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Disabilities, urban natures and children's outdoor play

Preface: the 'hell' of outdoor play

Interview with a parent in north-east London:

> "We sometimes take [son] out to the playground in [nearby country park], and I can tell you, it's hell! Just the sheer hard work involved in taking a wheelchair around any of these places is enough to make you think twice…It leaves you with a heavy heart"

Introduction

This paper considers the outdoor play experiences of families with diversely-disabled children. Specifically, I consider sixty families' experiences of visiting designated accessible natural play-spaces in two north-east London country parks. As I will show, for these families, outdoor play in urban natural spaces was typically described as unpleasant, unsettling, dispiriting, disappointing, upsetting, frustrating, exasperating, exclusionary, tiring, sometimes 'hell'-ish. I suggest that such accounts of outdoor play – or *trying*, with 'hard work' and 'heavy hearts', to play; often deciding to forgo play – typically remain overlooked in many chief, normative theorisations of children's outdoor play and engagements with urban natures, despite a large critical literature evidencing commonplace ableist 'barriers' to accessibility in many play/nature spaces. This argument is developed in the following section, where I situate the paper both in relation to prevalent narratives of the value of outdoor, 'natural' play for children in the UK, and research which itemises material and social barriers to accessibility in outdoor play/nature spaces. Over the course of the paper, and following an outline of my research in this context, I suggest that the qualitative experiences of families with disabled children complicate these ways of knowing outdoor play, urban natures and barriers to accessibility. Specifically, building upon recent conceptualisations of everyday, social-material, emotional-affective (Holt, 2010, Holt, et al., 2013) and "small, almost unremarkable" (Ryan, 2005, p.73, 2008) geographies of disabilities, I highlight four key complications. First, I present an overview of the multiple, compound social-material ‘barriers’ reported by parents/carers in recalling visits to the two outdoor play-spaces. These barriers made families with disabled children substantially less likely to visit or enjoy local outdoor play/nature spaces than other local families. However, they were typically *not* framed as barriers to access so much as barriers to fun, comfort and relaxation. Second, I note how such barriers were described in terms of their emotional impact for families. In particular I show how memories and narratives of outdoor play and urban natures were frequently closely intertwined with anticipatory, intersectional feelings of ‘resignation’ and ‘dread’. Third, I highlight how many parents’/carers’ discussions often featured ‘sadness’ occasioned by perceived ‘failures’ to ‘live up to’ normative ideals of parenting and family engagement with outdoor play and urban natures. However, fourth, I show that parents’/carers’ accounts of outdoor play/nature spaces were *not only* about barriers, sadnesses and exclusions. Indeed, I foreground instances where ‘hard work’ could ‘pay off’ to co-produce much more ‘joyful’, ‘hopeful’ moments, possibilities and spaces, where outdoor play and urban natures could, occasionally, and sometimes fleetingly, be ‘really loved’ by families with disabled children.

Children’s outdoor/natural play: outcomes and ableisms

A large, multidisciplinary body of research has engaged with spaces, experiences and outcomes of children’s outdoor play in diverse contexts in Europe, North America and Australasia. Four observations recur widely, and perhaps a little uncritically, within this literature. First, it is widely argued that, in recent decades, opportunities for children’s outdoor play in minority world contexts have been eroded and constrained to a degree “unprecedented in the life of the human species”, perhaps constituting “a near extinction of the outdoor child” (Gill, 2004, p.1-2). Such claims are supported by numerous quantitative and qualitative studies evidencing a range of ongoing societal shifts towards, for example: heightened parental anxieties about traffic and ‘stranger danger’; changing family formations and (auto-)mobilities; increasingly-regulated adultist exclusions in public spaces;

increasingly-prevalent sedentary, screen-rapt entertainments; and swingeing political-planning-resource constraints on public play provision. In sum, these trends are said to constitute a generation of 'battery-reared', 'play-malnourished', 'chauffeured', 'bubble-wrapped', 'couch kids' (Gill, 2004, Cole, 2005, DCMS, 2006, Wheway, 2007, Romero, 2010, Voce, 2015). Through such discourses, active outdoor play is explicitly or implicitly normatively idealised as a natural, necessary, constitutive element of childhood per se.

