

**MAPPING FUTURES, MAKING SELVES:
SUBJECTIVITY, SCHOOLING AND RURAL YOUTH**

by

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Abstract

This dissertation explores how rural young people imagine their futures in neo-liberal times. The analysis is based upon three months of ethnographic research with grade 7/8 students in 'Fieldsville,' a predominantly white and working-class rural community in Southeastern Ontario. I examine students' participation in a widely-used career-education program called *The Real Game*, in which they are encouraged to become entrepreneurial subjects capable of crafting productive futures in an uncertain world. My study asks: How do these young people produce and perform their imagined future selves, and what does this suggest about the opportunities and constraints that shape their current identities? Integrating insights from feminist poststructural theory and cultural geography, the project extends and challenges studies of the neo-liberal subject by integrating an analysis of place. The thesis builds upon, and contributes to, critical scholarship theorizing young lives as socially, spatially and temporally situated by exploring *processes of location* within subjectivity formation.

Integrating classroom and playground observations with focus groups and interviews, the analysis reveals that young people draw upon diverse discourses in order to envision the person they hope to become. In addition to the subject positions on offer in *The Real Game*, popular culture provides a key resource in practices of self-making, as students invest in middle-class ideals of the "good life," and distinguish their own rural location from racialized mappings of urban and global others. Although Fieldsville students are deeply invested in their rural

community, tensions emerge where local attachments meet dominant narratives of mobility that encourage them to locate their futures elsewhere. These place-based tensions present particular challenges for girls, who must negotiate the gendered dynamics of rural social space alongside popular discourses of “girl power” that proffer unlimited possibilities for today's young women. Teasing apart the intersections of gender, race, class and space within students' narratives, I argue that studies of neo-liberal subjectivity must examine how dominant discourses are negotiated from particular social and geographical locations. Methodologically, the analysis demonstrates how school-based ethnography can shed light on broader socio-historical processes as they are lived in specific geographical and cultural spaces.

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Chapter 1

Introductions

Over the low hum of the projector, Mrs. Sullivan reads aloud the role profile for Hotel Desk Clerk, which is displayed on the screen at the front of the classroom. She moves slowly through the job description, income breakdown, and educational preparation, highlighting key terms in each section and inviting students to explain their meaning. Following “gross monthly income” and “transferable skills,” they reach “full time,” and Johnathon's hand shoots into the air. He appears excited to see a vocabulary term he's heard before. “My dad works for a truck company and his full time is 12 hours a day,” he says, turning around in his chair to watch for his classmates' reactions. When Paul says, “Whoa!” Johnathon smiles and turns back to the front.

It is no surprise that most of these vocabulary terms are new for the grade 7/8 students in Mrs. Sullivan's class. The first Friday of September, this is only the third lesson within a career-based learning program called *The Real Game*, which will be a major focus during the first two months of the school term. *The Real Game* is promoted as a way to make schooling more “real,” and to help students begin thinking about their futures. Earlier this week, students discussed the idea of a “career” as one's path through life, encompassing education, family, and hobbies, in addition to work. They then designed wish lists for their ideal future home, creating collages to represent the lifestyle of their dreams. This afternoon's vocabulary lesson is preparing them to meet their very own *Real Game* “character,” an occupational profile that will become their role for the rest of the program. From this position, they will balance budgets, plan vacations, and negotiate the struggles of job loss. Each of these role-play activities is preparation for the final task of looking toward the future from their own embodied locations, as young, mostly white and working-class, boys and girls in a rural community that I call Fieldsville.

As students become acquainted with this new set of concepts and questions, I negotiate a different set of introductions. Seated at the back of the classroom, I watch quietly as the lesson unfolds, a small purple notebook in my lap. Still feeling like a newcomer within the grade 7/8 class at Fieldsville Public School, I scribble notes about everything from student interactions to desk configurations and clothing brands, trying to make sense of what's meaningful for young people in this space. As they navigate their first week as a grade 7 or 8 student, I begin my first week as a doctoral researcher within a project exploring how rural young people imagine their futures. I've come to Fieldsville with questions about subjectivity and schooling in this particular historical moment and socio-spatial context. I'm curious about how students engage in the task of projecting themselves into a desirable future, and how this relates to practices of self-making. How do these young people produce and perform their imagined adult selves, and what does this suggest about the opportunities and constraints that shape their current identities?

After completing the introductory vocabulary, Mrs. Sullivan turns off the projector and reaches for a stack of handouts. "Today you get your own jobs!" she says, grinning at the students. A few respond audibly with a "yay!" while others sit up in their seats, trying to glimpse what their teacher holds in her hands. Fanning the job profiles face down like a deck of cards, Mrs Sullivan tours the room instructing students to select one at random. The suspense generates an excited buzz, as students quickly skim through their chosen profile and then compare income and vacation time with their friends. Mrs. Sullivan reminds students that this process is a lottery, but when Tim becomes visibly upset about his selection of Nursery Worker, she quietly allows him to pick again. He flips over his new selection and says, "yes!" when he sees that he has just drawn the role of Photographer. In another corner of the room, Rebecca pleads with Dillon to trade his Veterinarian for her Physiotherapist, explaining that becoming a veterinarian has always been her dream job. Embracing his new-found power, Dillon puffs out his chest and

holds the coveted profile out of reach, telling Rebecca there's no way he's giving up this job.

Behind them, Amanda quietly celebrates a personal victory for having selected her desired career of Actor. She shows me her *Real Game* folder and points out the gold stars and bright lights that she has already drawn on the cover.

As students settle back into their desks, the volume gradually lowers, although many continue to discuss their new jobs with their neighbours. But just as quickly as this excitement has subsided, a new source of interest captures students' attention. "Look!" shouts Paul, pointing out the window. Following the students' lead, I turn my head just in time to glimpse what looks like a yellow school bus driving by the school. I quickly realize that this is no ordinary school bus; instead, the roof has been cut off and the back half is stacked high with hay bales. The class erupts in laughter at the site of this make-shift hay wagon. "That's bizarre!" says Kyle, chuckling. His assessment is quickly corrected by Paul, who declares, "That's *awesome!*" The yellow wagon continues its slow journey, traversing the slight bump where the road switches from paved to gravel just past the school's driveway. As it disappears, the view out the classroom window returns to the usual scenery, stretching across the quiet road to the open field on the other side, where a small herd of cows graze contentedly.

Introducing Fieldsville

With a population of less than four hundred residents, Fieldsville is quite a small place. The walk from school to "town" is less than a kilometre, and many of the older students make this journey during lunch so that they can buy a burger and fries from Thompson's take-out/ convenience store, the lone food establishment in the village since the General Store closed a few years ago. Along the way, they pass a few small bungalows and old farmhouses with high gables and peeling white paint. Very little traffic passes this way – so little, in fact, that the entire school can

make this trip together each October for the annual Terry Fox Walk. Just over one hundred students in total, they march along the gravel roadside, kindergartens hand-in-hand with Intermediate students, who tug the little ones along as quickly as their legs can manage. The stroll through town reveals four churches, a volunteer fire hall and a community baseball diamond that is converted into an outdoor rink each December. Even in the winter months, this area remains the primary gathering place for local youth, who brave the cold in order to take advantage of this shared social space.

Given the relative lack of local employment opportunities, very few Fieldsville residents work in the community, and those who do mostly struggle to piece together mixed farming and maintenance work. The majority of Fieldsville's working population travels 30 minutes to an hour each day for part-time or shift work in one the three small surrounding cities. The biggest of these cities is Warden, which has a population of just over 100 000. Along with manufacturing, health care, and service industries, Warden's network of correctional institutions provides a key source of employment. Like other rural villages in the area, Fieldsville has undergone dramatic changes in the almost 200 years since it was settled as a farming community. Now that farm work is no longer a financially viable way to make a living, it is arguably the small public school that sustains the community's core.

Originally opened in the 1960's, I'm told by the school custodian that Fieldsville Public School once boasted a population of 300 students (necessitating four portable classrooms to be temporarily added to the main brick building). Now, it sits at just 116 students.¹ During my time there, the school was comprised of six split-grade classrooms covered by 5.5 teachers, with the kindergarten teacher spending half her time at another school. The rest of the staff was made up

¹At this small number, the loss or addition of a few families can drastically change the make-up of the school population. When I was there, three new families arrived during the first week of school, and this prompted a reorganization of classrooms and the hiring of the additional half-time kindergarten teacher. The following fall, the numbers shifted again and the staff went back down to 5 classroom teachers.

of a part-time French teacher, part-time secretary, one custodian, two educational assistants, and a principal and vice-principal who divided their administrative duties between Feildsville and another small school 15 minutes away. Before students had arrived on the first day of school, I joined an informal meeting of the entire staff in the school's single hallway, called together by the new vice-principal. She thanked everyone for their friendly welcome and encouraged staff to feel free to tell her how things work as she would be taking their lead for the first bit. "It's nice here, because I don't have to run too far to find you," she said with a chuckle. Having just made the transition from a large city school, she described past experiences of having to cross big courtyards in order to find people. "But not here!" she remarked with a smile.

Despite Fieldsville's small population, the school's catchment area is quite large, collecting students from a radius of 15 to 20 km. Waking early to catch one of the two buses that make their circuitous route through the backroads, some students travel as much as 40 minutes to an hour at the beginning and end of each day. This vast community geography makes it difficult for students to get together on weekends. Save for the few who are allowed to traverse the fields independently by all-terrain vehicle (ATV), most are left to convince parents or older siblings to make the 15 minute drive to a friend's house. On the occasional Saturday when a parent is driving to Warden, Fieldsville students call up their friends, who pile in the car for the 40 minute drive, taking advantage of the chance to spend a few hours at the mall, or go to a movie. Relaying the experience to their friends at school on Monday, they will likely remark that the movie was pretty good, but that Warden was dirty and crowded, as always, and that they were happy to get back to the country.

Having been raised in an Ontario town much like this one (a mere 30 minutes away, in fact), I can identify with many of these experiences of being a young person growing up in a small rural community. Now as a graduate student at the University of Toronto, I bring a

different set of lenses to this social and spatial geography. Equipped with the tools of feminist poststructural ethnography, I am eager to explore how students negotiate the multiple discourses through which they are constituted, as they embrace certain categories and resist others in the process of crafting selves and futures. I have arrived at the question of imagined futures by way of critical scholarship on neo-liberalism and education. This vast body of work has raised concerns regarding the ways in which schooling is being defined in this historical moment, with particular focus on the kind of person that students are encouraged to become. What studies of the neo-liberal subject tend not to ask is *where* young people locate their futures, and how this question of the “where” fits into practices of self-making more broadly. As I sit at the back of the classroom during my first week in Fieldsville, it is this collection of questions that shapes my own sense-making. Over the next several months, I will reflect upon and revise these questions many times, in an effort to better understand how Fieldsville young people navigate their own lives and futures. In some ways then, this dissertation is the story of those reflections and revisions. By sharing them, I hope to say something about how subjects and spaces are relationally constituted, as well as what this might illuminate about how broader socio-historical processes are lived in place.

Scholarly introductions

This project examines specific discursive practices among a group of young people in a particular rural community, but the analysis is animated by a series of broader conversations. Thus, my own entry into the discursive, social and geographical space of Fieldsville – including the questions that brought me there – must be contextualized within this discursive frame. I discuss these theoretical underpinnings in detail in Chapter 2. Here, my goal is simply to highlight a few starting points, intersections, barriers and hoped-for destinations.

One set of conversations that frames my entry into this project is recent research documenting a growing anxiety about “the future of youth” in neo-liberal times (Harris 2004, 5). According to this body of work, young people are increasingly viewed as the inheritors of a “risk society” marked by social and economic insecurity (Beck 1992), where they are responsible for their own uncertain futures (Kelly 2001). Scholars exploring historical shifts in the way that schooling is imagined and evaluated point toward a relatively new set of discourses that have dominated recent decades (Apple 2001; Davies and Bansel 2007; Yates 2009; Walkerdine 2003). Across transnational policy initiatives, popular debates, and curriculum design, a common feature within contemporary articulations of schooling in “the West” has been an emphasis on the production of particular kinds of people. Public concern over the “cultural production of the educated person” (Levinson and Holland 1996) has a long history within modernist legacies of schooling, but this ideal figure is constructed out of historically specific demands and desires. Thus, within a socio-historical context dominated by concerns about the insecurities provoked by neo-liberal restructuring, the question of whether “schooling is adequate to the changing world,” tends to revolve around national performance measures and global economic competitiveness (Yates 2009, 20). Within these conversations, the educated person is imagined as one who is capable of independently navigating this uncertain terrain, having gained the personal “capacities” required to flexibly adapt to an ever-changing world (Bradford and Hey 2007; Davies and Bansel 2007). Thus, while this emphasis on the future is not new to the educational project of cultivating a responsible and productive citizenry, what stands out in contemporary discourses of schooling is the emphasis upon *individual* choice and responsibility. These discourses sustain the production of an ideal student-subject who skillfully navigates an uncertain world and produces his/her own future success (Yates 2009, 25).

Critical, feminist scholars have critiqued the assumptions surrounding this neo-liberal

subject (gendered, racialized, classed and otherwise), which have the effect of obscuring systemic inequalities that engender uneven opportunities and constraints within young lives (Aapola, Gonick and Harris 2005; Davies and Saltmarsh 2007; Dehli 2009; Demerath and Lynch 2008; Francis and Hey 2009; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001; Weis 2008). It is this critical work that originally inspired my interest in *The Real Game* (RG). As a career-oriented program that encourages students to become self-reliant, adaptable, and future-oriented subjects, RG appears to reflect the discursive shifts I've just described. Promotional materials published by Canada's National Life/Work Centre frame the program within a “new career management paradigm,” developed in response to rapidly changing working conditions (Jarvis 2003a). Lead spokesperson Philip Jarvis argues that traditional academic instruction and vocational guidance fail to prepare individuals for current “labour market realities,” thus producing schooling experiences that are disconnected from students' futures. By contrast, this new model of career education is directed toward helping students to become the kind of worker and citizen who can achieve success within a changing world. By developing students' capacities for “choosing wisely,” and “making the best of ever-present change” (4), this model is said to have the potential to “help more youth and adults become satisfied, fulfilled, self-reliant, contributing and prosperous citizens” (Jarvis 2003, 17). At the heart of this educational project is an emphasis on laying the foundations for ongoing self-improvement. In Jarvis's words, “The key to success in the modern workplace, as in life, is not finding the right job or life partner, it's *becoming* the right person, continuously” (2003, 1, italics in original).

Viewing *The Real Game* as a curricular site where students are invited to construct “real-life” subjectivities, I approached this study with questions about how rural youth envision futures in neo-liberal times. How do these young people interpret and respond to this invitation to become enterprising citizens of the future? What discourses do they draw upon to envision their

futures, and how is this process shaped by their geographical and social location? By asking these questions of this problem space, I invoke an additional set of scholarly conversations that give shape to this project. My engagement with the broad literature on neo-liberalism and education, as well as the specific question of imagined futures, is informed by critical scholarship investigating subjectivity and schooling (McLeod and Yates 2006). More specifically, my analysis is deeply shaped by the work of education scholars who use feminist poststructural theories to examine the discursive practices and performances through which young subjectivities are constituted (Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz 2009; Davies 2003; Gonick 2003; Kenway et al. 1994; Reay 2002; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001). Working within the broad framework of Foucauldian approaches to discourse and subjectivity, feminist poststructural theory provides conceptual tools for exploring how we come to know ourselves through the interplay of various categories – as specifically gendered and racialized, for instance – which become inscribed onto our bodies and make available particular identifications. It is through these very processes that it becomes possible (and distinctly meaningful) to speak of/as white, working-class, rural girls and boys in this moment.

But there is a third, equally important piece to this puzzle. My questions about the interplay between dominant discourses and young people's everyday discursive practices is premised upon the foundational assumption that location matters. That is, the project begins from the understanding that the way in which young subjectivities are situated in time, space and social relations both shapes and is shaped by dominant representations of youth in place. Subjectivity is not a pre-formed entity that is inserted into particular contexts (Francis and Skelton 2008); rather, the processes by which young people are located and locate themselves are central to the making of young subjectivities (Corbett 2007b; Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz 2007; James 2005; Skelton and Valentine 1998). In this project, I build upon critical scholarship

theorizing young lives as socially, spatially and temporally situated by exploring *processes of location* within subjectivity formation. In doing so, I extend the argument that location matters by calling for greater attention to *how* young people are located – that is, to the processes and practices through which youthful subjectivities are positioned in particular bodies, relations, spaces, narratives.

In an effort to make sense of young people's shifting stories of place and movement, I examine social and spatial location as relationally constituted. This is similar to the approach taken by Rachel Thomson and Rebecca Taylor in their analysis of mobility as a resource in transitions to adulthood. Through a longitudinal study among young people in the UK, they show how “localities have their own particular economy of mobility, operating at levels of the material, cultural and fantasy” (2005, 331). Nevertheless, Thomson and Taylor assert that we mustn't treat local economies of mobility as fixed typologies, for “individuals and groups are positioned differently in relation to these conditions and associated meanings” (331). Thus, one's sense of place in the world – and one's sense of self in place – is produced through a geography of identification that is deeply embedded within negotiations of gender, class, race, and other social structures.

What emerges throughout this dissertation is a constellation of imagined futures that are rife with contradictions, as Fieldsville students make sense of the dominant discourses of a neo-liberal era from their embodied locations within geographical and social space. Integrating classroom and playground observations with focus groups and interviews, the analysis reveals how young people draw upon diverse discourses in order to envision the person they hope to become. In addition to the subject positions on offer in *The Real Game*, popular culture provides a key resource in practices of self-making, as these white, working-class youth invest in middle-class ideals of the “good life,” and distinguish their own rural location from racialized mappings

of urban and global others. Tensions emerge where Fieldsville students' local attachments meet dominant narratives of mobility that encourage them to locate their futures elsewhere. These place-based tensions present particular challenges for girls, who must negotiate the gendered dynamics of rural social space alongside popular discourses of “girl power” that proffer unlimited possibilities for today's young women. Teasing apart the intersections of gender, race, class and space within students' narratives, I argue that studies of neo-liberal subjectivity must examine how dominant discourses are negotiated from particular social and geographical locations.

Questions of the future appear to invite imaginative possibilities, but they are often accountable to strict categories that discipline ways of being and knowing. Throughout the next six chapters, I examine how Fieldsville students struggle to construct futures that satisfy competing attachments to material and imagined geographies, gendered embodiments, and classed mobilities. At the same time, I hope to highlight opportunities to learn from and think with these young people as they read possible futures from the contradictory discourses available to them, and then write themselves into narratives of adulthood that work to mediate these contradictions (Kenway et al 1994, 204).

Chapter introductions

The second chapter picks up where the preceding discussion left off, crafting a theoretical framework to support the analysis that follows. In this chapter, I situate the project in productive tension with theories of the neo-liberal subject, as I work to both build upon and challenge some of the conclusions generated in this body of work. In particular, I propose an alternative approach to asking questions about neo-liberalism and youth. Instead of assuming that neo-liberal discourses are the driving force shaping young lives, I attempt to decentre the neo-liberal

in an effort to explore young people's practices of self-making on their own terms. In making this shift, I draw insight from the fruitful intersection of feminist poststructural theory and cultural geography. Contextualizing the concepts of discourse and the subject within embodied relations in place, I build upon discursive approaches to subjectivity formation by exploring how these processes are spatially organized and affectively negotiated. Together, feminist poststructural theory and cultural geography provide a conceptual apparatus for exploring how subjects and spaces are relationally constituted. As Fieldsville students articulate their visions of the future, they make use of the discourses available to them in order to establish their place within legitimate categories of being. However, because subjectivity exceeds the imagined boundaries of a unitary self, this process is not easily contained within the linear model of an internally-consistent biography. In an effort to attend to the multiple, shifting attachments that structure students' future narratives, I propose a theoretical approach that attends to ongoing *processes of location* within subjectivity formation.

Chapter 3 turns to questions of method as I consider what it might mean to conduct a feminist poststructural ethnography of subjectivity formation in place. Continuing to explore the complementary insights of feminist poststructuralism and cultural geography, the chapter examines the specific geography that gives shape to this ethnographic project. I argue that many of the central debates within feminist poststructural ethnography – including issues of access, positionality, representation, and ethics – can be extended through an analysis of space and place. This methodological approach is in keeping with my theoretical commitment to exploring the interplay between social and spatial location, beginning with questions about the construction of Fieldsville as a research “site.” The chapter demonstrates that while ethnographic knowledge is always produced in context, it also lays claim to and produces that context in ways that warrant closer inspection. After reflecting upon my own movements as a researcher within and

around the socio-spatial context of Fieldsville, I consider the various discursive spaces generated in and through this project. Contrasting the interactions and performances that I encountered during classroom observations, focus groups, and interviews, I argue that each of these spaces made possible different kinds of discursive work, and thus opened up multiple interpretations throughout the project.

Thematic analysis begins in Chapter 4, where I explore how Fieldsville students establish their sense of self through relational constructions of space and place. Working primarily with focus group transcripts, I examine key themes within students' place-based narratives, which centre on discourses of the rural idyll. Locating their current lives and future imaginings within a quiet and open countryside, these young people construct their own rural location in opposition to a dirty and dangerous city. Even as they describe individual experiences that challenge these spatial constructs – for instance, by revealing inequalities washed over by the rural idyll, or gesturing toward desirable aspects of city living – these young people remain heavily invested in the rural/urban binary. What's more, their place-based distinctions extend to transnational geographies, as Fieldsville students locate themselves within the borders of a peaceful and picturesque Canada and regard global others with a mixture of wonder, fear and disdain.

Taken together, these mappings reveal strong racial imagery that I examine more closely in the chapter's final section. Drawing upon work that brings critical race theory to studies of space and place (Goldberg 1993; Holloway 2007; Razack 2002), I show how an implicitly white rural is marked off from racialized urban spaces that are depicted as sites of rampant crime and degeneracy. Rather than interpret these mappings as proof of individual young people's racist attitudes, I argue that Fieldsville students' racialized place-narratives reflect broader tensions within discourses of race, class and rurality in a national context. As Canada's cities are celebrated as a source of enterprising and cosmopolitan citizens, rural spaces are represented as

sites of stagnation and decline, invoking classist imagery of “rednecks” with “backward” lifestyles (Corbett 2006). By reclaiming their rural identity in the image of the romanticized rural of Canada's colonial mythologies, Fieldsville students resist the pathologies that are projected onto their community and give value to their own sense of place (Ching and Creed 1997). The fact that this place-based identification is sustained by racist imagery highlights the troubling existence of deeply racialized spatial discourses in Canada.

Having mapped out students' sense of themselves in place, Chapter 5 focuses on gendered processes of becoming. In keeping with a feminist poststructural framework, I begin with questions about how students are discursively positioned as gendered subjects, as well as how they respond to and negotiate these positionings. But alongside questions of discourse, the chapter examines how Fieldsville students' gender performances are distinctly *spatialized*. While navigating dominant discourses about what it means to be a boy or girl in this moment, these young people enact masculinities and femininities that are deeply informed by conceptions of rurality, and must be understood in this socio-spatial context. This interplay between gender and rurality positions individual students with uneven access to gendered performances that secure local legitimacy. School social hierarchies centre around a dominant rural masculinity that is produced in opposition to “weak” masculinities as well as categories of femininity. Drawing upon a combination of classroom observations, interviews, and focus group discussions exploring students' gendered understandings and experiences, I highlight the deeply classed femininities available in Fieldsville. While a “popular” femininity affords girls a significant amount of social power, it demands ultimate deferral to a patriarchal, heterosexist matrix. On the other hand, girls who are viewed as poor are positioned as “dirts,” a category of femininity that (despite sharing several attributes with the valued rural masculinity) is expelled to the realm of the abject.

Connecting this gender analysis to my research questions about subjectivity, schooling and imagined futures, the analysis shows how this grid of gendered and spatialized identities shapes the kinds of futures that students perceive to be available and desirable. This becomes apparent in the contradictions that structure many girls' future narratives, as they project themselves into the (implicitly urban) adult femininities that popular culture deems desirable, yet remain adamant that they will build futures in the country. I interpret these contradictions as expressions of the distinctly gendered and place-based challenges produced by the neo-liberal imperative to design one's future. Fieldsville girls are positioned as *individually* responsible for reconciling the disjuncture between their own spatial identifications and available models of femininity. The analysis provides a poignant example of how ethnographic studies can generate new insights about neo-liberalism and education. Rather than allow theories of the neo-liberal subject to dictate how questions are asked, talking to these girls about what is significant in their current lives and imagined futures allows me to see how dominant discourses of mobility and self-improvement are negotiated from their specifically gendered, classed and rural location.

As the last of the three analytic chapters, Chapter 6 explores how Fieldsville students construct the person they hope to become. This is a diverse group of young people who bring varied histories and investments to our conversations, yet the interviews reveal remarkable consistency in their understandings of what constitutes a “good life.” Plotting futures along a series of collectively-valued achievements – such as getting a good education, a good job, and a good home – these young people invest in classed fantasies of mobility that work to locate their futures within a life that is “good.” Because such ideals are relationally defined, they produce a set of imagined futures that are organized around the binary of success and failure. Alongside depictions of the “good life,” students paint vivid images of the many potential failures that threaten to undermine their hopes and dreams for “success.” Working within the discursive

frame of individual responsibility and self-improvement available in *The Real Game*, students appear to regard their potential success and failure as a measure of their very selfhood, a reflection of their personal capacity to move outward and upward beyond the constraints of their rural, classed locations. The analysis highlights the deeply *affective* work required to manage these pressures, as students narrate their visions of the future through stories of hope, fear, anxiety and wonder. I argue that this demonstrates the need for more work exploring the affective practices that neo-liberalism demands, particularly within bodies that are marked as sites of improvement, such as the rural, working-class young person.

In the concluding chapter, I reflect upon the insights generated throughout this project and consider how they might open up possible futures. That is, alongside the personal futures that will be lived by Fieldsville students, the dissertation also points toward possible scholarly and pedagogical futures that might come out of this work. These include research exploring intersections of race, class and rurality in Canada, as well as anti-racist educational initiatives in rural contexts. I highlight the potential contribution that the stories of Fieldsville girls might make to the burgeoning field of girls studies, which has yet to probe deeply into intersections of gender and place in Canada. I also call for the continued development of an analysis of class as embodied and inscribed through emotional geographies. Returning to my initial questions regarding how rural youth envision futures in neo-liberal times, I propose a deeper investigation into the spatialized workings of neo-liberalism. One of the key insights of this project is how neo-liberal processes are lived differently depending on one's location. Thus, the implementation of *The Real Game* would surely invite different practices of self-making in, say, an “inner city” neighbourhood with a large population of recent immigrants, or an upper-middle-class suburb with abundant resources. Beyond offering a picture of local complexities, I believe that such place-sensitive work can contribute to understandings about broader socio-historical processes

by examining the specific workings of neo-liberal technologies as they operate in place.

Chapter 2

Re-imagining the Neo-liberal Subject: Theorizing Subjectivity in Place

Hilary tugs at the cuffs of her yellow hooded sweatshirt and shakes her dark side-swept bangs off her face. She appears unfazed by the audio recorder on the table between us, and speaks candidly about the surprises she encountered in *The Real Game*.

KC: Is this kind of stuff that you've thought much about before?

Hilary: No, not at all. When we started doing the money, I was like, wow, life is - I'm gonna grow up to prob'ly be on the street! Cuz you have to pay a lot of money just for like, rent on your house, to pay for a car and stuff.

KC: So what did you think about [*The Real Game*]?

Hilary: I think it helps a lot to know what it's actually gonna be like when we grow up. And how you have to pay the bills and how you have to fill forms out and stuff just to like, live at your house.

Over the course of our thirty minute interview, the conversation gradually shifts from the specific lessons Hilary took away from *The Real Game*, to a broader sense of her hopes and dreams for the future. She describes her desire to pursue a career in fashion design, as well as her dream to eventually assume ownership of her parents' house in Fieldsville. When I ask how she envisions her life twenty years from now, she pauses to contemplate the possibilities:

I think I'll either still be a fashion designer, or if that kinda goes downhill, all that stuff goes downhill, um, I think I'll just do something like work at a general store. Like, cuz you can still make good money doing that too. So I'll do that or I could be, I don't know. I'd have to think of something. But um, then I want, apparently Cody [Hilary's boyfriend] thinks he's gonna grow up to be a, um, NHL hockey player on the Toronto Maple Leafs team, but I don't think that's gonna work. But, it could. But um, I'm gonna grow up and I'm gonna have a good job, and my husband's gonna have a good job. And we're gonna, if I have kids then they're gonna, it's not gonna just be about me and my husband, have to involve them and stuff. I don't know how to explain, but like, I don't know. I don't know [laughs].

However tentative and varied they may be, these visions of the future offer a glimpse into what

Hilary considers meaningful in life. Through these narratives she projects herself into a respectable future, as a responsible person who works hard to support herself and her family. As the career-oriented lessons of *The Real Game* are drawn into the realm of fantasy, they become enmeshed in a network of investments that surround Hilary's sense of self – an embodied self that is relationally constructed within systems of gender, class, race and space:

I think it's important to have money, but not just for stuff that you want. But you have to [provide] stuff for your family. Like, clothes, cuz you can't walk around naked [laughs]. So like, clothes and shoes to wear and school supplies and food and all that stuff, etc. And it goes on and on. And that's why I think it's good to have money cuz you don't, you wanna have money cuz you can't just live without food. You can't live without clothes or school supplies. You can't live without any of that stuff. You just need it. It's like a fact of life, you need that stuff. You can't just go on living without it. But I um, like those commercials on TV and it's people that live in these, like on the other side of the world in um, [pause] I don't know. I forget what it's called. But me and my grandma always go to McDonald's and we get McDonald's toys and we send them to Haiti where they don't get much. And you see these commercials on TV of these kids that don't even have food, they can't go to school, they have to drink from like, mud water and stuff. And I feel so bad for them. And it's just like animals in the pound and they've like, been abused and stuff. And also you'd need stuff to feed your animals as well. Cuz I'm gonna grow up and I'm gonna have a big Saint Bernard.

Upon first reading, the above paragraph might be perceived as an unfocused rambling, jumping between issues of responsibility, representation, experience and desire. Surely, one might suggest, Hilary's past trips to McDonald's and dreams of future pets are not grounds for theoretical investigation into questions of subjectivity and imagined futures. While it's true that these narrative traces do not add up to a coherent life-plan, I want to argue that this very scattered quality constitutes rich analytic potential. Hilary draws upon multiple discursive frames to articulate what she considers important in life, moving from the necessity of money as a “fact of life,” to popular representations of global Others, to related experiences, feelings and imaginings. Although *The Real Game* serves as the shared context for our discussion, this aspect of the formal school curriculum provides just one discursive thread within this textured tapestry. How might we learn from this complex articulation of self? More specifically, what kinds of

theoretical tools can facilitate an analysis of Hilary's identifications in their multiplicity, as well as the shifting alignments through which she fashions her subjectivity? In this chapter, I argue that exploring questions of subjectivity and schooling in neo-liberal times requires a framework that attends to how these multiple threads intertwine to fabricate selves and futures.

I begin by situating my theoretical approach in relation to a now widely established body of work theorizing the production of the neo-liberal subject. Within critical studies of education, a growing literature examines how neo-liberal discourses are reshaping educational policy and curriculum, and warns of the rise of an ideal student-subject characterized by flexibility, mobility and entrepreneurial capacity (Bradford and Hey 2007; Davies and Bansel 2007). While recognizing the important contributions of this work, I consider the limitations of an approach that assumes the primacy of neo-liberal discourses as the key factor shaping young subjectivities. What discursive boundaries are reproduced by this assumption, and what aspects of young lives are excluded in the process? I argue that ethnographic research has the potential to enrich these theoretical debates by attending to the local practices through which young people come to understand themselves and their futures in and through schooling.

Reviewing the literature on subjectivity and schooling in neo-liberal times, I explore how subjectivity formation operates at multiple levels: on one hand, as the construction of an imagined young subject who is imbued with the promise and anxieties of the future (Cole and Durham 2008; Harris 2004; Katz 2008; Kraftl 2008; Ruddick 2003); and on the other, as the everyday practices through which young people navigate their lives, make sense of who they are and envision who they might become (Flanagan 2008; Francis 2002; Gordon and Lahelma 2004; Leccardi 2006a). In an effort to probe this dynamic relation, I begin from the understanding that exploring the construction of youth subjectivity within this socio-historical moment means asking not only how young people are situated within neo-liberal discourses (Harris 2004; Katz

2008; Kelly 2001; Ruddick 2003), but also how they take up and rearticulate these constructions, and work to locate themselves within shifting positions and relations (Davies 2003; James 2005; Pomerantz 2008; Willet 2006).

The chapter embraces this dialectic as a generative tension from which to develop the theoretical foundations for this project. Seeking to ground studies of discourse and subjectivity within embodied relations in place, I build upon feminist poststructural approaches to subjectivity formation by exploring how these processes are spatially organized and affectively negotiated. While theorizing subjectivity as constituted through discourse, I draw upon work in cultural geography and affect studies to explore subjectivity as embodied, felt and embedded within particular histories, spaces and social structures (Skeggs 2004; Dillabough, Kennelly and Wang 2008; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001). But before laying out the theoretical approach that I have developed to support this project, I begin by revisiting the question of the neo-liberal subject.

Playing *The Real Game*: Producing the Neo-liberal Student-subject?

Developed in Canada in 1994, and now implemented internationally, *The Real Game* invites grade seven and eight students to temporarily assume the role of a working adult.² At the outset, each student is randomly assigned to an occupational profile, which becomes their character for the rest of the program. From this position, students create “dream lists” for their ideal home, balance budgets, recover from job loss, and learn key life principles, such as “Change is constant.” In the program’s final phase, students design their own personal life-plans based on lessons learned through role-play experiences.

The introduction to the RG Facilitator's Guide situates the program in relation to a

² The official website for *The Real Game Series* provides links to versions used in Australia, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Netherlands, New Zealand, United Kingdom, and United States of America.

particular socio-historical context:

The Real Game career and life exploration program is a response to the new and emerging challenges the evolving working world is relentlessly throwing at young people, indeed all citizens. It not only introduces them to everyday realities of the future upon which they are embarking, but helps them learn the competencies they will need to find meaning, purpose, satisfaction and fulfillment in both their present and their future. (Barry 2005, 13)

As seen here, the program is promoted as a necessary intervention to help students make themselves into the type of person who can succeed in an uncertain world. In this way, RG may be interpreted as one manifestation of an historically specific vision of schooling, in which a successful education produces future-oriented, enterprising citizens who can adapt to constant change. In the words of Australian education scholar Lyn Yates: “Almost universally today the task of schooling is not only addressed in terms of knowledge or skills, but also in terms of what kind of person (or least what kind of worker) students should become: what learners will need to be able to do and who they will need to be to manage their future lives” (2009, 22).

As a curricular program that stresses the importance of flexibility, mobility and entrepreneurial capacity for success in a changing world, *The Real Game* fits within a set of educational discourses that have been widely critiqued by critical scholars who view them as technologies of neo-liberalism (Apple 2001; Bradford and Hey 2007; Harris 2004). In an article entitled “Neoliberalism and Education,” Davies and Bansel characterize neo-liberalization as the shift to “a state that gives power to global corporations and installs apparatuses and knowledges through which people are reconfigured as productive economic entrepreneurs of their own lives” (2007, 248). Studies in North America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand have shown how neo-liberal shifts alter the discursive terrain in literacy (Davies and Saltmarsh 2007), media education (Dehli 2009), vocational programming (Yates 2006; Vaughan 2005), and notions of student success (McLeod and Yates 2006), as they produce a student-subject that reflects the

ideals of risk-management and entrepreneurship (Demerath and Lynch 2008; Kelly 2001; Komulainen, Korhonen, and Raty 2009). Accordingly, schooling is currently seen to perform a critical function in the formation of a neo-liberal subject characterized by “the devolution of more and more choice to a seemingly ever more autonomous individual who must rationally calculate the benefits and costs of all aspects of life” (Mitchell, Marston, and Katz 2003, 417).

In the context of discourses of choice and self-invention, Petersson, Olsson and Popkewitz argue that the future operates as “a technology to shape and nurture the 'future oriented' subject” (2007, 49). They explain that while this emphasis on the future is not new to Western modernity, what is produced through neo-liberal discourses is the conception of the individual as an “agent of the future” (49) so that “the making of the present and of the future thus becomes an individual project” (53). Critical studies of education show how discourses of neo-liberal selfhood obscure enduring structural inequities, presenting particular challenges for young women, working-class, and racialized individuals, who are encouraged to interpret structural constraints through the lens of individual agency (Aapola, Gonick and Harris 2005; Francis and Hey 2009; Goodkind 2009; Harris 2004).

These critiques provide insight into the dominant rationalities currently shaping systems of education, yet they tell us little about how these discourses become meaningful in the context of schooling (Coe and Nastasi 2006; Yates 2009). What I am suggesting is that even as studies attend to discursive shifts that redefine understandings of schooling and youth, they must not fall into the analytic trap of suggesting that this imagined ideal captures students' lived experiences (Dehli 2009). Making a similar argument, Coe and Nastasi suggest that “many studies of neo-liberal technologies of the self treat the making of the self as a *fait accompli*, rather than a contested process” (2006, 194). In their ethnographic study of a curricular program designed to develop students' problem-solving capacities, they argue that while the problem-solving

discourse operates as a technology of neo-liberal governance, “it was limited in its scope and ability to remake students' subjectivity” (194).

My own relationship to theories of the neo-liberal subject has shifted over the course of this project, as the practice of doing ethnographic research with young people in Fieldsville challenged me to rethink some of my theoretical assumptions. During my initial visits to the school I was immediately struck by the complexities of this research site. Fieldnotes from these first few weeks highlight several processes that emerged as salient themes throughout the research, such as students' strong investments in their rural environment and the complex gendered performances that structure classroom interactions. As I probed these processes more deeply through observation and conversation with students, *The Real Game* itself began to recede into the background. While the program continued to provide a shared context in which to engage with students about their visions of the future, in fact, it was somewhat secondary in terms of what these young people wanted to talk about. In my fieldnotes, I reflected upon students' articulations of what it means to grow up in a small town, to resist certain social categories and embrace others, to imagine what it might mean to live a “good life,” and to worry about the kinds of obstacles that threaten this vision. Taking my cue from these young participants about what was significant in this research space, the image of the entrepreneurial subject became a somewhat distant figure, more fit for the pages of academic journals than the everyday context of schooling.

In coming to terms with the seeming absence of this supposedly pervasive student-subject, I began to reflect upon how, in my efforts to interrogate neo-liberal discourses in education, I had inadvertently centred these discourses within my vision for the project. Of course, I had never expected students to adopt dominant neo-liberal discourses without contestation; I had indeed anticipated forms of rupture and resistance. But what I encountered seemed more like a

range of alternative discourses operating around and outside this apparently dominant vision of the entrepreneurial subject. Did this mean that the broader socio-historical context of neo-liberalism was no longer relevant to this work? Or could it be that I was encountering a different story of neo-liberalism than the one so often told in critical studies of education?

In this chapter, I offer some preliminary thoughts on these questions by outlining the theoretical framework that I have developed over the course of this project. By highlighting the shifts in my own theoretical thinking, my intention is to demonstrate how the practice of doing ethnography opened up spaces for inquiry that would not likely have been visible within an approach that centred dominant neo-liberal discourses. More specifically, I suggest that ethnographic studies can contribute to debates about neo-liberalism and education by exploring how dominant discourses are located and felt.

The Real Game provides a fascinating site through which to explore how dominant educational discourses are connected to local classroom contexts and the everyday practices of embodied learners. Accordingly, the curricular program is not so much the focus of my project as it is an entry point into the processes through which young people come to understand themselves and their futures in and through schooling. By examining students' engagements with the RG alongside their own representations of their current and future realities, my research pursues a contextualized account of the relationship between educational discourses and student subjectivities. I suggest that studying the complex negotiations that young people perform as they envision future selves can generate insight into the conditions of their becoming – that is, the dominant discourses, structural inequalities, local cultures and material struggles from which their subjectivities emerge.³ More than just a vision of what's to come, these future narratives

³When I refer to processes of becoming, I do not mean this in a developmental sense that locates young people in the early stages of a journey to adulthood (Qvortup 2005). Rather, my use of “becoming” evokes a poststructuralist approach in which subjectivity itself is understood to be a process of becoming (Butler 1997). From this perspective, becoming is not a journey toward a stable adult self; rather, subjectivity is viewed as a continual process that is

reveal a great deal about how young people understand themselves in the present (Sanders and Munford 2008). As Wendy Luttrell observes, “We are what we know and hope for about our futures; we are also what we know not to anticipate or expect for ourselves” (1997, 37). This project uses the tools of feminist poststructural ethnography to explore what Emma Renold has called “children's ongoing struggles in being, doing and becoming” (2005, 4).

Between Subject and Subjectivity: Theorizing Youth

In the inaugural issue of *Subjectivity*, launched in 2008, editors Blackman et al. point to “a re-prioritization of subjectivity as a primary category of social, cultural, psychological, historical and political analysis” (1). Approaching subjectivity as “topic, problem and resource” (1), they devote this opening editorial to a genealogy of the concept, tracing its emergence through recurrent debates around structure and agency, discourse and materiality, consciousness and experience, and recent discussions regarding embodiment and desire. In constructing this history, the authors distinguish between the concepts of the *subject* and *subjectivity*. They argue that with the shift from Althusser's ideology-based accounts toward Foucauldian approaches, “we begin to see a distinction between subjects as produced in power/knowledge and subjectivity, which we could call the experience of being subjected” (6). They go on to describe subjectivity as the historically contingent “experience of the lived multiplicity of positionings” (6). Blackman et al. argue that, rather than constituting separate objects of study, “it is in this interplay between the subject and subjectivity that the current horizons of interest in subjectivity is born, and which has produced some of the productive tensions that are now being played out in new and novel ways” (7).

This first issue of *Subjectivity* provides a useful starting point for examining theories of

made and remade through discourse (Davies 2003).

subjectivity and schooling in the context of neo-liberalism. I welcome Blackman et al.'s invitation to probe the interplay between the subject and subjectivity, for much current youth research explores how young people are invited to assume the position of the flexible, responsible and self-made neo-liberal subject (Bradford and Hey 2007; Davies and Saltmarsh 2007; Harris 2004; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2006; Yates 2006). These studies vary in relative focus on the dominant construction of the ideal student and the everyday practices of forging subjectivities within and against neo-liberal discourses. Building upon this literature, I argue that the subject and subjectivity must be viewed as interrelated, yet irreducible, in the production, performance, and embodiment of youth.

Discourse and subjectivity

Many studies of subjectivity formation draw upon Foucauldian theories of discourse and the subject. In this approach, discourse is understood as a system that “structures what statements it is possible to say” (Mills 2003, 66). Embedded within relations of power, discourse is constantly remade through forms of thinking, acting and speaking that both shape and are shaped by “particularized, local meaning systems” (Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz 2006, 423). Foucault explored how these systems of meaning crystallize within institutions in order to produce particular categories of being, such that discourse operates as “a space of differentiated subject-positions and subject-functions” (1991, 58). Highlighting the dynamic interrelation of discourse and subjectivity, poststructural feminist scholars explore how “each person actively takes up the discourses through which they and others speak/write the world into existence *as if they were their own*” (Davies 2003, 14, italics in original). Scholars who bring these theoretical tools to the fields of education and youth studies examine how young people construct their own evolving subjectivities by negotiating the discourses that constitute them (Gonick 2007).

This dissertation builds upon a diverse collection of critical educational scholarship that explores the interplay between subjectivity and schooling (Corbett 2007a; Currie and Kelly 2006; Gaztambide-Fernández 2009; Levinson and Holland 1996; Luttrell 1997; Pomerantz 2008; Yon 2000). This research is guided by the assumption that the work of schools extends well beyond the formal goals outlined in institutional mandates. In the words of Wendy Luttrell, schools constitute “arenas of struggle where selfhood, identities, values, and knowledge are contested and where only certain students garner respect as a 'somebody’” (1997, 53-4). Poststructural ethnographies of schooling examine “the qualities of discourses that circulate and which open or foreclose the different ways people can imagine themselves in the school” (Yon 2000, 125). A central focus of this work is how interlocking systems of oppression and opportunity—race, gender, class, sexuality, disability—structure discursive practice, rendering particular subject positions differently accessible across diverse social locations (Razack 1998). Thus, even as young people take on particular discourses as their own, they do not choose freely in this process, but rather work within the opportunities and constraints afforded by their embodied positioning within relations of power (Pheonix 2004; Pomerantz 2008).

Youth scholars have examined how neo-liberal discourses of choice and self-invention produce an enterprising young subject who is said to thrive in a climate of risk and uncertainty (Kelly 2001; Yates 2006). Feminist scholars demonstrate how discourses of entrepreneurial selfhood can have especially detrimental effects for young women, who are constructed as “ideal neo-liberal subjects – flexible, technologically savvy, open to change and in control of their destiny” (Nayak and Kehily 2007, 145). These scholars note that amid celebratory rhetoric about “giving voice” to girls (Gonick 2007; Bragg 2007), “girl power” discourses encourage young women to engage in endless practices of self-invention in order to strive for a virtually unachievable selfhood (Sanders and Munford 2008; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001). This

ideal girl is constituted alongside her undesirable other, producing a binary that has been variously described as “good girl” versus “bad girl” (McRobbie 2001), “can-do girl” versus “at-risk girl” (Harris 2005), and “Girl Power” versus “Reviving Ophelia” (Aapola, Gonick and Harris 2005). However named, these two subjects – one responsible and ambitious, the other vulnerable and pathologized – regulate the production of feminine selfhood, inviting young women to work on themselves while obscuring their unequal social contexts (Aapola, Gonick and Harris 2005). As these polarized images of good and bad femininity map onto systems of race and class, the desirable subject position of the “can-do” girl is most easily achieved by white, middle-class young women who have privileged access to economic and cultural capital (Harris 2005, McRobbie 2001).

Accounts of the ideal neo-liberal subject are sometimes complemented by studies of girls’ own identity work (e.g. Pomerantz 2008), but often these analyses remain at the level of dominant discourses. Conceiving of youth scholarship as a practice that contributes to the very discourses it works to critique (cf. Foucault 1994), I wonder what is produced by a barrage of texts highlighting (albeit critically) the image of the idealized feminine subject of neo-liberalism? Who is this “can-do girl” (Harris 2005) and what does she reveal about the messy complexities of how discourses are lived and reworked as subjectivities? By posing these questions, I do not mean to disregard studies of how neo-liberal subjects are constructed in dominant discourses, but rather to suggest that we also examine whether and how this imagined subject becomes meaningful in the lives of young people.

Calling for a deeper interrogation of discursive approaches to the subject, McLeod and Yates ask: “How do discourses turn into subjectivity?”(2006, 26) They critique theoretical accounts that posit individuals as the mere outcome of discourse and suggest that “subjectivities are constructed through discourse, but are not simply effects of discourse” (86). That is, the

positions and narratives made available in discourse are actively negotiated in relation to life histories, material realities and personal investments as subjectivities are fashioned (Davies 2003; Pomerantz 2008). Scholars who embrace this complexity have examined how neo-liberal discourses are taken up within local school contexts. These studies show that even as notions of self-reliance, flexibility and mobility commonly associated with the entrepreneurial subject pervade educational spaces, this rhetoric is taken up in a variety of ways.

In a study of two vocational programs in Australia, Lyn Yates (2006) finds that even as policy advocates promote the need to “vocalise the curriculum” in order to develop among all students the generic abilities needed to succeed within the “new economy,” teachers and students view the usefulness of vocational programs in terms of providing industry-related skills and experiences that will translate directly into jobs. Furthermore, what students make of these courses is influenced by their own “embodied being and family enculturation” (293). Studies like this one present a generative challenge to theories of the neo-liberal subject. In this way, ethnographic analyses can complicate the story of an overarching and all-encompassing discourse, by highlighting the varied and uneven ways in which these discursive shifts occur in particular contexts.

Studying subjectivity in the context of schooling extends beyond the formal implementation of curriculum to also explore how young people forge identities through interactions with others. Engaging students in conversation around literary texts, Bronwyn Davies' poststructuralist analysis reveals how gender is produced and policed through students' verbal interactions, making visible “the discursive threads through which their experience of themselves as specific beings is woven” (2003, 13). Taking a slightly different approach, Carrie Paechter integrates Butler's work on performativity with the literature on communities of practice (e.g., Wenger 1998) and theorizes gender as something that is learned and enacted

within “loose, overlapping, local communities of masculinity and femininity practice” (2007, 6). Similarly, in an analysis of informal talk among primary students, Willet proposes that “access to friendship groups involves positioning oneself 'correctly' within the dominant gender-specific discourses” (2006, 443).

In addition, scholars highlight how such gendered performances are also classed (Corbett 2007a; Keddie 2007; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001) and racialized (Hayes 2004; McCarthy 1998; Nayak 2003; Murray 2005; Reay and Lucey 2000). For example, Pheonix (2004) examines how racialization positions boys differently in terms of discourses of masculinity and school success. She shows how authentic performances of “doing boy” are racially coded, making it especially difficult for black students to construct masculinities that align with academically “successful” subjectivities. By analyzing the socio-spatial construction of rural masculinities in Fieldsville, this dissertation contributes to this broad literature by showing how gendered engagements with neo-liberal discourses are also differentiated in relation to issues of place (Kraack and Kenway 2002).

The rapidly expanding field of girlhood studies draws on both youth cultural studies and sociology of education to explore how girls construct meaning in their everyday lives (Bettis and Adams 2005; Aapola, Gonick and Harris 2005). Many scholars in this field approach subjectivity as constructed through discourse, and focus on highlighting girls' agency in an effort to rework dominant representations of girls as passive conformists or pathologized victims (Pomerantz 2008). Canadian scholars Dawn Currie, Deirdre Kelly and Shauna Pomerantz have performed several studies of “girls' empowerment in the everyday contexts of school cultures” (2006, 419). Critical of the static notion of discursive positions, Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz analyze girls' practices of *positioning*, incorporating theories of performativity in order to attend to the “embodied actions through which the obviousness of gendered identities is sustained” (2006,

424). In a related work, Pomerantz's feminist poststructural ethnography of "girls' negotiations of identity through style" (2008, 23) analyzes girls' style as a form of embodied subjectivity. While highlighting girls' active engagement with the school's "symbolic economy of style" (154), Pomerantz does not romanticize their cultural practices. She notes that it was vital for participants to gain "knowledge of how one was positioned by others as a certain 'kind' of (raced, classed, schooled) girl" (154). Far from being free to choose their styled selves as one might select an item from a clothing store, students had to "understand the limits of their performances of girlhood and work within these restrictions if they wanted others to take them seriously" (154).

