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LIFELONG LEARNING, GEOGRAPHICAL SPACES, AND NOMADIC NECESSITY

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ABSTRACT

This paper interrogates my personal experiences of being "situated" as an educator within a regional context. Current dominant discourses encourage individuals to take responsibility for their own lifelong learning and imply there are opportunities available in regional locations to use this knowledge and "education". While the desire to contribute to the social fabric of place and community may be keenly felt, the impact of globalization and economic rationalism ultimately constrains opportunities and undermines lifelong-learning discourses. I conclude this paper by suggesting that Central Queensland University could play a role in building sustainable regional communities through fostering local growth in employment opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

In this paper I reflect on the way that government policies within contemporary Australia have impacted on my own positioning, both geographically and occupationally. My "living space" and my "work space" are domains that are constantly changing in response to global issues and events. I indulge in the pleasure of exploring the multiplicities, competing discourses, ethics, and values that make up the place in which I live and the space that I occupy as a female body. To do this I divide my paper into three sections. The first section deconstructs the notion of place (McDowell, 1999) and positionality, where I establish the contexts associated with work, occupation, and lifelong learning in a specific geographical space. Very broadly, I summarise social indicators and present a snapshot of Rockhampton – the place where I currently reside and work. In the second section I use the concept of "multiple mes" to explore my own positioning within diverse communities – both real and imagined. In the last section I raise the issue of nomadic necessity and divide this section into two subsections. In the first subsection I use the notion of the nomad (Braidotti, 1994) to outline my journey through occupational groups and opportunities in Rockhampton. In the second subsection I explore the ways in which I am also positioned as a non-nomad by my desire to contribute to the social fabric of the local community culturally, educationally, and occupationally; I constantly negotiate tensions between the desire to remain and the necessity to go if I want to pursue a professional career, problematising the notion of sustainable regional communities.

PLACE AND POSITIONALITY: BEING A COMMUNITY

McDowell (1999, p. 100) contends that the concept of community carries with it visions of warmth and solidarity with the corresponding

assumption that a lack of community is a bad thing. Community is also used to label groups, sometimes negatively and often establishing stereotypes (McDowell, 1999, p. 100). In this paper I use the term "community" in specific ways denoting both place and group; place meaning geographical location, and group meaning occupational community. Geographic location comprises many different and diverse members located in one specific geographic location while an occupational community involves a group of workers in the same occupation that are located across many sites or locations thus forming imagined communities. Virtual communities follow a similar pattern, but rather than being held together via occupational interest they are held together by way of the Internet and information technologies in relation to both personal and public spheres.

Because of their discursive positioning it is possible to argue that women and men occupy place and space differently. For example, the home is a place that many men often seek as a haven from the pressures of the outside, public world. Therefore these men use this site as a place of relaxation and leisure. For most women the home is a site of housework and childcare; work rather than leisure. This is not to say that women don't gain pleasure from their home, but for some women home can be a site of violence, despair, and loneliness. I argue in the following section that, while Rockhampton is a community moving towards transformation of home and community, there are competing discourses present that serve to discursively position women in specific ways that impact on how women are seen in both the private and public spheres of the community.

Place and community: my geographical isolation

Rockhampton, Central Queensland, has a population of approximately 60,000 people, and it services a large, rural, geographical sector west from the Capricorn coast. The regional population in February 2003 was approximately 261,204 (State of the State, 2003). To give some dimensions of the geography of the area of Central Queensland, Rockhampton is a six-hour drive north of Brisbane and is geographically situated just inside the Tropic of Capricorn, hence the local name of "Capricorn Coast". Yeppoon lies 45 kilometres east of Rockhampton on the coast, while Longreach is a seven-hour road journey to the west. There are

road, rail, and air services to and from the city. Rockhampton was the original campus for Central Queensland University (CQU), which has since expanded to locate regional campuses at Bundaberg, Mackay, Gladstone, Emerald, and Noosa. There are also campuses located interstate and overseas that cater for international students. Table 1 indicates the percentage of graduates in three of the regional communities at two different times.

Place	2003	1996
Mackay	6.3%	5.1%
Rockhampton	6.9%	5.7%
Gladstone	6.5%	5.1%

Table 1. Percentage of bachelor degrees: comparison between 2003 and 1996 (State of the State, 2003).

