Global Studies of Childhood

Space for Queer and Trans⋆ Youth?
Reflections on Community-Based Research in Montreal

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ABSTRACT This article focuses on the process of conducting community-based geographic research with queer and trans⋆ youth. It is based on a research project that investigated the spatial experiences of adolescents between 14 and 18 years of age who attended Project 10, an out-of-school LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) community support organization for youth in Montreal, Canada. The authors examine the ways in which working within this community space shaped the research process and how it functioned as a site of critical geographic inquiry. The article highlights the process of gaining access to this population, the methodological particularities of working with queer and trans⋆ youth support groups and, finally, how conducting research in an LGBTQ community space facilitated the research process. The objective is to reflect on the possibilities and limitations of this site in terms of conducting geographic research that considers the lives of queer and trans⋆ adolescents.

Introduction

Over the past few decades, LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) populations in many countries across the globe have experienced significant legal and political improvements. Gains within Canada and Quebec have been significant, particularly for lesbian and gay communities: having partially decriminalized homosexual acts in private in Canada as early as 1969, protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation has been guaranteed in Quebec's human rights charter since 1977 and at the federal level since 1992, and same-sex marriage and adoption rights were finally granted throughout Canada in 2005 (Smith, 1999, 2008). As in many other regions, there have been spatial gains in large urban centres in terms of the formation of residential neighbourhoods, commercial districts and community institutions that provide systems of support for LGBTQ populations. However, the benefits of such changes have been uneven, often moderated by intersections often shaped by the intersections of sexuality with gendered, social and racialized inequalities. Young age is also an important factor in defining access to these systems, since adolescents, in the process of forming their gendered and sexual selves, primarily inhabit social worlds that are circumscribed by heterosexual and cis-gendered norms, such as the family, the school and the neighbourhood community (Valentine et al, 2003; Schroeder, 2012). At the same time, their status as minors also makes it difficult to access many adult-defined LGBTQ spaces; age and economic restrictions limit their access to commercial spaces, such as the bars and clubs of gay villages (Valentine & Skelton, 2003). Like other adolescents, their access to public spaces may also be limited by adultist codes of conduct and even curfews (see Collins & Kearns, 2001; Thomas, 2005). For these reasons, students, parents, allies and LGBTQ community activists continue to work to provide safe spaces within schools and within the broader LGBTQ community context for young queer and trans⋆ [1] people. Nonetheless, such community spaces

are also limited in terms of access and availability, as well as being regulated by adults (Hackford-Peer, 2010; Walls et al, 2010; Schroeder, 2012).

Given the spatial complexity experienced by queer and trans* youth, it might be assumed that this population would attract the attention of geographers of sexuality and youth geographers alike. Applied research shows that the repercussions of the social and spatial exclusions experienced by this population are numerous: many national surveys show that LGBTQ youth disproportionately experience violence, homelessness and suicide (McDermott et al, 2008; Russell et al, 2009; Taylor et al, 2009; Quintana et al, 2010; Abramovich, 2012). Moreover, the experience of social exclusion in school is well documented (see, for example, Kosciw, 2004; Blackburn & McCready, 2009; Taylor et al, 2009; Walls et al, 2010). While LGBTQ youth studies has developed as a research field in many social science and cultural studies disciplines (see, for example, Russell, 2002; Rasmussen et al, 2004; Driver, 2008; Gray, 2009), geographers have been relatively slow to engage in research with this population. This absence is surprising, given that many of the exclusions experienced by queer and trans* youth are specifically spatialized 'problems', such as homelessness generated by parental homophobia, harassment and bullying in schools, and violence in public spaces.

