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What about Place? Considering the Role of Physical Environment on Youth Imagining of Future Possible Selves

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Abstract

Identity research indicates that development of well elaborated cognitions about oneself in the future, or one's possible selves, is consequential for youths' developmental trajectories, influencing a range of social, health, and educational outcomes. Although the theory of possible selves considers the role of social contexts in identity development, the potential influence of the physical environment is understudied. At the same time, a growing body of work spanning multiple disciplines points to the salience of *place*, or the meaningful physical environments of people's everyday lives, as an active contributor to self-identity. Bridging these two lines of inquiry, I provide evidence to show how place-based experiences, such as belonging, aversion, and entrapment, may be internalized and encoded into possible selves, thus producing emplaced future self-concept. I suggest that for young people, visioning self in the future is inextricably bound with place; place is an active contributor both in the present development of future self-concept and in enabling young people to envision different future possible places. Implications for practice and future research include place-making interventions and conceptualizing place beyond “neighborhood effects.”

Keywords

identity; adolescence; place identity; futurity; possible selves; neighborhood

“There is no social environment that is not also a physical environment.” Ittelson, Proshansky, Rivlin & Winkle, 1974

How young people conceptualize and cognitively represent their futures – as full of positive potential or constraints and negative possibilities—bears influence on their developmental trajectories. Adolescence is a developmental period when future-thinking becomes increasingly salient. Future self-concepts, or possible selves, are self-relevant cognitions of enduring goals, aspirations, hopes, fears and threats that function as a framework and guide for individual identity development (Markus & Nurius, 1986). For adolescents, a foreshortened view of the future, or belief that “I might not be here tomorrow,” is associated with increased risky health behaviors (Rothman, Bernstein & Strunin, 2010; Borowsky, Ireland & Resnick, 2009; Burton, Obeidallah & Allison, 1996) and lower educational investment (Abedalu, 2007; Horstmanshof & Zimitat, 2007; Oyserman, Bybee & Terry,

2006), underscoring the importance of future self-concept as a focus of intervention and prevention efforts to promote healthy youth development.

Research on adolescent possible selves considers the influence of social context on future self-concept; however, the potential role of physical environments in self-concept development has not been well examined. A growing body of interdisciplinary work, including significant contributions from environmental psychology and human geography, points to the salience of *place*, or the meaningful physical environments of people's everyday lives, as active contributors to self-identity (Dixon & Durrheim, 2000, 2004). Human geographers have turned a critical eye to the varied role of place—experienced, remembered and imagined—in youth identity formation (Reay & Lucey, 2000; Jones, 2005; Valentine, Sporton & Neilsen, 2009). Psychogeographies of rural youth unearth the conscious and unconscious influences of physical environments on everyday affective responses to place, and the mutually constitutive relationship between sense of self and sense of place (Matthew & Tucker, 2006). Additional work on memory, emotion and narrative shows how rural youth identities are enacted in part through repeated contact and experiences with everyday places (Leyshon, 2008; Leyshon & Bull, 2011). Thus, the inclusion of place in identity development processes arises from the recognition that physical environments are not inert backdrops against which social life unfolds; rather, it is in the transactions between people and their everyday socio-physical environments that identity is created.

Bridging the theory of possible selves and theories of place, I provide evidence to illustrate how place-based experiences, such as belonging, aversion, and entrapment, may be internalized and encoded into possible selves, thus producing emplaced future self-concept. An emplaced approach to understanding how youth vision their future possibility holds promise for both researchers and practitioners invested in understanding how future orientation develops and helping youth to build expansive and hopeful visions of self in the future.

Two points of intersection between possible selves and theories of place are particularly fruitful to this endeavor: place identity and social representations of place. First, the concept of place identity provides a compelling foothold for considering how future self-concept and place intersect. Place identity is conceptualized as a psychological structure that reflects how the physical environments of an individual's everyday life are actively incorporated into the self (Krupat, 1983; Dixon & Durrheim, 2004). While the “affective turn” in human geography affirms the centrality of emotions in people's relationships to place, including pre-conscious emotional landscapes and embodiment, (see for example Anderson & Smith, 2001; Davidson & Milligan, 2004; Thrift, 2004), this paper further articulates the connections between cognitions and identity. For the purposes of this paper, I will examine how the cognitive material of future self-concept contains place-related ideas, beliefs, affects and symbols. Place identity, the produce of individual lived experience of place, is one source of such material that informs self-concept. The social cognitive foundation of both place identity and possible selves offers a natural point of intersection to examine how place may be an active contributor to this aspect of self-identity, thus enriching our understanding of both concepts.

A second foothold to consider the intersection of place and possible selves is found in literature that foregrounds the influence of social representations of place on identity. In the context of power, the tensions between love of place, place belonging, and community identity within places and external social representations are made clear as they often conflict with messages received about personal worth and ability based on place stereotypes, stigma, and the physical realities in marginalized places. Stigmatizing and negative representations of place may also be internalized by youth as cognitive representations of future possibility. How these two theoretical footholds intersect with possible selves illuminates an important dimension of how future self-concept develops and influences youth development, particularly regarding historically marginalized and underserved youth.

