenas that are shaped and reinforced by the actions and struggles of those individuals and institutions (Wacquant, 1992). The field imposes parameters, rules, and so-called norms that people come to embody. Through their actions, individuals perpetuate or challenge those parameters, rules, and norms—thus shaping the field.

Within different fields human beings attempt to secure resources that are perceived as valuable in that environment. For example, in the economic field, assets that have monetary exchange value are worth more than other kinds of assets. In this study, particular attention was given to participants' lived experiences within economic, cultural, and social fields. The notion of field also provided a perspective through which to consider participants' attitudes and actions within the context of the research field.

It is the values of the dominant that tend to serve as the norms within fields, thus supporting the status quo that reinforces inherent inequalities. In many societies, overt forms of domination are difficult to sustain (Bourdieu, 2001). Hence, *symbolic domination* exists. With symbolic domination, arbitrary values become recognized and accepted as normal within a particular field (Bourdieu, 2001). Over time, such values are embedded in the habitus of the agents within that field. Both privileged and marginalized citizens

experience symbolic domination as they struggle to obtain capital within the field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). The day-to-day practices of the study participants shed light on their struggles to secure capital that would help them experience social and economic health. Moreover, the obstacles they encountered and attempted to overcome served as indicators of the symbolic domination they embodied. Their lived struggles inevitably had an impact as well upon how they interacted and were represented and served within the research space.

Critical Ethnography

Bourdieu advocates an interpenetration of theoretical and empirical work (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). He engaged in ethnographic methodological study characterized by in-depth, long-term field study. His work included detailed explorations of the historical and contemporary landscapes of the research field in relation to participants' lives. Given the potential for theoretical and methodological fusion (Bourdieu & Wacquant), I adopted a critical ethnographic approach to explore socially and economically disadvantaged young adults' experiences and perceptions of social and economic health.

Critical ethnography may be described as a politically oriented research methodology that aims to expose mechanisms of power that support injustices. According to Wainwright (1997), critical ethnographers consider subjective lived experiences within their historical and social reality. A social and historical critique can reveal power dynamics and conditions of inequality that shape people's experiences, perceptions, and interpretations. Ethnography has been successfully used to explore issues of education, class, and gender among young adults and youth (Skeggs, 1997; Weis, 2004). Further, Cook (2005) calls for critical ethnographic health research, stating it is most likely to disclose and address inequalities in health status.

As noted earlier, small communities on Eastern Cape Breton Island served as the research site for this study. A local non-profit community youth outreach centre provided the space that served as a home base, so to speak, for the duration of my research. According to an employee, the centre offers educational programs for young people between the ages of 19 and 30. They develop skills and knowledge in the areas of employment, citizenship, health, learning, and capacity-building. Many socially and economically disadvantaged young people from the community have forged connections with the centre as program participants. Some remain involved as volunteers or as visitors.

Five young adult women and five young adult men participated in this study. All participants lived on Eastern Cape Breton Island and they ranged in age from 19 to 30. All participants identified as Canadian and appeared Caucasian, although they did not self-identify using that signifier. The community that served as the research site is a predominantly white community. Given the recruitment challenges outlined later, it was difficult to recruit a cross-section of participants racialized other than white. All but one participant had family-of-origin ties to the area. The other participant lived in the area for a number of years with a partner who grew up in the community. Most of the participants disengaged from public school between Grades 8 and 11. Some were a few credits short of a Grade 12 diploma. One had a Grade 12 diploma. One participant completed a university degree. At the time of the data collection, all

but one participant were enrolled in some type of government-funded employability or skills upgrading program designed for youth who face barriers to employment. The other participant had previously been enrolled in a program. Program participants earned a minimum wage. The young adults who agreed to take part in the research had all experienced and were still experiencing significant barriers that had an impact on their social and economic health. Issues included (1) lack of employment and paid and volunteer work experience, (2) lack of adequate income, (3) homelessness and lack of adequate housing, (4) inadequate formal and informal social support, (5) lack of formal education, (6) learning disabilities, (7) substance addiction, and (8) victimization as a result of crime and violence. Two females and two males were parents and one participant was pregnant.

