"Before I Settle Down": Youth Travel and Enduring Life Course Paradigms

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Abstract: Young Canadians taking up opportunities for extended stays abroad on work or study programs often represent this form of travel as something that you do before you "settle down." In doing so, they are implicitly constructing a version of the life course, also espoused by many contemporary scholars, which allows the phase of youth to be redefined and extended, even while continuing to fix adulthood as the attainment of particular roles and statuses. The more that the definition of youth is reworked to accommodate changing roles and transitions, the less pressure there is to redefine the nature of adulthood.

Keywords: youth travel, emergent mobilities, life course, adulthood

Résumé : Les jeunes Canadiens qui profitent d'occasions de séjourner longtemps à l'étranger dans le cadre de programmes d'étude ou de travail décrivent souvent ce type de voyage comme quelque chose qu'on accomplit avant de « s'établir ». En ce faisant, ils construisent implicitement une version du parcours de vie, aussi adopté par de nombreux universitaires contemporains, qui permet de redéfinir et d'élargir la phase de la jeunesse, tout en continuant à définir l'âge adulte en fonction de l'atteinte de certains rôles et statuts particuliers. Plus on retravaille la définition de la jeunesse pour accommoder des rôles et des transitions en transformation, moins il y a de pression pour redéfinir la nature de l'âge adulte.

Mots-clés : voyages de jeunesse, mobilités émergentes, parcours de vie, âge adulte

> Um, I've always wanted to travel, and that's kinda, I just decided to do it now, 'cause I wasn't attached to a job or anything. And at the time that I made the decision to travel, I wasn't attached to um, any guy either, but that changed before I came. So I just thought, I'm young, I can do it, and before I settle down and get, you know, started in life, I'll come over and travel.

Maureen's[1] explanation of why she embarked on a working holiday in Edinburgh at the age of 24 invokes a theme that recurs in the literature on youth travel, as well as among other interviews conducted in a study of young Canadians on extended sojourns abroad which I recently conducted in collaboration with Noel Dyck and several graduate research assistants. But what does such an expectation of "settling down" imply for broader perceptions of life course phases?

The designations of certain forms of travel as configured around youth, that is as "youth travel," implicitly entail particular conceptions of the life course. Thus, emergent forms of contemporary youth mobility have often been identified with more general developments involving a supposed extension of youth and delayed transitions into adulthood in affluent Western countries. In many respects, therefore, the ways in which these young travellers experience and account for their voyages could serve as a textbook illustration for some of the key shifts in the roles associated with, and the duration of, youth noted by many social scientists over the last three decades. And yet, running through these young travellers' renderings of "settling down" is an implicitly conservative set of expectations about the nature of adulthood that seems fairly impervious to the possible implications of their own experiences of travel, work and study abroad.

The insistence by many of these youthful travellers that an extended sojourn abroad is only possible when one is young and unfettered can be juxtaposed against a range of studies in which people actively seek out opportunities for travel and extended stays abroad at many

ages and points of their life course. The young travellers' expectations that in due course they will return home and take up stable long term work and family commitments can also be set against scholarly and institutional renderings of uncertainty and mobility as an inescapable entailment of the entire life course in a "post-traditional cosmopolitan world" (Beck 2000:211). But at the same time, Maureen's expectation that sooner or later, she will settle down and "start life" by establishing a home, family and a stable career can also be viewed as converging with another kind of scholarly and institutional discourse that emphasizes the extended duration of youth in affluent Western contexts, without redefining the goal posts of adulthood.

In this paper I contrive a dialogue between recent scholarly considerations of the reconfigurations of youth, or the life course more generally, on the one hand, and recent studies of contemporary forms of travel on the other as a framework for considering the expectations for "settling down" voiced by Maureen and her fellow sojourners. I argue that the apparent willingness of these young travellers to seek out adventure in an extended sojourn abroad may arise not from an embrace of uncertainty and mobility but from a persisting belief in a modernist, linear life course.

Changing Life Course or Changing Youth?

