

# The discourse of choice and the 'missing generation'

*by* Francesca Sidoti

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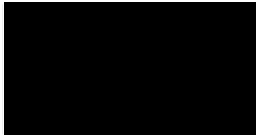
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**THE DISCOURSE OF CHOICE AND THE ‘MISSING  
GENERATION’**

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2016

**Statement of Authentication**

The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.



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### **Abbreviations**

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ASGS	Australian Statistical Geography Standard
BMIHMS	Blue Mountains International Hotel Management School
ERP	Estimated Residential Population
MYST	Mountains Youth Services Team
NSW	New South Wales
SEIFA	Socio-Economic Index For Areas
TAFE	Technical and Further Education colleges

## **ABSTRACT**

The ideological project of neoliberalism has implications in everyday life. One fundamental aspect of this is the discursive construction of choice within neoliberalism that suggests the individual is free to choose from unlimited options. This thesis investigates this discourse and how it is understood, incorporated and reproduced in the everyday lives of young adults. Using a case study of the 'missing generation' of young adults in Katoomba, New South Wales, this thesis explores the intersection between everyday choices and the discursive construction of choice. First, it argues that there is a disconnect between these two types of choice, and that young adults negotiate the disconnect in a variety of ways. Second, this thesis suggests that the enduring importance of belonging disrupts the discursive construction of choice, particularly through the redefinition of the concepts of 'opportunity' and 'limit'. Third, it argues that the discourse of choice is more evident in the discussion of institutions than other aspects of life, such as family. Finally, it argues that there is significant analytic value in approaching neoliberalism as an open-ended process which shapes human experience but is not that experience itself.

# INTRODUCTION

## **The conception of this research**

“You can be whatever you want to be, you only have to choose it”. One need only to glimpse at a billboard or watch ten minutes of commercial television to recognise the pervasiveness of the idea that, in the modern world, the individual has boundless potential and freedom.

This contemporary discourse of choice operationalises neoliberal values in everyday life. As part of this process, characteristics of an economic system—competition, self-interest, investment—are increasingly imposed and felt on an individual level. Yet researchers have contested the reality of unlimited choice (Salecl 2010; Vromen, Xenos & Loader 2016; Baker 2008) and argue that, for most people, this discursive construction of choice does not reflect their experience in everyday life.

This has particular significance in the lives of young adults, whose choices are extensively discussed, both in academia and in public and policy fora. Thus, the question for this research centres on how the discourse of choice is incorporated, understood and reproduced on an everyday level by young adults. In investigating this question, it is possible to begin to unpack how young adults interact with the discourse of choice, what this means for how they understand choice in their everyday lives, and how the disconnect between discursive construction and everyday experience of choice is negotiated. These questions are not only important in understanding contemporary young adult lives, but also in ascertaining the operation of this aspect of neoliberal ideology on an everyday level.



### **The focus of this research**

This research is based on three particular understandings. The first is of youth as a socio-cultural category. The second is of neoliberalism as an ideological project. The final understanding is of the importance of localised research that examines the specificities of experience. These three aspects of the research are developed below.

Youth is a notoriously difficult idea to define. The understanding of this thesis is of youth as a socio-cultural category and not a development phase. A socio-cultural approach suggests that childhood, youth and adulthood are ‘fluid relationships that are given definition and meaning by their social, cultural, political, institutional, locational, governmental and economic contexts’ (Wyn 2015: 3). The focus of this thesis is on young adults, an age range from post-secondary school to mid-thirties. This reflects a generally recognised social understanding of youth and young adulthood, and is consistent with the literature (Côté 2014; Silva 2013; Nairn, Higgins & Sligo 2012).

The effects of the discourse of choice are not limited to young people alone. Yet young people are ‘frontier actors—people who are born into this increasingly detraditionalised world’ (Skrbis et al. 2011: 617). They are also often vulnerable to social change and this motivated my research. This research stemmed from a concern with whether the discourse of choice was assisting young adults or merely obscuring enduring structural constraints in their everyday lives.

This thesis is based on a specific understanding of neoliberalism, which has implications for the research design and analysis. Here, neoliberalism is an ‘ideological project, and not a fully realised reality’ (Dawson 2013: 7). This draws on the work of Doogan (2009). Further, drawing on Ricoeur, Cameron and Palan argue that social theories are examples of storytelling (2004). This implies:

That the generation and reproduction of social theories as stories is a dialogic and evolutionary process which takes place not only in the world 'out there', but in the forms of inter-personal and inter-institutional narrative construction we are all, wittingly or not, engaged in.

(Cameron & Palan 2004)

Therefore, the understanding of this thesis is of neoliberalism as an ideological project which, among other things, entails narratives about the nature of the social world. As Ricoeur argues, these narratives are engaged with and indeed co-constructed on an interpersonal level. Instead of understanding neoliberalism as a monolithic system, it therefore can be approached as incomplete, contested and co-constructed in everyday life. This approach also offers insight into how aspects of neoliberalism might be challenged, as suggested by Springer who argues 'we call neoliberalism into being and it is therefore ultimately all of us who are empowered to change it' (2016: 2).

Using a case study methodology, this thesis also examines the local specificities of neoliberalism—a discourse usually examined on a global or national scale—in relation to young adults from Katoomba, New South Wales (NSW). Specifically it will focus on those who make up what is locally known as the 'missing generation' of 19-35 year olds, and how they felt about leaving and/or returning to town. The 'missing generation' is a colloquial term used in Katoomba to describe the absence of young adults. As will be established in greater detail in Chapter 3, demographic data shows Katoomba has a much lower young adult population, than NSW and national averages. The population returns to state and national equivalence from 35 onwards. This demographic trend is recognised locally as the 'missing generation'.

There are, of course, many dimensions to choice. Gender, class, disability, ethnicity, sexuality all shape the understanding and negotiation of choice. It was not possible to canvass all of these aspects in this thesis, and I have therefore concentrated on a particular aspect: the discursive construction of choice and how that intersects with everyday choice. In future research, I hope to analyse the specificities of these experiences in greater depth.

### **The structure of this thesis**

The structure of the thesis is as follows. Chapter 1 contextualises the research, focusing on a review of the literature on choice as understood in two ways: as a neoliberal discourse and the everyday decisions of young adults. I examine in particular the context of choice in young adult lives and how this affects the choices they make, with a focus on decisions about the future and location. I then look at two studies that bring together these areas, and describe the conceptual contribution of this research and the gap it addresses.

In Chapter 2, I describe the methodological approach of this research. The four research methods—statistical data collection, document analysis, interviews and focus groups— and the forms of data analysis are discussed. I also outline the sampling strategies and ethical considerations of this research.

Chapter 3 is the first of three empirical chapters. In this chapter, I provide an in-depth analysis of the case study, the ‘missing generation’ in Katoomba in NSW. This is achieved by comparing views from ‘above’ and views from ‘below’, drawing on the work of de Certeau (1984) and Kenway and Hickey-Moody (2011). This chapter explores the various ways of ‘knowing’ Katoomba—the map, the tour, the street and the body— and compares the differences between these views. It describes the institutional view of the ‘missing generation’ through demographic data and document analysis, and

examines how young adults negotiate this view in everyday life. It particularly explores the embodiment of place and ways participants draw on alternative discourses, such as nature, nostalgia discourses and the City-as-Other.

In Chapter 4, the contrast between 'above' and 'below' views is continued. Here, however, the focus is on choice in the lives of young adults in Katoomba. It explores the diverse ways participants understood choice: as a result of fate or necessity; as an aspect of belonging and obligation; as a result of location or place; and within an institutional context. In particular, it examines the intersections between these descriptions of choice and the discourse of choice, the everyday alternatives to the discourse of choice, and the way participants negotiate a context of uncertainty.

This is extended in Chapter 5, which investigates the ways in which participants referenced and interacted with the discourse of choice itself. The particular focus of this chapter is on the uses and contestations of the discourse in the data, and what this might suggest about the functioning of the discourse of choice on an everyday level. I then examine the role of the individual in these interactions, through the framework of the individualisation thesis.

The conclusion establishes what can therefore be drawn about the understanding, incorporation and reproduction of the discourse of choice in the everyday, discussing the conceptual contribution of this research and highlighting potential future directions.

## **CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW**

Choice is understood in two ways throughout this thesis. The first of these is as a discursive construction within neoliberal ideology. The second is as decision-making in everyday life, with a particular focus on the lives of young adults. This thesis is focused on the intersection of these two types of choice, and asks how the discourse of choice influences and is influenced by everyday choices in the lives of young adults. Crucially, it asks what insights an analysis of these interactions might provide as to the functioning of the discourse of choice in the everyday lives of young adults.

To approach this, it is important to first establish how both types of choice are understood in the literature. Therefore, this literature review is divided into three parts. The first concentrates on the understanding of choice as a discursive construction within neoliberal ideology. The second focuses on how choice is understood within youth studies. The final section reviews the literature that combines these two areas, namely, the literature within youth studies that focuses on neoliberal discourses and their effects in the everyday lives of young adults.

The macro-theoretical framework of this thesis draws on social theory of late modernity. This approach, based on the work of Giddens (1991), Beck (1992), Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) and Bauman (2001) suggests a significant shift between modernity and late modernity that began to emerge in the second half of the last century and became pronounced after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 (Beck 2002; Woodman & Wyn 2015). There is a more extensive review of the theoretical framework later in this chapter, but one element is of particular importance and therefore must be included in preliminary discussion. The individualisation thesis is a central element of

social theory of late modernity, and is used by theorists to critique and analyse the role of the individual within the new contexts of late modernity.

Bauman defines individualisation as 'the way in which identity is transformed from a "given" into a "task" and that individuals are encouraged to take responsibility for this task' (cited in Dawson 2013: 19). In other words, identity shifts from being something intrinsic to something that is constructed and developed by the individual. The individual, in this form, is a significant departure from the possessive individualism of modernity, and from the 'ethical and altruistic individualism of the Enlightenment. Indeed, Enlightenment individualism is more about "being individual" than becoming-individual at all' (Lash, in Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002: vii).

In the literature, the individualisation thesis is commonly understood to involve two components. The first is that social structures, such as gender and class, no longer have the structuring influence they once did (Brannen & Nilsen 2007: 415) The second is that, as a result, the individual becomes increasingly responsible for their identity and their choices. As Giddens described it, 'we are, not what we are, but what we make of ourselves' (1991: 75).

This view has been extensively criticised, as both overstating the diminishing influence of social structures and as obscuring the ways in which these structures continue to shape lives (Brannen & Nilsen 2007; Doogan 2009). Woodman and Wyn argue, however, that this is a mischaracterisation of the individualisation thesis (2015: 5). They instead point to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's original depiction of the two components:

Constantly changing between different, partially incompatible logics of action, [individuals] are forced to take into their hands that which is in danger of breaking into pieces: their own lives.

(2002: 23)

Here, the first component of the individualisation thesis is the different and partially incompatible logics of action. This is not a lessening of structural constraints but a multiplication of them. Alongside the multiplication, structural constraints have become increasingly obscure and, often, incompatible. The second aspect of the thesis suggests that, as a result, the individual is 'forced' to respond to this multiplication by taking responsibility for the direction of their own lives. As Woodman, Threadgold and Possemai-Inesedy describe, the individualisation thesis 'is better understood as the institutional transfer of the task and responsibility for papering over the inconsistencies and contradictions of second modern life into the hands of individuals' (2015: 1121). This study is based on this understanding of the individualisation thesis. As might be obvious, choice is fundamental to this process.

#### **The discursive construction of choice**

Neoliberalism is a dominant ideology in developed liberal democracies (McGuigan 2016). While there are differences within neoliberalism (Mirowski 2013: 51), all variants centre on a principle of 'increased marketisation by enacting policies favourable to capital' (Dawson 2013: 4). As such, neoliberalism has primarily been situated as an economic model. Yet, as Doogan states, it is also an ideological project (2009: 34) which has had significant impacts on many areas of social life.

Increasingly influential on public policy in the past four decades, neoliberalism's core values of privatisation, marketisation and competition have extended from values associated with the state to values associated with the individual. This is crucially different to the status of the individual within liberalism. MacPherson suggests that individualism was a feature of liberal political systems, but that this was balanced by forms of obligation to a wider collective (2011: 276). Within neoliberal ideology, those relationships between individual and collective are increasingly dismantled and

replaced with a collectivity 'of reciprocal individualisation' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002: xxi). The idea is that if everyone looks after themselves as individuals, society will function smoothly.

Choice is central to this process and within this ideology. As Brannen and Nilsen describe, 'the freedom to choose is the marker of the free, autonomous individual' (2005: 412). Indeed, choice can be seen as a crucial mechanism in enabling the ideological values of neoliberalism to be realised on an everyday level. This is achieved by a particular discursive construction of choice.

Gee defines discourses as involving:

a) situated identities; b) ways of performing and recognising characteristic identities and activities; c) ways of coordinating and getting coordinated by other people, things, tools, technologies, symbol systems, places and times; d) characteristic ways of acting-interacting-feeling-emoting-valuing-gesturing-posturing-dressing-thinking-believing-knowing-speaking-listening

(2011: 40)

The discourse of choice involves a situated identity of the individual as free to choose. It is performed predominantly through language signifiers, such as "you can be whatever you want to be" or the recurring motif of contemporary society, 'unlimited'. It is a form of coordination, both in how the individual understands themselves and their context, and has characteristic ways of being and, importantly, not-being.

This discourse is pervasive and can be found in advertising, educational institutions and government policy. Examples include the Nike campaign 'Unlimited You', where 'life isn't about finding your limits. It's about realizing you have none.' (2016), the Western Sydney University campaign



'Unlimited' (n.d.), and the 'Age of Opportunity' suggested in government rhetoric (Hockey 2014). The discourse of choice is also prominent in self-help books, such as 'It's Your Choice' which suggests '[y]ou can choose to live the life you want. It is your choice. To prosper you must be in control of you and your destiny' (Duféal 2011: 5).

Part of the difficulty in analysing the discourse of choice is finding a way to question the type of choice it promotes, without appearing to suggest that choice itself is undesirable (Baker 2008; McRobbie 2009). Thus, it is not choice itself, but the way it is understood in neoliberal ideology that is under scrutiny here. As Salecl argues:

Liberal democratic capitalism glorifies the idea of choice but with the proviso that what is on offer is primarily a consumerist model of choosing. The choice of a new form of social organisation, of different ways in which society might develop in the future and especially the possibility of rejecting capitalist society as we know it appear not to be available choices.

(2010: 149)

The unlimited choice suggested by the discourse is, therefore, only unlimited *within* neoliberal parameters. Here, the nature of choice is programmatic and facilitated solely on an individual level. Further critiques of the discourse of choice suggest that the discourse hijacks the language of feminism and yet obscures ongoing gender inequality (Baker 2006, 2008; McRobbie 2009) and that the discourse functions as a form of self-regulation, as is consistent with governmentality (Rose 1999). These are important debates. Although there is not scope in this thesis to address these theoretical approaches, unpacking these areas more fully would be an exciting area for future research. For this thesis, the most important criticism of the discourse of choice is that it is not reflective of lived experience. As Wyn and White describe, there is a 'paradoxical relationship

between perceived choice and agency among young people at an individual level and the structural conditions of young people's lives, which for many preclude the attainment of adult social goals' (2000: 166).

The literature suggests three things. Firstly, the discourse of choice limits the nature of choice to one that is consistent with neoliberal ideology, primarily through the focus on the individual. Secondly, it is pervasive throughout but not reflective of everyday experience. Finally, the discursive construction of choice obscures ongoing structural considerations, making it harder to engage with these structural constraints or begin to change them.

### **Choice in youth studies**

The second way in which choice is understood in this thesis is based in youth studies, focusing on young adults' decision-making in the everyday. This takes two prominent forms: the context in which young adults are making decisions, and how this affects the choices they make in everyday life.

### ***The context of choice in late modernity***

There are three aspects of social theory of late modernity, as applied to youth studies, that are particularly relevant for this thesis: reflexivity, risk/responsibility and uncertainty. While these aspects of life were present in simple modernity, in late modernity their influence on everyday life has been intensified. This has significant implications for the choices that young adults are making, and the context within which they make those choices.

