

**Childhoods past and present: Anxiety and idyll in reminiscences of childhood
outdoor play and contemporary parenting practices**

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Outdoor play is considered an essential aspect of a ‘proper childhood’. However, unsupervised outside play is declining, a decline attributed to parental anxieties about children’s safety. However what drives these anxieties and how this impacts on contemporary outdoor play is less clear. Our paper seeks to explore this through an analysis of adult narratives generated through digital map-making and forum discussion about where they played as children and where they would allow a child to play unsupervised now. Our analysis explores the nature of these narratives and pivotal moments in which adults articulated the disconnect between their own recollections of idyllic spatial freedom and the spatial restrictions they place on contemporary children. This offers a rich understanding of how parents navigate conflicting cultural imperatives on risk-avoidance and children’s rights to a ‘good’ childhood.

Keywords: Risk, play, children’s spatial mobility, remembering childhood

Background and research context: Children's outdoor play

The opportunity to play outside is perceived as an important aspect of a 'proper childhood' (Hendrick, 1997; Ward, 1988; Layard and Dunn, 2009) and beneficial for children's social, emotional and physical wellbeing (Gill, 2014; Bruosni et al 2015).

These perceived benefits are often articulated alongside arguments about the intrinsic value of play in 'natural' spaces and symbolic associations with community and idyllic childhoods (Jenkins, 2006; Jones, 2000; Valentine, 1997; Zylestra et. al., 2014).

However, despite adults' apparent belief in the value and importance of outdoor play for children (Alparone and Pacilli, 2012) a growing body of research points towards a marked decline in children's independent mobility, home range and unsupervised outside play in Western countries including the UK (Brussoni et. al, 2015; Wooley and Griffin 2015; Layard and Dunn, 2009; O'Brien, 2000) the Netherlands (Karsten, 2005), New Zealand (Witten et al, 2013), Canada (Holt et al 2015) and Italy (Prezza 2007). UK research for example suggests that whilst 71% of adults played in the street or neighbourhood near their home everyday as children, only 21% of contemporary children do so (Play England, 2015).

Research on independent travel to school suggests similar levels of decline (Gill 2007), while O'Brien et. al.'s (2000) study of urban children's spatial mobility notes a decrease in independent use of public space for 10/11-year-old English children since the 1970s.

The age at which children are allowed to play unsupervised also appears to be rising, with under 10's increasingly restricted from playing outside unsupervised even with friends (Layard and Dunn 2009; O'Brien et. al, 2000). These intergenerational changes appear to be experienced differently by girls and boys and across ethnicities. Research

by Skelton (2000) and O'Brien (2000) suggest that girls and Black and minority ethnic children are more likely to experience restrictive parenting and to feel out of place in the public space of the street.

These changes to children's spatial mobility appear to have been accompanied by a trend towards children spending more time at home and on supervised activities.

Valentine (1997) and others (Carver et. al., 2008, Witten et. al., 2013) describe children spending increasing amounts of time on scheduled activities to which they are escorted by adults with diminishing opportunities for unsupervised outdoor play. Holloway and Valentine (2000: 15, our emphasis) argue, 'there is a sense in which this... (the home) is where children *should* spend their time', although it should be noted that this is complicated by more recent tensions around children remaining in their 'electronic bedroom(s)' (Witten et al., 2013:222; Zylestra et. al., 2014).

There are a number of key studies of children's experiences of their neighbourhoods (Christensen and O'Brien, 2003; Hart 1979; Holloway and Valentine, 2000; Morrow, 2001) including teenage girls experiences of urban space (Skelton, 2000) as well as Mathews et al.'s (2000) research with 9-16 year olds living in marginalised suburban locations. Each of these studies describe how children create a sense of belonging and wellbeing through their unsupervised play in neighbourhood spaces from the perspective of children themselves. However, it is also critically important to consider adult attitudes to children's spatial mobility and unsupervised play. Not least because, as these studies of children's experiences attest, it is adults who most often control children's access to the outdoors through the setting of curfews and boundaries and

through their attitudes to children and young people's visibility in public spaces (Jones, 2000; Witten et al, 2013).

