Being-in-motion: The everyday (gendered and classed) embodied mobilities for UK university students who commute

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Abstract

This article makes the case for a more robust mobilities approach to student geographies in the UK, in order to problematise the enduring binary of [im]mobility ('going away' versus 'staying local') and to challenge the presumed linearity of educational (and mobility) transitions in higher education. Through a discussion of two UK-based studies, we make the case for considering the complex and multi-layered everyday mobilities of students who commute to illuminate a broader range of mobility practices that shape students' experiences and identities, and which are embedded in multiple and intersecting embodiments of class, gender, age and ethnicity.

Keywords

Introduction

Widening participation and the drive for local recruitment has been one of the most significant outcomes of the shifting landscape of the UK higher education (HE) system, changing the ways in which students consider notions of their social and geographical mobilities (Holdsworth, 2009b; Christie, Munro and Wager, 2005). Such mobilities are recognised as key characteristics of the ubiquitous 'student experience' and, relatedly, to how HE transitions are understood and (de)valued (Holdsworth, 2006). Thus, the diffuse mobility choices made by contemporary university students at various scales has opened up exciting avenues in which to

investigate students' transitions and educational outcomes that cut across geography, sociology and education studies (Donnelly and Evans, 2016; Hinton, 2011). In the English context there is a sense that residential mobility is often privileged over remaining in the family home during study. Holdsworth (2009b) reflects on the many and varied ways that students find themselves on the move whilst a university. Even so, she argues that:

> "Very little attention has been given the broad range of students' different mobility practices; rather, it is the semi-permanent move associated with leaving home and migrations over distance rather than mobility and everyday-life, that is most closely associated with student life." (1852)

This paper develops this critique of the preoccupation with narrow notions of student mobility. We argue that this view necessarily valorises residential relocation above local mobility performances (Holton, 2015c) which are often mistaken for immobility, thus writing out everyday movements such as commuting, co-present and virtual social interactions, and different ways of engaging with campus for a significant minority of university students in the UK. It is pressing to take seriously the mobility practices of apparently immobile students, given that the numbers of students choosing not to move away from home to attend university in the UK are growing. Current figures from the Higher Education Statistics Agency [HESA] (2016) reveal that for UK-domiciled undergraduate students, around 25 per cent live with parents or guardians and a further 15 per cent live in their own residence, indicating a small but significant shift away from the 'boarding school' model – in which students live in shared, campus-based residences – which has a long history embedded in the elitism of university participation.

These adapting modes of HE participation are attributed to the changing student body; specifically, the increasing numbers of 'new students' (that is, women, minority ethnic and mature students, as well as first generation entrants) (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003). There is now a large body of research which links students' gendered, classed, aged and ethnic identities with tendencies towards spatial fixity in the local (Bagguley and Hussain, 2014; Pokorny, Holley and Kane, 2016). However, there is far less discussion about the ways in which the everyday mobilities that sustain ostensibly 'local' participation are shaped by, and indeed shaping of,

embodied practices and performances of gender, social class, ethnicity and age. Narratives of (im)mobility play a central role in the constitution of gender as a social and cultural construct (Cresswell and Uteng, 2008) and the spaces of everyday mobility – buses, trains, parks, libraries and cafes – "can be sites of subjugation, contestation, politics, and identity making; of racial segregations, class conflicts, or community sentiments" (Wilson 2011, 635). Thus, it is important to recognise how students' identities are formed not just as a response to 'the local' (and indeed in its juxtaposition to 'the university') but in and through their mobilities to and around campus. This paper, synthesises theories of gendered and classed mobilities with empirical data from two separate studies undertaken with students who commute to university in two areas of England (Portsmouth and Lancaster) which present interesting contexts for studying (and troubling) ideas about student (im)mobility. Whilst our focus is specifically concerned with gender and class we also recognise that intersectionalities between different identities (ethnicity, sexuality, age etc.) may impact upon students' propensities to be mobile. We begin by overviewing the literature relating to student mobilities, outlining the contributions that a more thorough engagement with the mobilities turn brings to this field. After outlining the methods, we discuss the ways in which students who commute used their narratives of (im)mobility to challenge, subvert or shore up gendered aspects of selfhood; particularly masculinist ideals of the flexible learner and/or stereotypically feminine notions of spatial fixity in the caring or private sphere. From here we explore the multiple (classed and aged) identities that were performed across and within different student and non-student environments and how, through these performances, practices and meanings of mobility were understood and articulated by the participants. Finally, we conclude by making a case for valuing the everyday interweaving of different modes of mobility for commuter[1] students.

Students who commute: The everyday and embodied 'micro-geographies' of HE participation

Within HE research there has been a strong focus on the process of decision-making and the reasons why some, usually middle-class students, leave the parental home to attend university at a distance [either regionally (Holdsworth, 2009b) or overseas (Brooks and Waters, 2010)], whilst other working-class and mature students might

stay in their local area (Abrahams and Ingram, 2013; Patiniotis and Holdsworth, 2005). This reveals residential mobility as linked to stronger feelings of belonging (Thomas, 2013) whereas the apparent immobility of local students is characterised as a decision borne out of constraint and educational and social disadvantage which compromises identities (Christie, Munro and Wager, 2005). The impact of this discourse on the ways student mobilities are conceived and understood within HE research is firstly that student mobilities are often framed in the context of a linear transition, rather than shaped through meaningful interactions between stasis and flow (Jensen, 2009). Secondly, it has generated a set of seemingly enduring binary positions: middle-class mobility versus working-class immobility; ease versus struggle; fluidity versus rootedness. We argue here that this presumed linearity of mobility, and the binaries attached to this, masks the complexities of students' experiences of 'being mobile' at university.