In this project, I hope to build upon, challenge, and extend this rich body of literature theorizing the production of young subjectivities in neo-liberal times. Upon entering into research with students in Fieldsville, I brought with me a conception of subjectivity as dynamic social processes and practices performed through discourse. This framework is rooted in a Foucauldian approach to discourse as a system of meaning that structures ways of thinking and being in the world (Foucault 1991; 1994). Driving this approach is a commitment to critically interrogating systems of power, such that an analysis of discourse and subjectivity must be contextualized within relations of privilege and oppression. As Bronwyn Davies states, "Social structures are coercive to the extent that to be recognizably and acceptably a person we must operate within their terms" (2000, 95). Thus, as young people are encouraged to imagine their futures, they must negotiate the discourses available to them in order to establish their membership within appropriate categories of being. Working from this perspective, Hilary's narrative in the introduction to this chapter may be read as an expression of how discourses of middle-class femininity (represented by the hardworking parents who produce and sustain the heteronormative family) are negotiated alongside moralizing (and racializing) discourses of the

Canadian citizen who gives to those less fortunate around the globe. Like McLeod and Yates, I am interested in exploring “the interaction between dominant and normative social discourses and practices of the self – including narratives of the self and self-descriptions, memories, and dreams” (2006, 87). Thus, throughout the project I examine how young people draw upon available discourses in order to narrate themselves into categories, places and futures that are deemed intelligible and desirable.

A key strength of feminist poststructural approaches to subjectivity is the recognition that processes of subjectivity formation are often contradictory (Davies 2000). During my time in Fieldsville, I was struck by students' ongoing efforts to maneuver between, or simply live with the competing discourses that give meaning to their lives. By attending to young people's lived experience of contradiction, the project works to challenge the fiction of the non-contradictory subject who crafts a coherent life-plan through *The Real Game*. Thus, I approach imagined futures as a site from which to explore subjectivity formation in process, as young people negotiate the discourses on offer in *The Real Game* alongside their local discursive practices and investments. This approach is animated by a very different set of questions than those that underpin traditional studies of “youth transitions,” where youth is constructed as a period of personal development and a site of collective investment for the nation's future. In the following section, I provide a brief overview of this literature in order to contextualize the project's critical intervention into this scholarly and policy discourse.

Imagined futures and youth “transitions”

As the category of youth is redefined within the current context of neo-liberal uncertainty, the notion of youth “transitions” becomes an urgent site of investigation (Chisholm 2005).

Supporting young people's passage into the workforce has long been regarded as an investment

in the nation's future, but as globalizing processes pressure governments to conceive of their citizens' productivity on a world scale, studies of youth transitions have shifted to reflect this interest (Gauthier 2007). In 2003, the International Union for Scientific Studies of Population created the Scientific Panel on the Transition to Adulthood, a network of researchers formed “with the aim of increasing the knowledge of the variations, determinants and consequences of the young adult years” (Gauthier 2007, 218). The fact that such a body exists both reflects and reproduces discourses that position young people's future plans and aspirations as a problem site worthy of examination.

Historically rooted in theories of developmental psychology, traditional studies of youth transitions approached adolescence as a developmental stage with the aim of ensuring that “young people are steered on a path into healthy adulthood” (Horowitz and Bromnick 2007, 209). This approach was famously critiqued by Nancy Lesko (2001) in *Act Your Age!*, where she demonstrates that the developmental model is heavily invested in Enlightenment discourses of progress, and has bolstered imperialist civilizing narratives that preserve race and gender hierarchies. Sociological approaches to youth transitions have shifted over time from theories of reproduction, examining the extent to which young people's economic careers mirror their parents (see Gauthier 2007), to theories of navigation that explore how young people negotiate risk and uncertainty (Du Bois-Reymond and Chisholm 2006; Leccardi 2006b). Other recent work draws on poststructural approaches to subjectivity in order to explore how young people negotiate the lived experience of contradictory positionings (Brannen and Nilsen 2002; Gordon and Lahelma 2004; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001). These shifts reflect a broad move away from “the old-style linear model of transition” and toward “uncovering the complexity and ambiguity of transition in post-industrial society,” with a focus on how young people understand and experience these processes (Dwyer and Wyn 2001, 204).

Recently, biographical approaches to youth transitions have been promoted as a way to centre young people's experiences while embedding individual lives within their sociological and historical context (Thomson 2007). Henderson et al.'s longitudinal study with 100 young people in the UK follows “young people's projects of self over time” (2006, 15), through repeat interviews conducted from participants' teenage years through to their mid-twenties. This methodological design provides insight into the shifting understandings of adulthood that young people construct over time, as participants “create a series of retrospective accounts of the past, and...project themselves into an imagined future” (15). Henderson et al. use these narratives to engage critically with late modern perspectives that position individuals as the authors of their own futures (e.g., Giddens 1991). By contrast, their longitudinal research suggests that even as young people today enjoy new opportunities, “old forms of inequality...are being remade in new ways” (23).

This finding is supported by many studies that demonstrate how gender, class, race, sexuality and disability continue to structure young people's futures, creating historical patterns of both continuity and change (Francis 2002; McLeod and Yates 2006, Gordon and Lahelma 2004; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001). Despite the persistence of structural inequities, Flanagan (2008) finds a pervasive embrace of the self-made individual among American high school students. She cautions that “there are psychological costs in anxiety and self-doubt for individuals who imagine only private solutions to the uncertainties that global capital and the privatization of risk have normalized” (126). Thus, the discourse of “choice” has been shown to sustain or even deepen existing inequalities by perpetuating an individualizing logic that deems young people solely responsible for their own positions of relative privilege or marginalization.

One theme throughout this literature is the continued relevance of social location in young people's imagined futures, not only because of persistent challenges like racism and

homophobia, but also in relation to young people's orientations toward the future. Based on focus groups with youth in Norway and Britain, Brannen and Nilsen (2002) identify three different ways that young people approach their futures. Whether participants took up the model of “deferment,” “adaptability,” or “predictability” depended largely on their gender and class positioning as well as their ethnic background, which shaped the extent to which they viewed the future as uncontrollable and abstract, as a set of risks to be calculated, or as a pre-set destiny. Based on these findings, Brannen and Nilsen suggest that “the 'discourse of choice' is likely to be prominent among particular groups: among the relatively privileged youth whose education is likely to lead to better career opportunities,...while in other groups, the old order of collectivism prevails” (531). Similarly, Leccardi (2006a) finds that young people with greater resources tend to read future uncertainty as a multiplication of possibilities. Rather than devise life plans in an attempt to control the unfolding of time, efforts are invested in “the ability to keep open the horizon of the possible” (46). A corollary of this shift in conceptions of the future is the production of new subjects: “A new figure—that of the permanently active individual, able to work out a personal biography in an activist way, always ready to explore the new frontiers that accelerated society opens—is particularly in tune with this redefinition of the future” (Leccardi 2006a, 46).

This research suggests that some relatively privileged young people are taking up neo-liberal discourses of flexibility and risk in order to constitute themselves as the ideal youthful subject ready to pursue a “youthful career path” (Ruddick 2003, 356). However, the degree to which this subject position appears desirable and attainable depends on one’s location within a particular socio-political landscape. For example, the prospects of forging an independent female future differ significantly within the Finnish welfare state and within the neo-liberal context of the UK, where class differences have a more significant affect on young women's options

because of minimal social and material supports (Gordon, Holland and Thomson 2005).

Working from a theoretical perspective that views subjectivity as embedded within relations of power, I see this project as contributing to a growing body of literature that explores how young people's social location may shape the available discourses through which they imagine futures. However, I want to argue that this sensitivity to positioning within structural systems such as race and gender can be expanded to also explore issues of geography. When formulating the initial questions for this project, I became curious about how Fieldsville students' imagined futures may be shaped by their rural location. When I began doing research in the school, issues of space and place quickly rose to the fore as a central theme within the study, as I became attentive to the significance of students' rural location for their current identities and ideas about the future. In the following section, I consider how tools from cultural geography can enhance discursive theories of subjectivity formation by exploring how these processes are negotiated spatially.

Insights From Cultural Geography: Becoming in Place

In *Cool Places: Geographies of Youth Cultures*, editors Tracey Skelton and Gill Valentine set out to “place youth on the geographical map and to demonstrate youth's relevance to a range of geographical debates” (1997, 1). Widely cited as a seminal text within studies of youth and space, this collection brings geographical insights to youth culture studies in order to examine “young people's experiences of everyday spaces and their sense of spatial oppression” (9). In the years since *Cool Places* made a convincing case for exploring the lives of youth in and through space, previously unexplored sites such as shopping malls (Vanderbeck and Johnson 2000), cheerleading practices (Adams 2005), bedrooms (Baker 2004) and basement hangouts (Soep 2005), have proved fruitful places in which to examine how young people forge subjectivities

(Bettis and Adams 2005; Holloway and Valentine 2000). In addition, education scholars have drawn on spatial analyses to better understand how power operates within schools.

Denaturalizing the spatial organization of educational contexts, these studies examine how schooling formations function as disciplinary technologies (James, Jenks and Prout 1998; Foucault 1977), as well as how students navigate school spaces in order to perform (raced, classed, gendered) identities and draw boundaries between social groups (Jewett 2005; Thorne 1993). Recent work examines how information and communication technologies give rise to new spatialities (Henderson et al 2006; Holloway and Valentine 2003), and how youth's spatial practices are relocated within transnational contexts (Maira and Soep 2005). Examining how global media flows or “scapes” (Appadurai 1996) are made meaningful within local contexts, this research explores how young people project themselves onto imagined cosmopolitan spaces (Fadzillah 2005), forge diasporic identifications (Schneider 2005), and work to embed their identities within new nation-spaces after migration (Forman 2005).

This sensitivity to space has generated rich insights within studies of youth subjectivity; but the extent to which this literature helps us understand the lives of young people in a variety of contexts has been limited by a tendency to centre the urban. Thirteen years ago, when geographies of youth remained marginalized within youth studies, Valentine, Skelton and Chambers noted that “young people's experiences of green open spaces and rural environments have received even less attention than their use of urban spaces” (1997, 8). This oversight continues despite the widespread embrace of spatial analyses within youth studies; as a result, geographies of youth have contributed to the implicit coding of “youth” as “urban” (Matthews et al 2000).⁴ This scholarly privileging of urban spaces both reflects and bolsters popular portrayals

⁴I am referring here to representations of “Western” youth, and base this review on youth studies in North America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand. These processes operate quite differently in relation to the Global South, where youth are commonly represented in rural, impoverished areas. This 'other' rural is imagined through a colonial logic, whereby images of starving children are interpreted as the pitied objects of Western consumers, reproducing a

of youth in news and media, which together work to locate the imagined young subject in city spaces.⁵

While it is important to problematize youth studies' urban focus, one must not overstate this disparity, for a small but growing literature is working to bring rural spaces into visibility (Kenway, Kraack and Hickey-Moody 2006; Panelli, Punch and Robson 2007). In this section, I survey geographical and education studies of rural youth subjectivity, exploring how the “rural” is both imagined and lived by young people (Lefebvre 1991; Leyshon 2008; Rye 2006). In doing so, I am working to build the foundations for this project, as well as to disrupt, or “unmap” (Phillips 1997), dominant geographies of youth. Reflecting upon my own scholarly investments in exploring subjectivity and schooling within a rural area – investments that are rooted in my experiences growing up in a rural community – I wonder: What is meaningful about the “rural” within the lives of young people? How? And, for whom? Alongside the distinct challenges and opportunities faced by rural young people, this literature raises several issues that are common throughout youth studies, including questions of agency (Schafer 2007), exclusion (Dunkley and Panelli 2007), and contradiction (Leyshon 2008), and thus may be viewed in light of broader debates about theorizing subjectivity formation among young people.

The rural as socio-spatial construct and lived geography

Within geography, the “cultural turn” fostered a new interest in the notion of imagined spaces, and has prompted rural geographers to study the mythic construction of the rural as an idyllic

narrative of capitalist salvation (Ruddick 2003). A reflection of this dynamic can be seen in the beginning of this chapter within Hilary's lament for poor youth “on the other side of the world.” Due to issues of scope, I am unable to explore this construction of rural youth in this chapter; however, it is important to note that such constructions are relationally (and transnationally) produced, and thus participate in constructions of “Western” youth (Katz 2005; Cole and Durham 2008).

⁵This association between “youth” and “urban” must be unpacked for its racial coding, for scholars have argued that “urban” often works to signify “black” (Forman 2005). I explore this issue in Chapter 4.

space imbued with notions of safety and community (Little 2002). Definitions of the “rural” are problematized beyond a straightforward notion of territory or population, as “rural places and people are constructed and contested via circuits of discourse and material relations where dominant meanings and conditions are reproduced, but opportunities for resistance also occur” (Punch et al. 2007, 211). Alongside young people's understandings of the rural (Rye 2006; Leyshon 2008), studies illuminate diverse experiences of rurality, showing that “there is not a 'universal' rural childhood and that (rural) children do not possess one homogeneous voice or culture” (Matthew et al. 2000, 151).

Research on rural youth geographies suggests that young people construct their rural contexts in contradictory ways (Leyshon 2008; Matthews et al 2000; Rye 2006). Drawing on the metaphors used by young men in rural Australia to talk about their locale, Kenway, Kraack and Hickey-Moody develop the concepts of “live and dead zones” to capture the “affective nature of place” (2006, 93). Participants in their study sometimes depict their rural surroundings as a barren social landscape, and other times describe a place that is “light, populate and alive” (98). Similarly, Rye describes the competing constructions of “rural idyll” and “rural dull” among teenagers in a remote area in Norway, and notes that these contradictory assessments are held simultaneously by many youth. Even so, Rye finds substantial diversity in young people's responses, and notes that “the *dominant* views on rurality are not necessarily also *hegemonic* ones in rural areas” (2006, 415, italics in original). Among these varied responses, some patterns suggest that young people's “social constructions of rurality are embedded in structural properties of their everyday life context” (420). In light of this finding, Rye argues that studies of the cultural construction of rural spaces should not replace structural analyses, for spatial constructions are shaped, in part, by one's gendered and classed positioning (420).

This emphasis on the cultural construction of rurality has brought with it a focus on

everyday experiences of rural living, explored through narrative and description (Little 2002; Kraack and Kenway 2002; Matthews and Tucker 2007; Panelli et al 2002). Here, studies demonstrate that rural young people's everyday geographies are highly differentiated by gender and class (Corbett 2007b; McGrellis 2005; Keddie 2007). In Dunkley's (2004) study of the "rural teen landscape" in Northern Vermont, girls express frustration over their spatial restriction, while boys boast of wild adventures and brushes with authority. She observes that "girls and boys tend to occupy separate spheres in the rural landscape" (570), and suggests that this results largely from gendered narratives of "boys will be boys" that naturalize wild behaviour among young men, and position young women as potential victims in need of protection (571). Further complicating these processes, Matthews and Tucker find that while rural middle-class girls complain of their "limited spatial freedom," where every movement is sanctioned, facilitated, and supervised by a network of adults, less affluent young people lack access to these "escorted geographies" and the resources that accompany them (2007, 103).

Spatial identifications and place-based subjectivities

Whether situated in rural or urban spaces, youth geographies are rooted in the understanding that "identity and place are...mutually constitutive features of young people's lives" (McGrellis 2005, 519). These studies foreground processes of spatial identification in an effort to illuminate "the strength and character of emotional attachment to place and space" (Scourfield et al. 2006, 579). The move to explore spatially young people's day-to-day practices has prompted youth identity scholars to ask not only "Who am I?" but also, "Where am I?" (Bettis and Adams 2005, 4), and I would add, "Where do I see myself in the future?" This literature enriches key debates within studies of subjectivity – questions of selfhood, boundary maintenance and positioning – by examining how they operate in young people's everyday spatial practices.

In a study of how young people locate themselves within discourses of the rural, Leyshon draws attention to processes of “emplacement,” understood as “the daily cultural practices of participating in places” (2008, 22). He examines how young people construct meaning out of the resources available to them, emphasizing “the role of the local as a means of understanding how collective cultural meanings are inscribed and embedded in young people's sense of place and belonging” (6). Although identity is fluid, multifaceted and contradictory, Leyshon argues that individuals experience a stable self, produced in part through place-based identifications. In his view, achieving a coherent sense of self is important for young people “to maintain a precarious position characterized by 'betweenness'— apparently between life stages, included and excluded, holding a range of complex, inconsistent and possibly contradictory ideas about the countryside, their peers and the adults in their lives” (6). This sensitivity to spatial identifications and (dis)locations offers another angle through which to explore how subjectivities are constructed through sites of contradiction, which makes for a complementary fit with feminist poststructural approaches to subjectivity.

Boundaries and exclusions

One way that young people forge subjectivities in and through space is by constructing boundaries and exclusions (Scourfield et al 2006; Dunkley and Panelli 2007; Hayes 2004; Matthews and Tucker 2007). Recognizing that “a subjective sense of place is constructed largely in relational terms” (Scourfield et al. 2006, 578), youth scholars examine how young people construct spatial boundaries to demarcate social groupings. These socio-spatial boundaries often align with structural differences, for “topographies of the public and the private, the foreign and the familiar are powerfully classed, gendered, and racialised” (Reay and Lucey 2000, 412). For example, Matthews and Tucker introduce the concept of “moral *terroir*” to capture the unequal

relations between young people “growing up on different sides of the tracks” – a territorial marker that naturalizes a classed divide (2007, 104). In one of few studies that examines race among rural youth, Kenway, Kraack and Hickey-Moody describe how young men in rural Australian communities constitute their own place-based masculinities in relation to “scapes of abjection” (2006, 117). In a process of “spatial purification” (137) that has both material and discursive elements, Aboriginal people and welfare recipients are contained within poorly serviced areas and constructed through discourses of waste and pollution. As the non-Aboriginal, middle-class boys in their study assure themselves that these impure others are not of their place, they preserve their own sense of local identity.

While many young people are constrained by spatialized relations of power, others are enabled by their privileged position within them. In his research within a fishing community in Atlantic Canada, Michael Corbett shows how privileged levels of economic and cultural capital provide some students access to a “differential sense of social space” that enables them to navigate among various social groups in their school (2007b, 779). These privileged “floaters” describe a freedom of movement quite different from working-class students, who feel “trapped in social space” (781). Shauna Pomerantz (2008) identifies a similar pattern in her ethnography of girls' negotiations of identity through style in a Vancouver high school. She describes a “doubleness” of identity whereby girls experience varying degrees of fixity and fluidity in their multiple positionings, and where racialized and working-class students feel more “fixed” in social space than their middle-class, white peers. These studies suggest that among both urban and rural youth, systems of race and class shape young people's ability to navigate socio-spatial boundaries.

Mobility trajectories and imagining “elsewhere”

In addition to exploring how young people position themselves in relation to other spaces, some studies of rural youth explore how and where these young people locate their futures. This research suggests that young people's spatial identifications facilitate particular geographies of the future, and that these processes are both classed (Dunkley and Panelli 2007; Scourfield et al 2006) and gendered (Corbett 2007a; Dunkley 2004; McGrellis 2005). For instance, Dunkley and Panelli show how identity categories like “redneck” and “preppy-jock” are both locally defined and “embedded in broader geographical imaginations” (2007, 175). In their research in rural Vermont, those who identified as “preppy-jock” drew upon “wider, 'urban' imaginaries” (175) in fashioning their subjectivities, favouring hip hop music and baggy jeans. Not surprisingly, these (mostly middle-class) young people assumed that their futures would transcend the boundaries of their rural community. By contrast, the (mostly male, working-class) “rednecks” envisioned “lives deeply rooted in the [local] landscape,” a reflection of how the redneck narrative operates within the national imaginary to signify an “allegiance to local rural places” (Dunkley and Panelli 2007, 175). These contrasting visions demonstrate how constructions of space and time intersect with structural differences and identifications as young people work to understand themselves and their futures in and through space.

Michael Corbett examines “different identity orientations to place, space and mobility” among young people within a coastal community in Atlantic Canada (2007b, 773). Analyzing students' spatial identifications and aspirations, Corbett demonstrates that “families in different social and economic positions support different ways of seeing place and space” (788), and suggests that these different spatial practices have meaningful implications for students' educational trajectories. Namely, young people with greater economic and cultural capital are more likely to experience spaces beyond their local community, allowing them to envision

futures “elsewhere” (782). Corbett suggests that students' contrasting experiences create differential access to either “mobility capital,” providing an “external perspective on the local” (782), or “localized capital,” constituted by social networks and forms of knowledge that are valued within the community (783). He argues that such differences must be examined in relation to the “mobility imperative” in rural education, whereby schooling is constructed as a means of exiting rural spaces (772). As neo-liberal discourses idealize the mobile, flexible student, rural youth who are attached to local spaces are seen as inflexible and “stuck.” In view of this contradiction, Corbett concludes that “the moralistic coupling of education and leaving generates a discourse of schooled salvation that, as usual, elevates the already privileged” (789).

This dissertation incorporates insights from cultural geography to ground a more contextualized approach to subjectivity formation as a process of becoming *in place*. Cultural geography can enrich discursive theories of subjectivity formation by attending to the significance of location in young people's lives, and the way that spatial identifications shape their sense of self. Given the dissertation's focus on subjectivity formation and imagined futures, I conceptualize place through Massey's relational notion of a “lived world of a simultaneous multiplicity of spaces” (1994, 3). That is, to suggest that rural youth forge place-based identifications does not mean that these local practices can be understood apart from the contradictory ways in which globalizing processes inform the constitution of specific spaces and subjects (Kenway, Kraack and Hickey-Moody 2006, 57). Approaching rural space as both a socio-spatial construct and lived geography (Little 2002), I explore how young people in Fieldsville produce their own spatially articulated sense of self alongside, or in opposition to, constructions of 'others' located 'elsewhere' (Massey 1995).

Central to my analysis is the question of how young people's social and spatial location shape understandings of who they are and who they can become. Throughout the dissertation, I

explore how young people negotiate the social and spatial contours of these locations as they chart possible futures upon complex landscapes of opportunity and constraint. Bringing a spatial analysis to young people's discursive practices helps to contextualize subjectivity within particular geographical and cultural spaces. But how do these theories account for the strength of young people's subjective attachments? That is, how do subjectivities become so forcefully bound to landscapes of rurality or visions of the “good life”? In the final section of this chapter, I argue that theories of emotion and affect offer useful tools for conceptualizing how structures of power operate subjectively in the making of selves and futures. As Sara Ahmed states: “Emotions show us how power shapes the very surface of bodies as well as worlds. So in a way, we do 'feel our way'” (2004, 12).

Theorizing Emotion and Affect: Feeling Futures

In the past decade, many youth scholars have suggested that young people's emotional lives constitute a significant and meaningful resource within subjectivity formation (Fine 2004; Nayak and Kehily 2007; Reay and Lucey 2000). This new attention to affect has inspired a virtual flood of critical ethnographies examining the role of anxiety and desire in young people's identification practices (Davies 2003; Gonick 2003; Hayes 2004; Henderson et al 2006; Soep 2005; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001; Zannetino 2008). In addition, scholars have looked at how cultural constructions of childhood and youth constitute a site of affective investment where collective anxieties and longings are projected (Anagnost 2008; Cole and Durham 2008; James, Jenks and Prout 1998; Katz 2008; Kraftl 2008; Ruddick 2003). My analysis of Fieldsville students' imagined futures draws insight from studies that attend to young people's affective negotiations in the process of forging subjectivities.⁶

⁶Scholars continue to debate the conceptual distinctions between “emotion” and “affect” (see Harding and Pribram 2009, 17). In this project, I follow Ahmed's (2004) approach of using both terms within an analysis of how

One of the most frequently cited texts within this literature is *Growing Up Girl*, a study of working- and middle-class female subjectivities written by Valerie Walkerdine, Helen Lucey and June Melody (2001). Viewing subjectivity formation as historically specific, the authors argue that traditional sociological approaches are unable to account for the production of classed subjectivities in neo-liberal times. Instead, Walkerdine et al forward a “psychosocial” approach that attends to social, cultural, economic and emotional processes as they intersect in the formation of classed subjectivities. They position this approach as an extension of theories of discourse and the subject, and insist that “those discursive processes, those fictions in the Foucauldian sense, work in and through desires, anxieties, defences” (83). Bringing this multifaceted approach to their research with working- and middle-class young women, the authors demonstrate that subjectivity formation demands a great deal of work, especially within current discourses of “choice” and self-invention. In particular, they highlight the enormous resources (social, cultural, economic, emotional) devoted to the production of the successful middle-class female subject—a process that extends well beyond the straightforward reproduction of capital. In light of these findings, the authors conclude that the “new professional femininity is certainly not produced through a simplistic and easy notion of female future, but through the painful struggle of constant reinvention” (182).

Many scholars investigating affective engagements with neo-liberal discourse share this focus on the emotional demands of subjectivity formation. Bradford and Hey (2007) examine how New Labour's education agenda in the UK works to align individual aspirations with state interests by fostering the “psychological capital” needed to continually work on the self. In what they refer to as the “project of successification,” young people take up discourses of the

emotion/affect operate to orient bodies in space and time, forming felt attachments to particular categories of being. This approach may be contrasted with studies of affect as “intensity,” as seen in the work of Brian Massumi and others following Deleuze and Spinoza.

successful student by policing the boundaries of failure – both in others, and in themselves – in ways that contribute to “the production of new forms of classed and gendered ethnicities” (611). Drawing upon the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Diane Reay (2007) uses the concept of habitus to analyze the affective challenges for working-class students forging academic subjectivities. She argues that “the combination of working-class background and educational success often generates a habitus divided against itself, both deeply ambivalent and consigned to successive allegiances and multiple identities” (1198).

In addition to issues of class and gender, scholars have drawn on affective approaches to explore the formation of racialized subjectivities (Fanon 1967; Hook 2005; Reay and Lucey 2000). Lucey and Reay show how discourses of race and racism shape “the psychic construction of 'good' and 'bad' schools” within education markets in the UK (2002, 53). From a young age, “children constructed complex cartographies of schools based on an imbrication of official and unofficial knowledges, objective and subjective information, rumour and gossip, individual, familial and group experience, all of which went towards the construction of internal and external realities” (255). The authors demonstrate how students attending those schools demonized through racist discourses “were driven to emotionally work towards repairing the image of the school and their sense of themselves in relation to it” (260).

These studies demonstrate that analyzing affective processes does not require that one reject theories of discourse; instead, they build upon discursive approaches in order to better understand how young people experience themselves as emotional beings. However, some scholars working with psychoanalytic approaches take a more rigid view, positing psychical processes as the foundation of subjectivity. For instance, Zannettino (2008) argues that discursive theories of subjectivity do not adequately account for the role of girls' desires and unconscious fantasies in forging gendered identities. In her research exploring how girls'

engagements with literature and film inform their views of self and future, she concludes that “it is these personal emotional meanings, rather than discourse, that serve to move each girl inevitably towards motherhood” (471). While I appreciate Zannettino's investigation of the distinct personal histories and investments brought to cultural texts, I am unsure as to what is gained by locating subjectivity within a particular point of origin. Theorizing subjectivity as *truly* the product of psychical, rather than discursive or spatial processes, might in fact work to limit the possibilities for understanding a given context.

Scholars like Valerie Walkerdine and Diane Reay do not attempt to resolve once and for all a particular foundation of the subject, and instead are interested in understanding how social constructions become meaningful for individuals. In *Growing Up Girl*, Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody (2001) provide a compelling analysis of how cultural and social processes are experienced affectively. When analyzing how girls' fear of failure operates within the production of educational success, they suggest that this anxiety is “lived as psychic but it is produced socially and needs to be understood as profoundly psychosocial” (145). The authors do not claim that the “inner life” pre-exists entry into cultural and material processes, but rather work to analyze emotional investments in an effort to better understand how subjectification is lived. We may understand anxieties as socially and culturally produced, and as negotiated in relation to the subject positions that are discursively available to us, but they are lived emotionally, and this needs to be recognized and explored.

Instead of dwelling on the question of how to define emotions, Sara Ahmed asks “What do emotions do?” (2004, 4) This question has much to offer my analysis of how Fieldsville students understand themselves and envision their futures, as it brings into visibility “the ways in which rhetoric of the emotions are used strategically to shape and proscribe ways of being in the world” (Woodward 2009, 30). As young people are invited to imagine “successful” futures, they

must negotiate their own relationship to narratives of “the good life” that uphold gendered, classed and racialized ideals of selfhood. Whether in the form of fear, hope, shame or happiness, discourses of emotion organize the possible futures that one finds available and desirable.

Despite growing attention to affective processes in subjectivity formation, studies of young people's imagined futures are generally organized around a focus on either educational decisions and vocational plans, or longings, fears and expectations. McLeod and Yates (2006) criticize this divide between structural analyses of “pathways” and cultural studies analyses of “daydreams.” They note that “young people's future thinking combines ideas about 'destinations' (what sort of job I would like) and desires about being and becoming a certain type of person—these are not neatly separable orientations” (104). The persistent divide between these two areas of study places limits upon understandings of young people's emerging subjectivities, and points to the need for analyses exploring how structural processes and formal curriculum interact with affective investments in the production of imagined futures.

This dissertation takes seriously McLeod and Yates' critique. Centering on the question of imagined futures, the project challenges the discursive boundary that separates youth's “playful” imaginings in their engagements with popular culture and peer social networks from the more “serious” imaginative work that is demanded of them in school. In the face of seemingly endless queries about what they want to “be” when they grow-up, young people are expected to craft responses in the form of educational plans and career aspirations. But beyond this institutionalized framing, questions of becoming are also deeply felt. In the words of Sara Ahmed, “The question of the future is an affective one; it is a question of hope for what we might yet be, as well as fear for what we could become” (2004, 183-4). So while narrating their life-plans through qualifications and job titles, young people look toward the future with a desire to “become somebody” (Luttrell 1997), to live a “good life” that has value (Ahmed 2007). My

research explores how such visions are affectively negotiated and spatially organized, as young people feel out tentative futures in and through space.

In my efforts to attend to affective processes, the dissertation engages with critical and feminist scholars who explore emotions as “collaboratively constructed and historically situated, rather than simply as individualized phenomenon located in the interior self” (Boler 1999, 6). In particular, Raymond Williams' (1977) concept of “structures of feeling” offers a way to capture the fluidity and ambiguity of how structural processes are experienced in everyday life. I approach structures of feeling as a way to illuminate how certain historical conditions are experienced subjectively – not just as a set of ideologies that are internalized, but as embodied ways of being in the world. Attending to the workings of power relations, my analysis explores how these historically constituted possibilities are unevenly distributed according to social and spatial positioning. Jennifer Harding and Deidre Pribram describe structures of feeling as “organizing processes that constrain and suggest how an individual's emotions – her or his felt existence – are played out at any given time and place” (2004, 870). Kathleen Woodward (2009) highlights how the concept of structures of feeling can support a feminist “epistemology of feeling,” whereby emotional experience may provide a source of knowledge about social structures (Boler 1999; Grosz 1993; Jaggar 1989).

Building upon these insights, this dissertation explores the significance of social and spatial positioning in shaping how a particular set of historical conditions is lived and *felt*. While using structures of feeling as a guiding concept, the analysis draws upon a rich body of feminist scholarship illuminating affective elements of subjectivity formation (e.g. Ahmed 2004; Gonick 2003; Harding and Pribram 2009; Luttrell 2008; Skeggs 2004; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001; Walkerdine 2006).

Conclusion

This chapter engages critically with the literature on neo-liberalism and education, as I attempt to both build from and challenge the analytical contributions in this work. Driving these engagements is my concern that when we reify neo-liberalism as a set of pre-established concepts, we not only limit the possibilities for understanding neo-liberal processes, but inadvertently do the work of neo-liberalism by recentring these dominant discourses in our research (cf. Gibson-Graham 2006). By contrast, ethnographic studies provide an opportunity to explore how neo-liberalism is lived as a constellation of possibilities and constraints that emerge in relation to one's social and geographical location. This chapter lays the foundations for a multi-faceted approach to exploring how rural young people envision futures in neo-liberal times, combining feminist poststructural theories with conceptual tools from cultural geography and studies of emotion and affect. In doing so, I hope to have highlighted the potential for ethnographic research to provide a more contextualized analysis of the interplay between dominant discourses and student subjectivities. Surely, young people's experiences of schooling are influenced by the broader socio-historical context of neo-liberalism; but what my research suggests is that there is a need for a more localized analysis of how such dominant discourses become meaningful in the context of students' becoming in and through space.

Chapter 3

Ethnographic Locations: Researching Subjectivity in Place

It's my last week in Fieldsville and I'm sitting at the large table at the back of the classroom chatting with students over lunch. I observe the series of trades that I've grown accustomed to as a sort of midday ritual, as Dunkaroos and fruit cups are shuffled among members of the group until the food distribution better reflects the preferences around the table. Arbor selects a baggy of Cheerios from the communal snack bin at the front of the room and pulls up a seat beside Paul, who is engrossed in a pre-meal arm-wrestling match with Dillon. When a friendly dispute erupts over technicalities – “hey, your elbow's off the table!” – the boys argue only briefly, but soon shrug off the disagreement and return to their lunches, red-faced and smiling.

“So, it'll take you a long time to go through all the research?” Dillon asks, ripping open a bag of potato chips. “Ya,” I say. Paul nods, and adds “Prob'ly like 3 years, Mrs. S said,” as he reaches over to grab one of Dillon's chips. I tell them that hopefully it'll be more like two, and Dillon says “Whoa!” apparently shocked by this time frame. I chuckle and say it will be fun because I'll be watching the focus groups and listening to the interviews, “So it'll be like I get to hang out with you everyday even though I'm not here anymore.” The boys laugh, and I'm not sure whether they're laughing at my comment or at the image of me sitting alone for two years reviewing hours of video and audio recordings. Paul chews thoughtfully for a moment, and then asks a follow up question: “Why'd you pick Fieldsville to do your research?” The question surprises me, as I've now spent three months talking to students about the project and sharing my reasons for wanting to do this research in a rural setting. Nevertheless, I'm pleased to see Paul take interest in what it is I've been doing here. “Well, I grew up in Maplewood and so I went to a school kind of like FPS,” I say. “And there's not a lot of research done in schools like this.” The

boys nod, seeming to accept this brief response. When Paul stands and begins to gather his things, I interpret this as a signal that our conversation has ended. But as he tosses his pudding cup into the garbage can, he calls over his shoulder, “This school is *way* better than Maplewood.” Dillon grunts in agreement, and hustles to join his friend as they head out for recess.

This lunchtime conversation provides a starting point for exploring methodological questions surrounding the ethnographic study of subjectivity in place. Paul's query and the interaction that followed raise questions relating to issues of representation and responsibility in research, as well as the relationships that facilitate and complicate these processes. The initial question – *Why here? Why us?* – invites critical reflection on the taken-for-grantedness of any research “site,” and exposes the processes of selection and containment that sustain its ongoing production. My response to Paul's question draws upon a collection of logics that are often used to justify these processes. These include, first, my personal history and lived geography in the area, bestowing a form of legitimacy on me as an apparent “insider;” and second, a gap in the scholarly literature, serving to establish the apparent necessity of this research.

In mobilizing these logics, I attempt to convey to Paul and Dillon my belief that there is something about the schooling experiences and future imaginings of rural young people that is worth studying, and that I am an appropriate person to be conducting this research. Although the boys initially appear to accept this explanation, Paul ends the conversation with a final challenge that pushes the analysis further. By stating that “This school is *way* better than Maplewood,” Paul not only reasserts his identification with this particular rural community, he also forces me to carefully consider the ways in which I constitute this research site. Even as Fieldsville Public School provides a site through which to explore questions about rurality, youth and schooling, it is not *reducible* to this set of concepts. On paper, Fieldsville looks a great deal like Maplewood,

but anyone living in either of the communities would be quick to point out their differences. In my efforts to explore how young people in this particular rural community perform identities and craft futures, I mustn't make the mistake of re-presenting these practices under the banner of fixed categories like "rural youth." Rather, viewing Fieldsville students as active meaning-makers who co-create this research and give the project its shape (Holloway and Valentine 2000), I am primarily interested in understanding how such categories are produced, contested, and circulated through discursive practice. This commitment to doing research that is sensitive to a particular local context, while viewing this context itself as the site of ongoing construction and contestation, is at the very heart of this project's ethnographic approach to subjectivity formation in place.

Long before I took my research questions "into the field," I grappled with issues of representation, responsibility and ethics that surround the power-laden sphere of research relations, as well as the particular challenges that arise when doing research with young people (Cairns 2009). These already complicated issues took on new complexity when I entered the halls of Fieldsville Public School. Here, issues of positionality, access and experience suddenly sprang from the pages of methodological texts and into my everyday negotiations in this research space. What I hope to show in this chapter is how navigating and reflecting upon these challenges helped to generate new understandings about the practices and processes at the centre of this project, and of ethnography, more broadly (Gaztambide-Fernández et al, Forthcoming). In particular, the process of exploring how young people locate their identities through narratives of the future led me to consider how debates in feminist poststructural ethnography might benefit from an analysis of space and place. In keeping with the project's overarching interest in how processes of subjectivity formation are negotiated spatially, I suggest that even as ethnographic methods can illuminate place-based identifications, ethnography also has its own geography that

must be subject to critical reflection (cf. Katz 1994).

Locating Fieldsville

To readers of this dissertation, the pseudonym “Fieldsville” will likely be interpreted as a play on the methodological concept of the 'field'. In fact, the inspiration for the name was much more literal, originating from my attempt to capture something about the physical geography of this place. Several months after I had left the school, I still had not developed a pseudonym that felt satisfactory, so I decided to enlist the students' help. I sent an email to Mrs. Sullivan and asked if she would pass it along to the students. In the message, I explained why a pseudonym was required, and asked if they could help me come up with a name for their town and school to use in my work:

It could be something that reminds you of the town, like “Fieldsville,” because there are a lot of fields. Or it could be a totally made up name, like “Dartonham”. It just needs to be believable (so not “Jonas Brothers Land”) and not the name of another place that's well known or nearby. I'm having trouble coming up with a good one, and I would love your help! If you think of an idea, send me an email.

Of the students who replied, a few suggested names that wouldn't satisfy the requirements of confidentiality, or said that they would think on it and get back to me, but several others expressed their support for “Fieldsville”. I hadn't put much thought into the name myself – I'd simply offered it for the purpose of illustration – but upon reflection, I came to like it. Given that constructions of rurality are a central focus of this dissertation, it seemed fitting to develop a name that gestured toward the rural landscape. It was not until I had received the students' feedback and was trying out the name in my writing that I suddenly recognized its quite obvious double-meaning. Although I had not set out to develop a pseudonym that played on the language of the “field,” I came to see this as an opportunity to critically interrogate this concept, in order to highlight the production of a space that is sometimes taken-for-granted as simply the site in

which ethnographic research occurs. This perspective marks a shift from approaching the “field” as a descriptive concept that refers to the spatial boundaries of some pre-existing social world, to one that actively constitutes – and *locates* – the people and places under study (Amit 2000; Appadurai 1996; Katz 1994). In this way, “Fieldsville” signifies not only a material environment and a set of relations and identities that are formed there, but also a research site that is made and remade through the doing and telling of this ethnographic story. Building upon the theoretical framework developed in the previous chapter, my methodology continues to probe the productive intersection of feminist poststructural theory and cultural geography, in order to develop a critically reflexive ethnography that attends to the mutual constitution of subjectivity and space without fixing people and places into seemingly bounded field sites.

Developing an ethical research practice requires first confronting ethnography's racist and colonial history, which has centred on the Western ethnographer's journey to distant places inhabited by 'foreign' peoples whose 'exotic' practices are to be studied and known. In this colonial project, ethnography “reflects the circumstantial encounter of the voluntarily displaced anthropologist and the involuntarily localized 'other'” (Appadurai 1988, 16). Over recent decades, cultural geographers have made a substantial contribution to anthropological debates by demonstrating how the “field” has historically operated as a technology of colonial rule (Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Olwig and Hastrup 1997). A central component of this critique has been to disentangle supposedly inseparable facts of geography and culture, wherein cultural practices are compartmentalized according to categories of people contained in particular places (Amit 2000; Appadurai 1996; Low and Lawrence-Zuniga 2003). Contrary to the view of the ethnographic field as a bounded site of cultural otherness, feminist theorist and geographer Cindi Katz proposes “looking at *the field* and its constitution as a discursive and spatial practice” (1994, 67, italics in original). As an ethnographer, Katz does not position herself outside of these

constitutive practices. Rather, she argues that “under contemporary conditions of globalization and post-positivist thought in the social sciences, we are always already in the field – multiply positioned actors, aware of the partiality of all our stories and the artifice of the boundaries drawn in order to tell them” (1994, 67). For critical feminist researchers, this presence in the field also implies our implication within it.

Similar critiques of ethnography and its assumptions have developed out of feminist poststructural writing, albeit with a less explicit focus on space and place. Feminist poststructural scholars challenge traditional conceptions of ethnographic representation as “the mere translation of an experienced reality” (Britzman 1995, 231), where one reports on a stable site as it exists in the world. Instead, poststructural ethnography works to explore how the “real” is constructed in particular contexts. From this perspective, Fieldsville students' narratives are analyzed not because they offer an authentic depiction of reality, but because they are constructed through available discourses. Thus, young people's experiential accounts and future imaginings say something about the discursive possibilities that are available to them, as well as those that are not, and yield insights into the particular discourses circulating in this context.

The very notion of “experience” has received much critical scrutiny within poststructural scholarship. Joan Scott (1992) famously demonstrated how individual experiences have historically been read onto bodies in ways that naturalize social categories. Taking seriously Scott's critique, Davies and Davies argue that the concept of “experience” continues to hold analytic potential for poststructural ethnography when viewed in terms of “the performative force of spoken utterances” (2007, 1142). They suggest that while experience “cannot give us a fixed or fixable truth about particular identities or particular categories or particular social worlds... it can, paradoxically, tell us about the complex processes of producing oneself and being produced as 'having an identity' and 'belonging to a particular category’” (1158). Similarly,

Beverly Skeggs distinguishes between an approach to ethnography that “represents people as vessels of their experience,” and one that explores the processes by which subjects are constituted (becoming gendered and classed, for instance) through their experiences (1995, 199).

A further challenge in developing an ethnographic approach that is sensitive to the constitutive and performative nature of experiential realities is the fact that the researcher's identity is similarly constituted, and thus is also at stake in the doing and telling of ethnography. Kari Dehli warns that the “story of the ethnographer as critical outsider” is a powerful governing discourse within qualitative research in education, seductive in its appeal to researchers' desire for “epistemological clarity, political commitment and ethical responsibility” (2008, 56). Given the theoretical commitment to process and partiality in poststructural theory, the poststructural ethnographer must resist the temptation to make truth claims on the basis of her research. A more appropriate strategy is to map the ways in which truths are constructed within the research context, with the aim of denaturalizing common sense understandings and opening up new questions and interpretations (Talbut 2004). In doing so, one must continually reflect upon the ways in which ethnographic narrative is implicated in the production and circulation of truths (Britzman 1995). At the very least, this means recognizing that because narrative writing must adhere to particular stylistic conventions, the composition of readable ethnographies requires imposing at least a degree of coherence on complex lives.

Having read extensively into these debates before beginning my doctoral research, I was nevertheless unprepared for the struggles I would encounter while doing research with young people, always wary of the daunting responsibility of eventually having to generate an ethnographic text. In a journal entry written one month into my time in Fieldsville, I reflect upon the challenge of representing complex lives without wrapping them up in familiar tropes, wherein 'common country folk' are romanticized for their hardship and isolation, or pathologized

for their bigotry and ignorance. Over the course of the journal entry I reflect upon how, when faced with the impossible challenge of representing people's lived realities, the language of *contradiction* and *complexity* takes on new meaning. More than just the standard buzz words of critical, feminist scholarship, these terms extend an opening into something that approaches an ethical and meaningful ethnographic practice. One can only resist seductive truths by exposing the complexity and contradictions that disrupt them. A respectful representation, then, does not offer explanatory closure. Rather, using the tools of feminist poststructural ethnography, I engage with data “as a way of reading that keeps systems of signification open to other readings” (Ellsworth 1996, 140). This approach suggests a rethinking of ethnographic research as a generative practice that seeks to provoke questions rather than offer fixed conclusions (Talbot 2004).

The commitment to disrupting truth-narratives in feminist poststructural ethnography can be extended by drawing connections to complementary insights from cultural geography. Just as poststructural ethnographies work against taken-for-granted categories by exposing the conditions of their production, cultural geographers similarly challenge fixed notions of place by examining how spatial constructs are constituted (Ward 2003). Arjun Appadurai has argued that given the transnational flow of signs across contemporary lived geographies, “the ethnographer needs to find new ways to represent the links between the imagination and social life” (1996, 55). He presents this ethnographic challenge as follows:

Those who represent real or ordinary lives must resist making claims to epistemic privilege in regard to the lived particularities of social life. Rather, ethnography must redefine itself as that practice of representation that illuminates the power of large-scale, imagined life possibilities over specific life trajectories. This is thickness with a difference, and the difference lies in a new alertness to the fact that ordinary lives today are more often powered not by the givenness of things but by the possibilities that the media (either directly or indirectly) suggest are available. (Appadurai 1996, 55)

Appadurai points to an ethnographic struggle at the very heart of this project. Namely, I seek to

explore the significance of locality in shaping young people's subjectivities and imagined futures, but without restricting the analysis to a territory that I call "Fieldsville". I approached this project with a commitment to engaging in a contextualized analysis of young people's local discursive practices; however, I was constantly reminded by students of the fact that any version of the "local" is relationally constituted across vast and often competing geographies (Massey 1998). Thus, to say that subjectivities are spatially embedded is not to suggest that they may be geographically determined or contained. As I explore in Chapter 4, Fieldsville students forge their own place-based identities by distinguishing their rural location from the imagined geographies of urban and global others. These spatial identifications and disidentifications are further complicated by the gendered geographies of young people's future imaginings (examined in Chapter 5), as girls manage contradictory fantasies that bridge rural and urban adulthoods. Throughout the dissertation, the "local" in which these young people create a place for themselves and their futures is constituted through a wider network of place-based images and fantasies, always in excess of the territorial boundaries surrounding the ethnographic site of Fieldsville.

While geographically located in Fieldsville, this research builds upon a broad base of critical educational scholarship that explores subjectivity within the context of schooling (Currie and Kelly 2006; Gaztambide-Fernández 2009; Levinson and Holland 1996; Luttrell 1997; Pomerantz 2008; Yon 2000). As such, the physical "site" in which this research takes place is Fieldsville Public School. Despite this localized focus, I approach schooling as a social site that both reflects and informs broader socio-historical processes. Schools emerge at the meeting place of state knowledge agendas, economic restructuring patterns, histories of inequality and diverse interests, relations and practices. As students navigate these "complex eddies, waves, and flows"(Willis 2004, 262), they fashion subjectivities that do not simply reproduce dominant

structures of power, but also contribute to and reshape them. Thus, Daniel Yon insists that a “focus on the everyday practices of schooling asks us to think about how the structures that are often conceptualized as merely coming from the outside are in fact present in the everyday actions of groups and individuals” (2000, 125). Schools are dynamic sites of meaning making that, like subjectivities, are constantly being produced. In the words of Shauna Pomerantz, “a school is made by the bricks and walls that give it physical shape, by the rules and regulations that give it social structure, by the bodies that give it purpose, and by the internal and external discourses that institutionalize it as that thing we call 'school’” (2008, 69). As students navigate and co-create “that thing we call 'school,’” they fashion subjectivities that reflect particular constellations of histories, positionings and investments. Critical researchers face the challenge of developing methods of inquiry that do justice to this complexity.

Methodological insights from cultural geography have the potential to extend poststructural critiques of ethnographic representation by offering a spatial analysis of how experiential realities are constituted. These complementary perspectives generate analytic resources with which to formulate a place-based critique of the ethnographic “field,” revealing how the research site is constituted and located through power-infused practices of knowledge production.

Indeed, it is through this interplay of social and spatial processes that my doctoral research came to be located in (while also locating) Fieldsville. As I’ve already mentioned, my entry into this project is deeply informed by my own rural childhood. My past experiences as a young person in the nearby community of Maplewood have instilled in me both a familiarity with, and a curiosity about, intersections of subjectivity, schooling and rurality. On a practical level, it was my past relationship with Mrs. Sullivan, who I knew from growing up in the area, that led me to conduct my research in this particular place. Having already identified *The Real*

Game as a potential site of inquiry, I approached her about the possibility of exploring students' engagement with the program, as well as their ideas about the future more broadly. She was immediately keen to have me conduct this research in her classroom at Fieldsville Public School.

While my own socio-spatial history has contributed to the geography of this project, this does not detract from the analytic value of Fieldsville as a research “site.” On the contrary, this small town offers a rich setting in which to explore how neo-liberalizing processes in the transnational sphere are translated into everyday life within specific rural localities. Existing studies in other “Western” rural contexts show this process to be far from uniform, varying not only by place, but also in the contradictory ways in which these processes unfold within a specific locality (Geldens and Bourke 2008; Jarocz and Lawson 2002; Kenway, Kraack and Hickey-Moody 2006).

Fieldsville offers a particular, place-based lens on this socio-historical context. Unlike remote regions that have their own economic base, Fieldsville is better characterized as a “small town” that sits within driving distance of an urban centre. The fact that many Fieldsville residents commute to the nearest city for employment is an indication of the limited work opportunities within the community. While some rural communities have “re-invented” themselves in response to economic restructuring, shifting from a resource-based industry to a tourist destination (Kraack and Kenway 2002; Ni Liaore and Fielding 2006), Fieldsville has not undergone such a transformation. Rather, as farming has gradually declined, no major industry has moved in to replace it. In this way, Fieldsville could be seen to exemplify many of the features of dominant narratives of rural “decline,” including a lack of local employment opportunities, an aging population, and decreasing school enrolment. And yet, as I show in this dissertation, Fieldsville is still very much alive to the young people who live there, providing a counter-narrative to the story of Canada's dwindling rural communities commonly told in the

media (Corbett 2010).

My decision to conduct this research with grade 7/8 students is driven largely by the fact that this age group is targeted within *The Real Game*. In 2007, RG released a “National Pilot Report” based on surveys conducted in forty-four participating schools across Canada. Under the heading “Why Middle School Now?” the report characterizes “adolescence” as a critical juncture in which young people “are developing lasting attitudes about learning, work, and other adult values” (Esbin 2007, 9). Proponents of the “new career management paradigm” have pushed to integrate career education into the curriculum for earlier grades, prior to secondary school (Jarvis 2003). Thus, young people within this age category are being encouraged to envision their futures with a new sense of urgency, as they are increasingly identified as a population in need of intervention. Despite the increased investment in the “middle school” years, students in this age category are less often the focus of existing research. A great deal of research with “rural youth” works with young people in their teens, usually nearing the end of high school (e.g., Dunkley and Panelli 2007; Leyshon 2008; Morris 2008; Panelli, Punch and Robson 2007). By contrast, studies in the sociology of childhood and children's geographies tend to focus on younger children, exploring children's social and spatial practices in the school and outdoor spaces (e.g., Holloway and Valentine 2000; Matthews et al. 2000). Rather than viewing 12- and 13-year-olds as merely “in between” these more easily identifiable categories of “childhood” and “adolescence,” I wanted to explore the discursive practices of young people who are located within this particular age category, as a group who has their own experiences and insights on the social world.

Of course, the processes of location involved in ethnographic research do not end with the creation of the research site; ethnography is very much about relationships among people and the shifting locations that organize them. Throughout my time in Fieldsville, I was invited into a range of positions and relations – as visitor, teacher, friend, community member, and countless

combinations in between. Negotiating these shifting positions forced me to attend to the power relations structuring our research experiences at the very time that it exposed such relations as tenuous productions.

