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Exploring Family Norms and Young People’s Identities through Multi-sensory Research

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Young People Creating Belonging: spaces, sounds and sights

exploring (non) belonging and its links with material objects, place and sensory experience with young people in foster, kinship or residential care, drawing on previous work on:

- everyday domestic practices and personal life (Morgan 1996; Smart 2007; Mason and Davies 2010)
- home and its association with intimacy, privacy (Mallett 2004) and sensory respite (Adams et al. 2007)
- belonging: as ‘emotional..ontological attachment..feeling at home ... include[ing] a notion of project or sense of hope for the future’ (Yuval-Davis 2011: 10; May 2011)
- sensory literature (Bull 2007; Rose 2007; Pink 2009; Büscher and Urry 2009, Miller 2010; ‘aesthetic dimension of autonomy’ DeNora 2000)
- work on parental substance misuse suggesting a link between unwanted sensory experience and not belonging (Wilson et al. 2012)
A 2 year project based in Scotland:

Stirling
Methods and sample so far

- 2 loosely structured, participatory interviews with young people across Scotland (rural, urban and island communities)
- 22 participants (13 male; 9 female) aged 10-23 (most 14-17); 12 second interviews so far

Categories shifting:

- Kinship Foster Care 1 - Foster Care 11/9
- Adopted 1 - Children’s Unit 3
- Secure Accom 1 - Home with supervision 2/4
- Residential School 1 - Independent Living 2

Islands (urban) 4/5; (rural) 3/4,
West Central (urban) 8, (rural) 1
East Central (urban) 4, (rural) 1
Running script (1st interview)

Take a series of photographs of:

- Your 2 favourite places (any space inside or outside, from different angles)
- Your 2 least favourite places (any space inside or outside, from different angles)
- The door/entrance to your favourite and least favourite spaces.
- 1 room which is used by you and by others where you live
- 3 objects or ‘things’ that are most important to you

Make 1-3 minute sound recordings of:

- 3 sounds that are positive or make you feel good inside. Include at least one music track that makes you feel good or that you play the most.
General methodological points

► ‘multi-sensorial’ approach: photos can ‘carry flesh and blood’, convey the ‘texture’ of places and objects, encourage talk that would not be possible in their absence (Rose 2007: 237-48), understanding participants’ aesthetic.

► interviews supplemented by ethnographic material (long initial discussions, text and phone contact, home tours, walks to stations, social work offices, cat rescue homes, residence and observation on islands)

► participatory approach – ‘understand[ing] and engag[ing] with other people’s worlds through sharing activities, practices’ (Pink 2009: 9); sense of collective and creative endeavour, non-threatening proximity, fun!
This presentation will focus on two participants:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym:</th>
<th>Channel (‘Chanelle’)</th>
<th>Reggie</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age and sex:</td>
<td>17, female</td>
<td>23, male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location:</td>
<td>W. Central (town)</td>
<td>W. Central (city)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation:</td>
<td>College (FE)</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official residence:</td>
<td>foster care (town A)</td>
<td>own flat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favourite places:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st interview</td>
<td>auntie’s house, beach (town D)</td>
<td>sofa, mother’s friend’s bedroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>friend’s flat (town B)</td>
<td>friend’s bedroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>foster carers’ caravan college</td>
<td>park, art gallery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>bus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd intw additions:</td>
<td>boyfriend’s bedroom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>local park</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Belonging: surroundings and movement

SW: So how does it make you feel [travelling on bus]?

CH: Relaxed. Cos I don’t argue with anyone...and all my feelings just go whoo...away from my head. I feel relaxed.

SW: So you just let everything go?

CH: A-ha. Especially when I go to [auntie’s]. Because I walk on the beach ...that’s where I go usually, to ...forget about things.

SW: What do you like about the beach?

CH: ...the quietness there..(a-ha). At night. The wind, the sky and everything.
Non-belonging: solitude and emptiness

Reggie (talking about his own flat):

I don’t really like my flat at all, I kinda hate the place to be honest, ... if I want to see anyone I've got to travel at least 30 minutes ... I hate the quiet which is weird cause quiet’s one of my favourite things and being by myself is one of my favourite things, but only in moderation and only when I choose it.
Belonging: feeling embedded in a space, with some autonomy (Reggie’s corner at his mum’s place)

► This is my little segment. This is my computer and my couch!

► I'm like sort of furniture there so it’s good.

► I like the busyness and that I can be completely comfortable and no one will hassle me!

► That computer’s just everything good to me... my games, ... sad to say but.. my whole life’s on it.
Belonging: shared biography, memories

SW: Does this picture mean anything to you?

CH: Aye, it was my grandad’s. That’s why I like it...that’s why I got it in [in the photo].

SW: Ah... So was it your grandfather’s house?

CH: Aye

SW: ...So before it was your [auntie’s] house did you go there a lot?

CH: A-ha..It’s never been changed That’s why I like it so much.

SW: So this house has always been the same throughout your life...
Belonging: biography and (re) creativity
(Channel at her friend Alannah’s place)

SW: Did you choose the wallpaper here?
CH: Yes
SW: ...because it looks a bit like the one in your (grandad’s house)
CH: Aye
SW: But it’s in Alannah’s house? (Aye) So she let you choose the wallpaper?
CH: A-ha.
SW: Did you choose the carpet as well?
CH: Me and Alannah
SW: A-ha. So her house is kind of like a ...project?
CH: Aye (laughs)
Belonging: Reggie’s difficulties feeling embedded in his flat and maintaining his aesthetic

SW: D'you have cupboards and chest of drawers?
REGGIE: I've got a chest of drawers, ... [and] a table [laughs] that we found.

SW: D'you keep anything on them, displaying anything or?
REGGIE: I've got some toys, you know like, erm, little plastic figurines you get...? Wolverine and all that type of thing.

SW: Cause last time you said you didn’t listen to dance music?
REGGIE: Yeah I know, I know. It’s horrible [laugh]!

SW: Yeah, so you like it when the music changes, .... changes between different parts of the song?

REGGIE: Mm hmm. Perfectly honest, I've just sort of stopped engaging with things, I just put things on in the background now.
Final thoughts

- Sensory methods can illuminate norms of ‘home’ spaces and their effect on young people’s identities
- Evidence of conventional norms of ‘one home’ but also of ‘other’ busier norms and the importance of multiple spaces (physical, less tangible, interior and exterior, static and moving)
- Importance of links (of these places) to personal history of liveable relationships, important memories, ‘shared biography’
- Importance of (some) creative autonomy but embedded in shared biography
- Fear of emptiness and fragility of material, relational resources (poverty as ‘societal neglect’ (Hooper et al. 2007))
References

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