‘Local Embeddedness in a Global world: Young People’s Accounts’

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Abstract

This paper is concerned with exploring issues related to local embeddedness. It is based on material provided by a national sample of young people aged 10-12 years and 14-17 years who were invited to write a single page about their lives and the future. Approximately 34,000 young people did so within a school context. The paper is based on a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of a stratified random sample of 4,100 of these texts. Firstly it looks at the significance and meaning of the local area. Secondly it looks at their life styles as contexts for the relationship between the global and the local –focussing particularly on those related to media and to sporting activities. The paper concludes by noting that although many aspects of young people’s lives draw on global products, the young people remain deeply embedded within local contexts structured by age and gender. (149 words)

Key words: Local, global, community, life styles, age, gender, media, sport

Introduction

It has been argued that in late modernity, traditional institutions are disembedded and are replaced by those that purport to be global. Globalisation has been variously defined although there would be some agreement that it has a political, economic and cultural element; and that it includes references to the ‘processes, procedures and technologies- underpinning the current ‘time-space’ compression’ (Haywood and Mac an Ghiall 2003: 84). Giddens (1991:64) has defined globalisation as ‘the intensification of world wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice-versa’. Frequently globalisation is linked with the dominance of a consumer culture and the apparent rise in individualism within a society where: ‘All that appears to be on offer are the insatiable demands of consumerism or the superficialities of the TV screen, neither of which give an individual any real sense of personal stability’ (Miles, 2,000:50). It has also been widely noted that this focus on transnational processes and
technologies obscures the significance of the local; underestimates variation in the meaning and assimilation of global products within particular cultural contexts and fails to recognise that such global cultural products may be used to assert local cultural differences (Bennett, 2000; Paulgaard, 2002; Roth, 2002).

Griffin (20001) has been amongst those who have suggested the possibility of a fruitful debate between globalisation theory and youth cultural studies. This article is concerned with two related ideas: that the importance of the local is waning; and that in a globalised society life styles are shaped largely by the impact of a global communications system (Miles, 2000 and Miles et al, 1998). We look at these ideas in the context of a study of accounts written by young Irish people, focusing particularly on media and communication technologies and sports since these are frequently seen as the main causes and/or indicators of global cultural homogenisation (Devereux, 2003; Rygaard, 2003)

**Methodology and description of sample**

It has been suggested that young people  ‘are the best resource’ for understanding youth (Corsaro, 1997: 103). Young people in Fifth Grade in First Level (typically aged 10-12 years) and in Transition Year in Second Level (typically aged 14-17 years) in Ireland were invited to write a page about themselves, their hopes for the future and their vision of Ireland in the new millennium. Half (51per cent) of the 3,658 schools in Ireland returned a total of 33,828 texts. in order to ensure that small schools were not under-represented, a stratified random one in ten sample of these texts was selected, providing a total of 4,100 individual texts.

The majority (84 per cent) of these texts were produced by young people in Fifth
Grade in First Level. Texts written by girls accounted for roughly half (56 per cent) of all the sample texts—with the gender difference being greatest amongst the Transition Year students. INSERT TABLE 1 The vast majority (92 per cent) of these young people were attending Roman Catholic schools and over three fifths were attending co-educational schools. It was not possible to assess the class position of these young people. The method of analysis was both quantitative and qualitative. A preliminary selection of sheets was used to identify the main themes to be explored and to form the basis of the coding frame which assessed the absence/presence of a number of themes including family; friends; school; locality; roots and heritage; paid work; hobbies/activities etc. A ten per cent sample of the first 700 texts were double coded so as to assess the adequacy of the coding scheme and the reliability of the main coder. In addition, a thematic qualitative analysis was also undertaken of a random selection of 600 sheets each by two of the other researchers. Since the adolescents’ texts constituted only 15 per cent of the total, and hence were under-represented in these samples, a supplementary thematic analysis of a random sample of 220 of such texts was undertaken. Working initially in the context of the categories identified in the quantitative analysis, themes and sub-themes were identified. This paper focuses on a sub-set of this material.

For reasons of confidentiality, identifying information, local or school referents are not used and pseudonyms are used in the case of direct quotations. The ethical issues of conducting research with or on young people have begun to be given the attention they deserve in recent years (Alderson 1995; Denscombe and Aubrook 1992; James et al, 1998; Morrow, 1998). This material came from an initiative aimed at involving young people in millennium celebrations and providing an account of their lives for
future generations: a reference to the use of such data for research purposes being included in the material sent to schools. Permission to use the data was obtained from the Department of Education which had collected the data. The specific permission of the young people involved was not sought. This raises issues of informed consent (James et al, 1998). However, given an increasing awareness of the importance of young people’s perspectives both politically (Government Publications, 2000) and in the wider sociological context (Cleary et al, 2001; Lynch, 1999; Brannen and O’Brien, 1996), the data set was seen as providing a unique opportunity and one that was compatible with the impetus behind the initial compilation of the data (viz the compilation of an informative public document).

