'*Most of the people my age tend to move out*': Young men talking about place, community and belonging in Manchester

Abstract

Universities are as a means of leaving for the city for young people living increasingly precarious and mobile lives. This paper explores how male university students (aged 18-25) talk about, and belong to, the places they inhabit in Greater Manchester, UK. Drawing on mixed-methods data collection from survey responses and in-depth semi-structured interviews, this paper finds that whilst young men embrace liquid understandings of place, they express tensions between 'insiders' and 'outsiders'. While universities appear to be significant places for male university students, only half of participants reported feelings of belonging to university communities. Consequently, this paper proposes recommendations for universities, in order to ensure male university students feel they can open up to staff, thereby enabling them to feel part of a 'learning community' - a key theme of the National Student Survey.

Keywords

Belonging, Community; Liquid; Masculinity; Place; Universities; Urban Centers; Young People.

1. Introduction

The focus of this paper is on young male university students in the metropolitan county of Greater Manchester, UK. This interdisciplinary paper works at the intersection of human geography, sociology and sociolinguistics to investigate the places young male students inhabit, along with bringing to the fore their sense of belonging, and the communities they choose to belong to during university. Male university students in our study highlighted the complexity of being '*of* place' or '*in* place', 'belonging to a place' and 'belonging to a community', while leading rapidly changing mobile lives, and navigating feelings of inclusion and exclusion. We argue, echoing Cuervo and Wyn (2017:220), that in contexts of mobile lives, 'young people build meaning through their connections with people and places over time'. In

this paper, we open a window into the meanings constructed by these young men as they put down transient roots in the city.

This paper makes a timely contribution to researching young people in contexts of mobility and diversity. It is conducted in times of 'moral panic' (Cohen, 1972), characterized by national debates around Brexit, and the associated precarity of young people's imagined futures; as well as a rise in hate crimes, right-wing nationalism and gang culture. In addition, young people's feelings of belonging in the city are threatened by tensions with 'locals' who tend to blame 'student outsiders' for anti-social behavior, degradation of environments, and lack of parking etc. (Sage et al. 2012). Against such complex socio-political contexts, the question that begs to ask is, how do young men conceptualize belonging to the places they inhabit in urban spaces?

It is important to gain insight into how young men conceptualize belonging, since men are often reluctant to discuss feelings or problems with friends and family (Mental Health Foundation 2019). Eliciting their perceptions of belonging will assist universities in creating spaces where young men can feel a sense of attachment, comfort and belonging. Indeed, a sense of belonging to a 'learning community' is a key theme of the National Student Survey[1]. Recent research by University Business (2017) found that universities can be lonely places, with almost half of UK students (45%) admitting feeling lonely during their study time at university, and 37% are likely to consider dropping out. Many of the male students referenced in this paper emphasize the importance of relationships with others, highlighting the importance of not being alone, and working together through bad times. Rather than interpreting young men's engagement in practices, such as care, as a failure to comply with the tenets of orthodox masculine construction, we argue, echoing Anderson (2005), that these young men are enacting

[1] The National Student Survey is aimed predominantly at final-year undergraduates, and gathers opinions from students about their time in higher education. It asks students to provide honest feedback on what it has been like to study on their course at their university/college.

more inclusive versions of masculinity. For young men in our study, a 'friendly atmosphere' was important in combatting loneliness. This highlights the importance of creating a sense of belonging to the university, which is likely to enhance students' retention (O'Keeffe 2013). Most importantly, feelings of belonging could address some mental health problems experienced by young men caused by loneliness and sadness.

This paper is structured as follows. First, we discuss place and belonging in contexts of mobility, before moving on to discuss the paradox of communities. We then cohere literature on masculinity. After this, we discuss our methodological approach, before presenting findings surrounding three key themes: understanding place; perceptions of belonging; and community membership. Following this, we discuss the significance of our research findings for engaging young men in university spaces to (re)instate feelings of belonging to the university, which provides a solid anchor for being in the city.

