

Article

The Integrated Use of Audio Diaries, Photography, and Interviews in Research with Disabled Young Men

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Abstract

In this article we provide a critical reflection on the integrated use of solicited audio diaries, photography, and interviews in a study with disabled young men transitioning to adulthood. In the study, we developed a methodological approach for illuminating the intersectionality of gender, disability, and generation (life stage) identities. Drawing from a critical Bourdieusian perspective, we suggest that rather than producing single or “true” accounts, the combination of methods can be used to elucidate how participants establish, maintain, and reform their identities in everyday practices. Furthermore, we discuss how participants’ acts of data creation are analyzable events in themselves, wherein participants do work to establish, maintain, and reform their identities. We conclude with some lessons learned and future directions.

Keywords: audio diaries, visual methods, interviews, critical methods, disability, adolescents, youth, masculinity

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In this article we describe the novel integration of audio diaries, photos, and interviews in a study with disabled young men transitioning to adulthood. In this pilot project, we adapted and combined these methods to capture identity practices, engage disabled male youth, encourage reflection, and provide some independence in data generation. In the study, we investigated the intersectionality of gender, disability, and generation (life stage) on young men's identities and well-being. Although there is a burgeoning amount of research examining disabled youth's transitions to adulthood (Bjarnason, 2002; Clark & Hirst, 1989; Forbes et al., 2001; Frazee, 2003; King et al., 2003; Morris, 1999, 2002; Priestley, Rabiee, & Harris, 2003; Stevens et al., 1996; Stewart, Law, Rosenbaum, & Willms, 2001), very little work has been conducted from a critical sociological perspective and even less has focused on gendered experiences. In the study, we considered how gender, generation, and dis/ability denote hierarchical social orderings and distinctions between social groups. As children age they are implicitly expected to acquire the abilities, privileges, responsibilities, and characteristics associated with the prevailing socio-cultural understandings of adulthood and gendered roles (Osgood, Foster, & Courtney, 2010; Priestley, 2003; Walkerdine, 1993). Little is known about how these identities intersect in young disabled men's experiences (Lohan, 2007; Priestley et al., 2003). The primary purpose of this pilot study was to develop a robust methodological approach for interrogating these social processes. The substantive study results are discussed elsewhere (Gibson et al., 2013).

In what follows we briefly outline the study details before discussing how audio diaries, photos, and interviews were used to generate a mosaic of accounts and practices that illuminated how identities intersect and are produced and reproduced. We discuss both logistical and analytical lessons learned in the study. Drawing from a critical Bourdieusian perspective, we suggest that rather than producing single or "true" accounts, the combination of methods can be used to illuminate everyday identity practices without expecting participants to be able to explain these practices. Furthermore, we discuss how participants' data creation processes are analyzable events in themselves, wherein participants do work within the research context to establish, maintain, and reform their identities. We conclude with some lessons learned and future directions.

Study Details

Conceptual Framework

The study was grounded in a critical approach that drew on the work of Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1990, 1997; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Critical approaches focus on individuals' experiences and behaviours within the context of the larger socio-political themes that shape people's experiences and world views (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). In the study, we focused on an examination of shared social assumptions regarding masculinities, adulthood (and adult male roles), and disability and how they intersect. Intersectionality is a concept used to theorize the relationship between different identity categories, such as gender, race, sexuality, and ability, and how they are constituted in people's everyday lives (Valentine, 2007). For example, it can be used to explore how particular identities are given importance by individuals in specific contexts, and it looks at the circumstances under which categories such as disability might override other categories such as gender. Critical intersectionality research recognizes that identities are usually understood in relation to their alternatives (i.e., masculine to feminine, disabled to nondisabled, and child to adult). Identities are constituted through relations of power such that certain identities are valued more so than others in particular times and places (Rose, 1993, pp. 4–6).

Bourdieu's "sociology of practice" provided specific conceptual tools for examining these interrelationships. His central concept of *habitus*, which can be described as a set of dispositions

that incline persons toward particular practices in given contexts, provided an explanatory lens for analyzing the interplay between individual attitudes and behaviours and internalized social norms and patterns of behavior (Bourdieu, 1990, pp. 7–10). Habitus operates in relation to fields which can be described as relatively autonomous social microcosms, such as the family, health care, or education. In the study, we examined the relationships between hierarchical field positions (dominant, subordinate, marginalized, complicit) and participants' everyday strategic practices in accomplishing their gendered identities (Coles, 2009; Connell, 1995). Identity work was thus linked with practices of claiming or rejecting membership in particular social groups (men/boys, teen/adult, disabled/nondisabled), in particular times and places, and with the strategies participants engaged in to improve their positioning within these groups (Bourdieu, 1997; Gibson, Young, Upshur, & McKeever, 2007).

