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“Where are you from?” Adolescent formulations of place identity

<https://doi.org/10.1515/applirev-2017-0043>

Abstract: In globalized times, high mobility has complicated the meanings of allegiance to place, creating a need for a critical awareness of place identity. Although place identity has made important contributions to the social sciences, there is little empirical research on how it can be operationalized, or critically interrogated. In response to this need, we analyzed ways that Australian secondary school students responded to the question, “*If someone asks you ‘Where are you from?’ how do you answer this question and why?*”, and created a basic typology of place formulations to serve as a starting point for interpreting notions of place identity in research, professional and educational settings.

Keywords: place, place identity, high school students, Proshansky, place formulations, language and identity

Notions of place have been approached from a variety of perspectives in sociology, anthropology, social and environmental psychology, tourism, planning and cultural geography. This multi-disciplinary focus has perhaps been a reason for a lack of conceptual clarity, differing epistemological traditions and foci and the plethora of meanings connected with the notion of place (Patterson and Williams 2005, p.365). Yet, throughout this diverse research literature, a sense of place plays a formative role in shaping identity and self-perception. It is also inextricably linked to a sense of self-esteem, inclusion, belonging and social connectedness.

In an age of transnational mobility, social relationships and notions of identity, belonging and place are more complex than they have been in the past (Van De Vijver et al. 2015), requiring researchers to apply frameworks that account for a sense of place and belonging in ways that reflect these complexities. As Johnstone (2011) notes, economic change, globalization and their associated social processes have expanded the meanings of place and rapid social change, gentrification, urban expansion, colonization, displacement and high

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rates of mobility complicate the meaning of questions like ‘*where are you?*’ and ‘*where are you from?*’ (e.g. Johnstone 1990; Johnstone 2004; Modan 2007).

In all of this research, place is described as more than just a physical or geographical location (Hague 2005, p.4). As Relph (1976, p.37) defines it, place is made up of those fragments of environments where meanings, activities and a specific landscape are all enfolded with each other. In a similar vein, Rose (1995, p.88) writes that it is through the investment of meaning and feelings that a space becomes a place. The meanings and identities imputed to places are formed in interaction with other people, and they are often imbued with power and prestige (Hague 2005, p.6).

Place can thus be conceptualized as a physical environment, as a socio-logical variable, and as a discursive construct (Johnstone 2011). It is a central concept in the field of sociolinguistics, where it has been studied from numerous perspectives. Phonological studies on dialect geography and language variation typically have place as their starting point (for a recent compilation, see Montgomery and Moore 2017) and More recently, place has been the locus of linguistic landscape and geo-semiotic studies (e.g. Gorter 2013; Scollon and Scollon 2003). Because so much sociolinguistic theory is predicated on fixed notions of place, “once tried and trusted notions of community-based linguistic differences no longer wholly apply” (Bigham 2012, p.536). In other words, globalization, displacement and mobility have all contributed to unsettling our understandings of place.

Not only have the effects of mobility, migration and forced population movement disrupted the notion of place as a fixed and stable entity, they also highlight how place can be used to categorize and exclude others. In an Australian study, Hatoss (2012) found that Sudanese new Australians were asked so frequently where they were from that they interpreted the question as an expression of social exclusion. A number of social-psychological studies confirm how being asked where one is from can threaten one’s personal identity if it continually calls it into question (Tajfel and Turner 1986; Turner et al. 1987). Such constant questioning can contribute to what has been called the perpetual foreigner stereotype (Tuan 1998), referring to ethnic minorities’ sense of never being accepted by the host community (Armenta et al. 2013). For these reasons, in a worldwide climate where anti-immigration discourse is on the rise, the exploration of place identity, especially with young people, provides an important counterpoint. Professionals interested in promoting a climate of inclusivity could therefore benefit from incorporating a critical awareness of place identity into their policies and practices.

Place identity has made important contributions to the social sciences but, as several scholars note, there has been little empirical research on how the

notion can be operationalized (Hauge 2007; Lalli 1992; Twigger-Ross et al. 2003). Inspired by Myers' (2006) informal account of how participants in his study answered the question '*where are you from?*', we conducted a thematic analysis of Australian student responses to this question to build a more comprehensive picture of student perspectives on place and belonging. In analyzing the responses, we made use of and extended Schegloff's (1972) term 'place formulations' to develop a typology of the place identities grounded in our data. We also drew on Proshansky, Fabian and Kaminoff's (1983) interpretations of place identity to frame our analysis.

1 Place as a social and discursive construct

Myers (2006) argues that social researchers should evaluate placed-based questions and take into consideration the range of responses evoked by the question '*where are you from?*' as well as the different meanings that can be attached to the question. Myers drew on Schegloff's formulations of place from a discourse-analytical perspective and we too consider this to be a useful starting point. To show that place references are discursive and interactive, Schegloff (1972) distinguishes between geographical and relational place formulations. Geographical formulations assume an objective position as on a map, while relational formulations are deictically anchored in interaction (e.g. in the statement '*I am here*'). He argues that relational formulations need to be contextualized to be understood. These geographical and relational formulations are inter-connected. Recent scholars interested in the effects of globalization on identities take a relational view of place. For example, Massey (1994; see also Massey and Jess 1996) argues that our ideas of place are the socially constructed products of the society we live in (1994, p.168). Taking a discursive view, Taylor and Wetherell (1999) argue that both place and time are resources that speakers draw upon in narrative to present an identity. The consensus in the research literature then is that place is given meaning by human practices, language and beliefs (Myers 2006, p.323) and is made meaningful through interaction with others.

