

Positioning and subjectivation in research interviews: why bother talking to a researcher?

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Abstract

Qualitative research interviews constitute specific contexts for creating and telling stories. The present paper illuminates the significance of the research interview on the subjectivation of participants who are usually rendered problematic or victimised – in this case, young people who live in residential care provided by Child Protection Services. It explores how the interview situation offers possible subject positions for the interviewees that contradict with how they are positioned in their daily lives. In contrast to the conversations these young people often engage in with professionals, the research interview may position them as competent actors. It may also allow for a greater degree of complexity, ambiguity and ambivalence. When the aim is not necessarily to acquire an understanding of how things ‘really are’, or to describe the participants in categorical ways, the variety and diversity of life may be speakable. This in turn allows for the telling of new narratives, the prospect of other subjectivities and the creation of new developmental possibilities.

Introduction

This paper has its origins in experiences acquired in interviewing young people living in residential care provided by Child Protection Services. The participants were taking part in a research project seeking to learn about how these young boys and girls give personal accounts of their lives and the situation they were placed in. Furthermore, the project aimed to explore how we can understand developmental moves in relation to such personal accounts. When first planning the interviews with young people living in residential homes, my expectation was that these boys and girls were weary of being questioned and interviewed by adults. These expectations drew from my own work experiences with child welfare clients as well as similar experiences reported by other researchers (Miller and Rollnick 2013). The participants who took part in the study had lengthy histories with the child protection services and some had spent years living in residential care units and foster homes. They were used to talking to all kinds of professionals: social workers in the institutions, psychologists and other professionals from various child welfare agencies. As one boy stated, “I have had lots of

psychologists, why should I talk to them?” My question was: Why would they bother to talk to a researcher?

However once the project began and I was actually meeting these young people, my experiences were surprising, and I have come to know that other researchers have had similar experiences. The young people who took part in the study were more than willing to share their stories with me about what had happened in the past, in their everyday lives and for some, of their plans and hopes and fears about the future. They were eager to be interviewed and keen to know when the next interview was going to take place. With the sole exception of one boy who refused to take part in the last interview for reasons I do not know, and one girl who was indisposed, they all signed up for further interviews. Moreover, all appointments were kept! That is no matter of course for many of these young people.

As my research progressed, I was constantly puzzled by one question. Why were these young people so eager to take part in the interviews and share their experiences with me, when they otherwise often seemed to be quite reluctant to engage in other kinds of conversations with professionals? One girl stated that taking part in the research interview was more beneficial than talking to psychologists. Another girl talked repeatedly about how the child protection services had failed to understand and meet her needs and that the placement was a waste of time for her. Still she asked if we could arrange for the third interview, which was scheduled a year ahead, already the following week after the second. Aiming to understand this I have applied several different theoretical perspectives and also examined in some detail the interviewees’ contexts of living as well as the characteristics of the research interview. My argument is that the research interview provides the participants with possibilities of being in the world usually not present in their daily lives and that these alternative ways of being were experienced by them as more liveable (Phoenix 2007). One implication of this is that experiences drawn from these research interviews may inform and guide other kinds of professional talks with children and adolescents in beneficial ways.

In the following, I present some considerations of what may take place in various professional talks with young people placed in residential care. I will use two different theoretical approaches in analysing what happens during the interaction that takes place. The first of these draws from a therapeutic framing influenced by psychoanalytic theory as represented by Kohut, while the second makes use of the concepts of subjectivation and positioning as they are found within poststructuralist theory. Using these two approaches,

illuminates how two quite different theoretical positions provide quite different, though not mutually excluding, answer to questions of young people's engagement in situations of social interaction and suggests ways of understanding that may broaden the way we recognize and interact.

However, before attending to these two understandings, it may be fruitful to describe in brief the research project where these interviews took place. This will also include a general description of the young people in question as well as the role of residential care in their lives.

A study of young people in residential care

The research interviews were part of a study of placements in out-of-home care focused on learning how young people in residential care experience their lives and account for their situations in care. With the exception of the two earlier noted, twelve young persons, nine girls and three boys, were interviewed three times over a period of fifteen months. The first interview was conducted as a life mode interview. Originally this kind of interview was designed to gain knowledge about daily life in families with small children (Haavind 1987, Andenæs 1991), but it has since been applied in other settings. It has a temporal focus and often the previous day is chosen as the time frame to be explored. The interview's overall structure is mainly set by the interviewer, but in practice the interview is largely interviewee-driven.