In this article, *disabled young men/youth* refers to male teens and young adults who have one or more physical impairments. We use the term *disabled people* rather than *persons with disabilities* in keeping with current usage in disability studies. Disability is not considered a condition of individuals as is implied by the phrase “with disabilities” but rather something experienced as a result of social discrimination and exclusion (Morris, 2001). *Generation* is drawn from Priestley's (2003, pp. 19–25) work to denote an age-related life stage and *social* category with associated expected roles (i.e., childhood, adulthood, and old age). In the study, we considered how one “transitions” between generations, when each begins and ends, and who is included or excluded. Similarly, masculinity was viewed as both a relational identity category and as a set of “situated doings” that emerge in relation to time and place and the interacting social positions of individuals (Connell, 1995; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Study Team

The study builds on our previous international research exploring the identities, masculinities, and transitions with this population and other disabled youth and men (Abbott, 2012; Gibson, 2005; Gibson et al., 2007). The seven member team consisted of transdisciplinary rehabilitation clinicians and researchers with expertise in qualitative methods, disability studies, sociology, and policy analysis. Two individuals with Duchenne muscular dystrophy (DMD) also acted as advisors and provided input on study procedures, interview questions, and emerging analyses.

Photo/Diary/Interview Methods

The study methods included participant-generated photographs, solicited narrative diaries, and a final semi-structured interview. We speculated that the combination of methods would provide a potentially powerful approach for capturing and analyzing identity practices. Latham (2003) has similarly used what he calls the “diary-photograph, diary interview” method in human geography research as a way to investigate “social practices *in the making*” (p. 2005). Like Bourdieu, Latham suggested that much of what individuals know they come by through intuitive knowledge which, although not exactly unconscious, obeys an internalized logic not ordered through the discursive. Investigating this logic is thus aided by non-discursive methods. Individuals perform and reveal their identities in their actions and talk, the places they go, the objects they treasure, the décor of their rooms, their dress and comportment, and their hopes and desires (Sweetman, 2009). The mixture of methods in our study was meant to capture identity practices without necessarily expecting participants to be able to fully articulate or explain these practices.

Photographs are increasingly used as tools of elicitation in qualitative studies, particularly as the technology becomes cheaper and easier to manage digitally (Harrison, 2002). They can ease rapport between researcher and participant, lessen potential awkwardness of interviews by

providing a point of focus, and introduce relevant topics potentially unknown to the researcher (Booth & Booth, 2003; Capello, 2005; Clark-Ibáñez, 2004; Croghan, Griffin, Hunter, & Phoenix, 2008; Radley & Taylor, 2003; Strack, Magill, & McDonagh, 2004; Wang & Burris, 1994). In research with men, photo elicitation has been used to facilitate discussion about potentially sensitive topics and to illuminate the complexities of how and in what circumstances gender norms are followed or rejected (Bottorff, 1994; Oliffe & Bottorff, 2007).

Research with children and youth suggest that photographs can increase children's engagement in research, encourage expression of their ideas, reduce self-consciousness, and alter power dynamics (Adams, Theodore, Goldenberg, McLaren, & McKeever, 2010; Capello, 2005; Clark, 1999; Clark-Ibáñez, 2004; Einarsdottir, 2005; Morrow, 2001; Worth, 2009). Others have cautioned against overly simplified claims that photographs reduce power inequalities between researchers and participants (Lomax, Fink, Singh, & High, 2011). Although this might be the case, power dynamics within a study are multidimensional, shifting, and dependent on a number of factors. Visual methods may alter these dynamics in multiple ways that can and should be assessed rather than assumed.

Photography provides a method for investigating strategic identity practices that might be excluded from verbal accounts (Aitken & Wingate, 1993; Böck, 2004; Clark-Ibáñez, 2004; Sweetman, 2009). Because identities are largely performed pre-reflectively, individuals might struggle to explain their behaviours, values, or identities that obey the deeply internalized logic of the habitus (Gibson, 2005; Sweetman, 2009). Photographs can thus provide a visual illumination of the unthought or unstated that, when combined with other methods, reveals how identities are produced and reproduced in the everyday. Images are not "true" or "more valid" representations than talk but provide a partial account-in-the making (Latham, 2003) that is co-created by producers and viewers in the same way as other texts (Chaplin, 1994, p. 196; Harrison, 2002; Lomax et al., 2011).