Research examining adult attitudes and practices which shape children's outdoor play suggest that anxieties about road safety and 'stranger-danger' are key drivers for the increasing spatial and temporal restrictions on children's mobility (Alparone and Pacilli 2012; Brussoni et al, 2015; Carver et. al. 2008). As Brussoni et al, 2015; Layard and Dunn, 2009 point out, this is despite evidence to suggest that numbers of traffic related child deaths are in long term decline (ONS 2015) and the small number of child abductions - although amplified by media reporting (Peelo 2004). For others this is evidence of an increased culture of insecurity and risk-aversion impacting the lives of children (Furedi 2001). More particularly research by Holt et. al (2015) suggests the rise in levels of anxiety about the risks posed to children by unsupervised outdoor play are fuelled by perceptions of a decline in a sense of community, and an associated reduction in 'eyes on where children play' (Holt et. al. 2015). This idea of a decline in community cohesion in which children in the past had a greater freedom to roam because 'everyone knew everyone' is explored in Witten et. al.'s (2013: 224) study of parents attitudes to children's spatial mobility in which parents expressed nostalgia, anxiety and bewilderment about how to parent in contexts of rapid social and demographic change.

However, as Jones (2000) suggests, there is need for caution in interpreting recollected descriptions of the past in which adults' appeal to community might be explained as a nostalgic yearning for a mythical golden age in which children played in Arcadian settings. As he suggests, some places (e.g. rural village spaces) have come to symbolise innocence, an association which he suggest is

perpetuated in literature, news media and popular culture. Jones' work helps to make sense of the pervasiveness of these adult narratives; how ideas of purity and community are evoked to rationalise parental actions in relation to their children's safety and mobility. For Jones (2000: 33) these adult narratives function as a means of 'denying or declawing change' in an age of increasing uncertainty rather than having a specific basis in the actual experiences of children in the past or in the present (Alparone and Pacilli 2012). Karsten (2005:288) too argues that 'it is easy to romanticize children's traditionally high engagement in outdoor play' suggesting that there is a tendency to sentimentalize the past in which poverty and overcrowding often made outdoor play a necessity for children as much as a choice. Malone (2016) extends this critique to the current advocacy of the importance of reconnecting children with nature; this too, she argues, is over simplistic based on the idealisation of nature in adult reminiscences of their engagement with the natural world in the past. In this way, Malone's (2016) and others point to the ways in which adults' reminiscences about their childhoods invoke a sense of childhood that is often idealised, imagined and 'mourned'. Research exploring adult views on the perceived differences between their own and contemporary children's play relies on adults' recollections of their childhoods, for example through interviews (Valentine 1997), focus groups (Witten et al 2013) and surveys (Clements 2004). However, White (1998: 48) argues that the study of adult recollections of childhood raises both practical and theoretical challenges regarding the extent to which it is possible, as adults, to recall childhood experience or whether it becomes 'other' and 'unbridgeable' (Philo, 2003:9; Jones 2003, 2008). This is a source of considerable debate for children's researchers and draws attention to the ways in which adult reminiscence

may be filtered through layers of experience and emotion and infused with adult desires and fantasies (Walkerdine, 2006; Lomax and Fink, 2010;); how reminiscence is interpreted and what this might mean in terms of understandings of childhood. Our aim, is not therefore concerned with locating the ‘true nature’ of childhood (Taylor, 2011p 420) but to view these remembered childhoods as ‘*vehicle(s) for expressing concern(s) about contemporary childhood*’ (Valentine, 1997: 132 our emphasis).

Aims and Objectives

Our research builds on earlier work by Witten et. al, (2013) and Holt et. al., (2015) in exploring adult reminiscences of their own experiences of playing out as children and their thoughts about outdoor play for children now. These narratives are not presented as objective description of adult’s childhoods or of contemporary children’s actual use of space. Rather, our focus is on adults’ remembered experiences of outdoor play and their accounts of how they manage children’s spatial mobility today. We highlight pivotal moments in the adult narratives in which they sought to reconcile the dissonance in their own memories of spatial freedom, the expressed view that outdoor play is an essential part of childhood, and the anxieties about safety that frame their own curtailment of contemporary children’s unsupervised outdoor play.