2. Place attachment and belonging

Place, as a theoretical construct, has been problematized in social research in ways that challenge static, homogeneous, ontologies of place. Consequently, place becomes slippery (Markusen 1996), relative (Cele 2013), and space for meeting and sharing (Massey 2004). We align ourselves with liquid approaches to 'place' that ontologically and epistemologically draw on understandings of place as 'meaning' (Entrikin 1991). We do this by emphasizing the role of individuals' emotions, experiences and activities.

Place attachment, or a 'sense of place', emerges from an increased depth of knowledge and association with a location, which in turn gives meaning to abstract space (Holton 2015a). Holton (2015a) acknowledges the dynamic nature of place, and its potential for evoking powerful emotional responses. This has implications for the realm of higher education, as place

has an important influence on students as they progress through university. Holton (2015b) highlights how processes such as changes in accommodation, or adjustments to friendship groups, may provoke adaptations to understandings of place, which emphasize the understanding of place as 'meaning' (Entrikin 1991). Different places create experiences that produce memories wrapped in feelings, and this plays an important role in constructing identity (Marcu 2012). Such identity is diasporic and transient and is constructed as students dwell 'in and through being at home and away, through the dialectic of roots and routes' (Urry 2000:133).

Social scientists disagree on what it means of be '*of* place'. On the one hand, Relph (1976:preface) argues that, in our modern era, an authentic sense of place is being gradually overshadowed by a less authentic attitude that he calls 'placelessness', which results from 'an insensitivity to the significance of place'. This view holds a fixed understanding of having 'a sense of place', which features 'nostalgic yearning' (Relph, 1976: preface). Alternatively, Bauman (2000:6) argues that modernity requires flexibility and liquidity - what he refers to as 'melting the solids'. He maintains, 'the trick is to be at home in many homes' (Bauman 2000:207), arguing that this enables individuals to be *in* place, rather than *of* place and it lessens the anxiety of *placelessness*.

Belonging is another important construct when discussing a 'sense of place'. Savage and colleagues (2005) demonstrate that belonging is not a given, rather it is fluid, contingent, and unstable. It entails both states of unbelonging (from which one comes at the beginning of the trajectory) and possible states of belonging (to which one aspires). In their discussion of how middle-class residents choose certain places to live in, Savage and colleagues (2005) theorize belonging as 'a socially constructed, embedded process in which people reflexively judge the suitability of a given site as appropriate given their social trajectory and their position in other fields'. Savage and colleagues (2005) introduce the notion of 'elective belonging', which

implies a sense of personal agency to choose where to settle in. Elective belonging is an 'elastic concept' that does not presuppose claims to territorial or historical roots (Savage et al. 2005: 53). Here we extend the notion of 'elective belonging', arguing that it is relevant to university students who choose where they want to study, while judging the suitability of the city, the university, and the accommodation for their educational trajectory, socio-economic status, and personal needs. For example, Read and colleagues (2003) explore students' conceptualizations of 'belonging' at a post-1992 university, with a statistically high proportion of 'non-traditional' students, in terms of class, age, and ethnicity. The authors highlight how these students challenge discourses of 'otherness', by actively choosing an institution where they feel they might belong; often the urban 'new' university.

In addition to elective belonging, other types of belonging are relevant to researching with young people. Unlike Savage and colleagues (2005) who focus on the individual as a rational, choice-exercising self, Yuval-Davis (2006) highlights an interactional sense to belonging, asserting that belonging entails ethics of care, focusing on the relationships young people have with others. Moreover, Vieten (2006) explains that political belonging, which encapsulates boundary maintenance between 'us' and 'them', is becoming increasingly relevant as there are more 'strangers at our door', to borrow Bauman's (2016) phrase. Cuervo and Wyn (2017) propose another type of belonging; the authors conceptualize belonging as 'relational' - arguing that living in one place for one's whole life does not define or guarantee belonging because belonging is based on the quality of the relationships individuals have with others in a particular place.

In this paper, we adopt a 'liquid' understanding of belonging. We agree with Habib and Ward (2019) that belonging is as discursive and complex process, in constant interaction with personal histories, surroundings, trajectories and aspirations. Conceptualizing belonging as a

process allows for understanding it both as a feeling of choice (Savage et al, 2005) and as a performative effect (Bell 1999).

