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## Moral Orders of Mobility: Youth Aspirations and ‘Doing’ Social Position in Finland

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### Abstract

By studying the moral orders that young Finnish adults (aged 18–30) attach to geographical mobility, this article reveals previously neglected relationships between aspiration and mobility. The 40 young adult interviewees are living in the midst of Finnish political debates about youth aspiration, which emphasise geographical rather than social mobility as a way to enhance employability and demonstrate aspiration. We argue that young people themselves use the discourse of geographical mobility by leaning on morally ordered social positionings which tend to be classed and gendered. They position themselves on a moral map of Finnish society, and in doing so they work and rework the social order and social hierarchies among young adults. The article suggests that notions of global and domestic mobility might best be grasped by focusing on the moral orders of aspiration that young adults also attach to intimate life.

### Keywords

aspirations, gender, geographical mobility, moral order, social class, young adults

### Introduction

In this article, we examine young Finnish adults’ moral orders of geographical mobility through which they construct themselves as full members of society. We regard doing moral orders (of geographical mobility and aspirations) as communicative practices that are often mundane. This view is in line with Stokoe and Edwards (2015: 165), for whom moral orders are ‘the practices of everyday life in which people mix moral evaluations, a sense of right and wrong, blame and culpability, etc., with ordinary accounts and

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descriptions of persons, actions, and events'. Different aspirational models, which are conceived as ideals, may be used as a resource when young adults present their pathways to their present positions and their planned futures as understandable and morally sound. The assumed connection between young adults' aspirations and their mobility is at the centre of public and official discourse on young people. To challenge this assumption, our intention is to find out how, and in relation to whom, young people themselves conceive of geographical mobility. We examine the rights and responsibilities young adults conceive for themselves and their peers in relation to domestic and international mobility. Do they define themselves (and others) as aspirational in relation to mobility, and if so, how is this done? What attributes and actions do they attach to the categories they use in their talk about mobilities? Might it be that aspirational models, which young adults are supposed to assume, actually exacerbate hierarchies and divisions among young people?

### **Moral order and morality**

Moral reasoning is embedded in the daily practices of everyday life. However, because it is connected to social categories (identities), it can be used for 'doing' or 'redoing' differences that are bases or justifications for inequalities. Who is to blame for being too local and not aspirational enough? Who can be excused – or can excuse oneself – from being conventionally aspirational as a member of a certain category?

Being critical of positionings and categorizations that bear social consequences which can create inequalities means stepping outside the immediate context. In our use of the term 'moral order', we are in line with the researchers who conceive of categorization as culture-in-action (Hester and Eglin, 1997). Culture is done and redone in mundane acts and utterances. Change occurs when some moral order is no longer used because it is not seen as valid. Furthermore, as researchers we utilise our own cultural understanding of subtexts connected to categorizations used, thus our interpretations are not purely data driven (Kitzinger, 2000). Thus, we are interested in the connections between a single utterance and larger structures, institutional practices or discourses and their relation to the discourses on aspirations and mobility.

In addition, we see accounts and their repletion as consequential. We do not restrict our analysis on the basis of 'ethnomethodological indifference' (Garfinkel and Sacks, 1970) but our approach is more in line with Lena Jayyusi's (1991) idea that analysis should be critical and even political, otherwise we are in a danger of mere description. Interview accounts are culture-in-action: there is an interactional task in hand and the mobilisation of some moral order that justifies and judges some sort of action. Morality relates to possibilities to choose how a story is told – as Lena Jayyusi has stated, given the indefinitely extendible number of ways people can be correctly categorized, the categories that are used in descriptions and accounts are central to the emergence of morality in interaction. Members' categorization work is therefore embedded in a 'moral order'. (Jayyusi, 1984: 2).

This refers to the division of morality as a topic and morality as a resource (Jayyusi, 1984, 1991; see also Drew, 1998; Stokoe and Edwards, 2015). People do not think about what is moral all the time but often only use categorizations to tell something and make their stories intelligible – not to judge anyone nor explain one's own action. However,

Pirjo Nikander (2002) states that there are some categories – such as age-bound categories, which are relevant also in our study – that have the potential to provoke moral judgements because of morality-laden ideas of progression, from youth to adulthood, for instance.

## Aspirations

Aspirations are evidently a moral issue. It is bad if you do not have any aspirations as a ‘young adult’ (membership category). In addition some aspirations may be considered less good than others or less good for certain categories of people. Aspiring to be a professional footballer is good if you are an athletic boy, less good if you are a girl or seen as unathletic. Aspiration in itself means the will to approach a new category which is usually high in some hierarchy or somehow higher position than the current one. Sometimes, this shift of a category means orientation towards a whole new set of rules, a social as well as a moral order.

