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Ambivalent Positions and Challenging Contexts in Researching “Rainbow Youth” in Finland

Jukka Lehtonen and Riikka Taavetti

In Finland, young people who do not identify with the heterosexual and cisgendered norms, or are seen to challenge these norms, are sometimes referred to as “rainbow” youth. It is an umbrella term, not a term of self-identification, at least not a common one. In this chapter we discuss the positions of researchers and young people in research projects on young rainbow, or lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) people.

The context of the research projects discussed in this chapter is Finland, from a global perspective a progressive Nordic welfare state, but there is much to be done to transform the society and culture toward inclusivity, anti-racism and the questioning of heteronormativity. Finland has an international reputation of being a forerunner in equality and especially in women’s rights. This has become a core of Finnish national understanding as a country where equality has already been achieved (e.g., Holli, 2003). Thus, calling for the advancement of equality has not been easy, as the first question is whether there even are issues of inequality. Contrary to national self-understanding, many aspects of anti-discriminatory politics have reached the Finnish agenda relatively late as parts of European Union initiatives. The myth of Finnishness still includes an idea of homogenous, white and Finnish- or Swedish-speaking nation, and diversity is not in practice part of it. This is still true also when thinking sexual and gender diversity and their intersecting differences.

In the chapter we analyze methodological, ethical and theoretical problems that we each faced in our research on and with young people and discuss challenges related to our research contexts. One of these challenges is how to take into account the agency and diversity of young people in our research. We both use intersectionality as our starting point for our analysis and understanding of rainbow youth in Finland (see Hearn & Louvrier, 2014; McCall, 2005). Age, sexuality and gender are the main intersecting differences in our analysis, but the challenge in our practical research is how to take into account the other aspects such as social class, ethnicity and location. The specific contexts analyzed in this chapter were as follows: a government-funded short-term project with a need to produce results for advocacy work in which Riikka Taavetti worked; and a transnational research collaboration project with South Africa, in which Jukka Lehtonen worked. A major methodological challenge in both of our research projects was producing and analyzing our data so that the diversity of the young people and their lives is recognized (see Boonzaier, Lehtonen, & Pattman, 2015; Browne & Nash, 2010; Grace, 2013).

In his project, Lehtonen focused on the youth work of the LGBTI association, Seta, and the life and choices of non-heterosexual and trans youth. He was interested in how sexuality, gender and other differences are constructed within youth work; what issues are discussed and what topics silenced; how youth, young people’s agency and power are understood; and how the youth work of Seta is seen as part of the larger society and global interaction. Seta’s youth work that Lehtonen studies includes areas such as national political advocacy around youth issues, educational outreach work, youth peer-group work, as well as youth related projects, one of which was Taavetti’s research project.

Taavetti studied the agency of rainbow youth in situations they face in their everyday lives. She analyzed young people’s agency in different arenas of their lives: in families, in schools and during free time. In addition, she explored their experiences of discrimination and equality. She utilized survey data and a

collection of autobiographical writings. Additionally, she aimed to make the agency of young people visible in the research process by using participatory research methods and by forming peer-research groups. In these, young people worked fairly independently as peer-researchers, using the preliminary research results. Lehtonen followed this work as part of his ethnography.

We both based our work partially on a survey called *Hyvinvoiva sateenkaarinuori* ("Well-being of rainbow youth") (2012–2015), which was produced by Seta and the Finnish Youth Research Society in 2013, and funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture. The funding was allocated for the implementation of Finnish government's Child and Youth Policy Programme to fill the need for more knowledge on the position of young LGBTI people. The research interest of the Finnish government in the equality and discrimination of LGBTI people is sporadic and often, as in the case of the research project in question, the actions taken were initiated based on advocacy work of Seta and resulted only in short-term projects with very little connection to government policies in general.

In this chapter, we first discuss the specific problems involved in using the survey data. Then we describe our individual research projects and discuss how the position of the researcher and participation of the young people were negotiated in the research process. Finally, we ponder on how our research projects were influenced by their structure and funding. Even though our research projects come together at several points, they are separate. To clarify this, we write using our last names when discussing our individual work and use "we" when discussing our common analysis.

