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Adhering to the conventional sequence: Men's accounts of first-time fatherhood

Fiona Shirani

Abstract

This article considers the timing of the transition to first-time fatherhood and its position in the life course. Based on semi-structured interviews with thirty expectant fathers, I explore their experiences of timing, such as notions of 'right time' and perceptions of necessary pre-requisites to fatherhood. Subsequently I consider off-time transitions and the impact this has on the men's experience of fatherhood. Whilst the majority of men in the sample appeared to follow a standardised life course trajectory, those who did not generally experienced the transition to parenthood as more problematic. Therefore I suggest that timing in relation to a standardised life course trajectory has a significant impact on how transitions are experienced, highlighting how foregrounding aspects of temporality in research can offer greater insight into participants' life experiences.

Introduction

Although it would be inaccurate to suggest that time has been neglected in sociology (Nowotny 1992) it is a frequently taken for granted presence, embedded in normalcy and thus escaping a critical gaze (Daly 1996) resulting in rash generalisations or simplistic definitions (Bergmann 1992). The centrality of time to our daily existence has been commented upon elsewhere (Tabbioni 2001, Geissler 2002) yet the multiplicity of time and temporal diversity is often left unacknowledged, viewed as the mere framework within which action takes place (Adam 1998). This results in neglecting a level of understanding into participants' lives that a consideration of the importance of time can offer us, therefore the challenge now is to make time explicit in social research (Adam 1990).

Time becomes particularly salient in a moment of transition, where daily patterns are thrown into flux and time can be experienced in a number of different and apparently contradictory ways. Although research on the transition to parenthood has often focused on crisis and coping, new parents consistently mention time in accounts of how life has changed, making it a crucial aspect of their experience (La Rossa 1983). Whilst motherhood has long been recognised as a major life event for women, major events in men's lives are seen to focus on work (Greene 2003). However, particularly with increased cultural emphasis on father involvement, it would be naïve to suggest fatherhood cannot also be experienced as life-changing. Therefore, looking at men's accounts of the transition to first-time fatherhood, this article will consider the significance of timing in the context of a momentous life event. Whilst this inevitably neglects other aspects of time that also influence men's experiences during this period, a focus on timing and notions of right time offers an important insight into socially approved life course trajectories and their pervasive influence. Whilst some have proposed moving away from notions of a fixed sequence of normatively defined stages through which we are all expected to pass (Neale and Flowerdew 2003), others have presented evidence to indicate the continuing significance of following a normative life course sequence (Elchardus and Smits 2006). It is suggested that ideas about good and bad time for making life course transitions are dependent on a number of factors, involving attempts to combine a multitude of different times (Adam 1995), therefore this article will

consider several factors that participants believe must be coordinated in order to constitute 'right time'.

Method and Sample

The data for this article comes from in-depth qualitative interviews conducted with a group of thirty men from East Anglia in the year 2000 as part of a qualitative longitudinal research project (Henwood and Procter 2003). The project has received further funding through the Timescapes programme and recent interviews have taken place to follow up with the majority of these men eight years later, in addition to interviews with a new sample of first-time fathers from South Wales. For this article, data extracts are taken from the first round of interviews in East Anglia where men were asked to reflect on the timing of fatherhood in their lives.

The interviews were semi-structured in an attempt to consider the impact of fatherhood on all areas of personal and professional life without overly directing discussion. The research was designed to elicit men's own accounts of first time fatherhood, walking with them through time at a moment of significant lifestyle change, as participants were encouraged to talk about what they felt was important and how they made sense of their experiences. The men were aged 20-40 and from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds, although the majority were in full-time, professional employment and continued this after the birth of their child. Most (n=22) were married, the remainder cohabiting, and one father did not reside with his partner. Three men also lived with at least one step-child from their partner's previous relationship. Interviews took place two to three months before the birth of their first child and at two subsequent intervals during the first year of the child's life, facilitating a comparison before and after the birth.

Extensive thematic analysis was conducted with this data, involving a detailed reading of transcripts and assigning of themes or codes to particular extracts. The extracts relating to timing were then further considered whilst remaining grounded in the participant's account as a whole, in order to make links with other aspects of their experience. Throughout this article participants are referred to by pseudonyms to protect anonymity. Participants' ages are also included as they identified this as an important temporal marker for a consideration of 'right time'.

Right time

A predominant theme in the first round of interviews is one of timing; what constitutes the right time to have a child? For the majority of participants there was a strong sense of there being a culturally approved 'good' age to have children, which seemed to range from late 20s to late 30s, with anything outside this bracket viewed as less desirable. However, it was generally seen as more acceptable to be a father at an older age than to make the transition to parenthood too young due to issues around lack of life experience and maturity. For the men, right time appeared to be constituted by fulfilling a sequence of age related goals so they reached the stage where parenthood became the next 'logical' step.

I think a lot of people sort of put you in the fully grown up category. I think it sort of starts when you sort of get a job then if you move out if you meet someone, get the ring on the finger.... It's sort of ticking off little boxes and

once you've sort of got a child on the way I think that's the full set for a lot of people (Gary, 28)

Oh I think so, we have been married like five years you know, and I just think it is the expected thing. (Brendan, 30)

It would initially appear that age is overwhelmingly the most important factor in constituting right time, yet it a number of other appropriate timings come into play. For example, the couple relationship must have had an appropriate duration so as not to be seen as 'rushing into things', yet some men felt that if a relationship remained childless for several years, questions about fertility were raised. This careful balancing highlights how variability in the duration of life course stages is restricted by these unspoken limits.

It's sort of, 'well done!' pat-on-the-back kind of stuff, one of the club ... Yes, very much, people are pleased and happy. In many ways it suggests that previously they were saying, 'Oh well, why not?', 'Better cover that one up', kind of thing, 'and not ask any more questions about that one'. Because, if I was 35, then most people in a lot of the countries I go to would have expected that they should have children. Yes, so now, I mean, I have no idea, I suppose I'm speculating, but maybe they're thinking 'Oh well, he's not infertile then', kind of thing, which they might have been thinking, or 'she isn't', or something like that. (Simon, 35)

These extracts indicate the extent to which the timetable of socially approved life course progression is ingrained in the men's consciousness. There was an awareness that if they had not achieved fatherhood by a certain age they would be subject to public scrutiny, yet there were a number of pre-requisite 'tick boxes' that must be completed at appropriate intervals and for an adequate duration. Having a stable job and appropriate housing, as well as having had the chance to gain some life experiences were generally seen as pre-requisites for embarking on parenthood. Ideally the men would have been working for a few years with a stable income, own their own house and be married or in a long term stable relationship with the mother of their child. If any of these conditions had not been fulfilled, it appears that the timing of fatherhood became problematised. Signs of socially approved timing also came from other people in the same age cohort having children; particularly colleagues, friends and siblings. Once others began to have children, this acted as a signal for the men that fatherhood was something they should be thinking about. Going through the transition to parenthood at the same time as peers was a confirmation for men that they were following a socially approved trajectory and offered them a comforting sense of shared experience and being in it together, which several men described as 'joining the baby club'.

Off time

Whilst making an on-time transition may ultimately be facilitated by public approval and shared experiences, a transition outside these socially enshrined and imposed timings can be problematic (Greene 2003). In the first round of interviews, a 20 year-old father raises concerns that he and his partner will be treated as outcasts by their friends for making the transition to parenthood too early. His fear is that as they are becoming parents before anyone else in their peer group, they will have different responsibilities and become ostracised from the social group who like to spend their time drinking and clubbing, which a baby would inevitably limit them from doing.

For fathers making an on-time transition this was less problematic as their peer group were also likely to have children, so shared interests had become more child-centred and they continued to have the support and understanding of their friends. Although at 35 Adam fell into the 'appropriate' age-bracket, his transition can be viewed as off-time because of the circumstances involved. Anne, his partner, was several years older and at 45 with two teenage children felt herself too old to become a mother again, yet Adam's desire for a child meant the pregnancy happened fairly early in the relationship due to concerns about her biological clock. The pregnancy led to some hostility and resulting exclusion from her friends and as Adam did not have any local friends of his own this led to isolation.