‘Aspiration’ is a keyword which crystallises several political debates about youth. According to Konstanze Spohrer (2011: 53), ‘strategies of “employability” and “activation” are increasingly favoured in the European Union (EU) policy context. These strategies are aimed at fostering inclusion of young people by stressing the responsibility of an individual to participate in education and employment’. Spohrer suggests that similar tendencies in the United Kingdom (UK) debate have been framed as ‘raising young people’s aspirations’. Her analysis suggests that the ‘debate on “aspiration” constructs young people from disadvantaged backgrounds as deficient, conflates economic and social equality discourses and individualises structural problems’ (p. 59). Furthermore, in that discourse, some aspirations are not defined as aspirations at all, such as moving without any educational or work-related aims.

For our theorization of aspiration we draw on Mendick et al. (2018: 4), who write about aspirations as hopes and dreams that invoke young people to plan their futures. This includes some aspirations that government policy constructs as desirable, and others that it constructs as valueless. In a narrower sense, Mendick et al. (2018: 79) define aspiration as ‘a disciplinary technology that that shapes and directs our actions, hopes and dreams. It invokes young people to plan their futures in relation to socially approved pathways’. Aspiration in this sense demands that young people orient themselves to what counts as legitimate success. In addition, as Spohrer (2011: 58) has noted, ‘aspiration’ has its roots in psychology: it is seen as a personal trait or quality. The lack of it can be judged an ‘abnormality’. However, in our article, we also discuss aspirations which policymakers do not regard as desirable, and which rest on different moral orders (socially approved in other contexts) where actions that relate to mobility are judged on different bases.

In the UK, policymakers are explicitly calling the country an ‘aspiration nation’ (Littler, 2013). The goal for young people is upwards social mobility through education (and other supporting activities). In Finland, aspiration is not a catchphrase in the same way. However, in this article, we examine our interview materials using this concept, since it provides a more vivid lens than either ‘activation’ or ‘employability’ – the terms used in Finnish and EU policy discourse, as we explain below. Indeed, the term ‘aspiration’ provides an opportunity to examine the other side of the aspiration coin: aspirations

that are directed towards not economic prosperity (material goals) but private life (relational goals), or aspirations comprising plans that involve belonging to a certain place, which may be marginal but is still meaningful (see Cook and Woodman, 2019; Visser et al., 2015). Moreover, even aspirations for working life can resist or differ from current government ideals, and differences in aspirations may reflect social class and gender.

In Finland, aspiration is often framed in more modest ways than in the UK's 'aspiration nation' discourse, and more in line with what Spohrer (2011) has called the EU's 'inclusion and participation' discourse. Although there is a need for those who will be assets in the competitive global market, the expectations placed on others are not so high: they should simply avoid social exclusion and be good citizens and taxpayers.

This modesty of tone is observable in the Ministry of Finance's (2010) document 'Labour Markets of the Young: How Could Youth Employment Be Enhanced?' (a response to the 2008 EU initiative 'New Skills for New Jobs'). In this document, the ministry aims to enhance 'the integration of young people into the labour market', the main obstacles to which are (1) dropouts from basic education, (2) suspensions and non-completions of education, (3) paid work while in education, which lengthens completion times, and (4) the relationship of education and location with demand for employment. The answers the document produces lie in choosing the right education, completing it on time, and being able and willing to move wherever the jobs are (Nikunen, 2017). Thus, the requirements are fairly practical and guide young people towards certain acts (such as moving to locations where employees are in demand), rather than towards a particular mind-set or even upwards social mobility; implicitly, young people are guided to aspire to be employed. Thus, the talk is not about aspirations – at least as psychological traits – but a mere and rational quest for employment.

## **Mobility, immobility and aspiration**

When mobility is considered, morality is not always the issue: moving from one apartment to another or from one part of the country to another as an action is usually quite neutral morally, especially when moving with one's parents. There are forms of moving that are often oriented as moral, such as moving to another country to study, which is usually conceived as morally sound, but backpacking just for the fun of it can be judged as morally questionable.

Often, attachment to place is seen as hindering the 'successful' realisation of aspirations (Allen and Hollingworth, 2013). Schewel (2019) suggests that immobility should be reconceptualised on a spatial continuum from immobility to (hyper)mobility, and that we should also consider whether staying in one place is aspirational or reveals a lack of capacities to be mobile. Drawing from Carling (2002), Schewel (2019) proposes that migration (or mobility more generally) requires both aspiration and ability, while immobility can result from the lack of either. In Finland, both working-class youth in deindustrialised areas with declining employment and rural youth are seen as lacking aspiration, and the reason is supposed to be that they are spatially trapped: aspiring to gain an education and employment in these areas is not conceived as plausible (Juvonen and Romakkaniemi, 2019; see also Farrugia, 2016). In studies on the geography of young people's aspirations, it has been concluded that immobile young persons in peripheral

areas are conceived as ‘at-risk’ (e.g. Allen and Hollingworth, 2013). This speaks to the moral imperative related to aspiration: one should be willing to move in order to get ahead. ‘Social mobility requires escape from places that are deemed to lack opportunity’ (Mendick et al., 2018: 26).