Reflexivity was predominantly developed as a conceptual tool by Giddens (1991), and is the process by which ‘a self-identity has to be created and more or less continually reordered against the backdrop of shifting experiences of day-to-day life and the fragmenting tendencies of modern institutions’ (1991: 186). Obviously, choice is central to this concept. As Giddens described it, the individual has ‘no choice but to choose’ how to be and how to act (1991: 81). Yet, since this was written, the validity of reflexivity as representative of lived experience has been contested (Smart & Shipman 2004, Furlong & Cartmel 2006, Thompson, Russell & Simmons 2013). The ‘Inventing Adulthood’ study (Henderson et al. 2007) found that the framework of the reflexive project of the self, while theoretically useful in framing a discussion of biography and youth, had limited value as an operational tool of description and analysis (Holland & Thomson 2009).

Although Giddens and Bauman discussed risk and responsibility, these are primarily associated with the work of Beck (1992) and Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) who argued that individuals must find ‘biographical solutions to systemic contradictions’ (Beck 1992: 137). This suggests that, in late modernity, the responsibility for making a choice and living with the consequences of that decision rests with the individual. This has significant implications for how people see themselves and others. As Vromen, Xenos and Loader found:

Overall, many of these respondents argue that there is personal agency involved in whether young people remain poor or disadvantaged in contemporary society.

Therefore, socioeconomic status is constructed as a choice, and reveals the common-sense internalisation of individualised, neoliberal, ideas among many of the young people who participated in our research

(2016: 543)

The risk and responsibility of late modernity is accompanied by uncertainty. Uncertainty, also described in the literature as ambivalence and/or ambiguity, is regarded as a central modal condition of late modernity (Bourdieu, cited in Woodman and Wyn 2015: 66) and it is a key emphasis within the theoretical framework of this thesis. Uncertainty has two significant implications when it comes to choice in young adult lives.

The first implication is that uncertainty can obscure the context in which choices are made. If choice can be considered as a central mechanism by which young adults are meant to navigate their own biographies, then uncertainty is the context in which this navigation occurs. As Woodman describes:

In a sense this could be seen as an opening up of choice, but the ambiguity is that this emerges as one element of a process that at the same time weakens the kind of security and predictability, and in some cases even the possibility of thinking probabilistically about events, that makes choices possible.

(2009: 251)

This dual movement, of opening up (on a discursive level) and closing down (on an everyday level), is characteristic of late modernity, and uncertainty is fundamental to this process. The same trend is evident in Furlong and Cartmel's epistemological fallacy, where 'although social structures, such as class, continue to shape life chances, these structures tend to become increasingly obscure as collectivist traditions weaken and individualist values intensify' (2006: 2) and in Wyn and White's 'paradox' of youth, where young people perceive their lives as characterised by choice and agency, despite the enduring constraint of structural conditions (2000: 166). Such a tension is similarly evident when considering choice, where the discursive construction of choice is not reflected in the everyday experience. Uncertainty obscures the contexts in which a choice is made.

The second implication of uncertainty is that the context in which choices will play out becomes unpredictable. Indeed, the very notion of linear progression becomes complex as transitions are increasingly non-linear (Lash 2003) and reversible (Du Bois-Reymond 1998: 63). Choices are made in the present for a future that is constituted as unpredictable. As Cairns suggests, conditions of risk and uncertainty in late modernity are ‘converted into matters of personal choice and opportunity’ (2013: 343). This resonates with the work of Threadgold, who suggests ‘ambivalence is both individually and socially constructed and our life choices and identity building become projects for producing order in an unstable and contingent existence’ (2012: 26).

Uncertainty therefore has a significant effect on choice. To establish this, we shall now turn to two significant choices young adults make: choices about the future and choices about location. Both of these choices are of relevance for this thesis. They also explore how uncertainty has altered the way in which young adults’ choices in the everyday are experienced and can be understood.

### *Young adults and the future*

The ways in which young adults orient towards, plan for and create their future is one of the most extensively studied aspects in the literature (Cuervo & Wyn 2014; Leccardi 2005, 2006). This has predominately been studied through a transitions approach, which focuses on the various ‘status passages’ that are achieved on the way to adulthood. As Antonucci describes, transitions have been conceived of as ‘diverse passages: from full-time education to full-time employment, from the biological family to the family of destination and from the family home to independent housing’ (2010).

This approach has become increasingly untenable. The first point of contention is the positioning of youth in the framework. As Woodman and Wyn describe, the transitions framework ‘positions youth as a stage, phase and space through which ideal trajectories to adulthood may be

forged' (2015: 76). This is based in a developmental approach to youth, where youth is a life stage to be passed through and adulthood is a destination. The literature suggests that the fixed categories outlined in the transitions framework, both of youth and of adulthood, are increasingly obsolete or unrepresentative of everyday life. In the work of Blatterer, adulthood is understood as a socially recognised category and the nature of that recognition has changed. The difference in contemporary adulthood 'can be traced as a shift from the social recognition of stability in the past to the social recognition of flexibility in the present' (2007: 787). This is consistent with Woodman and Wyn's suggestion that 'the fluidity and complexity that have been associated with the idea of an extended period of youth are, we suggest, now a characteristic of many adult lives for this generation—not a precursor to it' (2015: 54). The life stages, both of youth and adulthood, suggested by a transitions framework are increasingly questionable.

The second point of contention is the nature of transition itself. Theorists suggest that uncertainty in late modernity has meant clear-cut shifts between stages are no longer the norm. Du Bois-Remond suggests that 'status passages have changed structurally, they show the tendency between synchronicity instead of linearity and have become reversible' (1998: 63). Milestones 'may occur simultaneously, serially or not at all' (Gillies, cited in Wyn, Lantz & Harris 2011: 9). Therefore, the uncertainty of late modernity complicates the idea of adulthood-as-destination, as well as the notion of ideal trajectories, which are two central tenets of the transitions framework. This has significant implications in discussing choice in the everyday lives of young adults.

There are extensive debates in social theory of late modernity about how this shift affects young adult orientation towards the future (Threadgold 2012; Brannen & Nilsen 2007). The role of planning in young adult lives is one of the central debates in this area. As Skrbis et al. detail, some individualisation theorists suggest the concept of the concept of life as a "planning project", that is, they actively determine their future pathways through autonomous decision-making' (2011: 5).

Another increasingly dominant suggestion is that, due to the lack of predictability about what the future might hold, young adults are increasingly encouraged to not plan for specific futures, but to develop skills in the present that ensures they are 'ready for anything'. The concept of resilience is an indication of this (Hunter 2012), as is the ubiquitous 'flexibility' (Cairns 2013: 338). Both of these concepts suggest an orientation, within the present, that can respond to multiples kinds of futures. Instead of trying to change the future, young adults are increasingly encouraged to remain open and responsive regardless. The implications of this require further research. The important conclusion, at this point in time, is that it is increasingly acknowledged within the literature and in everyday life that young adults make choices in anticipation of an unpredictable future.

The literature therefore suggests that choices that young adults make in terms of the future are different in late modernity in three significant ways: they are constructed as 'opened up' or unlimited, they are made within a context of uncertainty, and they are contingent.

It is evident that young adult choices about the future are not made exclusively within the domain of institutions or in the context of family or as a result of a moment in time, but a complex combination of all of these. As demonstrated above, a transitions framework no longer captures the complexity of future orientation in young adult lives. A relational framework, represented in this thesis through the concept of belonging, allows us to focus on that combination of factors, rather than focusing on each distinct part. As explained by Cuervo and Wyn, a relational framework has several dimensions:

In addition to supporting an understanding of the ways in which institutions and formal processes include and exclude (i.e. who 'belongs' and who doesn't), the metaphor of belonging frames an understanding of the efforts that young people make to be connected to people, places and issues that matter to them, as well as the historical dimensions of their relationship to their time.

(2014: 903)

A relational framework can therefore bring together institutional and relational connections, while retaining an awareness of the temporal dimension. It therefore does not simply capture 'being in social worlds' (Berlant 2016: 395) but rather investigates belonging as a practice. It also allows us to locate young adult lives firmly within time and, crucially, within place. It is to issues surrounding location that we now turn.

### *Young adults and the choice of location*

For young adults, the choices that surround location are often explored in two interrelated areas of scholarship, out-migration and mobility studies. In these contexts, choice might be constructed as simple: to move or to stay still. Yet the literature suggests decisions around location, and the construction of place, is infinitely more complex.

In recent years, mobility has become a dominant framework in which to analyse movement. This is understood on many levels: physical, socio-spatial and imaginary (Urry 2000). It is also understood as a process that creates inequality in late modernity. Bauman argues that 'mobility has become the most powerful and the most coveted stratifying factor; the stuff from which the increasingly worldwide social, political, economic and cultural hierarchies are daily built and rebuilt' (2001: 188). It is, therefore, important to be aware that mobility is capital, like any other (Kaufmann, Bergman & Joye 2004; Skrbis, Woodward & Bean 2014) and that people can experience this capital in many different ways: as enforced, chosen, or normalised.

There is a sense in late modernity that movement, of any kind, is progress. Hage describes this as existential mobility, the sense of 'going somewhere' (2009: 97). This has a necessary corollary, what Hage describes as stuckedness (2009: 97), or the experience of stasis or 'standing still'. As Turner discusses in his review of Boltanski and Chiapello, 'successful people are incessantly on the



move, while the unsuccessful who have squandered their talents are characterized by their fixity' (2007: 413). Cairns argues that the risk and uncertainty that characterises late modernity are increasingly constructed as notions of choice and opportunity (2013). Certainly, movement is one of the primary ways this conversion is achieved.

The issues surrounding mobility have particular ramifications outside of urban centres, as discussed in the Australian research of Kenway, Kraak and Hickey-Moody (2006), Wierenga (2011), Easthope and Gabriel (2008) and Geldens and Bourke (2008), and internationally in the work of Henderson et al. (2007). Predominantly, Australian research focuses on normalised out-migration from regional or rural areas to urban centres. These migrations are often underpinned by a sense of stasis and notions of identity that are intrinsic with movement/progress. For Easthope and Gabriel, mobility was the starting point for young adults' decision-making where 'the prevalence of a culture of migration within Tasmania places the decision to stay or leave the island at the centre of young adults' decisions about employment, education, independence and identity' (2008: 172).

Choice in these contexts seems relatively simple, between movement and stillness. Yet, choices of location are complicated by the ways in which people understand where they are. Young adults' choices are not simply about movement and location, but equally about the construction of place and the notion of home.

Place is not a bounded locality, but a 'particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus' (Massey 1994: 154) with enduring and complex effects. As Gieryn describes it, referencing Soja, 'places are doubly constructed; most are built or in some way physically carved out. They are also interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood and imagined' (2000: 465). Place therefore can be a means of achieving mobility and as a form of

resistance to notions of immobility. Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst argue it is also an 'elective belonging',

critically dependent on people's relational sense of place, their ability to relate their area of residence against other possible areas, so that the meaning of place is critically judged in terms of its relational meanings.

(2005: 29)

The concept of home is deeply connected to this conception of place. As Blunt and Dowling argue, home is a '*spatial imaginary*: a set of intersecting and variable feelings, which are related to context, and which construct places, extend across spaces and scales, and connect places' (2006: 2). This is not to conflate the concepts of place and home, but to point to their interconnections. Both place and home are important ways of belonging, which necessarily means they can also function as ways of not belonging. As Noble and Poynting argue, 'belonging, and not belonging, are, of course, not simply cognitive processes of identification, but are highly charged, affective relations of attachment to and exclusion from particular places' (2008: 130). Thus, the choice of location for young adults is more complex than a simple dichotomous decision between movement and stillness. The choice of location and the sense of place are not one and the same, and these choices operate within a complex process of belonging and identification.

### **The intersection of choice**

This thesis is focused on the discursive construction of choice and how it is understood, maintained and reproduced in the everyday by young adults. In other words, it is focused on the intersection between the discursive construction of choice and everyday decision-making. Two studies have

particular importance for this thesis, as they analyse the operation of neoliberal discourses in the everyday lives of young adults.

The study of a 'neoliberal generation' in Nairn, Higgins and Sligo's work (2012) is an account of the effects of neoliberalism on young adults. Choice was frequently raised throughout the study, and the discourse of choice was evident. As the authors found, a number of participants:

Told us that if they worked hard enough (and many took themselves to task for not doing this), and made the right choices, they could be whoever they wanted to be, and have whatever future they chose.

(2012: 25)

Nairns, Higgins and Sligo point out that the 'neoliberal exhortations and promises were responded to and acted upon in different ways, not always favourably, but there was no doubt that they had been heard and understood' (2012: 37). This study provides a powerful collection of data detailing the existence of neoliberal discourses on the everyday level in young adults' lives. However, the source of these discourses and how they have been incorporated remained obscure.

Silva's work on working-class adulthood in the United States is an in-depth discussion of the ways in which young adults incorporate and respond to neoliberal ideology on an everyday level. In particular, she asks 'why young people who would seemingly benefit most from social safety nets and solidarity with others cling so fiercely to neoliberal ideas of untrammelled individualism and self-reliance' (2013: 25). This resonates with the central question of this research.

Silva suggests two significant theories as to why young adults identified with neoliberal values. The first is that experiences of betrayal, within the labour market and institutions, ensure young adults

feel completely alone and that self-reliance is their only form of security (2013: 83). Further, she suggests that adult legitimacy is achieved 'not with traditional currencies such as work or marriage but instead through the ability to organise their difficult emotions into a narrative of self-transformation' (2013: 115).

For the purposes of this thesis, one aspect from each of these works was especially important. From Silva, it was the analysis of the context within which aspects of neoliberal ideology remained unchallenged and were, instead, subscribed to. From Nairn, Higgins and Sligo, it was attention to the different ways in which young adults interacted with neoliberal discourses. Yet, while both of these works provided empirical evidence that neoliberal discourses were referenced in the everyday lives of young adults and the context in which they remained unchallenged, the actual functioning of the discourses, the ways in which they were understood, incorporated and reproduced on an everyday level, requires further investigation.

## **Conclusion**

Silva (2013) and Nairn, Higgins and Sligo (2012) analyse neoliberal ideology in the everyday lives of young adults. This thesis builds on their contribution, with particular focus on the discourse of choice.

This addresses a gap in the literature. While the disconnect between the discursive construction of choice and the decisions of young adults in everyday life has been established, the ways in which this disconnect is negotiated remains under-examined. This thesis addresses this gap by examining how the discourse of choice is understood, incorporated and reproduced on an everyday level by young adults in the case study.

In doing so, this thesis also draws on two slightly different theoretical approaches. The first is approaching neoliberalism as an ideological project, and this thesis tests the validity of this approach in analysing neoliberalism on an everyday level. The second builds on the work of Cuervo and Wyn (2014), among others, in employing a relational framework in place of the more traditional transitions approach.

## CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

This research is qualitative, and based within a constructivist framework. As elaborated by Holstein and Gubrium, ‘while still deeply interested in what is going on, constructionist sensibilities also raise questions about the processes through which social realities are constructed and sustained’ (cited in Silverman 2014: 24). Analytic induction was central to the research: as a result the categories and conclusions were generated from the data.

The analysis of neoliberalism is often undertaken on a large scale. While this has advantages, there is much to be learned from the specific and localised interactions with neoliberal ideology in everyday life. Therefore, a case study methodology was employed for this research. This was consistent with the literature (Howard et al. 2011; Henderson et al. 2007; Brannen & Nilsen 2007). The case for this research was Katoomba, a town in NSW.

The characteristics of Katoomba will be discussed in greater depth in the next chapter but it is important to establish its relevance as a case study. The first reason it was chosen was pragmatic. I grew up and live in Katoomba, and this ensured accessibility for recruitment and familiarity with the patterns that emerged in the data. The second was to do with location. Katoomba is somewhat unusually placed in that it has a very distinctive culture as a ‘small town’, yet is almost peri-urban. This placement, somewhere between the rural and urban dichotomy, has significant implications for how lives are lived and constructed.

The third reason was demographic. As discussed in greater depth in the following chapter, Katoomba’s population between the ages of 19 and 35 is notably lower than state or national averages. In Katoomba, this age range is referred as the ‘missing generation’. This trend is both

notable and distinct from trends in other comparable areas in NSW. Unlike other regional centres close to Sydney, such as Wollongong or Newcastle, Katoomba doesn't have a university. Yet, the closeness to Sydney ensures the out-migration trends from more rural towns are also not reflected in the demographic data of Katoomba.