Complicating the Survey Data

We both used the Internet survey data produced in a research project titled "Well-being of rainbow youth". The research project was the largest project so far in Finland to cover the situation and well-being of rainbow youth (Alanko, 2014). In the project a quantitative analysis of the survey data was completed by Katarina Alanko, and later Taavetti worked with the qualitative part of the project (for an English summary of the results of the research project, see Taavetti, Alanko, & Heikkinen, 2015).

Lehtonen took part in designing the survey questionnaire and commented on Alanko's report. He used the survey data to form four groups out of all respondents under 30 years old (N = 1861): non-heterosexual women and men, and transmasculine and transfeminine respondents. In his analysis of the survey responses of these groups, he looked at the differences between trans and non-heterosexual youth and also the gendered differences within these groups. He was particularly interested in the transitions and choices of these young people in relation to education, career, work environment and military service (Lehtonen, 2014a, 2015, 2016). He analyzed the meanings given by young people to gender and sexuality, as well as differences such as social class and location. The survey and answers to open-ended questions reveal that trans youth experience their situation at work, in education as well as when thinking about the obligatory military service system as more challenging than non-heterosexual youth. There are also gendered differences between non-heterosexual women and men, as well as between transfeminine and transmasculine respondents.

Taavetti, in turn, conducted a qualitative analysis on the open-ended survey answers of 15 to 25-year-old survey participants that identified as non-heterosexual or as transgendered (N = 1535). She analyzed the data as a whole, without grouping the participants by gender or any other factor. One of the reasons behind this choice was her commitment to queer theoretical thinking. This means, on the level of everyday experiences, that no matter how the rainbow youth define themselves, or how their identity is defined by others, they are all affected by norms that govern gender and sexuality. In addition, she wanted to emphasize individual rather than group-based differences. She also wished to prevent strengthening the often identity-based categorizations that may be alien to the young respondents themselves. That said, she

recognized some problems caused by this decision; for instance, differences between rainbow youth of different genders were largely erased in her study.

Lehtonen found that grouping the young respondents into four categories and conducting the analysis based on them helped him not only to gather vital information on young people's experiences from the point of view of gender, but also challenge the obvious identity-based categories. When grouping the young people, he rejected the typical lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans identity categories, forming instead four groups based either on challenging of gender norms or on certain sexual acts and feelings towards the same gender. The groups of transfeminine and transmasculine respondents included those respondents who replied that they were in some way trans or that they were not sure if they were trans. In these two groups there were, thus, young people who did not define themselves with trans-terminology. Similarly, in the non-heterosexual groups there were respondents who defined themselves as heterosexual but had had sexual acts with or feelings towards people of their own gender.

In the survey questionnaire there were very detailed questions on how the respondents understood their gender and sexuality. This was seen as necessary in order to make visible to the rainbow youth that their experiences of themselves were taken into consideration, at least as options in the questionnaire. In the statistical analysis of the survey, however, it is impossible to take the diversity into account in such detail, but larger respondent groups needed to be formed for quantitative analysis. Because of the groupings, though, the diverse nature of individual experiences is lost. Therefore, Lehtonen thinks that it might be better to inform young people of how the responses will be grouped and analyzed in the survey questionnaire already, if this is known when planning the questionnaire.

The survey data with its statistical analysis was productively used in the political advocacy work of Seta to argue that more attention should be given to rainbow youth and the heteronormative practices they are surrounded by in their everyday life in schools and elsewhere. We would like to emphasize the importance of qualitative analysis which let us understand the complex and multi-layered situations in which LGBTIQ youth live and the meanings they give to their sexualities, genders and life in general. With qualitative analysis it might be also easier to tackle differences and diversities which are not so easy to reach within the statistical analysis in case of small respondents groups. For example, there were only a few respondents belonging to ethnic, religious or cultural minorities, and statistical analysis is impossible with such small numbers. The same is true with disabled respondents. In addition, there was no specific question concerning respondents' possible migrant background which made the analysis of ethnic or immigrant positions even more difficult. Many groups such as intersex, transvestites and genderless youth were too small for separate statistical analysis, and this easily makes them invisible in the research. Interview-based or other methods might work better with them. That said, the current survey data makes it possible to do intersectional analysis based on gender, location and social class, which will be taken further in Lehtonen's analysis.

