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## Children's experiences of participating in research: emotional moments together?

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This paper reflects upon emotional moments in research with children and young people. In particular, we seek to contribute to the now-extensive literature on emotions in social scientific research practice by: (i) attempting to acknowledge the often-overlooked emotions experienced by children and young people whilst participating in research; (ii) highlighting the complex, multiperspectival nature of emotions in research. We suggest that these complexities can, simultaneously be problematic and an opportunity to celebrate the achievement of doing research *together*.

**Keywords:** children; young people; qualitative research; emotion; GPS

### Preface: the school leavers' song

This is our leavers' song,  
We're proud of what we've done,  
So many happy times we've had,  
So many songs we've sung (Walker 2010, 43).

June 2010. Morning assembly in a primary school in the south-east of England. The final assembly of the school year. Up on stage, the year 6 pupils – most of whom have participated in our research over the last six months – sing the 'school leavers' song' with faltering voices. Several start to cry; groups of pupils hold hands or hug one another. Some wave at members of the audience: at friends, teachers, parents, school staff, us. We're smiling, waving back, eyes prickling . . .

### Introduction

This paper reflects upon emotional moments in research with children and young people. In particular, we seek to contribute to the now-extensive literature on emotions in social scientific research practice (see Greco and Stenner 2008; Gregg and Seigworth 2010) in two ways. First, we shall acknowledge the often-overlooked emotions experienced by children and young people whilst participating in research: as manifest, for example, in the tearful goodbye waves directed at us, the researchers, in the preface. Second, moreover, we shall highlight the always social, relational and distributed nature of affects (see McCormack 2003, 2006; Anderson 2006; Anderson and Harrison 2006), such as those encountered during fieldwork: that is, how feelings can be communicated, reciprocated and distributed across spaces and between individuals

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and collectivities, as in the opening bars of the 'school leavers' song'. We will focus, in particular, on the peculiar ways in which research processes continually constitute affective geographies through conversations, encounters, incidents, practices, and exchanges of material objects.

The paper is divided into four main sections. Section one situates the paper in relation to accounts of reflexivity and positionality, and theorisations of emotion and affect, within social studies of childhood. Here, we note a number of particular, and perhaps somewhat limiting, tendencies relating to the writing of emotion in this important body of work. Section two introduces the ethnographic research project which we reflect upon in this paper, and the specific phase of data collection which was conducted at the end of an extensive period of fieldwork. Section three presents findings from the very final phase of the project, where children were invited to reflect upon their experiences of participating in the research. Here, we are able to consider children's seldom-reported emotional experiences of participating in research itself. In the wake of these data, section four draws together field notes reflecting upon several emotional moments from the research project. In conclusion, we argue for acknowledgement of the complex, multi-perspectival, relational and spatial nature of emotions in research practices.

### **Emotional-affective encounters in social studies of childhood**

Within social scientific accounts of research with children and young people, it has become increasingly commonplace to discuss emotions and/or affects (an important definitional distinction which is outlined below). There are now numerous sociological, geographical, educational and ethnographic studies of children's emotional experiences in diverse contexts (for an overview, see Kraftl 2013) as well as multiple broader theorisations of emotion and affect in relation to childhood, youth and life course transitions (for explicitly geographical examples, see Jones 2005, 2008; Kraftl 2008; Evans 2010). Moreover, there are various reflexive accounts of emotions experienced when conducting research with children and young people (again, for examples written by geographers, see Horton 2008; Anderson and Jones 2009; Horton and Kraftl 2009, 2010; Weller and Caballero 2009). This latter line of enquiry – constituting a burgeoning set of reflections upon emotional encounters in and of research practices – is our immediate concern in this paper.

This heightened focus on emotional moments has emerged from two broad, transdisciplinary turns in social scientific theory and practice. First, as many authors have noted, there has been a significant transition towards reflexivity in research practice (Humphreys 2005; Sultana 2007). In the wake of critiques of positivistic research assumptions and practices, influenced notably by feminist writings and praxis, there has been a proliferation of discussions of researchers' positionalities and relationships encountered during fieldwork (England 1994; Rose 1997; Barker and Smith 2001; Holt 2004; Moser 2008). Postcolonial writings have also contributed to heightening researchers sensitivities to 'the other' in anthropological and ethnographic contexts (Henry 2003; Elie 2006; Sharpe 2009). Reflection upon emotional moments in research has been a key technique in qualitative research (Gilbert 2001; Holland 2009; Davies 2010; Jansson 2010). Recognition that emotions are always 'an essential part of the living texture of the research process' and that 'the researcher is not a distant, neutral observer, but a living, breathing, emotionally engaged participant' has been both a means and end of reflecting upon positionality (Weeks 2009, 5). That is: (i) reflexive, auto-ethnographic and participant observationist research and writing tactics have been a central method in which social scientists have sought to register and reflect upon emotions and affects; (ii) a recurrent outcome of reflexive practices has been a realisation, or acknowledgement, that research is an emotive business involving emotional labour, and that researchers can be passionately, fallibly, vulnerably, or efficaciously emotional in their work (Game and Metcalfe 1996). So, the argument holds that recognition of one's emotional involvement and sensitivity is valuable in anticipating, understanding and analysing research: for, 'accepting one's emotional

disposition and understanding the emotional involvement in the field can be beneficial to how the research is written up and designed for future work' (Briggs 2009, 64) and 'writing emotions into research accounts can facilitate a better understanding of the work undertaken and forms an important part of the process of situating knowledge' (Widdowfield 2000, 205). Emotional moments, encounters and relationships have thus been increasingly written into formalised accounts of research, including, as already mentioned, many recent accounts of research with children and young people.