Yeah yeah, it has been kind of difficult in that a lot of Anne's friends are they are in their forties as she is and they have got teenage kids ... And um so there has been that kind of thing "rather you than me" kind of thing, you know and "I am glad you're there and not me"... But I felt kind of sad that we can't talk about it as a couple with her friends and it has been a bit kind of awkward and not that kind of happy. But with my friends a lot of them have just got years away from marriage they are really young and want to be on their own and deal with life. So I have felt a bit lonely really talking about it I can't, and I can't with Anne's friends really, it's been, I don't quite know.
(Adam, 35)

This pregnancy was experienced as out of time due to Anne's age, the age gap between the new baby and her existing children, and the speed at which the pregnancy came about in the couple relationship, illustrating the varying factors that contribute to ideas about right or wrong timing. The resultant difficulties and sense of isolation that Adam experienced from not undergoing the transition to parenthood at the same time as friends led to problems in the couple relationship and eventual separation.

Barbara Adam (1995) suggests that ideas of good and bad time are inevitably dependent on a variety of factors being in place and are therefore incompatible with linear conceptions of time. Subsequently we can see that though influenced by age, the notion of right time is also strongly associated with sequence and the appropriate duration of pre-requisite stages, indicating the considerable influence of conforming to a socially approved life-trajectory or 'social clock' (Neugarten 1968). Garfinkel argues that these sequences are the result of an aggregate of individuals pursuing their separate projects together (Rawls 2005), ultimately forming a socially approved pathway that highlights the importance of timing in the transition to each stage. It is suggested that sequential ordering and timing comprises a large part of the meaning of each stage, through which people present and develop their self-identity. As Elchardus and Smits (2003:306) note

'The modern temporalisation of life is therefore not only described in terms of stages, transitions and the sequence of stages, but also in terms of the timing and the duration of transitions and stages, or the chronological age at which the transitions take place. The fundamental, modern parameters of the temporalisation of life are therefore the distinction of stages, the sequence of stages, and the timing of the transitions in and out of the stages.'

That the men had a strong sense of the right time to become a father is further highlighted by their experiences of unplanned pregnancies. In Kenny's (married, age 40) case, two earlier pregnancies with previous partners had ended in abortion because it had not been the right time or the right relationship. Although he would have been an 'on-time' father in terms of age, that

other pre-requisite conditions were unfulfilled meant that the pregnancy was experienced as out of time. This corresponds with other research suggesting that, for men, not feeling that the couple relationship was right, and not feeling able to provide for a child were key reasons for abortion (Reich 2007). Kero *et al.* (1999) also support this with research that indicates among men the primary motive for abortion was family planning; it was not the right time to have a child.

Body Time

Although there are several factors contributing to an understanding of right time, concerns about physical time were particularly pervasive. The ever-ticking biological clock is present in the majority of the men's accounts about right time, but never in relation to themselves. Any reference to the biological clock is made in terms of their partners, indicating that men do not see themselves as having a fertility time limit. For many of the participants, concern about their partner's biological clock had been a major impetus for trying to conceive. For those couples who had taken some time to conceive, this waiting had raised question marks and concerns over the attainability of a fatherhood identity the majority of men had always expected to assume, consequently influencing subsequent life course timings. This extract illustrates how Vincent has taken into account issues of body time, timing and socially approved trajectories, also noting that what is a culturally acceptable age to become a parent has changed over time

My wife's three years older than me and she was sort of fairly keen on it, she was a bit worried that her "clock" was starting to tick, erm, and we didn't really want to be "old" parents. I know parenthood's got, erm, tends to be a lot older now, people used to have kids when they were 18, everybody did, whereas nowadays it's mainly, erm, well it's not as many people, it's more sort of professional people perhaps having a little bit little later and also actually got through university and that sort of thing, erm, so that's the main reason we didn't want to be very old, we thought well "we've been together for two years", we got married, and we thought well, "ideal time". (Vincent, 30)

Having reached a stage where all the boxes have been ticked and there is no longer any impediment to parenthood, the biological clock is an indicator for men that 'it's now or never' and for some there is a concern that, having taken the time to fulfil all the social pre-requisites to parenthood, they now run the risk of being an old parent, which is viewed as undesirable. Whilst the men were generally accepting of those who chose to have children at an older age, many of them did not want to leave it too late for fear of not being able to be physically active and involved with the child; perceived as a crucial aspect of the father role. The imminent birth also caused men to think about their own impending mortality, highlighted to them with the arrival of a new generation. These extracts indicate how striking the men's realisation of aging and mortality became with their impending fatherhood. For many this emphasised a sense of time as a resource and a desire to fit all their future goals in the remaining period.

I don't know, I suppose we thought, "Christ, we're getting older!" I don't know, to be perfectly honest..... Erm, (2) I do think about my age a lot more than I ever did before. Erm, you start going through, I never really thought about my age before too much, everyone thinks about it, but you start working out "Christ! that means when the baby's ten, I'll be...", this,

that and the other, I can't quite think, "I'm going to be an old parent". (Bob, 36)

You realise your own, I think it makes you realise your own mortality as well. You kind of, you know you think you've got a baby when it's born, when it's thirty I'll be sixty five or something and you don't want to create it and miss out on all, you want to watch your kids grow up and enjoy them don't you so, I think it does, it does make you think more about your own health and your own mortality. (Pete, 35)

For some of the men, the pregnancy provided a wake-up call to make lifestyle changes – like stopping smoking and cutting down drinking – to improve their health in an attempt to ensure they will be around to see their child grow up. This fear of aging and mortality becomes more prominent in the second round of interviews once the baby has actually arrived and parenthood becomes a reality. In later interviews there is a significant switch in men's thinking about time, indicating that a concern about and awareness of the future is increasingly apparent.

One overarching element in thinking about time is mortality, the ultimate limitation emphasising the time frame of the life course. It has been suggested that men who are experiencing fatherhood for the first time have a new consciousness of the biological life course; by experiencing the birth of their child they also feel closer to their own deaths, a reminder that they are no longer a member of the younger generation (Shapiro 1995). During the later interviews, it is evident that the tempo of the life course is highlighted to participants by the speed that they can see their child changing. For some men, this recognition of how quickly their child is growing up causes them to reflect again on their own aging and mortality. Indeed, for a few of the men, having a child was a way in which they could make themselves immortal and therefore transcend time.

Time is going- time is going to tick, we're all dying, to be perfectly honest, you know, really horrible, and in one sense, somebody made a fantastic comment that children are the thing that makes you immortal - in a lot of senses that is true - that child is going to be one half me (Bill, 34)

Discussion

This paper has offered an insight into the apparent importance of adhering to a rigid socially approved, though often implicit, life course sequence, and the consequences of not doing so, illustrating the significant influence that timing has on the experience of fatherhood. By highlighting some noteworthy aspects, the paper has shown how exploring understandings of time is imperative for understanding participants' experiences and expectations of major life course events. The evident persistence of the standardised lifecycle (Elchardus and Smits 2003) has implications for those who make transitions off-time, as this has been shown to significantly affect their experience of fatherhood. It has been argued that a consideration of time and timing is crucial for accessing deeper levels of meaning around participants' experiences, as time is a pervasive feature of social life yet it often remains implicit. By problematising time I have been able to frame the existing data in a distinctive way, leading to the emergence of findings that illustrate the importance of time for understanding life transitions. Therefore I suggest that the utility of problematising issues of time should be acknowledged in future research. My current PhD research on the timing of fatherhood seeks to further explore these issues.