Sample

The data for our paper was derived from an online discussion forum for students on an undergraduate module offered at the Open University, UK. Open University qualifications are delivered primarily by distance learning and include online asynchronous tutor-led forums. This forum was open for three weeks to allow time for

students to engage in a multipart activity, including responding to the work posted by other students. The tutorial activity is designed to complement students' learning on play, safety and risk. The module is designed for students who are either in practice, working with children or who are interested in working with them in the future.

All the students who completed all elements of the activity (248) were contacted for permission to access their work and comments for analysis. Of these, 64 (29%) agreed to participate. Contact with students for research purposes is mediated and approved at the University by the Student Research Project Panel. All data was anonymised which included removing students' names and any place identifiers. Agreements were secured and data collected after the module and all related assessment tasks had been completed in order to avoid any concerns students may have about any adverse consequences of (non) participation.

The gender balance of the participants is a reflection of the module as a whole (59 women, five men) and the wide age profile is also a reflection of the nature of students at the Open University, many of whom have non-traditional routes into higher education and are returning to study as mature students. Seventeen participants were under 35; 23 were aged 36-45; and 24 were over 46. 56 participants (87%) described themselves as White, 4 as Asian and 4 as Black.

Methods

The multipart activity required students to use an online app to draw two 'maps'; the first to illustrate where they were permitted to play as an eleven year old child and the second to repeat the activity as for an eleven year old child they know today –

researching this latter part of the activity with family and friends if they did not have a child of that approximate age. Importantly our focus was on children *before* the point that a majority of children in the UK transition to secondary school from when they may experience greater independent travel and a marked move towards more spatial autonomy (O'Brien et. al. 2000). The app, designed in-house at the University, enabled students to create a map using icons and free-hand drawing to illustrate their local environment and indicate areas they were permitted (and prohibited) from playing. An example of these maps is provided in figure 1 below.

Students posted their maps to their online tutorial group in which asynchronous discussions took place initially focussing on their own childhood map and then on their map for a contemporary child and finally on comparisons between the two generations. In adapting digital map-making as a creative method for adults to explore experiences of childhood (their own and contemporary childhoods) the research builds on Alison Clark's (2011) proposal that such methods may offer 'participant-centred' methods for generating knowledge. As we explore in our analysis, such methods enable opportunities for reflection which may not happen in interview based studies. The map-making and forum discussion providing a unique opportunity for participants to recollect and make sense of their experiences in the process of rendering them visible to others. Map-making, in this context, is not cartographically accurate but rather, as Wheeldon and Ahlberg (2011) note, provides a visual, spatial and (through the accompanying text) a narrative representation of their creator's understanding of the socio-cultural and symbolic meaning of the physical landscape. As such, it can offer researchers insights into how participants experience place, enabling their creators to illustrate what is important to them, what their lived social relations are, where they

spend their time and what this means to them (Powell, 2010; Kara, 2015; Stirling and Yamada-Rice 2015).

In our study, written commentary accompanied the students' maps. These textual descriptions provided opportunities for reflection (on participants own and others' maps), the maps themselves offering a 'jumping off point' for participants to narrate their experiences. In this way, the combination of map-making, online sharing and discussion offered a space for discussion of the commonalities and differences between participants' childhood experiences and contemporary caring practices, adding 'layers of story to images' (Templeton, 2018:2) about how adults see children's spatial mobility now and in the past.

Analysis

The maps and commentary were downloaded from the online discussion forums for analysis. The authors analysed the written data using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The text was read for meaning then initial coding was undertaken independently by two members of the research team. The coding frames were compared and then refined and developed further, generating a number of themes relating to constructions of childhood, risk, reminiscence and spatial autonomy. For the purposes of this paper, analysis is focused on adult's recollections of their childhood outdoor play; attitudes to contemporary childhood outdoor play and the relationship between these reminiscences and their attitudes towards parenting and contemporary childhood play. The latter aim became an important analytic foci emerging in pivotal moments in adult's narratives as they sought to understand, and account for, the considerable

dissonance between the activities they recollected enjoying as children and the restrictions they suggest imposing on children now.