In order to contribute to the project of building LGBTQ youth geographies, this article examines one experience of researching queer and trans* youth from a geographic perspective. Engaging in critical research with this population raises many methodological issues related to access, power and representation, which, we suggest, are importantly related to where and how the research is conducted. The article builds on the discussion of the research process between a student researcher (Julia) and her thesis supervisor (Julie). The research project was community-based and concerned with the spatial experiences of queer and trans* youth from 14 to 18 years of age. It was conducted with participants of Project 10 (P10), a Montreal-based out-of-school community organization that provides support for young LGBTQ people between 14 and 25 years of age.[2] Our goal is to reflect on the role of this organization as a site for critical geographic inquiry into the lives of queer and trans* adolescents, while providing insights into the process of conducting research with this population. We begin by situating this project within three literatures: (1) the geographic literature on sexuality, young people and space; (2) a broader literature on researching with queer youth; and (3) the geographic literature on the importance of space to the research process. Next, Julia tells the story of developing the research project in this out-of-school LGBTQ community space, considering issues such as institutional access, the positionality of the researcher and representation of the youth through the research process. Finally, we reflect on the possibilities and limitations created by this space during the development of the research project. Specifically, we consider the role of this community space in shaping the research process, and demonstrate the importance of this concern when researching with queer and trans* youth. We conclude by discussing what this case study offers researchers interested in working with queer and trans* adolescents in community organizations.

Where Are Queer and Trans* Youth?
A Gap in Geographic Knowledge Production

Over the past 20 years, research in social and critical geography has demonstrated that social 'difference' is centrally shaped by and reflected in space. Within this framework, geographers of sexualities and queer geographers have worked to understand how cis-, homo- and heteronormativities produce spatial exclusions based on gender and sexuality, and the specific spatial experiences of LGBTQ populations in a wide array of spaces (Browne et al, 2007; Oswin, 2013). Geographers studying children and youth have adopted similar approaches, demonstrating the ways in which spaces are shaped by ageism, and highlighting the multiple specificities of young people's geographies (Hopkins & Pain, 2007; Evans, 2008; Holt, 2011). However, the intersections between these two very well-established subdisciplines have very rarely been explored (Valentine, 2008). Geographers of sexualities have been slow to engage with ideas emerging from youth geographies, and the rapidly expanding literature on children's and youth geographies has rarely focused on adolescents (Valentine, 2003; Weller, 2006; Evans, 2008). Moreover, the literature has almost completely neglected to consider youth's sexualities or genders (see Thomas, 2004). This

gap is notable when we consider that these subdisciplines use research frameworks that should draw attention to young people's sexual and gender experiences (Valentine, 2008). For example, despite the adoption of an intersectional approach in these vibrant subdisciplines (Hopkins & Pain, 2007; Brown, 2012), few studies explore axes between young age and gender and sexuality. Moreover, central concepts in youth geographies, such as the transition to adulthood (McNamee et al, 2003; Valentine, 2003; Hopkins & Pain, 2007), could be greatly enriched by considering the role played by gender and sexuality as aspects of such spatial processes.

At the intersection between these subdisciplines lie a few case studies that provide important starting points for geographers of LGBTQ youth. Valentine, Skelton and Butler published the first geographic research articles on this subject, investigating how young lesbians and gays experienced a range of spaces, including clubs, bars and social spaces, in the United Kingdom (see Valentine et al, 2001, 2003; Valentine & Skelton, 2003). A few years later, Gorman-Murray (2008) published research on the spatialities surrounding the experience of lesbian and gay youth coming out in supportive homes in Australia. However, the research agenda represented by these articles has not been further advanced until recently, with the publication of a cluster of articles on LGBTQ youth geographies. These include Schroeder's (2012) research on the spatialities of LGBT youth support groups in Toledo, Ohio; Rodó-de-Zárate's (2013) research on young lesbians and their experiences of everyday life spaces in Manresa, Spain; and Downing's (2013) investigation of how non-heterosexual youth use the space of the Internet to construct socio-sexual identities.

