

Aspirations for automobility: Family geographies and the production of young people's aspirations for cars.

Abstract:

Whilst a burgeoning body of research explores how families shape children's everyday experiences, less is known about how families influence children's future aspirations. Drawing upon two research projects exploring children's mobility, this paper explores children and young people's aspirations for cars in adulthood. The paper considers what these aspirations can tell us about current and future relationships between children, siblings and parents. The paper draws upon the concept of habitus to demonstrate how expectations around future car ownership are not aspatial- aspirations are informed by locally derived cultures of parenting and local economic, political and planning contexts. In doing so, the paper critiques broader theorisations of automobility which assume an independent, autonomous adult. Instead, the paper points to an understanding of the role that families play in developing relationally produced aspirations about cars.

Introduction

Human geography has always, by definition, provided accounts which have considered the significance of location, space and place (Massey, 2005). Particularly, the "spatial turn" had led to a renaissance in the explicit cross-disciplinary theorisation of the importance of place and space in making sense of people's lives (Howley, 2009). Whilst these terms have been hotly contested (see Johnston, 2004), there is an awareness that locales provide the local material context for social relations to unfold, and that spatiality and social life are co-implicated (see Horton and Kraftl, 2014). In this sense, place and social action are relational- that is, that social life happens within and is configured and shaped by space and vice versa (Massey, 2005). Space becomes more than simply a container for social action- places are locations (whether they be real, imagined or discursive) imbued with meaning and power, which help to form, produce, shape and influence social life (Cresswell, 2013).

The subdiscipline of the Geographies of Children and Youth has grown rapidly over the past 15 years to explore the connections between space, place, and children and young people's lives. Inspired by the broader New Social Studies of Childhood (see James, Jenks and Prout, 1998), Children's Geographers have explored the significance of space at a variety of spatial scales, considering (as mapped by Hopkins, 2010), sites such as bodies, home, neighbourhood, and national and global processes. In doing exploring everyday spaces of childhood, processes such as the growing institutionalisation of

childhood in a variety of contexts have been mapped (see Kraftl and Horton, 2014, McKendrick et al, 2010, Smith and Barker, 2002, Holdsworth, 2013).

Children's Geographers have debated in depth the extent to which children exercise agency as knowledgeable, social actors (see Kraftl et al, 2012, Benwell, 2013 for more discussion). More recent work has also begun to explore the geographies of children, youth *and families*- recognising that the majority of children live amongst a variety of generational, familial forms. Families are powerful, dynamic and highly contested spaces, which generate and structure a diversity of everyday practices (Holdsworth, 2013). The often-ignored political context of family life shows how family practices are often located within and engage with a variety of landscapes (Jupp and Gallagher, 2013). Families are political sites of everyday, mundane struggles for resource and power, and families empower, enable, and constrict and restrict (Philo and Smith, 2003, Brown 2011). Whilst parents may be structurally, economically and culturally located within more powerful positions, children and young people negotiate, lobby, contest and resist parental power, and exercise their own agency (e.g. see Barker, 2003, Benwell, 2013, Jupp and Gallagher, 2013). Furthermore, decision-making in families has been explored amongst very diverse disciplines (Tinson and Nancarrow, 2007), often noting changes in parenting styles (Pacilli et al, 2013) and shifts towards the democratization of family life (Holdsworth, 2013).

As well as focusing upon the more static concepts of space and place, human geography has also turned its attention to mobility. The new mobilities paradigm has rapidly developed to theorise the transformational shift to movement, circulation and flow through space, landscapes, places and territory (Beckmann, 2001, Cresswell, 2013). Whilst research explores a diverse set of mobility experiences, e.g. airports, motorway service stations, cyberspace and virtual environments (Urry, 2004, Cresswell, 2011), one key focus is automobility, a term referring to the increasingly central role of cars within societies (Urry, 2000). As well as a prime means of transportation, automobility also refers to a broader system, where cars are cultural symbols, manufactured objects, items of consumption and significant users of environmental resources (Featherstone, 2004). Urry argues that automobility is so pervasive that to not own a car can be a form of social exclusion (Urry, 2000).

However, critiques of the system of automobility note that the spatial restructuring and dispersing of societies associated with automobility has created new dependencies (Featherstone, 2004), creating distances between home and other facilities that often only car drivers can travel. Automobility does not only represent freedom or choice, but also signifies compulsion, co-ercing people into particularly intense forms of flexibility. The freedoms sought through cars are often eroded by congestion as more people attempt to make use of these opportunities (Cresswell, 2011, Pacilli et al, 2013).

One group whose mobility has been critically debated is children and young people. Changing trends in children's travel have highlighted a decline in children's independent mobility, a corresponding increase in adult escort, and growth in children being driven to school and other places (see Valentine, 1997, Pacilli et al, 2013). Cars play an increasing role in the production of family life (Laurier et al, 2008, Barker, 2009). Many children (at least in the Global North) increasingly lead highly complex, spatially diverse, car dependent lives (Freeman and Quigg, 2009). Often a number of diverse factors influence children's mobility patterns. Returning to a discussion of the importance of space and place, Local cultures of parenting and motherhood, local school catchment areas, local discourses of safety and fear and local infrastructure all influence and reconfigure the mobility of children and families at the local level (Valentine, 1997, Holloway, 1998, Barker, 2003). Whilst discussions explore children and young people's current experiences of mobility, much less has been written about their aspirations for mobility in adulthood (see DfT, 2013). Their aspirations are particularly interesting since (depending upon their imagined futures) they may well form the next generation of car owners and users.