Childhood past: A 'golden age' of spatial freedom and safe communities?

[figure 1 in here]

Caption

My parents had a relaxed attitude towards my ability to navigate the area which included a very fast road and deserted wooded and brook area [although I was told] never go to the brook on your own. [Annie map 1]

There was a dominant perception amongst participants of all ages of their own childhoods as a time of extensive mobility and freedom to play, many recalling happy and carefree childhoods in which they were unsupervised directly by parents:

We made jam sandwiches, filled glass bottles with water and went off for picnics. We were gone from home for hours. We were very happy and content [Rowena]

While Rowena's account is one of the more idyllic representations, reminiscent of Kehily's (2010:171) description of remembered childhoods as 'romantic fantasies of play and adventure', similar sentiments, of freedom to roam and of being out for many hours at a time, were widely shared. As Maddie,, below confirms, her experience of freedom and safety in her neighbourhood is something she has in common with the contributions from most other forum participants:

I thought I would be the only 11 year old to feel completely safe in my home environment and go exploring everywhere with friend(s). Glad to see the majority felt the same. [Maddie]

Participants discussed feeling safe, connected, and having a sense of social belonging ('knowing everyone') within their neighbourhoods, feelings which appeared, as Sarah's forum post suggests, to withstand differences of ethnicity or class:

It was a mix(ed) community; people just accepted each other regardless of race, religion and culture. We knew all the neighbours, children and even the local shop-keeper knew who we were. [Sarah]

These sentiments were consistent across the data set, irrespective of the decade in which their childhood occurred. As the quotations from Ila and Sarah (below) illustrate, while some recollections appeared to draw on ideas of the 'rural idyll' noted in the wider literature, the sense of 'feeling safe' in neighbourhood spaces was also shared by participants who recounted urban childhoods (Alparone and Pacilli, 2012).

I felt safe at all times. My parents and teachers did not imply that there were any real dangers. I lived in a small village and I was allowed to play anywhere in the village. Perhaps I did not know about life outside that village?[Ila]

The houses were terraced (a bit like Coronation Street). Growing up at 11, I felt a real sense of community; don't think I ever felt scared in my neighbourhood.

[Sarah]

Feelings of safety and 'community' were conveyed through descriptions of shared outdoor spaces, where adults were more visible and children were portrayed as often playing in large groups. These recollections of 'community' are redolent of Witten et al.'s (2013) focus group study of Auckland parents, in which adults reported playing in big groups as children, watched over by a community of adults. Whilst participants reflected that being part of a community made them feel safe there was also a discussion of how being 'known' by the community was also a form of surveillance in which children's behaviour was closely monitored. For example:

We were all a close community and it gave us greater confidence, and any other parents were just an extension of your own family. If they told you off, you knew it would get back to your own parents, so we generally behaved in where ever we might find ourselves playing! [Gary]

There were still 'rules' and adults recounted how their freedom was provisional on staying within clearly delineated spatial and temporal boundaries set by parents. This is clearly seen in maps where participants' marked boundary lines to represent the limit of where they were allowed to play, some adding red crosses to denote the forbidden areas which including hazards such as rivers and roads. Participants discussed ways of staying safe and of having restrictions placed on them by parents. For example through curfews and expectations regarding meal-times:

It was well before ... mobile phones... my parents had to know where I was, whom I was with and my curfew time. I stayed in my surroundings, where you knew people were keeping an eye out for you. [Sally]

There were a small number of accounts of more restrictive childhoods with very firm boundaries around playing out. As Terri explains, these differences emerged through the comparisons made with other participants' maps and the accompanying posts

Looking at other peoples' maps and reading their experiences I feel that my childhood was quite sheltered. ... we used to play at each others' houses or in the gardens, sometimes we played out on the front, but were restricted to play between certain lamp posts as our safety zone! Terri

Such findings are consistent with research in the UK in which adults recalled childhood experiences of playing outside unsupervised as young as 8 (16%) while other adults report not doing so until aged 14 (32%) (Layard and Dunn, 2009). Similarly whilst the majority of participants remember childhoods in which outdoor play felt 'completely' safe there were a small number of examples where this was not the case. Marion for example described feeling scared on occasion:

