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Children's Emotional Geographies: politics of difference and practices of engagement

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[A] Introduction

Geography is a discipline with much to say about space but, until relatively recently, more reluctance to talk about children and emotions. Over the last twenty years, however, both children's and emotional geographies have become established sub-disciplinary fields with successful dedicated journals (*Children's Geographies* established in 2003 and *Emotion, Space and Society* established in 2008), a flourishing tradition of international conferences (the 5th edition of *International and Interdisciplinary Conference on Emotional Geographies* and the 4th edition of *International Conference on the Geographies of Children, Youth and Families* will take place in 2015) and a number of journal articles and book-volume publications with impact across the field of geography and far beyond.

The purpose of this chapter is to reflect on the entanglements of geographical debates regarding children and emotions and to present an overview particularly for readers from outside the discipline. The histories of children's and emotional geographies have been both reflected and re-reflected in much detail on various occasions, and more comprehensive and accessible invitations to broader debates are available elsewhere (e.g. McKendrick 2000; Holloway and Valentine 2000a; Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2011; Holloway 2014; Kraftl et al. 2014; Skelton 2017; and Davidson et al. 2005; Bondi 2006; Smith et al. 2009; Pile 2010). My aim is to focus rather on the points where the two meet and to sketch one of many possible (and fragmented) reflections of why considering children's emotional geographies matters.

Children's emotional geographies have not evolved in a disciplinary vacuum and indeed, many references in the chapter encapsulate an inter-disciplinary scholarship. Yet, geographical approaches to children's emotions build on a long-term and sustained focus on spatial concepts, which are then deployed as tools for advanced understanding of social life. In this chapter, I outline this tradition and draw on some of these tools to offer one possible route of engaging with children's emotions, where spatial perspectives on children's lives fuse diverse questions of epistemology, politics and methodology into an account of policy and practice.

The chapter begins by discussing how the two key terms implied in the title of the chapter – childhood and emotions – are viewed in the (sub-)disciplinary scholarship. I briefly look at their intellectual trajectories and trace the emerging debates on the role of emotions and space in children's lives. After that, while being aware of the limited space this chapter offers, I sketch a thread of themes connecting theorisations and practices regarding children's emotions and space, drawing on some recent discussions in the field of children's emotional geographies.

Comment [S1]: What are the links between this and researching children's experiences and shaping practice, what does an emotional geographies lens bring to understanding children's lives?

Comment [n2]: The previous paragraph seeks to respond to this.

[A] Children's emotional geographies: trajectories and intersections

[B] Human geography: space, place spatiality, and scale

Since the 1970s, human geography has been refining its conceptual vocabulary and augmented the theoretical deployment of its key terms (see Clifford *et al.* 2009). Engagements with social theory, particularly the idea of space as produced in multiple forms (Lefebvre 1990; Harvey 2006) extended the traditional view of the three-dimensional Cartesian space as an absolute container in which social life is simply located. Instead, the concept of *spatiality*, the indivisible linkage between the

social and the spatial, appropriated a position at the heart of the discipline. The understandings of *place* also burgeoned, from a delineated locality on a (Cartesian) map towards comprehensions of places in their interconnections and openness beyond the physical borders (Massey 1994) and as carriers of cultural associations producing ways of understanding the world both near and far (Cresswell 2004). Finally, the idea of *scale* shifted from a mathematical expression of the relationship between space and its cartographic representation, to theorisations of the global, local and intimate processes, their relations, and the wider political implications of the construction and perpetuation of scalar categories (Marston et al. 2005).

Children's and emotional geographies have developed in such a context of theoretical proliferation with a particularly prosperous period starting in the mid-1990s. The intellectual trajectories that shaped the two sub-disciplinary fields reveal similarities but also differences and outline a genealogy of children's emotional geographies at the junction of the two.

[B] Children's Geographies

Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson (2011) recognise three roots of the current sub-discipline of children's geographies. The first is the focus on children's spatial cognition unfolding at the juncture with developmental psychology (Blaut 1991; Blaut et al. 2003), the second is the feminist interest in geographies of family life and caring (Holloway 1999), and the third is the concern about spatialities of children's lived experiences shaped through engagements with the new social studies of childhood (Holloway and Valentine 2000b). Of the three, the latter inspired the largest share of interest by putting children's lives into the spotlight and considering children as relevant social actors in their own right instead of subsuming their experiences and practices within broader views of adults.