Despite the increased focus on how and where students participate at university, HE scholars have not explicitly embraced the mobilities turn in the social sciences, favouring instead the transitional theories of migration studies (Prazeres, 2016) or concerns over *social* mobility. That is not to say, however, that the literature does not take a spatial approach. On the contrary, Bourdieu's conceptual triad of habitus, field and capitals has dominated sociological, geographical and educational debates, simultaneously illuminating student choices about staying or going as embodied classed practices, and the wider system as fraught with inequalities (Reay, David and Ball, 2005). Whilst this approach is undoubtedly useful, not least in its attention to space, we argue here that HE research will benefit from a more robust engagement with mobilities theory and the methodological innovations pioneered by this field. As Sheller (2014) maintains, mobilities theory makes it necessary to radically rethink the relation between bodies, movement, and space and reconsider embodied practices and the production of being-in-motion as a "relational affordance between the senses, objects and kinaesthetic accomplishments" (792).

Thus, a mobilities-centred approach to students' experience allows us to 'problematise the binary' (Holton, 2015a; 2016) between mobility and immobility, home and university, student and local, by seeing and theorising the many and varied ways that university requires students to 'be-in-motion'. Following Sheller, we

are particularly interested in how a focus on everyday, routinized movements allows us to consider student mobilities as much more dynamic than linear transitions or, in the case of students who commute, as simply a way of connecting A to B. Indeed, mobilities theory allows us to appreciate mobility as much more than the physical act of moving between places and spaces; it is multi-sensory and embodied so that it becomes "something we feel in an emotional and affective sense" (Adey, 2010, 162).

By embracing this way of thinking we are not suggesting that *all* students enjoy the same access to, or competences of, mobility. While our capacity to *be* mobile has become a ubiquitous factor in the construction and maintenance of identities and sense(s) of self, we are also increasingly defined by our relative (and perceived) lack of mobility. Whilst it is, of course, important to emphasise differences and highlight inequalities of both choice and experiences of HE, as Adey (2006) argues, such immobilities are contested and subjectively judged in relation to others' relative mobilities, meaning power plays a significant role both in defining 'the local' and in influencing and providing access and degrees of egress from, certain types of mobility and movement (Hannam, Sheller and Urry, 2006). Thus, we seek to challenge the use of terms like 'immobile' and 'local' which are so often used as a catch all to denote a range of proximate and more remote students' experiences by conflating experiences of commuting with being rooted in the local area. We are mindful that when scholars approach the study of student mobilities without challenging these concepts or the binaries they constitute they run the risk of "enacting particular realities and bringing into being what they discover" (Law and Urry 2004, 393). Thus, we argue here that by bringing the everyday, embodied mobilities – and moorings – into view, we can take seriously a much greater variety of movements and mobilities as meaningful social practices.

We argue that redirecting attention to the everyday mobilities, (rather than the perceived immobilities) of students who commute, can alert us to the nuanced and complex politics of mobility that go beyond the dualistic conceptualisations we have become used to working with. When we discuss 'everyday mobilities' we refer to the mobile practices and performances that students engage in as they travel to and from university; the movements that facilitate official and unofficial connections (May 2013) to aspects of their lives such as parenting, caring (for the self and others), paid

employment, sport and hobbies. We are not suggesting that it is only students who commute who experience mobility in this way, but rather that their movements, which are tied to the routines and practices associated with everyday life, are the most overlooked and under-theorised because they are misrecognised as immobile and rooted in place. Thus, what we advocate here, through a focus on the embodied micro-geographies[2] of students who commute, is a view of student mobilities as not necessarily constituted from exceptional encounters but as the product of everyday, corporeal routines and behaviours (Peters, Kloppenburg and Wyatt, 2009). These behaviours, practices and performances are highly dynamic, embodied practices that involve meaning, power and attachment that constitute a politics of mobility (Cresswell, 2006) that underpins the experiences of university and the process of self-identification.

Everyday mobilities are important for self-identity because they have within them the potential for creativity, subversion and resistance (Lefebvre, 1991; de Certeau, 1984) and, as they are enmeshed within ordinary routines, students' mobility practices can powerfully reconfigure notions of self and home (Jensen, 2009). It is the complexities and incongruences of everyday performances that create space to articulate multiple modes of resistance and innovation, that extend beyond the binaries of staying local or going away to university. Indeed, although place is central to people's subject formation, everyday and occasional mobilities *within and between* places have also been shown to shape the ways identities are imposed, imagined, lived and contested for young people (Skelton, 2013); for women in public spaces (Valentine, 1989); and for men, women and children as they negotiate gendered and classed familial roles and obligations (Jensen, Sheller and Wind, 2015). Indeed, embodied encounters of gender, generation and social class position intersect on a daily basis through everyday mobilities (Murray, Sawchuck and Jiron, 2016) which, in turn, shapes, and is shaped by, class-based identities.