While choosing Katoomba as a case study came with advantages as an embedded researcher, there were obvious limitations. The first was the possibility of that those I approached would feel they could not refuse involvement. This coincided with a second consideration, that people I had talked to in my personal life about my research would be familiar with the research and try to provide 'appropriate' data when interviewed. In order to address both of these issues, anyone I knew well personally or who I had spoken to about my research was excluded from the sample. It was, however, impossible to entirely exclude people I knew. This, in the end, turned out to be a strength of the research. It enabled an effective recruitment process and a familiarity with the ideas and processes that were being discussed, as is consistent with Garton and Copland's discussion of acquaintance interviews (2010: 548).

### **Research sample**

The purpose of this research was analytic, not scientific, generalisability (Yin 2009: 15) and therefore a statistically representative sample was not attempted. That said, the intention was to 'provide a range of recipients' (Thompson, Russell & Simmons 2013: 67) across age, gender and socio-economic backgrounds. Participants were between nineteen and thirty-five, as consistent with the 'missing generation' of Katoomba, and had grown up in the Upper Mountains. It was essential that the participant had extensive experience in Katoomba, either living, working or having attended school in the town. Recruitment was theoretically sampled (Silverman 2014: 122) and undertaken through Blue Mountains City Council, Western Sydney Institute of Technical and Further Education

(TAFE) colleges, Mountains Youth Services Team, and personal networks. Overwhelming, personal networks provided the bulk of the sample. Snowball sampling also contributed three of the participants.

Of the eighteen participants, the characteristics of the sample were as follows:

- Ten were female, eight were male.
- Seven participants were between 19-24. Nine were between 25-30, and two between 31-35.
- Five participants had full-time jobs, eleven had part-time jobs and two were unemployed. Of those who had part-time jobs, the primary area of employment was hospitality and retail. Of those who had full-time jobs, two were in trades, two were professional and one was a clerical worker.
- Five participants had left school before Year 12, though three of those had gone on to get qualifications from TAFE. Two participants had Bachelor degrees, and another seven were studying at university.
- Four participants had a parent born overseas. The countries of origin were the Phillipines, China, Japan and Greece.

### **Research methods**

Several methods were utilised to collect data. The first was a preliminary statistical collection of publicly available data on Katoomba, primarily through the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Tablebuilder and the ABS.Stat beta websites. While there is a significant amount of available data, there were limitations in establishing trends across data sets. As discussed in Black (2009), there are difficulties in obtaining some data at the Statistical Area Level 3 (local government area) and Level 2 (postcode). There are also issues with different age groupings across data sources. As is the case with Black (2009), the statistical data presented here is regarded as indicative and not intended for a



technical audience. The reader is invited to view the original data sources for more in-depth statistical information.

Documents from the Blue Mountains City Council, Blue Mountains youth organisations and *Blue Mountains Gazette* archives were analysed. Naturally occurring data, such as brochures and pamphlets from local youth organisations and Centrelink, were collected where possible. Some online data, such as Western Sydney Institute videos and Youth Council Facebook pages and websites, were also analysed. For a list of collected documents, see **Appendix A**. These were analysed thematically and with attention to how these documents constructed the categories of 'youth' and 'young adults' in Katoomba.

Statistical data and document analysis were primarily used in establishing the context of the case study and the discursive construction of 'the missing generation'. To collect data about the discourse of choice on an everyday level, I conducted interviews and focus groups. The initial intent was to conduct interviews and focus groups with equal numbers of young adults who were planning to leave (Cohort A) and young adults who had left and returned (Cohort B). Such a neat distinction soon proved impossible. With two exceptions, participants had left and returned at least once (and, often, several times) and had thoughts of moving again. As is consistent with the reversible nature of transitions in late modernity, people could very often have fit into either cohort. Therefore, a loose separation of participants into two groups was used, with nine people in each group.

Eight in-depth interviews were conducted, ranging from 45 to 90 minutes each. These were semi-structured, following a loose chronological form. This approach was informed by the narrative inquiry work of Riessman (2001) and Gubrium and Holstein (2009). Four focus groups were held, two with participants who had returned and two with participants who planned to leave although, as established above, these categories were blurred.

Throughout the data collection, a research journal was kept, in accordance with Burgess (1981).

### **Data analysis**

As described in McLellan, MacQueen and Neidig, the understanding of this research was that data transcription is data reduction and cannot ever fully reflect the interview (2003: 66). As suggested in their article, all interviews and focus groups were transcribed in their entirety, including mispronunciations and grammatical errors, laughter, stops ('ums' and 'likes') and some 'nonlinguistic observations' such facial expressions or gestures where necessary as context (2003: 66-67). As transcription was regarded as an essential step in analysis, I also transcribed all the interviews and focus groups.

Analysis was initially thematic, drawing on the categories of participants as is consistent with analytic induction (Silverman 2014: 119). This analysis then provided the structure of the thesis. This proved a powerful approach, as the categories that emerged from the data were different from the ones that had been anticipated.

The second level of analysis drew on a narrative approach (Riessman 1993, 2001). Discursive and narrative analysis was preliminary, and a more in-depth narrative analysis in future research would be of great value. Time constraints meant that a detailed transcription process, consistent with the work of Riessman (1993) and Gee (2011), was not possible. However, the research design and analysis accorded with the narrative approach, particularly in remaining aware of the co-construction of narrative between interviewer and participant, paying attention to the structural features of the data and comparing similarities and differences between narratives (Riessman 2001).

Discourse analysis centred on identifying the elements of discourse, as discussed by Gee (2011: 40), within the data. The data was first analysed for evidence of the discourse of choice: language constructions; ways of acting or knowing that were characteristic of the discourse, particularly any suggestion from the participants of unlimited possibility or choice in the lives; and any performative demonstrations that suggested the situated identity of the discourse. A further analysis was conducted to identify ways in which the discourse was negotiated, and what other discourses might be utilised in participants' discussions.

Narrative analysis requires 'attention to subtlety: nuances of speech, organisation of a response, local contexts of production, social discourses that shape what is said and what cannot be spoken' (Riessman 1993: 69). The research itself was based in two of these elements: attention to social discourses and local contexts of production. So narrative analysis seemed a natural fit.

The interviews and focus groups were loosely structured to allow participants to 'frame' their stories. Frequently in the data, this allowed participants to quickly establish the importance of closeness to nature and their romantic views of their childhood, resources they then drew on throughout the interview. Nuances of speech were also crucial in the analysis of the data, for example metaphors or language signifiers such as "I've always said...". Word choice, interaction between narrator and listener, and any shifts in language as a result of that interaction were included in the analysis.

### **Research ethics**

This research received ethics approval and accorded with the standards of the National Health and Medical Research Council (2014). Informed consent was regarded as an ongoing negotiation.

Written consent, in accordance with Neuman (2003: 124), was obtained at the beginning of each

interview and focus group and collected data was immediately de-identified. Completed transcripts were sent to participants, to provide them with the opportunity to view the transcript and request alterations. On two occasions, participants asked for the removal of a statement during the interview. These statements were therefore excluded from the transcript.

An awareness of issues surrounding anonymity, as discussed by Kaiser (2009), underpinned this research. This is of particular significance in a small community. Participants were informed that any statements that would reveal their identity would be removed. This only occurred once but was considered important as discussions of employment, in particular, could have negative implications should a person be identified. An awareness of the positionality and reflexivity of the researcher underpinned this research, and the subjective and embedded nature of all research is acknowledged.

## CHAPTER THREE: KATOOMBA, A CASE STUDY

I think of the Mountains as a place I leave. I leave to go to Uni, I leave to go out at night. I leave to go shopping, I'll have to leave to get a job and I will probably have to leave to buy a house. What I would hope for the younger people of 2025 is a place where they can stay to do more things.

(Young Blue Mountains resident, in Blue Mountains City Council 2010)

### **A distinction**

There is fluidity in the ways participants referred to Katoomba throughout the data. Participants rarely referred to Katoomba and, instead, frequently alluded to 'the Mountains'. Although it may appear this is intended to describe the Blue Mountains, instead, it is used as a synonym for Katoomba. This was clearly demonstrated in the data:

*Mila: I think different types of the Mountains have different stereotypes things, like, Glenbrook is sort of classed as this, like, quite fancy, you know, it's still Mountains...*

*Helene: Quite conservative though...*

*Mila: Like it's the gateway to the Mountains and it's still got some cool coffee shops and there's the national park and everything, but it's not like the heart of the Mountains.*

*Helene: No.*

*Mila: And then everything sort of between Glenbrook and Springwood is just sort of void, like, that's not even really thought about...*

*Helene: Yep.*

*Mila: Because it's not like a prominent... like, Blaxland, its like.... Blaxland you know. And then Springwood's kinda getting a bit more hipster, and then, you know, Hazelbrook's meant to be, like, the Penrith of the Mountains, which hurts because I grew up there...*

*Helene: So did I.... (both laugh).*

*Mila: Um, and then, kinda same thing, Bullaburra and Lawson, always a little bit void whereas Lawson has kinda come into itself.*

*Helene: Mmm, Lawson's been pretty Westie for a long time.*

*Mila: Yeah but...*

*Helene: Bit bogan, bit Westie.*

*Ben: Not now though.*

*Mila: No, it's got all the—*

*Helene: It's starting to actually pull its shit together.*

*Mila: Yeah, like it's got the—*

*Helene: Which is great coz I live there, so I'm like "Wooo, cool".*

*Mila: Like, it's got the little organic store there now, and coffee shops round the back and everything and like, it's trying. And then Wentworth Falls is, like starting to get Mountains but it's still a bit classy.*

*Helene: Wentworth Falls is kind of family orientated.*

*Mila: Yeah, family orientated. And then Leura's sort of aimed at tourists and people who just have shit-tonnes of money. And then Katoomba's, like, bam. That's where the Mountains is.*

Drawing on the participants' own categories, 'the Mountains' and Katoomba are understood as both describing Katoomba. Any reference to the Blue Mountains is made explicit.

### **Katoomba: a case study**

Katoomba is the largest town in the Blue Mountains, at the western fringe of the Sydney metropolitan area in NSW. It is a tourist town and home to Echo Point, one of the major tourist destinations in Australia (Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise 2014). The major industries of employment are health care and social assistance (16.6%), accommodation and food services (13.2%), education and training (11.2%) and retail (10.4%) (ABS 2011). 81.4% of Katoomba's residents were born in Australia, with 8.2% of the population born in a non-English speaking country (ABS 2011). Katoomba has the highest population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the Blue Mountains at 2.9% (ABS 2011). In all, 13.5% of the population is aged between 20 and 35 years. This is lower than both the NSW and Australian populations in this age range.

The town of Katoomba is partly a product of its physical location. The highway to Katoomba follows a ridge, connecting towns and villages en route. The limitations on growth are real: the towns are hemmed in either side by cliffs and surrounded by a protected national park, ensuring housing development is almost at capacity. The towns are therefore small, and unlikely to get much bigger without significant change to housing density policy. The physical placement of Katoomba also creates access issues; with one train and, effectively, one road in and one road out, the inhabitants of Katoomba are easily isolated despite the proximity of a global city.

As indicated above, there is variety within the Blue Mountains in terms of classification of the area and levels of disadvantage. The Lower Mountains is classified as metropolitan and has relatively low levels of disadvantage, whereas the Upper Mountains, including Katoomba, is classified as

regional with higher rates of disadvantage (Black 2009: 3). The importance of separating out the experience of young adults in Katoomba is therefore evident, as it is generally different from the experience of a young adult in the Lower Mountains.

### **Young adults in Katoomba**

To discuss young adults in Katoomba involves looking at four particular aspects: the demographic evidence available, the discursive representation of young adults in Katoomba, the location of Katoomba in its proximity to a global city, and the embodiment of place itself. Though interwoven, these aspects do not form a cohesive whole but rather place a young adult in Katoomba within competing tensions.

Kenway and Hickey-Moody draw on de Certeau's concept of spatialised knowledge in their work on the strategies and tactics of boys in regional Australia (2011: 153). In this framework, spaces can be known from 'above' or 'below'. In order to illustrate the competing discourses and multiplicity of positions for young adults in Katoomba, de Certeau's concepts have been employed as a launch pad. Here, the map or the tour are views of space from 'above'; the map is a tableau, forming 'tables of legible results' (de Certeau 1984: 121) whereas the tour is a how-to guide (Kenway & Hickey Moody 2011: 153), discursively constructing normative pathways for young adults. The views from 'below', the street and the body, approach Katoomba as, respectively, entangled with the city and embodied. Of particular importance is the contrast between views from 'above' and 'below'. We begin with the map, a survey of the relevant demographic data on young adults in Katoomba.



### **The map: demographic evidence of young adults in Katoomba**

The basis of this thesis is the 'missing generation' of young adults in Katoomba, a reference to the absence of young adults between the ages of 19 and 35. This can be seen in the age structure of the population. The 2011 Census (Table 1) found that the child and teenage populations of Katoomba were only slightly lower than NSW and Australian averages. This alters significantly between 20<sup>1</sup> and 35, becoming generally comparable to the NSW and Australian averages once again after 35 years of age. This is the 'missing generation', a demographic trend corroborated in other research (Black 2009: 3).

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<sup>1</sup> Due to the age range classification of ABS data, the reduced young adult population only becomes evident at 20 in the statistics. While there is a significant out-migration after secondary school, and there is therefore a reduced population of 19 year olds, this is obscured by the age range classification.

**Table 1: Age in 5 year groupings, Census 2011**

Age	2780, NSW	%	NSW	%	Australia	%
<i>People</i>						
0-4 years	690	5.3	458,736	6.6	1,421,050	6.6
5-9 years	726	5.6	434,608	6.3	1,351,921	6.3
10-14 years	699	5.4	439,168	6.3	1,371,054	6.4
15-19 years	694	5.4	443,416	6.4	1,405,798	6.5
20-24 years	613	4.7	449,685	6.5	1,460,673	6.8
25-29 years	544	4.2	473,160	6.8	1,513,236	7.0
30-34 years	589	4.6	468,336	6.8	1,453,775	6.8
35-39 years	778	6.0	488,124	7.1	1,520,138	7.1
40-44 years	942	7.3	483,502	7.0	1,542,879	7.2
45-49 years	923	7.1	481,428	7.0	1,504,142	7.0
50-54 years	1,063	8.2	469,024	6.8	1,447,404	6.7
55-59 years	1,119	8.7	419,612	6.1	1,297,244	6.0
60-64 years	1,042	8.1	390,678	5.6	1,206,116	5.6
65-69 years	797	6.2	304,327	4.4	919,319	4.3
70-74 years	584	4.5	237,362	3.4	708,090	3.3
75-79 years	436	3.4	186,032	2.7	545,263	2.5
80-84 years	303	2.3	150,724	2.2	436,936	2.0
85 years and over	377	2.9	139,735	2.0	402,681	1.9
Median age	45 -		38 -		37 -	

(Australian Bureau of Statistics 2011, generated 12 April 2016 using *ABS.Stat*)

In Estimated Resident Population (ERP) data from the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS), collated by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the trend is similarly apparent over the course of the past five years (Table 2). Note that the age groupings are slightly different, and less specific, than Census data.