Locating myself, and being located, in Fieldsville

At 6:20pm, people begin to trickle into the classroom, 10 minutes early for the “Information Night” that Mrs. Sullivan has scheduled for the second Thursday of the school term. I soon notice a pattern developing, as each newly arrived parent or guardian scans the student names taped to the front of the desks, and then dutifully heads to their child's assigned seat, as if they are the pupils this evening. Mrs. Sullivan greets people in the hallway, and I overhear her say, “Go ahead and check out our class website!” Inside the room, few parents touch the computers, and most sit with their hands in their laps. Two women at the back of the room giggle about being “back in school again.” A man sighs audibly as he manoeuvres his adult body into his son's desk. “I feel like I'm in trouble,” he says with a chuckle, drawing laughter from those seated around him.

By 6:30, the room is packed. While there are clearly more women than men, I take note of the number of men who are present, usually in cases where two people have come instead of one. Parents greet each other on their way to their seats, and I'm reminded of my own schooling experiences, recognizing that many of these people will have attended school events together for 8 or 9 years now. I scan the faces from my seat at the back table and try to guess which student each adult belongs to. The woman seated in Dillon's desk looks like she has come straight from work, dressed in a black and white patterned blazer and gold bracelet. Most others are dressed casually, in jeans, shorts or sweatpants and t-shirts or sweatshirts. A man enters wearing a John Deere hat and t-shirt with cut-off sleeves, and I recognize him as Shaun's dad, who dropped his

son off on the first day of the year. Amanda, Rebecca and Jessie bustle into the room with their mothers, along with a small white shihtzu tucked under Rebecca's arm. The girls usher their moms to their seats and then head back out the door, leaving the adults to deal with the business of the evening.

Once everyone has settled into their seats, Mrs. Sullivan begins her introduction. She speaks enthusiastically about the year that lies ahead, and the room responds warmly to her comfortable manner, laughing frequently at her jokes. The first item on the agenda is *The Real Game*, and I'm immediately struck by how positively the parents respond. Mrs. Sullivan describes how students will be introduced to "practical skills" of budgeting for groceries and leisure activities, and how a pay cheque can "get eaten up quickly" with the everyday responsibilities of running a family. As parents chuckle and nod, it occurs to me that while *The Real Game* claims to make schooling more 'real' for students, it may also increase the perceived legitimacy of schooling in the eyes of some parents. When Mrs. Sullivan mentions that students will be exposed to the challenges of job loss, a ripple of knowing head nods suggests that this may be a lived reality for many of those in the room. She stresses the fact that the program explores many different "pathways" after high school, including immediate entry into work, apprenticeship, college or university, or some other combination of these. The teacher ends by saying that this is her fourth time running *The Real Game* (as she uses it every second year), and it is always one of her favourite parts of the school year. With a smile, she describes the rewarding experience of observing students take on their role with enthusiasm, seeing their eyes pop open as they're struck by the surprise challenges of adulthood, and watching them continue to draw upon these lessons throughout the school year.

"This year is extra special," Mrs. Sullivan concludes, "because we have a researcher here with us." She introduces me as a graduate student from the Ontario Institute for Studies in

Education in Toronto, and turns over the floor. I've dressed up my regular Fieldsville outfit of t-shirt and jeans by adding a button-up shirt for the evening. This costume change is an attempt to convey a degree of both professionalism and maturity, having learned from past research experiences that, even in my late twenties, I am easily mistaken for a high school student. I move to the front of the room and deliver my brief spiel as rehearsed, explaining why I believe *The Real Game* provides a valuable opportunity for exploring how young people think about their futures, and why I am excited to be doing this research in Fieldsville. These remarks are met with mostly blank stares until I mention that my interest in the project is rooted, in part, in my own childhood experiences growing up in Maplewood, just a half hour away. With this allusion to my own tiny hometown, several heads snap to attention, as if this seed of recognition has suddenly made my presentation worth listening to. When I go on to suggest that rural schooling experiences may differ from those in urban contexts, and these particular circumstances deserve greater attention in educational research, I am encouraged to see a few heads nodding in agreement. I give a quick overview of the planned research activities and assurance of confidentiality, explaining that these are described in detail on the consent forms, and then ask if there are any questions. When I am met with silence, Mrs. Sullivan jumps in to assure us there will be plenty of time for discussion throughout the evening.

Having survived my brief moment in the spotlight, I'm free to relax at the back of the room while the teacher moves through the other items on the agenda. Administrative topics like homework policies are addressed quickly, while others generate more discussion. During a conversation about the class website, I gather from the groans throughout the room that few (if any) have access to high-speed internet at home. Mrs. Sullivan assures them that she has tried to reduce the size of pictures and files so that they are compatible with dial-up internet, as she appreciates how painfully slow it can be. On the issue of class fieldtrips, the teacher presents

parents with two options: one “high-impact” trip at the end of the year, or several smaller excursions spread throughout the year at a lower total cost. When a parent raises the possibility of fundraising, the teacher expresses her support for collaborative initiatives, but notes that in small communities it's too often the parents who end up putting in all the money, and then searching for a corner of their shelves to stash the extraneous items they've purchased. She recalls the success of a community volleyball tournament a few years earlier, which not only raised a lot of money but also brought families together for two days of fun, and didn't require them to buy anything. Ultimately, Mrs. Sullivan stresses that it is the parents' decision whether or not they take on fundraising projects, as she knows that the majority of the work and cost falls on their shoulders. “Finally,” she says, “I know that for many money is tight right now,” and that's why she wants to give them the opportunity to tell her *privately* what option is most feasible and preferable for them. She hands out a short questionnaire for them to complete at home and then send back to her with their feedback.

After the information session in the classroom, the group heads to the gym to check out the school's new athletic equipment. When the tour is finished, Mrs. Sullivan gives a quick wrap-up and then points to the clock: “Ah ha! 7:30! I did it!” she exclaims, referring to her promise to use up no more than one hour of their evening. Parents laugh and the room transitions into a low buzz of conversation. Some leave immediately, others linger, chatting and moving slowly toward the door.

A woman with neatly cropped brown hair and gold hoop earrings approaches me, and I recognize her as one of the people who had appeared most interested when I was describing the project. She tells me that she's just curious about one thing: in the final report, will I be identifying students in terms of gender? She's referring to my insistence that my writing won't include anything that might identify their son or daughter. When I answer, “Yes,” she says, “Oh,

good! Cuz I was thinking, girls and boys...” she laughs, leaving the rest for me to fill in.

Absolutely, I respond, gender might be important in terms of how students feel about school and how they're thinking about their futures. I explain that the issue with confidentiality is just that one mustn't be able to identify individual students, but factors like gender will certainly be considered.

At this point, the man who'd been seated beside her joins us. He looks like he might be one of the eldest parents in attendance, and I recall noticing that he was more comfortable on the computers than many of the others. “So is this for your thesis?” he asks. I explain how, yes, the study would support both my own thesis work, and a shorter report for the school board that would also be available to parents. As I begin describing how the thesis and report would differ in terms of communicating to different audiences with different concerns, he nods and interjects. “I work at [a university],” he says, smiling as if to assure me that he knows how this all works. His smile is friendly and I interpret it as a gesture of shared understanding, rather than an attempt to assert his authority in terms of academic knowledge. He tells me about his work in the Sciences, which involves providing computer support to graduate students.

The conversation winds back around to my research, and the man says he is just “thrilled” that I'm doing the study in Fieldsville, and that he hopes his daughter, Kristin, will participate. He then comments that it's true what I'd said about how most research is done in the city. At this point, his partner chimes back in. “And when you said you grew up in Maplewood, I was like, 'Bonus!'" she says, giving a thumbs up to indicate her approval. I laugh, and repeat my earlier point that one of the primary aims of this study is for rural students' lived experiences to be better reflected in educational research.

Kristin's dad says that he's very curious to see the results of the study, particularly in terms of the girls. He tells me that he makes an effort to talk with his own daughters about the

kinds of opportunities that are available to them, and the importance of school for their futures. “We talk about these things,” he repeats, emphatically. He goes on to say that it's crucial for girls to know that they can do whatever they want, and don't just have to “get married and have babies.” His partner quickly adds, “unless that's for you,” as though this were a necessary afterthought. I say something about how my own approach to educational research is committed to exploring the diversity of the student body, even within a tiny school like Fieldsville, where students come from varied family backgrounds and have a range of strengths, challenges and interests. Kristin's dad and his partner agree. Noticing that most of the other parents have left, they joke that they'd better get going before they lock the doors. We shake hands and they leave.

Feminist poststructural ethnography calls upon researchers to interrogate how their own subjectivity contributes to the formation and shaping of any research project (Lather 1991; St. Pierre and Pillow 2000). Given this emphasis on reflexivity, I am compelled to consider the historical, social, and material conditions that make possible my own engagement in this project. To paraphrase a question posed by Caroline Fusco: what kind of person am I who is able to ask questions about subjectivity and schooling in this rural community? (2008, 169) In an article on reflexivity in rural social research, Barbara Pini (2004) admits that being seen as “a nice country girl” by participants in the town where she conducted her study afforded her legitimacy that she would not likely have had access to had she claimed the title of “feminist academic.” I encountered a similar evaluation of my own multiple identities when introducing this project to parents in Fieldsville, quickly noticing how my rural upbringing and knowledge of the local area appeared to carry greater weight than my academic credentials. And yet, the conversation with a parent later that evening reveals how such positionings are relationally constituted, rather than fixed in a particular context. Kristin's dad highlights our shared experience in academia as a point of connection, despite the fact that we work in vastly different fields. We continue to negotiate

our relative positions throughout the conversation, as he presents himself as an engaged and supportive father who encourages his daughters to pursue ambitious futures, and I emphasize my commitment to a non-judgemental and context-sensitive research practice that seeks to foreground, rather than reduce, local complexities. The conversation also opens up questions about what kinds of 'problems' this research sets out to address – such as rural girls' understandings of the possible futures available to them – as well as how I participate in this construction. Through this dialogue, we each perform particular identities and locate these identities in relation to Fieldsville. As I negotiate my own shifting locations, I find myself credited with an “insider's” knowledge of the local community and an “outsider's” perspective on its workings. How do these dual identifications work together to facilitate my access to this research site? And by what measure are they justified?

Feminist scholars have long emphasized the significance of location in research practice, insisting that all knowledge is “situated knowledge” (Haraway 1988) and that “location is epistemologically salient” (Alcoff 1991, 7). This attention to positionality has predominantly centred around issues of *social* location within systems such as gender, class, race, sexuality and disability. I do not dispute the significance of these factors, and my own position as a young white woman with access to particular resources certainly shaped my relationship to students. But is spatial location not also at play in these ethnographic mappings?

At a conference I attended last fall, a British colleague began her presentation by sharing that since beginning ethnographic research in a rural community, she was constantly being asked whether or not she grew up in “the country.” Laughing, she remarked that never before had her personal history been viewed as so relevant to her capacity as a researcher. In light of the power dynamics that structure research relations, any researcher's claim to an “insider” status must be subject to critical scrutiny (Acker 2001), and the same goes for issues of geography. While doing

research in Fieldsville, I had to think critically about the degree to which I mobilized a form of local legitimacy on the basis of my personal history growing up in the area, especially in light of how this identity is complicated by the “expert” authority that is conferred through my position as an academic. Reflecting on similar questions in her own research, Barbara Pini shares how she initially worried that she was being disingenuous by taking up the identity of “nice country girl” that participants extended to her. Ultimately, though, she decided that rather than a form of manipulation, this identity offered a way of relating to participants and highlighting commonalities through which she could connect to them. Thus, “it was a decision motivated by a sympathetic engagement with the context and culture in which [she] was conducting the research,” and this fit with her understanding of a feminist approach (2004, 173).

Feminist scholars continue to debate the ethical implications surrounding personal relationships forged between researchers and participants (Reinharz 1992). Some draw attention to how familiarity and trust can foster a more equitable and less intrusive research process that is likely to generate rich insights (Gouin 2004), while others suggest that these very bonds increase the possibility for exploitation by masking the power dynamics inherent to research (Stacey 1991). Recent work has challenged the researcher/researched binary model of power in order to explore how participants also exercise forms of power in research (Thapar-Björkert and Henry 2004). In my view, the key question is not to determine once and for all whether researchers' multiple identities help or hinder the research, but rather, to examine how the ease of access to particular locations and not others might help us to understand the structure of power relations in which we are participating. From this perspective, reflexivity is less an exercise in autobiography than it is a critical strategy through which to illuminate issues of context (Pini 2004). Even so, such an approach does not facilitate access to a “transparent reflexivity” where systems of power may be mapped onto a visible landscape, for the researcher can never step outside of the power

relations through which s/he is constituted (Rose 1997, 311).

In addition to negotiating one's shifting social and geographical location, educational researchers face the added challenge of navigating the institutional dynamics of schooling, where the dominant categories of “student” and “teacher” set up an age-based authority structure (Davies 2003; James, Jenks and Prout 1998; Mayall and Zeiher 2003). School ethnographers frequently write about the challenge of participating as an adult within a school while resisting the 'teacherly' identity that is most readily available to them (Pomerantz 2008; Renold 2005). I encountered this challenge during the first week of school when I was talking with the grade 7/8 class about my project. After discussing the idea of a “focus group” and inviting students to brainstorm what that might entail, I asked them why they thought I might want to conduct focus groups with them about how they imagined their futures. Despite my repeated insistence that, as a researcher, I wanted to *learn from them*, the first student to raise his hand said, “Cuz maybe you'll teach us, like, you'll teach us at the same time?” Clearly, establishing myself as something other than a teacher was going to take more than a simple statement of fact, and required building relationships of trust over time.

Indeed, during my initial weeks at the school, students staged regular tests to see whether I would stay true to my identity claims. During one of the first focus groups, a boy raised his eyebrows when I assured him that I would not report their words or behaviours to their teacher, and that they were free to say or do anything as long as it wasn't disrespectful to other members of the group. “Anything?” he said, daring me to qualify my previous statement. I said, “Yes,” but was suddenly terrified that I was going to have an ethical dilemma on my hands, unsure of what he was hinting at. Still maintaining eye contact, he reached deep into the cargo pocket on the side of his pant leg and pulled out a massive handful of candies, plunking them down in a pile in the middle of the table. Eating is strictly forbidden in the library, and the three boys waited in

anticipation to see how I would respond. When I casually selected one of the candies and began unwrapping it, the boys laughed and we proceeded happily, snacking and talking together. In addition to winning some small degree of trust, navigating these kinds of tests helped me to learn about school social dynamics as they often relied upon exaggerated identity performances, such as the resistant masculinity performed through the bold encounter I've just described.

Over time, the grade 7/8 students came to realize that if they swore or smuggled a snack outside at recess, I wasn't going to "tell on" them. But in the larger school community, resisting a teacher identity remained an ongoing negotiation. When a sniffing grade 3 student approached me on the playground to say that so-and-so had pushed her on the climber, I had to gently direct her toward the teacher on yard-duty. Nevertheless, within this very small school community I was constantly invited into new forms of participation. Over the course of my three months at FPS, I found myself doing things like borrowing the custodian's ladder to retrieve a hacky-sack from the roof of the library, coaching the girls' volleyball team during their 1-day tournament, and answering the phone in the office one morning when the secretary's son was sick. A school is a fine-tuned machine with clear categories of membership, and I was in a category of my own. While there were a fairly regular stream of educational professionals who would be in and out of the school over the course of a week – speech pathologists, social workers, learning disability specialists, etc., who traveled among the various rural schools in the area – they didn't stick around for the whole day and hang out on the playground at recess. One day a grade 5 student approached me to settle a debate about whether a group of primary students were outside the boundaries of their designated play area, and I gave my standard friendly but noncommittal response of, "Oh, sorry, I'm not the right person to ask." A precocious grade 1 student looked at me sympathetically from under her blond bangs and asked "Kate, you're new here, aren't you?"

At times, being positioned as the clueless newcomer opened up opportunities for

learning, as students saw it as their responsibility to inform me of whatever social or institutional knowledge I was lacking. One day while hanging up my coat after recess, I overheard Jessie say behind me, “You should tell Mrs. S they’re callin’ you that.” I turned around to see Tanya looking quite upset, her eyebrows furrowed. “What’s up?” I asked. Tanya turned to face me, placing her hands on her hips. Her cheeks were flushed after playing soccer at recess and I noticed a small hole on the thigh of her black stretchy pants. “People are callin’ me ‘dirt squirrel’ and ‘dirt’ and stuff like that,” she said with a sigh. “Oh, what does that mean?” I asked, unfamiliar with the term. Jessie jumped in to offer an explanation. “It means, not *dirty* like there’s mud on you and stuff, but like ... it’s hard to explain!” Her hands flew wildly around her face as she attempted to convey the implicit meanings attached to this term. Over time, I became attuned to how the discourse of “dirt” was used to delineate classed boundaries among students in Fieldsville, where the inscription of dirt operates as a mechanism of abjection. Jessie’s inability to define the term speaks to both its complex meaning – combining physical, social and moral markers of degeneracy – as well as how deeply it is woven into the social fabric in this discursive community. It was only in my position as “outsider” that I could question the use of such a common term.

Observing in the Classroom

While it was often during socializing activities at lunch or recess that I gained the greatest insights into students’ identities, classroom observations also comprised an important part of my daily research activities. By listening to math lessons, participating in group discussions and creating art projects alongside students, I developed a sense of the daily practices that make up the formal aspects of schooling for these young people. During my first two months at the school, a large portion of the afternoon was often devoted to *The Real Game*. As I described in

the previous chapter, the program itself came to occupy a less central place in this project over time, as I began to see this piece of curriculum as just one of multiple discursive resources that students draw upon to imagine their futures. Nevertheless, it was in the context of these in-class activities that the question of the future was raised and explored as a site of both collective investment and individual aspiration. During these activities, I watched as students developed understandings of vocabulary terms such as “transferable skills,” “sex-role stereotyping,” or “job satisfaction,” used calculators to balance their character's monthly income and expenses, and planned group vacations based on their own internet research. While observing each lesson, I tried to glean a sense of what kinds of knowledge students brought to this pedagogical encounter. Although the discussion was somewhat constrained by the boundaries of the formal curriculum, students frequently made references to past experiences, family history and different aspects of popular culture. For instance, when they arrived at a question about the meaning of a “pink slip” on the “World of Work Survey,” one student responded: “My dad's was white when he got laid-off.” In my fieldnotes, these fleeting references helped me to map out the various discursive frameworks that gave meaning to these schooling experiences, as well as to highlight potential points to follow-up on in focus groups and interviews.

On other occasions, classroom observations revealed less about students' engagement with the specific curricular content in the RG than they did about their performances of self more broadly. For instance, in my fieldnotes describing “The Spin Game” (a trivia-style activity where students answer career-related questions in teams) I wrote extensively about gendered modes of participation. Having been permitted to select their own teams, students had organized themselves into same-gender groupings. For the most part, the boys shouted out answers before consulting their team, and then chastised each other for getting the question wrong. By contrast, the girls would put their heads together and discuss each question thoroughly before offering a

tentative answer. Gendered patterns were also visible in students' preference for particular trivia categories, with boys expressing confidence in Science, Math and Technology, and Health and Phys. Ed, and girls seeming to prefer Language and Creative Arts, Social Studies and then Health and Phys Ed as well. When a team member would flick the spinner to randomly select the category for their next question, the result often generated embodied expressions of delight or disappointment, ranging from cheers and hi-fives to slouches, sighs and slumped heads. While none of these observations is particularly noteworthy on its own, together they reveal continuities between students' participation in the RG and other aspects of school life, for no matter what the specific focus of the lesson, students were actively performing identities through interactions with each other.

Following a warm-up activity or discussion, RG sessions usually involved an extended period in which students worked independently or in groups on an assigned activity. This meant that I could listen in on, and sometimes participate in, the conversations that surrounded the day's lesson. For instance, while creating their "wish lists," students debated whether it was acceptable to shop at second-hand clothing stores, with Hilary boasting about the latest deals her mom had discovered at Value Village and Cody insisting that he will only buy new, brand name clothing when he's older. Often, these conversations drew upon popular culture, such as when Kristin and Rebecca informed me that they would each be sharing their future home with one of the Jonas Brothers (a young pop music duo). Students sometimes invited me into these conversations as a source of knowledge, particularly when the topic of discussion was education, highlighting their keen awareness our different locations within the educational sphere. For instance, it was during one of these activities that Melissa asked me what it's like to attend university. At other times, I was positioned as the one who was learning from them, such as when Paul gave me a detailed account of the job description for a Diesel Technician, which he had researched on a website

called Career Cruising. Even when I wasn't participating directly in conversations, I watched as students co-constructed meaning and identities. This included displays of tough masculinities, such as when Cody exclaimed that as a Police Officer, "I get to taser anyone I want!" and Dillon replied, "Taser me and I'll kick you in the balls!"

During these lessons, I was able to observe how students engaged with the RG material in class, and in their interactions with other students. Ultimately, however, these activities took on new significance for the project when we returned to them in focus groups, a space in which students offered their own reflections and interpretations and raised related issues that were meaningful to them. In these small group discussions I caught glimpses of the multiple knowledges and investments that students brought to the program, and explored through dialogue how they used these discursive resources to envision their futures.

The Discursive Space of Focus Groups

My approach to focus groups is informed by feminist claims that this method holds potential for granting participants greater control in the research process by opening up space for dialogue and contestation (Munday 2006; Wilkinson 2004). Similarly, youth scholars have advocated the use of focus groups in efforts to create a collaborative context in which young people can contribute without feeling pressure to provide the 'right' answer (McClelland and Fine 2008). In a journal entry written after the first two of the eighteen focus groups I would eventually conduct in Fieldsville, I wrote enthusiastically about the possibilities this method creates for exploring issues that are meaningful to young people. I was surprised and delighted to find that these two discussions had gone in totally different directions, and I interpreted this as a positive sign that I was doing research *with*, rather than *on*, students, as these young people were actively co-constructing the research agenda.

Yet, while recognizing the exciting possibilities opened up by this method, feminist and youth researchers mustn't overstate the potential to redistribute power in focus groups. Although I may have relinquished some authority in these group discussions, this was by no means a power-free zone. Instead, students brought with them ongoing struggles over power and positioning from everyday social relations, and these continued to play out during our discussions. While this sometimes generated ethical dilemmas about whether or not I should intervene in a conversation (for instance, if I worried that a student was feeling hurt or shut out of the discussion), it also provided me with greater opportunities to explore these dynamics in practice.

Beyond efforts to redress power inequities in research, focus groups are widely promoted as a means of generating interactive data, and encouraging participants to “unpack contested understandings” through discussion (Jowett and O'Toole 2006, 464). Thus, focus groups are well-suited to an epistemological approach that views meaning as collaboratively and contextually produced through discursive practice, rather than pre-existing and located in individuals (Hollander 2004; Wilkinson 2004). In this study, focus groups provide a discursive site through which to explore how young people engage in the co-construction of realities (Munday 2006), as they work to position themselves and others as particular kinds of subjects, in particular kinds of places and moving toward particular kinds of futures. These complex identificatory practices are explored throughout the dissertation.

Focus groups were held in the library, which is housed in a one-room portable behind the school. A carpeted room with comfortable chairs and brightly coloured posters on the walls, this made for a cozy setting that was clearly separate from the rest of the school, leaving no risk of interruption or others overhearing our conversations. In total, twenty students volunteered to participate in the focus groups and interviews, having obtained formal consent from their parents

or guardians. I initially divided participants into clusters of 3-5 students, based on friendship groupings. This approach was informed by existing feminist research which suggests that the use of “friendship groupings often helps to create a non-threatening and comfortable atmosphere” (Renolds 2005, 13). After the first round of focus groups, I decided with the help of students' feedback that 5 students was too many, so the second and third rounds were held with groups of 2-4. Before each focus group, I arranged a video camera on a tripod in order to record the discussion. My decision to videotape, rather than simply audio record these group discussions derives from my interest in student interactions, which involve not only verbal exchanges, but also body language, physical gestures and facial expressions. Mindful that video recordings can “give a misleading illusion of comprehensiveness” (Kitzinger and Barbour 1999, 15), yet are always produced from a particular perspective (Pink 2007), I approach these recordings not as transparent recreations of the groups themselves, but as sources of data to complement my own notes and recollections of the discussions. The video recordings served as a valuable tool for reflection and analysis, which I describe in greater detail later in this chapter.

I structured the focus groups so that each conversation began with reflections on a recent activity in the *Real Game* (namely, creating their “Dream Lists,” planning a vacation, and discussing “sex-role stereotyping”), and then invited students to talk about related issues that were meaningful to them. The objective behind this approach was to extract shared moments from the class and encourage students to reflect collectively upon these experiences, while opening up the discussion to topics beyond those addressed in the RG. The loose structure of these conversations meant that they often went in directions I had never anticipated, ranging from debates about hunting regulations to detailed accounts of a favourite television show. What soon became clear was that these conversations were doing much more than providing a source of interactive data; these were also social sites for the production and performance of students'

identities (Allen 2005; Renold 2005). In addition to the *content* of these conversations, the *interactions* in this space helped to illuminate broader social dynamics that I observed in other school contexts, such as classed boundary work and gendered performances.

Sue Wilkinson (2004) observes that the growing popularity of focus groups as a research method has produced several “handbooks” on the practice of conducting focus groups, yet little writing exists on how to analyze focus group data. Taking up this task, Wilkinson suggests that analyses of focus group research can be organized into two dominant approaches: content analysis (examining recurrent features or themes in the text) and ethnographic analysis (examining interactional processes of meaning-making). She argues that these two approaches are informed by different epistemological assumptions. Content analysis views focus group transcripts as providing access to some stable and pre-existing social world. By contrast, ethnographic analysis “considers talk as *constituting* the social world” (187), and thus approaches the focus group as a social context that is worthy of observation in its own right. An ethnographic analysis explores the interactive nature of focus group data and examines how participants design their talk to present themselves in a particular way.

Taking guidance from Wilkinson, I have worked to analyze the focus groups ethnographically, and have found this approach to be quite generative. For instance, through these group discussions I was able to observe how students relationally negotiate their positioning within contradictory discourses. In Chapter 5, I describe how three “popular” girls move between critical discourses positioning boys as “jerks,” and caring discourses positioning boys as complex individuals who just need to be understood. Immediately after criticizing their male friends, the girls would then become protective, calling to mind Debbie Epstein's (1998) analysis of how girls often take on the responsibility to “rescue” boys. As I explain in the chapter, I interpret these alternating positions as an expression of the challenges the girls face in

negotiating gendered discourses of popularity alongside feminist discourses of gender equality.

The discursive space of the focus group provides an opportunity to explore such complex manoeuvres as they are unfolding in practice.

While focus group dynamics tended to reflect students' everyday discursive practices and relations, they also differed from daily interactions in meaningful ways. In a few cases, this unique discursive context appeared to create opportunities for transgression, in relation to both institutional authority and dominant social codes. One of the most striking examples of this emerged during a discussion with four boys on the topic of gender taboos in childhood play. Debating whether there is such a thing as a "girl toy" and a "boy toy," the boys waver between investing in dominant masculinities and then activity contesting them.

KC: What do you guys think about that? Are there girl toys and boy toys?

Tim: Yes! Video games!

Nick: My aunt gave me a My Little Pony for my birthday last year!

KC: Did you like it?

Nick: I burned it. [laughter]

KC: Why did you do that?

Nick: Cuz it's a stupid little purple doll with long hair [switches to a high pitched voice, swinging his hands in front of him] and they wanted me to comb it and play with it. [back to regular voice] And I didn't want to. I'm not into girl toys.

Scott: My friend has a Barbie.

Johnathon: I used to play with Barbies at my cousin's house.

KC: What makes something/

Johnathon: Although I had no choice.

Nick: Good thing this isn't going out of the room!

Johnathon: I was four years old and there was nothing else to do in the house and/

Scott: Okay, I admit it, too. [raises his hand] I played with Barbies at my babysitter's house.

As they continue to debate the concept of “boy” and “girl” toys, the boys occasionally enter forbidden territory by “admitting” to cross-gender play. These tentative transgressions are frequently followed by statements that work to defend their masculinities, such as Johnathon's clarification that he only played with Barbies because he “had no choice.” In her research exploring men's sexual identities, Louisa Allen found that “focus group interaction served precariously as an opportunity to signify masculinity, yet also provided an encounter in which masculinity’s vulnerability was heightened” (2005, 43). Central to the men's identity performances was a practice Allen calls “managing vulnerability,” wherein an uncomfortable and potentially damaging disclosure would often be followed up by an assertion of hard masculinity (46). In the example above, the boys appear to be managing their own vulnerable masculinities. Commenting that it's a “good thing this isn't going out of the room,” Nick alludes to the fact that such dangerous talk would not be permitted in everyday discourse, implicitly referencing the unique context of the focus group setting. Although he maintains a rigid performance of masculinity in the initial exchange, he later admits that he, too, has transgressed gendered boundaries:

Johnathon: I used to wear a tutu! With my cousin. We'd dress up into these, like, ballerina suits [laughs].

Nick: If you go on Facebook, my aunt posted um, me dressed up as a girl.

Tim: Facebook is not a pretty thing!

Nick: My cousin dressed me up as a girl when I was asleep and I woke up and I started doin' fashion poses.

At these critical moments in the conversation, there appears to be a collective sense of exhilaration derived from these disclosures, as the members of the group share private

experiences that violate the boundaries of acceptable talk. But just as quickly as the boys offer these disclosures, they often return to embracing rigid gender binaries. The thrill of these transgressions is conveyed affectively, as the boys appear to experience a “rush” or sense of release that comes from momentarily rejecting those informal rules that shape daily conduct. After this exciting exchange, when we finally return to the topic of gendered toys the boys challenge the notion that any toy is inherently gendered:

KC: Okay, I want to come back to this. What makes something a girl toy?

Johnathon: Nothing.

Nick: It was originally played with by girls, and boys didn't play with it, so.

KC: Okay, so just kind of by history, is that what you're saying?

Johnathon: I guess they could sort of be called boy toys and girl toys but I think that they're still just a piece of plastic.

Scott: A piece of plastic that could be melted down and made into something else!

Johnathon: Exactly.

Here, the boys collaboratively develop a critique that gestures toward a social constructionist approach to gender. The assertion that a toy is not by nature gendered, but is simply “a piece of plastic that could be melted down and made into something else,” challenges normative gender binaries by revealing the fluidity of gendered meanings. While I don't want to overstate the significance of this critique, I think there is something to be said for how the discursive space of the focus group opened up an opportunity for talking about gender in ways that are not possible in students' everyday negotiations. As such, these transgressions also shed light upon the regulatory regimes in which student's subjectivities are constituted.

Scholars of subjectivity note how the “public” nature of focus groups makes them a prime site for performing identities, as participants' “talk serves as a means of creating and

producing a certain image of themselves” (Allen 2005, 42). While I had anticipated this to be the case, I was surprised by how this performative aspect sometimes appeared to be heightened by the presence of the video camera. Despite my repeated assurances that the only person who would view these recordings was me, some students addressed the camera as though it represented an “audience” beyond those in the room, and thus staged their identity performances accordingly. This impulse was particularly strong when enacting resistant masculinities that transgressed school rules, and students sometimes went so far as to remind each other to make sure that their rebellious actions were “on tape”. In the following example, the camera is positioned as though it represents the gaze of authority, which participants relate to differently depending on their own student identities. Prior to this exchange, Nick has just been recounting some of the “dirty” jokes told by other students at his old school.

Scott: Don't say that in front of the camera!

KC: No, no, remember the camera doesn't matter.

Nick: You can say FUCK in front of the camera! [Johnathon and Scott burst out laughing, mouths wide open and eyebrows raised]

Tim: You can say anything you want.

Johnathon: Don't tell Mrs. S! [Nick laughs]

KC: No, I won't. The things we talk about here, it's private, between us, right? I really, I promise I won't tell Mrs. S what we talk about. [Everyone begins talking at once]

Tim: I'm gonna swear 10 times [silently mouths “fuckfuckfuckfuck...” etc]

By observing the different ways that these boys relate to the authoritative gaze of the camera – e.g. from the impulse to censor “bad” language to openly flaunting it – I learn a great deal about their student identities, and the way that they want to be viewed by others. This provides another example of how the discursive space of the focus group differs from everyday interactions: the presence of the researcher and camera may make participants more aware of their speech and

actions, leading to a heightened performance of self. Rather than viewing this as a potential “bias” in the research process (e.g., that students are not being their “real” selves), I see these performances as opportunities for exploring how subjectivities are discursively constituted, as young people produce themselves differently depending on the discursive context (Hollander 2004). The focus group generates a space in which to explore students' identity work in practice, as they position themselves in relation to others, including the researcher and imagined audience symbolized by the camera.

Finally, I discovered an additional way of interpreting the discursive space of the focus group when I asked students during the interviews about their focus group experiences. From their responses, I began to see the focus group as a subjective experience to which students attribute particular meanings. Students frequently asked me when the next focus group would be held, and many seemed to see these half hour discussions in the library as a fun social activity that broke up the regular school day. In Rebecca's words, “It was fun. Like, really fun. Like, everyday I'd be like, 'Kate, please take me for a focus group!' [laughs]” Students talked about how they enjoyed listening to others share their thoughts, and watching friends respond to their own interpretations. Tanya said she liked “how you got to express how you were,” and that “you got to hear other people's stories about their lives. So it was just different.” The fact that focus groups were “different” from the kinds of things they usually do in school was raised by a lot of students. In Justin's words: “It's just different. Never done that kinda stuff at school.”

The meanings that students ascribe to focus groups say something about their experience of their own social and institutional location (Jowett and O'Toole 2006). For instance, many said they enjoyed these conversations because they rarely get a chance to “just talk about stuff” with their friends. This common reflection highlights how relations of knowledge are organized within schooling, such that there is little space for students to share their own interpretations free

from the gaze of authority and curriculum. Paul told me he liked “Just like, talking and being able to say whatever. Not like, having to watch your words or whatever.” So while students continued to manage their identity performances for their peers, these reflections suggest that the focus groups may have opened up an alternative space where different kinds of talk were made possible (Warr 2005). Throughout the dissertation, I approach the focus group as a discursive space with multiple meanings that hold different implications for the kind of identity “work” generated in this context.

Interviews

Initially, my dissertation proposal included ethnographic observation and focus groups, but not interviews. The thinking behind this was that my epistemological approach to subjectivities as relationally constituted meant that I was not in search of the “authentic self” sometimes assumed within conventional interview design (Skeggs 2002). Furthermore, I was concerned about the heightened power dynamics potentially created by a one-on-one interview with a young person. Despite these concerns, my committee encouraged me to incorporate interviews into the methodological design in order to provide an additional perspective on the research context. In the end, these one-on-one conversations proved to be extremely rewarding.

I conducted each of the 20 interviews during my final month at the school, after all the focus groups had been completed. This allowed time for me to first develop relationships with students, and to form preliminary ideas about themes and questions that I wanted to follow up on individually. I planned for the interviews to be roughly 30 minutes in length, but in actuality this varied from 20 to 40 minutes depending on each student's level of comfort and engagement. Our conversations were loosely structured around an interview protocol that covered questions regarding students' backgrounds and self-descriptions, school experiences, and future aspirations.

Students' *Real Game* portfolios also provided a tool for reflection and discussion, and I found these materials especially helpful as conversation starters with those who initially seemed slightly uncomfortable speaking about themselves. For instance, I found that students were much more comfortable starting the interview by describing the “A Day in the Life” exercise that they had completed for their ideal career, than they were responding to a personal question about, say, how they would describe themselves. It was easier to come back to these kinds of more personal questions later, once the conversation was flowing more easily.

Different conditions produce different possibilities for what can and cannot be said, so it is not surprising that the interview responses were quite unlike the dynamic engagements that occurred during focus groups. The most striking difference between these two formats was that the interview narratives were often infused with emotion, as students described their hopes and fears for the future. While these same issues may have arisen during focus groups, in this social context the conversation tended to bounce across a number of topics without dwelling on any one issue for an extended period of time. The one-on-one structure meant that the interviews moved at a very different pace, facilitating longer individual narratives and more in-depth personal reflections. I was often amazed at how freely students seemed to open up to me in this setting, whether describing the painful experience of being marked as a “dirt” or teased for being “weak” as a boy, struggles at home following the loss of a parent's job, or deep anxieties about the future, often beginning with high school and extending into the years beyond. At least five of the twenty interviews included moments in which the student appeared close to tears.

The prevalence of affective interview narratives may be connected to implicit social conventions about the kind of context in which such intimate feelings should be expressed. Within popular culture, interviews are commonly represented in the form of a confessional exchange, whether between psychiatrist and patient, or talkshow host and guest. Thus, the fact

that students' interview narratives were deeply invested with emotion holds not only methodological, but also theoretical and analytical implications. In addition to illuminating how different research methods create different discursive possibilities, this pattern may generate insight into how subjectivity formation is negotiated affectively, and how narratives of affect and emotion can speak to students' lived experience of broader social structures and processes. I explore these questions further in Chapter 6.

Finally, my concerns about the power dynamics structuring interviews with young people were later challenged when I asked students about the interview experience. Many stated that while they had enjoyed the focus groups, they appreciated this opportunity to talk one-on-one, where they could share their thoughts uninterrupted and without concern for what others would think. For instance, Amanda notes that the interactive structure of the focus groups meant that it was sometimes difficult to make one's point: "I like the whole one-on-one thing because we all had stuff to say, but there's three of us talking, you know? And then you'd forget what you were gonna say because you had to wait for the other person to finish and stuff." Continuing to reflect upon the different discursive opportunities generated through focus groups and interviews, she concludes that there are advantages and limitations to both approaches: "Like it was nice being with them [in the focus groups] cuz then you're more, well I don't really care [laughs], but you know, some people, you're more outgoing and stuff when you have your friends with you. And then this way is good too cuz you actually get to talk. And if there's something you didn't want to say in front of them, you got to say it, kind of thing." Thus, contrary to my original apprehensions that individual interviews might not be an appropriate tool for exploring how Fieldsville students imagine their futures, these conversations appeared to serve an important role in validating students' sense of their personal contributions to the project.

Analysis: Making Sense of Students' Sense-making

In their study of young women's sexual desires, McClelland and Fine ask: "how do we both respect the positions that young women speak *and* still analyze critically the ideologies and discourses through which the young women are speaking?" (2008, 242, italics in original) A poststructural feminist analysis explores how multiple discourses are produced and policed through participants' verbal interactions, while making visible "the discursive threads through which their experience of themselves as specific beings is woven" (Davies 2003, 13). An important tension underlying this analytic process is the fact that a theoretical understanding of subjects and knowledge as discursively constructed must not lose sight of how fluid and contradictory discourses are lived as truths (Fusco 2008). To this end, Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz argue that the use of ethnographic methods within studies of discursive positioning allows researchers to "recognize the contradictory and unstable nature of discourse, but also...to see how coherence is accomplished through context-specific logic" (2007, 391). Their work draws attention to the fact that girls articulate themselves as coherent beings, even as they generate contradictory self-narratives. By tracing the production of "Yourself" as an identity category assumed by the girls in their study, the authors remind poststructural scholars that fragmented identities are not necessarily experienced as such.

Integrating the theoretical insights of feminist poststructuralism with the tools of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1995), my analytic approach sought to identify themes that emerged across the data in relation to how the rural young people in this study construct their subjectivities and their futures. While in Fieldsville, in addition to regularly writing up fieldnotes from the three days each week that I attended school, I also wrote memos that reflected upon emerging questions and patterns, and developed preliminary themes. For instance, it was in the context of a memo entitled "Space and subjectivity" that I first reflected upon how students

distinguish their own sense of place through oppositional mappings of rural/urban, and Canada/elsewhere. Here, I also made note of the unexpected observation that these place-based narratives often mobilize racialized ideas about people and places. Although I did not know it at the time, this memo would eventually provide the foundation for Chapter 4, “Situating Selves.” To say that my memo-writing focused on emerging patterns does not mean that these early writings sought to develop a seamless analytic narrative; equally important to this phase of the analytic process was charting points of contradiction and ambiguity within the data (Denzin 1997). In this way, the memos offered space in which to explore the multiple 'truths' operating within the research context. Guided by an interest in “how private utterances are connected with social practices” (McLelland and Fine 2008, 240), I noted ways in which young people's personal narratives appeared to draw upon dominant discourses regarding adulthood and 'success' in the 'real world' (Davies 2003), and made notes for areas to follow up on in focus groups and interviews.

Once I had completed my time at Fieldsville Public School, I began a multistage coding process (Charmaz 2006). This began with a phase of “initial coding,” in which I read through the data (ie., fieldnotes, focus group transcripts, and interview transcripts) and developed a list of preliminary codes. In addition to recurring themes in students' narratives, such as “rural,” “adulthood,” and “popular culture,” I also created codes for key concepts that I bring to the analysis, such as “gender” and “class,” as well as codes for specific discursive practices, such as “boundary-making” and “dis/identification.” Finally, I developed a few codes on the basis of specific language used by students – what grounded theorists call *in vivo* codes (Charmaz 2006, 55) – such as the term “dirt.” I purposefully generated codes that operate at different levels of discursive practice – e.g., thematic, relational, conceptual – in order to facilitate multiple ways of interpreting the data. This first phase involved an iterative process of moving back and forth

between developing initial codes and comparing them with the transcripts, in order to ensure that the codes were closely connected to the data (Merriam 2009).

Once I had developed a list of codes, I was able to complete a round of “focused coding” using the qualitative data analysis software, ATLAS.ti. I had used this program as a research assistant on two different projects in the past, so I was familiar with how it worked and the kind of support it offered for coding and analyzing large amounts of data. Working within ATLAS.ti, I re-read all of the data a second time and coded specific excerpts using the list of codes I had developed, occasionally attaching a short memo to keep track of my ideas. While the software is capable of performing complex analytic procedures, my coding process was akin to using different coloured highlighters or post-it notes to mark pieces of text, but in the context of a database that made it easy to retrieve coded material. This second round of coding allowed me to explore patterns and points of contradiction across the data by extracting all the excerpts for a particular set of codes. Thus, ATLAS.ti provided a useful tool for organizing and categorizing data, but the interpretation of these patterns was ultimately left to me, using the theoretical tools that I had available (Coffey and Atkinson 1996).

My theoretical interest in practices of positioning demands an analysis of talk as embedded in social interactions (Barbour and Kitzinger 1999). As stated earlier in this chapter, focus group data is often analyzed in terms of discrete excerpts that remove participants' words from the conditions in which they are spoken; as a result, the interactive context is rendered invisible in the presentation of research (Wilkinson 1997). By contrast, my analytic approach emerges from a theoretical framework that foregrounds how meaning and subjects are relationally constituted through discourse. Thus, the analysis was guided by the work of many feminist poststructural scholars of education who examine “the relational nature of positioning” (Davies 2000, 101) within discursive practice (Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz 2007; Davies 2003; Gonick 2003;

McLelland and Fine 2008). I have provided examples of this sort of interpretive reading throughout the chapter. These examples are meant to illustrate how I analyzed specific excerpts of the transcripts and fieldnotes, and then drew connections across these points of analysis in order to generate insights into broader social processes that might extend or challenge existing scholarly debates.

In addition to exploring what is said in classroom activities and focus group discussions, I also examine what is *not* said. According to Frosh *et al.*:

While culture makes available the subject positions we can inhabit, the 'investment' that people have in these subject positions is not necessarily captured by the articulation of the discourses themselves; rather, it may hinge on unspoken and at time unspeakable events, experiences and processes, all of them 'cultural', but also deeply embedded in subjectivity. (Frosh *et al* 2003, 42)

By attending to gaps and silences in students' narratives, the analysis probes deeper into the multiple logics that structure the “discursive space of schooling” (Yon 2000). Thus, my analysis of how Fieldsville students envision their futures also examines the kinds of futures that are absent from their narratives, and considers what these omissions suggest about these young people's understandings of who they are and who they can become.

Conclusion

Wendy Luttrell argues that because qualitative researchers cannot eliminate the tensions in their work, instead they must take responsibility for them. Specifically, she makes a case for what she calls “good enough” methods, which require researchers to “think about their research decisions in terms of what is lost and what is gained, rather than what might be ideal” (Luttrell 2005, 244). This chapter has examined the various research decisions and preoccupations that give shape to this project. Beginning with the construction of “Fieldsville,” I have argued that feminist poststructural ethnography can be enriched through insights from cultural geography, in order to

examine “*the field* and its constitution as a discursive and spatial practice” (Katz 1994, 67, italics in original). Attending to what I have called the *geography of ethnography* facilitates an analysis of researcher positionality that is sensitive to both social and spatial location. This is crucial for reflecting upon my own multiple positionings within this project, and the ways in which particular understandings of “insider” and “outsider” have facilitated my access to both Fieldsville, and to scholarly communities beyond this rural setting. After laying out the methodological foundations that underpin my ethnographic approach to subjectivity formation in place, I have reflected upon the daily activities that comprised my research practice in Fieldsville. Exploring focus groups and interviews as tools of inquiry that create different discursive spaces, I discussed the multiple kinds of talk and interaction made possible in these settings. Through the use of specific examples, I hope to have given readers a sense of the analytic process that underpins the interpretations offered in this dissertation. To restate a point made earlier in this chapter, in keeping with my commitment to exploring subjectivity as a contradictory process, I have attempted to engage with the data in a way that opens rather than forecloses interpretive possibilities. Indeed, throughout my fieldnotes and research journals, I frequently remarked upon how Fieldsville students negotiate the contradictory discourses that structure their lives, including the tensions that emerge where local rural identifications meet dominant discourses of social and geographical mobility. I explore these place-based tensions in detail in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

Situating Selves: Place-based Narratives of Race, Class and Rurality

“I wanna live in the country cuz I wanna have a barn and I don't want all the traffic,” Hilary announces definitively. Beside her, Jessie pulls a worksheet from her thick binder and slaps it down in the middle of the table where her friends can see. “I'm in the country,” she declares. Among the many homes pictured on the sheet, Jessie has circled the image of a white farmhouse on the lefthand side of the page. “I couldn't afford that house!” cries Rebecca, pointing toward Jessie's sheet. Amanda and Kristin lean in to have a look at the selection.

Tucked in the back corner of the library for our first focus group, the five girls are comparing the “wish lists” that they've created during a RG activity called “The Dream.” As described in the Facilitator's Guide, in this exercise “students explore and express their dreams by creating wish lists (homes, pets, cars, leisure pursuits, etc.) they would like to have as adults” (Barry 2005, 55). The challenge is then for students to balance the cost of desired items with the salary attached to their character's occupation. (This particular focus group includes an Actor, Lawyer, Guidance Counselor, Physiotherapist and Animator.) However, just minutes into our conversation, the girls shed these roles and share their own visions for the homes of their dreams.

While touching on many aspects of their imagined futures – work, family, romance, leisure – the discussion consistently returns to issues of place. Within five minutes of sitting down together, each has aligned herself with a future in “the country” or “the city,” with only Kristin choosing the latter. I ask them to elaborate on these preferences:

KC: So I'm curious, why the country? Like, when you think about living in the country/

Rebecca: Maybe cuz like, we've lived here/

Hilary: We've lived in the country/

Amanda: I don't like, I like to be able to look out my window and there not to be anyone else, like, right there. [Murmurs of agreement around the table]

Hilary: You can see like, you can see nature [stretches her arms out in front of her as if visualizing a vast landscape]

Jessie: [with disdain] In the city you can see like, cars goin' by and/

Kristin: See, that's why I want to live in a neighbourhood because there's not a lot of cars going by, and like, you/ [all talk at once]

Hilary: I want to live in the country cuz I'm used to it.

During this first focus group, I begin to notice how students approach their futures with a sense of themselves as embedded in space. The task of creating “wish lists” is not simply about what kinds of possessions they desire for their adult homes, but *where* these homes will be located – the physical landscape, community context, associated lifestyle, and proximity to particular people and places. Thus, while compiling a collage to characterize their “dream home,” students negotiate questions of belonging that reveal a great deal about how they understand the spaces that give shape to their lives.

Studies of young people's geographies have drawn attention to the “ways in which place-based narratives are implicated in the construction of social identities” (Vanderbeck and Dunkley 2003, 256). This chapter builds on this work by exploring how young people in Fieldsville locate themselves through narratives of place. While incorporating insights from observations and interviews, the analysis primarily examines focus groups following two particular RG lessons – one, described above, called “The Dream,” and another called “Getting Away,” in which students plan group vacations. These conversations explore issues of belonging, mobility, and difference, as students construct cartographies of people and places. In this chapter, I explore how students establish their own sense of place through relational processes of identification and

disidentification in order to secure sites of belonging within overlapping spatial discourses (Holloway and Valentine 2000).

Students' place narratives reflect the interplay of material and imagined geographies, for “people's sense of 'their' place depends on how they relate to the particular cultural meanings that have become attached to it” (Scourfield et al. 2006, 579). As focus group discussions travel across local and distant spaces, a range of place-based categories take shape and are imbued with shifting meanings. In depictions of the local environment, an idealized countryside emerges in opposition to a dangerous and polluted city; but such discrete binaries cannot contain the complexity of young people's spatial stories. In addition to negotiating rural/urban distinctions, students also craft maps of national and global spaces. They place themselves within dominant Canadian mythologies as inhabitants of an expansive and peaceful landscape. Casting their gaze beyond national borders, students collaboratively construct distant places by weaving together images from school curricula, popular texts, and news media.

As I listened to, participated in, and reflected on these focus group discussions, I was struck by one pervasive pattern: in their efforts to characterize particular contexts and communities, these young people frequently generate *racialized* mappings of place. Rather than interpret these mappings as evidence of racist attitudes often associated with rural communities, I strive to contextualize students' narratives through an analysis of power and discourse. I argue that students' investments in their rural community, as well as their racialized depictions of elsewhere, must be approached with an understanding of how they are positioned by contradictory discourses of rurality in Canada – namely, the romanticized rural of Canada's colonial past, and the pathologized rural of Canada's cosmopolitan future. To pursue this analysis requires attending to intersections of class, race and space that inform students' identifications. Thus, within the broader discussion of how students locate themselves in space, the chapter

focuses on a set of processes that I did not set out to explore, but that emerged in the context of the research. While not all place narratives were racially coded, the fact that many young people did construct racialized mappings suggests that this is an area worthy of investigation. There have been few empirical studies of the interplay among race, class and rurality in Canada; this chapter offers one perspective on this relatively unexplored topic. I suggest that examining how young people in Fieldsville narrate their own sense of place may reveal something about the interplay of race, space and class within this particular national and socio-historical context. Thus, the analysis advances the dissertation's broader argument that ethnographic research can shed light on the ways in which the current neo-liberal historical moment is lived in place.

The chapter begins with a brief description of the RG activities that provided the shared context for these focus group discussions, both of which occurred during the first month of the school year. The subsequent sections explore key themes in students' place narratives, organized according to the spatial categories that give shape to these discussions (ie., rural, urban, national, global). After noting patterns and contradictions in the way students talk about place, and in doing so, construct spatial (dis)identifications, I look more closely at the racialized and classed undertones of these narratives. Contextualizing students' place narratives within broader discourses of race, class and rurality in Canada, the analysis proposes a reading of these narratives as situated efforts to construct meaningful identities in place. Students work with the spatial discourses available to them in order to create value in the places they call home, and in turn, to disidentify from discourses that pathologize them. The fact that this process relies upon racist depictions of urban and global others highlights the deeply racialized mappings that circulate throughout spatial discourses in Canada. This suggests the need for anti-racist responses – scholarly, pedagogical, political – that extend beyond commonsense accounts that naturalize racism as an inherent feature of rural space.