This paper has considered one aspect of how participants experienced time during the transition to fatherhood but many other important aspects remain important. There has been no opportunity, for example, to discuss experiences of time as a resource (Southerton 2003) in its allocation, or experience of its lack (Pasero 1994). There has been no mention of managing the contradictions between work time, family time, quality time (Kremer-Sadlick and Paugh 2007) and the negotiation of these around the all important routine. Similarly there has been no discussion of time frame, historical or generational time and how the participant situates their account in a wider perspective. These omissions give an indication of how far an exploration of time can extend and how salient it becomes at a moment of transition. More space than this article allowed would be required to adequately present and discuss these aspects.

The arguments made in this paper are predominantly based on data from men who made the transition to fatherhood on-time and who alluded to following standardised life course stages. Whilst a small number of participants experienced an 'off-time' transition, it would be beneficial to consider more accounts of fathers in this situation in an effort to further explore the difficulties they may encounter. I am seeking to explore these experiences in my current PhD research with additional data from men who have become fathers at different ages. Although suggesting that a standardised life sequence exists, it is acknowledged that whilst the particular stages appear to have remained fairly consistent across generations, what has changed is the socially approved timings of these stages and intervals between them. By paying attention to how fathers today conceptualise 'right time' we are also able to reflect on how the understanding of this has changed over time, considering factors that may be unique to the current generation of fathers.

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New International Division of Labour & the Foreign Manpower Policy of Singapore

Peidong Yang

Abstract

Singapore's economy was historically tied to labour immigration. In fact, since the 1819 British colonisation of this then sparsely-populated tiny Southeast Asian island, it was mainly the immigrants from the vicinity and later the wider region, notably China, who made up the original population of what was to become today one of the most prosperous nations in the world. Whether it be historical coincidence or necessity, the interesting fact is that today's Singapore relies on immigrant labour no less than it did before. However, the current reliance grew out from a vastly different set of economic, social, and political circumstances compared to that of the colonial Singapore. This article looks at Singapore's current dependence on foreign labour and the Singapore state's foreign labour strategies and policies against the dual backgrounds of the city-state's post-independence (1965) economic development and the concept of 'new international division of labour'. By highlighting some of the social implications of both the influx of foreign labour and the state's policies, the essay suggests on the one hand that viewed from a sociological perspective, Singapore's aggressive developmental strategy is characterised by a tinge of pathology and on the other hand, the Singapore case confirms the neo-imperial thesis of globalisation, although some fine tuning seems to be in order.

Key words: *Singapore, economy, labour, migration*

In 1965, Singapore's per capita GDP was \$511.76, ranking the 42nd among the world economies (2009a). In 2008, Singapore's per capita GDP was estimated to be \$51,649 based on purchasing power parity, ranking the 4th out of the 181 world countries available in the IMF database, only falling behind that of Qatar, Luxemburg and Norway (2009f). It would be no exaggeration to say that in a span of just over four decades, Singapore had made the leap from the third world into the first.

What explains such spectacular economic growths? The take-off of modern Singapore's economy should probably be attributed to its incorporation into what Froebel et al (1980) called the 'New International Division of Labour', or NIDL. In the late 1960s and 1970s when business and manufacturing profit rates across the industrialised world dropped unprecedentedly (Armstrong et al., 1991), many big corporations started to relocate certain productions to the developing world where large amount of cheap labour and consequently higher profit rates were available. Thus, when the industrialised countries devolved the low-skill, labour intensive productions to the developing countries that were 'fitter' for the jobs, there emerged a new international division of labour (the 'old' or 'classical' one refers to the

historical division that a few industrial countries produced capital- and consumer- goods whereas the underdeveloped world primarily supplied raw materials, *ibid.*, p. 44).

Indeed, Singapore's early developmental strategy is no other than attracting foreign investments in the manufacturing sector by providing the most favourable investment conditions and environments. During 1968-73, total manufacturing investment commitments exceeded S\$2.3bn (Bercuson, 1995). This probably could not have been possible were it not for the generous tax incentives offered by the government (*ibid.*, p. 15) and perhaps more important the hardline official industrial relations policies which outlawed strikes, disempowered labour organisation and artificially kept wages low (*ibid.*, pp 29-33). Thus, between 1965 and 1978, Singapore was able to achieve an average annual GDP growth rate of 10 per cent.

There are some interesting debates about NIDL, as to whether the incorporation into NIDL through export oriented manufacturing could really benefit the developing countries. Frobel et al, the originators of the concept, held rather pessimistic views, arguing that in terms of the improvement in the social condition of the mass of the populations in the developing countries, export-oriented industrialisation (EOI) hardly achieved anything because:

...these world market factories are industrial enclaves with no connection to the local economy except for their utilisation of extremely cheap labour and occasionally some local inputs (energy, water and services for example), and are isolated from the local economy in almost all other respects. (*ibid.*, p. 6)

This is echoed by the 'dependency theory' which asserts that politically and economically, developing countries are destined to subordination by virtue of their dependence on the investment and technologies of the multinational corporations based in the industrial countries (Frank, 1969). Furthermore, not a few have also forcefully argued that neoliberal globalisation, which seems to be more than cheek by jowl, if not one and the same, with the NIDL, did make the rich richer and the poor, poorer (e.g. Clawson, 2003, Harvey, 2005). In other words, the NIDL is a Darwinian game with the powerful industrial countries sitting on the higher end of food-chain and the powerless developing countries subject to neo-imperial predation.

While a disempowered labour and state-controlled wage system to some degree agree with the above, this defeatist stance is on the whole not supported by the experience of Singapore. In his examination of Singapore's industrialisation process, Rodan (1989) accentuated the primacy of *state autonomy* in the provision of various favourable conditions for the inflow of foreign capital. While this challenges the image of an utterly impotent state portrayed by the theories mentioned previously, what Rodan failed to spell out clearly is *how* the state at the same time made sure that the nation did not end up being a loser in the EOI process.

For Singapore, two possible explanations seem available. Firstly, Peebles and Wilson (1996) suggest that while aggressively attracting foreign capital, the Singapore government at the meanwhile cultivated its own national capital base in the form of large government owned/linked companies (GLCs). The compulsory national saving scheme Central Provident Fund (CPF) and the foreign reserves accumulated through manufacturing exports provided the funds with which the government could invest heavily in infrastructure and other strategic industries such as telecom, shipping, aviation and so on. Hence, a strong government owned industry base was established in Singapore. By the mid-1980s, as much as 45 per cent of

Singapore's GDP was generated by government-owned companies (Clad, 1989). Therefore, although today's Singapore still relies heavily on foreign investment (2009c, Lee and Lim, 2007), the Singaporean capital itself has grown hugely powerful and is acting as an aggressive investor on the global arena. Through both the gigantic GLCs and local SMEs, Singapore's investment abroad reached S\$28bn by late 1994, accounting for 31.2 per cent of its GNP (Peebles and Wilson, 1996). In 2002, the figure had risen to S\$147bn, only to almost double again in 2007 to reach nearly S\$260bn (2009e). Today, Singapore's GLCs such as SIA (airline), PSA (port), NOL (shipping), SingTel (telecom), CapitaLand (property), to name but a few, are powerful global/regional players, actively investing worldwide, but particularly in the fast developing countries such as China and India.

The second possible explanation is perhaps that the Singapore leadership, as it is always lauded for, is a particularly visionary, efficient and 'rugged' one. It had the strategic vision and executive capability to shed its skin of being merely a low-wage low-skill manufacturing site and thence transform itself by firstly shifting its focus to technology-intensive, high value-added manufacturing, and later to financial and business service industries but eventually to a highly diversified economy model founded largely on knowledge-based industries with a globally competitive human capital (2007). Namely, it had the ambition and determination to ascend the hierarchy of NIDL and it managed to do it.

