

## **Abstract**

Homes occupy a complex and contradictory space in our lived, symbolic and imaginary geographies. Often idealised as a sanctuary, homes are also places of conflict, tension and danger. The research presented in this paper used a Memory Work Group method to explore women's recollections of embodying fear as children, in the context of their childhood homes. Our analysis suggests that experiences of fear were remembered in terms of a sense of separation, or being in a relational void. This void can be described as a felt and sensed relational space, characterised by a lack of communication and sense of nothingness. As such, others were present, but the child experienced not being seen/not seeing others, simultaneously being there with the other, but also experiencing not existing to the other. We suggest here that remembered experiences of fear were lived through materially, and in process with objects and spaces not as passive backdrops, but as giving opportunity to and participating in meaning making and the management of the embodiment of fear, and felt sense of relational void. These findings are discussed in relation to the role of children's imagination in navigating the disparity between child and adult experiences of the world, as well as the potential role of memory as a route to bridging the gap between child and adult understandings and experiences of embodying emotion.

**Keywords:** childhood; fear; home; space; objects; memory work.

## **Facing the void: Embodying fear in the space of childhood homes**

### **1. The home and emotion**

Homes occupy a complex and contradictory space in our lived, symbolic and imaginary geographies. Firstly, the broad organization of space along a public/private binary (Massey, 1994), often designates the homes as a private realm, identified with the self, emotion (Curtis, 2010; Mallet, 2004; Morley, 2000; Cooper, 1971) and freedom from external surveillance (Saunders & Williams, 1988). As argued by Hareven (1991), such an understanding of the home emerged in the West after the Industrial Revolution, and entailed a clearer separation of home and paid work spaces than had existed previously (although this separation has never been quite complete, see Massey, 1994), as well as an emergence of the nuclear family as the ideal domestic unit. As Mallet (2004) outlines, a further shift to the individualisation of responsibility since the 1970s has been argued to further cement the association between “house, home and family” (p. 66), as indicated by an increasing emphasis on home ownership (Madigan, Munro & Smith, 1990). Prevalent conceptions of the meaning of ‘home’ therefore, can be seen to identify this kind of space as, ideally, a private, domestic space identified with the self and family life. Multiple studies have found that one experience of the home afforded by these characteristics is a sense of agency and safety (Davidson, 2000a; McGrath, Reavey & Brown, 2008; McGrath and Reavey, 2015), finding a ‘safe haven’ (Pinfold, 2000) from the world.

It would be simplistic, however, to conceive of the home as a universal ‘safe haven’ that is always characterised by agency and territory (Wright, 1991; Wardaugh, 1999). Wardaugh

(1999) points out that such arguments ignore both the violence and abuse that occurs within many homes, as well as implicitly exclude those who do not fit into the ‘ideal

home’ being conjured, which she argues is assumed to contain a suburban, white, middle-class, heterosexual, nuclear family. Willis, Canavan & Prior (2015), for instance, have identified experiences of child sexual abuse (CSA) as a ‘present absence’ in much geographical research, whereby the prevalence of experiences of abuse often within home spaces are left unexamined, casting a shadow through the discipline. In addition, the same authors (2016) explore how adult survivors of CSA navigate personal geographies, including creating boundaries and the importance of creating and maintain feelings of safety. Douglas (1991) indeed, has argued that the common vision of the home as haven is overlaid with nostalgia, out of sync with the complexity, mundanity and oppression lived through and maintained in many home spaces. Blunt and Varley (2004: 3) capture this inherent complexity, suggesting: “As a space of belonging and alienation, intimacy and violence, desire and fear, the home is invested with meanings, emotions, experiences and relationships that lie at the heart of human life”.

Repositioning the process of living at the centre of our understanding of the home in this way, recalls Ingold’s (2011: 139) concept of ‘dwelling’, which he characterised as: “not the occupation of a world already built, but the very process of inhabiting the earth”. Homes as opposed to mere houses, Ingold argues, are made up of joint practices, habits and shared activity. As such, it can be argued that the embodiment of emotion is central to an understanding of home as relational, and produced through joint practices and activity. Emotion can in this context be understood as a continuous process of felt and sensed being in, and living through, the relational and material space of home, in process with objects and others (Ahmed, 2006). As described by Denzin, embodied experience is a process of living through time and space:

The lived body is a temporalized spatial structure. That is, the person's spatial movements, locations, and relocations can be understood only as movements within time ... The body does not fill up space in the same way that other real, physical things do or a piece of equipment does. The person takes space in and determines her own locations, making room for herself as she moves about and draws things near (2007: 58)

