

# Identity Trouble and Opportunity in Women's Narratives of Residence

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This article employs a narrative and discursive approach to investigate contemporary identities of place and meanings of place for identity. Transcribed interview extracts are analysed to illustrate how speakers discursively construct a place of residence and a new residential identity, and how this identity work in relation to place conforms to the individualized contemporary identities discussed by Rose, Walkerdine and others. A construction of a place of residence in terms of opportunity enables a speaker to take up a residential identity corresponding to a 'choosing self' and also to present her life course in terms of choices she has made. A claim to a new residential identity can offer an alternative positioning, for example, for people positioned outside the conventional born-and-bred narrative. However, this claim to a more individualized and agentic identity of place is not necessarily unproblematic, and presents particular issues for women speakers.

## INTRODUCTION

Research on place-related identities in contemporary western societies confronts contradictory commonsense assumptions. One is that a connection exists between a place and the people who inhabit it. This appears, for example, in generalizations about people of named places ('London', 'Yorkshire') or people who live in certain kinds of place, such as those defined by urbanization ('suburbs', 'the country'). This assumption is linked to the notion of local or native identities which are based in long-term personal and family connection to a place. Such identities imply a distinction between the people who authentically belong there and others who are newcomers or outsiders. A story is evoked of successive generations living in the same place, sharing a common 'born and bred' identity derived from blood and tradition. The second, quite different assumption

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about place and identity is that people nowadays are freed from traditional ties to place. They move house at their convenience, change their place of residence to follow jobs and opportunities, and live wherever they choose. The places where they live are no longer important for their identities, or perhaps a place of residence is important to its residents in a different way, as somewhere chosen to suit who they are.

Finnegan (1998) has suggested that there is a strong overlap between academic theories and the everyday narratives or stories, like these ones, that affect our understanding and experience of places such as cities.<sup>1</sup> The born-and-bred story I have outlined has parallels with the myth of common origin cited by theorists of the nation, such as Connor (1994). The second assumption accords with theories of identity that suggest that the contemporary person selectively constructs an individual identity to replace what was once conferred by the larger society and its structures. Theorists such as Walkerdine (2003) propose that in contemporary society, variously described as 'postmodern', 'high modern' and 'neo-liberal' (see also Giddens, 1991; Rose, 1996; 1999), it is not only the way of life, such as people's relationship to places, that has changed: the very nature of identity itself is different. Identities are more fragmented and more individual. They are not straightforwardly conferred on people, but are chosen and actively constructed.

In this article, I employ a narrative and discursive approach to investigate new residential identities and contemporary meanings of place for identity. An analysis of interview material suggests that there are new identities in relation to place of residence which correspond to the individualized identities described by Walkerdine and others as a feature of contemporary society. However, as with the new work identities discussed by Walkerdine, the analysis suggests that women may have particular difficulties in claiming these new residential identities. 'Trouble' (Wetherell, 1998; Wetherell and Edley, 1998) in speakers' identity work indicates possible limits to individualization and could be seen as confirmation of the constraints that, according to Wetherell and Davies and Harre (Davies and Harre, 1990), larger social meanings set on individual identity work.

## **NEW IDENTITIES OF PLACE?**

A place can be understood as a repository of social meanings and identities, including those given by narratives and by contrast or connection with other places (Massey, 2004). Theorists seeking to explain the significance of nation and national places have discussed the importance of history and tradition, however mythical (e.g., Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983). Other named places, such as counties and cities, have their own historical narratives. There are also narratives around certain kinds of

places. For example, the contrast between the city and the countryside invokes a 'temporal dimension' (Finnegan, 1998: 15) and a dystopian story in which nature in the form of the English countryside is 'the unspoiled other' (Macnaghten and Urry, 1998: 36) threatened by urbanization. The meanings attached to places imply identities for the people of a particular place. For example, an association of wealth or established suburbs or late-night clubbing extends from the place to suggest something about the identity of the people who belong there. And the same association can imply an identity for a person in a different relation to the place, for example a visitor or a resident who does not fit in.