There is a burgeoning literature on aspirations (see Holloway et al, 2011 for further discussion). Defining aspiration is complex, since whilst the term refers to hopes and imagining of future pathways, it can include a variety of expectations across a spectrum of achievability (Hirschi, 2010, Pimlott-Wilson, 2011). Some aspirations might be idealistic, abstract or hypothetical (with little thought for attainability), whilst other future pathways are held as concrete and achievable (Howley, 2009, Scanlon et al, 2008, Brown 2011). Research exploring children and young people's aspirations has tended to focus on educational aspirations (e.g. Howley, 2009) or occupational aspirations (e.g. Care et al, 2007). Strand and Winston's work (2008) summarizes the many different

influences shaping aspirations. Personal factors held by the aspirant (such as personal motivation) and social dimensions and contexts (as also explored by Wainwright and Marandet, 2011) combine and inter-relate in complex, non-unidirectional ways. Family members often help to influence children and young people's aspirations, socialising children within existing values which can reproduce normalized "acceptable" versions of behaviour, action and aspirations (DeWitt et al 2013, Pimlott-Wilson, 2011).

However, Pimlott-Wilson (2013) shows that children do not passively accept these aspirational messages, and that children actively re-create their own aspirations, and evaluate aspirational messages from other locations. Schools, peer groups, and broader media, institutional and cultural vehicles shape young people's inspirations (Strand and Wilson, 2008). Aspirations are also shaped by contextual factors (Hirschi, 2010), including gender (Care et al, 2007), class (Brown, 2011), ethnicity (deWitt et al, 2013, Strand and Winston 2008) and disability (Scanlon et al, 2008).

A small but growing body of research has begun to explore the relationship between aspiration and locality (Holloway et al, 2011, Pimlott-Wilson, 2011). Particular contexts, settings and spaces shape how aspirations are produced and managed (Pimlott-Wilson, 2011). Connolly and Neill (2001) use Bourdieu's habitus as a way of "*understanding the nature of the social processes that surround the notion of locality*" p115. The local area has "a specific field of relations" which influences and configures social action, and habitus works to normalise and legitimise behaviour, choices and (of interest to the discussion here) *aspirations*. People's aspirations are therefore shaped by their habitus (Brown, 2011). Habitus is not deterministic, but adaptive, offering a flexible way of considering aspirations (Pimlott-Wilson, 2011). Others have considered more explicitly Bourdieu's different fields of "pedagogic action"- including for example how the family is an incubator of habitus (Holdsworth, 2013), how local cultures of parenting influence expectations (Holloway, 1998), how different contexts might influence school aspirations (Weller, 2012) and how rurality reconfigures and shapes children's aspirations (Howley, 2009).

However, there is very little evidence about children, young people and families' aspirations for cars, how family dynamics work to produce these aspirations, and the role that locality might play in this. In response to these gaps, this paper seeks to fulfil a

number of objectives. Firstly, it explores whether young people aspire to be car owning adults. Furthermore, the paper considers how these aspirations are not aspatial, exploring some of the ways in which they are shaped at the local level. Secondly, whilst young people's aspirations to own cars as young adults are often based on ideals to be "independent", the paper explores the role that families play in producing these aspirations, and what this contributes to a broader understanding of the political geographies of families. In doing so, the paper considers aspirations as social things worthy of study in themselves and generators of social practice.

Methods

The findings presented here are drawn from two broader research projects encompassing four geographical areas. Between 2007-2009, the National Youth Agencyⁱ (a national charity helping youth workers to transform the lives of young people) commissioned two research projects which sought to explore young people's perceptions and experiences of travel. This project mapped the transport problems faced by young people, and considered innovative public transport solutions developed by local authorities. As part of this, research was conducted in two adjacent local authorities (West Sussex and the Isle of Wight) within the South East of England. Whilst it is important to note as much variation within each local authority as between them (a point which is more fully explored in the results section, since the analysis often cuts across these in exploring microscale locations), both local authorities are predominantly rural areas with a number of large towns. Public transport services vary across the local authorities, with the Isle of Wight having a relatively extensive and frequent bus service. The Census 2011 shows relatively high levels of car ownership, with only 17.8% of households in West Sussex and 22.5% of households on the Isle of Wight not having access to a car, compared with an England average of 25.8% (ONS, 2012). A convenience sample (targeting three youth clubs associated with these innovative public transport initiatives) recruited 11 young men and 9 young women aged 13-19, from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. All but three of the participants were white British, reflecting the ethnic make up of the locations chosen. Focus group interviews with small groups (usually 2-4 participants) lasted 20-60 minutes, exploring these young people's experiences of public transport, car use and future mobility aspirations.

