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Belonging and the self as enterprise: place, relationships and the formation of occupation-based identities

Abstract

Research considering young adults' experiences of place is characterised by two focal points: the relationship between place, education and employment; and immaterial aspects of place such as experiences of belonging, attachment and relationality. Previous research has worked across these focal points considering, for instance, how symbolic and immaterial factors and social ties can inform mobility choices and experiences. We extend this work by drawing on longitudinal qualitative data to show how attachment to place can be an integral part of the formation of occupation-based identities. Using the concept of the self as enterprise (Kelly 2013) we mark out this development as part of a broader generational shift in occupational identities. We ultimately find that some young adults have remained in or returned to meaningful rural and regional places by developing an occupational identity or 'personal brand' informed by changing occupational demands and enabled by social ties linked to specific places.

Introduction

The growing centrality of the city, seen as representing the new, modern form of life, was integral to the development of early modern scientific thinking about society (Lockie 2001), with this assumption continuing to shape much social science research today. Literature within the sociology of youth has, for instance, been predominantly urban-focused and when rural areas are addressed it is almost exclusively to highlight disadvantage (Farrugia 2014). This work can seem to provide, if sometimes only implicitly, a narrative of cross-generational decline in rural and regional areas, suggesting that in the face of globalisation place is no longer significant in young lives, or that only some places really count for understanding contemporary life (Woodman & Leccardi 2015). As a result, the lives of urban young people are too often implicitly treated as a universal, used to represent what is common in the lives of all young people (Farrugia 2014). As well as leading to the relative neglect of rural young people in youth research, at its worst this bias feeds a wider cultural perception of the rural as 'backward' and the urban as vibrant and valuable (Nairn, Panelli & McCormack 2003). Alongside and related to the tendency to neglect rural lives and to see rural areas as stuck in the past is a tendency to view young adults from these places as not fully sharing the conditions facing their wider age cohort, and thus as not fully part of their generation. The contemporary generation of young adults is imagined as an urban generation and young adults from rural and regional areas only part of it if they respond to the 'mobility imperative' and leave. However, youth research beyond human geography is increasingly paying attention to place and the way that place shapes opportunities and identities (Shildrick, Blackman & MacDonald 2009; Woodman & Leccardi 2015; Farrugia 2014), and a body of research on rural youth experience is growing. The best of this is recognising that rural young people are part of their generation, albeit in place-specific ways.

In this article we contribute to this body of literature by drawing upon longitudinal interview data collected from young adults over 11 years spanning 2007-2017, during which they were aged approximately 19-29. We focus specifically on participants who have either remained in or returned to the rural and regional areas in which they grew up, drawing on their occupation-based identities and experiences to consider the ways in which instrumental determinants of mobility intersect with relational and immaterial dimensions of place. In so doing, we contribute to research working across these focal points (Farrugia 2016; Cuervo & Wyn 2012; Kan 2007). We do this by showing how specific places, as well as relational ties, are implicated in the formation of occupation-based identities that emerge from the cultivation and performance of entrepreneurial forms of selfhood; we show how these forms of self are enacted by some participants as a means of remaining in or returning to people and places that are meaningful to them. We use these findings to suggest that some of the paradoxes of recent social change and the characteristics of a new generation's response to these changes may be most sharply visible among young people with these attachments to place.

Material and immaterial factors in (im)mobility decision-making

Over the last two decades numerous studies have addressed young people's migration from rural and regional areas to metropolitan centres in pursuit of further education and employment opportunities (see Cuervo 2016; Ye 2018). This trend has been underpinned by transition in many countries to a post-industrial economy which has shifted emphasis from primary and secondary industry to the tertiary education and service sectors (Beer 2012). The shift towards so-called knowledge-based forms of employment has placed increasing pressure on individuals to acquire the qualifications and skills necessary to secure a place in the labour market (Brown 2016; Cuervo 2016). These economic shifts, and the normative expectations they produce in relation to post-secondary education, have substantively contributed to high rates of youth out-migration from rural and regional areas (Corbett & Forsey 2017). These changing conditions – along with explicit encouragement to relocate for further education stemming from key institutions such as schools in many rural areas (Corbett 2007) – form 'push' factors; the consequent 'valorisation of metropolitan lifestyles' and the material opportunities offered by urban areas form 'pull' factors (Farrugia 2016: 837). Taken together, these factors equate to what Farrugia (2016) has termed a 'mobility imperative' in which young people in rural and regional areas either relocate or face the personal and professional consequences of failing to do so.

