

ARTICLE

Constructing the places of young people in public space: Conflict, belonging and identity

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Abstract

Building on the growing discursive approach to people–place relations, we examine how young people negotiate people–place tensions and relations, and how they establish their everyday sense of place in contemporary public spaces. Facilitated by the use of Collaborative Spatial Mapping, analysis of focus group data from 51 young people focuses on three aspects of participants’ talk about the places that make up their everyday lives: appropriation of micro-geographical spaces, the construction of autobiographical insideness and the mobilization of shared socio-spatial histories. Our analysis illustrates young people’s responses to a broader problematic of being ‘troublesome’ in public spaces, demonstrating how they construct a deep-rooted attachment to, and sense of themselves as located members within, such spaces. We argue that place appropriation and autobiographical insideness are important concepts for understanding the practice of citizenship by young people, and how such practice is embedded in wider political processes of spatial conflict and exclusion.

KEYWORDS

autobiographical insideness, citizenship, collaborative mapping, place appropriation, place identity, young people

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INTRODUCTION

Social psychologists have become increasingly interested in the importance of place for understanding the lived experiences of everyday life. Such work demonstrates that geographic spaces are more than simple backdrops to social psychological processes, and instead highlights how social categories are inextricably bound up with notions of place (e.g. ‘ethnicity’, ‘community’ or ‘nation’), and how places are central to, and invested with, psychological concepts such as ‘identity’, ‘belonging’ and/or ‘attachment’ (see Altman & Low, 1992; Barnes, 2000; Bonnes & Secchiaroli, 1995; Dixon & Durrheim, 2004; Dixon et al., 2006; Hopkins & Dixon, 2006; Stokoe & Wallwork, 2003; Stokols & Shumaker, 1981; Twigger-Ross et al., 2003; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996). In short, what this work demonstrates is that human beings are always located somewhere, and that this locatedness is central to understanding the social practices through which we inhabit our worlds (Hodgetts et al., 2010, p. 3).

In this study, we seek to expand this body of work through a discursive examination of young people's accounts of their everyday use of public places. Young people have been notably absent from social psychological analyses of place to date. However, we argue there is considerable need – and value – in interrogating the range of concerns and experiences inherent in negotiating the manifest problems of being a young person in public, and how these competing tensions are managed in everyday interaction and in everyday place use (see also Gray & Manning, 2014; Hadfield-Hall & Christensen, 2021; Lim & Barton, 2010; Valentine, 2019). Our starting point is the growing body of work that takes a discursive approach to people–place relations (e.g. Di Masso et al., 2014, 2020; Dixon & Durrheim, 2004). At its heart, this approach is an attempt to overcome the individualistic focus of previous work on place identity, and instead to develop a genuine social understanding of the relationship between self and place (Dixon & Durrheim, 2004). Attention is drawn to the ‘performative, relational and ideological nature of environmental discourse’ (Di Masso et al., 2017, p. 100). Thus, expressions of place identity or attachment are not seen as straightforward reflections of affective relations to place, but can have ideological functions in terms of conflict and exclusion, or as expressions of resistance, or as legitimizing actions. For example, in their work on street drinking, Dixon et al. (2006) demonstrate how the construction of public spaces rests on an ideological tension between freedom and control, which can be used as resources in arguments to position people as ‘out of place’. This work usefully highlights the ways in which places are important for the production and maintenance of social categories and groups, and therefore to how inequality, spatial conflict and exclusion is sustained and reproduced in the mundane routines of everyday life (Barnes, 2000; Di Masso, 2012, 2015; Di Masso et al., 2011; Stokoe & Wallwork, 2003).

Young people and public spaces

While young people's use of place has not yet been a focus for social psychologists, there is a wealth of research in other disciplines – most notably the field of Children's and Youth Geographies – that demonstrates the centrality of such spaces to young people's lives. For example, work on the geography of ‘hanging out’ demonstrates the ways in which public spaces – without adult mediation – meet young people's need to gather in places where they could see and be seen, to meet, to confront the adult world and to negotiate community membership (see Pickering et al., 2012; Pyyry & Tani, 2016). This work highlights the ways in which public spaces are a central and active agent in the geographies of young people, providing contexts for the enactment of spatial, temporal and affective identities of self and other (e.g. Childress, 2004; Hall et al., 1999; Holloway & Valentine, 2000a; 2000b; Kintrea et al., 2010; Nairn et al., 2003; Massey, 1998, 2008; Nairn et al., 2003; Valentine, 2004).

Yet, despite the importance of such spaces to young people, their presence in such spaces is seldom unproblematic. Many researchers have highlighted the precarious position of young people in public spaces, and the ways in which their use of, and presence in, public spaces is increasingly regulated and controlled. Such researchers have argued that this is due to the dilemmatic positioning of young people and children as both ‘at risk’ and ‘risky’ in what are typically seen as adult spaces (Karsten, 2005;

Monahan, 2006; Rudner, 2012; Skelton, 2009). Adult concerns over children's safety are important determinants of children being allowed to walk or ride to destinations (Faulkner et al., 2010), engage in active free play (Veitch et al., 2006) or roam independently in their neighbourhood (Foster et al., 2014). Likewise, adult anxieties over young people's 'troublesome' behaviour in public have led to measures seeking to minimize their use of public spaces or ensure that they are used in the 'correct' way (Fionda et al., 2006; Gray & Manning, 2014; Panelli et al., 2002). As a result, young people frequently find themselves at the mercy of implicit and explicit processes of exclusion that erode their legitimate rights to occupy, socialize and participate in their neighbourhoods (Gray & Manning, 2014).