In their review of sociological and anthropological perspectives on the life course, Hockey and James contrast "classical" social science notions of the life cycle as a "series of fixed stages and roles through which every individual moved as they aged" with the perspective of such contemporary theorists as Jenkins "who are more likely to highlight a diversity and fragmentation of paths, rather than a commonality and continuity of experience, as the outcome of life's turning points" (2003:11). Drawing on theorists such as Beck and Giddens, one version of this dedifferentiation of the life course places the emphasis on a loosening of normative structuring and a concomitant "individualization" of the life course (Beck et al. 1994; Bynner 2005:368; Hockey and James 2003:107). Here, the emphasis is on the increasing importance of individual agency and self-reflexivity in the construction of the self. Nothing can be taken for granted, it is a state of being that encompasses an augmentation of both individual freedom and risk. Thus Beck argues that in the shift from the understanding of modernity rooted in the European Enlightenment to the "cognitive insecurity" and the "risk regimes" of what he calls the "second modernity," "people are expected to make their own life-plans, to be mobile and to provide for themselves in various ways. The new centre is becoming the precarious centre" (Beck 2000:70).

For Beck, an integral feature of this paradigmatic shift has been a move away from the standardization of Fordism toward notions of flexible work. And as both Richard Sennett (1998) and Beck have noted, the archetype of the flexible worker presumes a mobile person who changes employment frequently and, if necessary, residence as well, going "where the jobs are" (Beck 2000:30). This version of contemporary modernity, hence, intrinsically links the individualization of the life course with the ongoing normalization of uncertainty and associated pressures for mobility.

However as Hockey and James note, in spite of more fluid contemporary processes of age classification and life course transitions, there are many ways in which "the more rigid pattern of the modern Western life course which emerged in the mid-nineteenth century" continues to claim a powerful hold on Western imaginations (2003:57). Bridging the contradiction between the conception of a linear progression through demarcated life course phases and the actual experience of highly unstable and contingent age categories, is the assertion of dualities such as child–adult or adult–elderly. Here, child- or elderhood is defined as the lack of fit with adulthood, while adulthood itself remains largely tacit, an unexpressed set of presumptions about the normal state of being (Hockey and James 2003:80-81). At the heart then of these dualities is a crucial essentialization of adulthood, which stands in marked opposition to the problematization of its oppositional categories.

> Compared with the essentiality of adulthood, childhood studies has provided ample evidence of the problematic, unresolved status "child" when compared with the "essentiality" of its "unremarked" oppositional half—adult. [Hockey and James 2003:81]

A very similar kind of treatment, relying on a tacit set of assumptions about adulthood, also operates in a swathe of contemporary scholarship that has probed the apparent extension of youth. Here, the oppositional half to a prolonged youth is a largely "unremarked" concept of adulthood identified through a set of goal posts. *When* the goal posts are passed may change but the nature of the goal posts themselves is left largely unquestioned.

Thus across a number of scholarly disciplines, there appears to be a wide consensus that in affluent, postindustrial societies there has been a general shift in the ages at which key transitions to adulthood are being enacted. According to a *Canadian Social Trends* report produced by Statistics Canada:

> In recent years, social scientists have found that the transition to adulthood is taking longer to complete. Young people are living with their parents longer, are more highly educated and attend school for more years than their parents did. The age at marriage has been rising, fertility rates have been falling and the age at which women have their first child has been increasing. [Clark 2007:13]

At first glance, Jeffrey Arnett's conception of "emerging adulthood" seems to draw away from the kind of social science consensus on an extended youth that Clark cites above in favour of an emphasis on exploration and uncertainty more reminiscent of Beck's (1994) notion of reflexive modernization. But a second glance quickly makes clear that far from dedifferentiating the life course, Arnett is simply adding another phase to it. Thus, Arnett has argued that in Western industrialized countries, demographic changes have made the years between 18-25 a distinct period of the life course and he proposed the term "emerging adulthood" for this phase, which he characterizes as a period both of greater instability and possibility:

> It is in many respects the age of possibilities, a period in which many different potential futures remain possible and personal freedom and exploration are higher for most people than at any other time. [Arnett 2000:479]