Solicited narrative diaries are reflections that participants are asked to create for a research study. This method has been shown to facilitate the capturing of participants' priorities and understandings about what are often taken for granted issues in their accounts (Elliott, 1997; Milligan, Bingley, & Gatrell, 2005; Worth, 2009). Elliott (1997) suggested that an advantage of the diary-interview method is its flexibility. Participants, she noted, come to the diary task with different notions of what they want to reveal and how to structure their entries, for example as factual information or more abstract reflections. These choices reveal aspects of the self as much as diary content and can be probed further within an interview. Audio-recorded diaries have the advantage of capturing the subtleties of tone not possible in a written account (Monrouxe, 2009). On a practical level, the ease of operation of the recorder can make audio diaries well suited for individuals with physical functional limitations (Worth, 2009). The audio diary approach we used in the study was adapted from the work of Worth (2009), who combined audio diaries and interviews to explore visually impaired young people's transitions to adulthood.

Like interviews, the photos and diaries were viewed as reality-constructing, meaning-making occasions (Jarvinen, 2000) that provided examples of "doing identity work" where participants positioned themselves in a given way for a perceived audience. The data could thus be analyzed not only for participants' intentional choices but for the invisible structures that organize them (Bourdieu, 1996). Participants created data as members of a category of persons defined by the research (young men with DMD transitioning to adulthood) and produced accounts of themselves that embraced or resisted this categorization. As in any narrative study, participants impose their own definitions of the situation (consciously or not) and turn it to their advantage to present an image that they want to give both to others and to themselves (Bourdieu, 1996; Holliday, 2000).

Reviewing diaries and photographs within an interview does more than elicit information from participants. It also creates a situation of co-analysis where the interviewer learns from the participant how the image was created, the motivation for including it, and what it represents for them (Aitken & Wingate, 1993). Through this process, participants actively negotiate the details of the photos and diaries, revealing their identities to themselves as well as to the interviewer (Latham, 2003). With both the photo and diary methods, we sought to provide participants with a degree of control over how to represent themselves, while recognizing that the context of the study and the absent-presence of the researchers significantly mediated their choices (Clark, 1999; Darbyshire, MacDougall, & Schiller, 2005; Gibson, 2005; Lomax et al., 2011; Worth, 2009).

Study Participants

The study was conducted in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Eleven young men, aged 16 to 27 years, with Duchenne muscular dystrophy (DMD) participated in the study. The age range is based on our clinical and research observations that this group of young men generally become interested in and/or begin “typical” transition activities (e.g., postsecondary school, independent living, dating, and condition self-management) later than nondisabled peers. The age range allowed us to include participants who have a range of experiences with transitioning. All of the participants lived with parents/guardians, which is quite common for this group. We were not able to identify any potential participants in the study area who lived independently. Six participants were attending high school, one was at university, and the remaining four had completed community college or university.

DMD is a genetic condition that exclusively affects males and is characterized by progressive weakening of skeletal muscle. This population has been largely excluded from transitions research to date, likely because it is only in the last 15 to 20 years that their expected life span has extended past childhood. With new interventions, they can now live into their thirties or forties, and life expectancy continues to increase. In their teens, youth with DMD begin using power wheelchairs for mobility and require assistance with activities of daily living, including eating, dressing, and toileting. Because of progressive weakness of their respiratory muscles, youth in their late teens and twenties increasingly require mechanical ventilation, initially at night only and eventually for 24 hours a day.

Participants were recruited from a large regional children’s rehabilitation centre in Ontario, Canada that provides life-long services and supports for individuals with DMD from across the province. Institutional ethics approval was obtained from the centre’s Research Ethics Board. Potential participants were approached by clinical staff to ascertain their interest and then interested individuals were contacted by a research team member. All participants provided independent consent. Through the recruitment and consent processes, participants were informed that the study was oriented to exploring their perceptions of their experiences transitioning to adulthood as boys/men. They were not given the opportunity to self-identify their gender and those who did not strongly identify as male may have chosen not to participate. This was perhaps a limitation of the study, but we believe it may have been confusing to some participants to enter into a discussion of gender identification.