It was all too easy to be led by my peers and at times I found myself in unfamiliar territory. This would make me feel uncomfortable and so would urge my sister to agree to going back to where we had permission to beLarge gangs used to bother me greatly as they do children today. [Marion]

Parental boundaries were reported as enforced with varying degrees of success with several participants describing the excitement in risk-taking and their parents not knowing where they were; swimming in rivers or playing on building sites. For example:

I lived on an estate which was brand new and was still being built. At weekends the building site was just abandoned by the workers and it became our playground!... I can remember sitting in the forklifts and pretending to drive them and playing with bags of cement. My mum didn't know most of what I was doing.
[Penny]

These adult narratives recall idyllic childhood pleasures, a remembering which centres on the value of outdoor space for physical risk-taking, autonomy and friendship (Hart, 1979; Holloway and Valentine, 2000; Mathews et. al. 2000). Such freedoms draw on a discourse of community watching benevolently over children, a narrative which was consistent for urban and rural childhoods and irrespective of gender and ethnicity. It is, we argue, most notable that the discourse is shared by participants of different generations, hence the appeal to an idyllic childhood with spatial freedoms is not rooted within a particular historical period but rather a discursive product of many adults' views of the past.

These accounts of autonomy and independence diverge sharply with adult participants' views of contemporary children's spatial mobility outlined in their second map and the accompanying narrative.

Childhoods Present: Rules, risk-avoidance and contradictions

Figure 2

Caption

'there are not ANY places I would recommend that he go unattended' [Debbie map 2]

After posting their first map and commentary, participants were asked to consider the spatial mobility of a child they know today. Of significance was the strong contrast that participants noted between their recollections of their own childhoods playing unsupervised outdoors and the tighter parameters seen as appropriate to set for contemporary children. This can be seen in Jasmine's description of her own freedoms and pleasures as experienced as a child:

'...a happy child(hood)... loved to play out, make dens, climb trees and make new friends'

and the restrictions she places on her own daughter:

The second map I have drawn is of where I live now and where I allowed my daughter to play when she was growing up and especially when she was 10. In all honesty, I put in many more boundaries than I had [experienced as a child]. She was given strict instruction not to go in wooded areas, even if with a couple of friends. [Jasmine]

Jasmine's restrictive approach was echoed by others in a range of different forms:

Elliot (11 year old child whom Denise knows) is only allowed out to the local corner shop alone and most other occasions he is transported everywhere by car. He likes to go to (name) Shopping Centre with his friends and is taken there by his mum who then leaves him to go off while she goes shopping. She said she calls him every half hour on his mobile phone. [Denise]

With few exceptions, the majority of participants reported that they specify strict curfew times, have a clear preference for children to play close to home and require them to be constantly contactable by mobile phone. The perception of mobile phones as a safety device was ubiquitous in the discussions of contemporary childhood as noted in other research studies (Brockman, Jago and Fox 2011) As Misha explains:

She (daughter) can only go out if she has her mobile phone on her and it is fully charged. I have kept her in before because she had no charge remaining on her phone and neither did her friends. [Misha]

These striking contrasts were brought in to focus through the creative map-making and reflective forum discussion. The activity provides a pivotal moment for participants as they sought to understand and reconcile the freedoms and pleasures they remember with the restrictions of the present and, particularly, their own position as mediators and limiters of children's spatial mobility. This is evident in the forum discussion in which participants initially expressed surprise at the extent of the differences between their digital representations of 'now' and 'then':

When I was thinking about my map I was amazed at how relaxed my parents were (with me) when I was younger compared to me (and how I am) as I get older!!. [Mo]

Recollecting the past and reflecting on present childhood experiences was an emotional experience for many participants. For example, one participant revisited the estate he grew up on during the summer holidays. His photographs and accompanying forum post contrasts his recollection of an idyllic childhood with his contemporary encounter with the same landscape now completely devoid of children:

At age 7 I played in forests/scrub land for hours with my older brother (aged 11) for hours and hours, especially during summer holidays. There were children everywhere -no adults. We made dens, built ridiculously unstable bridges across streams, jumped off trees, made swings from rope, swam in rivers and reservoirs, and made little fires to roast apples.