In this period it is not demographic transitions such as establishing stable residences, finishing school, settling into a career or marrying which matter to one's subjective sense of adulthood but "individualistic *qualities* of character" (2000:472-473). Nonetheless, it is to these kinds of demographic transitions that Arnett turns in explaining why his conception of "emerging adulthood" cannot simply be folded into a general phase of "young adulthood":

> The period from ages 18 to 25 could hardly be more distinct from the thirties. The majority of young people ages 18-25 do not believe that they have reached full adulthood, whereas the majority of people in their thirties believe that they have (Arnett, in press). The majority of people ages 18-25 are still in the process of obtaining education and training for a long-term adult occupation, whereas the majority of people in their thirties have settled into a more stable occupational path. The majority of people ages 18-25 are unmarried, whereas the majority of people in their thirties are married. The majority of people ages 18-25 are childless, whereas the majority of people in their thirties have had at least one child. The list could go on. The point should be clear. Emerging adulthood and young adulthood should be distinguished as separate developmental periods. [Arnett 2000:477]

In other words, what most distinguishes "emerging adulthood" is that it is *not* adulthood and adulthood is defined in terms of the same goal posts identified by Clark as marking out the extension of youth. Where people between the ages of 25-29 fit into this paradigm is unclear but what Arnett's distinction between "emerging" and "young" accomplishes is that it leaves the criteria of adulthood unchanged even while a larger number of people are defined as outside of it.

While Arnett's theory of "emerging adulthood" has attracted a good deal of interest, its emphases on "individualistic qualities" and developmental schemas have also elicited criticism from a number of other scholars in youth studies (Bynner 2005; Côté and Bynner 2008; Molgat 2007). Bynner (2005) has argued that the psychological orientation of "emerging adulthood," like other normative paradigms of human development, tends to downplay the importance of structural factors in shaping and stratifying roles and identities. Drawing on British surveys, Bynner (2005) contended that more privileged youths are responding to the increasing emphasis on formal qualifications through extended participation in post-secondary education and the postponement of family commitments while their less advantaged counterparts are pursuing a more "traditional" route to adulthood with rapid and early transitions from secondary school to work. In a later comparison between Canadian and British survey material, Côté and Bynner (2008) contended that while Arnett had correctly identified young people's tendencies toward individualization and destandardization, his emphasis on *choice* and the emergence of a new development stage to frame these trends was misplaced. Instead, Côté and Bynner viewed these orientations as *reactions* to structural processes of globalization and technological transformation that have undermined the social supports available to young people as well as increasing the uncertainties and ambiguities of trajectories toward adulthood. Rather than viewing young people as freely choosing to prolong their transitions toward adulthood while experimenting with identities, Côté and Bynner argued that young people have been forced to respond to a set of historical processes of economic exclusion and marginalization, which have made financial independence harder to achieve. Rather than entering a new stage of development, young people are, in this perspective, simply trying to cope with a particular set of institutional changes.

However, while Côté and Bynner (2008) criticized Arnett's emphasis on volition and were doubtful about

the utility of introducing a new developmental phase, they, nonetheless, strongly agreed with his characterization of the delayed transition to adulthood:

> One of the least contested issues in contemporary youth studies is that the transition to adulthood is now taking longer on average than in the past, delayed until the mid-twenties to late-twenties for a significant proportion of youth cohorts in many developed societies. [Côté and Bynner 2008:253]

In short, in this treatment, youth may be extended, may or may not be divided into subphases, or may be attributed new characteristics and roles, while the definition of adulthood remains fixed since anything that does not fit this prevailing designation of entry points into adulthood is relegated either to an extended youth or defined away as the peculiarities of a small minority.

Emergent Mobilities

Côté and Bynner's (2008) emphases on the interaction between structural shifts, uncertainty and individualization also appear in some of the literature on contemporary forms of travel and mobility. But in contrast to those scholars in youth studies who insist on associating these features with an extension of youth, many recent studies of travel and movement are likely to associate it with a wide range of ages and periods in the life course.