Study Procedures

The introductory interview was conducted by a research assistant (RA) either at home (n=8) or at the rehabilitation centre (n=3) according to the participant’s preference. The interview focused on building rapport, reviewing the data collection procedures, and setting up adaptive equipment to

facilitate data generation. We gave participants the option of having someone else present during the initial interview. The five oldest participants chose to be interviewed on their own, whereas the others were accompanied by a parent or guardian. Each participant was provided with a digital audio recorder (Sony ICDUX300) and a digital camera (Kodak ZI8 Pocket Video Camera). We provided camera mountings and adapted switches to facilitate independent photography and audio recording according to each participant's functional abilities.

The RA who was responsible for data generation with 10 of the 11 participants has a background in critical qualitative research and interviewing. The team acknowledged that as a nondisabled woman in her 30s, her positionality differed from participants, and this could affect the data in unpredictable and/or unknowable ways. We did not, however, see this as a weakness (or strength) of the design but rather as part of the multiple individual and structural factors that shape the co-creation of knowledge within the interview and research (Gibson, 2005; Manderson, Bennett, & Andajani-Sutjahjo, 2006; Pini, 2005; Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2001). We discuss this further below.

Over the subsequent two weeks, participants were asked to audio record thoughts and take photos that reflected their daily lives (Gibson, 2005; Worth, 2009). For both activities, they were given a list of suggested topics (see Box 1 and Box 2) but encouraged to include anything they wished. Participants were invited to take a photo and/or make a diary entry as many times as they liked, but at least once a day over the two weeks. The digital photos and recordings were then collected from the participants. This second visit also provided an opportunity for unstructured discussion regarding the participants' experiences with the data generation processes. Audio entries were later transcribed and photos were catalogued in terms of number, setting, people, objects, and activities. The RA took detailed field notes at each of the first two visits and any intervening telephone contacts.

What to say for the diary recordings:

Talk about anything: who you are, what you do, and what life is like for you. There is no right or wrong.

Suggestions:

- People, places, activities important to you
- Things you do on a typical day
- Your future and becoming/being an adult
- Relationships, dating, and sex
- Ways you see yourself as a "man"

Box 1. Suggestions for audio diary recordings.

What photos to take:

Anything is welcome. You can put yourself in the photos! There is no right or wrong.

Suggestions:

- Rooms and objects in your home
- People, places, and things important to you
- Things you do on a typical day
- Photos that show you as a "man" or "adult"

Box 2. Suggestions for photographs.

The photos and recordings were reviewed by the research team to identify potential lines of inquiry that could be explored in the final interview. Interview guides were created that included a mix of topics common across all interviews as well as topics specific to each participant's data. Both sets of questions were oriented to the photos and diary entries, which were used to elicit discussion (see Box 3). We recognized that some of the issues participants included in their recordings or photos might be more difficult to discuss face-to-face. Participants were thus given the option of declining to comment on any photos or diary entries (Milligan et al., 2005). Because an aim of the study was to further develop and assess the methods, we asked all participants to comment on their experiences with generating the photos and diaries.

Based on audio recordings:

- You said that wheelchair hockey "is one thing that keeps me going in life." Can you tell me about this?
- You talked about dating as a possibility. Can you say more about this?

Based on photographs:

- You included a few photographs of your paintings. Can you talk about those?
- I noticed that all of the pictures you took were inside of your home. Can you tell me about that choice?
- You are in all of your pictures. Can you tell me about that decision?

Box 3. Sample interview questions.

Experience and Insights

Our first lesson learned from the study related to the unexpected length of time needed for data generation. The average data collection period per participant was 43 days, much longer than anticipated because of a number of contributing factors. Four participants asked for more time to complete the photos and diaries because at the end of two weeks they had not yet completed the tasks. One participant, Jeff (all names are pseudonyms), did not create a diary or take any photos and would not say why. Scheduling all the visits, but particularly the final interview, was challenging. The participants who were attending school would delay appointments until after exams or the end of a busy study period for reasons of fatigue and/or lack of free time.

Diary/Interview

The participants created between two and 20 audio entries each. Some participants quite closely followed the suggested topic list and tried to comment on each, including topics they were less comfortable discussing in the interviews. Some entries focused on more or less factual descriptions of a day's activities with little elaboration. For example, the entirety of Michael's recordings for two subsequent days was as follows:

It's Sunday August the 1st. My friend came over to my house and, ah, we watched movies and played video games, and that's it.