Denzin here articulates the embodied person as significantly different to other material objects in space, exactly through an emphasis on embodiment as being in continuous motion (Del Busso and Reavey, 2013). Subjectivity, thus, is constructed in process with the spatial world, and through our ability to move towards and away from other people. The containment of the home, for instance can afford both agency (e.g. seeking sanctuary) and disempowerment (e.g. being sent to your room), formed through the relationships, shared practices, and the shifting affective space of the particular home. This paper will explore adult memories of embodying fear in the childhood home, as a route to unpacking some of these tensions inherent in the home space. As we consider in more detail in the methodology, this approach brings tensions of its own, raising the question of whether adults can ever access the emotional worlds of children (Philo, 2003; Jones, 2001, 2003, 2008). Here we propose that Memory Work, with its concern with experience, emotion, embodiment and space, and acknowledgment of the precarious and ambiguous nature of remembering, is a useful vehicle for exploring adult memories of childhood, and addressing some of the concerns raised by Jones (2001, 2003, 2008). First, however, we need to explore some of the links between childhood, emotion, and space.

## **1.2 Childhood, emotion and space.**

The contradictions noted above, positioning the home as a space of both agency and disempowerment; safety and danger, are arguably even more acute when considering childhood experiences. Much of the research on home considers the construction and experience of adults, whilst children's experiences are less visible (Bartos, 2013; Holloway, 2014). As Holloway (2014) outlines, within multiple disciplines there has been a move towards understanding and theorising children as valid subjects, rather than adults in waiting (James, Jenks & Prout, 1998). Nevertheless, children still face "spatial marginalization" (Holloway, 2014: 5), having reduced capacity to shape their environment compared to many adults. Home spaces for children are still, however, a critical site for experiencing and learning about emotions. Psychological research tells us that early relationships are crucial for learning about the meaning, impact and 'regulation' of emotions; it is through our relationships with intimate others that we first learn about the world, ourselves and the capacity, meaning and appropriateness of our emotional experiences (e.g., Vygotsky, 1926). Mayall (1998: 144) argues that while school comprises the main social world for UK children, home is the space through which children learn about intimate relationships, including 'private' emotions. She argues that children "participate in constructing the moral and social order of the home", a joint enterprise between children and adults.

We thus approach the idea of children's subjectivity through the lens of seeing children as active subjects and agentic participants in the joint practices of the home; this comes with a caveat that children are still less powerful agents than adults. Research exploring children's experiences of home, does indeed outline a role for children's active management of space as a route for negotiating their emotional experiences. Korpela, Kytto and Hartig (2002), for instance highlight that children's 'favourite places' tend to be contemplative places which they

seek out for either ‘restoration’ or ‘emotion-regulation’, often without the knowledge of their parents. Bartos (2013) has argued that children have a more sensorial experience of space than adults, highlighting a need to explore children’s experiences of emotion and space. Boschetti (1987) also found that ‘environmental autobiographies’ written by students of their childhood memories, contained a particular affinity for enclosed spaces which afforded seclusion, exploration and imagination. These can be seen as an agentic move by children to recreate the adult-defined experience of home as a place of safety and territory. One point to note from these examples is that whilst children occupy the same space as adults, they do so in particular and separate ways. As such, adults and children are thus both proximate and distant. Geographers of childhood, such as Jones (2003; 2008) and Philo (2003), have for example discussed the “otherness” of children” (Jones, 2008). Jones (2008: 195) suggests that otherness can be understood in terms of an inevitable “unbridgeability of self and other”, and relates the otherness of childhood to differences between “adult and child becoming”. Children can thus be understood as “becoming” through processes of development, growth and learning, which are different to those of adults. As such, a key difference between the becoming of adult and children highlighted here, is the role of imagination and play in children’s meaning making and negotiation of the world. Furthermore, developmental psychologists (Cole, John-Steiner, Scriber & Souberman, 1978), drawing on Vygotsky (1926; 1967), have long argued that imagination provides a ladder between the space of childhood and adulthood. Vygotskian theories of play (Bodrova & Leong, 2015) thus posit that through play and imagination, children transform the objects and people in their environment into substitutes for the adult world, to learn and practice social norms, as well as future relationships and activities. Imagination is therefore seen as a ‘zone of proximal development’, that enables children to connect with the adult world without fully occupying it. Indeed Dovey (1990) argues that ordinary and familiar spaces best promote imaginary play, as these enable a process of transforming the everyday

through imagination. In this paper, we will take forward the idea that children's imagination and play is materially grounded (Winnicott, 1971; Keith & Whittaker, 1981; Wilson & Ryan, 2005), and that children use imagination to transform their everyday spaces and make the adult world comprehensible, when negotiating their emotional experiences. As we focus on the embodiment of fear, it is worth first examining the treatment of childhood fear in research.