Thus Bianchi (2000) noted that economic restructuring in North America and Europe, combined with the globalization of labour markets, has precipitated emergent patterns of mobility including new flows of migration into Southern European countries. Amongst the tourists, migrant workers and retirees who have flocked to Mediterranean resorts, Bianchi also observed the presence of a new set of unregistered resort workers whose mobility blurs the boundary between tourist and worker. Originating, for the most part, from northern European Union countries, they are legally entitled to work and reside in other parts of the EU. But they are mostly seeking unregistered, casual employment, moving seasonally between different resort areas:

> Although the specific content or nature of work is not of paramount importance for migrant tourist-workers it is not purely a means of securing their material subsistence, but undertaken as part of a broader recreational experience in which they can indulge in certain social, artistic and sensual pleasures among similar groups of like-minded individuals. [Bianchi 2000:124]

In spite of the voluntarism and hedonism that distinguishes this class of migrants from more classic forms of labour migration, Bianchi suggested that the deterioration of living standards and declining job prospects in many occupational sectors of Northern Europe may have provided an incentive to look for better prospects further afield.

This is a heterogenous migrant tourist workforce, which can include people who have previously been in secure employment as well as graduates who have just entered the labour market (Bianchi 2000:123). Hence, it comprises a workforce that displays some of the aspects of liminality, self-exploration and individualism that have been associated with the extension of youth, even though its members may not all be of the same age or at the same phase in their lives.

The notion that some of the tendencies that Arnett used to define "emerging adulthood" could also be associated with other phases of life is echoed in other studies of what Caroline Oliver (2007) has called "aspirational movements." Oliver used this term to describe English retirees who have migrated to Spain "as a better way of living on pensions" (2007:127). Like the migrant tourist-workers with whom Bianchi is concerned, these older travellers invested their mobility with aspects of self-growth, transformation and individualism. A similar set of aspirations can be found among the working "volunteers" that Rodman (2007) encountered at Kalani, a Hawaii oceanside spiritual retreat, who ranged in age from recent college graduates to retirees in their 60s. Some left behind no career or permanent work but others left or sold their businesses to free up cash and time to take up their temporary residence at Kalani. Resident volunteers were expected to stay at least three months but many stayed longer or returned regularly to the retreat. In exchange for working 30 hours a week, they paid reduced fees for their stays in Kalani. Once more, we encounter a dedifferentiation between migration and tourism and here again, there is an emphasis on self-transformation, liminality and an exploration of alternative lifestyles that resonates with both Bianchi's case study and Arnett's characterization of "emerging adulthood."

Benson and O'Reilly (2009) are even more explicit about associating a search for an alternative lifestyle, often represented by its protagonists as an individualist quest for self realization and exploration, with a wide range of ages and circumstances. Benson and O'Reilly argue that the kinds of sojourns described by Oliver and Rodman can be viewed as part of a larger category of "lifestyle migrants":

> As we perceive it, lifestyle migrants are relatively affluent individuals of all ages, moving either part-time or

> full-time to places that, for various reasons, signify, for the migrant, a better quality of life ... The fundamental features of the different lifestyles sought thus include the re-negotiation of the work-life balance, quality of life, and freedom from prior constraints. Through these strategies of reorientation, the migrants seek the greater good in life, however that might be perceived. [2009:609-610]

Thus while these forms of mobility appear to facilitate some of the qualities of exploration and possibility that Arnett attributed to "emerging adulthood," they challenge his attribution of these orientations to a specific life phase. In terms of some contemporary forms of mobility, there seems to be at the very least some basis for suggesting the broader loosening of normative parameters around the life course rather than just in terms of one extended phase. And while these cases do not express the same tones of economic exclusion and marginalization emphasized by Côté and Bynner, they do signal the ways in which broader structural shifts are implicated even in the most personalized quests for alternative lifestyles: the opportunities for cross-border movement made possible by the EU; the possibilities for new retirement lifestyles and settlements afforded by regional economic differentials; and, the extended travel that can be enabled by a blurring of the boundaries between leisure and work.

Given such possible overlaps between shifts in the duration and experience of youth, the life course more generally, economic restructuring and spatial mobility, what are the implications and conclusions that young Canadians on an extended period of travel abroad draw from this experience?