However, mobility in the sense of upwards social mobility seems to be a central aspect of the UK’s aspirational youth policies (e.g. Littler, 2013; Payne, 2018; Spohrer, 2011). Geographical mobility can also be related to social class, for instance as a need for aspirational working-class youth to move to middle-class districts (Payne, 2018). For critical researchers, the idea that aspirations should be about upwards social mobility is problematic, since working-class youth who do not succeed in climbing the social ladder are then labelled ‘non-aspirational’, which is perceived as negative (Littler, 2013; Spohrer, 2011). In addition, it bypasses working-class youths’ hopes and aspirations to find working-class jobs (Holland, 2007; Ikonen, 2019).

Upwards social mobility and the question of social class are not present in the Finnish discussion, which is usually gender- and class-neutral. This also applies to the more aspirational way of talking about mobility in the Finnish context – namely, talking about internationalisation (Nikunen, 2017). Finland’s Centre for International Mobility (CIMO, 2009) stresses that internationalisation is important not only for university students, but also for young vocational education students, employees and entrepreneurs. However, according to the statistics, it is mainly university students who are active in learning mobility (Garam and Korkala, 2014). Gender is not oriented to as a problem; it is merely noted that according to statistics, young women are more active than young men in learning mobility. This is related to a strong gender segregation in education in Finland: arts and humanities students are mainly women, and the skills needed in these fields, such as learning languages and different cultures, call for going abroad (Garam and Korkala, 2014). The less mobile groups are encouraged towards international mobility, but in that case the focus is on vocational education, not on men as such (Garam and Korkala, 2014). We culturally assume that men are more internationally mobile than women *during working life*, when family responsibilities remain a ‘burden’ for women, which may explain why mobility statistics do not give rise to concern about boys (see Nikunen, 2017). Due to structural inequalities, Finnish men are more internationally mobile than women in their work careers, while women often accompany their spouses abroad (Nivalainen, 2010).

While these EU and CIMO documents emphasise that those who are active in learning mobility will also be mobile in their working lives – and will therefore be employable and improve global competitiveness – mobility is also seen as an instrument for personal growth: becoming more tolerant and open-minded towards other cultures. It can be argued that for policymakers, young people who demonstrate international mobility also demonstrate the proper type of aspiration. Furthermore, mobility can be seen as ‘embodied cultural capital’ that expresses values, aspirations and life goals (Holdsworth, 2006), and it therefore concerns a wider spectrum of aspirations than working life alone. David Farrugia (2016) uses the term ‘aspirational mobility’, by which he refers to ‘upward mobility through geographical mobility’ (see also Mendick et al., 2018: 12). Moving upwards in the social order is achieved by increasing one’s cultural capital (i.e. skills and knowledge) and social capital (i.e. networks) through spatial movement.

We suggest that this geographical mobility as part of a desired ‘aspirational package’ deserves extra attention. In studies of the transition to adulthood, the time aspect is usually hegemonic, hiding the fact that there are people who must overcome spatial difficulties in order to fit into those time limits (e.g. Farrugia, 2017). Farrugia (2016) even writes about the ‘mobility imperative’, meaning young rural people’s need to move elsewhere – to centres and metropolises. However, the mobility imperative does not concern rural youth only, as Farrugia (2017) also acknowledges. Elliott and Urry (2010: 47) point out that mobility constrains those who want to be on the top of hierarchy: it is not good to appear too localist or not networked enough. David Cairns (2014) writes about the ‘mobility imperative’, referring to (mainly international) mobility that is motivated by the limited opportunities for educated young people living in marginal areas. In addition, he and his colleagues (Cairns et al., 2017) point out that motives for geographical mobility are not purely rational but also contain hopeful elements, ‘mobility dreams’. They argue that the EU and governments, as well as various ‘gatekeepers’ such as administrators in educational institutions, encourage such dreaming, even though it largely benefits only those who also have other employable capacities (see also Nikunen, 2017).