### **1.3 Remembering fear in childhood**

The framing of the discussion of fear and childhood has often been articulated through the language of a fear of crime and risk to the vulnerability of children (Kitzinger, 1999). Fear is thus located in public space, and is often embodied in the figure of the predatory stranger, particularly in media discourses (Kitzinger, 1999). One response to the situating of danger and the associated fear as being located in public spaces, has been in the relocation of children into the home, or commercialised childhood spaces (Ansell, 2009). However, in mapping 'geographies of fear' these specialisations of fear are in fact seen to be movable, with spatial restrictions imposed on children as a response to fear expanding and retracting in accordance with a variety of factors, including time of day/year, location, local events and domestic situations (Valentine, 1997; Pain, 2006). In addition, any perception of a static binary division between public and private/risk and safety is complicated by the strategies children use to renegotiate public space as a means of managing and mitigating fear (Nayak, 2003; Pain, 2006; Wells, 2005). Rachel Pain (2006) argues that children's perceptions should be at the centre of thinking about the relationship between fear, childhood and space, and when they are, the complexities of articulations, experiences and geographies of fear emerge. In addition, it is important to destabilise the binary distinctions between public and private spaces by exploring

childhood memories of fear in the home, thereby exposing the complexities of the experience and articulation of fear, and challenging the notion of home as a haven.

As discussed above, the romanticized notion of home as haven, is one that does not reflect the lived experience of many who experience fear in the home, and for whom home is not necessarily a place of safety and security (Jones, 2000). Jackson (1995: 122), thinking about home in its broadest terms, also describes it as “always lived as a relationship, a tension”. The boundaries and emotional landscape of the home are always permeable and shifting, and so explicitly engaging with memories of fear, an emotion that challenges so many of our idealised notions of home and the relationships lived through it, offers one means of exploring its contradictions and complexities. In doing so, we can ask what it means to experience fear in a place that we are so often told should be a place of safety. In particular, interrogating our *adult* memories of our *childhood* fears in the home can challenge any potential erasure of these memories, through nostalgic or idealised reflections that are based upon the division of public and private spaces. Exploring memories of the emotion of fear also offers one way of exploring Denzin’s argument that a “person takes space in” (Denzin, 2007:58). In looking to memories of an emotion that we might imagine requires eradication or mitigation, we can engage explicitly with the ways in which fear is managed through objects, relationships and movement and how emotion is in itself a process.

## **2. Memory work: Exploring embodied subjectivity**

Memory Work is an approach which simultaneously takes account of, and emphasises, the embodiment of feeling and sensation, and the social construction of embodied experience (Haug, 1987; Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault & Benton, 1992). In memory work, accounts of specific and concrete lived through experiences are taken as the starting point for remembering,

and as such remembering, meaning making and the construction of experience is *grounded in* concrete and specific lived through experiences. The method allows for a recognition of people's material existence and embodied being-in-the-world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), as well as asserting that such experience is inevitably and continuously constructed and re-constructed (Haug, 1987). As such, the data produced are narratives grounded in women's embodied experiences, as opposed to narratives which are produced on the basis of asking women to 'talk about' emotions. Haug (1987) do however suggest that the exploration of women's individual memories allows insight into and can facilitate the production of theories of more generalised social processes, and modes of being, through which the gendering of embodied experiences such as emotion are made possible:

Since it is as individuals that we interpret and suffer our lives, our experiences appear unique and thus of no value for scientific analysis. The mass character of social processes is obliterated within the concept of individuality. Yet we believe that the notion of the uniqueness of experience and of the various ways in which it is consciously assessed is a fiction ... if therefore a given experience is possible it is also subject to universalization (Haug, 1987: 43-44).

As well as viewing memory as a social process which is constructed in the present, we also here draw on Reavey (2010) and Brown and Reavey (2015) to understand memory as grounded in, and contingent upon, material context. According to Latour (2005), objects, settings and artifacts lend something of their seeming stability and potential anchorage in recall. That is to say, that recollected events may be inflected not only by the social relations that structure the events, but also by the artefactual or non-human relations present in the setting being recalled. What is recalled, under this view, is not the behaviour of persons set against some neutral

backdrop, but rather an action-complex involving an assembly of relations between people and things. The relational propensities of artefacts and spaces may then become embedded in our recollections (Reavey & Brown, 2009). In recollection, the artefacts and spaces that participate in the relations being recalled, may not literally be present, but their propensities are concretely felt with respect to the ‘privileged trajectories’ they have constrained and afforded.

Both Philo (2003) and Jones (2003, 2008) are concerned with the possibilities for adult researchers to explore and understand childhood worlds, whilst maintaining a sense of the ‘otherness’ of childhood. Jones (2003) comments on the gap between adulthood and childhood as ‘unbridgeable’, and asks whether elements of childhood are ever “retrievable through memory, or whether the illusion that it is, in fact makes the other/other even more inaccessible and invisible”. In so doing, he rightly observes that when adults research childhood worlds “adult constructions and memories of what it is/was to be a child are inevitably processed through adulthood”. (Jones, 2001: 177, cited in Philo 2003: 9). The Memory Work method recognises the inevitable incompleteness of memory and the precarity of the process of remembering. With its focus on the sensuous and the detail of lived experience, it is not an attempt to convey, or access events as they were experienced at the time, but as they are remembered from the present.