There are also established narratives which connect people and places. These narratives can ascribe or confer identities, albeit within a range of possibilities and variations. For example, native and local identities are based in a born-and-bred story of continuity of residence and a long-term personal and family connection with a place. This overlaps with a narrative of successive generations and the gender and sexual identities associated with family, for example, positioning women as wives, mothers and homemakers (cf. Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis, 1995).

There have always been people whose life trajectories do not conform to the born-and-bred story. However, in contemporary western societies, changing life circumstances present a more general challenge to this narrative, as the second commonsense assumption suggests. Continuity of residence is disrupted by moves to new houses and jobs. New family structures create different roles. Both changes potentially weaken the former social ties of local networks and communities. There are more people whose lives do not fit into the conventional relationship to place of residence. One consequence might be that the connection between place and identity is severed, so that where people live no longer seems relevant to who they are. Alternatively, places of residence may become significant in a different way, giving rise to new identities of place.

Some theorists argue that the nature of identity itself has changed in contemporary western societies. They suggest that the identities given or conferred by larger social structures have generally become less important than more individualized identities which people construct and claim for themselves. For example, Giddens (1991) claims that in the environment of an advanced capitalist society, which he calls 'high modernity', the reflexive project of the self is greater than in any other socio-historic situation. Rose (1996; 1999) and Walkerdine (2003) similarly argue that within contemporary western societies, the onus is on the individual to 'render her or his life meaningful as if it were the outcome of individual choices' (Rose 1999, quoted by Walkerdine, 2003: 240), shaping the story through the telling and, in doing so, taking up what Rose (1996: 17) describes as the identity of a 'choosing self'. These theorists approach

life stories as individual constructions and emphasize the importance of intention and choice in people's identity work.

These theorists are not suggesting that the claim to an identity as a free and agentic individual eradicates obligations or constraints. Giddens argues that for the person in high modernity there is an absence of tradition and existing structures, but this absence creates an inescapable obligation to construct and present an individual identity. Rose, somewhat differently, associates the focus on constructing an identity as a 'choosing' individual with the internalization of previously social constraints rather than their disappearance. Walkerdine (2003) offers an example which suggests that limitations are reinterpreted rather than removed. Her interest is in how 'new workers' reject class identities for an identity given by a discourse of 'upward mobility'. As an example of a self-realizing life project with relation to work, she cites a secretary who describes the experience of a series of over-demanding jobs in terms of a individual narrative of achievement and career trajectory and also a personal 'psychological' narrative of not feeling good enough. In claiming a new identity as upwardly mobile, this woman must still contend with difficulties that arise from her relationships with other people, even if she interprets these difficulties in individualized terms.

The change described by Walkerdine, from a 'given' social identity, of class, to an 'achieved' personal identity, of career success or failure, has possible parallels in identities of place. The kind of born-and-bred identity that I have already described may be supplanted by a more individualized connection to a chosen place of residence. Writers on narrative and discourse, particularly those working in the field of social psychology, offer a theoretical and also an analytic approach for the investigation of contemporary identity work in relation to place of residence.

#### **A NARRATIVE AND DISCURSIVE APPROACH TO IDENTITY**

Narrative and discursive theorists approach shared stories and social meanings as resources which pre-exist and shape particular instances of talk. Bruner (1991) uses the term 'canonical narratives' for a culture's stories of the accepted or normal. He suggests that the more contingent narratives in ordinary talk are used by a speaker to explain deviations or exceptions from the canonical or normal narratives of the culture. Similarly, Mishler (1999) suggests that in telling their life stories, speakers 'appropriate and resist' what he calls the cultural 'master' narratives. Discursive psychologists (e.g., Edley, 2001; Potter and Wetherell, 1987) analyse the shared meanings and established logics of talk, including the words and images which speakers use. The term 'interpretative repertoire' has been proposed to describe a 'relatively coherent way ... of talking

about objects and events in the world' (Edley, 2001: 198) and 'a culturally familiar and habitual link of argument comprised of recognizable themes, commonplaces and tropes' (Wetherell, 1998: 400). It is a more specific and analytically focused concept than the Foucauldian notion of a discourse (cf. Carabine, 2001: 268). An analysis of repertoires looks for patterns across a body of talk which indicate different speakers' use of shared resources. The commonality of resources is the basis for generalization.