Five methods of data collection with the young adult participants were adopted throughout nine months of in-depth research. They included individual interviews and focus group interviews, as well as participant observation and field notes compilation. Two other methods—critical dialogue and an adaptation of a technique known as photovoice—were also employed and are discussed in greater detail later in this article. In addition, expert interviews were conducted one-on-one with (1) community and youth workers, who worked with youth and young adults; (2) a local historian with expertise in Cape Breton labour history; and (3) the police chief. Expert interviews were not included in the data sets for coding. Instead, they were used to describe the historical and present-day community. They helped to contextualize the research and findings that emerged from what young adult participants shared.

As well as in conjunction with participant observation, field notes were recorded after interviews and focus groups and during the transcription process. Field notes also included preliminary analyses of what was emerging from the data being gathered. In some instances, they were used to record ties between the data and the study's theoretical framework. As the researcher, I conducted and transcribed all interviews and focus groups and recorded all field notes.

Data collection and analysis often occur simultaneously in the qualitative research process. Hence, it is somewhat misleading to suggest a chronological process of analysis, as it is ongoing throughout the course of research. Still, transcription, coding, and interpretation describe the key phases employed in an effort to begin to make sense (Denzin, 1994) of the data gathered. Verbatim transcripts and field notes were reviewed. With the assistance of the computer analysis program, Atlas ti 5.2, emerging patterns were coded and consistently revisited in the context that they were delivered. This process continued until new codes no longer appeared and it was decided a level of analytical saturation had been reached. Descriptions were attached to each code and corresponding quotations that supported the codes were identified. Codes, comments, and quotations were organized as descriptive themes and analyzed in relation to the theoretical framework for this study.

Reflexive Notes From the Research Field

The reflexive nature of critical ethnography calls for “examining researcher bias and discovering researcher value orientations” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 328). Alvesson and Sköldböck (2000) assert that reflexivity “means that serious attention is paid to the way that different kinds of linguistic, social, political, and theoretical elements are

woven together in the process of knowledge development, during which empirical material is constructed, interpreted, and written" (p. 5). Furthermore, given the critical dimension of the approach to this study, I was compelled to honour the reflexive dimension of the research process. In this section, I present elements of my engagement with reflexivity. In particular, I reflexively critique some of the challenges that emerged when conducting research with a difficult-to-reach population. This was deemed an appropriate issue of examination given my argument that community development must reflect the experiences of all citizens—including those often excluded from public dialogue. I consider participant recruitment issues faced by researchers who work with difficult-to-reach citizens and who must adhere to ethics boards and regulations. I give specific attention to concerns surrounding initial contact, informed consent, and information sessions. Next, I present retention concerns. I look at ways I attempted to support participant involvement throughout the research process by considering reciprocity, flexibility, and culturally relevant research methods.

Recruitment

The intent to conduct research with a disadvantaged population does not automatically translate into willing participants. Many of the typical processes of participant recruitment presented by ethics-regulating bodies are designed to protect participants. For example, it is in potential participants' best interest that recruitment strategies emphasize voluntary participation and that approaches that may be interpreted as coercive are avoided. Further, informed consent can ensure that participants are aware of factors that may influence their decision to participate, such as confidentiality, privacy, and their right to withdraw from the research. Still, these processes can create significant barriers to participation for less dominant members of society (Jansson & Benoit, 2006). Leadbeater and Glass (2006) warn:

While federal regulations and professional and institutional ethics guidelines for research with human subjects have expanded, compliance with these guidelines does not necessarily lead to ethical research practices for community-based research with individuals marginalized by social status, ethnicity or race, culture, stigmas, poverty, unemployment, lack of education, mental status, or sexual orientation. (p. 250)

Research with socially and economically disadvantaged young adults living in a semi-rural community presented unique challenges that were often intensified by ethics policies. For example, at the recruitment stage, direct contact between researchers and potential participants can be perceived by ethics boards as problematic (Chiang, Keatinge, & Williams, 2001). There is a concern that individuals may feel pressured to participate. To address this ethical dilemma, recruitment flyers can be used as a relatively cost-efficient and non-coercive way to introduce research to potential participants. The flyers briefly describe the research study and invite parties to call, email, or attend a meeting for additional information. Flyers can be physically posted in locales frequented by potential participants and electronically posted in cyber-communities likely to be visited by those interested in the research. Hence, I chose flyers as an ethically sound recruitment strategy—a decision that proved problematic.