Emplacing Future Self-Concept

The emplaced nature of human experience has been well articulated by previous scholars. Philosophical perspectives on place assert that to be human is to be in place (Tuan, 1974; 1977; Relph, 1976; Malpas, 1999; Casey, 1993). From Heidegger's perspective, place is an ontological structure; a fundamental part of our existence and identity (Heidegger, 1962; Manzo 2003). The questions, "Who am I?" and "Where am I?" are thus intimately connected (Sarbin, 1983; Dixon & Durrheim, 2000). Similarly, though from a cognitive rather than non-representational perspective, I argue that *future* imagining of self ("Who will I be?") is also inextricably bound up with place ("Where will I be?")—and moreover, that place experience in the *present* is a significant contributor to that imagining. One cannot imagine the future without place, yet place is missing from current conceptualizations of possible selves. Critical intellectual understanding of place as an agentive component of self-concept formation may be particularly important in relation to youth, who are developmentally situated to be grappling with questions of self. In considering the developmental trajectories of youth, place is a critical ingredient; indeed, place is embedded in how young people think about themselves in the present as well as who they imagine themselves to become in the future.

Place as an important element of youth identity development and future self concept is especially vital to consider in the developmental trajectories of historically marginalized and underserved youth. Social hierarchies are deeply embedded within U.S. society, "promot[ing] intergenerational inheritance of social status and assets in a highly systematic and deterministic fashion" (Furumoto-Dawson, Gehlert, Sohmer, Olopade & Sacks, 2007, p. 1238). For marginalized and underserved youth, future possibility is shaped by historically entrenched, structural, and systemic inequalities. Inequalities manifest in complex ways, including place experiences, and are thus critical to consider in relation to future self-concept.

I argue that the ability to envision expansive and hopeful future selves may be attributed in part to experiences of place in young people's present lives. Young persons with expansive future self-concept are able to "vision boldly" and exhibit a sense of hopefulness about their futures, due to formative experiences that enable them to accomplish this task. Part of this experience is place-based, because places have the potential to affirm a sense of self. For instance, while youth development programs may focus explicitly on activities,

opportunities and skills, the physical environments where such programs occur also matter. A young person may come to view the classroom where a program is housed as a safe place for self-expression and personal growth. The physical setting of the program – the theatre, studio, classroom, garden or community center – becomes an active ingredient in that young person's developing sense of self. Further, everyday places that are invested with care and aesthetic appeal reflect a sense of pride, commitment and worth not only about the environment, but also its inhabitants.

Conversely, young persons with blunted future self-concept may operate solely in the “here and now” – living in the moment because the future is uncertain, or even unimaginable, resulting in a deficit of visioning personal goals or milestones. Blunting may occur when youth experience chronic limited portrayals of future possibility or absence of social cueing of future potential. Moreover, blunted future self-concept may be tied to a young person's experience of place, including how place becomes encoded cognitively into future self-concept. Imagine a young woman whose daily walk to school involves passing a corner memorial of hand-written notes, photos and stuffed animals for a teenager who was shot and killed there. Next, she walks through a concrete schoolyard strewn with trash to the back of the school, where students must enter the building. She enters the back hallway, painted institutional yellow, dimly lit and smelling of stale cigarettes and urine. At the end of this hallway are security guards and metal detectors. Before even entering a classroom, this young person has already experienced place as potentially deadly (“Don't walk down that street, you could get killed”), violating basic human dignity (“The hallways are ugly, dim and smell”) and restrictive (“Enter the back of the school”). Place-based experiences like entrapment or restriction may become part of one's current sense of self, and may also be part of one's developing cognitions about future possibility, or place identity.

Theoretical Foothold: Place Identity

Place identity was coined by Proshansky (1978, 1983) to emphasize a sub-structure of self-identity containing a “potpourri” of positively and negatively valenced cognitions (including affects, symbolic meanings and beliefs) about one's physical environment, accruing from an individuals' ‘environmental past,’ or memories that arise from experiences within physical places over time (Proshansky, 1983). These experiences contain the cognitive content of a person's place identity; like possible selves, the nature of this content, for better or worse, influences individual self-concept.

Building from this groundwork, Korpela (1989) argued that place identity is not an amorphous collection of cognitions related to physical environment, but rather has internal structure, the purpose of which is self-regulatory. That is, individuals utilize aspects of their daily physical environments to maintain a coherent sense of self. For example, everyday places may offer respite, privacy and retreat to re-center self. Extending the concept further, Twigger-Ross and Uzzel later (1996) assert that “—rather than there being a separate part of identity concerned with place, *all aspects of identity will, to greater or lesser extent, have place-related implications* [italics added]” (p. 206). These conceptual contributions open the door to conceptualizing place identity as those dimensions of self-concept that are influenced by significant places.

More recently, Dixon and Durrheim (2004) distilled four key components of place identity. First, place identity involves a deep sense of familiarity or ‘insidedness’ that arises from habituation within physical environments. Second, place identity involves ‘affective-evaluation’ or a sense of emotional belonging within the environment. Third, place identity encapsulates the ways in which these environments take on symbolic meanings in relation to self. Finally, place identity involves the “role of the physical environment in enabling the achievement of identity-relevant projects” (pg. 458). These last two aspects of place are particularly germane to future self-concept. Symbolic meanings about place are one component of cognition that may inform future self-concept. Second, imagining the future is considered an identity project, or self-project. Place is an active ingredient in this imagining.

Others have theorized ways that place identity functions to assist in what Dixon and Durrheim call “identity-relevant projects”. For example, Twigger-Ross and Uzzel (1996) theorize four distinct functions of place: *distinctiveness*, or using place identifiers to distinguish self or group from others, *continuity*, or linking of current sense to self to past selves using place anchors; *self-esteem*, or the positive evaluation of oneself or group based on place and *self-efficacy*, or belief in one’s ability to meet his or her situational needs or demands in a place. Together, these place functions can either support or threaten an individual’s sense of self.