Second, this idealisation is commonly supported by eclectic, wide-ranging clinical, educational and social scientific evidence about positive outcomes of children's active outdoor play. In the UK, for example, successive major evidence reviews have detailed the value of outdoor play in terms of: children's physical/cardiovascular fitness; mental health and self-esteem; cognitive/communicative development; socialisation and citizenship; environmental education and sense of place; skills development; and wider, multigenerational social bonds and community conviviality (CPC, 2001, Cole-Hamilton, et al., 2002, DCMS, 2004, BHF, 2009). Access to outdoor play provision, and opportunities to engage in regular outdoor play practices, are therefore understood to be of paramount, wide-ranging importance for children, young people and families.

Third, it is widely argued that outdoor play in 'natural' spaces is especially valuable for children and young people (Wake, 2007, Muñoz, 2009). Notwithstanding critiques of notions of 'nature' (Ginn & Demeritt, 2009) and 'natural play' (Lester & Maudsley, 2007), there is considerable evidence that positive outcomes of outdoor play are deepened when children play with/in green spaces, trees, woodlands, vegetation, and natural landscapes/ecosystems (von Benzon, 2010). Such spaces are noted to offer rich opportunities for play practices, affording: physical movement and exercise; mental wellbeing and restorative experiences; exploration, adventure, risk and independence; social bonds and rites of passage; imagination, awe and wonder; aesthetic reflection and creative practices; place-making, rootedness and nurturance; environmental learning and education for sustainability (Lester &

Maudsley, 2007, RSPB, 2010, Moss, 2012). Access to opportunities for natural play is thus understood as especially valuable, although declining, for ‘play-malnourished’, ‘nature-deficit’ – perhaps particularly urban – children and young people (Skår & Krogh, 2009, Ridgers et al., 2012).

However, fourth, many digests of positive outcomes of outdoor and natural play acknowledge a need for further research about play experiences of children, young people and families with diverse disabilities (Dunn et al., 2004, Lester & Russell, 2008, p.162-163). For example, Street (2002, p.41) identifies a ‘considerable variability’ in the accessibility and quality of outdoor and natural play-spaces for disabled children and young people, but also highlights a notable absence of research in relation to this issue. In this paper – while recognising the considerable evidence for benefits of outdoor, and especially natural, play; while applauding the importance of extant work which makes a powerful political-conceptual case for the importance of playing/play-spaces – I will sound a somewhat cautionary, critical note in relation to this still-apparent absence in existing literature. For I suggest that many chief accounts of children’s outdoor play have been instrumental in constituting a powerful, particular normative societal idealisation of active outdoor play in natural spaces. In the following sections I explore how ostensibly-accessible spaces of outdoor, natural play – and contemporary *ideals* and *discourses* of outdoor, natural play – may be experienced as exclusionary and problematic by precisely those children, young people and families whose perspectives are absent from much existing literature.

To these ends, I build upon a wider critical literature which has highlighted the absence of disabled bodies from many contemporary spaces of play, leisure and nature, and the limited consideration of disabilities in many key conceptualisations of such spaces. An array of studies have evidenced relatively low participation rates in leisure activities, and usage rates of play, leisure and nature spaces, among diversely-disabled people (Murray 2002). For example, large-scale studies by McKendrick et al., (2000) and Pyer & Bush (2009) found that UK participation rates in a range of popular, ostensibly-accessible leisure activities were consistently lowest among families with disabled children. Thus, across a range of leisure, play and outdoor practices, Pyer & Bush (2009, p.8) found that families with disabled children consistently have less ‘access to leisure activities’ and less ‘fun’ and ‘quality time as a family’ compared to their contemporaries. Indeed, McKendrick et al., (2000) suggest that the disproportionate absence of families with disabled children from many spaces of play, leisure and nature is so prevalent as to be habitually taken-for-granted. It is noted that this absence is especially troubling given the particular value of outdoor and natural play for health, wellbeing, socialisation, relationships and capabilities of disabled children, young people and families (Jeanes & Magee, 2012). Moreover, critics like Aitcheson (2003) and Hodge & Runswick-Cole (2013) argue that the relatively limited consideration of disabilities in extant literature on multiple forms of leisure is symptomatic of broader ableisms inherent in normative understandings of leisure-itself. Thus, it is argued that disabilities are often rendered invisible in many contemporary popular and academic discourses, norms and ideals relating to leisure and play (particularly, I argue, outdoor, natural, active play). Therefore, like Pyer et al. (2010), MacPherson (2008) and Skelton & Valentine (2007), I will argue that the presences and perspectives of disabled people in spaces of play, leisure and nature have the capacity to significantly unsettle some key, normative assumptions about such spaces and practices which circulate widely in extant literature.