Of course, young people are not passive in the face of attempts to control their use of public spaces. Instead, young people engage with spatial regulation in a manner that reworks and can ultimately undermine its targeting of young people's use of public spaces (Gray & Manning, 2014; Valentine, 2004). Others have focused on how children and young people actively subvert adult surveillance, rather than be subject to it, constructing 'secret spaces' (Moore, 2017) or 'safe spaces' (Djohari et al., 2018). Although such reconstructions of space can be of benefit to young people, enabling them to express themselves, to resist and reshape the social pressures that control many aspects of their lives (Djohari et al., 2018), this is not always the case. Instead, such processes can lay the foundation for intergroup conflict that can be disadvantaging for young people, imposing limitations on their mobility and access to leisure, education, employment and social opportunities (Pickering et al., 2012).

Young people's places as discursive practices

Here, we draw together this work on young people's experiences in public spaces with social psychological work on the discursive construction of place, with the aim of providing a uniquely interdisciplinary analysis of how young people negotiate people/place tensions and relations, and how they establish their sense of place in contemporary public spaces. From the perspective of social psychology, we further demonstrate the utility of a discursive approach to the study of place by focusing on a group that is seldom heard. This enables a (re)engagement with everyday processes that structure children and young people's construction of meaningful spatial communities, drawing from Children's Geographies the complexity of child/place relationships as material, affective, temporal and contingent socio-material projects (Pyry & Tani, 2016). From the perspective of Children's Geographies, discursive psychology offers a conceptual framework and methods of analysis that simultaneously attends to both the micro- and macro-processes involved in young people's experiences in public spaces, by interrogating how groups are socially constructed in interactions, and how inclusion/exclusion is sustained and reproduced in the mundane routines of everyday life. We therefore provide the kind of examination that Krafft and Horton (2018) call for in relation to children's play: one that acknowledges the 'multiple ways' that young people's everyday experiences of public space are 'spatially patterned, politicised, interconnected, contingent, narrated, and co-constitutive of community lives' (p. 1).

One clear area of synergy between these two literatures is in relation to young people's everyday spatial politics. Children's geographers have long called for a conceptual broadening of the definition of children's politics, to include children practising politics in their everyday lives, when negotiating positions, defending identities and using and challenging positions and identities offered to them by adults and peers (Christensen et al., 2017; Hadfield-Hill & Christensen, 2021; Kallio & Häkli, 2011a; 2011b; Pyry & Tani, 2016; Philo & Smith, 2003; Skelton, 2010). Likewise, discursive social psychologists have begun to develop the notion of 'locational citizenship' (e.g. Di Masso, 2015) to demonstrate the ways in which the psychological practice of citizenship (e.g. belonging, acceptance and recognition) is derived from everyday access to public spaces (see also Hopkins & Dixon, 2006). In our analyses, we draw on this concept of locational citizenship as a useful lens through which to view young people's spatial political practices and see young people's engagement with public space as a useful further illustration of the 'locational' construction of citizenship. This progresses wider debates regarding young people as political actors in their everyday lives, through an understanding of how young people construct (and

enact) their sense of citizenship in a context of regulation, exclusion and safety concerns (Kallio & Häkli, 2011a, 2011b; Kraftl et al., 2013; Measor & Squires, 2017; Sharkey & Shields, 2008).

A discursive framework is also useful for (re)examining existing spatial concepts and frameworks, via their application to understanding young people's engagement with public spaces. In this study, we draw on two such concepts, both of which highlight the temporal dimension of place-based relationships, which we have demonstrated before is central to young people's experiences in public space (Gray & Manning, 2014). The first of these is 'autobiographical insideness' (Rowles, 1983), which is used to explain how, over time, an individual acquires a mosaic of place-associated memories, which provide a sense of identity and a source of reinforcement for life narratives (which Rowles refers to as 'grand fictions', p. 114). This concept is most often used with adults, as it is usually assumed that young people have not had enough time or experiences to develop a deep-seated sense of 'being in place'. However, we reclaim this concept by looking at how young people actively construct a sense of 'insideness' and highlight how constructions of 'autobiographical insideness' can be a useful resource in managing problematic spatial identities.

The second concept is that of 'appropriation of space', which has been reintroduced by Benages-Albert et al. (2015). It is highly relevant to understanding young people's psychological investment in space because it provides a way of understanding the temporal nature of people/place relationships, as well as its territorial and embodied dimensions, thereby providing a clearer understanding of the conflict provoked by competing uses and transformations of space (see Benages-Albert et al., 2015). Our use of a discursive perspective adds to the recent recovery of the concept by examining how expressions of 'appropriation of space' are deployed in talk, by who and for what purpose. Thus, for example, through our analysis of young people's collective talk about the places and spaces that they frequent, we illustrate how some places become appropriated to the extent of 'commitment' (see Benages-Albert et al., 2015), while others are more transient. We therefore look at the temporally 'fleeting' characteristics of space appropriation in the context of young people's use of space. Moreover, we seek to understand how young people negotiate the fundamentally interrelated nature of identity, attachment and appropriation.