Second, often related, there has been a significant turn to theorisation of emotion and affect in practically every area of social scientific research (Williams 2001; Bondi, Davidson, and Smith 2005; Svašek 2005). There have been two chief foci in this context. On one hand, there is work focusing upon what are often termed affects: the complex physiological, somatic, neurological states and phenomena which can sometimes be felt and interpreted as 'feelings', but which can otherwise be unsaid, unsayable or unknowable (Thrift 2004; Hardt 2007; Stewart 2007). On the other hand, there is a focus on the processes through which these bodily and neurological states are described and socially constructed through language and cultural norms and practices: in formal terms, the constructs produced via these processes are what are called 'emotions' (Bondi, Davidson, and Smith 2005). The distinction and relationship between 'emotion' and 'affect' – and the political, ethical and semantic problematics of both terms – have been vigorously debated (Pile 2010). This discussion has provided the impetus for a new sensitivity towards emotions and affects in all manner of social scientific research projects, including much recent work with children and young people (Ahn 2010; Meunier 2010; Brown 2011). In this paper, we are less concerned with taking sides in this debate than with exploring how researchers and research participants are able to articulate personal experiences and geographies, in their/our own (problematic, partial, ambivalent, sketchy) words and ways. For reasons that we explain in our conclusion, we use the terms 'emotion/affect' and 'emotional-affective' as we try to think our way through this issue. For although we remain committed to a distinction between emotions and affects, in theory, we think it is important to recognise that most people – including our research participants and us – do not habitually display such a rigid distinction in everyday talk about experiences and 'feelings' (or however we articulate them in practice).

As already noted, one consequence of the turn towards reflexivity and emotion/affect has been a preponderance of reflective accounts of emotions experienced by researchers during fieldwork. Social scientists working with children and young people have been particularly prolific and prominent in this context: perhaps because of the heightened ethical-emotional demands of work with vulnerable younger people (Horton 2001, 2008), or the especially affecting experience of witnessing children's lives, issues and life course transitions (Jones 2008), or a relative openness to qualitative methods and reflexive writing within new social studies of childhood. Such accounts have proved important in constituting a vocabulary and set of reflexive writing practices with which to acknowledge the always-affecting nature of undertaking research. We suggest that they have also constituted an openness to such discussion: a gradual admission that researchers are often vulnerable, fallible, anxious, and in need of support, and that research is often a messy, awkward business, full of angsts, contingencies and imperfections (Horton 2008), which entails a whole set of emotional skills and competences. Moreover, discussions of the 'emotion work' involved in research (Dickinson-Swift et al. 2007) have often been a point of departure for broader theorisations of the affective, bodily nature of all human (including children's) lives, and the ethical-political implications of registering emotion in social scientific research. Furthermore, this attentiveness to emotion/affect in research practice has surely been important in affording the rich array of studies and publications which have recently foregrounded the emotional experiences, transitions and geographies of diverse children, young people and families.

We are keen, therefore, to celebrate the importance of the recent reflexive accounts of emotions encountered in research with children and young people: certainly, such accounts have been deeply influential in our own development as children's geographers. However, this paper is written from concern with two recurring, limiting tendencies within this body of work. As we will outline, these tendencies are understandable (and perhaps ultimately unavoidable): but, still, they seem to us to have gone relatively un-noted. First, we suggest that there is a tendency for reflexive accounts to focus only, or primarily, upon emotions experienced or witnessed by the adult researcher(s) themselves. This is quite understandable: an inevitable consequence of reflexive writing practices which privilege, and develop valuable insights from, critical self-reflection, and of systems of academic publication which overwhelmingly decentre the perspectives of research participants (Rose 1997; Bondi 2005). However, it seems to us remarkable that children and young people's perspectives and emotions whilst participating in research have gone relatively unrecorded (though see Christensen 2004; Christensen and James 2000, 2008 for work with the reflective practices of younger people). As others have noted (Holt 2004; Hill 2006), this tendency is surely particularly problematic in disciplinary contexts, where there have otherwise been concerted efforts to explore children and young people's emotions and opinions about research topics, and to grant them voice and participatory agency. Second, we suggest that there is a broader issue, relating to the way in which emotion is conceived and written: an implicit tendency to understand emotions as belonging to the individual researcher, and as readily knowable, capture-able, and represent-able through their acts of writing. Undoubtedly, this concern gestures towards an intractable problem of representation - the inevitable gap between feelings and the words used to describe them (Thrift 1997; Harrison 2007) - which should not dissuade anyone from attempting to write, discuss, share and support one-another in, the affecting busy-ness of research. However, we suggest that there is mismatch between the way in which emotions/affects are written in empirical studies of children and young people in particular communities, issues or spaces vis-à-vis the way they are written in reflexive accounts of research encounters with children and young people. In the former context, we note that there have been many rich, multiperspectival accounts giving some sense of the complex, social relational constitution of emotions/affects by communities in particular spaces, materials, landscapes and moments (e.g. Jones 2005; Jupp 2008). In the latter context, however, we suggest that emotions/affects tend to be written in a more one-dimensional manner: as individualised, more readily write-able experiences. As a number of critics have noted (Ahmed 2004; Davies 2010), the turn towards emotion/affect in social sciences appears to have resulted in a huge selection of accounts of emotions, which somehow fail to get to the heart of the matter, and which actually present relatively circumscribed accounts of researchers' states of being.

### **Introduction to research project**

This paper presents data deriving from a large-scale mixed-method research project exploring children and young people's everyday lives in new urban developments in the south-east of England (see acknowledgements for details). Table 1 summarises the key research methods conducted with 123 9–16-year-olds in two of our four case study communities during 2010–2011. Participants were recruited for the study via local schools, youth groups, community events and word-of-mouth. Young people could opt-in to the elements of the research in which they wanted to participate: most took part in all of the research activities. In addition, members of the research team conducted participant observation in the communities; being involved in activities with local schools, youth groups and community organisations. Throughout the project, observations and encounters were written-up in the form of ethnographic field notes: field notes were taken on a

Table 1. Overview of wider research project discussed in this paper.

