Guest Editorial: Special Section on Child and Youth Mobility: Current Research and Nascent Themes

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Abstract:

Our motivation for this special section can partially be attributed to William Black's contributions to the proceedings of the 2007 Anderson Distinguished Lecture in Applied Geography, and Barry Wellar's 2007 Fleming Lecture in Transportation Geography. Both scholars discussed the longer-term efficacy of targeting children and youth for transport planning intervention. We were also motivated by our own research into child and youth mobility, work that largely focuses on the tension between the declining use of active transport in the west and the increasing prevalence of sedentary behaviour, physical inactivity, and obesity among children and youth.

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During the 2010 meetings of the Association of American Geographers, we hosted two sessions, sponsored by the Transport Geography Specialty Group, entitled, "The mobility of children and youth: Current research and nascent themes". These sessions further stimulated the idea of creating a Special Section for the Journal of Transport Geography on child/youth mobility to demonstrate some of the range of work being conducted in the area. Early drafts of several of the

Special Section's papers were presented in those sessions, others were submitted afterward in response to a targeted call designed to expand the international scope of the section, and to ensure inclusion of research about children and youth.

The Special Section's focus requires clarification of our perspectives on mobility, children, and youth. Mobility can broadly be defined as the ability of people or machines to move information, the body, and/or goods between physical, mobile, or cyberplaces (Buliung, 2011). Unintentionally, most of the included works focus on the movement of children and youth between home and school (Fusco et al., 2012, Emond and Handy, 2012, Mitra and Buliung, 2012, McDonald, 2012). The mobility of children and youth for school, however, is not only considered something to explain or predict. Rather, we see, particularly through Fusco et al. (2012), how the space between home and school can become a 'lived space', or thirdspace (Soja, 1996, Matthews et al., 2000), originally planned and constructed by adults, but then re-created and re-visioned as children experience it. Children and youth, however, likely produce and experience mobility in ways that are distinct from one another.

Looking across the history of our discipline, the geography of children and youth has received relatively less attention than the geography of adults (Holloway and Valentine, 2000a). The greatest concentration of effort seems to have emerged more recently within the postmodern, critical, cultural traditions (Matthews and Limb, 1999, McKendrick, 2000). Efforts within and beyond these schools have produced the subdiscipline of children's geographies, several books, and a journal of the same name (Evans, 2008, Valentine et al., 1998, Holloway and Valentine, 2000b). Our study of the *transport geographies of children and youth* may well be informed by the research of colleagues working from within other geographical traditions (Mackinnon et al., 2008). This argument for epistemological inclusivity has recently been echoed elsewhere (Schwanen and Kwan, 2009). Four of the six articles are closely aligned with the quantitative tradition in transportation geography (Emond and Handy, 2012, Mitra and Buliung, 2012, Susilo and Waygood, 2012, McDonald, 2012). Adding to the emerging interest in the qualitative study of transport processes (see Lang et al., 2011), the pieces by Tranter and Sharpe (2012) and Fusco et al. (2012) demonstrate what we can learn by studying transport processes using the lens of critical and/or cultural geography.

With respect to geographical scope, the papers are unintentionally biased toward the North American context; exceptions include Susilo and Waygood (2012) (Japan), and Tranter and Sharpe (2012) (Australia). While we acknowledge the limitations of essentialist precision with respect to the description of the categories child and/or youth (Holloway and Valentine, 2000a), we use the definitions of the United Nations (2011) (children as ⩽14 years and youth as 15–24 years) as a means to clarify the links between each piece and the child/youth populations. The section contains three papers primarily focusing on children (Fusco et al., 2012, Mitra and Buliung, 2012, Tranter and Sharpe, 2012), and three on either children and youth (McDonald, 2012, Susilo and Waygood, 2012) or youth explicitly (Emond and Handy, 2012).

The constructs used to describe those who are young are many, and are not easily agreed upon (Holloway and Valentine, 2000a, Evans, 2008). For example, and quite interestingly, Susilo and Waygood, essentially argue that the age over which childhood occurs is socially constructed. A "child" in their study, set in Osaka, Japan, is a person who is 20 years of age or younger. This

reminds us that adult–child relations, and childhood in general, may be differentially constructed across time and place (Holloway and Valentine, 2000a). There is arguably an important conversation to be had within our subdiscipline regarding the spatial and temporal construction of the child, youth categories. A wide range of opportunities and obligations, capabilities and mobilities, and needs are observable up to 24 years of age with difference likely to be apparent across space and time.