Last summer holidays (I'm now 39) I went back to my old estate with my two boys to show them the exciting place I grew up (in). It was a beautiful warm sunny day and it was tragic. In 2 hours of walking around the estate and the scrub land/forest we failed to see a single child... The silence hit me like, well I still can't really articulate it. [Barry]

As well as contrasting an idyllic risky landscape of yesteryear with a 'desolate' contemporary landscape, the tone is also one laden with a sense of regret, along with the

missing children a feeling that something fundamental about the nature of childhood has also perhaps been lost.

While the lack of freedom to roam was often regretted this did not prevent participants advocating restrictive boundaries for children today. Previous studies reveal a range of reasons offered by parents - demographic, social and economic (Jenkins, 2006; Witten et al 2013) and here too participants argued for the significant role of demographic change as necessitating such restrictions. The forum discussion also provided a unique insight in to participants' struggles to account for this difference between their own high levels of anxiety about contemporary children's spatial freedom and their own childhoods. As Penny explains:

My childhood was full of risk-taking. We also liked to swing from metal bars pretending to be gymnasts with concrete slabs under our heads (no safety playgrounds in those days...I cannot even imagine my children doing any of this but it seems ironic as I had a great time and no one was hurt in the process and maybe we grew up a lot more streetwise than today's children. [Penny]

Penny's account is typical of many responses in simultaneously suggesting the value of her own risk taking yet it being unimaginable that her own children could be allowed to benefit from such risk-taking opportunities. This was highlighted in forum posts in which participants actively discussed their concerns about how to balance possible risks to the here-and-now child with the necessary exposure and preparedness for risk of the developing child. As Debbie explains in response to a previous post: *'I am in agreement [with your comment] about how children are going to learn to manage their own*

risks?' The importance of children developing resilience and the role that risk-taking can play in this was well understood, however, the overriding view remained that the risks today were somehow too great to allow children more freedom.

It is clear from Barry, Debbie and Penny's forum posts that they experience the intergenerational inequality in children's spatial freedom as personally troubling. This is in part a feature, and a strength, of the study design through which participants' were facilitated, through the map-making and forum activity, to reflect on their own childhood and the experiences of contemporary children.. The expressed ambiguity and tension provides a window into these reflections and an analytic opportunity to explore and understand the cognitive dissonance which these adults experience in their everyday parenting practices.

One way that adults can be seen to manage and explain the apparent intergenerational differences in childhood spatial mobility was for participants to collectively question their own and others memories of childhood. Reports on the forum of going back to try and 'check' memories showed that participants were well aware of the fragmentary nature of memory. For Debbie this prompted her to reflect on the ways in which recollection might be selective; focused on the pleasures of childhood at the expense of long- forgotten conflicts with parents. Similarly, Sarah uses the discursive space of the forum to wrestle with the incongruence of happy memories of an idyllic childhood playing outside on her bike (described above) in a neighbourhood that she now sees as a 'ghetto':

I really think I did have more freedom than those 11 year olds today but you (another participant on the forum) could be right and that I could just be remembering the good parts and forgetting the arguments I had with my parents about where I could and could not go. [Debbie]

Now when I go back to visit my family, I can't believe what a ghetto I was brought up in, but I'm sure it has gone down hill since... maybe that's me thinking that now as an adult and knowing all the things I know now? [Sarah]

While the accuracy of recollections of childhood was openly discussed on the forum, one participant admitted a feeling that may have been shared by others - a resistance to questioning their memories and a desire to preserve a particular image of their childhood:

Looking at everyone's maps...makes me think that all of us appear to have had much more freedom than eleven year old children today. Do you agree? Or do we want to think we had a lot of freedom as a child? Do we want others to think we had a lot of freedom? I feel protective of my childhood which I enjoyed and I do not want anyone to spoil that illusion of bliss. [Rowena]

Rowena's post and the earlier poignant narratives (e.g. of Barry, Penny and Debbie and others) may be seen as adults' attempts to resolve and account for these perceived differences in their own and contemporary children's experiences. As the following section discusses, participants are writing for a semi-public audience in the forum and

hence are also ‘performing’ particular kinds of acceptable narratives of their own childhood and current (good) parenting/ caring identities.