Participant observation	30 weeks of observation in each case study community: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• participant observation whilst working in local schools, youth groups, community events and everyday spaces;</li> <li>• author 1 kept continuous fieldwork diary during this period; other members of research team took additional, more sporadic, field notes.</li> </ul>
Four semi-structured interviews	123 young people participated in a programme of up to four interviews: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• interviews were conducted either one-to-one or with friendship groups at schools, youth groups, community events or public spaces within each community;</li> <li>• interviews covered the following themes: everyday spaces and routines; mobility and risk; citizenship and participation; sustainability;</li> <li>• at the end of the programme of interviews, 29 young people (aged 9–13) from one of the communities agreed to complete a pilot questionnaire about their emotions during the research.</li> </ul>
Guided walks	44 of the young people led researchers on tours of key spaces within each community: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• guided walks were led by individuals or friendship groups, recruited via in-depth interviews;</li> <li>• conversations were recorded and participants took photographs en-route;</li> <li>• a GPS device was used to log the route of the guided walk.</li> </ul>
GPS activities	90 of the young people participated in a week long GPS activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants were given a GPS device for one week to record daily mobility patterns;</li> <li>• Participants responded to text messages three times a day, answering specific questions about their mobility at that moment;</li> <li>• Participants took part in an interview post-GPS week, to discuss maps produced via the GPS activities.</li> </ul>

daily basis by the first author; other members of the research team also kept field notes (albeit more sporadically) over the course of the project.

The following sections present data from two specific elements of the research project. Section three presents findings from the final element of the programme of semi-structured interviews: a sample of participants was invited to complete a detailed, reflective questionnaire survey about their emotions during the research project. The questionnaire consisted of open questions asking participants to write about any time(s) during the research when they felt: happy; frustrated; jealous; sad; embarrassed; worried; excited; annoyed; unhappy; nervous and cared for. The questionnaire largely consisted of open questions where participants could elaborate upon their feelings in relation to these prompt words (after Plutchik 1980). The prompt words were chosen on the basis that they had previously been used by research participants, in different contexts, during the research project and they appeared to be widely understood by this cohort of participants. The questionnaire was piloted in two contexts: (i) a class of primary school pupils, at the end of the school day, on the last day of the summer term; (ii) a community centre, with a group of Girl Guides. Section 3 reports on the findings of this pilot survey. In total twenty-nine participants (four males and twenty-five females, aged 9–13) opted to complete the questionnaire: most took time to complete it in considerable detail. While questionnaires may be considered a blunt and problematic tool in research on emotions (Thrift 1997, 2004), a survey was deemed to be appropriate in this instance because: (i) participants were able to reflect on the questions in their own time, instead of being asked the questions in a face-to-face interview scenario, whereby they may feel restricted in uncovering their emotional experiences; (ii) participants were able to choose

where they wanted to complete the survey (some went into another room, some lay on the floor, others sat at a desk); (iii) the survey was anonymous, so the participants could write down their emotional experiences without being overlooked by others present in the classroom (participants were asked to place their completed survey in a pile in the corner of the classroom or community centre hall).

Section four draws together field-note reflections upon some particular emotional moments in the research project. By juxtaposing different field notes (see also Cloke et al. 2000), and considering them alongside the young people's perspectives in Section 3, we develop some sense of how particular emotional moments were experienced and shared by different people, and were complexly constituted. In our discussions of emotion and the emotional sensitivities of our research respondents, it is important not to forget the intersecting positionalities of these bodies in their interactions as well as the situational and cultural variations in showing emotion. Gender for example, has surfaced in much of the emotion literature, investigating how the different sexes control, rationalise and express feeling (Fischer 2000). At several moments in this paper, we comment on gendered positionalities and the role this has had on shaping the research, and indeed the paper. In our conclusion, we consider some practical lessons for researchers, and broader conceptual challenges, arising from these juxtapositions.

### **Children's experiences of participating in the research project**

Tables 2 and 3 present analyses of findings from the survey of participants' reflections upon emotions felt during the research. The following discussion of participants' responses to the open questions of the survey suggest some of the themes, experiences and complexities which characterised young people's responses to the somewhat bare prompt words used to name emotions in the questionnaire. For example, Table 2 summarises experiences and incidents when participants reportedly felt 'happy', 'excited' and 'cared for' during the research process. While, in some cases, it is not possible to discern exactly why participants felt this way, or what exactly they meant by 'happy', 'excited' or 'cared for', many responses do reveal a little of young people's emotions during the research process.

The majority of participants reported that they had felt happy, excited and cared for at some point during the research process, and it was evident from their responses that: (i) different young people experienced these emotions at different moments in the research project; (ii) the labels

Table 2. When research participants felt 'happy', 'excited' and 'cared for' during the research project.

When participants felt this emotion	Happy	Excited	Cared for
During interviews	12	9	–
During GPS activities	8	12	2
When felt that I was helping/caring	3	–	2
All the time during research	2	4	2
When working with friends during research	2	1	–
When interacting with researcher (author 1)	1	–	9
When doing community walk	–	1	–
When researcher asked my opinion	–	–	5
When given opportunity to take part in research	–	–	3
Never	1	–	1
Not sure	–	–	2
No response	–	2	2
Total	29	29	29

Table 3. Some other emotions experienced by participants during the research project.