Making place in *The Real Game*

The first set of focus groups followed a RG unit called “Making a Living.” In these early activities, students assume occupational roles and learn about “A Day in the Life” of their character; craft “The Dream” home of their future; and then face a “Reality Check” when they must balance monthly budgets based on their character's salary (Barry 2005). Of these activities, the one that seemed to interest students most was “The Dream.” They excitedly compared “wish lists” featuring homes, cars, sporting equipment, computers and cell phones. In the process, they often slipped out of character and approached the task as if they were drafting *their own* futures. For instance, despite the fact that RG roles are explicitly single and childless, Hilary explained that she had included two trucks on her list “cuz if there's two of us, and my husband needs to go to work and I need to go to work, then we both need one.” Tanya also adapted the game to better reflect her future projections, selecting the “Seasonal Home” (depicted as a small cabin in the woods) as her primary residence.

I approached this first set of focus groups as an opportunity to explore the themes of “home” and “dreams,” beginning with students' reflections on these recent RG activities. The specific topics covered in these conversations varied by group – ranging from stories about recent deer sightings to debates about what matters most in life – but what was consistent throughout was a focus on place in students' lives.

The second set of focus groups followed another place-related activity called “Getting Away.” Here, students worked in groups of two or three to design a holiday that fit within their combined budgets, either by selecting one of the possible destinations provided in the RG materials, or by designing their own getaway. Handouts featured popular vacation spots (e.g., Costa Rica, Mexico, China, Australia) with a brief blurb about the notable sites one might find

there. Some groups embraced these pre-packaged vacations, while others opted to design their own. These alternative holidays included two hunting expeditions in Alaska, a week of ranching in British Columbia, and a trip to Canada's Wonderland. Still others mixed and matched; one group followed the suggested "England's Ancient Mysteries Tour" with their own weekend of camping in Northern Ontario. Students researched the landscape, climate, language and food of their chosen location, and developed an agenda for each day of the journey. They then created slideshow presentations detailing trip "highlights," and shared these with the class as though they had just returned from their vacations. Presentations took a variety of forms: Melissa, Christie and Arbor found pictures of surfers on the internet and wrote their own names above the bronzed women in bikinis; Cody inserted his own picture from a recent hunting trip, where he is shown giving a thumbs up behind the head of a large buck; Tanya recorded a spoken narrative over her group's images of tents and campfires in order to avoid the dreaded task of reading in front of a group.

The learning objectives associated with this activity include the development of various skills – communication, research, teamwork, problem solving, budgeting and time management – as well as for students to "explore the culture and geography of their own and other countries" (Barry 2005, 109). It was this latter aspect that I hoped to discuss further during the focus groups. I began these conversations by asking students to describe their vacation plans, and to explain what drew them to these places. We then discussed other possible destinations listed on the handouts, and I encouraged students to speak about the images they associated with these places. (e.g. "What do you think it would be like in Mexico?") I also invited students to speak about places beyond those listed in *The Real Game*, and asked if there were particular locations they would and would not want to visit. To probe for students' visions of national space, I asked how they would describe Canada to someone who had never been here, and how they thought

Canada was viewed by people living elsewhere. Landscapes of class were woven throughout these discussions, and a few students stated outright that their family could not afford lavish vacations. When students spoke about trips they had taken, they revealed disparate geographies of personal experience, with a handful describing trips as far as Florida, and many never having travelled beyond a three hour drive to Ottawa or Toronto.

The significance of place that emerged during the first focus groups continued in this second round of discussions, as students created global cartographies of imagined places – some desired, others feared – all the while working to secure their own contested place of belonging. The following four sections share focus group excerpts that illustrate key patterns and tensions in students' narratives of place. Organized according to the geographical and discursive boundaries that students used to structure their talk, the sections retrace students' mappings of rural, urban, national and global places.

“It's nice, friendly, and everybody knows everybody”: Constructing the Rural Idyll

KC: Imagine that I've just come here from Toronto and I've never been to this area before. How would you describe Fieldsville to me? Like, what would you tell me about it?

Amanda: [Without hesitation] It's nice, friendly, and everybody knows everybody.

Kristin: Ya, there's like a hundred people in Fieldsville [laughing], and everybody's/

Hilary: It's like, “Oh hey!” [as if waving to others she knows]

Rebecca: And everybody knows everyone.

The vision of a small, close-knit community emerges repeatedly throughout focus group discussions. When asked to describe Fieldsville, students speak warmly about a town that's “friendly” (Scott), “quiet” (Karen), “nice and peaceful” (Cody). Again and again, they draw upon this same cluster of adjectives to characterize the place that they call home. As these warm

community relations are mapped onto the physical environment – the “nice fields” (Scott) and the fact that “there's lots of room for bike riding” (Melissa) – the social and material landscape blend into a mix of people and places, as well as the feelings that tie them together. Locating themselves within this landscape, students articulate a personal “fit” that is deeply felt:

Hilary: I would live anywhere that's sorta like this town. Like, a small town in the country that just has one little store that you can get stuff there. If it was just like this, then ya. Cuz I like the country, I don't wanna live where's there's all traffic. I'm used to the trains. I can get to sleep with those.

Amanda: I love the trains.

Rebecca: And the donkey.

Hilary: And the donkey, and the cows beside us and [trails off]

Conveying a deep fondness for the sights and sounds of rurality, this excerpt illuminates the intensely “affective nature of place” (Kenway, Kraack and Hickey-Moody 2006, 93). Cultural geographers highlight the mythic construction of the rural as an idyllic space characterized by themes of nature, safety and community (Leyshon 2008; Little 2002; Matthews et al. 2000; Rye 2006). While speaking about their local community, students invest heavily in this discourse of the rural idyll, as their lived experiences are imbued with romanticized images of rurality that reflect an “emotional attachment to place and space” (Scourfield et al. 2006, 579).

Studies of the rural idyll have demonstrated “the centrality of ideas of safety and security within dominant imaginings of rurality” (Panelli, Little and Kraack 2004, 449), and this forms a pervasive theme in students' narratives. Although I never ask about these issues, students consistently note feelings of personal safety and an absence of criminal activity as defining features of Fieldsville. They assure me that this is a place where there are “very little crimes done” (Karen), and say things like, “there's not a lot of robbers going in your house so you don't really have to worry” (Nick). Johnathon characterizes the community this way: “It's small, we live in a

small town so it's not like anyone's gonna come in and shoot people. It's not like Warden.” Safety is constructed as a natural outcome of the small, close-knit community:

Karen: If anything bad happened, there's always people in the village. Even if they don't know you they might know somebody in your family and they'll come and comfort you or something.

Melissa: I know one thing. Like, everybody, if you don't know one person another friend of yours in Fieldsville will know them so, like, everybody's mainly friends here.

Karen: Ya, everybody knows everybody. It's like that country song [laughs].

This sense of security is significant to students' understanding of Fieldsville as a place where they belong. In Rebecca's words, “I like living where I know who people are and everything. I know that I'm safe and everything.”

Despite this narrative consistency, it would be a mistake to interpret students' investments in the rural idyll as an accurate depiction of their lived geographies; on the contrary, rich analytic space exists between dominant spatial discourses and the everyday experience of place (Holloway and Valentine 2000). For even as students identify with idealized depictions of rurality, their investments in the rural idyll are not homogeneous, but rather are negotiated in relation to their social positioning. Contradicting idealized depictions of Fieldsville as a close-knit community, students construct boundaries around legitimate “locals” and “outsiders” who are seen to breach shared values. For instance, Paul laments that while Fieldsville is generally characterized by peace and quiet, “some people can get pretty loud at night.” Elaborating further, he reveals classed differences underpinning this distinction: “Usually it's people that, like, don't really have a lot of money, and they just throw parties to have fun.” Rebecca and Hilary draw similar boundaries:

Hilary: New people that move in, they don't get that we're quiet people.

Kristin: Ya. They make a lot of noise.

KC: So who, like, who would that be? I don't mean names, necessarily, I just mean, like/

Rebecca: Like there's a lot of new kids in our school, and well, there's this one house and it's like really close to my house, just down the road/

Hilary: Is that the Jackson house?

Rebecca: Ya. And there's like 10 kids who live in it and they're really noisy.

Hilary: Actually, I think there's 12.

Rebecca: And they're like all over Fieldsville and they're always down at my house and they're so noisy. And my parents work shift work so they're tryin' to sleep and everything and, I'm like, "Oh my god! Leave me alone!" [laughter]

The girls mobilize the narrative of "community invasion" (Panelli, Little and Kraack 2004, 45) to capture a perceived clash between longstanding members of the community and "new people" who "don't understand" the local lifestyle. The fact that they focus on a building that houses several children (likely a shared living arrangement among friends or relatives) suggests that these boundaries reflect – and reproduce – classed divisions, evoking images of poor people who are loud and disruptive (Skeggs 2004). Doreen Massey's (1995) work has been fundamental to understanding how young people forge place-based subjectivities by constructing boundaries and exclusions (Scourfield et al 2006; Dunkley and Panelli 2007; Matthews and Tucker 2007). She notes that individuals define their place through understandings of whom and where they are not:

The social definition of the place involves an active process of exclusion. And in that process the boundaries of the place, and the imagination and building of its 'character,' are part and parcel of the definition of who is an insider and who is not; of who is 'local,' and what that term should mean, and who is to be excluded. It is a space of bounded identities; a geography of rejection. (Massey 1995, 194)

By disidentifying with noisy "outsiders" who are seen to disrupt local norms, students establish themselves as deserving members of the community who make a legitimate claim to this place.

By contrast, students with less material resources negotiate classed boundaries on a personal level, aware of the distance between their own lived geographies and idealized visions

of the rural “home.” Christie speaks of the spatial adjustments required by her family's recent move from a house into an apartment, stating “I'm so used to actually going outside and playing in my backyard, and I can't do that no more.” Arbor describes a similar shift, noting that her family's move from a farm outside the village to an apartment in Fieldsville has been “kind of a shock for all of us.” She continues:

Cuz we moved from a farm to here, into town, and it's kind of weird because we only have, like, our house pets and I was used to riding almost every day, twice a day, up a trail. Um, and I was like hunting, trapping every day. And now we're in the city, like, in the town, and we don't have any land that I can do that on. Like, we have a donkey that we're boarding and we have no land for him. And that's really hard.

Arbor experiences the move into the village as a spatial loss – not only in territorial terms, but also the lifestyle associated with a particular rural geography to which she had grown accustomed. Matthews et al. suggest that “what particularly distinguishes a rural upbringing... is the sharp disjuncture between the symbolism and expectations of the Good Life (the emblematic) and the realities and experiences of growing-up in small, remote, poorly serviced and fractured communities (the corporeal)” (2000, 151). While students articulate the discourse of the rural idyll with remarkable consistency, their own rural experiences are varied and uneven.

Furthermore, a close reading of Arbor's narrative provides a glimpse into the relational construction of place. The notion that moving into Fieldsville – a village of just a few hundred people – could be described as a transition into “the city” would likely seem absurd to many. However, for Arbor, the imagery that she associates with this place-based category appears to capture something about her experience of this recent shift. While she is alone in applying the label of “the city” to Fieldsville (a discursive slip that she quickly corrects), many students draw subtle distinctions between living “in town” and “on the backroads.” For instance, Tanya insists that it's “too crowded” in the village, adding “that's why my family moved on the outskirts. We couldn't live in here.” In the following exchange, rural/urban distinctions are exposed as

contested constructs, rather than rooted in obvious material differences:

Dillon: In the country, like, you can pretty much do whatever you want, but in the city people are, like, right there.

Paul: There isn't cops and firetrucks goin' around all the time. It's not loud, it's nice and peaceful.

Dillon: But you live in town.

Paul: It's not a city!... [to KC] It's still like, I just moved into Fieldsville. I lived like, back, near the backroads [before].

Dillon's suggestion that Paul would not experience the same level of peace and quiet because he lives “in town” highlights the interplay between place-based constructs, like “country” and “city,” and the shifting spatial gradients in which students locate their own sense of place. For young people in Fieldsville, relational processes of place-making are often structured around distinctions from the imagined city – a space of excitement and danger that takes shape in opposition to the rural idyll.

“There's scary people in the city”: Imagining Urban Others

Geographers have problematized the categories of “rural” and “urban” by revealing the diverse meanings ascribed to these spatial constructs, yet research suggests that rural/urban distinctions constitute a meaningful difference for young people in rural communities (Vanderbeck and Dunkley 2003). Studies demonstrate how the imagined space of the city contributes to rural youth's personal geographies (Dunkley and Panelli 2007; Hayes 2004; Leyshon 2008). Two extreme views tend to characterize these constructions: “the city as a utopia of boundless opportunities, or alternatively the city as a fearful hellhole” (Kenway, Kraack and Hickey-Moody 2006, 102). Similar ambivalence emerges in the place narratives generated by young people in Fieldsville, as students weigh their desire to participate in urban youth culture with the

“moral geography of the countryside” that constructs the urban as deviant (Leyshon 2008, 13).

A common criticism of city spaces raised by Fieldsville students is a perceived lack of space. Karen views urban living as cramped and stifling, and states “the main problem with it is there's too many people around.” Students contrast this perceived spatial limitation with the image of an open countryside. Rebecca remarks, “I have more room in between my house and my grandma's house [next door] than they do in between five houses in the city!” For boys invested in dominant rural masculinities, the city is seen as a threat to their freedom of movement. “It's just like, you can't hunt or anything. You can't shoot guns,” complains Cody. Paul agrees: “You can't drive ATV's. You can't really do anything.” Cody and Paul construct the country as a space of possibility, where they are free to engage in practices that are central to their identities – hunting, skeet shooting, ATViing. By contrast, the city is imagined as a strictly regulated space with limited potential for action. Closely linked to ideas about cramped urban living, concerns about “rowdy” city life are contrasted with visions of peaceful rurality:

Karen: I go to Warden every now and then over holidays and stuff, to sleep at my grandparents' house.... They're up on the 9th floor in an apartment building and I still, it's crazy hearing the cop cars and everything just drive by out the window.

Christie: Warden's a very rowdy town.

The students' contrasting assessments of what counts as “rowdy” and “peaceful” provide a poignant example of the cultural construction of place. While Warden is labelled rowdy because of the density of traffic, local noisy and dangerous activities like hunting and ATViing are among the qualities that describe the rural as peaceful.

Even still, the very aspects of urbanity that students disdain – the crowded streets, the constant buzz of activity – are also sources of intrigue, rendering the imagined city an enticing (though mysterious) place. Rye documents the competing constructions of “rural idyll” and “rural dull” held by teenagers in a remote area in Norway, where the rural is constructed as

“natural,” “safe,” and “caring,” as well as “boring,” “backward,” and “non-modern” (2006, 409).

Gesturing toward the “rural dull,” Rebecca complains that there's “nothing to do in Fieldsville,” and jokes that, relative to Fieldsville, a trip to Warden becomes an exciting adventure:

Rebecca: Whenever anyone goes to Warden, like Amanda, she'll be like, “Rebecca, wanna go to Warden? Hilary, wanna go to Warden?” Everyone like, calls people. “Come to Warden!” It's like, ya, “Come!”

Jessie: It's like big, exciting, like “Let's go to Disneyland!” Like, “Let's go to Warden!”

Others are drawn to the convenience of living within walking distance of daily amenities and social activities, rather than constantly having to beg parents for rides. Dillon is considering a future in the city because “you can go to resources better.” He explains: “Since I like the movie theatre, like, I could just walk there. And like, grocery stores are there, you don't have to drive into the city.” Having just moved to Fieldsville from Warden, Shaun admits that he's feeling “kinda mixed up.” He explains: “I like [it here] cuz it's quiet on the weekend. But you don't have that much places to go, like to the mall and go shoppin' or fast food.”

Some students contest the rigid boundaries between rural and urban living, and craft visions that bridge country and city life:

Kristin: One reason I would want to live in the country is quietness, but ah, I want to live in the city because I'm so close to everything. I wish it could be the country, but just be like, stores and that in the country.

Amanda: But then it would turn into the city.

Kristin: Ya, it would turn into the city.

Rebecca: And then you'd get all those, like, khaki people that are like, “na-na-na” [sticks her nose in the air and waves her hands in mock snobbery]

Kristin's attempt to imagine a future outside of the rural/urban binary is quickly overruled by her friends, who remain committed to these categories. The exchange demonstrates that while these spatial categories exist along a continuum, binary distinctions exert a powerful influence over

their construction. Furthermore, Rebecca's imitation of so-called "khaki people" highlights how class inflects the cultural dimension of rural/urban distinctions. Implying that an increase in commercial activity would bring with it an unwelcome influx of city snobs, Rebecca references narratives of urban superiority, where city dwellers are said to look down upon "country folk" (Ching and Creed 1997; Vanderbeck and Dunkley 2003). While cities hold the seduction of excitement and entertainment, students in Fieldsville remain staunch defenders of their rural community and the lifestyle that it represents.

Moreover, beyond issues of noise and overcrowding, cities are seen to house a more menacing threat. Students associate the small population in Fieldsville with a sense of safety and familiarity, but the large, faceless city is viewed with suspicion. This fear of the unknown is projected onto urban bodies, captured in the figure of the "stranger." In Rebecca's words, the city holds "too many people, and too many creepy people, and like, weird people." During the focus groups, I was struck by how frequently students raised concerns about urban crime (especially given that they were usually speaking about Warden, which is not generally known for its high crime rates). Explaining why he prefers living in "the country," Scott contrasts images of rural safety and urban crime:

Scott: Country's safer than the city.

KC: Okay, tell me about that. What do you mean?

Scott: Like in some cities there's like, criminals. At our old house we found a whole bunch of harmful needles around our house.

KC: Where was that?

Scott: Um, in Batestown [just outside of Warden] ... It's a really bad place, you don't want to go there.

Shaun offers a similar caution about Calgary, where he visited his brother. He describes the city as "not too good," and recalls: "We saw like, hookers and everything on the road at night.... My

brother said that sometimes when it's night time there are gangs and everything start fightin'. So I don't want to go back there.” Shaun and Scott both reference personal experience in their depictions of cities as crime-ridden spaces; however, these experiential narratives are made meaningful through their articulation with public discourses about the “inner city” that inscribe deviance onto particular urban bodies and spaces (Goldberg 1993; Reay 2007).

As in Shaun's story above, narratives of urban crime sometimes use language of “gangs” and “ghettos.” This imagery is most often invoked by boys, many of whom appear both frightened by, and enthralled with, what they imagine to be dangerous city spaces (Hayes 2004; Kenway, Kraack and Hickey-Moody 2006). For instance, Cody states that “you can't go for bike rides cuz there's scary people in the city.” Paul agrees, adding “you go for a bike ride and gangsters jack your bike.” When I ask these boys if there is anywhere they would not want to visit, they connect the space of the “ghetto” with imagery that is explicitly classed, and implicitly racialized:

Paul: The ghetto.

KC: Why not?

Dillon: Cuz you'll get shot.

KC: What do you mean when you say “the ghetto”?

Paul: Like/

Cody: Where all the people live that don't have a lot of money.

Paul: Like Compton, like LA.

Here, the boys draw upon a cluster of images that they associate with crime-ridden urban spaces. Cody's explanation of the term “ghetto” is explicitly class-based, evoking imagery of poor, urban communities that are inherently criminal. Paul offers the example of Compton, LA – arguably the prototypical “ghetto” of popular culture, closely associated with hip hop. This reference

reveals the racial coding of this category, calling to mind representations of the Compton “ghetto” as a poor, racialized community marked by gang violence.

David Hayes' (2004) research on the urban fantasies of white rap fans in small-town Ontario is one of very few studies that examine how rural youth's spatial imaginings are racially coded. Hayes shows how the young men in his study exoticize the racial Other of the city, and regard urban spaces “with a mixture of awe and fear, wondering how their own masculinity would measure up on the streets of these perilous sites” (67). In their fan narratives, these young men express conceptions of desire and fear that “echo colonialism's racist depiction of the uncivilized, violent black man” (72). A similar affective ambivalence is apparent in Fieldsville boys' narratives of the urban “ghetto.” With visible excitement, Paul shares a personal story of sleeping over at a friend's house in Racklyn, a neighbourhood in Warden that the boys regard as the closest “ghetto” to Fieldsville:

Paul: We were sittin' in his room and lookin' out his window, cuz he lives in this thing where there's houses like this [creates a semi-circle with his hands] and then there's a playground in the middle. And ah, we were lookin' out at like, two in the morning and there was this whole gang walkin' by.

KC: How could you tell it was a gang?

Paul: You can tell.

KC: How can you tell?

Cody: Who walks in a gang, who/

Paul: There was like ten guys all wearing their hats and their baggy clothes and everything, smoking/

Cody: Same coats.

Paul: No.

Cody: Not the same coats?

Paul: And they had, like, knives and stuff. And Ed [Paul's friend] was bein' stupid and

he yelled out the window. I don't know what he yelled, I forget. But we ducked and they stood out there for like ten minutes, starin' at our window. Scared the friggin' crap out of me.

A mixture of experience and imagination inform Paul's thrilling account of a night spent inside the Warden “ghetto.” Insisting that “you can tell” what a gang looks like, he references the symbolic codes that are written onto particular urban bodies, marking them as criminal. The boys view gang culture as something that exists outside the boundaries of their rural community, yet they easily call to mind popular representations of what a gang is supposed to look like. Emphasizing “their hats and their baggy clothes,” Paul crafts an image found in movies and music videos, which is often embodied by young men of colour. The power of these images is highlighted by Cody's confidence in his assessment of this scene (that the gang members were all wearing the same coats), despite the fact he was not present. Exhibiting a mixture of fear and fascination reminiscent of the white rap fans in Hayes' research, Cody and Paul co-construct their urban imaginings around the “spectacle of the ‘Other’” (Hall 1997, 225), drawing upon essentialist depictions of urban masculinities as racialized, classed, and inherently violent – images that are readily available in a variety of media texts.

What complicates these boundary-making practices is the fact that Racklyn is more closely connected to their rural community than the boys' sensationalized stories suggest. Paul's friend, Ed, moved to Racklyn from Fieldsville a few years ago, and Dillon (Paul and Cody's close friend, and the third member of this focus group) lived in Racklyn before his family moved to Fieldsville when he was in second grade. The fact is that these two communities actually have similar class compositions, with a large proportion of low-income households and low levels of formal education. The boys' urban imaginings are all the more striking in light of these shared community features, as they map racialized images of crime onto this space of otherness. Sherene Razack (2002) has demonstrated how mappings of respectable and degenerate spaces

are both constitutive of and constituted by racial categories. So as these rural young people narrate city spaces through the language of moral contamination – with references to “gangs,” “hookers” and discarded needles – these constructions of “elsewhere” serve to secure their own spatial identities within a countryside that is clean, respectable, and implicitly white.

Fieldsville students also mention desirable aspects of the city – primarily in terms of access to social activities like shopping, movies and fast food restaurants – but overall, their characterizations of urban space take shape as a negative counterpoint to the rural idyll. During the second round of focus groups, these binary constructs are redrawn along national borders, as these rural young people map out the space of Canada and beyond.

“We're the best country in the world”: Constructing Canada

Fieldsville students identify strongly with the nation, proudly declaring their membership in “the best country in the world” (Nick). This national affiliation has meaningful implications for students' place narratives, such that the images and feelings they associate with “home” map onto the country as a whole. Students describe Canada in similar terms to their local environment, depicting a picturesque and expansive landscape that is home to a peaceful national community. Paul describes Canada as “homey,” and Cody emphasizes the spacious territory. Comparing Canada to China, he says, “Like, you're not squished like they are. You've got like, lots of room that's not even being used.” In fact, many Fieldsville students represent Canada as overwhelmingly rural. For instance, when asked how they would describe Canada to someone who has never been here, Kristin and Jessie say:

Kristin: Most of it is countryish, except for like, some of the cities. But like, a lot of Canada is like/

Jessie: Country.

Kristin: Ya. Trees and all that stuff.

Jessie: I'd tell them that it's like, a great place for nature and all that.

In students' place narratives, the material and symbolic elements of the rural idyll are inscribed onto national space more broadly. Even when I encourage students to speak about other aspects of Canada, they continue to emphasize features that align with images of rurality:

KC: What about things that like, that don't necessarily have to do with weather and nature? Other things about Canada as a place to live.

Rebecca: It's quiet.

Hilary: There's a lot of nature.

Rebecca: It's not busy. It's a lot of wildlife, and it's a lot of just like, trees. Like, Vancouver is like, all trees.

Hilary: Like, if you tried to turn around, I bet you, like here, if you tried to turn around and look at another house, you'd see a field and trees around it and like hay bales and/

Rebecca: I'm pretty sure that everyone's house has at least three trees in front of it.

Amanda: Yep.

The girls characterize the national territory in terms of its rural spaces, offering a vision of the Canada they know best. But beyond the lived geographies of Fieldsville students is a dominant national narrative that defines Canada through its wilderness spaces (Razack 2002). Despite the fact that less than one fifth of Canadians reside in rural municipalities (Mitchell 2005, 468), we are constantly reminded that this is a citizenry that remains in close contact with nature (Erickson 2008). From Group of Seven paintings, to the writings of Margaret Atwood and Northrop Frye, to radio and television features by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, a range of cultural texts locate the nation within a vast Canadian wilderness (Grace 2002; Mackey 1999; Manning 2003). Commemorating the colonial journey of Canada's white settlers, this imagined geography has significant implications for the racial codings in students' spatial

identifications. As Fieldsville students depict Canada in the image of the rural idyll, highlighting its vast and seemingly empty landscape, they echo colonial discourses that attempt to erase the presence of Aboriginal peoples in order to justify Canada's ongoing colonial project (Razack 2002). I explore the workings of these spatial discourses more closely later in the chapter.

Alongside this preoccupation with physical geography, students also speak about Canada as a safe place to live. They rearticulate national narratives that position Canada as a steward of global peace, stating “we have peacekeepers, not troops” (Nick). Many distinguish Canada from other countries due to a perceived lack of violent conflict, describing it as a “safe haven” for global migrants (Arbor). During one focus group, Cody asks his friends, “Did you know that Canada's the only country that has never been bombed? Every other country has been bombed. Pretty cool, huh?” Similarly, Karen suggests that people living in other countries long for a Canadian lifestyle that is unthreatened by war:

Karen: If it's a country where they have war going on in it, they think, “Those luckies. They don't have war going on ever.” Sort of thing, probably.

KC: Hmm. And what kind of places would that be?

Karen: Like, over in Africa where they've got all the wars going on. Be like, “They just get to sit around at home, don't have evil war people running into their schools and killing off their kids and stuff like that.”

In addition to this vision of a peaceful nation, students also praise Canada's international standing, drawing upon progress narratives to position Canada as a global leader:

Rebecca: Canada is actually like/

Hilary: The best ever!

Rebecca: It's like, rich. It's like, loaded with money! And then you go to other countries/

Hilary: They're so poor.

Rebecca: They're not poor but they're just like, not as up-to-date as we are.

Rebecca and Hilary mobilize discourses of progress to locate themselves within an “advanced” nation that occupies a desirable position in the transnational sphere.

Students were overwhelmingly patriotic in these discussions, eagerly identifying with narratives about a peaceful, picturesque Canada. Even still, positive appraisals were not without contestation, and a few students questioned this national self-image. These provocations were often subtle, simply opening up the possibility of critique. For instance, Melissa wonders aloud if people in other countries might be critical of things that most Canadians cannot see: “Well, maybe they would think that we have a lot of problems instead of them because they don't really notice their problems in their country, sometimes. And they would notice ours. Like how we're, um, [long pause] I don't know.” Melissa implies that dominant Canadian narratives might obscure underlying “problems.” Ironically, the fact that she can't think of an example (or perhaps is reluctant to share one) seems to demonstrate this very point. A more explicit critique emerges in a conversation about Canadian history, where Nick questions Canada's colonial mythology:

Nick: I went to a concert last year and they said that, cuz it was a Native concert, they said that Christopher Columbus did not find Canada. Cuz it wasn't a new found land because they were already there.

Tim: He found the United States and the/

Nick: No he didn't. The reason that Newfoundland is called New Found Land is because Christopher/

Tim: It's a new land and it's been found.

Nick: Ya, cuz Christopher Columbus *found* it.

Scott: Christopher Columbus was awesome!

KC: Hmm. And so what do you think about that, Nick? Like, were you surprised when you heard that?

Nick: No, not really. I thought about it before that and I said that it didn't make any sense that he found it and they were already there. Did you know that I'm a third Scottish and one of the places in Canada, one of the provinces, is actually called in

Scottish, New Scotland? Cuz Scotland found it. But they didn't actually found it because it was already there cuz the Natives were there.

In this interaction, the boys take up a number of different positions in relation to Canada's colonial history. Nick's original statement about the presence of Aboriginal people prior to colonization is met with a mixture of confusion and resistance. Scott does not question Nick directly, but his assertion that "Christopher Columbus was awesome" reflects the strong attachments that some students form with narratives of European expansion. Even Nick has trouble sorting out his location within these stories, proudly declaring that Scotland "founded" Nova Scotia, but then revising this statement to acknowledge Aboriginal inhabitants. The exchange illustrates how students engage in ongoing, *spatialized* processes of identification, as they co-construct place narratives through which to make sense of their own identities. In doing so, they encounter unresolved questions about the place of Aboriginal people in Canada, who constitute an absent-presence within spatialized national mythologies (Razack 2002).

While I do not want to downplay the significance of these moments of contestation, for the most part, Fieldsville students invest as much confidence in dominant national narratives as they do in associated discourses of the rural idyll. As a result, they imbue Canada with the same sense of comfort and personal "fit" as they do their rural community:

Cody: I'll probably always be in Canada.

KC: Why Canada?

Paul: Cuz we grew up here and we know it good.

Dillon: It's the safest country.

It is against the backdrop of this secure space of national belonging that students look to places beyond Canadian borders, envisioning other countries with a mixture of curiosity, desire and condemnation.

“It's cool, but it's scary”: Envisioning Transnational Geographies

Recent scholarship suggests that rural young people constitute their sense of place not only through constructions of the city and nation, but also in relation to global “mediascapes” (Appadurai 1996). In *Masculinity Beyond the Metropolis*, Kenway, Kraack and Hickey-Moody (2006) examine how globalizing processes are interwoven throughout the local contexts of four rural Australian communities. Using the methodology of “place-based global ethnography,” the authors expand conventional ethnographic practice to “investigate the links between [the] lived cultural research sites and other related spaces, places and media representations outside, yet connected to, such locations” (57). Attending to the contradictory ways in which transnational flows of labour, signs, and capital inform the production of specific spaces and subjects, the book reconceptualizes the study of rural space as both globally and locally constituted.

Global spaces take a variety of shapes in Fieldsville students' narratives, ranging from tourist attractions to exotic destinations and war-torn regions. Through the discursive space of the focus group, students could go shopping in Paris, fight rattlesnakes in Australia, tan on the beaches of Costa Rica, and explore historic sites such as Stonehenge and the Egyptian Pyramids. Across these global narratives, it is clear that media representations play a significant role in shaping students' perceptions of places around the world. A prime example of this is found in students' depictions of China. As a featured “destination” for their RG vacations, China was regularly discussed during focus groups, and students often referenced specific media texts to support disparaging representations of the country. For instance, Melissa expresses concerns over recent health alerts about products made there. She warns that “there's bad things going on in China by accident. Like, there's things that are going into baby formula and other things, like

toys and stuff that they're making.” Similar discourses of contamination support Karen's concerns about air pollution, informed by media hype over poor health conditions for athletes at the Beijing Olympics:

I don't wanna go there. They've got too much poison over there. Even in the air. If you just walk through the air, they're used to that air so it doesn't bother them, but since I'm used to this kind of air, the country air, it would really bother me cuz it's going into the big city where there's a lot of factories and smoke in the air and stuff. Like, I think they said when the Olympics were going on that um, they were getting a little bit sick. The Olympians were getting a little bit sick from the air over there. I think that's what they said, anyways something like that.

The boundaries constructed in these narratives serve to demarcate not only different places, but also different types of *people*, as illustrated in Karen's suggestion that people in China are accustomed to different air than the “country air” that she's used to (a globalized distinction that maps onto narratives of rural/urban difference).

Other focus groups contain more striking examples of how ideas about particular places are inscribed onto bodies (Ahmed 2004; Skeggs 2004). In the following exchange, images of a polluted China translate into feelings of disgust toward Chinese Canadians, who are positioned as ignorant and abject:

KC: Why, you said you would not want to visit China. Why not?

Rebecca: It's so like, dirty and like/

Hilary: People don't care there.

KC: What do you mean?

Hilary: I don't think people care because/

Rebecca: I'd see the Great Wall of China and then leave. Wear one of the gas mask things.

Hilary: I don't know. It just seems weird to me. I don't know what.

Rebecca: Cuz last year Mr. D [a Fieldsville teacher] was always talking about it because he went there and he was like, “It's so dirty, never go there.”

Hilary: And we've seen pictures of the place and it looks gross.

Rebecca: And when China people come here they're weird. Like, they're not weird, but like, they talk different and they look different and/

Hilary: Ya, there was this Chinese man/

Rebecca: And they're like, not as smart as us – well, they're as smart as us but they're not like/

Hilary: They don't know what we know about our country.

Rebecca: Ya.

Hilary and Rebecca move from descriptions of China as a “dirty” place, to racist assessments of Chinese people as “weird” and ignorant to Canadian ways of life. This interaction reveals how racialized place narratives are mapped onto bodies, and suggests that racialized spatial discourses are intertwined with racist ideas about individuals. Drawing upon discourses of contamination, the girls produce images of China that are similar to those referenced by Karen and Melissa above. Thus, although they don't name media texts explicitly, the China that they imagine appears to be deeply informed by available mediascapes.

Hilary and Rebecca's words must be read alongside the silence of Amanda, the third member of this focus group, who casts her eyes down toward the table during this exchange. Although Amanda does not verbally challenge her friends' racist claims, she removes herself from the conversation in a way that could be interpreted as a form of protest, especially considering her active participation during the rest of the focus group. Hilary and Rebecca go on to describe how the old convenience store in Fieldsville used to be owned by a Chinese couple, and how this generated frustration for local residents because “they didn't understand anything” (Hilary). When they use this story to support racist views of China, Amanda finally weighs in, distancing herself from her friends' logic:

Rebecca: They talk weird and everything, so like, from our experiences/

Hilary: I wouldn't like China.

Amanda: I just wouldn't wanna go. I'm just not interested in it.

By stating that she's "just not interested in it," Amanda distinguishes her own reasons for not wanting to visit China from those espoused by her friends. While I cannot profess to know Amanda's thoughts, there appeared to be a lack of consensus around the table on this issue.

Other countries are depicted as dangerous sites of drugs and crime, associated with images of urban decay. Kristin and Jessie choose Mexico for their RG vacation, but explain that they will stay away from Mexico City to avoid "all the bad stuff." When asked to elaborate, they say:

Kristin: Just things I hear like, people say and stuff like that, in my family and stuff like that. Cuz they talk about everything [laughs] and I hear stuff so that's how I found out about that it was a good place but kind of has bad people and stuff like that.

Jessie: How there's like, kidnappers and killers/

Kristin: Drug sellers.

While the girls are wary of the potential "bad people" they might encounter in Mexico, Kristin insists that this is not related to race. Describing how she imagines people in Mexico, she says "well they, they'd be nice, but some people might not be so nice. But ya. We don't care about the race or anything like that. Or any, what colour they are, how their accents are or anything." Kristin draws upon a liberal discourse of equality to distance her own views from those that might be deemed racist. While this "colourblind" approach has serious limitations for addressing race-based inequalities, the fact that Kristin even acknowledges the potential for racism in ideas about place is significant, and highlights a diversity of perspectives on race and racism among Fieldsville students. As our discussion shifts to visions of the future, the girls express a desire to travel with their future children because they "want them to see the world and stuff like that. I

don't want to keep them cooped up” (Kristin). I respond by asking if they have experienced this kind of mobility in their own lives:

KC: Do you two feel like you've had the opportunity to see parts of the world? To see things, to go places?

Kristin: Well, ya, I've had, well I've been to not a lot of places, but I've been to those places a lot of times and different parts of it, so. I don't, no, actually, I've never taken a plane before and I've only been, the farthest I've been is Florida, so.

Jessie: The farthest I've ever been is Mississauga, like, near Toronto. That's the farthest I've been because we can't really afford big trips to like, Florida [gestures toward Kristin] or stuff like that.

The girls invest in discourses of cosmopolitanism that valorize transnational mobility and the experience of a wide range of places and cultures; however, neither has access to this mobility in her own life, with Jessie experiencing an especially restricted (and classed) geography.

In contrast to Kristin's careful liberal discourse, some students use overtly racial markers to map global sites of crime and violence. As Cody, Paul and Dillon swap friends' stories of trips to dangerous destinations, they draw upon racialized imagery of urban bodies wrapped up in the same mix of fear and desire that accompanied their tales of the “ghetto”:

Paul: Cuz it's cool, but it's scary because Natalie went, a girl named Natalie, she graduated last year. She went to Jamaica and she said that there was like, guys walking around with guns and stuff.

Dillon: Guards.

Paul: No! Like, people.

Cody: No, one time Amy Green, they were walkin' down the, they went to Mexico and they were walkin' down the street and there was this black guy sittin' on the wall and he took a handgun and pointed it right at Amy Green and her mom, and the police like, tackled him.

Paul: That'd be scary [laughs].

Here, the association between place, race and deviance is made explicit, embodied in the figure of the armed black man. Drawing upon this same set of connections in a different focus group,

Justin explains that he would not want to go to Jamaica because “too much ex-cons go there.” He expresses this as a statement of fact, supported by knowledge that he has obtained from his aunt who works in correction services.

One other place occupies significant terrain in students' discussions of transnational geographies, and that is Afghanistan. Consistently envisioned as a space of war where Canadians are “battling terrorists” (Tim), Afghanistan was mentioned by almost every group, which is noteworthy considering the fact that it was not a featured “destination” in their RG materials. Fluent in the discourse of “terror,” students attempt to make sense of the narratives available to them, drawing on news media and popular culture as well as scraps of information obtained from family members, and the knowledge that the father of one girl in their school is currently stationed in Afghanistan. Consider the following interaction:

KC: What is that war about in Afghanistan?

Dillon: It's like/

Paul: Tryin' to keep peace.

Cody: No, it all started/

Dillon: It started with George Bush, cuz like George Bush thought that like Pakistan and all them had bombs and were planning to bomb the United States. So then George Bush declared war, but then they/

Cody: No, it all started when the terrorists bombed the Twin Towers and killed all the people.

Dillon: Ya, but/

Cody: And then that's when they went over and started bombin' them. And then the armies just went together and started shootin' each other.

Paul: I watched that World Trade Centre movie. It was freaky.

Dillon: Ya!

Paul: It's scary.

Dillon: They're walkin' in the, the firefighters are walkin' in the buildings and it's like [makes sound effects of smoke and crumbling building].

In their efforts to make sense of Afghanistan and the war that dominantly defines this place, the boys weave together discourses of peacekeeping and terror alongside popular representations of the conflict. They engage in an interactive process that was evident in other groups, revising and building upon each other's contributions in order to co-construct a coherent narrative. In these discussions, the figure of the “terrorist” is produced as a discursive subject of a particular place, providing yet another example of how spatial discourses are inscribed onto bodies as place becomes racialized.

Students struggle to negotiate their own relationship to these racialized spatial discourses. This process is best illustrated by an emotionally charged discussion in which a group of boys are discussing their understandings of the war in Afghanistan. When someone mentions Pakistan, Jonathon says, “I don't like calling it Pakistan,” adding “I just find it racist.” The others explain that Pakistan is just the name of a country, like America or Australia, not a racist name. I ask Jonathon why he thinks it feels racist to say Pakistan, and he says, “Cuz people call people from Pakistan 'Pakis'.” Nick nods, and clarifies: “That's a racist name. But calling it Pakistan isn't.” Then, after making this point, Nick suddenly exclaims, “But they *are* Pakis!” He pauses, and for a moment the table is silent. Everyone turns their attention toward Nick, except for Scott, who withdraws, scrunching his knees up to his chest, his chin on his hands, gazing forward at nothing. “They're total Pakis,” Nick says again. I ask him why he would say that, and he states, “Cuz I don't mind being racist when they deserve it.” At this point, the others jump in. Jonathon bets Nick he wouldn't use that word if “one of them was right beside you,” and Tim changes the subject, launching into a fantasy war scene accompanied with sound effects. The discussion continues:

Nick: Calling them Pakis is like calling black people Niggers [Jonathon raises his eyebrows and Scott gasps]. So it's rude, but/

Tim: No. Know what'd be cool? Jumping in a jeep in the war! No, after the war's done, jump in a jeep and start drivin' around in the sand! [The others ignore this comment]

Nick: Black people don't deserve it because they've done a lot for white people, but Pakis don't, didn't do anything. They tried to kill all of us.

Scott: [Raises his head from his hands and turns toward Nick] Remember the saying? "It's hard," [he pauses, struggling to recall the words from a recent character education lesson] "it's easy to see how they are the same, it's hard to see how they are different."

Jonathon: No, "It's easy to see how they are *different*!"

Scott: Oh ya!

Nick and Scott: "It's hard to see how they are the same." [The boys repeat the message in unison]

Jonathon: Exactly.

Nick: I still call them Pakis.

Nick's racist comments will offend many readers, as they did me and some of the other students in this focus group. I highlight this excerpt not for its shock value, but as a way to explore how the boys struggle to negotiate their own shifting relationship to racist discourses. Jonathon's admission of discomfort surrounding the name of a country demonstrates how racialized spatial discourses are negotiated on an affective level. He tentatively states his opposition to the term "Paki," which he understands to be a racist, but commonly used term. The others draw on diverse discourses to speak about race and racism, ranging from Nick's racist assertion of "just desserts," to Tim's strategy of avoidance through fantasy. In the end, the boys work together to help Scott recall the liberal discourse offered in a video they recently watched during a character education lesson on "respect," which had left students with the moral that "It's easy to see how people are different, it's hard to see how they're the same." The exchange reveals that, while pervasive, racialized spatial discourses are a deeply affective and contested, rather than fixed

aspect of rural young people's lives.

While analyzing students' talk about race and place, it's important to consider how my own presence may have shaped the conversation. While I have no way of knowing how a discussion like this would have unfolded in my absence, I can draw upon other conversations where students responded to me in different ways. One particularly memorable interaction occurred during the second round of focus groups, in the context of a discussion about how students think Canada is perceived around the world. Cody begins to make a comment, but then suggests that he needs to censor his language because our conversation is being recorded.⁷ Not knowing what topic he is about to broach, I reassure him that he can say whatever he likes. He then raises the issue of racist jokes, and wonders aloud whether people of colour tell jokes about white people. As the conversation continues, the boys position me in two distinct ways: first, as a white person included in a shared “we,” and second, as someone who potentially disapproves of racist jokes. I've included the interaction in its entirety, to give a sense of the full exchange:

Cody: Do you know how – actually I'm not gonna say. That camera's over there.

KC: But the only person who watches it is me. I promise you. So it's just like if it weren't here.

Cody: Like, it's a funny thing that like, well one, like um, like a black person and a white person. You know how we have jokes about them? Imagine they have jokes about us?

Paul: Prob'ly [laughs]

Cody: That'd be kinda funny.

Paul: I wanna hear the jokes they have about us.

Cody: “Hey, Whitey-Joe!” [laughs]

KC: So do you guys tell, do you tell jokes about/

Cody: Not a lot.

⁷See Chapter 3 for a discussion of how students sometimes positioned the camera as a symbol of authority within the focus groups.

Paul: I do, but [all three boys laugh]

KC: Where do you hear those jokes?

Paul: I don't know, I just hear them.

Cody: Just like, Dillon. And they're on like the internet too. And then on the bus. Dillon usually tells me all of them.

KC: [to Dillon] Where do you hear them? [Dillon points to Paul]. And you get them off the internet? [To Paul]

Paul: Internet or friends from camp.

Cody: Tell one, Paul, tell one! [laughing]

Paul: Naw.

KC: And would you think, like, do you think it's funny to tell those kind of jokes?

Paul: It's funny but it's mean at the same time.

Dillon: It's funny when none of the people that you're talking about rude is around, but when people are around/

Cody: It's like you don't want to say anything.

Paul: [Swings a right hook into his left palm] Punch you right in the face.

KC: But so what about, so you think it's okay as long as someone isn't around who/

Dillon: Ya.

Paul: Sort of.

Dillon: Paul, you should tell one.

Paul: No.

KC: Why do you say "sort of"?

Paul: Cuz, it's still mean.

Dillon: Paul's got a funny one.

Paul: What? No, never mind.

With this last statement, Paul indicates that the conversation is over, presumably because he has decided that he should not tell the joke in my presence. I felt extremely uncomfortable during this conversation, and was unsure of what an ethical research practice might look like in this context. On the one hand, I refused to participate in the form of racism that I was being invited into through a sense of shared whiteness. On the other hand, I wanted to better understand the boys' race-based identification practices, and so I didn't want to pass judgment in a way that would shut down the conversation. Clearly, though, the boys read through my effort to remain open. They know that racist joke-telling is widely considered "wrong," so they restricted their language accordingly. This interaction should not be read to suggest that racist jokes were widespread at Fieldsville Public School. They weren't. Rather, I reflect upon this conversation in an effort to consider how my own presence shaped this discursive space, and thus was inevitably bound up in students' racialized discourse. As the boys negotiate their own identity performances, they position me in different ways, and the conversations that are recorded in the transcripts reflect this relational process. Because meaning and identities are co-constructed and context-specific, my presence was inevitably a factor within all of the focus group discussions, and so the students' statements and actions must be viewed in this context.

In recent years, some youth scholars have celebrated the possibilities that popular culture affords young people in relatively isolated areas, suggesting that global media flows provide rural youth with "space for a more expansive version of self" (McGrellis 2005, 524). Others explore how young people "create for themselves, mini-urban spaces" (Matthews et al. 2000, 145) where they can perform cultural practices they see represented in television and film. Nevertheless, global media flows do not dissolve all boundaries. In a study exploring how children in Wales identify with place and space, Scourfield et al. find that "when asked to think

about moving away, children mentioned those Western, developed countries which allowed them to see continuities between their own selves and the people who lived there” (2006, 583). The authors suggest that this sense of sameness was produced through familiar media representations that position particular places as “communicatively close to the children's own domestic experiences” (583). Thus, while popular culture offers rural young people access to aspects of youth culture that may not exist in their local area, scholars must not idealize global imaginaries for their potential to transcend entrenched systems of difference.

As an example of the racist imagery that young people access through available mediascapes, recall Nick’s distinction that Blacks don’t deserve racist slurs because they’ve benefited white people, in contrast to people from Pakistan. This deeply troubling distinction seems to suggest an elaboration on difference that’s informed by popular culture. From news media to Hollywood films, the figure of the “terrorist” circulates widely throughout contemporary Western media, a site of abjection produced through what Sara Ahmed calls “the performativity of disgust” (2004, 82-100). This “dangerous” other is sustained by racist and Islamophobic images that have particular salience in this historical moment (Butler 2004; Razack 2008; Thobani 2007), and Nick appears to be drawing upon these available discourses in his assessment of the racist term “Paki.” Situating students' local discursive practices within this broader context allows for an analysis of how Fieldsville students' race-based place narratives draw upon broader racial discourses that are widely circulated in popular culture. This also facilitates an analysis of how racism operates through historically constituted racial categories, rather than simply viewing young people's racist statements as the product of individual prejudice.

What emerges as a common feature across Fieldsville students' varied global depictions is the significance of racial difference in young people's understandings of the world around

them. Students consistently mobilized racialized understandings in their efforts to construct global cartographies of people and places. The focus group excerpts shared in the previous sections challenge the assumption that issues of race are less relevant within predominately white rural communities that are too often perceived to be disconnected from global processes (Hayes 2004; Kraack and Kenway 2002; Lee 2006; Mackey 1999). Beyond issues of relevance, though, the analysis suggests that these racialized understandings inform rural young people's very sense of self, as their own identities are produced through actively disidentifying with racialized, non-rural others.

Putting the rural in its place: Competing discourses of rurality in Canada

Some might interpret students' racialized mappings of “elsewhere” as evidence of widespread racism in rural communities, but such quick rejections of perceived rural cultures obscure the complexity of these accounts. Instead, I argue that students' spatial identifications must be understood in relation to intersecting discourses of race, class and rurality in Canada. Situating Fieldsville students' place narratives within this broader discursive context reveals two dominant discourses that compete to define Canada's rural spaces: one longing for its idyllic rural past, the other lamenting its lagging rural future.

In the first of these two competing discourses, the rural is attributed value within nostalgic depictions of Canada as an imagined community that is deeply connected to nature (Mackey 1999; Grace 2002). As romanticized narratives of the 'north' are projected onto Canada's remaining rural spaces, this spatial discourse contributes to a racialized mapping of national space that conflates rurality with whiteness (Shields 1991, Razack 2003). Cultural geographers show how the “rural idyll” is often perceived as a space of whiteness, rooted in legacies of the British countryside that conjure images of blond-haired, rosy-cheeked children

playing innocently in open fields (Holloway 2007; Jones 1999; Panelli et al. 2009). This association takes on a particular significance within the Canadian context, where it is bolstered by historical narratives of rugged settlers traversing Canada's harsh landscape (Razack 2002). Even when race is not named outright, such familiar national tales reproduce a spatially articulated Canadian "essence" that echoes the colonial ideal that, as a Northern nation, Canada's citizens possess a distinct "racial character" (Berger 1966, 3). Thus, despite the urban concentration of its population, at its spatial core, Canada continues to be imagined as fundamentally rural.

This idealized rurality is central to what Henry Lefebvre (1991) might call the "abstract space" of Canada. As a dominant representation, abstract space is imagined as homogeneous and harmonious, and is produced through the erasure of marginalized spatial practices and histories (McCann 1999, 343). The imagined inhabitant of Canada's idealized rural is produced as a white subject that simultaneously requires and denies both the Aboriginal subject, who secures a settler identity, and the racialized subject of the city, against whom the whitened space of Canadian wilderness is defined (Razack 2002). Illustrating this relational constitution of bodies and space, Bruce Braun describes how the rural/urban opposition emerges out of colonialism as a spatialization of race: "Consistent with a discourse that linked nonwhites with degeneracy and associated both with the city, nature was troped as a site of moral and racial purity: the true foundation of the nation, and the true home of its original settlers" (2002, 197). While Fieldsville students may be unaware of the racialized histories that inform their identifications, they forge their own sense of place within this broader discursive context. It's clear that national mythologies have shaped their historical consciousness, as illustrated, for instance, in Scott's evocation of Columbus as "awesome." Thus, while working to align themselves with an idealized rural, and to mark distance from a deviant city, these young people establish

themselves as legitimate subjects with a valued place in Canada's settler story.