Some rural young people leave their communities to study or work in cities, contributing to a loss of youth from rural areas. On the one hand they are sometimes judged negatively for this, for not following the norm or trajectory of the generation leaving school in the 1960s and 1970s (Cuervo & Wyn 2012). On the other, mobility is now recognised as part of young rural lives across generations. Easthope and Gabriel (2008: 173) use the idea of a 'culture of migration' to highlight that some young people live in a culture, either national or local, where migration is assumed or expected, and the notion is that the 'best and brightest' will

leave. As such, staying comes to require justification. Through these discourses, many 'rural youth now frame their rurality and their choice to live in their home communities as failures, either in relation to education and/or to occupation and career' (Looker & Naylor 2009: 39). It is in this sense that these individuals appear to be left behind in space and time; to not fully be depicted as a part of their generation, despite sharing common structural conditions and life stages.

While much literature addressing the post-secondary mobility imperative faced by rural youth has focused on the draw of the metropolis, another body of literature has considered why some young adults may desire to remain in their local areas. This literature has focused on place-based considerations addressing, for instance, the desire to remain proximate to familiar and emotionally evocative landscapes (Rye 2006). The pull of place-based considerations can perhaps be best understood in relation to the notion of belonging. Employing a broad definition, May (2011: 372) understands belonging as 'a sense of ease with oneself and one's surroundings', drawing on Miller's (2003: 218) claim that belonging is 'the quintessential mode of being human ... in which all aspects of the self, as human, are perfectly integrated – a mode of being in which we are as we ought to be: fully ourselves'. Miller's understanding of belonging aligns with strong links that have been drawn between belonging, place and ontology, and several authors have used the notion of belonging in a similar spirit (see Bell 1999; Edensor 2006; Dymitrow & Brauer 2017). Cuervo and Wyn (2017) have applied this work to regional Australia, drawing on understandings of belonging as performative and relational, and finding that belonging could perhaps be best understood as both a feeling and a practice dependent on the materiality of place. This work provides a counter-point to the specific focus of the previous body of literature on education and employment opportunities and post-secondary transitions, thus attending to the impact of place in a more holistic way.

Additionally, a growing body of research has considered the role of relationships in rural mobility and immobility. Uptake of Elder's (1994) concept of 'linked lives', which emphasises the embeddedness of individual lives in social relationships, has led to increased consideration of relationality in migration research (see Coulter, Van Ham & Findlay 2016). This approach is underpinned by considerations of intergenerational solidarity and mutuality, dovetailing with the above literature addressing belonging and place attachment in constituting an immaterial factor that may contribute to immobility. However, a separate strand of mobility literature has considered the way in which certain types of social, human and economic capital may be location-specific and the role that possession or acquisition of these resources may play in mobility and immobility decision-making. DaVanzo (1981) has, for instance, developed the term 'location-specific capital' to refer to resources that are specific to a location and cannot be taken to a new location. Focusing specifically on location-specific *social* capital Kan (2007) has found that high levels of this type of social capital reduces residential mobility, and that this effect is more pronounced for long-distance moves than it is for shorter moves. However, while the role of location-specific social capital has been addressed in relative depth, the role of family ties (especially between parents and adult children) as a source of location-specific social capital has received little attention in

scholarship addressing internal migration (Mulder 2018). Interestingly, this topic is comparatively well covered in international migration literature (see Castles, De Haas & Miller 2013).

The literature reviewed thus far is characterised by a division between what amount to material and immaterial factors in mobility decision-making. Literature addressing the role of family is less likely to use this dichotomous frame compared to discussions of education or employment-based mobility and belonging and place-based considerations. Yet, even this work is commonly marked by a distinction between networks which may impart social capital and the relational ties of family. Notably, this illustrates the neglect of non-residential family ties in this research, highlighted by Mulder (2018). However, several authors have recently sought to reconcile these divisions, and in so doing to draw together the impact and significance of material and immaterial dimensions of place. Eriksson (2017), for instance, has considered how young adults from rural Sweden manage the mobility imperative alongside the sense of belonging and attachment that many of them have to their local area. Eriksson contends that her participants' narratives of mobility and immobility are used both to resist and to reproduce neoliberal associations between the city and progress in complex ways. Similarly, Farrugia (2016) has considered the role of symbolic and immaterial elements of belonging as prompting, rather than curtailing, rural out-migration, contending that a sense of 'youthfulness' associated with urban areas can prompt youth to migrate (see also Farrugia, Smyth & Harrison 2016). Finally, Mulder's (2018) aforementioned work has highlighted the role of family outside of one's direct household in discussions of mobility and immobility, emphasising the need to integrate consideration of the impact of both relationality and social capital in mobility research addressing the role of family ties.