Student–Youth Travel

In this paper, I draw on material collected as part of a larger project,[2] which involved collaboration with Noel Dyck and the assistance of several graduate students, particularly Heather Barnick, Kathleen Rice and Meghan Gilgunn. The project was a multi-locale study (Canada, Australia, U.S. and the U.K.), which focused on three forms of Canadian student and youth travel and sojourns abroad including university exchanges, working holidays and athletic scholarships. Some students and youths were interviewed in Canada as they prepared to embark on, or more commonly after they had returned from, one or more of these kinds of opportunities for travel abroad. Others were interviewed while they temporarily spent time abroad respectively on a "working holiday" in Britain, on a university exchange or on a more extended period of study in Australia, or completing a program of study in an American university supported by an athletic scholarship. Altogether we interviewed 99 Canadian students and youth travellers. Each of our graduate research assistants also completed an ethnographic study of 4-6 months duration with Canadian working holidaymakers in Edinburgh (Kathleen Rice), exchange and international students in Melbourne (Heather Barnick) and university athletes in Boston (Meghan Gilgunn). In addition to our encounters and exchanges with student and youth travellers, we also interviewed 43 government, university and NGO officials who were involved in developing, administering or promoting programs for student and youth mobility in Canada, Australia, the U.K. and the U.S. In this paper, however, I will be concentrating primarily on the young people in our study that participated in working holidays and university exchanges.

University student exchanges, which have been a feature of the postsecondary educational landscape since the Second World War, have more recently received a new discursive wrapping as part of general calls for "internationalization." But the ubiquitous mention of internationalization in the mission statements of universities in many countries does not necessarily connote either agreement about its definition or indicate what kind of priority it is actually accorded in practice (Welch and Denman 1997). Nevertheless, if there is not much clarity about "internationalization," it is still reasonably clear that its most substantial aspect involves the mobility of students. While much of the institutional (i.e., universities, government, academic advocacy groups etc.) interest in student mobility has usually concerned international students seeking to complete a full degree in their host university, there has also been talk of, and in some cases more or less concerted effort expended at, increasing the numbers of students who participate in short term international exchanges of a semester or two. The students participating in such exchanges are still, however, very much in the minority; in Canada, probably around 2% of postsecondary students participate in these forms of extended stays abroad.

One of the most common rationales in the field of "international education" for encouraging students to participate in these kinds of exchanges is offered by Daly and Barber:

> It is widely acknowledged that in the globalizing marketplace, organizations are seeking employees with skills and characteristics that enable them to be more competitive in the international arena ... One of the most effective means for graduates to develop "international skills" and communication competencies is through international academic programs such as study abroad and student exchange. [2005:26-27]

Echoes of such arguments can also be heard with respect to work abroad opportunities. Thus, according to a Canadian official with whom I spoke whose work involves the development of bilateral exchanges enabling students and youths to temporarily work abroad, young people taking up these possibilities:

> gain experience in the workforce and once you return to Canada you become more attractive to Canadian employers as part of a knowledge-based economy because the employer looks at the participant and sees an individual who is open-minded, who has seen other things, who is actually also open to new ways of doing things and is willing to accept changes, which is very important for an employer these days.

Another Canadian official administering a work abroad program argued that it is important to convince young participants:

> that nowadays fields of study tend to vary over one's career, right? A lot of people are in two, three careers even in this day and age and it's probably going to stay that way for some time. But more importantly, we try to get across to them that, look, it doesn't matter what the overseas work experience is, it's the fact that you've done it.

In short, official discourses tend to emphasize that one of the benefits of extended stays abroad for young Canadians is the training it can provide for future work in a globalized marketplace that often demands versatility in work practices, roles and occupational choices.

But as noted elsewhere (Amit 2007a), this kind of official rationale for extended stays abroad does not necessarily conform to the motivations enunciated by young people for such mobility. I and others have reported that more than training for future professional or occupational roles, young travellers are likely to represent their journeys as an interregnum before they move to take on—or in some cases resume—the commitments they associate with adulthood or, in Maureen's words, "get my life started" (Amit 2007a, 2010; Sørensen 2003). While this "time out" may have resonances with the period of liminality that both van Gennep (1960) and Turner (1969) associated with rites of passage, it does not necessarily effect either the socially recognized shift in status van Gennep associated with this period or the more radical personal and social transformations that Turner thought could be generated by this experience of between-ness (Amit 2010). Instead, for many of the young Canadians we spoke with, who had taken up opportunities for work or study abroad, their journey was noteworthy for the "temporary reprieve it seemed to offer from social expectations of a predictable progression through educational and career commitments" (Amit 2010:64). A stay abroad did not so much facilitate a passage to other statuses and phases as stave them off a little longer.