The conceptual foundation of place identity, then, involves habituation within everyday physical environments, and an affective-evaluation of these everyday places ranging from belonging to alienation. Places also become imbued with symbolic meaning; they inform current self-concepts and can become an important part of an individual’s self-identity. Finally, individuals use aspects of place to support various identity-relevant projects, such as creating a continuous sense of self and self-worth. With this foundational knowledge, one can begin to understand how place identity, founded in cognitions about the physical environment, and possible selves, grounded in cognitions drawn from social environment, intersect to inform future self-concept.

Theoretical Foothold: Social Representations of Place—A second theoretical foothold in considering the intersection of place and possible selves is found in literature that foregrounds the influences of social representations of place on identity. Differences in possible selves are apparent for youth based on their social identifiers within local cultures and larger dominant U.S. culture. Cultural values and beliefs about what is acceptable for a girl, a child living in poverty or an African American to become will differentially define the parameters and possibilities of future selves for young people (Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006). Indeed, research has shown that possible selves are significantly determined by facets of social identity such as race, ethnicity, class, and gender (Oyserman, Bybee & Terry, 2006; Unemori, Omeregic & Markus, 2004; Kao, 2000; Fryberg & Markus, 2003; Anthis, Dunkel & Anderson, 2004; Knox, Funk, Elliott & Bush, 2000). Similarly, social representations of place, such as the meanings, symbols and attributes attached to places, influence identity (LeFebvre, 1974). Research in this area demonstrates the salience of place in constructing personal and social identity, including neighborhood representations (e.g. “ghettos” or “slums”) (Bauder, 2001a; Manzo & Kleit, 2008) and changes in places such as gentrification (Cahill, 2007).

Lefebvre (1974) introduces a tripartite model of spatial practice, representations of space and representational spaces to illustrate how 'space' is socially produced and maintained. *Representations of space* are "official" or "bureaucratic" descriptions of space produced through discourse. These representations exist at a level of abstraction from *representational space*, or the cognitive or imaginative representation of space as directly experienced by individuals and *spatial practice*, or the everyday routines and actions that produce social spaces. Representational spaces are traditionally conceived of as being under the purview of planning bureaucrats and authorities. However, other bureaucratic agents, like social service providers, also discursively produce representations of place. For example, the perceptions of institutional administrators working with youth in two similar low-income neighborhoods exhibited marked differences based in part on the ways in which those neighborhoods were represented by outside professionals (Bauder, 2001b). Specifically, the presence of public housing contributed to negative stereotyping of young people residing in the neighborhood as low-achievers. Such representations often conflict with individual's lived experience of place, yet for youth living in stigmatized places, these representations may contribute to current and future self-concepts.

These two footholds, place identity and social representation of place, offer promising insight into how place influences possible selves. Before further examining this relationship, it is helpful to understand the theoretical and empirical foundations of young people's future possible selves.

Examining Future Self-Concept: The Theory of Possible Selves

The theory of possible selves emerged from in social psychology to expand scholarship on self-concept to include future-oriented cognitions. Possible selves are self-relevant cognitions of enduring goals, aspirations, hopes, fears and threats that function as a framework and guide for individual identity development (Markus & Nurius, 1986). Thus, who one hopes to become or is afraid of becoming reflect how an individual views the future (as hopeful, dim, or unknowable). Possible selves may be viewed as motivational resources, which function to regulate and motivate individual behavior (Aloise-Young, Henningan & Leong, 2001; Oyserman et al., 2006; Nurius, Casey, Lindhorst & Macy, 2006). These functions will be explored in further detail shortly.

Similar to other facets of identity, future self-concepts, including those depicting who one aspires to be or is afraid of becoming, develop through a process of experiencing, interpreting and storing in memory self-referent cognitions, including symbolic meanings, beliefs and emotions. Over time these become part of one's internal working model of self. Socially-determined values, expectations, and norms influence the *content* that young people will incorporate into their possible self-schemas. Social and physical contexts, like schools, neighborhoods, families, and religious organizations, instruct youth about who they might—or might not—eventually become. Over time, young people accrue experiential information about how their future selves will be received in their various contexts. Hoped for or aspired to possible selves may be supported, encouraged and strengthened through positive interactions with people and place. Or, they may be ridiculed, silenced, denied or belittled.

The contents of an individual's self-referent cognitions will include a variety of social information, for example external appraisals of self (e.g. parents' valuations of a young persons' skill or ability within a particular domain). They will also contain, as environmental psychologists have argued, cognitions related to the physical environments that one experience on a regular basis. Thus, both the social and environmental contexts of everyday life are implicated in current, past and future self-identity.