Bringing children's agency to light has also transformed children to relevant actors in, rather than just objects of, geographical research. The decade following the establishment of children's geographies in the mid and late 1990s saw flourishing breadths and depths of methodological developments labelled as participatory, child-centred or child-friendly research approaches (van Blerk and Kesby 2008).

Elevating the status of children and their agency in the production of geographical knowledge has not remained without a critique, ~~and it~~ which implicitly questioned the character of how children have been viewed. Most importantly, children's agency has been shown to still have its limits. It remains entrenched in structural constraints which marginalise children in relation to adults but also some children against others, depending on their socio-spatial positionalities (Holt 2011). As Kesby (2007) argues, it is important to attend to children's individual existences but this does not take away from their need for protection or from their structural vulnerability given by the socio-spatial positionality of childhood (Philo and Smith 2013; Horschelmann 2015). In addition, and like adults, children are not all-knowing actors but their intellectual, embodied and social capacities are limited by a range of factors, material and immaterial (Holt 2006; Gallacher and Gallagher 2008; Philo and Smith 2013). The view of childhood carried forward by sub-disciplinary scholars has thus emerged as one where children and their lives are important in their own right but children's agency is inevitably limited by social, environmental, biological and psychological causes.

Comment [S3]: By 'it', do you mean the critique questioned this?

[B] Emotional Geographies

In the introduction to their book on Emotional Geographies, Bondi et al. (2005) discuss the location (illustrated by geographies of health and embodiment), production (discussing geographies of social relations and identity) and representation (drawing on a wider body of writings that problematise

the representing of emotions) as conceptual areas elucidating how emotions matter in geography. Elsewhere, Bondi (2005) traces geography's 'Emotional Turn' and the emergence of geographers' interest in emotions in three relatively independent theoretical traditions: humanistic geography of the 1970s and early 1980s and its interest in individual subjective experience, particularly of place, shaped by ideas from phenomenology (Ley and Samuels 1978); the feminist critique of the body/mind, nature/culture and emotional/rational dualisms and their impacts upon the oppressive gendered production of space and subjectivity (Rose 1993); and the prospects of non-representational theory critiquing the scholarly fixation on cognitive and representable areas of the human experience (Thrift 1996). Commenting upon the often belying views of the importance of the individual vs. trans-/pre-individual constitution of emotions, Bondi adds another perspective, drawing from psychotherapy and building a relational understanding of emotions framed within the intersubjective dynamics between embodied individuals.

Such a brief overview suggests a theoretical diversity to the point of fragmentation and contradiction. Indeed, in a discussion in the journal *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, the prevalent opinion was that theoretical purity eradicates the richness, complexity and elusiveness of emotions and their mattering in space (Curti et al. 2011; Bondi and Davidson 2011). Emotions have become established at the heart of geographical inquiry but this happened through the proliferation of (often contradicting) theories and practices (Davidson et al. 2014) rather than the constitution of a unique, distinctive framework. What the majority of such work have in common, though, is the recognition that emotions matter, they are shaping and shaped by geographical elements such as places, environments or mobilities, and that their presence, location and effects require attentiveness to relational dimensions of social and "more-than-social" interactions so they should not be seen as "possessed" by individuals.

[B] Children's and Emotional Geographies

These overviews suggest diverse intellectual trajectories that led to the repositioning of the two sub-disciplinary fields from the disciplinary periphery towards its core. Even where the theoretical influences suggest parallels, the particular concepts approached by geographers interested in childhood and emotions often varied, such as when the feminist critique of care and caring economy informed the developments of children's geographies whereas emotional geographies drew primarily (though not exclusively) on the insights of power and subjectivity. This does not mean that geographers interested in childhood have not attended to the relevance of emotions (and, to a much lesser degree, vice versa,). Horton and Kraftl's (2006a) call to consider emotions, if nothing else than for the reason that they clearly *matter* in children's lives, was echoed in a number of projects important in their own right: Nayak (2003) and Pain et al. (2010) explored children's fear in relation to the local and the global respectively; den Besten (2010) debated the relations between emotional belonging to a place and mobile identities of migrants; Harker (2005), Hemming (2007) and Horton and Kraftl (2009) looked at emotions in the institutional context of education and care; and Jones's (2000) interest has been in children's emotional autonomy in the spaces of their own becoming. However, a focused theorisation of the importance of emotions in understanding childhood, and of childhood in approaching emotions, has remained rather fragmented.