This table shows that there has been a marginal increase in the percentage of people with bachelor degrees; however, the percentages are low considering that regional campuses of CQU exist at these three locations. Table 2 indicates the change in unemployment in these same communities.

Place	2003	2001
Mackay	6.9%	9.2%
Rockhampton	9.6%	10.8%
Gladstone	7.1%	9.2%

Table 2. Percentage of unemployment: September 2003 and September 2001 (State of the State, 2003).

Table 2 shows that there has been some decrease in the number of unemployed people across these three sites. Both Rockhampton and Gladstone have undergone extensive industrial development. About a quarter of the Australia's coal exports go through Hay Point (Mackay). This port and Port of Gladstone moved AUD$9.4 billion in exports during 2002, but Rockhampton had the Lakes Creek Abattoir close in July 2002 with the loss of 700 jobs. Although the "beef capital" (Rockhampton) is attempting to reinvent itself as an educational and cultural hub for the Central Queensland region (State of the State, 2003), currently there is still a shortage of medical specialists, and the university is cutting back on staff despite healthy enrolments.

Cameron Forbes (2001), a journalist, revisited Rockhampton after a long absence and reflected,

in an article in the Weekend Australian newspaper, on some of the changes that he saw.

> For many of my generation Rockhampton was a place to leave, one of those regional centres stuck between the bush and the big smoke, places of broad horizons but limited opportunities …Rockhampton regarded Brisbane with resentment and suspicion … It was a tough old town founded on the dispossession of the Darambul people, the "wild dogs" whose survivors lived out of sight in reserves or in near invisibility on the town fringes… It was a macho town, the self-proclaimed beef capital of Australia with a predilection for scattering statues of bulls through the streets. Mayor Rex Pilbeam who dominated politics for three decades … instituted council policy against employing married women and said that working mothers caused a litany of social evils.
>
> Things have changed. The girls are back at the Rockhampton Grammar…. Women are everywhere now … sitting in the mayor's seat is Margaret Strelow, married with 4 teenage children and the Federal member for Capricornia is 31-year-old Kirsten Livermore [but] about 40% of the Rockhampton population seems to be below 25 and the rest are much older. There's a middle missing … (p. 7).

What Forbes is describing is a site of competing discourses. Rockhampton is a regional centre that has strong ties to rural industries and agricultural families. This means that there are also strong beliefs about the place of women and what women should or should not do, in or outside of the house or farm gate. Generations of the same families have lived in this region, and until the 1990s there had not been much movement of migrants into the region. Many of the local families have sons and daughters who return to the region after finishing boarding school or have remained here because of family ties, but many, like Cameron Forbes, prefer not to return on a permanent basis. While there has been minor change with the public appearance of women in some positions of status, attitudes in many sectors of this community are still traditional. Gatens (1998, p. 3) reminds us that families are perceived as "natural" entities rather than institutions shaped by dominant or prevalent historical, social, and political

relations of power that underpin particular ideologies. This illustrates that movement towards transformation in Rockhampton is gradual rather than radical.

Discursive constructions: being a woman in Rockhampton

There are some fairly traditional normative practices that are firmly entrenched within the white, Anglo-Saxon community living in Rockhampton. These emerge from certain beliefs and cultural values pertaining to the role and position of women. Discourses and discursive practices are embedded in such institutions as the family and the workplace (Lindsey, 1994; Weedon, 1987). Discourses related to the family are highly emotive and powerful and form our cultural values, norms, and beliefs. At the same time, the family is the most significant socialising agent in shaping and constituting gender norms. We learn how to be male, female, mothers, fathers, workers, and providers within this institution and from imitating those close to us.

There is an expectation of the second wage, but childcare and housework still fall primarily to women (Lupton, Short, & Whip, 1992). While there has been some movement of women into the public sphere of Rockhampton and into leadership positions such as Mayor, Vice Chancellor (CQU) and Federal Member, these are not enough to change attitudes towards the roles and position of women generally. Many women work in full-time positions in traditional "service" occupations such as nurses, teachers, retail assistants, and hospitality workers. At the same time, there are women who work on rural properties alongside husbands and partners. Probert (2002) contends that while women are encouraged to enter the workplace, discourses around domesticity and motherhood remain relatively traditional.