2 Place and identity

From 1978 to 1987, Proshansky and his colleagues produced the foundational work on place identity, defining it as a set of broad ideas about the physical

world in which one lives.¹ At its core is the assortment of memories, ideas, experiences and feelings about the environmental past that are connected to, and associated with, places (Proshansky et al. 1983, p.59). Proshansky et al. incorporate place into the larger notion of the self. In their view, one's sense of self is expressed through relationships with others but also by the physical settings that define and structure one's everyday life (see also Proshansky 1978; Proshansky and Fabian 1987). Foreshadowing later scholars of place, they argued that a person's sense of self is not static but rather "characterized by growth and change in response to a changing physical and social world" (1983: 59). As such, the home, school and other early socializing environments are essential to the development of a sense of belonging.

Proshansky et al. also observe that detachment (real, potential or perceived) from such places gives rise to a heightened awareness of place. Early socialization plays a significant role in place identity, as it is through our oft-repeated experiences in these early places of socialization (home, school, and neighborhood) that social categories, values, norms and attitudes are formed (p. 62). Thus, places are not only physical but also social realities, which are associated with place through our interactions within them (p. 64).

Proshansky et al. argue that it is out of these cognitive connections that we come to expect the world to function in particular ways (p. 65). Cognitive components change through life as we move to new places and lose contact with previous ones (such as leaving a childhood home, moving to a new school or job etc.). Through such processes, our perceptions of past places may become idealized. Our physical environments are also susceptible to change, as are our thoughts and feelings about them. As such, Proshansky et al. (1983, p.66) describe physical environment as a "database against which every physical setting can be experienced and responded to in some way".

This database provides a way of connecting the present with the past, making connections with the familiar and unfamiliar in any physical setting (p. 66). Because we all experience diverse physical settings, distinct cognitions develop as individuals play different roles in society. In any group therefore, individuals can have different place identities and may respond to them in varied ways. This point emphasizes that typologies of place are difficult to generalize from and are best understood as grounded in what

¹ Other scholars also consider place identity but describe it in terms of a person's strong emotional attachment to a place. For example, early researchers such as Buttimer and Seamon (1980), Relph (1976) and Tuan (1977, 1980) all share the assumption that through attachment to geographically locatable places, one acquires a sense of belonging and purpose in life.

participants say about place. Place identity also affects how individuals modify their physical environment (e.g. through the ways they make a house into a home). It also affects which environments individuals choose to live in, as well as what Proshansky et al. call “clusters of positively and negatively valenced cognitions of physical settings” (p. 76), referring to our attraction or aversion to particular places. Proshansky et al. also acknowledge that rapid urbanization may eventually require that we identify *types* of place-identity (p. 81). In response to this call, we asked Australian adolescents to answer the question ‘*Where are you from?*’, and to explain the reasons for their responses.

3 The questionnaire

To explore how Australian high school students connected their sense of self with place, we considered their written responses to an item in a questionnaire (see Starks et al. 2013). Written responses enabled us to tap into student reflective processes. Proshansky et al. (1983: 61), following Tuan (1980), posit that reflective processes are important for distancing self from place, as it is this distancing that helps shape our sense of self. Although Proshansky et al. state that this distancing process emerges through thinking and talking, we contend that it can occur through writing. It is important to recognize that writing is interactive, albeit not always in real time. Many of the student answers to our questionnaire were phrased as if they were responding to an imaginary interlocutor; for example, by adding the colloquial Australian term of address ‘mate’ to their response, or reacting to different contexts.

Our written question was “*If someone asks you ‘Where are you from?’ how do you answer this question and why?*” While researchers have often made comments about the complexity of the question, few have asked participants why they answer questions about place identity in the ways that they do. We used this question to prompt participants to reflect on how their personal identities were connected with place. As the ‘*where from*’ question was the second last question in the questionnaire, other questions preceded the item. These items focused on different issues relating to language and identity. The first page of the questionnaire (Section 1) contained two questions designed to probe participants’ views of their own and others’ nicknames. The second and third pages (Section 2) contained six questions about students’ beliefs about their own and others’ varieties of English (see Starks et al. 2013 for details). The final two pages (Section 3) requested background information about the participants’ individual and family background. This information included the languages they and their

parents spoke and whether they considered themselves to be Australian. At the end of these questions we asked the ‘where from’ question.

We followed the ‘*where from*’ question with one final question which focused on the qualities that the participants thought important in friends. One of the friendship qualities we queried was the importance of where the potential friend was from. The participants thought ‘*where from*’ was the least important of the values questioned, with only 27 (or 4%) of the students deeming this to be important (25 Australian born; 2 overseas-born). The findings from this question suggest that as a whole, these participants showed a high degree of multicultural sensitivity.

4 The participants

To enable us to have a broad sense of adolescent place identity within the Australian context, we targeted two age groups: students in their early and later years of secondary school. In our opportunistic sample, 171 students were beginning their secondary schooling (Years 7–8) and 471 were in their final two years of secondary education (Years 11–12). The selection of older and younger students enabled us to explore whether student attitudes become more sophisticated and nuanced as students age.