In this context, normative ableisms in spaces of play, leisure and nature are typically critiqued in terms of an itemisation of numerous physical and social *barriers to accessibility*. Collectively, these critiques can be understood as part and parcel of disability rights activisms and scholarships which cohere around the social model of disability: emphasising the physical and social barriers which constitute disabling experiences in practice. For on one hand, studies in diverse play/nature spaces show how accessibility for disabled children, young people and families is very often physically hindered by: challenges relating to family transport, logistics and time constraints (Dalton et al., 2001, Keil, 2001, Murray, 2002, Pyer & Bush, 2009); (non-)availability/proximity of accessible facilities (e.g. toilets, seating) (Shelley, 2002); and material obstacles, barriers and hazards (e.g. steps, kerbs, steep gradients, narrow pathways, uneven surfaces, and inconsiderately-designed access points and infrastructures) (Fieldfare Trust, 1997, Dunn et al., 2004). As Matthews & Vujakovic (1995) note, many everyday material and infrastructural barriers which appear 'trivial' or 'invisible' to most passers-by are frequently experienced as 'insurmountable', or at best deeply frustrating, by disabled children, young people and families attempting to access a space of play, leisure or nature. On the other hand, several studies have highlighted how social geographies of outdoor play/leisure spaces can also be, in effect, exclusionary. For example, research has drawn attention to: the typically limited supervision, or limited staff skills/expertise, to facilitate inclusion of disabled children, young people and families in many play/nature spaces (Finch et al., 2000, Murray, 2002); a lack of inclusionary know-how, compounded by trends towards risk-aversion, standardisation and funding cuts, among decision-makers, planners and designers working in relation to play/nature spaces (John & Wheway, 2004, Hendricks. 2011); and the often-exclusionary attitudes, atmospheres and anxieties of some users of play/nature spaces in response to the presence of 'other' behaviours and bodies (Nabors et al., 2001). This itemisation of physical and social barriers has been important in guiding, galvanising and constituting a policy-practice environment characterised by considerable work to enhance the accessibility of play/nature spaces in diverse contexts (Gill, 2004). Certainly, the two play/nature spaces featured in this paper had undergone recent refurbishment via a series of regional and national policy agendas (DCMS, 2004, Mayor of London, 2004, ODPM, 2006, DCSF, 2008) which included the express aim of creating accessible outdoor play/nature experiences for local children, young people and families with diverse disabilities and needs.

Through this paper, I add further evidence and substance to itemisations of ableist social and physical barriers to accessibility in outdoor play/nature spaces. I note that these kinds of barriers do continue to constitute spaces of sadness, where it is ‘hard work’ for many families to ‘have fun’, even within outdoor play/nature provision which has been purpose-refurbished to facilitate accessibility. However, I also seek to extend understandings of experiences of play/nature spaces, by exploring how families with disabled children *do not only* experience such spaces via a succession of reactions to barriers to accessibility. Indeed, in a number of ways I will suggest that these families’ narratives complicate a common working presumption that *barriers to accessibility* are the principal way in which play/nature spaces are encountered. For example, in the following sections I note that families described: how removing barriers to accessibly does not necessarily remove ‘barriers to fun’; how *anticipated* barriers can have similar emotional heft as experienced barriers; how fears of not ‘living up to’ normative ideals of outdoor/nature play can constitute a kind of ‘emotional barrier’; or how reportedly relatively inaccessible spaces can be experienced as spaces of fun, ‘joy’ and ‘love’.