MULTIPLE MES: POSITIONING AND BEING POSITIONED

While Kenway, Willis, Blackmore, and Rennie (1993) suggest that women learn how to be women (in the culturally endorsed sense) through the discourses of the everyday, Davies (1990) contends that women learn to choose between different discursive constructions, thus taking up some and rejecting others. Some discourses are clearly more powerful than others within different historical or cultural contexts

and are legitimised within various institutions (Kenway et al., 1993; Kenway, Willis, Blackmore, & Rennie, 1997). What I term as "multiple mes" (i.e., various forms of me) is helpful here. I contend that the concept of multiple mes (Moore, 2003) is a device for explaining how competing and contradictory discourses are negotiated and reconciled. Because a woman may negotiate a number of discursive fields – mother, wife, daughter, worker, student, or academic, for example – she holds a different subject position and can be seen as a different "me" in each of these fields. This multiplicity may be contradictory, that is, she is both a mother and a daughter. Coupled with this are markers of difference such as age, race, ethnicity, and physical ability; all providing constructions of how this woman is seen by society and demonstrating differences found among women (Braidotti, 1994). These multiplicities can allow many women to challenge the limited and narrow traditional constructions of "woman" in a rural environment such as Rockhampton. The concept of multiple mes is significant because it demonstrates that context is important and that choices are made in non-neutral contexts.

Being 'me' in Rockhampton: my occupational isolation

When I first arrived in Rockhampton I was able to continue my commitments to my New Zealand employer regarding nuclear-medicine training for radiographers by belonging to a virtual community. In my tangible community I did short-term locum work, covering for staff on annual leave, in the nuclear-medicine section of a private radiological practice. I also covered for radiographic staff when times got very busy and when regular staff were unavailable. As well, I covered for staff at the base hospital in a similar arrangement. There was not enough work or funding for either a full-time or part-time position at either site. After about two years of this I enrolled in an Arts degree at CQU. I become involved with the local Women's Health Centre (WHC) as a member of the management team. Here I met a diverse range of local women; I had also met other migrant women through more formal channels associated with my own allied health work and my husband's work. As a woman without children, I was told by a couple of local women I was "abnormal". As a wife, I was viewed suspiciously when stating that I wished to continue my career. Both

of these situations challenged the traditional construction of "woman" in this community.

Taking on lifelong learning discourses

Neither did I readily fit the image of the "CQU domestic student" because my aim was to learn about Australian society rather than re-train for a job. I was demonstrating a commitment to lifelong learning at the local university, thus taking up a prevailing discourse in the local community. The university offered a way to value add to my existing skills and knowledge. At the time I was occupationally isolated but felt I should be able to apply my new knowledge in this region. Axford and Moyes (2003) consider that lifelong learning has a particularly close resonance with current debates regarding the needs of both workers and organizations that form the globalized market place. There is a strong discourse that ties continual upgrading of skills to economic success.

Although I enjoyed my voluntary involvement at the WHC I did not want to work there. I applied to enrol in a PhD program – hoping to have the same supervisor as I'd had with my Honours degree. However, while my candidature was accepted, owing to re-structuring within the faculty, my supervisor suddenly became unavailable. Within the university I could see the effects of micropolitics at play. I also felt that the micropolitics of the workplace would be a good PhD topic. What came to concern me in my thesis was that transformative practice at the micro-social level (subjectivity) was not transforming the macro-social level – the workplace. There were competing discourses, but the dominant traditional discourse continued to position the women I interviewed as complementary to men. While the women I interviewed demonstrated transformative practices in their work, this was not changing attitudes towards the place of women in society. These women were valued when they took on traditional roles of caring but were devalued in research or management – roles that were more often associated with men. On reflection, the university mirrored the local community, but this wasn't just a case of oppressed women. The women I knew, and also myself, were negotiating complex and complicated lives in a context influenced by such macro-issues as drought, industry profitability, rising interest rates, workplace reform, and competition policy. Jobs, workers, and community sustainability are negotiated along a very fine line that appears to

be ultimately controlled by economic rationalist policies and cost-effective measures. There were material consequences coming from this complexity.