It's Monday August 2nd. Yesterday I went crazy and, um, played 7 hours of video games.

Even these brief entries, particularly when combined with the photos, provided useful entry points for discussion in the interviews. Many of Michael's photos were taken during activities with the friend he mentioned in the first entry. In the interview, he described their relationship as a "bro-mance" and his account revealed how he positioned himself in relation to particular masculinities:

- Interviewer: You said you guys talk a lot. You go to eat at the mall, you go to movies. Shopping?
Michael: Yeah. Watch girls [laughs].
Interviewer: Oh, so you just sit and watch girls. Do you ever approach them?
Michael: Not yet.... I'd say my confidence is not that high.
Interviewer: Your confidence isn't that high.... Does your friend?
Michael: He's got so much confidence, it's scary.

Michael thus performed his masculinities through presentation of a largely fact-based diary, but the diary also provided a point of departure for collecting a much more detailed and reflective narrative in the interview. His account also demonstrates how diaries generated in a research context differ significantly from other forms of expression with different purposes and audiences (Gibson, 2005; Harvey, 2011). Michael shared with us his online blog where he discusses the experiences and challenges of living with DMD. Many of his entries contained detailed personal reflections that stand in sharp contrast to the brevity of his audio recordings, even though they cover many of the same subjects. Nevertheless, Michael did not seem to want to hide this information. Rather, the audio diary method was either a less appealing form of expression for him and/or he created it according to his idiosyncratic interpretation of the aims of the research.

Other participants provided much lengthier and reflective audio recordings on a variety of topics. Shyam, for example, recorded this entry about his discomfort with the label of "disability":

I don't really like it when people use the word "disability." The reason for this is because disability sounds as if a person is broken. But people with DMD are not broken. They have a medical condition which causes their muscles to deteriorate over time. For example, when someone has cancer, and their health deteriorates, people do not say they have a disability. Therefore I prefer to think of DMD as a medical condition.

When this topic was raised in the interview, Shyam was at first somewhat reticent to discuss it further. He noted that the process of creating the diary prompted him to reflect on how he understood himself in relation to disability:

- Interviewer: In your diaries you spoke about not wanting to use the term disability.
Shyam: Oh yeah.
Interviewer: But rather think of DMD as a medical condition.
Shyam: Yeah.
Interviewer: Can you say more about that?
Shyam: Um [pause – looks away shyly, smiling]. Oh I forget what I wrote.
Interviewer: You wrote that disability is sort of like being broken.
Shyam: Oh, I wrote that, yeah.
Interviewer: And it's a condition. You sort of compared it to cancer.
Shyam: Yeah, ah [looks away]. 'Cause it's more of a, a [pause, looks away], like a condition because of the muscles and all that. It's not [pause] like it's not like your leg is chopped off or something like that. It's getting harder over time.

Like same with cancer and that, it's, [pause] like your body is breaking down like that. Like if somebody has cancer, they don't tell them that they have a disability. It's a condition.

Interviewer: So how did you come to this way of thinking?

Shyam: Ahh, just as I was writing, I thought about that.

Interviewer: Oh, in the process of writing [out your diary entry].

Shyam: Yeah.

Shyam thus revealed that the act of creating the diary prompted his reflective thinking about disability and identity, a position he further articulated in the interview. He is hesitant to get into the discussion without some reminders about the content of his diary, which suggests that the recording and the interview together might help to stimulate a deeper discussion compared to either method alone. Other participants also suggested that the diaries helped them to learn about themselves, reflect on becoming an adult, and improve their confidence:

Interviewer: Did you learn anything about yourself, in doing the diaries?

Albert: Yeah. Being more confident in myself and who I am.

Interviewer: How was the process of creating the diaries, how did you find that?

Joey: At first, very irritating. I can't really talk to a black box very well. It was awkward for the first few times. And then it got easy, just, the hard part was finding something to talk about.

Interviewer: Did it make you think about anything new or think about things in a different way?

Joey: Yeah. Like thinking that, from a view of someone older, because really I didn't see many things from an adult standpoint, like what am I going to do for a home, for a job and stuff like that.

Jean Marc Diary: I really found that doing audio diaries and pictures is a pretty nice way to show what you're feeling and what you think about adulthood.