However, it would also be erroneous to credit Singapore's success entirely to the brilliancy of the state. The other half can be viewed as necessitated by some ineluctable consequences of industrialisation and external competitive circumstances. For example, between 1979 and 1984 alone, the unit labour costs in Singapore rose by as much as 40 percent, way outstripping productivity growth (Rodan, 1989). The less developed countries surrounding Singapore and the 'open-up' of China in 1978 meant even cheaper labour were available elsewhere. One could even argue that the massive neoliberal economic restructuring of the industrialised world and the massive emergence of low-wage work in these erstwhile high-wage countries might have had an effect of narrowing the wage gaps between the developed and developing worlds (e.g.: Bosch and Weinkopf, 2008, Caroli and Gautie, 2008, Lloyd et al., 2008), thus eroding the traditional competitive advantages of industrialising economies like Singapore.

Hence, just as Reich (1992) had suggested that America should turn as many of its citizens as possible into 'symbolic analysts', Singapore must transform itself from a nation of manufacturing workers into a nation of managers, engineers, business entrepreneurs etc. To some extent, this is what it did and certainly this is the future direction it has set for itself. Between 1989 and 1999, the percentage of Singapore workforce holding university degrees more than doubled from 6.1% to 14.7% while those holding sub-secondary school qualifications had dropped from half to 37.5% (Low, 2002). Another source shows that the number of degree holders in 2007 was 2.5 times of that in 1997. The general upgrading of local workforce led to the situation where fewer and fewer indigenous workers were willing to take up the so-called '3D jobs' (dirty, dangerous, and demanding) such as those to be found in marine and construction industries, which are nevertheless still there, or sometimes even expanding. This opened up the demand for a large number of foreign male labourers. On the other hand, a related effect to skill upgrading was increased female work participation rate. While male work participation rate remained high throughout 1957-1990, the female participation rate for the same period rose dramatically from 21 percent to 53 percent (Huff, 1994). When the wives and mothers withdraw from unpaid (and often unacknowledged) household work and join waged employment, foreign domestic workers (FWDs), i.e. maids,

are sought as a (lowly) paid substitution (Heyzer and Wee, 1994). By the end of 2006, it was estimated that there were approximately 160,000 foreign maids and 135,000 foreign construction workers, together making up more than half of the total 580,000 foreign low-skill labourers in Singapore (Teng and Wu, 2007), with the others in service, manufacturing and marine industries.

Yet, the above does not exhaust what are broadly counted as ‘foreign workers’. At the other end of the spectrum, there are the expatriates of the MNC/TNCs, the internationally mobile professionals, businessmen, artists and so on. These middle/high-skilled foreigners reside and work in Singapore because of the career/business opportunities presented by this vibrant economy. They are cordially referred to as ‘foreign talents’ by the Singapore government and are warmly welcomed to come in and settle down. They make up the rest of the total 756,000 foreign workers in Singapore (end of 2006 figure, *ibid.*). As Yeoh et al (2000) point out, these talents are strongly desired by the Singapore state because their presence dovetails with the city-state’s aggressive ambition to become a globally competitive knowledge-based economy with first class human capital. In fact, as shall be touched on later, the state has implemented various policies and measures in order to attract and absorb such global talents. However, the state’s ‘hunger’ for global talents should also be read in a wider context. The incorporation of more female in workforce and the rapid growth of economy had led to some undesirable consequences. The total fertility rate in Singapore had been dropping steadily since the 1960s (Hui and Hashmi, 2004) and some estimates claim that 3000 to 5000 families were emigrating from Singapore yearly since the late 1980s (Trocki, 2006, Tan and Chiew, 1995). Tan and Chiew further point out that ‘those Singaporeans who are likely to emigrate are precisely the ones whom Singapore cannot afford to lose’ (Tan and Chiew, 1995) because it is usually those career-wise successful and thus considered more talented who have the resources for emigration. Therefore, from the Singapore state’s viewpoint, to attract foreign talents, just like the importation of foreign labourers, is not only desirable but also necessary.

Table 1 (adapted from 2009b, Yeoh, 2006) below captures the growth trajectory of foreigner workers in Singapore from 1970 to 2008. Clearly, the number was growing at staggering rates, more than doubling itself every decade since 1980. Currently, one in every three working persons, or one in every five persons in Singapore is a foreign worker (the latest estimate of Singapore population is about 4.84m, see 2009d). There seems no updated figure as to the talent-labour ratio of this one million odd mass. Assuming the 2006 year end statistics still holds, more than three quarters of them should fall into the un/low-skilled labourer category.

Table 1. *Foreign Workers in Singapore, 1970–2008*

Year	Total Labour Force	No. of Foreign Workers	% of Foreign Workers
1970	650,892	20,828	3.2
1980	1,077,090	119,483	7.4
1990	1,537,000	248,000	16.1
2000	2,094,800	612,200	29.2
2008	2,960,000	1,057,700	36.0

How does the Singapore state manage such a massive number of foreign workers? A number of researchers (Hui and Hashmi, 2004, Low, 2002, Teng and Wu, 2007, Yeoh, 2006, Yeoh and Huang, 1999, Wong, 1997) have analysed the foreign labour management system and policies in Singapore, unanimously pointing to the bifurcated or bipolarised nature of the policies. Very much to reiterate what the various authors have already put very well, the system works by granting 'Employment Pass' (EP) to the foreign talents on the one hand and 'Work Permit' (WP) to the foreign labourers on the other. EP holders enjoy various privileges such as being able to bring families along, entitlement to long term social visit pass and liberal immigration policies. In sharp contrast, the WP holders are subject to stringent rules and restrictions of all kinds during their stay in Singapore. Their permit is valid for only two years and is cancelled immediately upon loss of employment. In this way, the WP holders are kept as a group of transient workforce, repatriated in case of economic downturn. This greatly increases the state's flexibility in managing the employment and general economic situations. These foreign labourers are not allowed to marry Singaporeans. They are subject to regular medical check-up and are immediately repatriated upon discovery of sexually transmitted diseases. They are not allowed to stay in public housing flats, let alone private/landed properties which in Singapore are for the really well-off only. Instead, they are accommodated in dormitories or temporary establishments at work sites, which can be of uninhabitable conditions in case of unscrupulous employers. Yet, the worst of all perhaps happen to the female WP holders, most of whom domestic servants. These maids are not even protected by the Employment Act, the local legislation governing employment relations. Hence apart from being paid disgracefully low wages (apparently determined by market mechanism), overwork and personal abuse occur not infrequently without any legal recourse for these maids to seek. The state's argument for such a heartless policy is that domestic employment relation is special and could not be effectively governed by law, and to govern it constitutes an intrusion of the privacy of the households. While maintaining only minimal legal protection, the state imposes various monetary levies and deposits on the employers of both the male and female WP holders, cleverly devolving the tasks of foreign worker regulation and surveillance to the private sector. This often leads to the employers' further exploitation and mistreatments of these already vulnerable workers. The state's laissez-faire attitude does not only mean minimal legal protection, but in many instances also means turning a blind eye to unethical employers.

The Singapore state's bipolarised policy towards the two bifurcated groups of labour is a case of appalling contrast. Yeoh (2006) has labelled the state's attitude towards foreigner labourers a 'use and discard' one, just as Cheah (2006) points out that these workers are viewed by both the government and individual employers as no more than instruments. Cheah in his book gave more accounts of the dehumanising mistreatments these alien workers oftentimes have to bear, which we cannot afford to mention here. Interestingly, Cheah's gaze at the maids' plight is different from Yeoh's in that he sees the inhuman condition of these transient workers as evident to the fact that, contrary to the neoliberal rhetoric, globalisation can work against humanity in specific contexts. And for him:

The dizzying rapidity of change in the Singapore state's strategies for ascending the hierarchy of the new international division of labor [...] allows us to see the inhuman face of globalization in the highest relief. (Cheah, 2006)

This brings us back to our earlier discussion of the NIDL. While Singapore magnificently accomplished its ascendancy on the hierarchy and hence generally afforded its own people a better life, one cannot help but realise that this better life is to some extent built on the backs

and shoulders of some less fortunate others. But this does not trouble the Singapore state. The aggressive ambitions of this tiny country, its burning desire to always excel itself to become ever more competitive leads to a pragmatism that casts moral concerns to the margins. Yao (2007) puts this very well:

This is the other side of the Singapore Story: the dark moral vacuity that comes out of the PAP's¹ famous pragmatism, its obsession with 'things that work' and 'the ends justifies the means' (p. 179)

What better evidence to this moral vacuity can one find than the plight of foreign labourers under the official foreign manpower policies of Singapore?