Social Cognitive Underpinnings of Possible Selves

Individuals pay selective attention to contextual stimuli that are perceived to be self-referential; without the ability to “tune in” to that information which appeals to or poses a threat towards one's personal sense of well-being, the flood of stimuli individuals are constantly exposed to would be overwhelming. At any given moment, such limitations on cognitive capacity are instrumental in the process of bringing differential sets of cognitive material into active play. For example, a young person receives a failing mark on test and “loser” or “stupid” self-concepts may be brought into active play. Working memory can thus be thought of as an active site of meaning-making – an ever shifting combination of new input and old memories that are brought “online” to make sense of in-the-moment circumstances. Self-defining memories are, in a sense, the ‘building blocks’ of self-concept. Existing memory structures influence what we perceive and how we make meaning of in-the-moment information. Memories that are self-referent, vivid (positive or negative), distinct or elaborated, (i.e. highly developed and associated with other similar memories), will be more readily activated and drawn into working memory. Much of this process becomes automated, so that one shifts from one “working” model of self to another unconsciously. Over time, accrued experiences will elaborate self-concepts into more complex and dense memory structures, or self-schema. The mental structure of self-schemas is important because the “...ordering of schemata in interrelated memory networks helps us both anticipate and explain how activation of one construct (e.g. incompetent) can spread to other related constructs (e.g. dumb, unemployed, poor, abandoned, loser), resulting in a negative experience of the self” (Nurius, 1993, p. 266). Self-schemas are particularly well elaborated memory structures because they are activated and drawn into working memory on a consistent basis. Working memory is the most readily accessed within memory structure and therefore a young person's cognitions about future possibility are constantly activated and reactivated within working memory, solidifying these components of self-concept. In this way, future self-concept represents a highly elaborate and potent identity structure – more so than a singular ‘hope’ or ‘dream.’ Moreover, future self-concept includes both positively and negatively valenced affective-cognitive material about the self in the future.

Consider, for example, how a young person may develop a future self-concept involving an aspired-to self of “college student” alongside a feared-self of “high school drop-out.” As experiences with being a student accrue; a young person may begin to develop a sense of him- or herself as academically-inclined and “college-bound” or not. Support from a respected teacher or personal experiences of school success contribute to this sense of future possibility, as would experiences of alienation and struggles in school. Other cues, however, may contribute to the feared-self as well as the hoped-for self. Not knowing anyone who

went to college or seeing classmates drop out of school could contribute to the drop-out self. Chronic personal experiences of school failures or set-backs may also contribute to the feared self. As individuals are biased to identify and make meaning of contextual cues that 'fit' with pre-existing conceptions of self; a young person who fears becoming a high school drop-out will be more likely to pay attention to and make meaning of contextual cues related to that feared self. Such contextual cues may also derive from physical settings. The physical structure of a school building, including the surrounding campus (concrete or trees; well cared for or littered with trash), and classrooms, hallways and other places within the building (displaying current students' work, awards or important alumni accomplishments, barren or painted, dimly lit or well-lit and inviting) all serve as contextual cues which may in turn become part of the young person's developing self-concept.

As will be explored in the following section, current self-schemas represent more defined memory structures, well-worn and highly utilized to the point of becoming automatic. In contrast, future self-concept often has an elastic, evolving quality, making it more amenable to change. While still derived from past meaningful experiences, imaginings of the self in the future have the potential to transcend the limits of current place.

Functions and impacts of possible selves—As the cognitive manifestations of an individual's enduring hopes, fears, aspirations and expectations for their future, possible selves can be viewed as motivational resources, the contents of which serve to harness ambition and direct action. An individual's possible selves are theorized to possess motivational and self-regulatory functions with three distinct components: *valence* of the contents of one's possible selves, *elaboration*, including strategies for attaining positive or aspired-to future selves and *discrepancy* between current and future selves.

First, the contents of one's possible self-schema matter because, for better or worse, this content will be drawn into play by contextual information and inform how a young person acts within various circumstances. The presence of positive expected future selves alone can be quite powerful. For example, one study of ninth grade students found that those who reported at least three positive expected future selves had a heavy substance use rate of 1.6% compared to 25% for youth lacking positive expected selves (Aloise-Young, et al., 2001). On the other hand, the presence of feared selves or the failure to obtain a hoped for self has been shown to increase the risk of negative mental health outcomes such as depression (Oyserman & Fryberg, 2006; Strauman, 2002).

Second, the presence of aspired to future selves elicits actions to move individuals towards actualizing their goals. This is especially true of possible selves that are well elaborated and contain prescriptive information compared with more abstract possible selves. For example, in a middle school-based randomized control trial with low-income, minority youth, Oyserman and colleagues (2006) found that when well elaborated academically-based possible selves (e.g. "be a college student") contained cognitive information about how to reach the desired self (e.g. "I hope to be a better student and therefore I must pay attention in class"), they exerted stronger motivation and regulation influence on student behavior. The regulatory action (If-Then) served to guide and direct behavior in tangible ways to move towards the hoped for self.

In other words, the *presence* of an academic aspired-to self alone (e.g. “Be a good student”) is unlikely to be sufficient to stimulate effective performance or motivate the student to persist through challenges *unless* coupled with realistic and attainable strategies such as spending more time on homework or participating constructively in the classroom, actions which incrementally move the student towards that aspired-to self. Youth who demonstrated academically-based future possible selves containing this kind of how-to procedural content achieved significantly higher GPAs, standardized test scores, and lower absenteeism. They were also twice as likely to advance on-time to ninth grade as control youth. Effects were sustained after one year, with intervention youth achieving higher GPAs and experiencing less depression (Oyserman et al., 2006).

Third, possible selves also elicit regulatory behavior when current self is compared against a potential future self. This is especially true for feared future selves. When the discrepancy between current self and feared future self is significant and potential resources to avoid the feared future self are made available, individuals are significantly more likely to adopt behaviors to avoid that self (vanDellen & Hoyle, 2008). Applied to an intervention to reduce risky sexual behavior among African American seventh graders (Clark, et. al, 2005), one mechanism that potentially contributed to the program's success is that it “increased the salience of hoped-for selves for at-risk youth, who were likely to be experiencing undesired levels of discrepancy between these hoped-for selves and their current selves” (vanDellen & Hoyle, 2008, pg. 302).