We also aimed for a sample that was geographically and socially diverse and thus better representative of Australian society. Using our personal contacts with schools, we collected questionnaires from students at seven high schools in two states, Queensland and Victoria, administered through teachers in English classes in senior secondary school, and through general classes in earlier years. The two states where we collected the data are perceived to be quite different. Queenslanders are stereotyped as ‘laid-back’ and conservative (Potts et al. 2013), whereas Victorians are stereotyped as more cosmopolitan, especially in Melbourne. Yet in both states, urban centers are thought to be more multicultural than rural areas. Both states are socio-economically diverse with a broad range of students from different socio-economic backgrounds and our selection of students tapped into this socio-economic variability.

From Queensland, we collected 215 responses in total. This number included students attending a private boys’ boarding school in a small regional city that catered for families both in the region and more remote areas (88 responses), two co-educational state schools serving low to middle income families in the same city (49 responses), and one co-educational state school that catered for children of all social backgrounds in Brisbane (88 responses). In Victoria, the students came from a large co-educational state school in a regional city, with a wide,

low-middle income catchment area (65 responses), and two schools in Melbourne, a co-educational private school with a high number of Anglo-Australian families (27 responses), and a state-school with a large immigrant population (335 responses). Data from this latter school represented half of the data collected. We collected data from two age-cohorts in this school (see Table 1), which was useful in supporting any claims of age differences in the data set.

Table 1: Overview of sample.

School	State	Beginning Secondary School	Finishing Secondary School	Geographical Location	Overseas- born	Total
REP	Queensland	30	0	Regional Town	0	30
Maryville	Queensland	19	0	Rural	0	19
City College	Queensland	0	78	City	21	78
Walter Taylor	Queensland	0	88	Regional Town	13	88
Smithton	Victoria	6	21	Rural	4	27
Dendale	Victoria	0	65	Regional Town	5	65
Rickdale	Victoria	116	219	City	22	335
Total		171	471		65	642

Although Australia is considered a multicultural nation, with first and second generation migrants comprising 47% of the population at the time of the 2011 census (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012), we did not target students on the basis of where they or their parents were born. In the sample, Australian-born students constituted the majority of participants. Of the 642 students, 565 were born in Australia and 65 were born outside Australia (a further 12 did not state their place of birth). One hundred and eighty-five students had at least one parent who was born overseas. Although this measure could be used to investigate whether first generation Australian students differ from second generation, it has its own set of complications. In our sample, some students born overseas had at least one parent who was Australian-born and one student mentioned that their grandparents were Australian-born. It was also not uncommon for students to note that their parents were born in two different countries.

The majority (535) of the Australian-born students said that English was their L1. Of the 185 students with at least one parent born overseas, only 30 listed a language other than English as their preferred language, and 69 reported that their parents communicated in a language other than English. This number is low compared with national statistics, where the proportion of speakers who speak a language other than English at home is 20.6%

(<http://profile.id.com.au/australia/language>). The wording of the question ('what language do you speak most of the time?') and the nationality of the overseas-born students account for some of this difference. Of the 65 students who were born overseas, 20 came from English-speaking countries (New Zealand, UK, Canada, and the USA). Others came from contexts where English was or had been one of several official languages (South Africa, Hong Kong, and Kenya). So although some students came from contexts where English had no official status (e.g. Sudan, Switzerland, Argentina), many did not.

In the next part of this paper, we detail our thematic analysis and the typology we developed from our findings.

5 Thematic analysis

To analyze the responses, we entered the student data into an excel file, entering the student responses to each question in a separate column. We typed the student responses on the '*where from*' question exactly as they had been written. We then analyzed this data for recurring themes connected to place identity. We first created a column adjacent to the '*where from*' responses and entered in this column key words from the student responses. We then used the filter function to merge initial categories into broader themes. The two adjacent columns enabled us to constantly compare our coding with the student responses to ensure that we were being consistent. We took this bottom-up approach as we did not know what types of data would emerge and the filter function enabled us to compare data and change it systematically until we had a coding system that could encapsulate the varied and diverse nature of the student answers. Through this recursive process, we noted that participant responses included two separate types of data. The first was a place identity theme: geographical, personal, familial/ancestral and/or interactional. All but three undecipherable responses fitted into these categories and were excluded from further analysis. The participant responses often included more than one of these themes.

The second set of data that emerged from the participant responses relates to whether students constructed their identity: as existential or temporal. Students who provided existential responses gave answers of the type *Australia, because I am; Australia because it's the truth*. Students who provided responses that were temporally constructed did so in varied ways (e.g. where born, lived, live). These again were not singular and sometimes the same information was presented in different order (e.g. lived + born or born + lived). To code the existential and temporal themes, we created two new columns in the

excel file, adjacent to the column with the original student responses. In the first of these, we coded the data as existential or temporal. In the second, we coded the temporal data into various types. We then cross-checked these data, filtering the various codes and adjusting them for inconsistencies as we had done earlier with the place identity themes. Once we had developed clear categories, we copied and pasted the excel data into an SPSS file to allow us to obtain basic descriptive statistics and check for inherent variability in the sample. We queried for differences between older and younger students, differences by state of residence, and whether the L1 played any role in the data. There were remarkably few differences of this sort in the data. Those that reached levels of significance ($p = 0.05$) are noted in passing.

We now consider the types of place identity themes that emerged from the data. Although we present these themes as separate, many of the participant responses are layered and illustrate more than one theme. To reinforce this point, in a few instances we repeat examples under multiple themes.