When participants felt this emotion	Frustrated	Jealous	Sadness	Embarrassed	Worried	Unhappy	Annoyed	Nervous
During GPS activities	11	1	2	3	3	–	5	1
When missed a lesson due to research	1	1	1	–	–	–	–	–
During interviews	1	–	–	–	4	–	1	9
When research ended	–	–	4	–	–	3	–	–
When interacting with researcher (author 1)	–	–	–	3	–	–	–	–
Discussing problems in community	1	–	1	–	–	1	–	–
When talking about personal matters	–	–	1	–	–	–	–	–
When unsure what research would involve	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1
Never	10	19	13	17	12	16	15	11
Not sure	–	1	1	–	1	1	–	1
No response	4	7	6	6	9	8	8	6
Total	29	29	29	29	29	29	29	29

‘happy’, ‘excited’ and ‘cared for’ were used to denote some quite diverse experiences. For example, two-fifths of participants reportedly felt ‘happy’ when participating in semi-structured interviews. However, we note that happiness was actually articulated in several subtly different ways, in relation to different aspects of being interviewed. For some, happiness related to the moment of being invited to participate in an interview:

- I felt happy when ... I was called into the interviews
- I felt happy when ... I was called for my first interview
- I felt happy when ... I was waiting [in the classroom] to be sent to the interview

Other young people described their happiness in terms of the actual process of being interviewed. The process of being asked, and ‘successfully’ answering, questions was evidently itself a cause for satisfaction for a number of participants:

- I felt happy when ... I got asked questions
- I felt happy when ... I successfully answered the [interview] questions

For some participants, this happiness specifically related to the opportunity to talk about their local community and everyday lives. Sometimes, this happiness related to a sense of raising important issues, ‘getting involved’ and ‘help[ing] other people understand about young people’s life’:

- I felt happy when ... we were doing the interviews because you got an opportunity to talk about the community
- I felt happy when ... They [researchers] asked about where you live
- I felt happy when ... we talked about how we could help and getting involved
- I felt happy when ... help[ed] other people understand about young people’s life

For other young people, the happiness of participating in interviews primarily related to the time and space afforded to spend time doing focused activities with small groups of friends:



I felt happy when ... My friends were doing the interviews with me  
I felt happy when ... I was doing the interview with my friend  
I felt happy when ... working in our group

As noted in Table 2, most participants responded to the prompts 'I was excited when' or 'I was happy when' by writing about GPS activities during the research project. Although this activity was a relatively small component of the research project (see Table 1), it was evidently especially memorable and affecting for research participants. Again, here we note that several forms or events of happiness and excitement were evident in young people's responses to the survey when recalling the GPS activities. Their happiness variously related to the experience of receiving the GPS device, viewing the cartographic products of the activity, or working with peers and the research team to learn how to use GPS technology (see also field notes 5 and 6):

I felt happy when ... having a go at the GPS  
I felt happy when ... I was walking around with a GPS and a phone to school and back.  
I felt happy when ... using the GPS and getting a map at the end  
I felt happy when ... other people doing the GPS were helping me

Likewise, excitement in relation to the GPS could relate to holding the GPS equipment, learning about GPS technologies, or the quality and detail of GPS maps showing their everyday mobilities:

I felt excited when ... I held the GPS  
I felt excited when ... I had GPS out of school  
I felt excited when ... I went out with my GPS (Global Positioning Satellite)  
I was excited when ... I was shown my fab map

Participants were also asked to reflect upon feeling 'cared for'. As noted in Table 2, most participants indicated that they had felt 'cared for' at some point during the research, and most of these responses specifically related to different kinds of encounters with the research team (especially author 1). For some, the feeling of care related to time spent simply being-with the ('kind and friendly') researcher:

I felt cared for ... every time I was with [author 1]  
I felt cared for ... when [author 1] was leading us  
I felt cared for ... [author 1] was really kind and friendly  
I felt cared for ... when [author 1] came in to see us

Other participants specifically linked their feeling of being-cared-for to the experience of being listened-to by researchers. Some appreciated the opportunity to talk about their everyday lives and personal experiences; others valued being listened-to, in a broader sense, in terms of having the opportunity to voice young people's local issues and needs with adults who might be able to 'help':

I felt cared for ... when [author 1] listened to me.  
I felt cared for ... when [author 1] would listen to me all the time  
I felt cared for ... the researchers listened to us ... talking about improving [name of community]

Several participants also identified specific moments during the research when they felt cared for by researchers and peers assisting them with particular technical or logistical challenges (see discussion of Table 3):

I felt cared for... when I messed up and [author 1]... helped me sort it out  
 I felt cared for... people helped me with GPS

Table 3 summarises experiences and incidents when participants reportedly felt 'frustrated', 'jealous', 'sad', 'embarrassed', 'worried', 'unhappy', 'annoyed' or 'nervous' during the research process. In each case, most participants indicated that they had never experienced this emotion during the research, or provided a blank response to the question. However, it was notable that occurrences of these emotions tended to be related to participants' experiences of a few specific aspects of the project.

First, for example, most of the emotions listed in Table 3 were experienced in relation to the GPS activities. Although, as already noted, GPS activities were generally considered 'exciting' they could simultaneously cause frustration, annoyance, worry or embarrassment. Many of these frustrations and anxieties were occasioned by small technical and logistical challenges with the GPS survey. Although the project team worked constantly to support young people during the survey, and address these challenges, it is clear that some enduring frustrations had resulted from malfunctioning GPS devices and having to wait for devices to be handed out. In the following section of this paper, we develop some further discussion of emotions relating to this part of the project.

I felt frustrated when... GPS wouldn't switch on 1st time  
 I felt frustrated when... I was texting for the first time and when it needed a...code  
 I felt frustrated when... it kept locking [when] trying to use the GPS  
 I felt jealous when... people had the GPS before me

A further set of frustrations and anxieties related to the interruption of everyday life and normative behaviours via participation in the GPS activities. Some young people related their frustration at the everyday work involved in participating in the GPS activities. Several young people also described feelings of embarrassment at having to carry or wear a GPS device when with friends or 'in public':

I felt frustrated when... I had to clip the GPS on and lock the phone  
 I felt frustrated when... I had to keep remembering to wear the GPS and turn it off  
 I felt frustrated when... having to clip the GPS onto everything  
 I felt embarrassed when... I was a little worried people would talk about me behind my back about the GPS.  
 I felt embarrassed when... I went out in public with a device on me  
 I felt embarrassed when... I was talking and the GPS [beeped]

Second, several participants reported feeling nervous or worried in relation to some particular aspects of semi-structured interviews. Some recalled feeling worried prior to, and at the beginning of, the first interview, particularly because of a sense they 'didn't know what was going to happen next'.