The objectives and spaces in these case studies are diverse, but one commonality is the way in which 'youth' is defined: with the exception of Schroeder (2012), these studies conceptualize youth as young adulthood, raising the issues of defining 'youth' across space, time and culture (Valentine, 2003). Herein lie some of the methodological limitations of the existing literature for the study of adolescents. Gorman-Murray (2008) examines the coming-out process through published autobiographical narratives written by adults that recall the experiences of their youth across many decades. Other research has involved direct interviews with the youth, but the range in their ages was more clearly young adulthood, starting with the age of consent at 16 and ranging into the twenties. Rodó-de-Zárate (2013) conducted interviews with young people between the ages of 16 and 29, including 7 young lesbians, 2 of whom were in their teens. The samples in the United Kingdom research range from 16 to 25 years (Valentine et al, 2003; Valentine & Skelton, 2003; Downing, 2013), although Valentine and Skelton (2003) also included an older group who recalled their youth experiences and Downing (2013) included interviews with adult youth workers.

The absence of adolescents in this literature suggests that there are challenges for geographers wanting to conduct research with younger queer and, especially, trans* people (see Valentine et al, 2001). The use of adult recollections and interpretations of 'youth' and the minimum age limit of 16 for direct interviews suggest that one major hurdle in researching with queer youth is gaining access to this younger population. As many youth geographers have argued, working with children and young people generally raises important issues regarding the relationship between the researcher and the participants (Pain & Francis, 2003; Skelton, 2008; Hopkins, 2010). At the most basic level, moral concerns could be raised regarding the power dynamic between the adult researcher and the 'under-age' participants, especially when the subject of the research is sexuality. For example, stereotypes about 'predatory' LGBTQ adults interested in 'converting' innocent 'not-yet-sexual' adolescents may underlie concerns about the project raised by people and institutions surrounding the project, such as schools and parents (Valentine et al, 2001).

On a practical level, a significant concern is ethical, in terms of who can give informed consent for the participation of minors in the research project (Skelton, 2008). Since queer and trans* youth are often perceived as 'vulnerable', gaining access to this population can be especially challenging (Valentine et al, 2001). As Talburt (2004, pp. 17-18) has argued: 'Historically, queer youth, who dwell in two devalued positions relative to the binary categories of homosexual/heterosexual and adult/youth (not to mention other hierarchies of race and gender), have been unthinkable except in pathologizing terms'. This perception informs the ways in which research ethics boards and other institutional gatekeepers frame this population. Viewed as 'vulnerable', gaining ethical consent to conduct research with this population requires careful consideration of the risks of participation. For example, important risks can be created for youth who are not 'out', if parental/guardian consent is required. Not only does this mean that some will be excluded from participating, but it also means that some may be put in a position of 'outing'

themselves when parents are unsupportive. In this context, participation in the research could compromise the safety of the participants and potentially expose them to rejection or even domestic violence (Mallon, 2000; Valentine et al, 2001, 2003). At the same time, concerns about their capacity to consent can limit the benefits created by research for this population, shutting out opportunities for queer and trans* youth to represent themselves in research. Without the requirement of parental consent, ethical approval may not be granted, therefore research cannot be conducted with this population until they arrive at the age of consent, which would ultimately mean they are no longer adolescents.

Beyond access, a second major concern in researching with queer and trans* youth is the issue of representation (Driver, 2008). While this population faces very real spatial exclusions and risks, it is equally important to avoid research frameworks that overstate their vulnerability (Talburt, 2004, 2006; Driver, 2008; Marshall, 2010). As Marshall (2010) points out, research frameworks that depict queer youth as victims remove their agency as individuals who are capable of changing their circumstances. In the face of this discourse, many researchers have stressed the opposite, focusing on their resilience as 'well-adjusted, out and proud gay youth' (Talburt, 2004, p. 18). Cultural studies projects that focus on self-representation (in which participants determine how their own experience is represented) have been seen as a way out of the victim/hero binary. For example, Driver's (2008) edited collection on queer youth culture seeks to give validation to the self-representational practices of queer youth engaging in cultural production (websites, zines, performances, music). This focus on self-representation enables researchers to develop a methodology that not only recognizes the participants' agency, but also creates the opportunity for them to represent their own experiences. At the same time, participatory methods bring their own challenges: they can be time-consuming and require high levels of commitment on the part of the young participants. Furthermore, research based on these methods can also be difficult to direct towards disciplinary objectives and, ultimately, challenging to translate into the academic realm (Pain & Francis, 2003; Pain, 2004; Hopkins, 2010).