METHOD

Context

The data for this study were collected in and around a large city in the South of England. The geographic areas for the study were purposively selected, as they contained one or more locations identified by police as 'hotspots' and thereby subject to increased monitoring and/or formal restrictions, whereby police could disperse groups of two or more individuals in designated areas and return children under the age of 16 to their home after 9:00 PM (a so-called 'curfew order'). The areas selected included an inner-city location (in a central business district) and three residential locations. Two of these locations fell within the 10% most deprived and one within the 1% most deprived areas in England, according to English Indices of Multiple Deprivation, although all three were adjacent to some of the least deprived areas in the country.

Data collection

Data were collected through 12 focus groups with 51 young people (22 males, 29 females) aged 11 to 16. Participants were recruited through five different youth clubs and two schools across the study locations. A member of the research team attended sessions at each site and invited the young people present to sign up to a research study about their perceptions of their area, and their place use. Participants were encouraged to take part in already established friendship groups, to facilitate their comfort with the data collection process and to encourage interaction more akin to everyday conversation, which is

often cited as an advantage of focus groups (Wilkinson, 2003). As a result, the focus groups were a mix of sizes, from two to eight participants, and tended to comprise of young people of different ages and genders. We could not collect detailed demographic data, as participants were unwilling to complete demographic questionnaires onsite. Age and gender were recorded for all participants at the start of each focus group instead. All focus groups took place in youth centres or schools.

A core focus of this project was to develop a methodology that captured the complexity and multimodality of young people's spatial experiences. For this reason, the focus groups utilized a variety of methods. Initially, young people were asked to talk about the things that they liked and disliked about their local area. Then participants were asked to hand draw a map of the places that they used every day and those they thought were important. Participants were given free choice over how the map was constructed: it could be done individually, but often quickly became a collective task, which we termed Collaborative Spatial Mapping (CSM). These maps then formed a basis for further discussion, as participants were asked to talk through their maps, providing a way to focus attention on the spatial aspects of their everyday experiences, and to examine their relationship to talk of conflict, identity and belonging. We have described the use (and benefits) of this method in detail elsewhere (see Gray et al., 2021), but in brief, the maps were essential in our attempt to enable a 'grounding' of young people's experiences within spatial contexts and material environments, by offering a means of creating a tangible representation of places and their relationships that could then be 'worked through' in the focus groups. This was particularly useful for examining a range of different practices, including embodied practices (e.g. 'being in place'), social practices (e.g. the construction of group categories and processes) and ideological practices (e.g. moral arguments about 'who belongs where').

Data analysis

Discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Pseudonyms were used for participant and place names (e.g. BLUE/ORANGE). Data were analysed using a broadly critical discourse analytic method (see Wetherell, 2007; Wetherell & Edley, 2009), which advocates for both fine-grained micro-analysis of data, as well as attention to institutional and macro-cultural perspectives. In practice, this meant that we did several iterative rounds coding, where data were first analysed on a line-by-line basis, focusing on how participants constructed specific spaces, their own and others use of those spaces, and theirs and others' identities in relation to such spaces. Thereafter, we revisited the data with the aim of examining the ideological features of talk – specifically, how the young people (re)produced spatial ideologies, and how these were related to broader practices of inclusion and exclusion and/or the construction of group identities. We additionally drew from the work of Di Masso (2015; Di Masso et al., 2017) who provides an analytic framework for understanding how spatial discourse is related to material location, as well as broader wider cultural, historical and political contexts. The maps aided in this analytic process by providing context and grounding to points in our analyses, enabling us to engage with young people's use of space through both participants' accounts in focus groups and participants' physical representations of space.

ANALYSIS

We focus here on three aspects of our participants talk about the different spaces and places that make up their everyday lives. Firstly, the importance of micro-geographical spaces to young people, and the ways such spaces are both bounded by, and related to, their appropriation of space. Secondly, the ways young people construct (often collective) accounts of 'auto-biographical insideness' (Rowles, 1983) to position themselves as appropriate and legitimate spaces users. And, thirdly, the ways participants' place talk involves the construction of shared socio-spatial histories, as a resource to highlight the temporal, changing and often precarious nature of spaces.

Young people's everyday (micro)-geographies

Specific types of places featured strongly in the physical landscape of our participants talk about their everyday lives: community centres, youth clubs (although many focus groups took place in youth clubs), parks, outside local shops and 'street-spaces' were consistently represented as regular places of being across our data corpus. This echoes other research on young people's regular use of spaces in less affluent neighbourhoods that notes the predominance of street, parks and the exterior of retail spaces (e.g. Castonguay & Jutras, 2010).

Extract 1: It's Our Bench!