This data is supplemented by qualitative data which was collected as part of a broader PhD project exploring children and young people's experiences of cars. This research was undertaken in two local authorities. The first, an economically, socially and culturally mixed North London borough, has lower than average car ownership levels amongst adults (32.5% of households without a car, compared with the England average of 25.8%, ONS 2012), and a comprehensive 24 hour bus network, and a network of National Rail and London Underground train services. By contrast, Buckinghamshire is a predominantly affluent and rural county north west of London, and has some of the highest rates of adult car ownership in the UK- the Census 2011 showed only 12.6% of households without a car (ONS, 2012). A convenience sample recruited families through schools interested in developing a School Travel Plan. Families had a variety of socio-economic backgrounds, and approximately 50% of the sample were from a minority ethnic group. Given the option of taking part in an individual interview or a joint interview with their parents, most children chose the former. In total, 23 families took part in in-depth interviews, involving 28 children- 13 boys and 19 girls.

In both research projects, informed consent (having been given information detailing what participation in the research would entail) was sought from each young person and, (where appropriate) parent before taking part in data collection. Individuals' anonymity was assured- the research uses pseudonyms for young people and their parents. Participants were sent a summary copy of the findings. Young people taking part in the NYA project were given a gratuity payment for taking time to participate.

The data was analysed using a thematic approach, by following the established method of coding and grouping responses into themes, relating to relevant concepts such as automobility and aspirations. Potential differences, such as those relating to place, were also explored. Where appropriate, parents and children's accounts were also linked, to compare accounts from different family members. That the two projects did not consistently undertake research with parents and young people is an acknowledged limitation of the datasets here, in that the NYA data only explores young persons' accounts (in which they might talk about their parents, but not vice versa). Furthermore, due to the limited space available within the paper, the data has not been explored here in relation to other social variables such as gender, although this is acknowledged as an intellectually important endeavour, particularly as mobility patterns and responsibilities

are often highly gendered (see Barker, 2003). Similarly, given the wide age range of young participants (7-19), it must be acknowledged that the analysis must consider the significance of age- a point which is returned to, where appropriate, in the results.

Young people's aspirations for automobility

Across all of the locations, the overwhelming majority of young participants spoke of their aspiration to drive. Many had very clear detailed aspirations to learn to drive and buy a car at age 17 (the UK legal age for obtaining a car licence):

Yeah, I'm getting a car, I can't wait, I really can't wait to get to 17 to drive. (Dean, 15, West Sussex)

I want a car... (Ranj, 11, London)

If i had a car, that would be ideal. But I'm not 17 yet, so I can't. Eventually I'd like that. (Vanessa, 16, Isle of Wight)

These findings reflect other research highlighting that the majority of children and young people have aspirations for cars. Car ownership is a key target for young people (Carrabine and Longhurst, 2002). That automobility is a central feature of young people's aspirations is perhaps not surprising, since automobility is so embedded within contemporary societies (Urry, 2000). In particular, the older groups of young people taking part in the research often held very developed aspirations to drive, and were able to discuss and account for their aspirations in depth. Aspirations to drive were significant in being interwoven with future imaginings relating to broader youth transitions towards personal freedom and independence:

Driving is so... I see it as more freedom, more freedom to do what I want, when I can drive, I can take myself places and go where I want to go, take people to go places. More convenient than having to wait for a bus or walk, that would just take longer. It's much quicker to drive places. (Dean, 15, West Sussex)

It's more the freedom for me. Because I think it's difficult to rely on public transport when it's not that reliable really. Some of the time its on time, but other times the bus will be delayed or cancelled. (Sean, 16, Isle of Wight)

That young people's aspirations link car ownership with freedom and convenience is perhaps not surprising, given that existing research highlights that across all sectors of the population, car use is seen to offer these qualities (Sheller, 2004). These qualities associated with automobility are powerful and seductive, if often illusory: car travel often locks car drivers into congestion, traffic jams and high levels of expenditure through a plethora of running and maintenance costs.

One significant and perhaps unique feature of young people's aspirations for cars is that, in theory at least, cars represent (at least at first consideration) escape from dependent relationships with parents:

The car will take me wherever I want to go, and the buses aren't always there, I can't walk to places, I live right down, a mile and a half from town. I could walk there, but that's an inconvenience, so I'd like to have a car. At the moment, I get my Mum to take me, though she doesn't always. (Dean, 15, West Sussex)

Hence aspirations for cars are a prerequisite for young people's broader future imagined pathways of youth transitions towards independence and autonomy (Holdsworth, 2013). These aspirations were important future rites of passage towards independence for young people:

There is, it's like a fashion. It's gone from 2 or 3 years ago in year 11, there were 3 or 4 people in the whole sixth form who had cars, it wasn't a massive thing. Last year, I had my car and a lot more people started getting theirs. This year at school, I think most people have a car. You reach 17, you pass your test, you get a car. (Paul, 19, Isle of Wight)

These young people's aspirations reflect that cars are seen as integral to adulthood and independence. For young people, cars often symbolise rebellion and freedom (Miller, 2001, Carrabine and Longhurst, 2002). Young people discussed the relationship

between cars and status. Owning a car (or not) was an important signifier of a young person's identity (both in the present and the future):

...some of the bus drivers.. they get quite annoyed...and they look down on you, like "it's another teenager" kinda thing. (Cathy, 16, Isle of Wight)

... some people's cars are quite bad! (Luka, 18, West Sussex)

Model of travel impacts upon status and identity, and future car-based aspirations provide a framework to enhance identity. Cars were embedded within young people's aspirations not only as a form of everyday mobility, but also importantly as aspirational status symbols and cultural icons. This is perhaps not surprising, given that cultural symbols such as toy cars and television commercials combine with everyday travel patterns to immerse children within automobility from an early age (Carrabine and Longhurst, 2002). The last quote highlights the complex relationship between cars, status and identity, since the distinction in status is not simply between owning or not owning a car, but also that different types of car may afford (or not) prestige. Material objects such as cars can be used as status symbols to create and maintain social difference (Maxwell, 2001).

