

## **RURAL CHILDHOODS: LITERATURE REVIEW**

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Over recent years there has been a significant growth in research studies focusing on the lives and experiences of rural children and young people throughout the world. However, the focus of the research attention has differed between the Majority world and the Minority world<sup>1</sup>. Majority world research has mostly focused on the conditions and experiences of children and young people as related to their work in rural areas. In contrast, Minority world research initially focused on the experiences of children in urban environments, then more latterly on deconstructing the notions of a rural idyll, and exploring issues of the marginalisation and social exclusion of young people.

This paper reviews the literature relevant to children and young people in both Minority and Majority world contexts. It is by no means an exhaustive overview, but it includes recent literature, covering a range of significant issues and themes. The paper is divided into separate sections, reviewing literature relating to Majority world and Minority world rural children and young people. This division allows for the conceptual organisation of the literature. However, a limitation is clearly apparent in the use of broad Minority/Majority world binaries, which dissect the globe, as “the world is not so neatly separated into clear cut and mutually exclusive categories” (Robson, Panelli & Punch, 2007, p. 221).

Beyond the binary are diversity and commonalities, both between and within countries. The rural location provides a common background to disparate lives and diversity of experiences:

Rural locations are regarded as sites of traditional cultural practices, of primary production, of the maintenance of more conservative political structures, and the existence of diverse (sometimes inaccessible) biophysical environments. (Bushin, Ansell, Adriansen, Lahteenmaa & Panelli, 2007, p. 70).

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<sup>1</sup> Majority world refers to the world area in which most of the world's population live, the economically poorer countries referred to as the 'developing world', namely Africa, Asia and Latin America. Minority world refers to the economically more privileged countries, such as Europe, United States, Australia and New Zealand. Whilst it is a fairly broad distinction "... it enables the reader to reflect on the unequal relations between these two world areas previously referred to with negative connotations (Third/First World) or with geographical inaccuracy (North/South, or East/West)" (Punch, 2001, p. 819).

Often, these rural locations have been considered, and lives have been researched, in contrast to urban locations, using another conceptual binary. This paper highlights current literature focusing on the lives and experiences of children and young people in rural environments.

## **RURAL CHILDHOODS: MINORITY WORLD CONTEXTS**

Academic interest in rural childhoods in Minority World contexts is a relatively recent development, although children have long been present in research and literature relating to other aspects of geography, place and environment<sup>2</sup> (Matthews & Limb, 1999). This earlier body of work on children's environments within geography includes studies on children's cognition, competence, behaviour, attachment to, access to and use of space (Valentine, 1997). However, by the early 1990's some geographers were noting significant gaps, advocating for changes in the way children were viewed in geography and calling for greater inclusion of children with further exploration of relevant issues (James, 1990; Sibley, 1991; Winchester, 1991).

This call, which parallels developments in other social sciences, has been heeded with a growth in research that focuses on children's geographies, notably in the 'fourth environment'. These are the places where children spend time that do not involve their home, school or playground (Matthews et al., 2000), and which are set within the context of Western urban societies (Matthews & Limb, 1999). The research attention has however focussed on urban children, such that those children growing up in the countryside were a 'hidden geography' (Matthews et al., 2000), part of the marginalised rural 'other' - "peoples other than white, middle class, middle aged, able-bodied, sound minded, heterosexual men" (Philo, 1992, p. 193). Rural children have therefore been marginalised both in respect of being children and of living in rural locations.

While the inclusion of children in geography more generally has risen, this was not reflected in the field of rural geographies until the very recent increase in studies exploring children's lives and experiences in rural areas. These seek to redress reports of rural living that focus on, and promote, adult interests (McCormack, 2000; Matthews et al., 2000; Valentine, 1997). However, there is a scarcity of research addressing rural life sociologically and from the perspective of children (Cummins, 2006), and "still no coherent geography of children in the countryside, especially that which draws upon their disparate lifeworlds" (Matthews et al., 2000, p. 142).

## **CONSTRUCTIONS OF RURALITY**

The attention drawn by Philo (1992) to the neglected rural geographies of 'other' rural peoples was part of the cultural turn, which saw a heightened awareness of the constructed and contestable notions of rurality, including constructions of this in lay, popular and academic

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<sup>2</sup> For example, over 800 references to children were recorded in a book by Matthews (1992) entitled 'Making sense of place: Children's understanding of large scale environments' (cited in Matthews & Limb, 1999).

discourses (Panelli, 2006). Integral to both the cultural turn and socioculturally based studies of childhood is the awareness that cultural contexts shape understandings of rural living and childhood (Panelli, Punch & Robson, 2007). “The socio-cultural and rural nature of young people’s lives is a common analytic theme across this literature.” (Panelli et al., 2007, p. 6).

Within the research literature on rural childhoods there are a range of social constructions of rurality, notably the rural idyll and the rural dull. Alternative constructions also include rural horror and rural deprivation.

## THE RURAL IDYLL

Various bodies of discourse, particularly in the UK, portray a rural childhood as an ideal childhood (Jones, 1997) and the countryside as a better place for bringing up children (Little & Austin, 1996; Valentine 1997). Rural life is seen to be closer to the world of nature and therefore more natural, with freedom and the opportunity to explore outdoors as key features (Aitken, 1994). Strong, culturally bound, popular discourses exist that idealise the rural childhood. For example, a rural setting, with its emphasis on the natural, is perceived as enhancing, protecting and prolonging the English portrayal of childhood as a time of innocence (Ward, 1988). Ward’s (1988) seminal book, ‘The child in the country’, portrayed a “purified identity of rural childhood, uncontaminated by urban influences which muddy and confuse the image” (p. 18).

Popular discourse plays an important part in the creation and dissemination of the idealised natural, free and innocent life in the countryside, the rural idyll, through cultural structures such as art, literature and all forms of media (Jones, 1995; 1997). Key examples are cultural texts in the form of stories depicting rural childhoods, and stories for childhood, which celebrate the countryside as a rural idyll and the best place for children (Jones, 1997). Many stories are written by adults, for children, and present images and messages to children and parents that serve to perpetuate the interpretations of the rural (Matthews et al., 2000).