While the technique may work in some instances, it assumes a degree of homogeneity within the target population, which makes it relatively easy to determine where posters should be placed. In reality, as with other marginalized groups (Shaver, 2005), socially and economically disadvantaged young adults are not necessarily part of a homogeneous collective nor members of organizations and groups that are visible in the community. Moreover, some of the characteristics they may have in common do not make them easy to locate. Results from this study indicate that many socially and economically disadvantaged young adults move often and do not have regular phone and internet access. With little attachment to formal labour markets and education systems, they do not have typical jobs or schooling practices. Hence, there is less likely to be an obvious structure to their days that requires them to be in certain places at certain times. Low income and inadequate access to transportation means their visits to the few local restaurants, shops, and entertainment and sporting venues are limited. Consequently, determining the best places to post flyers was an initial concern.

Posting flyers also presented a literacy issue. A number of the young adults I met throughout this study avoided written material and appeared particularly uncomfortable reading in public spaces. Hence, there was some doubt that potential participants would stop and read a flyer posted in a public venue.

Motivation to participate was an additional concern. In accordance with ethics board criteria at the institution through which I conducted this study, a flyer must display the researcher's university logo. As was evident through this research, many young adults have troublesome relationships with educational institutions and many disengaged from school in their early teen years. To return to Bourdieu's (1990a, 1990b) theory, some participants' attitudes and "ways of being" were reflective of their own habitus inherited through history and lived experiences often connected with living in poverty. In many instances, the skills they possessed were deemed to have little value in formal school systems. Consequently, they encountered significant struggles in institutionalized education settings and the overarching educational field.

Further, I was a student at a university located on the other side of the country from where the research was to be conducted. Participants suggested that Cape Breton is often misrepresented and stigmatized by the rest of the country. This attitude may be reflective of the historical nature of what Bourdieu (1990b) refers to as the collective habitus of people who come from a particular place and social environment. He suggests that while no two people have identical experiences, individuals from a particular class are more likely to face similar situations throughout their lives than individuals from different social classes. For generations, working-class Cape Bretoners have experienced a particular lack of respect and, in some instances, brutality at the hands of outside interests that controlled many aspects of the labour economy (Penfold, 1994). In more recent years, Cape Bretoners, along with other Atlantic Canadians, have combated negative external perceptions that attack their work ethic and need for federal support. Given the commonly held attitudes regarding schools and mistrust toward off-island interest, I was concerned that skepticism may decrease potential participants' desire to take part in research being conducted through a large urban university located in a distant, more prosperous region of Canada.

Consent forms posed similar challenges. Most institutional ethics review boards create specific procedures all potential researchers must complete before their research is considered for ethics approval. These have become increasingly rigid and restrictive (Leadbeater & Glass, 2006). The amount of information that must be included in a consent form can result in a multi-page document. "These can understate benefits, overstate minimal risks, obscure what the research is about, and even intimidate or overwhelm potential research participants" (Leadbeater & Glass, p. 254). Once all required material was included in the consent form for this study, it was four complete pages—a potential deterrent to any prospective participants who faced literacy barriers.