The Local area: Its Significance and Meaning

Giddens (1991:146) has argued that in late modernity, the local area declines in importance: place ‘becomes thoroughly penetrated by disembedding mechanisms which recombine the local activities into time-space relations of ever widening scope’. Thus in a post or late modern society characterised by family instability, trans-spatiality consequent on technological developments, the breakdown in class allegiances and consumerism, local places it is argued will have a tangential relevance in young people’s lives. However, others have argued (Tovey, 2002; Furlong and Cartmel, 1997) that the importance of location is heightened in late modernity.

In this section we will explore these ideas, looking at the significance of place in these young people’s accounts, focussing initially on references to the local area. At a more subtle level, we will look at the meaning of that area and the extent to which such meaning varies by age and gender. Thus, we will look at variation in references to its
natural and built environment; its amenities; its perceived social character, its history as well as looking at variation in the scale of what is seen as local.

Overall, the local area was a salient element in young people’s texts. Thus, two thirds of the total sample (63 per cent) referred to the local area in their texts. There were age differences: with the younger ones being very much more likely than the older ones to refer to their local area (67 per cent of the 10-12 year olds did so as compared with 40 per cent of the 14-17 year olds). There were no gender differences amongst the 10-12 year olds as regards such references, although the 14-17 year old boys were marginally more likely than the girls of that age to refer to their own locality (43 per cent versus 38 per cent respectively).

Looking in more detail at the qualitative aspects, it was striking that all kinds of natural features were strongly valued by the young people (regardless of their age or gender). This contrasted with the trends in Nairn et al’s study of young people in New Zealand (2003: 18) where they ‘did not valorize the rural’. However, the tone of the young people’s accounts in the present study sometimes suggested that nature had become a ‘commodity to be marketed, packaged and sold to visitors’. The product included ‘scenic landscapes’, a ‘green unspoilt environment’ that will satisfy their demand for ‘the distinctive and extraordinary gaze’-the ‘tourist gaze’ (Sheerin 1998: 39 & 45). Tourism is a major source of employment and revenue in Ireland and one which has penetrated local consciousness. Thus, James (Transition Year student) in describing his local area referred to ‘the beautiful, picturesque setting…. the natural splendour, the majestic scenery from nature and eternal greenery’. The possibility that such statements were ironic cannot be excluded, although the context of this and
sim similar references typically suggested that this was not so:

‘During the summer holidays me and my mates take the bus up to the lighthouse. The fare is well worth it for the scenery alone. As we reach the Summit, Dublin Bay unfolds in front of us. One a good day with the sun shining the bay lights up. The view is breathtaking’ (Rory, Transition Year, Second Level).

For the 10-12 year olds, (as in Livingstone, 2002), the local area was seen as offering opportunities for unstructured individual or collective play activities. Thus for both boys and girls who were attending schools in rural areas, the fields and roads around them were seen as very much part of places they could play, cycle on their own or with their friends. ‘When I am bord (sic) I go to Jim Hanly’s house.. we look for bird’s nests and we go racing on gocarts’ (Mike, Fifth Class, First Level). Those attending schools in the urban area also referred to spaces that were not under the control of adults and that provided opportunities for unstructured play activities (Griffiths, 1995; Ennew, 1994; Matthews et al, 2000 ):‘In Heartlawn there would be robbed cars and it was grate (sic) (Tracey, Fifth Class, First Level).

As in Poole et al’s study (2002) the amenities that were referred to in the texts were not restricted to those specifically for young people. Typically, shops and sports facilities were included. However the sheer range of the amenities was very wide- including leisureplex, cinema, MacDonalds, clothes shops, swimming pools, pitches, fun factories, lakes for fishing and swimming, beaches, as well as post offices, creches, carnivals, furniture shops and even a graveyard. References to such facilities was often combined with references to the natural beauty of the area:

‘We have playgrounds and swimming pools and fun factories and football, tennis, rugby, soccer, gymnastics and I have been in all of them [except] rugby. When you got to a field in the summer when it is sunny you can see a tree in the centre and blossoms everywhere. With flowers everywhere it is a lovely place and nice and clean. Heaven is on earth in Dublin’(Nicole, Fifth Class,First
Level).
‘I live in a small village right beside Lough Tuohy (pseudonym) and every summer my friends and I swim there. It has no shops, just the pier, a pub, a guesthouse and approximately 50 resident houses. The lake is one of the best fishing lakes in Ireland. As well as being good for fishing it is very beautiful’ (Christine, Transition Year, Second Level)

Overwhelmingly, in contrast to the trends emerging in, for example, Morrow’s (2002) study of 12-15 year olds, far more good than bad features were mentioned by these young people, although there was evidence of older boys being critical of the perceived absence of facilities for young people (see also Nairn et al, 2003). It was the older boys who were also most likely to make the occasional references to the perceived ‘socially problematic’ character of the area they lived in:

‘The area I live in …., has a lot of problems such as drugs, crime and violence. There are a lot of drug abusers in my area. The main drug in our area is probably cannabis, heroin and e… The violence in the area is big also, people do be in different gangs and don’t blend with one another. This ..causes gang fights between people which involves bars, sticks and in some cases guns’(Noel, Transition Year, Second Level)

Phenomena such as physical aggression and gangs are related to a hegemonic concept of masculinity, which is simultaneously valued and seen as socially problematic (Connell, 1995).

