
Children’s Corporeal Agency and Use of Space in Situations of Domestic Violence

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Contents

| | | |
|---|---|----|
| 1 | Introduction | 2 |
| 2 | Constructing Children as “Victims”: Domestic Violence Literature | 3 |
| 3 | Children, Domestic Violence, and the Limits of “Voice” | 6 |
| 4 | Violence, Corporality, and Embodied Agency | 11 |
| 5 | Illustrations: Exploring Space and Embodiment in Children’s Narratives of Domestic Violence and Abuse | 15 |
| 6 | Conclusions | 17 |
| | References | 18 |

Abstract

This chapter draws on empirical and theoretical literature from a diverse range of disciplines and perspectives, illustrated with examples from the authors’ research with child survivors of domestic abuse, to explore children’s corporeal agency and use of space in situations of violence. There is a noticeable paucity of literature that explores how children cope, or their capacity for resilience and resistance, in situations of domestic violence. Furthermore, while violence and abuse are perpetrated and experienced in ways that are embodied and spatial, research seldom explores how children and young people experience and

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manage living in violent situations in corporeal and spatial ways. This chapter highlights the need for future research to consider children's capacity for agency and resilience, taking into account spatial and corporeal contexts and experiences of violence in order to balance *problem-focused* debates around children's experiences of domestic abuse with a more *resilience-focused* lens. Findings illustrate children as capable and active agents, resourceful and inventive in their capacity to use, produce and construct physical, embodied, and relational spaces for security, comfort and healing during and after living within violent and volatile contexts.

Keywords

Domestic violence • agency • resistance • resilience • corporeality • spatiality • visual methods • photo elicitation • graphic elicitation

1 Introduction

Within a large body of domestic violence literature, there is a noticeable lack of empirical and theoretical work which engages with the embodied and spatial experience of violence. This includes a lack of attention to the ways in which children use physical space to produce resistant embodied agency (Callaghan et al. 2016a). Work undertaken within the field of children's geographies continues to provide insight into children's interactions with and within their environments, and to the way space and place are meaningful in children's lives. There has been some interesting work undertaken by children's geographers exploring how children use outside spaces in contexts of conflict and war. However, the use of *home space* in contexts of *domestic violence* has largely been neglected in children's geography and in the social sciences more generally, with a few notable exceptions (Øverlien 2011, 2012; Wilson et al. 2012). Researchers in the field of children's geography provide valuable insight into the complexities, obstacles, and ethical issues of conducting research with children (see Skelton 2008; Darbyshire, MacDougall, and Schiller 2005) and are increasingly placing importance on the investigation of embodied, corporeal, and lived experience of bodies in context (Hörschelmann and Colls 2010; Horton and Kraftl 2006). There is a need for this work to be extended though, to include critical analysis of the body within situations of violence and the interconnections between embodied and spatial experiences, particularly as the perpetration and experience of violence operate on spatial and corporeal levels.

This chapter draws on empirical and theoretical literature from a diverse range of disciplines and perspectives, illustrated with examples from the authors' research with child survivors of domestic abuse, to explore the experiences of children who have lived in situations of domestic violence and abuse. An investigation of these experiences challenges the dominant representation of children who experience domestic violence as passive victims, damaged by their experiences. The aim of this chapter is to challenge discourses of damage, through an exploration of children's corporeal agency and use of space in violent contexts.

This chapter is composed of three key sections; the first presents a review of domestic violence literature, the second discusses the ethical and practical issues of involving child survivors of domestic abuse in the research process. The third section considers the survivor's body in the context of violence and illustrates children's capacity for agency using data from the authors' project "Understanding Agency and Resistance Strategies: Children in Situations of Domestic Violence and Abuse" (UNARS).

Throughout the chapter, the terms "children" and "young people" are used interchangeably to refer to persons aged up to and including 18 years. "Domestic abuse" and "domestic violence" are also used interchangeably. As of March 2013, the UK Home Office defines domestic violence as:

Any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive or threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. This can encompass but is not limited to the following types of abuse: psychological, physical, sexual, financial, emotional [...]. (see Home Office 2013, p. 2)

This is the working definition which framed the UNARS project. In addition, authors considered children's experiences of domestic violence as a violation of one's own personal space, both in the sense of their body and their familial and intimate environment.

2 Constructing Children as "Victims": Domestic Violence Literature

In this section, psychological and social research on children affected by domestic violence and abuse is reviewed to explore how "the child" is constructed within this literature.