These meanings and stories are also resources for the identity work which is carried out in talk. This is not to say that identities are 'just talk' but that talk is understood as part of a continuum of meaningful life practices. Sclater (2003: 319) ascribes to narrative psychology a 'critical view', which sees 'language, not as reflecting experience, but as constitutive of both experience and subjectivity'. Similarly, discursive psychologists (e.g., Edley, 2001; Wetherell, 1998) approach talk not just as the expression or outward manifestation of identity but the site in which identities are constructed and taken up and performed. Davies and Harre (1990) suggest that in the course of talk, speakers position themselves and are positioned, including by other speakers. A position can be defined as a temporarily occupied coherent identity with its own 'vantage point' or perspective. A person's overall identity, so far as one exists, is not single or fixed but an ongoing construction from the aggregate of previous positionings in various situations and interactions, including the narratives through which the speaker has positioned herself: Davies and Harre call these the 'cumulative fragments of a lived autobiography' (1990: 49). Identity work is an ongoing and open-ended reflexive project for the speaker. The narrative of a life is therefore understood as a work in progress, shaped both by the purposes of the current telling (a communicative focus) and by previous tellings which simultaneously serve as resources for the speaker and a constraint on too much variation.

The shared or social nature of talk and its resources also set limits on the identity work that is possible. Davies and Harre (1990) suggest that subject positions are constituted through the larger discourses of society, although people can make choices about taking them up. Similarly, Wetherell (1998) suggests that discourses make available multiple subject positions which speakers negotiate. These writers emphasize the constraints or limits on speakers' identity work. Wetherell is interested in those constraints which derive from the successive turns of talk which are the focus of conversation analysis. Davies and Harre discuss how people are positioned by others in the unfolding conversation, and also by the requirement to conform to 'the storylines which are embedded in fragments of the participants' autobiographies' (1990: 48). This is not to say that speakers construct a 'linear non-contradictory autobiography' (p. 49) through their talk, but nonetheless they are already positioned by their

previous histories and talk. Identity is therefore understood as in part chosen by an active speaker but in part socially determined or conferred.

How do these restrictions or limits operate on identity work in practice? Wetherell (1998) suggests this can be seen in an analysis of talk data. Limits or constraints appear to the analyst as 'trouble' (Wetherell, 1998; Wetherell and Edley, 1998). This term is used with two slightly different meanings. The first is of a troubled identity as one which is negatively valued or 'not creditable' (Wetherell, 1998: 398), for example, when a young man talking about his sexual adventures is positioned by another speaker as 'on the moral low ground'. The second, which I take up in my analysis, is of a troubled identity as one which is potentially 'hearable' and challengeable by others as implausible or inconsistent with other identities that are claimed. As Wetherell and Edley (1998: 161) put it, '... departures from "what everybody knows to be appropriate" require explanation and create "trouble" in the interaction which will need repair'. Similarly, Gubrium and Holstein (2001: 9) suggest: 'Our identities must resonate with our community's understandings of who and what individuals might possibly be, or else we have some explaining to do.' There are also similarities with Bauman's notion of 'ambivalence', cited by Walkerdine (2003) and characterized by her as 'the problem of contradiction between positions, possible identities, identifications and the shaky move between them' (2003: 247). However, Wetherell and Edley's discursive psychological approach is more concerned with the transient formulations and subject positions of talk 'on the ground, in this very conversation' (1998: 395). As I have already outlined, part of a speaker's reflexive identity work is to construct coherence, however temporarily, out of multiplicity and fluidity.