**Table 2: Estimated Residential Population 2009-2013 (% of total population)**

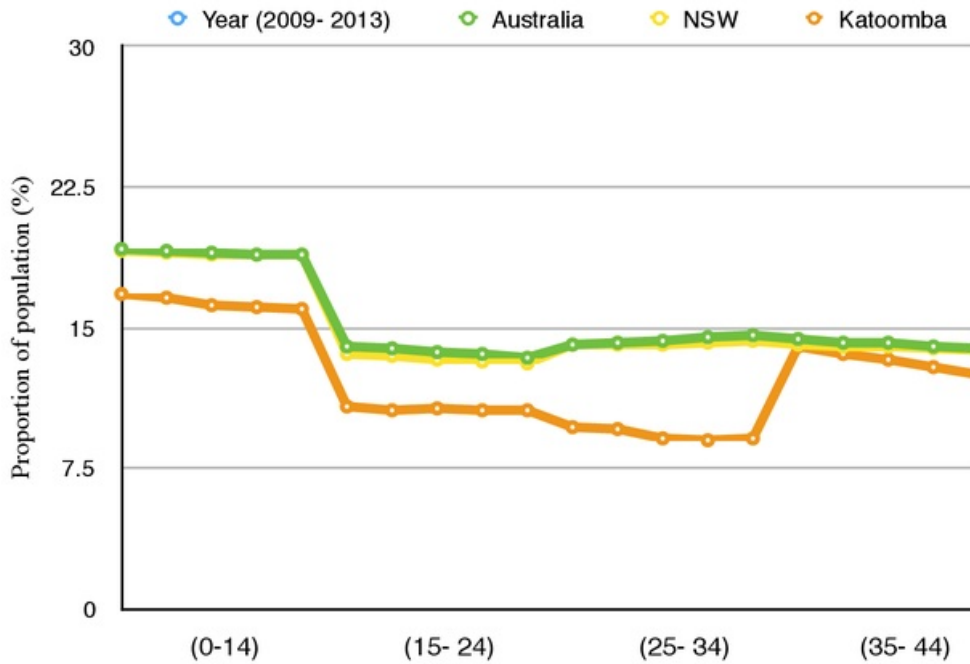
Age Range	Year	Australia	NSW	Katoomba
0-14 year olds	2009	19.2	19.1	16.8
	2010	19.1	19.0	16.6
	2011	19.0	18.9	16.2
	2012	18.9	18.9	16.1
	2013	18.9	18.9	16.0
15-24 year olds	2009	14.0	13.6	10.8
	2010	13.9	13.5	10.6
	2011	13.7	13.3	10.7
	2012	13.6	13.2	10.6
	2013	13.4	13.1	10.6
25-34 year olds	2009	14.1	14.1	9.7
	2010	14.2	14.1	9.6
	2011	14.3	14.1	9.1
	2012	14.5	14.2	9.0
	2013	14.6	14.3	9.1
35-44 year olds	2009	14.4	14.1	14
	2010	14.2	14	13.6
	2011	14.2	14	13.3
	2012	14	13.9	12.9
	2013	13.9	13.8	12.5

(Australian Bureau of Statistics, Estimated Residential Population 2009-2013, generated 19 April 2016, using *ABS.Stat*)

It is important to establish trends over time, with an awareness that external factors such as the economic climate, might influence young adults' decisions to leave or stay in Katoomba. As demonstrated, the age structure has remained relatively constant over the past 5 years, and that the 'missing generation' is consistently evident. Obviously, part of the 15-24 year old group falls outside the parameters of this thesis. Yet, it denotes a distinctive trend over the course of 5 years. It

can also be demonstrated that the Katoomba population becomes once more reflective of national and state averages in the 35-44 year old age group. In depicting this visually, the ‘missing generation’ is observable in comparison to NSW or Australia-wide trends (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Estimated Residential Population 2009-2013 (% of total population)**



(Australian Bureau of Statistics, Estimated Residential Population 2009-2013, generated 19 April 2016, using *ABS.Stat*)

The trend for out-migration among young adults is also evident in internal migration statistics from the 2011 Census. Table 3 reveals migration by age group, note 18-24 years in particular. It is important to note both Table 3 and Figure 2 represent the entirety of the Blue Mountains, not Katoomba itself and therefore cannot be equated with the above population trends. They are to be regarded as indicative.

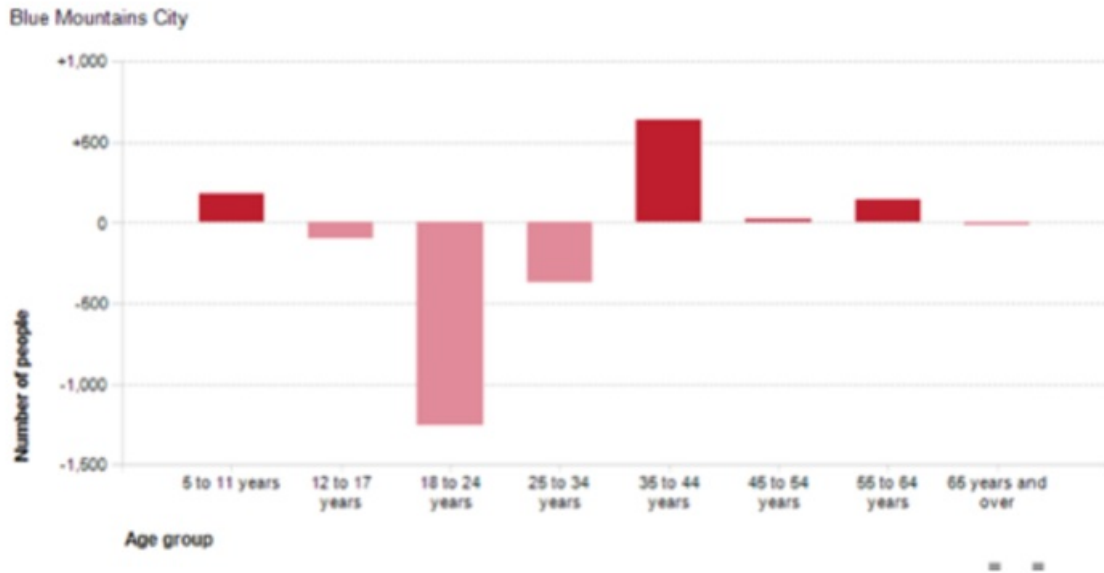
**Table 3: Migration by age**

Blue Mountains City			
Age group	In migration	Out migration	Net migration
5 to 11 years	1,248	1,062	186
12 to 17 years	586	684	-98
18 to 24 years	672	1,929	-1,257
25 to 34 years	2,098	2,466	-368
35 to 44 years	2,352	1,711	641
45 to 54 years	1,345	1,323	22
55 to 64 years	1,339	1,191	148
65 years and over	1,194	1,201	-7
<b>Total</b>	<b>10,834</b>	<b>11,567</b>	<b>-733</b>

(Australian Bureau of Statistics, Migration by age, generated 19 April 2016, using *ABS.Stat*)

Figure 5 confirms this trend, whilst showing a simultaneous in-migration after 35 years of age.

**Figure 2: Net migration by age**



(ABS, in Atlas ID 2016)

It is clear, therefore, that the 'missing generation' can be established in demographic data. There are, however, several other trends worthy of note. One of these is the socio-economic status of the town. Katoomba has the lowest Socio-Economic Index For Areas (SEIFA) score in the Blue Mountains at 936.9 (Black 2009: 3), suggesting relatively high levels of disadvantage compared with the Australian average and with other parts of the Blue Mountains. 30.2% of households are classified as low income, again the highest in the Blue Mountains (ABS 2011).

The youth unemployment rate in Katoomba is 19.1% with a 'disengaged youth' (not in education or employment) rate of 16.5%, compared to 8.1% in Greater Sydney and 9.6% nationally (ABS 2011). 46.4% of the population work part-time in Katoomba, compared to 31.9% in Greater Sydney and 34.5% nationally (ABS 2011). The available industries for employment in Katoomba is a significant aspect of these trends. While health care and social assistance is the largest industry, hospitality (13.2%) and retail (10.4%) are industries of employment dominated by teenagers and young adults and have grown at a rate of 23% since 2000 (Blue Mountains City Council 2009: 21). Employment in these sectors is characterised by casualisation, with the ABS estimating that, Australia-wide, 65% of people working in the hospitality industry and almost 40% of people working in the retail industry are casual (Rayner 2016).

There are, therefore, real institutional considerations for young adults in Katoomba, particularly the availability of employment and further education opportunities. This is important when considering the experiences of participants in the data. There is also an established and normalised out-migration of young adults after secondary school, as evidenced in ASGS and Census data.

Yet, this is not the entire picture, only the map. This is how Katoomba is known, when crunched into numbers or mapped onto graphs. To understand this further, the next consideration is how young adults in Katoomba are perceived and discursively constructed.

### **The tour: perspectives and constructions of young adults in Katoomba**

Many of the documents collected and analysed in this research had a general Blue Mountains focus, as documents focusing particularly on Katoomba were unavailable. While these documents span a wider range than the parameters of this case study, they illustrate the constructions of young adults in the Blue Mountains and, by extension, Katoomba.

The *Blue Mountains Gazette* (henceforth, the ‘*Gazette*’) is the regional newspaper for the Blue Mountains. As part of document analysis in this thesis, I analysed *Gazette* articles from 2011 to 2016. In the *Gazette*’s representation, ‘young people’ of the Blue Mountains are, almost exclusively, under 18. There were very limited references to young adults, or potential issues they might face. When referred to, the predominant issues were employment opportunity, both generally and for young adults, and TAFE and vocational educational opportunities. In both the ‘map’ and the ‘tour’, young adults were considered primarily through their institutional contact.

Contrary to prominent discourses of the ‘brain drain’, the *Blue Mountains Gazette* contained no coverage of youth out-migration as an issue. It was possible to find only two references to the issue in the archive. The first reference was from Mayor Mark Greenhill, who stated it was as important as ever for Mountains residents, particularly young people, to know what career options are available and to ‘encourage them to look for work locally before they think about leaving the area’ (Blue Mountains Gazette 2014). The second statement came from another Councillor, Brendan Luchetti, defending an outdoor recreation course run at local TAFE colleges. Luchetti stated ‘there are not a lot of opportunities like that for the youth in the area—where they can pursue a passion and stay in the Mountains to do it’ (Lewis 2012). The absence of further discussion of these issues within the *Gazette* is notable and at odds with examples from other areas experiencing the loss of young adults (Easthope & Gabriel 2008; Geldens & Bourke 2008).

Unlike the Gazette, there is an acknowledgement of the normalised out-migration of young adults after secondary school in Blue Mountains City Council documents, evidenced in the quote opening this chapter. The Blue Mountains City Council Annual Report 2014-2015 raised the concern that many Blue Mountains residents 'leave permanently, particularly young adult school leavers, in order to access more attractive training and employment opportunities' (2014: 25). As part of developing the 'Our Mountains, Our Future' plan, the Blue Mountains City Council ran consultations with their staff. In these workshops, a recurring theme was the way the wider community viewed young adults in Katoomba (2001: 30). Participants cited issues 'around how young people are portrayed—18-24 year olds—problem', with 'young people dumped on—image as out group' (2001: 30), a finding corroborated in community consultations (Redshaw 2013).

The construction of young adults as absent or problematic was evident in Blue Mountains City Council policies, although to a lesser extent. The publications of the past ten years are limited to one youth-specific report, the 'Action plan to reduce youth related alcohol harm in the Blue Mountains' (2012), though Council strategy was also involved in the 'Youth Mental Health Report' (Black 2009). While not explicitly focusing on youth-related crime or issues, the 'Blue Mountains Crime Prevention Plan 2014-2017' identified malicious damage to property as the most prevalent crime in the Blue Mountains, with the 10-17 year age group responsible for the greatest number of incidents (2014b: 7). The tenor and content of these policies is indicative of how young people and young adults are viewed in the Blue Mountains. Responses to the issues confronting young adults centred on providing economic and educational incentives to stay in Katoomba (Blue Mountains City Council 2014). Investment in cultural occupations, creative industries and the Blue Mountains as the 'City of the Arts' are suggested as methods of improving general employment opportunity and, in particular, retaining young adults (Blue Mountains City Council 2009; Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise 2014).



Youth services in Katoomba, and the wider Blue Mountains, are predominantly focused on under-18s. Available services focused on at-risk youth and included outreach, counselling, legal and health assistance and accommodation, some of which are also available to 18-24 year olds. Secondary documents collected at Centrelink and youth service centres were either exclusively aimed at 12-17 year olds or focused on income assistance available after leaving secondary school.

Three significant trends can be ascertained from this analysis. The first is the prominence of under-18s as representative of 'young people' and young adults as absent with a consequent silence on issues affecting young adults. This is compounded by the second trend: an acknowledgement of the loss of young people after secondary school, although this was notably missing from the local newspaper. The combination of these two trends ensures that young adults are not only demographically but discursively 'missing'. The final trend is the categorising of young people in Katoomba as problematic. This is explicitly acknowledged in Council documents (Blue Mountains City Council 2001: 30) and can be implicitly drawn from the documents collected from Centrelink and youth service centres, as well as the 'Mountains of Help' website (Blue Mountains City Council n.d.).

The map and the tour provide a sense of how the Mountains is constructed from 'above', or outside, the everyday youth experience. The prominence of institutions is notable. It is also indicative that much of what was asserted in the 'above' views was contested in the data from participants. For example, the Council's 'City of the Arts' as a strategy for improving youth employment prospects was explicitly dismissed by some participants as ineffective and inaccurate (Will, Luke). This is why the view from 'below' is crucial.

### **The street: between the regional and the metropolitan**

A brief detour to a view from 'above' to set the scene. The proximity of the Upper Mountains to Sydney is noted in official Council documents, which describes the Blue Mountains as a 'city on the edge' and the opportunities and challenges of such proximity (Blue Mountains City Council 2005: 6). The closeness provides work opportunities, with 50.3% of working residents commuting outside of the Blue Mountains for work (ABS 2011). This is more complex in the Upper Mountains as access to the employment benefits of a global city is complicated by greater distance and fewer transport options.

The relation of Katoomba to Sydney is, therefore, complex and operates in many different ways, simultaneously a matter of closeness and of distance. In some ways, Katoomba is peri-urban, perched on the edge of a global city where people commute daily to work. In others, it is a small town. In a third sense, it is a tourist destination and a weekend getaway. The proximity to Sydney has different implications in all of these instances. For those participants living in Katoomba, the difficulties in accessing the advantages of the global city meant they felt effectively regional (Zoe, Jane). However, as Sydney grows, Katoomba may increasingly be understood as an outlying suburb.

Throughout the interviews, there was a tension between a sense of entanglement with the city and a discourse of the City-as-Other. Proximity (entanglement) and distance (the City-as-Other) were frequently used by participants, both as opposites and in tandem, to explain the complexity of this position.

The most obvious way in which the proximity of Sydney influenced participants was in facilitating a normalised out-migration. As Daniel stated:

*And then, as I got older, I guess I started going to the city, I think a lot of, probably people do from up here, start going to the city coz it's all... like, you see those lights on the horizon and it seems like there's so much opportunity and so much going on down there, and up here there's... just nothing.*

The “lights on the horizon”, perhaps the defining metaphor for out-migration, are both metaphorical and literal. The lights of Sydney are visible from vantage points around the Mountains and provide a physical dimension to what participants universally understood as a normalised out-migration. Consistently, the out-migration to Sydney was also described as an initiation rite, something that young people *had* to do.

*There's such a culture of, of people moving to Sydney from the Mountains, when they finish school, it's like, it's almost like a rite of passage or something. Everyone moves to Newtown.*

(Ben)

The sense of a rite-of-passage was consistent across the data. To leave Katoomba at some point was considered essential:

*I love the Mountains but you do need to leave and come back, and I think sort of even to appreciate that. And just to get that outsider perspective, be like, oh is there other things that you want other than what the Mountains can provide.*

(Archie)

This rite-of-passage is not only based on a normalised out-migration but also enables participants who had returned to distinguish themselves from associations with failure. As Mila stated, "I don't want to be here always, I think you need to go and come back sometimes. To be able to, to enjoy it". Achieving the rite-of-passage validated return, differentiating those who had returned from those who remained.

Proximity also complicates the idea of an out-migration or linear transition. Many of those who had returned to Katoomba continue to access Sydney. As Marie stated:

*So, I can go down there on the weekends and it's fun, it's great, and get to see all the things that I want, it's like everything you want out of Sydney, you see, in a weekend. And then I can come back and have stability and know what my goal is and everything.*

A reverse trend was evident among those who had left Katoomba. While young people might move to Sydney, they are still connected to the Mountains. As Will responded, when asked if his friends had moved away:

*Yeah... yeah. Most, a lot, a lot of them have moved down to the city. They don't spend anywhere near 100% of their time in the city. Because their parents are still up here and a lot of them are still connected to the area, whether it's through sports or bush or, I don't know, some choir they sing at on the weekend or whatever, they're all connected here in some way.*

A similar confusion was discussed by Zoe when asked if her friends had moved:

*They mostly moved out to the city, a couple of them have moved interstate. Um, there's a few of us still here, but... yeah, they go down to Blacktown area for work or, you know, things like that. And friends that have moved out into the city, they do come back on weekends or things. Like, one of my friends still has a job up here because she can't find a job in the city, which is really strange to me. But, um, yeah so she can't find a job so she keeps her job here so she can pay the rent down there and so she comes up on weekends.*

This points to the importance of reflecting on the 'below' view as well as the 'above'. The statistical and external discursive construction of young adults would suggest a dominant trend of out-migration as complete and fully realised. It would also suggest that institutional opportunities, particularly employment, exist elsewhere and do not exist in Katoomba. The above excerpts suggest that this picture is not reflective on everyday life in Katoomba. This is not to dismiss the enduring structural issues in Katoomba, but to suggest that an institutional understanding is not necessarily the same as how it is experienced in the everyday.