This reading of the scholarly debate leads us to present two approaches to aspirational mobility. First, social mobility, often seen as upwards mobility, is more visible in other European – especially UK – discussions than in Finland, where class as a social category does exist but is less explicitly articulated. Second, there is mobility in the meaning of geographical mobility, in both official texts and young people’s own conceptions. Generally, this mobility is from peripheries to centres, and from rural to urban areas. In the Finnish context, this mobility is complemented by an emphasis on international mobility.

## **Data and analysis of moral orders**

The research data consist of semi-structured interviews conducted in 2015 and 2016 for our research project ‘Division into Two? Young Adults, Work and Future’. Altogether, 40 young adults (aged 18–30) were interviewed about their geographical and social life paths; their situations in terms of work, education and intimate relationships at the time of the interview; their future plans, hopes and fears; their conceptions of the good life, success and failure; and the expectations placed on young people in working life.

The participants came from different class backgrounds, and they were recruited through a variety of social and institutional networks, using email lists and contact persons from different organisations. The sample included 12 men and 28 women, most of whom were white, had Finnish-born parents, and had lived in Finland all their lives, with a few exceptions. The interviewees lived in the Tampere city region. Tampere is the third-largest city in Finland with about 250,000 residents. Some of the interviewees were active in education, the labour market or entrepreneurship, while some were unemployed or had no education beyond compulsory schooling. Some had had various international experiences, while others had not been internationally mobile. The smaller proportion of men reflects the fact that it is often easier to recruit young women interviewees than men (see Butera, 2006; Koivunen, 2010).



In our analysis, we examine moral orders of aspiration and mobility. What moral orders do young adults orient to – either by rejecting them or complying with them? What rules of mobility do they construct as moral, and is this morality also aspirational? These rules are category-bound: they relate to the categories in which people are placed, and the attributes and actions related to those categories. (Garfinkel, 1967; Heritage, 1984; Jayyusi, 1984; Sacks, 1972a, 1972b; Stokoe and Edwards, 2015).

Our analysis is an application of membership categorisation analysis (see Jayyusi, 1984; Sacks, 1972a, 1972b). We do not trace all the categorisations used, but we focus on how young adults categorise themselves and others, in relation to mobility. In categorization work (in interviews) common ideas mobility and aspiration may be complied – the moral order read in the question is accepted–or rejected – often by ‘shifting’. The shift from one moral order to another is usually made by changing categorisations – as if to say ‘this is a more suitable categorisation to think about this question or this context’ (on shifting, see Watson, 1983). Indeed, a counter-force to categorisation is particularisation: one may emphasise that the person in question is a representative of many categories, not just one – and thus that she or he is a particular person with a set of many features (Billig, 1987).

Some actions and attributes are usually seen as ‘normal’ or ‘ordinary’ for a person who is categorised in a certain way and belongs to a certain group. One is socially punished if one’s behaviour or appearance is out of (social) order and one cannot correct it (explain it away) (Heritage, 1984: 121). On average, people want to be socially accepted, and they often orient themselves to the possibility of moral accountability, before any sanctions are imposed. Thus, explanations that are requested – and even more so, explanations that are not requested – often mark a moral order and orientation to morality. A moral order relates to rights and responsibilities: does one have the right or responsibility to do something – behave in a certain manner – as a member of the group to which one is assigned in a certain situation or context?

It is clear from the policy documents about young people and mobility that young adults have a *responsibility* to be mobile to gain an education and employment. They have a *right* to be immobile only if they live in an area with vast possibilities, such as a few metropolitan areas (see Nikunen, 2017). Next, we analyse how young adults themselves utilise and resist these moral orders.

## **Moral orders of domestic mobility: reasoning moving or staying**

Our interviewees currently live in the Tampere region. Some have moved here from other parts of the country or other countries, while others have lived in the region all their lives. For most of the interviewees, domestic mobility connected to education seems to be taken for granted, especially and obviously for those who have moved to Tampere from rural parts of Finland. Former rural or otherwise peripheral youth have lived according to the aspirational-geographical moral order, and thus have nothing to explain nor correct. A moral order is used as a resource but explicit morality is not mobilised. Some of those who have lived here for most of their lives are hesitant to move away for precisely that reason: they have always been here. It is a fact that the area offers vast



educational possibilities, and therefore young people living in Tampere are not seen, or do not see themselves, as responsible for giving any explanation for their own ‘immobility’ other than their preference to stay. For instance, a journalism student expressed a sense of injustice and failure when she did not get into the university in her home town, but only a university in a somewhat smaller town 150 kilometres away:

Then I applied to Jyväskylä and Tampere, with the same entrance exam. Here [in Tampere] I was the first on the waiting list but then no one cancelled, and then I had this study place in Jyväskylä, and then I took that, even though it was not my plan in the beginning since I absolutely wanted to get in here [Tampere], but then I did not want to wait any more [before starting her studies]. [ . . . ] Well, it was a huge disappointment that I did not get in here even though I had enough points.