In the guest editorial to a special issue of *Emotion, Space and Society* on children's emotional geographies, Blazek and Windram-Geddes (2013: 1-2) identified eight emerging threads and suggested these themes as a starting (yet incomplete) agenda for the engagement between geographers and scholars from other disciplines interested in the spatialities of emotions in children's lives. First, they assert that 'children's emotions [are] firmly situated within the wider contexts of children's lives', and highlight 'the need to view children's emotional geographies as inseparable from the social, cultural, economic and political landscapes of childhood'. Second, they stress 'the complexity of the media through which children's emotions emerge, are channelled, and

come to matter', pointing to the crucial yet insufficient-on-its-own relevance of factors such as embodiment, voice and representation, introspection or memory. Third, they reflect on the importance of 'the spatialities of power in child–adult relationships that co-constitute emotional geographies', re-invoking the construction of childhood in relation to adults as a category of otherness. Fourth, they call for attentiveness to the details of children's everyday social relationships and 'the collective dimension' of the relevance of emotions in children's lives. Fifth, sixth and seventh, they argue for a continuous *theoretical* and *methodological* innovation and openness as a channel to contest and re-invent *policies* and *practices* targeting children's emotions. Finally – and consequently – they make a point about the necessity for geographers to engage with other scholars but also practitioners; even to cross the line between different professional identities, retaining the awareness of similar yet often different agendas, but approaching the concepts and practices of each other.

The rest of the chapter debates four topics implied by some of these discussions. They do not present a comprehensive picture of the field but this is neither possible nor necessarily desirable.

Instead, I wish to outline an intra-connected sketch indicating how geographical approaches to children's emotions might span through theoretical, methodological and practical areas, and to highlight the relevance of emotions and spatialities in children's lives.

[A] Engaging with Children's Emotional Geographies

[B] Children's emotions, space and politics of difference

Comment [S4]: Could you add something about the relevance of these approaches for other disciplines, i.e. what can a geographical lens bring to understanding children's emotional and relational experiences?

Could you also comment on this in the introduction?

Comment [n5]: Is any further signposting necessary at this point, with an extra paragraph in the introduction?

In 1990-1991, an early debate on the absence of children in geography turned towards a range of substantial differences between childhood and adulthood (James 1990; Sibley 1991; Winchester 1991) and triggered a series of interventions over the next decade that established the foundations of the sub-discipline (Philo 1992; Valentine 1999; Matthews and Limb 1999). A theme raised by James was about the extent to which childhood is a universal experience shared by all adults, and what this implies for the ways in which adults might approach children and childhoods. Responses from Sibley and Winchester problematised the notion of universality, pointing towards the different structural circumstances of children's lives that set up not just social and political but also epistemological *gaps* between children and adults. Philo's (1992) contention that children's worlds are 'structured "from without"' but 'experienced "from within"' (198) reinforced the view that the settings which embed children's experiences are fundamentally different from adults, and adults' universal experiences of being a child do not mean that understanding children is in any way straightforward.

The debate on differences between adults and children and the approachability of children's experiences from the standing point of adults has remained prominent in both theoretical and methodological terms over the next decade (Jones 2000, 2003; Philo 2003). The question of how to understand children was extended to how to understand adult understandings of children, and particularly in writings of Jones, it evolved from an epistemological problem to a political one. Jones (2008) argues that childhood is constructed through lopsided power dynamics with adults, and he labels the structural process of 'reduc[ing] the child's opportunities to control his or her own relationship with time and space' (196) as the 'colonisation' of childhood. Jones argues that efforts to disregard the differences between adults and children and to claim for a comprehensive understanding of children are also efforts to further colonise children's lives by denying them their cultural and symbolic subjectivity, which is distinctively unequal to adults. Jones views childhood constructed as an unbridgeable (although approachable, see Philo (2003)) otherness to adulthood and proposes to 'strive to imagine children as 'other' [as] an attempt to resist colonising them"

(Jones 2013, 7). Children's otherness is to be acknowledged and celebrated as one of few means that warrant children autonomy without subtracting the necessary love and protection.