Studies of young men living in correctional facilities show that the motivational and self-regulatory capacity of possible selves is blunted. Young men residing in correctional facilities are less likely to believe their actions are moving them towards desired future selves compared to their peers attending public school (Oyserman & Saltz, 1993). Further, for youth who have committed delinquent acts, a significant association was found between their level of self-reported delinquency and reporting crime-related feared or expected possible selves (e.g. “be a thief” or “get into more trouble”) (Oyserman & Markus, 1990). Two qualitative studies of male juvenile delinquent offenders living in correctional facilities found that more of these young men possessed greater feared possible future selves than hoped for future selves (Abrams & Aguilar, 2005; Inderbitzin, 2009). The paucity of hoped for future selves in these contexts is indicative of past developmental histories – and formative experiences of both people and places which contributed to these young men's current and future self-concepts. A history of blunting is reinforced by systems which often perpetuate such self-conceptions, with limited opportunity to develop competing positive possibility alongside procedural competence. For these young men, the ability of possible selves to exert positive motivational and self-regulatory force may be limited for several reasons.

The *content* of their future self-schemas contains more negative and feared possible selves than aspired to or hopeful ones. Further, feared or negative future selves may be more highly elaborated, because of the young person's experience. An abstract hoped for future self like, “stop stealing” or “do something good,” may not be elaborated enough to regulate behavior. Additionally, lack of how-to procedural information, or strategies detailing how to avoid feared selves or attain hoped for ones, limits regulatory power of possible selves. Finally,

whereas the discrepancy between current self as “offender” and future hoped for self (e.g. “be back in school” “be employed”) may be significant, without the resources necessary to support the future aspired to self, comparison may not be sufficient to motivate change. However, I would argue that there is another source contributing to the foreshortened future self-concepts of these young men – the physical environment of the correctional facility. “Place-identity cognitions express and reflect the physical settings and their properties that support and are directly relevant to the social roles and attributes that define who the person is, how he or she is to behave, and what he or she is worth” (Proshansky, pg. 80). Blunted future perspective could then be attributed in part to the blunting experiences and effects of place.

Whereas the theory of possible selves has paid attention to how social contexts shape future possible selves, how place contributes to young people's sense about their future possibilities has been under-studied. I will now consider the relationship of place identity and social representations of place with future self-concept, thus emplacing possible selves.

Place and Self in the Present

As previously discussed, the content of a young person's future self-concept arises through an iterative process of experiencing, encoding, storing and retrieving information in memory linked with social experiences relevant to self. Individuals also possess an ‘environmental past,’ and present – experiences that are ordered and valued based on accrued experiences with physical places. These experiences provide the content for a young person's developing place identity. Two derivatives of place identity warrant some exploration here—place belonging (developed from positively valenced cognitions about socializing environments e.g. home, school, or community) and place aversion (the product of negatively valenced cognitions of place) (Proshansky, 1983; Relph, 1976).

The nature of such place identities includes both affective and cognitive components. “The cognitions that form the basis of place identity include *affective responses to settings that range from attachment to aversion* [emphasis added].” (Proshansky & Fabian, 1987, pg. 36). For example, a young person may develop love or fondness for a favorite neighborhood hangout. However, the same neighborhood hangout could be a part of memories characterized by fear or discomfort for a young person who was excluded or bullied in this context. Memories of the “school yard” or other places where young people congregate are examples of physical environments that are laden with affective and symbolic meanings. The cognitive component of place identity refers to beliefs, knowledge and meanings that a person attaches that particular place. For example, the favorite neighborhood hangout could have symbolic meanings such as ‘a place of freedom or independence’ or social meanings like ‘belonging to a group’. Rather than inert backdrops against which social interactions occur, places like the neighborhood hangout, school yard, and many other everyday places are part of young people's developing sense of self—and contribute to place-based experiences of belonging or aversion.

Another way that place becomes part of current self-concept is through place-based identifications. For example, when a young person says, “I am Black, female and from West

Philadelphia,” place is an identifier analogous to the social markers of race and gender. Such identifiers serve a distinctiveness function; “I am” statements signify who a person views themselves to be, thus distinguishing them from who they are not (Twigger-Ross & Uzzel, 1996). Place identifications may further reflect a range of spatial scales, for instance, streets, parks, or corners can serve as important spatial identifiers. For example, “I am from 60th Street” conveys specific meaning for a young person from West Philadelphia: 60th street is known as a place where violent activity occurs, including shootings and muggings. Therefore, when used as a place identifier, ‘60th street’ conveys specific social meanings for the young people who live there, such as being “tough,” or “hard.” Place identity is thus a concept that captures how interactions with everyday physical environments enable places to become part of self-concept.