Rainbow Youth Participating in Research: Participatory Research and Ethnography

Although a number of young activists of Seta commented on the questionnaire in the planning phase, the survey in general cannot be considered especially participatory. In contrast, in Taavetti's study, youth participation played a central role. Six peer-research groups participated in the research project, studying the answers of the survey and their preliminary analysis in the light of their own experiences. The groups worked independently and were facilitated by young volunteers. The groups could choose both the themes they wished to address and their methods of working. That said, the fact that the group work was part of a research project was clearly visible in the choices made by the groups. For example, a short questionnaire was developed within the group, and in another, the participants interviewed each other (for more details, see Taavetti, 2015).

The main rationale in participatory methods is that those who are being studied actually participate in the research in different phases of the process (e.g., McIntyre, 2008). When studying rainbow youth this would mean, ideally, that they would take part in the planning of the research, gathering the research material and interpreting it, as well as the process of writing. In reality, participation throughout the research process is often not possible, and it is common that the participatory elements are present only in some parts of the research process, such as gathering or analyzing the data (e.g., Kaukko, 2013). This is especially true when participatory methods are applied in a short-term research project.

Participatory methods are often used when studying people that are marginalized in the society or whose voices are not often heard in research—like youth or queer people. Researchers employing participatory methods, as many other activist-oriented researchers, stress that their task is not, though, to give a voice to anyone. Those being studied have a voice (or multiple voices), but the researchers can strengthen these voices by bringing the views and experiences into academic discussion. In youth research the use of participatory methods has developed hand in hand with the political practices that aim at strengthening youth participation (Heath, Brooks, Cleaver, & Ireland, 2009; Heath & Walker, 2012).

Taavetti felt that participatory research was both rewarding and laborious. Working with peer-research groups demanded instructing and organizing, even though the main load of the practical work was carried by the young facilitators of the groups. Still, the need to make participation as worthwhile, pleasant and safe as possible placed pressures on the researcher as well. Taavetti was constantly worried that peer-group working would be too burdensome for the facilitators or the participants. This concern made the group work emotionally tough for her, too. That said, it was surprising how easy it was for her to gather the groups and thus to get “to the field”. Finding participants was fairly simple with the help of the facilitators, largely by distributing the invitation on Facebook and through personal networks. The young participants were also highly motivated to work in the research.

Lehtonen conducted an ethnography on Seta’s youth work, observing several occasions and events related to youth work and educational outreach work for over a year (2013–2014). He also kept a research diary, gathered documents and photos, and conducted 14 interviews with employees of both Seta and its cooperation partners as well as with young people. Lehtonen conducted his research as part of a large Finnish-South African research collaboration project, which was focused on young people, sexualities and gender. Lehtonen visited Cape Town, South Africa, for 6 months, producing research data in the local LGBTI organizations (Triangle and GenderDynamix). He interviewed five activists or researchers and observed several situations and seminars.

In Lehtonen’s research young people themselves were not in a key position in producing the data. He observed, though, many situations where there were young people present, which required some negotiating with them. As he has earlier been an employee and an activist of Seta and has studied non-heterosexual and trans youth for a long time, he assumed that most of Seta’s activities would be familiar to him. In the early phase of his ethnography, though, he understood that many aspects in Seta’s youth work were new to him and that he would have difficulties in finding his way to the field (see Lehtonen, 2014b). An example of his research diary on the first focus group interview he did with young people in national rainbow youth camp shows the complex and emotional relation he and his young interviewees had:

I also experienced that young leaders of the camp took distance from me. They hardly talked at all to me during my visit. I don’t know what their attitude towards me was, or if there was resistance, questioning my position, or what, or if they simply thought that maybe I am more interested in the younger participants and not of them, and that is why they left space to the participants. Somehow it felt that it was difficult to ask or talk about many topics such as sex, embodiment, their definitions of their gender and sexuality,

relationships, the role and selection of the leaders, their reasons to join the camp, possible problems at home, health issues and so on. I really need to think in more detailed way the group dynamics and all.