However, a notable omission from the literature is consideration of the ways in which young people who remain in or return to rural and regional areas are orienting themselves to local labour markets in much the same ways as their urban counterparts. This is particularly curious due to the fact that conventionally rural industries – farming being a quintessential example – are at the forefront of new labour-market developments such as automation (see Rose & Chilvers 2018). In the following discussion we consider this question, and in doing so build upon the above work by considering not just occupational choices that align with rural and regional labour markets, but the formation of specific, concerted occupational identities as part of a strategy for remaining in or returning to a specific place. Additionally, we consider the role of family ties in young adults' mobility and immobility decision-making, and the ways in which they may intersect with their formation of an occupational identity. In so doing, we ultimately consider how our participants are reflecting elements of a new regional and rural generation who can be imagined as temporally and spatially co-present with their urban counterparts. In some aspects, these young people particularly sharply articulate broader challenges and paradoxes facing contemporary young people and their relationship with other generations.

Methods

The data presented in this paper take the form of longitudinal cases. Due to our aim of presenting a holistic representation of mobility and immobility experiences we draw on in-depth cases of three individuals who were interviewed at multiple time-points rather than presenting the data thematically. The choice to present the data as cases which elucidate the intersections of place-based factors, relationships and occupational identity-formation aligns with the aims of this article as we seek to highlight how aspects of life and specific motivations that have often been considered separately, or even viewed as conflictual, may interact. Case study research has been identified as particularly well suited to the generation of in-depth knowledge about processes and relationships (Yin 2014).

The cases are drawn from the [name of study], an ongoing longitudinal mixed-methods research program which recruited participants from secondary schools in the Australian states of Victoria, New South Wales and Tasmania, as well as the Australian Capital Territory. This research program has followed two generations of Australians through their pathways to adulthood, seeking to develop a holistic understanding of their transitions through key milestones of adult life by documenting their experiences in areas such as education, employment, family life, attitudes, friendships and relationships and health and wellbeing. The participants were recruited into the study in 2005 in their penultimate year of secondary school and have been surveyed annually since then. In 2005-2006 when the sample were initially recruited it totaled 4,007 and 60 percent lived outside metropolitan areas (in regional centers, country towns, and rural areas outside towns). By 2017 the sample totaled 520 participants due to attrition, and 38 percent lived outside of metropolitan areas.

Biennial interviews have been conducted with a sub-sample (approximately 50) of the participants, and in this article we draw on data collected from participants who have been interviewed regularly in the period spanning 2007-2017. We draw predominantly on analysis of interview data while using responses to the annual survey to verify the timing of the life course events that our participants discuss. The schedules for the interviews (conducted in 2007, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2015 and 2017) were developed with the intention of providing a broad account of the participants' lives, focusing on key areas such as education, employment, family and interpersonal relationships, leisure and health and wellbeing. While the degree of emphasis placed on each of these areas changed as many of the participants began to transition from post-secondary education to full time employment, these focal points were nevertheless maintained, meaning that comparisons can be drawn and spaces of change and continuity can be noted within single biographies over time. Importantly, a focus on place was maintained over the course of the interviews due to the study's aim of addressing the specific experiences of young adults living in regional and rural areas.

The findings presented in this article initially emerged from analysis of a round of interviews conducted in 2017 by the authors (author two conducted many of the earlier round interviews). In the course of this process a relationship was identified between the personal and social resources that the participants drew on in their everyday lives and their experiences of work and place attachment. We then turned to data from previous rounds of interviews to consider whether this relationship could be explained more fully by contextualising it within