Changing Places, Changing Self

People's relationships with places, as with people, change and are actively called upon and reconstructed as part of on-going identity development (Manzo, 2003). Intrinsic to this dynamic relationship are themes of change. Thus, ruptures, continuity/discontinuities and transitions are important aspects of place identity. A compelling example of the dynamic relationship between place and self is found in an ethnographic study of urban, African American youth development (Burton & Price-Spratlen, 1999). As one participant stated:

People be studying me and everything and they think they know about me and how I live. They don't know nothing cause they don't pay attention what I say. I live in three different places and I'm different in every one. Each place makes me different. I know that. Why don't my teachers and counselors figure it out too? - Wylene, 10 years old (pg. 89)

The recognition that “each place makes me different” clearly demonstrates how identity is place-dependent, complex and fluid. Children in the study were also aware of how codes of conduct shifted based on place, and labeling of particular places. For example, youth interviewed discussed changing their behavior to “fit in” with different places, including not telling teachers about the different neighborhoods they live in to avoid negative stereotypes attached to those places (pg. 87). While such findings suggest that places might inform self-concept in mutually exclusive or compartmentalized ways, there is also evidence that an array of significant places in people's lives intertwine to inform self-identity (Manzo, 2003, 2005). Nonetheless, the above-mentioned study demonstrates that young people are aware of how place labels are attached to people; especially by outsiders such as teachers and counselors, and that they adopt strategies, such as keeping secrets, to counter this labeling. Adults often overlook youth's awareness of how place operates in their lives.

Burton and Price-Spratlen's study highlights the ways in which movement between places, in this case neighborhoods, is directly linked with changes in self-concept or that highlight different aspects of one's identity (“each place makes me different”). In effect, places operate as contextual cues that elicit different sets of self-concept clusters, bringing, for example “the fighter self” or “hard self” into active play. But what happens when the *place* itself changes?

Changes to place may trigger an oppositional response from local inhabitants. Leyshon (2008) shows how signs of urban encroachment were met with resistance by rural youth in the UK. Recognizing the potential threat of change to the countryside due to increasing urbanization, one young man noted:

Well...being English is all about being allowed to be from the country...like no one's gonna stop me from being from around here [countryside] or make me be something else. Colin, Oakford. (pg. 17)

This response illuminates how, for this youth, national identity (“being English”) is tied to rurality, and further, perceived threats to place bolstered this youth's sense of self and defiance of anyone trying to “make me something else.” In other cases, changes to place may result in shifts in identity.

Evidence suggests that structural changes in urban neighborhoods also impact individual place identity. In her research with young women of color residing in the Lower East Side of New York, Cahill (2007) reveals how urban gentrification produces a series of ruptures in the lives of local young people. Participants describe the ‘whitening’ of their neighborhood, including the appearance of boutiques, wine bars and other ‘out of place’ businesses. These appearances are coupled with increased police surveillance of public space and the disappearance of neighbors and friends who are forced to move out due to increased rent, dramatic changes that resulted in mounting unease among the youth. The young women describe feeling like outsiders in their own neighborhood; uncertain who they are in relation to their familiar places. As the place—the “Lower East Side” of Manhattan— changes, place identity also shifts.

Studies such as these highlight the ways in which self-concept and place are interrelated. Place is critical to one's sense of self – it directs behavior (when I'm in this place, I am this person and I act this way) and it is an active ingredient in self-concept (“I am my neighborhood” “I am this place”). When place changes, self-concept changes, underscoring the complex interplay of identity and socio-physical environment.

Place and Self in the Future—Place identity also informs future-oriented self-schema. Corbett (2007) reveals how the future educational aspirations of youth living in a Canadian rural fishing town are tied directly to place. For these young people, accessing higher education means leaving home – and region. In this study, differential ability to imagine and articulate educationally-based future selves was directly tied to place identity. For young people who were already “outwardly mobile,” that is, those who had access to social and economic resources to travel beyond their home place, the act of imagining a future outside their current place was easier. However, for youth without ‘mobility capital,’ the act of imagining beyond home place was far more difficult.

A complex interplay between social and environmental contexts takes place in the fashioning of future possible selves. Outwardly mobile youth describe opportunities to travel with family as well as conversations with parents about travel, and the value of being elsewhere (Corbett, 2007). These prior experiences incrementally lay a foundation for envisioning not only self elsewhere, but ‘*elsewheres*’ that are real and detailed. In turn,

accrued experience with being ‘elsewhere’ scaffolds a young person's sense of confidence in the ability to be mobile. Thus, the cognitive process of detailing an outwardly mobile possible self is already in play. The future possible self, “college student,” is therefore more readily accessed and developed when “living in a city” or “living elsewhere” is also elaborated. In contrast, another group of young people described abstract and generalized future visions that lacked a clear depiction of self “elsewhere”:

[This] group appeared to be trapped in place, unlikely to leave regardless of their intentions. This group appeared to have difficulty imagining future possibilities that extended beyond secondary school educationally, and beyond the immediate area geographically. (Corbett, 2007, pg. 785)

It is arguable whether leaving a local community is the most desirable course of action for every young person. Indeed, it is far too easy to assume that certain youth populations – rural or inner city – are trapped in place. Nonetheless, understanding that future imagining of self is intimately tied with place, and that these place-based characterizations of possibilities shape decision-making behavior, is critical. Envisioning future possible selves entails not only imagining social selves (e.g. “Be a college student” or “Be a teacher”) but also visioning future possible places, (e.g. “Fitting in somewhere new,” or “being a successful university student in X city”).

Clearly, social class plays an integral and formative role in visioning of future possible selves and places. We have already seen how “individuals may connect to a place in the sense that it comes to represent who they are” (Scannell and Gifford; 2010, pg. 3). By extension, I am arguing that place can come not only to represent who a person is, but *who they may become and where they might find themselves in the future*. One significant contributor to the relationship between place and future self-concept is evidenced by the ways in which social representations of place influence the formation of expansive or blunted imagining of the future.