Methodology

This paper emerges from two separate research projects with students in England. The first is a study with undergraduate students from the University of Portsmouth that explored students' evolving sense of place in their term-time location. The second is a Society for Research into Higher Education (SRHE) funded study with

Lancaster University students examining the experience of the daily commute in relation to feelings of inclusion, wellbeing and students' orientations towards sustainable consumption practices. Both projects employed go along and walking interviews and were shaped theoretically by the mobilities turn. These mobile methods were vital in developing the emotional, sensory and affective characteristics of the students' interviews while we accompanied them on their journeys (Holton and Riley, 2014). This was particularly useful in developing awareness of the subtle references and impromptu self-reflexivity that sedentarist interviews may miss. Whilst there is perhaps no need to rehearse arguments for the mobilities turn in this journal, it is important to set out how we are working with these ideas. Following Cresswell (2010), we understand mobility as movements underpinned by relations of power and meaning so that physical, embodied practices come to represent and reiterate values and meanings of wider society. This means that all mobilities must be understood in relation to one another and that there is no absolute immobility, just relative mobilities (Adey, 2006) that we mistake for immobility.

We are particularly interested in the relationships between emotion, (im)mobility and identity (Adey, 2010) and how this affects what and who everyday mobilities students are able to do and be. These emotional dimensions of university choice remain a point of interest in HE research (Christie, 2009), particularly in terms of how movement, negotiation and emotion underpins local students' experiences of the city and of being a student differs across a specific cohort and also throughout the period of the degree pathway (Holton, 2015a; 2015b). We extend by considering how the routinized mobilities of locally-based students may enliven debates about the embodied, mundane and everyday dimensions of university-related mobilities.

While we admit that these studies are brought together advantageously for the objective of this paper, these research locations characterise the complexity of commuting experiences for local students – albeit in specific and contrasting ways. Portsmouth, the UK's only island city, has excellent but limited transport links that funnel commuter students from across Southern England into the city. Many of the Portsmouth participants made, on average, a 40km round trip to university, yet this journey did not distract from them identifying as 'local' students. The university itself was established as part of the 'post-1992' initiative and currently sits in the middle of

the academic league tables (although it is one of the top modern institutions). In contrast, Lancaster University is a 1960s 'plate glass' institution that emulates the Oxbridge college model, with students assigned a college through which they live, study and graduate from. Its greenfield rural Lancashire site presents mobility constraints as students living in Lancaster itself often commute up three miles to get to the campus. These study sites demonstrate that there is no blueprint for examining the 'student experience'. The complex configuration of learning, living and social spaces coalesce to produce unique mobilities, identities and experiences for those that study within them. Our study does emphasise, however, that while these spaces may be exceptional, the combination of home, university and the spaces in-between will influence the mobilities of *all* those involved.

In terms of sampling, the Portsmouth data was derived from 31 walking interviews with undergraduate students conducted in and around the city in the spring of 2012. Each encounter lasted approximately 1-1.5 hours and the participants were encouraged to take the lead of the walk to make it as much as possible about 'their' experiences. The data for this paper has been taken from the experiences of thirteen participants who lived with parents or in their own homes and comprised students with a diverse range of non-university commitments which they had to consider alongside their academic timetable. This sample were primarily female (10), White British (12) and fairly even in terms of age (six of the participants were aged between 22 and 45 years of age). Eight participants lived with their parents and the remaining five lived in their own homes with partners, spouses and/or children. Only three participants lived in Portsmouth, while the other ten lived between eight and twenty miles from the city.

The Lancaster study provided 21 interviews (nine 'go along' interviews, using public transport; four walking interviews around campus; and eight interviews carried out in a fixed location on campus primarily because these participants were car users and, due to health and safety reasons, go along interviews were not possible). The sample includes a mix of undergraduate (14) and postgraduate (7) respondents, as well as young (9) and mature (12) students. Most participants were female (16) and White British (15). Seven participants lived with parents, others were co-habiting with a partner and/or family (10) or friends (1), and three lived. The interviews lasted

between 30 minutes and two hours. Only four participants lived in Lancaster; the other participants were located around the North West region, between eight and 55 miles away from the university campus.

Gendered embodiments on routes to and within university

Embodied mobilities of selfhood

This section examines how the participants reflected upon their everyday mobilities and how narratives of movement, flow and stasis allowed them to perform different identities that were both resistant of and constrained by traditional notions of gender, space and movement. Participants' orientations towards place and self are understood in relation to gendered embodments and how these inform practices of mobility, the meanings attached to movement and attempts to subvert notions of 'the local student' as being lesser/problematic partners in the mass HE system (Christie, Munro and Wager, 2005). Thus, participants tended to articulate their mobilities in ways that emphasised personal freedom and choice, and neoliberal self-advancement and responsibility, so as not stray too far from masculinist conceptions of "the ideal learner"; 'an autonomous individual unencumbered by domestic responsibilities, poverty or self-doubt" (Leathwood and O'Connell, 2003, 599). However, this process was uneven with some (usually male) respondents having greater access to these kinds of narratives through their embodied mobility practices than others for whom there were more explicit tensions and ambivalences. We pay particular attention to the tensions between the different spaces students inhabit (e.g. home, university, campus bars and clubs etc.) and the activities performed in them (e.g. care-giving, studying, identity work etc.) to reveal how everyday micro-geographies are shaped by, and a shaping of, gender identities for commuter students.

Although other studies of students who live at home focus on the pressures of managing travel and distance, care responsibilities or work, within a tightly constrained timetable (Christie, 2007) for many participants the daily commute was understood as a productive encounter that afforded ways to switch between or (de)activate different modes of selfhood. Movements to and from university were often characterised as therapeutic rather than hassled experiences and although

they were not always straightforwardly positive about public transport or lengthy motorway journeys, students reflected on the act of commuting as more than simply a barrier to overcome or as dead space connecting home and university. For many participants, the repetition of university-home mobilities became, over time, as meaningful and the destinations themselves (Adey, 2010). Notwithstanding, there were observable gendered differences in how meaning was conveyed and what this allowed participants to do in terms of tapping into notions of the unencumbered, individualist student.