3. Community and the paradox of inclusivity

Community is a buzz and fuzz word, which is becoming increasingly hard to define due to rapidly increasing levels of diasporation and mobility. Hobsbawm (1994: 428) argues that 'never was the word 'community' used more indiscriminately and emptily than in the decades when communities in sociological sense became hard to find in real life'. Community is often perceived as 'an island of homely and cosy tranquility in a sea of turbulence and inhospitality' (Bauman 2000:182). A sense of community offers feelings of security, belonging, home and being. That is why 'men and women look for groups to which they can belong, certainly and forever, in a world in which all else is moving and shifting' (Hobsbawm 1998: 40).

Communities are often perceived in a geographical and collective sense. Keller (2003) explains that a territorial understanding of community is the most common. Researchers advocating this view, such as Daraganova and colleagues (2012), argue that human relationships are predominately local and therefore the longer the distance between social actors, the more unlikely for social ties to be established. However, this is not the only conceptualization of the term. Communities can be imagined within the geopolitical borders of the nation-state (c.f. Anderson, 1983 on 'imagined communities').

Nonetheless, the introduction of 'post-place community' (Bradshaw 2008) emphasizes the role of networks over the role of locality. The network can be either online or offline. Here, we are reminded by Rheingold (1993) that a virtual community may have more in common than those living in the same building. Similarly, Raacke and Bonds-Raacke (2008) demonstrate that social networking websites can satisfy people's needs for maintaining contact with distant

friends, as well as making new ones. This argument maintains that geographic proximity is not necessarily a precondition for community. Further, it is important to consider community as 'practice', as introduced by Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998) in their theorization of 'communities of practice'. Yet, Cox (2005) explains that even though the focus here is on practice, rather than locality, such communities tend to be local and situated. In our research with young male university students, each of these understandings of community were relevant.

There are ontological paradoxes surrounding the notion of 'community'. First, it is built on the perception of a harmonious inner world that separates the 'we' from the 'them' and aims to protect 'us' from the fears brought about/along by 'them'. Therefore, a community unites and segregates at the same time, leading scholars to question the viability of the term 'inclusive community' (Young 1999; Bauman 2000). Second, the 'we' feeling, as Sennett (1996: 39) proposes, is 'a way for men to avoid the necessity of looking deeper into each other'. This can lead to feelings of loneliness despite being part of a community.

4. Masculinity

Within the broader literature on masculinity, attention has been paid to the ways in which transitional male roles are being redefined, and the consequences of this for men's social and psychological well-being (Reddin and Sonn, 2003). According to Connell (1995), there is a hierarchy of masculinities. At the top of this hierarchy is hegemonic masculinity, with qualities including heterosexuality, whiteness, physical strength, and the suppression of emotions, such as sadness. Below this comes complicit masculinity which refers to men who may not fit all of the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity, but they do not challenge it as they receive some of the benefits of being male. We then have marginalised masculinity, in which men cannot access all the features of hegemonic masculinity due to factors such as their race or disabilities, but still withhold emotions and may display physical strength (Connell, 1995). At the bottom

of Connell's (1995) hierarchy is subordinate masculinity in which men exhibit qualities that are oppositional to hegemonic masculinity, such as being physically weak and showing sadness.

David and Brannon (1976) outline four types of masculinity that they believe are guidelines for male sex roles, and which men must perform in order to be considered hegemonic males. First, "no sissy stuff", which suggests a distanced self from femininity, homophobia, and avoidance of emotions, appreciating the stigma of all stereotyped feminine characteristics and qualities, including openness and vulnerability. Second, "be a big wheel", where an individual strives for achievement and success and focuses on competition. Third, "be a sturdy oak", which is concerned with avoiding vulnerability, staying composed, tough and in control. Fourth, "give 'em hell", where an individual acts aggressively to become dominant. David and Brannon (1976) presented these themes in recognition of the role society encourages men to play; that is, men are required to perform a false front in order to 'make it'.