Tovey and Share (2000) have suggested that community as a relationship, as well as a place is a strong theme in Irish society and this pattern emerged very clearly amongst both age groups. Amongst some of the 10-12 year olds the perceived reality of community ties was described in terms of very real social patterns that could be seen as indicative of the child friendliness of the area (such as neighbourhood sports’ days, barbeques, visits by Santa etc). In some cases there seemed to be a ‘rhetoric of community’ and an idealisation of social ties in both rural and urban areas: ‘It is the
strong sense of community that makes Oldland [pseudonym] the wonderful place it is now and has been down through the ages’ (Jack, Transition Year, Second Level).

There was a suggestion amongst the 14-17 year old girls that the social gossip which were part of such community ties was not always appreciated:

‘The people in my area live for and thrive on gossip....All this talk is very interesting unless you are the poor unfortunate it's about. To my horror I often had the honour of this pivotal position, which sent me into hiding for a few days for fear of showing my face’ (Aideen, Transition Year, Second Level)

There were also occasional indirect references to the social class profile of the area by those who did not ‘fit in’ (see Poole et al 2002). Lynch and Lodge (2002:62) in a study of Irish second Level students found that there was considerable unease about naming social class. Thus, as in this study, a ‘euphemistic discourse’ was used:

‘Its kind of hard livin g in Timonea (pseudonym)...and going to school in Downlea (pseudonym) but I manage. Timonea is not all that bad. It is a bit rough but you learn to handle it’ (Jane, Transition Year, Second Level).

It has been widely suggested that children and young people who are unaccompanied by a responsible adult are being excluded from public spaces in western societies, since they are seen either as potential victims (of traffic, strangers etc) or as potential threats (up to no good, not being entitled to be there: Holloway and Valentine, 2000; Mayall, 2002). In the present study (as in Corcoran et al’s 2003 Irish study) there was little evidence that the 10-12 year olds endorsed such views other than by very occasional references to traffic (which would be compatible with their perception of themselves as potential victims). There was a suggestion that some of the 14-17 year old boys saw adults as perceiving them as trouble makers because of the anti-social activities of a minority:

‘Well in this day and age being a teenager is a strange part of life with… people being prejudiced against us simply because of our age and a minority of SCUMBAGS’ (sic).’ (Eugene, Transition Year, Second Level).
Others referred to using public secluded areas for illicit activities (i.e. underage drinking or drug taking)-and suggested that the only ones who saw them as not entitled to do so were the police:

‘Occasionally we go to a disco. We get prepared by buying drink for that.. We usually buy the drink and go to a secluded area, drink, and then drink more…. Sometimes you can be unlucky and be caught by the Guards’ [i.e. police] (Mick, Transition Year, Second Level)

The qualitative data suggested that the 10-12 year olds, particularly those who were at schools in rural areas, had a strong sense of place rooted in historical material artefacts (such as castles, standing stones etc) validated explicitly or implicitly by tourist interest in such phenomena. For others, historical connections were more personal in the sense that they referred to places where their ancestors had come from or been buried, or those related to historically significant events in the lives of their own community. In the present study, the focus on heritage was stretched to breaking point by the inclusion of housing estates and national and international supermarket chains in it. As in Poole et al’s (2002) study of Australian children, reference to place embraced the natural and the built environment and with (as in their study) local cleanliness being referred to particularly by the 10-12 year old girls.

Making the transition to adulthood was seen by many of the 14-17 year olds as involving a spatial canvas that was wider than the local area. In some cases (as in Bennett’s 2000 study) for the 14-17 year olds, the relevant geographical area was Ireland and they focused on it, in what can best be described as an orgy of pride:

‘Even the Irish soccer team managed by Mick Mc Carthy is considered one of the best in Europe. We are even considered one of the twentieth century’s greatest countries as far as literature is concerned with writers like James Joyce’ (Vincent, Transition Year, Second Level).

Occasionally their occupational aspirations were such that they implied that they
would remain in or return to their local area (working on their fathers’ farm, or as a mechanic or carpenter, positions which they were growing into as they worked alongside the adults in those communities: see Paulgaard, 2002). For the most part however as in Rygaard’s (2003) study they wrote about going away to University; about wanting to travel and visit other countries, and occasionally of wanting to live abroad:

‘When I finish school I would love to travel the world….I would like to have a career which consisted of travel to get the opportunity to visit other countries and maybe even live abroad’ (Freda, Transition Year, Second Level)

Nevertheless, overall, it was clear that the local area was a very salient element in these young people’s accounts: with 63 per cent of them referring to their local area in their texts. This pattern varied with age, with the 10-12 year olds being particularly likely to refer to their area. There were no gender difference amongst the younger group as regards references to the local area. However, the 14-17 year old boys were marginally more likely than the girls of the same age to refer to their local area—a pattern that it will be argued may be associated with their greater embeddedness in the local area through sporting activities and interests.