Finally, at the centre of all of these dynamics also lies the significance of the actual research space when working with youth (see Barker & Weller, 2003; Anderson & Jones, 2009). Exploring the space that research makes, Barker and Weller (2003) have argued that the specific power relations between adult researchers and children require close attention. Their article explores three different aspects of the spatiality of their research relations: the type of space in which the research is conducted; the representations of space in the research process; and the interpretation of these representations of space by the researchers in spaces of dissemination. As they argue, close attention to the power dynamics embedded in the space where research is conducted is important when working with youth: schools are highly controlled by adults and homes are sites of familial power relations. Given that both the school and the family home can be significant sites of tensions for queer and trans* youth (Valentine et al, 2001), considering the dynamics surrounding the spaces of research is especially important. Out-of-school LGBTQ community support spaces might offer an alternative in terms of parental control and peer exposure. However, such spaces present challenges of their own. We turn now to our case study of one such site in Montreal to explore the possibilities and challenges created by conducting research with queer and trans* youth in out-of-school LGBTQ community youth support spaces.

Researching Queer and Trans* Youth within an Institutional Framework

The research project we describe here was developed as Julia's Master's thesis under Julie's supervision. As a young (24-year-old) queer-identified woman involved in youth work in Montreal, Julia's goal was to integrate her personal experiences into a research project that would broadly consider how queer and trans* youth, aged 14-18, find, define and create space for themselves in the city. Since she had pre-existing connections to local LGBTQ community youth groups as an employee and volunteer with related organizations in the city, she was already familiar to staff members and volunteers of P10. In addition to providing a starting point for her research, this background facilitated contact with this difficult-to-access population. Based on some of the gaps in the existing geographic research and concerns about spatial exclusions experienced by queer and trans* youth, Julia set out to develop a collaborative research project that would support the youth

and prioritize their self-representations. As geographer Cahill (2007a, p. 297) has argued: 'while youth research is a burgeoning field, there is still not enough research on young people's everyday lives from a youth perspective'. This consideration was seen as especially important with regard to researching with queer and trans* youth. As Talburt (2006, p. 93) suggests: 'in a world in which queerness is changing, adults and researchers concerned with sexuality, society, and youth may have something to learn from queer youth rather than about them'. So, in an effort to develop a research project that would make space for queer and trans* youth, the project began by drawing on tools proposed by participatory action research (Pain, 2004; Cahill, 2007a, b; Kindon et al, 2007; Pain & Kindon, 2007). However, for a variety of interrelated methodological reasons outlined below, the research process led to a shift away from this framework and the project developed into a critical ethnographic case study.

Indeed, the research process was dynamic and presented many challenges. Some institutional hurdles were introduced even before the research started. In 2010, Julia initiated the research project for her undergraduate Honours thesis, but the university's ethics board did not grant approval. The board was concerned about informed consent due to the status of the population as minors. Moreover, the application process revealed that the board identified queer and trans* youth as extremely vulnerable, even conflating the category with 'street youth'. For these reasons, Julia reoriented her Honours thesis to study the institutional discourses surrounding queer and trans* youth in schools (de Montigny, 2011). When applying for ethical approval for her Master's thesis research in 2012, two important changes were made to the application. Firstly, Julia proposed that this new project would be a community-based participatory project which would involve close work with P10, assuring the participants' safety and well-being. Secondly, the ethics board suggested the application of Article 21 of the Quebec Civil Code, which grants minors over 14 years of age the right to autonomous consent for research approved by a competent research ethics committee where the research involves only minimal risk.[3] On this basis, ethical approval was granted. The goal of her new project was to consider the social and spatial boundaries that queer and trans* youth negotiate as part of their everyday lived experiences. The premise of her graduate research was that while they face significant spatial exclusions in everyday environments, queer and trans* youth find ways to negotiate these exclusions, and to participate in and create meaningful places for themselves (de Montigny, 2013).