a wider portion of the participants' biographies. This stage of analysis allowed us to confirm that the specific intersections between work, relationships and place attachment that we identified (specifically, the dual use of place-attachment and relational ties to position oneself in the labour market) were particular to the participants living in regional areas, as those in urban areas did not reflect this experience. Turning to the portion of the qualitative dataset who lived in the same regional area in both 2005 when they entered the study and 2017 at the time of their most recent interview, we found that this portion of the sample reflected three key experiences: those who remained in their local area over the course of the study (2005-2017); those who had relocated and then subsequently returned and were forming place-based occupational identities in a similar way to those in the first group; and finally those who had relocated and then returned, but were not forming place-based occupational identities. After identifying these tendencies we decided to present the data in the form of longitudinal cases, following Yin's (2014) characterisation of case-based research as an ideal means of identifying the mechanisms through which decisions and changes occur. In fidelity with such an approach we selected three cases to exemplify the relationships between (im)mobility, place attachment, occupational identity and relationships that were reflected in each of the tendencies that we identified in the wider regional sub-sample. Our selection of cases was intended to align with what Flyvberg (2006) has termed paradigmatic cases, meaning that they most clearly exemplified the themes that we had identified within each of the three categorisations of regional participants. We then wrote descriptive cases of each of these participants, focusing on the way in which work, place, relationships and (im)mobility intersected in their biographies in order to draw out the specific ways in which occupational identities were (or were not) formed over time, and in dialogue with relationships and place attachment. These cases are presented below.

Jason

Jason grew up in a regional part of Tasmania and has remained there for the duration of his participation in the study, conforming to the first type of experience that we identified in the regional sample. In the final year of his secondary education his mother identified a potential cadetship¹ in a specific area of real estate that he could undertake:

My mum was at a basketball game with a friend – their daughters played together. She mentioned 'oh well I work at [name of firm]', she said 'they're probably looking to put a cadet on so I can have a word to them if you like, with the directors.'

Following his mother's advice Jason undertook this cadetship in his local area while completing a degree via correspondence. At the age of 22, a young age in contemporary Australia, Jason bought a house with his partner to correspond with the arrival of their first child. He has continued to spend significant amounts of time with his parents throughout his 20s. In 2010 he discussed the types of support that they provided to him, stating:

[They support me] financially and emotionally. I wouldn't be in the position I am in now without their help financially. Emotionally, once again I have spoken about the different situations where they have helped me previously, whether it is just having someone to talk to about things or, you know, them just coming 'round and helping you out, those sort of things.

While Jason's attachment to his local area was rooted in his relationship with his parents and the support that they provided to him, it was also shaped by his experience of the area. He has consistently reflected on his strong attachment to his local area, and to Tasmania more generally, focusing on the natural environment and the lifestyle available to him:

I do like it in [local area]. I like it in Tasmania, generally. Pure and simply because it's big enough to have department stores and all the services and, you know, we get the odd concert down here and all those sorts of things. But then, you've also got the mountain bike trails, World Heritage Areas, highland areas, coastal areas, rain forests, you know, all of that sort of stuff here... Why wouldn't you want to live here?

However, at times Jason appeared to struggle to reconcile his desire to remain in his local area with his career ambitions and strong motivation to support his family. In 2012, towards the end of his cadetship, he was asked whether he perceived any barriers to the professional success that he aspired to and he replied:

The biggest barrier is probably exposure to the relevant people and resources to get that knowledge and industry experience. Being a regional sort of area, there isn't that big city industry where there are lots of things happening... You're not getting industry contacts and information.

However, considering this issue further Jason reframed these perceived barriers as potential opportunities, reflecting the narrative work that he performed in making his regional area work for him:

[Local area] is big enough that there is a reasonable demand for all the different careers that you can have, and you can be rather successful in a small town if you offer a good quality service in whatever career you do.

Jason's desire to distinguish himself in his local labour market rather than relocate to an area that he perceived as offering more opportunities was a recurrent theme in subsequent interviews. In 2015 he began to draw links between his local area and personal attributes. While discussing the fact that many of his friends had relocated to metropolitan areas Jason stated:

Down here there's no doubting that you need to make Tasmania work for you as opposed to the other way 'round. If they aren't suited to that type of approach down here then it probably is better that they move away.

When discussing how precisely he ‘made Tasmania work for him’ Jason emphasised the attainment of his professional qualification, as well as the work that he performed alongside his studies as part of his cadetship. However, for Jason his tertiary qualification and professional experience were only a starting point. He emphasised that what he termed the opportunities for ‘building a brand’ were also important, and that his location offered a particular type of opportunity for this:

[Local area] and Tasmania offer the ability to build yourself a brand and be recognised... Build yourself a brand surrounding your quality of work, how you approach your job, your approach to customer service, all those sorts of things. You're not as anonymous down here as what you might be in, say, some of the bigger cities where you're competing for space with a lot of different competitors.