We had anticipated that participants would find speaking to be physically easier than writing, thus the choice of audio-recorded as opposed to written diaries. Participants were provided with adapted switches to facilitate independent recording. Three participants, however, complained that the recorder was difficult to operate on their own despite the switch, and they thus asked someone to assist them. Three others (Albert, Peter, and Shyam) typed out their entries and then read them into the recorder. Each stated that, not only would they have found it physically easier to submit written responses but writing also gave them an opportunity to reflect on the topics and organize their thoughts.

Many participants were more articulate and more forthcoming in their diaries as compared to their interviews, and overall the diaries provided some of the richest data in the study. They might have felt more comfortable expressing their thoughts this way as opposed to a face-to-face encounter. Although participants were aware that the recordings would be discussed in the interview, some participants became self-conscious when the content of their entries were probed, and they reacted by deflecting further questions. The following exchange provides an example of how Peter expressed clear views on what makes him "feel like a man" in his diary, but struggled when asked to elaborate:

Peter Diary: Hi, today is Friday April 22. Um, I feel like a man when I can make my own decisions about going to school and jobs and stuff like that. Yeah, hopefully I'll be more of a man, uh, one day [laughs]. Uh, I think, I think also, moving out would be a man, would be what I think about being a man, uh, living on my own. So yeah.

Interviewer: You spoke in your recordings about things that make you feel like a man. You said making your own decisions, and moving out are things that would make you feel like a man. Can you tell me more about that?

Peter: Um [laughs] [pause – looks away]. Hmm. It's [laughs], well, [laughs] um [pause] hmm, mmm [shakes his head].

Interviewer: No?

Peter: No.

After several additional probes, Peter was able to talk about the importance of sports to his sense of masculinity. We thus concluded that it was not that Peter had nothing more to say but rather that he found these topics more difficult to articulate within the spontaneous demands of an interview situation. As someone who wrote out his answers prior to recording them, Peter might have preferred to have time to reflect privately on his answers. For participants that struggled with the immediacy or intimacy of the interview situation, the audio diaries provided a mechanism for participants to prepare their thoughts in private and at their own pace.

Photographs/Interview

In general, the participants were very enthusiastic about this aspect of the study. They took between seven and 113 photos each (Average = 39). Three participants took all of their photos independently, two had others take all of their photos, and five used a combination. This was expected as we had left these choices to the participant's discretion and viewed these choices as a source of data. For example, Chris refused to have his parents assist him and viewed the study task as an opportunity to assert his independence:

Chris: [My parents] told me, "How about I take something better?" I said, "No, it's okay."

Interviewer: So you directed them but they wanted to take another picture?

Chris: First they wanted to take me outside to take a picture. I said, "No. The thing is, it's my study, so there's nothing for you to worry about."

This exchange illuminated some of Chris' struggles to assert his independence within his family. Chris independently consented to the study without his parents' signature, which would likely differ from most of his treatment and research decisions in the past, and this consent helped establish the study as "his." The study context provided Chris with a framework for independently crafting his own story in his own way. In contrast, other participants, particularly those under age 17, were welcoming of collaborations with parents and other family members.

The primary subjects of the photos were families (siblings and parents), participants themselves, pets, friends, and personal objects—action figures, posters, school awards, medical and assistive devices, and computers (see, for example, Figure 1 and Figure 2). Viewing the images was particularly beneficial to members of the research team who were not directly involved in data generation. The photos helped immerse us in the contexts of the participants' lives. This included all the subtle reflections of the habitus reflected in, for example, clothing, décor, neighborhood scenes, and the biographical objects in participants' personal spaces (Böck, 2004). Nevertheless, we remained cognizant that the photos were not direct representations of their lives, and like any

data source, they provided only a partial, transient, and particular view of the participants' lives and experiences.



Figure 1. Example of participant photo.



Figure 2. Example of participant photo.

As with the diaries, some participants followed quite closely the suggestions provided, whereas others had their own ideas about how to best represent themselves, including what they believed would be beneficial to the research:

Interviewer: Did anything influence the pictures, besides what we asked you?

Shyam: Um, maybe to see how the set-up is here, similar to other people with DMD, so that they can, if other people took similar type of pictures, then you guys could compare and see if there's any differences between living arrangements.