In sharp distinction to Côté and Bynner's construction of extended youth as an effort to cope with processes of economic marginalization and exclusion, our study included examples of young people who had left what they considered to be "good" jobs in order to take up opportunities for an extended stay abroad. Rhonda was 24 years old, had already completed an undergraduate degree in journalism and had worked in her chosen field of media relations and event coordination when, after visiting some friends in Europe, she decided to spend a period of time abroad on a working holiday in Edinburgh.

> I just absolutely fell in love with the city, and the travelling, so, um, I had a really good job back home, and I just decided last year that it wasn't the time for me to have that nine-to-five job and sign the government contract, you know, so I just decided to take up the working holiday visa, and come to Europe and work.

She had, she explained, just put her career "on hold." Rosanne was 28 years old and had left a job she had occupied for three and a half years as an assistant bank manager of a large branch in order to take up, like Rhonda, a working holiday in Edinburgh. After being repeatedly promoted in her job at the bank, she had arrived at a point

> where it was time to take the management courses and move up again. And [I] was definitely feeling the pressure from my big bosses. I don't really feel that's where I want to go with my career, so I was thinking of a career change anyway when I came here.

Rosanne's primary aspiration for her stay in the U.K. was to "have a good time and relax" but she also felt that "professionally, it's obviously not that great of a career move. It's not really fabulous on your resumé to sort of work your way up, and then leave and come back and so, it's not a career move, it's just to get experience. Life experience, I guess." So rather than the "résumé enhancer" that a student travel official used to characterize working holidays, for Rosanne at least, this journey was a résumé interruption that in due course she felt she would probably need to justify to future employers.

Similarly in his study of backpackers, Sørensen noted that while many of these young people were embarking on these travels at a crossroad in their lives, in most cases, this transitional period was "self-inflicted, brought about by a desire to travel" (2003:853). They had quit a job,

broken up with a partner or effected some other break to facilitate the backpacking journey they were planning.

But if elsewhere I have been concerned with exploring the limitations of the liminality associated with youth and with forms of youth-oriented travel, in this paper I want to focus more particularly on the constructions of adulthood implicated in the rationales often crafted for youth travel. In other words, what light do the constructions of particular forms of youth travel shed on the ways in which young travellers comprehend the life course and articulate their expectations of adulthood? One might be forgiven for assuming that like some of the emergent mobilities I described earlier, the willingness of young people to interrupt "good" jobs or careers for an extended period abroad indicates a shift toward non-linear and individualized representations of the life course. But in fact one of the most consistent subtexts of youth travel representations reasserts a very conventional and conservative notion of the life course.

Like Maureen, whose comments opened this paper, in one form or another many of the young travellers we interviewed or encountered represented their stay abroad as something they could only do before they "settled down." Rosanne who had interrupted a job as a bank manager to work temporarily in an Edinburgh youth hostel did not think it was likely that she would go on this kind of extended travel again because

> you eventually at some point have to get into your job, and get married, and have kids, and do all of that. And once you have kids to do extended travel would be difficult. So it may be in retirement, it's a possibility, but not in the next twenty years.

Rhonda who had put her career on hold to travel to Europe similarly felt that

> I know I have to settle down for a bit and do my Master's. But I tell myself, I give myself until at least the age of 28 or 29, 30 and then really like, settle down and really like, you know, maybe think about buying a house and the job and everything. But until then I don't think I'm ready.