The City-as-Other was constructed as both positive and negative. Participants suggested Sydney provided the excitement and opportunity the Mountains lacks. As Freya stated:

*After growing up in a small, um, very close community and kind of quiet environment, a lot of my friends wanted to experience something completely different and, um, kind of were after a sense of excitement, you know, like the city has to offer.*

This was inseparable from the stasis implied by remaining. As discussed in the literature review, in the contemporary era, movement is frequently aligned with success or growth. Participants suggested that those who remained in the Katoomba became "narrow-minded" (Tia) or "settled

down” earlier (Alice, Tom, Tia). Thus, the sense of ‘stuckness’ identified by Hage (2009: 97) was clearly identified by participants.

However, it was also contested by participants who had returned.

*And, um, yeah, it pisses me off when people are like (simpering voice) "How's Katoomba?" and... you know how its like, just don't ask me. I really don't like that, I don't know why there's this massive fear of coming back here is like you've failed. If Sydney's it. Or whatever city you go to, that's it. You've made it. You know, you're officially cool or educated or better than Katoomba. I just don't understand that. It's like, well, people are different. Like, I didn't like it. That time. Does that mean that I've failed because I didn't push myself to believe that Sydney was the be all and end all of everything? Yeah. That really annoys me.*

The alignment of movement with progress, characteristic of late modernity, is clearly felt in this excerpt. But Marie’s response challenges this alignment, and does so by drawing on the City-as-Other discourse. A similar redefinition is evident in Jane’s discussion of returning to the Mountains. The idea of stasis or failure is clearly identified:

*I had this perception that moving back here was taking some sort of huge step backwards because, purely from a point of ... (gesticulating) birthplace, moving outwards, moving onwards, moving upwards but if you circle back to your birthplace, surely, well you haven't done what you needed to do to get ahead in life.*

However, Jane then goes on to contest this notion of ‘circling back’:

*I had this mental image that they would be TRAPPED, for some reason. I moved away and I changed but no one in the Mountains would've... so I had to be exposed to people up here again and go "the whole place has grown, everyone grows, the people that I may have had issues with when I was a teenager have grown up as much as I have, if not more (laughs).*

By tapping into the discourse of City-as-Other, participants contested the association of return with stasis or failure. By challenging this association, participants could then compare Katoomba and Sydney to suggest there were benefits Katoomba offered that Sydney could not. As Marie stated:

*Like, in Sydney, I was way more creeped out walking around, like, there's frigging cockroaches everywhere, there's like creepy men, and like, here there's just no one around. I can walk from here to home in darkness really late at night and not feel that threat.*

(Marie)

The proximity of Katoomba was therefore fundamental to a normalised out-migration, but complicated notions of completed transitions or migrations. The entanglement with the city was also negotiated by participants through a City-as-Other discourse. Within this, Katoomba was described in glowing terms, and in direct comparison to Sydney. Many of the participants who had returned actively rejected Sydney, describing it as a “terrible city” (Archie), a “struggle” (Marie, Jane) or “sprawling and unnatural” (Daniel). Luke stated “I don't like what it does to me”, as if the city had an effect on his sense of self. In this sense, the City-as-Other discourse was invoked to describe an embodied sense of place, a ‘wrongness’ in urban environments and a need for connection to nature. This brings us to the final sense of ‘knowing’ Katoomba: as embodied.

### **The body: Katoomba as embodied**

Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst regard the embodiment of place as inevitable yet often neglected in the literature (2005: 53). For De Certeau, embodiment—in his work, often described as walking—is a primary way of knowing space and one that ‘affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects etc., the trajectories it “speaks”’ (1984: 99). The embodiment of place operated in diverse ways throughout the data.

The first was that of the “Mountains person” (otherwise described as “Mountains goat” (Jane, Zac) or “Mountains Kid” (Alice) in the data), an identity that was acknowledged and understood by participants. As Marie said, “Oh yeah, its like a branding”. This is consistent with Wieranga’s discussion of the qualities that are described by participants as very ‘Valley’ (2011: 381).

As was clearly identified by the participants, a ‘Mountains person’ is not a resident of the Blue Mountains in general but a description of someone who has grown up in Katoomba. As Ben described it,

*But I think that, um, that is something that's identified with Katoomba in particular. And if you say the Mountains person, people from Glenbrook aren't coming up to Katoomba to hang out with the beanie-wearing, weed-smoking hippies.*

‘Mountains people’ were variously described as hippie, left-leaning, alternative, “six fingers” (Julie) and easy to get along with or friendly. They were also consistently described as attracted to one another. This was used to explain the uniformity of migration patterns, where young people consistently moved to similar areas in Sydney, Melbourne and NSW:



*I used to bump into the same people, so, there was a little network of Mountains people or, like, it just... Mountains people and other kind of people, we all seem to be drawn to these places of... I reckon it must be like epicentres or something, energy centres. Yeah. So Mountains. Newtown. Even Fitzroy in Melbourne. Then Byron and that area. Lismore. It's just the same people, in the same places, all through my life.*

(Daniel)

The phenomenon of encountering ‘Mountains people’ in similar locations emerged frequently in the data. Luke recounted a recent trip to Sydney:

*I went to Sydney the other day for a gig and I'm still hanging out with ten people from the Mountains. That, that I'd not planned to see there, they're all just there. And we're just out the back of the pub, smoking. And it's "Fucking, why'd I leave?" (laughs).*

To demonstrate the ways in which Katoomba had shaped them, participants drew on alternative discourses. Underpinned by the Sydney/Katoomba dichotomy, participants frequently referenced discourses of nature and nostalgia as a way to demonstrate how their selves has been shaped and changed by the Mountains.

Participants invoked natural discourses to explain their identities and values, often as the first response to questions about their experiences of Katoomba. Ideas of “fresh air” and “space” were frequently used and contrasted to the city, where the metaphor of concrete was frequently deployed. Zac referred to the presence of “too much concrete” while other participants criticised the notion of having to live in a “concrete box” (Ben) or “concrete jungles” (Jane, Mila). The frequency with which this cliché was drawn on suggested it was more than a metaphor but representative of how many participants negotiated the Sydney/Katoomba binary and resolved it in favour of Katoomba.

A similar sense of the dichotomy between Sydney and Katoomba was evident in references to childhood, frequently underpinned by a sense of nostalgia. Allusions were made to “freedom” or “free” childhoods (Will, Leo, Luke, Jane, Zac). In a parallel to de Certeau, this freedom was often expressed through the description of walking. Participants described being “allowed to walk to the shops” (Alice), “just like walk around the corner to school” (Alice) and “able to walk through the streets in this town as a young kid” (Jane).

Participants also suggested this type of childhood was not universally available, but a result of place. Crucial to this was the combination of the nostalgia discourse and a nature discourse. As one focus group described:

*Zac: Yeah, I can, yeah, growing up, like where I grew up there's a lot of bush and pretty much all we did was go exploring down the bush, go exploring down the creek, making dams, finding little rocks...*

*Daniel: Yeah*

*Zac:... and making little cubbies in the bush...*

*Daniel: Yeah, that's what we used to do*

*Zac: Yeah, like riding the pushbike down fire trails, trying to find caves and... yeah, that's probably the majority of my growing up.*

This connotes a certain type of childhood, and was very different to the way in which participants envisioned childhood for those in the city. As Alice made explicit, “I’ve got lots of friends who grew up in the city and then, like, their childhoods don’t sound half as awesome as what ours did”. This

type of childhood was regarded as a significant opportunity, and one that Katoomba provided and Sydney did not.

Drawing on these discourses, participants suggested they had been shaped by place, and in ways that continued to be discovered. For some participants, this was explicit:

*Mila: I feel flustered when I'm in the city like...*

*Helene: Yeah so do I.*

*Mila: ... and like I feel like if I lived there, maybe I wouldn't be who I am now. Like, I think the Mountains maybe shaped who I am a little bit.*

*Ben: I feel like that too.*

*Mila: Yeah.*

*Helene: Mmm.*

*Mila: Like, I think it's that kind of environment. That that's just how you sort of end up like that.*

*Helene: Yep.*

*Mila: But I think that's kind of nice, like... that you can sort of be shaped like that.*

*Helene: Mmm.*

*Mila: Like it, it's sort of like a good mould. The Mountains. For a person.*

Casey suggests 'the body not only goes out to reach places; it also bears the traces of places it has known' (2001: 414). This was true of the participants in this research. There was variance in the

extent to which participants felt like place had *determined* their lives. For example, Luke suggested he no longer experienced the Mountains as he once had: “once I broke that mould, just can't... I don't think I'll re-find that mould”. Yet, while place did not always determine participants’ lives and choices, there was a universal sense across the data that place had shaped participants’ selves and that they embodied the Mountains. They spoke of bearing the marks of where they were from as they negotiated their everyday lives and the surprise of continuing to discover the ways place had shaped them.

### **Conclusion**

Consistently, the ways in which young adults in Katoomba were understood varied according to the ‘above’ or ‘below’ perspective. The limited opportunities of the ‘above’ view were negotiated and contested by participants, who drew on discourses of nostalgia, nature and the City-as-Other to suggest a more complex picture. As will be established in greater depth in the following chapter, the ways in which participants draw on these resources suggested a redefinition of opportunity outside of institutional arenas. Instead of focusing on the lack of education or employment possibilities, participants spoke of the opportunities of a “free” childhood and connection to nature.

This redefinition of opportunity was similarly evident in the descriptions of stasis or failure. This was clearly recognised and felt by participants, and reflected the internalisation of institutional discourse. Yet participants negotiated these ideas and framed their stories in ways that questioned the notion of stasis or failure in their lives. This is markedly different to the absent/problematic construction of the ‘above’ view.

Further, while the extent to which the embodiment of place *determined* participants’ lives varied, it was universally acknowledged by participants that growing up in the Mountains had shaped them.

This embodiment of place, regarded by participants as intrinsic, is a conundrum for a discourse that suggests the individual is free to choose and has unlimited options. This will be explored in further detail in the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: CHOICE IN EVERYDAY LIFE**

This chapter contrasts the view from ‘above’ and ‘below’ in terms of choice in lives of young adults in Katoomba. This is the intersection of the two types of choice discussed in the literature review, between the discursive construction of choice and the everyday decisions of young adults.

### **Choice in Katoomba: the view from ‘above’**

The discourse of choice was a recurring feature in institutional discourse around young people and young adults in Katoomba. The language of Mountains Youth Service Team was particularly striking as invoking neoliberal values to describe and evaluate their activities. The Annual Report includes a measurement of the economic impact of MYST’s work with young people (2015: 6), while describing themselves as ‘delivering outcomes via innovation and excellence’ (n.d.). While this has become a part of the not-for-profit landscape, it is noteworthy that MYST is alone, among the Katoomba service providers, in subscribing to this trend.

Recent campaigns from the Blue Mountains arm of Western Sydney Institute of TAFE have explicitly used elements of the discourse of choice in their promotional videos. In the video promoting beauty therapy at Blue Mountains TAFE, the student states ‘I choose my future. I know what I want to study. I want the best facilities and I want a job after studying. That’s why I chose Blue Mountains TAFE’, while another chimes in ‘I know my future’s set’ (TAFE Western Sydney Institute 2015). Another video, advertising hospitality courses, begins ‘It’s my future to choose. I’ll study my way’ (TAFE Western Sydney Institute 2015).

The discourse of choice is also reflected in promotional interviews with alumni of the Blue Mountains International Hotel Management School (BMIHMS), publicised on the school's Facebook page. In one, the alumni stated 'For me, BMIHMS is a world of endless opportunities' (2016).

In the *Blue Mountains Gazette* coverage of a local Youth Job Shop event, deputy mayor Brendan Lucchetti was quoted as stating 'you are starting a long journey but there is a world of opportunity in front of you' (Desiatnik 2013). The suggestion that there is a 'world of opportunity' is at odds with the lack of institutional opportunity in Katoomba. As established earlier, this lack of opportunity is openly acknowledged by Blue Mountains City Council and, interestingly, Lucchetti himself.

Three things are evident in these explicit references to the discourse of choice. The first is that the 'world of opportunity' is based on an individualist framework, where there is a 'world of opportunity in front of *you*'. Secondly, the world of opportunity is not necessarily locally based. Opportunity exists but, as characteristic of late modernity, flexibility and mobility are necessary. Finally, the discourse of choice is used as a form of encouragement and as an injunction to social mobility, despite an awareness of the enduring structural constraints the discourse obscures.

#### **Choice in Katoomba: the views from 'below'**

Unsurprisingly, the view from 'below' suggests a more complex and nuanced understanding of choice. Four distinct tropes emerged in the data, with consequent effects on how the narrator positioned themselves with regard to their decisions. This was fundamental to how the choice was understood and is important in considering the relationship between everyday decisions and the discourse of choice. This position also shifted dramatically across and within the participants'

accounts of their lives. Alternative discourses, as discussed in the previous chapter, were used to explain and make sense of these accounts.

*Fate and necessity: the choices we don't make*

*So, for me it's like... I don't choose to come back here, but I feel like, it's almost like karma or something. It's like, I come back and I'm all messed up and this place just goes "You'll be right" kind of thing. And I don't know why that is, because it's never really been like... I haven't chosen to be here, necessarily. It hasn't been a conscious decision to be here. But it feels like it just, it's like I'm meant to be here.*

(Helene)

Notions of fate, karma, “the Universe”, the right time or season, a trust in God and situations that were ‘meant-to-be’ recurred throughout this research. This runs counter to the discourse of choice, the central tenet of which is that all individuals are free to choose and that possibility is unlimited. Notions of fate suggest the opposite. Here, all efforts by the individual are futile in the face of a grander, unknown (but essentially benevolent) scheme. This is distinct from the ‘fatalism’ suggested by Giddens, which is characterised by structural constraint and demands ‘resigned acceptance that events should be allowed to take their course’ (1991: 112). The fate described here is metaphysical.

*I know this is just a season in our lives and I'm just trusting in God that, yep, this is a season so just be diligent and just see how it goes. Like, do not worry about tomorrow because, you know, who knows what's going to happen.*

These approaches are not new. Indeed, Giddens points to the enduring role of fate in late modernity (1991: 109). They also stem from different sources. For some participants, this approach seemed



consistent with a New Age worldview that can be characterised by both an alignment with emotional intuition over rationality and/or an ‘abandonment of the self-responsibility of the individual’ (Beit-Hallahmi, in Höllinger 2004: 291). For other participants, this sense of fate drew on Christian metaphors.

The participants who talked of fate were not defined by choice. Rather, they eschewed responsibility for the decisions in their lives and the results of those decisions. They were not the central agent when it came to choice and instead narrated and understood the role of choice in their lives as conforming to an inevitable and unknown plan. Participants made day-to-day choices, but they were not in control. Instead, they were part of a wider, metaphysical scheme determined by a benevolent deity or universe.

This was constructed as a positive thing, and one that gave meaning to their lives. Leccardi notes a similar process in the discussions of luck, which she suggests serves ‘as a cognitive trick for actively coping with the dimension of uncertainty and fear of the distant future’ (2006: 132).

Similarly, Morgan, Wood and Nelligan found in their work on creative work and precarious labour, many narratives were characterised by notions of serendipity or luck, with a ‘language of magical opportunity that we heard often from young people who have enjoyed a measure of success’ (2013: 408).