Discussion

Our analysis supports and adds to the literature on children’s spatial mobility (Wooley and Griffin 2015, Brussoni et al 2015 etc.) in finding that a majority of adults report having experienced significant freedom to roam and play unsupervised outdoors as children, and the belief that this level of freedom is much reduced for children today. This reduction in freedom for contemporary children is largely imposed by the adults themselves and draws substantially on the argument that there has been a cultural shift and, more particularly, a loss of the sense of community underpinning previous freedoms. In this respect our findings echo those of Holt (2015), Witten et al (2013) and Karsten (2005) in which adults recounted differences in the way they experienced play compared to the experiences of contemporary children.

Our analysis is informed by a theoretical perspective that does not assume that methods can access the ‘truth’ about a particular phenomenon; neither do we assume that memories of particular events are consistent and unitary. Rather we view memory of childhood to be fluid and filtered by the requirements of the time and context in which participants recount their stories of childhood. It was striking, for example, in our study with a wide age range of participants that broadly similar views of an idyllic childhood, in which children were free to play safely unsupervised by adults, were provided by participants who ranged from their 20s to 50’s in age and hence were recalling childhoods over many decades (70s, 80s, and 90s). This seeming continuity across

generations appears to challenge received ideas about a year-on-year decline in unsupervised play although the retrospective study of active free play by Holt et al (2015) found similar sentiments expressed by 18-21 year olds whose childhoods were in the 2000's. These young people 'generally shared the view that factors that facilitated active free play during their childhood had since become eroded from modern society' the most important of these factors being the loss of 'a sense of community' (Holt 2015:81). This suggests that the reminiscences of childhoods in the past are a product of memory, experience and emotion (Valentine, 1997, Lomax and Fink, 2010, Taylor, 2011). The discussions of childhood implicit in talk about where the majority of participants played as children can be seen as a reflection of a deeply held view of it as as a time of freedom, regardless of external societal/historical context.

The map-making and forum discussion have provided us with material to generate an analytic insight that can provide a different perspective from previous studies. Unlike conventional 'one off' interviews and surveys, the asynchronous nature of the forum discussion meant that participants were free to go offline, reflect, check out and even revisit childhood stomping grounds. Moreover, they made this process visible in their forum discussions and in so doing added richness to the data in which they freely speculate on the accuracy of their recollections of childhood. The fact that some participants did go back to places they played in as children illustrates the strength of the response to the activities required of them in their tutorial activity. The semi-public nature of this forum is such that there was an inevitable element of performance, for example of particular kinds of childhood experiences and particular adult and parental identities. However, rather than seeing this as a limitation, these narrative-performances offer insight in to adults' perspectives of what constitutes a 'good' childhood in a

cultural context in which a good parent is one who manages and minimises risk. In this regard, participants in the study appeared to be trying to stitch together seemingly competing narratives about the value of outdoor play and appropriate levels of risks for contemporary children. Through their discursive practices participants can be seen to be experiencing pivotal moments in trying to make sense of and, at the same time reconcile themselves to a changing contemporary, risk-averse landscape for children in which outdoor play is considered both beneficial (for children's emotional and physical health and development of resilience through risk taking) and unacceptably risky.

The idea that adults are increasingly anxious about the risks posed to and by children from unsupervised outdoor play can perhaps be understood as part of a wider cultural shift towards 'intensive' parenting, whereby parents are held to account for every aspect of their children's development (and safety) within an increasingly risk-averse society (Hays, 1996; Kehily, 2010; Lee et. al, 2010, Faircloth 2014). . Intensive parenting is underpinned by the assumption that parents have the ability to shape and control the lives of their children (Faircloth 2014).As Shirani et. al. (2012:26) suggest, 'the process of "making" the child through attentive parenting (seen in these data by restricting children's opportunities to play out and the use of mobile phones to monitor children's activity) offers a way of managing risk', or more particularly, being seen to show proper attention to risk. As Fűredi (2002, 18) argues, the "positive connotations traditionally associated with 'risk-taking' have given way to condemnation; consequently, in many situations, 'to take risks' is to court social disapproval". Hence for the adults in our study, children's play, what and where is permitted, is not only shaped by the material environment but also by the prevailing moral culture. Within this cultural context it is perhaps not surprising that adults will seek to curtail the potential risks posed by

unsupervised outdoor play, replacing it with structured activities which are designed to maximise their children's opportunities and minimise the risk of harm (Jenkins 2006).