It was clear from the qualitative analysis that the meaning of the local area was complex. However, boys and girls at both ages and in both rural and urban areas valued the natural aspects of their environment. They also saw both these and the built aspects of their environment as potential recreational areas. Furthermore, as in Poole et al’s study (2001) of Australian young people, it was not simply facilities specifically for young people that were referred to. Boys aged 14-17 years seemed most critical of the absence of specific facilities for young people in the area. Both age groups referred to the existence and the importance of community ties, although
there was a suggestion that 14-17 year old girls were less than enthusiastic about the informal social control exerted through gossip.

There was little evidence that the young people saw themselves as potential threats or victims in public spaces. Insofar as such perceptions did exist, it was the 10-12 year old girls who were most likely to feel victims and the 14-17 year old boys to perceive themselves as a threat. The 10-12 year olds, both boys and girls, particularly those attending school in rural areas, were most likely to refer to the history of the area. There were strong feelings of local pride—their perception of the attractiveness of their area to tourists (frequently seen as a globalising phenomenon: Paulgaard, 2002) appearing to enhance their own appreciation of it.

It was also clear that although some of the 14-17 year olds remained embedded in the local area, others were mentally anticipating a move away from it to University or looking forward to travelling and working abroad, and even in some cases to living abroad. Such patterns may be associated with the lower proportion of 14-17 year olds referring to the local area in their texts. However, other explanations, such as those related to the fact that the 14-17 year olds’ texts were more varied in content and structure than the 10-12 year olds cannot be eliminated. It is to a more detailed exploration of two aspects of their life style that we now turn.

**Life Styles: Contexts for the relationship between the global and the local**

In looking at these young people’s live styles, we are particularly concerned with the relationship between the global and the local, focussing on media and communication technologies and sporting activities. It has been argued that in late modernity, life
styles can be seen as part of a performance based concept of identity (Butler, 1991) or ‘identity without agency’ (Williams, 2000: see also Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991; Sardeillo, 1998; Haywood and Mac an Ghiall, 2003). Life styles have often been seen as based on consumer goods: ‘The market offers not just goods, but goods attached to versions of selfhood’ (Frost, 2003: 54; see also Miles, 2000). Furlong and Cartmel (1997) have argued that the ‘epistemological fallacy’ of late modernity is that structured inequalities deriving from gender and class cease to be important. Thus, they argued that although subjectively people feel that their life styles reflect their individual choices, in fact structural realities affect the range of choices, and hence the life styles available to them (see Frost, 2003; Gordon and Lahelma, 2002).

It will be shown that such life styles varied by gender and by age in this study. Thus, references to global elements (such as computer related activities; supporting international soccer; watching American Teen Programmes on TV; listening to chart music) were embedded in and interwoven with local elements (such as playing hurling or gaelic football in a local club, walking etc). It will be suggested that the focus on these aspects has consequences, particularly as regards the depiction of the life styles of the 14-17 year olds. Nevertheless, it seems plausible to suggest that these young people’s life styles involved a ‘creole interplay’ (Rygaard, 2003) and that they were best characterised as locally embedded within a global world:

‘Every month I go to a disco in the community center (sic) with my friends.. I play hurling and Gaelic for Timonae[pseudonym for local club]. I have an N64 and a PC. I always watch South Park -it is my favourite programme on TV. I support Man U and I watch them when they are on TV’ (Barney, Transition Year, Second Level)

It will be argued that effectively through their life styles, these young people were ‘doing gender’ (Butler, 1991) and ‘doing age’ drawing on the resources around them.
whether these were global or local. Such patterns will be illustrated by looking more closely at two aspects of these young people’s life styles: those related to media and communication technologies and to sporting activities.

**Media and Communication Technologies**

As in Livingstone (2002), computer games, internet, television, hi-fi, radio, videos and mobile phones etc. are included in the concept of media and communication technologies. These are for the most part, home based activity. Both Livingstone and Rygaard (2003) have stressed the importance of locating these in the context of their potential availability. Such availability at its most basic level is related to the existence of these types of media within the household; to young people’s access to them and the perceived availability of alternative sources of entertainment. Such data was not available in the texts used in this study. However, nationally, exposure to communication and information technologies as indicated by ownership of a computer at the household level has been increasing rapidly in Ireland: rising from 19 per cent of all households in 1998, to 32 per cent in 2000 to 42 per cent in 2003. Similarly, the percentage of households with internet connections rose from five per cent in 1998 to 20 per cent in 2000 to 34 per cent in 2003. Thus, at the household level, both computers and internet connections are still a minority phenomenon, albeit a rapidly increasing one. Levels of use of both are highest amongst young people. Thus, by 2003, 60 per cent of young people aged 16-24 years had used a computer and 50 per cent had used the internet –and roughly three quarters of those using them used them at least once a week (QNHS, 2003).