However, the story does not quite end here yet. As Pang (1982) sharply points out, the importation of foreign manpower, be it talents or labourers, is not just for their economic utility; the top decision makers in Singapore also believe the foreign labour's perceived (and often factual) conscientiousness and thrift will serve to rouse the competitive spirit of the local population. In other words, the influx of the foreign labour sets off a tooth-and-nail Darwinian competition among the populace, with the state nevertheless harnessing all the fruits in form of the increased competitiveness of Singapore's human capital. It is no wonder a 2002 poll of Singaporean youths showed that 58% of them felt 'threatened' by the foreigners working in Singapore (Yeoh, 2006). Thus, Yao is not exaggerating when he commented that in Singapore '...people are living under a patronising, authoritarian state which produces in people feelings of *deep insecurity*' (Yao, 2007). The state's own deep insecurity about its competitive position in the global battlefield thus trickles down and finds its mirror images in the ordinary Singapore people in terms of their personal insecurity and aggressiveness about their jobs, social status and so on. While the notion that competitiveness is necessary for a healthy economy is hard to deny, much evidence seems to suggest there is a tinge of pathology to the way this small island nation fashions itself and its people.

In response to the current global economic downturn, the Singapore government is implementing a series of policies and programmes (2008a) to subsidise employers and preserve jobs, not unlike those seen in the West, though nothing comparable in terms of scale and extensiveness. But it is important to note that first these measures are temporary because they run counter to the state's fundamental philosophy and second, not surprisingly, they do not include the foreign labourers. In fact, as mentioned earlier, the transient foreign workforce serves exactly as a cushion for the economy and unemployment in such dire circumstances.

In conclusion, through describing and analysing Singapore state's foreign manpower policy against the background of the city-state's industrialisation process, this essay offers a fine tuning to the neo-imperial interpretation of neoliberal globalisation, that being: individual developing countries are not of necessity hopelessly subject to the domination of the power of the developed world; state can play an active role in lifting the national economy on the hierarchy of the international division of labour; however this is, as the Singapore foreign labour case illustrates most candidly, usually accomplished at the expenses of some other less fortunate countries/peoples. In other words, Darwinism applies macrologically at international and global levels as much as it does micrologically at intra-national and inter-personal levels. It is also exactly the Singapore state's religious belief in and execution of

¹ PAP: People's Action Party, the monopoly political party in Singapore.

such Darwinian principles that led to what I consider some of the pathological traits in Singapore's hyper-development. Also precisely because of this, the Singapore case potentially becomes an important lens through which the economic and social developments of various forthcoming industrialising countries can be critically assessed.

A postscript upon reflection

With regard to national (or for that matter, regional) competitiveness discourse which evidently overwhelms Singapore, one position critically suggests that individual labour do compete; companies do compete; but regions or countries do not necessarily compete (Lovering, 1999). In my opinion, the fact Singapore being a tiny country without any natural resources largely mandates that it be run on the principle of a competitive and profit-chasing company. In fact, this city-state has often been referred to as 'Singapore Inc' (Peebles and Wilson, 1996). Added up by the hegemonic Competition State ideology which is wholeheartedly espoused in Singapore, alternative modes of economic development is unlikely to appear on the government's horizon, which is also the reason why such an alternative possibility does not feature in the discussion presented in this essay. Therefore, I feel obliged to qualify my foregoing conclusion by acknowledging certain peculiarities associated with the Singapore case, although I would not go so far as to alter it because in many ways, Singapore has been looked up to as an exemplar by many industrialising countries, among them not least China. Nevertheless, the alternative possibility actually holds the key to whether Singapore's developmental pathologies stand a chance of being alleviated. Hence, this remains a key research question waiting to be addressed.

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Balancing on the boundary between two discursively different worlds: A mother and daughter case study exploring space, place, class and identity

Dawn Mannay

Abstract

When the media portray marginalised housing estates they often cast residents in a Beggar's Opera of modern grotesques, which bear little resemblance to their ways of living. This paper draws upon data generated by one mother and daughter pair from a research project, which aimed to explore and represent the everyday experiences of working-class mothers and daughters residing on and around a peripheral housing estate. The intergenerational visual data production and interviews revealed that although commonalities abound, individuals develop their own ideas, feelings and perceptions of their immediate locality. Furthermore, participants' demonstrated a complex set of emotional challenges inherent to working-class upward social mobility, which illustrate the ways in which place and space permeate individual biographies and can contribute to fragmented, contradictory and unresolved identities. Specifically, the psychological consequences of the spatial positioning, 'border crosser' are explored both in terms of residence and education.

Keywords: Britain, class, daughters, hybridity, mothers, place, visual methods, Wales.

Introduction

As Wills (2008) remarks *'geography is often used as a surrogate for the question of class'* and indeed in many ways the postcode has become shorthand to denote class so that the caricatures of 'Sharons' in 'white high heeled shoes' (Skeggs 1997:76) or more recently Vikki Pollard [1] and the cast of Shameless [2] are coded by their residence in the *'next-door yet foreign place where the other neighbours live'* (Toynbee 2003:19). In this way, the imperialist project, which maintained the hegemony of the west by *'constructing or perpetuating myths about the exotic or uncivilized 'others''* (McDowell 1992:61) remains active within the confines of its own national boundaries.

The significance of space was explored by Skeggs (1997) in her longitudinal ethnographic study charting the complex ways that disadvantage and privilege work to shape the trajectories of women. In regard to the immediate shared locality, Skeggs found that metaphors of place and space allowed the distribution of resources and people to be framed and provided an insight into women's movements through space especially in the areas to which they are denied entry.

Similarly, Reay and Lucey (2000) found that place and identity are inexorably linked. Their qualitative study gathered data from children, living on and around a large council estate officially designated as a site of social exclusion. The study illustrated that although the children shared many common experiences of their surroundings there was no single sense of place. Children living on the estates unanimously described them as dirty, noisy and dangerous places but the recognition of the stigma associated with the estate was undercut by a shared sense of belonging.

The way in which place and identity are powerfully connected situates the children who live on the estate, pathologised in local and national media, at an impasse. An impasse, which has a bearing on the social-pedagogical aspect of the neighbourhood, which as De Visscher and Bouverne-De Bie (2008) argue influences not only the day-to-day realities of children's lives but as Hall et al (1999) previously explored, also notions of their future citizenship and community.

Locality then is central to identity. Place is both a heuristic mechanism, a quick fix, for placing ourselves and others and a 'social construct arising out of our interactions with others around us' (Scourfield et al 2006:15). Consequently, this research aimed to gain a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of the locale. The aim was not to establish an overall view of the working class mother and daughters experience but to give specific individuals the opportunity to share their everyday experiences and their conceptions of place, space and identity. The intention, then, was to replace the pathologised and the homogenous with the '*myriad of details that make up a real life, the only kind of life worth talking about*' (Benn 1998:236) and to gain an understanding of the ways in which place and space permeate individual biographies.

Methodology

Places and spaces: the research site

Hystryd [3], the geographical space that is home to the participants is an area, which saw a rapid expansion after World War II, in a building programme to provide 'homes fit for heroes'. The area has since acquired a reputation that many of the residents are keen to dispel. One of the largest housing estates in Europe, this predominately white area has become the epitome of the classically disadvantaged council estate and the poverty yardsticks applied to the estate include those measuring high unemployment; high rates of teenage pregnancy; high numbers of lone-parent families and high take-up of free school meals.