Interestingly, whilst aspirations for automobility were very strong throughout all four locations, geography is important as these aspirations were not uniform, but were manifest in different ways in different places. Explanations were often prefaced with "where I live..." or "in my town..." One participant explained her aspiration for cars:

Where I live, the bus goes round the estate and then back into town, in a massive loop. So if I drove, it would be wonderful, much quicker (Cathy, 16, Isle of Wight)

This comment begins to suggest how the local context helps to shape aspirations. The following conversations with children about car aspirations indicate further how expectations and aspirations are informed by local contexts:

Soon we are going to get a new jeep, a silver one..., it's got great seats like benches. (David, 7, London)

As David described a whole host of possible contenders for the new car, it was assumed that the car would be new. Indeed observations at the end of the school day showed that the vast majority of mothers were waiting in cars which were new, high-spec and expensive. The concept of habitus provides a way of exploring what is produced as “normal” in a locality- in this atypically wealthy part of the London Borough, where large 4x4s and people carriers were commonplace, local expectations were that “everyone” buys a brand new car. Within this habitus, status and distinction are finely produced through car models, furnishings and in-car technological gadgets (reflecting that cars are highly differentiated products, see Shelley, 2004). Furthermore, habitus is very powerful as references to “*everyone* buying a new car” serves to exclude those who could not or chose not to do so.

Conversely, the habitus relating to status and distinction was different in one deprived location. One child spoke of the status of being driven to school in a new car:

*Yeah, (our car) it's a **brand new** car.* (Tim, 8, Bucks, emphasis added)

Contra to the earlier example, in this location, status and differentiation were made through families’ economic position and purchasing power. That very few cars parked outside Tim’s school waiting to collect children were new (in comparison with other local schools) provide some more context and weight to his account, highlighting the significance of the quote and the rarity of a “brand new” car for children in that location. These two contrasting examples highlight that locality is significant in considering young people’s aspirations (Weller, 2012, Strand and Wilson, 2008, deWitt et al, 2013). Habitus informs and shapes what particular kinds of aspirations might be acceptable.

Hence these accounts demonstrate that many young people have strong, complex, multiply layered and locally informed aspirations relating to car ownership. Automobility is powerful and central, both to aspirations about mobility and young people’s everyday lives and cultures. Aspirations for cars are tightly interwoven with perhaps idealised future pathways of youth transitions towards independence. However, some young people’s aspirations, particularly the older young people taking part in the research, questioned automobility. Whilst none expressed views which clearly rejected cars, a

small number identified more uncertain and ambivalent aspirations. One young person explained:

I don't know whether I will be learning to drive as soon as I reach 17, which is what some do. I don't know whether I will be bothered to be honest. (Lily, 16, Isle of Wight)

A number of young people talked about their aspirations for car ownership in more staged or delayed terms, with them not aspiring to drive as young adults, but not ruling it out at a more distant point in the future:

I think I will learn to drive before i go (to uni) but I don't intend to get a car. (Tom, 18, Isle of Wight)

There is no necessity to run a car. Possibly if I have a family, then it's a good idea, but for me, its just as easy to use the bus service. (Andrew, 18, West Sussex)

Young people's ambivalence towards automobility (Fotel and Thomsen, 2004) is reminiscent of 'reflexive automobilisation', which Beckmann (2001, p598) describes as a shift towards more thoughtful recognition of the problems of automobility. Furthermore, one young person's account identifies how aspirations are not fixed or static, but evolve and change. Previously having no aspiration to drive, he discusses how his aspirations evolved and changed:

Since I moved to (large market town), I haven't really needed a car or a bus, but I turned of my friends were learning and passing their test, but I thought there was no real point, since I had just moved to (the local town). I could walk to school, it was fine. But then I did start to drive and realised it was a lot better. It's addictive. I just love driving around. (Paul, 19, Isle of Wight)

As mentioned earlier, aspirations can range from those being highly abstract to those which are achievable and realistic (Hirschi 2010, Pimlott-Wilson, 2011). Young people's aspirations "realistically" identified a complex number of barriers which might prevent their car aspirations from being achieved. One focus group interview vignette identifies a wide range of barriers:

Andrew, 18, West Sussex) *I think it's the expense more than anything else...*

(Luka, 18)...*apart from Claire, she had three jobs whilst she was having lessons for her driving licence*

(Tom, 17) *It costs a lot of money...*

(Luka)... *particularly when you are trying to buy a car and get insurance as well*

(Andrew)... *yeah, and then by the time you've crashed a few times...*

(Luka)... *yeah, there is quite a high crash rate for young people... That puts me off driving, at any rate...*

(Andrew)... *yeah, I wouldn't trust myself...*

(Tom)... *and drink driving, or drunk driving is the problem...*

(Andrew)... *Yeah, and people just going too fast, people get very cocky when they have been driving for six months.*

Young people explained that they did not necessarily expect their aspirations to drive to be realised in the short term, and identified a wide range of barriers which might prevent them from driving. These include the costs associated with learning or drive, to buy, insure and maintain a car, as well as other issues such as safety, accident rates and other risks associated with young drivers (DfT, 2013). Interestingly, as the next section discusses, young people often turned to their parents to help them address and solve some of these problems and realise their aspirations, producing a new set of family geographies.