Starting this Special Section is a thought-provoking contribution by Tranter and Sharpe (2012). They present the Disney–Pixar movies, Monsters, Inc. (2001) and WALL-E (2008) as allegories for the links between childhood mobility and the health and environmental challenges facing western societies in particular. Their presentation at the 2010 AAG symposium personally demonstrated to us the power of what they describe here – that film can be used to communicate important issues in ways that provoke an affective response - this may in turn encourage new ways of thinking about issues. Regarding childhood mobility, Tranter and Sharpe (2012) emphasise that creating cities where children's independent and active mobilities are enhanced is likely to benefit young and old alike. The concept of 'playful mobility' resonated with us, Tranter and Sharpe (2012) suggest that if children's mobilities can become more like play, then children will not only enjoy their mobility but adults will need to spend less time promoting physical activity.

Susilo and Waygood (2012) remind us that travel behaviour is an evolving, learning process across the lifespan. Using large-scale household travel surveys from the Osaka metropolitan area of Japan conducted in 1980, 1990 and 2000, they examine how children's activity and travel engagements have changed over time. Some trips and activity parameters have remained constant; while others have changed. One notable change over the last two decades was the increase in the number of boys travelling by car with no change for girls. This contrasts with much existing research, primarily conducted in Western nations, including some of the studies in this special section, that demonstrate girls are more likely to be 'chauffered' in cars, particularly for the school trip. Cross-cultural, multidisciplinary examination of the gendered nature of childhood mobility is a necessity.

While investigating the relationship between neighborhood built environment (BE) and active school transportation (AST) is of continued interest to researchers, Mitra and Buliung (2012) seek to inform future work on the modelling of school travel mode choice by studying the influence of the modifiable areal unit problem (MAUP). They reported the relationship between BE and AST for children 11–12 years by constructing six neighborhood representations in the City of Toronto, Canada. Although their findings reported that travel distance, density, signalized intersections, walking density and low-income neighborhoods are associated with active travel; these results were not consistent across different geographic units, suggesting the presence of MAUP effects. Their research recommends that future research should construct neighborhoods at various scales, while taking into consideration individual perceptions about the geography of neighborhoods.

Complementing qualitative work on parental perspectives on school travel mode choice (Faulkner et al., 2010, Lang et al., 2011), Fusco et al. (2012) aim to understand children's perceptions of school travel and the built environment in Toronto, Canada. They used a

photovoice methodology to study the transport–built environment experiences of 41 children, 21 who walked to and from school (AST) and 20 who were driven (Non-AST). School and home emerge as key places of meaning and importance for all children. Children are shown to have sophisticated and unique understandings of their surroundings, understandings that are undoubtedly influenced by the scaling of mobility (i.e., automobiles compared with self locomotion). Travel mode is also shown to affect ecological acuity, with walkers demonstrating a finer grained reporting of social and environmental features.

The paper by Emond and Handy (2012) is the only piece to explicitly focus on youth. The authors study the school travel behaviour of high school students in Davis, California. The focus on youth and bicycling represents an important contribution. The authors found that parents can be key enablers to the adoption of cycling to school, and that student self-efficacy about cycling moderates mode choice. Perceptions about travel distance also appeared to be more important than network distance in the mode choice decision. Using data from the US National Household Travel Surveys, McDonald (2012) conducts an over time analysis of gender differences in school travel. A long-term trend in increased automobility is observed, alongside some gender differences in school travel mode. Gender differences appeared most pronounced for biking compared to walking – with more boys cycling than girls in every year. Patterns of gender difference were similar in the a.m. and p.m. school travel periods. Autonomous mobility emerged as a powerful theme. Travelling independent from adults increased with age, however, from grade five (approximately age 10) and up, parents were less likely to allow girls to travel alone.

Looking across included papers, several directions for future work emerge. Classical geographical concerns about scale and spatial representation permeate the section. Here, there is room for thoughtful engagement at the intersection between quantitative concerns regarding the digital representation of environments and transport, and how perceptions about the spatial extent of influential environments (and elements/objects within them) vary across and within the child, youth, and parent/caregiver populations. The qualitative pieces draw our attention toward the contributions that spatial theory, developed from within contemporary humanistic traditions in geography (e.g., postmodernism, critical social theory, cultural geography) could have on developing more nuanced understandings about child/youth mobility. Unlike the adult literature, where much of the focus has been on mode choice and instrumental concerns, and given what we know about the increasing exposure of children–youth to all forms of media, we sense that situating child/youth mobility within a broader psycho-social frame (the symbolic; affective) could elucidate key insights into child/youth mobility values, decisions, and practices. As we see the transport geography of children and youth as an emerging and increasingly important theme within our subdiscipline, we would suggest that, as has been done in this section, we continue to advance our thinking about, and research into, child/youth mobility from a theoretically broad and methodologically inclusive place.

Acknowledgements

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