In the minds of outsiders the Hystryd is one of those 'types of places' inhabited by 'types of people' (Haylett 2003) and although there are 'in house' distinctions of council, private, lower, upper, the other side, north, south, best and worst for outsiders it is a homogenous place, where ever residents stake allegiance is inconsequential for all addresses retain the stigma of the estate. Nevertheless, the experience of living in Hystryd is far from homogenous and solidarity is infiltrated with discourses of belonging and disengaging.

As Massey (1994) maintains, there exists a simultaneous multiplicity of spaces because the social relations of space are experienced differently and variously interpreted, by those holding different positions as part of it. Discourses of 'us and them' (Southerton 2002) can also translate into residents living at the interface between two discursively different worlds, a position often demonstrating the psychological consequences of spatial positioning of 'border crosser' (Lucey et al 2003:287).

Participants

As Rawlins (2006) maintains, by considering intergenerational relationships it is possible to gain a greater depth of understanding since one can compare different versions of the same story. Thus, the study was interested in considering the views of both mothers and their daughters to explore intergenerational notions of place and identity. Additionally, in Hystryd there are close ties between spatial and social distinctions, therefore, in order to preclude 'place-centrism' (Jessop et al 2008) it was also important to explore notions of territory by comparing the accounts of those residing in council properties in the heart of the estate with those living on the borderlines in privately owned homes and I selected participants to illustrate this multiplicity of

space. For the purposes of this paper I selected a mother and daughter, Caroline and Sophie [4], who have resided on both sides of the private/state divide.

Caroline is white, working-class, thirty-eight years old and is in a stable relationship with her husband of 16 years. They both grew up in council housing in Hystryd and took out their first mortgage, when Caroline was 18, on an ex-council house within the heart of Hystryd. They have since moved to a privately owned home on the periphery of Hystryd. Caroline's husband works full-time have three children, two sons aged 13 and 8 and one daughter Sophie who is 15.

As well as exploring issues of space it was also important to engage with the modernist discourses, which place a responsibility on the individual to succeed suggesting that individual duty is a moral imperative. This idea is resonant with the concept of the elusive American Dream (Bullock and Limbert 2003), which forgets that social class and locality is far more than an abstract concept, rather it is an operational force contributing to the difficulties of accessing and completing education and 'getting on'.

Therefore, for this paper I selected Caroline, a mother who left school with no academic qualifications and found herself constrained within the traditional three Cs – catering, cleaning and caring with an associated wage that acts as '*a large No Entry sign on every ordinary pleasure in today's consumer society*' (Toynbee 2003:239). Caroline recently re-entered education and her experience illustrates the complex set of emotional challenges inherent to working-class upward social mobility both in terms of residence and education.

Sophie attends a local a co-educational community comprehensive school, Hillside, which concentrates on compulsory education up to the age of 16. The school draws approximately 750 pupils from the immediate area, 45 per cent of pupils are entitled to free school meals and the school is in the lowest quartile of achievers with only 28 percent of children achieving the benchmark of 5 GCSEs grade A-C. As many of Sophie's neighbours shun the school she attends, Sophie has also had to struggle with maintaining an acceptable femininity in school and at home.

Research Relationships

The relationship between researcher and researched is key to the collection of rich and reliable data (Pole 2007). Therefore, it is important to explicate the position of the researcher. I have known Caroline for about three years through our children's sporting activities and have met Sophie occasionally through sports games and events. Furthermore, I used to live in Hystryd both as a council tenant and private homeowner, on both sides of the proverbial fence. There is, then, a shared sense of geography, which positioned me as 'researcher near' and influenced the design of the study (see Mannay 2009 for a discussion of the consequences of being 'researcher near').

Sikes (2003) conducted research with women sharing her working-class background having found that the predominately dominant middle-class accounts available were often partial and limited. However, Sikes discovered that when researching within ones own cultural settings it is easy to assume commonalities. In order to counter this difficulty Sikes made a deliberate cognitive effort to question her taken for granted assumptions and learnt that much of what she had thought customary was really very different. Similarly, Reay (1996) calls for reflexivity in the research process in an exploration of her own trajectory from working-class girl to feminist academic, which examines the strength and fragility of her connections with working-class experience.

Thus, although this paper does not intend to engage with debating insider and outsider dichotomies there remains the concern that I am ‘experience near’ (Anderson 2002: 23), which can intensify the need to guard against familiarity. Therefore, it remains fundamental to ‘make strange social context that we assume to understand by virtue of taken for granted cultural competence’ (Atkinson et al 2003:47).

Consequently, it was important to address my position as an indigenous researcher and make a deliberate cognitive effort to question my taken for granted assumptions of that which I had thought familiar. Therefore, in combination with earlier strategies (Delamont and Atkinson 1995), I was influenced by research that has used participants’ visual data to refresh the habitual responses of the researcher and to render the familiar setting more perceptible (Gauntlett 2007, Kaomea 2003).

Accordingly, I employed participant -directed visual data collection techniques to promote subject-led dialogue and to limit the propensity for participant’s accounts to be overshadowed by the enclosed, self-contained world of common understanding. The mother and daughter featured in this paper used the data collection techniques of photo-elicitation [5] to express their own perceptions of their social and physical environments focusing on elements within their home, their street and the wider locality.

The practice of asking participants to explain the visual images that they create has become a common feature of social science research (Belin 2005; Darbyshire et al 2007; Morrow 2001; Ross 2007). This technique privileges the notion that the most salient aspect in understanding a visual image is what the maker intended to show, an approach often referred to as auteur theory (Rose 2001).

Auteur theory was required on a practical level because the interpretation of the audience is not necessarily the same as the narrative the image-maker wanted to communicate; indeed it can often be markedly different (Kearney and Hyle 2004; Mannay, 2009). Thus, rather than giving my own interpretations and assumptions to the pictures, I applied auteur theory by conducting interviews guided by the photographs to ascertain the participants’ own reasons for creating visual images.

By employing the technique of self-directed visual data collection I was able to gain a more nuanced understanding of the mothers and daughters worlds. Participants provided comprehensive and thoughtful accounts of their lives and their relationship with their immediate locality, offering vivid, eloquent and amusing descriptions alongside candid appraisals of their everyday lives.

The technique of participant-directed visual data production proved useful within a participatory methodology and illustrated a potential for making the familiar strange (see Mannay 2009 for a discussion of visual data production). However, this paper is concerned with presenting individuals’ own ideas, thoughts, feelings and perceptions of their immediate locality, rather than the exploration of visual methodology.

‘Easy Pickings’

Caroline describes her families move from council housing seven years previously as ‘*one of the best the best move we made*’. For Caroline, the only drawbacks are instances of vandalism and theft but these are generally restricted to the surrounding road, which is used as a cut through. Caroline summarises the problems with a photograph of graffiti, Figure 1, but there are a wide

range of incidents such as tipping over wheelie bins, arson, car crime, and burglary. Caroline relays one act of vandalism below;

Caroline: *Well I mean last week or the week before um, the last guy who lives right on the lane, on like like, on a gully [6] they pulled all his flowers up in his garden and put 'em on top of his car*



Figure 1: Vandalism

Caroline explains how her parents moved into a street of private housing and experienced a series of such incidents, after five decades of living in council housing a stones throw away with no occurrence of damage to their property. The vandalism is seen as the work of teenagers from council housing and the theft is accounted for by Caroline in the extract below;

Caroline: *You know that is the only thing because obviously you get people coming from different parts of Hystyd, you know to all the private houses thinking easy pickings*

Paradoxically these families, who had been living within council housing all their lives without incident, found that the move to the 'better life' of private housing was tainted by theft and vandalism. Although, the people and the property inside the homes may have no immediate material change the move signifies that they are now worth stealing from and deserving of the destruction of their property, the cost of appearing to become 'the other'. The threat of theft, however, in Caroline's case has been dealt with by investing in security measures and Caroline's home and car have not been subject to vandalism.