The role of parents in the production of young people's aspirations

Parents and home life are key influences which shape young people's aspirations (Pimlott-Wilson, 2011). Whilst young people almost without exception held aspirations for cars, parents also had future imaginings relating to their children's future mobility patterns, and sought to shape and influence their offspring's aspirations. Parents held a more diverse range of aspirations compared to their mostly car-aspiring offspring. Rather than talking about aspirations in a positive sense (Brown, 2011, talks about how aspirations have emotional and affective resonances), many parents were "resigned" to their children leading car-dependent lives as adults, and were pessimistic about their children's future travel habits:

I think we do an awful lot of car journeys and it's not setting up good habits for them.
(mother of Rebecca [13] and David [7]., London)

I don't think it (car chaffuering) is good for them, we do not do them any favours at all. There is a time when they will have to come to terms with doing it (travelling) by themselves. (mother of John [8], Bucks)

Whilst parents were critical of automobility and were aware that cars have been implicated in growing rates of childhood obesity and poor future health outcomes as adults (Pacilli et al, 2013), some parents were reluctant or felt powerless to change behaviour. Demonstrating again the importance of the local context influencing aspirations, one parent living in a rural area with little or no public transport commented:

I don't think we make decisions, it's just what we do (drive). There isn't another alternative. (mother of Anushka [10], Bucks)

Research has explored the wide variety of reasons behind why parents might feel “resigned” to car dependent lives (with no viable alternatives), including increasing distances between home and school which cannot be travelled by other means, the lack of affordability of other modes of transport, a requirement to juggle parental employment and other caring tasks with the journey to school, and fears regarding stranger danger and traffic (see Valentine, 1997, Freeman and Quigg, 2009, Pacilli et al, 2013). Parental habitus often contained contradictory ideological expectations of parenting. Whilst for all the reasons identified above it may be seen as 'good mothering' to escort younger children, mothers expressed concern this may also be poor parenting since it also prevents children obtaining basic spatial skills and may set up car-based aspirations. However, there were a diverse range of parental aspirations, and many parents were quite ambivalent about cars and some actively tried to shape and influence their children's aspirations to exclude cars:

No, I have never driven, I don't want to drive either. For environmental reasons. There are too many of them (cars) about, especially in London. (father of Daphne [8], London)

Interestingly, once more the local (“*especially in London*”) provides a context to support and justify the argument made by this parent. Motivated by environmental concerns or social attitudes, some parents had planned their everyday lives without cars or tried to limit car use:

I bought this house with the intention that they should walk to school, I think they should be able to walk there. (mother of Kylie [10] and Stephen [7], London)

Since we moved here, a lot of things we used to do by car, we can now do on foot. (mother of Gill [10] and Sarah [7], Bucks)

Once more, location is important here, as parents discuss how their choice of residence is at least part based upon a set of future aspirations about freedom, and more specifically of interest for this paper, how family members might *travel* independently. Similarly, property purchases can be heavily informed by local school catchments (Weller, 2012). Hence at least some parents have made a sometimes lengthy sequence of decisions over a long period of time (maybe before children were born) in sophisticated and often subtle ways to attempt to influence their offspring’s aspirations. Parents attempt to construct particular kinds of lifestyles, informed by the local habitus (Holdsworth, 2013):

One of the things we looked for when we moved was that... as the children get older and change school next year, that (things) will change. They will be able to be independent- they will be able to walk down to the bus stop, walk to the train, walk to the shops and park, and all of that. For us, that was a key consideration. We did think of moving further out into the villages, but the driving implications of that.. (mother of Ritchie [9], Bucks)

However, many parents talked about they were unable to achieve their own aspirations about residence and mobility. Several families stated they would prefer to live closer to amenities such as schools, bus routes or railway stations (with the travel aspirations this might generate and enable) but could not afford to due to higher property prices:

If we lived in the village, our life would be different. She could walk to school and she could always walk to go and see her friends... but it's too expensive to live there. (mother of Anushka [10], Bucks)

These accounts show the complexity of parental aspiration for their children. Parents play a powerful role in shaping aspirations, and are engaged in complex, long-standing, sophisticated and often subtle attempts to influence their offsprings' aspirations. These are often linked to broader familial aspirations about quality of life and the social status of families (Holdsworth, 2013). Whilst Brown (2011) and others (Wainwright and Marandet, 2011) refer to a "politics of aspiration" in relation to formal political spheres, this research begins to highlight the importance of family geographies and how families are sites to explore political action as it happens in mundane, everyday forms.