Jason essentially ‘built himself a brand’ by specialising, and in so doing he capitalised on a specific aspect of his identity. Evidently, his ‘personal brand’ was not only facilitated by his local area, it emerged in and was inseparable from it. It is crucial to acknowledge the role of location-specific social capital in facilitating this experience. Jason found his cadetship through his mother and relied heavily on emotional, financial and practical support, especially in the case of childcare, throughout this time. For Jason, ‘making Tassie work for him’ appeared to rely on both family support and the legitimacy that a family history of farming gave to him in a highly specialised area of the labour market. Ultimately, while Jason initially viewed his desire to remain in his local area – motivated by his ties to both his family and the materiality of this area – as at least somewhat counter to his professional ambitions, over time he came to view his local area as central to his professional success.

Matilda

Like Jason, Matilda grew up in a regional area. However, she relocated from her hometown in regional Victoria to metropolitan Melbourne in order to pursue post-school study in design, conforming to the second type of experience that we identified in the regional sample. When interviewed in 2010 she reflected on the experience of this move, focusing on her parents’ views:

Initially [parents] didn't want me to go to Melbourne. Because there's a similar course in [local area] they wanted me to stay. But they kind of knew that that's what I wanted to do, so they were happy to support me and helped me set up here.

She chose to relocate for study rather than remaining in her local area due to her perception of the metropolitan university that she attended as offering a better quality of education and better opportunities. Although she enjoyed living in Melbourne Matilda considered returning to her local area at some stage. However, she also expressed some ambivalence about this option:

Matilda: Maybe I'll just go back there one day.

Facilitator: Really?

Matilda: Yeah. I think so.

Matilda's ambivalence appeared to stem from the fact that she missed her parents, and yet was concerned about what she perceived to be a lack of desirable employment opportunities in her regional area.

Matilda completed her degree and continued to live in Melbourne, believing this offered better career opportunities. She worked multiple part-time and casual jobs in an effort to 'get a foot in the door' before deciding to focus on saving money to travel abroad. She returned to her local area sporadically, occasionally using her parent's house as a 'landing pad' following international travel. After one of these periods living with her parents, and an unsuccessful effort to find a job, Matilda moved to Sydney in 2016 to pursue a second design qualification. However, when she was interviewed in 2017 she was in the process of again relocating to her regional Victorian hometown. While discussing this return she initially emphasised her desire for proximity to family and friends:

I don't have any of my family up there [in Sydney] or long-time friends. So, it's always like regardless of where I am, I just want to be where my friends and families are at the end of the day.

However, upon further reflection she identified her plan to return to her local area as motivated also by the belonging and attachment that she associated with it:

I love the community vibe that it has. I think that's part of why I want to move back as well, because as much as I feel like I can fit in in places like [suburb in Sydney], I don't feel like I really belong there like long term.

During her 2017 interview Matilda also discussed a direct marketing company² she had joined on the recommendation of a friend. This discussion followed on from her discussion of using social media as a tool for maintaining relationships:

Yeah, it has been, like encouraging me to, um, just, yeah reconnect with people who I may not have spoken to in a while, um, yeah. So, it's funny how that works.

She also viewed her involvement with this company as a tool for personal and professional development:

It's actually, like driving me to do business, and hopefully make a little bit of income for myself on the side, as well as, like that personal development, as well that comes with it.

Notably, she linked her involvement with this company to her eventual ambition of owning her own design firm, stating that it would help her to build her professional confidence. Rather than providing any concrete connection to design, Matilda's engagement with the direct sale company instead appeared to represent, for her, the development of an entrepreneurial identity. Indeed, many direct marketing companies tend to valorise, exploit,

and explicitly link to the idea of entrepreneurially tapping into friends, family and ‘community’ to sell product and recruit new members.

Although Matilda originally left her local area for the education and employment opportunities available in Melbourne, and later Sydney, her decision to return did not correspond with a movement away from these ambitions as she did not view returning to her regional hometown as incongruous with them. Rather, during her 2017 interview she appeared to view her professional ambitions and her local area as mutually constitutive. Specifically, she reflected on the rapid gentrification of the area, stating:

[The last time I visited] I think I sort of found [local area] booming to be honest. In this last ten years, it has just come so far... I guess, they have taken a lot of cues from Melbourne as a, like, smaller, little brother or whatever. But also, we've got all that beautiful regional produce.