Whilst both Philo (2003) and Jones (2003) are concerned with maintaining a sense of ‘otherness’ of childhood when adults research children’s experiences, Philo, unlike Jones, does not see the gap between these worlds as one of ‘unbridgeable’ distance. He suggests instead that, as we have all been children, we retain a ‘fragment of connection’ (2003: 9-10) with experiences of childhood. Memory, Philo suggests, can act as a bridge to the experiences of childhood and adulthood. This bridge does not allow us to claim a full and complete knowledge

of childhood experiences, but can “bring into play a sense of common lives, worlds and spaces that is nonetheless fully aware of its own precariousness” (Philo, 2003: 10). In using the Memory Work method to explore the embodiment of fear in childhood, we explicitly embrace and foreground this point of connection, positioning ourselves as both researcher and researched, as adult and child, recognising at every point that we are exploring the emotions of fear not *as* children, but through our memories of being children.

Furthermore, Jones warns of the dangers of adult researchers ‘colonising’ childhood experiences when they become the producers of knowledge about children, suggesting that most “relatively standard social sciences methodologies” (Jones, 2008: 27) are ineffective for accounting for the “distances and intimacies” (2008: 11) that are simultaneously present between children and adults. He writes: “It is the affective geographies of their distant, other world which I feel are vital to what children’s lives are. They are thus vital to children’s geographies yet also very difficult to address” (2008: 11). What we explore through the memories analysed here, is that distance, and the use of imagination as a means of bridging or navigating that distance. In using memory and remembering to make an imaginative leap back into our childhood worlds, we are not claiming to collapse that distance, but rather attempting to sit with it, and to recognise what we did not know as children, about adult lives, and what we do not know as adults about children’s lives. Jones (2003: 34) argues that to explore the worlds of children through our own memories requires “entering into a state where feelings and emotions are more to the fore”. By evoking and generating this sense of not knowing, in both the present and the past, we are committed to exploring an emotional experience of childhood and attending to the emotional process of remembering childhood. Memory Work, with its focus on embodied emotion and feeling, allows us to do that and to explore the “fragments of connection” (Philo, 2003: 9-10) between childhood and adulthood.

## **2.1 The Memory Work Group method**

The memory work group method includes a number of key stages (Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault & Benton 1992). For this study, we followed the three stages laid out by Gillies, Harden, Johnson, Reavey, Strange and Willig, (2004): 1) Generating memories; 2) Analysis of memories; 3) Theory building.

A group was formed, mainly consisting of academics with a shared interest in theorising emotion and embodied experience. Most have written on topics of relevance to the project, such as embodied experience, emotion and space (e.g. McGrath, Reavey and Brown 2008; McGrath & Reavey 2016; Del Busso and Reavey 2013; Guest 2016). The group consisted of the authors of the current paper.

### *Phase 1. Generating memories*

The participants each wrote a memory of experiencing fear as children in their home, before the first group session. They were given instructions to write their memories in the third person; to focus on a specific experience and include as much detail as possible (for example details of bodily experience such as sensation, touch, taste, smell, sound, material setting), and not to include biographical information, explanation/justification or interpretation. Our aim was to include as much detail about the felt and sensed bodily experience and material setting as possible, to avoid explanation and to encourage rich descriptions. The participants were instructed not to edit their memories in order to produce a consistent narrative, as tensions and inconsistencies were considered important and beneficial to theoretical development.

*Phase 2. Analysis of memories*

Before the first group analysis session all the participants received all the memories, and were instructed to consider each memory in terms of: initial impressions/opinions; similarities and differences between the memories; cultural images/metaphors/popular stereotypes/discourses; relevant theories; and what is left out/silenced. The memories were then analysed in two group sessions. Each memory was examined in terms of the embodied detail of the fear experience, the material setting of spaces and objects, descriptions of others and the child's relation to others in the home (Gillies et al 2004). The analysis thus was concerned with the phenomenological detail of the descriptions provided in the memories, the described felt and sensed experience, as well as utilising a poststructuralist hermeneutic (Del Busso and Reavey, 2013; Langdridge 2007) to identify how these were discursively constructed and allowed for the production of specific narratives.

*Phase 3. Theory-building*

The group analysis sessions were tape recorded transcribed, and all the group members received and read the transcripts before meeting for a final group session. In this session, the transcripts were used as data in further building theory in relation to phenomena such as fear, home and objects. Our aim for this session was to identify how we as a group had analysed the memories in the previous sessions, and theoretically constructed the phenomena at hand, and to further develop our theoretical understandings. In doing so, theory building included discussing and contextualising the main phenomena and overall narratives constructed in the group analysis sessions in the existing literature. For instance, in this session our analysis of experiences of fear as the embodiment of a relational and spatial "void" was developed and confirmed. We

also discussed in detail the role of imagination in the memories, and reflected on how this was perhaps a distinct resource through which children managed emotions.