Country childhoods are seen powerfully in terms of a synthesis of innocence, wildness, play, adventure, the companionship of other children, contact with nature, agricultural spaces and practices, healthiness, spatial freedom and freedom from adult surveillance. (Jones, 1997, p. 162)

“A core concern of the new rural studies of childhood has been to deconstruct the rural idyll which is presumed to exist” (McKendrick, 2000, p. 374). Recent studies which attend to exploring and describing, in multiple contexts, children’s heterogenous rural lives have included an interrogation of the ideas and imaginings apparent in lay and popular discourses of the rural idyll. Idealised constructions of rural childhoods have been juxtaposed with constraints that children and young people must negotiate (Panelli et al., 2007).

A significant aspect of the rural idyll is the imagining of the countryside as an ideal setting for family life. This has been explored in a number of studies, such as the prevalence of this imagining in English literature, lifestyle magazines and children’s toys (Jones, 1997) and perceptions of women as the rural being a better place for bringing up children (Little & Austin,

1996). Studies in the UK and in Mid-western America have found that parents perceive rural living as better and safer for children (Little & Austin, 1996; Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000; Valentine, 1997). Findings from an English study, found women perceived the country as a better environment for bringing up children, for a number of reasons including greater freedom (Little & Austin, 1996). Likewise, in another English study, parents used constructions of rurality that included access to more space for children to play, more opportunities for environmental exploration and prolonged childhood innocence (Valentine, 1997).

The notion of children's freedom is central to rural idyllic visions of family life. However, research findings have contested this in several ways. Environmental freedom has been noted as being constrained by landowners enforcing trespass laws to keep children off their property, the loss of rural areas and the allure of indoor entertainments, such as television, computers and other electronic devices (Valentine, 1997). Freedom to participate in leisure activities for children in rural areas is often dependent on a parent (usually the mother) providing transport (Little & Austin, 1996; Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000; Valentine, 1997). Furthermore, children's spatial movement is restricted by parents in response to beliefs about the countryside being a particularly dangerous place for a child (Valentine, 1997).

Parents perceive dangers in rural areas for children as including: those they were exposed to through the global media (for example, national and international cases of child murder), those they related to urban environments (for example, stranger danger, abduction, traffic problems with speeding cars, narrow lanes and lack of footpaths) and those identifiable as local concerns (for example, rural demonised strangers, known previous village cases of sexual crimes, and groups of teenagers with nothing to do intimidating children) (Valentine, 1997). As a consequence of these perceived threats to children's safety, parents restricted children's movements, structured their time and many drove children to organised activities.

An Australian study demonstrated that young people did not feel safe in their local environment after dark, despite feeling safe during the day (Fabiansson, 2007). The researcher argued that "global issues in combination with local reality and experiences create a fear discourse and feelings of being unsafe, which is not imaginary but felt real by the young people" (Fabiansson, 2007, p. 46).

In a North American study, parents ambivalent perceptions of their children's safety were apparent. Parents indicated a belief that their children were safer as a consequence of living rurally, but they also discussed experiences, such as instances of child abuse and inadequate child care, which illustrated they were not (Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000). These studies reveal how parents can understand the rural as simultaneously both safe and dangerous (Nairn, Panelli & McCormack, 2003). Despite the concerns expressed by parents for children and the subsequent restrictions and constraints placed on them, parents considered a rural environment a safer place for their children to grow up than an urban one (Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000; Valentine, 1997). The rural idyll is particularly potent in its comparison to the urban. In one study, for example, rural characteristics were seen as positive, and "the 'rural, not urban' comparison was desired, looked for, preserved and to some extent created" (Jones, 1995, p. 44).

Community is an important notion for rural dwellers (Liepins, 2000; Nairn et al., 2003), and particularly so in the construction of the rural idyll. Within the multiple constructions of rurality,

in the English setting, “perhaps the most powerful imagining is of the rural as a peaceful, tranquil, close knit community” (Valentine, 1997, p. 137). Community is often revered in positive and idyllic terms (Panelli et al., 2002) with rural lay discourses using ‘community’ to convey a sense of belonging (Halfacree, 1993). Parents also mobilise popular representations of the rural idyll as a supportive community, in response to fears about children’s safety (Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000; Valentine, 1997). However, the expressed belief that a rural community is more caring does not necessarily help parents in issues such as finding child care, or relieve their fear of bad groups and bad influences on their children (Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000). The sense of sameness in constructions of community is also simultaneously fractured by the representations of ‘other’ including differentiation by class, age, and status as incomers or long term residents (Valentine, 1997).

Constructions of the rural community as an emotionally harmonious, safe and peaceful space may be challenged by women’s experiences of fear in rural spaces (Panelli, Little & Kraak, 2004). Community can be mobilised to provide support and security in the face of fear. However, constructions of community can be rigid, narrowly defined and exclusive which can lead to a focus on danger coming from sources external to the community and therefore fail to recognise danger from within the community.

In some Minority world settings rurality has become a commodity which is actively sought by middle class migrants attracted to the idyllic rural vision (Swaffield & Fairweather, 1998). The rural is “increasingly regarded, and marketed, as an important home domain for the new middle classes” (Valentine & Holloway, 2001, p. 384). A key feature of the rural idyll is an increasing reliance on the notion of exclusion and selectivity, in which the imaginings of the rural idyll are created by the wealthy and for the enjoyment of the wealthy, thus reflecting power relations in society (Little & Austin, 1996). Concerns with regard to low income English rural families are in contrast with, and subordinate to, the influx of wealthy incomers and early retirees who are a powerful group with dominant interests (Davis & Ridge, 1997). The existing rigid class stratifications as described in some rural communities are reinforced (Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000).

Jones (1999) argues that the equation of nature, innocence and childhood has led to the construction of the ‘natural’ state of childhood being male. Accounts of rural childhood in popular and literary discourses see boys out in the countryside, wild and innocent, able to be at one with nature, whilst girls can only participate in this imagined, idyllic, natural childhood by becoming a tomboy, a quasi-male, honorary boy (Jones, 1999). Rye (2006) notes that the gendered image of the countryside with predominantly male symbols and activities, may mean that girls feel less comfortable in this social context.

Contributing to the notions of the gendered rural image are the findings of an historical study looking at girls’ contribution as labour on farms, both domestically and in the field, in New Zealand, Australia and Mid-western USA in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (Hunter & Riney-Kehrberg, 2002). These findings indicated that by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century there was increasing pressure to exchange usefulness for dutiful behaviour, and girls became increasingly excluded from outdoor farm activities.