Economic cutbacks to the university mean that employment for many women, if available at all, may come in the form of casual tutoring. At the same time, many of my allied heath colleagues have left because of disappearing jobs. Many medical specialists and their families have also left. Community funding is under threat as places like the WHC worry whether the government will continue funding at the current level or even discontinue programs. Community groups are being asked to tender for service provision, meaning that they compete among themselves to continue services rather than complement each other. This makes for division rather than partnerships in community service. Each government bureau that centralises services back to Brisbane means a few more families leaving the district, the consequences of which are felt in declining school enrolments and fewer wages being spent in the local industries and businesses. Those banks that close their doors and expect the community to embrace online services send strong messages that people in regional areas are not valued customers. So where does this leave me? The concept of the nomad (Braidotti, 1994) is useful here.

NOMADIC NECESSITY OR RE-PROGRAMING: DO I STAY OR DO I GO?

My negotiations with the university, the workplaces and people that I have met in Rockhampton have emerged from what Suchman (1987) refers to as situated action where responses can lead into both familiar and unfamiliar spaces. As Rowan (1998, p. 22) reveals, for her, "situated action emerges from a specific context and thus can never have the reassuring familiarity of a plan". Indeed, my own journey into the community of Rockhampton has been one of unpredictability, uncertainty, and dynamic flows venturing into many unfamiliar spaces. As Braidotti (1994, p. 5) asserts "some of the greatest trips can take place without physically moving from one's habitat". Having enjoyed some of my journeys into the local community I feel I am now positioning myself as a non-nomad because of my desire to stay awhile and to contribute to the local community. Unfortunately, the jobs and

investment by larger institutions are not there for me to be able to do this.

CQU provides value-added exports in the form of overseas students returning to other geographical places in the global market place. There is potential for domestic students to value-add to the local economy. Unfortunately, in regional areas such as Central Queensland the consequences of competition policy and economic-rationalist practices have resulted in declining services and employment opportunities. This has seen a movement of skilled professionals out of Rockhampton. While I am not suggesting that CQU should become a job agency, I am advocating that universities, such as CQU, could take on a leadership role in the local community by building sustainable communities through the promotion of lifelong learning and partnerships with local industry, professional groups, and government agencies. At the same time universities could critique government policies that have negative consequences on regional areas. CQU could re-position itself as an advocate for sustainable regional communities within its campus locations.

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have explored the notion of community in relation to both geographic location and occupational groups. An image of community was provided through rich descriptions of Rockhampton, a regional city located in Central Queensland. This community is a site of multiple positionings for women where dominant discourses tend to construct women in traditional ways. There are women who challenge this positioning, and to explain the negotiation and reconciliation of competing discourses the concept of multiple mes was useful. Using my own experiences of both geographical and occupational isolation I reflected on a complex, exciting, and uncharted journey into the community that is Rockhampton. Undertaking this journey also meant immersing myself in the local university culture as a lifelong learner. The university has the potential to act as a leader and partner with their community to build regional sustainability in Central Queensland.

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PORTFOLIO CAREERS AND LIFELONG LEARNING: WHO TAKES RESPONSIBILITY?

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I explore the notion of *portfolio* careers for women. Globalization and economic rationalism draw attention to the changing nature of the workplace where these ideologies are shaping the performances of workers. When this context is coupled with discourses around lifelong learning, some significant questions are raised such as who takes responsibility for ensuring that workers involve themselves in lifelong learning, who gains from the promotion of lifelong learning, and what can be called legitimate lifelong learning within a portfolio career.

INTRODUCTION

There has been much discussion and debate over the past thirty years concerning women and their entry to the workplace. In this paper I continue this discussion by exploring three key themes that draw attention to issues pertaining to the positioning of women in contemporary workplaces, the ongoing debate about childcare and parenting responsibility, and discourses around lifelong learning. The first theme centres around the notion of *portfolio* careers, once the domain of successful, high-flying male executives and now the domain of part-time and casual workers. The second theme highlights the changing nature of the contemporary workplace

that is under the influence of globalization and economic-rationalist policies. The third and final theme of this paper draws the first and second theme together to interrogate the discourse of lifelong learning and how this intersects with women workers in the contemporary workplace.

THE PORTFOLIO CAREER

The notion of a portfolio career is not new or particularly novel. Many middle-aged executive men have been involved in such careers for years (Waite, 2002). However, this concept has also become an attractive option for some women. Waite (2002, p. 92) uses the well-known corporate identity, Margaret Jackson,