In a study of place and identity, a narrative and discursive analysis of talk data can reveal the discursive resources associated with particular places of residence and also the general relationship of residence. The analysis can be employed to investigate speakers' identity work in relation to current and former places of residence, for example, through the ways that these places are constructed in talk and speakers' positionings in relation to place. It can explore the extent to which they take up new residential identities that correspond to the individualized new identities described by Walkerdine and others. In addition, a narrative and discursive analysis can investigate the constraints on speaker's identity work which appear as 'trouble' in their talk.

## **THE INTERVIEW PROJECT**

The data I analyse are taken from a project on 'Place and Identity', conducted between August 1998 and June 2000. The participants had responded to a invitation in a university newspaper to talk about place and identity,

including their 'experiences, ideas and feelings' about where they lived. Nineteen women were interviewed about their current and former places of residence, the features of these which they valued or found problematic, other places they considered important in their lives, and their expectations about where they would live in the future. The interviews were informal with a list of questions used as prompts where required. Interview questions were phrased to allow participants to interpret 'place' as they wished. Each participant was interviewed once, for approximately an hour. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and analysed as a single body of data.

All the women were resident at the time of interview in London or another area of the south of England accessible to the university where the research was based.<sup>2</sup> All were in part-time or full-time paid employment. Their other life circumstances varied. Most were owner-occupiers of flats and houses but some were tenants, one was boarding with relatives and one lived in a residence connected to her workplace. Their ages ranged between late twenties and early fifties. Some lived alone, some with a child or children, some with a partner or a partner and children.

The lives of the project's participants, as they described them to me, echoed the mobility and instability of residence which I have discussed as a possible feature of contemporary society. Of the 19 women interviewed, only two still lived in or near the place where they had been born and grown up, and both of them had left and then returned. Nine had lived in more than one country for extended periods, not including moves between England, Scotland and Wales. Two still lived away from their country of birth. Of course, these numbers, while interesting, are too small to be significant or representative and I was not conducting a quantitative analysis.<sup>3</sup> My interest was in the consequences of commonly held meanings and understandings for speakers' identity work in relation to place of residence. In analysing the body of interview data, I looked first for patterns across interviews as indicative of a shared discursive resource, such as an interpretative repertoire (cf. Taylor, 2003). I then examined the implications of this resource for the identity work of particular speakers, including the identities it made available and trouble around those identities. The interview extracts presented below are illustrative of larger patterns which occurred across the data, although the other occurrences were not necessarily equally succinct or easily quotable.

### **CHOSEN RESIDENTIAL IDENTITIES**

The extracts I analyse are from interviews with three participants who were resident in the Greater London area. In Extract One the first speaker, indicated as P1, talks about the town in the North of England where she and her husband had both grown up.

Extract One<sup>4</sup>

- 1 P: I don't feel I don't have any sort of (.)  
 2 um I don't have any dealings with that particular town any more that is  
 3 it seems to it for me it's been a closed book (INT: Right) I don't have  
 4 any family who live there any more (.)  
 5 not immediate family so to me it was just a place where I lived at the  
 6 time and ah I have more I feel (.)  
 7 more part of a London community than I do part of that um and in terms  
 8 of my (.)  
 9 what moved me away from that was going away to university and then  
 10 sort of moving down to London for work after that so that's been the  
 11 pattern and (.)  
 12 finding that this area in terms of its opportunities for work and schools  
 13 has really been why we've stayed here ah (.)  
 14 And we have considered as in that from a perspective of moving back  
 15 up North but then you think of it (.)  
 16 we had this both my husband and I had this idea of it would be like  
 17 when we left (.)  
 18 (INT: Mm mm mm) but in fact when we went to have a look and explore  
 19 it wasn't (.)  
 20 anything like [LAUGHTER] what we'd imagined and the people that  
 21 we you know we had as friends were no longer there (INT: Yes) so it  
 22 would have effectively it would have been setting up a whole new home  
 23 and a whole new set of friends and everything and in the end we just  
 24 decided no we would actually (.)  
 25 stay put (.)