Overwhelmingly, domestic abuse discourses have centered on trauma, harm, and detrimental implications to mental health and wellbeing and to social, emotional, and behavioral development (Anda et al. 2006; Ehrensaft et al. 2003; Meltzer et al. 2009; Repetti et al. 2002). Wolfe et al. (2003) conducted a meta-analysis into the effects of children's exposure to domestic abuse; findings suggest that research has consistently reported negative effects on emotional and behavioral functioning and social competence. Neurophysiological research tends to emphasize abnormal development of neurophysiological and intrapsychic processes as a consequence of experiencing domestic violence (e.g., Vythilingam et al. 2002; Shonkoff and Garner 2012; Gerhardt 2004). Permanent negative impacts on neurophysiological development are considered to be a result of extreme stress induced by childhood trauma (Osofsky 1995; Shonkoff and Garner 2012). Brain structures thought to be responsible for memory storage and retrieval, and mood and anxiety regulation are reportedly smaller in adults who suffered childhood trauma (Gerhardt 2004; Frodl et al. 2010; Vythilingam et al. 2002). Physical health and

development are also considered to be negatively affected by the stress response which suppresses the immune system, digestion and growth, thereby impacting upon general health and wellbeing in the long-term (Anda et al. 2006; Rothschild 2000; Sapolsky 2000, 2004). Hester et al. (2007, pp. 64, 84) suggest that child survivors can experience depression, introversion, aggression, and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) such as detachment, impaired memory, hypervigilance, and flashbacks.

Intergenerational transmission is a highly influential and pervasive concept in the literature but is rarely critically examined. Literature tends to focus on the impact of transmission and the contributing factors, rather than exploring the complexities around the lived experience of being in families affected by violence in multiple generations, or the ways that spatial and embodied relationality might play a role in transmission. Often belying research and practice is the assumption that experience of domestic abuse in childhood creates irrecoverably damaged adults; and the detrimental effects of one generation are transmitted to subsequent generations, affecting childhood, adulthood, partner choice and offspring, children's children, and so on (Repetti et al. 2002). Social Learning, from parent to child, is widely attributed as the process by which intergenerational transmission occurs. Counterintuitively though, research in the field of domestic abuse is more heavily focused on the negative influences "nonviolent" mothers have on their children than that of violent fathers (Bancroft and Silverman 2002). There is also an inherent gender bias apparent in the literature that tends to presume that children who have directly and/or indirectly experienced domestic violence will become future female victims or future male perpetrators (Ehrensaft et al. 2003; Pears and Capaldi 2001).

Findings are often reported without any hint of hope for remediation, further implying that damage is long-lasting if not permanent, becoming an inherent part of the self. But where amelioration and reparation is of concern within research and intervention, it is typically aimed at restoring "victims" to a former state of being, prior to experiences of domestic abuse (Evans and Lindsay 2008). The underlying assumption being that there *was* a former self, independent from the relational context, and that this former self is a favorable state to revert to. An area which escapes the lens of research, however, (possibly because it could be misinterpreted for promoting violence) is children's learning and development that might arise as a result of their difficult and challenging experiences.

Only within the last decade or so, amidst sustained and convincing discourses of deficit and harm, have there been enquiries into children's resilience, agency and capacity to cope with, and manage their experiences of violence (as exemplified by Katz 2015; Buchanan et al. 2014; Buckley et al. 2006; Collis 2013; Anderson and Danis 2006; Hester et al. 2007). These authors call for a reframing of the ways that "victims" of domestic violence are perceived and studied. Such enquiries provide hope that a sense of balance and openness may be brought to the debate around domestic abuse and that those who experience violence may be studied and considered through a *resilience-focused* rather than a *problem-focused* lens.

Masten (2011, p. 494) defines resilience as, “*The capacity of a dynamic system to withstand or recover from significant challenges that threaten its stability, viability, or development.*” A research focus which does not deviate from resilience to acknowledge potential risks and vulnerabilities is equally as problematic as one entirely focused on harm (Masten 2011). A balanced presentation of resilience and risk/vulnerability is particularly important since the historical use of the term “resilience,” to describe an intrinsic personality trait, has left a legacy which has potential repercussions for current research (Luthar and Cicchetti 2000) and policy. An overreliance on findings from resilience research could portray survivors as strong enough to withstand the adversity of domestic abuse. This could unintentionally give credence to a shift in social policy and commissioning practices towards the reduction or withdrawal of already limited fiscal allocation to domestic abuse, the protection of victims from violence, and the punitive measures and reformation of perpetrators.

“Problem-focused” explorations can provide knowledge of the potential short-, mid-, and long-term implications of violence. However, by adopting a resilience- or strengths-based approach to research and intervention, an improved understanding can be developed into how children and young people might be enabled to enhance positive aspects of themselves and their lives (Zimmerman 2013) and how they might be most safely supported to be resilient and appropriately resistant under circumstances of domestic violence (Anderson 2010). Although Masten (2011) suggests that the introduction of resiliency theory to research and practice in clinical psychology and psychiatry has been transformative, there are still adverse contexts where resiliency theory is rarely applied, such as domestic violence.

Although an analytic model was not directly applied, the philosophy underpinning the UNARS action research project echoes the strengths-based approach and key associated principles to family support as described by Powell et al. (1997, p. 1): “a philosophy based on family strength; a partnership approach to service provision; a family-centered, family-driven agenda; and an individualized response to family [and individual members’] needs and capacities. . .”.

The positioning of those who experience domestic violence in childhood as irrecoverably traumatized is disconcerting not least because it reinforces and (re) produces representations of damage and powerlessness. The damage implied obscures the capacity of professionals, service providers, and researchers from seeing and building on children’s agency and resilience. This is especially problematic when taken together with the (often hidden) implication that remediation is neither within the individual’s nor the family’s power. There is a need to explore and interrogate the reified concept of intergenerational transmission, particularly as it enables and ratifies stigmatization and oppression, and permits social, statutory, and professional quiescence. Finally, the singular notion of damage influences research such that data collection and analysis can be compromised by researchers inadvertently neglecting to fully consider holistic and contextualized understandings of the impacts of domestic violence, and in doing so obscure other possible insights. This is compounded by complexities around defining and measuring

domestic violence (Hogan and O'Reilly 2007; Gelles 1980), neurophysiological processes, development, and brain structures (Anda et al. 2006).