1. MOD: Yeah, that's cool, ok, um (.) do you
2. guys wanna just tell me what like all
3. those different places are, um and like,
4. why you go there, why they're
5. important (.) what you do there?
6. Lisa: Um, we can start with my house
7. and then we go to, when, like there's
8. things going on in BLUE, we go there
9. MOD: Yeah? (.) what sort of things (.)
10. do you do there?
11. Lisa: Like when there's like, um like
12. Emily: Fun stuff
13. Sara: Yeah, fun stuff, we like, go there, but (.) we don't really
14. go there otherwise (.) er we go to the park sometimes, just like
15. chat, chill or when there's like (.) festivals or stuff going on
16. Lisa: But most of the time there we go to the bench, don't we, just outside here
17. Emily: It's our bench! [laughs]
18. Sara: Yeah [laughing]

Map 1: It's Our Bench!



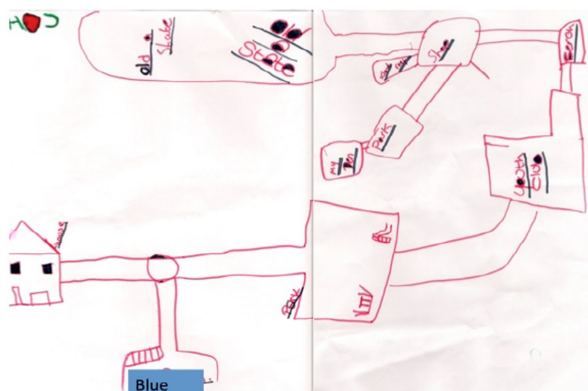
Beyond describing types of places, these accounts highlight the centrality of micro-geographical spaces to young people: these young people typically talked of place use within small geographic areas, local to their place of residence and rarely moving beyond them. Map 1 (and corresponding Extract 1) represents several different places identified as being used by these participants (the youth club, the park, etc.; see also Map 2 and Extract 2). The material space represented in the maps covers two neighbourhood streets. Many participants situated this micro-geographic place choice within an economic discourse that centred on the accessibility of transport: Their choice of places and spaces was constructed as limited by cycling or walking, rather than by using buses or cars.

Similarly, space choice was characterized by places where participants did not have to spend money, thereby focusing on use of outside (rather than inside) spaces (e.g. streets or parks). Retail spaces, such as local shops, featured strongly in young people accounts, and were most often described as physical markers by which young people navigated their neighbourhoods, or as places where young people congregated outside of, but seldom went into. While this could be read as limiting, participants often constructed such places in terms of their proximity and ease of accessibility, as well as being straightforwardly navigated. For example, in Extract 2, we can see how participants describe how the spaces that they use (home, the youth centre, the skate park) as proximate and easily (and linearly) accessible and navigable ('straightforward', line 9). Moreover, in Map 2, we see the ways in which these participants have drawn the spaces they use as connected by a series of pathways that enable them to move around their local neighbourhoods.

Extract 2: Navigating the Neighbourhood

1. MOD: What's that?
2. Chloe: Youth centre
3. MOD: Ah!
4. Chloe: It's basically in a big line!
5. MOD: Yeah, it is, isn't it!
6. Isabella: It is! (.) My house is direct to
7. the youth centre,
8. MOD: Oh, ok
9. Chloe: Straightforward

Map 2: Navigating the Neighbourhood



Within these localized areas there are (even more) micro-geographical spaces that young people have 'appropriated' for their own purposes (Benages-Albert et al., 2015). The bench that features in lines 16–19 of Extract 1 and Map 1 is a good example of this kind of space. Indeed, it is telling that the only space where people have been drawn in Map 1 is on the bench. Other such spaces included the roofs of buildings, areas of parks and streets. For example, in relation to Map 2, participants talked about 'a den' in the park (in the middle of their map). These micro-spaces are constructed as more than just a place to go; they constitute niche territories within the wider neighbourhood environment that young people actively occupy, appropriate and transform for their own purposes. While these may technically be in public space, they are also constituted by these young people as being private spaces for private use, over which they may even exert ownership or assert territorial rights. As stated by Emily in Extract 1, line 18: 'it's our bench'.

However, such assertions of micro-ownership are not unproblematic, as the laughter that accompanies the claim that 'it's our bench' in lines 18 and 19 indicates. The proprietorial rights claimed for such spaces are often constructed as arising out of continued and regular use of place, and in contrast to their attendance at more formalized events. For example, the occasional nature of attendance at BLUE (line 8, a Local Authority owned social space that houses a community centre and events run by council employees) when 'there's things going on' serves as a contrast to the habitual frequenting ('most of the time', line 16) of 'the bench', highlighting the ordinariness of their population of that place and therefore their right to call it their own. Such spatial appropriation additionally highlights one of the ways in which young people can assert a level of participation in public space that might not be available in other spheres of their lives. Thus, we can see how (micro-) place appropriation (Benages-Albert et al., 2015) can be achieved discursively by young people through constructing their everyday use of public micro-spaces, thereby illustrating a means through which the centrality of such spaces to young people's geographies (Childress, 2004; Kintrea et al., 2010; Panelli et al., 2002) and their problematics can be re-examined.

Benages-Albert et al. (2015) point out that this kind of 'place appropriation', where shared meanings and affective bonds evoke a sense of spatial ownership, can serve to facilitate the emergence of a sense of familiarity, and in turn feelings of safety and environmental control. This is evident in the accounts of our participants, who often constructed 'appropriated' micro-geographical spaces as 'safer' spaces, as demonstrated in Extract 3:

Extract 3: 'When it gets dark...'