Some practices undertaken by young men (e.g. caring / displaying emotion) may, from the perspective of Connell (1995) and David and Brannon (1976), be interpreted as constituting a threat to dominant notions of masculinity, and in turn result in a loss of masculine status and self-esteem (Harder & Demant, 2015). However, this is not entirely adequate to fully understand/interpret the doings/performance of masculinity. Anderson (2005), in the context of the construction of masculinity amongst heterosexual male cheerleaders, should be praised for promoting a more inclusive understanding of masculinity. Rather than interpreting young men's engagement in practices of care as failure to comply with the tenets of orthodox masculine construction, Anderson (2005) contends that they are enacting, what he terms, 'inclusive masculinity'. That is, an alternative form of masculinity, not based on the exclusion of femininity, but rather open to (inclusive of) enactments and practices traditionally associated

with femininity such as displaying care and emotions. In this paper, we maintain that there are multiple and differently configured performances of masculinities.

5. Methodology

This section firstly outlines the study's case study location. After this, we discuss sampling, data-collection, positionality, analysis, and ethical considerations.

Manchester is a leading metropolitan European city with over 99,000 students (Universities in Manchester 2018). A recent report by Centre for Cities (2019) found that Manchester is among the best UK cities at both attracting and retaining recent graduates, which reinforces its position as a 'meeting-place' (Massey and Jess 1995) for young people. In addition, Manchester is a city with increasing ethnic diversity as evident from the 2011 census which suggests that the proportion of residents within the White broad ethnic group has fallen in Manchester from 81.0% in 2001, to 66.6% in 2011 (Manchester City Council 2011).

Since the project only targeted young university students aged 18-25 years, the recruitment followed a purposeful sampling approach (Creswell 1994). Respondents included both male and female university students from across three universities in Greater Manchester. The data presented here are part of a larger project, which included 57 male and female university students. This paper draws on qualitative data from three in-depth, semi-structured interviews (each lasting approximately 1-3 hours), and 22 online questionnaire responses. We have chosen to present the voices of James, Robert and Hassan in this paper because they present three different trajectories and place-experiences, as demonstrated in the following section. In our research, we are interested in exploring rich, singular experiences of space, rather than searching for generalisable or exhaustive patterns of experience. Such experiences open

windows into the liquid lives of young men in the city and highlight the complexity and liquidity that underpin doing/performing masculinity among young men.

An online questionnaire was distributed electronically via Online Surveys. It consisted of 61 items, which yielded a large data set. The questionnaire had a combination of close-ended questions and open-ended responses. It covered the following themes: accommodation; spaces of belonging; spaces where students may feel 'out of place; student encounters with diversity; whether students have experienced feelings of loneliness; whether students feel part of a community; and spaces of social networking.

We supplemented the quantitative survey data with semi-structured in-depth interviews. This enabled us to research complex behaviours, opinions, and emotions (Longhurst, 2003). Semi-structured in interviews were supported by novel embedded participatory tools, such as activity sheets. The interviews explored the following themes: spaces and places students feel they belong to or excluded from; feelings of loneliness; how use of spaces and places vary depending on the time of day or time of year; which communities students below to; and experiences of hearing different languages and dialects in the city.

The research assistant, Elisha, who helped with data generation is a white, female, in her twenties; this positionality inevitably had an impact upon the tenor of the research relationships (Wilson, 2013). Elisha, being a young person, and a former student, was somewhat an insider into student communities, which diminished a potential hierarchy between interviewer and interviewee.

The following tables provide some biographical details of the interview participants:

Participant	Age	Course	University	Interview Duration
James	25	Postgraduate (PG)	Manchester Metropolitan University	02:49:51
Robert	23	Graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (BA) and currently working	Salford University	01:12:13
Hassan	25	PG	Manchester Metropolitan University	01:48:21

Table 1 Details of the interview participants

Table (2) details of male questionnaire respondents:

Age distribution	Course distribution	Fee status distribution	University distribution	Residence in Manchester
18 (1)	UG degrees (16)	British Student-England (15)	Manchester Metropolitan University (13)	6-12 months (3)
19 (2)	PG degrees (6)	EU student (1)	University of Manchester (6)	1-2 years (7)
20 (4)		International student (6)	Salford University (3)	2-4 years (4)
21 (1)				+5 years (2)
22 (5)				+10 years (6)
23 (2)				
24 (2)				
25 (5)				