The life mode interview is well-suited for research exploring how a person's daily life is organised, experienced and interpreted. The interview focuses on the concrete events occurring during a day, how the interviewee experiences these events and how she/he understands and makes sense of what has happened. Typically, a day will consist of routine events as well as of less common or infrequent events. By inquiring how and why things usually happen, the interview may shed light on what often remains unspoken. According to Bruner (1990), we create stories to explain anything that departs from ordinary events or occurrences. This could imply that knowledge of common events is less accessible. Nevertheless, such events constitute a great part of daily life and are just as loaded with cultural meanings as uncommon events.

The main aim of conducting the life mode interview with young people in care was to explore cultural practices that they engaged in, the meaning they gave to such practices and

how they came to understand themselves and the possibilities they held. This interview format was supplemented with pre-set themes in order to ensure that topics relevant to the research questions were covered. These included reasons for placements, relationships to family and friends, and ideas about the future. Usually, these themes were introduced by the interviewees themselves and often all I had to do was to ask follow-up questions. In some instances, however, these themes were introduced by me.

The second and third interviews were designed to revisit themes and narratives that had been introduced in the previous sessions. Generally the second interview took place three months after the first while the third interview took place one year after the second one. Again, time was an organising principle, but in these interviews, the time frame was greatly extended and covered the period since the last interview. This extension made the interviews even more open for the participants to select their stories, since their daily conduct no longer functioned as the organising structure.

The context of living

It may help to understand what happened during the interviews to take a closer look at the broader context in which they took place. In Norway, young people living in out-of-home care are placed there because of major concerns about their future development. In general, this concern is due to *either* previous circumstances in their lives, such as inadequate care, abuse or mistreatment, *or* to the youth's own behaviour. In the latter case, this relates to serious behavioral problems, such as severe or repeated criminal conduct, lasting drug abuse or retreatment from care (the Child Welfare Act of 1992). One major consequence of the rationale for placing young people in out-of-home care is that they are viewed as either victims or troublemakers (Jansen 2010). As youngsters grow older, their own conduct increasingly tends to become the grounds for placement (Falk 2006), making it more likely for them to be defined and understood as troublemakers.

Ideally, the placement is intended to serve as compensation or correction for securing a more positive development than might otherwise be likely for the youngster. At the same time, considerable research has shown that former child welfare clients fare much worse as young adults than the population in general (see e.g. Clausen and Kristofersen 2008, Vinnerljung & Sallsnäs 2008, Courtney & Dworsky 2006,). The gap is especially significant for those who have experienced placement in residential homes (Clausen and Kristofersen

2008, Helgeland 2010). This has led to some degree of treatment pessimism and reluctance to place young people in residential care. When some young people today are still being placed in residential homes, this is often understood to be a last resort underscoring the problematic and difficult aspects of in-care placements.

These and other problematic aspects of the lives of those in and after placement have considerable influence on how society at large comes to regard them. As Elaine Chase and her associates have noted:

[T]here is a risk that the poor track record of service provision begins to determine the lot of young people and makes it seem impossible that, having spent time in public care, they can actually achieve anything at all. By presenting young people in and leaving care solely as ‘victims’ of systems that fail them, we risk ignoring and undermining the role they themselves play in determining their own futures, and the resilience and resourcefulness that many process. (Chase et al. 2006: 2)

These and related factors work to creating a context for the research interviews where being a victim or a troublemaker is often part of the interpretative framework for understanding who these young people are. This particular context shapes a climate where there is a tendency to focus more on the problems these youngster appear to represent rather than on the resources they possess.

‘Why should I talk to professionals?’

To illustrate how a number of the interviewees related to the placements provided them as well as to professionals they were in contact with, I present here an excerpt from one interview with Kristian, a fifteen year old boy, who had been placed in residential care a few weeks prior to our first interview. He told of being presented with a choice of voluntarily moving to a residential home or being sent there forcibly, and that he had chosen the former. He also told of being bullied since kindergarten and that he eventually dropped out of school. He had, however, found friends through the internet and reported that ‘gaming’ had become an important activity for him during recent years. His experience with child welfare professionals goes back several years and he had this to say about the psychologists he encountered during this period:

K: I am not able to talk to psychologists... I have always sort of thought that... Often – many psychologists are... why should I want to tell them anything – I don’t even

know them. I don't know who they are... and I always felt better talking with friends, in a way. Still I have been forced to talk with psychologists ...

I: Mm. How many psychologists have you talked with?

K: Four.

I: Four?

K: Three-four... [] Something like that...