The next step in the research was to gain approval for the project from P10 itself. This process took place over many months and involved ongoing communication and feedback with staff, board members, volunteers and participants. This contributed to the significant reshaping of the methodology of the research project. Through these meetings and conversations, it became clear that the organization's perception of research involved traditional qualitative methods. The project, therefore, began with a focus group, which was used to highlight the primary concerns of the youth. This was followed by individual semi-structured interviews. While it can be argued that these methods might at least be considered 'youth-friendly' (Hopkins, 2010), because the participants can self-identify and describe their experiences in their own words, this meant a shift away from a participatory action research methodology. Indeed, all of the interview questions were presented to the staff and board, who reviewed them for relevance, language and appropriateness. However, it was ultimately Julia, not the participants, who guided the direction of the research.

Julia also proposed an additional component of the research project, which had the potential to be participatory. The board was enthusiastic when she suggested that participants could develop video representations of their experiences. She then invited an organization that offers digital literacy workshops to community organizations to work with P10's participants. This group came to the P10 drop-in for several weeks in the fall and trained the youth on video production. This component of the research was initially imagined as an opportunity for the participants to elaborate on their perceptions of safety and space, inclusion and exclusion, and possibly create a visual geography of their lives. However, the project soon took on a life of its own and, in the end, the youth who had participated produced videos on topics that were not in any way related to the research project. As time passed, it became apparent that the possibility of initiating a truly participatory research project was not feasible within this framework. The focus then shifted to Julia's field observations and the qualitative interviews and focus group as components of a critical ethnography.

Having accepted that the project would be an ethnographic account, but with the spirit of participation in mind, Julia worked to break down the barriers between the researcher and the participants, and to increase participation in every stage of the research process. Firstly, in order to provide space for those youth who might not be comfortable in other environments, the board and the staff recommended that the interviews take place during P10's Thursday-evening drop-in. Julia regularly attended and participated in P10's drop-ins for a period of six months, during which time she interviewed over 20 youth who embodied a wide variety of gender and sexual identities. Embedding herself in this space, she built trust with the participants and created her sample by presenting the interviews as part of the evening's drop-in activities. Although, at 24, she was older than her sample population, she was essentially a peer in this context, as P10 provides support for youth between 14 and 25 years of age. In addition to providing the opportunity to make observations as an 'insider', involvement in regular activities also gave the participants the chance to get to know her before participating in an interview, and a context in which the researcher and the participants came to know one another as individuals. Secondly, throughout the research, Julia adopted a reflexive approach to the observations she made in the space, the themes that developed in the initial focus group, and the individual interviews. Drawing on Elwood and Martin's (2000) discussion of the 'micro-geographies' produced during qualitative research, she built her representation of the research process around the spaces that the youth identified as significant to their experiences. This approach provided, as participatory researcher Hunter (2009, p. 141) describes, 'a contextual map of issues underlying broad events of cultural, economic, social, and political significance' for young queer and trans* people. Finally, although the participants were not involved in the analysis of the findings, they were included in the process of determining how they were individually represented. Each participant was contacted through email to confirm the details, quality and accuracy of how they were represented, as well as verifying that the pseudonyms and pronouns that they had chosen were still relevant before the final thesis was submitted.