In contrast to the idealized rural of Canada's colonial history, much current media and policy discourse represents rural communities as “backward,” targeting these seemingly anachronistic spaces as barriers to Canada's cosmopolitan future in the “knowledge economy” (Corbett 2006; see also Popkewitz 1998). For instance, in a report commissioned by the provincial government entitled “Ontario in the Creative Age,” Roger Martin and Richard Florida call for urban centres to reach out to rural communities that are “increasingly disconnected from the creative economy” (2009, 27). They warn that, in a globalized world, where “people and ideas are fast moving” (27) rural regions suffer economically and culturally: “While a slower pace and non-metropolitan living will appeal to some, it’s clear that they do not offer benefits to enough creative workers to sustain these smaller more distant locations. These disconnected places face a future of decline unless they are better connected to [urban] Ontario” (27). Martin and Florida's vision for Ontario's future is firmly grounded in neo-liberal discourse, with appeals to mobility, risk, and “entrepreneurial spirit” (20) – values that are said to thrive in metropolitan centres and languish in rural settings.

Similarly, recent media coverage of debates about the long-gun registry points to the “divergent visions” of Canada held within rural and urban populations. During my time in Fieldsville, a front-page *Globe and Mail* story announced, “Vote to kill gun registry exposes rural-urban split” (Thurs. Nov. 5, 2009, A1). Coverage of the issue on the following day continued to use the rural/urban binary as the organizing frame. A feature titled “Dismay in the city, celebration in the country,” opened with a dramatic vision of a divided Canada: “Different reactions. Divergent visions of a country. Wednesday's vote in the House of Commons to abolish the long-gun registry reinforced the divide between rural Canada and its metropolitan centres” (*Globe and Mail*, Fri. Nov. 6, 2009, A4). Running alongside this feature, a column by John

Ibbitson reiterated this message through the lens of voting patterns. Titled “Rural overrepresentation defeats the people's will,” the column linked the bill's passing to disproportionate weighting of rural populations in the House of Commons. In Ibbitson's portrayal, Canada's voting populace can be neatly divided into two opposing currents: “Urban voters support the registry, and any other measure that limits gun violence. Rural voters oppose the registry, seeing in it an insidious government conspiracy to pry rifles and shotguns out of hunters' and farmers' infuriated hands” (A4). Noting that 80% of Canadians live in cities, Ibbitson concludes that “Canada's destiny is ever-more urban.” According to this narrative of rural decline, whatever future is envisioned in rural Canada, it looks nothing like the future that is envisioned in the rest of the country, effectively denoting two different imagined communities and deeming one increasingly obsolete.

This second discourse of rurality – what we might think of as the rural of Canada's future – is heavily classed, as it works to pathologize working-class, rural populations. In the words of Canadian education scholar Michael Corbett, “rurality is powerfully associated with the past, with place... with stagnation, and with a kind of vague shame. Rural is the place we are supposed to have left behind in the march of history” (2006, 295). Pointing toward enduring narratives of rural inferiority that associate the urban with sophistication and progress, and the rural with conservatism and backwardness, Vanderbeck and Dunkley note that “a rural identity is often a stigmatized one” (2003, 245). Occasionally, young people in Fieldsville demonstrate an awareness of how their local community might be negatively perceived. For instance, when I ask Rebecca how she would describe Fieldsville to someone from Toronto, she says, “you would probably think it was the middle of nowhere.” But the negative connotation associated with this second discourse of rurality extends beyond ideas of spatial isolation to suggest something about rural *people*. In a particularly telling exchange, Justin describes how Fieldsville students are

labeled “dirts” when they enter high school in a nearby town:

Justin: My sister gets called a dirt all the time by other kids at [high school] because she went to Fieldsville. Whoever lives here are supposedly “dirts” [uses his fingers to indicate quotation marks].

KC: What does that mean, “dirts”?

Shawn: Dirty.

Justin: Like, dirty people that don't shower and stuff like that. But my family's really clean.

Kyle: Same here.

During my time at the school, I observed how students used the discourse of “dirt” to construct classed boundaries around those who were seen to be living in the most severe economic deprivation. The “popular” students (who tended to have access to the most economic and cultural resources) labelled those considered to be poor as “dirts,” a marker that signifies not only physical filth but also moral degeneracy (Skeggs 2004). In the above exchange, Justin reveals how, in fact, this category is inscribed onto Fieldsville as a whole, placing students in the impossible position of constantly having to disprove their “dirty” status, a kind of ongoing “positional suffering” (Bourdieu 1999, 4).

While rurality is central to these young people's identities, these attachments are fraught, as students negotiate the threat of rural pathology. This tension became apparent when I travelled with Fieldsville students to the regional volleyball tournament. While riding the bus through a small rural community about 30 minutes from Fieldsville, I overheard a student in the seat behind me say, “This is such a hick town.” To the average outsider, this village would look much like Fieldsville, comprised of small houses, an elementary school, a general store, and a few churches. Nevertheless, the student's comment shows how subtle distinctions are drawn between seemingly similar places. It also shows how even as students actively forge rural identifications,

they mark off their own rural from those less desirable (ie. “hicks”). Indeed, other studies have found that young people locate themselves in terms of “differing degrees of 'ruralness,'” identifying with valued aspects of rurality and disidentifying from others (Vanderbeck and Dunkley 2003, 250).

As a discourse that marks rural, classed populations, “dirt” operates similarly to the American discourse of “redneck.” According to Jarosz and Lawson, the term “redneck” circulates as “a largely unproblematized slur against working-class rural people, a generalized assumption about their politics, and a generalizing stereotype about the degeneracy and lack of morality that has historically defined poor people in Euro-American discourse” (2002, 12). They argue that critical analysis of the redneck discourse is especially pressing within the “contemporary socioeconomic climate, because the livelihoods and futures of working-class people in rural places are in question” (9). In fact, recent studies show that some rural young people are reappropriating the 'redneck' identity as a kind of rural pride. Based on research conducted in Northern Vermont, Vanderbeck and Dunkley describe how some young people from poorer families who invested in stereotypically rural activities (such as hunting and fishing), “found the 'redneck' narrative to be one with which they could identify, given how they felt it ascribed positive characteristics to rural people who were often stigmatized for either their relative poverty or their lifestyle choices” (2003, 255). Despite the similarities between the discourses of “redneck” and “dirt,” the latter does not appear to afford the same redeeming possibilities. I never encountered an instance of a Fieldsville student claiming a form of “dirt” pride. Instead, students describe the frustration of working to belong somewhere, only to be rejected as worthless. In Jessie's words: “I feel like it's a major put down. Cuz you think you're in the prep group and stuff cuz you hang out with them, and you're kind of like, 'Ya, I fit in here.' But then people look at you and they're like, 'No, she's a 'dirt',' and then it just brings you right

down.”

Over the course of my fieldwork, I began to wonder if students' intense preoccupation with markers of “dirt” might be interpreted as a response to their social location – as classed *and* rural. The focus group excerpts in this chapter provide examples of Fieldsville students assigning markers of “dirt” to other people and places, whether explicit (as in the case of China), or implicit (as in depictions of a polluted city). Within the relational constitution of place, this active marking of dirty others operates as a compensatory practice to secure their own identities within clean, desirable bodies and spaces – what Diane Reay calls “fighting free of negative emplacement” (2000, 157). This process is similar to how the women in Beverley Skeggs' (1997) well-known ethnography, *Formations of Class and Gender*, invest in the discourse of “respectability” in efforts to reject their working-class status. However, an important distinction exists between the positioning of Skeggs' participants and the young people in this study. Namely, Skeggs argues that the working-class women in her study strove to escape their working-class positioning by becoming “respectable” because “they rarely had the potential to re-valorize their classed subjectivities” (1997, 161). By contrast, Fieldsville students have access to a discourse that offers this potential. Faced with narratives of rural decline that pathologize them, these young people identify with romanticized images of rural space. Viewed within this broader discursive context, students' attachment to the rural idyll is not surprising, given that these images provide a means of valorizing their own spatial and social location. Ching and Creed have made a similar argument from the perspective of identity politics, suggesting that “when rustics denounce city life they may be deploying an identity politics that challenges this urban hegemony and asserts their own value” (1997, 18).

Connecting this class analysis back to the intersections of race and space discussed earlier, I am suggesting that students' intense investment in their rural landscape and stated

rejection of other places might be interpreted as an effort to redeem the value of their social and spatial location. From this perspective, students' racialized narratives of “home” and “elsewhere” must be understood in relation to: 1) students' social and geographical location as both classed and rural, and 2) the contradictory place of the rural within narratives of Canada's colonial history and cosmopolitan future. Placing these empirical patterns within a broader discursive context, it is possible to see how rural young people may identify with idyllic images of rurality as a means of defending against pathologizing class-based discourses of rural decline. In doing so, students take on racialized spatial discourses as their own. Canada's rural idyll is defined by the colonial legacy of a white settler society and is sustained in opposition to various racialized figures, each of whom performs a distinct function in the constitution of dominant subjects (e.g., the urban “gangster,” “weird” immigrant, and dangerous “terrorist”). As students draw upon these images in their place narratives, they inscribe racialized spatial discourses onto particular bodies, while maintaining their own positions within an implicitly white rural idyll.

By making this argument, I want to be clear that I am not excusing students' participation in racist discourse, nor am I downplaying the significance of their racist expressions. Rather, I am attempting to extend the interpretation beyond “rural racism” by showing that these narratives are not confined to rural communities, and are circulated widely through global mediascapes and national mythologies. Accusations of “rural racism” deflect attention away from the need to take collective responsibility for these racialized narratives in Canada. For instance, Monika Kim Gagnon (2007) documents how expressions of racism during the so-called “Hérouxville Affair” were diminished as isolated incidents confined to specific rural municipalities in Quebec.⁸ This discursive manoeuvre produces urban centres as cosmopolitan

⁸In January of 2007, the small town of Hérouxville, Quebec, issued a set of guidelines for prospective immigrants to the community. The list included specific resolutions prohibiting the stoning of women and the covering of one's face, as well as other directives that many critics perceived to be a reflection of “strange fantasies and outdated stereotypes of Muslim culture” (Gagnon 2007, 5).

and tolerant, elevated against the backdrop of an apparently racist rural periphery. As Gagnon argues, naturalizing racism as an inherent feature of rural space not only, “downplays and dismisses such racist behaviour and expressions,” but also “marginalizes the need to responsibly address and analyze the violence of such gestures and the hostile social climate it creates” (2007, 6). Furthermore, Sarah Holloway argues that while there is a need for continued research into the enduring significance of a rural ideal that equates the countryside with whiteness, this research must not assume that such notions persist unchallenged. Instead, she suggests that critical studies of race and rurality should also work to “highlight potential moments of frailty in the discursive whitewashing of the countryside” (2007, 18). The young people in Fieldsville deploy a variety of discourses about race and racism in order to talk about people, places and difference, including liberal discourses of equality. The diversity of these discursive constructions challenges popular images of rurality as a space in which racist discourses circulate without contestation.

Conclusion

As Richard Phillips reminds us, “identities are mapped in real and imaginary, material and metaphorical spaces” (1997, 45). This chapter has explored how Fieldsville students establish their own sense of place through spatial identifications and disidentifications – a process integral to the formation of imagined futures. Through the analysis of focus group transcripts, I have demonstrated how place-based categories take shape as students align themselves with images of an idyllic rurality and peaceful Canada, distinguishing these sites from urban and global others that are deemed dirty and deviant. Highlighting the racialized undertones that inform some of these narratives, I have explored how the mutual constitution of bodies and spaces contributes to processes of racialization. While drawing attention to patterns in the data, I have demonstrated that students' narratives are neither fixed nor homogeneous, but rather are subject to shifts and

contestations, both between and within students' identification practices.

What conclusions might one draw from this analysis? Pedagogically, the fact that Fieldsville students consistently draw upon ideas of racial difference in order to map the world around them suggests a need for anti-racist education that addresses rural young people's relationship to the transnational sphere (Lee 2006). But I am arguing that what is at stake here extends beyond the individual attitudes of rural young people to look critically at the discourses that are available to them; to do so is to work toward broader accountability for racialized narratives in Canada. With a few notable exceptions (Hayes 2004; Henderson et al. 2006; Kenway, Kraack and Hickey-Moody 2006), studies of rural youth tend to highlight the workings of gender, class and geographical location as the forms of difference that structure these young people's experiences. By implication, issues of race appear mysteriously absent from rural space. By failing to explore the workings of race, rural youth scholarship reproduces an imagined rural space where "whiteness is normative and ubiquitous" (Mackey 1999, 94). Critical race scholars have drawn attention to how images of the rural function within the national imaginary to produce Canada as a space of whiteness (Bannerji 2000; Berger 1966; Razack 2002; Shields 1991). In this way, even as geographies of rural young people work to contest the urban focus within youth studies, they may also sustain racialized binaries, whereby the rural's apparent racelessness (or normative whiteness) confirms the coding of "urban" as "black" (Braun 2002; Goldberg 1993). More research is needed regarding how race works in rural contexts. By contextualizing students' racialized articulations in relation to contradictory discourses of class and rurality in Canada, this research investigates the nuanced workings of discourses of race and space as they are articulated in place.

In terms of the dissertation's guiding questions about how rural young people imagine futures in neo-liberal times, this chapter has demonstrated how Fieldsville students look toward

the future with a distinct sense of themselves in place. This place-based identification is sustained by a set of discursive practices that are both geographically and historically specific, as Fieldsville students draw upon available discourses to locate themselves within an idyllic (and implicitly white) rural. This desirable rural is distinguished from a racialized urban and global “elsewhere,” as well as from the pathologized rural that dominates contemporary media and policy discourse in Canada. However, while the rural occupies a significant place in Fieldsville students' current identities and imagined futures, these young people's experiences of becoming in and through rural space are by no means uniform. Rather, subjectivity is constituted through the interplay of social and spatial location, and the space of Fieldsville is deeply gendered and classed. In the next chapter, I examine how issues of gender, class and rurality intersect in the formation of students' current realities and future imaginings.

Chapter 5

Gendered Ruralities: Power, Positioning and Possibility

As students stream into the classroom after lunch, Mrs. Sullivan weaves throughout the bustling bodies distributing the first handout of today's *Real Game* lesson, "Fair Play." The intended objective of this lesson is for students to "reflect on attitudes and preconceived notions they have about the roles of men and women in society" (Barry 2005, 120). The handout is entitled "Man's Work or Woman's Work?" and is structured as a two-part survey. Under the heading "Occupation," a chart at the top of the page lists several jobs in the paid labour force, including Cook, Plumber, Nurse, Architect, and others. Adjacent to this list are three columns titled, "Male," "Female," and "Both," with space for a checkmark under the chosen category. Beneath it, a second chart with the identical layout is titled "Activity." This list includes: Paying bills, Housecleaning, Cooking, Child care, Grocery shopping, Laundry and ironing, and Taking out the garbage. A series of bolded questions at the top of the page ask: "Which of these occupations and household activities most suit males? Which most suit females? Which can be done well by both?"

Students are still settling into their desks and recapping recess events with friends when Mrs. Sullivan introduces the lesson. "Today we're going to be talking about sex-role stereotyping," she says, using one of the vocabulary terms laid out in the RG Facilitator's Guide. "Now, just so nobody is disappointed, we're not talking about *sex*," she adds, drawing laughter from blushing students. Now everyone is paying attention. "What do you think I mean by sex-role stereotyping?"

"Like, women can't be mechanics and men can't clean house?" Rebecca suggests, her voice rising at the end of the sentence so it comes out like a question. "It's true!" shouts Dillon.

“Okay,” Mrs. Sullivan takes control again and tries a different tack. “Are there ever times when you feel pressured to do or not do something because you're a boy or a girl?” Dillon is the first to respond. “No,” he says, definitively. Turning in his front row seat so that he can face the room, he extends his arms into the air and sticks out his chest as he announces triumphantly, “Guys rule everything!” This provokes responses throughout the room. Some students express disgust with a dramatic “Ugh!” or “What?” while others chuckle or shake their heads. Over top of the commotion, Dillon declares, “Guys are strong and women are weak!” He laughs confidently and looks around the room as if daring others to take him on.

As the discussion continues, students weigh in on issues of gendered expectations, responsibilities and embodiment. Mrs. Sullivan encourages them to reflect on common stereotypes surrounding work and parenting, but it is often difficult to discern whether a statement is offered as stereotype or fact. For instance, Jessie's assertion that “girls mature faster than guys,” is met with murmurs of agreement throughout the room, as is Tanya's statement that “guys are normally rough with kids.” Sometimes stereotypes are named more explicitly, such as “some guys could be pressured if they chose to be a hairdresser” (Paul), or “guys can design clothes even though girls mostly do that” (Tanya). When Kristin states that “girls can have babies and guys can't,” Jonathon points out that, “a man could adopt a baby.” In another exchange, when someone suggests that only men can work as security guards, Ben says, “One time I was at this concert and there was a security guard there and she was big. I was like, 'I don't wanna mess with her!'” This comment draws laughter from his classmates.

After discussing the “Man's Work or Woman's Work?” survey in small groups, students share their responses as a class. Although most recognize that they are supposed to check “Both” for each occupation and activity, some remain committed to a gendered division of labour. A heated debate breaks out over the question of whether a woman can work as a plumber. “I think

only a man should be a plumber because even with a wrench it's still gonna be really hard to pull, so strength is required for a plumber," says Cody. Kristin's hand shoots into the air. "Both could go to school to be a plumber and so both have the same knowledge. And a woman can be just as strong as a guy," she responds. Cody snorts, and says "except for you." This comment – said under his breath, but just loud enough for all to hear – is directed as a jab at Kristin's petite build, which she is frequently teased about. Mrs. Sullivan jumps in: "Now that's a personal attack, and as soon as you go to a personal attack it undermines your argument because it means you have to make yourself stronger. So Kristin, you're saying a woman could train herself to be strong to be a plumber?" Kristin nods, and says "Ya." Mrs. Sullivan turns to Cody. "Cody, would you agree?" He shrugs. "Ya. But most guys are stronger."

As a class, they continue to move down the list of occupations and activities, ultimately concluding that each one is fit for "Both." Mrs. Sullivan asks, "Do you think a trend will start to develop here?" Rebecca calls out, "We're all equal!" Jonathon nods, adding "There's nothing that a male can do that a female can't do." Despite these proclamations of equality, the room feels tense. From my seat at the back, I can see that many students look exhausted and a few have placed their heads on the desks. Moving on to a handout showing Statistics Canada data on gender-based income disparities, Mrs. Sullivan asks students why they think it may be that, as a group, men make significantly more money than women. "Harder jobs!" calls out Paul. "Work harder!" says Tim. "Different types of jobs?" Nate suggests. When their teacher asks if men and women *should* receive the same pay for the same work, students nod and a few give a halfhearted, "ya," but many appear to have withdrawn from the conversation. Mrs. Sullivan seems to notice the strained atmosphere, and although they have not completed all of the RG handouts for this lesson, she lets the class out early for afternoon recess.

Reflecting on my fieldnotes later that day, I try to make sense of what I have just

observed. Students had seemed quite engaged when the conversation began, enthusiastically calling out responses, but a sense of tension, even hostility, hung over the room by the lesson's end. By this point, major disagreements divided the classroom, with some students committing to a gendered division of labour, and others insisting that both men and women can do all types of work. With a few exceptions, it tended to be the “popular” boys who were most adamant about maintaining gendered divisions, while some of the boys who occupy more marginalized social positions seemed more open to challenging these stereotypes. Beyond the question of whether students hold gendered beliefs, what I found especially striking was the fact that some boys had confidently performed sexist masculinities before their classmates and teacher. Having read the RG materials before class, I had anticipated that students would generally take up the position of “we're all equal” because this was clearly presented as the “right” approach to gender. By contrast, it seems that for some Fieldsville boys, the “right” approach to gender requires reasserting gendered boundaries and refusing to waver on traditional stereotypes.

When I mention this to Mrs Sullivan later that afternoon, she agrees that she found parts of the discussion troubling, but says she's pleased that they've cultivated a classroom environment where students feel they can express their views openly. It's true that rather than simply restating the position advocated by their teacher, students appeared to be grappling with their own views on this topic, at the same time that they were performing their own gendered identities for others. A central concern within current critical research in education is the problem of how to address forms of oppression that operate beneath claims of equality (e.g., Baker 2009; McLeod and Yates 2006; Ringrose 2007). A different set of pedagogical questions arise in a context where some socially powerful students invest in overt expressions of sexism. What conditions lead these particular boys to identify with sexist masculinities within a broader socio-historical context where ideals of gender equality are widely celebrated? What

implications does this have for these young people's gendered subjectivity formation, and the available masculinities and femininities that may be performed in this context? It seems that for some of these boys sexist masculinities offer socially rewarding identities. Could their aggressive defense of rigid gender roles reflect a perceived threat against hegemonic masculinities? (Davies 1989)

A series of focus groups held in the two weeks following this lesson provide an opportunity to explore these issues further. Each conversation begins with reflections on the “Fair Play” lesson, and then expands to explore issues of gender more broadly. Students speak about the significance of gender in their lives, touching on family, school, and peer relationships – and often discuss these topics in ways that are well-documented in the literature on gender and schooling (e.g. Epstein 1998; Nayak and Kehily 2007; Reay 2001; Renold 2005). For instance, some girls express frustration over being excluded from soccer games at recess, or being expected to give boys the answers to their homework, while some boys complain that teachers favour the girls and that they themselves are the targets of greater surveillance and discipline. Students draw upon a range of discourses to speak about gender in their lives, including liberal feminist discourses of equality, sex-role discourses rooted in biological determinism, and nostalgic discourses celebrating a 'traditional' gendered division of labour. Despite the uptake of sexist perspectives, though, few students regard sexism as a significant issue in their lives. Instead, sexism is generally dismissed as something located in the “olden days” of history, a past problem that has largely been overcome.

This chapter explores how young people in Fieldsville negotiate their identities as gendered subjects, and how these gendered identifications come to inform their narratives of the future. Approaching gender as something that is discursively and relationally enacted, rather than a stable property residing in individuals (Butler 1990; Connell 2005; Davies 2003), the analysis

examines the contextual underpinnings and effects of these gendered performances. That is, Fieldsville students are not simply “doing girl” or “doing boy,” but are working to produce themselves as appropriately gendered subjects in relation to the dominant expectations of this socio-spatial context (Kenway, Kraack and Hickey-Moody 2006; Pini, Price and MacDonald 2010; Skelton 2001). In addition to highlighting how femininities and masculinities are constructed in and through rurality, I show how students' gendered performances are further differentiated by class (Hicks 2005; Reay 2002; Skeggs 1997). Focus group transcripts are read not only as expressions of these multiple discourses, but also as gendered texts in themselves, as the group discussions serve as a forum for performing and evaluating gendered identities (Allen 2005).

After mapping out the peer hierarchies in which Fieldsville students negotiate their everyday gendered performances, the final section explores how intersections of gender, class and rurality come to bear on students' imagined futures. More specifically, this section examines gendered patterns in the relationship between students' spatial identifications and embodied visions of future success. Many Fieldsville girls explicitly locate their futures within geographies of country living, yet fantasize about futures as actors and fashion designers, valorizing an embodiment of urban professionalism. By contrast, Fieldsville boys appear to have access to imagined adult masculinities that align more easily with their rural investments, featuring occupations in which strength, risk and physical dominance are integral to success, such as police officer or mechanic.

What shapes the gendered patterns in the relationship between students' spatial identifications and embodied adulthoods? What conditions give rise to these competing investments? Guided by these questions, the chapter explores how Fieldsville students manage intersections of gender, class and space as they imagine futures. I argue that the gendered

contradictions in students' spatial investments and future embodiments must be explored in relation to i) the gendered context of rural social space, where masculinities and femininities are unevenly valued; and ii) the context of neo-liberal discourses of meritocracy and upward mobility. These mobility narratives have particular implications for girls, who are positioned as the beneficiaries of apparently unlimited opportunities opened up in a post-feminist world (Baker 2010; Goodkind 2009; Walkerdine 2003; Weis 2008).

Popular culture emerges as a key resource informing students' gendered performances. In the words of Anoop Nayak and Mary Jane Kehily, “popular culture is an arena where fantasy, power and gender ideologies come into play, but it is also the space within which we attempt to produce our imaginary 'selves' in ever incomplete ways” (2007, 35). The analysis in this chapter illuminates how young people draw upon available cultural resources in order to identify with particular futures. However, this process is highly complex – far from simple models of career aspiration – as youth engage affective investments across different gendered geographies in order to imagine a future of belonging. But before turning to questions of gendered futures, I first examine how students navigate the gendered geographies of rurality.

Gendered Ruralities

It is the first day of school, and I have spent the morning mostly observing from the back of the classroom. As students retrieve lunches from overstuffed backpacks, Mrs. Sullivan strikes up a conversation with Kyle about a wilderness skills program that he completed over the summer. I mention that my brother participated in the same program when he was younger, and Kyle turns around in his seat so that we can chat about his experiences. When Mrs. Sullivan leaves us to continue the conversation while we eat our sandwiches, Kyle suddenly shifts his focus from

camping and canoeing, to romance and fighting. He tells me that while playing “truth or dare” around the campfire one night, somebody dared him to kiss a girl who “liked” him. This made another boy “real jealous” so he challenged Kyle to a fight. At this point in the story, Kyle stands up so that he can act out the moves he used to conquer his opponent. “I didn't wanna hurt him,” he explains, demonstrating how he hooked his elbow around the boy's neck and pinned him to the ground. Then, smiling, he confides, “I'm a good fighter. I don't take mercy. Once I'm angry...” he trails off, allowing me to fill in the blank. Just then, the bell rings indicating that it's time to go outside for recess. Kyle seems pleased as he zips up his lunch bag. When I ask how he and the other boy got along after that night, he smiles and tells me that he fought him again the next day.

Kyle's re-enactment of his summer adventures marks my entry into Fieldsville social relations in two ways. First, he invites me into a conversation about kissing and fighting that he likely would not have shared with a teacher (as signalled by his abrupt shift in tone after Mrs. Sullivan leaves the area). This might be interpreted as a sign of approval, or perhaps as a test, pushing the limits of acceptable conversation to see how I would respond to this kind of talk. Second, Kyle invites me into the school's gendered relations by introducing himself through an exaggerated performance of masculinity – one centred on outdoor adventure, heteronormative relationships, and physical domination. This was a masculinity that I would come to know well over the course of my three months in Fieldsville. Occupying the top of school social hierarchies and the core of imagined rural geographies, this dominant masculinity served as the primary reference point against which other gendered performances were evaluated. Kyle's story illustrates how intersections of gender and rurality featured centrally in my research long before the “Fair Play” lesson in the RG, which occurred over a month into the school term.

Within ethnographies of schooling and identity, a great deal of attention has been devoted

to the make-up and workings of internal social hierarchies (Bettie 2003; Morris 2008; Reay 2001; Renold 2005; Willis 1977). Book titles such as *Jocks and Burnouts* (Eckert 1989) and *Freaks, Geeks and Cool Kids* (Milner 2004) highlight social cliques as a legitimate object of scholarly inquiry and a rich site in which to examine the (re)production of social inequalities. Such studies analyze how symbolic boundaries are drawn around categories of student, often in ways that reflect divisions of race, class, and gender. Yet, as Shauna Pomerantz notes in her study of girls, style and school identities, students' social groupings are often difficult to pin down, as their porous boundaries and competing definitions defy the ethnographer's desire to map (2008, 68).

An added difficulty in mapping Fieldsville hierarchies derives, somewhat paradoxically, from the extremely small student population. When students spoke about the different “groups” that made up their school, their descriptions rarely exceeded the boundaries of Mrs. Sullivan's grade 7/8 class, save for the occasional mention of a grade 6 student who hung out with the older students. Thus, my analysis of these groupings must be read with an understanding that these patterns are charted within a population of roughly 30 students. That said, Fieldsville students do see social divisions within their school, although they often locate themselves outside of these cliques, describing their own positioning as “in between,” or “just normal.”

Throughout focus groups, interviews, and playground conversations, students consistently drew attention to two main groupings in Fieldsville Public School: 1) the “preps” or “popular” group, and 2) the “dirts.” Other marginal categories, such as “geeks,” “field group,” or “Yugio nerds,” were also mentioned, but with nowhere near the same consistency and focus. What I attempt to show throughout this chapter is how these two social groupings are produced through the interplay of gender, class and rurality. The division between the “popular” and “dirt” groups expresses a fundamentally classed distinction. However, the significance of this

positioning for one's social identity is deeply gendered.

As mentioned previously, a dominant rural masculinity occupies a powerful position within Fieldsville hierarchies, evidenced by students' consistent centring of Cody and Andrew in their description of school groups. For instance, when I ask Kyle where he sees himself fitting in these groupings, he says, "Like, I hang out with like Cody and Andrew. Cody and Andrew are pretty popular in this school. They're my friends so I'd say I'm pretty, pretty right in there." Similarly, Rebecca tells me, "Everyone moves around every once and a while, but Cody and Andrew, they stay put wherever they are [laughs]." While Cody and Andrew are firmly positioned within the "popular group," some boys who are occasionally labelled "dirts" are still able to mobilize a degree of social power through their performance of masculinity. For instance, during focus groups, Cody and Paul consistently make jokes at the expense of their friend Dillon, suggesting that he is a "dirt." These jokes, while always presented in the spirit of "just kidding around," draw repeated attention to Dillon's class status. Nevertheless, even though Dillon is viewed by others to come from a poorer family, he regularly hangs out with the "popular" group, and wields significant social power through exaggerated displays of rural masculinity. By contrast, girls who are labelled "dirts" have a much more difficult time gaining social capital, as I demonstrate later in the chapter.

Rachael Sullivan has highlighted the need for more critical scholarship exploring "ideas around self-presentation and gender norms within the rural 'everyday'" (2009, para 30). Her research with queer women in Northern Ontario combines insights from Butler's theory of performativity with Lefebvre's analysis of spatial practices in order to explore how gender performances are read in relation to a particular socio-spatial context. Sullivan positions this work as part of a "growing field of both sociological and feminist examinations of gender and sexuality, which consider the importance of space, place, and location" (2009, para 30). More

and more, studies with rural young people attend to this interplay between gender and space, exploring how gendered identities are crafted in and through rurality (Keddie 2007; Kenway, Kraack and Hickey-Moody 2006; Morris 2008; Ni Laoire and Fielding 2006; Pini, Price and McDonald 2010). Within this emerging literature, however, there remains a decided emphasis on young rural *masculinities*, with fewer studies of young femininities in rural space.⁹ This disproportionate focus may have roots in a history of youth studies research on white, working-class masculinities. (Indeed, a considerable proportion of these studies reference Paul Willis's canonical text, *Learning to Labour*). On the other hand, while studies of girls and girlhoods have emerged as a field in their own right over the past two decades (Mitchell and Reid-Walsh 2008), girls' studies research within Western contexts remains predominantly urban in focus. In addition to leaving a significant gap in the literature, the disproportionate focus on rural boys naturalizes a gendered spatialization of the rural as implicitly masculine (Jones 1999; Campbell et al. 2006). In the analysis that follows, I explore how femininities and masculinities are co-constructed in and through the rural space of Fieldsville.

Mapping rural masculinities and femininities

One site in which this co-construction of gender and rurality becomes apparent is in Fieldsville students' narratives of rural space. During the first set of focus groups, as students spoke at length about their relationship to their local community, I began to notice a gendered mapping in the ways that these young people locate themselves in their rural environment. Namely, students tend to draw upon gendered images of rural masculinities centred on outdoor activities and mobility, and rural femininities centred on feelings of community and an aesthetic appreciation

⁹There are some exceptions to this general focus on masculinities within studies of gender and rurality. In particular, Jo Little has done extensive research on gender, sexuality and rurality that also examines femininities (e.g., Little 2002; Little 2003; Little and Leyshon 2003; Little and Morris 2005; Little and Panelli 2007). However, Little's research does not generally focus on young people.

of natural surroundings. In the previous chapter, I described how several Fieldsville boys construct the country as a space of possibility where they are free to engage in activities that are central to their identities. These boys emphasize activities like hunting and fishing as defining features of a rural masculinity that is passed on from father to son:

KC: So hunting is important to you.

Cody: Oh ya.

Paul: Hunting and fishing.

KC: Ya. You too, Dillon?

Dillon: [nods] Fishing's better.

Paul: My dad's like a, pretty much a pro fisherman.

Cody: He *is* a pro fisherman.

KC: Do you all, like, go hunting and fishing with your dads?

Paul: Yep. [Cody nods]

Dillon: Ya.

Cody: And for my birthday, like, I invite all my friends back to the camp (Paul: Huntin' camp) and we like, shoot skeet and everything and we couldn't do that with, if you lived in the city.

Dillon: No. Pull out your gun and a cop would be there in like fifteen seconds. [Paul laughs]

Cody: We aren't even supposed to be shootin' skeet but we just do anyways for my birthday.

Even as the boys speak casually of these activities as common practices within their everyday geographies, their narratives are laced with an air of competition that suggests they must constantly prove themselves as sufficiently rural and masculine. In a different focus group, three boys bolster their own rural masculinities by questioning the degree to which Cody embodies this performance:

Kyle: It's like, Cody and Andrew, they're pretty tough. Like, I can take down/

Justin: Cody's not that tough, he's just skin and bones... Like, he takes three shots with a gun and his shoulder will be killing him. He'll go, "ahh" [reaches up to his shoulder as if in pain]. He has to put a pillow there.

Shaun: Oh wow.

Justin: And me and Andrew, we'll just keep shootin', shootin', shootin'.

Kyle: Like, Andrew has meat on his shoulder. He'll just/

Justin: So do I!

...Shaun: I dare Cody to shoot my brother's gun. It would knock him right on his ass.

By suggesting that Cody may not be as tough as he claims, these boys call into question his dominant position within peer social hierarchies (albeit from the somewhat protected space of the focus group). The exchange highlights the fluidity, even fragility, of rural masculinities, which require endless competitive displays of strength and outdoorsmanship. While describing the specific contours of this hegemonic masculinity, I must be careful not to reproduce essentialized depictions of gender in rural space. Rather, I seek to highlight a spatialized and gendered discourse through which some students forge identifications, while illustrating that this idealized rural masculinity is highly unstable and contested.

While rough, outdoor displays constitute defining features of rurality for many Fieldsville boys, these are rarely mentioned by girls. The only girls who identify as hunters are Arbor and Tanya, both of whom occupy marginalized positions within peer social hierarchies, and are viewed by others to come from poorer families. These girls speak of hunting as a collective activity that they do with their families, rather than an individual, competitive practice. As Tanya explains: "Some girls don't believe in hunting because they believe it's better for a guy to do it. But not really. Because mostly, my whole family, all of my girls in my family are either back at the [hunting] camp on the weekends or hunting." When other girls mention hunting, it is

generally described in gendered terms:

Jessie: Whenever my dad's gone hunting, we call it "Girls' Weekend." We have like, my aunt Suzie... and we have Bonnie, which is her daughter, my cousin. And I'll have like, Amanda or Kristin or someone up. [My sister] will have a few of her friends over. We just like, hang out and our junk food is like, pizza and chips and all that. We watch a whole bunch of chick flicks. And the odd time my uncle Frank comes out for Girls' Weekend. And the last time we actually watched Ice Princess. And after we watched it he was like, "Wow, they need to make a second one!" [laughs] He's like, all up for chick flicks and stuff, so I was like, "Hey, Uncle Frank, I'm watchin' a chick flick," and he's like, "Not fair!" [laughs]

KC: So he doesn't go hunting?

Jessie: No.

KC: How come?

Jessie: Well he does sometimes, ya. But like, the odd time on Girls' Weekend he's not hunting. So sometimes, like the very odd time, he'll come over.

Jessie's description of "Girls' Weekend" constructs hunting as a masculine practice located in the wilderness, outside of the rural home. Delighting in the fact that her Uncle Frank sometimes joins them for a "chick flick," Jessie's playful description of this transgression highlights the gendered boundaries of the ritual. While the men are out hunting, the girls and women in this story emerge as fundamentally social beings, defined by their location in family networks and friendships. Many girls characterize Fieldsville by its close community ties, particularly those revolving around the family:

Kristin: See like, my aunt and uncle and my cousins live across from me and my grandma, my great-grandma and my aunt and uncle and my cousins, other cousins, live just down the road from me, like right there. (Jessie: We're close to family) And around the corner, up the hill, lives my grandma. So like [laughs]/

Rebecca: All of Fieldsville is like my family.

Hilary: I know, same. My whole dad's side of the family, like, um, my grandma and grandpa live there, and then across the road is my Aunt Debbie, Uncle Harold, down on the, like down that way where the dump is, they live like, not on that road, but like, somewhere there. And um, my aunt and uncle live there too.

Rebecca: Well, my whole street is all Newmans [Rebecca's family name]. That's right. By defining their own rural location in terms of proximity to various relatives, the girls are literally mapping Fieldsville through its familial networks. The roads and hills of their local geography are narrated according to the people one can find there, as well as the relationships between them. This emphasis on social relations generates a very different rural geography from one defined by the mastery of wilderness spaces through hunting and ATViing.

Beyond simply acknowledging the differences in these gendered place narratives, it is important to examine the uneven value assigned to masculinities and femininities within rural space. Based on an analysis of children's literature, Jones (1999) argues that idyllic constructions of childhood and nature create an image of a 'natural' childhood that is assumed to be male. As a result, he suggests that rural childhoods are dominantly imagined as *masculine* childhoods of rough and tumble outdoor play, such that, in order to fit into "perfect (country) childhood(s), girls have to become nominal boys to fully take part" (Jones 1999, 126; see also Cummins 2009, 77). Jones's argument can be related to students' gendered mappings of leisure spaces in Fieldsville. Many boys define their lived geographies by an abundance of outdoor activities that are only available in the country; by contrast, some girls bemoan a lack of social activities, and say all there is to do is "hang out" with friends and family. While these girls invest heavily in the social geographies of their rural community, they appear to perceive fewer opportunities to perform young femininities in and through the rural landscape.

In their introduction to *Country Boys*, Campbell, Bell and Finney (2006) argue that rural masculinity is not just an identity attached to boys and men in remote locations, but is produced widely and of significance across gender and geographical location. They recall how past American presidents like George W. Bush mobilized rural imagery in order to convey power and toughness, "deriving symbolic power through the imagery of country boys" (1). This power

comes, in large part, from the fact that rural masculinities are deemed *authentically masculine*; that is, “real men are rural men” (2). Drawing upon Connell's concept of “hegemonic masculinity” Campbell, Bell and Finney highlight the contextual and relational character of this gendered construct, as “the version of masculinity that's considered legitimate, 'natural,' or unquestionable in a particular set of gender relations” (10). There is no single hegemonic masculinity across space and time. Rather, the power of hegemonic masculinity derives from its invisibility, as a naturalized and valued way of being, within a particular relational context. In his empirical contribution to this edited collection, Campbell (2006) highlights how, because of strong associations between rurality and masculinity, public performances of rural masculinity can work to secure one's status as legitimately local. From this perspective, Fieldsville boys' embodied re-enactments of hunting expeditions or ATV adventures may serve to constitute both masculinity and *localness*, proving one's legitimate community membership and claim to place. What gendered practices are available for Fieldsville girls to access such socio-spatial legitimacy? If, as Campbell, Bell and Finney suggest, “real men are rural men” (2006, 2), does that imply that the rural is always-already masculine? What space does this leave for rural femininities? The following section continues to probe these questions as I explore how students negotiate the gendered power relations at their rural school.

Gendered hierarchies in rural social space

Rebecca: But like, Cody, he is the worst!

Hilary: For all that.

Amanda: He thinks that he/

Rebecca: He's like, the big man. (Amanda: Ya) On top of everything.

Amanda: And everyone like, owes him/

Rebecca: Stuff.

Amanda: Like, the world!

Hilary: "I can kick your butt at wrestling!" Obviously.

Rebecca: Like the world is his.

Expressing frustration over Cody's claims to power, these girls demonstrate a keen awareness of how gender relations structure social hierarchies at Fieldsville Public School. As they describe him, Cody performs a dominant masculinity wherein physical strength is taken-for-granted as an entitlement to power. The girls are critical of Cody's arrogance, always assuming that he's "the big man," as well as the way he demeans others. However, when I ask about their personal relationship to Cody, the image of this dominant masculinity takes on new complexity:

KC: Would you consider [Cody] a friend of yours?

Amanda and Rebecca: Ya.

Hilary: Ya, he's a friend but like [Amanda laughs] he just doesn't understand. I don't know how to explain it.

Rebecca: Like sometimes when he's joking around it's funny, but when he goes too far, it's like, "Okay, Cody, you've gone too far."

Hilary: Ya, we get the point.

KC: Ya, that's interesting how it can be, you know, that you say that he doesn't understand and he's a jerk and he's mean and stuff, but then he's also your friend.

Amanda: He can be really nice though, too. (Rebecca: Ya) Like when I came into class today [after being sick] he gave me a hug and was like, "We missed you!" But yet like, ya, later he'll be like, "Oh my god!"

Rebecca: Ya, "You're so bad!"

This interaction highlights the complex power dynamics that surround gendered relations at Fieldsville. The girls' contradictory statements regarding their friend Cody must not be dismissed as the indecision of flighty teenagers. Rather, their ambivalent orientation toward this hegemonic

masculinity is indicative of the networks of power in which students forge identities, and sheds light onto the girls' struggles to establish themselves as appropriately gendered subjects. These kinds of contradictions arose repeatedly during the focus groups about gender. In line with the "Fair Play" message advocated in the RG, a liberal discourse of equality often served as the reference point for these conversations, with both boys and girls making statements like "Any person can be anything," (Kyle), and "I'm just saying if you love it, do it" (Jessie). However, as students discussed their social worlds and ideas about the future, this gender-neutral position was consistently interrupted and undermined, sometimes implicitly, sometimes quite explicitly. What became clear was that the critique of work-related "sex-role stereotyping" that students had been exposed to in the RG provided few tools for responding to the gendered contours of the everyday, and the implications of these for their imagined futures.

As evident in the classroom scene that begins this chapter, several boys openly challenge the RG's discourse of equality by claiming masculine superiority attributed to biological sex differences. Many who take up this position consider these innate differences to be common sense. For instance, Justin distances his own views from those he considers prejudicial, stating "people get made fun of and it's not right because guys can do anything women can do, and women can do *almost* everything guys can do." From this perspective, apparently 'natural' differences render women physically incapable of performing some jobs, as bodily strength is idealized as the key factor enabling or limiting access to careers, and ultimately, life success. For instance, Dillon equates strength with educational opportunity, explaining "Cuz we're stronger and we can do more things, more jobs. Like, in college we could apply for more things." Some boys contest the fact that strength is an exclusively masculine domain. For instance, Kyle disagrees with the claim that women aren't fit for certain jobs, saying "Not really. Anyone can be strong." Justin nods, and admits, "Ya, I seen a couple of strong women." But even as this

position opens up the possibility for women to be strong like men, what remains unquestioned is the significance of physical strength as the measure of one's personal capacity.

This image of strong masculinities must be understood within the context of rural social space. As noted in the previous section, rural gender relations have historically centred on a hegemonic masculinity characterized by toughness, competitiveness and outdoorsmanship (Cambpell, Bell and Finney, 2006; Kenway, Kraack and Hickey-Moody 2006; Pini, Price and MacDonald 2010). Many boys invested in this masculinity during focus groups, displayed through both verbal and embodied performances. Consider the following exchange:

Tim: [Stands up and grabs Nick's shirt at his shoulders] Bring it on, buddy! [laughing]

Nick: [Sits down. Turns toward the camera, eyes wide] Little fight there!

... Tim: What we just did was very manly.

KC: What makes that manly?

Tim: Ah, men love to argue and fight. They love to wrestle. Football, hockey, wam!

It's significant that 13-year-old Tim uses the word "manly" to categorize this performance of masculinity. In her research on sexuality in the English primary school, Emma Renold draws attention to "how discourses of sexuality and gender interact and intersect with generational discourses" (Renold 2006, 506). Fieldsville students regularly draw upon developmental discourses to position themselves as a particular type of gendered subject. For instance, Jessie and Kristin complain of how boys boast publically about their maturing bodies:

Kristin: One night on the bus they were all talking about their armpit hair. (Jessie: Ya!) It was just, ugh. They were like, "I have more, do you wanna see?" And I'm like, "No, I do not wanna see anything!" [Covers her eyes with her hands]

... KC: Why do you think they do that? Like, compare armpit hair.

Jessie: Be like, manly or something.

Kristin: Cuz they try, they try to say that all the other boys haven't hit puberty, or

whatever, they're the first to hit puberty. They're like more, you know/

Jessie: Macho.

Kristin: Macho and grown up and stuff like that.

Just as developmental discourses are mobilized in the constitution of “strong” masculinities, boys who do not embody this performance are penalized through teasing about their bodies being small or weak. The assumed connection between physical strength and social power is made explicit as boys articulate what makes someone popular:

Paul: Popular kids are pretty much the ones that/

Dillon: Like, the strongest and the biggest and/

Paul: Strongest and the rebels.

These boys define popularity according to characteristics that are closely associated with masculinity – strength, size, rebellion – particularly in working-class contexts, where critical education research has shown how tough masculinities are performed through a rejection of feminized academic work (Epstein 1998; Keddie 2007; Morris 2008; Weis 2008; Willis 1977). I witnessed countless occasions of boys reminding others, and being reminded of, the ways to be appropriately masculine. One memorable exchange is captured in this field note:

The boys are playing 21 [the school-appropriate name for Black Jack] at the back table again. The group is larger today than usual, and they have pulled up an extra desk to accommodate all the bodies. Jonathon deals from his seat in a chair at the back, and Cody and Andrew call out orders from their perches atop the tall stools on the opposite side of the table. I tune in when I hear Cody say to Scott, “Did you just say, ‘May I have a card?’” Scott nods sheepishly, having obviously failed at his attempt to blend into the lunch time routine. Cody laughs, and says “You’re such a nancy!” The other boys laugh and Scott blushes. “Ah, leave him alone,” says Andrew, laughing.

Scott, the unfortunate object of Cody’s masculine display, is one of the so-called “nice guys” in the class. In focus group discussions, the girls speak warmly, but peripherally, of the few “nice guys,” who tend to occupy lower status positions in peer hierarchies. During our interview, Scott

describes an ongoing personal struggle over his small physical build:

Scott: At my old school I'd get teased every single day.

KC: Oh, about what?

Scott: Well, about my height and [pause] that's what I'd get teased about.

KC: That was the big thing? Ya. But does that not happen here?

Scott: No.

KC: Oh, that's good.

Scott: Doesn't happen, like, every day, but once in a while it'll happen, it'll pop up.

KC: Mm. Does it bother you?

Scott: Big time. Last year I had a guy, um, tell me that I was two foot somethin'. And then I came home and told my dad and he was like, "Just wait. You'll grow full size and you'll be bigger 'n him and you'll say, 'Ha ha, who's bigger now?'" I always think, "Am I always gonna be a little dwarf? Or am I gonna turn out to be just fine?"

Scott's discouragement over constant teasing about his height shows how hegemonic ideals of masculinity powerfully shape students' social worlds even when they are not personally invested in this image. When I ask Scott what kinds of qualities he looks for in a friend, he says, "Nice, caring, there for you, [pause] that's the kind of friends I look for." These are not characteristics generally ascribed to the rural masculinity idealized by many of his classmates. Scott's identification with an alternative, "caring" masculinity points toward some diversity in the gendered identities taken up by Fieldsville students. Nevertheless, my observation of his public humiliation for asking politely during a card game, as well as his own description of enduring regular teasing about his body, suggest that Scott must continually negotiate hegemonic gendered expectations in his everyday school experiences. Scott's personal story also points toward the effects these gendered expectations can have on boys who don't fit this masculine ideal.

In addition to ideas about embodiment, students also draw distinctions in terms of gender-appropriate ways of being. While supposedly natural differences in bodily strength serve to legitimize women's exclusion from particular jobs, assumptions about what is and isn't "normal" work to police feminine and masculine roles. Discussing the movie *Meet The Parents*, in which Ben Stiller's character works as a nurse, a group of boys insist that this career choice is "just not normal" for a man (Cody). When I ask them what might happen to a man who works as a nurse, Paul says: "Well, it depends what kind of person you are. Like, if you were like, if you were me, then ya, I'd probably make fun of him. If you were somebody else, probably wouldn't say anything." This response provides yet another example of how students cultivate gendered identities through focus group discussions. Paul secures his own masculinity by asserting that he would police gendered boundaries around work that he considers inappropriate for a man.

This kind of gender policing is heavily classed. In the previous chapter, I described how classed boundaries are maintained in the local school culture through the discourse of "dirt." While Fieldsville might be categorized as a working-class community, students draw subtle distinctions between those who have access to more – such as brand name clothing and iPods – and those who do not.¹⁰ As a category commonly assigned to students considered to come from poorer families, the "dirt" label draws upon a long history of marking classed bodies as degenerate (Skeggs 2004). While a classed judgement is implicit in the term, being a "dirt" is usually framed around the lifestyle of someone who is said to not care about hygiene or appearance. Of course, the making of class is a deeply gendered process (Skeggs 2004), and because of historical associations between femininity and cleanliness, the discourse of "dirt"

¹⁰Students' parents generally work in manufacturing, maintenance, retail, or clerical work, while a few receive Employment Insurance or other forms of social assistance. Some of those who are seen to be the most well-off work shift-work in factories (like Rebecca's parents). Kyle's mother is a nurse and Kristin's father works at a University. According to the Ontario Ministry of Education's website, only 6% of students in Fieldsville have parents with "some university education," compared to the provincial average of 36.9%.

marks bodies in gendered ways that are especially devastating for girls. In the following exchange, as three boys discuss who can legitimately work as a plumber, classed and gendered discourses serve to push their classmate, Tanya, outside the boundaries of acceptable femininity.

Dillon: [Re. being a plumber] That's not really suitable for a woman.

KC: What makes it not suitable?

Dillon: It's like, it's a dirty job and most women don't wanna do it.

Paul: And if they, if they do wanna/

Cody: Unless they're Tanya [all three boys laugh]

When I ask Cody to explain this comment, he says, “Cuz most girls are like, no offense, like, they don't like to get dirty a lot, they like to be clean. But you know, some girls, they don't care what they do, as long as they're making money.” Here, classed and gendered discourses intersect so that women are doubly excluded: those who fulfill gendered expectations are excluded from certain jobs, and those who transgress gendered expectations are deemed dirty and unfeminine. Later in this same discussion, the boys describe popularity as a gendered phenomenon that ranks girls in terms of looks. As a result, the necessity to establish oneself as not a “dirt” is more pressing for (working-class) girls than for boys, as this category is more likely to dominate their identity.

KC: Do you think it's different for guys and girls what makes them popular?

Cody: Ya.

KC: How so?

Paul: Girls are like, “Oh ya!” [Said in a high-pitched voice as he holds his hands up by his shoulders, wrists bent]

Dillon: But mostly, like there's certain/

Cody: Like, there's some girls that are geeks¹¹, and there's some that are dirty.

¹¹The term “geek” was not widely used among Fieldsville students. In this case, Cody seems to be referring to girls

Dillon: There's a couple girls in this school that are dirty.

Cody: But like, girls kinda, hard to explain but like, they look better when they're like, hard to explain. Help me out here [looks to Paul]. They look better when they're like/

Paul: Wearing good clothes.