However, counter-prevailing trends includes experts who decry the loss of children's opportunities to connect with nature and advocate that parents encourage play to combat child obesity, healthy risk taking and 'pro-social' development (Gill, 2014). As such, parents and carers are faced with an almost impossible dilemma; they must maximise their children's opportunities for autonomy, self-expression and encounters with nature but also ensure that no accidental harm befall them through their participation in such activity. The collective power of reminiscence combined with cultural demands of parenting make it inevitable parents will fail:

This emphasis on romanticising past generations of childhood normalises the 'perfect' childhood and a 'perfect' parent who should be reconnecting their child to nature. If not, then they are viewed as deficit. (Malone 2016 p44)

As we have explored, our participants were clearly aware of these positive connotations of risk and many were concerned about their loss. In common with Jenkins (2006: 385) therefore we saw participants largely conforming to the prevailing risk averse culture towards children but also struggling with their awareness of the problems of 'wrapping children up in cotton wool.'

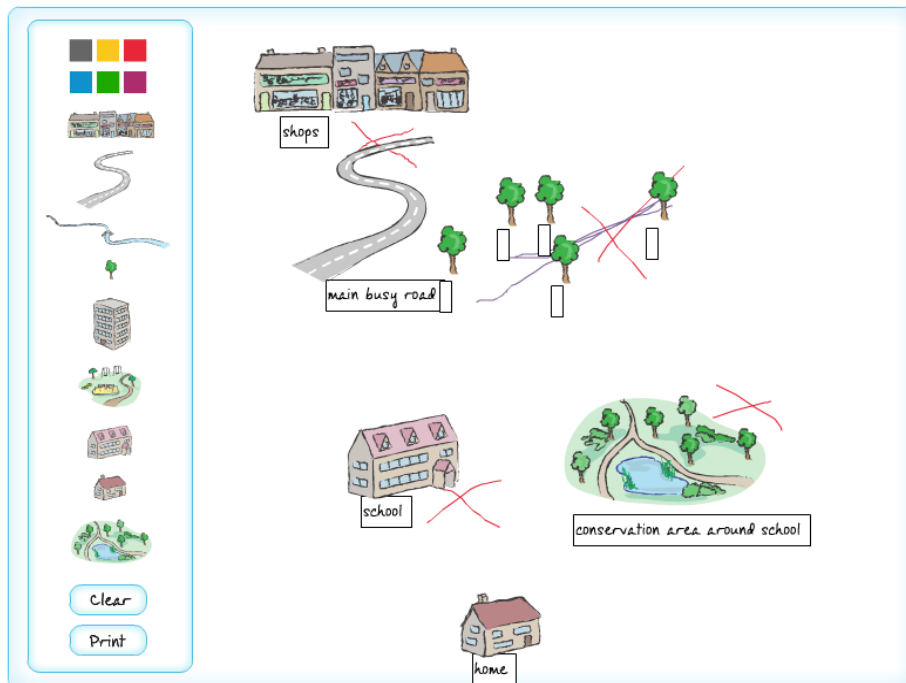
Participants' digital maps and forum discussion perfectly illustrate these tensions and go some way towards their public reconciliation. Recollections of childhood outdoor play, its pleasures and affordances give due recognition, within the semi-public space of the

forum, to the importance of the freedom of play. Here adults' reminiscences of childhood spatial freedom enable them to celebrate this aspect of childhood, acknowledge its importance in a 'proper childhood' while avoiding the 'moral jeopardy' (Kukla, 2008) of permitting their own children to take, what have become increasingly constructed as unacceptable risks. This is evident in the ways in which adults, in the collective space of the forum grapple with the contradictions of their own positive recollections while performing collective identities of appropriate risk-averse parenting.

Figure 1



Figure 2



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