However, that (as stated above) the vast majority of young people had strong aspirations for cars as adults questions the success of parents to shape their offspring's future imaginings. Whilst young people's aspirations may be influenced by families (Pimlott-Wilson, 2011), this research shows how parental attempts to shape aspirations may fail, and how parents and children may hold quite different ideas about their children's future. A "politics of aspiration" ensues, as different family members attempt to shape young people's future imaginings, and aspirations themselves can become sites of conflict. Even discussing the issue in some cases resulted in conflict between parents and their children. Ranj (mentioned earlier for "wanting a car") and his family are a good example of this, although the quote cannot show the tension, aggression, raised voices and rapid-fire responses which were present in the conversation, perhaps suggesting this was an often-explored debate in this household. Ranj's parents had explained that they did not own a car and did not want their children to become car dependent:

Ranj (11, London,): I want a car...

Ranj's Dad: ...I'm sure Ranj will want to drive, his (older brother) will want to start learning soon.

Ranj, 11: most (friends' families) do (have cars).

JB: what do you think about not having a car (in your family)?

Ranj: Yeah, it's good, mostly, but you have to pay for the travelcards and the train.

Ranj's Mum: You'd have to pay for your car as well

Ranj: yeah, but you can use your car as much as you want.

Ranj's Mum: You can your pass as well.

Two points are of particular significance in the above quote. Firstly, the example shows how clearly how aspirations can be sites of different values which might result in conflict for families. Ranj's parents were both clearly trying to explore the debate and perhaps dissuade him from aspiring to own a car, although Ranj was also clearly defending well his own sets of ideas about his future. Aspirations are political, are negotiated and managed vis a vis other family members, reflecting broader understandings of families as active, fluid and immanent (Holdsworth, 2013). That disagreement and struggles arise over aspiration-forming is perhaps not surprising, given that Tinson and Nancarrow (2007) and others discuss how ideas are formed and decisions are increasingly made democratically within families. Family relationships can shape aspirations and, in doing so, aspirations help to shape family relationships (Holdsworth, 2013).

Secondly, place is significant in helping to shape these discussions. The London context was discursively employed as part of the argument, identifying that owning a car was "not necessary". London's comprehensive public transport system shaped how each family member saw Ranj's aspirations and future. Hence, an addition to considering local ideological, cultural and economic contexts, planning contexts (specifically in this case the local-and indeed beyond the local- transport policy and planning contexts) also shapes and informs how different family members assemble aspirations and construct particular futures.

On one level, seeing how young people can and do contest their parental aspirations for them adds to the plethora of ways in which young people can be seen as social actors. Similarly, habitus is productive rather than restrictive- it allows individuals to alter their trajectories and find new ways forward (Pimlott-Wilson, 2011). A more critical reading of young people developing car based aspirations against their parents' ideals is that young people are reproducing (in some cases, unquestionably so and in others very passionately supporting) the powerful system of automobility, and aspiring to be the next generation of car drivers locked into lives centred around cars (Urry, 2000, Sheller, 2004).

Whilst the vast majority of young people held strong aspirations for cars, they were also aware that these aspirations could rarely be realised independently. Young people explained their aspirations could often only be realised through negotiation and compromise with parents. Furthermore, parents were often co-opted or recruited into young people's aspirations to make them achievable. For example, young people often stated that parents would be required to provide practical, financial support to enable them to realise their aspirations:

The ones that I do know (who drive), it's people whose parents have paid for their lessons mostly. (Luka, 18, Isle of Wight)

Young people's aspirations positioned their parents not only as offering direct financial support, but also in sharing the resource of a "family car":

The reason I am thinking ahead (of learning to drive) is that my parents have said they'll put me on the insurance of one of the cars, we have two cars, on the smaller one (Vanessa, 16, Isle of Wight)

The "family car" was often spoken as a site of everyday political action and conflict. Layers of family dynamics and expectations were at work here, involving debate about who would purchase the car, allocate time and expenditure to maintain it, and how such a scarce resource would be managed and negotiated between different family members:

They (two siblings) will have arguments about who was going to use the car. (mother of Elissa [12], London)

This provides some indication of how aspirations are constructed with reference to and are imbued with particular sets of political dynamics within family geographies. The implication above is that the family car will ultimately lead to sibling conflict. Interestingly, in this example, family geographies are very significant. The mother adopted a position that she would be left to "resolve" these disagreements, reflecting that she (as parent) is simultaneously positioned as relatively powerful but also as outside of (and hence to act a judicator for) these political geographies.

Rather than having aspirations for young people to have future independent mobility, many parents again expressed rather pessimistic predictions about how they would be continue to be implicated and involved in their offspring's mobility, even when young people begun to drive:

Elisa (16 years old) will soon be driving herself, so I can't imagine whether it will be worse, not chauffeuring but waiting for my car to come home safely! The issues don't go away, they just change. (mother of Elisa [16] and Belinda [12], Bucks)

As events worthy of study in their own right, young people produced detailed, complex aspirations which foreshadowed complex mobility patterns as adults. Families can be complexly intertwined and employed within young people's aspirations, and for plans realising these aspirations. This young man's aspirations to drive draw upon very complex sets of family dynamics, recruiting various family members into his aspirations to make them achievable:

I already have a car. My Dad uses it every day to get to work, but I will have it. He uses this car, but he has given it to me. My Mum doesn't drive, I have two younger brothers and sisters. The deal is that I will take them around in it too, I become the taxi service. (Sean, 16, West Sussex)

As well as family members being co-opted into these aspirations, some young people's aspirations involved drawing upon their peers within new sets of dynamics and relationships:

My friend drives already, he has found it so much easier, he can give us a lift as well, Its cheaper that way. (Cathy, 16, Isle of Wight)

Yeah, I have one friend who will learn soon as he's 17 in October, I'll get him to take us places. (Dean, 15, West Sussex)

Hence, young people's aspirations are very detailed and complex. Young people often construct a relational set of aspirations which recognise continuing links and

dependencies with others (particularly family members), rather than straightforward young transitions to independence.