This has resonance with the ‘meant-to-be’ attitude discussed in Howard et al. (2011). This study focused on how older adolescents planned for the future, and how they anticipated coping with future barriers. The ‘meant-to-be attitude’ was one of the coping strategies that emerged from their data. For some participants, this denoted a belief that things would ‘work out’ Howard et al. (2011: 668) or that ‘there was not much control over what would happen in the future because it was meant-to-be’ (Howard et al. 2011: 668). Consistent with these findings, the sense of fate as a

'coping mechanism' and in response to uncertainty was reflected in this data. The participants who referred to notions of fate conceived of their life as a matter of destiny, which allowed them to feel secure within the context of an uncertain and unpredictable future and contest the extent to which they could be held responsible for their choices

This construction of fate as crucial to notions of choice did not exist in a vacuum. Rather, there were intersections with the discourse of choice, and recurring tensions between the two. This opposition was evident in the metaphors utilised by Leo in discussing his perception of being in the Mountains:

*In terms of opportunities, I, I think we're all born here, or we all live here for a reason and it's always been a healing ground, the Blue Mountains for Indigenous or non-Indigenous people alike, so... whether it's abundant in opportunities that you desire or not, I think we're here for a reason, we're all fulfilling what we need to do here.*

This discussion is underpinned by a sense of purpose or fate, a feeling of the meant-to-be. Yet, when asked directly about how he perceives choice in his life, the answer was less straightforward.

*Leo: Like, is it my choice? I can't know, I don't know but um, I know that I'm able to be grateful every morning for it and give thanks for it and that's all I know for sure. Whether it's my choice or not, I'm not too sure. But I am, I'm thankful for it.*

*Interviewer: Yeah. Um...*

*Leo: And if I didn't like it, I'd change it so... I guess it's my choice, in that sense.*

Here, Leo exhibits a meant-to-be orientation as described by (Howard et al. 2011: 668), yet he simultaneously regards choice as an individual responsibility and a matter of individual control. To

point to this is not to poke holes in the consistency of participants' narratives. Rather it is to interrogate what the ambiguities may tell us about the processes surrounding the discursive construction of choice on an everyday level. What is particularly striking throughout the data is the way in which participants draw on several discourses, or even incompatible explanations, without the sense that they are inconsistent. This is indicative of the partially incompatible logics of action that young adults are forced to try and shape their lives within and around as suggested by the individualisation thesis (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 23).

Notions of fate, predestination or a religious worldview clearly have an enduring influence on how people understand their lives and the choices they make. Discursively, it constructs these participants as actors within a larger plan, demarcates the responsibility for the consequences of these choices as resting elsewhere, in direct contradiction to ideas of personal responsibility characteristic of late modernity, and re-narrates all experience as worthwhile and important, from which lessons can be learnt. As Leo described it, "I guess everyone's journey is different, they need different things from their experiences".

Necessity functioned in a less all-encompassing way throughout these narratives. As in the discussion of fate, participants suggested they did not have control over choice. Although they may technically have made a decision, the circumstances were such that a choice was, in practice, redundant. As Ben explained:

*Ben: Mine wasn't a, it wasn't so much a choice as a necessity for me.*

*Interviewer: Why was that?*

*Ben: Because I was in, I was living in Surry Hills. And that's when I had an accident.*

*Interviewer: Yeah right.*

*Ben: And I couldn't afford the rent. So I was in hospital. Not working. So, I moved back. So I was in for a while. And I couldn't afford the rent so I moved to my grandparents for a little bit, in Parramatta and just moved back with Mum and Dad. I had a very different... they were so stoked for me to move back with them. There was no "What are you doing, you're supposed to be an adult" and like... they were just stoked. And then, that's when I started up uni and, like, doing some other stuff like that. But yeah, so it wasn't my choice, it wasn't like "Oh, I miss the Mountains, I need to move back", it was like, "What am I going to do? I can't afford to support myself right now. I need the nurse to come and look after me every day" and it was just all done for me.*

Here, Ben removes himself from the responsibility of the choice. A similar sense can be drawn from Jane's account of returning to the Mountains:

*I don't know... it was put upon me that I could. It wasn't so much the penny dropped with me, it was the fact that I needed a couple of other people, like my Mum and my best friend to actually point it out to me so.... um... my Mum actually called him [the best friend] worried about me because she knew that I was starting to... I wasn't well, I was losing a lot of weight, I was very run down all the time and stuff like that and constantly in tears, like I was very emotionally distressed because I wasn't eating right and all those things that flow on from that, um, and it was the fact that he called me one day and went "Your mum's called me and you need to move home".*

In this data, necessity functions in a way similar to constructions of fate; it ensures choice is outside of the participants' control. Further, this positioning allows participants to negotiate ideas of stasis of failure. They didn't choose to return to the Mountains, they were forced by necessity.

The above examples are of participants who have returned. But how do ideas of necessity influence those who are planning to leave? There were two dimensions to this in the data: the necessity of

leaving for work or further education, and the necessity of leaving the Mountains as a rite-of-passage, as discussed in the previous chapter. Some participants who were planning to leave suggested that the Mountains forced you to choose: it made migration a necessity. This was notably different to how those who had returned constructed the idea of necessity with relation to the Mountains, and it would be interesting to investigate further how that process may have altered participants' views of what constituted necessity.

***Belonging and obligation: the choices we make for others***

*I just don't want to be around the same people. It's just, my family has been stuck in Blackheath for about five generations. And I don't want to be the sixth. Pretty much.*

*(Tia)*

*But for me, it's like "Can't believe this is happening!". He's like, "Well, what did you expect? Did you think your relationship with your parents was going to be like picture perfect kind of thing?". And I'm like, "Yeah, I thought that they would be like 'You're our saviour, you're awesome...'" (Catherine)*

Participants frequently identified other people as the 'reasons' for their choices. Moves to and from Katoomba were often a result of a new relationship or, conversely, a relationship breakdown. Participants wanted to stay in the Mountains to be near family and wanted to escape for the same reason. Participants returned to take over the family business, to grieve for the loss of a parent, to return to the safety of the family home, to raise a family or to reconnect with a former partner.

In discussing their relationships, participants identified as having choice but within limits. These limits were constituted by family expectations, duties and love. While participants did not remove

themselves from the decision-making, as was the case in discussing fate and necessity, choice was depicted as constrained. For some participants, they felt choices had been made for them by others. For example, Mila and Tia stated their parents had “blackmailed” them to ensure they attended university and Catherine suggested her parents had insisted on which school she should attend against her own wishes.

The importance of social networks in the process of out-migration was a recurring theme throughout the data. This functioned in two ways: in facilitating the out-migration, as participants migrated with members of their social network, and contributing to a sense of exclusion for those who remained or returned. As Zac described:

*Yeah. Lot of, lot of my mates from up here all sort of moved down, lot of them. There was, yeah, I sort of found myself, not many friends for a while, and they're like "Oh when are you coming down, when are you coming down?". Just never really, I don't know, I liked going down there for a weekend and going to a gig or going to a party, but then I just found the city so... so... overcrowded and... too much concrete...*

(Zac)

Participants who acted counter to the normalised out-migration described this as having a significant effect:

*I think that, like, when you find a friendship circle, when you're like in your teens or whatever, and you're sort of stayed together for years and years and years and everyone starts to part, move to Sydney, it's kind of like this chemical effect, where it's like "I wanna be near them" and if you split from that, and go back, they're kind of like... like you feel like you have a... if anything goes wrong in your time that you're here, they're*

*like "Just move to Sydney". And it's like, because you didn't follow what your friends were doing and you're not in that group anymore and that closeness, and you leave and do your own thing, people are like, I don't know, think that you're a failure.*

(Marie)

This reflects the enduring importance of belonging, revealing what the view from 'above' might miss. Social networks were fundamental to the processes of migration in the sample: while some young adults moved for opportunity, frequently participants moved because their friendship circle was moving or because they felt isolated remaining in the Mountains.

Romantic relationships were an equally powerful influence on participants' choices. These choices were narrated in significantly different ways to the choices dictated by fate or necessity, and even in different ways to those choices influenced by social networks. While an out-migration with friends was treated as a default, moves influenced by relationships were generally narrated in a way that was more self-critical. This is encapsulated by Mila's narration of her return from living abroad in order to resume a relationship:

*And it was this guy and I couldn't, I couldn't shake him off and so, when I had the opportunity to stay, over in England, like, I had the opportunity, like, you know, to change my flight. I could have changed it, I could have kept working over there. I had two different jobs, I loved the village that I lived in but I chose not to, because I came back for a guy. And then, you know and then I came back and this guy, who pretended to still care about me, actually had a girlfriend and obviously didn't tell me about that, until afterwards. And so I beat myself up for that, for letting myself come back and not being independent. Because it was like, I tried so hard this whole year to be independent and to be like "Yeah I'm doing everything because I want to do it" but actually, I still*

*had this pull to come back because of this... absolute asshole. You know, like, so that really frustrated me and as soon as I got back and I found out about that, all I wanted to do was go back overseas, I didn't want to be here and be comforted by everyone. I wanted to escape again.*

In another example, Helene discusses moving to the North Coast with her partner:

*Helene: But I think because I was such an insecure person, and I started seeing this guy who was almost like a father figure, I... felt safe with him and kinda did what he wanted to do, and he wanted to move up north. So I just followed him, basically, and then I lived up there for seven years. No, five years. Yep. But I wanted to move to Newtown. With all my friends.*

*Ben: Mmm.*

*Interviewer: And they did?*

*Helene: Yeah. Most of my best friends moved around Newtown, that area.*

*Ben: Mmm (agrees).*

*Helene: And went partying. Yeah, exactly, yeah and went partying and I kinda felt like I missed out on all of that, because I was basically married and living up north and having this really boring kind of life with this guy. For years. Like, I was with him for seven years.*

These examples might initially seem like a fairly standard discussion of former relationships and the reasons they eventually failed. Yet, here participants understand these experiences as ‘wrong’ choices. This is an exception in the data. Many of the experiences discussed throughout the focus groups and interviews did not turn out as planned, but these were usually constructed as a “good



change” (Archie) or a learning experience, and therefore with positive value. Even traumatic events, such as high school bullying, were narrated in this manner.

This sense of ‘worthwhile experience’ was absent in the discussion of romantic relationships. There is perhaps some insight into this difference in the work of Salecl, who states, ‘the idea that we are supposed to be able to manage ourselves and that there is a choice in how we deal with our emotions, is linked to the very perception of the self that dominates late capitalist society’ (2005: 1142). This is also consistent with Silva’s notion of emotional self-regulation in the mood economy (2013). It may be that the emotions that surround a relationship breakdown are understood by participants as a failure: they had failed to emotionally self-regulate and to act rationally as would be consistent with the ideal self of ‘late capitalist society’ (Salecl 2005: 1142). As a result, these choices are described as ‘wrong’. This is certainly an area for further research.

While Tia also cited a romantic relationship as central to her decision-making, it was familial obligation that was most prominent in her understanding of choice. Tia described her father as deliberately making it difficult to leave the Mountains:

*Um, that's why he [her father] let me get a dog. And like stuff like that. Because he knows it's hard to rent apartments like, outside, with pets and stuff. Um, yeah, my parents are separated so, like my Dad doesn't have a partner to, like, rely on. And so my Dad works seven days a week, 70 hours a week, and he wants to come home and there be dinner on the table, and I feel like it's my responsibility because we don't have anyone else to do it.*

This was directly against Tia's own desires. Tia regarded herself as having little practical choice as a consequence of her family's dependence on her for financial and domestic support. When asked whether she would ever think about returning to the Mountains permanently, Tia responded:

*Tia: Um.... I think it is in the back of my mind. But I would like it not to be.*

*Interviewer: Ok. Can you explain that a bit more?*

*Tia: Um, I don't wanna have like, I don't want to be stuck here all the time, and I don't wanna keep being drawn back but, like, my Mum doesn't have anyone else but me and my brother here, so if I leave, I kinda feel like I have to come back, unless she would come with me.*

As is evident above, belonging was described as a powerful influence on choice and can be understood as disruptive to the discourse of choice. This was particularly evident in the discussions of raising children, where notions of opportunity and limits were engaged with and contested. Participants discussing the prospect or actuality of raising children in the Upper Mountains were comfortable with the notion of limited choice. This was achieved through a reframing, almost a contestation, of the meaning of opportunity. Participants frequently referred to friends who had returned to the Upper Mountains to start a family and suggested they might do the same.

In the discussions of raising children in Katoomba, participants contrasted dominant ideas of opportunity with what they regarded as real opportunity:

*Ben: I think maybe, I mean, I don't want to speak for everyone, but... I felt like, um, some of the things that are, like, progress, are not heading in the right direction. So if kids are so stressed out, they're on anti-depressants to get through their HSC exams, which I know is like super common, um, that's not something that I value. Like, I'd kind of be like "You're doing too much" like...*

*Helene: Mmm.*

*Mila: Yeah.*

*Ben: Whereas if you were super insistent that your kid was like, "No, the best opportunity for my kid is the highest grades, and the best education", then you might want, then obviously you'd be like "No, you've got to go this school in..." and probably that school's going to be in the city, more than up here. With the best opportunities.*

This taps into the City-as-Other discourse in a way that suggests the opportunities offered in Katoomba are different, as opposed to worse, than those offered in the city or elsewhere. Indeed, while Ben suggests that the city might have better options in terms of education, he also suggests that such a focus on institutional opportunity is misguided. Catherine suggested a similar distinction, arguing that the 'lifestyle' opportunities Katoomba offered balanced out institutional limitations. This discussion was underpinned by the nature and nostalgia discourses described in the previous chapter. Katoomba was described as being a better environment, more natural, and as "the best place to raise children, just because of the point-of-view it gives you and your mindset" (Archie). There was also a suggestion that children would be sheltered from the dangers that came from life in a city and less liable to get into serious trouble (Julie, Zac).

Here, the notion of belonging disrupts the discourse of choice in two significant ways. Firstly, it redefines opportunity. Secondly, it questions the negative associations of limits. What is evident in the above discussion is that some limits, like those imposed by the love of a family member, are desirable and wanted. Belonging in itself was a limit, sometimes decisions were both made by others and for others. It is evident in this data that the discourse of choice does not speak to what most participants regarded as the 'reasons' for their choices: the people in their lives.

*Belonging and locality: the choice of place versus the choice of location*

*I didn't think at that time, like... I mean, I had let go of all my friends up here, I hadn't spoken to anyone in all that time that I'd been away. And I didn't think that I would have anyone when I came back. I had no job. I had no boyfriend. I had no friends. But it was like the Mountains just embraced me. Like, it was, like, really surprising. I thought I wouldn't, you know, I thought I'd really struggle, and I thought it would be really hard but it wasn't at all, like, I just suddenly all these people just came out of the woodwork and were like, "Oh my god!". You know, loved me and wanted me back and it was just so beautiful and I just felt really, um, like, protected and kind of like, like, I feel held here. Like, I feel like nurtured here and it was the same thing when I moved to Sydney recently, and I came back with my tail between my legs again. It was the same thing. Like, I came back and I felt totally, like, embraced and supported.*

(Helene)

Place complicates the choices people make. In the data, while location was something that could be and was chosen, place was constructed as innate and intrinsic. In using some of the alternative discourses outlined earlier, many participants suggested they were essentially 'wrong' in the city, and this justified their ongoing presence in the Mountains:

*Daniel: Yeah, I think a lot of Mountains people find that, well, when you've grown up in the bush, probably just people growing up in the bush in general, living in cities always seems a bit unnatural and there's something inside you always kind of yearning, yearning for the bush.*

*Zac: Yeah.*

*Daniel: Or, yeah...*

*Zac: Anxious. In the city. And just, really uncomfortable.*

*Interviewer: Right.*

*Zac: Yeah, probably get like... yeah anxious and it just, just freaks me out a bit sort of like (laughs). Yeah, it's really intense. Yeah, yeah. Just not... relaxing.*

This is, once more, a discursive turn that separates the narrator from the choice. It is not a *choice* to return or to stay in the Mountains. Rather, it is an intrinsic part of selfhood that cannot exist in a fulfilling way in the city:

*Mila: At heart, like, you. Like, that's how I feel. I never feel quite right when I'm in the city, like something's just a little bit off. Like. I'd rather be here, in the bush, like.*

*Ben: Me too.*

*Mila: Yeah, like, and I think maybe just living up here for all those years has done that. Maybe if I, you know, if I lived in the city, I might feel more at home within all the concrete buildings and apartments and little quaint coffee shops. Whereas I don't.*

These participants understood themselves as shaped by place in a way they cannot change. This suggests that, for them, possibility is characterised by tangible and non-negotiable limits. As in the discussion of fate, participants suggested they had little choice, although the reasons for this were very different. In fate, responsibility for choice is evaded because of a divine or metaphysical destiny. In discussions of place, a lack of choice is a result of a fixed and intrinsic sense of self. They did not choose, they simply were.