Canadian boys were found to be more likely to engage in risk taking behaviour, with places to socialise that reinforce a “kind of rural, masculine identity, an identity that is closely aligned with external nature as well as an internal ‘wild’ nature” (Dunkley, 2004, p. 574). Similarly, an Australian study found “cars, speed and danger” to be both a feature of rural small town life for young males and an important aspect of their masculine identities (Kraak & Kenway, 2002, p. 148). Some rural towns have developed a culture of protection for girls, who have no sanctioned safe public space, and no boundaries for boys (Dunkley, 2004).

## ALTERNATIVE (TO IDYLIC) CONSTRUCTIONS OF RURALITY

While the rural idyll is a dominant construction of rurality, alternatives to this do exist in particular Minority world cultures. These constructions serve to challenge the rural idyll and present other views of rural childhood contexts.

### **Rural horror**

Bell (1997) draws attention to the different emotional connotations of rural between Britain and North America, by contrasting the settled landscape of English villages with the frontier life and the ‘Old West’ that is part of American rural history, along with American small towns and farms. Noting that horror movies are frequently sited in the countryside, for example *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and *Deliverance*, Bell (1997) discusses the “armchair countryside” and the “behind the sofa countryside, a place far, far from idyllic” (p. 95). In an inverse of the rural idyll, the victim in horror movies tends to be urban, whilst the setting and the horror, or monster, are rural.

In a continuation of the theme of the rural as a setting for horror rather than tranquillity, Bell (2006) notes the perception of the countryside as wild and potentially violent. As the rural becomes increasingly selective and exclusive (Little & Austin, 1996), people that do not fit the middle class rural imaginings, for example ‘hillbillies’, are seen as wild and potentially destroying the rural environment (Bell, 2006). In this construction the rural and ‘other’ within it are viewed as needing taming, domestication and containment.

### **Rural dull**

Laegran (2002) comments that in Norway there are two competing representations of the rural - “the rural as an idyll: beautiful, safe, healthy and harmonious; and the rural as dull: traditional, backward and boring” (p. 158).

For some young people rural areas can be regarded as a place with nothing to do, claustrophobic and restrictive (Davis & Ridge, 1997; Matthews et al., 2000; Tucker, 2003; Valentine & Holloway, 2001). Typically in UK studies, younger children expressed more positive views of rural lifestyle, with signs of growing dissatisfaction as they became older (Matthews et al., 2000). The increasing dissatisfaction of young people living rurally is accompanied by an increased proportion of children wanting to live in town (Davis & Ridge, 1997). Several Scandinavian studies have shown that young people living in rural areas “often experience tension between

identification with the local community and a desire to reach out for education and to see the world” (Laegran, 2002, p. 158).

The ‘peacefulness’ and ‘tranquillity’ that adults value so much in the rural idyll, may just be boring to teenagers. (Rye, 2006, p. 411)

The findings of a Norwegian study indicated that rural youth presented an idyllic version of rural life “characterised by nature and a dense social structure” (Rye, 2006, p. 419), which also co-existed with more negative aspects. Rurality was not seen exclusively in terms of rural idyll or rural dull, but rather characteristics of both were acknowledged without contradiction (Rye, 2006). Similarly, another study found that young people “aligned themselves with particular public narratives of rural and urban and distanced themselves from others” (Vanderbeck & Dunkley, 2003, p. 255), actively constructing their own social identities, with a country identity generally constructed as being an inferior one.

Social exclusion can be a feature of rural living, whereby young people feel powerless and disenfranchised (Davis & Ridge, 1997; Matthews et al., 2000). Rural young people can be less likely to be consulted and to participate in community life than urban young people (Freeman, Sligo & Nairn, 2003). They can feel observed, under surveillance, and singled out for disapproval and intolerance, with their visibility in small communities being compounded by a lack of space (Davis & Ridge, 1997; Laegran, 2007; Leyshorn, 2002; Panelli et al., 2002). The idea that everybody knows each other in rural communities, which can be expressed as a positive factor in the rural idyll, particularly when mobilising notions of safety, can also be a negative factor for young people where the social fabric is both caring and controlling (Rye, 2006).

Rural young people, like their urban counterparts, seek locations where they can be seen by other young people - but away from the adult gaze - almost trying to create mini-urban spaces in these rural villages (Matthews et al., 2000). Gatherings of young people can be perceived by adults in the community as disruptive and threatening (Kraak & Kenway, 2002). There can be confrontations with other young people and adults over contested social space, and a feeling of not being a part of the community (Matthews et al., 2000).

Many rural villages in the Minority world are desolate places for young people, characterised more often by spatialities that exclude, marginalise and persecute. (Matthews & Tucker, 2007, p. 105).

These issues are typical of many childhoods, but Matthews et al. (2000) point out that a distinguishing feature of rural childhoods is a sharp disjunction between the symbolism of a rural upbringing, the rural idyll created by adults for adults, and the realities and experiences of growing up in rural communities.

Technological developments, such as information and communication technologies, have been perceived as having the potential to expand rural children and young people’s economic and employment opportunities, and social and spatial horizons (Valentine & Holloway, 2001). However, studies found that children and young people used the internet for purposes relevant to their current experiences, for example to increase social capital with their off-line friends and to

extend their repertoire of identities in their local community, rather than extending globally as adults had imagined they would (Laegran, 2002; Valentine & Holloway, 2001).

### **Rural deprivation**

The dominance of a particular idealised version of the rural in popular discourse means that 'other' versions, such as those including rural poverty or rural deprivation are denied (Bell, 2006).

This hegemonic idyll is so powerful, Cloke (1994) argues, that it renders terms like 'rural poverty' or 'rural deprivation' as culturally illegible, since life in the country can never be 'poor' or 'deprived'. (Bell, 2006, p. 152)

James (1990) argues that the urban-rural myth obscures the fact that rural areas have various problems including deprivation, poverty, agricultural decline, unemployment, housing, transport and lack of service provision.

The literature indicates a tendency for poverty in rural areas in the UK to be hidden in various ways (Davis & Ridge, 1997; Little & Austin, 1996). The notion of the rural idyll excludes poverty, and the persistence of this popular notion contributes to keeping poverty concealed. Even when poverty and deprivation are acknowledged, and linked to poor wages and exploitation, the traditional rural community is constructed as a place of solidarity and happiness (Little & Austin, 1996). The rural idyll "portrays the countryside not only as an ideal place to live, but as an antidote to urban deprivation" (Davis & Ridge, 1997, p. 9).