(Woman, 24, university student)

In this extract, the interviewee does not see any reason to explain her reluctant attitude towards mobility. It is understandable through the lens of the spatial moral order of centres and peripheries: those who aspire do not want to move to smaller places or smaller universities. Later she got into the University of Tampere. Now she is reluctant to move from Tampere to any other city. She herself constructs a moral order of places: in this order, Tampere is a (relative) centre from which one cannot be expected to move for education or work – not even to Helsinki, the capital city. However, she feels obliged to explain her anti-aspirational reluctance to move to Helsinki, because such a move would benefit her career as a journalist. Building an aspirational career with a higher-education qualification often requires one to move to the Helsinki metropolitan area. To explain her non-aspirational thinking, she then shifts to the moral order of intimate relationships and talks about her commitment to her boyfriend (a turn we examine below).

Interviewees who have moved to Tampere from other parts of the country can also mobilise the moral order of centres and peripheries. For many who have moved from a smaller to a bigger place with more opportunities for education and employment, the move is a self-evident idea that requires no explanation. This applies even to those with a low-level education who moved to Tampere to seek a job and have not yet found a position. Young people can connect mobility to other hierarchies and differences between smaller and bigger places, beyond the educational and employment opportunities. In such hierarchies, smaller places are plagued by immoral thinking: they are characterised by narrow-mindedness, bigotry, anti-individualism, and bullying of those who are ‘different’. Feelings of attachment and pride – which rural youth sometimes connect to rural areas – are rare among the interviewees, whereas feelings of detachment and entrapment are common (see Pedersen and Gram, 2018). Particularly for university students who have moved, young adults who stay put appear to be immobile, anti-aspirational, compliant with traditional but not modern norms, and at a symbolic level as potential ‘losers’ or ‘socially excluded’, as also noted by e.g. Pedersen and Gram (2018). Indeed, social exclusion is often depicted using metaphors of immobility: being stuck at home, or in some isolated small town or village. A female university student who has moved from Eastern Finland, a generally peripheral area, says:

A: Well, I respect a sort of . . . cannot say that I would mean civilised [laughter] but I mean a sort of [person] who has a bit wider world view. Like there in Joensuu [a town in Eastern Finland], it felt like these people do not go anywhere, never. They just do not do anything but 'I go to the supermarket and then back home', like. I respect a person who can understand, is open to new ideas. (Woman, 21, university student)

These ways of conceptualising geographical mobility as a sign of progress, and of being aspirational and individual, are in line with governing bodies' ideas of mobility. However, young adults see mobility not only as an economic and instrumental move, but also as a mental or intellectual move. It contributes to one's personal development, not only as an aspirational person but as a person with a wider scope of experience, where mobility is a classed person value (on person value, see Skeggs, 2011).

Indeed, some of our interviewees construct themselves and their geographical position as morally higher compared with those who have decided to stay. This can also build hierarchies between social classes even when the moral order is used only as a resource. It has been concluded in several studies that social capital – local networks, family and friends – are important for those with working-class backgrounds or lower-level educations (and therefore they will want to stay put, even in deprived neighbourhoods – see Visser et al. (2015), while middle-class cultural capital is tradable in other places, and therefore being geographically mobile is easier for those from the middle class (e.g. Holland, 2007; Tolonen, 2005). However, many of our interviewees have lower educational levels but have still been geographically mobile. They explain the reasons for their geographical moves in terms of their own educational aspirations, or sometimes the local atmosphere or uneasy relations with their parents, which led to a lack of local social capital. However, in these cases, the hierarchical moral orders of places are not so clear, not necessarily oriented as moral. Furthermore, many lower-educated interviewees have difficulties with their career aspirations: they do not quite know what to become, they are unemployed, or they have been forced to retrain.

## **Moral orders of international mobility: dilemma of complying**

Many of our interviewees have been 'internationally mobile learners' by being exchange students. There are also a few who lived abroad with their families as children. Many have enjoyed travelling and 'being abroad' for a while, although some do not report any international experience or intentions to be mobile.

A young man heading to Central America, is particularly strict with himself about learning internationality:

[When you are] handicapped language-wise, in the sense that you cannot properly get by in French or Spanish, well, I do handle everyday things, but school tasks then, it might be that I wouldn't understand everything, so it's easier just to go around these old British colonies. Although one should know something about everything, my knowledge and understanding of local Latin American politics is close to zero, so I think I would be studying it a bit if I was there on the spot. (Man, 26, university student)

Elsewhere in the interview, he even defines staying in countries with which he is familiar as becoming stuck. In Finland, things have started to be too easy for him, with a satisfactory job and his own flat. The same danger of getting stuck and losing one's aspirations is described by a female arts graduate who has a great job for which she knows she should be grateful. By describing leaving and the aspiration to leave, these interviewees build themselves up as morally superior to other young adults, though they do not explicitly mention others.