This session was not tape recorded, but one of the researchers (DB) took notes, which were later used in the write-up of the memory work analysis presented in the following section.

### **3. Analysis**

In this section we present two of the themes generated in the memory work process: *fear experiences as a sense of being in a void*, and *making meaning of fear experiences by ordering the void*. In our written memories, fear was described not only in terms of sensuous and embodied detail, but also to a large extent in relation to the spatial and material conditions in which an experience took place. Details of spaces and objects featured in the memories as important mediating aspects of living through the emotion of fear. As such, experiences of fear were often described as involving a separation from others – both in spatial and relational terms. The separation from others, who were simultaneously present in the home and inaccessible to the child, was described as a sense of being in a void or being invisible/disappearing from others. Furthermore, women's memories suggested that imagination was central to trying to understand and manage their experiences of fear. Imagination was thus utilised in materially grounded ways, with objects and spaces not as passive backdrops, but as giving opportunity to and participating in meaning making and the management of fear.

#### **3.1 Experiencing the void: Fear as a sense of spatial and relational distance**

## Facing the void: Embodying fear in the space of childhood homes

Common to all the women's memories of experiencing fear in the home were descriptions of a felt sense of separation, or being apart from others who were present in the home, spatially and relationally. Katherine for example wrote:

She sits in the middle of her room playing alone. Toys are spread out over the blue swirling carpet. She feels contented and absorbed. Suddenly she freezes in the middle of playing, her body tense and still. Downstairs she can hear arguing, her mum shouting loudly at her dad and her dad grumbling in response. Stamped feet, slammed doors. The sounds echo up the house to her bedroom on the first floor and she strains to listen to the arguments, she can't quite hear. From being absorbed in her own world, she feels pulled into her parents' argument below and feels smaller, vulnerable, and suddenly aware of the rest of the house again. (Katherine, Ps 4)

In this memory Katherine described being comfortable and "contented" being in her room alone, until she realised that her parents were arguing downstairs. She described being "frozen" in her position on the floor. "Tense" and "still" she experienced a felt sense that each shout had an "impact on her body". Katherine felt "pulled" out of her "own" space, her room, and into the argument or the relational in-between space between her mum and dad below. Her fear centred on her ideas that the argument would cause her parents to separate. She "strained" to listen to the argument in order to get information about what was happening. She did not however have access to this space, the in-between mum and dad, and later in the memory wrote: "she feels trapped in the room, wanting to go downstairs, but fearful of also being shouted at, being taken into the scene below". In her memory, Katherine expressed a need for information and access to her parents in communicative and emotional terms. Katherine's "own world", of play and toys, was thus experienced as separate from the adult "world" downstairs, both

spatially and emotionally. Simultaneously, she experienced a sense of being “pulled into” the interaction and communication between her parents, which can be understood as “adult”, and therefore difficult for her to manage and interpret (Jones 2008). In her memory, the separation was material-spatial (upstairs/downstairs) and emotional-relational. In these terms, the void is a felt sense of *being there* in spatial terms, and *not being there* in relational terms (in-between parents). Katherine experienced being not there/invisible, because her parents were not aware that she was experiencing, or “taking part” in the argument, unable to communicate that it was causing her to experience fear. In her memory, the void can be described as a relational silencing, or atmosphere of communicative silence, in which modes of communication are made difficult, both by the material-spatial separation (upstairs/downstairs), and the inaccessible in-between emotional-relational space between parents. Extending Jones’ (2008: 196) understanding of the disparity between child and adult experiences of the world, Katherine’s embodiment of fear, as a sense of spatial and relational separation, can thus be understood as Katherine experiencing and being part of an “adult world”, in which she cannot fully participate (Jones, 2008). Similarly, Rita wrote a memory of fear as centring on a felt sense of separation, and failing in her attempt to access her parents in their space/world in the living room:

The bed sheets are pulled and feel unwelcoming, nothing like the pretty sheets and covers on her friends’ beds, warm, pink and cozy. Hers are brown and white and soulless. She stares at the horrid yellow walls thinking about what the future might bring and begins to think intensely about her parents ageing and dying. What would she do without them (Rita, Ps 2)