1. Anne: So when it gets dark you think the light
2. Mary: If we actually walk down the road when the streetlights on and you then you walk
3. past shops, when you walk past shops it is a load brighter
4. Anne: it's a brighter area yeah
5. John: It is also because (.) people (.) go to shops they want to be where people they know
6. are, don't they. They want to be (.) where people can see them, they don't want to be
7. hidden away anywhere
8. Mary: and the police are like always trying to move them into the park and they wouldn't
9. want to go, and it was like, well its dark and it's not safe.

In this extract, participants are discussing their appropriation of a particular micro-geographical place outside of a row of shops, where they congregate on an almost daily basis. Here, we can see the ways their use and appropriation of this space helps these young people to navigate their own safety in public, as it is constructed as a safer place for them to be (e.g. because of the light and the presence of other people) as compared to their potential use of other places (e.g. the park, which was dark and therefore unsafe). Importantly, this discourse of safety helps them to defend against charges that their space use is somehow difficult, which the young people in our study often orientated to. Here, we see participants switching from discussing their own space use (e.g. 'we' in line 2) to discussing

it in terms of (other) 'people' (e.g. 'they' in line 6). This discursive manoeuvre was often used when defending potentially problematic place use, as a way of distancing themselves from accusations that their place use was somehow wrong. By constructing their place ownership as a fundamentally sensible spatial strategy for ensuring their safety, young people could reconstruct seemingly problematic spatial practices (e.g. hanging outside of shops) into an ordinary and justifiable use of space. In this way, we can see how these young people actively navigate the risky and 'at risk' dilemma highlighted in Children's Geographies (Fionda et al., 2006; Karsten, 2005; Manning et al., 2011; Rudner, 2012; Skelton, 2009), through their appropriation and transformation of places as 'safer' and therefore as safely appropriate for themselves to use.

Constructing autobiographical insideness

Participants therefore demonstrated a fine-tuned understanding of the ways in which their spatial practices (or mere presence) could conflict with the desired space use of others. While issues of exclusion regulate these young people's space use, such spatial boundaries cannot be 'read off' straightforwardly as being experienced as limiting. Instead, many participants positioned themselves as having a deep-seated sense of belonging and investment in their local neighbourhoods, clearly positioning themselves as spatial 'insiders'. For example, in Extract 1, participants demonstrate clear knowledge of their local environments, both in terms of knowing what activities happen where, and in terms of constructing themselves as being able to navigate specific areas. Importantly, this sense of 'insideness' relates not only to how the young people see themselves (e.g. as 'emplaced') but also to how they constitute their use of different places as being a function of their 'insideness'.

Extract 4: 'Lived here all my life'

1. MOD: [laughs] Ok, cool, erm, is there any places around the local area where you, like
2. wouldn't go...
3. Becky: No
4. Amy: No
5. Amy: Yeah, lived here all my life
6. Becky: Yeah, so you know like, everyone and-
7. Amy: I've been here for like six years

Extract 5 'I don't know hardly anyone down there'

1. MOD: So is there anywhere else that you might avoid because of anti-social behaviour?
2. Rory: Places where I know we could () get started on. I wouldn't ever go to a new place
3. where we don't anyone...
4. Liam: RED, because everyone from different schools goes there don't they?
5. Lara: and it's all just one big gang
6. Rory: It's all the younger kids that just go out and get drunk and just don't care and older
7. boys
8. Lara: [inaudible] and I don't know hardly anyone down there so I choose not to go there

Extracts 4 and 5 follow discussions about participants' maps and the places they do and do not go to. Our focus is on the ways participants work to produce accounts of 'insideness' and position themselves as being insiders within their local areas. In Extract 4, participants position themselves as 'insiders' by

drawing on a spatial-temporal discourse ('lived here all my life', line 5) that allows them to claim a deep-seated sense of familiarity with, and belonging to, their local neighbourhood, which is clearly related to them knowing, and being known by, others in the local area. Thus, they claim their own position as 'known insiders' by implicitly differentiating themselves from 'unknown outsiders'. A similar set of discursive practices can be seen in Extract 5, where the participants constitute themselves as being outsiders in particular spaces as a function of not knowing people in these places. Thus, they work up an account of places as problematic (often unsafe and/or 'new') through the absence of familiar others, as well through the presence of unfamiliar and uncertain (and therefore potentially dangerous) others.

These accounts demonstrate many features of 'autobiographical insideness' (Rowles, 1983), with participants actively constructing a sense of 'insideness' based on life-long, regular and sustained engagement with places. For our participants, such a sense of autobiographical insideness helped them secure a sense of belonging in what was often a changing and precarious environment; a point which we will pick up in the next section. However, it is also the case that such constructions of insideness are strategic and effective in navigating the complexities of public space use, for example, in justifying avoidance of other places. This can be seen in Extract 5 where participants work up an account of knowledge of RED, a neighbourhood adjacent to theirs. This starts with a claim about knowing that this is a place where 'we could (.) get started on' (line 2), which is then built up by the rest of the group who list a series of problematic social categories that construct the place as one that is most sensibly avoided. Thus, by line 8 Lara can illustrate her knowledge of appropriate place use by using the 'unknown others' warrant but adding to this her informed choice ('I choose not to go there', line 8). This self-regulation is therefore presented as behaviour born out of experience of place, and illustrative of an attendance to responsibilities for keeping oneself safe. Not 'knowing' others, but 'knowing' the categories of people who are in a place, or the kinds of behaviours that one might expect from them there, is key to staying safe.