Evidently, Matilda viewed her local area as adopting some of the urban allure of Melbourne while still offering aspects of the natural appeal commonly associated with rural and regional areas. Additionally, rather than viewing the relatively small size of the area that she was relocating to as a constraint on her plan to work as a designer, Matilda instead directly linked her professional ambitions to the gentrification of the area. For instance, she reflected on the prevalence of ‘cute cafes’ in the area and stated:

I want to be involved in [local area]. I want to be involved in the region and help it get better. [Local area] is really coming into its own in terms of like, like its own uniqueness as well, um, yeah, so I was like, I'm really proud of it (laughs).

More specifically, at the time of the interview Matilda was studying interior design, stating that her interest in this particular field stemmed from her enjoyment of ‘going out to cafes and restaurants with my friends and creating an atmosphere.’ Matilda expressed the desire to work with local hospitality businesses as a design consultant, viewing herself as well positioned for such work due to her intimate knowledge of the area, as well as the entrepreneurial experience that she hoped to develop through her involvement with a direct sale company.

Notably, these plans, facilitated by both the development of the area and Matilda’s knowledge of it and embeddedness in local networks, constituted identity work through which Matilda aligned both her skills and her professional identity with the local labour market. In contrast with Jason’s experience, Matilda’s relationship with her local area evolved over time. She initially sought to leave the area for better opportunities, and later in order to travel, and her desire to return appeared to be negotiated through desire to be close to family, and the opportunities that she saw opening up in the local labour market. However, the struggles and ambivalences that Matilda experienced positioned her as very much within the dynamics experienced by members of her generation, for whom secure, full time work relevant to one’s qualifications is increasingly challenging to attain. Additionally, and again in contrast to Jason, Matilda’s attachment to place was based on a rapidly gentrifying town and emerging café and hospitality sector, rather than on the natural landscape. In this was the

specific contours of Matilda's place attachment challenged the notion of the 'rural idyll' through which regional areas come to be automatically equated with natural environments (see Waite 2018).

Grace

The third type of experience that we identified within the regional sample – the experience of returning to one's regional place of origin but not experiencing belonging and place attachment – was exemplified by Grace. Like Matilda, Grace left her regional hometown (in central New South Wales) in order to pursue tertiary study following the completion of her secondary education. For Grace, relocation from her local area was motivated primarily by the desire to be mobile. However, despite her strong desire to relocate away from her regional hometown Grace chose to attend a regional university that was relatively close to her local area, citing the proximity as a motivating factor. When asked why she chose to study there she replied:

Well, the location, I really didn't want to go to Sydney. I'm a clouds and grass kind of kid, I don't really like all the cement and scary people. I thought [regional university] would be good because it's rural and it's not that much of a city and it's not too far away [from hometown].

In the following years Grace's interviews continued to reflect a tension between her professional ambitions and desire to travel and be mobile (which were often equated), and her attachment to both her hometown and the regional city that she had moved to for her studies. For instance, she consistently prioritised trips home to visit her family, and frequently reflected on her enjoyment of the tranquility of the area in which she lived. However, when asked about her ambitions for the future she stated that she wanted to travel and have a 'cool job'. When asked what she felt that a 'cool job' would involve she stated:

A cool job would probably be doing freelance stuff, doing my own work, getting a couple of exhibitions maybe and yeah collaborating with lots of people cause there's a lot going on in Melbourne and Sydney here that I didn't realise what's going on and I'm sure a lot more will start happening over the next couple of years and it's exciting and I want to be a part of that.

Interestingly, Grace's desire to 'be a part of' new developments in Melbourne and Sydney echoed Matilda's desire to be part of the development and gentrification of her local area. However, Grace's desires are notable because they position her future and imagined professional contribution distinctly away from her regional hometown. This appeared to be in large part because Grace viewed her ambitions as incongruous with her local area. In a 2010 interview while discussing her local area she stated:

There aren't any like-minded people there. A lot of people leave [local area] when they finish High School and everyone who stays is sort of just there to work and I don't want to do that, I want to learn and play and you know find exciting people and play music all that kind of stuff.

However, despite her ambitions to eventually work in Melbourne or Sydney Grace also viewed 'big cities' in a largely negative way:

It just seems like a really big machine. Everyone is sort of a carbon copy of everyone else like little robots.

Notably, Grace appeared to have a sense of attachment to regional landscapes and areas in general, but not to her local area in particular. By 2011 Grace had completed her studies. She travelled within NSW for several months before moving back to her regional hometown due to her inability to find work. She had her first child in 2014 and when she was interviewed again in 2015 she had separated from her daughter's father. She relied primarily on a parenting payment from the government, while also doing some graphic design work for 'friends of friends'. At this time she again reflected that she did not feel that she belonged in her local area due to the sense that there were not people like her.