It took more time and energy to find out how to gain contact to the youth peer groups than it had in the mid-1990s when he had done interviews with young non-heterosexual people for his dissertation research project, soon after he had finished his work in Seta (Lehtonen, 2003).

Lehtonen had difficulties in gaining access to the youth peer groups. It was not easy to find the right people, and some of the groups felt that they did not want to spend time on the research or that they wanted to keep the atmosphere of the group intimate and confidential, without disturbance from a researcher. He succeeded, however, in interviewing some young people and observing several youth activities. When Taavetti and her peer-research groups agreed to share their data with Lehtonen for his research, his research data was clearly improved from the point of view of meanings given and stories told by young people. If he would have asked for help and support from the young activists of Seta in earlier planning phase of the project, he might have had easier access to the youth activities.

Young People's Positions in Research

Both of us were interested in youth agency in our research projects. Lehtonen analyzed the agency of young people mainly from the perspective of how it was discussed in the interviews of Seta's employees and how it was expressed and made possible in the activities of Seta that he observed. Taavetti analyzed youth agency in the small everyday choices the young rainbow people made and in the possibilities that were open for them as these were described by the young respondents of the survey, writers of life stories and participants of the peer-research.

One of the key benefits of using participatory research methods is the opportunity to place the researcher's views in dialogue with the ideas of the participants. While being an advantage for the research, this was also sometimes difficult. Placing unfinished and preliminary thoughts under the scrutiny of those who are actually being studied was a source of uncertainty. After the first meeting with the young facilitators of the peer-research groups in which she had presented the very first findings of her study, Taavetti wrote:

I stressed a lot beforehand about the meeting and also afterwards I lied awake in the night and wondered if everything went well. In addition, I notice that I stress about what the facilitators and the participants think of me and my competence and the whole project. I would not like to add one more layer of not understanding the experiences of the rainbow youth or speaking past them.

This uncertainty can, though, be seen as a way in which the researcher makes herself vulnerable in the research, in a slightly similar manner as those participating in the research are expected to expose themselves. This experience also leads the researcher to ponder how those represented in the research are treated, and how to make the research available and as useful as possible to them.

As our research interests focused on agency, we also considered the ethical questions from this perspective. Ethical concerns in youth research look very different when they are evaluated from the perspective of child and youth protection than from the point of view of participation. In Finnish youth research, young people's right to be heard in the matters relevant to them has been emphasized strongly, along with the ethical behavior of the researcher (see Lagström, Pöso, Rutanen, & Vehkalahti, 2010). There are both national and discipline-specific differences in research ethics. In the project "Well-being of rainbow youth" it became apparent that in the field of psychology there were more formal ethical procedures than in other social sciences. During his visit to South Africa, Lehtonen found out that the emphasis on ethical aspects in research was much stronger in South Africa than in Finland, both in studies, research planning as well as being a key topic in research conferences.

From the viewpoints of legislation and formal research ethical guidelines, research of minors under 18 years of age demands special ethical age-related consideration. In Finland, youth researchers emphasize the importance of research results for advancing young people's position in society and preventing discrimination. This means, on the one hand, that it is stressed that even minors have the right to be heard in research, and this right cannot be withdrawn by the obligation to consult the parents of the participants. On the other hand, in Finnish youth research sensitivity towards the life-situations of young people is emphasized, even if they are aged over 18 years, as they can be in a more vulnerable position than older adults. Also, youth researchers try to be sensitive to the power relations constructed in the research process. This means stressing the responsibility of a researcher simultaneously with the need of constructing a space for young people to be heard in research.