While some children, in particular younger children, experience many benefits of rural life, some children and young people, particularly those from low income families, experience increased difficulties (Davis & Ridge, 1997). Rural communities can have a lack of social, recreational and built resources for young people (Dunkley & Panelli, 2007). Difficulties have been noted for children and young people with inadequate transport, limited access to facilities and scarcity of resources, and with competition and conflict existing between different groups of young people, and increasingly with adults, in areas where resources and space are at a premium (Davis & Ridge, 1997). Rural youth wanting to access behavioural health services are affected by factors such as poverty, lack of transport, the stigma of seeking these services and the lack of available services (Heflinger, 2006). Some of the inconveniences caused by geographical location can be overcome where there is sufficient affluence and mobility, but for those on low incomes this has implications for limiting participation and increasing exclusion.

Poverty in rural America is perhaps less hidden following the 1980s Great Farm Crisis in the American Midwest which resulted in the emergence of massive economic and social costs (Elder & Conger, 2000). The poverty rates for children increased by 50% in the following two decades, and children living in rural areas of America became disproportionately at risk for experiencing poverty (Cochrane et al., 2003).

Rural America presents two faces to the larger society, the appeal of agricultural life, especially for children, and a portrait of chronic, debilitating poverty. (Elder & Conger, 2000, p. 8)

Many of the stressors faced by rural, poor families are non-economic, but endemic poverty accentuates most of the conditions experienced (Wijnberg & Reding, 1999).

Constructions of childhood in Minority world contexts contain a view of children as vulnerable, requiring protection and a range of guidance and services (Halliday, 1997; Valentine, 1997; Valentine & Holloway, 2001), which are lacking in rural areas (Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000). Poverty and rural residence present unique challenges in service delivery for a range of services including education, welfare, health and leisure.

For example, studies in the American Midwest found adult participants expressed concerns about the need to find employment and the lack of support services, such as quality childcare, available for children if parents are working (Cochrane et al., 2003; Struthers & Bokemeier, 2000). Common problems with rural childcare include: the limited and primarily voluntary nature of local services, typically limited preschool availability, the multiple nature of maternal responsibilities, and the multifaceted nature of service provision where the child's socialisation is paramount but not the sole consideration (Halliday, 1997).

Lack of community resources, transportation issues and the unavailability of recreational activities also affect leisure time and activities for rural families (Churchill et al., 2007; Trussel & Shaw, 2007). The effort involved in organising recreational activities, which are also influenced by farming demands, weather and work schedules, can mean increased stress, frustration and fatigue (Trussel & Shaw, 2007).

A New Zealand study demonstrated that young people experienced different kinds of rural childhoods, with some young people representing the rural as a place to escape from and others demonstrating a strong commitment to it as a place to live, highlighting both the poverty and the possibilities for young people living in rural towns (Smith et al., 2002).

## **CHILDREN'S AGENCY**

The concept of children's agency is a core feature of Childhood Studies, constructing children and young people as active participants in shaping their environment as well as being shaped by it:

Agency is understood as an individual's own capacities, competencies, and activities through which they navigate the contexts and positions of their lifeworlds, fulfilling many economic, social, and cultural expectations, while simultaneously charting individual/collective choices and possibilities for their daily and future lives. (Robson, Bell & Klocker, 2007, p. 135)

The increase in Minority world research on children's rural childhoods has highlighted the capacity and agency of children and young people (Panelli et al., 2007) within their leisure and work activities, in relation to adults and to peers (Robson et al., 2007).

Children and young people have been shown to be active participants in the productivity of family farms, historically (Hunter & Riney-Kehrberg, 2002; Sjoberg, 1997) and currently (McCormack, 2002; Leckie, 2002). Additionally, while the major focus on children's rural work has been in Majority world countries, there have been a few studies in the Minority world (de Coninck-Smith, Sandin & Schrumpf, 1997) which have found children's active and 'real' participation in a range of work activities in agricultural and fishing settings (Solberg, 1997).

Rural children and young people are creative in their pursuit of leisure and recreational opportunities (Jones, 2000, 2007; McCormack, 2002). Jones (2007) argues that the adult discourse of the rural idyll can provide circumstances whereby children have a greater degree of power and autonomy. Adults perceive children to be acting in accordance with the idealised childhood vision and they are consequently given greater freedom to pursue their own agendas.

In the country, young people can manage peer conflicts and form social groups (Dunkley & Panelli, 2007; Matthews & Tucker, 2007) even in the face of adult disapproval (Laegran, 2007; Kraack & Kenway, 2002; Panelli et al., 2002). Rural young people who felt marginalised or excluded were not passive in accepting positions imposed upon them within a community. Instead they used a range of strategies to position themselves within the community (Panelli et al., 2002; Smith et al., 2002; Tucker, 2003) and build specific identities and skills, for example through a car based youth culture in Norway (Laegran, 2007). Alternatively, they considered leaving the area as a way of improving their lives (Schafer, 2007; Smith et al., 2002).

### **Children's perspectives**

Until very recently the majority of studies contributing to our understanding of rural childhoods have been from the perspective of parents or other adults, and have tended to be studies *on* and *about* children, not *with* children (Matthews et al., 2000). However, more recent studies have emphasised and sought the views of children and young people in exploring their own experience (for example McCormack, 2002; Matthews et al., 2000; Nairn, Panelli & McCormack, 2003; Tucker, 2003; Vanderbeck & Dunkley, 2003). There is an academic move away from the construction of binaries that have been prevalent in Minority world cultural meanings and interpretations (Skelton, 2000) and a growing body of research emphasising the importance of recognising the diversity and difference between children (for example, Freeman, Sligo & Nairn, 2003; Nairn, Panelli & McCormack, 2003). "What to adults may seem to be a zone of sameness, is from young people's view a realm of difference and diversity" (Tucker, 2003, p. 113).

## **Minority World Summary**

A dominant focus in the literature on rural childhoods, and the experiences of children and young people in rural environments, in the Minority world is the construction and deconstruction of the rural idyll. A rural childhood has been idealised, particularly in the UK context, and perpetuated in popular discourses. Studies have sought to interrogate the notions inherent in an idyllic view of rural family life, with an exploration of themes such as freedom, safety, danger, and community, as well as gendered experiences.