Table 2 Details of male questionnaire respondents:

As this is a typical example of 'mixing methods' (Brannen 2005), we aim to foreground the explanatory relationship between the questionnaires and the interviews. The quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics; they were then further interpreted in light of the interview qualitative data. The qualitative data was manually analyzed using thematic analysis which facilitates the application of cross-case analysis in relation to thematic trends (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The key themes that emerged from the interviews were 'place', 'belonging' and

'community', with some references to the diverse configurations of masculinity. In addition, the thematic analysis moved beyond the semantic level of analyzing the surface meaning of the data and followed a latent approach to further 'examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations' (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 13).

The study was ethically approved by our institution's research and ethics committee; what Guillemin and Gillam (2004, 263) refer to as 'procedural ethics'. However, following Neale and Hanna's (2012) notion of 'consent as an ongoing process', we embraced the understanding of ethics as a process, rather than an initial step to fieldwork entry. In order to ensure confidentiality, all participants feature in this paper with a pseudonym (Morrow, 2008).

6. Findings

6.1 Understanding place

To unpack the notion of 'place', survey respondents were asked about places they deem significant in Manchester. We also asked them about places where they might feel that they do not belong. This section outlines these places and offers some brief justifications to feelings of (un)belonging.

In response to a multi-answer question, the participants were asked to choose as many options as appropriate for them in response to 'what spaces add to Manchester's value as a place?'

What spaces in Manchester add to its value as a place for you?	Number of respondents	Percentage (%)
Universities	21	95.45
Music Venues	15	68.18
Green Spaces	14	63.64
Sports Venues	14	63.64
Art Galleries	13	59.09

Cafés	13	59.09
Clubs	13	59.09
Shopping Centres	13	59.09
Museums	12	54.55
Food Venues	12	54.55
Independent Stores	11	50.00
Theatres	9	40.91
Cinemas	6	27.27
Religious Buildings (places of worship)	6	27.27
Co-operatives	3	13.64
Libraries	2	9.09

Table 3Which spaces in Manchester add to its value as a place for you?

95% of male university students chose universities as the most significant places in Manchester. The remaining significant places have recreational, consumptive or aesthetic value. Some of these places, particularly food halls and shopping malls, can be referred to as 'transient spaces' (Savage et al. 2005), which Auge (1995) describes as 'non-places'. Such places have a high level of significance in the city life of young men.

These places were not very different to those identified in the visual mind-maps of spaces and places frequented during their time in Manchester, completed by James, Robert and Hassan. It is worth noting that James has lived in Manchester for four years, Robert for five years and Hassan for almost one year. They all moved to Manchester for studying purposes. However, they had different motivations for moving to the city. James wanted to find a place that promises affordances of being and becoming, a place that allows the development of dynamic, liquid identities:

> *I feel that when I came to university (I think it is because no one knows you), in a sense you are so much freer to become something new. Whereas, the people back home already know a side to you and that is like, what sort-of, stays in their mind. I think it can be hard for people back home, to understand*

> *how much you are changing while you're in this new place, while you're meeting new people and studying new things.*

Above, James highlights that alternative performances of his identity are possible when he came to university. Below, we can see that, for Robert, moving out of his small town was a common practice among young people like him and it also allowed him to stay connected to music-based communities across the UK. His response reflects a dynamic, non-static understating of place:

> *Most of the people my age, tend to move out of Wigan to go to nicer places…I do a lot of travelling because I do music as well; so, it's really-easy to get around everywhere from here – public transport and that. If I was somewhere else, I'd probably just have to come into Manchester anyway – to go somewhere.*

Hassan, on the other hand, came from a rural city in Algeria and although his parents were against the idea of studying overseas, he decided to come to Manchester to experience life in an urban center, which is not too overwhelming. His response features elements of personal agency embedded in 'elective belonging':

> *In Manchester there are a lot of things to do. It is not a small city. It is like London when we talk about the size and all but it is not that crowded and as intense as London. So it is something in between. That is what I like about it.*