6 Findings

A total of 608 out of the 642 participants provided a response to the ‘*where are you from*’ question, representing a 95 per cent response rate. As noted above, three responses were undecipherable and therefore excluded from analysis, leaving a total of 605 responses. These responses contained nuanced understandings, indicating that the students saw place identity as something more than just a geographical location. This range of answers is perhaps not surprising as, in the words of Proshansky et al. “place identity is [...] a potpourri of memories, conceptions, interpretations, ideas, and related feelings about specific physical settings as well as types of settings” (1983, p.60), and indeed our participants’ responses conformed to this description. In the sections that follow, we provide details about the geographical, personal, familial/heritage and/or interactional nature of the student responses, starting with the geographical.

6.1 Geographical formulations

Of the 605 participants who answered the question ‘*Where are you from?*’ most expressed a response in terms of a stated geographical location that was identifiable on a map. In these geographical formulations, the majority tended to be framed solely around the nation state (420 responses), as in the examples below.

Participants who had an L1 other than English (43/53 or 81%) were more likely to provide a geographical formulation based solely around nation than those participants who had English as their L1 (373/569 or 65%). One might speculate whether this is due to their need to assert this identity.²

- *From Australia*
- *Australia*
- *Heaven on earth...Australia*
- *Australia!! Because Australia is the best place in the world*
- *Down under, in the great land of Aus*
- *Kenya*
- *"I AM FROM NEPAL" because that is my home country that's where all of my relative are*
- *England Because that's where I was born & usually Australians ask*

This general tendency towards a response based on nationhood could be a sign of a strong nationalist identity (see personal formulations below), but it could also simply be the expected response in a written questionnaire on language and identity or, as in the case of one participant, the best possible response for personal reasons: *Australia - specifics are not important*.

While the majority of responses were focused on the nation state, it is possible to zoom in or out geographically and 108 responses demonstrated these narrower and wider perspectives, although very few students zoomed out (3 responses).

- *I'm from Africa because I was born there*
- *Down under, in the great land of Aus* *Down under -> True Aussie Answer*
Australia -> proper

Of the 105 students who zoomed in, 16 drew attention to the Australian state or territory, or parts thereof in which they located themselves.

- *NT [Northern territory mate, because that's where I'm from.*
- *Victoria because that's where I live.*
- *North Queensland, because it's my favorite place in the world.*

Others were more specific, giving only an urban, suburban or rural location, without locating it further (42 responses). Older students were more likely to zoom into a city location than their younger counterparts (32 vs 1 response or 7% vs 1%).

² There were also a greater proportion of 'nation only' responses from students in Victoria (297/427 or 70%) than from students in Queensland (123/215 or 57%).

- *Melbourne.*
- *I'm from Dubbo.*
- *Bendigo because I am from [there]*
- *I say "I am from Brisbane" because that is where I am from.*
- *Gold Coast because that is where I live*
- *Bali, because I'm half-Balinese and they can tell I'm another nationality*
- *Vienna because that is where I was born. That will lead on to further conversation where I can explain a bit more about my background*

In other cases, students provided a response with multiple levels of locatability were embedded (58 responses):

- *Australia and Melbourne in particular.*
- *Goondiwindi or Australia because that's where I'm from*
- *Australia/Adelaide- that's where I was born even though I have lived in Melbourne since I was 8*
- *Australia, Kew*

As might be noted from some of the examples presented above, within some responses, there were explanations about why the participants had framed their answer as they did, e.g. *Bendigo, Calgully [California Gully] so that they know what suburb I live so I'm more easily identifiable*. Such responses project interactional formulations and are discussed in more detail below.

The inter-woven nature of place identity is however most vividly illustrated by the relatively low number of students who simply answered the '*where from*' question purely as a geographic location (84 responses). More often, students answered the '*where from*' question as a geographical and social construct. We discuss these perspectives below.

6.2 Personal formulations

Personal formulations reflect a personal sense of belonging to place. Two hundred participants responded in this way, taking the opportunity to reflect on how they positioned place as a reflection of themselves. As these are personal, the responses differ greatly. One participant, for example, responded to our question: *Melb, vic Aus -> Because I want to be known as a city kid and not a bogan* [an Australian slang term meaning rough and uncouth]. Another participant saw the question as an opportunity to distance themselves from the location, identifying instead with the nearest major urban centre, *Brisbane, because I hate Gatton/Laidley, where I live or even another country (Regretfully Australian. I wish I was English)*.

Of the 200 responses, twenty-four included general statements about a connection with place.

- *I feel completely Australian but my background is in other countries so I do feel a part of them as well.*
- *“Australia mate.” Say it with enthusiasm, as people know that Australia is a great place.*
- *Australia!! Because Australia is the best place in the world.*

Half these 24 responses made reference to home and belonging (12 responses):

- *Australian as it’s my [sic] hometown.*
- *I say Australia, as it is where I have always lived and where I belong. Australia, because I was born here and nowhere else feels like home.*
- *I would say I am Turkish because I was born there and my parents were born there. Moreover, I feel myself more comfortable living in a Turkish culture than the Australian culture is very rich. I was grown up in a Turkish culture so I am more comfortable in living in a Turkish culture.*

In other instances, a sense of belonging was implicit (rather than explicit). For example, some students added an exclamation mark after some of the national responses (*Australia!*), which that could be interpreted as conveying more than a pure geographic location. Other participants used a variety of Australian English lexis to reinforce their personal formulations of place-identity. In three geographical formulations, there was dual nomenclature of cities and towns, providing not only the proper name of the place but also its local hypocorism, a frequent Australian word-formation process which involves shortening a word and adding an ending to it (Bardsley and Simpson 2009; Simpson 2001; Simpson 2004). Examples in the data were *Calgully* for California Gully in Victoria and *Rocky* for Rockhampton and *Gundy* for Goondiwindi in Queensland. Other Australian lexical expressions scattered throughout data included *mate* (*Australia, mate!*), the lexical item for an Australian (*Aussie*) and the affectionate expression used to refer to Australia (and sometimes, New Zealand) ‘*Down Under*’.