For Darius, a White male 28-year-old PhD student living in Manchester with his partner, the daily commute engendered an important shift between different aspects of selfhood that also served to reinstate a sense of masculinist disconnection to notions of the local as a small-scale, provincial experience:

> "I don't, like, feel the liberty of coming up north into the countryside. I prefer getting back to the city. The size of the city. Feeling minuscule. It's a really good thing for me. I like that feeling when the train rolls in to the city; it just feels gritty and anonymous. More me I guess." (Darius, Lancaster)

Darius reflected on Lancaster's overwhelming 'whiteness' and its remoteness to other parts of the country. This way, developing a sense of selfhood as a student at Lancaster was contingent upon Darius' means of escape and maintaining connections with Manchester which he experienced as much more international, large-scale and in keeping with his sense of urban cosmopolitanism. Darius' everyday mobilities afforded him movement from the intimacy of his university activities, which involved playing in a sports team and dining at his supervisor's home, to the 'gritty anonymity' of the city with its traditionally masculine notions of risk and urban life. Thus, experimenting with scale and his presence as both local and non-local were integral to Darius' sense of self to the extent that these experiences of scale and space existed in synchronicity (in his mobilities) rather than in binary opposition. His mobility narratives were a way of shoring up masculinist notions of the ideal learner, as individualist and highly mobile, whilst simultaneously remaining connected to his local area where he felt comfortable. This process is, of course, as much a product of his social class position (discussed later in this paper) as his gendered performance of mobility. Nevertheless, this resulted in Darius's

ability, through his everyday embodied mobility performances, to resist and stand aside from traditional notions of the (culturally and economically) impoverished local student.

Access to such a narrative was not so readily available for Fleur, also a mature student, but who lived in a rural and fairly remote town 55 miles from Lancaster with her husband and two children. Notwithstanding their more obvious differences of status and location, Fleur's account of switching modes does share similarities to Darius. Both had experienced living overseas and both reflected on the more productive aspects of their commute and the value they derived from their everyday embodied practices of corporeal movement and other aspects of mobility. At 27 years, Fleur was the oldest student on her Law degree; after nine years of living abroad she began an access course, entering Lancaster University as a first generation entrant. Like Darius she described a rich and full experience at university; in only three months she had developed a good network of friends from the Law Society and from a student volunteering project. Fleur reiterated Darius' sentiments about the importance of daily mobility for facilitating the switch in modes of selfhood. There were differences, of course; namely that switching modes was embedded in the need to be there for others and to be able to continue to live in a close-knit rural community rather than being independent and anonymous:

> "I like travelling. I have always commuted. Because I've got kids and I've got a lot going on, I find that my time on the train *is my switch off time.* […] Thursday is my heavy day; I have a lot of lectures and my big seminar so by the time I'm done with uni on Thursdays my brain hurts. So I get on the train and I put my head phones in and I just zone out. It gives me 40 minutes where I can just, I dunno […]. Doing this degree, I couldn't be studying down the road and then just walk home and into the house to all the chaos of family life. I'd be so stressed and wound up. I don't want to walk into my house and be faced with like I need to go to the supermarket. This way, I finish my lesson, I stroll into the square. I get my bus and chill out on the bus; you learn to just have your quiet time. Once I'm on the train I get my laptop out, I might revisit seminar notes or make a list of things I need to go back to later. By the time I get home it's like I've closed the chapter on uni for the day. I've wound it

down. By the time I get through the door [at home] I can think straight and I'm in mum mode." (Fleur, Lancaster; emphasis added)

Fleur's narrative illuminates the ways in which her time on the move provided opportunities to push back against the demands of motherhood that awaited her at home. Through her movements through public space – the stroll through the square, riding the bus – she is able to sustain student mode for a little longer, making lists and revisiting reading, before closing that chapter for the day. This functionality of movement is not simply a way to reduce the costs of HE or to limit the impact of moving her family from where they are now settled. Indeed, her comments reveal the powerfully affective dimensions of mobility, for how it affords time for self-care and reflection, and for negotiating the complex and contradictory gendered experiences of 'student' and 'mother' simultaneously. This contrasts with other studies which characterise students like Fleur as 'day students' (Christie, Munro and Wager, 2005) and lacking time to care for the self (Reay, 2003). Whilst we are not suggesting that students like Fleur have straightforward experiences, her narrative does indicate that travel and mobility can generate positive emotions for mature women carers in the same way they can for independent, autonomous city dwelling men like Darius. Indeed, it was the specific practice of digital and communicative mobilities that allowed women like Fleur to connect the different realms of experience, and the identities that they supported, in ways that felt fluid and emotionally sustaining. She and others talked in detail about the value of social media for blurring the spatial and temporal boundaries of their student and home lives, so that these existed in parallel rather than in tension.

Urry's (2008) work is crucial in reminding us to understand the complex assemblage between the different tenets of mobility – from the virtual and imaginative to the corporeal, mobilities and movements of objects – and to understand the interaction between these. The mobilities paradigm thus directs the focus to the greater variety of mobilities and the ways in which they interact for student commuters. For students like Fleur digital mobilities and communications are essential to peer relationships and to how students manage different responsibilities and modes of selfhood. It is these kinds of movements that allow mature students with care obligations to feel the freedom and flexibility espoused in traditional notions of the unencumbered leaner

without actually 'being there' and, crucially, to indulge in traditionally feminine practices of 'support group culture' which are integral to emotional wellbeing and relationships (Brownlie, 2014). Thus, mobilities when understood as more than physical movements from A to B can reveal the important ways that students who commute generate a sense of belonging.