In addition to issues related to literacy, particular information included in the informed consent document was problematic. For example, according to the research protocol adopted by the university through which I conducted my PhD studies, graduate students are required to name their program supervisor as the principal investigator. The student's name follows as a co-investigator. The supervisor is also listed as one of the names to contact for further information about the study. Issues of concern about the rights of research subjects are to be directed to the Office of Research Services. Both my supervisor and the Office of Research Services were outside Nova Scotia. I doubted whether participants would make long distance calls to strangers in other places in Canada, and email posed literacy and computer access concerns. Instead of creating a sense of assurance that they would be protected from harm, some potential participants questioned the local nature of the research. One potential participant asked how someone who he would never meet could investigate him. These examples demonstrate how meaning embedded in language frames how participants engage in research, and potentially plays a role in whether they get involved in the first place.

As noted earlier, Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) contends that what is deemed symbolically valuable in a field most often reflects the interests of the dominant agents in the space. It may be argued that many of the regulations and criteria designed to protect potential research participants reflect the needs and characteristics of dominant members of society. When such criteria limits the involvement of less dominant members of a community there is less opportunity to use their perspectives to help expose existing inequalities. Exclusion can "... create serious gaps in our understanding of the factors that influence disparities in the health status of vulnerable groups" (Leadbeater & Glass, 2006, p. 250).

As an academic researcher, I was obligated to conform to the ethics criteria regardless of the recruitment challenges they created. Subsequently, it was imperative I find ways to connect with potential participants while adhering to the regulations. Upon further reflection, it was clear that issues related to the recruitment flyer and consent forms were symptoms of a larger problem; they impeded the establishment of trust. Eide and Allen (2005) contend that trust is a critical element of the research relationship and can be difficult to foster when researchers and participants come from different cultures. I suggest this can also be the case when researchers and participants are located in different socio-economic spaces and hold varying degrees of power in social fields. In this instance, I represented a public institution that had not served potential participants well and that often reproduced the social inequalities they experienced. Youth workers and young adults

interviewed for this study indicated that strangers, particularly those connected to formal institutions, must earn the trust of socially and economically disadvantaged young adults. Accordingly, months prior to the official start, I became involved in the youth community where I intended to conduct my research. I met people who worked with disadvantaged young adults. I volunteered as a communication workshop instructor for young adults and accepted a seat on the board of directors for a local youth outreach centre. I also spent time with the young adults and solicited their advice about recruiting participants.

The feedback provided by young people and youth workers further indicated trust must be established with potential participants. However, ethics protocol also limited the approaches I could take to make initial contact. Participants had to approach me if they were interested; I could not go directly to them and invite them to get involved. Therefore, I enlisted the support of local community agencies and workers whom young people trusted. Most agencies were unwilling to allow recruitment posters to be hung up randomly. However, many coordinators and staff members were willing to meet with me. Once they were comfortable with the work I was proposing, they allowed me to post flyers. Certain youth workers also offered to distribute an initial contact letter to potential participants and to share additional information orally upon request. From there, interested parties were invited to attend information sessions.

Information sessions posed another set of challenges. Transportation and childcare created barriers that often prevented those interested from attending sessions. Thus, I offered both services. Lunch and snacks were also provided. Attendance at the information sessions was still irregular. Because I did not receive any telephone calls or emails from interested young adults, my only indication that someone would attend a session came from youth workers who informed me of potential participants' expressions of interest. An intention to come did not guarantee attendance at a meeting. On one occasion I had been told that nine potential participants wanted to come to an information session. One actually arrived.

Trust is something that develops or wanes over time (Eide & Allen, 2005). Some young adults who attended a session asked for consent forms immediately. Others waited a month or more to decide to get involved in the research study. Others expressed no interest at all, and still others indicated they did not wish to participate but enjoyed attending the information sessions.

Retention

Once participants decided to take part in the study, efforts had to be made to enable them to remain involved in the research for the duration of the study. Attempts were made to facilitate a positive experience for participants and to ensure that they felt their contributions were valued and respected. Hence, I attended to issues of reciprocity and flexibility, and used culturally relevant research methods.

Critical ethnography often encompasses a notion of reciprocity in which researchers attempt to disrupt the power dynamics that privilege researchers and their own agendas. Harrison, MacGibbon, and Morton (2001) describe reciprocity as the give and take in research relationships. It is a way to respect research participants and the knowledge

they share, to give back to them and their community, and to collaborate with them to induce positive social change.