However, the man cited above categorises himself outside the kind of international future where he would need to 'wear a suit every day'. He sees himself in the future in an international work organisation, but in the field and not doing tasks with a dress code. He particularises (see Billig, 1987) his international career by differentiating his own aspirations from the more general and more frequently mobilised category of international businessperson or high-ranking official (e.g. Elliott and Urry, 2010). He might become a high-ranking official, but in a position that is defined in more detailed way. This particularisation again presents his plans as self-directed – he is not aspiring according to a preset agenda – and plausible.

Indeed, usually our interviewees either do not categorise themselves in terms of these political discourses at all or else they are critical towards them. For example, in one of the interviews, the interviewee reveals that she both has been abroad and went to university immediately after her matriculation exam. On hearing this, the interviewer says in a slightly humorous tone that the interviewee has done exactly what the government wants. The interviewee quickly replies that the government surely does not want young people to just hang around and not study seriously while they are abroad. In saying this, she mobilises a category of 'youth going on study exchange to acquire experiences' – a category in which she places herself, and which she contrasts with the government's ideal student. In other words, she mobilises a moral order of proper international experience that profits society. However, gaining new experiences – which in this statement is presented as unprofitable for society – is also recognised in official documents as beneficial (Courtois, 2019; Nikunen, 2017). Acquiring experiences and forming friendships, that is, networking, can also add person value, which may turn into social value (Skeggs, 2011). Nevertheless, the interviewees want to appear to be self-directional. Self-categorisation is not as simple or clear as it might appear at first glance. The similar self-categorization though particularisation is going on when some interviewees exclude themselves from the government ideal by choosing a destination that is peripheral, exotic or recreational, or that does not relate in any way to their educational goals (such as Russia or Jamaica). They are 'international', but in a way that exceeds the typical.

Another man with a considerable background in international mobility points out that earlier in the interview he deliberately did not mention how useful his international experience might be in terms of employability. When asked, he says firmly that there is too much talk about international mobility, which is just empty jargon:

I think it is sort of frivolous jargon, about innovations and such, also being international, and people keep saying so, and it's sort of supposition. But it's sort of hollow inside. Does it mean that a student has been drinking for half a year in Prague, or have they done some NGO [non-governmental organisation] work in Africa? I think it is a large and complex question, which is presented as rather simplified. (Man, 27, university student)

He also mobilises a moral order of improper international experiences, which includes mainly having fun and drinking. In that sense, he is critical of the hope that the official system invests in learning mobility. A simple political admiration of mobility does not reveal anything about the actual level of international interaction or the depth of international aspirations. By using his own experiences as examples, he demonstrates that some ‘international’ work tasks include hardly any interaction with foreign people, whereas during periods of living abroad he has had everyday encounters and deep relationships with people around the world. Thus, it seems that he agrees with the goals but not the means of internationalisation. The moral order he mobilises is the difference between actual skills, networks and experiences, and success on paper as a line in a CV.

We also had participants who were not highly educated, or who were currently unemployed or in positions intended to be temporary. Contrary to the discourse of international mobility as something that belongs to the most aspirational youth, in our data many others also have experiences or intentions of mobility. They do not categorise themselves outside of working abroad or having relationships there. However, compared with university students or graduates, their plans are vague, short term or somewhat offhand.

- Q: Your future then, if you were thinking about your life five years ahead, what would you see?
- A: Well, of course one cannot know, but what I’d like to, probably go abroad, somewhere, to work. Something from there. It fascinates me a lot.
- Q: Which jobs have you been thinking about?
- A: Anything, some service job stuff, like, working in a bar abroad. Something like that. (Woman, 23, vocational graduate)

The 23-year-old woman quoted above has two different vocational qualifications and another in restaurant work, but only recently got her first part-time job in a bar. It is typical for our working-class participants to have a fatalistic attitude towards the future: instead of aspirationally aiming for something, ‘one cannot know’ the future (also Ikonen, 2019). This woman does have a plan to move abroad, but what she will do there is just ‘something’, and the job could be ‘anything’.

Be it abroad or not, young people with lower-level educations describe the jobs they have applied for or will be applying for as ‘normal’ jobs, mentioning bars, restaurants, kitchen work and the like. This implies what they categorise as normal and what as abnormal, or tacitly as out of reach. Importantly, however, they do not think that being international per se is beyond their grasp.