Alternative constructions of rurality as it impacts on children and young people have also been presented, notably versions of the countryside viewed as sites of rural horror, rural dull and rural deprivation. The rural environment can be a stifling and boring one, particularly for young people, characterised by lack of activities, resources and transport, contested social space and adult surveillance. A lack of activities, resources and services can also impact on families with younger children, particularly when exacerbated by poverty, making the rural environment one of deprivation.

## **RURAL CHILDHOODS: MAJORITY WORLD CONTEXTS**

In the Majority world, research attention has primarily focused on urban children and young people, despite most people living in rural areas (Panelli et al., 2007). Rural areas in the Majority world tend to have a greater lack of access to basic services including school, medical, sanitation, electricity, transport and communication services (for example, see Ansell, 2005; Pillay, 2003; Punch, 2004, 2007a). Health issues have a significant impact, with poor overall health indicators (Schellenberg et al., 2003) and higher levels of child malnutrition and mortality (Ansell, 2005; Attanasio, 2004). As with the Minority world, great diversity exists across rural settings, although this is often overlooked with the tendency to contrast urban with rural contexts (Bushin et al., 2007).

The aspect of children's lives which has received the most significant research attention in the Majority world is that of children's work. For example, Hollos (2002) states that most descriptions of African children's lives emphasise the work they do, with little discussion of play or non-work activities. Ethnographic studies have demonstrated a continual overlap between work and play in rural children's lives (Katz, 1991; Punch, 2001), and noted that clear distinctions do not exist between paid and unpaid work, or home and workplace (Punch, 2002).

Minority world views set children apart ideologically and hold a view of childhood that precludes an association with monetary gain (Nieuwenhuys, 1996), whereas a Majority world view holds children to be useful, productive members of the household (Cheney, 2004). The relationships between parent and child are more inter-dependent than in the Minority world and young people achieve independence earlier, but with family interdependence continuing through the life course (Punch, 2002).

## **CHILDREN'S WORK**

Throughout the world child labour is overwhelmingly a rural phenomenon (Admassie, 2003; Tienda, 1979). Although there is much diversity in what work is undertaken by children in rural areas, generally hardship is a common feature (Bonnet, 1993), with global studies showing, for the most part, that the poorer the family, the more likely the child is to work (Kielland & Tovo, 2006).

It has been argued that in rural areas children may be perceived as available and valuable assets, for reasons relating to economic productivity (Nugent, 1985; Tienda, 1979). For example, findings from an analysis of household survey data in Peru supported the idea that children are valued in rural areas, by subsistence farming parents, for their productive capacity and economic utility (Tienda, 1979). A critical review of empirical studies from many Majority world countries indicates that children are important to parents to provide security in their old age, with the contention being that this motive is more likely to prevail in rural areas (Nugent, 1985).

Ruralization and child labour are clearly related, with the overwhelming majority of child labour taking place within farming (Bhalotra & Heady, 2003; Kielland & Tovo, 2006). The survival of rural families in many Majority world countries depends heavily on subsistence farming which produces an inflexible labour demand. These families require all members to work as a means of survival. In addition to this immutable fact of rural life, farm work is relatively well suited for children as most of it requires moderate skills and little supervision (Kielland & Tovo, 2006).

Children's work in rural areas of the Majority world is important in both productive and reproductive household tasks, contributing to household maintenance in paid and unpaid ways (Panelli et al., 2007). Time allocation studies from a range of African countries provided a fairly consistent picture of the activities carried out by children, with the most time-consuming tasks including fetching water, fetching firewood, doing dishes and household tasks, child care and herding (Kielland & Tovo, 2006). Similarly, ethnographic studies describe children's work in agriculture, animal husbandry, fetching water, providing fuel and gathering food (Katz, 1991; Punch, 2001).

These activities are subject to gender differences in the division of labour. In areas where subsistence farming is the dominant way of life, girls are typically involved with work in the domestic sphere such as preparing food, running errands and childcare, while boys' activities tend to include those further away from the home, such as agricultural work and herding (see Admassie, 2003; Beazley, 2007; Penn, 2001; Robson, 2004; Tienda, 1979). There is diversity between and within countries with regard to the gendered differentiation of work, with some activities being carried out by both boys and girls, for example, trading (Robson, 2004), looking after animals, fetching water and firewood (Kielland & Tovo, 2006), and household tasks (Punch, 2001a).

Whilst gender differences are clearly apparent in some societies, in others it has been noted that "whilst adult household labour is highly determined by gender roles, children's labour often cuts across gender stereotypes and doesn't merely mirror the adult division of labour in rural households" (Punch, 2001a, p. 804). Other factors were noted as coming into play, with both intergenerational and intragenerational issues needing to be considered. Age, birth order and

sibling composition are important in determining the division of household labour (Punch, 2001a).

Children's work is an essential and integral part of the family's functioning and survival. Children start to work at an early age, with their contribution in some cases being needed and expected by the age of three or four (Kielland & Tovo, 2006). Children's work has been conceptualised in Minority world views as socialisation, education, training and play (Nieuwenhuys, 1996), and there has been a failure to "appreciate that children's work is crucial to many spheres of economy and society" (Robson, 1996, p. 403). For communities surviving on subsistence farming, children's labour in fetching water and providing fuel is essential, and can outweigh the adults' contribution in these specific arenas (Katz, 1991). In some rural African communities married women, secluded by the Muslim practice of purdah, are dependent on children's labour. Children act as intermediaries hawking and trading commodities for the household (Robson, 2004) and may be responsible for gathering water and fuel (Katz, 2004) thereby supporting the seclusion of married women.

Bonnet (1993) suggests that children working with family are introduced to work in a way that is steeped in tradition and less likely to be exploitative. There is a perception that children will benefit in agrarian societies from parental protection (Bequele & Boyden, 1988), and from less exposure to the ills, such as prostitution, alcohol and drugs, that children in urban slum areas face (Mugisha, 2006). Child labour conditions may be more severe in slum areas than in rural areas, however exploitation and inequality can also be concealed within family enterprises and kinship networks (Boyden, 1988).