I spent a significant amount of time with young adults and youth workers at the centre that became a meeting site throughout the study. In time, they became comfortable asking me to get involved in projects and activities. Throughout the research process, I offered communication training in group sessions and worked one-on-one with participants who were preparing for interviews or presentations. I also offered tips and ideas on public and interpersonal communication-related matters when asked. I provided transportation to and from different locations in the community and ran small errands. I helped with creative projects at participants' requests. The participants also reciprocated with kind gestures. When some of the participants were organizing a ceremony at the youth centre, they invited me to attend—which I did.

Flexibility was exercised when scheduling time with participants. Some interviews were conducted in cars, on walks, and while sitting outside, and one was conducted while playing one-on-one floor hockey. I always provided lunch and snacks, and the comfortable conversations we would have before and after the actual interviews helped to create a climate of comfort and trust.

Traditional practices of qualitative data collection, such as interviews, focus groups, and participant observation, are valuable and were utilized throughout this study. Still, limitations are inherent in these, as in all, methods of data collection. Hence, I adopted two additional strategies of inquiry: critical dialogue and an adaptation of photovoice. Used in a focus group format, critical dialogue involves choosing pieces of media to stimulate group discussions on issues relevant to participants and the research topic (Pasco, 2000). Possible media are film, music, and graphic imaging. In this study, music and song lyrics about small-town life were used to spark dialogue regarding participants' experiences of social and economic health in their community. One goal is to limit the researcher's control in the discussion by enabling conversation to emerge without heavily structured questioning. Once songs were played, I seldom had to ask questions other than to clarify, paraphrase, and probe responses. It is noteworthy that these critical dialogues were not entirely framed by the participants. As the researcher, I chose the media and message used to spark the critical dialogue. As such, I influenced to a degree what emerged. Further, I adapted the technique slightly by preparing a reflection handout. I recognize this asserts more researcher influence than may be the original intent of the method. However, the technique is intended to reduce the presence of researchers, not to remove their involvement entirely, which is impossible. I was mindful of the power I had to control the discussion.

Photovoice is a research strategy in which participants are given cameras and asked to use photography and narrative to document their experiences, observations, and perceptions of their community. Photovoice gives groups of people whose experiences are often excluded from official accounts the opportunity to determine and document how they want their experiences and community to be portrayed (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). Photovoice participants draw upon images and representations of their community that reflect dominant discourses and privilege certain groups over others in various social fields. Accordingly, the liberating potential of the method should not be overemphasized. Still, photography served as another way for participants to express themselves. Participants in

this study were given disposable cameras and attended a session regarding ethics, safety, and proper use protocols. Once they took their photos they returned the cameras for development. Participants were given their pictures and invited to discuss them in a focus group with other young adults involved in the study.

Participants responded positively to the use of music and photography as ways to articulate their positions. In critical dialogue and photovoice sessions, they expressed a sense of ownership of the discussions. They noted their comfort with the format and indicated that the music and cameras made the experience interesting and exciting.

The success of the methods of data collection may also be reflective of the amount of time taken to foster relationships with the participants in this study. For three months, I engaged with participants a number of times a week. For the following six months, I continued to visit with them on a more irregular basis. Having the opportunity to interact outside the data collection sessions allowed further opportunity to foster a climate of trust.

My actions in regard to recruitment and retention were taken with the best of intentions of engaging in ethically motivated research. Yet a decision to attend to issues such as those described here far from ensures these goals will always be met. First, recruitment strategies discussed may have excluded potential participants, such as those without connections to the formal networks or the young adults who utilize those services. Hence, I suggest there is still another entire segment of the local population of socially and economically disadvantaged young adults with whom I was unable to connect through the recruitment processes employed. Consequently, their valuable experiences and perceptions are not reflected in the findings that emerged through this work. Second, attention to issues of reciprocity, such as efforts to offer my own skills, may not always be the support participants require or want. Third, power relations can seldom, if ever, be completely dissolved in research. For example, while the goal of the critical dialogue was to limit my own control in the research process, the impact on discussion created by my choice of songs should not be underestimated. Furthermore, participants may not have the capability or desire to take on a high degree of responsibility for the research (Maguire, 1993; Reid, 2004) such as was required with the photovoice strategy. For example, initially, participants worried about taking the “right” photos, and others did not want to have to “look after” the disposable cameras.