I: And you don't see any psychologist now?

K: No one – and I have not said very much to either of them.

I: OK. What happens then, when you go to the psychologist? Do you sit there without saying anything or have you – has it been, like you went once and... refused to continue, or...?

K: Mostly sitting without saying anything, and then I refuse to go.

I: Yes.

K: I am not able ...to talk to them – I can't sort of talk to them... ... To someone who sits and listens to me does not help ME, in a way... Not like – At least not when you don't – it is not – It is not personal for them... Why then should it be of help to ME personally... (Kristian's emphasis on the word ME)

There may be several reasons for Kristian's reluctance to talk to psychologists. He told, for example, of how it felt when he was forced to see them. Coercion, then, may play a key role in his reluctance. Even if talking to a psychologist or other professionals is presented as a way of offering help, the person in question may still understand this as an offer difficult to turn down. The way Kristian describes the choice he had faced in respect of moving to the residential home illuminates this lack of voluntariness. A research interview, in contrast, is characterized by voluntariness where interviewees have to give their informed consent and there are no sanctions if they should choose to reject an offer to take part or even withdraw at a later point.

Usefulness and gains are other aspects that may be central in understanding Kristian's adverse reaction to talking with psychologists. He is not denying that he might need help, but he does not see how speaking to psychologists could at all be helpful to him. The help they offer is simply not understood by him as something beneficial. He relates this to the fact that he is not known by the psychologists he has seen. This, of course, also characterizes first

encounters of interviewees with researchers. However, the significance of being a stranger varies with the purpose of a conversation and in the research interview gains bears a quite different meaning than in a clinical conversation. Far from being about making change in the lives of those meeting psychologists, gains in the research interview are related to something outside the lives of interviewees, yet dependent on their contributions.

Coercion and gains may, then, be central aspects of the reluctance by these youngsters to talk with professionals *and* their eagerness to participate in research interviews. However, there may be more to this and in the following section I will analyze the question posed initially from two different theoretical perspectives; First, from what we can call a therapeutic perspective and subsequently from a poststructuralist one incorporating the concepts of positioning and subjectivity. In so doing, a case will be made for going outside traditional psychological framings to find new ways providing greater insights into the challenges as well as the opportunities for action these young people face.

The therapeutic approach

As noted, young people in residential care are placed there because of concern about their further development. Many have experienced neglect and abuse and residential care is aimed at providing them with both care and treatment. Kristian's report that he has seen several psychologists can be understood as reflecting the belief that treatment would be beneficial to these young people. Conversations with other professionals, too, are often understood as ways of helping youngsters overcome earlier harmful experiences. In line with such therapeutic understandings, we can explore what happens in various conversation contexts by drawing on Heinz Kohut's insights about therapeutic practice.

Kohut (1984) described two phases in therapy: one for understanding and another for explaining. The first is characterized by the therapist listening and lending an ear to the client's stories without attempting to interpret things in a different way than that of the client. The therapist conveys she/he understands what the client is feeling and in so doing, the client will experience being heard and understood. In the latter phase, the therapist may contribute with alternative interpretations and understandings of the client's stories. Often, the therapist will alternate between these phases. However, Kohut calls attention to how - for some clients, or in some periods of the therapy - it seems crucial to remain exclusively in the first phase and this may be a long time. Sometimes, a client will simply be too traumatized to be able to

relate to other ways of seeing things and experience any intervention as unbearable. In reflecting on this, Kohut noted:

”The patient, as I finally grasped, insisted – and had a right to insist – that I learn to see things exclusively in *his* way and not at all in *my* way. And as we finally came to see – or rather as I finally came to see, since the patient had seen it all along – the content of all my various interpretations had been cognitively correct but incomplete in a decisive direction. [] What I had not seen, however, was that the patient had felt additionally traumatized by feeling that all these explanations on my part came only from the outside: that I did not fully feel what he felt, that I gave words but not real understanding, and that I thereby repeated the essential trauma of his early life.” (Kohut 1984:182)

Kohut describes how therapists, when they meet very ill patients, have to stay very close to the client’s stories. Sometimes several years are needed until therapists can begin challenging these stories and offer alternative interpretations. When one of the girls interviewed stated: “It is not easy being me”, she might have been expressing a need to be understood with respect to what it means and feels to be her, rather than a need to be challenged or even comforted.