Sophie shares her mother's view of their street as quiet and is in agreement that the move from council housing was positive;

Sophie: *Mmm yeah it is quieter over here (laughs) than over there with you know, people in the street and that, but I much prefer living up here*

The move the council estate to a private housing area then has been seen as positive but it has also introduced discourses of 'us and them' (Southerton 2002). As I will explore later such shifts can translate into residents living at the interface between two discursively different worlds. For Sophie, at a life stage where people are actively engaged in a process of constructing themselves

through the complexities of difference and similarity (Willis 1990), this position often demonstrates the psychological consequences of the spatial positioning of the 'border crosser' (Lucey *et al.*, 2003, p. 287).

Retreat from the street

Valentine (2004) has documented the way in which parents' anxieties about the safety of their children have resulted in spatial restrictions being placed on children's play. Parental fears are often mediated by the social and physical characteristics of their own neighbourhoods and in the current study these reservations were reflected in the accounts of mothers living in council housing.

However, Caroline is happy for her children to play outside in the immediate vicinity where they have lots of friends. Children's safety in public space from traffic accidents has been a focus of academic concern (Valentine 1997) but the area is pedestrianised so Caroline does not have '*to worry about any lunatics in cars*'. Sophie too is happy to live on her street and has lots of friends who live on the surrounding streets. However, akin to the young people in Tucker and Matthew's (2001) and Valentine's (2004) exploration of the culture of childhood, Sophie criticised the lack of public space available to her and the unreasonable intervention of adults into her social world.

Sophie: *Um the way people moan about (.) us all hanging round on the streets and that cause there's nothing for us to do obviously and they all go down and moan in front of my Mum and Nan*

Children's lives, then are spatially restricted (Pilcher 1995) and Sophie discusses the strategies adults employ to regulate her and her friends' use of space such as phoning the police, complaining to parents, installing a high pitched buzzer above the local shop and blocking the entrance to the surrounding countryside. The denial of access, even to these forgotten and redundant spaces of the adult world can result in the erosion of the '*third space, a dynamic zone of tension and discontinuity where the newness of hybrid identities can be articulated*' (Matthews 2003:103).

A hybrid is a combination of attributes that may give rise to contradictory identities and for Bhabba (1994) hybridity is a 'fraught, anxious and ambivalent condition'. Thus, aligning himself with the new politics of cultural identity that has emerged within postcolonial theory, Matthews maintains that young people are hybrids; neither child nor adult but something else besides. He argues that the third place, of the street, back alley or derelict land is a fluid domain set temporarily outside of adult society where the process of separation can be played out and the newness of hybrid identities may be articulated.

Despite the restrictions, which close down the third space, Sophie stays within the boundaries of the small private housing estate. Unlike Caroline who says '*it wouldn't worry me about walking around any where*', Sophie is wary of the council estate explaining '*I wouldn't like to walk round on my own*'. For Sophie, then, like the young people encountered in Reay and Lucey's (2000) earlier research study, the council streets that used to be her home now feel intrinsically more dangerous. As Hall *et al.* (1999) maintain 'the street can be an oppressive place to be, and sometimes young people would rather be anywhere else', even when, as in Sophie's experience, the available spaces perceived as safe are bounded by adult surveillance.

Thus, as Massey (1994) maintains there exists a simultaneous multiplicity of spaces because the social relations of space are experienced differently and variously interpreted, by those holding different positions as part of it. Fear of crime is intimately linked to individual biography (Holloway and Jefferson 2000) and while Caroline has grown up in council housing, Sophie

moved into private housing six years ago when she was nine years old and this difference is reflected in the different relationship that mother and daughter have with their local area.

Caroline is comfortable with Hystryd not only in the sense of personal safety and accessing the surrounding space but in the sense that Hystryd is the bedrock of her sense of 'who she is and where she belongs'. As Scourfield et al (2006) maintain, childhood experience is the foundation upon which self-identity is built and Caroline's upbringing, family and friendship networks has been consolidated in the council housing that makes up the heart of Hystryd. In this way, for Caroline, Hystryd is not the site of ignominy, which Sophie negotiates as a consequence of moving to the periphery and making new friendships across the dialectic of sameness/otherness, which have brought with them new insecurities of the self.

In contrast to other young people who find that their parent's spatial anxieties shape their lives (Scott et al 1998) Sophie's use of space is restricted not by the anxiety of her mother but by her own fear. Consequently, Sophie is subject to further ambiguities, syncretism and hybridity not just in regard to ever shifting adult-child social/power relations of space and place but in terms of an ambivalent embedded identity conceptualised integrally with space, place and class.

Project Gemini

For Sophie, the move from council housing to private housing has been tinged with an 'uneasy hybridity' (Lucey et al 2003). Place and identity are inexorably linked and in different situations Sophie has had to struggle to make sense of an ambivalent identity that was either in or just outside of the area. Sophie attends Hillside, a local co-educational community comprehensive school but many of her friends, who live in the same private housing area, attend Greendale, a high performing comprehensive school out of the area based in a rural setting on the outskirts of an affluent, picturesque market town. Although Sophie would like to attend Greendale, a combination of lack of knowledge about the school, application procedures and the connections with junior school friends living near her old home led to her moving on to Hillside.

Sophie is aware of differences between her friends at school and her friends that reside in the neighbouring houses. The conversations evolving from photographs that Sophie has taken of her street and her school introduce this divergence. However, neither the photographs nor Sophie's words can completely articulate these differences.

Sophie: Like like not all like not saying my friends are posh or anything but they're like, I forgot I don't know I can't explain it, but we has all different kinds of people who goes to um, Hillside

Sophie is also aware that these subtle differences make it difficult for her two sets of friends to mix socially and again this sets Sophie apart as neither belonging wholly to one set of friends nor the other.

Sophie: Ah I have had one or two but I don't really bring 'em up to be honest (laughs) (both laugh) cause they only end up arguing, cause I don't know, they just don't really get along (laughs)

Sophie often goes to the market town to attend youth club with her friends from Greendale. On these occasions, when other teenagers ask her where she is from, she careful to emphasis that she lives outside of Hystryd, even though this is a geographical imagination as the outskirts are not outside, because she is aware of how its residents are perceived. For example, she has heard comments such as;

Sophie: Like watch the Hystryd people they got knives and all stuff like that it's pathetic

Sophie rejects these stereotypes despite her own aversion of many of the Hystryd's streets. Sophie acknowledges that through metaphors of waste, refuse and rejection Hystryd becomes 'demonised' (Reay 2004) and she is careful to clarify her position in opposition to this cite of ignominy. Conversely, when Sophie is with her school friends she identifies herself as coming from the Hystryd, being careful not to distance herself from the majority of her peers at school. This duality between being and denying the other can be seen to position Sophie as a 'border crosser' forced to live at the interface between two discursively different worlds (Lucey et al 2003:287). The identity constructed through interaction with others, then, can be seen as 'contradictory or unresolved' (Hall 1992:277).

The maintenance of contradictory acceptable femininities, then, has to be actively made and performed by Sophie. The concept of performativity is synonymous with the work of Judith Butler, who focuses on gender, asserting that all identity categories are the effects of institutions, practices and discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin (Butler 1990). For Butler, then, our most personal acts are continually being scripted by hegemonic social conventions and ideologies but these categories are fluid and interchangeable. Here, Sophie's difficult and intricate performance is focused on maintaining two conflicting group identities.

