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Growing-up in the countryside: children and the rural idyll

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Abstract

The recent surge of interest in the study of children and childhood has brought with it a keener recognition of the diversity of growing-up. In this emerging geography, most attention has been given to the experiences and behaviours of urban children. Few studies have explicitly focused on what it is like to grow-up in the countryside, particularly within the United Kingdom today. In this paper we begin to address this *hidden geography* by reporting on a study undertaken within rural Northamptonshire. We explore some of the ways in which children encounter the countryside through their own experiences, and (re)examine the 'rural'™ from their own viewpoint. We uncover an alternative geography of exclusion and disenfranchisement. Rather than being part of an ideal community many children, especially the least affluent and teenagers, felt dislocated and detached from village life. Yet socio-spatial exclusion of this kind is also typical of many childhoods away from the rural and can relate to children almost anywhere. What particularly distinguishes a rural upbringing, however, is the sharp distinction between the symbolism and expectation of the Good Life (the emblematic)

disjunction between the symbolism and expectation of the Good Life (the emblematic) and the realities and experiences of growing-up in small, remote, poorly serviced and fractured communities (the corporeal).



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Keywords

Geography of children; Childhood; Rural idyll; Northamptonshire; Socio-spatial exclusion

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