In Taavetti's research, participatory methods also raised some new reflections on research ethics. As rainbow youth often have rather grim experiences of discrimination, and even violence, painful stories can come up in research. Taavetti gave the peer-research groups the autonomy to decide which topics they want to discuss, so they could avoid too difficult issues. Furthermore, the groups had at their disposal an edited selection of answers to the open-ended questions to the survey. Thus, it was possible to discuss the situation of rainbow youth on more general level without disclosing possibly painful personal experiences. As researchers, we need to make sure, on the one hand, that the participants have enough support when addressing these difficult issues and, on the other hand, we need to trust that the young people are capable of drawing their own lines and deciding in what kind of activities they can participate.

Researcher Positions

Working directly with the young people in research also made us consider our own positions as researchers in relation to the young participants. As researchers we have rather different positions, but we also found similarities in the questions that occupied us while doing research.

Lehtonen has a long history with Seta and its youth work. As part of his research process, he analyzed his position as researcher and also as an ex-employee and activist of Seta. He pondered upon his experiences and their influence on his current ethnographic project with the help of autoethnographic writing. Seta was in many ways familiar to him, and he had several presumptions about its youth work. This demanded him to step back and think how these presumptions influenced his research frame. By analyzing his own experiences, memories and the past he aimed at understanding his own premises for research. In addition, he aimed at constructing a temporal perspective for his work to help him to locate his research topic, Seta's youth work, in the present time (see Chang, 2008; Crawley, 2012; Ng, 2013). In going through his own experiences and doing the active memory work—which was partly done in the international research project—he was inspired by the work of Frigga Haug (2014; Jansson, Wendt, & Åse, 2008). The memory work and autoethnographical approach motivated him to look at Seta's youth work and young people's life choices from historical and temporal perspectives. This is illustrated in an excerpt from his research diary, describing his participation in a youth event during Helsinki Pride:

I walked around the place where they organised sofas and chairs for the coming discussion and another one in which most of the young people were preparing pride material, jewellery, and buttons, or printing t-shirts and bags. I started to prepare a bag with a printed image of Batman and Robin kissing. That felt good to me. I thought that maybe some unexperienced young person can be in a similar situation, and find a way of doing at least something in a strange place. Later I pondered upon my experience by thinking that maybe I searched and found the newcomer position. I also thought that I did not experience my position easy as an observer of young people, and maybe this explanation was a way of construction a researcher position instead. I just wanted away from the situation because of the uneasiness of it. When I was a young activist,

youth group leader [in 1980s], I did not have similar experiences. Then I was trying to make everybody else feel included.

By working autoethnographically, the activities of Seta were placed in the present time, constantly changing and as part of a longer development (Lehtonen, 2014b). Lehtonen also used this temporal aspect in his research interviews, asking the interviewees of their conceptions of the 1980s situation in the youth work of Seta. This helped him to understand how the interviewees saw the current situation compared to the past.

As another method to “take distance” from his own presumptions, Lehtonen used his research visit in Cape Town, South Africa. The data produced there as well as the experiences he wrote about in his research diary helped him to look at Seta’s youth work from a different angle. He asked the Finnish interviewees about their perceptions on how LGBTIQ youth work is organized in South Africa. Moreover, the cooperation with South African researchers had from an early stage made him follow themes which would not otherwise have been so important in his research, such as violence, HIV, poverty, masculinity, social class, ethnicity, racism and transnational aspects. Looking from a distance, from another cultural viewpoint, allowed him to see the situation in Finland differently (see also Ratele, 2015).

Many of the young people who participated in our research have had experiences of discrimination and exclusion. This means that our research material contains very painful memories. Addressing these issues is not easy for researchers who themselves are members of the LGBTIQ community. Many of the young participants’ experiences felt familiar and brought back memories of our own youth. Taavetti wrote in her research diary about her own insecurities after a discussion with a colleague: “I have wondered whether youth researchers have exceptionally peaceful relationship with their own youth. At least I am bothered by the unpleasant memories of youth that inevitably come up when I work with descriptions of youth.”