In this extract, the speaker claims a feeling of community (line 7) in her current place of residence. This reference, and the description of her former place of residence as being 'just' somewhere she lived (line 5), can be heard as countering a possible expectation that feelings of belonging and community are associated with a birthplace and home town. Billig (1987) refers to this kind of talk against established meanings as rhetorical. In this case, the speaker's positioning with relation to place challenges the commonsense born-and-bred narrative because she rejects the kind of connection conventionally associated with a place of birth and upbringing and claims a stronger connection with a chosen place, elsewhere.

Rose (1999) argues that 'each individual must render her or his life meaningful as if it were the outcome of individual choices made in furtherance of a biographical project of self-realization' (quoted by Walkerdine, 2003: 240). Speaker P1's construction of her move away from the former place of residence accords with this. It was a move first to university and then to other opportunities ('work and schools').



The positive direction is also emphasized in a kind of inversion of expectations: a move ‘back up North’ would not have been a return home but would involve ‘setting up a whole new home and a whole new set friends and everything’ (lines 22–23). The changes of residence construct a progressive narrative from the past to the present.

The current, chosen place of residence, in London, is described more fully in the next extract.

Extract Two

- 1 INT: Right (.)
- 2 So what do you value most then about where you live now?
- 3
- 4 P1: (.) Living here now (.)
- 5 Um safe I mean safety is actually (.)
- 6 is important um (.)
- 7 although we’re living in London we’re quite here in particular we’re
- 8 very close to the river we’ve got lots of parks (INT: Mm) um (.)
- 9 it is built up but it’s (.)
- 10 but it’s quite but there’s quite a bit of space around I think from that
- 11 point of view of living in (.)
- 12 [placename] area we’re very fortunate to have lots of royal parks and
- 13 we’re very close to the to the river as well It’s close to central London
- 14 so that should we want to use museums and (.)
- 15 the theatres etcetera we can we can do that

In this second extract the speaker presents a positive construction of her current place of residence which does rhetorical work against possible negative images attached to London and city life. The river and parks (line 8) offer natural places not usually associated with cities, and there is ‘quite a bit of space’ (line 10) even though the area is built up. The description does identity work for the speaker. The kinds of things which are valued are associated with nature and culture (cf. Macnaghten and Urry, 1998) and position her as a certain type of person. There is a positive reciprocal relationship between the resident and the place of residence.

There is an emphasis on choice, as in Rose’s ‘choosing self’, and also an emphasis on opportunity, exemplifying a pattern which occurs across the whole body of interview material. Speakers talk about what living in a certain place enables you to do, or prevents you from doing, putting a positive value on a place of residence in terms of the opportunities it offers, the things you can do there, the other places you can get to easily. Speaker P1 refers in Extract One to moving in order to obtain ‘opportunities for work and schools’ (line 12). In Extract Two, by characterizing her place of residence in terms of amenities (the river and parks, and also

central London, line 13, which is defined in terms of museums and theatres to 'use'), speaker P1 invokes opportunity through these references to being able to go to certain places and, implicitly, do certain things. It is not clear, from the extracts or elsewhere in the interview, how frequently she avails herself of the opportunities, or whether doing these things is actually part of her routine. Her emphasis is on choice and options. It is not that she necessarily intends to do everything, go to these places or whatever; the positive point is that she can, if she chooses.

This emphasis on opportunity can be understood as part of an interpretative repertoire and also a prevailing contemporary discourse of consumerism and choice (cf. Skeggs, 2004). Skeggs argues that such a discourse establishes the subject position of a 'modern' individual or self whose 'inner authentic individuality' (2004: 56) is expressed through the choices she makes. A further way to interpret this pattern can be derived from Bruner's notion of 'subjunctivizing' (Bruner, 1986). He develops the concept to explain how 'great narrative' (in literary works) 'creates not only a story but also a sense of its contingent and uncertain variants' (1986: 174). His larger point is that the attraction of narrative or stories is precisely in their connection to 'human possibilities' rather than 'settled certainties' (1986: 26). Kirkman (2003: 257) suggests that subjunctivising 'encompasses the multiple prospective plots which are possible when one is still living one's story'. References by speaker P1 to the opportunities offered by her place of residence construct prospective plots and possible forward narratives as part of her larger life narrative.