'Othered' mobilities – interruptions and flows

Whilst Fleur's experiences were not exceptional across the two studies, there was plenty of evidence that suggests that the everyday mobilities of women who commute to university bring feelings of constraint and difficulty too. Eve, a student in the Portsmouth study with a young son, reiterates many of Fleur's comments about managing identities and responsibilities through travel and mobility; however, she appeared ambivalent at how and whether this could be achieved. Whereas Fleur found other students more attuned to her need to be at home and to manage her mobilities quite closely, Eve had different experiences:

> "I wouldn't say they [other students] were hugely welcoming, I think they tried. I found it difficult personally to integrate into a new group. It's something I find difficult to do anyway so it was hard to join in. Plus, having a child at home, other than this one girl who also had a child at home, nobody else had kids so it was really hard to grasp that I had to go home and that I had these outside commitments that weren't uni based." (Eve, Portsmouth)

As a mature student and mother, Eve's need to be mobile and to weave together home and university marked her out as Other on campus when interacting with peers. As Loveday (2016) argues (citing Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody, 2001) signs of fertility, fecundity and motherhood in education "challenge established boundaries of 'appropriateness', so that the mere presence of a [female] body creates a feeling of disorder within a specific social field" (11). The fact that this is reiterated again and again, through Eve's family-related mobilities on and off campus, is significant here in inscribing upon her an identity as Other and making notions of the flexible, ideal learner out of reach. That said, Eve's everyday mobilities were more complex than other studies of class and gender conclude. She still derived pleasure and productivity from her on campus mobilities, and, as in Fleur's case, it was a means of

escape, a chance to resist the demands of care and home life and an important strategy for managing 'spillage', of her identities:

> "In many ways it's easier at uni to study […] I mean, at home I can shut the door but sometimes life does spill over into it [study time]. My little boy wants Mummy all of a sudden. It's like "Mummy look, Daddy's done this great drawing with me" and he'll want to show me and I'll get interrupted in the flow." (Eve, Portsmouth)

Interruptions and flows were recurring themes across the two studies; although invoked in different ways and in reference to different embodiments of gender, they are telling of how the experience of being a student is often narrated in the language of (im)mobilities rather than attachment to specific places. For other students, like Fahemma, a young (18-year-old) student at Lancaster who lived at home with her family 48 miles away from the campus, interruptions and flows were both the concern of and supported by family networks. Faheema relied on her parents to drive her to and from university each day. She is a young Muslim woman and expressed anxiety about leaving home to attend university. She perhaps expressed one of the strongest attachments to the local across the studies; however, as she reflected on her everyday mobilities she was able to invoke notions of flexibility and self-responsibility that are attached to the ideal learner in HE:

> "I don't have an issue with 9am lectures I really don't. I think if someone is committed to getting an education then they will make those lectures." (Faheema, Lancaster)

Contrary to findings in other studies (Christie, Munro and Wager, 2005), Faheema did not feel students who commute should receive more recognition and support from the institution to accommodate the mobilities that supported their participation and, in this way, is resistant to the idea of the 'caring academy' with its gendered subtext. At one level then, mobilities become attached to and embedded within performances of the neoliberal subject so desired by contemporary HE. On a separate level, however, these same discourses of masculinist flexibility and self-reliance can be quite harmful for the students like Faheema, who turn to their families rather than their institution for support. Faheema was so fearful of appearing

'out of place' on campus, that she would regularly call her father on her mobile to ask him to guide her around the campus from memory. Moreover, she tried to manage seamless mobilities between lectures and early finishes so that there were few occasions on which she was left 'dwelling' on campus:

> "I relied on my dad such a lot [during her first months]. I was like "dad, I actually don't know what I'm doing" and he said, "look, you'll find your way around". I had to sort of, once I left a certain lecture I would just look at my map. I had a real fear of getting lost. So I did have to ring my dad several times for his help. I didn't want to ask other students. I didn't want to stand out. Now I know my way around I am much more comfortable and I am feeling more at ease […] There are times, though, when I am just sitting there and I want to be at home. I like that I can just be in touch and [her parents] will set off early. If my plans change I will actually let them know. One of my meetings got cancelled the other day and I text home and I was so, itching for a reply because I wanted to know what I was doing, staying or leaving early, and I was in a lesson and I couldn't contact them. So I waited an extra hour. It was a bit frustrating I must admit." (Faheema, Lancaster)

Wearing traditional Muslim dress, Faheema felt that she already stood out on what is an unmistakably white campus. To be lost and unaccomplished in her everyday on-campus mobilities would simply exacerbate the experience of being a body out of place, as Loveday (2016) has noted.