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Rita wrote a memory about being away from her parents in material-spatial terms (upstairs/downstairs), and emotional-relational terms (her parents being/not being). Her fear focused on the idea she had that her parents might die, and she had questions about where and who she would be if this happened. In Rita's memory, her embodiment of fear was explicitly experienced as the material and spatial of the home in process with the emotional and relational of the relationships between herself and her family. For example, she constructed her embodiment in relation to the material space and the practices of others within the house, and experienced herself as "helpless": "she's aware of how small her body is, her thin legs and arms, helpless against the cold night, the cigarette smoke filled house". Furthermore, she described the condition of her room and the house as "horrid", "dirty" and chaotic, and related this felt material deprivation explicitly to the emotional and communicative care she received from her parents. Unlike Katherine, however, Rita described actively using her imagination in negotiating her experience of fear, by constructing a narrative of being in a different place/space, (Harris 2000, Dovey 1990), with a different family who would make sure that the material space was "clean" and "cosy", and would "cuddle her". Using her imagination, she was able to picture, and narrate, herself outside of her current fear experience. Children's processes of growing and developing during childhood (Jones 2008: 196), can thus be understood as involving imagination as an important tool for negotiating emotion then and there, in the moment. Furthermore, paired with children's openness to the world, this use of imagination can be seen as enabling narratives which open up "possibilities" for other/future selves (someone who is cared for), spaces ("cosy") and experiences ("cuddles") (Jones 2008: 201).

Later in Rita's memory she described going downstairs to tell her parents that she was afraid that they might disappear (die), and she experienced herself/her fear as invisible or not "real"

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to her parents. In contrast to Katherine, who “suddenly freezes in the middle of playing”, Rita did what can be understood, in Denzin’s words, as “determining her own locations, making room for herself and drawing things near” (Denzin, 2007:58). Hence, in addition to managing her fear experience using her imagination to construct the possibility of a better place for herself, she walked through the cigarette smoke filled house to “draw her parents near”, in order to elicit the reassurance she needed. Nevertheless, once downstairs she experienced “not being seen”, her mother continuing to watch the TV, as opposed to looking at her child, and responding to the child’s communicated fear, highlighting Rita’s felt sense of separation.

The experienced void in women’s memories was also constructed in terms of spatial inside and outside. In Katherine’s memory, the inside was her room, which she described as “her own world”, and the outside, into which she felt herself “pulled”, was the argument or the in-between emotional-relational space between her parents. Also constructing the inside and outside, Abbi wrote a memory in which she was woken by her sister’s screaming, fell off the top bunk bed and hit her nose on a chest of drawers. As she was lying on the floor after the fall, her spatial location was inside the room, experiencing the outside as very near through an open doorway, but still separate:

The room is still dark and she is still alone. Although she is facing away from it, Kylie can feel that the bedroom door is open and the corridor light is on. She can hear but can't see her mum and dad in the corridor. (Abbi, Ps 5)

Abbi described being alone, despite “feeling” that the door was open to the space where her parents were. Her parents were close by, but couldn’t be seen from her position in the room. Despite her parents being near, she was “alone”, or separated from them by their inside/outside

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spatial locations. The room she was in was dark, whereas where her parents were, the outside, was light. Thus, despite an open doorway, the two spaces were embodied by Abbi as separate, both in spatial (light and dark) and relational terms (parents are simultaneously there and not there).

In contrast to Abbi's memory, in which the inside was dark and the outside where her parents were was light, the inside in Lina's memory was light, and the outside space dark. In her memory, she described being chased by wolves:

She runs straight across the large playroom she shares with her little sister, into the small sleeping alcove. She gets to the bunk bed, grabs the wooden handles on the steps with both hands. She grabs them hard and almost jumps up onto the top bunk. She shrieks as she senses one of the wolves just missing her foot with its large, razor sharp teeth. A final jump and she pulls the curtain closed. She's in her little cave now, there is a little light on the shelf over the bed and it's on, her little cave, full of light. (Lina, Ps 6)

At the centre of Lina's memory was her embodied experience of being chased by wolves, who were attempting to harm her with their "large, razor sharp teeth". In the memory, the outside can be understood as the majority of the home, apart from her bunk bed. As such, the outside was constructed as a place of harm, aggression and danger, and the source of her fear imagined as wolves. In contrast to the outside/home space, her bunk bed was imagined and felt as "her little cave". The memory illustrates that Lina did not experience her home as a safe haven (Kitzinger 1999), rather as a place of possible danger and harm to the body. In line with Willis and colleagues' (2016) analysis of the narratives of adult survivors of CSA, Lina's memory

can be understood in terms of a negotiation of embodied experience through attempting to control space, or in other words, attempting to create a safe space of her own and a boundary to the harmful outside. Drawing on environmental autobiographies of places of peace in childhood, Dovey (1990:15) suggests that children may need a “hiding place” or “refuge” from the adults in the home. Furthermore, in addition to being refuges, such places can be places of “discovery and dreaming” (Dovey, 1990:15), which allow children to use imagination in order to negotiate their emotional experiences. As such, children use imagination to transform their everyday spaces, and make the “adult world” comprehensible (for example threat of adult violent behaviour). Not explored explicitly by Dovey (1990) or Willis et al. (2016), but highlighted in the memories analysed here, was the paramount importance of objects in the transformation of space and achievement of a boundary to the adult world, for instance the bed light and curtain in Lina’s memory,