Social representation of place and self in the future: The places that young people seek out, are relegated to, imagine and create are not neutral, but always reflective of and constituted within and by relations of power. “Viewed through the lens of power, place identity becomes more complex, affirming and nourishing but potentially also oppressive” (Kemp, 2010, pg. 122). Social representations of place are one of the prime examples of how power influences a young person's sense of future possibility. Such spatial representations, including characterizations of places as ‘ghettoes,’ ‘slums,’ ‘trailer parks,’ and ‘the wrong side of the tracks,’ are the product of complex social sets of place-based ideologies that work to affix moral ‘truths’ and negative characteristics both to physical locations and the people who inhabit them (Burton, Garrett-Peters & Eason, 2011). Thus, social representations often work to keep disenfranchised groups ‘in their place.’ In the case of marginalized youth, how place – especially residential place – is socially represented significantly influences on how young people think about themselves, including who they are right now and who they might become.

Two studies in the UK of working class youths' aspirations provide powerful evidence of how social representations, combined with the history of deindustrialization in working class

communities, together shape the future aspirations of local youth. These studies are illustrative of how “individual” aspirations are in fact the complex product of social, communal, and historical forces. In his ethnographic study of education, class, and youth transitions in three former coal mining villages in Derbyshire, England, Bright (2011) describes the physical place:

It is a space of anecdotal fascination and reputation, an abandoned front line where time slips backwards and forwards, where nothing changes and everything has changed. It is a space, perhaps most significantly, steeped in the present absence of its own truncated history. And, arguable, that is having an impact on the way that young people envisage the possibilities of their lives—their aspirations—in ways that are complex and cannot easily, in the local idiom, be ‘reckoned up.’ (pg. 65)

Bright poignantly and beautifully connects how the slippage of time between present and past within place seeps into the future visioning of local youth. Yet, the place itself is represented as “abandoned” and “truncated.” These metaphors speak to larger discursive patterns whereby formerly industrialized locales, like the coal mines, are described both linguistically and imaginatively as forgotten or lost. Youth within the study expressed a ‘protective defensiveness’ of the village where “... ‘staying’ is a critical measure of loyalty, ‘moving on’ is *always* tantamount to betrayal and ‘mobility’ is a fundamental risk to identity” (pg. 73). Youth described how outsider, such as teachers and youth workers, viewed their immobility as ‘being stuck’ or ‘lost’; however, for youth, self and place are interdependent. Such narrow interpretation of location, identity and mobility is harmful to young people's sense of place and sense of self.

In the second case study of youth aspirations in deindustrialized locales, Allen and Hollingworth (2013) examine how place representations and habitus in three communities—Stoke on Trent, Nottingham and an eastern borough of London—inform the content of young people's professional and work aspirations, specifically, whether they include careers in the creative industries; the cutting edge jobs in a new knowledge economy. Stoke on Trent, once home to pottery, mining and steel industries, is described by a member of a local youth organization as “a town on its knees” (pg. 504). Other powerful descriptions included a place broken down, insular, deprived, and lacking opportunities. Similar to Bright's description of former coal mining villages in Derbyshire, Stoke on Trent is symbolically represented through official discourse as a broken and stuck place, and by extension, those who live there are viewed in the same way. As one teacher explains:

For people in Stoke it's hard to escape. ... I want to get people to realize there is life outside Stoke, which is quite difficult if you are in Stoke and you don't see any exit signs anywhere. -Media Teacher, Stoke on Trent (pg. 513).

In contrast, Nottingham and East London, both urban communities, are represented as “forward,” “modern,” and “cosmopolitan.” Young people in these locales drew on ‘discourses of multiculturalism and social mix to narrate their locale (and its inhabitants) as a ‘good place’” (pg. 509). Teachers in these communities acknowledged their students faced challenges based on social and economic disadvantage, yet described their students as coming from ‘aspirational families’ who value ‘moving on’ and the ability to ‘do something

different' (pg. 508). Comparatively, school personnel in Stoke on Trent dismissed, and even ridiculed, the possibility of students pursuing careers in the creative industries, promoting only "traditional" career aspirations.

Finally, a case study comparing the work aspirations of young people in two economically depressed neighborhoods in San Antonio, Bauder (2001), found that the presence of a public housing complex in one neighborhood significantly influenced the future orientations of local youth. Young people residing in the neighborhood with public housing reported significantly lower future work and education-related aspirations. Moreover, these youth were stereotyped by outsiders as lazy, underachievers, welfare recipients and unreliable – damaging images linked to people because of place. Adults in positions to help these young people articulate future possibilities and access opportunities to support their dreams were also less likely to do so, instead adopting attitudes and practices reflective of the place-based stereotypes of their future potential (e.g. shepherding young people towards GEDs, not offering career shadowing opportunities). In contrast, young people who lived in the other neighborhood were labeled "poor but honest" and reported higher occupational aspirations. Clearly, adults acted as gatekeepers in the sense of opening doors for some and closing them for others. At the same time, youth in these communities may be internalizing and encoding beliefs about their own future potential based on such external characterizations. Therefore, creating positive places, or counter spaces, for youth in such neighborhoods is part of fostering brighter future self-concept and is vital to their future and well-being.

At times, outsider messages about who someone is based on place contradict insider messages. Residents living within stigmatized places describe how their own internal beliefs and values contradict external representations (Bauder, 2001a; Manzo, Kleit & Couch 2008). For example, youth in the stigmatized neighborhood in San Antonio were aware that being a "hamburger flipper" was considered a low-attainment career aspiration to outsiders. However, within the community, being gainfully employed, even in a so-called 'menial labor' position was highly valued. Similarly, to outsiders becoming a mother is considered negative and career-blunting. However, for young women in the community, motherhood was highly valued and expected. Thus, a double-bind presents itself for youth in this neighborhood whereby embracing internal community expectations for work and family results in being stigmatized by outsiders.