When she was interviewed again in 2017 Grace was working part-time at a café. She stated that she had found a supportive group of friends, as well as enjoying support from her parents, especially with childcare. Much like in 2015, Grace had found a professional niche for herself through friends. While working at the café, which was owned by her friends, she found that she was able to use her graphic design skills. For instance, she redesigned the menu and designed some of the interior of the café. However, she did not feel that she was fully utilising the skills that she gained through her degree as she did not look for employment opportunities outside her immediate social group. When asked again how she felt about her local area she stated:

It's a bit of a mixed bag. I like being close to my family, my parents I mean. But it can be a bit conservative. There are conservative parts of it. My friends are similar to me, but then big sections of the community can be quite narrow minded.

While Grace found a way to match her skills with her local area – at least to an extent – her narrative nevertheless presents a greater degree of ambivalence than those of Jason and Matilda. This appears to be because she did not feel like she fully belonged in her local area, instead identifying pockets of belonging by forming friendships and subsequent professional ties with like-minded people. Grace's experience of mismatch with her local area on a personal level also appeared to impact upon the scope of her professional experience as she only sought work with and through friends. Grace thus engaged in occupational identity-making that relied on relational ties, but was not linked to place attachment, and her experience illustrates the way in which truncated experience of belonging can curtail one's ability to fully act on professional ambitions within slim regional labour markets.

Discussion

Jason, Matilda and Grace each expressed an attachment to place that had, to varying degrees, both relational and immaterial dimensions. However, our findings are notable because, for our participants, place attachment was not experienced as a profound barrier to the attainment of occupational ambitions located elsewhere, nor was it an instrumentally neutral quality that

simply added depth to their experiences of their local areas. Place attachment instead became a resource in of itself for these participants, with Jason and Matilda especially leveraging their attachment to and subsequent knowledge of their local areas within their professional lives, and Grace finding her professional progress limited by its absence. This is significant predominantly because previous scholarship addressing mobility in a post-secondary context has suggested a view of mobility itself (rather than the attributes of one's destination) as a personal resource (Cairns 2014). However, our findings do not discount this claim. Instead, they are suggestive that, by going against the grain of what is expected, our participants are engaging in perhaps more concerted identity work than their urban counterparts. Moreover, our findings illustrate that they are experiencing and responding to many of the same challenges faced by young adults living in urban areas, including the blurring of work and non-work identities, and the way that networks of significant others are increasingly drawn into managing employment trajectories

Use of their attachment to their local areas was not the sum of the occupational identity-work that Jason and Matilda performed. Instead, this use of place attachment appeared to be part of a more general project of the self through which they shaped their occupational (as well as personal) identities over time. Although this conceptualisation presents significant homology with the work of many authors (e.g. Giddens and Beck), it can perhaps be understood best in this context in relation to Kelly's (2013) notion of the self as enterprise which, working from scholars such as Foucault and Rose, draws together the responsabilisation of individuals and the intrusion of free market logics into other spheres of life that characterise contemporary (neo)liberal governance regimes. Notably, while a growing body of scholarship has discussed entrepreneurship in rural and regional areas (see Pato & Teixeira 2014) the specific phenomena that we address is distinct from this. We are concerned not with entrepreneurship itself, but with the tendency to view the self as an enterprise and to position the self as both producer and product within the labour market (Kelly 2013). This tendency is distinct from, for instance, farm-based agritourism which, while capitalising on individuals' knowledge of and attachment to place in a parallel way, focuses on rural spaces and landscapes rather than serves as entrepreneurial products. This phenomena has been documented extensively in relation to urban young adults – commonly positioned at the forefront of labour market changes and related shifts in subjectivities – but has received little attention in relation to rural young adults.

In the case of our participants, market logics closely informed the occupation-based identity work that they performed, as they sought to position themselves to maximum advantage in employment markets that were, in many ways, highly competitive due to their relatively small size. However, the entrepreneurial forms of selfhood that the participants engaged with in the process of forming occupational identities that were tied to place relied on location-specific social capital and the ability to perform a specific type of self. This essentially means that while several scholars (e.g. Miller 2003) have identified belonging as something akin to a human need, individuals have differential access to the psychic resources that may aid them in staying in the areas in which they experience belonging in secure, long-term ways. This is especially acute in the context of a generation that is being asked to draw on these resources

more than in the past to manage paid employment. This was particularly evident in Grace's case, as her inability to feel that she fully belonged in her local area undermined her ability to pursue her professional ambitions, which in turn further undermined the capacity for belonging.