There were practical examples used to portray the 'wrongness' of participants in a city: jokes about a lack of reverse-parking skills, a hatred of navigating Parramatta Road, the overwhelming logistics

of getting from one place to another on public transport. This is consistent with feelings of discomfort that can come from exposure to any new setting: starting a new job, or moving to a new town. But the 'wrongness' described by several participants went deeper than this and was narrated on an emotional level: described as creating anxiety, feeling flustered and being unhappy. Helene expressed this within a harsh/soft dichotomy:

*I fantasise about other places coz I get bored here. Basically. I need excitement. So I, like, I go down to Newtown every second weekend currently, like, to entertain myself. Um, and I have friends in Sydney so I go often and hang out with them. Because I get so bored in the Mountains. But it's like I need the Mountains. Like, coz I'm a sensitive person and I'm a creative person. And I find anywhere else I live, it's too harsh.*

Yet, for all the discussion of connection to place, only one participant had definite plans to remain in the Mountains permanently. Most of the other participants suggested another migration might be possible, often with a notion of return later on. Participants consistently intended to move somewhere perceived as 'like' the Mountains, such as the north coast of NSW, with similar counter-cultural qualities and proximity to nature.

This was reflected in the complex ways in which participants described 'home'. Despite the deep affinity with the Mountains, Will said that he felt more at 'home' in Nepal after three months than he ever had in the Mountains while Daniel described his feelings about Northern NSW as:

*I feel more at home up there, probably, than anywhere else but this is the place I... that is home, even though what I, what my heart yearns for and what I actually know as home are completely different things, yeah.*

In these accounts, there is a home that is yearned for and a home that is. But there is also little sense of choice in what constitutes home or place, unlike the possibility of choice when it comes to location. Alice stated “I forget how much I think Sydney’s home until I start talking about it” and yet had chosen to return to the Mountains, regarding herself as a financial exile.

A distinction can therefore be made about choice of location versus a connection to place. For some participants, these aligned: they described the Mountains as a magnet they continue to be drawn towards, almost against their will. There was a sense they were helpless against the force of the place that they are from or where they feel at ‘home’ and their location was a result of this. For others, the choice of location was removed from a sense of place. These participants described a different type of limitation, where they did not have the opportunity to live—often for institutional or financial reasons—in the place that was ‘home’.

***Institutions: the choices we are given***

*Understanding, like, pushing those sort of things would have been nice. Like, in terms of getting work or jobs, they're... Korowal's a little, is kind of like "Oh! Do your own thing! Go out in the world! Have fun! Enjoy!"... "It's a great world out there!". And you're like "yes, but... I don't know what to do".*

(Archie)

Participants generally discussed choices in their lives in ways that were rarely in line with the discourse of choice. When discussing institutions, however, the opposite was true. The discourse of choice was more evident in the discussion of institutions than in other areas, as were the characteristics identified by the individualisation thesis and consistent with social theory of late modernity.

There was significant divergence between focus groups. One in particular described several instances where they felt they had been failed by institutions, including the education system, the Blue Mountains City Council and the local police force. Such a comprehensive critique was not reflected in other responses. The one structural issue, with regard to education, that was clearly identified by some participants was the manner in which post-school options were presented, with the differences in these options based along traditional class lines. One participant who attended the local state school suggested the school was “just prepping everyone for blue collar, entry level work”, whereas another participant who attended a private collage suggested:

*Um, they would try and discourage you from leaving in Year 10. Um, and I think... It was just sort of like, having the TAFE right next door to the school, and having the kids, from TAFE jump into the Grammar School and start fights with Grammar kids, I think it kind of turned us off, wanting to go down that path. Like, I don't think I've got... I think maybe two people dropped out in Year 10. Yep, and one of them's like a mum with two kids, and works at Subway.*

This, however, was the exception. Others suggested that schools were adequate and it was the fault of the participant for not taking advantage of the opportunity. Hence, participants portrayed themselves as failing, as a “shitty teenager” (Marie), not “the greatest student” (Zac) and “not paying attention at school” (Julie). So while participants often constructed the responsibility for choice as resting elsewhere in previously discussed areas, they were completely in control of their choices within institutional settings.



Here, Catherine can identify several structural issues that hindered her education:

*I went in there probably ambitious and wanted to do really well, and it was fine at, at the first few years but it, I was kind of led more astray or away from that academic side because the school itself at the time wasn't so well itself in terms of its disciplinary, um, and things like that. So it was difficult for me to, ah, push myself to follow the academic path because if you've got a class that just doesn't work and you've got a teacher that has the knowledge and is able to help you, and I guess I needed that. I needed somebody to actually push me along, and actually be in that proper environment.*

And, yet, within a couple of sentences, the discussions shifts from a consideration of the school's shortcomings to her own:

*I wish that I had just put my head up and stuck to my guns and concentrated and not go astray and follow the crowd in a sense, in terms of a, academically.*

This is consistent with characteristics of late modernity and the discourse of choice. In these examples, personal responsibility for the consequences of choices is clearly evident, much more so than in other areas discussed in the data. The obvious structural constraints in education discussed by participants—teachers who kicked them out of class and, in one instance, bullied them, the lack of learning support, difficult learning environments, the absence of proper guidance about post-school options—were not regarded as important to the participant's eventual success or failure. Instead, it was their individual attitudes that mattered. This is consistent with the literature (Nairn, Higgins & Sligo 2012; Baker 2008) but is not consistent with the ways in which choice was discussed in other areas of the data.

The discussion of employment was equally complex. Some participants pointed to the lack of professional work available locally, and accepted they would have to commute. Two others were migrating due to a lack of work opportunity. But the most common response suggested there was ample work in the Upper Mountains, especially for young people and young adults.

*Helene: I have never, ever had ANY trouble, ever getting a job up here.*

*Mila: Yeah, I'm the same.*

*Helene: Never. And I don't have any special degrees or qualifications in anything. And basically if put my resume around, I get a job. Like almost that day. And it's always been like that for me.*

This was an unexpected result. With high youth unemployment and the lack of full-time opportunities, it has been anticipated the data would suggest difficulty in gaining suitable work in the Mountains. In this sample, the opposite was true. This was particularly surprising, as most of the participants who voiced this opinion were working in low-paid and casualised labour. This was the closest example in the data to what Silva (2013) found in her research: that those most vulnerable to a lack of regulation and protection were the most fervent subscribers to neoliberal values. Participants suggested they could find work quickly and that they could—after a certain amount of time—exert some control over their work arrangements. They reacted against the suggestion that there wasn't any work for young adults and some suggested that a lack of employment was a personal failure or choice. Will was particularly demonstrative of this, when asked about the lack of employment opportunity in the Upper Mountains.

*Will: Yeah. I never got that though. I mean, I've had a job since I was 14 and there are definitely jobs around. You just have to ask for jobs. I think a lot of people are very picky about the work that they're doing, they say "I don't want to wash dishes. Come on!". I think that's actually a huge part of it. A lot of people think that, for some reason, they*

*think that they deserve a better job. Even though they're a fourteen year old kid. You know. But... I've never been that picky. So I just, I'll go around with resumes and I'll just put one in every shop and talk to the owner and then, it takes like two days to find a job, come on, you just have to accept what comes. Like you saw on, when I filled out the thing, I had three jobs at one time, they were all shit. I was distributing bins, I was washing dishes and I was, what was I doing?, selling vegetables. That's a job I've had for like five years, that's an alright job. But, you know, none of them are prestigious jobs. But they all paid me well, and now I've got ten thousand dollars saved up and I'm going to the other side of the world. So you just, people really have to just accept what...*

*Interviewer: So you think that there are, that never bothered you, never kind of...*

*Will: I never felt like there were... of course, the opportunities aren't that great. But I never felt like we were restricted with the work that was available to us. I mean, there's a lot of shops. There's a lot of cafes. There's, maybe there's more people than shops but... I don't know, I never felt unemployable at all. And throughout most of my life, most of my friends have had jobs. And those that didn't, it was by choice.*

In the discussions of employment and education, the participants' relationship to choice has changed. No longer are there discursive 'side-steps' or tricks: the narrator is central to the choosing process and responsible for its outcome. This is not to suggest that there is no awareness of limits, but that participants felt they could (and should be) overcome. This was not universally true, but was the dominant reaction. The sense was that people could either lower their expectations or go elsewhere. Either of those options was their choice, and no suggestion was made that any other factor, structural or relational, might be important to this issue. In the data, even the responsibility of the institution itself is by and large absent, with a couple of exceptions.

Beck argues, in late modernity, the individual is encouraged to find 'biographical solutions to systemic contradictions' (1992: 137) and that failure to do so is a personal failure. This was evident in the discussion of institutions. Indeed, institutional experience was the only area that clearly

demonstrated the personal acceptance of responsibility and subscription to neoliberal values the literature suggests is endemic (Vromen, Xenos & Loader 2016; Nairn, Higgins & Sligo 2012; Silva 2013). This is significant as it suggests that the discourse of choice is most pervasive and most readily accepted within an institutional setting.

## **Conclusion**

In the data, choice was constructed as nuanced, changing, interwoven and absent. It also changed: participants' capacities to choose was sometimes firmly within their grasp and other times out of reach. Predominantly, the way participants talked about choice evoked limits, finite possibility and, sometimes, the absence of control. Vromen, Loader and Xenos suggest that there is an 'acceptance by young people of *personal* responsibility to create an individualised life pathway' (2016: 535).

The findings in this thesis suggest that picture is not yet fully realised, except in the case of romantic relationships and institutions. The discussion of other aspects of life was underpinned by a strong sense of belonging, to both people and place, in ways that countered the discourse of choice.

Outside of the institutional setting, participants negotiated the discourse of choice, and the disjuncture between the discourse and everyday decisions, by suggesting a redefinition of opportunity and of limits. Contrasting institutional opportunity with lifestyle opportunity, several participants suggested that the opportunities that Katoomba offered were more important than the ones offered by the city. This was particularly true when discussing childhood, both participants' own and the ones they desired for their children. Participants suggested they would not only be happy to offer their children 'lifestyle' opportunities over institutional ones but—for most participants—they would prefer to. This implies an acceptance of limits that is at odds with the discourse of choice.

The ways in which participants negotiated choice resonates with the findings in Malpass et al. (2007) which indicated that participants accepted different kinds of responsibility for their choices (in their study, consumption choices). As they state, 'and maybe, just maybe, if you listen hard enough, they might be asserting finite limits to how much they, as individuals, can be expected to be responsible for' (2007: 12). A similar finding was evident in this data, where participants' frequently asserted finite limits to the role of choice in their lives.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: THE DISCOURSE OF CHOICE IN EVERYDAY LIFE**

It is evident that there is a disconnect between the discursive construction of choice and experiences of choice in the everyday lives of young adults in Katoomba. The extent of this disconnect varied. In some instances, such as the discussion of institutions, participants regarded the gap between everyday choice and the discursive construction of choice as minimal. In other instances, such as the discussions of belonging, the gap was distinct. When discussing family or place, most participants regarded their choices as constrained, rejecting the notion of unlimited possibilities and self.

It is not, however, enough to establish that a gap exists between rhetoric and reality. Rather, it becomes necessary to look for ways in which the gap is negotiated and what this might suggest about the functioning of the discourse on the everyday level. Throughout the data, explicit interactions with the discourse of choice—both uses and resistances—were relatively unusual. They do, however, give some insight into how the discourse of choice might be understood, incorporated and reproduced in everyday life.

### **The use of the discourse of choice in everyday life**

Although rare, there were instances in the data where participants acknowledged the discourse of choice. As Jane stated:

*Mum finished her schooling in Year 9, so she always put strong emphasis on us, that if... again, that old Baby Boomers thing.... "if you work hard enough, if you try hard enough, you will succeed at anything" so... and I believed that from her. And she's always, she's not surprised with my grades in uni, she never is surprised when I do well with things because she's always had that belief that if you apply yourself, if you do it, you will get there.*

It is evident that neoliberal values of hard work and effort dominate this excerpt. However, importantly, they are supported by the discourse of choice: "if you try hard enough, you will succeed at *anything*" (my emphasis). At face value this would suggest the discourse of choice, in this instance, had been understood and incorporated in everyday life. But when compared to the following excerpt, another picture emerges:

*I mean, as far as it goes, with our family, Mum made—and I understand it now that I'm older, at the time I didn't know what she was doing—Mum made a very conscious effort to surround us with very well-off people growing up. Her bosses are very well-off, people who owned their own small businesses, things like that. So all of her friends and that, she carefully made sure the ones that were around us most were the ones to aspire to.*

In this excerpt, Jane perceives her mother's actions as navigating class in a conscious way. This was particularly important as Jane comes from a low socio-economic background and described her mother's employment as "borderline wage slavery". Three observations are therefore possible. Firstly, this is an example of the operation and production of the discourse of choice. Secondly, the disconnect between the discourse of choice and everyday choices is understood and negotiated. Finally, as a result of this disconnect between the discursive construction of choice and choice in everyday life, the use of the discourse is instrumental. This is crucial. Here, the discourse of choice is used but not believed.

Gee's definition of discourse includes several aspects: situated identities, ways of acting and knowing, and forms of coordination (2011: 40). In the above example, the discourse is clearly used as a form of coordination, primarily as a form of encouraging social mobility. Situated identity is more complicated: it is not Jane's mother (the producer) who has the situated identity of the discourse, but her children. Both of these aspects demonstrate the production and operation of the discourse of choice. But there is a tension in this excerpt between the ways of knowing that are suggested, and the ways of knowing that are acted on.

The discourse of choice suggests that the individual is free to choose and Jane's mother suggests this is true for her children. Yet she acts in a way that denotes an understanding of enduring structural constraint. Put simply, while Jane's mother suggests that structural constraints no longer limit the individual, she acts in a way that recognises this is not true. This is the paradox at the heart of the operation of the discourse of choice. It suggests that the disconnect between the discursive construction of choice and everyday choices is understood, felt and consciously navigated in everyday life.



Discourses are never totalising, they are drawn on in conjunction with other discourses and people can hold multiple positions within a situation. Therefore, the fact that the discourse is contested and incomplete is not the focus here. *It is the way it is used* that matters in this discussion. In the context of the disconnect between rhetoric and reality, Jane's mother uses the discourse of choice instrumentally. There is no sense that unlimited opportunity, free of structural constraint, is reality. Therefore, the discourse of choice is used and produced as a form of motivation and as a framework for social mobility.

This has resonance with Vromen, Loader and Xenos' work, which indicated the importance of ideas of social mobility through choice and hard work to young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds, who 'wanted to believe that there were constructive possibilities for themselves and their peers, and that agency and change in their individual economic situation was actually possible' (2016: 543). The above excerpt suggests that, while Jane's mother might have wanted to believe in the discourse, she navigated the world in the way that assumed it wasn't true. This supports Salecl's suggestion as to why the discourse, or what she calls the ideology, of choice endures:

We may not think our choices are limitless or that we are fully capable of determining the direction of our lives and making ourselves whatever we want to be, but we believe that someone else believes in these ideas and so we do not express our disbelief. For the ideology of choice to hold such power in post-industrial society, all that is needed is for people to keep their disbelief to themselves.

(2010: 11)

In this instance, the discourse of choice was employed as an instrumental framework, produced by one generation for the next. The follow-up question is this: does the discourse of choice, produced by Jane's mother, become part of Jane's orientation toward the world? For this would suggest a

form of discursive reproduction. In this instance, the answer was no. In fact, the opposite was true. Jane, more than most, identified structural limitations. When asked about her opinion of raising children in the Mountains, Jane replied:

*Jane: I'd be happy for them to [grow up in the Mountains]. If I had kids, yeah I'd be more than happy for them to grow up here. The biggest difference is though, and this is nothing to do with Katoomba, this is just purely nation-wide, I would NOT in any way, shape or form, send them to the public schooling system up here.*

*Interviewer: Really?*

*Jane: Yep, I'd send them private so... the only way my, if I had kids, the only way they would actually do their education up here would be through either Columba's, or one of the Christians schools or through Grammar or something like that so...*

*Interviewer: And why is that?*

*Jane: Ah, economic opportunity. That's the thing, I don't think the public school system prepares you, I don't think it actually gives you any... ah... sort of equity to sort of deal with later on. So, I think too, the pressure of... It can go both ways, coz I know plenty of people that went private and still went, "Meh" when they got out of it. So I know that, but I just feel that the availability of resources will be better for them, you know. I mean I see these projects like Gonski and everything at the moment, and they're just band aid solutions, they're not going to fix long term problems of the... the inequality in the economics between private and public school*

Here, again, class and resource limitation must be navigated. There was little sense that the discourse of choice had been understood as reality. Although Jane's mother produced the discourse, it is not then reproduced as reality for her children. As Jane stated, "You can do anything you want in this town, but you need to come from the right environment that teaches you how to achieve that".