A similar parallel can be drawn to how social representations of place, such as the characterization of neighborhoods as "ghettoes" by social service providers or "degraded and toxic" by planning officials, can contradict the internal meanings attributed to place by those who live there (Manzo, et al., 2008). For children living in large council estates in the UK, awareness of the external constructions of the estates as risky and set-apart from 'mainstream' neighborhoods meant adapting a range of strategies to cope with the social exclusions they felt based on their place of residence. At the same time that children reported greater ambivalence and aversive emotions towards their residence than children living in flats or smaller blocks, they also spoke avidly about the need, "...not to find a better place, but to make the place they find themselves in better" (Reay & Lucey, 2000, pg. 423). The double-bind between external and internal values and beliefs ascribed to place is apparent here as well. Indeed, both how *others* represent place and *individuals'* lived

experience of place will contribute to shaping their sense of future possibility. The multiplicity inherent in the meanings of place, both those derived from personal experiences within meaningful places and those imposed by outside others, are important dimensions of place to consider in relation to future oriented self-concept.

Future Possible Selves, Future Possible Places

All aspects of identity will involve place to greater or lesser degrees. Place identity is grounded in the same social cognitive processes underlying possible self schema. Social and environmental cues direct individuals to pay attention to external messages—beliefs, values, symbols, and affects—that are deemed self-referent. Self-concepts are formed around these accrued experiences, which contain both social and environmental information. Similarly, the stigmatizing labels attached to people because of place may also be internalized and become part of one's current and future self-concept. Thus, the act of imagining future possibility reflects not only social messaging, but messages related to physical environments. Place is both an important contributor to youth cognitions about future possibility *and* a promising tool for building expansive and hopeful future selves. An emplaced approach to possible selves holds promise for practitioners and researchers invested in understanding how youth development trajectories are formed as well as illuminating potential strategies for assisting young people in building expansive and hopeful future selves.

Place-based Interventions

School-place and neighborhood-place are two interconnected sites of youth development – providing rich opportunities for fostering expansive and hopeful future selves and future place. One example of place making activities is found in the university-school partnership between the Center for Urban Studies at the University of Buffalo and Futures Academy (Pre-K-8th grade) located in the Fruit Belt, a distressed community in Buffalo, New York. Students in the Futures Academy are involved in various place-making endeavors that link their school-day curriculum with community service. For example, students are re-appropriating and transforming an expanse of vacant lots adjacent to their school into a community garden. The site of the garden was previously “—nothing more than a series of unkempt vacant lots, which symbolized the powerlessness of students, teachers, and residents. These lots were a vivid daily reminder to the school community that this was a worthless and feared part of the city” (Taylor & McGlynn, 2010, pg. 39). In re-envisioning this site, students became active place-makers, transforming this vacant site into an abundant and vibrant source of beauty, food production and youth-made artwork. This place now sends a very different message to residents about the symbolic value of the neighborhood. Students are also involved in re-appropriating deteriorating infrastructure by producing murals reflective of youth culture. Notably, the public spaces where these murals have been erected have become “sacred places” and are not graffitied or vandalized (Taylor et al., 2010). These examples of place-making activities illustrate how meaningful engagement with neighborhood place and school place may provide young people with the opportunity to develop alternate conceptions of self and place.

Future research directions—The intersection of cognitive manifestations of place vis-à-vis place identity and social representation with possible selves introduces a promising avenue for future research inquiry to examine how place influences well-being. Growing interest among health researchers in identifying the mechanisms by which place “gets under the skin” (Cummins, Curtis, Diez-Roux & Macintyre, 2007) opens the door for future research to consider carefully the role of psychological formations of place, including place identity and social representation, on health and wellbeing. While the preponderance of research investigates “neighborhood effects” on development, caution has been raised against oversimplification of neighborhood measures that rely on census tracts or aggregate measures of social characteristics (e.g. percent of household living in poverty, percent of female headed households, or percent racial or ethnic minority) as representative of “place.” While such approaches offer valuable information about how community-level characteristics interplay with individual level indicators of healthy development or impairment, such approaches may overlook how youth experience and make meaning of the environments they interact with on a daily basis.

Investigating the lived experience of place, including psychological formations of place identity and social representations as part of a young person's developing sense of future possibility, provides a promising avenue for further research. For example, do youth with place identities characterized by aversion or entrapment exhibit blunted future self-concept? Do youth with place identities characterized by positive attachment and belonging exhibit more hopeful or expansive future self-concept? Further, does an emplaced approach to assessing future self-concept self strengthen the predictive power of the construct in determining important outcomes like health behaviors, physical and emotional well-being and educational investment? In addition, investigation into the possible intervention capabilities of place for supporting the developing of positive and expansive future possible selves is another promising avenue of inquiry.

Imagining the future is a complex task. I have attempted to shed light on how imagining the future is particularly complex for young people who experience various forms of blunting, based on membership to marginalized groups such as class, race, and gender alongside blunting based on place experience. The tensions between love of place, place belonging and community identity within places can often conflict with messages received about personal worth and ability based on place stereotypes and the everyday experiences of places like school, parks, streets and other locales. Careful consideration of the dynamic contribution of place to future identity can strengthen the validity of future self-concept research and shed light on another mechanism by which future self concepts are formed and enacted.

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