Christensen, James and Jenks (2000: 148) suggest, based on their ethnographic research with children, that movement is characteristic of children’s everyday lives in the home, for example in terms of “being allowed out of home” and “‘having’ to come in for tea”. In the current study, descriptions of movement were also common in women’s memories of embodying fear as children in the home. These can be understood in terms of *moving towards* a “safe space” – a concrete spatial location, or an emotional-relational space interacting with a caring parent. For example, Lina remembered being in motion, and using her capacity for motion in order to manage her fear of the wolves. Similarly, in Rita’s memory she described getting up from her bed where she was laying down, thinking about her parents dying, and going downstairs to communicate her fear to her mum. Katherine and Abbi also described wanting to *move towards* their parents, or a safe emotional-relational space. In Abbi’s memory she found it difficult to move after falling off the bunk bed and hitting her nose: “every time she moves to get up the

sheets twist and move beneath her and she feels trapped by them”. She eventually managed to walk towards her mum, who was “outside” in the corridor. In the context of their research on children’s experiences of the home during after-school hours, Forsberg and Strandell (2007: 404) suggest that children’s agency can be understood in terms of “freedom of mobility”, and ability to control and use the home space without being supervised by an adult. In all the memories in this study, however, the parents were present in the home during the children’s fear experiences, and all the children expressed a capacity, need or wish to change their embodied experience of fear by exiting the void and entering a safe space, material or relational. Movement can thus be understood here as allowing the embodiment of agency through attempts to tackle and navigate the felt sense of void, for example in phenomenological terms, by moving towards others and drawing others and objects, who can assist in managing the child’s felt experience, near (Denzin, 2007: Ahmed, 2006). As such, the descriptions of motion in women’s memories illustrated that movement was mediated by objects and spatial locations, and that fear was experienced as *a living through (e)motion in process with the material-spatial world* as opposed to a state of being. In the following section, we further consider how, when imagination is spatially and materially anchored (Brown & Reavey, 2009; Latour, 2005), it collapses the distinction between imaginative and material worlds, specifically demonstrating how objects were remembered being used by the children to understand and manage their experiences of fear.

### **3.2 Ordering the void: Imagination, objects and meaning making**

In living through and making sense of the experience of being in a spatial and relational void, the memories highlighted the children’s use of imagination and narrative construction in

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making use of concrete spaces and objects (for example, bed, wardrobe, carpet, toy dinosaur, doors, handles, lights, wires, scarf, toys). In particular, the memories suggested that as children they imagined and experienced objects as taking on their emotions, allowing them to make sense of, and order the void by doing something with these objects. As such, many of the women's memories included descriptions of monsters, spectral presences or mythical figures (Warner1994). For example, amongst Natalie's toys there was a witch with a green face, and spiky crustaceans were living in her bed:

Staring down at the bundled up clothes and toys on the floor, shapes begin to emerge. These gurning, evil characters become more real the more that she looks but she keeps staring. She's fearful then and sits up in bed (Natalie, Ps 1)

In Natalie's memory, the clothes left on the floor before she went to bed turned into "evil characters" during the night. Similarly, Zena remembered: "male faces made of dark smoke and wide eyes" emerging from the objects left on the floor in her bedroom. In Lina's memory, she sensed the presence of a pack of wolves, chasing her up the stairs and into her bedroom. Living close to a forest Lina grew up with a local myth that wolves existed close by, but rarely made their presence known to people. Fairy tales and storytelling can be understood as important and common ways for adults to communicate with, educate and entertain children (Warner, 1994). It can be argued that the fairy tales and stories children are told, play an important role in "child becoming", for example by alerting children to possible dangers, social norms and expectations (Jones, 2008). What is illustrated in the memories analysed here, in particular, is that children may benefit from this familiarity with storytelling, and utilise and develop their own narrative skills specifically in the context of making sense of and negotiating their embodiment of emotion. Furthermore, in the memories of Natalie, Zena and Lina,

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monsters (evil characters), spectral and mythical presences appeared (male faces, wolf) in objects and spatial locations which “belonged” to the child. In the context of the felt separation from others in the home, or the emotional-relational void, objects that were familiar, and even treasured, became monstrous.