### **Child labour and school**

Whilst global studies generally indicate that the poorer a family is, the more likely its children are to work, poverty can also have different effects on child labour (Kielland & Tovo, 2006). Using data from household surveys, studies show that household poverty is strongly associated with children working and not attending school (Shafiq, 2007). However, a 'wealth paradox' can occur in which the likelihood of children working increases with the more land owned by their family, and school attendance decreases, as compared to children from land poor families (Bhalotra & Heady, 2003). The rationale being that children's work is required to maintain the productivity of the family land and that this is prioritised over school attendance. The wealth paradox can also have gender differences. For example, findings from a study in Pakistan show that girls were particularly affected by decreased school attendance in relation to family land ownership. Although many children combine school attendance with work, this is more common with agricultural work than household activities (Adamassie, 2003), suggesting that girls are more likely to have lower rates of school attendance.

Other studies have used household survey data to understand the relationship between poverty, children's labour and school attendance. The theory that child labour is due to poverty, and that improved economic conditions decrease child labour and may increase school attendance, has been validated for long term shocks (increases) to household income or wealth, but not for short term shocks (Kruger, 2007). Children from poorer and middle class households were less likely to attend school and more likely to work during temporary fluctuations in the local agricultural based economy (Beegle, Dehejia & Gatti, 2006; Kruger, 2007), which was consistent with

findings from urban areas (Duryea & Arends-Kuenning, 2003). The most likely explanation is that families capitalise on opportunities to increase their income in anticipation that the conditions will not remain favourable. Alternately, when economic conditions become less favourable for the seemingly long term, child labour can also increase and school attendance decrease (Dammert, in press).

In the realm of commercial agriculture some schools combine labour with education in an ‘earn-and-learn’ scheme, in which children work and attend school on the estate or plantation, with the extreme being boarding schools on plantations (Bourdillon, 2000; Kielland & Tovo, 2006). Children are better off on some plantations, where they live with their families and work in a familiar environment (Onyango, 1988). A key issue for children and young people working in commercial agriculture is the number of hours worked. Children expressed more concern about wanting a reduction in hours and abusive conditions than in the child labour itself (Bourdillon, 2000).

The issue for many is not how to ban child labour, indeed there are compelling reasons not to (Bourdillon, 2000), but rather how to improve the situation for children who are suffering or being exploited (Mutisi & Bourdillon, 2000; Porter & Phillips-Howard, 1997), and ensure that children’s work is recognised as work and rewarded materially and socially at all levels (Abebe, 2007). There are calls to reduce working hours and make the combination of work and school attendance possible (Adamassie, 2003; Bourdillon, 2000; Onyango, 1988). Adamassie (2003), for example, suggests the “introduction of a flexible school system that recognises the peak demand seasons for family and agricultural labour may be necessary” (p. 167). School programmes can be developed to meet the needs of working children, for example children in migrant rural families (Taracena, 2003).

Perceptions of school, and its relative merits, vary between and within countries. Taking a child out of school as part of a survival strategy can be the most sensible solution in some areas of subsistence farming (Bonnet, 1993). Families can have a lack of confidence in the benefits of a formal education system (Punch, 2002), and constraints such as poor quality teaching, lack of resources, and external work with seasonal demands, combined with school not being perceived as a priority, can lead to high rates of absenteeism, drop-out, repetition and failure (Punch, 2004).

The schooling that is available may not meet the needs of, or be specifically relevant to, families in rural areas, in which knowledge is transmitted through established family, social and cultural networks. For example, an increase in formal schooling in rural communities can decentre the household as a source of work-related knowledge (Katz, 2004). Findings from a study of rural disabled children, involved in household and community life in South Africa, found that “faced with an almost complete lack of formal structures to promote development in intellectually disabled children, rural communities appear to be empowering children with life skills to help them cope with daily living” (Pillay, 2003, p. 180). Further, institutions in some areas have adapted the schooling in an attempt to make it more relevant for rural life in that community, and found that whilst the parents generally valued schooling, they did not appreciate the ruralising or vocationalising of rural education (Meinert, 2003).

For children in Majority world contexts work is not isolated from other aspects of their lives. There is an overlap in work and play (Katz, 1991, 2004; Robson, 2004) and other arenas of

children's everyday lives (Punch, 2001b, 2003). For example, girls in an Indonesian village who are responsible for collecting water, meet their friends, play in the waterfall and swim in the river (Beazley, 2007). "Much of the discussion on child labour is heavily influenced by Western, middle class ideas about childhood and education" (Bourdillon, 2000, p. 171), and does not take into account the perceptions of children, work, family and education that prevail in Majority world contexts. Punch (2007a) advocates a more holistic approach to viewing children's lives and everyday experiences in rural Majority world studies. This type of approach shows how children integrate different aspects of their childhoods and negotiate autonomy, at home, at work, at school and at play (Punch, 2001b). Katz's (1991) ethnographic study indicates that when work and play are separated, play becomes trivialised. However, when play and work are intertwined, they provide the context for the acquisition and use of environmental knowledge, which is a key aspect of socialisation.

## CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES

### **Globalisation**

The experiences of children and young people throughout the world are undergoing profound changes as a consequence of the speed and nature of global neoliberal economic and social reform (Jeffrey & McDowell, 2004). The nature of childhoods and the transitions of youth to adulthood are rapidly changing in some parts, as globalisation processes blur the boundaries between global and local, and increasingly impact on children and young people's lives (Punch, 2007b). Economic and technological changes have altered the way the world works, and despite the promise of improved living conditions for the poor, have not automatically led to greater equality or better conditions for children (Penn, 2005). For example, families living in Outer Mongolia, who, following the collapse of communism and collective provision of services, had to increase the size of their herds to participate in the cash society, required their children to stop attending school and participate in agricultural and household work (Penn, 2001). Globalization processes have enormous impact in "destabilizing household systems of (re-)production and in depressing the material and living standards of children" (Abebe, 2007, p. 91).

Children and young people are affected to varying degrees by the processes of globalisation. Rural childhood and youth are not immune to this and are increasingly being shaped by the global economy and global cultures (Panelli et al., 2007).

Development strategies fuelled by globalization (e.g., unfair global trade, the HIV/AIDS epidemic and Structural Adjustment Programs) are altering children's work patterns, the nature and type of work they participate in and their social relationships within the community. (Abebe, 2007, p. 78)

### **Migration**

A consequence of the global economic restructuring is the migration of rural people to urban areas, within their own country or to other countries. There are different patterns of migration from rural areas as migrants can be independent young people (Punch, 2007b; Carpena-Mendez, 2007), parents, especially fathers, without other family members (Beazley, 2007; Onyango, 1988; Salazar, 1988), or whole families together (Punch, 2004; Taracena, 2003).