In developing this argument, I draw particularly upon recent conceptual-empirical work on geographies of young people with mind-body-emotional differences by Louise Holt and Sarah Ryan. Both Holt (2003) and Ryan (2005) begin by observing that play/leisure spaces which are purposefully designed/adapted to be ‘accessible’ for disabled young people are not necessarily experienced as positive, inclusive or enjoyable by those who use them. Over a series of parallel papers, and drawing on recent geographical conceptualisations of disabilities (Butler & Parr, 1999, Chouinard et al., 2010), both authors have called for more careful consideration of the complex, everyday social-material-spatial processes through which dis/ability is constituted in practice in particular contexts. For Holt, this requires the complication of some dualistic separations – e.g. between social/medical models of disability; between mind/body; between physical/social barriers – which are often taken-for-granted in understandings of disability. Holt (2004) argues that these separations have constituted a problematic tendency to overlook intersections between corporeal-mind-bodies and social-material-landscapes. She uses the term ‘embodied social capital’ as a focal lens to investigate such intersections. For Holt, embodied social capital directs attention to ways in which “powerful norms and values are embedded in everyday practices within specific social networks” (2010, p.26), particularly how disable-ist social-spatial exclusions, discourses and identities are embedded in, and (re)constituted through, habitual, everyday practices (2004). Holt (2003, 2010) notes how plural social geographies of disabilities intersect with contemporary identities, inequalities and discourses (e.g. in terms of age, gender, social class, ethnicity and parenting cultures), and how many of these intersections are ‘off the radar’ in social-scientific accounts of disability. Importantly, Holt et al. (2013) argue that affects/emotions are foundational to the operation/experience of social geographies of disabilities. A similar range of concerns are articulated in Ryan’s empirical and autoethnographic studies of the ways in which “small, almost unremarkable” (2005, p.73) occurrences– e.g. stares, tuts, glares (2008) – can produce enduring feelings of not-belonging in public spaces. Ryan observes that public spaces are ‘saturated’ with implicit regulative norms about ‘im/proper’ conduct (2008), and notes how ‘transgressive’ behaviours and bodies are stigmatised as ‘unacceptable’ (2010) in all kinds of detailed, habitual, performative ways. Ryan is a keen-eyed observer of microgeographical incidents when ‘disability’ surfaces and becomes ‘noticed’, unsettling, ‘other’, ‘significant’, or ‘disruptive’ for onlookers (2008). Importantly, she highlights the lasting spatial/social exclusions – via feelings of hurt, stress, strain, worry, embarrassment – that follow such incidents, for disabled young people and their families. Ryan (2005) notes how such families’ experiences of public spaces, such as playgrounds, can be profoundly shaped and affected by these kinds of moments, leading them to adopt performative strategies of coping, behaviour/perception-management (2010) and “negotiation, mediation and management” (2008, p.732). In this paper, I develop this observation by emphasising how such strategies are particularly affected by *anticipated* barriers and moments, and by contemporary *norms* regarding children’s outdoor/natural play. More broadly, I develop Holt and Ryan’s sense of the emotional/affective geographies of disabilities in public spaces by highlighting the deeply-emotive terms with which families recounted their experiences of outdoor/natural play-spaces, but also noting that their discussions included a wide range of emotions which were not *only* feelings of upset in response to barriers to accessibility.

Researching children's outdoor/natural play

The following sections present findings from a major study of children's outdoor play in a north-east London Borough[1]. This wider project[2] was commissioned by a consortium of public and third sector agencies, who specified a work package focusing on outdoor play experiences of local families with diversely-disabled children. Specifically, this aspect of the project sought to: (i) collect evidence of such families' outdoor play needs, in recognition that this population segment had been overlooked in Borough play strategies; (ii) evaluate usage and experiences of two local outdoor/nature play-spaces which had received substantial recent investment for refurbishment to enhance accessibility (but which seemed, anecdotally, to be poorly-used by local families).

To this end, contact was made with two local schools and two local playschemes which collectively share a remit to cater for children aged 5-16 who have a statutory 'Statement of Special Needs' and are assessed by the Local Education Authority as having 'moderate or severe learning difficulties'. In UK law, the 'Statement of Special Needs' denotes an assessment that a child has "a learning difficulty [which means]…they: (a) have a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age; or (b) have a disability which prevents or hinders them from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided for children of the same age" (DfES, 2001, section 1.3)[3]. The language of 'moderate' or 'severe' learning difficulties denotes individuals' assessed capacity to communicate, participate in school-based learning, and undertake 'day-to-day tasks'. Thus,

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[1] To protect participants' identities, names of all locations have been anonymised throughout the paper. Qualitative data have also been edited to remove individually- or locationally- identifying information.

[2] In addition to research reported here, the project also entailed: Borough-wide consultation with 1,200 5-13-year-olds; a mapping exercise with 360 children and a photography project with 180 children; a survey of 250 parents/carers of children in the Borough; interviews with 28 key workers in the Borough's play and children's services sectors; site visits and environmental audits of outdoor playspaces.