John, a part-time mature postgraduate student at Lancaster, provides a useful counterpoint to this notion of (in)competent mobilities. Whereas Faheema's narrative invoked feelings of nervousness and discomfort at being seen in her everyday embodied mobilities, John went to great lengths to be recognised and supported in his 24-mile round-trip cycle to and from university, and also to work. Thus, much of his narrative was concerned with seeking out spaces to facilitate his torsions of (im)mobility (Bissell, 2014) – the stops and starts – that were integral to his identity as a student and also as a keen cyclist:

> "Because there's always that thought when you're planning your [cycle] ride, it's an added stress for the day: where am I going to put my stuff? […]

Because I don't have to keep lugging it to work every day, which is a huge drawback with cycling. So I've got four lockers [on campus], one of which I dump all my kit, I've got shirts, toiletries, I've also got some kind of spare, I'm quite an organised person so I've got kind of spare tyres, inner tubes just in case I have a mechanical. […] I don't mind, no, [cycling is] important to me […] I tend to be like working on something in the library, like if it's heavy reading, and then when I'm out on the [cycle] home I can sort of process that; like that's a really important time for me I don't know my brain just needs that. Then when I get home I'm ready to work again. I do some of my best work after a ride." (John, Lancaster)

John's account of seeking out his lockers and managing his everyday mobility between university, home and work reveals how some marginal mobilities (such as cycling) carried less risk in terms of how they made participants visible to others. John, like Darius, was able to employ traditionally masculinist notions of selfhood through the narrative of independence, flexibility and self-responsibility attached to his everyday cycle. Moreover, John's concern for the stops and starts of his mobility was based in his commitment to a regime of self-care, a sense of responsibility for the environment, and need to bookend his day with physical activity and, therefore, contrast sharply with the accounts of Fleur, Faheema and Eve.

The women presented here demonstrate the ways in which everyday mobilities are dependent upon networks and relationships, both at home and at university. In such cases being a commuter student and considering the disruptions and negotiations in space and time that commuting brings through stops and starts did not necessarily create 'different worlds' (Holdsworth, 2009a) but certainly contributed towards erecting barriers between their student and non-student lives. The iterative process of moving between home and the campus means that for students who commute, particularly those whose mobilities are supported by, and/or are dependent upon, relational networks, the constant (re)negotiation over which aspects of their daily routines need prioritising can – to quote Eve – lead to a 'spillage' of one set of routines into another. This spillage is, for John, however, much more welcome and part of the fusing together of his multiple identities of student, cyclist and employee. Despite the clear gender differences in how these torsions of (im)mobility are lived

and narrated, commonalities exist across the studies which relate to the affective and embodied dimensions of mobility. As Jensen, Sheller and Wind (2015) maintain, "whether driving, walking, bus riding, bicycling, or train passengering, each route has its own embodied dispositions, visceral feeling, rhythms and affective resonance" (375).

Thus far we have presented masculine notions of mobility as easily accessed and performed (mostly) by the men in the study; however, before closing this section we want to trouble this a little by introducing Greg, a 22-year-old Mathematics student who lived with his family eight miles from Portsmouth. Like many students, Greg sought social interactions through university societies, first joining a sport's society in year one and latterly a church group at the university chaplaincy. Each were important drivers for defining Greg's everyday mobilities both on and off campus and were crucial in facilitating and thus maintaining some of this:

> "Last year I joined a sport society and I really enjoyed the fitness side of it. It was a bit 'blokey' [sic] though – y'know, going out and boys fighting with bags of sick and things like that, really childish sorts of things, and I couldn't really cope with that. I found it was very much, "you join us all the time or you're not part of the group" and I was quite shocked at that so I relied a lot on my home friends and stopped coming down to Portsmouth so much. […] I don't belong to the [sport] society anymore but I am involved with the church group and I socialise with them and I know people in the chaplaincy too. They are who I prefer socialising with really." (Greg, Portsmouth)

Here, Greg's sense of not 'fitting in' appears to (un)intentionally conform to the subjective norms of immobility that may embody disadvantage for local students (Christie et al., 2008). Yet as his comments infer, the hyper-masculinity of the sport's society, particularly through the hegemonic initiations that were performed (Anderson, 2011) directly affected Greg's interactions with university life. His detachment from the society coincided with an increased reliance upon home friends, changing his daily routinized movements to and from university and limiting his social interactions in term-time spaces. As Adey (2010) suggests, mobilities affect, and are directly affected by, emotions and Greg's subsequent presence at the church group exemplifies this. The changes of activity and location reinvigorated his

sense of belonging within the university, reconnecting him to term-time spaces and people. However, in avoiding those hyper-masculine activities and spaces, there was less opportunity for Greg to resist the traditional notions of 'the local student' and the ideas about spatial fixity that come with this. Moreover, while masculinities are relatively under-explored in terms of mobilities (Morgan, 2005), Greg's resistance to the performances, or 'ways of doing' masculinities emphasise that they are always mediated through a myriad of social divisions.

Socio-spatial mobilities: the influence of class, age and place

In this section we examine HE mobilities as inherently connected to class and the perceived notion that non-traditional students are likely to be constrained by their immobility. Recent trends of 'middling mobilities' (Conradson and Latham, 2005) highlight the influence the middle classes have had upon 21st Century socio-spatial movements. This links to HE movements in terms of who *goes to* university (Forsey, 2015). Moreover, the socio-spatial mobilities often discussed in HE research often links 'local' access with first generation university attendees from working class or minority backgrounds (Christie, 2007) and are couched in perceived difficulties with 'fitting in' at university (Holdsworth, 2006). In contrast, the mobility experiences presented here were often representative of multiple classed and aged identities, performed across and within different environments. Moving between selves and different locations/settings was a common theme for commuter students and there were observable classed dimensions in terms of how practices and meanings of mobility were understood. Here class was expressed in terms of age, experience and relationships with place through their everyday mobilities (perhaps through disruptions to how places and/or movements through space may have been perceived as a consequence of becoming students) These participants sought to establish and maintain (and possibly even protect) their, at times overlapping, social positions during term-time. To revisit the earlier aims of the paper, through the experiences of these students we have begun to problematise the presumed linearity of mobility and what are seemingly enduring binary student positions (middle-class mobility versus working-class immobility; ease versus struggle; fluidity versus rootedness). Returning to Darius, his daily commute engendered a shifting between different aspects of self that also reinstated a sense of his orientation to the world as

a well-travelled and cosmopolitan subject. On one hand, Darius mobilised his inclination to be a team player and group leader in Lancaster:

> "Lancaster is great. It's brilliant. I think I'm lucky because the department always has something going on. We have reading groups, which I organise, we have like weekly things that we do together, we play [sports game] I normally have dinner at my supervisor's house once a week. Then there's the supervisions [meetings] too […] fortnightly. It's quite an intense vibe. But I like that. I grew up playing football since I was eight so I like group stuff, I don't like being cut off. I like being active in that, in the mix if you will. I was shitting it. Sorry. I was really panicked about it [the distance]. It's a long way to come to spend the day on your own, and then travel back. But it's never been like that." (Darius, Lancaster)

And yet his process of departure/return to Manchester reclaimed his worldliness and a sense of being diverse and cultured in a way that Lancaster was not:

> "There's not enough going on [in Lancaster]. I like Manchester [and] last night I went to a Korean restaurant. Those are things I like to do and I couldn't give them up for the sake of being a bit handier, day to day, getting to uni I mean. Those things about city living are very important for me. It just doesn't feel right [in Lancaster] as nice a place as it is, and it is nice. For like half a day. But you can't live somewhere like Lancaster. Not when you have travelled and stuff." (Darius, Lancaster)

Referencing having "travelled and stuff", Darius referred to his previous experiences of back-packing and studying abroad. In doing so he invoked a disembedded and classed sense of self and, through his everyday mobilities, was able to resist and stand apart from what he perceived to be the parochial rural spaces of Lancaster. Darius, therefore layered aspects of his team-player, sporty youthful self with this more anonymous identity quite easily, and the practice of travelling facilitated this. However, it is important to question the extent to which this playful, pastiche approach to classed identity is embedded within a perceived notion of disembedded spatial 'snobbery' and how a similar process might be experienced by others who may approach university with divergent biographies and/or do not live in large cities.

Sarah exhibited similar superiority regarding her term-time location. Sarah was in her mid-40s and had left a high-powered career to read Law at the University of Portsmouth. She was in her first year and her recollections of memories and experiences of Portsmouth were often related to both the actions of her younger peers and her current residence in rural West Sussex. Sarah often talked dismissively of her fellow students' lack of knowledge of the city, particularly the spaces in which they might socialise:

> "I used to love going shopping in Gunwharf [Quays] but since becoming a student I would say that if I were to go out in Portsmouth I would go out in the Albert Road area rather than the Gunwharf area as it's all a bit posey [sic]. [The students] they go to Liquid and get really drunk and get thrown out. Get arrested and throw up on themselves and sometimes I have to tell them off (laughs). I've never really been that kind of, well it's a bit ghastly really." (Sarah, Portsmouth)

Sarah's comments, while provocative, are indicative of how age and social position might trouble the everyday mobilities of local students, particularly those with strong existing networks in the city. This provides a sense of, what Savage (2010) terms 'elective belonging', whereby:

> "middle class people claim moral rights over place through their capacity to move to, and put down roots in, a specific place which was not just functionally important to them but which also mattered symbolically" (116).

Here, Sarah's engagements with 'mobile sense-making' (Jensen, 2010) reveals how relational performances, emotions, materialities and routines contribute towards her movements in and through what were simultaneously intensely familiar but seemingly distanced term-time spaces. This was not unique to Sarah and these incongruent relationships between local and non-local students were evident in many of the interviews. For example, Jane, a mature student who lived across the water from Portsmouth Harbour, also spoke of being confused by the changing landscape of the city, not because she lamented any changes in her current social life, but more that she was disappointed that her younger peers might not understand the context of her own experiences of being a resident in Portsmouth. Similar to Sarah, during

Jane's walking interview she stated she would never spend time in Gunwharf Quays: "it's too studenty [sic]". Yet it turned out she chose our visit to point out the places where she socialised with her non-student friends in her home town, which was across the harbour from where we stood. She stared across as she recounted her social activities there:

> "When I used to go out before I was married, that sounds like I don't go out at all now (laughs), you knew the pubs that you went to and you knew the night clubs. When I used to go night clubbing there used to be one on the Guildhall Square and then the rest of them were down Southsea. So that's why I don't always connect students coming here [Gunwharf Quays] for their night clubs. The students would never bother to go over but a night out is a lot cheaper in [town]. And as long as you stay away from the main High Street you're alright." (Jane, Portsmouth)

This extract demonstrates how Jane's mobilities, identities, histories and belongings appear to collide in her term-time location. Feelings of belonging and/or not belonging are important for this process, particularly in terms of switching between different identities, and for Jane, this means responding to the shifting social landscape of the city and her capacity to actually *do* things relative to her peers. As Bissell (2016) suggests, certain mobilities (like student commuting) consist of an entanglement of enablement and constraint, privilege and disenfranchisement. Hence, for Jane, the mobile spaces in which she inhabits (e.g. the movement between home, university, work and social spaces etc.) and the materialities that she practices contribute towards developing fluidity between the disparate facets of her identities that are simultaneously reflexive and constraining.