Prevailing theories medicalize and pathologize those who have directly and indirectly experienced domestic violence. While acknowledging the negative impacts of domestic violence, it is important that the stigma and labeling which result from one-sided accounts of "harm" and "damage" are also recognized. What is ignored in the literature is an engagement with the embodied and spatial experience of violence, including a consideration of how children use physical space to produce resistant embodied agency. In order to move away from pathologizing accounts, it is important that lived experiences of coping are explored and that researchers, professionals and academics, take embodiment, space, and relationality more seriously when considering how and why people manage in situations of violence.

These theoretical points are illustrated in the rest of the chapter through examples from the authors' "Understanding Agency and Resistance Strategies: Children in Situations of Domestic Abuse" (UNARS) (Callaghan and Alexander 2015). This 2-year European action research project explored children's capacity for agency and resilience during and after living in situations of domestic violence. Interviews with 107 children were conducted in the UK ($n = 21$), Italy ($n = 43$), Spain ($n = 24$), and Greece ($n = 19$). Together with empirical and theoretical literature, this chapter draws on the UK interviews conducted with children aged 8–18 years. Within the UK, 15 children were interviewed once and 6 were interviewed twice. The second interview centered on the children showing and reflecting on photographs they had taken as part of the photo elicitation element of the UNARS project.

3 Children, Domestic Violence, and the Limits of "Voice"

The voices of child survivors of domestic abuse still remain relatively unheard in research literature with a few exceptions (See for example, McGee 2005; Swanston et al. 2014). Typically, where children are of concern, they are studied by proxy, framed as an extension to adults, and are subject to parental or professional appraisals of their experiences, behavior, and wellbeing postviolence. McGee (2005, p. 13) suggests that in trying to gather data and make inferences about the impact of domestic violence on children, researchers frequently rely on adults' perceptions of children through the use of questionnaires and rating scales which limit expression and articulation of the lived experience and the complexities and ambivalence around violent and conflictual familial relationships. This positioning of children in the research process as nonagentic and as the focus of an objectified gaze sits uneasily in an environment and at a time where there are calls for the rights of the child to be acknowledged, and where agendas promote the enablement of children's opinions to be voiced and heard in policy and legislative frameworks (Hogan and O'Reilly 2007; Darbyshire et al. 2005).

This paradox has not been lost on some researchers, who have also noted institutionally imposed obstructions and barriers impinging qualitative research with children which effectively results in their silencing (Skelton 2008; Darbyshire et al. 2005; Morrow 2001) or tokenistic participation (Dexter et al. 2012). Darbyshire, MacDougall, and Schiller (2005, p. 419) note the complexities and obstacles to involving children as participants in research: "*Researchers undertaking qualitative research with children immediately confront cultural, social, psychological and political perspectives that militate against taking children seriously. For example, children are seen as 'part of a larger unit, subsumed under families, schools and households.'*" In a similar vein, Skelton (2008) notes the obstacles in existence at an institutional level which may obscure children's voices in research. She reflects on the challenges experienced in obtaining ethical approval for research with children and implies that ethical infrastructure may inadvertently block children's voices by rejecting apparently ethically sound research.

Institutional and organizational barriers may be even harder to overcome when researching children who are deemed to be "vulnerable." For example, during the recruitment phase for the UNARS project, it was evident that adults' anxieties and protection around children's emotional and psychological capacity to articulate their experiences of violence often resulted in them declining interview on behalf of children or overruling children's decision to participate. This was experienced to some degree within all European partnerships involved in the project. Researchers frequently found that the opportunity to participate in the project was not filtered down by adults to children or young people. Rather than considering survivors to be capable agents, some parents and organizations held representations that the children were either not aware of the violence or that talking about their experiences might elicit secondary traumatization. Researchers anticipated that dominant representations of fragility and damage would emerge, and they were sensitive to the potential for re-traumatization and emotional upset as a consequence of participation in interview and took steps to minimize this possibility and to address representations in project design. For example, participants were fully informed about the nature of the research and of their involvement in the interview process, they were free to omit questions or stop the interview at any point, and following interview, where necessary, researchers referred or provided contact details of support agencies. UNARS interviews were designed to enable discussions around coping rather than the violence itself, and furthermore, only children who had left situations of domestic violence and were considered safe by those working with them were interviewed. Whilst there was an expectation that adults would show caution about the involvement of children in the research, the level of gatekeeping experienced by European researchers was not anticipated. Denying children an opportunity to reflect on and voice their experiences of coping is especially problematic, because it reinforces the stigma of children of domestic violence as passive, damaged, and lacking emotional competence (Callaghan and Alexander 2015; Callaghan et al. 2016b). McGee (2005, p. 99) reflects on her research with survivor children:

“Not knowing whether to talk to the children about the domestic violence was, as we have seen, also linked to the hope that children were either unaware of or unaffected by the violence. However, most children were very aware of the violence and it does not follow that they should not be allowed to talk about it. Domestic violence had been their actual experience: talking about it did not create trauma, experiencing their father’s violence did that. Talking about their experiences, or at least knowing that they could talk about them, was very important for children. [...] It is important that any discussions of the violence are led by the child’s pace and needs, and that children feel that they can broach the subject when it is the right time for them.”