- *Down under, in the great land of Aus.*
- *Down under - > True Aussie Answer. Australia - > proper.*
- *I am from Down Under.*

In other instances, the personal formulations were linked specifically to English (13 responses), and to Australian English, in particular:

- *Australia, I was born here, speak English and am currently living here.*

- *Australia because I know I'm from Australia because I live here, I speak Australia English and I was born here.*
- *Australia; I was born here, as were my parents. Our lifestyle is very Australian and we all speak Australian English.*

Some students even referred to an Australian or regional accent, and in one case to a broad Australian accent. In a few examples, the participants even tried to emulate this accent in their written response:

- *I 'm from Melbourne in Australia. But I would mostly say Melbourne because they would know that I'm Aussie from my accent.*
- *Australia, I speak with an Australian accent.*
- *Tasmania, because everyone asks about my Tassie [Tasmanian] accent.*
- *Australia with broad accent because I am proud to be born here.*
- *Australia, people only ever ask me if I'm in another country because they hear my accent.*
- *Awesome tain [Awesome town]?*

In only one instance did a student from an immigrant background comment on language, and only in response to their Australian accent:

- *Australia, people only ever ask me if I'm in another country because they hear my accent When people ask my nationality when I'm in Aus I say Australian Filipino.*

A final observation that emerged from these personal formulations of place was the surprising number of students who answered the question *'Where are you from?'* without any reference to a geographical location. Instead, the students made reference to their nationality, either on its own (64 responses) or combined with reference to Australia (10 responses). While we initially suspected that these were writing errors or Freudian slips because the *'where are you from'* question followed on from a question on nationality, the sheer number of such responses suggests otherwise. In these cases, the participant responses embody a sense of place as a personification of who they are³:

- *Aussie, because I am*
- *Australian, it's who I am (smiley face)*
- *An Aussie!*
- *Australian. I'm fully Aussie. Parents, grandparents etc*
- *Australian, because I live here, was born here and I speak the language.*

3 We have also since observed this type of response in ordinary conversations.

- *Australian as it's my hometown*
- *Australian and a lil bit ... and a lil bit ...*
- *Australian, because it's what I truly am, I've got the passport [for] that identity.*

6.3 Familial and heritage formulations

A third type of formulation encompassed what we refer to as familial and heritage connections (107 responses). These responses envisaged place as an extension of self, seeing the question through broader familial connections. These responses showed no observable differences by age or by state or L1.

In 54 responses, the participants answered the 'where from' question by making reference to family:

- *Australia, because myself and my parents were born here.*
- *Australia because I was born in Australia and so were my parents.*
- *English because my parent and me are.*
- *Toowoomba, Queensland, Australia. Proud of Australia and Queensland, long-standing family heritage in Toowoomba.*

Five participant responses referred to distant relatives. Although all five of these students were Australians, whose parents spoke English and only English at home, there were many students of similar background who did not explain their place identity in this way and the difference was not deemed to be at levels of significance:

- *Australia, where I was born, many generations in my family were born here*
- *From Australia as 7 generations have been from here.*
- *AUSTRALIA -> because 3 generations or more have been born here!*
- *Australia. 5 generations.*

In some responses, family and heritage co-occurred. In almost half of the familial cases, familial responses included explicit mention of the heritage of either parents or grandparents (27 responses):

- *Australia but my mum was originally from Ireland.*
- *Australia, but parents from Malaysia.*
- *I was born in Australia, but I have a Chinese/Malaysian background because my parents were born in Malaysia.*
- *I comment that I am 100% Australian although all my grandparents migrated from Greece after World War 2.*

Although few participants commented on why they had framed their responses to include their heritage, when participants did so, they framed heritage as a central element of their response:

- *I say I was born in Australia and state my ethnic background because I feel it's important to talk about that.*
- *Australia, I'm half English (because I am PROUD (underline) to be English.*
- *I was born in Australia, but I am from Greece. My heritage is important to me.*

In framing their heritage background, twenty-nine participants framed their responses positively, foregrounding their heritage by introducing it in the first clause or choosing a more equal framing through the use of the particles 'with', 'as' or 'because'.

- *I am Australian with a Greek heritage as my grandparents are from Greece along with my ancestors.*
- *Australian with Serbian background.*
- *English because my parents and me are.*
- *English because my parents and me are.*
- *I would say I came from Taiwan because it is my ethnic background*

Others however, positioned their heritage claims through a stance that was not entirely positive. Specific details provided about heritage were framed with an adversative particle, typically 'but' (51 responses). In these responses, the heritage information is backgrounded by its mention in the second clause rather than the first. As one participant wrote, [I'm] *Australian, but with an explanation of my heritage and background. I'm Greek but born in Australia.*

The 'but' responses were split between those mentioning family and heritage (20 responses) and those mentioning heritage only (31 responses).