One method employed by commuting students to ameliorate negative consequences from their changing social landscapes was to keep them separate. As Bissell (2013) argues, there is a social obligation of our everyday lives to be proximate (be it physically or virtually through social networks). Yet whilst such corporeal propinquity (Urry, 2002) may be favoured in many situations, for several of the participants here, this was quite selective and couched in their past, current and future social positions. Nina, a 25-year-old student studying Geography at Portsmouth explains how her

everyday rhythms (her movements, identities and understandings of place) became somewhat disrupted by leaving her permanent job and becoming a student:

> "I think that most of the time I don't feel like a student. I only feel like a student when I'm here and I spend more time away from uni than I do here, so most of the time I don't want to feel like a student because I don't live in that student environment, it's not me. I'm not in any way ashamed of it, I find that most of the time it's completely impractical, especially with my work. To be honest I'm only doing this to better myself and get on with my future. All the social stuff just isn't relevant at the moment, uni is just something else that I do and I find it completely separate." (Nina, Portsmouth)

Nina's convergent (and divergent) mobilities (Bissell, 2013) are co-produced by her multiple and contrasting social, working, domestic and learner identities. As Cresswell (2006) argues, "the way people are enabled or constrained in terms of their mobile practices differs markedly according to their position in social hierarchies" (199). So, the shirking of the student identity, the management of time spent at university, the admission that her degree is to afford a 'better future' for herself, points towards how Nina's socio-spatial mobilities are linked to her classed interpretations of university. This is evident in her understandings of the mechanics of HE, of gaining a degree as an endpoint, which were echoed through her everyday mobilities – her agency to engage with university spaces and university life in specific ways that reflected her position. Hence, this problematises notions of classed socio-spatial mobilities being rigidly vertical (Urry, 2007) by encouraging us to understand the interactions between the binary classed positions discussed in this section (e.g. working class 'journeys' versus middle class 'entitlement' (Crozier et al., 2008)). This problematises this persistent (and presumed) hierarchical linearity of mobility, producing instead more hybridised interpretations of students' mobile lives.

Conclusion

In this paper we demonstrate the significance of everyday mobilities for commuter students who are, too often, regarded as immobile and rooted within homogenous local spaces. Whilst clear differences exist between the sorts of mobility performances presented here and the fluid, seamless, hyper-mobilities attached to

international and elite students, we present a strong case for valuing the everyday interweaving of different modes of mobility for a growing section of students who choose to participate locally. Indeed, while the everyday mobility performances of commuter students reveal tensions and contradictions underlying the experience of *being* a student, to assume that the negotiations and balancing acts that ensue are a result of being fixed in the local vastly misrepresents these students' everyday socio-spatial engagements with the university, their mobilities on campus, and also, within the city. Moreover, embedded presumptions exist about how 'the local' is perceived by students who remain at home during university, notably that these spaces are perceived as safe, working class, feminised and, crucially, unchanging. The examples discussed here reveal how local students might perceive term-time spaces as rather dull and small when set against their shifting outlook and ambitions. Yet relatedly, while local everyday mobilities may be couched as small in scale and unremarkable, the experiences of our participants demonstrate more dynamic, complex and even contradictory interpretations of mobility. We must not, therefore, assume that all students who choose to live at home are looking for continuity and sameness. Instead we must appreciate how mobilities take shape across a range of (material, digital and imagined) spaces and temporal canvases that extend beyond the discrete rhythms of the university calendar.

There are three central points to take away from this paper. First, is how a focus on everyday, routinized movements allows us to consider student mobilities as more dynamic than linear transitions. We argue here that this presumed linearity of mobility, and the binaries attached to this, masks the complexities of how students actually experience 'being mobile' at university. Hence, mobilities into, through and away from the campus are much more than constraints on participation or barriers to be overcome. They can be understood instead as part of everyday strategies for managing feelings of safety and refuge, away from the stresses and obligations of life more generally; for coping with contrasting identities, embodied enablements, and sense of self; and as sites of agency and improvisation in the seaming together of everyday life in a complex and fast moving society. Crucially, these are not footnotes to a lesser or second-best university experience; everyday mobilities reveal the fundamental and embodied strategies for action which, to reiterate Ploner (2016), students' feelings of and strategies for resilience are developed through their

mobilities, and through the constant negotiation of movement and sense of place. The findings discussed here add weight to this claim.

Strategies of resistance and subversion are heavily gendered and classed, of course. This is our second point. We have sought to challenge the use of monolithic terms like 'immobile' and 'local' which are often used as a catch all to denote a range of proximate and more remote students' experiences. Nonetheless, the politics of UK HE is clearly underpinned by a politics of mobility and the specific interplay of digital, corporeal and imagined mobilities is complexly refracted along class, gender and ethnic lines. This paper exposes the different ways that male and female students from differing socio-economic backgrounds and with varying mobility capital were able to negotiate their mobilities. Importantly, our participants articulated their performances in terms of freedom and independence, care and obligation, cosmopolitanism and community and we invite further research that responds to other intersectional student identities in similar/different ways.

To close, our third point is how students' knowledges, experiences and identities were produced through their everyday movements and changing interactions. It is often assumed that knowledges, experiences and identities are (re)produced within the confines of 'official' campus spaces. Here we illuminate how everyday mobility performances (on/off campus) work towards, rather than, against the process of knowledge production, identity formation and feelings of belonging. We recommend universities and policy makers take heed of this and think beyond commuting as problematic for these three dimensions of student engagement and adopt more critical and creative approaches to attending to how off-campus students generate greater senses of affiliation to their university.

Notes

[1] Primarily a US term, we make reference to commuter students here as a way of demonstrating that 'local' students are mobile, active agents, rather than necessarily static and 'of' their term-time location (Holdsworth, 2009a).

[2] We define micro-geographies as the process of 'being in' and 'moving through' locations (Büscher and Urry, 2009).

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