Their self-construction as 'known insiders' positions these young people as competent social actors within this spatial environment, and as legitimately occupying the public sphere (Di Masso, 2015), albeit on a localized scale. That is, their ability to go anywhere (and be safe in) in their local area is constructed as a function of both knowing (and understanding) the space and the people in it, and thereby as additionally claiming locational citizenship. These participants do not construct their place use as limited or bounded, but instead as being accessible and open, relative to their sense of themselves as being insiders. Similarly, the decision not to go to other or new places is constituted as both a choice (rather than a boundary) and as being a function of competent space use. Thus, for these young people, inhabiting micro-spaces is a functional requirement of staying in known spaces and not going into unknown spaces – which could be a street or so away. Conversely, in spaces where they are known insiders, they can (safely) go everywhere and anywhere they want – even if this is limited to just one or two streets. As such, this insideness (and 'outsideness') construction is usefully illustrative of the kinds of political action identified within Children's geographies (e.g. Kallio & Häkli, 2011a; 2011b), as these young people negotiate the available places (and emplacement) available to them.

Constructing shared socio-spatial histories

In the previous two sections, we have looked at how participants constructed accounts of place-based belonging, drawing on constructions of autobiographical 'known' insideness within defined micro-geographical spaces. In this final section, we extend these analyses to consider the ways in which young people construct places as collective, social spaces and as sites of shared activity and shared memories.

Extract 6: 'Cos everyone was there...'

1. Elsa: Oh god, the bridge, you remember that?
2. Holly: Oh my god, yeah!
3. Elsa: Remember on my birthday, my fourteenth?
4. MOD: Where's the bridge?
5. Elsa: Just past, do you know where the old college is by BROWN School?
6. Flora: It's like there
7. Elsa: Yeah, it's just like over a little hill, so's like no one can see us, so we used to go there all
8. the time, used to be hundreds of people there
9. Holly: Hundreds
10. Georgia: Literally
11. Elsa: Literally, hundreds
12. Flora: Every school around here used to go there
13. Adele: Why did you go there?
14. Holly: Cos everyone was there
15. Adele: So what kinds of things happen at these places?
16. Holly: God!
17. Georgia: Everything (laughs)
18. Elsa: We just socialize
19. Holly: Bad things and good things
20. Flora: Socializing, stuff like that
21. Elsa: Drink, fags

In Extract 6, the space this group are talking about is a cul-de-sac that leads down to the campus of a local college, and which forms a (informal) boundary between two areas of the city. What is particularly notable is the way in which place use was accounted for via relations to others. For example, Holly (line 14, 'cos everyone was there') accounts for their place choices in relation to the place choices of other people. As was frequently found across the data, the notion of 'everyone' is drawn on to justify where they are, in the sense that places are about where 'everyone' goes, and where a collective form of 'everything' (Georgia, line 19) happens (which 'no one' can see). This construct of 'everyone' is not left abstract, but rather is solidified through ongoing descriptions of 'literally hundreds' of people from 'every' school in the local area (lines 10–13). Indeed, what makes this place useful (and attractive) to these young people is that they are places where everyone *can* go, while affording privacy due to spatial features.

This extract highlights the ways young people actively construct meaningful spatial communities, and their locatedness within such communities, through the construction of shared socio-spatial histories (Elsa, line 1, 'you remember that?'; line 5, 'remember on my birthday' and lines 9–10 'we used to go there all the time'). These participants construct place as a social facilitator, enabling collective action and social participation through a set of practices, memories and histories, which can be used to meaningfully construct a deep-seated sense of belonging and insideness, shared with others. While this is not something that is often considered with young people, our participants constructed social memories and (recurrent) collective actions as central to their sense of belonging and emotional attachment to place. Several authors have noted the importance of memory and temporality for a sense of belonging to place. Rowles (1983) argues that 'place becomes

a landscape of memories providing a sense of identity' (p. 114) that in turn reinforces attachment to place. Likewise, Benages-Albert et al. (2015) argue that individual and collective memory shared with others can contribute to developing an emotional and affective bond with a place, necessary for place appropriation.

Beyond this emotional and affective dimension of such shared memories, accounts of shared socio-spatial histories can be an important resource for young people. While participants constructed place as a social facilitator, the social can be constructed as a spatial facilitator. That is, the claiming of a particular history in a particular place facilitated claims regarding the right to be in that space, as in the bench in Extract 1. History in place means you can do anything, just as being known and knowing others in place means that you can go anywhere. In Extract 6, we see the construction of the potential and possibility of places, where 'everyone' can go and 'everything' is possible. This is not to say that young people did not orientate to the complexities of these places. This is perhaps most evident in Extract 6, where Elsa (line 18) uses a pervasive discursive manoeuvre found across the data set: that they 'just' socialize. This use of the term 'just' in our data signalled participants were orienting to potential charges of taking part in activities that others might regard as being wrong. The use of the term 'just' frequently defended against such charges by limiting activities to 'just' sitting, or socializing, indicating that these are legitimate things to do in these spaces. Similarly, participants orientated to the fact that others would see their collective use of space as problematic: as Elsa claims in line 7, they are over a hill 'so's no one can see us' in recognition of the fact that being seen ('socialising') could lead to conflict with others.