In response to 'are there any particular places where you might feel 'out of place' or that you do not belong?', 59% of the survey respondents answered, 'no', 23% chose 'yes', and 18% chose a 'somehow'. The five participants who answered 'yes' provided short justifications:

Justifications for feeling 'out of place' in some places:
Manchester city centre at night
Curry mile at night
Fallowfield. It's just very different from the part of Salford that I live in.
Certain spaces feel less welcoming to certain groups of people (e.g. feel less safe as an LGBT person)

I sometimes feel politically distant from most of the population in Manchester

Table 4 Justifications for feeling 'out of place' in some places

The four participants who chose 'somewhat' also provided some justifications as to why they could feel out-of-place in some spaces:

Justifications for possible feelings of being 'out of place' in some spaces in Manchester
Different cultures and languages
Curry Mile, I have been down there with Pakistani friends and felt a little uncomfortable
If a place has certain requirements for being there. I.e., religious buildings or other similar places
The business districts in central Manchester

Table 5Justifications for possible feelings of being 'out of place' in some spaces in Manchester

As can be seen, the justifications indicated numerous factors. These can be listed as temporal e.g. day versus night; ethnic, as evident in responses that mention the 'Curry Mile', which is described by Visit Manchester (2019) as, 'the largest concentration of Asian restaurants in the UK'; demographic, as seen in the reference to the dense student population in Fallowfield; religious; economic; and interactional, as evident in the reference to places that can be inhospitable towards LGBT communities.

With reference to interview data, the three young men initially denied feeling out-of-place in certain spaces but at a later stage they reflected similar sentiments with reference to places that have a particular ethnic or demographic dominance. This observation agrees with Vieten's (2006) argument that political belonging in contexts of increasing migration is becoming increasingly relevant to young people.

6.2 Perceptions of belonging

In this section, we start by discussing the mind-maps that the three young men created during the interviews in order to elicit perceptions of belonging. After that we present survey data that show the extent to which the male participants felt a sense of belonging to Manchester, before we discuss some of the bases for place belonging.

James, Robert and Hassan were asked to draw mind-maps to define the word 'belonging'. James adds four phrases: students, music, familiarity and potential > opportunities. Here, James links belonging to being part of a community, such as student communities and music communities. He also perceives belonging as a feeling e.g. familiarity. What is interesting, however, is that he also has a rather 'elastic' understanding of belonging when he writes 'potential > opportunity'.

Robert reflects different perceptions of belonging. His mind-map has numerous references to emotions 'happy, passion, laughter, silly', which reflect a sense of comfort. There are references to positive attributes such as ambition and determination. Also, ethics of care are mentioned by Robert in his supporting interview: "*Feeling looked after….everyone working together through the bad as well as the good*". For Robert, belonging is a feeling and an effect. Robert qualifies this thought, saying *"I don't feel lonely at all, even if I'm literally on my own or something*".

Hassan's perceptions of belonging are very similar to Robert's, as he also emphasizes the understanding of belonging as feeling (having good time, discovering), and as ethics of care (responsibility, trust, helping others and involving). Hassan is very honest about struggles with loneliness whilst at university:

> *I had some moments of depression here …. I came back from Algeria – so I was here, I got used to the place and what to do and all and [then] I went back to my home*

country – I got used to the place - there with my family friends, goings out hanging out with friends every day. Then I came back here, a lot of my friends – the Indian guy moved out, The Italian guy moved [housemates] - new roommates. So, I kind of felt, like a new atmosphere so I felt a little down, but after that I could pick myself up and move on.

The complexity of masculinity becomes apparent in these quotations. Both Robert and Hassan exhibit features of 'inclusive' versions of masculinity (Anderson, 2005) in that they talk about the importance of care and looking after one another. Further, by speaking honestly about feelings of depression, Hassan does not conform to David and Brannon's (1976) hegemonic ideal of 'no sissy stuff'. Rather, he portrays the significance of 'inclusive masculinity' to his ability to cope with changes in his social milieu. This version of masculinity is also relevant to the development of his belonging to Manchester.