- *Australia but my mum was originally from Ireland*
- *Australia but my dad is from Hong Kong, hence the skin and hair colouring*
- *Australia, however my background is Russian and Swedish*
- *I say I am Greek- Cypriot but I was born in Australia*

Three participants felt obliged to explain their ethnic origins as they felt that interlocutors would want to know about them because of their non-Anglo appearance:

- *I say I have Papuan New Guinean heritage but I am Australian, because people want an explanation about why I am.*
- *Australia but my dad is from Hong Kong, hence the skin and hair colouring.*
- *When people ask my nationality when I'm in Aus. I say Australian-Filipino.*

Given that Australian government policy until the 1970s was to promote white immigration (Ozolins 1993), these views are perhaps not surprising-but they should be concerning, as they show that these newer Australians are aware of being positioned as outsiders and feel the need to justify their authenticity as Australians. One response that confirms this claim came from a participant who commented on why people do not generally want to know where s/he comes from for precisely the opposite reason: *Australia, because I was born here and as a white person I'm unlikely to be asked where I'm from 'originally'.*

6.4 Interactional formulations

A fourth type of place formulation identified in our data indexes the layered nature of the question. Many of the participant answers above show that place identity is not simply one that elicits information but also one that is interactional in nature. There were 61 such interactional formulations in the data. Twenty-five could be considered to be highly interactional. In seven instances, the response to the '*where are you from*' question was interpreted as serving as a part of an adjacency pair, as in the following three examples:

- *Australia, why do you ask?*
- *Australia. Charleville. What about you mate?*
- *First I say 'Bath, England', followed by 'just kidding, I was born in Australia, but I do wish to visit here one day.'*

In three other cases, the participants focused on the intent behind the question, viewing it as an intrusive or celebratory act. One student wrote of deliberately avoiding being specific, so as to avoid giving personal information to others: *Melbourne ... in Victoria. I still say it so people don't stalk me.* Another rejected the very nature of the question: *Neverland. I never answer directly; where you are from is generally irrelevant for me.* Yet, qualifiers used to accompany another student response showed that other students relished the chance to talk about their place identity, e.g., *Heaven on earth ... Australia.*

The fifteen other responses involved personalized formulations of place, as described earlier, but where the participant appeared to talk to the questionnaire.

- *I should say I am from Melbourne, Australia to give an indication of the city because each city is different!*
- *Australia, Melbourne 'cause I always like to suggest I'm from Melbourne instead of what other countries would assume as probably Sydney*

The above response types were the only ones that differed across state boundaries. There were two other interactional response types in the data and both showed no state difference. These responses either reflected on aspects of the student's own identity or focused on the context of their reply. In the first cases, the participant responses focused on why they chose to zoom in or out depending on how much information they want to divulge to their imagined interlocutor about themselves. These responses could be seen as personal formulations expressed as if they were 'talking' to the interlocutor:

- *Victoria. I don't like to give away too much information about myself.*
- *Australia, and I live in Toowoomba - the reason is so they know a bit more about me.*
- "Here" or "somewhere else" it's none of their business*

The final set of interactional formulations came from students who acknowledged that their answers would shift depending on the context. In these responses, the students emphasized the need to adapt their responses to the geographical settings in which they found themselves (27 responses). In almost all of these examples, the participants made a distinction between talking to an interlocutor within and outside of Australia

- *If I am in Australia, I say I'm from Macedonia, but if I am overseas I say I am AUSTRALIAN.*
- *If someone is from Australia, I will say Box Hill south or Melbourne but if I'm in a different country. I will say Australia*
- *I say Brisbane when talking to people from Australia and Australia to people from overseas so that they have a general idea since they may not know the geography of Australia.*
- *From Toowoomba if town is required, otherwise Queensland, Australia.*

As one participant wrote, *it depends where I am. If I am in another country, I'll say Australia; if interstate I'll say Victoria; if inside Victoria I'll say [a] suburb*. While this expectation is one based on geographical place (described earlier), the responses are also based on expectations of what the interlocutor is expected to know, as reflected in such answers as: *Wallumbilla. I kind of expect them to know I'm from Australia*.

In other words, the geographical, personal and interactional formulations were often not separate, but interwoven and often very individualized. Age played little role in these responses.

6.5 Existential or temporal formulations

A second theme that emerged from our data concerned how the students connected with place. Although 605 students provided a response that we could analyze, 69 participants did not provide any reason for their answer. In these cases, the students simply provided the name of the town, city, suburb or nation as their response. We were unable to code such responses as existential or temporal, and their data was excluded from analysis. Of the remaining 536 responses, in 212 instances, participants took an essentialized stance removed completely from time. These responses showed no differences by age, state or L1.

- *Australian- Because I am Australian.*
- *Australia. Cos that's where I'm from!*
- *AUSTRALIA! Cause I am from Australia?*
- *Australia 100% Australian!*

In 13 instances, participants presented existential stances which they problematized either because their place identity conflicted with their place of birth, or their heritage, or with their current place of residence. These problematized positionings were all elicited from older students:

- *Aust but born elsewhere*
- *I say I am Greek- Cypriot but I was born in Australia*
- *Originally Australia, but my ancestors are from Ireland, England, and Germany*
- *New Zealand live in Australia*

While the above responses were presented as separate from time, other responses were framed through explicit and implicit reference to various sorts of timescales. The majority were framed entirely in terms of where the participants were born (133 responses). There were noticeable age differences in this response type. Younger students were proportionally more likely to provide this type of response than older students (85/471 or 18% vs 58/171 or 34%). This was also one of the few instances where participant responses differed by state. Thirty-five participants (16%) framed their response in this way in Queensland whereas 98 (23%) participants did so in Victoria.

- *I'm from Africa because I was born there.*
- *Australia - was born here.*
- *I'd answer that I am from Australia because I was born here.*
- *Australia, cause that's where I'm born.*
- *Australia/Melbourne. I was born there.*

In other instances, students framed their place identity in the past but encompassed it within a slightly longer timespan, taking into account where they were both born and/or raised (29 responses).