Gendered patterns as regards references to computer related activities (including
computer games and the internet) emerged in this as in other studies although the
gender differences were greater here (see Livingstone, 2002). Thus, boys in both age
groups were more likely than their female counterparts to refer to such computing
related activities. Reference to such activities was much greater amongst the younger
boys: and this may reflect either a cohort effect or the increasing pace of technological
change. In any case, 33 per cent of 10-12 year old boys referred to computer related
activities as compared with 14 per cent of the girls of that age. Gender patterns also
existed amongst the 14-17 year olds, with only three per cent of the girls, and 12 per
cent of the boys of that age referring to such activities. Holloway and Valentine
(2000) showed that in their study of British 11-16 year olds, the ‘techie boys’ were
seen as deviating from ‘normal masculinity’ so that their sexuality was questioned.
Haywood and Mac an Ghiall (2003) suggested that increased funding for technology
related careers could change the status of this kind of vocational knowledge. It is
possible that being a male ‘techie’ is less problematic in Irish society- something that
seems plausible given the state’s commitment to developing the information
technology industry as a site of high quality jobs (CSO, 2003).

The level of TV ownership in Ireland has been estimated to exceed 98 per cent of
households- with the viewing hours of Irish households being above the EU average
noted that in the UK study, television remained by far and away the most popular
medium, being watched by virtually all young people for an average of two and a half
hours per day. The kind of programmes watched can be seen as providing cultural
resources which are important in ‘doing gender’. Haywood and Mac an Ghiall (2003)
noted that in their study of primary school boys, cartoons containing high levels of
violence and aggression were one of the ways that they enacted gender (‘doing boys’). The kinds of programmes the young people referred to in the present study suggested that current gender patterns were reflected in and reinforced by these cultural resources. Indeed, the kinds of programmes watched seemed to reflect similar ways of ‘doing boy’ and ‘doing girl’ in both age groups. Thus, both the 10-12 girls and the 14-17 year olds were more likely than their male counterparts to refer to US teen drama (such as Buffy, the Vampire Slayer, Sabrina, Dawson’s Creek, Ally Mc Beal, Sweet Valley High) INSERT TABLE 2. There was a suggestion that the 14-17 year old girls were particularly likely to enjoy watching such programmes with their friends—such global cultural resources being consumed in a locally embedded context:

‘My best friend Mary Murphy and I always have out traditional Monday night in watching comedy night. The line up is as follows-70s show, Friends (kick ass) and Veronica’s Closet’ (Deirdre, Transition Year, Second Level)

‘Soaps’ (such as Coronation Street; East Enders etc) were not popular amongst these young people, although girls were again more likely than boys to refer to them. Only a very small minority of those in this study referred to anarchic comedy programmes (including the Simpsons and South Park). Of those who did, the boys were somewhat more likely than the girls to refer to them.

Livingstone (2002) found that girls were more likely than boys to listen to music. In the present study, both the girls aged 10-12 years and 14-17 years were more likely than their male counterparts to refer to chart music (music that was in the top 30 charts during the week when the data was collected: such as Boyzone, Westlife, Five, Britney Spears etc). It is possible to argue that both the singers and the lyrics (which frequently have a strong emotional component) are important in affecting the 10-12 year olds references to such music. McRobbie and Garber suggested (1991) that a
female ‘teenybopper’ culture was catered for by an almost totally packaged cultural commodity in a context where real boys remained a threatening and unknown quantity. At any rate chart music was particularly likely to be referred to by the 10-12 year old girls: 36 per cent of them referring only to chart music in their texts, as compared with 15 per cent of the 10-12 year old boys. Such references were less common amongst the 14-17 year old girls – although they were still more likely than their male counterparts to refer to such music. For these 14-17 year old girls, there was a suggestion that music was about signalling similarity and enjoying a group experience: ‘I love going to discos with my friends you have great fun dancing away to all the latest songs like TLC, Boyzone, and the other artists that are in the chart’ (Mary, Transition Year, Second Level). Thus, the experience of listening to such chart music was very much located in the context of their local social networks. Only five per cent of the 14-17 year old boys referred to chart music. There was a suggestion that boys of this age group were more likely to use music as a way of signalling difference:

‘I passionately detest the music of to day. I listen to much older music, the Blues of the 1920’s -1980’s, Rock Music of the 1960’s -1980’s’ (Marty, Transition Year, Second Level)

However although the girls at both ages were most likely to refer to chart music, they were also more likely than the boys of the same age to refer to a range of other cultural influences. Thus, the girls in both age groups were twice as likely to refer to reading as a hobby. Such patterns may simply reflect girls’ greater reading ability. They may also however reflect the greater perceived gender appropriateness of reflective and broadly cultured activities for girls than boys. The latter interpretation was compatible with the fact that girls in both age groups were also more likely than their same age male counterparts to refer to playing a musical instrument (see also
Livingstone, 2002). Such differences were greatest amongst the 10-12 year old girls. The reduction of this gender difference in the older age group may reflect the fact that at this age only those who are really interested persist, and that such persistence reflects and reinforces an indifference to its perceived gender appropriateness amongst this minority. These gendered patterns are not peculiar to Ireland: with Furlong and Cartmel (1997) noting that girls were more likely than boys to read literature, listen to classical music and to be more likely to play a musical instrument.