Moving now to survey data, in response to: 'Do you consider yourself to be part of Manchester?', 16 participants answered 'yes', 1 'no', and 5 'somewhat'. 12 out of the 16 participants who reported a sense of belonging to Manchester provided some qualitative justifications, which offer six thematic bases for belonging, as demonstrated in the table below:

Bases for belonging	**Data extracts**
The urbanity of the city of Manchester itself	*Liveliness of city.* *It is the most multi-cultural UK City I have seen which makes me feel comfortable.* *I like it. it's a nice city.*
Activities and networks in the city	*I am part of the activities that happen in the city.* *I believe my work and art makes a positive impact on the city.* *I feel that I have built my life here and have social, educational and employment connections.*

Being a student at university	*I feel very much a part of my university - both as a student and a student ambassador. I feel the university plays a crucial role in the local area. During my undergraduate degree, I also worked in a restaurant. This helped me to get to know some local people - some of whom I still keep in touch with.*
Historical connections (roots)	*Born and raised in Manchester.* *My grandfather graduated from Manchester, following in his footsteps makes me feel more a part of Manchester*.
Being welcomed in the city	*I feel like Manchester is an open melting pot and so welcoming for people from all over the world. Although I am not from here, no one ever made me feel that way which makes Manchester as my beloved second home*.
National/regional performance	*Mancunians all have similar experiences living in Manchester, we share slang and inside jokes that outsiders might not understand.*

Table 6Bases for belonging

The only participant who reported a sense of un-belonging to Manchester justified this by explaining that, '*I spend the majority of my time away from the city center'*. This suggests that the word 'Manchester' has a limited proximity for this participant.

On the other hand, four of the five participants who chose the hesitant 'somewhat' option provided further justifications to their feelings, which can be categorized into four factors: ongoing mobility, absence of historical roots, being perceived as 'foreign', and having a different lifestyle. The following table provides some data extracts to explain these factors:

Bases for a reduced sense of belonging	Data extracts
Mobility	*Always been to places I like to go.*
Lack of historical connections	*I feel a sense of community but I am not Mancunian and have not lived here for very long.*
Being perceived as a foreigner	*I see myself as a foreigner in people's eyes. I do do certain things that locals do (join student union, volunteering work, vote), though there will always be a perception that to each should belong to their own. I have not experience first-hand negativity, however one must admit that there is also a distinct lack of inclusiveness.*
Different lifestyle	*Having lived here most of my life, I do feel part of the city but due to my lifestyle I rarely spend time within the city.*

Table 7Bases for reduced sense of belonging

6.3 Community membership

In this section, we outline the communities that male participants in this study reported a sense of belonging to. We then discuss these findings against the perceptions of place and belonging presented earlier. Table 8 presents findings in response to 'what communities do you belong to?'. The question allowed the participants to choose multiple answers:

What communities do you belong to?	Number of students	Percentage
Academic (including Student, SU, Ambassador & Course Representative)	11	50.00
Sports	9	40.91
Family	8	36.36
Professional (Work)	6	27.27

Arts	5	22.73
Environmental	4	18.18
Gaming	3	13.64
Religious	3	13.64
Charity (including Volunteering)	2	9.09
Political (including Activism)	1	4.55
Other	0	0.00

Table 8 Communities students belong to

Even though 95% of the young men indicated that universities are the most significant places for them in Manchester, only 50% felt that they belong to academic communities. This is an alerting finding. This leads us to argue that significant places in the lives of young men do not necessarily offer a sense of belonging and community to them. The majority of the communities mentioned here are generally aligned with the places and spaces discussed in 6.1.

Another important finding is that 64% of male participants indicated that their communities existed in physical spaces, rather than digital spaces. 36% reported that their communities existed in both physical and digital places. This group consists of eight participants: six international students with families outside the UK, one EU student, and one student from Wales. This finding reveals that unlike common perceptions that young people live their lives online, for male participants in this study, the importance of communities in physical spaces were emphasized.