In talking about her place of residence, speaker P1 therefore does identity work which positions her positively, emphasizes individual choice rather than the relationship to place given by birth and upbringing, and constructs a progressive life narrative through past into future. Her identity work in relation to place conforms to the kind of individualized new identity described by Rose (1996; 1999) and Walkerdine (2003).

The third extract is from a second speaker, indicated as P2. She is describing a former place of residence, a flat she bought in the Docklands area of London in the 1980s. Her talk presents a more negative positioning in relation to a place of residence.

#### Extract Three

- 1 P2: a lot of the properties around me were empty (INT: Mm hm) (.)
- 2 and (.)
- 3 what it th- there was no infrastructure there that wasn't in place (.)
- 4 there the the the local (.)
- 5 none of the new type traders had moved in so the pubs were um still
- 6 very much the old sort of docklands pubs if you went in for a drink with
- 7 a friend there would be utter silence they'd be all men and they'd stare

- 8 at you (INT: Mm mm) you know what on earth were you doing in there  
9 um the (.)  
10 shops were very very (.)  
11 um grubby and they hardly carried any lines (INT: Mm) there wasn't a  
12 local Tesco's or Sainsbury's um (.)  
13 I even tried to buy an avocado pear once and the woman didn't know  
14 what it was and I just thought I just felt as if I was (.)

In this extract, there is emphasis on the absence of choice and opportunity. In this place of residence, as the speaker describes it, she could not go where she wanted, to the pub, or buy the kind of food she wanted (an avocado pear, line 13). The reference to the named, missing shops (line 12) emphasizes the absence further. For this speaker, therefore, an identity as a resident, or would-be resident, cannot be reconciled with an identity as a choosing self. By these criteria, the Docklands flat was not a good place to live and in fact the speaker concluded her description of it by saying

P2: all in all it it it wasn't a good move and I pretty much put it straight back on the market

Following Wetherell and Edley (1998), I have suggested that identity work which is potentially inconsistent or implausible is a source of trouble which may require repair. In this extract, the speaker cannot reconcile the identity she brings to the place, specifically as the kind of woman who values certain foods and social activities, with a positioning of herself as a resident. The incomprehension of the woman in the shop (line 13) and the stares of the men in the pub ('What on earth were you doing in there?', line 8) mark her behaviour as unusual; she is not as plausibly of the place as they are. There is a possible gender element to this problematic positioning. In the pub 'they'd be all men' (line 7). Whether her friend is male (so she is the lone woman) or female (so they are different together), she is out of place there as a woman.

However, the trouble around the speaker's positioning as a resident of this place is also resolved or repaired through her telling of the story. First, by rejecting the identity attached to the place of residence, this speaker positions herself positively in contrast, as different to the people of that place, wanting more than the limited opportunities offered, and so on. Secondly, like speaker P1 in Extract One, she constructs a progressive narrative through the move away from this place. In this way, the description of the past place of residence does present identity work for the speaker in the interview context.

Like speaker P1 in the earlier extracts, this speaker positions herself as a person who values opportunities and constructs progression in her life

narrative through (as she describes it) her individual choices. Their identity work constructs a ‘new residential identity’ for these speakers corresponding to the individualized new identities described by Walkerdine (2003) and Rose (1996; 1999).

The final two extracts are from an interview with a third speaker, indicated as P3, and show trouble in identity work around a current place of residence.