Conclusion

Through the example of cars, this research shows that families are central to the production of young people's aspirations. The paper adds to a growing body of literature indicating how aspirations are events in themselves worthy of study, offering insight into how young people's current lives are experienced and produced, as much as being of interest exploring young people's future imaginings. Whilst other research highlights the complex (and often worrisome nature) of young people's lives (Hopkins, 2010), the evidence here shows how aspirations are considered, detailed, sophisticated and complex in their formation (as also found by Pimlott-Wilson, 2011, Brown, 2011). Young people's aspirations often also hint at an expectation that their imagined young adult lives might be equally complex.

Aspirations are important imagined spaces in the production of family geographies (Jupp and Gallagher, 2013). The paper has teased out how parents held ambivalent positions, working in complex, sophisticated and subtle ways to enable their children to explore their aspirations and sometimes to influence them. However, parental influence over their offspring's lives (or indeed aspirations) is partial and patchy, and aspirations can become the site of complex familial debate, discussion and sometimes conflict. In the case of aspirations for cars, even faced with strong lobbying attempts from parents, young people demonstrate their social agency within families through maintaining strong aspirations to drive. Aspirations are therefore mediated and relationally produced. Relationships are shaped by aspirations, and aspirations are, in turn, reconfigured by relationships (Holdsworth, 2013).

Even though independence and autonomy are strong threads in young people's aspirations, young people are simultaneously "realistic" in acknowledging the need for parental support to achieve them. This is increasingly the case across many aspects of young people's lives, as many routes through youth transitions towards independence become more complex and difficult to achieve independently (Hopkins, 2010). With high rates of youth unemployment, record levels of house prices and self (or parent) funded post compulsory education, young people are increasingly facing futures where

aspirations for independence and autonomy may not be so immediately achievable in early adulthood (Holdsworth, 2013).

The paper also contributes to debates about automobility, and how many young people have strong aspirations for cars. Whilst at least some parents aspire for their children to be less car dependent, young people (and older teenagers in particular) held very developed, detailed and complex aspirations to drive. Although this is only a small scale qualitative piece of research, the findings present a challenge for policymakers and transport planners seeking to reduce car use (DfT, 2013). That young people's mobility aspirations contain expectations of generational, mediated mobilities in young adult life challenges theorisations of automobility which assume an independent, autonomous adult car-driver (Laurier et al, 2008, Barker, 2009, Cresswell, 2011).

Lastly, the paper also identifies how aspirations are not aspatial, but rather have geographies. The paper has fleshed out the importance of the local, identifying elements of habitus, including local cultural ideological and cultural expectations, local economic contexts (including those relating to social class, income and housing markets), and local planning and transport contexts—which all help to inform and shape aspirations at the local level. Whilst habitus may shape young people's aspirations, young people draw upon habitus in productive ways which highlight their social agency and can serve to contest parental aspirations.

Bibliography

Barker, J. (2003) 'Passengers or political actors? Children's participation in transport policy and the micro political geographies of the family', *Space and Polity*, 7(2): 135-152.

Barker, J. (2009) "'Driven to distraction?'" Children's experiences of car travel', *Mobilities*, 4 (1): 59- 76.

Beckmann, J. (2001) 'Automobility- a social problem and theoretical concept', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 19: 593-607.

Benwell, M. (2013) 'Rethinking conceptualisations of adult-imposed restriction and children's experiences of autonomy in outdoor space', *Children's Geographies*, 11 (1): 28-43.

Brown, G. (2011) 'Emotional geographies of young people's aspirations for adult life', *Children's Geographies*, 9 (1): 7-22.

- Care, E., Deans, J. and Brown, R. (2007) 'The realism and sex type of four- to five-year-old children's occupational aspirations', *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 5 (2): 155-168.
- Carrabine, E. and Longhurst, B. (2002) 'Consuming the car: Anticipation, use and meaning in contemporary youth culture', *The Sociological Review*, 50(2): 181-196.
- Connolly, P. and Neill, J. (2001) 'Constructions of locality and gender and their impact on the educational aspirations of working-class children', *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 11 (2): 107- 129.
- Cresswell, T. (2011) 'Mobilities I: Catching up', *Progress in Human Geography*, 35 (4): 550-558.
- Cresswell, T. (2013) *Geographic thought: A critical introduction*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- DeWitt, J., Osbourne, J., Archer, L., Dillon, J., Willis, B. and Wong, B. (2013) 'Young children's aspirations in science: the unequivocal, the uncertain and the unthinkable', *International Journal of Science Education*, 35 (6): 1037-1063.
- DfT. (2013) Top line summary of young drivers focus group research on attitudes to driving and insurance: September/October 2012.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/young-drivers-attitudes-to-insurance>
- Featherstone, M. (2004) 'Automobilities: An introduction', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 24(4/5): 1-24.
- Fotel, T. and Thomsen, T. (2004) 'The surveillance of children's mobility', *Surveillance and Society* 1(4): 535-554.
- Freeman, C. and Quigg, R. (2009) 'Commuting lives: children's mobility and energy use' *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, 52 (3): 393-412.
- Hirschi, A. (2010) 'Swiss adolescents' career aspirations: influence of context, age, and career adaptability' *Journal of Career Development*, 36 (3): 228-245.
- Holdsworth, C. (2013) *Family and Intimate Mobilities*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Holloway, S. (1998) 'Local childcare cultures: Moral geographies of mothering and the social organisation of pre school education', *Gender, Place and Culture*, 5(1): 29-53.
- Holloway, S., Brown, G., Pimlott-Wilson, H. (2011) 'Editorial Introduction: Geographies of education and aspiration', *Children's Geographies*, 9 (1): 1-5.
- Hopkins, P. (2010) *Young people, Place and Identity*, London: Routledge.
- Horton, J. and Kraftl, P. (2014) *Cultural geographies: An introduction*, London: Routledge.