Taavetti does not, like Lehtonen, have a prior history as a researcher of rainbow youth or sexuality and gender minorities. She often pondered on her feelings of being both an insider and an outsider among the rainbow youth (see Ng, 2013; Roberts, 2013). In the course of the peer-group work, she noticed feeling uncomfortable about being lesbian herself. She never brought it up in the groups, although she thought that everyone assumed that she was not straight. However, while Lehtonen’s career as a researcher of rainbow youth probably made others assume that he was as a member of the LGBTIQ community himself, the increased equality and visibility of LGBTIQ issues during recent years has probably changed people’s presumptions. Even though cisgendered and heterosexual researchers have studied LGBTIQ issues before, this has grown more common.

Lehtonen did not define his sexual orientation or gender identity to the participants in the interviews or in other processes of data production. On a leaflet given to the research participants it was stated that he had been a leader of Seta’s youth group, and how information on his earlier research could be easily found. The fact that he was a former Seta’s youth group leader and that the focus of his research was on sexual and gender diversity probably gave a message to the participants of Lehtonen being a member of the LGBTIQ community. He wanted to inform the participants that sexual and gender diversity as a topic—as well as Seta’s work—was familiar to him, and that he was part of “the community of the researched” himself. He thought that this would help in gaining the participants’ trust and avoiding their fears of him analyzing and interpreting the data in questionable ways (see Roberts, 2013).

Taavetti’s work is strongly influenced by feminist research theories and the notions that no research is neutral and that the personality of the researcher has a strong impact on the outcomes of the research (e.g., Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007). That said, in this research process the fact that she is lesbian felt somewhat awkward. This might be connected to how being involved with the topic of the research easily makes the researcher partial and their position questionable, and being a lesbian in particular brings out

difficult questions concerning sexuality and corporeality in the research (on sexuality of a youth researcher in the research process, see, e.g., Berg, 2010). In addition, in Finland it is common that those working with LGBTI issues, for example as employees of Seta, are not necessarily LGBTI themselves, or if they are, it is not automatically brought up. This culture may have the effect that in people's opinion a researcher of rainbow topics should also keep personal distance to the topics being studied. Considering that one of Taavetti's findings was that young queer people longed to see more queer adults in their life (see Taavetti 2017), by not discussing her identity or relationships Taavetti lost one obvious chance to be such an adult. Being silent may also legitimate the idea that sexuality or gender should not be part of a research situation if they are not heterosexual and cisgendered.

Researching in Projects

The contexts in which the research is done construct the research process as a whole. The project has, according to Kristiina Brunila (2011), "become the core of a new kind of power system in the Finnish public sector". With project funding, research can be channeled to produce applicable and politically useful results. Project, as a mode of working, is diverse and flexible, but still controllable. In Taavetti's project the survey data had been produced earlier, so she could use it but was not able to influence it. Moreover, the duration of her research funding was only 8 months. Lehtonen worked in a large international collaboration research project funded by the Academy of Finland. It offered short-term funding (18 months), but also gave him an opportunity to visit another country for a 6-month period. He was able to start his new research project when he heard about the funding, and he decided to produce data that he could use long after the actual funding period.

Both Lehtonen and Taavetti worked in cooperation with Seta and the Finnish Youth Research Network. Taavetti worked directly as an employee in a joint project by these organizations, while Lehtonen worked more independently in a separate research project, where the role of the two organizations was more that of partners. Taavetti was more tied to her employers as well as to the goals that were already set when they had applied for funding. That said, Lehtonen needed more negotiations to secure his access to the field, while for Taavetti the field was more open precisely because she was directly part of the joint project.

Being associated with the Finnish Youth Research Network enabled but perhaps also called for research that had societal as well as academic impact. We have pondered more, however, on how exactly cooperation with Seta guided our research choices. Seta was persistent that the survey had to include a very wide range of different definitions and labels for the participants' sexualities and genders in order to make sure that as many as possible would feel included and able to answer. Although this obviously was a worthwhile goal, it caused methodological problems when interpreting the data. In Taavetti's project there was also some discussion concerning the desired wording of sexuality and gender issues. Seta has their own vocabulary geared for the use of their political advocacy work, and their choices of words were not always compatible with the needs of the research. As the results of the research were to be used in advocacy, the questions concerning the choice of key terms required negotiating differing needs.