Although the participants experienced belonging to place in uneven ways, they each drew on relational ties in ways that were at once emotional and instrumental. While this is a widely recognised dimension of social ties that has motivated a huge volume of research and commentary, it is nevertheless necessary to emphasise that research addressing 'push' and 'pull' factors for young adults' rural out migration commonly depicts relational – and especially family – ties as considerations that stand opposed to occupational ambitions. As the experiences of our participants illustrate, this view discounts the degree to which social capital can potentially be at work in small labour markets. Indeed, understandings of rural youth mobility as 'leaving' can be challenged as the complexities of the impact of economic and social change on young people from different backgrounds are better theorised. Economic change means that the patterns followed by their parents are unlikely to provide a reliable guide to action for today's rural young people. While this is an example of the way social change is affecting both rural and urban youth, the challenge is arguably greater for rural young people as they must recognise shifts in the labour market, and in the skill sets required of them.

As noted, one of the historical failings of youth studies, within the social sciences in general, has been to take the experience of urban life and universalise it; the reflexive, individualised, entrepreneurial self presented within contemporary youth studies is an urban subject. The popular discourse of generations has a similar tendency, treating each generation as both internally homogenous and radically different from the previous. Rural and regional young people are often seen as left behind by their generation unless they are mobile and move to urban areas. A sociological approach to generations, however, from its first articulations in the early 20th Century has been concerned with identifying the way that other social differences and inequalities create divisions within a generation and links across generations. Karl Mannheim (1952), the sociologist most responsible for setting the foundations for the contemporary sociology of generations, conceptualised divisions within a generation as 'generational units', focusing particularly on adversarial and possibly even violent political differences within a generation, over new but common stakes, which gave coherence to the generation.

Today, few serious scholars would define generations and generational units in such concrete terms and recent work has highlighted young people's multiple significant affiliations and senses of belonging, which sometimes create tensions as well as affinities (Woodman & Leccardi 2015). Young people are living different lives to their parents. There are values that are shared across the generations but as they relate to the life course, if they are to be actualised it will be in different ways fitting with new conditions. Generation is one of many sociological factors that shape the lives of young people; their lives are shaped by ethnic, gender, class and other divisions but also by factors that cross these. Place and mobility are

one of the axes that shape young lives. Yet, rural and regional young people also remain part of their generation. There will be parallel experiences shared by young people across rural and urban spaces, as well as differences. In this article we look at how forced reflexivity, identity work and what Kelly calls, self as enterprise, are visible – often sharply but with particularities – in the experiences of young people from rural and regional areas. Importantly, these particularities exceed the simple binaries of mobile and immobile or material and immaterial.

In relation to the final point of the reviews to be addressed, the reviewer asks us to address implications, and suggests policy as a potential area (alongside development of rural areas, youth mobility). I think we could say something about the fact that it is important to consider the ways in which young adults in rural and regional areas are responding to many of the same labour market challenges as those in urban areas. Imagining rural areas as other in both time and space obscures this, equating rurality with a past in which employment was more stable, and perhaps based less on entrepreneurialism and identity work. We need to contend with the ways in which these generational challenges are also manifest in regional areas, just in place-specific forms.

Conclusion

In this article we have used longitudinal qualitative data to illustrate the complex ways in which material and immaterial aspects of place form both push and pull factors and resources in the lives of young adults. In so doing we have argued against a dichotomous understanding of material and immaterial factors, suggesting that if they are conceptualised separately then one is left unable to understand the ways in which individuals work between them form both decisions and experiences related to mobility and immobility. In service of this argument we have shown the specific types of identity work that our participants have engaged in, as well as the ways in which they have engaged with the notion of the self as enterprise, using location-specific resources to do so or, indeed, experiencing limitations due to the inability to do so. By showing this, we have ultimately suggested that rural young people are responding to generational challenges and experiences in place-specific ways, and using place-specific resources. We contend that it is necessary to do so in order to conceptualise rural young people as fully temporally co-present with their urban counterparts.

Notes

¹ Cadetships are paid positions that combine formal vocational training and practical work experience.

² Direct marketing companies sell products or services directly to the public, rather than through retailers. These companies have a predatory reputation in many cases due to high

upfront and ongoing costs for their workers and difficulties obtaining reimbursement while returning unsold products.

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