Shyam's comments reflected his assumptions about what would be most valuable for the study and how the research team would analyze the data. These comments provided an analytical resource for interpreting Shyam's photos as portraying particular aspects of identity that he assumes are useful for an imagined audience. All of Shyam's photos were images of the physical accessibility features of his home. No people appeared in any of the photos, nor did he speak about relationships in his audio recordings. This did not mean that relationships were not important to Shyam or that his disability was somehow the focus of his life. Rather, it suggested that he had a message about his life and experiences with DMD that he felt would help others, which he wanted to share through the research. Furthermore, the choices of recordings and photos, in conjunction with the interviews, provided analyzable instances of adult and masculine practices. Throughout his account, we saw numerous instances of Shyam (and others) positioning himself as an expert in the experience of living with DMD. The photos are an instance of this, whereby he takes up the position of key informant in a study about living with DMD, provides information to assist an uninformed audience, and presents his home set-up as a superlative example of accessibility.

We also had instances of the participants creatively augmenting the methods. Four participants used the added functionality of the camera to include videos in their data without any instruction to do so. In addition, our sixth participant, Albert, submitted photos that he had taken prior to the study, including images of vacations and professional sporting events. From that point forward, we invited the remaining participants to do the same. Through these additional images, we were able to get a more diverse and longitudinal picture of the participants' lives and identities (Böck, 2004). Because the images were not taken for the research study but as personal mementos, they also provided additional points of reference to probe in the interviews.

Interviews

The interviews ranged from 45 to 120 minutes, with an average length of 80 minutes. As noted above, it was at times challenging to draw participants into conversation, particularly the younger group, and particularly around sensitive topics. There are a number of possible explanations for this, which likely intersect. The participants could be seen performing "typical" adolescent communication patterns as part of maintaining and promoting particular masculinities/youth identities (Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2001). They limited their responses to just a few words and/or deflected questions. As discussed above, there were also gender, age, and ability differences between the interviewer and participants, which might (or might not) have led to decreased participant engagement (as discussed below). Finally, it is likely that many participants lacked experience reflecting on and discussing these topics.

This latter explanation emerged from the data. The accounts suggested that participants had learned to avoid thinking or talking about their impairments, the progressive nature of their condition, and their uncertain life expectancies. We identified a common disposition toward "staying positive" and focusing on the present. The study context, however, required participants to think and talk about their adult futures and processes of transitioning into adult men—topics that were challenging to discuss while staying positive. This was most apparent when participants were directly asked about how DMD affected their thinking about the future.

Interviewer: Does DMD affect your thinking about the future?

Mark: No.

Interviewer: No? You don't think about that?

Mark: Nothing negative, no.

[Later]

Interviewer: What kind of things do you do to help your health?

Mark: Um, what do I do? Uh [long pause]. Pass.

Interviewer: Pass? Okay.

Mark: Yeah.

Interviewer: How does DMD affect your thinking about your future?

Jeff: I don't know. Hard sometimes?

Interviewer: It's hard?

Jeff: Yeah, sometimes.

Interviewer: How is it hard?

Jeff: I don't know, I don't know.

Interviewer: You don't know what's gonna happen?

Jeff: Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you think about that?

Jeff: Sometimes.

Interviewer: Yeah? And what do you think about?

Jeff: Nothing important.

We also wondered if the reticence shown by participants in discussing some of these issues was partly related to the social position(s) of the interviewer. We asked a study advisor, who was also a young man in his twenties with DMD, if he felt it would have been easier for participants to engage with a male and/or disabled interviewer. He said "no" on both counts, that "it doesn't make a difference." However, in relation to sensitive questions regarding sexuality, he offered, "you could get someone with experience in to talk about that topic, that specific topic, so maybe someone, like you said, someone in a wheelchair."

A member of our research team (DA) had significant experience with interviewing boys/youth with DMD in a large qualitative study in the United Kingdom (Abbott, 2012). He reflected that his gender might have prompted some of the boys to be more forthright in some situations, but in others it might have been a deterrent. As someone more likely to be socially identified as a "successful man" (i.e., physically fit, nondisabled, educated, and with a career), participants might have been reticent to share their doubts, fears, and struggles regarding their masculinities and adult transitions. These insights are consistent with other work identifying complex gender dynamics within interview situations (Manderson et al., 2006; Pini, 2005; Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2001).

We approached these issues as both problems and resources. Schwalbe and Wolkomir (2001) emphasized that because gender, sexuality, race, class (and we would add dis/ability and age) are each internally diverse identity categories, the best approach to interviewing is to avoid using them to presume affinities and to rely instead on analysis of the interactions to understand the individual *qua* individual. Positionalities of both researcher and researched are multidimensional and the effects on the data are not always predictable. For example, female interviewers might be perceived as unthreatening by males (e.g., see Horn, 1997) or class and age similarities can be just as important to rapport as ethnicity or gender, which are often foregrounded in positionality discussions (Manderson et al., 2006; Pini, 2005). Furthermore, the subject of the research and the context in which it is implemented are also important mediators of data generation (Böck, 2004).