Nevertheless, by remaining aware of the limitations and consistently reflecting on my motives and actions, I aimed to identify ways in which I could reach potential participants who may not otherwise get involved and help them to stay involved throughout the research process. Similarly, I attempted to recognize and acknowledge when my research practices might be inadvertently contributing to inequalities that already exist.

Points for Future Consideration to Support Research With Difficult-to-Reach Populations

Participation barriers in research created by ethics protocols, traditional research relationships, and social and economic disadvantage are not impossible to overcome. Still, researchers need support in their efforts to engage in research with hard-to-reach populations. The time required to establish trust and create a climate of reciprocity is

significant. Moreover, costs associated with providing food, childcare, and transportation, not to mention travel by researchers—in this case throughout a geographically spread-out community—are a financial burden, particularly to those whose work is not funded. Consequently, some researchers may regrettably opt not to conduct research with difficult-to-reach populations, creating gaps in who is represented in research (Leadbeater & Glass, 2006).

Therefore, while it is important that researchers tackle the barriers, ethics boards and funding bodies can address the issues as well. For example, university ethics boards may need a wider spectrum of representation from local communities—in particular, segments of the population that tend to be underrepresented in research (Leadbeater & Glass, 2006). Review boards could consider the establishment and implementation of mechanisms to solicit feedback and recommendations from university and community researchers who work with difficult-to-reach populations. Regular reviews of procedures and protocols should ensure that new culturally relevant research methods can be effectively critiqued for ethical soundness in ways that reflect the needs of diverse populations and their local communities. In other words, there needs to be a degree of flexibility within guidelines without compromising the welfare of potential participants.

Funding bodies can increase their commitment to research with difficult-to-reach populations. Funding can better reflect the length of time it takes to enter a research field and to establish the climate of trust necessary to conduct sound, rigorous research. Further, funding could better cover costs associated with enabling participation of those who otherwise could not participate due to issues such as childcare and transportation.

Universities can increase efforts to make certain that graduate students have information regarding all possible avenues of financial support they can access to cover costs associated with participants. Moreover, university graduate program timelines and funding opportunities can better reflect the additional time that is often needed to enter and maintain research relationships with difficult-to-reach populations.

Conclusion

Adult education theorists have called for collaboration with people who move to challenge social and economic agendas (Miles, 1998). Such work requires a commitment to reflexively interrogate our own research practices to ensure that those who should be included in research are included. In addition, we must advocate for institutional support to facilitate our efforts.

At the same time, Bourdieu (2001) notes that violence inherent in symbolic domination lies in agents' complicity. The attention to reflexivity presented in this article aims to expose the misrecognition of certain held dispositions that legitimize particular research processes and practices. At the same time, like everyone, researchers embody the social fields (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) they occupy. Thus, the investigations presented here and the attempts made to make room for hard-to-reach citizens to participate in research are imagined from within various social fields. Consequently, they will not unhinge the symbolic value attached to research policies and practices that can lead to exclusion. This is not to suggest that nothing can be changed. Awareness of the constraints from which

attempts to disturb disparities occur is in itself empowering and can offer new perspectives from which to consider change.

We can never entirely remove the biases in our research that play a role in excluding participants and reproducing social inequalities. Nevertheless, mindfulness of inherent tensions between the emancipatory and socially reproductive nature of research is important for the development of inclusive research processes. More aware of our practices, we can work to create research spaces that invite those whose voices we often do not hear to participate in the creation of new and meaningful ways to embark on positive social change.

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