There is a need to conduct research *with* children rather than *on* or *about* children especially since adults’ knowledge of children’s lives is inevitably incomplete and sometimes inaccurate (Jaffe et al. 1990). In Punch’s (2000) ethnographic work, parental perceptions of children’s use of space contrasted with the way children themselves reflected on their actual use of space. Parents were sometimes not aware of where children were or of their preferred play areas (pp. 54–56). This further illustrates the need for children to be consulted in research, directly enabling their reflections, as opposed to an indirect consultation via adults.

When involving child survivors of domestic abuse in research, there are many complex ethical issues that need to be sensitively and carefully addressed in project design and worked through as they arise throughout the duration of the research. The ethical dilemmas encountered during the course of UNARS will be discussed in depth in a following paper, but we address the most salient issues here. Firstly, it was of paramount importance to ensure that the risk of violence and reprisals (relating to participation) to participants, their families, and researchers was minimized. To mitigate this risk, researchers only interviewed children and young people (aged 8–18) no longer residing in contexts of violence. At the point of interview, all UK participants were either living in refuge or resettlement accommodation. The majority of the UK interviews took place across two domestic abuse centers, with a small number in schools, refuges, and a resettlement home. Secondly, researchers collaborated with professionals who worked with survivors to identify potential participants who considered themselves to have previously experienced domestic violence. Researchers made initial contact with carers by telephone and, where appropriate, organized an initial meeting with them and their children to further inform them about the nature of the research and involvement in interview. The research team were acutely aware of the need to protect participants’ anonymity. All identifying information such as names, places, and specific events and incidents have been disguised or omitted from dissemination activities.

As part of UNARS, multiple visual methods were used in conjunction with semi-structured interviews. Researchers wanted to avoid being overprescriptive and sought to provide children freedom to choose the mediums by which they communicated in the interview space. This approach is theoretically underpinned by such works as Darbyshire et al. (2005) and Prosser and Loxley (2008). The former suggest that complementary methods might help to engage children and provide a source of fun and interest, as well as enabling access to and expression of different aspects of their experiences and histories (p. 430). Prosser and Loxley (2008, p. 4)

propose that “*visual methods can [...] slow down observation and encourage deeper and more effective reflection on all things visual and visualisable; and with it enhance our understanding of sensory embodiment and communication, and hence reflect more fully the diversity of human experiences.*” Visual methods were also introduced in interviews to counter some of the limitations associated with relying on “voice” in isolation. In her work with girls from four African countries, Unterhalter (2012) considers what is “speakable” in a particular culture as a limit to what can be achieved through research focused on “voice” alone: “[...] *contrary to the over-emphasised stress on voice in relation to children’s rights research, I want to signal that context is as important [...]*”. (p. 321). Looking “beyond voice” to facilitate an articulation of children’s stories of domestic abuse may enable richer, more detailed accounts of their lived experiences within relational and spatial contexts of violence.

Mitchell et al. (2011) maintain that using drawing as a visual methodology facilitates the rich exploration of participants’ perceptions, reflections, and views on a lived experience. They propose that drawing enables exploration of conscious or nonconscious issues and experiences, and in doing so, it can uncover parts that are not verbally expressed or expressible. Moreover, where semi-structured interviews bring forward the researcher’s questions, interests, and agendas, visual methods give complete freedom of choice and expression to children and young people. In interview, UNARS participants were invited to depict their families and map their homes and gardens. Following interview, participants were given the opportunity to take part in a photographic exercise and subsequent interview.

Mapping and photography are particularly pertinent to this chapter because they enabled visual and verbal expressions of spatial, emotional, and embodied experience. Children were invited to draw a map of the home and garden in which they had experienced domestic violence. Their maps generally took the form of floor plans within which they included furnishings, objects, and possessions as they wished. Where children had experienced domestic abuse within more than one residential context, they were given the option of drawing the most memorable location, which typically was the last residence in which they had experienced domestic abuse.

Research tends to define the meaning of home in positive ways, alluding to a place of security, warmth, and comfort (Meth 2003). Researchers were mindful that where there had been complex and difficult relationships, home might be perceived with a sense of ambivalence or conceptualized as a negative environment (Bowby et al. 1997; Meth 2003). Sixsmith (1986) and Sixsmith and Sixsmith (1991) first explored the meaning of home in the mid-1980s and progressed from more positive and place-based meanings of home to more negative and expanded meanings. In their article, Sixsmith and Sixsmith (1991) consider the meaning of home as a transaction between the physical space and the individual. In this respect, the meaning of home is transitional and shifting, influenced by individuals’ life transitions, lived experience and interactions with and within the physical place. Facilitating an articulation of the transitional nature of “home” is also particularly important when considering issues affecting those who experience domestic abuse

– issues, such as volatile and rapidly changing home spaces, and insecure and migratory housing processes.