It is not only the view from outside that is complex to negotiate but young people also orientate to their own sense of appropriate behaviour in place, linked to their age, their sense of change over time and a changing sense of what appropriate space use might be.

Extract 7: 'it's just with age'

1. MOD: Why would that place be the best place for you?
2. Sandy: Cos it's just got memories obviously like I went in the school and most of the time
3. when you was in ORANGE, and then it was just, the hill, and it was right by my house. We would
4. go through phases where we would just have like, one place to go
5. Bennie: Yeah it was weren't it
6. Sandy: But now we don't go anywhere we just, go to houses
7. Bennie: Mm
8. MOD: Is that because you are a bit older now?
9. Sandy: Yeah
10. Bennie: Yeah, I reckon it's partly because, as you got older, more people started arguing
11. Sandy: Yeah
12. Bennie: So like it was less people would go somewhere
13. Sandy: Cos it, yeah
14. Bennie: Clashes
15. Sandy: Too many (.) An like, groups would like, split into like, smaller groups and everyone
16. [inaudible]
17. Bennie: And then it would get really like, bitchy
18. Sandy: Yeah, yeah I think it's just with age [inaudible]

In Extract 7, the group are discussing which places in their local neighbourhood were ‘best’ for them, responding to the focus group moderator. We see a similar narrative to Extract 6, in the sense that their use of place is constructed through a spatial-historical discourse that situates place choice as being about shared memories with others (e.g. Sandy lines 2–3). However, we also see a reworking of this discourse, within a broader understanding that these choices and use of places change over time. Thus, they now spend time in smaller (more selective) groups (line 15). Likewise, while they used to spend time in public spaces (e.g. ‘the hill’), they now spend time in private houses. For these participants, changing place use is situated within a developmental discourse: place use has changed because they are older (however, it must be noted that this idea is raised first by the focus group moderator). In this way, place, social participation and social memories become intertwined in the identity projects of young people.

While some have noted the function of social memories as managing the continuity of (place) identity (e.g. Rowles, 1983), here we see the construction of a socially shared memory with a different past and present that enables the construction of more adult (than child) identities. Their changing relationship with, attachment to and appropriation of different places is a normative part of their changing ages and changing perspectives. Some of this change is, however, clearly beyond their control. For example, in Extract 7, the changing use of space is situated within an account of group conflict in those spaces (‘clashes’, lines 14–15), which made those spaces less appealing, and where fewer people therefore wanted to spend time, resulting in the loss of a broader ‘collective’. Thus, it is not only the case that conflicts with (adult) others, regulates and determines their space use, but also conflicts amongst themselves which mean that the ‘ideal’ of social spaces where ‘everyone’ goes, and ‘everything’ is possible breaks down. Alongside talk of public places being erased (e.g. by house building), participants highlighted the manifestly precarious nature of public space that young people navigate – both because of their own sense of (dis)continuity and their displacement by others. Such concerns once again illustrate the politics of young people’s everyday lives as they negotiate institutional practices (such as house building) alongside shifting personal and collective identities (and inter-relationships). Thus, our analysis illustrates the kind of ‘youthful political agency’ discussed by Kallio (2016), as it evinces ‘relational politics that are spatiotemporally embedded, identifying youthful agency as a concurrent state of being and becoming’ (p. 109).

CONCLUSIONS

Our findings here highlight how different aspects of young people’s spatial discourse constitute responses to and/or against a broader problematic of being ‘troublesome’ in public spaces, and how this is navigated by young people through the appropriation of micro-geographical spaces, the construction of autobiographical insiderness and the mobilization of shared socio-spatial histories. We have uniquely brought together work across a variety of disciplines concerned with the place of young people and have added a tangible ‘mapping’ dimension in our data collection, contributing to Futch and Fine’s (2014) call to realize ‘mapping’ methods that resist the ‘fetish of individualism’, de-historicism and the ‘de-socializing of the self’ (p. 55). In doing so, we provide an understanding of the complex, ideological and political ways in which people/place relations are both produced and reproduced by young people, in ways that are important for the construction of community, citizenship and belonging.

Our analyses provide further evidence of how public, particularly neighbourhood, spaces are important to young people (e.g. Childress, 2004; Pickering et al., 2012). It has been argued that the appropriation of place is essential (and rational) for young people, who would otherwise be limited in their space use by their lack of ownership of (and often their right to be in) the spaces and places around them (e.g. Childress, 2004). Our analyses further extend this work by demonstrating the processes through which this physical appropriation of place can result in psychological, emotional and affective investment by young people. Drawing on Benages-Albert et al. (2015), we demonstrate how young people’s continual, shared use and occupation of place enables the construction of deep-seated and emplaced insider identities. Participants evinced a sense of belongingness and control over space despite their often

precarious positioning within those spaces by others. We have also demonstrated how personal and collective social histories within such places are central to young peoples' constructions of emplacement within their local areas and communities to the same degree as adults (cf., Benages-Albert et al., 2015; Rowles, 1983), although not always in the same way. Following Rowles, we argue that just as his work on autobiographical insideness in older people necessitated a 'fundamental reorientation of perspective regarding [their] transactions with place' (p. 310), we similarly highlight the need to examine and appreciate the autobiographical insideness of young people, both at a theoretical level in terms of its role in the construction of young people's sense of place and, following Di Masso (2015), on a practical level in terms of the need in place making to appreciate the 'local, contextual nature of political meanings of public space' (p. 80) for young people in particular.