#### Extract Four

- 1 INT: So what do you value most about where you're living now can you  
 2 say that  
 3  
 4 P3: Um (.)  
 5 it's a variety (.)  
 6 (INT: Mm) of things that are available in that environment it's just  
 7 everything is so easy to get to from there (INT: Right) um (.)  
 8 and any kind of resources that I might (.)  
 9 need to have are very easily obtainable there either from going to shops  
 10 or getting places to bring stuff to us or finding information as well it's  
 11 very very good for finding information to be centrally placed rather than  
 12 further out um  
 13  
 14 INT: Could you just say a bit more about that what kind of information  
 15 are you thinking of you sound as if you have something specific in mind  
 16  
 17 P3: What sort of information well academic information is one thing um (.)  
 18 books I'm I'm interested in more kind of alternative culture things as  
 19 well (INT: Mm hm) and there's a lot of that and [placename] is a is a  
 20 whole huge market area with kind of fashion and art and theatre and  
 21 there's so much there (INT: Mm) you know that's interesting that you  
 22 can just kind of have a look round It kind of feels as if you're in touch  
 23 with with what's going on (INT: Mm hm) there whereas other other  
 24 places I've lived 've felt a bit kind of samey um High Street stuff and  
 25 nothing (INT: Yeah) kind of um I don't know (.)  
 26 not the same kind of individuality and also there's um (.)  
 27 it's kind of less judgmental about I I can go out wearing virtually  
 28 anything and it doesn't matter (INT: Yeah) um in [placename] whereas  
 29 it would be different in other parts of London (.)  
 30 yeah so

This extract provides a further example of a speaker positioning herself in relation to a place of residence which is chosen rather than given by her birth or family history. Her construction of the place makes certain

positionings available to her as resident there, and she simultaneously takes up those positions, as a person who 'is in touch with what's going on' (line 22) and has 'individuality' (line 26), whose interests evidence her breadth and cultural awareness, a person who requires the stimulus of new things and ideas (the references to 'resources', line 8 and information, lines 10 and 14) and who rejects convention (the references to 'alternative culture' line 18 and, negatively, to 'samey High Street stuff', line 24). Although the detail of this identity is different to that claimed by the speaker in Extract Two, there is a similar emphasis on opportunity and choice, on what you can get by living in this place (goods from shops, information), what you can do (you can get to other places easily, look around, wear what you like), again offering multiple forward narratives of prospective activity. This talk therefore provides a further example of sub-junctivizing and of the new residential identity I have described.

However, in the final extract the *same* speaker is discussing the *same* place of residence in answer to the question:

Do you expect to move from there under any circumstances?

Her answer is that she does expect to move, at an unspecified point in the future, because (for reasons not detailed here) she anticipates that she will not be able to continue living with her current partner and co-resident.

Extract Five

- 1 P3: And living where I'm now will be difficult for a single woman (.)
- 2
- 3 INT: Right um why
- 4
- 5 P3: Ah well it's quite a dangerous area (.)
- 6 (INT: Right) Um (.)
- 7 quite a lot of muggings go on and (.)
- 8 people soon (.)
- 9 you know notice if you're on your own (INT: Right right) You know
- 10 there's this quite a lot of awareness of who's living where and (.)
- 11 there's places are sussed um (.)
- 12 we have all sorts of um security on the house we've got gates and (.)
- 13 bars up at the windows and a double door and but ah (.)
- 14 it wouldn't be (.)
- 15 all that secure (INT: Yeah) (.)
- 16 It was burgled (.)
- 17 six times before he moved in there he's since he's been moved in he only
- 18 got burgled once um (.)
- 19 but then he can look quite intimidating but I'm not so sure I no

20 (LAUGHTER) I might get a big dog! (LAUGHTER) yeah And I just I  
 21 wouldn't like it on my own there not at night either it's a bit kind of hair  
 22 raising mm (.)

In this final extract, there is no longer an emphasis on opportunity but on negative possibilities set up by the construction of the place of residence. The extract is from the same interview as Extract Four and the speaker's life circumstances have not changed. However here she anticipates a future identity as a single woman, for reasons connected to her partner's health (which she explains elsewhere in the interview). The new residential identity she took up in Extract Four is now troubled because the positive identity of someone who values the opportunities offered by this place of residence is difficult to reconcile with a different positioning, as a woman vulnerable to attack because she is alone ('people soon you know notice if you're on your own').