John had embarked on a university exchange at an Australian university in spite of the likelihood that it would extend the duration of his undergraduate studies. But in his view, a certain kind of travelling definitely had a "best before" date:

> Yeah, basically what I'm trying to do right now is stay single and travel while I can. You know what I mean—cause like when you're 35, you can't really go around and travel in hostels and stuff like that so ... I kinda want everything out of life. So I want to be young and have fun now, travel, you know go do the hostelling thing, do all that, and then still have the education and what not to get back to Vancouver and, you know, work an office job and earn however much money and settle down with a family and kids and stuff like that.

At 24, Melissa was working in Montreal after several longer journeys abroad, first on a backpacking trip through Europe, then on a university exchange in Paris and finally, when she had completed her B.A., to teach English as a second language in Japan. She was enjoying her job in Montreal but had applied to go back to university for a second qualification and was also thinking of eventually spending a further year on a working holiday before she reached the age of 30. She did not feel ready to settle down yet, but "if I fall in love with someone ..." Meanwhile, her parents who had encouraged her travels also reminded her that "yes, I want you to go and explore and you're young and go, but at the same time, remember at some point, you will have to make a decision to be able to solidify a good salary and secure yourself some equity or something."

The notion that an extended sojourn abroad is something that you do when you are young, before you settle down is a theme that also resonates in other studies of youth travel. Sørensen quotes Mark from Britain who explained the urgency to travel "before it is too late":

> It's a question of now or never. Since graduating from University a couple of years ago, I've made good money, so I can afford to travel. I thought that if ever then now, because ten years from now I may be tied up with wife, kids, mortgage and all the rest of it. [2003:853]

Similarly, Desforges quotes Jenny, one of the young travellers in his own study of "long-haul" travellers:

> [p]eople want more from their lives and something for themselves first, to go and see the world while they're young and stuff, I guess. I know I do. There's a lot to see and a lot to do ... I think everyone I've spoken to has wanted to go away again and is not ready to settle down into a life, because they want to see the world, and there's more important things in life than commuting up to London every day. [1998:190]

Fixing Adulthood

The flip side of the insistence on travelling when you are young is the presumption that it will not be possible to do so when you are older and have "settled down." This

determined construction of adulthood as immobile and fixed is all the more striking when it is set against contemporary adulthoods that are integrally organized around ongoing movement. Harrison's (2003) study of 33 Canadian travel enthusiasts included individuals ranging in age from 30 to over 75 years old. One third were retired and about half were married, some divorced. Their incomes ranged from about $20,000 to well over $180,000 per year and almost all were working or had worked at a professional or managerial job in occupations ranging from business to engineering. The forms of their travel varied considerably from package tours to independent travel, with different ranges of frequency and duration of trips. But their travels were central to their identity while not excluding a commitment to other important pursuits and connections.

My own study (Amit 2006, 2007b) of transnational consultants included people whose work involved repeated travel to a variety of destinations. They too ranged in age from people in their 30s to those in their 60s. While for the most part they maintained a principal residence in Canada, their work might keep them abroad for months in any given year. Most had deliberately sought out this kind of peripatetic career, working hard to establish their profile and competence in this kind of transnational workscape.

Notwithstanding these kinds of mobile leisure and occupational practices, while a few of the younger travellers we encountered in our study expressed an interest in developing a career that allowed for travel, most viewed their journeys as a function of youth. In effect, they were defining a transition to adulthood, at least in part, in terms of bringing their participation in extended travel to a close. But as we can see from the comments by the youthful travellers I cited earlier, this insistence on what Hockey and James have called a "chronologised, modernist life course project" is not restricted to travel (2003:115-116) but also takes shape around presumptions regarding certain key elements of home, family and work. As Kenyon notes in her study of student housing:

> students therefore stated that close family groupings would eventually form the social units of "real" future homes. As Mark told me, "I'll get a job, hopefully, and then I will settle down, you know, probably get married at some point, have a few kids. That's what we all really expect isn't it?" [Hockey and James 2003:114]

But this version of the life course revolves around a particular tautology of adulthood, which appears to be shared by many people including youths, their parents (see Melissa's earlier comment), educational authorities, scholars and so on. What these perspectives share is a fairly pervasive notion of "settling down" as entailing certain key transitions around work, marriage, setting up an independent household, curtailing travel and so on. When these kinds of transitions do not happen at all or else happen at a different age, then the goal posts of adulthood are pushed back through the extension of youth. What this means is that while the definition of youth is being repeatedly revised in terms of age range, duration, appropriate activities and so on, adulthood remains socially and conceptually fixed as the attainment of certain key roles and statuses. Thus the extension of youth allows a concomitant arresting of adulthood as particular versions of "settling down." The more you change the definition of youth to reflect changing patterns of work, residence, education or travel, the less you have to change the definition of adulthood.