Howley, C. (2009) 'Remote possibilities: Rural children's educational aspirations' *Peabody Journal of Education* 81 (2): 62-80.

James, A., Jenks, C. and Prout, A. (1998) *Theorizing Childhood*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Johnston, R. (2004) *Geography and Geographers: Anglo-American Human Geography since 1945 (sixth edition)*, London: Arnold.

Jupp, E. and Gallagher, A. (2013) 'New geographies of parenting, policy and place' *Children's Geographies*, 11 (2): 155-159.

Kraftl, P., Horton, J. and Tucker, F. (2012) 'Editors' introduction: critical geographies of childhood and youth', in P. Kraftl, J. Horton and F. Tucker (eds) *Critical Geographies of Children and Youth: Contemporary Policy and Practice*, Bristol: Policy Press 1-26.

Laurier, E., Lorimer, H., Brown, B., Jones, O., Juhlin, O., Noble, A., Perry, M., Pica, D., Sormani, P., Strebel, P., Swan, L., Taylor, A., Watts, L. and Weilenmann, A. (2008) 'Driving and passengering: notes on the ordinary organisation of car travel', *Mobilities*, 3(1): 1-23.

Massey, D. (2005) *For Space*, London: Sage.

Maxwell, S. (2001) 'Negotiations of car use in everyday life', in D. Miller (ed) *Car Cultures*, Oxford: Berg 203-222.

McKendrick, J., Bradford, M., and Fielder, A. (2000) 'Time for a party! Making sense of the commercialisation of leisure space for children', in S. Holloway and G. Valentine (eds) *Children's Geographies: Playing, Living, Learning*, London: Routledge 100-116.

Miller, D. (2001) 'Driven societies', in D. Miller (ed) *Car Cultures*, Oxford: Berg 1-33.

ONS (2012) *Statistical bulletin: 2011 Census: Key Statistics for England and Wales, March 2011* <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census/key-statistics-for-local-authorities-in-england-and-wales/stb-2011-census-key-statistics-for-england-and-wales.html>

Pacilli, M., Giovannelli, I., Prezza, M. and Augimeri, M. (2013) 'Children and the public realm: Antecedents and consequences of independent mobility in a group of 11-13 year old Italian children', *Children's Geographies*, 11 (4): 377-393.

Philo, C. and Smith, F. (2003) 'Guest editorial: Political geographies of children and young people', *Space and Polity*, 7(2): 99-116.

Pimlott-Wilson, H. (2011) 'The role of habitus in shaping children's views of their future employment', *Children's Geographies*, 9 (1): 111-118.

Scanlon, D., Saxon, K., Cowell, M., Kenny, M., Perez-Gualdrón, L. and Jernigan, M. (2008) 'Urban adolescents' postschool aspirations and awareness', *Remedial and Special Education*, 29 (3): 161-174.

Sheller, M. (2004) 'Mobile publics: beyond the network perspective', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 22: 39-52.

Smith, F. and Barker, J. (2002) 'School's out? Out of school clubs at the boundary of home and school', in R. Edwards (ed) *Children, Home and School: Autonomy, Connection or Regulation*, London: Falmer Press 57-74.

Strand, S. and Winston, J. (2008) 'Educational aspirations in inner city schools', *Educational Studies*, 24 (4): 249-267.

Tinson, J. and Nancarrow, C. (2007) "'GROw"ing up: Teenagers' involvement in family decision making', *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 24 (3): 160-170.

Urry, J. (2000) *Sociology beyond Societies: Mobilities for the 21st Century*, London: Routledge.

Urry, J. (2004) 'The system of automobility', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 21(4/5): 25- 39

Wainwright, E. and Marandet, E. (2011) 'Geographies of family learning and aspirations of belonging', *Children's Geographies*, 9 (1): 95-109.

Valentine, G. (1997) "'Oh yes I can" "Oh no you can't": Children and parents' understandings of kids' competence to negotiate public space safely', *Antipode*, 29(1): 65-89.

Weller, S. (2012) 'School choice versus social cohesion: examining the ways education policies shape children's geographies in the UK', P. Kraftl, J. Horton and F. Tucker (eds) *Critical Geographies of Children and Youth: Contemporary Policy and Practice*, Bristol: Policy Press 115-132.

ⁱ The author wishes to thank the NYA for generously funding the research