In the study, we were thus cautious in making assumptions regarding how identity categories affected the data while acknowledging that they unavoidably exert effects. Having multiple sources of data, some of which were produced independently, helped to deepen the data by introducing different kinds of mediators into data generation. This helps to reveal the dispositions and habitus of participants by illuminating the various strategies they employ to position themselves with various identity categories. As others have noted, individuals perform their identities regardless of the gender of the interviewer but might employ different strategies by telling different stories or telling them in different ways (Pini, 2005; Schwalbe & Wolkomir, 2001). Because we were not searching for facts so much as understanding processes of intersection, we view this as a resource rather than a problem. We could reflectively analyze what masculinities were being performed in response to the interacting contextual mediators that together produce a text.

Conclusion

The diary/photo/interview approach we have described can be considered an example of both methodological “adaptation” and “adoption,” whereby we modified existing methods for the research context and combined them in novel ways (Wiles, Crow, & Pain, 2011). None of these methods are new to qualitative researchers but they are continually being adapted, applied, and integrated in new configurations and contexts. Rather than innovation for innovation’s sake (Wiles et al., 2011) or fetishizing methods to the point that they drive the research (Sweetman, 2009), adapted methods are most successful when they have a clear methodological purpose that is consistent with the substantive study goals and conceptual underpinnings. In this pilot project, we developed a multi-method approach to capture identity practices, engage disabled male youth, encourage reflection, and provide some participant independence in data generation. Furthermore, we aimed for congruence with a critical Bourdieusian approach, whereby we could illuminate how participants *do* identity in day-to-day life and within the research context.

We achieved these methodological goals in a number of ways and learned a number of lessons to inform future research. The first of these was the value of multiple contacts. Although the three face-to-face contacts created scheduling challenges and lengthened the data generation period, they also provided key moments for collecting observational data, building trust and rapport, and negotiating data content and interpretation. Through the mix of interaction, reflection, and independent data generation, participants constructed, shaped, and performed their identities within the research context (Latham, 2003). Combining methods also provided an entry into capturing practices and perspectives that might have been challenging for participants to articulate or intimidating to discuss in a face-to-face context. Data constructed outside of the interview context provided a window to these issues that may or may not have been discussed further in the interviews. The photo and diary activities also provided participants with time, space, and impetus to reflect on and later share their transitioning experiences. Participants reported this was a positive opportunity. Nevertheless, as with any research where individuals are asked to reflect on their lives and/or identities, there is potential for both benefits and harms (Clarke, 2006; Sinding & Aronson, 2003). At a minimum, we felt it was important that participants were very clear that they could choose which topics and questions they wanted to exclude, and in that respect we were pleased to see participants deviating from suggestions and declining to discuss some issues.

We also realized the importance of allowing for flexibility in the methods (Darbyshire et al., 2005). In the future, we would provide participants with an option to type or audio record diaries. We would also provide the choice to include preexisting photographs in their data. The circumstances and context surrounding the images and why they were included provides another

point of exploration in the interviews. Despite the potential benefits of including these additional images, we also caution against having too many images included in a study and instead suggest providing participants with an upper and lower limit. Limiting the number of images is more likely to encourage participants to be selective and reflective in their choices, and this avoids situations like we encountered where participants submit dozens of photos with multiple repeats of virtually the same image. We also would advise providing both broad advice and more specific suggestions regarding what to photograph or record. Specific directives can limit participants' choices but also provide focused data that can be probed further in an interview. Broad instructions do not depend on the participants' idiosyncratic interpretations of the purposes of the study or their ability to explain and represent their taken for granted practices.

Overall, with the suggested modifications, our experience suggests that the combination of diaries, photographs, and interviews was successful in illuminating the identity practice of disabled youth and has promise for research with similar purposes and theoretical commitments. Elsewhere we present the substantive study results (Gibson et al., 2013) where we discuss how identities intersected through *narratives of non-difference*, which were strategies used by participants to minimize their disabilities and claim putatively "normal" masculine and generational identities. We plan to further develop our approach and explore the results in a larger study with a more diverse group of men with DMD.

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