Cody: Wearing good clothes. Not dirty clothes. And their hair is/

Dillon: Not came to school with like, ripped shoes and ripped shorts.

It is impossible to separate the workings of gender and class in this co-construction of “popular” and “dirty” femininities. Recall that in a previous exchange, Paul and Dillon described the popular students as being those who are strong and rebellious, elevating a tough masculinity to the top of social hierarchies. However, their criteria for the popularity of *girls* are quite different, as they draw upon historically entrenched images of femininity that centre on dress and beauty.

In a different focus group, three girls who are sometimes labelled “dirts” offer their own perspective on the entanglement of class and gender in Fieldsville social hierarchies. The girls have just been describing how they are sometimes teased for playing sports at recess.

KC: And do you think guys ever get teased for stuff here?

Tanya: No, not really because guys can get away from it pretty much. Like what sports do we have that guys, that's really girlish?

KC: Or, are there other things, like beyond sports, that guys get teased for?

Christie: Ya. Like Paul, he gets teased for, most of the time, because Rebecca and them don't really like me and [my sister] and Tanya and that, so when Paul tries to hang out with us, they all make fun of him.

...KC: What kind of teasing? Like, what/

Christie: Like, “Why are you hanging out with them? They're the low class people.” And saying rude things to him to make him feel like he shouldn't be our friend.

who are not viewed as “popular,” but are not subject to the classed inscription of “dirt.” While members of the “popular” and “dirt” groups were fairly well marked, other students occupied marginal positions that were not explicitly categorized.

This is the first time I have ever heard a Fieldsville student use the word “class,” despite the fact that students regularly draw class boundaries through social categories. When I ask Christie what she means by the “low class people,” she explains through an example from popular culture:

Christie: It means like, at fancy schools, cuz there's a movie I watched, it's called *The Legally Blondes*, they're two twins. They're not high class, like, they're not rich. They don't have limos and stuff. [While Christie speaks, Arbor pretends that she is a “high class” person, pushing out her chest and making a snooty face. She whispers, “I've got a limo,” in a snooty voice.] The high class, they're popular, they think they're everything. And the low class are the people that have a scholarship. And the high class people make fun of them because they have a scholarship.

KC: Okay. And you think that happens here? That groups get set up that way?

Christie: Ya. There's like, there's groups kinda in our class, eh?

Tanya: Ya.

The girls begin to list different social groups at Fieldsville, naming the students that belong to each. While there is some disagreement about the precise naming of these categories, and the exact placement of certain students, they generally agree upon a rough mapping of peer social relations. When they mention the “popular” students (who Tanya calls the “hot popular” group), I ask them what makes someone a member of this group.

Arbor: New fashion clothes. Right on schedule new fashion clothes/

Tanya: Ya but, it's not really clothes, really. Like everyone has good fashion clothes.

Arbor: Nice clothes, your hair's always perfect. [Tanya runs her hands over her ponytail and then she and Arbor laugh]

Christie: Like, Rebecca and Hilary and Amanda and them. They usually/

Tanya: But Amanda's in the non-popular group too.

Christie: ... I think it's just, people just think other people are different just by the way they dress, and that's why there's groups. Because different people, well, different people and the way they dress, and ya.

For these girls, a discussion about gendered relations at their school automatically assumes a

discussion of class. This suggests that because of their marginalized positions within peer social hierarchies, Christie, Tanya and Arbor experience their gendered positioning as a distinctly *classed* femininity, marked off from the so-called “popular” students (Bettie 2003).¹²

By contrast, the “popular” girls do not situate their gendered identities within the same kinds of classed struggles. Instead, they define their own femininities in relation to socially powerful boys, like Cody. They tell me that boys are “willing to hurt you or be mean to you just to get what they want” (Kristin), and that the guys in their group of friends sometimes tease them in ways that hurt their feelings. These girls are adamant defenders of a liberal discourse of equality. Regarding their male classmates, Rebecca asserts, “Everyone's equal, but they gotta learn that everyone's equal!” In their efforts to explain gendered relations at Fieldsville, the girls draw upon a binary of aggressive masculinities, and caring femininities. Those who fall outside of this binary are described as exceptions, including “nice guys” like Scott.

Amanda: I think it's just that we're nicer, you know, girls are more, like, kind and think about how they feel.

Rebecca: Ya, like when we play volleyball and stuff I always hate it when we're on the same team as guys cuz they're always like, [deep voice] “Come on! GET THE BALL!”

Amanda: But then when they mess up we don't even say anything, we're just like, “Good try.”

Rebecca: Ya, we're like, “Good job. Nice try.”

Amanda: Ya, but cuz they don't really care, like how/

Hilary: They, they don't understand us. Just put it like that.

KC: Like, how so? Tell me more about that.

¹²For other students, gender is negotiated through disability. For instance, when I ask Melissa about the different social groups at school, she says “Usually popular people pick on people who, like, say, have disabilities, like they can't [pause] read very well, like me.” During the interviews, Melissa, Karen and Scott all mention a learning disability as an important aspect of their identity, in terms of how they understand themselves and how they are positioned by others. Although I cannot explore this issue in detail in this chapter, I want to point toward the way that disability, like class, becomes a significant site of identification for certain students who navigate gendered power relations from this distinctly marginalized position.

Hilary: [Looks to Rebecca for help] How would you say they don't understand?

Rebecca: They don't understand, um [trails off]

Amanda: I don't think they understand anything. They don't understand feelings.

Even as these girls challenge boys' claims to superiority, the binary of hard masculinities and feeling femininities works to excuse sexism as a natural outcome of gender differences. In the following excerpt, the three girls criticize their friend, Kristin, for “going too far” in responding to verbal abuse from Cody.

Rebecca: Like, when she was gonna sue him, that's just going way too far.

Hilary: Ya, Kristin was gonna take him to court!

...Rebecca: For making fun of her. But yet me and Amanda have been in his class for thirteen years and he's done it to us for thirteen years, but we don't do anything about it because/

Amanda: You know that it's just Cody and he can't help himself.

Rebecca: Ya. You have to understand because/

Hilary: He's been like that his whole life, so it's gonna be hard to get used to. And he's always jokin' around and Kristin takes a big flip.

Rebecca, Hilary and Amanda take up contradictory positions within this discussion, first complaining about how the boys treat them, and then criticizing their friend Kristin for considering legal action. Within popular representations of girls, this seemingly “two-faced” femininity is often ascribed to the category of the “mean girl,” an aggressive (usually white and middle-class) young femininity that is the focus of considerable moral panic (Ringrose and Walkerdine 2008b). Contrary to the discourses of individual pathology that surround this figure in the media, critical feminist scholars point toward the social and discursive context in which

this “mean” femininity is produced, as young women are expected to negotiate a sea of competing ideals, including feminine “niceness” and “girl power” (Currie and Kelly 2006; Gonick 2004). From this perspective, the contradictions in this focus group can be read not as a sign of the girls' meanness, but rather as an expression of the challenge of negotiating competing discourses of gender equality and popularity. According to Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz, “‘Popular’ signals membership in the prized – and well-guarded – clique of an idealized girlhood that meets the standards of ‘emphasized femininity’” (2009, 94). Thus, even as these girls commit to ideals of equality, their socially desired positioning requires that they ultimately defer to gendered power relations. In the end, this contradictory positioning works to uphold a patriarchal order. It's fine for popular girls to criticize boys' actions, but those like Kristin who actively contest the local gender regime suffer the consequences of considerable social punishment.

Later in this same discussion, the girls suggest that their problems would be solved if the two most popular boys in their class were gay.

Rebecca: You know what? I wish Cody and Andrew were gay. That'd be so nice. [Hilary laughs]

Amanda: That'd be so funny.

KC: Why would that be nice?

Rebecca: They'd be nice cuz they'd be gay and they'd like each other and they wouldn't like girls. They'd be like, “Girls are yucky” [Said with an effeminate lisp]

Amanda: And they'd be nicer.

Hilary: And they'd agree with us on everything!

Rebecca: Ya, cuz they'd be like girls, pretty much.

In this vision, the girls mobilize stereotypical images in which gay masculinity is equated with emphasized femininity. They go on to suggest that if Cody and Andrew were gay, they wouldn't want to play sports and would seek the girls' advice on what colour to paint their nails. Beyond

all else, the girls insist that the most significant outcome of this transformation is that the boys would be “nicer” (Amanda) and “more like us” (Rebecca). This fantasy highlights how systems of gender are always intertwined with sexuality. Drawing on the work of Judith Butler, Emma Renold argues that “children's gender identities are performed within a constraining and regulatory hegemonic heterosexual matrix”(2006, 504). The fact that the girls co-construct this scenario during a conversation about gender relations at Fieldsville shows how young masculinities and femininities are constituted through compulsory heterosexuality. Within this framework, one way to undermine dominant masculinities – arguably the most obvious way made available under heteropatriarchy – is to queer them (Epstein 1998; Nayak and Kehily 2001; Renold 2005). The laughter and excitement with which the girls contribute to this fantasy signals the thrill of this transgression, as well as the perceived absurdity of the scenario, paradoxically shoring up heteropatriarchy in the process.

Another group takes a different approach to the dominant masculinities asserted by some of their classmates. Drawing on conversations with parents, as well as popular culture, these girls begin to develop a critique of sexism as a defence of threatened masculinities.

Tanya: I put “both” for everything [on the RG survey].

KC: So why do you think some people say not both? Why do you think some people feel/

Christie: Maybe it's because men, like, the way my dad puts it is maybe sometimes men are threatened by women that they can do better than them and they're like, scared that they're gonna get -- like, if a guy doesn't want a girl to play football, and they play together, like them two, to see who's better, maybe he's just threatened by her.

KC: That's interesting. Okay.

Tanya: But, it could, it's just basically, there's this real show that they just actually go into this house and film it, but it's actually based on real [life]. (KC: Okay) And it's about a guy and a girl and they have kids, but they wanna, they, like, question his manhood, like, a guy's manhood. ... You never saw this? [To Christie]

Christie: No.

Tanya: It's always on. And then they broke up because people said that, like, just questioned it. And then, ya.

KC: What does it mean to question someone's manhood?

Tanya: To say that they can't do it.

KC: Do what? Like what would it mean to be manly?

Tanya: [pauses, thinking] Don't shave? [All laugh] That's the closest I got.

Even as the girls resist the sexist positions taken up by some of their classmates, they struggle to articulate this critique. Christie recalls her dad's comment regarding threatened masculinities, but when Tanya tries to build upon this point using an example from popular culture, she has difficulty explaining this argument. The interaction suggests that students make sense of their own gendered positioning through the discourses that are available to them, but these discursive resources are often fragmented and may offer only limited tools for critical reflection.

Various forms of resistance emerged during focus groups, and these tended to differ in ways that reflect students' social positioning. Some Fieldsville girls resist the constraints of gendered discourses by actively positioning themselves outside the boundaries of emphasized femininity. This strategy was most common among girls who are marginalized in peer social networks, often because of their class status. For instance, Karen was absent during the gender focus groups, but when I ask how she would describe herself during an interview, she says, "I'm not as into girl stuff as I am a lot of the guy stuff... I like to play in mud and stuff. Like, with my brothers I like to fight with them." She explains further: "I'm not all into like, dressing up for every little occasion, sort of thing. Like I don't pull my hair back nice and neat all the time." While Karen resists the expectations she associates with "girl stuff," feminist education scholar Diane Reay warns that the "performance of a surrogate masculinity works to cement rather than transform the gender divide" (2001, 163). That is, rather than challenging a hierarchical gender

binary, Karen aligns herself with the more valued, masculine side of it. While I appreciate Reay's critique, particularly as it draws attention to the constraints of gender binaries, I do not want to deny the transgressive potential of Karen's resistant identification. While Karen's gendered performances continue to be constrained by the discourses available to her, surely a space of possibility is opened by her refusal to be defined by dominant discourses of femininity (Paechter 2006; Renold 2005).

Jessie takes up a more ambivalent positioning, describing how she has both a “girly” side and a “guy” side. She explains:

The kind of person that I like to be friends with is like, like Tanya. She's wild and out there and brave to do stuff. And then, there's Kristin and Amanda which is kind of my girly side. They bring out the girl in me, but Tanya brings out kind of the inside guy in me and we like [laughs] run around and stuff. So ya. I kind of have a girly friend side and a kind of guy friend side.

When I ask Jessie to say more about her “girly” friends, she says: “They're kind of more into the clothes and the shoes and all that, and the fashion. But then, Tanya again, just kind of wear whatever you want to school and don't care what other people say about you.” While Jessie refuses the limits of a single gendered positioning, her description of her “girly” and “guy” sides invokes a binary that equates masculinity with freedom of movement and expression, and femininity with disciplined bodily appearance. However, the two sides that Jessie describes also express a *classed* division. Within Fieldsville social hierarchies, Jessie has the unique position of shifting between both the “popular” and “dirt” groups. Because she is close friends with Kristin and Amanda (who represent her “girly” side), she sometimes hangs out with the popular crowd. However, Jessie's place within this desired social circle is always in question, as others remind her of her “dirt” status. She describes it this way: “Like, if you're in the prep group and people usually say you're a dirt, they still think you're a dirt even though you hang out with them and stuff.” Jessie is quite open about her limited economic resources, and more than once I heard her

mention that her family does not have a lot of money. Jessie's relationship with Tanya appears to be grounded, in part, in their shared class status and experience of being called a "dirt." What's fascinating is how these gendered and classed discourses intersect so that Tanya comes to represent Jessie's "guy" side. The complexity of these gendered and classed intersections make it impossible to pinpoint Jessie's location within relations of power at Fieldsville. On the one hand, she has tenuous access to the socially desired "popular femininity," but this position demands tight restrictions around gendered presentation and embodiment. On the other hand, the more accessible position of "dirt femininity" is surrounded in social stigma, but affords greater flexibility in terms of self-expression and movement. Notably, Jessie's self-described "guy" side shares several characteristics with the highly valued rural masculinity, in terms of physical mobility and outdoor play. However, when this embodied performance is read through classed and gendered discourses to become a "dirt femininity," it loses the power granted to this masculine ideal (Bettie 2003).

The "popular" girls, by contrast, do not question their own location within discourses of emphasized femininity; but nor do they passively accept gendered inequities at Fieldsville. Toward the end of the focus group, these girls express frustration over the fact that they experience little institutional support in their gendered struggles, as they reject their teachers' recommendations to tell someone that he has "hurt your feelings." As an alternative, the group envisions a form of collective resistance performed outside of institutional authority structures:

Rebecca: Maybe if just, like, the teachers left the classroom and all the girls stood up in front of the classroom and all the guys were sitting around. And we'd be like, "Kay guys, you've hurt our feelings, you've/

Hilary: Peed us off!

Rebecca: Yep. You've made us angry, just right to the point where we wanna beat your face in.

Hilary: And we're tired and sick of it!

A growing sense of power is palpable as the girls describe this scene, each building off the suggestions of her friends. Their vision of collective resistance points toward a possible opening for feminist interventions. The fact that this vision of resistance requires the absence of institutional figures suggests that the girls see formal approaches to gender in schooling to be largely ineffective.

I end each gender focus group by asking students if they think sexism is a problem today, and am met with diverse responses regarding a perceived presence or absence of sexism. Some students dismiss the question with responses like, “No, cuz all the girls are doing what they want” (Nick). A few others admit that they are unsure what the term means, highlighting a lack of access to feminist language and a broader socio-historical context dominated by claims of gender equality. Even among the girls who adamantly defend a liberal discourse of equality, few view their own experiences as evidence of sexism. Many draw upon a progress narrative that locates sexism in the past:

Rebecca: Well, it's getting, it's different.

Hilary: It depends.

Rebecca: Because like, in the olden days ah, the woman would be in the kitchen and the guy would be working.

Hilary: I'm glad that that's changed!

The girls' dismissal of sexism as an outdated issue reveals a disconnect between feminist discourses and their own gendered experiences. While the girls speak extensively about their experiences as girls – experiences that they often view to be unfair – the critique of “sex-role stereotyping” that they are offered in *The Real Game* does little to help them understand their own experiences within a broader system of gender oppression. Instead, they are left with a

popular “boys will be boys” discourse that naturalizes sexism as an inevitable outcome of gender differences. Among the few girls who do see sexism in their lives, this tends to be limited to the context of sports. For instance, Christie describes how her friend's older sister is teased at high school for wanting to play football and rugby. Naming sexism in sport is certainly important, but this appears to be the sole context in which girls have access to such a critique, which they draw largely from popular culture. There is much to be learned by exploring the boundaries of students' talk about gender and sexism, as this illuminates the discourses that they have access to, as well as those they do not.

Kristin is the only student who confidently asserts that sexism is an issue in her everyday life, providing examples of how her cousins say she can't do certain things just because she's a girl. Recall that Kristin is the student who was said to be considering legal action in response to Cody's incessant teasing, so it's possible that she has access to feminist discourses at home. Following Kristin's assessment of sexism, Jessie considers the question for a few seconds, and then says, “Hmm, not really I don't think. Hmm.” When I ask the two of them if they think being a girl will have an impact on their futures, Jessie answers first:

Jessie: Mmm, I think it'll affect it kind of. Cuz when I was little I wanted to be like, a firefighter. And so [laughs] I would always go around my house pretending I had a hose and sneak up on my mom and stuff and like, pretend to spray her. But now, I'm kind of thinking that that's more of a guys' job, like, I don't know why. I just, from my perspective now, like, I'd be scared to be a firefighter. To like, go into a fire or something, I'd be really scared to like, lose myself and then my family losing me.

KC: Hmm. When do you think that kind of started, that you started feeling differently about that?

Jessie: Mmm, when I started seeing, like, on TV all the firemen going, I just kind of said, huh, maybe that's not the right job for me.

Having just stated that sexism is not an issue in her life, Jessie shares a personal story of gradually coming to feel like her childhood imagined future as a firefighter does not align with

her gendered identity. Popular culture once again appears as an important resource in this shift. Jessie makes an explicit effort to personalize her narrative – saying things like “from my perspective now,” and “maybe that's not the right job for me” – rather than making statements about what is or isn't appropriate for girls as a group. Jessie laughs at her childhood self, but she seems almost apologetic about the transition she describes. She appears to be struggling with the disjuncture between her investment in ideas of gender equity and her feelings of gendered difference. Jessie believes that gender should not be a determining factor in one's life, yet she experiences her own gendered identity as constraining in some respects, in terms of what she sees as appropriate and desirable life practices.

Jessie's story highlights the close connection between students' everyday gendered experiences and their shifting visions of the future. In this section, I have explored how students negotiate school social dynamics as they work to produce themselves as particular kinds of gendered subjects. These practices are shaped by a hegemonic rural masculinity that occupies a powerful place within rural social space, serving as the normative referent for other masculinities and femininities that are produced alongside and in opposition to this ideal. The analysis has shown how intersections of gender and rurality are heavily classed, and how these classed differences become particularly salient in the construction of rural femininities. It also shows how gendered experiences and visions are informed by popular culture, which may not represent the rural. Gender, rurality and class intersect in complicated ways, and students develop a variety of strategies for managing these intersections. Ultimately, however, certain masculinities and femininities are unevenly valued in Fieldsville, and this has implications for the extent to which students can envision a successful future in rural space.

Gendered Mobilities

In the final days of September the school looks especially well decorated, with colourful student work on display for the upcoming Parents' Night. I walk past the grade 2/3's autumn-themed poetry and the kindergartens' hand-print artwork, to the end of Fieldsville's single hallway, where I find work from Mrs. Sullivan's grade 7/8 students. Two banners hang above the students' *Real Game* materials. In block letters, the first states "Career Studies: *The Real Game*," and the second follows up in cursive lettering, "Budgeting Time and Money ~ Planning a Future." Beneath these, each student's RG work hangs in tastefully arranged clusters, including their Wish List, Occupation Collage, Business Card, and Activity Poster (which provides information on their characters' education and training). Scanning across the titles and images, a few pieces catch my eye. Christie's business card for her character's mechanic shop features a clipart image of a woman wearing coveralls and holding a wrench. The bubble-lettering above her head reads, "Girls can't what?!" Unlike her RG character, Christie actually aspires to become a dance instructor. Amanda, on the other hand, happened to select a profile that fits with her own imagined future as an actor. The focal point of Amanda's business card is simply her name, written in bold letters and followed by a gold star. Her personal information is listed below: "Actor; R.R. 1 Fieldsville, ON." The contradictions in this profile call to mind a conversation in which Amanda's friends discuss how she will miss her rural roots once she's a movie star:

KC: And where are you gonna be living once you're an actor?

Amanda: I dunno.

Rebecca: Paris.

Amanda: Ya. No, no, I'll be, I don't know/

Rebecca: You'll be like, in your house right now and people'll be crowding in/

Amanda: Ya, I don't know.

Hilary: Once you move you're gonna be wishing you were back in Fieldsville.

Amanda: Ya.

Hilary: I'm living in my parents' house.

Rebecca: I can't imagine leaving Fieldsville.

In this exchange, Amanda is positioned as the one who must struggle to reconcile her rural investments with an implicitly urban imagined future. However, other conversations suggest that Hilary and Rebecca encounter similar sticking points. During our interview, Hilary tells me that she hopes to become a fashion designer, and has already begun to compile a book of her own designs. She describes how she will “travel around the globe to see fashion shows,” just like designers do on television. Later in the interview, though, Hilary expresses a strong desire to stay in Fieldsville, where she hopes to eventually assume ownership of her parents' large farmhouse just outside of town. I do not point out to Hilary that she may have difficulty cultivating a cosmopolitan lifestyle as a fashion designer while living on the backroads in Fieldsville. For her, these dreams appear to coexist side by side, without contradicting each other.

Rebecca, on the other hand, narrates her imagined future as a veterinarian through a repeated emphasis on hard work and a personal quest to develop greater self-confidence.

Rebecca has long dreamed of becoming a veterinarian – a dream that her mother once shared, but was unable to pursue. Rebecca describes her mother's high hopes for her future:

She's got big plans for me, *big* plans. And my dad's just like, “You're going to community college.” And it's like, “No, I'm going to university.” And like, I need to go far, I need to go somewhere. Cuz my parents, they went to college, but then they didn't get the jobs they wanted, so now they work at [a plant in Warden].

Rebecca's vision of future success implies a need for movement and improvement that do not flow naturally from her current location. In her words, “I know that I have to do well or else I'm not gonna go far.” Yet, these visions of success create friction with a stated commitment to her

rural community. Contrast Rebecca's dream of socio-spatial mobility (“I need to go far, I need to go somewhere”) with her focus group comment that she “can't imagine leaving Fieldsville.”

Unlike Hilary, Rebecca is well aware of these tensions: “I couldn't imagine living anywhere else but Fieldsville. But it's gonna be weird cuz, like, college and everything like that, it's gonna be weird. Cuz the one I have to go to is in Toronto for vet school.” While the average thirteen-year-old may not be preoccupied with her future – or at least that is what dominant representations suggest – Rebecca worries about these issues constantly, almost to the point of obsession. As she says, “I think about jobs and opportunities and college and university and high school every day [laughs]. Like, when I'm sleeping, like when I go to sleep, I'm just like, okay, high school, so I'm gonna die. No, I'm not! Yes, I am! No, I'm not! Yes, I am! It's like, oh my goodness.” As a self-described “strong” and “independent” person, Rebecca has high expectations for herself, and these loom on the horizon as a source of both pressure and possibility. At the core of this imagined future exists a tension between a place-based identity that is rooted in socio-spatial landscapes of rurality, and a mobility-oriented future that equates personal success with an education and set of qualifications that can only be found in the city.

The contradictions that I have highlighted within Amanda's, Hilary's and Rebecca's imagined futures are not unique to these three girls, but fit within a broader pattern of gendered visions of future success. While most Fieldsville students insist that they will continue living “in the country” as adults, some construct visions of the future that appear out of place in this landscape. These contradictions can be seen to some extent throughout all students' narratives, but they are most pronounced in the construction of successful femininities. Many of the girls describe adulthoods that centre on ideals of professionalism and the world of art and society, crafting futures as dancers (Jessie and Christie), actors (Amanda), fashion designers (Hilary, Kristin, Melissa), writers (Karen and Kristin), and artists (Tanya). These future femininities draw

upon popular representations of the “real world,” marked by a cosmopolitan lifestyle most closely associated with urban living. This embodied vision of success sits in stark contrast to cherished ideals of rurality, including a quiet, slow-paced lifestyle surrounded by the natural environment. And yet, nearly every one of these girls remains adamant that she will build a future in or around Fieldsville. These contradictory future narratives highlight the girls' ambivalent relationship to their rural environment; although they are attached to the rural idyll, it is not capable of satisfying all of their fantasies.

By contrast, Fieldsville boys tend to imagine futures that provide a closer fit with the rural landscape. Whether envisioning a career as a police officer (Cody, Dillon, Scott), paramedic (Tim), mechanic (Jonathon), fisherman (Dillon and Jonathon), farmer (Nick), truck driver (Paul), or military (Shaun) or corrections officer (Justin), these futures build upon the rural masculinities cultivated in their youth. Many of these occupations emphasize characteristics that are required for hunting and fishing, including physical strength and outdoor activity – in Cody's words, “not stuck behind a desk.” Futures in law enforcement are an especially popular choice, and this appears to reflect both the strong presence of correctional services in Warden, and the fact that the boys associate these jobs with the skilled use of firearms. So, while identities forged through hunting and fishing do not translate directly into employment, the skills and experience at the core of these identifications do appear to open up futures in typically masculine occupations that are visible within the local economy. As a result, Fieldsville boys have access to imagined futures that allow for a sense of continuity with their current gendered and spatial identifications, envisioning adult masculinities whose embodied practices align closely with ideals of rurality. This pattern is in stark contrast with many of the adult femininities envisioned by their classmates, where embodied visions of success appear out of place within the rural landscape. Could it be that masculine futures provide a better fit with the rural idyll?

Gendered migration patterns are well-documented in rural communities, where local economies are often coded masculine (Corbett 2007; Campbell 2006; Ni Laoire and Fielding 2006). In his study of educational decision-making within a coastal community in eastern Canada, Corbett proposes that women's out-migration may be understood as “a form of resistance to the gender stratified opportunity structure in which they saw their mothers and some peers 'trapped'” (2007, 261). As boys are welcomed into the local fishing industry, girls are more likely to embrace schooling as a means of accessing futures “elsewhere.” Campbell's research on public masculinities in small-town New Zealand points toward a similar knotting of gendered power and place. He argues that as a result of entrenched associations between masculinity, locality and work, “the only way for young rural women who grow up in such communities to escape the male gender order is to leave” (2006, 102).

Recent research has investigated how gendered economies of rurality are altered in the wake of economic restructuring brought about by neo-liberal and globalizing processes (Kenway, Kraack and Hickey-Moody 2006; Ni Laoire and Fielding 2006). This research reveals enduring investments in traditional rural masculinities, even as the economic foundations of this identity come under threat. For instance, Kenway, Kraack and Hickey-Moody show how boys in one rural Australian community perform “frontier masculinities” for tourists, despite the fact that the industrial base for this identity has been largely dismantled (2006, 74). In Ireland, Ni Laoire and Fielding explore rural masculinities that negotiate competing processes of emplacement and movement. They write: “For some rural men...while their identity is still *rooted* in the place, it is constantly shifting and adapting as it is *routed* through the changes brought about by economic restructuring and social recomposition” (2006, 114). Analyses that situate rural masculinities within a broader socio-historical context prompt me to reflect upon Fieldsville boys' attraction to futures in law enforcement and corrections. The community of Fieldsville has no identifiable

economic base, and most men either commute to find employment or piece together a combination of farming and maintenance work, neither of which is financially sustainable on its own. During interviews, four different students spoke about their family's recent hardship after their father was laid off from work, usually in the manufacturing industry. Perhaps the boys are drawn to work in policing and corrections because these occupations provide a seemingly stable source of traditionally masculine labour within a context of economic instability. These are imagined futures that do not rely upon rural industries, but still open up a site for performing rugged, physically tough and risky masculinities.

And what of the contradictory futures imagined by Fieldsville girls? The fact that these girls envision urban adulthoods appears to fit the pattern of feminized out-migration in the rural literature; however, there is an added complexity that must not be overlooked. Namely, while Fieldsville girls dream of cosmopolitan lifestyles, their imagined futures are not characterized by narratives of escape from rural space. On the contrary, these girls remain heavily invested in ideals of rurality, which are central to their identities. Despite these socio-spatial investments, the gendering of rural space offers them limited possibilities for building successful feminine futures on this landscape. At the same time, growing up within a socio-historical context dominated by ideals of neo-liberal self-invention and “girl power,” these girls have access to a “discourse of possibility” (Weis 2008, 300) that proffers seemingly limitless opportunity (Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz 2009; Goodkind 2009). Within this discursive context, feminine futures become tales of mobility, as today's young women are encouraged to transcend the educational and career trajectories of their mothers and grandmothers (Walkerdine 2003). *The Real Game* echoes this invitation, encapsulated in the core principle, “Follow Your Heart”:

Know yourself, believe in yourself and follow your heart. Find your dreams and seek your destiny. Do not let others discourage you. The people with dreams, however unrealistic they seem to others, are the lucky ones. Follow your heart to find your dreams.

Set your sites high, but always stay open to new dreams. Dreaming about your future can help you understand what you really want in life. Knowing what you want and keeping it in your mind can give you the motivation you need to deal with life's challenges. Never be afraid to dream. (Barry 2005, 21)

If achieving a desired future is solely an issue of personal motivation, then how are we to understand the lives that do not mirror this dream? Within the individualizing framework of neo-liberal discourse, any gap between dream and reality is explained as the result of *personal* shortcomings. The fact that Fieldsville girls can envision successful futures is surely a positive thing; but what costs might such visions of success incur? What borders must these girls cross in their pursuit of successful femininities, and what losses must be mourned in the process? Beyond access to a “discourse of possibility,” what resources support this transformative journey?

In *Young Femininity*, Aapola, Gonick and Harris (2005) explore competing definitions of girlhood that circulate throughout academia, popular culture and global media. Strongest among these is the discourse of “girl power,” exemplified by iconic girl-band the *Spice Girls*, which suggests that today's young women are the beneficiaries of feminism, and face a world of exciting opportunities. As a result, “possibility, choice and self-invention have become central to the ways in which young women are able to think about their identities and futures within the new economy” (Aapola, Gonick and Harris 2005, 67). This vision is countered by the discourse of “reviving Ophelia,” which positions young women as morally and socially vulnerable, constructing an image of the “at-risk” female youth. Aapola et al argue that, while contradictory, these discourses work together to constitute girls as self-made neo-liberal subjects, for “both encourage young women to work on themselves, either through the DIY self-invention and 'girls can do anything' rhetoric of girl power, or through the self-help books and programmes that are available to transform girls in crisis” (54).

In mapping these discourses, *Young Femininities* illustrates the ways in which popular

culture offers girls stories about their possible futures, not by prescribing a specific path, but by constructing narratives of feminine self-making that “individualize the process of forging an adult female identity in a late modern world” (54). Within the context of these competing discourses, young women actively perform their own identities. Aapola et al offer an account of girlhood which is neither discursively nor materially overdetermined, but rather is produced through the negotiation of local constraints and possibilities, as “young women draw on the discursive and material resources available to them to make pragmatic choices” (218). Of course, because girls are unevenly positioned within relations of power, popular accounts of girl power afford them different imagined possibilities, depending on race, class, sexuality, disability, and, I would add, geography.

In related work in the UK, Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine (2003) examine the hybrid identities required of working-class young women who aspire toward, and achieve, educational success and social mobility. Their analysis challenges the claim that young women now face a future of unfettered opportunity, as well as the widely held assumption that upward mobility through higher education is an uncontested “good.” In fact, they argue that social mobility may come with intense emotional costs for these young women. The authors situate the analysis historically in relation to “transformations in the economy [that] require a new kind of feminine subject – one who is capable of understanding herself as an autonomous agent, the producer of her present and her future, an inventor and constant reinventor of the person she may be or become” (Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine 2003, 288). While such demands generate “instabilities of the self” for all young women, they generate particular challenges for those negotiating these pressures from working-class backgrounds. Elsewhere, Walkerdine (2006) has argued that the neo-liberal imperative for mobility is lived as a painful border at the intersection of spatial, emotional and classed boundaries. Contrary to the metaphors of travel within these

narratives, Walkerdine suggests that there is no discrete movement from one “place” to another, for “old inscriptions of place are not simply erased when new ones are brought in” (20). Instead, this storied mobility is experienced as a tension, where new sites of (not-quite) belonging must be managed alongside past identifications. Walkerdine argues that this results in a painful process, where “workers must be able to carry around with them an embodied flexibility in which locatedness is not defined by any material space or geographical location” (28).

Walkerdine's analysis resonates closely with Fieldsville girls' ambivalent futures. Could it be that in crafting fantasies that bridge rural ideals and urban embodiments, Fieldsville girls have already begun the work of “carrying around” these dual identifications? Walkerdine develops her analysis based on the narratives of working-class women who have previously experienced some form of upward mobility, or understand themselves to be upwardly mobile via higher education. What I am suggesting is that some Fieldsville girls appear to have adopted elements of these fractured mobility narratives as a way of telling their futures. It seems that these girls have already begun the affective work of managing competing commitments to place and movement, belonging and betterment, and *The Real Game* invites them to extend this work. They do so in order to negotiate an attachment to rurality that offers few feminine futures, and a discourse of possibility that encourages them to locate their futures elsewhere. These gendered discourses are not adopted uniformly, but rather are negotiated through lived geographies, as rurality is intertwined with narratives of mobile femininities.

Examining the future narratives of two girls who do not fit this pattern affords greater insight into the classed dimension of these processes. The first is Kristin, whose social positioning provides access to forms of cultural capital and travel experiences that are unique among her peers, and that have been shown to facilitate more expansive geographies of the future (Corbett 2007b; Dunkley and Panelli 2007). Kristin has a close relationship with her

father, who lives in Warden and works as a professional, and she tells me that they often discuss her future. She envisions an urban adulthood that aligns with her desired career as a fashion designer:

KC: But like, do you see yourself in Fieldsville? In Warden?

Kristin: No, [laughs] I'm not living in Fieldsville!

KC: Why do you say, "Ha, not Fieldsville"?

Kristin: Because chances are my job is not gonna be in Fieldsville and I'm gonna have to drive a long way. I just wanna live in like, the city. Maybe I'll live in Toronto, Ottawa, Niagara Falls - Niagara Falls, actually that would be a good place to work! (KC: Okay) Ya, I've been to all those places lots of times.

For Kristin, moving away from Fieldsville is a foregone conclusion. She speaks about post-secondary education as an inevitability rather than a hopeful possibility (her older sister is about to begin her first year of university), and she imagines this education translating into a professional career. Yes, Kristin's future requires mobility, but it is primarily geographical, not classed, since the life to which she aspires appears to flow naturally from her current social location. Furthermore, because Kristin's identity is not centrally defined by rurality, she does not have to manage competing place-based investments; instead, she is free to pursue the urban, middle-class femininity available to her.

By contrast, Arbor avoids these contradictory identifications by way of a very different perspective. Dismissing ideals of middle-class femininity, she invests in a future that is firmly embedded within her rural surroundings.

Like, honestly, I wanna have, when I move out I wanna move into, I'm never gonna move into the city. Like, I'd stay at home if I had to, but I'm gonna look for a place with good hunting land. Like, that's where I'd wanna be. Like, in a farm with good hunting land and horses. And goats and horses. I think that's what I'd want, where I'd wanna move. On a farm with land. (Arbor)

It would be inaccurate to portray this future as lacking a desire for mobility, for Arbor currently

lives with very limited economic resources and no land. Thus, the rural lifestyle she desires, while modest by most standards, does require an increase in material capital. But what I want to draw attention to for the purposes of this chapter is how Arbor's rejection of middle-class ideals of femininity allows her to envision a successful (working-class) future in rural space. Thus, it appears to be in gendered and *classed* narratives of mobility that ideals of rurality come into conflict with (normatively urban) visions of successful femininity. Arbor's imagined future as an animal caretaker fits neatly within landscapes of rurality, but it does not satisfy dominant ideals of feminine embodiment. This is the balancing act required of Fieldsville girls as they craft futures that inhabit contradictory locations across rural and urban geographies.

Within the context of limited supports, the weight of this tension falls onto the shoulders of individual girls, who must manage their own fraught attachments and aspirations. For these girls, the neo-liberal imperative to design one's future presents a set of contradictions between the spatial identifications through which they define themselves, and available images of success that are out of place in this landscape. As the girls look ahead toward their futures, these narratives can co-exist rather comfortably, running alongside each other as parallel possibilities. On occasion, however, conflicts arise, interrupting stories of peaceful countrysides and fashionable futures as if foreshadowing the challenges ahead:

Rebecca: Sometimes what annoys me in Fieldsville is like, sometimes you just wanna get out of Fieldsville and go somewhere bigger.

Hilary: And you can't.

Rebecca: You can't, but then again you're like, why do you want to go there anyways?
[pause] I don't know, it's just hard.

Conclusion

In my efforts to map the gendered contours of students' lived and imagined geographies, this

chapter has covered a lot of ground. The writing has moved frequently among observations, focus groups and interviews, drawing insight from the literature throughout, as I have attempted to embed the analysis of students' gendered identifications within questions of power, possibility and constraint. I have explored how historically entrenched associations between rurality and masculinity continue to shape the gendered organization of rural social space. While a hegemonic rural masculinity maintains a position of power within Fieldsville social hierarchies, this performance is always contested, as boys work tirelessly to secure their claims to both rurality and masculinity. The deeply classed femininities available to Fieldsville girls offer a paradoxical mix of positionalities: a powerful “popular” femininity that demands a disciplined embodiment and is defined through its relationship to hegemonic masculinity, and a marginalized “dirt” femininity that affords a degree of embodied flexibility, but is mired in social stigma. The analysis shows that while many girls express frustration with a gender order that they perceive to be uneven, few have access to critical discourses with which to reflect upon, and contest, gender oppression in their everyday lives. One resource these young people do have access to is popular culture, and many students (particularly girls) draw upon popular texts to perform gendered identities and envision desirable futures. However, these popular representations are rarely situated in rural contexts.

The final section of the chapter has examined how the power-infused intersections of gender, class and rurality open up different landscapes of possibility and constraint. This generates particular contradictions for girls who imagine successful, middle-class femininities (which tend to be coded urban), and yet maintain deep rural investments. I have argued that the socio-spatial paradoxes surrounding these future femininities reflect two overlapping sets of conditions: 1) a gendered rural context that extends to Fieldsville girls few successful futures at the intersection of (middle-class) femininity and rurality; and 2) a socio-historical context

dominated by neo-liberal discourses of self-invention and post-feminist possibility that invite girls into upwardly (and outwardly) mobile futures. These neo-liberal discourses operate in and through popular culture narratives of “girl power,” which claim to offer a universally attainable (yet implicitly urban) model of feminine “success.” While Fieldsville girls appear to already be managing these tensions, *The Real Game* invites them to extend this work through stories of choice and individual determination captured in the attractive mantra, “follow your dreams.”

In developing this argument, the chapter has engaged with literatures on gender in rural space, the performance of masculinities and femininities in school, and imagined futures within neo-liberal times. Canadian education scholar Michael Corbett has critically examined what he calls the “mobility imperative” in rural education, whereby schooling is constructed as a means of exiting rural spaces (2007a). This chapter has striven to bring this spatial analysis into conversation with critiques of “postfeminist, neo-liberal mythologies of success and possibility for women” (Ringrose and Walkerdine 2008a, 229), in order to better understand the conditions that give rise to the contradictory identifications formed by many Fieldsville girls. This particular set of contradictions – where spatial investments come into conflict with embodied visions of a successful future – highlights the complicated processes through which subjectivities are located and felt. According to feminist rural scholars Lia Bryant and Barbara Pini, the recent turn to gender in rural sociology has been accompanied by a shift away from class analysis, such that “gender has rarely been examined in ethnographic studies of rurality and class” (2009, 50). This chapter has taken up Bryant and Pini's call for research exploring “how rurality, gender and class come to be inscribed on rural people” (52). I continue to explore these intersections in the following chapter. Through a close reading of students' interview narratives, the analysis examines how these young people construct visions of the “good life” as they imagine their futures.

Chapter 6

Ambivalent Futures: Feeling Neo-liberalism

Three weeks into the school term, Scott, Nick, Jonathon and I sit in the library discussing their initial impressions of *The Real Game*. “It's pretty cool. A bit complicated,” says Scott, leafing through the RG materials that are spread out on the table in front of him. He tucks his feet up under his bum and perches on the chair to get a better vantage point. When I ask if this is stuff they've thought about before, all three nod. “Ya, I'm already thinking about a job,” says Scott. “Are you?” I ask. “What kind of stuff do you think about when you think about the future?” As Scott answers, he traces invisible lines on the table with a plastic ruler. “Um, I'm thinking that, what am I gonna have as a job? Is it gonna pay me much to live? Or is it gonna lay me off?” Scott trails off for a moment, then continues. “Cuz my nana lost her job only two days ago,” he adds, quietly. “Oh, I'm really sorry to hear that, Scott,” I say. “Ya,” he says, still looking down at the table. The mood of the conversation shifts abruptly as Nick jumps in to offer his own perspective on job security in the future:

I'm not really that worried about losing a job because I don't want any actual job. The last couple years I've been thinking if I should be a lawyer, a doctor. The only problem I have is that you lose int – I lose interest in a lot of things pretty fast. So I don't want to go to law school for five years and go and be a lawyer for six months and have a hundred thousand dollars in debt just cuz I wanted to go. So I just want to be a farmer. That's what I told my grandparents and they told me I should go to, whatever, the school where they show you how to be a farmer. And I said nope, I don't want to cuz I don't want to spend all that money and then not be able to pay it back, especially with like, the interest and everything on it. (Nick)

“Okay,” I say. “So you maybe wouldn't do more school after high school.” Nick shakes his head and says, “No.”

“You'd just be able to move into –” I pause, remembering that Nick does a lot of work on his grandparents' farm already, and change my choice of words – “continue doing work.” He nods.

“Ya. I would just worry about like, the pay cheque off cows or somethin'. Like what I'm doin' right now.” Nick continues, describing an imagined future where he maintains control over his livelihood, removed from what he perceives to be an uncertain and costly labour market: “If somethin', like took my chickens, that was my loss. I didn't build a good chicken coop. That would be the only debt I would see. I wouldn't see like, 'Oh, here comes all the taxes.' I wouldn't have any way to pay them.”

When Nick is finished, I turn to the third member of the group to see if he has any thoughts to add to this discussion. Jonathon wears the same red hooded sweatshirt that he wears most days to school. Although he speaks the least of the three, he smiles often. “What about you, Jonathon?” I ask. “When you think about the future, what kind of thing do you think about?” Jonathon fiddles with his binder for a second, then chuckles and shakes his head. Nick laughs. “I don't think he's worried about the future yet,” he says, grinning. “Well, that's alright,” I say, not wanting students to feel as though I expect them to articulate the kind of detailed life plan promoted in RG. “No, I mean, maybe it's not really something that's on your mind,” I add, trying to take the pressure off Jonathon. He is quiet for a moment, then laughs and says, “It's *hard* to figure out what you want to do in the future.” All three boys laugh now, and a shared feeling of relief seems to spread around the table. It's as if Jonathon's expression of uncertainty has opened up a little more breathing room.

Building on the gendered analysis of how students locate their futures, this chapter explores how students construct the person they hope to become. Drawing primarily on interview transcripts, I examine how students engage with dominant ideologies of meritocracy and individualism as they articulate their own aspirations for the futures they desire. I explore how students construct these ideal futures in relation to the world they know now, often mobilizing “improving narratives” (Skeggs 1997, 82) that centre on a “good education” as a means to better

the conditions of their lives. Within these narratives, students draw upon cultural models of the life course in order to envision their own transition into adulthood (James 2005). They express feelings of ambivalence regarding the freedoms and responsibilities that accompany this position, admitting that they find future independence enticing, yet intimidating (Gordon, Holland and Thomson 2005).

The future narratives explored throughout the chapter vary significantly, as each student describes his or her own vision of the ideal future. Without flattening the complexity of these narratives, I highlight two patterns that emerge across these varied visions. Specifically, while students imagine diverse futures, I explore how these futures are: 1) organized around a binary of success/failure, and 2) imbued with affect. I suggest that while the specific content of students' visions of adulthood vary, these structural consistencies in their narratives may shed light on the particular conditions in which they are forging selves and futures.

Returning to the literature on neo-liberalism and education that framed my entry into this project, I explore how young people negotiate pressures to imagine “successful” futures amid conditions of uncertainty. Instead of limiting the analysis to the degree to which students do or don't adopt dominant neo-liberal discourses, I argue that we might gain insight into the way that neo-liberalism is lived by exploring students' affective orientations toward (or away from) their futures. Beverley Skeggs has argued that “categories of class ... are also reproduced at the intimate level as a 'structure of feeling' in which doubt, anxiety and fear inform the production of subjectivity” (1997, 7). In this chapter, I strive to expand this formulation to consider the confluence of factors that intersect within the structure of feeling expressed by my participants. Curricular programs like *The Real Game* invite students to become future-oriented, self-reliant subjects capable of succeeding amid conditions of neo-liberal uncertainty. I argue that analyzing their affective expressions can yield new understandings of how neo-liberalism is lived within

the context of a particular geographical and social location.

By making this claim, I am not suggesting that every aspect of students' future narratives should be read as a direct reflection of neo-liberal processes; in fact, that is the very sort of interpretive determinism that I am trying to avoid. Rather, these narratives emerge from, and respond to, the conditions of students' lives, which are shaped, but not determined, by the discourses and materialities of a neo-liberal era. I suggest in this chapter that one way of exploring students' lived experience of these conditions is by examining the affective registers that underpin their future imaginings. What might expressions of anxiety, fear, hope, and wonder reveal about the lived experience of opportunities and constraints within a particular geographical and social location? Beyond students' affective orientations *toward* their futures, I also examine the forms of affect implicit within their rejections and refusals. Whether by investing in discourses of childhood or simply refusing to project themselves into an imagined future, these orientations away from the future are also revealing, in terms of students' (dis)identifications and investments. As in the other chapters, my focus on students' future narratives emerges from an interest in subjectivity formation. Rather than interpreting these projections as an account of what is to come, I share with Henderson et al. the view that

young people's aspirations can be read as reflecting their values and investments rather than seen simply as maps for a presumed future. A focus on resources, investments and the kinds of stories that young people can tell (and those that are difficult to articulate) can help us understand the particular dilemmas that they face. (Henderson et al 2007, 29)

Envisioning Adulthoods

During the interviews I asked students to describe what comes to mind when they think about being an adult. By framing the question this way, I tried to open space for them to discuss issues beyond the career paradigm offered in the RG. Their answers resembled findings from recent

research on youth “transitions” in other Western contexts, which reveal considerable consistency regarding the cultural characteristics young people associate with adulthood (e.g. Arnett and Galambos 2003; Du Bois-Reymond and Chisholm 2006; Gordon, Holland and Thomson 2005). Across the interviews, the category of “adulthood” takes shape as a site of independence and responsibility that is generally defined through the realms of work and family life. Students look forward to increased freedoms in the form of “getting to make my own decisions” (Kristin), “living alone” (Jonathon) and being able to “go wherever you want” (Paul). At the same time, they regard the future apprehensively as a site of increased responsibility. In Scott's words: “Being an adult is about a number of things. Paying your bills, doing housework, looking after your kids, your family, there's a lotta stuff.” It was not uncommon for students to offer this sort of checklist of adult living. Similarly, Tim describes his vision of adulthood this way: “I have my own car, my own life, um, a pet and a job. And that's it.” Across these depictions, students construct the defining characteristics of independence and responsibility as features of adult living that must be maintained in balance. As Dillon suggests, “Just like, don't rush right away and buy a whole bunch of stuff. Just take it slow so you have enough money later on.”

While noting similarities in the ways students characterize adulthood, it would be a mistake to assume that these characteristics are always ascribed the same meaning. On the contrary, because adulthoods are envisioned through the lens of current identifications, notions of “freedom” and “responsibility” are made meaningful in relation to students' lived experiences. For instance, Paul constructs freedom as an opportunity to independently pursue the activities that he values now: “You can hunt by yourself, you can fish by yourself. You can drive. Ah, you can get like, any kind of licence you want if you have the right experience.” By contrast, Christie looks forward to freedoms that she currently does not have access to. She tells me that as an adult she'll be able to “do more things,” and explains: “I can go shopping when I have the

money. And I can just hang out with my friends whenever, after work. It'll be more fun cuz I can do a lot of things.” The subtle differences between Paul and Christie's narratives reveal how the “freedoms” associated with adulthood are constructed in relation to students' lived realities. Paul and Christie differ not only in the practices they associate with these freedoms, but also the types of constraints that currently restrict their participation. For Paul, freedom is achieved by reaching the minimum age required to obtain a licence, be that for hunting, fishing or driving. For Christie, freedom is tied to an anticipated increase in material resources. The sense of agency that Christie associates with adulthood is constructed in relation to her current living situation, where she does not have access to the resources required to go shopping with friends or on a vacation with her family (which are both activities that she locates in the future). Thus, the notion of “freedom” may symbolize a range of imagined possibilities that speak to students' lived experiences of opportunity and constraint.

Within this image of adulthood as a balance of freedom and responsibility, students devote considerably more focus to the latter. Many speak about the imperatives of self-reliance, and see themselves as responsible for their own futures. As Tim asserts, “It's all up to you in what you should do. It's all up to you to take care of yourself.” Similarly, Hilary lists a host of responsibilities that she associates with being an adult:

A job. You're gonna have to have a job. You're gonna have to have a job to buy a house, to live with food. And then, grow up, have a husband and kids. You're gonna have to get stuff for Christmas for them. You're gonna have to get the clothes, you're gonna have to help them with health and get health stuff from the store and stuff. All that. Hair products, all that. Make-up, all that. All that stuff, so it's like, that'd cost a lotta money just to get that couple things. And ya. It sorta goes on I guess, so.

For Hilary, being an adult means having to satisfy an endless series of demands just to remain afloat. Furthermore, the framing of these elements as things each individual is “gonna have to” do leaves little room for alternative futures that exist outside of this dominant narrative. Aside

from having “a husband and kids,” every item that Hilary lists relates to the material resources required to support a family. She emphasizes the products that must be purchased for family members – Christmas presents, clothing, health products – firmly embedding this vision of adulthood within relations of consumption. This vision of the future draws upon a gendered narrative of care in which family members are given priority, while also emphasizing personal responsibility and capitalist markers of success. Finally, in addition to analyzing the specific *content* of Hilary's narrative, I do not want to lose sight of the overall *feeling* conveyed, which is one of apprehension as she imagines the weight of this perceived future burden.

Other students express mixed feelings about the increased freedoms and responsibilities that they associate with adult living. When I ask Amanda what comes to mind when she thinks about being an adult, she says:

Amanda: Scary!

KC: What's scary about it?

Amanda: I don't know, I wanna grow up. Like, I just, I don't know why but I wish I could just, for some reason, I know everyone's like, “Oh, it's the best part of your life,” being a teenager. I think it's horrible! I just want to skip to be like, twenty-one. And like, have a job and be living by myself and just be there, perfect.