In addition to contributing to queer and youth geographies through academic channels, the findings of the research were extended on through Julia's continued community engagement. A few months after Julia's thesis was completed, she presented her findings during P10's drop-in. Additionally, during the research process, Julia joined the board of the Montreal Youth Coalition against Homophobia (MYCAH), of which P10 is a member. The MYCAH connects community organizations that work with LGBTQ youth to 'help create safe environments that support all youth, no matter what their sexual orientation may be, in an inclusive society that is open to differences and to the diversity of sexual orientations' (Montreal Youth Coalition against Homophobia, 2013). In 2013, members of the MYCAH opened a safe space for LGBTQ youth, where P10 relocated to offer its services. Julia also stayed in close contact with staff members about the research and contributed to other P10 projects. For example, she worked on an evaluation component of a peer-support project that P10 organized, was involved in a planning committee for P10's summer events, and volunteered at its summer camp. This continued participation was a way to remain connected to the participants, give back to the communities who had participated in the research, and contribute insights from the research's findings.

Reflections on Researching in a Queer and Trans* Youth Community Space

As Julia's account of the research project at P10 suggests, the choice of the space in which to conduct the research played an important role in the research process. When initially framing the project, P10 was seen simply as a solution to the problem of access and, due to its format, as a potential site for developing a participatory research project with queer and trans* youth. In short, we did not consider the role played by the space itself in shaping and framing the research process. As Schroeder's (2012) study makes clear, out-of-school LGBTQ youth groups such as P10 are not 'neutral' spaces. As spaces of LGBTQ community support for queer and trans* youth, such sites have a variety of specific characteristics that distinguish them from other support and community spaces. In this section, we examine P10 as a space of research and the micro-geographies surrounding the process described above (see Elwood & Martin, 2000; Barker & Weller, 2003; Sin, 2003; Anderson & Jones, 2009). We elaborate on the specific characteristics of out-of-school LGBTQ youth groups and examine the limitations and possibilities that such sites can create for

research. Drawing on Rooke (2010), we also consider the specificity of conducting research with queer and trans⋆ youth in a space that they perceive as non-normative and inclusive – a space that differs significantly from most of their everyday experiences.

As Schroeder's (2012) comparison of various types of LGBTQ youth groups demonstrates, out-of-school LGBTQ youth groups such as P10 have particular characteristics. Most of these groups are created by adults who seek to improve the conditions of youth by providing them with a safe and supportive space for identity formation. In contrast with school-based groups, most out-of-school groups are specifically a product of the LGBTQ social service movement (Lepischak, 2004). Therefore, they are primarily initiated and managed by LGBTQ adults who, in turn, determine the needs of youth based on their own youth experiences (Schroeder, 2012). Out-of-school groups also differ in terms of their context: while school-based groups provide LGBTQ youth with a separate space within their everyday environments, out-of-school groups are usually located outside of these and within LGBTQ community spaces (Rasmussen et al, 2004). As Schroeder (2012) shows, this creates the conditions for particular LGBTQ versions of adultism, whereby volunteers and activists negotiate access to space and financial support in ways that can reinforce normative interpretations of LGBTQ youth as passive victims in need of protection from homophobia, without advancing a broader critique of the prevalence of heterosexism (see Halberstam, 2005). Despite some of the institutional normativities that this situation creates, in practice, many such organizations strive to be youth-centred and to support youth agency (Lepischak, 2004). For example, they may emphasize youth-directed activities and peer-to-peer support, or de-emphasize structured activities. Finally, while these youth create and find other places of support such as school groups and the Internet, out-of-school youth groups are unique in that they involve interaction with LGBTQ peers and integration into local LGBTQ communities. It is here that many youth have some of their first LGBTQ peer relationships and participate in LGBTQ community activities, such as pride.