Jones further argues that such autonomy requires space (Jones 2000) and encompasses emotional dynamics (Jones 2013), both of which might surface in a form that would appear strange, imprudent, deeply discomforting or even dangerous to adults. As an illustration, Blazek and Hricová (2015) discuss the street as a kind of space that has a fundamentally different value for adults, protecting its ordering, and children, exploring its opportunistic resources (see Lees 1998), and they recognise detached youth work as a form of practice that supports the links between spatial and emotional autonomy, so instead of seeking to diagnose or govern children's emotions, it is focused on how to accompany those emotions through the provision of relationships which are supportive yet allowed and handled by children themselves. Elsewhere, Dickens and Lonie (2013) show the power of social and spatial arrangements of music studios in youth work practice where young people accept the tangible resources and mentoring from adult practitioners but engage emotionally with their experiences on their own terms through rap lyrics and music. Both these examples mainly illustrate the importance and effects of relationships based on adults supporting young people and accompanying them in a mutually accepted manner, but retaining the respect to their need for spatial and emotional autonomy (and their interconnectedness – the space where young people can “feel” without being regulated, manipulated or condescended) and the recognition of the uneven power dynamics inherent to the socio-spatial relations between adults and children.

[B] Articulating emotions

The child-centred programmes of research placed children's participation and voices at the forefront of the geographical inquiry. One line of enquiry critical of this tendency addressed the notion of

participation: its instigations and constellations, formulations of the participatory agenda and the relations of participatory modes of work to other forms of practice (Percy-Smith 2010), but also the emotional dynamics of the underlying power relations between adults and children in participatory processes (Jupp Kina 2012). Another line, more explicitly concerned with emotions, focused more on the topic of voice and its deployment in the constructions of the politics of childhood (Mitchell and Elwood 2012; Kraftl 2013), doing so in two distinctive ways.

First, geographers inspired by non-representational theory argued that the world is too messy and excessive for our cognitive competences to fully comprehend and articulate the human experience, particularly its emotional dynamics, and this applies to both adults and children (Horton and Kraftl 2006). Horton (2010) illustrates this argument by showing how the focus on children's views often translates to requesting children to articulate 'meanings' from their experiences and how it overlooks children's difficulties to grasp such meanings of certain elements (such as popular culture), even if it is certain that they do 'matter' for them. Horton and Kraftl (2006) then argue that by overlooking the unspeakable facets of children's emotional experience, geographers not only miss on an important portion of what matters in children's lives (Harker 2005), but they also fail to pay attention to the role of emotions in the governance of childhood (Gagen 2014). Extending the critique, Kallio (2012) asserts that many participatory 'projects that aim explicitly at children's empowerment through voice-giving may unintentionally mask, bury or silence their experiences and views' (82) by failing to approach other modalities of children's experience and reflexivity.

Second, a number of geographers, writing from diverse perspectives, critiqued the voice-centred approaches as marginalising those children who are, in various ways, 'voiceless'. The use of participatory video with children (Waite and Conn 2011; Blazek and Hraňová 2012; Haynes and Tanner 2013) is one example of attending to the subaltern emotional registers that children are not ordinarily expected to display and might wish to express in formats less intelligible to adults, and which they struggle to express with words. Psychoanalytical approaches to children's emotions (Holt

2013; Blazek 2013; Preece 2015) are another body of work more focused on interpreting the importance of some children not speaking or of the meanings of their words not necessarily “matching” their emotions.

The problem of engaging with children’s emotions through the channel of their voiced articulations is one of translation: between the unconscious and the conscious, between embodiment and representation, between children’s and adults’ spatialities, and between the research participants and researchers. Each of these couplets is known to social researchers to some degree, but in the case of children’s emotions, they amalgamate into an extraordinary intersection that highlights the elusiveness of the *meanings* behind children’s words because of the messiness of the *matter*ing behind their emotions. Geographers have shown that emotions are important in and through the diverse spaces of children’s lives, but there are limits to how this importance can be articulated, raising a challenge for methodology.

Comment [S6]: Could you explain this further, for clarity

[B] Method

The socio-political and epistemological distance between children’s emotions and adult accounts of them has profound implications for the methodology of researching spatialities of emotions in children’s lives. Rather than data collection and analysis, the key problems are those of approaching, conceptualising and (re)presenting. Given the importance of the relational intersubjectivity in approaching emotions (Bondi 2005), taking seriously the spatialities of researching children’s emotions is becoming integral and equally important to the very spatialities of those emotions. The imagination of the passive field and the active researcher is entirely devastated (Nash 1994).