We can conclude with what Walsh and Black (2015) say about international mobility: it provides opportunities for personal growth and enrichment. It is not gendered in a conventional way whereby women would emphasise that they were learning from different cultures and to be tolerant, while men would talk about developing their CVs (Yoon, 2014). Both male and female interviewees with experience of learning mobility seem to appreciate both sides – the aspirational and the personal growth. Yoon (2014) indeed argues that these different approaches to mobility are just different sides of the same coin: even if one talks about developing oneself, one ultimately also adds a new entry to one’s CV. These sides are also presented in EU policies (e.g. Courtois, 2019; Nikunen

and Lempiäinen, 2020): drinking and having fun are not explicitly mentioned, but networking is. Indeed, in the literature on employability and class, even universities are viewed – especially by the middle class – as places to network with the right people and make contacts that will be beneficial in the future (Holland, 2007). What is important is not what you have done, but who you know (Elliott and Urry, 2010).

In our study, we found a division between instrumental mobility and mobility as a means to develop oneself. The young people we interviewed mobilised a moral order of international experience that profits society, but also a moral order of improper international experience that is too focused on useless leisure activities. Many differentiated themselves from both these categories and particularised their experiences. They wanted to present themselves as self-directed, and not as persons who unreflectively followed the paths suggested by authorities, peers or parents. They also mobilised the moral order of close relationships, including affection and romantic love. These relationships both pushed young adults into mobility and prevented it, as we will now show.

### Staying put, moving ahead and intimate relations

Intimate relationships can prevent domestic as well as international mobility, or they can be used as an explanation for a reluctance to move. If one's partner has a good job in a certain geographical location, it is natural that the couple will not move. However, when job opportunities are scarce even for highly educated young people, moving might be an alternative for one partner. This is not a desirable option for all. In particular, moving just for the sake of more *potential* options, without a secure job, looks unwise. For example, a female history graduate says that she has not found work as a history teacher, and the situation looks bad.

Q: How are the employment prospects for a history teacher?

A: Not good. I have applied for two posts in Pirkanmaa [Tampere region]. This spring I looked for those positions, and there were only two. I never got any additional information about them, and there were not any others, I didn't know if there would be any in the whole of Pirkanmaa. I do not have any craving to leave Pirkanmaa, since my husband has got employment here [as a coder in an information technology firm], so it would be quite risky if we left for somewhere else for my job hunt when the other one already has a job and a quite good position. (Woman, 28, university graduate)

This interviewee has decided to retrain as a secretary and is seeking office positions, because she no longer wants to work as a cleaner, which she had done since graduation. This can be interpreted as lowering her aspirations. Shared well-being and livelihood as a couple – a family unit – is the desired category to which this interviewee orients herself.

In quite a different manner, a young unemployed man with a vocational education talks about his girlfriend's mobile lifestyle, which seems to prevent their living and making plans as a couple.

Q: Do you have any family plans or plans concerning partnership, in terms of where would you see yourself in five years?

- A: Family and partnership, I don't know. . . [ . . . ]. No, no, taking my girlfriend's lifestyle into consideration, I cannot say anything.
- Q: No sure plans?
- A: No, she's currently somewhere in the Kenyan desert. And she has planned that she'll perhaps go to Ahvenanmaa [an island in the Baltic] to work for the summer or to Sweden or Kouvola [a small town in south-eastern Finland], or. . . So, I don't count on it. Well, I don't know, maybe if I found a cool place to work I would probably be there. I have pondered that I could work abroad also. [ . . . ]
- Q: Do you have any concrete plans for this being abroad issue..?
- A: Not really.
- Q: It has just come into your mind?
- A: It has just come into my mind, but of course if I just began to work towards it. But I don't know, I like being here as well. It's pretty cool here. (Man, 25, vocational graduate)

This interviewee's plans to be internationally mobile have been just passing thoughts, and they do not involve his girlfriend. He then concludes that he enjoys living here, presumably even if his partner ends up abroad or in new places in Finland.

Furthermore, there are intimate relationships that explain an original desire to go abroad and be mobile that follows from earlier international experiences and the relationships formed. This reason lies behind the mobility of many, and not only of university students. Relationships also prevent international mobility or restrict it to short periods that are seen as 'necessary' to add to one's future value in the labour market. As is the case with national mobility, there is a gendered element in the moral order of mobility restricted by intimate relationships: it is mobilised by women more readily and easily than by men, even though it is presented as gender-neutral.

## Conclusion

We have operated with the concept of moral orders in order to complicate contemporary discussions of aspiration and mobility. By borrowing the concept of aspiration from the UK debate about 'raising young people's aspirations' (Spohrer, 2011), we have been able to attain a more intense picture of how young Finnish people are positioned and position themselves socially in terms of mobility while they are growing into adulthood.