Central to this project is the need to consider the spatiotemporal nature of young people's everyday engagement with the politics of place (see also Kallio, 2016). Our analyses demonstrate that discourses of temporality are complex for young people to navigate. Firstly, because they understand that their appropriateness of space use is temporally fluid, determined by being in a particular place at a particular time at a particular age (Childress, 2004; Gray & Manning, 2014). Secondly, because their sense of being emplaced is linked to their own sense of discontinuity; a changing sense of what appropriate space use might be as they transition from child to adult, which changes (although does not erase) their social histories with others. While partly age related, it also illustrates complex micro-politics of (micro-) geographies over time. In line with Uprichard (2008), we argue that this demonstrates the ways in which young people are always and necessarily 'being and becoming', in a physical and social world that is itself 'being and becoming' (p. 303). This makes it essential that future research interrogates more closely the ways in which this temporality and discontinuity plays out for young people in their everyday lives to maximize both the theoretical and practical implications of work on the places of young people. For example, we would argue that creating open and democratic community spaces that are physically, socially and culturally multi-generational would better align with young people's spatiotemporal identity projects, than spaces which are designed solely for young people's use, which can further entrench tensions between 'childhood' and 'adulthood'.

Finally, our analyses point to the political and ideological dimensions of young people's accounts of public space use, thereby building on the discursive approach to people-place relations (Di Masso, 2015; Di Masso et al., 2014; Dixon & Durrheim, 2004), and facilitating an engagement with the everyday practice of politics by children and young people that has been called for by Children's geographers (Elwood & Mitchell 2012; Kallio et al. 2016; Kallio and Häkli 2010; Kallio & Häkli, 2011a; Philo & Smith, 2003; Pyyry & Tani, 2016; Skelton & Valentine 2003; Skelton, 2010). We have sought to extend concepts like place appropriation (Benages-Albert et al., 2015) and autobiographical insideness (Rowles, 1983) beyond the physical or psychological inhabitation of place. Using a discursive lens, we demonstrate how such concepts can be strategically useful for young people, allowing for the (re)construction of place as 'familiar' and 'safe', rooted in a temporal/historical discourse of life-long belonging, shared social memories and collective actions. It is difficult – and indeed not our intention here – to 'read' these findings straightforwardly as necessarily either 'good' or 'bad' for young people, and we acknowledge other work that has pointed to the potentially disadvantaging (and disabling) impacts of close affinity with place for young people (e.g. Pickering et al., 2012). However, it is also the case that our analyses point to the liberatory potential of spatial appropriation for young people, in contrast to their regulation and control (Gray & Manning, 2014). These concepts provide young people with important tools to make claims of social belonging and identity that are 'politically meaningful and psychologically consequential' (Di Masso, 2012, p. 125) for their normative right to be *in place* and resist others positioning of them as *out of place* (Di Masso, 2015; Di Masso et al., 2014, 2017). As such, we argue that they are important concepts for understanding the daily (and emplaced) practice of citizenship by young people, and how such practice is performative, relational and embedded in wider political processes of spatial conflict and exclusion.

We argue that this both extends and challenges contemporary ideas on young people's inclusion and exclusion in public spaces across a variety of disciplines. While our findings do echo work in geography

that young people inhabit ‘micro-geographies’ (Matthews et al., 1999) or ‘micro-territories’ (Harris & Wyn, 2009), and are therefore far more spatially constrained, both physically and symbolically, than (some) adults, our findings also point out that this does not necessarily lead to constructions of powerlessness or social marginality on the part of young people. Instead, the young people in our study were able to construct themselves as spatial ‘insiders’ (although against the ever-present charge of being an ‘outsider’). We argue that this requires us to pay more attention to *both* the exclusionary and inclusionary practices that structure young people’s experiences of use of places, and how these are complex and interrelated (see also Nairn et al., 2003). Moreover, it requires further attention to the ways in which such constructions of inclusion and exclusion function and work for young people, for example, by justifying avoidance of other places or other groups of people. Overall, we need a more fine-grained theorization of the complexities of exclusion, which pays more attention to what and where young people are being excluded from (and by who), coupled with what and how they are included, or include themselves in. This would be a useful area for future research in that it also further extends work that has sought to understand the dilemmatic nature of public spaces, as being a tension between ‘freedom’ and ‘control’ (cf., Dixon & Durrheim, 2004) by further developing theorizations of the inclusive and fragmentary nature of public spaces.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Debra Gray: Conceptualization; Data curation; Formal analysis; Funding acquisition; Investigation; Methodology; Project administration; Resources; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing.
Rachel Louise Manning: Conceptualization; Data curation; Formal analysis; Funding acquisition; Investigation; Methodology; Project administration; Resources; Writing – original draft; Writing – review & editing.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available as they contain information that could compromise the privacy of research participants.

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