Geographers have paid a lot of attention to their own positionalities in the fieldwork with children and on the dynamics of their mutual relationships. For the lack of space, I will mention just four

topics from this area. First, the question of positionality in relation to temporality has been highlighted. Focusing on how positionality exceeds the space and time of fieldwork, Procter (2013) thus writes about the interpretational shifts between experiential moments of emotional encounters and associations logged and surfacing from adult memory. In contrast, Hadfield-Hill and Horton (2014) ponder upon the temporality of the fieldwork itself, highlighting the necessity (rather than a need) to dedicate enough time during the research to reflect on emotions as they are present in instant moments but generate aftermaths and continuations. Second, the researcher's body and the cultural associations of corporeality are instrumental in setting the dynamics in and through which children's emotions can be encountered. Windram-Geddes (2013), for instance, writes about how her body shape created a powerful social scenery next to which girls in her research talked about their fear and repulsion of fatness. Elsewhere, Barker and Smith (2001) as well as Horton (2001) explore the impact of the researcher's gender and gendered body on their reception in spaces occupied by children, on the creation of their status as an insider/outside and on the management of children's expectations. ~~Finally~~Third, discussing the role of the relationships with children, Blazek (2013) draws on Anna Freud's psychoanalysis, suggesting that continuous relationships with children are channels that both convey emotions in the events of the fieldwork and also enable further developments and alternative approaches to children in which emotions can surface in different ways. ~~Finally~~, work with children's emotional geographies reflects Law's (2004) ascertainment that '[m]ethod is not... a more or less successful set of procedures for reporting on a given reality. Rather it is performative. It helps to produce realities' (143). Particularly the limits of representation have been challenged and geographers have focused on more elusive outcomes of doing emotional geographies, other than knowledge intended for presentation and circulation, including everyday practices, personal learning and embodied experience (Pyry 2015; Blazek and Hraňová 2012; Woodyer 2008). In all these four topics, the recognition of emotions as ultimately 'unstable subjects' (Bondi and Davidson 2011: 595) with a lot of importance has been sustained.

Comment [S7]: repetition

Comment [S8]: repetition

[B] Minor policy

The outstanding aim of this chapter is to establish (and problematise) links between the theory and methodology of approaching children's emotions and the dynamics of policy-making and professional practice. Blazek and Kraftl's (2015) recent effort to analyse the 'mattering' of emotions in policy and professional practice with children identifies emotions as an important device of constantly evolving forms of childhood's institutionalisation in the contesting spaces of (predominantly) adult governance. It is beyond the scope of these paragraphs to scrutinise this question in full, but the following sketch serves as a conclusion to this debate by linking together the previous themes of theory and method and by articulating a mobile approach to childhood and children through lens attentive to the spatialities of emotions in children's lives.

Blazek and Kraftl (2015) give a prompt to upscale the mattering of children's emotions into policies and practices regarding childhood and at the same time downscale ~~these two areas~~ policy and practice to come into tangible terms with the presence and effects of emotions, connecting the 'micro' and 'macro' in children's spatialities (Philo and Smith 2003). As Collins and Tymko (2015) show, discourses on social policy and professional practice are framed by narratives of rational organisation which conceals the powerful impact of emotions on the construction of public policy. It is important to reflect on the localisation of emotions and on the spacing of their formation in the context of the governance of childhood, and at the same time to consider policy and practice as fields embedding and converging with emotions at various points. Children's emotions should not be viewed simply as objects or targets of policy and practical efforts, but rather as their elements and media.

This in turn requires reflecting on adult positions towards children in order to appraise the intersubjective relationality of the emotional geographies of childhood. Age has been theorised as a

Comment [S9]: Do you mean policy and practice?

relational category (Pain and Hopkins 2007) and thinking about emotions in and through space gives an opportunity to rethink wider ideas of childhood and how adults position themselves in relation to children. Adults might wish to consider mobile practices diverging from policies or the spatial and emotional autonomy of children as a policy target itself (Blazek and Hricová 2015), or they might need to succumb to the necessity of nourishing and protecting children by intervening in the spaces of childhood and in children's emotional experiences (Horschelmann 2015).

This chapter's narrative linked a number of epistemological, political and methodological dilemmas as they stem from the different positionalities of adults and children, including different ways in which adults and children appropriate, shape, move through and experience space and individual places. My ultimate call is thus for a policy and practical approach that would be engaged with the inevitable elusiveness of children's emotional geographies (the spatial elements of the role of emotions in children's lives), attentive to the ontological, epistemological and political differences between adults and children, and – at the very moral level – sensitive to the very difficulties of being a child (Jones 2013).

Comment [S10]: Seems to end rather abruptly, could you say more about the implications of this call for researchers working with children to understand their emotional experiences?

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