A number of researchers have applied mapping in their research design to explore children's use of space (Morrow 2001; Darbyshire et al. 2005). However, these tend to be in the field of children's geographies and often involve exploration of spaces outside of the home such as neighborhoods and community spaces rather than the inside home space. Exceptions to this include the work of Bridger (2013) and Gabb and Singh (2015) who utilized graphic elicitation of home spaces to support interviews. Gabb and Singh (2015) explored relationality and emotions of the home space using floor plans and emoticon stickers to elicit participants' verbal and nonverbal reflections. They maintain that graphic elicitation in the form of emotion maps can be a useful clinical tool, encouraging clients' personal reflections and enhancing clinical assessment and therapeutic practice. Bridger (2013) explored young adults' experiences of shared households and involved a number of visual methods in conjunction with interviews including "household" maps and photo elicitation. Bridger (2013) suggests that photo and graphic elicitation can not only help to elicit rich data in interview, prompting in-depth and nuanced discussion, but images themselves can provide a source of rich data.

Photo elicitation in the UNARS project subscribed to traditional methods as discussed by Bridger (2013). After an initial interview, children and young people were invited to take part in a photographic exercise. Willing participants were instructed on the use of the photographic equipment and were given a brief to take photographs of material, personal, or relational things that had helped them cope during and after living in circumstances of domestic abuse. Researchers explained to children the importance of respecting their own and other people's privacy and dignity, and informed them that if they wanted to take photos of other people they must first gain written consent and ideally take obscured photographs which symbolized but did not reveal the identity of the person. A second interview was then arranged in which participants discussed their photographs with the researcher. The photo elicitation approach implemented in UNARS differed from that associated with "Photovoice," as participants' reflections relied on the spoken rather than the written word as is common with Photovoice. However, the fundamental principles of Photovoice were evident: engaging young people in participatory methods and empowering participants to critically reflect, capture, and voice the issues that affect them, and their environments, in order to stimulate social action and change (Wilson et al. 2007). As an action research project, data generated from interviews, played a substantial role in informing the manualized UNARS training program for professionals and the therapeutic intervention program which aimed to build child survivors' capacity for resilience and coping (Fellin et al. 2015).

Visual methods generated rich data and enabled children's critical reflections and articulations of how they (agentically) used spaces and places within and outside the violent home environment. Maps focused on private home and garden space, whilst photography enabled exploration of both private and public spaces. Findings support Bridger's (2013, p. 106) work and suggest that photo and graphic elicitation enables discussion of spatiality, relationality, and temporality.

Potentially the act of reflecting on contexts of violence specifically in relation to coping might help children to re-envision and re-author their histories more positively, enabling them to acknowledge their capacity for resilience.

Understanding the ways in which children use space and place is important to understanding their worlds (Holloway and Valentine 2000). Photo and graphic methods could prove useful research tools, helping to elicit discussions directly relating not only to spatiality but also to corporeality. In the following section, the authors explore violence and embodiment from a theoretical perspective before moving on to discuss findings from the UNARS project.

4 Violence, Corporeality, and Embodied Agency

Studies of children and childhood often progress in sociological and psychological perspectives which pay little attention to the role of places in children's lives, to their meaning structures, or to their relational or material environments. The exception to this is the work undertaken in the field of children's geographies which directly explores children's interactions and perceptions of their environments. Where space and place are considered in any discipline though, discussions around embodiment, corporeality, and bodies (especially of children's bodies) within spaces appear to be less well developed. Addressing this paucity, Hörschelmann and Colls (2010) draw on their work in children's geographies and develop the area of embodiment by bringing together a collection of works which focus specifically on addressing the overwhelmingly negative portrayal and construction of children's bodies. Despite the work being undertaken within children's geographies and the broader social sciences, there still remains a surprising dearth of research which addresses or even acknowledges the body within contexts of violence despite the corporeal and spatial nature of domestic abuse. The exception to this is research from a clinical perspective which considers the abused body primarily in relation to deficits and developmental abnormalities that possess and inscribe it (ibid). There is a need for research and practice to go further in considering and exploring bodily experience, corporeal agency and the physical actions, acts and responses that adults and children experience and engage in. This is not to suggest there is a clear path to understanding these factors, not only are they nebulous and ephemeral, but they are not always accessible, knowable, or sayable (Horton and Kraftl 2006). Possible reasons for the lack of research exploring the body *as* space and the body *in* space might be due to the complexities and ambiguities surrounding corporeality and bodily experiences. Conscious and unconscious processes and responses to domestic abuse, the knowable and unknowable, the articulable and inarticulable, and all of the accompanying complexities and messiness are important for researchers to acknowledge, particularly due to the implications for social policy and practice (Hogan and O'Reilly 2007). With a body of research to draw on which predominantly has a clinical focus, in practice, domestic abuse support systems often adopt clinically focused theories which further reinforces the notion of victims as inevitably damaged. Understandably

(but not unproblematically), the concept of intergenerational transmission of psychological and physiological damage underpin many domestic abuse programs. Not only can oppression and trauma themselves impact upon corporeal identity (Harbin 2012) but messages of harm and damage voiced in “reparative” programs potentially (re)produce and reinforce the stigma of domestic violence and have implications for the corporeal identity and agency of survivors. In this respect, the habitus of organized domestic abuse recovery, including social practices, expectations, and representations of victims, become the clients’ embodied practices.