As a space of research, the institutional context of P10 created both limitations and opportunities. As the story of the research project has demonstrated, some important limitations were created by institutional gatekeeping and adultism – a concern that has been highlighted by other youth geographers (Barker & Weller, 2003; Anderson & Jones, 2009). For example, in their investigation of the space that research makes, Barker and Weller (2003, p. 223) found that, despite their efforts to 'place children at the centre of research', their research had largely empowered other adults who controlled the spaces where the research was conducted. The empowerment of other adults and validation of their specific concerns in the research process was part of the process of researching at P10: in order to conduct the research, the mostly adult board members and staff had to approve the project. Moreover, Julia and the adults at P10 determined the project's methodology. Considering the casual level of participation (at a once-a-week drop-in) in the space, and in light of the commitment that such projects require, the adults agreed on a more researcher-directed format, including focus groups and interviews. Therefore, adultist and institutional interests were served by redirecting the research methodology, possibly at the expense of youth agency and self-representation in the research process.

At the same time, as a space of research, P10 created some specific opportunities that might not have been possible in another research space. The most important was the institutional framework that it provided, which made it possible for queer and trans⋆ adolescents to be participants in research about them. Unlike a family home or a school, this space was free of some of the many power dynamics that shape the everyday spaces they inhabit. Moreover, the institutional framework legitimized and provided a context for the research in a space that was shaped by the presence of older queer and trans⋆ people as volunteers and workers. With ethical approval for the research project at P10, this space also created the conditions in which minors could give informed consent for their participation in the research project without parental approval. In this sense, conducting research at P10 involved accepting certain LGBTQ institutional dynamics but avoided reinforcing familial or educational power relations that could have significant implications for those youth whose families, guardians, teachers or peers might not know about their identities and may not have approved of their participation in the research. The project was also integrated into a space where intergenerational interaction and support for queer and trans⋆ youth was a central aspect of the dynamic of the space. This made it possible for an adult researcher to participate in the space and build rapport with the youth. Ultimately, the research

was a compromise between institutional restrictions on the methodology and the creation of an opportunity for the youth to represent themselves within a more traditional qualitative interviewing format.

The research was also shaped by the ways in which the participants saw the space where the research was conducted. While the participants had some suggestions for how P10 could be improved, they described this space as a place of support, peer interaction and self-recognition. One interviewee described why she came to P10 after her friend told her about how it was a space for young queer and trans* people to connect: 'that's cool because I don't have gay friends … it's different to sit down and talk with other people to see I'm so – I'm not alone' (Lesbian, female, 16 years old). They also valued its diversity, its lack of normativity and, at the same time, the sense of belonging that they found in this space. Since it is an LGBTQ space in a large North American multicultural and multilingual city, the youth attending P10's drop-in are diverse in their gender, sexuality, race, ability, language and attire. This environment of difference was generally felt to be very welcoming by the participants. Another of the interviewees described the atmosphere as follows:

> It feels like a place where people come and, like, people who are lesbian, gay or bisexual or, like what I feel like, that when they come here they feel, like, accepted … It's kind of like a place where they feel like they belong. (Pansexual, female, 17 years old)

In this space, differences were accepted in a number of ways – for example, through the affirmative, non-judgemental language adopted by the participants, staff members and volunteers alike, and sometimes through the explicit ground rules that were set out during the evening's activities. Another participant described how P10's welcoming environment felt different from other everyday spaces. He explained that participants who came to the drop-in 'are just looking to get away from the world around us, if you want; the world where it's not always safe to be who you are. And then we come here and we get to be who we are' (Undecided, gender fluid, male, 17 years old). Perceived as a non-normative space of belonging and acceptance of difference that provided safety and lay somewhere outside the hetero- and cis-normativities that the youth experienced elsewhere, P10 was more than a generic community space in which to conduct research.