I was worried when... [author 1] was taking me out for my first interview, I thought I was in trouble  
 I was worried when... nervous at my first interview  
 I was worried when... it was my first interview... I didn't know what was going to happen next

Others recalled nervousness at the prospect of being recorded during interviews (although all gave prior and ongoing consent to the interviews being recorded); for some, this compounded broader anxieties about speaking in front of adults and/or peers, particularly on personal topics.

I felt nervous when . . . I was on the tape and what I would sound like on the tape  
I felt nervous when . . . I was being tape recorded (at first, when I got used to it, it was fine)  
I felt nervous when . . . I was talking  
I felt embarrassed when . . . I talked about my family life

For a few young people, the topics discussed during interviews had prompted a certain degree of sadness and frustration, particularly in relation to ongoing social and political issues within the local community.

I felt unhappy when . . . I found out about the horrible things in [name of community]  
I felt sad when . . . I knew about what was going wrong in the village/country  
I felt frustrated when . . . I knew not everywhere in the village cares as much about helping

Third, a number of young people recalled sadness at the ending of the research project, and particular milestones relating to this ending.

I felt sad when . . . it ended and I had to give the GPS back  
I felt sad when . . . the project stopped  
I felt sad when . . . the project was coming to an end  
I felt sad when . . . it was the last interview

In the following section, we effectively juxtapose these data with our own reflections of and around these same research practices and encounters. In so doing, we will explore the multiperspectival and complexly distributed nature of these emotional experiences. Before proceeding, however, let us draw out five realisations from the data in Tables 2 and 3. First, we find it striking – and heartening, and in some ways surprising – that so many participants reported strong feelings of happiness, excitement and care in and of the research project. It can be easy to forget, or not really appreciate, the considerable energy and generosity of research participants, and their feelings of happiness, excitement and care in participating in research. Their descriptions of these feelings should prompt us to register the particular value which children and young people can care about researchers and research projects: if nothing else, this should renew children’s geographers’ commitment to do justice to this degree of emotional engagement in our research projects.

Second, it is evident from the preceding discussion about GPS technology that brief technical and logistical challenges in research projects can cause significant annoyance or disappointment for young people (see also Christensen et al. 2011). As researchers working within a large, multi-method project, these moments had passed us by, and were accepted as just part and parcel of the socio-technical achievement of any research project. However, for young people reflecting on the experiences, these disappointments and embarrassments appeared to be keenly felt, six months later. In hindsight, we can recognise that we tended to treat these challenges as problems to be quickly and instrumentally fixed: and that such an adultist problem-solving approach can often not fully recognise, or respond to, young people’s feelings of concern and vulnerability (Christensen 1998, 2000). Indeed, third, it should be pointed out that at least some of the emotional experiences reported above were not especially registered by researchers at the time: for example, to our regret, here and now, some of the reported angst about the first interview was not detected, there and then. Fourth, it is evident that the event of ending a research project can be an emotional, upsetting and troubling moment for some young people (and researchers too). The issue of leaving the field has been widely discussed by ethnographers but, we would argue, applies equally to many other forms of research encounter. There is an ethical question here which we have not fully resolved: if close qualitative research creates the potential for research participants

to be saddened when research ends, is our responsibility as researchers to modulate and modify research practices to preclude such sadness, or is a certain degree of sadness and disappointment acceptable?

Fifth, we acknowledge some degree of awkwardness around the naming and labelling of emotions. We recognise that Tables 2 and 3 posit a bare summary of survey responses, and that questionnaire responses can only produce limited verbalisations of emotional experiences. However, we suggest that the responses do prompt us to acknowledge young people's emotional encounters in/of our research practices: in so doing, they also challenge us (as academic researchers) to enact more generosity towards the necessarily imperfect and problematic lexicon of terms and concepts which are used (by us, by young people, by diverse publics) to denote emotions.

### **Several perspectives: Emotional moments *together*?**

When reflecting upon emotional moments in our field notes, we were initially drawn to moments such as the singing of the school leavers' song (see preface): moments which were simultaneously experienced by all involved, which were obviously, memorably and dramatically emotional, and which were readily narrate-able as such. In short, we were drawn to singular events where something clearly emotional had happened to us, together. We make this admission because it seems to us that this lure of the clearly emotional is evident in many other authors' reflexive accounts of research, and might be traced to three broader tendencies in accounts of qualitative social scientific research. First, there is a tendency (critiqued by Dewsbury 2000; Bassett 2008) for social scientists to reproduce particular, limited understandings of events: via habits of writing and knowing which portray particular events as neat, singular and compactly, reassuringly knowable, and overlook the considerably complex, contingent socio-technical processes through which stuff happens in practice. Second, as already noted, it is often the case that social scientists (re)produce understandings of emotions as, again, neatly, singularly, reassuringly, self-evidently knowable and representable (as critiqued by Anderson and Harrison 2006). Third, as Valentine (2008) argues, social scientists often reproduce some particular assumptions about collectivities and togetherness: often valorising experiences which are clearly shared, encounters which are clearly meaningful, relationships which are duly representable. We recognise each of these tendencies in our initial urge to write about clearly emotional moments such as the singing of the school leavers' song. However, through the following discussion and juxtaposition of field notes, we develop a sense that emotional moments in research are not always so dramatic, singular or communal as our prefatory example.