Threat, coercion, control, and violence in the forms of psychological, physical, sexual, financial, and emotional abuse (Home Office 2013) are all inherently physical and spatial by nature and occur within embodied and relational spaces (Callaghan and Clark 2007). Domestic abuse always involves spatial and corporeal regulation of one form or another, constraints on space, body, movement, resources, and physical and verbal expression. In terms of direct physical impact to the body, individuals living within violent contexts might experience purposeful physical injury to the body and injury sustained in the cross fire of violence. Imposed restrictions on the body in relation to behavior, speech, movement and appearance, combined with the trauma of living with volatile people in unpredictable spaces can elicit withdrawal and inhibition (Devereaux 2008), hypervigilance and dissociation. Dissociation is typically considered to be an unconscious defense mechanism that triggers in response to actual or potential threat to the self. Dissociative symptoms can include a disconnection from pain or emotions, a feeling of disembodiment, traumatic visual, auditory or somatic flashbacks, and an altered sense of time (Rothschild 2000, pp. 13, 65). It is pertinent to note here that for the purposes of safety, rescue actions from domestic violence (e.g., refuge, police, and social care interventions) also pose restrictions to use of space and personal freedom.

“Walking on eggshells” and “being tied in knots” are just two metaphorical phrases associated with domestic abuse which directly relate to somatic experience. Both phrases conjure images of constraint and repression. Both assume an external actor involved in the imposition of the oppression, a power imbalance, with the external actor setting rules and restrictions and creating an environment in which fear exists. Both assume that the person walking on the metaphorical egg shells and being bound in knots must exert control and restraint over their body in order to abide by the rules. Within situations of domestic violence, whilst the implicit and explicit “rules” may be imposed externally initially, in order to avoid or reduce threat, survivors themselves internalize and impose self-control, self-censorship, and restraint on their bodies (Devereaux 2008). Drawing on Foucault’s analysis of Bentham’s Panopticon, domestic abuse survivors in effect engage in self-surveillance under a controlling and dominating gaze, “*An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising surveillance over and against himself*” (Foucault 1977, p. 155).

If freedom of expression is inhibited, so too is the way the body is used, how it moves and how it negotiates space. In order to manage emotions and increase

chances of physical and psychological survival, those who experience domestic abuse learn to suppress and contain emotions that could betray the body, lead to a physical response, and elicit further harm from the perpetrator. Survivors may inhibit speech (Anderson 2010) and constrain the body, movement (Devereaux 2008; Chang and Leventhal 1995), and use of space in order to reduce triggers for the perpetrator's abuse. In spite of this, involuntary physical responses to anxiety and distress may occur. McGee (2005, pp. 71, 100) notes that nail biting, bedwetting, nervous twitching, sleepwalking, and stuttering were evident for some children whilst living in situations of domestic violence, desisting when away from perpetrators.

With the exertion of control and dominance, the kinespheric spaces or "physical horizons" (Rydström 2003) of individuals who experience domestic violence are violated and boundaries blurred (Rothschild 2000). Rydström (2003) implies that such acts which disregard the boundaries of a human body and mind not only implicate identity but also redefine the ways in which the abused person perceives, relates to, and experiences their own body. Similarly, Rothschild (2000, p. 146) suggests that because trauma is often the result of events which are physically invasive, in working therapeutically with survivors of trauma, (re)establishing a sense of corporeal integrity and bodily boundaries is important. In order to help trauma survivors (re)connect with and become accustomed with their own physical boundaries, Rothschild (2000, p. 146) suggests to her clients that they physically feel their own skin. Wesley et al. (2000) also recommend activities to reconnect mind and body as part of the healing process for domestic abuse survivors. They explore how women survivors reflect on their corporeal identity and consider that identification with the body may be compromised. They promote participation in recreational activities and particularly physical activities to counter corporeal impacts of violence and reduce dissociative effects (Wesley et al. 2000). Similarly, Devereaux (2008) suggests that the body is heavily implicated in domestic violence, with survivors exhibiting patterns of physical and emotional immobilization. In working therapeutically in a series of dance/movement therapy sessions with a mother and her two daughters postabuse, Devereaux (2008) noted dissociative responses, verbal and nonverbal constipation or "immobilization," and emotional and verbal withdrawal. Devereaux (2008) promotes the use of dance/movement therapy with this client group, suggesting that it (re)connects mind and body, (re) establishes healthy familial attachments and boundaries, and enables individuals to develop healthy regulatory processes.

For survivors of domestic violence, their coping processes and expressions of survival are frequently framed as binary opposites of resilience or dysfunction. The two cannot be disentangled; the complexities of coping and resilience, deficit, and harm should be thought of as being interlinked (Anderson and Bang 2012; Thompson and Calkins 1996). Resilience and dysfunction are the result of adaptation to living in violent and hostile environments, as Anderson and Bang (2012, p. 56) suggest: "*In trauma recovery, resilience and impairment are not necessarily opposites, but are instead different aspects of the overall experience of coping and adjustment.*"

In focusing on the clinical presentation of symptoms, survivors of domestic abuse are framed as docile and passive, and the active ways they resist and manage violence can be overlooked. Despite restrictions over space and movement, there are many resourceful and inventive ways that children construct and negotiate their spaces and embodied experience in violent contexts.