Ahmed (2006) suggests that having contact with objects generate feeling, and that the way an object feels is dependent upon our previous experience of the object in itself, and in relation to other objects. Because the objects in the home were familiar to the children, and some were even treasured, it can be argued that these objects were therefore safe”, and as such allowed the children to “see” and manage their embodied experience of fear. In Zena’s memory, for example, the scarves she loved and tied to the handles of her wardrobe as decoration, became threatening during the night. The objects described can thus be understood as participating in “showing” Natalie and Zena their own emotion, or reflecting the emotion of fear, so that it becomes something which can be “handled” or managed by the children. Furthermore, as explored previously in this section, Lina experienced her bunk bed as an “inside” cave. This “refuge” (Dovey, 1990) also included a “special” object:

Beside the light there is a large plastic dinosaur toy, her protector, he is special, bought on holiday. She grabs it quickly and sits in the top corner of her bunk bed, her legs tucked underneath her, in a position ready to jump forward and strike. She holds the dinosaur by its tail, close to her body. Her pulse is slowing down, her chest is a long thin pain and she stares at the curtain. She is ready to jump forward and hit whatever comes forward through the curtain. (Lina, Ps 6)

In Lina's memory, she created a place of safety, and had access to a "weapon", which she imagined would be able to protect her against "whatever" came through the curtain in her bunk bed. Lina described a felt sense of being competent with regards to escaping harm, an emotional accomplishment made possible through the use of space and particular objects. Similarly, in order to protect herself in the future, Zena remembered laying in bed unable to move or call out for help, and focusing on making a plan of how to avoid the monsters in the future. She made up a "bedtime ritual", which consisted of using her wardrobe to store all the objects in her room, which may become monstrous during the night. Furthermore, the use of objects can also be understood as a way for these children to concretise their being-in-the-world (Merleau-Ponty 1962). Living through and expressing emotion by utilising an object, which is material and therefore considered "real", allowed children to reach out to the other through something, which was materially real to the other, "bridging" the gap between child and the adult worlds. In this way, the children accomplished meaning making and created order, in relation to their embodiment of fear, by actively and imaginatively utilising the participating spatial and material surroundings.

#### **4. Bridging the void: fear, imagination, and memory**

In the study presented here, women's remembered experiences of embodying fear in the home were characterised by a felt sense of being in a void, or being apart from others who were present in the home, spatially and relationally. In women's memories, fear was thus experienced as a lack of access to intimate others in the home, and grounded in, and mediated through, specific spatial and material conditions. Furthermore, our analysis suggests that the home was not experienced as an unambiguous safe haven, where something strange and unfamiliar to the

home caused fear (Kitzinger, 1999), but rather that these experiences were embedded in the intimate everyday relationships and spatiality of the family.

In analysing the memories we have highlighted the role of imagination as a key tool in children's emotional management. In doing so, we have drawn on Vygotskian (1926; 1967) ideas of imagination, as a 'bridge' between the child and adult worlds, along with an understanding of children's imagination and play as materially grounded (Winnicott, 1971; Keith & Whittaker, 1981; Wilson & Ryan, 2005). Whilst other research has emphasised the use of space in children's everyday lives (Dovey, 1990; Christensen et al., 2000), the analysis of the memories in this study foreground the presence and use of objects within the home space. Aided by their imagination, the children in the memories utilised objects in the home in order to manage their embodied experiences of fear materially, spatially and relationally, moving towards and away from others in the home (Christensen, 2000; Dovey 1990). Furthermore, we have suggested in this paper that imagination is a resource for children to navigate an adult world they live with, but are not fully part of. We also see memory, and its close relationship to imagination, as a resource for us as adult researchers to connect with and capture fragments of our embodied experiences in childhood (Jones, 2001, 2003, 2008; Philo 2003).

In our attempts here, to explore these "fragments of connection" (Philo, 2003: 9-10) through memory work, our understanding is that researching ordinary everyday experiences can aid the theorisation of children's agency. In particular, exploring the concrete experiences of everyday living allows emphasis on the ways in which children continuously engage in complex embodied and sensuous processes, and thus actively manage their emotions and relationships (Forsberg and Strandell, 2007; Horton and Kraftl, 2006). Centrally important to this endeavor

are questions of power and agency. As we have highlighted, children face “spatial marginalisation” (Holloway, 2014: 5) in the home, living within a space which is theirs, yet to a large extent, defined by adults. Whilst other work has addressed the most acute instances of power abuses, for example, child sexual abuse (Willis et al, 2015; 2016), we have instead attempted to address the everyday negotiation of agency within the home. In doing so, we have explored memories of *specific* and *concrete* remembered experiences that illustrate how children may utilise their material environment to embody and manifest agency, through their capacity for imagination and narrative construction. This adds a different dimension to Forsberg and Strandell’s (2007: 404) suggestion that children’s agency can be understood in terms of “freedom of mobility”, the ability to control and use the home space without being supervised by an adult. A sense of “mobility” can also be seen here, as the freedom to re-write the meaning of spaces and objects, reshaping the adult’s world through the child’s imagination. In making this argument, we do not wish to undermine material limitations on agency, and wider power dynamics, which echo through the memories in question, from the male faces in Zena’s bedroom imbricated with gendered power relations, to the material inequalities and class dynamic structuring Rita’s experience of her bedroom. We argue, however, that these memories indicate how children can use the tools of childhood to render these wider dynamics understandable, knowable and navigable.

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