Just as young people described being interviewed as a 'happy' experience (see Table 2), we can identify in our field notes a sense of quiet contentment with the process of conducting many interviews during the project. As in the following field note (1) and interview transcript, this contentment became particularly noteworthy at moments where researchers and research participants were engaged in collaborative co-construction of knowledge about the case study communities: in this instance, through pointing at maps and jointly reading the local landscape and geography at the beginning of an interview. Moments such as these can feel rather unmemorable and low key in hindsight, even though they were characteristic of large swathes of the research project. It is striking that these crucial, recurring moments are forgettable to us, here and now, certainly in comparison to the one-off event of the school leavers' song: indeed, we are left feeling that we have somehow forgotten the background emotional experience of most of our research practice of the last three years. We also note that the evidence of these kinds of moments (for example the transcript 'I just remembered, yeah'... 'ah, there you go!') rarely ends up becoming central to our analyses and publications.

*Fieldnote 1. 'Just remembered, yeah'... 'ah, there you go': discussion around a GPS map*

(Author 1) Soon after the GPS activities, we conducted GPS interviews, using a laptop, Google Earth and the children's GPS tracks to produce maps for discussion. Almost all the children and young people expressed excitement at this, being able to zoom in and see their weekly movement was hugely beneficial to this interview process. It was a collaborative task, looking at a place in a different dimension, and researcher and participant working out together where the participant had been during the week (some young people had difficulty remembering). Reading the map together, to jog the memory of the young person, as to where they had been, who they were with and how they got there was a collaborative process:

Researcher 1: *Did you drive there [points], to BP [garage]? [Researcher could see from GPS tracks that participant had been there]*

Participant: *Yeah, I just remembered, yeah.*

Researcher 1: *Did you have to get petrol before you went down to?*

Participant: *No.*

Researcher 1: *No?*

Participant: *No, because we went in my Nan's car because my stepdad was at work, so we went with my Nan and she needed, and my mum, needed to go and get some, a cake for my Nan.*

Researcher 2: *At Sainsbury's [researcher could also see that participant had been to Sainsbury's super-market]*

Researcher 2: *Oh, looks like you've been in the car park [points this out to the participant]*

Participant: *In Sainsbury's, oh we went to...the cash machine.*

Researcher 1: *Ah, there you go!*

Participant: *Because first we had to go because this was before the fête, we had to, we went to the BP to go and get some cash but there was none so...my mum went into BP to get something for my Nan and then we went to Sainsbury's to, and then there was cash in there, so.*

Juxtaposing each other's field notes also reveals how emotional events are rarely as neatly synchronous as the singing of the school song. Instead, we can identify countless examples of how emotional events impacted on each of us, and the young people with whom we worked, at different times and places. Consider the field notes below (2 and 3), recording our respective feelings of joyful curiosity at learning about a site-specific play practice. Here – in our learning from young people's longer-standing knowledge, and in our subsequent, asynchronous telling of this quirk of the built environment to others – we note the often extended duration of emotional events. Emotional events in research can thus be extended and re-presented, in all sorts of ways, by different individuals at different moments.

*Field notes 2 and 3. Discovering the 'echo in the square'*

(Author 1) The girls spent several minutes talking to each other about the areas they wanted to show me. They decided that they would take me to Colette's area first. Whilst walking across the Square, the girls wanted to show me the amplification and acoustics of the landscape. If you stand directly in the centre of the Square and talk normally, the sound is amplified. I have learnt something new today!

(Author 2) I'd often seen children standing in the middle of the Square, appearing to shout upwards, but I'd never really guessed what they were doing. Then [Author 1] showed me while we were walking around, learning how to use the GPS devices. A group of children had showed her the secret of the echo in the Square last week, and she said she'd been looking forward to demonstrating. If you stand in the middle of the Square and start talking, there is a weird, echo-y acoustic effect, which makes your voice sound loud... It feels like a privilege to be in on this secret knowledge... We had good fun showing this to [another researcher], shouting 'I love GPS'!... I showed the echo to my parents when they visited... When I took a group of geography students around [the community] I got them to stand in the middle of the square and say 'I love Geography'!

Field note 4, is an example of an emotional moment triggered by the research content. It shows how, during a peer group interview about 'citizenship and participation' ultimately the subject matter raised by other research participants can initiate negative emotions of fellow participants. During this peer group interview, one of the girls talked about people who smoke; this then stimulated sadness in one of the participants and worry in the researcher, as she did not know what had 'upset' the participant (evident from his change in bodily comportment).

*Field note 4, Peer group emotions*

*Extract from interview*

Amy: ... and my mum and dad don't smoke, my next door neighbours don't smoke, nobody up my street smokes or swears ...

(Author 1) Wayne began the interview by joining in and looking interested, however, he then changed and looked sad for the rest of the interview. After the interview I felt I should talk to Wayne to see if he was ok. I asked if there was anything he was sad about. He immediately said yes. He said that during the interview Jane and Emma had said that smoking and swearing was something that only bad people do [this was his interpretation of the quote above, in the context of the discussion]. He then reflected on this and said that both of his parents smoke and swear. I asked Wayne if he wanted to let his teacher know that he was upset, his response was '50/50' and then he said 'yes.' Together, we went and found the teacher and sat in one of the offices. Wayne explained what had happened. The teacher comforted him by saying that not all people who smoke are bad. However, he did not really address the swearing issue. Wayne went out of the meeting happier. The teacher said that he would keep an eye on him, he commented that Wayne is a sensitive child. You could tell that Wayne had been thinking about what happened in the interview – it had upset him.

Juxtaposing our field notes with young people's perspectives suggests how emotions in research are complexly distributed via the socio-technical achievement of doing research. For example, we note how many diverse emotional moments were mediated and interlinked by the task of distributing GPS devices to young people. In the following extracts (Field notes 5 and 6), we note how the black box of the GPS device serves as a point of articulation for stress, embarrassment, fascination, care, urgency, excitement at different moments.