With careful consideration and mitigation of the risks involved in interviewing children and young people who have experienced domestic abuse, this population should more readily be engaged in research as participants and enabled to voice their experiences directly (Mullender et al. 2003). Supporting direct consultation, Krause (2011, p. 307) makes an interesting point, implying that corporeal agency should be determined via the agent and not simply through interpretations of the agent: *“The meaningfulness of action makes the difference between instances of human agency and merely random occurrences or non-agentic bodily functions. This meaning is partly determined by social interpretations [. . .] but it also issues from or affirms the subjective existence of the agent herself. We can distinguish corporeal agency from other kinds of bodily movement by looking for concrete manifestations of the agent’s subjectivity in the deed”*. Here Krause’s (2011) statement aligns with the theories of Merleau-Ponty (1968) and Young (2005), proposing that our individual and subjective interior and exterior lives, our perceptions of our material and relational worlds in space, place, time, and history, and our physical and emotional experiences of these worlds are interconnected and interwoven. That said, as our experiences, are subjective and individual, it is all the more necessary to consult directly *with* subjects rather than *on* or *for* subjects.

Trawick (2007) enabled the voice of a 14-year-old boy living in war-torn Sri Lanka to be heard. Her touching reflection gives insight into Menan’s world as he negotiates and manages the restrictions and challenges of his ever-changing and perilous environment. Not only is Menan consulted about his experiences but he guides the “consultation,” he is the expert, and the ethnographer, Trawick (2007), respects him as such. Trawick (2007) explored the lives of children living in Sri Lanka during 1997–1998, overshadowed by armed conflict and extreme violence. Counterintuitively, she notes that it was not witnessing or directly experiencing violence that was one of the biggest hardships for the children, but the loss of freedom and personal autonomy over space and movement (2007, pp. 21–22). A parallel may be drawn here with the loss of personal autonomy over space and movement experienced by children and young people who live with and who flee domestic abuse. Not only do children experience a lack of freedom and control within the home space, but in fleeing violence, they often have to contend with being uprooted to unfamiliar geographical areas and the confines and restrictions of shared refuge space. Measures are often put into place in shelters to mitigate potential harm or kidnap that might ensue as a result of being found by perpetrators, such as ensuring that children are accompanied to and from school and are not left unattended outside of refuge and resettlement accommodation. Often within refuge space, children are expected to be monitored by their mothers at all times (Support Worker – *“in your own home you’d be free to leave your children wherever you wanted while you got on with something for ten minutes, but they [mothers] can’t do that [in refuge], they’re*

expected to supervise their children at all times”). Whilst families experience the safety and protection that refuge affords, in fleeing to shelter, they are still subject to monitoring and rules – essentially exchanging one set of rules for another within the “home” environment. The upheaval of relocating, moving away from family and friends and periods of transition between shelter and resettlement accommodation, can also be sources of great anxiety and uncertainty for parents and children.

Punch's (2000) work highlights the resourceful ways that children negotiate restrictions imposed by adults on their time and space. Her research shows children as active agents, creating time and space around daily chores to play, socialize and interact with nature. Similarly, patterns apparent within the UNARS data set suggest that children living in situations of domestic abuse are by no means passive, they might *learn to behave* and *appear* as such in specific situations, for instance when under threat or when they are unsure if they can trust someone. Rather, in spite of and due to the limitations and restrictions of their relational spaces, they are resilient and active agents, engaging with (inter)personal and material resources in order to manage their circumstances. During and after violence, children demonstrate a capacity for corporeal agency, and construct space (in time and vicinity) for security, comfort, escapism and healing. In constructing these spaces, they become intrinsic in their own coping processes.

5 Illustrations: Exploring Space and Embodiment in Children's Narratives of Domestic Violence and Abuse

Children interviewed as part of the UNARS project managed spatiality in a variety of ways to enhance their feelings of safety and security. Children monitored familial interactions from a distance, found vantage points and listening posts, and during conflict positioned themselves in order to action speedy escape or access help where necessary (See also Callaghan et al. 2016a). Some children also constructed hiding places and built barricades to resist violence and increase security. (All names given to the children in this section are pseudonyms and not their actual names.) Below, Emma (aged 16) manipulates her relational space and shifts the balance of power to a less threatening and more neutral position in order to improve her actual and felt sense of safety and comfort:

Int: ...When there were bad times at home, what was it like for you?

Emma: It was lonely but I always used to, 'cause I had a phone at 10, so like, I always used to try and get my friend round and sleep over, so then when I had friends round, nothing would happen, he wouldn't dare try anything, so I used, I used, then when I did realise that I used to get friends round all the time ((laughs)) [...]

Int: And how did you feel, when they were there, what was that like?

Emma: Safe, I could just go wherever I wanted, I'd go downstairs, sit in the living room, be a bit of a daredevil, in my head ((laughs)).