Accordingly, as I noted earlier in this paper, Arnett justified the distinction he is positing between "emerging adulthood" and "young adulthood" as revolving around the relative proportions of people between 18-25 who are still obtaining education and training, have not yet married and are childless, as opposed to the ratios of people in their 30s who have settled into a more stable occupational path, married, had at least one child and so on (2000:477). This rendering of adulthood stands in marked contrast to the late capitalist rhetoric of flexibility described by Sennett (1998) and Beck (2000) in which mobility, insecurity, reinvention and re-education are treated as lifelong necessities. Yet, as I also noted earlier, scholars such as Côté and Bynner (2008) who are trying to explain the extension of youth often account for this moratorium in terms of the same factors of economic restructuring and globalization that are used to buttress the rhetoric of economic flexibility. And likewise, as I noted earlier in this paper, the emphasis on versatility often cited by officials promoting or administering programs for youth travel would appear to be oriented toward a similar notion of the impact of globalization and economic restructuring. That is to say, this kind of "international experience" is seen as instilling a capacity for flexibility necessary in globalized economies.

There is thus a fundamental contradiction vested in certain scholarly and official notions of an extended youth. They at once stress the impact of postindustrial economic restructuring in reshaping the nature of youth even as they reaffirm a longstanding modernist chronology of the life course. It is, however, a contradiction that seems to be accepted, even asserted by many of the young travellers that participated in our research project. Why? I suspect that this is a version of youth and of the life course that

offers a more reassuring notion of what is at stake in being young and mobile.

Elsewhere I have suggested that what is most attractive about international university exchanges and working holidays is that, however exploratory, they put very little at risk (Amit, 2010). If you do not like your job on a working holiday, you can just go home. Many of the university exchanges in which Canadian students participate stipulate minimal pass/fail requirements and in any case usually last for little more than a semester. Youths embarking on these kinds of extended stays abroad are overwhelmingly from middle class family backgrounds, in fact, providing evidence of a certain level of parental or personal financial resources is usually a visa requirement. Parents often, in one way or another, provide financial backing for these journeys, either directly funding them as is usually the case for academic exchanges or providing a measure of back-up support. Thus most of the young people participating in working holidays do not expect to return to their countries of origin with much, if anything, in the way of accumulated savings. But they know that in most cases, their parents will likely provide them with temporary accommodation or support while they work out their subsequent plans for work, education or residence. If it is an adventure, it is a fairly safe one.

However, if this travel was to be viewed as not just an interlude but also the shape of things to come, it might well take on very different connotations. Quitting a "good" job to embark on a temporary sojourn abroad or extending the duration of one's studies to enjoy a semester or two abroad is not a risky proposition if you believe that when you return to Canada, you will easily be able to find another job or finish your degree and then begin an attractive career or, in short, "settle down." Some scholars appear to assume that an extension of youth reflects perceived difficulties in attaining particular signposts of adulthood. But is it possible that one of the factors encouraging these kinds of interludes is precisely a continued faith in a "chronologised, modernist" life course? Very few of the young travellers we talked to expressed any doubt or uncertainty that when they were ready, they would be able to settle down. It is this confidence in the eventual prospect of a certain kind of adulthood that imparts to their travels the volitional aspect noted by Arnett. An extended but still contained youthhood can present a much more reassuring prospect than an adulthood in which jobs, residence, family and marriage continue to be constituted as uncertain, insecure and fluctuating processes over the course of your whole life. They can be youths for a while longer because they are still confident that in due course they will be able to become a certain kind of adult. And this confidence is bolstered by a range of official discourses, scholarly constructions, media images and parental reminders. What will they think or do if it turns out not to be altogether true?

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