If we use this perspective when trying to understand the participants’ engagement in the interviews, we may come to see that they were offered an opportunity to relate their experiences and express their interpretations of them without interruptions or attempts to adjust their ways of seeing things. These research interviews aimed at getting the interviewees accounts of their lives without the researcher trying to interrupt in any ways other than to facilitate further narration. The participants’ narratives were not challenged by questions that might have been perceived as threatening to their own interpretations and understandings, and this may have contributed to their openness and desire to talk. Following Kohut’s reasoning, this may have been exactly what they needed.

However, this implies that we understand these young people as traumatized and in need of treatment to overcome their problems, perhaps without them even acknowledging this themselves. Without denying that many of these young people face severe difficulties in their lives, it is clear that viewing them solely as victims in need of treatment can easily limit our understanding of what these boys and girls are up to as well as what is happening in the interviews. Turning toward the poststructuralist notions of positioning and subjectivation will allow us to broaden our understanding of both the participants and the possibilities provided by the research interview format.

Positioning and subjectivation

Subject positions can be understood as possible or impossible ways of being (Phoenix 2007) that are offered and taken on by subjects in various situations. This understanding focuses on the context of being as well as on the idea that our ways of thinking and feeling about ourselves shifts according to the situations we find ourselves in and the people we relate to there. In emphasising the fluctuating natures of these processes, Davies and Harré state that

Persons as speakers acquire beliefs about themselves that do not necessarily form a unified coherent whole. They shift from one to another way of thinking about themselves as the discourse shifts and as their positions within varying storylines are taken up. Each of these possible selves can be internally contradictory or contradictory with other possible selves located in different story lines (1990: 58-59).

Closely related to notions of positioning is subjectivity which is understood as the experiences of oneself that evolve through discursive practices and positioning in multiple situations. The term subjectivation refers to those processes through which the subject comes into being within particular discursive practices (Staunæs 2005). Davis and Harré further argue that the notion of positioning comprises the multiplicity and discontinuity of processes of subjectivation (1990). Seen from this perspective, the research interview and the therapeutic conversation can be considered to be certain forms of discursive practices involving both positioning and subjectivation offering those being interviewed opportunities for different ways of being.

Taking this approach makes possible a view of the research interview as a social situation – similar to other social situations – offering certain subject positions for the participants. As found in an earlier study, the two subject positions most often available to young people in residential care are *either* the troublesome youth in need of guidance and correction *or* the victimised child in need of proper care and treatment (Jansen 2010). It is this traditional pair of subject positions rendering youngsters either inferior or problematic. Drawing on attachment theory, it is not uncommon to view young people in residential care as so damaged that they have problems or are incapable of engaging in close relationships. This theoretical understanding often serves as the rationale for viewing them as needing help or treatment. One major consequence of this kind of framing is that situations involving interactions between these young people and adults often become sites for measurements, assessments, evaluations and treatment.

The research interview, in contrast, may position these young people as persons who are worthy of listening to, not as a means of correcting or motivating them, but because they have experiences that are valuable for scientific research. What also characterizes the research interview is that the interviewee's statements and narratives are not subject to evaluation. Such statements and narratives are not necessarily taken at face value, but instead of evaluating their validity, the researcher can focus on how the lives of the interviewees are presented in precisely this context, and why they choose to communicate themselves in the ways they do.

In the present study, the focus was directed at the young people's narrative engagement, and questions like, "what is the interviewee trying to accomplish by telling this story?" became much more fruitful than any question about the story's truthfulness, or how well the story corresponded with actual events. This fits together with the central ideas of discourse analysis not specifically focusing on talk as representations but instead asking questions about "why this utterance here?" (Wetherell 1998) as well as framing speech as acts (Austin 1975). This non-evaluative quality of the interviews, and the researcher's interest in understanding the interviewee's experiences and narratives - or the focus on seeing "things exclusively in *his* way and not at all in *my* way" to put it in Kohut's words - has the potential for framing certain kind of questions providing for greater openness and curiosity.

This may provide for subject positions experienced as being more livable, in contrast to how the interviewees speak of being positioned as problematic in their daily life. Margaret Wetherell (1998) uses the term "troubled subject positions" to illuminate how some people come to experience being positioned in situations of social interaction as someone they feel uncomfortable being or uneasy with. Experience from the research interviews indicates that these situations provide positions to the interviewees enhancing their feelings of competency and agency most often not available to them in their everyday lives in care. This assumption is further reinforced by the willingness and indeed eagerness of the interviewees to participate in the interviews. This can be interpreted as resulting from their experiences of being allowed to be positioned as well as positioning themselves in the interview situation as being less troubled than otherwise in their lives.