7. Discussion

The findings from this paper highlight that 'place' for young men is liquid (Bauman, 2000) and relative (Cele 2013). They do not perceive their lives to be anchored in a particular place, nor were historical roots a determinant when it comes to choosing where to settle. However, they prefer to be in a place with some proximity to historical roots, demonstrating how they navigate through 'the dialectic of roots and routes' (Urry 2000:133). Their significant places are constructed around the activities and memories they have in these places, which indicates perceptions of place as meaning (Entrikin 1991). These places have educational value (university, library), instrumental (work), recreational (sports, games), consumptive (food halls, cafes, shopping malls, cinemas), aesthetic (galleries, green parks, theatre, music), religious (worship places) and political (campaigning). Yet, the meanings of these places are discussed in a dynamic and critical way with sensitivity to changing temporal, demographic, ethnic, and political aspects of the place.

Belonging is presented as a nuanced, fluid and complex concept. While the young men exhibit elective belonging (Savage et al. 2005) showing the influence of personal agency and rationality, they also indicate that belonging is relational (Cuervo and Wyn 2017), when they talk about how feelings of belonging to a particular place are temporal. For example, some participants explained that they feel out of place in the city center at night. Others invoked 'political belonging' either by talking about feelings of being 'foreign', 'non-Mancunian' or by emphasizing a 'we' feeling. The findings agree with Vieten (2006) that political belonging in contexts of increasing migration is becoming more relevant to young people. This creates some paradoxical indications in the findings. While the young men in this study perceive places are liquid where there is 'no one space where we feel at home all the time' (Savage et al. 2005),

they reflect some discrete tensions between 'insiders' and 'outsiders' in the city. In other words, they were aware of their political position in relation to being '*in* place' as opposed to '*of* place'.

In addition, an interactional sense of belonging was prominent in the findings from young men in this study, which agree with Yuval-Davis' (2006) focus on belonging as 'ethics of care'. This conforms with Anderson's (2005) notion of 'inclusive masculinity'. That is, an alternative form of masculinity, that is not based on the exclusion of femininity, and related symbols and practices, but rather open to (inclusive of) enactments and practices traditionally associated with femininity. Another interactional dimension was noted in responses where feelings of belonging were contingent on how the participants are treated by others, as evident in responses from LGBT individuals, and individuals perceiving themselves as foreigners or members of ethnic minorities. In a similar vein, the findings suggest that performative belonging (Bell 1999) does not necessarily stem from, or produce, a sense of belonging as a feeling of comfort. Such feelings require validation from others in the city as demonstrated in this quotation from a questionnaire respondent, '*I do certain things that locals do.., though there will always be a perception that to each should belong to their own'.*

Moreover, the findings indicate a combination of 'mixophilia' and 'mixophobia' (Bauman 2016). Whereas the diversity of Manchester was somehow appreciated from consumptive and aesthetic perspectives, some young men in this study expressed mixphobia by trying to avoid dense student communities and other ethnic or religious communities. Even though the majority of the significant places mentioned by the young men are 'non-places' (Auge 1995) that perform as meeting-places for people from different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds, the superficial contact does not generate a communitarian feeling. This is also observed with reference to academic universities, to which only 50% of the participants reported belonging, in spite of 95% of participants ranking universities as the most significant places in the city.

8. Conclusions

Drawing on survey data supplemented by in-depth interviews with James, Robert and Hassan, this paper has demonstrated that the transient lives of young men studying in the city beget transient places and vice versa. The young men in this study highlight that this liquidity can cause loneliness and feelings of depression. The research highlights the importance of creating a sense of belonging within the university. Universities need to ensure that male students feel they can open up to staff, in order to feel part of a 'learning community' - a key theme of the National Student Survey. Development training courses for staff could focus on how to have difficult conversations with male students, in order to ensure that they can open up enough to be signposted to the appropriate university services for support. These courses need to highlight the complex configurations of 'performing masculinity' and 'belonging' in order to avoid essentialist and reductionist understandings of these liquid notions. This will go towards ensuring that university is an environment in which male students can feel a sense of belonging. We conclude by contending that universities have a true opportunity, since findings show that they are the most significant places in the city for young male university students. Universities provide a sense of identity and a basis of being in the city for young men. In times of 'moral panic', we argue that universities have a significant social role to play in the lives of young men.

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