As a site for research on spatial experience, P10 served as a site of recognition, safety and support that contrasted with those in which queer and trans* youth feel invisible and excluded. We suggest, therefore, that conducting research within this space created another space – a space of self-recognition through which to talk about other spaces, either with peers during a focus group or individually during an interview with Julia. In this important way, P10 served as a relational space – a space through which the normativities of other spaces experienced by the participants were evaluated by comparison. This speaks to the productive aspect of the research process and its role in creating space. Rooke's (2010) analysis of the space created for trans youth by the Sci:dentity Project, for example, draws attention to the ways in which a participatory pedagogical project created a space of self-recognition that lay beyond the gendered normativities that shaped everyday experiences of space. She argues that the project provided a 'temporary space in which trans youth could see themselves and the possibility of creating a space for themselves in the world, as *trans*' (Rooke, 2010, p. 665). By creating a place of self-recognition, the trans youth who participated had the opportunity to actualize their self-understanding in this space and then return to the 'real world' on new terms. While the research at P10 was much less participatory and much more temporary, these arguments about self-recognition and relational spaces are relevant. The youth who come to P10 engage in a process whereby P10 is positioned as a space of self-recognition: here they can periodically explore who they are in relation to adult LGBTQ identities and the identities of their LGBTQ peers. By participating in a research project that focused on their experiences of P10 in relation to other spaces, they had the opportunity to compare and contrast their experiences from a place of self-recognition. While we cannot evaluate the impact of this aspect on the research directly, it stands out as an important consideration for future projects that research the geographies of queer and trans* youth.

Conclusion

The objective of this article has been to contribute to the emerging literature on LGBTQ youth in geography by reflecting on the methodological challenges that working with this population involves. We began by reviewing the existing literature on LGBTQ youth geographies and examining its methodological limitations. Highlighting the lack of direct research with LGBTQ adolescents within the discipline, we examined issues of access, representation and space. We then provided an account of Julia's experience conducting research with queer and trans⋆ youth aged between 14 and 18 at a Montreal-based community support organization called Project 10. This account was used to demonstrate the methodological complexity of working within multiple institutional frameworks to access, work with and represent the perspectives of queer and trans⋆ youth in geographic research. Finally, we reflected on the role of 'space' in the research process, arguing that while the institutional context in which the research was conducted posed some challenges, the research space was significant in terms of providing opportunities for participation and representation for an understudied, but important population within geographies of sexuality and gender and geographies of young age.

Beyond the review of this specific case study, this article offers suggestions for extending the existing literature on queer and trans⋆ youth in geography. Firstly, based on this limited experience, we stress the importance of creating opportunities for the representation of this population in geographic research. While geographers working with queer and trans⋆ youth will face challenges regarding informed consent, access, agency and representation, these methodological challenges need not be reasons to neglect the opportunity to represent their experiences. Secondly, we suggest that while self-representational methods may provide a solution to the victim/hero binary in the discourses surrounding queer and trans⋆ youth, when conducting community-based research, these methods may be constrained by institutional and site-specific considerations. Indeed, one of the most important outcomes of this research is our reflection on how important it is to consider the level of commitment and engagement that will be required when proposing a participatory project to a community organization. Where those levels of commitment are too onerous and do not necessarily benefit the participants, critical and engaged community-based research can be a suitable alternative to self-representational or more participatory methodologies. Finally, when conducting community-based research with queer and trans⋆ youth, it is worth considering the space of the research in the analysis, including institutional and other power relations surrounding the project, the relational construction of the space of research to other spaces, and the productive impact created by the space of the research project. In this case, our reflections on a critical geographic research project in an out-of-school LGBTQ youth community space missed the opportunity to situate the space in relation to other community spaces like it, or to consider the productive role that the research created. However, our discussion of the dynamics surrounding the research space highlights the potential for further inquiry into the spatial processes when researching with queer and trans⋆ youth in a community setting.

Notes

[1] In an effort to present the diversity of identities that can be embodied by trans⋆ people the term 'trans' is accompanied by an asterisk throughout this article. The use of the asterisk has been suggested by trans⋆ activists and community organizations who use it to emphasize how varied trans⋆ identities can be.

[2] See the Project 10 website at: http://www.p10.qc.ca

[3] Civil Code of Québec, Statutes of Québec (1991) Chapter 64, Article 21.

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