Positioning of the participants in interviews

Positioning happens in relation both to prevailing discourses *and* to other people involved. It is about context and relations. Thus far, we have directed attention to the positioning of the interviewee, which is traditionally the main focus of interview studies. However, the interviewer is equally a participant in this context and she/he is also offered subject positions. When first telling colleagues about doing interviews with young people placed in residential care, most responded that it must be difficult to relate to what the interviewees disclosed. I reckoned that this assumption by my colleagues drew from their own experience as clinicians where they often felt emotionally overwhelmed in working with youngsters in care having troubled and often traumatic pasts. There were certainly times, too, when listening to the tales told by these young people that I felt the burden of the problems and traumas they had experienced. Some of them described extremely dramatic and painful events and situations in their childhoods nearly impossible for me to comprehend. Yet most of the time, I was most concerned with trying to understand their narratives. The narratives have often affected or disturbed me more when reading them afterwards, when I no longer sit face-to-face with the young person in question, and can see and hear the spirit and defiance and courage they demonstrated when they told their stories. Because what has struck me most is how they struggle and strive and then stumble and fall flat on their faces but still continue to struggle, some of them, admittedly, with more adaptive strategies than others.

I focus on this because it may shed light on what happens in the interview where the interviewee is not the only one who is positioned. Interviewers, too, as well as therapists, are also provided with and assume various subject positions. While the former are positioned as persons seeking knowledge, the latter are positioned as persons intending to help. While the therapist has a responsibility to help, the researcher from the outset is exempted from such a task, and this exemption may allow for a greater focus on the young person's resources and capacities, rather than on the problematic aspects of her/his life. This, of course, impacts greatly on how the interviewee is positioned and comprehends the interview situation.

A claim not to finalise the interviewees

The epistemological and methodological choices a researcher makes have ethical implications. There is always a risk for research to contribute to the stereotyping and pathologisation of individuals and groups. Salway and her associates (2011) contend that social research addressing ethnicity is in danger of producing biased understandings and

thereby doing more harm than good. This claim which may represent a clear parallel to research with young people in care is also supported by Gunaratnam (2003),

Employing a poststructuralist perspective involves seeing the research interview not only as a site where information is exchanged, but as a site for *social interaction*. Arthur Frank promotes research that is based on a dialogical approach, and writes, “research requires hearing participant’s stories not as surrogate observations of their lives outside the interview but as acts of engagement with researchers” (Frank 2005:968). Drawing on the writings of Bakhtin, he views this as an alternative to a monologue approach that results in finalising the participant, which involves fixating who the participant is, and also what the future entails. Frank argues that such research should emphasise the participants’ engagement in their own struggles of becoming, not on statistical themes or characteristics that fixate the participants’ identities to some typologies. The result of the latter would serve to finalise the person, he argues.

The question of how the participants in interview situations are positioned concerns issues of both epistemological and methodological significance. Viewing interviewees as participants is also a matter of arranging the interviews in ways that allow for participation and performance of competency. Discussing how to overcome challenges of researching ‘young offenders’, Holt and Pamment (2013) put focus on how to carry out interviews in ways that prevent a feeling of self-incrimination among the interviewees. In their case, using assisted questionnaires promoted the interviewees’ engagement. They also found it fruitful to shorten the length of the interviews considerably. This shows the need to design interviews in ways appropriate not only for the research question but also for the research subjects, even if it deviates from customary ideas of how research interviews should be conducted. This has implications not only for data produced, but also for how the participants experience taking part in research.

A point made by one reviewer of this paper is worth mentioning. It relates to my reactions to the interviews when reading them afterwards as noted above. When distanced from the situation of direct interaction, the interviews may be read in ways actually reinforcing views of the interviewees as victims or troublemakers. This makes a point relevant for both researchers and practitioners; namely that texts have limitations in understanding lived lives and the engagement, happiness, sadness, anger and struggles central to them.

Avoiding finalisation has been an important issue in my own research, as the participants are young people who are generally recognised as being problematic. Conducting research not contributing to further stigmatisation or marginalisation has for me been an important ethical consideration. Among other things, this has to do with the participants' experience of being described and understood once and for all. As I have suggested, this involves how results are presented, but also with the research process, or what goes on during the interview and what status interviewers give the interviewees' stories.