KC: Why does that seem, what seems better about that than now?

Amanda: Cuz this is just all so dramatic! You can just live on your own and do what you want when you want. And ya.

KC: What ah, so you said it's partly scary, but then there are things that you're excited about.

Amanda: Ya, I just think it's, I'm, and I don't want to grow up because I feel like once I'm that age I'm gonna be like, you know, time has gone by so fast. And I'll wanna be back to this age. But right now I wanna be that age.

This exchange captures the ambivalence that some students feel toward their futures, as a source of both fear and possibility. In her efforts to manage this tension, Amanda idealizes a moment at

age 21 when she will “have a job and be living by myself and just be there.” As she envisions it, this moment exists outside of the contradictions of aging, which leave her longing for adult independence while preemptively mourning the loss of her youth. Notably, Amanda is not the only person who romanticizes life in her 20's.

Kristin: Like, I just wish I was like, um, twenty-two for the rest of my life.

KC: [laughs] What seems good about being twenty-two?

Kristin: I don't know. You're young, you're just starting out in the world. And, you're young [laughs], you're not old. And um, I guess I would be anywhere in my twenties, cuz that's not really old. But um, and chances are you're not gonna be married at twenty-two. And ya.

KC: And that's a good thing?

Kristin: No-no-no. Like, if you're twenty-two for the rest of your life – I would like to go through my twenties over and over and over again. So, start at twenty-one, go to twenty-nine, and then start back again. Ya.

KC: So what do you think about, like, when you think about being twenty-two, what comes to mind?

Kristin: Um, do you remember when I was saying like, I picture myself older as walking down the street with a cup of coffee and one of those skirt-things that come up to here [draws an imaginary line around the base of her ribs] with those puffy tops, sunglasses on, a phone in my hand, and like, my high heels [laughs], or whatever. Ya.

Like Amanda, Kristin invests in the idealized figure of the “twenty-something” who has access to all the freedoms of independent living, but without the weighty responsibilities of adulthood. Kristin emphasizes that this future selfhood is “young,... not old,” and depicts an embodied vision of a stylish, youthful femininity. These two girls appear to manage their ambivalence by locating their futures within a body that bridges the realms of youth and adulthood, providing access to the culturally valued aspects of both. This position is similar to the young Finnish women in Gordon and Lahelma's (2004) research, who expressed a desire to “stay apart not only from past childhood but also from their future adulthood,” preferring to occupy the position of

“girl” rather than “woman” (84).

As seen in the above examples, young people draw upon age-based discourses of “youth” and “adulthood” to articulate their own sense of self (Arnett 2003; Galambos et al. 2003; James 2005) and studies indicate that these understandings vary across historical periods and in relation to gender, class, race and sociopolitical context (Everingham, Stevenson and Warner-Smith 2007; Gordon, Holland and Thomson 2005). James (2005) suggests that to understand what aging means to young people, we must explore “the ways in which children as individuals come to understand, and learn to live with the chronologized life course through which their lives are culturally narrated” (253). She shows how children take up age-based narratives in their articulations of past and future selves, in order to make sense of their evolving subjectivities. Although notions of childhood, youth and adulthood are culturally constructed, they are lived as real, and provide potent sources of self-understanding.

Beyond studying how young people locate themselves through age-based discourses, scholars have also explored how these discourses function within broader political processes. Particularly relevant to the examples given above, Sue Ruddick (2003) proposes that notions of “youthfulness” operate in the service of neo-liberal economic and social relations by glorifying flexibility and risk amid reduced state support. She argues that within Western, neo-liberal contexts, workers of all ages are “encouraged to actively construct themselves as 'youthful' in their ability to retool intellectually, to embrace uncertain career paths and—even in cultures of the body—to dress and discipline their bodies to appear younger, fitter and more energetic” (351). Citing anti-aging remedies, extreme sport packages and other youth-oriented consumer goods, Ruddick suggests that “youth, youthful bodies, youthful energy and creativity have become a defining ideal of contemporary Western culture” (353). She argues that as a state of impermanence is normalized, citizens are encouraged to mobilize a “new cultural capital—their

youthful ability to sustain risk and to adapt” (354). This agile, energized worker pursues “the youthful career path,” bearing responsibility for perpetual risk and uncertainty through constant work on the self and “lifelong learning” (356).

Emphasizing core principles like, “Change is constant” and “Learning is ongoing,” *The Real Game* echoes many of these youthful tropes (Barry 2005). Further, Amanda and Kristin's expressed desire to forever embody the freedom and flexibility of a “twenty-something” appears to draw upon similar cultural ideals. However, even as students invest in this youthful subjectivity, their future narratives also reveal a desire for stability and security that runs counter to this emphasis on movement and change. Recall Amanda's projection into her twenties as a time when she will “have a job and be living by myself and just be there.” Even as she idealizes youthfulness, Amanda's fantasy might also be interpreted as a longing for stability and security – a time and place in which she can just “be there.”

Later in the chapter, I explore how this desire materializes in students' visions of their ideal home, which is constructed as a site of belonging that symbolizes the material and emotional security of the “good life.” For now, I simply want to highlight how students' investments in “youthful” ideals of flexibility and adaptability are often bound up with desires for place and stability. Sometimes this is expressed as a concern over maintaining relationships, as if adulthood signifies a break with established social ties. When I ask Melissa about her thoughts on being an adult she says, “Well, I'm nervous that I'm not gonna see my mom a lot because I don't, I really like her and I was mostly with her.” Similarly, Karen says, “I don't really wanna go far away from my parents too much cuz I'd miss them too much.” Immediately following this comment, she makes the link to place-based continuity: “And I don't wanna live in the city cuz I don't like cities. They're, I just don't want to live in a city. They're too loud at night and the cars are always going by, it's too bright.” These stated commitments to preserving

current relationships and place-based attachments suggest that for some young people, the future presents a site of change that threatens to sever the social and spatial relations of their formation. Melissa and Karen's commitment to these relational and spatial continuities counter a vision of the future centred on the disembedded, self-reliant individual.

“A good education”: Envisioning educational futures

Although personal dreams and career goals vary from one student to the next, the value of “a good education” arises repeatedly during interviews and focus groups. Many students perceive higher education as a necessary step on a journey toward secure employment. Scott tells me that he plans to “spend as much as I can do in education to get myself a good job.” Nick suggests this is a central lesson within *The Real Game*, in that “*The Real Game* teaches you that you do need money to live and you need a good education. You need a grade 12, you don't want to just drop out of high school and be a, be a truck driver or something like that.”

Despite this shared assumption regarding the importance of education, students are not necessarily enthusiastic about their educational futures. For instance, Justin tells me that he must attend college in order to pursue a career as a corrections officer. When I ask him what he's looking forward to about college, he says, “Nothin' really. Just doin' it, gettin' done, get out workin'.” From Justin's perspective, college presents a necessary, though undesirable, means to an end. Nevertheless, whether they like school or not, students generally take for granted the dominant cultural association between “a good education” and “a good life”.

Fieldsville students often speak about their educational futures in terms of their parents' hopes and expectations. In Christie's words: “Mom says that no matter what, her kids have to go to college so they can get a good career. And so that, that way we have something to look forward to everyday.” It was not uncommon for students to mention their parents' desire for

them to exceed their own educational and career trajectories, echoing the mobility narratives documented in Sennett and Cobbs' classic, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (1972, 166). As Christie explains: “Mom told me that I could be a dance instructor. Cuz mom's always wanted to be one as well. Or a teacher. But she never got the education to cuz she didn't go to school completely. But Mom said that I could be whatever I wanted to be. And I picked dance instructor.”

Students sometimes express hesitations about continuing schooling after high school, but say their parents insist they do so. As Jessie explains:

I said, 'Mom, do I really have to go to university and all that?' cuz I wasn't sure about going. And she said, 'Well if you don't wanna end up like me and not having a full education and all that, then ya I'd consider going to college or university.' So I'm like, alright, it might be kinda fun, like, getting more knowledge of what you actually want to do.”

Here, Jessie's Mom's experience is constructed as a reference point from which to build a narrative of mobility through higher education. Valerie Walkerdine (2003) has highlighted the tensions at the heart of such mobility narratives, which assign a negative value to people and practices that are central to one's identity. At another point in the interview, Jessie speaks with pride regarding her mom's work as a painter:

Me and [my sister] actually went to one of her houses that she was painting and it was like ginormous. She had to do, like, the basement... and then the main floor and then the upstairs, so she had to paint so much. And so I was like, “Mom, this is really cool.” And she was like, “Ya, I enjoy it.”

Jessie sees value in her mother's work, and her mother describes this work as personally rewarding. I place these two excerpts alongside each other in order to highlight the potential struggles that young people may encounter when invited into “improving narratives” of bettering the life experiences of their parents (Skeggs 1997, 82). In her study of working-class women's struggles to become 'respectable', Beverley Skeggs writes that “class was configured through the improvement discourse because in order to improve they have to differentiate themselves from

those who did not or could not improve” (1997, 82). While Jessie has access to the encouragement of a supportive mother, I wonder how she negotiates the tensions within this vision of educational success. That is, how does a young person feel about her own future “mobility” if it is premised upon devaluing those whom she loves and admires?

In other improving narratives, Fieldsville students are invested with the hopes of realizing the missed opportunities of others. Rebecca describes how her own career goals symbolize a potential success for her entire family: “Well, um, I wanna be a vet when I grow up. No one else in my family's a vet but like, everyone in my family says they wanna be a vet but my mom thinks I'm the only one who's actually gonna go through with it.” From Rebecca's perspective, the dream of becoming a veterinarian represents a potential achievement for her entire family; however, in her view, realizing this dream will require ongoing self-improvement that she sees as essential to her educational future:

One of the things I have to improve on is my confidence in me and in my, like, grades and everything, and how I feel. Like I've done a really good job over the last two years getting really big confidence. Cuz reading is one of my, like, worst subjects and I'm not very good at it. But I've got a lot of confidence built up now and I've actually been doing pretty good... And I like, I guess that I've gained a lot of confidence and I'm telling myself that I can do this. Like, don't doubt yourself anymore. And I'm actually, like, pretty good at it now. But, it's just that when you read and everything, I get, my face gets red and everything. And um, ah, it feels like you're really little and everything when you read and everyone's like, “That word's like, psh.” And like, Cody, like I don't make fun of him but he makes fun of me, but that's just the way he is and the way he'll always be. And he'll just be like, they'll laugh when you don't get a word and everything, and it's like, okay then. And that's the part, that's what brings you down in your confidence. But then when you just start ignoring it, which I have the last, grade 7/8 here. I just started ignoring it and don't care and everything. *I need to improve myself*, I don't care what he thinks at all, and just, just keep goin'. Don't listen. (emphasis added)

Rebecca locates the makings of her future success within her personal capacity for ongoing self-improvement. She returns to this issue of building greater confidence repeatedly throughout the interview, reiterating the point so many times that it becomes a sort of personal mantra. While there is much to celebrate about the fact that Rebecca has high aspirations for what she can

accomplish, I also want to consider the emotional work that this endless self-improvement requires. Walkerdine suggests that one of the harmful consequences of neo-liberalism is that individuals are positioned as responsible for supporting themselves based solely on internal psychological resources (2006, 11). As Rebecca speaks of struggling with her reading skills, she also tells a story of constant *emotional* work, a journey of building confidence and shedding self-doubt in order to persevere on an individual journey toward success.

When discussing the pursuit of a “good education,” several students mention the fact that if they were to attend college or university, they would be the first person in their family to do so. Dillon tells me that his father wants him to be a police officer, but he thinks he might like to go into carpentry. He is unsure about whether he'll continue schooling after high school. When I ask if he knows anyone who's gone to college or university, he says: “Actually, no one in my family. Like, my brother didn't do college cuz he, he was going to go to college but then he failed grade 12. My other brother didn't do it and my sister didn't do it. My dad didn't do it, my mom didn't do it. So if I go to college, I'd be like, the only one in our, my generation to do it.” Similarly, Nick says “every single person in my family either didn't finish high school or didn't go on to college or university.”

Melissa tells me that she doesn't know anyone who's been to college or university, but she might like to study to become a fashion designer or a teacher. When I ask her what she thinks that would be like, she says: “Ah, well I would think you'd have to stay there over nights and stuff in their dorms. And you would not, I think, like, I've heard that you choose classes that you need skills for. You don't like, have classes, like a whole bunch of them like you have in middle school or such.” Melissa draws upon widely circulated images of 'college life' to draft a mental picture of post-secondary education. The mention of living in “dorms” likely reflects the emphasis on student living within popular representations of the university experience. In fact,

Jonathon raises the same issue during our interview. When I ask what comes to mind when he thinks about life after high school, he says: “I think about college, how in these shows that are on TV now, like *Zoe 101* and all that, how they have dorms and it's like a college that you live at sorta thing. I just wonder, do you know if you actually do that?” At times like these, the students turn to me as someone who can provide information about what college is “really like,” highlighting our very different locations within the sphere of education, and making visible one aspect of the power relations that structure our conversations. Like Melissa, Jonathon doesn't have any family or close friends who have been to college or university, so he uses popular culture to help him envision this space. His question points toward the difficulties that Fieldsville students may face as they embrace the culturally mandated narrative of achieving a “good education,” but have little or no experiences to draw upon in order imagine themselves pursuing this future. So while post-secondary education is seen by many Fieldsville students as an important part of future “success,” it often represents a mysterious unknown that they must brave alone.

Although the importance of achieving a “good education” is generally accepted among Fieldsville students, some young people do not see themselves following a normative educational trajectory involving college or university. Nick tells me that this is a point of contention at home with his grandmother. “I don't like spending time in classes,” he explains. “Like, I wanna get outta school when I'm in grade 12, like, after grade 12.” During the interview, Nick talks about the work that he does with his dad and grandfather. They recently built a new horse pen for a woman who had been seriously injured in an accident. He describes the work in great detail, and tells me that “it was really, really hard cuz we had to like, work sixteen, seventeen hour days.” Nevertheless, Nick speaks about a sense of personal satisfaction that comes from this physically demanding work:

You feel like after you did it you accomplished something. And if you were like, a meteorologist or something, like in *The Real Game*, you wouldn't really feel that. Like, you wouldn't feel that you accomplished a whole lot cuz you just went out for like five, six hours or somethin', looked at the clouds and whatnot, and then sent it into the Weather Network, which like, no one watches [laughs]. So, you don't really accomplish much. But when you're doin' stuff like that, you know that you helped someone and that you did good stuff for them. And um, you can look back at it and say, "I built that room."

Nick contrasts the sense of accomplishment he derives from this kind of physical work with what he perceives to be the meaningless work of a meteorologist (the occupation of his RG character). Even as he focuses on personal satisfaction, Nick distinguishes these two forms of labour through their relationship to others, contrasting a weather broadcast that "no one watches," with physical work where "you know you helped someone and that you did good stuff for them." Nick's disinterest in post-secondary education appears to reflect this perceived distinction between meaningful and useless work, leaving him with a desire to "get outta school" as soon as possible.

Like Nick, Paul also resists others' suggestions that he attend college or university. He explains how his own imagined future conflicts with his mother's expectations, saying, "My mom wants me to be like, big millionaire guy, like, doctor or something." Paul describes an ongoing argument they have about whether he will enrol in "Academic" or "Applied" courses in high school next year.

Paul: Because she thinks I got the brains for it and everything and she wants me to grow up and be successful and stuff.

KC: And what do you think about that?

Paul: I just argue about it with her, saying I can do what I wanna do. My life.

Later in the interview it becomes clear that these divergent visions of Paul's educational future reflect deeper contestations about who he is as a person. When I ask Paul how he would describe himself he says:

Paul: Probably, sorta smart, but not, like, a lot.

KC: Why do you say that?

Paul: I dunno. Cuz I get good grades, but I don't get good grades at the same time.

KC: Like, you mean in different subjects?

Paul: Ya. (KC: Okay) And, ah [pause] I get in trouble a lot.

KC: For what kind of thing?

Paul: I don't know, just a lotta stuff. Fighting and like, mouthin' people. [pause] Ah, I don't know [laughs]. It's hard!

Paul's self-description as “sorta smart, but not, like, a lot,” contradicts his mom's view that he has “the brains.” While admitting that he gets “good grades,” he complicates this student identity by emphasizing the fact that he also “get[s] in trouble a lot.” Contrary to his mother's wishes, Paul does not embrace the identity of the 'good student', as he also invests in a resistant identity performed through “fighting and... mouthin' people.” Diane Reay (2002) has explored young people's struggles to negotiate working-class masculinities at the intersection of competing discourses of academic achievement and resistance. Paul laughs as he attempts to position himself within this intersection, finally exclaiming, “it's hard!” The tensions that surround questions of who Paul is in the present are not left behind when he imagines his future. Rather, the very question of the future becomes one of self-definition, where Paul must articulate and defend his own identifications. He conveys this pressing need with force: “I can do what I wanna do. My life.”

The above examples illustrate how the process of imagining one's future is firmly bound up with present identifications. Young people's student-identities create reference points for their educational futures, making particular pathways appear attainable and desirable, and others less so. During the interviews, I became aware of students' ambivalent encounters with a range of

student categories. For someone like Paul, this struggle is implicit in his efforts to negotiate academic achievement alongside the performance of a tough masculinity. But some Fieldsville students speak more overtly about the way their own student-identity has been shaped by institutional categories. This kind of reflexivity tended to coincide with the experience of a shift in the way they understand themselves as students, brought about by a change in school or teaching style. In fact, four different students narrated their own student identities through stories of transformation – not necessarily in their learning, per se, but in the way they were encouraged to understand their learning.

When I ask Karen how she would describe herself, she says, “I used to not think of myself [as] too, too smart cuz I couldn't get my work done hardly at all, so. But now I realized I am smarter, its just I'm, it's hard to get stuff on paper for me.” I ask her to tell me more about this shift, and she says it began last year when “Mrs. Sullivan took us to a, um, learning disabilities thing.” Rebecca describes a similar shift, and, like Karen, she attributes this to Mrs. Sullivan's efforts to develop pedagogical strategies that support her learning:

When I got with Mrs. Sullivan my grades were like, all A's and everything cuz she was explaining it more. Like, she gets like really, she explains it a lot. And I have a different learning style than everyone else. Everyone else uses pictures and words and everything. I have to use numbers.

The changes that Karen and Rebecca describe are about much more than an increase in grades – although Rebecca highlights this as a measure of her own improvement. Beyond raising their marks, the girls have gained access to new ways of understanding their own learning that have significantly altered their relationship to schooling, in terms of where they fit within the categories it offers them.

Melissa shares a similar experience as a result of moving schools. She describes Fieldsville as “fun,” and explains:

Melissa: It's not like at one of my other schools. They thought I was just stupid because I had a disability, so they just put me back a grade.

KC: Oh.

Melissa: So that's why I wasn't in grade 6 when I was supposed to be.

KC: Okay. And so how has that been different here?

Melissa: Well, Mrs. Sullivan is helping and all sorts of people were helping with a disability, instead of just not knowing and just thinking I'm dumb. So people help me, and Mrs. Sullivan helped me get back in my grade I should be in.

KC: Um hmm. And how's that been going?

Melissa: Good.

Melissa's schooling experiences – and thus, her student-identity – have been deeply shaped by the painful experience of being seen as “stupid” and “dumb,” and then singled out to repeat a grade. With the shift in schools, she gained the resources with which to attribute these labels to the misconceptions of others, rather than a personal deficiency. However, these past experiences of belittlement and humiliation leave her feeling apprehensive about her educational future beyond Fieldsville Public School.

KC: And so are there things about high school that you're looking forward to?

Melissa: Um, I dunno.

KC: Not sure.

Melissa: Not sure.

KC: What about things that you're worried about, or even just nervous about a little bit?

Melissa: That the classes are way gonna be really hard. [pause] And that I'm not gonna instantly click to figuring out all the stuff that they know. Cuz they could be reading big chapter books but I don't, I'm not really comfortable doing big chapter books sometimes. I'll do them if they're interesting but sometimes they're so like, they'll have big dictionaries you have to look up things. And they'll have lots of different math problems that are gonna be really hard.

Melissa's voice grows increasingly shaky throughout this response. I try to reassure her that there

will be people at high school to support her learning, just like at Fieldsville, but I can see that her eyes have filled with tears. Although Melissa has gained a sense of comfort and capability as a student at Fieldsville, she remains distrustful of other educational spaces. Her concern that she is “not gonna instantly click to figuring out all the stuff that they know,” suggests a view of schooling in which students must independently decipher institutionalized codes of learning. This future anxiety appears to be connected to her past experiences of being classified as “stupid” because of her learning disability.

Although he doesn't explicitly mention a learning disability, Scott also talks about having to struggle against the labels imposed upon him in the past. He tells me that he likes Fieldsville a lot more than his previous school, and when I ask why, he explains as follows:

Scott: Well, at my old school I was in grade 5/6, I think, and the teachers actually had the nerve to call up my mom, make her drive to the school. I run a little test and they said I was stupid.

KC: Oh, Scott, I'm so sorry to hear that.

Scott: Ya.

KC: That's awful.

Scott: They actually had the nerve to say that. So we had to move here. And I had alotta good friends there.

KC: I'm really sorry to hear that, Scott.

Scott: Umhm. [His eyes well up with tears]

KC: And so have you felt like it's better here?

Scott: Ya. The teachers are more friendly. I like living in the country better than the city.

Like Melissa, Scott describes a shift in his student-identity as a result of changing schools, leaving an institutional space where he was labeled “stupid.” He associates this transformation with positive aspects of the Fieldsville environment – friendly teachers, living in the country.

When I ask how he feels about going to school here, he says “I love it.”

How do these stories of shifting student-identities relate to young people's educational futures? I include the above narratives to highlight how students' schooling experiences shape the way they understand themselves as students, and thus become integral to their subjectivity. These shifting identifications operate largely on an affective level, apparent in the potent emotionality conveyed in the above examples. For young people to narrate their educational futures, they must tell stories about what kinds of students they are and can become. Fieldsville students relate to schooling in diverse ways that reflect their own experiences, access to resources, and emotional investments. The student-identities that emerge from these constellations are often fractured and contested, as seen in Paul's struggle between achievement and resistance, Rebecca's never-ending quest for self-improvement, and Melissa's fear of other school spaces. Even with all their cracks and fissures, these student-identities provide a framework from which to chart educational futures, as young people position themselves in relation to dominant narratives of a “good education.”

“A good life”: Moralizing Visions of Success

In addition to “a good education,” Fieldsville students set their sights on several other “goods” that they view to be integral to their imagined futures. During interviews, young people discuss the need to secure a “good job” (Rebecca) on a “good career path” (Dillon), and express their desire to become “a good person” (Christie) with a “good family” (Paul), who lives a “good life” (Scott). In this section, I suggest that this discursive repetition can be read as something other than students' frequent use of a common adjective; rather, these various “goods” comprise a series of culturally approved benchmarks that are seen to reflect, and thus confirm, individual worth.

While students tend to story success in material terms – a well-paying job, nice house, etc. – these elements of “the good life” are ascribed value beyond their monetary measure. As these various “goods” are assembled within narratives of a desirable future, taken together they come to symbolize a life *that is good*. Through a close reading of students' narratives of the “good life,” I show how young people project themselves into adult lives that confirm their individual moral worth, marking off their own imagined futures from one less desirable. Operating under the weight of this moral imperative, Fieldsville students narrate their hopes and fears for the future through visions of “success” that are always punctuated by the threat of “failure.” Mindful of the fact that moral attributions are closely tied to class-making (Sennett and Cobb 1972; Skeggs 2004a), I analyze these narratives with questions about the “embodied, social, cultural and deeply affective ways in which class works” (Luttrell 2008, 62).

In this analysis of the moral investments that anchor students' future narratives, I draw insight from Sara Ahmed's work on how affect orients bodies in space and time. According to Ahmed, “emotions are not only about movement, they are also about attachments or about what connects us to this or that ... What moves us, what makes us feel, is also that which holds us in place” (2004, 11). Attending to these affective attachments, she demonstrates how narratives of happiness compel individuals toward particular visions of the “good life.” In her analysis of the popular movie *Bend It Like Beckham*, Ahmed highlights the limited possibilities that are made available through dominant discourses of happiness, such that happiness operates as a moral duty: “The promise of happiness directs life in some ways, rather than others. For a life to count as a good life, then it must return the debt of its life by taking on the direction promised as a social good, which means imagining one's futurity in terms of reaching certain points along a life course” (128). In the case of young people's future narratives, dominant ideals about what constitutes a “good life” are felt as affective pulls that draw students toward particular ways of

being and away from others. The movement implicit within this process is both literal and metaphorical, as students envision themselves traveling toward a “good life,” which occupies a desirable, though contradictory, location in social and geographical space.

Central to Fieldsville students' future narratives is an expressed desire to become a “good person.” These young people construct this ideal in a variety of ways that reflect their diverse identifications, and shed light on the conditions in which they are becoming. Christie speaks openly about her desire to be “good,” which she defines in relational terms, as someone who supports those around her: “Like, I see myself when I get older being a good person where if something ever happened I'd be right there, no matter what.” When I ask her to tell me more about what it means to be a good person, she says, “Like be, if somebody was picking on your friend, don't just stand there, actually do something about it.” While not always discussed in these terms, this emphasis on helping others is central to many students' visions of their future selves. For instance, when I ask Kyle what he is looking forward to about his desired career as a lawyer, he says, “Well, pretty much going into court and helping people. I've always wanted to be in a live court. Being in like, law enforcement stuff. Ya, pretty much really looking forward to doing that.” Although Christie and Kyle place different practices at the centre of their imagined futures, they both commit to “helping others” as a defining feature of a life that they understand to be good.

The contrast between Christie and Kyle's responses reflects a gendered distinction that emerged across students' helping narratives; namely, girls tended to draw upon care discourses of helping others through caring professions or interpersonal relationships, while many boys invested in protective discourses of helping the public good through law and order. Amanda explains that her mom wants her to become a nurse, like her, because it suits her caring personality: “I just think I'm really caring for a lot of people, and stuff like that. Like, I like to

help people and be there and everything. So, she's a nurse and I really, she wants me to be a nurse and everything. She thinks I'd be good at it." Although Amanda isn't sure that a career in nursing is what she desires, she is certain about her identity as a caring person, and she sees this as an important part of her future.

Offering a different approach to helping others, Tim tells me that he wants to work as a paramedic. He gestures toward the ambulance that he's drawn on the front cover of his *Real Game* folder, and explains what appeals to him about this job: "That you're helping out the law. You're helping out people with their medical problems. Car crashes, helping them get rescued." Tim goes on to say that he looks up to his aunt and uncle, who are both police officers, because "they help out the law, too. Arrest those who are being bad, don't follow the law." Tim's desire to work alongside those who are "helping out the law" aligns his future self with a particular vision of "the good person."

This ideal of the good person is produced in opposition to one who is not – in Tim's case, the "criminal." This category was a common site for the marking of moral boundaries, as many boys invest in protective masculinities that work to cleanse the social fabric through expelling criminal elements. In these narratives, boys position their future selves as defenders of the public good, by "stopping crime" (Jonathon) and punishing "scumbags" (Justin) in order to "help people out" (Cody). Sometimes, these visions emphasize improving the quality of life of others. In Scott's words: "Well, there's alotta crime here-adays, now [more than] there used to be. And the world needs more safety and all that. So I just thought I'd be a police officer, so I can, so the world can be a better place." At other times, boys' visions of helping others were tied up in sensationalized (and masculinized) stories of danger and adventure, as in this focus group exchange:

KC: What appeals to you about being a police officer?

Cody: Just like, you're not sittin' in an office on a computer. Like, you're ridin' around in a car.

Paul: You get to help people.

Cody: Help people out. Like my aunt's friend, right now he's up in, he's got the scariest job [as a] police officer. He's in Toronto right now dealin' with bike gangs.

Paul: He gets, like, a shotgun.

Cody: He gets a shotgun and a taser and everything.

KC: Would you like that?

Dillon: Ya

Cody: Ya, it'd be fun ridin' around in a car and

Paul: It'd be scary [laughs]

Cody: It'd be a scary job, but it'd be like [nods his head as if he's getting pumped up]

Paul: It'd be, like, endurance. [pumps his fists]

Cody: It'd be endurance. You're running around with a gun and everything. People are out, knock em down. Get to chase cars, pull 'em over.

Here, the notion of “helping others” by fighting crime is narrated through a story of risk and danger that draws upon discourses of rural masculinity and urban crime explored in previous chapters. This exchange demonstrates how young people's investments in moral ideals of “doing good” are not isolated from other aspects of their subjectivity, but rather are embedded within these local identifications and attachments.

Another example of how students' current identifications inform their visions of a “good” future can be seen in the way they draw upon the discourse of “dirt” to narrate the life they desire. Or rather, to be more accurate, notions of dirt provide students with tools for depicting the life they do *not* want to live – that is, a life that is not good. Consider the following response from Hilary:

I just don't wanna grow up to live in a dirty house and stuff. Cuz you gotta have responsibilities. Like, when you brush your teeth you don't just leave the toothpaste layin' on the sink. And like, when guys go to the washroom, they don't just leave the seat up. And, when people eat food and they don't want anymore, they don't just leave it on the table, or you don't wash the dishes. If you cut up food and you take what you want and just leave it there, that's gross too. And if you don't clean the tub or the toilet at all, yuck! Ugh, it's nasty!

After her initial statement about not wanting to “live in a dirty house,” Hilary shifts to a normative assessment of the responsibilities required for respectable living. This move is signalled by a change in pronouns – from “I” to “you” – as she details a series of “don'ts” within the duties of maintaining a clean house. In this account, the “dirty house” comes to symbolize someone who lacks responsibility, reflecting poorly on her or his inner character. As Hilary works to produce herself as a good person, classed discourses of hygiene intersect with feminine ideals of domesticity, such that her future home becomes a site from which to judge her moral worth.

These moralizing distinctions between the clean and dirty home also map onto the body. In the following quotation, Kristin draws boundaries around those who are “sloppy” in order to distance herself from the kind of person she is not. At this point in the interview, I have just asked how she would describe herself. After beginning to tell me that she doesn't care what other people think of her, she amends her answer as follows:

I would say, um, I don't really care what other people – like, I care what I look like and stuff like that. Cuz I don't really like to go around in my pajamas, [laughs] I never go around in my pajamas. But it's okay if other people do [said quickly, as if in defense] but I don't really do that cuz I don't really want people to get that feeling on me that I'm kind of, like, sloppy and I don't really care and anything. But I would say, I don't really care what other people think, except for like, what they think of, well, no – it's confusing! [laughs]

As Kristin attempts to articulate a coherent self-description, she struggles to negotiate a series of conflicting statements about herself. On the one hand, she takes up a liberal narrative of the autonomous individual who is free to be herself, and is not concerned about how she appears to

others. However, this not-caring self is restricted to what might be called her inner self, consisting of her thoughts and behaviours. When it comes to embodiment, on the other hand, Kristin cares a great deal how she appears to others. Explaining why she does not “go around in my pajamas,” she alludes to a process whereby the body is read as a reflection of one's moral character. In her words, “I don't really want people to *get that feeling on me* that I'm kind of sloppy and I don't really care.” Careful not to seem as though she is passing judgment, Kristin clarifies that it's fine if other people want to dress in their pajamas, this is just not suitable dress for her. Like Hilary's disgust at the idea of a dirty home, Kristin distances herself from a “sloppy” appearance, identifying instead with a body that is clean and cared for. Beverley Skeggs writes that “clothing and objects are experienced intimately: they signify the worth of the person” (1997, 86). As key markers of femininity, the home and body become sites for the production of “good” feminine futures. Alongside the boys' stories of fighting crime, the girls' investments in a clean home and well-kept appearance reproduce gendered narratives of care that are imagined to secure their futures within the “good life.”

In addition to drawing out these gendered overtones, I want to argue that such moralizing visions are also deeply classed. Wendy Luttrell asserts that “in the realm of discourse – the ways in which people talk and feel about themselves and others, and in the ever-so-subtle and everyday ways that people are oriented to understand their own success or failure – *the power of social class is hidden in notions of and feelings about individual worth, dignity, and respectability*” (2008, 62, italics in original). Luttrell's analysis of the “hidden-ness of class” (2008, 62) is supported by other scholars who explore how class is emotionally inscribed through attributions of moral value (Bryant and Pini 2009; Dillabough, Kennelly and Wang 2008; Pini, Price and McDonald 2010; Reay 2004; Sennett and Cobb 1982; Skeggs 2004a).

Beverley Skeggs' analysis of class-making has been central to this body of work (2004a).

According to Skeggs, class is “not a pre-existing slot to which we are assigned, but a set of contestable relations; it is not a given, but a process. It is the process of evaluation, moral attribution and authorization in the production of subjectivity that... is central to understanding contemporary class relations” (2005, 976). Contrary to the popular assumption that class is no longer a meaningful distinction within a neo-liberal era of choice and self-invention, Skeggs argues that class is implicated in the production of self now more than ever. Her analysis centres on the issue of *value*, as she seeks to “understand how class is made through cultural values premised on morality, embodied in personhood and realized (or not) as a property value in symbolic systems of exchange” (2005, 969).

Skeggs' analysis offers insight into the classed processes that shape, and are shaped by, young people's narratives of the future. Because visions of the “good life” reflect the practices, relationships and identities that are deemed to be of collective value, this cultural construction is a powerful site for class-making. Discourses of the “good life” create moral boundaries around types of people and ways of living that are worthy of legitimacy, and those that are not. These moral boundaries become integral to subjectivity formation, as individuals draw upon the discourses available to them in order to make sense of – and create value within – their lives. Crucially, though, Skeggs shows how practices of self-making require forms of capital that are unevenly distributed: “The working-class are not allowed access to the resources and technologies required for self-production. This is why self-making is class-making” (2004b, 91). In a socio-historical context where practices of ethical self-making are elevated as the cultural ideal, the discourse of “choice” actually serves to exacerbate existing inequalities by revealing (and pathologizing) those “who cannot perform the good self because they do not have the cultural resources to do so” (Skeggs 2005, 974). Thus, the invitation to “choose” one's future becomes a test of moral character premised upon classed attributions of value, as young people

must mobilize the symbolic resources required to align their futures with a life that is good.

The evaluative pressures that govern these processes are perhaps most visible in Fieldsville students' preoccupation with categories of success and failure. During the interviews, I was struck by the consistency with which these young people organize their futures around this binary opposition, articulating aspirations for personal success against the backdrop of failure. Within this binary, vague images of the “good life” are often paired with vivid accounts of the many potential failures that threaten this vision of success. For instance, Jessie tells me that she's “nervous about [pause] a whole bunch of things. I'm nervous about maybe losing my house or my kids and stuff. Or my husband leaving me when like, say if my kids are only three and an infant, then I'm kind of scared of him possibly leaving me for something or someone else, something like that.” Students shared fears that their career would “come crashing down” (Melissa), or that they might end up “not having money, not having a house” (Rebecca). Tim tells me that he is “nervous about maybe getting my driver's licence, getting my job ... nervous that you're gonna pass or fail, or hired or go find another job.” Students plot their futures according to these cultural milestones of “growing up” (e.g., getting a driver's licence, getting into college/university, getting a job, buying a house). I was struck by how students perceive each of these narrative markers as a kind of test – a point at which they must prove themselves, or risk becoming a “failure.” Skeggs writes of how the women in her study “had a strong sense of what they did not want to be, but were less sure of what they wanted to be” (1997, 82). Similarly, while Fieldsville students structure their imagined futures around success and failure, these possibilities are not devoted equal weight in their narratives. Rather, alongside abstract visions of living the elusive “good life,” these young people construct vivid accounts of the myriad possibilities for failure that they view as obstacles on their journey toward future success.

Becky Francis and Valerie Hey highlight numerous studies that show how “neo-liberal

discourses of meritocracy and individuality project responsibility for failure away from social structures and institutions and on to individuals” (2009, 226). For the students at Fieldsville, this success/failure binary is the focus of much emotional work. After sharing that she is “nervous about failing,” Hilary constructs a narrative linking school-based categories of failure to other areas of life: “I’m kind of scared about that because I’m kinda failing this stuff [in math] now... So it’s like, ‘Oh, I’m not gonna do so good,’ I think and stuff. And when you grow up and get a license and you fail on that, or you get a job and you don’t get it cuz you don’t have the right experience and stuff like that...[trails off].” Rebecca expresses similar worries, stating, “I’m just scared that I’m gonna fail. Cuz I don’t wanna fail any classes.” She approaches this fear of failure as a psychological weakness that she must overcome through personal motivation and self-confidence:

Like, pretty much I think that school is my life for the next 10 years and I have to like, get over it and like, I have to get over. Like, “Rebecca, you’re gonna do well, you’re not gonna fail all your classes. You’re not gonna get Cs and Ds in your classes and everything. And then get out to college and you have no job and it’s like, you’re livin’ with your parents in your basement!”

For Hilary and Rebecca, concerns about failing at school translate into the potential for failure in later life. I want to contextualize their narratives in relation to what Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz call the “ethos of competitive individualism” that structures schooling under neo-liberalism, promoting classification and hierarchy while maintaining the myth of meritocracy (2009, 217). This framework generates seemingly infinite opportunities for failure, which are read onto individuals as the product of some personal deficit. These failed individuals then serve as the symbolic motivation for the self-discipline of others, and thus perform an integral role within dominant stories of success.

Jessica Ringrose and Valerie Walkerdine illustrate this dynamic in their analysis of televised make-over shows, where pathologized working-class women are coached in the

embodied presentation of middle-class femininity. They argue that such shows reflect the promise of neo-liberal self-invention, organized around the “continuous risk of failure set in dynamic opposition for the potentiality of ultimate success” (2008, 240). This process of promising transformation shores up the boundaries around the successful bourgeois femininity that is coded normal and universally attainable. Ringrose and Walkerdine acknowledge that constructing boundaries around society's apparent worthy and unworthy is not a new phenomenon. Rather, they argue that “what has intensified in our neo-liberal, individualizing times is the psychological imperative to improve and transform the self” (235). In the previous section, I showed how Fieldsville students take on this duty for self-improvement through narratives of educational mobility. The success/failure binary serves to promote these forms of improvement, as seen in the following quote from Kristin: “I'm not gonna be one of those kids or whatever that doesn't finish anything or has no job or anything. I'm gonna go to, I want to go to university, like, I don't wanna just stop. Cuz I wanna get a good job.”

Much like their aspirations, young people's fears for the future are informed by their lived experiences. In addition to critical moments in their past – such as a parent's job loss – young people's ideas about success and failure are shaped by their understanding of their current social location. Hilary constructs the life she would like to live in relation to those around her, calibrating her own classed location by comparing her family situation to that of her peers. “I wouldn't wanna live Jessie's life cuz her parents are kinda poor,” she says, adding “And so are Dillon's parents.” As Hilary develops this assessment of her own classed positioning in relation to her friends', she moves from perceived financial inequalities to differences of lifestyle:

I don't know how to explain it. Just, I feel really bad for them, though. Cuz like, they look at us and Jessie can come to my house and like, I have stuff she doesn't. And I can go to Rebecca's house and we can all go over there and Rebecca has a lotta stuff we don't. But like, I could have that if I wanted to, but just my parents make decisions, like they don't want me to grow up and sit inside and just sit on the computer the whole time or watch

TV the whole time. I asked for, all I wanted, I just wanted a Wii, then I changed my mind. And um, the only reason they didn't get us a Wii is because my dad didn't want us to grow up to live inside and sit on the couch and eat chips all day and just play the Wii and stuff. But ya.

Hilary evaluates her own living situation in relation to friends who appear to have more or less. Her efforts to articulate these differences demonstrate how class is bound up with ideas about moral value, which are interpreted as individual lifestyle choices. Commenting that her parents do not want her to “grow up to live inside and sit on the couch and eat chips all day,” Hilary draws upon dominant representations of a pathologized working-class lifestyle that is deemed lazy and unhealthy (Skeggs 2005, 968). Her understanding of her own class positioning provides a resource for envisioning the life she does and does not want to live. More broadly, her narrative demonstrates how ideas about the future are always mediated by social positioning.

Students' narratives of success and failure touch on various elements of their imagined futures, but crystallize in the vision of their future home. As a symbol of both material and emotional security, the home is elevated as the ultimate measure of the “good life.” Supporting Skeggs' assertion that “the home is an important site for displaying cultural investments” (1997, 89), students use the imagined home as a backdrop on which to project their fantasies of the future. Often, when I would ask more general questions about how they envision their lives in the future, students would answer through representations of home. For the most part, students do not locate their futures in expensive mansions symbolic of fame and fortune. Instead, they express their desire for a modest home in the country where they will feel safe and secure. When I ask Paul what he means by wanting a future with a “good lifestyle,” he says “Just mellow and living in a safe place.” Scott says, “When I grow up and try and get a house I just want to get, not a fancy house, just enough to live in and get a car just enough to get around and all that. Nothin' fancy.” He describes his grandparents' house in a neighbouring town as an example of the sort of

home that he hopes for in the future. Jessie is among a handful of students who hope to eventually assume ownership of their parents' house:

So I really wanna like, live at my house where I am now. I'm so comfy with it. I've only moved once and we were living in my grandma's house and they were back at her cottage cuz we had nowhere to live. So I was only a little baby and [my sister] was three, and so, we lived there. But now we live in our house. We've been here for seven years I think. So ya, I've just kind of grown a really strong liking to this house that I'm in.

Expressing her affection for this place where she feels “comfy,” Jessie constructs the emotional experience of home as an embodied “fit” that fosters feelings of familiarity and belonging. While Rebecca does not share Jessie's vision of taking over her parents' home, she does reflect upon her personal connection to this place and foresees potential challenges managing this affective attachment in later life.

Rebecca: I would love to live really close, but then if I can't live close, I need to move far away.

KC: Why do you say that?

Rebecca: Because if I'm in the middle I'd just keep going to my parents' house and not go back. And then when I'm far away I know that I can't go back.

KC: Okay.

Rebecca: Can't go back there. But when I'm, like, close to there, I would just be there every night. Cuz I have, when I'm at friends' houses, like, if I'm at Amanda's I know I can go back [home] when I don't want to spend the night and everything, but I don't. I used to, though. But then when I'm in Warden with my friend Nancy, I know I can't go home because, like, my dad's not gonna drive into Warden [laughs]. But like, I either have to live far away or really close. One or the other.

Rebecca constructs the place of “home” within an internal tension she imagines for her future, in which she must negotiate her desire for independence and mobility alongside enduring place-based attachments. In doing so, she provides a poignant illustration of how “home” is embedded within emotional geographies of being and becoming, such that certain places are folded into the self as a part of one's subjectivity. Here, it is helpful to recall Sara Ahmed's reflections on the

spatiality of affective attachments, as that which both moves us and “holds us in place” (2004, 11). As young people look toward the future, fantasies of home provide a site in which to place these attachments, a stable structure where futures are housed and furnished with the makings of the “good life.”

In addition to investing in ideals of “home,” students reference the threat of homelessness as the ultimate failure. I first encountered this preoccupation during a RG activity early in the school term. When Amanda realizes she cannot afford the home on her Dream List, Cody and Shaun make loud jokes about her becoming a “hobo” or “bum.” I did not attribute particular significance to this interaction at the time, but later came to understand the field moment within a discursive pattern where homelessness becomes the marker of a failed future. For instance, Nick tells me that he jokes with his grandma when she asks about his plans for the future, saying “I wanna be a hobo.” When I ask how she responds, he says, “I kid around with her and she says, ‘Except for that! You can’t be a hobo.’” During a focus group discussion about gender and schooling, Hilary invokes homelessness as a potential outcome of not caring about school:

Amanda: I think [girls] just put more effort into it.

Rebecca and Hilary: Ya.

Amanda: We care more about what, our grades and/

Hilary: Our grades and how we’re gonna grow up to be and not live in a dumpster.

In this formulation, the boys’ perceived lack of effort in school positions them on a failed trajectory culminating in homelessness. Although Hilary assumes a playful tone while delivering this harrowing assessment, I would argue that the logic underpinning her statement warrants closer consideration. What enables this link to be made between a lack of effort and “care” at school, and a future living “in a dumpster”? Hilary’s narrative contrasts the person who cares about her schooling and who she’s “gonna grow up to be” with one who does not, placing the

responsibility for these opposing fates in the hands of the individual. Here, the individualizing binary of success and failure materializes in visions of home and homelessness, so that the housed and homeless body represent different categories of personhood. Within this discursive frame, the threat of homelessness exerts a disciplinary force, as punishment for not successfully charting one's future. When I ask Kristin if she has any worries about the future, she answers with a succinct reiteration of this logic: “Just about being homeless [laughs], which I hope never happens! Cuz if I go to university, which I probably will be, and get a good job and money and stuff. I just, ya.” Although the possibility of becoming a “hobo” was often raised in jest, the theme of homelessness was discussed in more serious tones during the interviews, when some students expressed fears about losing their house in the future.

Samira Kawash writes that the homeless body “appears as a limit figure in relation to the public” (1998, 329). She analyzes how this abject figure functions to shore up the boundaries around what is deemed “good”:

[The homeless body] emerges as the corporeal mark of the constitutive outside of the realm of the public, a product of the same spatial and economic processes that work to secure a place for the public subject. This body is therefore simultaneously material and emergent. What appears as the “filth” of the homeless body—the aligning of homelessness with stench, waste, and bodily excretions—is not simply the natural outcome of attenuated circumstances. The public view of the homeless as “filth” marks the danger of this body *as body* to the homogeneity and wholeness of the public. (Kawash 1998, 329, italics in original)

An immense amount of work goes into producing this abject body, and young people draw upon these widely circulated discourses in their efforts to align themselves with a life that is “good”. As they map out possible futures according to dominant ideas of morality, images of home and homelessness come to represent potential success and failure.

While navigating culturally mandated ideals of the “good life,” many Fieldsville students invest in an individualized model of success in which they alone are responsible for their futures.

Jonathon tells me that he is worried about “being poor” in the future, adding “Just because a lot of people now are being poor, or ending up poor because they don't plan out how they're gonna live when they're young. And that's [pause] I guess that's what happens.” When I ask Jonathon to explain further, he adds, “Well, they don't get a good enough education which leads them to not a very good job and eventually that can't be very good.”

It's helpful to contextualize Jonathon's concerns about future poverty in relation to his current living situation. Jonathon's dad works as a truck driver and his mom commutes to Warden everyday to work at a fast food restaurant. During my time in Fieldsville, their family spent several weeks staying with a neighbouring family because their own house had no electricity. By sharing these details about Jonathon's family situation, I do not mean to reduce complex lives to a cluster of demographic characteristics. Rather, my intention is to provide some context for Jonathon's fear of “being poor,” in order to open up an interpretation of this emotional expression as emerging from a set of lived conditions. By this I mean that Jonathon encounters poverty not simply as an abstract “bad” that threatens narratives of the good life, but as a very real experience of material insecurity and constraint. That said, the interpretation that one brings to such circumstances is always mediated by discourse, so that the telling of experience represents the interface between material conditions and the cultural frameworks used to make sense of them (Scott 1992). Jonathon's account of poverty as something that happens to people who “don't plan out how they're gonna live when they're young,” draws upon an individuated understanding of inequality that blames poor people for their own hardship.

Given the emphasis on future-planning and personal responsibility in *The Real Game*, Jonathon's use of this explanatory framework is not surprising. Critical scholars who link this type of reasoning to neo-liberal discourses of entrepreneurship and self-reliance argue that such individuated narratives obscure structural processes and enlist individuals into their own self-

governance (Francis and Hey 2009; Gonick 2007; Harris 2004; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001). Building on this work, I want to consider what affective tensions might arise at the place where these materialities and discourses collide. How does Jonathon reconcile his account of poverty as a product of individual failure with his own experiences of material hardship? Does he understand his own family's struggles within this causal frame? After offering this explanation as to why so many people are "ending up poor," Jonathon repeats his previous statement that this is something he worries about. He then adds, "Makes me wanna stay in school as long as I can. And I think I'm going to." In this formulation, the threat of "being poor" is lived as a fear of personal failure. In response to this threat, Jonathon constructs a mobility narrative in which the pursuit of a "good education" works to secure a future outside of poverty.

Valerie Walkerdine has called for a more complicated "understanding of the issue of upward mobility and the terrifying invitation to belong in a new place, which [is] simultaneously an invitation to feel shame about what one had been before" (2003, 238). This perceptive statement suggests that invitations into normative (urban, middle-class) visions of "success" are produced, in part, through affectively orienting the subject *away from* the location that precedes such mobility. Widely circulated images of success and failure convey a moral imperative to produce oneself on the "good" side of this divide. For many young people in Fieldsville, these individuated futures require a double mobility that moves across geographical and social space, as they are positioned as solely responsible for transcending the constraints of their rural and classed location. The binary of success and failure maps onto moralizing categories of personhood such that young people are *affectively* drawn into narratives of the "good life," as the value of their very personhood relies upon their ability to take on these imagined futures as their own.

Walkerdine interrogates some of the internal tensions that are smoothed over by stories of

mobility toward the “good life.” Exploring how one young woman negotiates the shift from working-class to middle-class selfhood, she writes:

What I want to think about is the way in which Lisa understands her old childhood subjectivity as a working-class girl in a council house and how she understands and fantasises her new subjectivity. I want to argue that she imagines remaking herself and this demands a complete negation of her Other self. She then engages in powerful and pleasurable fantasies about the kind of woman she wants to become. Held inside these fantasies, though, is a painful Other, that which she fears that she is and wants not to be. (Walkerdine 2003, 245)

This account aptly describes the future visions articulated by many of the young people in this study, in which a failed Other looms as a constant threat. What I appreciate most about Walkerdine's analysis is her careful attention to the forms of affect that compel and complicate these self-productions. In the final section of the chapter, I discuss the analytic possibilities that may be opened through a close reading of affect in young people's visions of the future.

Future Affects

“I do think about it a lot,” says Rebecca, referring to the start of high school next year. “I think I over, like, I get myself scared and everything and I get myself worked up and everything.” As I listen to this ambitious thirteen-year-old talk about her educational future, I am struck by how she assumes personal responsibility for these feelings – “I *get myself* scared ... I *get myself* worked up” – as if she is to blame for experiencing such emotion. Rebecca then shifts from this introspective tone to one of motivation, as if she is psyching herself up for the struggles that lie ahead:

Rebecca: But um, you just have to know what you wanna do, where you wanna go, how you wanna do your life. It's just, it's kinda weird deciding now, cuz like, you have to go through high school and get your different classes and everything. It's weird deciding now. It's like, feels like you're 21 and you're moving out already!

KC: Do you feel like there's pressure on you now to decide?

Rebecca: Well, I don't have very much time to decide what I'm gonna be. I'm trying to

look if I can have like, if the marine biologist and the veterinarian classes are similar so that I can do, like, all the classes that are in there and then when I get to the end of high school I can just pick whatever one.

Rebecca experiences the future as if it were rushing toward her, forcing her to map out her life before she has even finished elementary school. She encounters the current moment as a time of grave significance, in which she must choose her very identity: “I don't have very much time to decide *what I'm gonna be*.” Determined to set herself on a pathway toward the “good life,” she takes up the position of the future-oriented, self-reliant subject offered within *The Real Game*. But this position is not embodied with ease. Rebecca sees herself embarking on a difficult and uncertain journey that will demand hard work and constant self-improvement. And this prospect both excites and terrifies her.