As traditional subsistence farming is making way for commercial agribusiness and the need to participate in a cash based society, young people are migrating from rural areas, such as rural Bolivia to Argentina (Punch, 2007b), Mexico to the United States (Carpena-Mendez, 2007; Taracena, 2003), Ecuador to the United States (Pribilsky, 2001) and Indonesia to Malaysia (Beazley, 2007). The migration may be seasonal (Punch, 2007b; Taracena 2003) or for longer periods (Pribilsky, 2001).

Rural young people migrate for a number of reasons including education and employment (Ansell, 2004; Punch 2002). In the context of global restructuring, schooling can intervene in the transition to adulthood, as young people continue longer in secondary education in the hopes of a secure future, with consequences such as marrying later, delayed economic activity and earlier home leaving to pursue education (Ansell, 2004).

Decisions about where to migrate to and for what purpose are influenced by economic and structural constraints, such as lack of access to land or local employment, lack of local education opportunities, scarce economic resources, parental attitudes, gender, birth order, social networks and support, and the role models of other migrant rural youth (Punch, 2002). For young people “migration for work is an attractive opportunity as it enhances both their economic and social capital” (Punch, 2002, p. 131), as well as facilitating their transition to adulthood (Punch, 2007b).

Children’s lives are also being shaped by the consequences of their parent’s migration. The migration of men to seek employment in urban areas or elsewhere has frequently increased the workload of the women and children in rural areas maintaining the household (Abebe, 2007; Beazley, 2007; Hollos, 2002; Onyango, 1988; Salazar, 1988). There are also instances where the remittances sent home by migrant fathers has meant that families have moved away from subsistence agriculture, and the emphasis on children attending school increases (Pribilsky, 2001). However, the sending home of remittances from adult male migrants can have significant social consequences for the wives and children remaining at home, exacerbating inequalities between migrant and non-migrant households (Punch, 2007b). Intercommunity tensions can develop between those with increased consumption and access to global goods and those without (Carpena-Mendez, 2007; Pribilsky, 2001; Taracena, 2003).

Children can suffer emotionally when separated from parents for a long time, with feelings of loneliness and missing their parents (Beazley, 2007). A study in the Ecuadorian Andes documented cases of children afflicted by ‘nervios’, a condition that starts with profound sadness and despair and leads to, sometimes extreme, anger, as a consequence of their fathers’ migration to the United States (Pribilsky, 2001). Parental migration also has physical effects on children. In some areas the migration of parents has negative implications for child rearing, with infant deaths and children not being properly cared for (Beazley, 2007).

Identities are changing in the context of wide-ranging socio-economic changes and the dynamic processes of migration. Children, young people and their families in Majority world rural environments are increasingly exposed to images encapsulating a 'modern' westernised view of childhood and consumerism (Taracena, 2003; Penn, 2005). This can bear little relevance to their own situation, as children face images of freedom and choices dependent on material goods, which they do not have (Penn, 2001). A community in which some families are affected by male migration, has two different parental conceptions and experiences of childhood co-existing, one (non-migrant) being a utilitarian view of children as workers and the other (migrant) one in which childhood is viewed with a more Minority world emphasis on play/education and less work (Hollos, 2002).

In the Majority world urban areas can be idealised, attracting migrants from rural areas, particularly those in search of economic opportunities and social services (Punch, Bell, Costello & Panelli, 2007). Findings from one study, including interviews with children and young people in rural Uganda, indicated that they imagined that town life would be "sweeter" and better (Meinert, 2003, p. 182). However, the reality of migrant life in urban areas often does not match this perceived ideal (Klocker, 2007; Mugisha, 2006).

### **HIV/AIDS motivated migration**

A cause of migration from some rural areas is as a consequence of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Children have been affected by HIV/AIDS in huge numbers and have been forced to migrate to other family members for care, to urban areas to seek work either for family support or to earn their keep, and to live on the streets and in orphanages (Young & Ansell, 2003). Children and young people are also moving to other households and to other areas to be carers for relatives who are unwell (Robson, 2000). Households are being reformed, with children moving within family networks as well as between different geographical locations in search of better living conditions.

As the ratio of children to healthy adults increases, households are often re-formed with children and grandparents (Young & Ansell, 2003). Thus, alongside the geographical movement, children's social position is frequently changing within the community in which they live. Findings in one study suggested that the social position of orphaned children may resemble that of adults in traditional society (Nyambedha & Aagaard-Hansen, 2003).

Whilst geographical and social movement are core features of migration, the consequences of these are important. Children and young people have to adapt to different surroundings, household expectations and requirements. Rural children and young people sent to care for relatives in urban areas may do so at the expense of their education, while the resident urban children continue at school (Robson, 2000).

The physical movement of children affected by the HIV/AIDS crisis can be from rural to urban centres or conversely from urban to rural settlements (Young & Ansell, 2003). Some young people moving from urban to rural areas do not find it easy to integrate themselves into the rural family extended network (Nyambedha & Aagaard-Hansen, 2003). However, learning new tasks and performing daily activities can contribute to a growing sense of belonging for some young people (Ansell & van Blerk, 2007). "Migration, then, is not simply a case of moving from place

to place, or of uprooting contexts and identity. Rather, it involves becoming part of a place” (Ansell & van Blerk, 2007, p. 27).

Despite the widespread movement of Majority world people brought about by migration as a consequence of globalisation processes, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, civil war and hardship, rural areas are valued and romanticised (Klocker, 2007; Punch, 2007a), and urban children of rural migrants may maintain positive imaginings of their rural ‘home’ (Cheney, 2004; Hammond, 2003). Children, born elsewhere as a consequence of refugee migration and who have never seen the Ethiopian farmlands from which their parents came, consider them ‘home’ (Hammond, 2003). In some societies rural villages can be marginalised locations, associated with ‘backwardness’ and antidevelopment (Cheney, 2004), and a sense of shame (Mackie, 2007, cited in Punch et al., 2007). However, in one study, families living in urban Uganda, despite seeing rural villages as marginalised, also saw them as places of cultural value and potential investment, to which parents intended retiring (Cheney, 2004).

Whilst findings from a study with young people forced to migrate as a consequence of HIV/AIDS related family illness did not indicate a specific rural identity, “it was important to many that they *belonged to* (rural) places” (Ansell & van Blerk, 2007, p. 26).