Lehtonen was thankful for Seta and its employees for their willingness for cooperation, and he stated in the correspondence with Seta that he hopes to conduct research that, even if critical, could be used to develop the work of Seta. He has sent all the research publications to the key persons in Seta for further use in development and political work. The aim was to make the cooperation partner, and non-academic audience in general, to profit from his research results, which would in turn benefit non-heterosexual and trans youth themselves (see Grace, 2013).

The current academic model of funding emphasizes international publishing in academic journals, in practice, publishing in English. Writing in English complicates analyzing Finnish data and also understanding the results. In addition, it takes time and energy not only from the perspective of writing but also as

international publishing processes tend to be long. On the other hand, in the international collaboration project it was a vital way to communicate, which made writing in English motivating. However, when writing in English is looked at from the perspective of advocacy work in Finland, there are problems. Also publications in Finnish are needed for the results to be accessible for the decision-makers and young people themselves.

Language was a vital theme in the collaboration of Lehtonen's research project. In both teams there were people whose mother tongue was English and those whose mother tongue was some other language. In such a situation, words and concepts used are easily understood differently between and inside the research teams. In the project there were eight researchers studying the South African situation—the whole South African team—and the three researchers from Finland were not all actively doing empirical research on the Finnish situation. It was noted in discussions that often those from the North or West concentrate on South Africa, but not vice versa (see Ratele, 2015; Shefer, Hearn & Ratele., 2015). It would have been easier in this project to do it the other way around if there had been more researchers analyzing Finnish youth. Now Finland was positioned as a representative of the North/West, which it is, but the particularities of Finnish society and culture were not dealt with.

Both in Finland and in South Africa much emphasis is given to Anglo-American literature on gender/sexualities, but the collaboration project gave the participants a chance of questioning that and opened up a discussion on the local or cultural specificities. The collaboration made it possible for Lehtonen to question his own research focus, methodologies and viewpoints to his data and topics. Personally it made him more aware of issues in relation to poverty, violence and culture/language, and also their intersections with sexual and gender diversity. (See also Hearn, Ratele & Shefer, 2015.)

Conclusions

In this chapter we have discussed the methodological and ethical questions faced when studying young rainbow, or LGBTIQ, people. We have both pondered on the recognition of, simultaneously, the diversity of the young people we study and the need to acknowledge the structures that affect them, regardless of their precise self-identification. Our interest towards agency has led us to consider the research process and ask how the young people themselves could be more visible in the research. This has led us to develop participatory methods that have brought us new questions concerning the responsibilities of the researcher and the effect our research has on those participating in it. Working in an interdisciplinary and multinational research project has shown us that questions of research ethics can be addressed in multiple ways, by stressing the role of formal ethical evaluations and proper training of the researcher and by emphasizing careful evaluation of the choices made by the researcher in their research processes.

We have worked with two organizations, Seta and the Finnish Youth Research Network, both of which stress the societal impact of research. The need to produce results that can also be used in political advocacy and equality politics has had at least a double effect on the language of our research. On the one hand, we have negotiated the vocabulary used on diverse sexualities and genders between the needs of our research and the choices that Seta has made in their work. On the other hand, in current academic research in general, but in particular when working in an international research project, there is a strong pressure to publish in English. When studying Finnish youth, this causes a contradiction, as the results should also be available for those who are studied.

Ambivalent positions were faced and challenges came up at every turn during the research processes. Still, many of the reflections discussed here have been possible only after the actual research was finished. While research is in full speed, there is hardly a chance to step back and ponder upon the choices made and ethical issues faced. This is especially true in short-term projects, in which there is a pressure to get the publications finished in time. Many of the reflections on the ambivalences and challenges simply need to be

ignored. If we want to actually consider the wider questions on researcher positions, ethics and participation in our research, the time to work on these is stolen from something else—often the next research project.

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