A similar instrumental use of the discourse can be found in Marie's account:

*But now, I think that if you work, if you really want something and you work really hard for it, that, that's the best you're going to do, as far as the world is your oyster, like, if you know you aren't lucky and people don't just pull you out of the crowd, like if you really strive for it, I think that you can do it. That's as far as I think. But, you know, it is so hard when, like, life experiences affect you so much, so you really have to try and push past that stuff, if you can, to realise what the goal is. To reach for it. Do the study. Try and be the best. Sacrifice. And, you know, there are some times that it's just... it's unfortunate, and it doesn't happen like that. Um, but I'd like to think now, as far as inspirationally, I would like to think that if I try really, if I try my hardest, I can do it. Because nothing's really told me that I can't. I mean, I've just never really tried.*

Two observations are important. Once more, the discourse of choice is used as motivation despite a clear awareness that structural constraints endure. The second observation is that uncertainty underpins this excerpt, reflective of what Leccardi describes as the 'uneasiness generated by the gap between what is real and what is possible' (2005: 140). While Marie suggests the world is "your oyster", there are also references to luck and fortune. Marie oscillates between these understandings of choice in her life and the consequent possibilities available to her. It would seem that she wants to believe that her options are unlimited and accessible through hard work and desire, but she cannot convince herself of it.

In analysing the ways participants used the discourse of choice, it is evident that the neoliberal ideological project is not fully realised, that the disconnect between the discursive construction of choice and everyday decisions is understood, felt and navigated and that, as a result, the discourse

of choice is used instrumentally. The relatively rare references to the discourse obviously makes these conclusions preliminary, but it is an exciting avenue for further research.

### **The resistance to the discourse of choice in everyday life**

The resistance to a discourse can consist of two things: rejection or contestation. This is consistent with Williams' analysis of alternative/oppositional practices. Alternative practices can exist alongside the dominant hegemony, while oppositional practices challenge it (Williams 2006: 137). Throughout the data, resistance to the discourse of choice was achieved through the redefinition of opportunity.

As established in previous chapters, participants redefined opportunity by focusing on the advantages that Katoomba offered, constructing these as more important than the institutional ones provided in a city. This redefinition was frequently achieved through the City-as-Other discourse. As Ben described it:

*So, like no matter what shitty stuff is going on, I can go out in the bush and I feel okay. And I can walk, like, half hour from my door, I can walk and sit in the stream on top of a waterfall. I feel totally rich. And I think a lot of people are misguided, or they're not seeing it or, if you don't get it, that's great because there's more for me...*

In this excerpt, wealth is redefined as non-material and contrasted to the "misguided" approaches of others. This was a redefinition that was frequently referenced in interviews. Leo described his experience of an alternative school in terms of opportunity:

*At the time of being at that school, um, I definitely took it for granted as something I felt was normal in education and, looking back at those years I had there, and the experiences that I've had outside of the Blue Mountains, I can see pretty deeply into my heart how amazing of an opportunity that was, to, um, grow up in, as far as it's given me an understanding of the kind of life I want to live, as an adult, and as a human being.*

This redefinition of opportunity was seconded by Luke, who linked it to place:

*I'm a much better person, much nicer person, much more helpful person. I'm glad I didn't live my life like an asshole (laughs). Like, I'm glad I've learnt now, this early. You know, not to be an asshole in life. And that would, I don't know, that probably wouldn't have happened if I wasn't in the Mountains. Yeah, so yeah. I think that's probably one of the best opportunities a person could have, is to learn to be a good person.*

The redefinition of opportunity does not contest the discourse of choice and therefore can be analysed as an alternative practice. That said, it rejects and redefines the notion of limit. In this redefinition, some limits are valued, as was evident in earlier chapters. This has the potential to disrupt the discourse of choice, which is based in the concept of unlimited options as the ultimate good, consistent with neoliberal values of competition and choice.

A similar resistance can be seen in the importance and fixity of place. This is not to suggest the Mountains was always described positively. Throughout the data, the Mountains was described as “like a long-term relationship” (Archie), a “big, dirty trap” (Marie), “a sponge” (Jane), “rehab” (Marie), a “safety zone” (Helene), a “healing site” (Leo) and “Hell” (Archie, Marie).

Yet, crucially, whether a positive or negative limit, the Mountains became a fixed point used to navigate uncertainty, both in the participants' actual lives and in their narratives.

This is particularly important, as it reveals what an analysis of neoliberalism on a larger scale might miss. The literature would suggest that, in the contemporary era, fixity is stasis. This was certainly a perception that dominated discussions of out-migration and the 'failure' of return. But there was also a sense where fixity, as in the fixedness of the Mountains, provided a reference point in what otherwise could be construed as a fluid world. As Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst argue, 'Fixed places thus play crucial roles within globalising processes. They become sites for new kinds of solidarities among people who chose to live in particular places' (2005: 53). This was reflected in this data. Within this thesis, the construction of place as fixed was understood as an oppositional practice, one that knew limits and relied upon them. This not only rejects the discourse of choice, but has the potential to disrupt it.

## **Conclusion**

There is evidence of the discourse of choice in everyday life. The above chapter demonstrates ways in which the discourse is understood and incorporated, as well as the silence that is crucial to the reproduction of the discourse.

Processes of individualisation were evident in *responding* to the discourse of choice. While the explicit references to the discourse were limited, they were consistently characterised by individualism. This is an important distinction. While this research found that the discourse of choice itself was not frequently referenced on an everyday level and was, indeed, sometimes actively contested or renegotiated, it was always negotiated individually. While other aspects of life were discussed in terms of collective networks, particularly that of social and familial networks, any

interaction with the discourse of choice was exclusively individual. It is therefore the working hypothesis of this thesis that, although the discourse of choice is incomplete and unrealised on an everyday level, it is consistent with the 'different, partially incompatible logics of action' that Beck and Beck-Gernsheim identify as part of the individualisation thesis (2002: 23). And, as is consistent with the individualisation thesis, participants are forced to find 'biographical solutions for systemic contradictions' (Beck 1992: 137).

Responses to the discourse of choice were also characterised by uncertainty. The instrumental use of the discourse, the redefinition of opportunity and the fixity of place were all used to navigate uncertainty and resolve it on an individual level. References to the discourse of choice were frequently accompanied by contradictory explanations, although they were not regarded as such by participants. Again representative of the incompatible logics of action that theorists have analysed in the individualisation thesis, these explanations were mobilised as needed, pointing to a much more complex interaction with neoliberal ideology than the literature would suggest.

## CONCLUSION

This research looks at the functioning of the discourse of choice on an everyday level amongst young adults. It analyses the intersections of the discursive construction of choice and everyday decision-making of young adults. It does so by addressing a significant gap in the literature: how the discourse of choice operates in everyday life. This was addressed by a case study of young adults in Katoomba, NSW.

The setting of the case study had several characteristics that were of great value to the research. The category of the 'missing generation' meant two things: I could focus exclusively on young adults, as opposed to a more general 'young people', and that the case study involved complicated migration patterns, which were as much about return as out-migration. Further, the accessibility of Sydney from Katoomba, and vice versa, meant that I could analyse the complicated relationship between choice, location and place.

### **Research findings**

The findings of this research are preliminary and require further investigation. They are also not statistically generalisable, and so these ideas would benefit from quantitative research in the future.

The first finding of this research supports much of the literature: that there is a disconnect between rhetoric and reality when it comes to choice in the lives of young adults. While the discursive construction of choice, which suggests the individual is free to choose and opportunities are unlimited, and the everyday decisions of young adults intersect in a variety of ways, they do not align. Choice in the lives of young adults remains bounded and constrained and is understood as such in most areas, with the exception of romantic relationships and institutional settings.



Yet it also became evident that the nature of ‘limit’ or ‘constraint’ is often too readily understood as a negative. Certainly, structural constraint was evident in the lives of the participants, often in ways that made their lives harder. Yet, in this data, ‘constraint’ also meant the love and obligation to family members, the sacrifice for a child, the feeling of being ‘home’ in place. The limits that participants spoke of were sometimes positive and desired. This is perhaps indicative of the power of analysing data through a relational framework, rather than focusing solely on transitions. Through this approach, it became evident that, although participants regarded themselves as limited, the reasons for this ranged from negative to positive. In its most powerful form, the nature of limit was contested through a redefinition of opportunity.

Throughout the research, it became increasingly apparent that the ways in which participants understood and interacted with choice was much more varied than had been anticipated.

Participants positioned themselves in different ways in relation to choice: as removed from decision-making, evidenced in the discussions of fate and necessity; as making choices for others as a result of belonging and obligation; as caught between the location and the intrinsic connection to place; and of being ‘given’ certain choices by institutions. Any mention of the idea that “you can be whatever you want to be” was accompanied by significant doubt and used instrumentally, as a form of motivation and within the context of uncertainty. While participants seemed aware of the discourse of choice, it was not a primary influence on their decisions.

The exception to this was the discussion of institutions. Here, neoliberal ideology and the concepts suggested by social theory of late modernity—reflexivity, risk and personal responsibility—were evident. This is an important initial finding of this research: that neoliberal ideology has more impact on some areas of everyday life than others, and has particular impact on everyday interaction with institutions. Often, when participants discussed institutions, they placed themselves front and

centre: they were free to choose, and responsible for the outcome. This was not universally true, but was the dominant trend in the data. In this view, limits were acknowledged but could and should be overcome by the individual. A potential reason for this is that institutions are a significant source of the discourse of choice, though advertising and institutional structures, as was seen in previous chapters. Further, while most everyday choices were influenced by notions of belonging (with the notable exception of romantic relationships), interactions with institutions and with the discourse of choice were both underpinned by individualism. Both of these examples were consistent with the processes of individualisation described by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002).

Leccardi (2006) suggests that participants in her study used the concept of luck as a cognitive trick to respond to uncertainty. Similarly, Howard et al. (2011) found that some participants developed a meant-to-be orientation as a coping mechanism for future uncertainty. This resonates with many of the accounts in this data. This is an area that requires further investigation, but it is the working hypothesis of this research that participants actively negotiated an unpredictable future and uncertain present in the way they discussed choice, particularly in the discussions on fate, belonging, and the intrinsic connection to place. What is common to these discussions is the construction of a certainty—sometimes a destiny, other times an innate connection to place or a responsibility to others—that provides a structure for their choices. Belonging, within both relational networks and to place, became a source of stability within a context of fluidity and unpredictability. The most powerful example of this was the embodiment of place, where participants linked self to place in a way that could not be changed or chosen. Place did not always determine participants' decisions, but they all suggested that it had shaped them and was embodied by them in ways they continued to 'discover'. Thus the unpredictability of the future, and the uncertainty of the present, are partially negotiated by the construction of fixed points in these participants' lives.

The findings of this research, preliminary though they are, suggest that the discourse of choice is understood, incorporated and reproduced in limited ways in the everyday decisions of young adults. This varies according to what sphere of life in which the decision is being made, and is more likely to be evident in decisions and understandings of institutional experiences. Conversely, belonging—to place, to family, to friends—disrupts the discourse of choice and little evidence of the discourse's influence could be established in those spheres, with the notable exception of romantic relationships. The individualised nature of interactions with the discourse of choice, as is consistent with the individualisation thesis, was fundamental to the discourse's reproduction.

### **Theoretical Contribution**

Obviously, any contribution this thesis could make is limited by its scope and time constraints. There are, however, some directions suggested by the research that are encouraging.

The first is the value in analysing neoliberalism as an ideological project. Very often, neoliberalism is regarded as reality and as without alternative. To understand neoliberalism as an ideological project is to challenge both of these assumptions. This approach also provides insight into how and, crucially, where neoliberal ideology has gained traction on an everyday level and where it has not. The findings of this data, that suggest neoliberal ideology is not evident in all areas of the everyday lives of young adults, would not have been possible without approaching neoliberalism in this way.

The second theoretical contribution is validation of a relational, as opposed to transitional, framework in analysing the lives of young adults. Certainly, the data contains evidence that transitions are non-linear and reversible, as is consistent with the literature. The non-linearity of young adults leaving and returning to Katoomba was evidence of this. Notions of belonging were fundamental to participants' accounts of their lives. The transitions framework did not provide the

necessary language to capture this, whereas the relational framework clearly did. The data also supported the suggestion of the importance of mobility in late modernity, and the consequent concerns about stasis, although they were negotiated and contested in the data. The contemporary injunction to move was clearly felt throughout the data.

The third contribution of this research is in providing further evidence of the importance of contrasting 'above' and 'below' views, as is consistent with de Certeau's discussions of spatialised knowledge (1984). The 'ways of knowing' Katoomba varied from 'above' and 'below' and important insights into the research topic—the redefinition of opportunity, unrealised transitions and the varieties of choice—were only possible through the contrast of these two views.

### **Conclusion**

This research builds on the work of Nairn, Higgins and Sligo (2012) and Silva (2013) in analysing the effects and operation of neoliberal ideology in the everyday lives of young adults. There is much left to be done. The potential for further insight by revisiting participants and collecting a new round of data, by broadening the scope of the research to include those young adults who never plan to leave the Mountains or those who have already migrated permanently, the opportunity to tease out the inevitable tangents that time would not allow for in this thesis, these are just some of the future directions this research suggests. In beginning this research, it was the hope that, in identifying the operation of the discourse of choice, there would be insights into the way it could be challenged. This research is the beginning of that undertaking.

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## **APPENDIX A: LIST OF COLLECTED DOCUMENTS**

### **Blue Mountains City Council**

- 'Action plan: reducing youth alcohol related harm', 2012
- 'Cultural strategy', 2009
- 'Annual report 2014- 2015', 2015
- 'Resourcing strategy 2013- 2025'
- 'Delivery program 2013- 2017'
- 'Operational plan 2015- 2016'
- 'Sustainable Blue Mountains 2025: community strategic plan',
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- 'Youth strategy survey' 2003
- 'Where are we now?: Issues and trends for the Blue Mountains', 2001.
- 'Youth services in the Blue Mountains', 2009
- 'Blue Mountains crime prevention plan 2014- 2017', 2014

### **Other Blue Mountains organisations**

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- Mountains Community Resource Network, 'Youth', 2015
- Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise, 'Blue Mountains economic and demographic profile', 2014
- Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise, 'Creative industries profile', 2014
- Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise, 'Tourism industry profile', 2014
- Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise, 'Health and wellbeing industry profile', 2014
- TAFE Western Sydney Institute, 'T-nxt magazine', 2014.

### **Pamphlets from Katoomba Centrelink**

- Centrelink, 'Studying or training?' 2014
- Mountains Outreach Community Service, 'Parenting young' and 'Childcare service', n.d.
- Nepean Adolescent and Family Services, 'Reconnect program and counselling program', n.d.
- Australian Government, 'SEE: skills for education and employment', n.d.

### **Websites**

- Blue Mountains City Council, 'Mountains of Help', n.d.
- Mountains Youth Services Team, 'Mountains Youth Services Team', n.d.
- Blue Mountains City Council, 'Blue Mountains Youth Council'. 2015
- Blue Mountains Youth Council, 'Have your say'
- Facebook, 'Mountains Youth Services Team'

- Facebook, 'Blue Mountains Youth Council'
- Facebook, 'Blue Mountains International Hotel Management School'
- Facebook, 'TAFE WSI Blue Mountains College'
- TAFE Western Sydney Institute, 'Blue Mountains' n.d.

#### **Videos**

- TAFE Western Sydney Institute, 'Beauty therapy: Blue Mountains cinema ad', 2015
- TAFE Western Sydney Institute, 'Hospitality: Blue Mountains cinema ad', 2015
- TAFE Western Sydney Institute, 'Outdoor recreation: Blue Mountains cinema ad', 2015