Few Fieldsville students describe feelings of anxiety with the same intensity as Rebecca, but many share her concerns about the need to plan for their futures. Amanda tells me, “I'm trying to, like, this year I wanna plan out what I'm gonna do in high school. Like, what I'm gonna take and everything. Cuz I'm just worried that I'm gonna take stuff for something and I'm not gonna end up becoming that, and then I'm gonna not have everything for what I wanna be and then I'll just have to go back to school.” Like Rebecca, Amanda views herself as an agent of the future who must assume responsibility for crucial life decisions that will determine the course of her life. Even as she takes up the neo-liberal tenets of future-planning and individual responsibility advocated in *The Real Game*, she's apprehensive about the uncertainties within this model of the life course and is not ready to embrace the corollary tenets of flexibility and lifelong learning. Also wary of future uncertainties, Kyle worries that this hard work and planning might be all for naught. He tells me he's concerned “if I don't get it and I did all those years, just wasting my time.” At first, I'm not sure I understand what he's saying, so I ask for clarification:

KC: If you don't get what?

Kyle: If I don't become a lawyer, I just wasted all like, pretty much halfa my life tryin' to become a lawyer and I'm unable to.

KC: Why would that happen, do you think?

Kyle: I don't know. I can't remember that good. Like, I can remember stuff, but not that well. I can't remember every single thing, every word. So I'm afraid that I have to remember pretty much everything in a case that might have to come up, and I won't be able to.

Kyle worries that, despite his best efforts, he may not be able to fulfill his dream of becoming a lawyer. He attributes this potential failure to some personal deficit that could render his education and training useless.

Other students take a more hopeful approach to their futures. For instance, Jessie talks enthusiastically about the many unknowns in her life:

I'm excited that school's almost over for me and then I'll get to, like – cuz when I was little and right now still, I want to see myself, like, as when I'd be growing up and what job I'm gonna take and stuff. And so I'm excited to see, like, once I get that done I'm goin' to college or university. And then, so I'm excited to see how my life is gonna turn out from, just like seeing high school and stuff, ya.

Jessie states repeatedly that she is “excited to see how my life is gonna turn out.” While her excitement conveys a positive feeling toward the future, she takes up a passive position of “wait and see,” suggesting that the future is not hers to decide. Christie expresses a similar sense of wonder and curiosity that suggests she also feels little control over the path her life will take. “Cuz I've always wondered, like, what would it be like in college? What would it be like in high school?” She tells me that she thinks about her future often, and says “sometimes I have dreams about me goin' off to college, and how fun it would be.” Framing these possibilities in the conditional tense, Christie approaches the future with a hopeful curiosity, and she looks forward to the surprises that await her. The paradoxical result is that Christie aspires toward, and feels ultimately responsible for, a future over which she understands herself to have little control. Her

contradictory feelings point to tensions that may emerge where neo-liberal discourses of self-invention meet the lived constraints of a particular classed and geographical location.

Still others resist the invitation to envision their futures. While boys were more likely to take up this resistant orientation, they did so in multiple and diverse ways. For instance, Shaun tells me that he's learned from his older brother, who is in the military, that it's better to focus on the present. He explains, "Like don't, don't think what's gonna happen. Just think of what's gonna happen right now and what's gonna happen right there. Not what's gonna happen, like, ten minutes from now. What's happenin' right there." By contrast, Scott questions the future-orientation advocated in *The Real Game* by investing in age-based discourses of childhood. He suggests that he is too young to be thinking about these things: "Like, personally, if I was a teacher, I wouldn't make students learn about this stuff yet." He recounts an interaction with his mom in which she displays her own investments in maintaining Scott's location within discourses of childhood:

Scott: When I start talkin' 'bout that stuff, since I'm in grade seven now, she says, "Don't talk about that! We're not there yet!" [both laugh]

KC: Why do you think she says that?

Scott: Cuz she does the saying, "I'll get old if you say that! I'm aging!"

This anecdote illustrates how we may become deeply invested in age-based categories, such that defending the boundaries of childhood and adulthood becomes a matter of protecting our very identities. For Scott, the kinds of issues discussed in *The Real Game* belong to a period of one's life that is separate from his identity as a young person, and he works to maintain this distinction in order to preserve a certain understanding of who is and where he "fits" in time. Even as Scott expresses doubt over the claim that he must project himself into the future, I want to draw attention to a point of similarity between his own reluctance, and the worry and wonder of his

classmates. Namely, in each of these cases, young people relate to their futures *affectively*.

Although they respond differently to the positions offered to them by neo-liberal discourses of choice and self-invention, they tend to articulate these responses in felt terms. Whether through narratives of fear, hope or hesitation, these young people draw on emotional registers to locate themselves within shifting aspirations and orientations.

Throughout this chapter, I have explored how the task of imagining one's future demands various forms of affective work. This may entail managing ambivalent feelings toward the freedoms and responsibilities associated with adulthood, or navigating competing attachments within narratives of educational mobility. In each case, the struggle to imagine one's future is negotiated on an affective level. I have attempted to demonstrate how an analysis of these affective struggles might generate new understandings about the process of forging subjectivities within this socio-historical and geographical context. Harding and Pribram argue that “emotions are a crucial means by which individuals and social formations are reciprocally constituted” (2009, 10). From this perspective, affective expressions are not merely individual responses to structural conditions; rather, these affective negotiations might be viewed as the interface between dominant discourses and subjectivities – as captured by the notion of structures of feeling – such that embodied affects constitute an apparatus through which structures of power operate. In this way, these various forms of emotional work can be read as an expression of how young people create lives within, through, and against the conditions in which they are becoming.

Analyses that strive to contextualize young lives in relation to histories, geographies or material conditions often take for granted a particular understanding of these structuring influences, and then ask how young people interpret and respond to them. In this project, I have sought to turn this question on its head, in order to ask what young people's affective expressions

reveal about the material and discursive conditions in which they are living. Such an approach works against a form of interpretation that begins from a predetermined set of conditions, which I see as a limitation in some analyses of neo-liberal subjectivity. Rather than assuming we know what neo-liberalism looks and feels like, and what kinds of subjects it produces, the analytic approach I am advocating asks: how do these young people envision their futures in this particular geographical and socio-historical context? What images animate their narratives? What inspires, excites and troubles them? This approach draws insight from Indigenous scholar Eve Tuck, who calls for a shift away from “damage-centered” research, and toward a “desire-based” framework (2009, 416). Rather than ask how neo-liberalism “damages” young people, I believe there is much to be gained by asking how they make meaning within the social, spatial, and historical locations they inhabit.

This approach does not set out to generate a new account of neo-liberalism; indeed, the analysis challenges the very idea of such an overarching account. Instead, I examine how young people in one rural community negotiate the dominant discourses of a neo-liberal era. At the same time that the analysis resists the seductions of a tidy neo-liberal narrative, I do not want to dismiss the significance of broader sociopolitical processes. To do so would be to explore local discursive practices as if they existed in a vacuum, outside of the histories, political trajectories and cultural texts that give them meaning. The challenge, then, is to contextualize the project in relation to broader processes of a neo-liberal moment, while also attending to the specificity of this particular geographical and cultural site. In this chapter, I have argued that an analysis of affect offers one way of doing this. I approach this work with an understanding of affective processes as simultaneously subjective and culturally embedded. In Harding and Pribram's words,

Simply because emotions, most conspicuously, are enacted or experienced at the level of

the individual does not exclude them from being operative, concurrently, in larger cultural structures and processes... [emotions] are the means by which social and cultural formations affect us, that is, render us as feeling beings in a series of complex, intricate ways. (Harding and Pribram 2009, 13)

From this perspective, studies of affect can foster a critical analysis of larger socio-historical structures and discursive processes as they are lived through specific bodies, relations and places.

Conclusion

My goal in this chapter has been to explore the affective processes that complicate and sustain students' imagined futures, and to consider what insights may be gleaned from them. These young people forge diverse and contested relationships to dominant neo-liberal discourses, for instance, embracing ideals of self-invention while maintaining an ardent commitment to local attachments. Even still, most adopt an individualized approach to the future that is structured around the binary of success and failure. The result of this individualizing frame is a seemingly endless struggle to prove that one is deserving of, and destined for, the "good life." I have highlighted the multiple strategies young people develop to manage this affective burden, and argued that these diverse examples demonstrate how neo-liberal discourses are negotiated on an affective level. Contextualizing this analysis in terms of the particularities of students' lives, I have shown how such affective negotiations are mediated by geographical and social positioning. Grounding the analysis in students' local discursive practices and affective struggles has illuminated how broader neo-liberal processes are lived in place, such that neo-liberalism demands different kinds of self-work from differently-positioned subjects. A great deal of this work is accomplished on an affective level, as young people are positioned as the sole authors of their futures, personally accountable for their own movement and improvement.

Chapter 7

Future Imaginings

This dissertation explores the imagined futures of young people in one rural Ontario community. By asking how grade 7/8 students in Fieldsville envision the person they hope to become, I have attempted to better understand processes of subjectivity formation in a specific historical and geographical context. This broader theoretical inquiry draws insight from Judith Butler's questions regarding processes of becoming: "What counts as a person? ... Whose world is legitimated as real? ... By what norms am I constrained as I begin to ask what I may become" (2001, 621)? If subjectivity is understood as something that is not fixed but rather is performed through discursive, spatial and social relations, then in constructing narratives of their future lives, young people are actively producing themselves as subjects. Situating their local identifications and discursive practices within broader socio-historical relations and discursive contexts, I have examined the ways in which students' narratives of the future operate through collectively imagined constructs like home, nation, and the "good life." Like Kenway et al, I have found that young people "learn about the future, their futures and themselves through contradictory and shifting webs of discourses" (1994, 199). In an effort to better understand complex processes of self-making, I have directed my focus toward the knots within these webs of discourses, and have highlighted how young people negotiate the tensions surrounding their contradictory location in discursive, social and geographical space.

But to suggest that Fieldsville students' visions of adulthood are the *only* futures at stake in this project excludes part of this ethnographic story. If I am to take seriously my commitment to feminist poststructural ethnography and its critique of knowledge production, then I must consider how the project itself is an exercise in imagining futures. On a personal level, I mustn't

overlook how this dissertation advances my journey toward a Ph.D., providing access to a set of credentials that will (hopefully) open up my own possible futures as a feminist scholar. To cast the project in such an instrumentalist light leaves an uncomfortable feeling in the pit of my stomach and seems to cheapen the value of its insights, but such discomforts do not erase the scholarly conditions in which this research has been conceived, conducted and communicated.

Beyond the personal futures envisioned through this project – my own, as well as those of the young people who so generously shared their hopes and fears with a curious researcher – the pages of this dissertation craft the conditions for another set of futures. Here, I am thinking of the different scholarly futures that might be imagined through this project, as a generative text that holds political and pedagogical potential (Cairns 2009). In this way, we might re-imagine ethnographic writing not as a story of the past – a report on what has been – but rather as an invitation into what might be, an opening into possible futures. Describing her vision of an alternative ethics that attends to the particularity of any encounter, Sara Ahmed suggests that “we could ask not only what made this encounter possible (its historicity), but also what does it make possible, what futures might it open up?” (2002, 562) It is with such an ethical project in mind that I begin this final chapter with the suggestion, however clichéd, that it might serve more as an introduction than conclusion – an opening into the not-yet.

To the critical reader, this investment in the project's possible futures might be interpreted as a paradoxical move that inscribes the dissertation with the neo-liberal discourses it seeks to critique. Certainly there is something to be said for the reminder that critical scholars cannot escape the discourses through which they are constituted. But wouldn't such a reading ultimately hand over the future to the figure of the neo-liberal subject, establishing it once and for all as *only* a site of enterprising self-governance? It is this sort of discursive closure that I seek to challenge by ending with a discussion of the multiple futures that are imagined both in and

through this project. According to Susan Buck-Morss, the value of critical theory is in its “power to dispel the illusion of the inevitability of events by demonstrating that it is how we conceive them that gives them their aura of fate” (2003, 42). Perhaps, then, it is by making visible the contingent and partial discourses through which futures are imagined, that new spaces open for imagining otherwise.

As the writer of this ethnography, I take on the responsibility of mediating the encounter between the young people I am representing, and the community of readers to whom I am writing. Resisting emancipatory narratives of “giving voice” to rural youth, my hope is that the personal accounts that are represented in this dissertation are read with an openness that inspires reflection. Put differently, I believe that one way to engage respectfully with the contributions that Fieldsville students have made to this project is to think with them, so that they may become a platform from which new questions are asked, and new futures imagined. In this chapter, I revisit key themes explored throughout the dissertation, with the hope that they might provoke such scholarly imaginings.

Locating subjectivity

Four years ago, I began what I thought was a project about neo-liberal discourses in education. Inspired by a collection of critical scholarship that documented a discursive shift in educational policy and curriculum (a body of work that had provided the theoretical framework for my master's thesis), I set out to add to these debates by examining what these discourses looked like in the classroom. If, as the literature suggested, students were now encouraged to embrace the position of the enterprising agent of the future, how were they interpreting and responding to this invitation? By exploring students' engagement with *The Real Game* – an educational program that appeared to be born of this discursive shift – I would generate an ethnographic account of

young people's lived experiences of neo-liberalism. Furthermore, by examining these processes in a rural context, the project would broaden existing debates by highlighting the perspectives and experiences of an understudied population. As I envisioned it, the dissertation would generate a nuanced analysis of how students were grappling with these dominant discourses as they imagined their futures, providing a contextualized reading of processes of self-making in a broader neo-liberal moment.

While these basic questions and commitments continued to occupy my thinking throughout the project, I quickly bumped up against the limitations of this interpretive frame. Within my initial days of research at Fieldsville Public School, I began to question whether theories of the neo-liberal subject provided the necessary tools for making sense of the practices and performances I was observing. In a matter of weeks I became convinced that something wasn't right about this approach. Rather than incite critical interpretation and reflection, the focus on discourses of neo-liberalism seemed to restrict my ability to explore students' social worlds in terms that were meaningful to them. It was as though I were trying to force a pre-established theoretical frame onto a set of practices that exceeded its boundaries.

As my focus gradually shifted away from questions of the neo-liberal subject and toward Fieldsville students' daily practices of self-making, new spaces of inquiry were opened. Across the various thematic sites that would eventually take the shape of individual chapters, the analysis returned repeatedly to the significance of location. In this project, I explore location not simply as a demographic marker, but as an ongoing process of establishing one's relational positioning in geographical and social space. Thinking about location in this way – an approach that emerged through my engagements with young people in Fieldsville – has allowed me to draw upon complementary insights from feminist poststructural theory and cultural geography, in order to examine how various factors intersect to shape one's sense of place in the world, and

one's sense of self in place. By approaching social and geographical space as distinct yet interrelated planes of identification, the project has illuminated specific discursive practices through which Fieldsville students produce and perform identities. While negotiating the contours of their own diverse material circumstances, available discourses, and personal investments, these young people work to establish themselves as particular people, in particular places, moving toward particular futures.

It was during focus group conversations following the initial activities in *The Real Game* that I began to notice the significance of place in students' imagined futures. As described in the Facilitator's Guide, this opening assignment requires students to perform the seemingly benign task of compiling a “wish list” for their future home. In practice, however, the task of envisioning a “dream home” raises questions of belonging that force students to articulate fundamental assumptions about where they “fit” in the world. Rooting their identities within the material and imagined geographies of their local community, these young people invest the rural with a set of socio-spatial meanings that exceed its physical and demographic characteristics. Drawing upon idyllic discourses that are widely documented in studies of the cultural construction of rurality, Fieldsville students project their futures onto a mythic countryside that epitomizes ideals of nature, safety and community (Leyshon 2008; Little 2002; Matthews et al. 2000; Rye 2006). Within educational policy discourse, the category of “rural” commonly signifies a geographically and economically marginalized population of students, who are assumed to struggle in the context of limited resources. While this framing may reflect certain aspects of students' lived realities, it overlooks the intensely “affective nature of place” (Kenway, Kraack and Hickey-Moody 2006, 93), and thus fails to consider the power of rurality in shaping these young people's very sense of self.

Engaging in relational practices of place-making, Fieldsville students craft their own rural

location in opposition to urban spaces that they imagine to be dirty and dangerous. These oppositional mappings also extend to the transnational realm, where a picturesque and peaceful Canada is marked off from distant global spaces characterized by contamination and instability. Young people in Fieldsville mobilize popular representations of unfamiliar spaces in order to craft these global cartographies, making use of the spatial discourses that are available to them as they establish their own sense of place. Taken together, though, these mappings reveal a troubling pattern, as many of the students' place-narratives contain racialized undertones. Fieldsville students map the world according to different people and places, and in doing so, often reproduce racist associations between “other” places and categories of personhood. What's more, because spaces of otherness help to constitute rurality through their very opposition, these race-based mappings are not simply visions of elsewhere. Rather, racialized understandings inform rural youths' sense of self, and thus are as much about self-definition as they are about imagining others.

Working from a theoretical perspective that seeks to problematize common sense categories, I do not interpret Fieldsville students' racialized place-narratives as proof of widespread beliefs about rural racism. Instead, I situate these mappings in the context of broader discourses of whiteness and rurality in Canada. From this perspective, rural youths' investments in racist spatial discourses – while deeply problematic – may be understood as efforts to redeem the value of their socio-spatial location. Faced with contemporary discourses that pathologize working-class, rural populations, students invest in a nostalgic, colonial rural that has historically been coded as a space of whiteness.

In addition to highlighting how these young people's place-narratives are informed by broader discourses of race and rurality in Canada, I believe the analytic value of this argument lies in its generative potential, inviting further questioning and exploration. Representations of

rurality proliferate throughout Canadian media and political discourse, most commonly framed by narratives of decline and division that pit the country's cosmopolitan, urban populations against its apparently rigid and old-fashioned rural communities. To critically engage with these representations requires exploring both their conditions of possibility and associated effects. My analysis of Fieldsville students' racialized place-narratives points toward intersecting discourses of race, class and rurality in Canada that demand deeper investigation. Such studies are required not only to generate alternative narratives that can counter racist spatial discourses in Canada, but also to develop effective pedagogical efforts to address these practices with young people.

Like many other young Canadians, Fieldsville students engage enthusiastically with a transnational flow of signs and images, but this engagement is shaped by their own socio-spatial context (Hayes 2004; Kenway, Kraack and Hickey-Moody 2006). This study demonstrates the pressing need for anti-racist education initiatives in rural contexts of relative racial and ethnic homogeneity. Beyond liberal efforts to promote tolerance through anti-stereotype education, effective interventions in this context will need to acknowledge that such racialized understandings may be central to students' very sense of self. As such, these efforts might benefit from the insights of feminist poststructural scholars who see transformation as more than a problem of knowledge, since this may require challenging the very discourses through which subjectivities are constituted (Boler 1999; Kenway et al. 1994). To support such initiatives, further research is needed exploring intersections of race, class and rurality in Canada, within both dominant and subordinate representations, as well as the embodied lives of rural young people.

Even as they invest in discourses of the rural idyll, Fieldsville students' sense of their own location is not uniformly experienced through the category of "rural youth." Rather, these spatial identifications are performed through their intersections with other social categories, including

gender and class. Despite significant shifts in gendered expectations and relations over time, historical associations between rurality and masculinity continue to have an enduring effect on what it means to identify as legitimately local in this context. Alongside boys' ever-contested performances of rural masculinity, I examine how Fieldsville girls manage their contradictory positioning within intersecting discourses of gender, rurality and class. Here, I point toward two different categories of rural girlhood – “popular femininity” and “dirt femininity” – and consider how each category opens up a different constellation of possibilities and constraints within gendered relations in Fieldsville. While popularity provides the girls with access to power, this power is confined by the constraints of heteronormativity and contingent upon its relationship to hegemonic masculinity. On the other hand, the “dirt” label may relax some of the demands surrounding feminine embodiment, but in doing so it makes the girls' claims to femininity rather precarious. Focus group conversations on the topic of gender and sexism reveal that Fieldsville girls do not passively accept these categories; on the contrary, many express frustration over what they see as unfair gender relations in their school community. However, even as they invest in ideals of gender equality, few have access to critical feminist discourses that allow them to connect these ideals to their everyday lives.

The gendered mappings that structure these young people's current lives also shape the landscapes onto which they chart possible futures. Through focus groups and interviews, I became aware of a tension within many girls' future narratives, which are marked by competing attachments to ideals of rural living and visions of middle-class femininity that are dominantly coded urban. This desirable urban looks nothing like the racialized space of crime and degeneracy examined in the previous chapter. Instead, the girls project their adult femininities into an implicitly urban future characterized by ideals of cosmopolitanism and professionalism. Exploring this tension as an issue of location, I suggest that the girls' competing attachments to

rural and urban adulthoods emerge from their conflicting position between two sets of discourses. On the one hand, Fieldsville girls face the gendered constraints of a rural idyll that extends a limited range of feminine futures; on the other, they fashion subjectivities in an historical moment dominated by popular discourses of “girl power” that invite them to imagine a world of endless possibilities.

Over the past decade, the “girl power” discourse has come under much critical scrutiny from feminist scholars (Aapola, Gonick and Harris 2005; Baker 2010; Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz 2009; Goodkind 2009; Ringrose and Walkerdine 2008b). Acknowledging the fact that young women may feel empowered by a “discourse of possibility” (Weis 2008), these scholars point toward the potentially harmful effects of a neo-liberal narrative that positions girls as individually responsible for their futures, denying persistent gender inequities and erasing the impact of other structuring factors such as race and class. The critical field of girls' studies has developed a strong presence within debates about education, popular culture, and other aspects of girls' lives, highlighting the challenges of satisfying competing visions of girlhood. Fieldsville girls' perspectives and experiences can extend these debates by bringing socio-spatial location into the scholarly conversation. Compared to recent writing on young rural masculinities (e.g., Campbell, Bell and Finney 2006; Kenway, Kraack and Hickey-Moody 2006; Morris 2008; Ni Laoire and Fielding 2006), young rural femininities have received relatively little critical attention in Western contexts, an especially noteworthy oversight given the rise of girls' studies. It is my hope that the stories of Jessie, Christie, Rebecca and others shared in this project might prompt reflection on the intersections of femininity and rurality in Canada, both in their discursive construction and lived experience.

The dissertation's analytic chapters ends with a close reading of Fieldsville students' interview narratives in which I explore how these young people construct the person they hope to

become. Situating their current selves within the beginning stages of a biography unfolding into the future, students share their hopes and uncertainties for what lies ahead. In doing so, they weave together desires for social and geographical mobility through stories of moving outward and upward, transcending the boundaries of their rural, classed locations. However, these personal quests for movement and improvement are fraught, as students bring with them local attachments and associated desires for stability and continuity. Contributing to this ambivalence, many young people in Fieldsville carry the weight of parental hopes and expectations, which often centre on the dream of “bettering” their own lives. Such “improvement narratives” offer students a source of hope and encouragement, but this vision for a better life is tainted by its implicit critique of the lives they currently live, including the people and places they love and admire. Thus, the analysis reveals tensions between discourses of betterment and the social relations that shape young people's day to day lives (Walkerline 2003). As Fieldsville students manage these conflicting attachments, it becomes clear that the process of imagining one's future is firmly bound up with present identifications, as young people tell stories about what kind of person they are, will be, and hope to become.

Fieldsville students plot their futures along a series of culturally approved benchmarks that signify entry into adulthood, including getting a good education and a good job in order to reach the eventual goal of becoming a good person who lives a good life. By gathering together these various “goods,” they construct a future life that is good. Beyond visions of what's to come, these narratives of future goodness operate in the present to establish young people's current moral standing. While the meaning of goodness varies from student to student, reflecting gendered identifications and access to resources, it generally mirrors the image of a respectable, middle-class lifestyle, ensuring the responsible care for the heteronormative family. These visions of goodness are accomplished by marking off one's future from a life that is *not* good.

Undesirable futures are projected onto abject bodies such as the criminal, poor, or homeless, each of whom embodies the threat of a failed future. Working from the understanding that class is emotionally inscribed through notions of moral worth, I interpret these future narratives of “goodness” and its failed other as classed fantasies of mobility. Situating the analysis at the intersection of class and rurality, I examine how Fieldsville students project themselves into futures of upward and elsewhere, while struggling to preserve attachments to the here and now.

When read alongside each other, the interview narratives reveal marked similarities in the way that future uncertainties are managed *affectively*, generating mixtures of hope, anxiety, excitement and fear. Exploring students' emotionally invested interview narratives, I suggest that we might gain a different perspective on the lived experience of a particular set of conditions by exploring autobiographical affects – that is, the “felt futures” that emerge out of an historically and spatially located structure of feeling. What might expressions of anxiety, fear, hope, and wonder reveal about the lived experience of opportunities and constraints within a particular geographical and social location? This question suggests we have much to learn from feminist scholars like Valerie Walkerdine and Beverley Skeggs, who examine class-making as a felt and embodied process. These scholars demonstrate how the affective impact of classed inscriptions are heightened amid neo-liberal discourses of self-improvement, which isolate the individual as solely responsible for creating one's own future. By exploring how stories of classed mobility intersect with spatialized narratives of “escaping” rurality, we may better understand how young people navigate the intersections of place- and class-based inequalities in order to align their futures with the “good life.” In this way, studies of affect can foster a critical analysis of larger socio-historical structures and discursive processes as they are lived through specific bodies, relations and places.

Across these specific analytic sites, the dissertation has explored one key theoretical

process: namely, how subjectivity is spatially organized and affectively negotiated. Entering into conversation with recent writing on the neo-liberal subject, I have suggested that studies of youth, schooling and neo-liberalism have tended to ask questions in ways that limit the interpretive possibilities that are available. Rather than begin from the assumption that we already know what neo-liberalism looks and feels like, I have argued that we might learn about the specific contours of this socio-historical formation by taking young people's practices of self-making as our analytic starting point. That is, instead of asking how neo-liberalism shapes young lives, could we not ask what young lives reveal about neo-liberalism? In this final chapter, I return to an idea repeated throughout the project, and that is the suggestion that by asking these questions differently, we might open up new interpretive possibilities.

By way of conclusion, I'd like to highlight two insights into neo-liberalism that have emerged through this research, each one closely linked to my analysis of subjectivity formation. First, the project contributes to existing literature by examining how neo-liberal discourses are spatially organized. By making this argument, I mean to suggest that differently positioned subjects are invited into neo-liberal discourses in different ways. These differences reflect not only structural influences such as gender and class (as have been documented in existing feminist literature), but also matters of geography. The distinctly spatial operation of neo-liberal discourse is apparent in Fieldsville students' narratives of space and place, where dominant ideals of mobility conflict with local identifications and an allegiance to place. These young people encounter neo-liberal notions of flexibility, mobility and self-improvement from a very specific location – one dominantly marked by classed narratives of “rural decline” – which calls upon distinct forms of self-work.

Although the analysis in this project is tied to a specific context and set of practices, the insights generated through this work have broader implications. Namely, I argue that to approach

neo-liberalism as a monolithic discourse fails to attend to its varied geography, wherein differently located subjects are invited into particular practices and performances. Studies that document the discursive production of an ideal student-subject tell us something about how schooling is currently imagined in media and policy discourse, but they reveal little about the uneven relationships forged where this ideal comes to bear on the lives of multiply-positioned young people. My own struggle to connect theories of the neo-liberal subject to Fieldsville students' local negotiations is illuminating in this case. Living neo-liberalism means very different things for differently positioned people in different socio-spatial contexts. For critical scholars to wash over these differences is to do a disservice to those who live and struggle with them.

A second insight that has emerged through this work relates to the ways in which neo-liberalism is affectively negotiated. Here, my argument is in keeping with the work of feminist scholars like Valerie Walkerdine and Beverley Skeggs, who point toward emotional costs incurred through processes of individualization. This dissertation builds upon this important work by demonstrating how Fieldsville students affectively manage the need for *movement and improvement* within their narratives of the future (as demanded of their distinctly rural, classed and gendered locations). I analyze students' emotionally-laden interview narratives in order to explore how this self-work is managed on an affective level. But the specific contribution of this project lies in the move to analyze these spatial and affective workings in tandem. That is, the affective negotiations that structure Fieldsville students' imagined futures are themselves the product of a distinctly *spatialized* invitation into discourses of self-improvement. Thus, rather than examine each of these processes separately, I am calling for more research exploring the interplay of the spatial and the affective within neo-liberal discourse, working toward an analysis of how subjectivities are located and felt.

In theoretical terms, this study offers a new approach to understanding how young people produce and perform identities as they navigate the conditions of their own becoming. In doing so, it makes two specific contributions to theorizing subjectivity, spatiality and schooling. First, it was by striving to engage with students' lived geographies that I came to see the limitations of feminist post-structural approaches to the neo-liberal subject. By documenting this shift, I hope to inspire future research that takes up the challenge of working within the complexities of young people's everyday lives, rather than narrating these lives through theories that pre-determine their meaning. As Fieldsville students envision their futures, they make use of the discourses available to them in order to establish their place within lives they understand to be “good.” This is not an easy feat, for it often requires them to occupy multiple, contradictory locations. It is here that the project makes a second major contribution, demonstrating how spaces and subjects are relationally constituted. In an effort to capture the shifting attachments that structure young people's future narratives, I argue that we must attend to ongoing *processes of location* within subjectivity formation. This approach charts new territory within debates about feminist theories of subjectivity, as well as critical youth geographies, as it foregrounds the relational practices through which young people negotiate their contradictory locations. How else can we attend to Jessie's embodied attachment to her rural community and resistance to the painful inscription of a “dirt femininity,” alongside the improving narratives that promise a future free of these tensions? In addition to posing the contradictions of place as a problem for theories of the neo-liberal subject, I believe this theoretical work has the potential to foster analyses that are sensitive to how young people manage the competing forces in their lives.

Beyond these broad theoretical conversations, the study opens up two specific avenues for research with young people. First, the dissertation highlights the complexities of rural girlhoods, and reveals the virtual erasure of young rural femininities within both scholarly and

popular representations of the Canadian countryside. This absence suggests that there is important work to be done integrating an analysis of place and space within the ever-expanding field of girls' studies. Catherine Driscoll's (2010) recent publication entitled "Becoming a Country Girl in Australia," charts a first step in this project. An analysis of rural girlhoods in Canada would engage questions of place, gender, race, and indigeneity alongside each other in order to examine how young rural femininities come to be both lived and imagined in and through discourses of the Canadian nation. Such scholarly work is needed to support educational efforts to provide young people with feminist tools that can do meaningful work in their everyday lives.

Second, my analysis of students' racialized place-narratives highlights a pressing need for more research into the interplay of whiteness, rurality, and class, particularly amid current debates about Canada's position in the "knowledge economy." Leading critical race scholars like Sherene Razack have carefully traced the production of Canada's countryside as a colonial space of whiteness, but few studies examine how such narratives enter into young people's spatial identifications. I view this scholarly work as a necessary component to developing anti-racist pedagogical initiatives with rural young people that go beyond character education models of respect for difference. This is just one example of how I hope others might take up this project in ways that extend beyond its 300 pages as a thesis. Whether in the field of teacher education, or anti-racist and feminist work with youth, I am excited by the possibilities that others might create by building upon these insights in their own practice.

Futures to be lived

In the end, the dissertation's scholarly futures mustn't overshadow the personal futures at the centre of this project. That is, the future lives that will be lived by the twenty young people that I

met at age 12 and 13 in Fieldsville. Some of these students are in high school now, and I receive the occasional email updating me on their lives. These messages give brief accounts of school events and relationships, and often leave me wanting to know more. Do they feel like they fit in? Do they worry about what will come next? I imagine meeting them again four years from now, when many will have reached the end of high school. They look older, dress differently, and some don't even recognize me. Their hopes and fears have changed, reflecting a new set of circumstances and desires, possibilities and constraints. But even though their imagined futures differ markedly from those crafted at age 12 and 13, they continue to negotiate the contradictions of their shifting locations. This requires managing the competing pressures of spatial attachments, gendered identifications, material constraints, and dominant discourses of the “good life.” This is a formidable challenge, requiring immense emotional work and insights from diverse discursive resources, including family history, popular culture, and school curriculum. Telling new stories about who they are, and who they hope to become, these young people continue the difficult performance of crafting selves as they feel out tentative futures in and through space.

Appendices

Appendix A – Initial letter of contact for the principal

Dear Principal:

My name is Kate Cairns, and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. I write to request your permission to conduct a small ethnographic study at your school, exploring Intermediate students' experiences of the career-based learning program, *The Real Game*.

As you know, the grade 7/8 class at your school will be participating in *The Real Game* this fall, a program that strives to better prepare young people for their futures as adults in a changing world. Developed in Canada in 1994, and now implemented internationally, the program engages grade seven and eight students in simulated, “real-life” adult experiences. Each student is given an occupational role and, over the course of about six weeks, navigates through various challenges with the resources allocated to the assigned job. Students must balance budgets, recover from job loss, and learn key life principles. In the program’s final phase, students design their own personal life-plans based on lessons learned through role-play experiences.

Programs like *The Real Game* are commonly evaluated for their effectiveness in developing life-planning skills among students. Rather than evaluate the success or failure of this program in achieving its end, I will examine *The Real Game* as a pedagogical site where young people imagine their futures. The purpose of this research is to better understand how rural youth envision their futures, including the particular obstacles and opportunities that they foresee, as well as the role that their educational experiences play in shaping these perceived future options.

This research will be conducted between September and December 2009. It will involve up to three school visits per week during which I will observe activities within the grade 7/8 classroom. These observations will be unobtrusive and non-evaluative, and I don’t foresee that the research will have any adverse effects or pose any risks to any members of the school community. I would also like to conduct brief focus group discussions and interviews with students about their experiences of *The Real Game*. If you agree to let me visit your school, I will send a letter to the students and their parents to inform them of my work and give them my contact information. I will obtain parental consent to conduct focus groups and interviews with those students who volunteer for the project. All of the data collected will be confidential and secured. Your school and local community will not be identified, and pseudonyms will be used for individual participants.

Participation in this research is voluntary, and you and any member of your school community may withdraw from further participation at any point during the research process and may choose not to answer any questions at any point. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, you may also contact the University of Toronto Ethics Review Office at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

The data collected for this project will be used to write a research report documenting students' experiences of *The Real Game*. This report will complement existing research on *The Real*

Game, which has focused on the program's effectiveness in developing life-planning skills among students. In addition, the study will highlight the views of rural youth, whose educational experiences are likely to differ from those in urban areas. The report will facilitate reflection on current educational practices, and may inform future policy initiatives. In addition to this report, the data will form the basis of my doctoral dissertation.

Please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor, Professor Kari Dehli, at your earliest convenience to discuss the details of this research and any questions that you may have. You may reach me by phone at 416-536-2730 or via email at kate.cairns@utoronto.ca

I look forward to hearing from you and learning more about your school.

Sincerely,

Kate Cairns
Ph.D. Student, OISE/UT
416-536-2730
kate.cairns@utoronto.ca

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karidehli@oise.utoronto.ca

Appendix B – Initial letter to parents and students:

Dear parents and students of Fieldsville Public School:

My name is Kate Cairns, and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. I write to inform you of a research project that I will be conducting at your school this fall.

As you know, the grade 7/8 students at your school will be participating in *The Real Game*, a program that strives to better prepare young people for their futures as adults in a changing world. Developed in Canada in 1994, and now implemented internationally, the program engages grade seven and eight students in simulated, “real-life” adult experiences. Each student is given an occupational role and, over the course of six weeks, navigates through various challenges with the resources allocated to the assigned job. Students must balance budgets, recover from job loss, and learn key life principles. In the program’s final phase, students design their own personal life-plans based on lessons learned through role-play experiences.

Programs like *The Real Game* are commonly evaluated for their effectiveness in developing life-planning skills among students. Rather than evaluate the success or failure of this program in achieving its end, I will examine *The Real Game* as a pedagogical site where young people imagine their futures. The purpose of this research is to better understand how rural youth envision their futures, including the particular obstacles and opportunities that they foresee, as well as the role that their educational experiences play in shaping these perceived future options.

This research will be conducted between September and December 2009. It will involve up to three school visits per week during which I will observe activities within the grade 7/8 classroom. I would also like to conduct brief focus group discussions and interviews with students about their experiences of *The Real Game*. If your son/daughter volunteers to participate, you will receive additional information including a consent form for participation. My observations will be unobtrusive and I don’t foresee that the research will have any adverse effects or pose any risks to any members of the school community. All of the data collected will be confidential and secured. Your school and local community will not be identified, and pseudonyms will be used for individual participants.

The principal of the school has agreed to let me conduct this research. Participation in this research is voluntary and the principal may withdraw the school from further participation at any point during the research process. If you have any questions or concerns about this exploratory study, you may contact the school principal, myself (see contact information below), or the University of Toronto Ethics Review Office at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

The data collected for this project will be used to write a research report documenting students’ experiences of *The Real Game*. This report will complement existing research on *The Real Game*, which has focused on the program’s effectiveness in developing life-planning skills among students. In addition, the study will highlight the views of rural youth, whose educational experiences are likely to differ from those in urban areas. The report will facilitate reflection on

current educational practices, and may inform future policy initiatives. In addition to this report, the data will form the basis of my doctoral dissertation.

Please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor, Professor Kari Dehli, at your earliest convenience to discuss the details of this research and any questions that you may have. You may reach me by phone at 416-536-2730 or via email at kate.cairns@utoronto.ca

I look forward to hearing from you and learning more about your school.

Sincerely,

Kate Cairns
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416-536-2730
kate.cairns@utoronto.ca

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Appendix C – Introductory script for observation of classes:

Good morning/afternoon. My name is Kate Cairns, and I am a graduate student at the University of Toronto. Over the next few months, I'm going to be spending time in your classroom while you participate in the *The Real Game*. I am interested in studying your experiences of this program, and hope to talk to some of you about your own thoughts on growing up and becoming a part of the “real world”. The principal has given me permission to observe the daily activities at the school, and I have spoken with your teacher and explained the purposes of my research. I will be writing down descriptions of what I see so that I can remember later and so that I can write about it, but I won't use your names. If you would like to learn more about the work I am doing, please feel free to ask. Do you have any questions at this time?

I'm also interested in holding small group discussions and individual interviews with some of you about your experiences of *The Real Game*. If you are willing to participate in discussions with a few of your friends and to be interviewed individually, please see me at the end of the class. These group discussions and interviews will be private, and your participation will not affect your mark in the class. You will not be required to answer any questions, and you may choose to stop participating in the discussion at any point. Do you have any questions?
Thank you!

Appendix D - Focus group protocol

D1 - Introduction and consent

Thank you for volunteering to participate in the focus groups. This letter explains the purposes of the study. Please read it when you have a moment and sign the form that is attached. We'll look at the letter together later, and I'll be happy to answer any questions that you have then.

In addition, in order for you to participate in the focus groups at a later date, I would like to ask you to take this letter to your parents requesting their permission to participate in this study. This letter outlines the purposes of the study and has contact information in case your parents have any questions. I'm giving you two copies so that they can keep one for themselves, and you can bring the signed form back to me. Once your parents have signed this consent letter, we can do the focus groups.

D2 - Introductory Script

Thanks again for agreeing to participate in this study. Do you have a signed copy of your consent form? Do you have a signed copy of your parents' permission form? Thank you. Do you have any questions before we get started?

As a way to keep record of our discussion, and so that I can return to it later, I'd like to ask you for permission to videotape our conversation. I'm the only person who will have access to this recording. You may remove yourself from the discussion at any point. Is it okay with you if I videotape our discussion?

Thank you!

D3 - Focus Group Guide

Focus Group I

Themes: Home, Dreams, and Reflections

Materials: Dream Collage

1) Home

- Which home did you select for your Dream Collage?
- Where do you want to live? Why?
- What's it like living here? What are the people like here? How is it different from elsewhere?

2) Dreams

- What kinds of things did you include in your Dream Collage? Why these things?
- How have your dreams changed over the years? How are your dreams for yourself similar or different to the dreams that your parents have for you?

3) Reflections on *The Real Game*

- What do you think about *The Real Game* so far?
- Why do you think you're studying this?
- Is this stuff that you've thought about before?
- What have you learned? What's missing?

Focus Group II

Themes: Mobility, Place, Identity, Difference

Materials: “Possible Destinations” worksheet from the RG Facilitator's Guide

1) *The Real Game* “Getting Away” Lesson

Where has your group decided to go on vacation? Why? What do you know about this place? What makes it different from where you live? What do you think the people are like there? Have you ever met anyone from there?

- Which of these other places would you like to visit? Why or why not?
- Do you think any of these places are similar to Canada? Which would be most different?
- If you could visit anywhere in the world, where would it be? Where would you least like to go?
- How do you learn about other places? That is, when you think about these places, what things come to mind, and where do these ideas come from?

2) Students' experiences of other places

- Has your family ever gone on holiday? Where? What was it like?
- Have you ever visited somewhere that was really different from where you live? What about somewhere that was similar?
- How do you think Canada is viewed by people in other countries? How would you describe Canada to someone who's never been here?
- Is there any other country where you can imagine yourself living? What do you know about that place? How do you know these things?

Focus Group III

Themes: Gender, Careers and Futures

1) RG “Fair Play” Lesson:

- What were some of the issues raised during the discussion of attitudes toward men and women's roles in society? How about during your small group conversations?
- How did that discussion make you feel? Did anything surprise you?
- Do you think that men and women have different responsibilities/ opportunities as adults?
- Do you think sexism is a problem?

2) Understanding Gender

- In class, someone mentioned that there's a common perception that girls do better in school than boys. Do you think that's true? Do you think boys and girls act differently in school?
- Do you think there are different expectations for girls and boys?
- How about friends – do you have friends that are boys/girls? Are they different from your friends who are boys/girls?
- In class, we talked about stereotypes. What kind of stereotypes do you face as a girl/ boy?
- In class, some people suggested that it's harder for boys to challenge stereotypes than it is for girls, because they'll get teased more. Do you think that's true? Why or why not? Can you think of a time when you or someone you know was teased for doing something untraditional? What kind of things did people say?
- Do boys and girls get made fun of in different ways? What sorts of things do people say to girls/boys to make fun of them?
- What about being popular. What makes a girl popular? A boy?

3) Futures

- Do you think being a boy /girl affects your future? (Probe for job, family, leisure)

- What are some of the careers that you selected on Career Cruising?
- When you think about the future, what things come to mind, other than work?
- On the whole, what are your thoughts on *The Real Game*? (Liked/disliked; Learned; Memorable)

Appendix E – Consent form for teacher

Dear Mrs. Sullivan,

My name is Kate Cairns and I am a graduate student in the Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. I am writing to request your permission to conduct a study of students' experiences in *The Real Game* within your classroom. The purpose of this research is to better understand how rural youth envision their futures, including the obstacles and opportunities that they foresee, as well as the role that their educational experiences play in shaping these perceived future options.

With your approval, this research will be conducted between September and December 2009. It will involve up to three school visits per week during which I will observe activities within your classroom. These observations will be unobtrusive and non-evaluative, and I don't foresee that the research will have any adverse effects or pose any risks to any members of the school community. I would also like to conduct brief focus group discussions and interviews with students about their experiences of *The Real Game*. If you agree to let me visit your classroom, I will send a letter to the students and their parents to inform them of my work and give them my contact information. I will obtain parental consent to conduct focus groups and interviews with those students who volunteer for the project. All of the data collected will be confidential and secured. Your school and local community will not be identified, and pseudonyms will be used for individual participants. The NAME School Board has granted approval for this study, and the school principal has given permission for this study to be carried out.

Participation in this research is voluntary, and you and any member of your school community may withdraw from further participation at any point during the research process and may choose not to answer any questions at any point. **If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, you may also contact the University of Toronto Ethics Review Office at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.**

The data collected for this project will be used to write a research report documenting students' experiences of *The Real Game*. This report will complement existing research on *The Real Game*, which has focused on the program's effectiveness in developing life-planning skills among students. In addition, the study will highlight the views of rural youth, whose educational experiences are likely to differ from those in urban areas. The report will facilitate reflection on current educational practices, and may inform future policy initiatives. In addition to this report, the data will form the basis of my doctoral dissertation.

Please indicate on the attached form whether you agree to have your students take part in this study. Your cooperation will be very much appreciated. Please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor, Professor Kari Dehli, if you have further questions.

Yours sincerely,

Kate Cairns,
OISE/University of Toronto
(416) 536-2730; kate.cairns@utoronto.ca

TEACHER CONSENT FORM

I, _____, acknowledge that the topic of this research has been explained to me and that any question that I have asked has been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Kate Cairns and agree to have my classroom observed for the purposes described:

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Kate Cairns
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(416) 536-2730
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Faculty Supervisor:
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karidehli@oise.utoronto.ca

Appendix F - Consent form for parents:

Dear parents of _____:

My name is Kate Cairns and I am a graduate student at the University of Toronto. I am conducting a study of students' experiences in *The Real Game* at your son/daughter's school. The purpose of this research is to better understand how rural youth envision their futures, including the obstacles and opportunities that they foresee, as well as the role that their educational experiences play in shaping these perceived future options. The data collected for this project will be used to write a research report that will facilitate reflection on current educational practices, and may inform future policy initiatives.

The NAME School Board has granted approval for this study, and the school principal has given permission for this study to be carried out. I would like to request your permission to include your son/daughter _____ in three focus group discussions and one interview. Focus group discussions will each take about 30 minutes and will be video-recorded. The interview will take about 20-30 minutes and will be audio-recorded. Videotapes and audio recordings will remain confidential and information shared in focus groups will be treated as confidential by all participants. I will conduct the focus groups and interviews during the school day in a school space determined by the principal. I will not use your son/daughter's name or anything else that might identify her/him in the written work, oral presentations, or publications. All information collected will be strictly confidential.

Participation in this study is voluntary and will not affect your son/daughter's attendance in class or his/her evaluation by the school. You and/or your son/daughter are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. Your son/daughter may decline to answer any specific questions. There are no known risks or benefits to you or your son/daughter for assisting in the project.

If you have any questions or concerns about you and your son/daughter's rights as a participant in this exploratory study, you may also contact the University of Toronto Ethics Review Office at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

Please indicate on the attached form whether you permit your son/daughter to take part in this study. Your cooperation will be very much appreciated. Please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor, Professor Kari Dehli, if you have further questions.

Yours sincerely,

Kate Cairns
OISE/University of Toronto

PARENTAL/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

I, _____, have read the letter describing this research.
(please print your name)

I agree to allow _____ to take part in this research.
(son/daughter's name)

I do not wish _____ to take part in this study.
(son/daughter's name)

Signature: _____

Date: _____

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Appendix G – Assent form for students:

Dear _____,

My name is Kate Cairns and I am a graduate student at the University of Toronto. I am conducting a study of students' experiences in *The Real Game* at your school. The purpose of this research is to better understand how rural youth envision their futures, including the obstacles and opportunities that they foresee, as well as the role that their educational experiences play in shaping these perceived future options. The data collected for this project will be used to write a research report that will facilitate reflection on current educational practices, and may inform future policy initiatives.

I would like you to participate in this project by joining in three focus groups discussions and one interview. The small group discussions will each about 30 minutes and will be video-recorded. The interview will take about 20-30 minutes and will be audio-recorded. Videotapes and audio recordings will remain confidential and information shared in focus groups will be treated as confidential by all participants. I will conduct the focus groups and interviews during the school day in a school space determined by the principal. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in the written work or presentations. All information collected will be strictly confidential.

You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this exploratory study, you may also contact the University of Toronto Ethics Review Office at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

If you agree to participate in this study, please sign the attached form. The second copy is for your records. In addition, please bring the permission letter to your parents and ask them to sign the permission form. This form is necessary in order to conduct the focus groups. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Kate Cairns
OISE/University of Toronto

STUDENT ASSENT FORM

I acknowledge that the topic of this research has been explained to me and that any question that I have asked has been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Kate Cairns and agree to participate in focus groups and interview for the purpose described. I have also obtained my parents' permission to participate in this study.

Signature: _____

I agree to allow the focus groups and interview to be recorded. I understand that these recordings will be transcribed to ensure accuracy and that the recordings will be destroyed once the research is completed.

Signature: _____

Name (printed): _____

Date: _____

Kate Cairns
OISE/University of Toronto
Department of Sociology and Equity Studies in Education
(416) 536-2730
kate.cairns@utoronto.ca

Faculty Supervisor:
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karidehli@oise.utoronto.ca

Appendix H – Preliminary interview protocol for students:

H1 - Introduction and consent

Thank you for volunteering to participate in the interview. This letter explains the purposes of the study. Please read it when you have a moment and sign the form that is attached. We'll look at the letter together later, and I'll be happy to answer any questions that you have then.

In addition, in order for you to participate in the interview at a later date, I would like to ask you to take this letter to your parents requesting their permission to participate in this study. This letter outlines the purposes of the study and has contact information in case your parents have any questions. I'm giving you two copies so that they can keep one for themselves, and you can bring the signed form back to me. Once your parents have signed this consent letter, we can do the interview.

H2 - Introductory Script:

Thanks again for agreeing to participate in this study. Do you have a signed copy of your consent form? Do you have a signed copy of your parents' permission form? Thank you. Do you have any questions before we get started?

As a way to keep record of our discussion, and so that I can return to it later, I'd like to ask you for permission to record our conversation. I'm the only person who will have access to this recording. You may choose to end the interview at any point. Is it okay with you if I record our conversation?

Thank you!

H3 - Interview Guide:

The interviews will consist of loosely structured questions regarding students' backgrounds, school experiences and future aspirations. The final section of the interviews will draw on recent experiences within *The Real Game*, asking students to reflect upon aspects of the program that have been meaningful to them. This approach will allow me to be dynamic throughout the program, and to structure the discussions around the topics and questions that are most meaningful to students.

Introduction

Up until now, all of our discussions have been in a group context. This is a chance for me to learn more about your individual thoughts and experiences. So to start, I'm just curious to hear how you would describe yourself.

- How would you describe your personality? Interests?
- Where do you live? With whom? What do you like about living here? What don't you

like about it? Is there anything you wish you could change?

- In the last focus groups, we talked a little bit about the different kinds of social groups that there are at school. Where do you fit within the school community? Do you see yourself as part of a certain group? What are your friends like?

School experiences

- What's it like to be a student here?
[Probes: How would you describe the school/ your classes/ your teachers?]
- What's your favourite class? Why? What's your least favourite class? Why?
- What's the most challenging aspect of being a student here?
- Is there anything you wish you could change about this school?

Future aspirations

- Thinking about finishing elementary school, what are you most excited about?
- Is there anything you're nervous or concerned about?
- What are some of the careers that you looked at on career cruising?
- When you think about the future, what things come to mind, other than work?
- What sort of things do you think are important in life?
- On the whole, what are your thoughts on The Real Game? (Liked/disliked; Learned; Memorable)
- The Real Game gets students thinking about their futures. Is this something you thought about before?
- When you think about being an adult, what comes to mind?
- Do you think about the future? Do you talk to your parents or friends about the future? What are you excited about? What are you nervous about?
- What do you think it means to be successful in life? Can you think of someone (family member, friend, celebrity, TV character) who is living your vision of success, or who you look up to?
- How do you imagine yourself in 20 years? Paint me a picture. (Where do you live? With whom? How do you spend your time?)
- What was it like to participate in the focus groups?

References

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