Sophie: I don't know, in some things I can be like the girls from school and then in some things I can be like the girls from up here... so but then if I say I talk like the girls from school, then all of these'll catch on, my friends up here'll catch on and then they'll start talking like it too

When Sophie says '*then they'll start talking like it too*' this is a signal for Sophie to pick up on, a signal that her way of talking is inappropriate. As James (1986) illustrates different forms of cultural expression distinguish and maintain group identities and Sophie has to pick up and perform markers to be accepted within the boundaries of both groups. Here the concept of hybridity is different for unlike Matthews's conception, which finds resolution in '*a transition towards incorporation into the adult world*' (Matthews 2003:115) there is no natural progression from one to the other. Rather, Sophie remains a combination of different and supposedly opposite things with no tangible *third space* where hybrid identities can be articulated.

Perhaps though Sophie has found a global *third space* in her fascination with celebrity; one of the photographs that she has taken to illustrate her world is the cover of a popular magazine featuring Katie Price [7]. Here in the pages of Sophie's magazines there are her favourite characters, working-class girls, with working-class accents who seemingly *have it all*. These celebrities have the designer labels and trappings of success that Sophie associates with 'getting on' in the same way that she reflects on moving from council housing. Sophie pressures Caroline for the latest fashion items and works after school and at weekends, and regulates her eating to achieve the 'right look'. However, although Sophie manages to exert control over outer appearance she is unable to disguise her accent, which aligns her identity with Hystryd and the 'titillating sins of the underclass' (Toynbee 2003:12).

Legitimate Motherhood

Caroline also shares the tensions of hybridity, which are linked with the social and moral identities bound up with parenting. Caroline had re-entered education after an early academic experience tinged with feelings of inadequacy and a career of low paid employment in the cleaning sector that she describes as '*a load of shit*'. Caroline wanted to escape the notion that she is a defiler because of the day to day nature of defiling material encountered (Davidoff 1976) and improve her family's prospects by investing in education.

Although Caroline had the support of her *'proud'* husband and mother returning to learning was difficult and she felt that she was not a legitimate mother because she could neither offer a high level of fiscal support nor spend an adequate amount of time nurturing her children and keeping the home clean, as prescribed in the ideal notion of the new motherhood (Benn 1998; May 2008). Despite Caroline's attempts to do her academic study late at night, when the children were asleep, her youngest son was particularly upset by the constraints that studying placed on her time telling his mother *'I hate that nuniversity I wish you never started that nuniversity'*.

As Butler (2004) suggests agency always exists with paradox as she explains 'If I have any agency, it is opened by the fact that I am constituted by a social world I never choose' (Butler 2004:3). The pre-existing world of work for working-class women like Caroline is formed from a history in which the woman who must work should ideally be engaged with motherhood or lower-level, gender stereotyped paid employment (Pilcher 1999). Class then, is complicated by gender and lived as an identity, not simply as an economic relation to the means of production, and the emotional complexities involved in challenging the expected trajectory of the working-class woman eventually result in Caroline letting go of the elusive American Dream. Several months after our initial interview Caroline had left university and was applying for jobs that could be found under the category of the *'dirty work of neo-liberalism'* (Herod and Aguiar 2006).

Conclusion

Medhurst's (1989) analysis of comedy revealed one of its functions is to police the ideological boundaries of a culture, to act as a border guard on the frontiers between dominant and the subordinate, to keep laughter in the hands of the powerful. Thus, the caricatures of Vikki Pollard and the cast of *Shameless* act to pathologise and homogenise the working-classes. This research attempted to dilute these stereotypes of the urban poor with a case study offering a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of the Caroline and Sophie's lives.

The concept of no single sense of place was illustrated in the accounts this mother and daughter who share the same home. For example, Caroline is confident to go anywhere in the area, whilst Sophie is reluctant to walk through the council estate alone. Relationships with place and space, then, are complex and the decision to interview mothers and their daughters revealed that although commonalities abound, individuals develop their own ideas, thoughts, feelings and perceptions of their immediate locality, which can be *'cross-cutting, intersecting, aligning with one another, or existing in relations of a paradox or antagonism'* (Massey 1994:3).

Valentine's (2004) suggestion that teenagers are dissatisfied with the amount public space available to them and the unreasonable intervention of adults into their social world was also apparent within the data. Such confinement and restriction, means that there are fewer opportunities for children to 'develop coping skills from direct experience, to exercise their imagination, extend their physical competence and capabilities, and give reign to their instinctive desires to extend their geographical boundaries' (Hillman 2006: 62).

Furthermore, the contested nature of the public domain closes down the third space where young people can articulate hybridity and develop a sense of self-hood (Matthews 2003). Caroline and Sophie's move from council housing to living in a privately owned home illustrated a range of difficulties. Private homes on the outskirts of the estate often evoke discourses of the 'other' and are the target of crime. Additionally, the timing of the move meant that Sophie still attends a low achieving secondary school, which the majority of her new neighbours shun as a choice for their own children. Sophie, then, is caught in a duality between being and denying the 'other' with the choices of identifying with and distancing ones self from the local area made in relation to situation, location, the influence of others and the identity that was adopted.

The psychological consequence of the spatial positioning of 'border crosser' as a fragmented, contradictory and unresolved identity was demonstrated in Sophie's account and also in terms of the cost of Caroline's investment in the ideology of an untenable modern motherhood. The absence of a third space and the hybridity for which there may be no resolution, incorporation or complete transition is particularly problematic and supports the need to challenge accounts of 'reflective modernism', which suggest increased freedom for individuals outside of structural constraints such as class and gender.

Further Research

It has been argued that there is an urgent need to explore class as a lived experience, rather than an abstract concept, which has often been bypassed by broader interpretations of inequality (Stenning 2008). Furthermore, there has been an emerging recognition of the importance of involving lay publics in the formulation and delivery of services that affect them (O'Neill and Williams 2004). Thus, this paper has been concerned with making space for working-class understandings of locality and place within academia.

The current findings suggest that innovative participatory methodological approaches such as the use of participant-directed visual data could be developed further to facilitate an understanding of the unique view points of both adults and children. Mundane, everyday things and places provide an insight to the other people's worlds, for much can be learnt, both practically and theoretically, from that which is *'often unnoticed, often unsaid, often unsayable, often unacknowledged and often underestimated'* (Horton and Kraftl, 2006, p. 259).

The development of such techniques, then, offers the opportunity to develop more complex and differentiated representations of working-class lives and contribute to making 'informed as opposed to ignorant policy decisions' (Reay, 2004, p. 1020). Future research could develop this work to open up discourse and thus open up a space where working-class ways of being and speaking are not pathologised as antithetical to progression or silenced in the fallacy of a classless society. A space beyond the stereotypical and the homogenous, a space for the multitude of details and diversity of urban living that represent the everyday experiences of working-class mothers and daughters residing on the margins of contemporary Britain.

Notes

1. Vikki Pollard is a character in the BBC comedy sketch series Little Britain - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/comedy/littlebritain/>
2. Shameless is a British comedy drama television series set in a fictional social housing estate produced by Company Pictures for Channel 4 <http://www.channel4.com/entertainment/tv/microsites/S/shameless/>
3. The name Hystryd is fictitious and it was chosen to maintain the anonymity of the area.
4. The names Caroline and Sophie are fictitious and were chosen by the participants to maintain their anonymity.
5. The techniques of self-directed photography and photo-elicitation, or 'photo-voice' as it is sometimes called, have been used successfully in a range of research studies. In this study participants were each provided with a camera and asked to take a series of photographs depicting meaningful places, spaces and activities. The photographs then formed the basis of an interview where I engaged in a tape-recorded discussion with each participant. Further discussion of the technique can be found in Mannay 2009.
6. Gullies are narrow, purpose built pathways between streets that form shortcuts between neighbouring streets.

7. Katie Price also known as Jordan is a former [English](#) glamour model, currently a television personality and businesswoman. Her personal life is regularly featured in British [tabloids](#) and celebrity-based magazines. Price has become an inspiration to many young working-class girls. Price has won awards for being Celebrity Mum of the Year and written best selling biographies. It is Price's relationship with her children, particularly her son Harvey, who has the condition, septo-optic dysplasia, and her time as a single mother, which has endeared her to young women.

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