Overall, then as in the case of the local area, references to media and communication technologies were much less common in the 14-17 year old texts than in the case of the 10-12 year olds. There were clear gender patterns as regards the young people’s references to media and communication activities in both age groups. Thus, at both ages boys were more likely to refer to computer related activities; and girls were more likely to refer to listening to chart music and watching US Teen TV. It seems possible to suggest then that rather than transforming ‘doing gender’, such global media were accessed in such a way that they reflected and reinforced current gendered patterns. (In other situations, such as those relating to future careers, it seemed possible that they broadened possibilities, with Ally Mc Beal’s TV programme exemplifying the attractiveness of the legal profession, in a society where married women’s access to the labour force in general, and to the professions in particular is a relatively recent phenomenon: O’Connor, 1998). It was striking that the range of cultural activities which the 10-12 year old boys referred in particular was more dependent on global media and communication technologies than those referred to by the girls. Indeed it has been suggested that cultural resources used for ‘doing man’ are much more limited (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997) and hence the
possibility that the content of hegemonic masculinity will become broader and more reflective is inhibited.

_Sports_

References to sports in these young people’s accounts included both participation in and watching sports, mainly football, at the local and international level. Lesko (2001:155) stressed that football matches, like other public spectacles mobilised emotions, they ‘invented group ties, by creating both pasts and futures’. The relationship between sport and gender is socially and culturally constructed. When football is not available, boys have to find other ways of ‘doing boy’ (i.e. other signifiers of masculinity: Epstein et al, 2001). It has been widely noted (Connell, 1995; Lesko, 2001; Willis, 1990; Haywood and Mac an Ghiall, 2003; Frost, 2003; Frosh, 2003) that sport has become a key element in defining masculinity in Western Society, not least because of the perceived relationship between masculinity and men’s bodies. Lahelma (2000) also suggested that strength, toughness and group solidarity reflected key elements in hegemonic masculinity: and such elements are arguably reflected in and reinforced by sport. The importance of sports as signifiers of gendered identity was suggested in the present study insofar as boys aged 10-12 and 14-17 years were for the most part, more likely than similar age girls to participate in and/or to follow sporting activities. Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) sports (such as gaelic football and hurling) were the most popular participative sport amongst the 10-12 year old boys: with 40 per cent of them referring to playing these sports as compared with 22 per cent of the girls. Such sports were also the most popular participative sports amongst the 14-17 year old boys, although the proportion referring to them was much lower (18 per cent) and there were similar gendered
differences. Such gendered patterns also existed at both age levels amongst those playing soccer only. INSERT TABLE 3 The proportion of the 14-17 year olds who referred to playing any kind of sports was also much lower than the 10-12 year olds. Such patterns may reflect the fact that only the really committed continue playing these sports at this age, in the presence of a greater range of alternative ways of ‘doing boy’ (such as meeting girls, drinking, ‘hanging out’ with friends, earning money through part-time work etc).

Similar factors seemed likely to lie behind the fact that age and gender differences also existed as regards watching sports (with international soccer on its own being the most common sport followed). The proportion of boys who referred to following sport was almost twice as big as the proportion of girls doing so at each age level. The 10-12 boys were most likely of all to refer to the sports they followed: 43 per cent of them as compared with 23 per cent of the 14-17 year old boys. The younger boys were particularly likely to make a connection between the sport they followed and aspects of their own narratives, such as their place of residence, their sporting ambitions or their favourite sport: ‘My favourite hurler is Joe Deane and my favourite soccer player is Roy Keane. Both of these players come from Cork’ (Colm, Fifth Class, First Level). Kuhling and Keohane (2002:117) suggested that in Ireland celebrities ‘ordinariness’ and their local links might be stressed. Amongst the boys, public figures that were identified as role models were particularly likely to include international footballers (such as Roy Keane) as well as national footballers and hurlers from their own local area. The meaning of both participative and non-participative sports was also closely related to a sense of identity reflected in their identification with a team. Identification with the Irish soccer team (reflected in ‘we’)}
is explicit and the memory of it and the vicissitudes of the local Kildare team dominate this young man’s account:

‘both World cups 1990 and 1994 had some of the happiest and saddest days of my life. When we beat Italy in 1994 [it] was unreal, but then to lose to Holland two weeks later was heartbreaking. But the best moment in my life up to know (sic) was when Kildare won the Leinster final… for the first time in 50 years. The celebrations went on for weeks… Kildare.. lost in the final to Galway and that was heartbreaking’ (Tom, Transition Year, Second Level).