This vulnerable positioning is part of another pattern or interpretative repertoire in the interview data, of references to danger and fear of attack in connection with places of residence. It can be seen in the brief mention of safety in Extract Two (line 5), and perhaps also in the way that speaker P2 in Extract Three was positioned by the men in the pub. Chasteen (1994) conducted an interview study of 25 American women and reported that they were highly aware of the safety of their environment and felt they were less vulnerable 'with a man around', although 'this lesser fear stemmed not from men's perceived ability to defend the women, but from their symbolic value; a woman with a man was described as "looking" less "out of place" to others' (1994: 321). In my discussion of the born-and-bred narrative, I suggested that women are conventionally positioned in relation to place through their roles within a family centred on a heterosexual couple/parent relationship. Following this, a woman alone may be positioned negatively by others, as Chasteen's participants realized, whether the negative positioning has associations of violence or something less extreme (as in Extract Three). Wetherell (1998), and Davies and Harre (1990) suggested that the identity work of individual speakers is constrained by larger social meanings. The analysis shows how for speaker P3 the more conventional meanings around an identity as a woman alone constrain her individual and individualized work to take up a new residential identity.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis I have presented shows a connection between place and identity that can be claimed even on the basis of a relatively short period of residence, in contrast to the kind of 'native' or 'local' identity conferred by

birth and long-term family connection. Places are rich in meanings and associations. Speakers can characterize a chosen place of residence in certain ways and position themselves in relation to it in order to do identity work for themselves. These positionings around place correspond to the kind of individualized new identities that theorists have suggested are a feature of contemporary societies.

A construction of a place of residence in terms of opportunity makes available a positioning corresponding to a 'choosing self'. The place where someone lives is claimed as appropriate to its resident, not because it made her but because it matches who she wants to be. This is an alternative to a conventional identity of place and is available to people positioned outside a born-and-bred narrative. References to opportunity also indicate prospective narratives. The speaker can construct a biography with a progressive life course shaped by the choices she has made, so a move away from a birth place and hometown becomes part of a success story. This is identity work for a mobile, consumption-oriented society. However, a claim to the more individualized and agentic identity, which I have called a new residential identity, is not necessarily unproblematic.

Wetherell (1998) and Davies and Harre (1990) suggest that the identity work of individual speakers is constrained by larger social meanings. This can be seen in Walkerdine's example of a woman office worker who positioned herself as able to succeed through her own effort, but could not reconcile this with how she was positioned by others, as a subordinate who could be exploited through overwork. Discursive work to construct and take up 'new' identities does not erase old meanings but must, inevitably, contend with them, particularly in the ways that speakers are positioned by others. In my analysis the women speakers' work of 'self-realization', in Rose and Walkerdine's term, is constrained by more conventional positionings of women in relation to place, especially women alone. This constraint appears in the talk as 'trouble' around reconciling different identities and positionings. In other words, a new identity as someone who chooses and controls her life circumstances and the trajectory of her life narrative does not in itself necessarily create control or confer agency. For women in particular, the new residential identities I have described may be difficult to sustain.

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**NOTES**

1 Discourse theorists would understand the everyday stories as part of the larger discourses of ethnicity, race and nation. See, for example, Stasiulis, D. and Yuval-Davis, N. (1995).

2 The project was funded by the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Open University in Milton Keynes.

3 Ten Have (2004: 173) defines a quantitative analysis as examining the variation of a few features across a large data-set.

4 The transcription conventions used are listed below. The talk has been transcribed to include the irregularities of ordinary speech but without the detail employed by some other analysts such as those working in the conversation analytic tradition. The following conventions are used:

(.) indicates a short pause;

(LAUGHTER) indicates laughter from either person present;

(INT: Yes) indicates a brief comment from the other person present;

[placename] indicates a reference to a named place. The real name is deleted to protect the participant's anonymity.

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