## CHILDREN’S AGENCY

The conceptualising of agency in a Majority world context must take into account the structural accounts and the limited life chances for children in comparison to children living in Minority world contexts (Abebe, 2007). Reviewing the literature relating to children’s work in Majority world countries highlights issues of impoverishment, inequality, hardship, survival and deprivation. However, the literature also provides insights into children’s agency in their transformation and negotiation of life circumstances and experiences, rather than just positioning children ideologically as passive, innocent, or vulnerable victims. In Majority world settings children are valued for their active contribution to the household, rather than being passively dependent (Bourdillon, 2000). They are not set apart ideologically from work and the production of value, as in Minority world settings where children’s agency in the creation and negotiation of value is denied (Nieuwenhuys, 1996).

Robson et al. (2007) have identified “a continuum of young people’s agency, or power/control over their agency” (p. 144). This continuum outlines degrees of agency from (almost) no agency at one end, in which children and young people are forced to act against their will, to public agency at the other end, in which young people openly act with adult sanction. In between, along the continuum, lie two other points, one of little agency, whereby children act out of necessity to survive or improve their own lives, and one of secret agency, which indicates a subtle resistance to adult control. Several aspects impact on, and are relevant to, a young person’s agency including the individual young person’s perceived sense of being able to act and confidence to do so, the constraints which they face daily, for example poverty or restrictive sociocultural norms and expectations, and personal (dis)ability (Robson et al., 2007).

The following examples illustrate the literature on children and young people's agency along this continuum:

- Children and young people who are forced to migrate against their will as a consequence of HIV/AIDS related family illness, might appear to have almost no agency, but through 'doing' daily activities in their new environment they come to gain a sense of 'belonging' there (Ansell & van Blerk, 2007). Nyambedha and Aagaard-Hansen (2003) note that children forced to shift place physically also shift place socially and can move from a position in which they have been disempowered by poverty and traditional structures, to a more empowered position as head of a household or with differences in conventional relationships.
- Numerous studies have indicated the essential nature of children's work to the survival of their households and the improvement of their own lives. In some of these situations children appear to have little agency. For example, child domestic workers in Tanzania who transition from school to work, despite not wanting to be domestic workers, do so "as a coping strategy, an active and rational response in the face of a crisis of social reproduction" (Klocker, 2007, p. 92). Some children, whose parents have migrated, "actively respond to their impoverished and marginalised position by developing a 'repertoire of strategies' in order to survive" (Beazley, 2007, p. 111).
- The literature also reports instances of secret agency, whereby children and young people's resistance is subtle. For example, children using work as an opportunity to escape surveillance and play (Beazley, 2007; Katz, 1991; Punch, 2001b; Reynolds, 1991), or forming forbidden friendships and relationships (Bell, 2007).
- Agency is most apparent in public displays of power, for example, when children and young people negotiate generational power relations and reach agreements with parents over land and work, in order to generate an income (Punch, 2002). As children and young people acquire economic power this tends to increase their social power, although Punch (2007a) argues that young people can be both powerful and powerless simultaneously, in different aspects of their social worlds. Children negotiate autonomy in the overlapping areas of their lives, work, school, home and play (Katz, 2004; Punch, 2001b; Robson, 2004), actively using strategies for coping with and avoiding tasks in negotiating power relations with parents and siblings (Punch, 2001b, Robson, 2004). Children also take pride in their work and in gaining autonomy and independence (Robson, 1996).

### **Children's perspectives**

As with Minority world research, developments in Childhood Studies over the last couple of decades have seen an increasing number of Majority world studies focusing on eliciting the views and perspectives of children and young people. The studies were initially focused on children's work in Majority world contexts and to this extent were consistent with the dominant concern of Majority world research studies on rural childhood (Bourdillon, 2000; Katz, 1991; Reynolds, 1991; Robson, 1996). More recently, however, Majority world research has focused on a greater

range of issues concerning the voices of children and young people, such as young carers (Robson, 2000; Robson & Ansell, 2004) Africa's HIV/AIDS crisis (Ansell & van Blerk, 2007), migration (Cheney, 2004; Klocker, 2007; Pribilsky, 2001), youth transitions (Ansell, 2004; Punch, 2002), and schooling (Punch, 2004). Some studies have adopted a more integrated, holistic approach encompassing multiple and overlapping arenas (Katz, 2004; Punch, 2003).

## **Majority World Summary**

The main focus of the literature on rural childhoods in Majority world contexts has been on children and work. Productive and reproductive work is a feature of life, and family survival, for many children and young people in Majority world rural environments. Studies have looked at children's lives specifically in relation to work, schooling, and economic developments, as well as the overlap between the different facets of children's lives at home, school, work and play.

Research has also focused on the changing circumstances for children and young people in Majority world countries, as a consequence of globalization, technological changes, migration and the HIV/AIDS epidemic. These rapidly changing circumstances contribute to both geographical and social changes for children and young people. The literature highlights the physical and social constraints in children's lives and the active roles they play in family and community life.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper has reviewed current research literature focusing on rural childhoods, using a binary Majority /Minority world framework to organise and present the information. In using this conceptual binary, differences and similarities are readily apparent. There are clearly noticeable differences in the material realities of children living within each world context, with some areas in the Majority world being extremely impoverished. Massive inequalities exist between countries, between urban and rural areas, and within specific locations. There are also differences in cultural expectations, with children's intergenerational responsibilities seeming to be stronger in Majority world countries (Robson et al., 2007).

However, several important and consistent themes in the lives of young people can be identified across these Majority and Minority world contexts (Robson et al., 2007). Firstly, there appear to be less restrictive forces and greater relative freedom for young people living in rural areas than in urban areas. Secondly, inadequate access to transport and mobility, and lack of access to services and opportunities, exist across these global contexts. Thirdly, migration for work or education is often necessary for rural young people. Fourthly, emotional aspects of belonging to a

place and experiencing rural life are important to rural young people in Minority and Majority world situations.

Simplistic distinctions between Minority and Majority world contexts can mask the enormous diversity that exists in the experiences of children and young people. Given the diversity of young rural lives there is huge scope to continue exploring experiences, themes and issues, and to build on the knowledge and understandings already generated by scholars in the sociologies and geographies of children who have, as the literature demonstrates:

... increasingly considered how children and young people construct their own understandings of their environments; negotiate a range of social relations; and actively create their own cultures and social practices. (Panelli, Nairn & McCormack, 2002, p. 106)

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