The risk of doing harm

A key ethical question for this study involved the risks of doing research with children and adolescents considered to be especially vulnerable. Initially I encountered reluctance among professionals about inviting young people to take part in the study. This reflected a general idea that participation could trigger feelings and memories that could be harmful. The view that talking to children about sensitive matters is harmful was recently challenged by the Norwegian sociologist Anne Solberg (2012), who argued that research interviews can be seen as joint enterprises of knowledge production. Although there are good reasons for in each case to thoroughly consider how and on what level children and young people should take part in research (see e.g. McCarry 2012 for discussion on this), my experiences are, as Solberg's and others, that in spite of initial worries about evoking stressful emotional reactions, the participants took part with what I apprehended as enthusiasm. This does not lessen the responsibility of the researcher to put attention to potential harm. However, experiences drawn from these studies indicates that interviews where the interviewees are positioned as competent and where careful listening and sensitive consideration (Kvale and Brinkman 2011, Solberg 2012) takes place, offers a context the participants perceive as positive. This is supported by other studies where children exposed to traumatic events were asked about their participation in research interviews and the majority responded positively (Jensen 2012). Even in those cases where stress was reported, the children did not regret taking part and this has been interpreted as indicating that emotional engagement is not necessarily harmful (Newman et al 2006). In her study of foster families, Ulvik (2005) found that themes of conflict were ever-present in the lives of foster children. Such conflicts can be actualised in interviews, but the interviews do not produce them. Instead the interviews can offer a context to deal with the conflicts in new ways.

Viewing young people placed in residential care and other young people in difficult circumstances as competent actors does not imply that they are not vulnerable or in need of help. So what happens to our responsibility to help those we interview? I would argue that the research interview can contribute to both a feeling of worthiness that is truly valuable for all people, but especially to these young people. In addition, the simple process of being listened to can in and of itself make a difference. A main tenet of narrative psychology is that putting one's own experience into words is the way we as social beings organize and give meaning to our lives (Bruner 2002, McAdams 1993, Riessman 2008). When stories are acknowledged as important enough to become part of research, they become even more powerful and meaningful. I often invited the interviewees to follow up stories they told me in earlier interviews and they have without exception accepted the invitation. My invitation communicates to them that something is so important that it has been remembered three months or even a year later, and that it is considered to be so interesting that someone wants to hear more. In so doing, their narratives are given extra power, but this presupposes that the interviewer resists the urge to help and bring relief to the interviewee. Moreover, other studies show that doing biographical narrative interviews may have therapeutic side effects (Vadja 2007). And this is a lesson that also can inspire other kinds of practices that take place in research interviews.

Closing

The most obvious potential of a qualitative research interview is that it allows us to see the interviewee as a resource, not as a problem. The interview does not necessarily aim to acquire an understanding of how things 'really are' or to describe the participants in simple categorical ways, but instead allows the variety and diversity of the interviewee's life to be voiced. This then opens space for telling of complexity, ambiguity and ambivalence, which in other situations are less welcome because this kind of speaking is viewed as obstructive in finding solutions.

In taking a poststructuralist approach, we will see that the interviewees may be offered subject positions that are quite different from those usually available to them in their everyday lives. They become participants whose knowledge is essential for the production of research. The poststructuralist perspective also helps us see the interviewees not only as persons with traumas and problems, but also as persons engaged in a kind of identity work where the interview situation is serving as a site for such engagement. It makes it possible to focus on

both the proximate and wider context of this work and ask; what subjects are possible for these young people? And how do they engage in processes of being and becoming?

To put to rest preset ideas of who these young people 'are' may contribute toward showing the diversities of their lives as well as how prevailing notions put restrictions on them. This study has thus far shown how young people are in one sense 'captured' by discourses about youth in care and that these discourses also provide professionals with interpretative frameworks for understanding as well as for misunderstanding the actions of these young people. An awareness of such discursive powers is important for understanding how the ways of doing narrative work (Gubrium and Holstein 2009) for these young people are restricted and also for understanding what interpretative limitations exist for professionals. One main aim of this study has been avoiding finalizing the interviewees. It seems to be an equally important challenge for professionals not to confine the clients of child protection services in understandings leaving them with fewer possibilities for being and becoming.

In recent years, as client participation and user involvement have been increasingly incorporated as central ideas in social work and the importance of 'hearing children's voices' has been emphasized, it is also of great importance to find ways to arrange for situations where such participation can take place. Interacting with children and adolescents can be carried out in so many ways and a major challenge is to find ways of doing this so that they can experience these exchanges as meaningful. Experience from research interviews may provide knowledge making it possible to arrange for situations where dominant discourses lose their power in ways allowing clients to assume less troubled positions and where liberating and sustainable stories can be created.

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