

What difference does it make? Some reflections on 'disability', bodily differences and childhood research.



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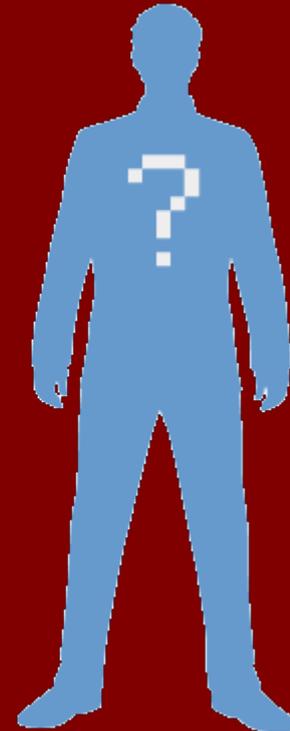
Outline

- Introducing positionality
- Explaining the research (x2)
- Disability as impact?
 - Planning
 - Undertaking
 - Evaluating
- Comments and future issues

Introducing positionality...

Children's geographies

- Impact of personal identity (Valentine, 1997)
- Reflection and scrutiny – a disembodied researcher? (Smith, 2003)



Introducing positionality...

Children's geographies

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Disability Studies

- The voice of disabled people?
- 'Nothing about us, without us' (Barnes and Mercer, 1997)
- 'Non-disabled people are not where we are and can never be' (Branfield, 1998).

The studies in question...

Study 1

- Data collection in 1999-2002
 - Everyday experiences and lifestyles of teenage girls in rural Northamptonshire
1. Survey of 200 10-15 year olds
 2. In-depth research (group discussions, self-directed photography, video tours)
 3. Interviews with mothers



The studies in question...

Study 2

- Data collection in 2006-2007
 - Play experiences of teenage wheelchair users
1. Survey-based interviews with 69 13-17year olds
 2. In-depth research (self-directed photography, video tours)



Planning for research...

- Gatekeepers
- Informed consent and co-ercion
- Communication barriers

Planning for research...

- **Gatekeepers**

School → **(head)teachers**

Family → **parents**

Individual → **young person**

Planning for research...

- Gatekeepers
- **Informed consent and co-ercion**
 - Active agreement
 - Ability to withdraw
 - Choice over involvement type

(Thomas & O'Kane, 1998)

Planning for research...

- Gatekeepers
- Informed consent and co-ercion
- **Communication barriers**
 - **Breaking down adult language**
 - **Facilitating communications**

Doing research...
Primary identity?

Doing research...

Primary identity?

- Age

“as adults, we may be able to identify and construct a notion of childhood, but it is unlikely that we will be able to capture or fully appreciate children’s experiences. Years of encounters and accumulated knowledge may filter and structure our thinking about what it means to be a child... The fact that we have all been children does not automatically provide lifelong access to this area of experience... children’s perspectives may be remote and isolated from those which we as adults can claim as our own” (Aitken and Herman, 1997, p.76).



Doing research...

Primary identity?

- Being 'non-disabled'

'Non-disabled people are not where we are and can never be'
(Branfield, 1998).

Doing research...

Primary identity?

- Being 'non-disabled'

Mum: ...as much as possible we book in advance, so that...does your Dad fly, does he go out?

Doing research...bodily difference

Secondary identity

- Bodily size
- Gendered bodies
- Bodily similarities/familiarities
- Bodily performances

Evaluating research

then:

‘typical’ children’s geographies issues
and concerns

now:

reviewing and questioning – too much
attention paid to some things? some
things overlooked?

Evaluating research

An account

January, Saturday morning, cold and wet, muddy underfoot 3 hour video tour of a village and surrounding area, led by two 11-year-old girls across fields, over stiles, through woods, along muddy lanes...

Evaluating research

Now

- Feeding back  participant evaluation
- Meaningful change or adding to oppression?

In the Future

- To be continued...

Concluding comments

- In positioning yourself within research, are you driven by the identity of yourself or your participants? Does it matter either way?
- The impact of changing identities
- Are there aspects of our selves that prevent a close understanding of the lives of others?
- Does time enable clarity of thought?

References