- *Australia, for I was born here/lived here in my childhood.*
- *Australia- because it's where I was born and raised.*
- *Australia- I was born here and grew up here.*

In all responses presented thus far, there is a sense of entitlement not available to all Australians, and in 5 instances, this form of a place identity was questioned:

- *Born in Australia, but from Greece*
- *I would answer I was born in Canada But i consider myself Australian*
- *I say that my parents were born in Egypt*

Other participants presented a perspective that included more than where born, but still framed their responses as backward looking, having been born and having lived in a place for all or most of their lives (58 responses):

- *I say from Toowoomba because it is where I was born and the city where I have spent most of my life.*
- *I say Australia because I was born here an' lived in Australia most of my life.*
- *Australia/Melbourne, because I was born here and I lived here my whole life*
- *Australia, it is where I was born and where I have lived my whole life.*
- *I would say I was born in India then lived in Azerbaijan, then England and then moved here.*
- *Toowoomba, I've lived there 10 years*

In some of these responses, an expressed continuity between past and present was made explicit: *Australia because I was born here and have never ever left it.* In these responses, the stance is justified through reference to the past, which may have contributed to the problematized familial/heritage identity constructions referred to earlier.

In contrast, some participant responses were oriented more towards the present, but these were comparatively few. Some more present-oriented responses still contained reference to the past but the order of the text was reversed to foreground the here and now (10 responses):

- *Where I am, then where I was born, then where I have lived Australia.*
- *Because I live in Australia and was born there.*
- *Australia, because it is both my country of residence and where I was born.*

A few students answered the question with reference to the present (27 responses). Yet one went so far as to reject an answer based on the past:

- *Australia, because I live there.*
- *Australia- because I LIVE there (doesn't matter if I was born there or not).*
- *Bendigo, as it is the town in Australian in which I live.*

One final response transcended space and time, referring to past, present and future:

- *Sudan- It's my motherland and I would like to keep thinking and go for a visit even though I don't live there now.*

7 Discussion

Proshansky et al. (1983, p.81) predicted that researchers may eventually be required to identify different *types* of place identity. This is because, as Myers (2006: 321) asserts, there is nothing routine about place identity and questions like ‘*where are you from?*’. Myers argues that researchers should look at how people talk about place before they try to categorize what they say about it. Since place identity is not a shared universal but socially, locally and individually constructed, there are unlimited possibilities for the ways people may conceive of place identity. This means that most analyses of place identity must necessarily be data-driven.

The multi-layered nature of our participants’ responses confirm place “as a resource for constructing identity, and establishing one’s “meaning in the world” (p. 340). This meaning-making is an important part of identity formulation, imbued in personal, familial/heritage and interactional formulations.

Place formulations take as their focus a *geographical* site. The participant responses were typically ones articulated as points locatable on a map but, as we noted in the participant responses, this was not always the case. In many responses, the answer to the ‘*where are you from?*’ question was one that was not a geographical location, but a personification of it (*I’m Australian!*). This is perhaps not surprising as human geographers such as Tuan (1980), Relph (1976), and Buttimer and Seamon (1980) share the assumption that it is through personal attachment to geographically locatable places that a person acquires a sense of belonging and purpose.

While formulations of place can be positioned as objective, they are often positional. For Proshansky et al. (1983, p.64), geographical and social places are closely interlinked. As they note, “there is no physical environment that is not also a social environment, and vice versa” (see also Ittelson et al. 1974). The

personal formulations in our data invoked the social meanings of place and belonging, as well as the practices and beliefs associated with place (see also Myers 2006). In referring to personal formulations of place, some participants made reference to language – which is hardly surprising in view of the dialogic relationship between place and talk, in which spaces become places partly through talk, and the meanings of places shape how people talk (Johnstone 2011). However, in our data not all languages were positioned this way. Place was inherently tied to English, the de-facto official language of the Australian nation. It was also tied to the Australian accent and to specific lexical items that connect place and language, such as ‘*Down Under*’, and frequent word formation processes such as the hypocorisms commonly associated with Australian language use.

A third type of place formulation is one that refers to place in relation to *family and heritage*. In the responses of this type, place identity was shaped not only by “the physical settings and the day-to-day existence of the person” (Proshansky et al. 1983, p.62) but also through family socialization. For Proshansky et al. family is intricately linked to self and place identity as it is one of the earliest places in which self and place identity are formed (1983, p.65 and p. 67). Drawing on research on displaced populations, Proshansky et al. observe that when individuals are disconnected from place (p. 61), they are often highly attuned to place identity. This may explain why those of our participants with heritage other than Anglo-Australian often prefaced that identity with *but*. The fourth type of place formulation in our data indexes the *interactional* nature of the question, a category present in Schegloff’s (1972) early work on social interaction theory. These responses focused on the interactional nature of such questions, and assumed an interlocutor and a context. Many of these place formulations were not so much interpreted as a request for information but as part of a larger conversational routine, such as an opener for individuals who are not well acquainted. Other interactional responses positioned the student answer in relation to a particular context. These responses echo Myer’s (2006) observation that interlocutors revise their statements of where they are from and re-present themselves in response to how they perceive the knowledge and stance of their co-interlocutor. Yet in all cases, the four types of place formulations interconnect. We represent this as four intersecting circles in Figure 1 below.