*Field notes 5 and 6. The logistical/technical achievement of GPS activities*

(Author 1) I sat in the bus stop at 7:50 and waited for the young people to arrive ... there was soon a huddle of young people around me. I was quite strategic in my approach, going through the instructions and efficiently handing out the devices [the bus was coming!] Just as the bus arrived, three more young people turned up with consent forms ... I quickly explained the situation to the bus driver, he let me on ... from the front of the bus I was able to go through the instructions and hand out the GPS equipment. By the time the bus pulled into the school car park, I was ready, all the devices had been handed out ... briefly I explained about the battery changes and checked the numbers of the devices, correlating with their names ... it was a stressful start to the morning, but all in all a good experience [for authors 1 and 2]

(Author 1) Young people were keen to comment on receiving and using the GPS technology and bodily interactions of using the equipment and subsequent emotional reactions. The participants commented that through taking part in the GPS Week, their emotions ranged from happiness and excitement through to frustration, jealousy and worry. One female participant, aged 11, commented that she ... felt happy when she was walking around with the GPS; excited when she had the GPS and phone; frustrated, when she had to remember to wear the device; sad and annoyed, when she could not use the phone because it had been blocked; and cared for, with she received the texts as part of the GPS week. Other participants expressed worry about the technology and the potential of damaging it when under their responsibility ... In order for the GPS week to be a success, it involved a great deal of organisation on the part of the researcher; in terms of distributing the GPS and mobile

phone devices, making sure all participants knew how to operate them, mid-week changes of batteries and daily reminders to remind the participants to take their devices home from school. The same goes for the young people, in the post-GPS interview, the participants talked about the organisation involved in taking part, the slight changes which they had to make to their everyday routines, to remember the GPS. For the success of the study, it relied on both the researcher being organised, but also it relied on the participant remembering and caring about the study and the device.

We have already recognised (see previous section) that considering children's perspectives on research can reveal how differently researchers and participants can feel during research, and how we can sometimes be essentially oblivious to the feelings of research participants. In our field notes, we find numerous mismatches between the emotional experiences of us, as researchers, and the young people with whom we have worked. In the following examples, we note the mutual otherness of adults' and young people's experiences. In field note 7, compare author 1's rising panic versus young people's playful enjoyment. While we detect echoes, here and in several similar scenarios, of Jones' (2001) discussions of the mutual otherness of adults and younger people, it is important to note that our field notes also contain numerous suggestions of emotional mismatches between adult members of the research team.

*Field note 7. Playful children and panicking researcher!*

(Author 1) [On guided walks] given the reversal of power and decision-making, on several occasions I felt like I was being 'naughty' or pushed into things that ordinarily I would not do. The girls wanted to . . . cross over the large [drainage channel] . . . I was worried, not that I would fall and hurt myself, but that the girls would . . . We then had to cut through a patch of stinging nettles. I was again worried; Sarah had cropped trousers with ankle socks, leaving her lower leg exposed to the nettles. Fortunately, she managed to manoeuvre through the area without getting stung. . . The script below is taken from this guided walk; the worry from the researcher is apparent (feeling the responsibility of making sure the young people get home safely), what does not come across in the written form is the playful, adventurous tone of the young people's voices, they were clearly enjoying this experience. This shared experience of a particular space elicited very different feelings for the researcher and the participants. The panic in my voice is also much clearer when playing back the tape!

Researcher 1: *What we have to go over there do we?*

Participant 1: *Yeah it is fine*

Researcher 1: *But isn't it all wet down there?*

Participant 2: *No*

Researcher 1: *Be careful, don't fall*

Participant 1: *We'll blame it all on you [Author 1]! . . .*

Participant 2: *It's not sloppy down here, it's just long grass*

Researcher 1: *Oh, they have got stinging nettles down here . . . mind the stinging nettles . . . mind your ankles!*

Participant 2: *Run* [pushing participant 1 whilst running]

Researcher 1: *Don't push her, because her ankles aren't covered . . . careful*

Finally, in our field notes, there is recognition that the emotions experienced during fieldwork are seldom just emotions-about-research. We are never just researchers, just doing research and our participants are not just participants in research. There were numerous examples of emotions-not-about-research which surfaced through the interactions researchers had with the communities, families and participants, two notable examples of these are shown below (Field notes 8 and 9). In the second of these two examples, the outpouring of excitement which the family showed in providing updates of their latest news was touching, special in the context of the relationship and discussions which had developed between the family and author 1 during the course of the fieldwork.

*Field notes 8 and 9, Reassuring and moments together*

(Author 1) This morning I was spending time observing the Year 6 class, at the moment they are preparing for their SAT exams. You can feel the pressure in the classroom, this morning there were three consecutive tests; practice, practice, practice. After lunch the teacher handed back their marks from the morning paper; there were some smiles and some tears. I went to collect a book from the library and on my way back Elicia was sitting crouched behind one of the book cases, she looked like she wanted to talk. She burst into tears, she had dropped four marks in her paper (although still got the highest marks in the class), she was distraught. We chatted for a while, I tried to reassure her; after a chat and a tissue, she said thank you and went back to class.

(Author 1) Today I visited Colette's house to drop off her participant certificate (for taking part in the project). I was feeling somewhat sad as this might be the last time I see Colette and her family. The family was not expecting me. I was invited into the living room where the whole family congregated. I chatted to Colette and handed over the certificate, what happened next though was extremely touching. One by one, with an air of excitement, the other family members told me their latest news. Her brother, aged 8, told me with pride that he had been picked for the cricket team; her 16 year old sister (who has previously had problems at school) ran upstairs and bought down her photography portfolio to show me. Then Colette's mum also explained that things were looking up for her, she had recently started a new job.

Through the juxtaposition of researchers' field notes with extracts from interview material, we have shown that emotions in research emerge from being and working together. In this paper, we have sought to go beyond acknowledging how emotions-about-research can seep into all aspects of researchers' lives (a now well-documented aspect of doing research). By contrast, we suggest that the implications of other emotions for research processes have gone relatively unsaid.