By tracing the categories Finnish young adults mobilise when talking about mobility, we have revealed Finnish young adults' moral orders of geographical mobility on which they draw when they construct, or 'do', themselves as morally sound members of society. This is sometimes done by making actions and choices that reflect the official moral order, whether by complying with it or by resisting it. Some categories of people tend to be seen as mobile, and others as (too) sticky. In a similar vein, some directions, places and durations of mobility are conceived as more appropriate than others. Even though these 'others' are often just imagined others, and categorizations are used as a resource for presenting oneself, they reflect the explicit moralities in our society that are either about intimate relations or career aspirations.

In our Finnish study, we found some differences in the moral orders of national and international mobility. In the case of national mobility, immobility seems to be justified



if one wants to stay in a (relative) centre such as Tampere, which is a big city on a Finnish scale. One does not feel that one owes anyone any further explanation. In the Finnish political discourse, particularly lower-educated and unemployed young adults should be mobile to increase their employment opportunities, and this obligation applies even more to unemployed youth in more peripheral areas. Our research covered only young people in a relatively large city, that is, people whose national immobility was justified because they were already in the midst of opportunities, or because they had already made the move considered necessary to seek a job or enter higher education. Therefore, their immobility talk mainly related to intimate relationships, and the category of intimate relationships was mobilised.

This importance of the category of intimate relationships is one of the contributions of our article. We argue that life aspirations related to intimate relationships are not always easily fitted into official moralities of mobility. The issue of family, children and parenthood is often bypassed in youth policy documents. For instance, the European Commission's (2010: 8) 'Youth on the Move' document states that international learning and occupational mobility suits young people because they often do not have family responsibilities. However, they sometimes do have them. The issue of intimate relationships is often solved in a gendered way: women mobilise the moral order of intimate relationship, which sometimes prevents and sometimes prompts mobility, whereas men often categorise themselves as self-directed and not affected by the (im)mobility of their partner. When thinking about career aspirations, it is obvious that conceiving of family as a restriction on women's mobility, justification for immobility, has a negative effect on them. It is also noteworthy that this effect happens without governing policies paying any attention to it. This is a double-edged sword: if the most powerful way to resist official mobility and aspiration morals is to rely on intimate relations based on traditional gendered family morals, this approach can have negative effects on gender equality.

In the case of international mobility, we argue that mobile young adults in higher education are aware that their international activities have opened some new possibilities, and maybe given them some advantage in comparison with their peers. The most important gain is not only 'real profit', which is connected to career aspirations, but they mobilise also the moral order of 'experiences', which is connected to either to leisure or personal growth. However, because 'experience' is also at the heart of the current discourse on employability and aspirations (e.g. Courtois, 2019), emphasising the importance of gaining experiences and growing as a human being may serve to present oneself as self-directed as well as aspirational, that is, as a person who understands why and what kind of international experience really matters. Furthermore, we argue that in young adults thinking depth outweighs surface: real gains are different from just lines on a CV. Thus, government ideas are presented as good, but as somewhat naive in the sense that they do not take into consideration that some young people are not aspirational in their mobility choices. Young internationals reason that their conception of 'international experience' – based on their experience and perception of other young students' non-aspirational experiences – is more nuanced than that of governing bodies. Therefore, it might be beneficial for the governing bodies to carefully listen to



the experiences of young people instead of forming mobility policies based on hegemonic mobility discourse.

Relatedly, an important finding of our study was that young adults distance themselves from the government's 'ideal youth' who complies with others' advice. We conclude that the highest form of international learning mobility for the Finnish young adults is to be unique (particular) and self-directed. This idea about international mobility as part of being aspirational was mainly held by higher-education students. For those with lower educational levels, gaining experiences, recreation and intimate relationships were the main motivators for aspiring to move or travel abroad. Overall, it must be noted that the moral order of intimate relationships means that taking a significant other into account is important and justifies mobilities as well as immobilities (also Schewel, 2019).

Our findings support the argument that the project of becoming adult is not always the same as official moralities depict (e.g. Holland, 2007; Mendick et al., 2018). It is not a direct path through education to work or career success in which mobility is a mere instrument. Young adults may have other aspirations than those presented as 'proper' in youth policies, and they can still position themselves as aspirational. This is owing to different moral orders. The tendency to particularise one's own experiences and to be self-directed, autonomous and independent can direct aspirations in other directions and even counter the moralities of governing bodies, officials, peers and parents. As geographical mobility is at the centre of public and official discourse on young people, in order to better understand the phenomenon, it is important to pay attention to these other moralities and aspirations which guide young adults' mobilities.

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