In addition to these formulations, there is a second dimension to place identity based on how participants framed their answers. This dimension is represented in Figure 1 as lines that move across the place formulations. One of these lines is labelled ‘*I am*’ because for some of our participants, their answers are essentialized. We see the essentialist view of place identity in

Figure 1: A typology of place formulations with its essentialist and temporal dimensions identified in our data.

participant responses through the lens of place identity as an “enduring and timeless property” (Proshansky et al. 1983, p.58). Such responses were often patriotic and nationalistic in tone. They also, by their very nature, served to exclude those who may have seen their place identity as fractured. For other participants, place identity was represented as temporally constructed. They included references to past contexts (where born, raised and lived), as well as current ones (live). The responses to the past signaled an enduring identity that can also be viewed as essentialist, and potentially excluding for those who were born outside of Australia. Through the participant responses, we can also see alternative ways of viewing the world where the past is recognized, but its associations with the present are foregrounded. Proshansky et al. note the enduring nature of place identity that is formed in early childhood in many – although by no means all – cases (p. 64). Memories are important in these formulations. As Proshansky et al. argue: “Place identity in essence evolves from and represents the environmental past of each individual” (p. 68). In many of the formulations of those of migrant backgrounds in our data, pasts are presented as fractured, not only in their geographical place formulation but also in their personal, familial and interactional formulations, most noticeably framed through ‘but’, a lack of reference to language, and an explanation that the expected response is one that must relate to mixed backgrounds.

8 Final comments

In this paper, we have taken up Proshansky's et al. (1983, p.81) statement that a theory of place identity may require that we identify *types* of place identity. We have also taken up Myers and Lampropoulou's (2013, p.349) call for researchers to not impose categories and maps without first attending to "the ways in which participants describe and name places, and recognizing the complex uses to which this personal geography can be put". In engaging with these calls, we have drawn on Proshansky et al. (1983) claims that place identity is best constructed through reflection. Through the responses of our participants, we have attempted to show the advantages of considering reflections about place identity as a useful way of understanding responses to the question '*where are you from?*'. We have highlighted the need to ground any analysis of how individuals describe and name places in empirical data and to consider how such responses form part of an individualized potpourri of memories, values and beliefs associated with place. We hope that the approach we have taken to our analysis can be useful as an awareness-raising exercise for thinking about place identity in an inclusive way and for providing examples that can facilitate discussion. Since we worked with secondary school students in this research project, our findings have relevance for adults in various professional roles, who work with young people from diverse backgrounds, most particularly teachers. Since place is locally constructed, we suggest that our typology of place formulations should be added to and extended by users for their own particular purposes in their own localized settings.

In values-enriched settings which aim to foster tolerance and inclusion,⁴ it is important to understand and respond appropriately to the question '*where are you from?*' and help others to engage with their responses to this question. Working from a social inclusion perspective, young people should be encouraged to look critically at how place formulations change and how place formulations can be used to create a sense of belonging for some but also to exclude others. Speakers orient themselves in relation to place in complex ways and linguistic practices do not merely reflect place, they also construct it. Our study highlights the need to be aware of the potential range of meanings

⁴ For values-based education in the Australian context, see e.g. http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/National_Declaration_on_the_Educational_Goals_for_Young_Australians.pdf (accessed 9 December, 2016). And in the British context, see e.g. <http://www.valuesbasededucation.com/> (accessed 22 December 2016). For the USA see, e.g. <http://www.livingvalues.net/countries/usa.html> (accessed 22 December 2016)

involved in asking people where they are from and the importance of listening attentively and critically to how they answer.

In terms of taking our study forward, we suggest that future research which considers place formulations might explore how place and time constructions are interlinked in personal narrative, and how they can be presented as a series of consecutive life stages corresponding to different places of residence (see Taylor and Wetherell 1999). Such explorations would enable fuller accounts of many of the place identity formulations described in this paper to emerge. We have argued that in globalized times with high levels of mobility, using place as a sociolinguistic category demands complex analysis. Côté and Schwartz (2002: 573) remark that as community bonds loosen people are being left without a secure sense of place and belonging. This observation alone makes place identity a relevant category to explore.

Funding: This research study was initially funded by a La Trobe University Faculty Start-Up Grant. The Victoria Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2010_000611) and the Queensland Department of Education and Training (550/27/948) as well as the relevant school principals granted us approval to distribute the questionnaire in schools.

Appendix

SECTION 3: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

I'd like to know a little more about yourself and the languages you and your family speak.

First, tell us about your family

1. Which country were your caregivers (i.e., your parents or legal guardians) born? (You may circle **more than one**)

SAME AS ME

DIFFERENT FROM ME

If one or more of your caregivers were born in a different country than you, provide details below

-
2. A. In what language/s do your caregivers speak to each other?

B. If your caregivers speak more than one language, what is the language they use most of the time?

Now tell us about yourself

3. In which country were **you** born? _____
4. What was the **first** language you learned to speak? _____
5. What language do you speak **most of the time** now? _____
6. In what languages can you talk about a **lot** of different things (e.g., English)?
 Language 1: _____
 Language 2: _____
 Any other languages? _____
7. Do you think of yourself as:
 A. Australian
 B. Mostly Australian and a bit of another nationality
 C. Mostly another nationality and some Australian
8. If someone asks you “*where are you from*”, how do you answer this question, and why?
9. What do you think is important in a friend?
 A. The way they dress YES NO
 B. The way they think YES NO
 C. The way they talk YES NO
 D. The way they act YES NO
 E. Who their friends are YES NO
 F. Where they are from YES NO

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