Even where girls referred to sports they followed, there were indications that they saw supporting international football teams as unusual for girls: ‘I support Brazil in football. I love football a lot and I am the only girl in my class who likes football that much’ (Laura, Fifth Grade, First Level). The relationship between following a sport played by men and gender identity received indirect support from the fact that 30 per cent of the 10-12 year old boys followed sports played solely by men, as compared with one per cent of the girls of the same age following sports played solely by women.

Young people can and do contest gender signifiers (Holloway and Valentine, 2000). This has happened in the case of Ladies’ Football, which is now reputed to be the fastest growing sport in Ireland. However, the texts suggested that football had not been fully assimilated into gender definitions. Thus Carol (Fifth Grade, First Level) referred to pressure on her to conform to a gender stereotype that does not include football-one that she rejects: ‘Most people slag me saying ‘girls dont play football’ but I love playing football’. References to the ‘normal’ gender patterns of activities were also made- with the deviation from these also implicitly underlining their stereotypical male gendered character: ‘My favourite sport is football because it is very rough’ (Lena, Fifth Grade, First Level). There was also some evidence that these 10-12 year old girls were reflexively aware of their own role as trailblazers ‘We made
History today it was the first girls [football] team ever’ - the ‘we’ suggesting a collective reframing of gendered definitions. Interestingly, these young girls saw no obstacles to their participation in Gaelic football or soccer at either a local or international level in the future: the only issue being whether or not they wanted to play for money.

Furlong and Carmel (1997) noted that there was considerable evidence that, despite some modification of gender differences, girls were less likely to participate in team sport than boys. Perhaps not surprisingly then, as in their study, amongst both the 10-12 and 14-17 year old girls, the references to sport that occurred most often were to non-team local sports (roller blading, pool, cycling, swimming etc)-with 36 per cent of the 10-12 year old girls and 17 per cent of the 14-17 year old girls referring to such activities. Indeed, only in these non-team based participative sports was girls’ participation in both age groups greater than boys (22 per cent and 13 per cent respectively). Such patterns can be seen as part of the gender differentiated pattern. They arguably reflected and reinforced the fact that girls’ life styles (particularly at 14-17 years) were typically home and network based and less supported by public institutional structures involving local teams, clubs etc: ‘In my free time, I like to watch television, read, cycle, walk, talk on the telephone, go down town with my friends, go to discos’ (Anna, Transition Year, Second Level).

The one area where there was little gender difference was in the case of the 10-12 year olds participation in prestige sports activities (such as golf, skiing etc). At that age, such leisure activities were typically undertaken in the company of their parents- and so can be seen as reflecting a broader class related family lifestyle (see Griffiths,
1995; Frost, 2003; O’Connor, 2002/1992). Hence, one might suggest that the importance of class transcended gender in influencing participation in such prestige sports at that age. However, amongst the 14-17 year olds, the older boys were more likely than the older girls to refer to such activities. This may reflect patterns of ‘patriarchal privileging’ (Connell, 1995) since participation in such activities at this age arguably necessitates family decisions as regards expenditure (since the 14-17 year olds are less likely to be covered by family memberships).

Overall then as in Lahelma’s (2000:12) study, although overwhelmingly the young people in this study did not refer to gender when talking about sports, it ‘still appeared as a self evident backdrop’. Gender differentiated trends existed in both age groups, with boys being more likely to play GAA sports and soccer, and more likely to follow sports, especially international soccer. Participation in non-team based sports was the only kind of sporting activity that girls were more likely than boys to refer to. Thus, arguably many of the phenomena such as awareness of hierarchy; interest in football etc that are implicitly assumed to be ‘natural’ are socially and culturally generated. Finally, arguably because of the greater variety in the content of their texts; the existence of other ways of ‘doing boy/girl’ (such as dating or drinking); and/or the greater importance of part-time jobs or of ‘hanging out’ with their friends, the 14-17 year olds were less likely than the 10-12 year olds to refer to sporting activities.

Summary and Conclusions
In this article drawing on texts which were written by young people aged 10-12 and 14-17 years old, we looked at young people’s local embeddedness in a global world,
focusing particularly on references to the local area and on two aspects of these young people’s life styles: media and communication technologies and sports.

It was very clear that the local area was important in their texts, with 63 per cent of the young people referring to it. Because of the nature of the methodology, we do not know to what extent it was important to others, who for various reasons did not refer to it. Boys and girls at both ages (and in both rural and urban areas) valued the natural aspects of their environment. There were strong feelings of local pride—their perception of the attractiveness of their area to tourists enhancing their own appreciation of their area. These young people saw both the natural and the built aspects of their environment as potential recreational areas, with boys aged 14-17 years being most critical of the absence of specific facilities for youth. Both age groups referred to the existence of a wide range of local amenities and to community ties. Thus, quite clearly these texts show that the local area was an important focus for these young people at many levels. It is not possible to say whether it is more/less important now than it was to young people a couple of decades ago, since comparable data on this is not available. However the fact that 63% of these young people referred to the local area in their texts clearly indicates its importance in these young people’s texts.