In learning that she could temporarily free herself from oppressive control, reclaim spaces within her home, and transgress her step-father's boundaries,

Emma engages in a purposeful act which temporarily makes her feel safe and comfortable, and enables her free movement of the space. Understood in the context of her whole story, inviting friends over is not just about social interaction or even social support. It is an embodied act of resistance that enables her to claim space for herself within the violent home.

In addition to this use of space as a form of active but subterranean resistance, participants talked about their use of material resources and objects to soothe and promote an embodied sense of comfort and calm:

Int: So when there was lots of arguing going on, you know, was there anything that you did that helped you?

Lizzy: I told you about my comfort blanket, didn't I? ((smiles)) [...] I used to rub it together and like put it over my face, and it used to like, calm me down and make me feel safe. I don't know why, but it just did.

[...]

I still have it. It's silk, and I love silk, and my nan gave it to me, and it's just got loads of like, flowers, different patterned flowers and colours, and it's just all silk, and you just rub it together and it's just, a lovely feel ((mimes rubbing the blanket on her face)) ((laughs)).

Lizzy's blanket has an association with her grandmother who was available for Lizzy (aged 14) and her mother during times of crisis. The sensorial experience of the touch and look of the blanket is a stimulus which induces positive somatic experiences and feelings of safety and comfort. The tactile object triggers a psychological and emotional space between Lizzy and the conflict occurring in nearby rooms, and Lizzy resourcefully and purposefully relies on it to aid self-soothing. Lizzy's quote highlights the importance of material and spatial elements of relationships. Relationships are lived and experienced not only intrapsychically but also in shared spaces and places, and through embodied interactions often mediated by physical objects.

Nancy (aged 9) (below) also uses and manipulates material objects to promote healing. Post domestic violence, but still living with the fall-out amidst familial division and sibling conflict, Nancy transforms her room into a sanctuary in which she builds her self-esteem through positive affirmation:

Int: Is there anyone else you can talk to about the things that have happened?

Nancy:[...] I talk to this doll, she's called Nancy as well! And she feels like a real person [...] In a way, she speaks stuff. She's like a brave doll. She's like ((puts on a macho voice, American accent)) "You can do it man!"

Int: Does she really speak?

Nancy: In a way yeah. She has a voice recording thing. Every time I go up to her and say something, it replies with what I've recorded

Int: And what have you recorded?

Nancy: I've recorded stuff about being brave, able, able to survive, stuff like that

Int: And how does that help you?

Nancy: It helps me feel like I can make it, I'll be okay

Int: What d'you mean "make it"?

Nancy: Like, get to the end of the road

Int: What's the end of the road?

Nancy: ((errm)) Like, happiness

Nancy uses her motion-sensor activated doll to trigger messages of strength and support, and in manipulating space and engaging in this spatial practice, Nancy constructs a space for healing and positive affirmation. She is resourceful in taking control of her space and at her will she can adjust her spatial proximity to her doll and activate the voice recording. She purposefully programs her doll to act as a motivational force, encouraging and spurring her on through relational difficulties. Amidst familial conflict, her doll allays her fears, fears of not being able to cope in her challenging environment. Her quote contains a spatial metaphor for hope of future happiness. Nancy's act is a purposeful and powerful attempt at making her bedroom a space which directly contrasts with the difficulties and intrinsically undermining nature of her relational and home spaces.

6 Conclusions

Within a few words, Emma, Lizzy, and Nancy provide insight into the creative ways they have found to cope with domestic violence. They inform us how they protect and heal themselves, and how they have resisted violence in their own ways, without aggression or conflict but through the use of their relational and material environments. Much research into domestic abuse portrays children as passive bystanders, damaged by their experiences and as nonagentic extensions of their parents. If we, as professionals and academics, neglect to acknowledge the many varied and resourceful ways in which children are coping, we risk obscuring their voices and reproducing the stigmatizing representations and stereotypical images of damage and deficit that are prevalent. So prevalent in fact, that they accompany survivors en route to recovery and beyond. A more balanced discussion of resilience and vulnerabilities will facilitate consideration of how children might be empowered and enabled to build their capacity for resilience and coping. Research and practice need to shift focus from studying and considering survivors through a *problem-focused* to a *resilience-focused* lens. Child survivors should be included more readily in social action research and given the opportunity to articulate their experiences. Spaces and places of violence are highly relevant to the field of Children's Geographies, particularly because domestic violence is inherently located within and between physical, embodied and relational spaces. Although children are coping within their immediate contexts of violence – their private home spaces – they also actively and purposefully utilize and seek enjoyment from public outdoor spaces and the natural world to mitigate and help cope with the occurrences of the indoor home space. Since they have slightly different connotations, future research might consider two key issues for child survivors of domestic violence: the use of space and the use of objects to mediate experience of space. Authors have drawn upon their research with child survivors of domestic abuse and have pulled together empirical and theoretical literature from a diverse range of disciplines and perspectives to explore children's corporeal agency and use of space in

situations of violence. Findings illustrate children as capable and active agents, resourceful and inventive in their capacity to use, produce and construct physical, embodied and relational spaces for security, comfort and healing during and after living within violent and volatile contexts.

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