Here it is appropriate to acknowledge the role that gender may have had in the performance and production of emotion/affect. In some respects, we find it difficult to make definitive statements about the 'impact' of gender. As has been evident in the preceding field notes, author 1 developed strong, sensitive and emotive attachments to the families and communities with which she worked, but we find we want to be cautious about drawing neat conclusions about gender from this fact. Reflections about gender are invariably complicated by intersecting factors (social class, ethnicity, personality, sensitivity, research and communication skills, experiences, knowledge and time spent in the community) which have, themselves a complex relationship to gender. Nevertheless, there were clearly moments in the research when gender mattered. In the presentation of the survey discussed in section three, for example, only four of the twenty-nine participants were male. The gender imbalance was largely stimulated by the teacher in her introduction to the session: *'for those of you who want to complete the survey you can stay in the classroom, for the rest of you, you can go outside and play football.'* As soon as 'football' was given as the alternative to the survey, there was a mass exodus of males. Here, then, the framing of research became gendered in the positioning of football as an alternative to research (almost certainly anticipating that males would prefer football, and females would prefer to assist the female researcher). But then again, we find we cannot be sure: when one considers the complex, multiple emotional-affective moments in research, we suggest that clear statements about positionality become increasingly elusive and complicated, and we reflect on this elusiveness further in our conclusion.

**An ending: emotional moments together**

We began this paper with an event which we remembered as the 'most' emotional – and the most *self-evidently* and consensually emotional – moment of our research project. However, over the course of the paper, we have come to critique our impulse to write, first and foremost, about this



kind of emotional event. Emotions in research are rarely as dramatic, neatly bounded and conveniently-narrate-able as the emotive ceremony of the ‘School Leavers’ Song’. As we have suggested, emotions in research are frequently low key, complexly distributed and extended through all manner of processes, incidents and encounters. Crucially, they are also experienced differently by different individuals, as is clear from the juxtaposed perspectives of participants and researchers in this paper. In conclusion, we are pulled in two (quite differently emotional) directions by this latter realisation. On one hand, like many other researchers who have reflected upon emotions in research, we worry about the emotional mismatches and asymmetries evident throughout this paper. Even as researchers committed to participatory practice, even after working closely and continuously with these young people for the best part of a year, even after working closely with each other for three years. . . these kinds of emotional asymmetries are still evident, and compound other forms of difference (most notably the power asymmetry between adult researchers and younger research participants). The survey outlined in section three of this paper has proved useful in sensitising us to children’s emotional experiences of research itself: and particularly the ways in which these emotions can sometimes be underestimated or overlooked by adult researchers. As one of us reflected in field note 10, acknowledging children’s emotions in research can prompt a series of ‘practical and logistical’ amendments to research practices.

*Field note 10. ‘Practical and logistical points’*

(Author 1) Below are a series of practical and logistical points which the survey [discussed in Section 3] has raised in terms of thinking about the emotional sensitivities of our participants when conducting qualitative research and working children, young people and technologies.

- Increasingly in this age where children and young people are using cameras and other technological equipment for research purposes, as researchers we need to be more sensitive towards the potential stress this could cause the research participant (in terms of them caring for the equipment).
- When participants are asked to use technological devices, they may be frustrated (if they don’t work properly or they do not know how to use it), this could lead to the participant disengaging with the research. As researchers, we need to offer significant training, advice sessions (for children and their parents if required) and make sure we are contactable to answer any questions.
- When using GPS devices in research, we as researchers need to be aware of the potential embarrassment the participant may feel, wearing the device. We could consider using smaller, more discrete devices.
  - The survey reminds us of the role of the researcher in making our participants feel at ease in interview situations, being sympathetic and showing empathy are key characteristics.
  - As researchers we often talk and write about the emotions experienced in leaving the field, ending a period of fieldwork and relationships with our participants. This research has shown that some of our participants may also feel sad and unhappy at this time; perhaps we as researchers should talk more about this process (more than we currently do), with the children and young people, our participants.

On the other hand, though, reflecting upon the multiperspectival nature of emotions in our research project feels almost like an affirmation of the achievement of doing research. When working on a research project, we rarely pause to appreciate just how much is going on and being done. Reflecting on the field notes and data selected for this paper, it seems remarkable just how much activity and emotion is involved in doing (this and any) research. There are so many processes, moments and encounters; on buses, in school buildings, reading maps, negotiating nettles, during interviews, distributing GPS devices, in families’ homes – so many emotions, and so many individuals co-constructing them and acting in relation to them. Given all this, and especially given the emotional asymmetries noted above, it seems remarkable that research can happen at all: it is always, already a complex achievement and, of course, we probably knew

this all along. For this reason, too, we find it difficult to derive neat statements about positionality from our reflections.

Elsewhere in our field notes, we find reminders that emotional events are rarely over in an instant, but can haunt and return to us over an extended period. As other reflexive accounts of research have noted (Game and Metcalfe 1996; Rose 1997), emotional events can continue, and we can remain affected by research, long afterwards and in spaces distant from one's field site; as too can our participants. Through a focus on the multiperspectival, relational and spatial nature of these emotions, encountered by multiple bodies and actors in our research, we have attempted to reflect back upon extant literature about affects and emotions. As we noted at the outset, we have found ourselves using the terms 'emotion/affect' and 'emotional-affective' – rather than maintaining a strict separation of emotion and affect. This is in acknowledgement that: (i) even as academic researchers who care about the important distinction between emotion and affect, we find it difficult to separate the two when we think and, particularly, write about our own experiences; (ii) while we may agree, in theory, with the eschewal of subject-centred logic which characterises most concepts of affect, we still find that we (i.e. both us and our research participants) talk, write and think in subject-centred ways about feelings and experiences in practice; (iii) when research participants – and we – try to make any kind of statement about feelings during research, the result invariably contains a messy, inseparable amalgam of words, concepts, anecdotes, gestures, expressions – some relating to what we would call emotions, some relating to what we would call affects. In short, we conclude that it is important to talk with research participants about their feelings and experiences in/of research, to value their ways of articulating and thinking through these experiences, and to reflect on research and scholarly practices in the process.

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