As in Lahelma’s (2000) Finnish study, young people in Ireland to-day are growing up in an educational system which purports to be gender neutral, and which ignores gender differences in orientations, career choices and recreational activities. Yet ‘doing gender’ is a reality in their lives: globalized phenomena being drawn on selectively to reinforce ways of ‘doing boy/girl’ within a particular local context.
Thus, the 10-12 year old boys were most likely to refer to globalising phenomena such as computer related activities and following international soccer; and to the most local of activities namely participating locally in GAA team sports such as gaelic football and hurling. The 10-12 year old girls were more likely to refer to globalising phenomena such as listening to chart music and watching US teen drama on TV. They were also more likely to refer to a range of non-electronic local cultural influences (such as reading). Similar gendered trends emerged amongst the 14-17 year olds. Thus, in both age groups it was possible to see a ‘creole interplay’ (Rygaard, 2003) between the global and the local, with both being articulated within local contexts in ways that reflected and reinforced gendered differences.

References to media and communication technologies and to sports were also affected by age. Thus they were less likely to occur in the 14-17 year olds texts than in the 10-12 year olds. This can be interpreted simplistically as reflecting the 10-12 year olds greater involvement in globalising phenomena. However, the 10-12 year olds were also most likely to refer to the local area, and to participating in local GAA sports such as gaelic football and hurling. It is possible that the differences between the 10-12 and the 14-17 year olds texts may reflect methodological factors (such as the greater variety in the content of the 14-17 year olds texts); or that media and communication technologies and sports are not the most important indicators of globalisation/local embeddedness for this age group. Other indicators such as those related to their hopes or dreams about exotic jobs, travelling or living abroad (Rygaard, 2003) might be more useful as indicators of globalisation for them; while social network based references might be more important indicators of local embeddedness. Thus, it is arguable that the indicators chosen in this article are more
relevant to reflecting the global and the local in the lives of the 10-12 year olds than the 14-17 year olds. Hence, it is suggested that further work needs to be done on the way in which the local and the global facilitates youth transitions in the 14-17 year age group.

Ireland is a society that has undergone very rapid economic, social and cultural change. With a total population of less than four million, it inevitably has local characteristics. During the lives of these young people, not only has it been increasingly affected by global technologies, but it has been transformed from an economy characterised by very high levels of unemployment and outward emigration, to one characterised by high growth rates, inward migration and dramatic increases in married women’s participation in paid employment (see O’Connor, 1998 and 2000). It is also a society which purports to be gender neutral but where men and women’s lives remain culturally very clearly differentiated; and where men continue to dominate the economic, political, legal, and religious institutions numerically and hierarchically, so that it has remained in many ways, a society characterised by a ‘patriarchal dividend’ (Connell, 1995; O’Connor, 2000). Nevertheless, as an English speaking country, influenced by American popular culture and EU policies, it has experienced substantial social and cultural changes during the lives of these young people: including a dramatic increase in the birth of children outside marriage; changes in sexual behaviour; public recognition that girls are outperforming boys educationally; the legalisation of divorce; and changes in the relationship between the state and the institutional Roman Catholic Church.
In such a context, it is not surprising that the local would be important to these young people. Equally, it is not surprising that many aspects of these young people’s life styles reflect global resources. However, assumptions that global processes or influences are reducing the importance of the local or transforming its gendered nature are naïve and reflect a failure to appreciate the ‘creole nature’ of these young people’s lives and the continuance of age and gendered patterns within a very rapidly changing global but locally embedded society.

References


Tovey, Hilary and Share, Perry (2000) A Sociology of Ireland. Dublin:Gill and Macmillan


Table 1: Profile of Respondents in terms of School Grade and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Grade</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fifth Grade, First Level</td>
<td>Girls 55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition Year, Second Level</td>
<td>Girls 62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Class or School</td>
<td>Girls 48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Texts written by young people (sub-sample=4,100 texts)
Table 2: Age by references to Cultural Media, Controlling for Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>10-12</th>
<th>14-17</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Girls</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen only to Chart Music</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watch US Teen TV</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computers</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play musical Instrument</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Boys</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen only to Chart Music</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watch US Teen TV</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computers</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play musical Instrument</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listen only to Chart Music</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watch US Teen TV</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computers</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play musical Instrument</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Texts Written by young people (sub-sample=4,100 texts)
### Table 3: Age by references to Sporting activities, Controlling for Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>10-12</th>
<th>14-17</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing GAA</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing Soccer only</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing Non team sports</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing Prestige sports</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports followed</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following International soccer alone</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing GAA</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing Soccer only</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing Non team sports</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing Prestige sports</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports followed</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following International soccer alone</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing GAA</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing Soccer only</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing Non team sports</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing Prestige sports</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports followed</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Following International Soccer alone</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>