[3] These definitions, and the statutory processes, mechanisms, duties and assessments which constitute them, derive from the UK *Education Act* 1996 (HMSO 1996) and subsequent guidance (DfES 2001, 2003). While these terms were current – and actively mobilised by parents, carers, policy-makers and practitioners – during the research project, note that this legal and definitional framework was revised in January 2015 (DfE/DoH 2015).

children with ‘moderate’ learning difficulties “have attainments significantly below expected levels,…much greater difficulty than their peers in acquiring basic literacy and numeracy skills and in understanding concepts. They may also have associated speech and language delay, low self-esteem, low levels of concentration and under-developed social skills.” (DfES, 2003, p.3). Children with ‘severe’ learning difficulties are assessed as having “significant intellectual or cognitive impairments [with]...a major effect on their ability to participate in the school curriculum without support. They may also have difficulties in mobility and coordination, communication and perception and…acquisition of self-help skills” (DfES, 2003, p.3-4). In practice, these contested labels encompass a wide range of intellectual, social or adaptive ‘dysfunctions’ (Holland, 2011, p.1) – or mind-body-emotional differences (Holt, 2004) – constituted by diverse genetic factors, illnesses or brain injuries, which commonly co-occur with mobility difficulties, sensory impairments, autistic spectrum conditions, communicative, emotional and behavioural difficulties, and/or chronic, complex often life-limiting medical needs. The decision to engage with children and parents/carers via these schools and playschemes was by no means an uncritical endorsement of the universalising labelling of ‘learning difficulties’, so much as a pragmatic strategy to engage with local families of children with a wide-range of complex, multiple disabling conditions.

With assistance from staff at the schools and playschemes, an introductory letter and questionnaire survey were distributed to parents/carers of all attending children. The questionnaire was designed to elicit parents’/carers’ responses to a mixture of closed and relatively substantial open questions about usage and experiences of visiting local outdoor playspaces with their child/ren. The questionnaire concluded with an invitation for parents/carers and children to participate in a follow-up semi-structured interview. Following a consent process[4], interviews were conducted during the course of

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[4] Formal informed consent was acquired from both children and parents/carers for the interview activities. Introductory letters, consent documents and all research materials were prepared in four languages. After Pyer (2009) a range of consent materials were available, to support the inclusion of children with diverse communicative styles. School/playscheme staff reserved – and in a small number of cases invoked – a right to ‘veto’ consent because of ongoing family safeguarding issues, challenging circumstances, or concerns over children or parents’/carers’ capacity to meaningfully consent.

scheduled playscheme events, activities and trips. The interviews were designed to engage parents/carers and children in extended discussions about experiences of two local outdoor/nature play-spaces which had recently received major investment from national and local funding bodies with the specific intention of enhancing accessibility, whilst also transcending distinctions between mainstream/normative versus 'accessible'/specialist provision. Hereafter, the two spaces are referred to as 'The Woods' and 'The Lake'. At both sites, play-spaces dating from the 1970s had been refurbished via a commissioning process which facilitated collaboration between design practitioners, landscape artists and providers of play equipment[5]. At The Woods a new 'natural play trail' – comprising a range of wooden play equipment, sculptures and designed landscape features – was intended to 'blend into natural woodland habitats'. At The Lake, a series of water-side 'linked natural play experiences' were designed to 'appear like natural glades in the surrounding vegetation'. At both sites, refurbishment was explicitly designed to: (i) 'open up natural play to a wider audience' within predominantly urban neighbourhoods, with designed 'incorporations' of local wildlife, flora, geology and landforms and emphasis on 'play with natural materials' (e.g. den-building) and 'play on natural surfaces' (e.g. soil, mud, grass, tree stumps and trunks); (ii) constitute play-spaces which were 'accessible to all', being 'suitable for all ages' and incorporating 'best practice' in accessible pathways, equipment, signage and proximity of amenities and services.

Sixty completed questionnaires were returned and twelve families opted to engage in audio-recorded semi-structured interviews together. Questionnaire responses and interview transcripts were characterised by extensive, personal testimonies by parents/carers, and these qualitative data were thematically analysed. Contextual information about research participants is presented in Table 1.The lower part of Table 1 indicates the frequency of some common mind-body-emotional differences within the sample: in the interests of maintaining anonymity, individuals' specific combinations of

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[5] Quotations in this paragraph are taken verbatim from planning visioning and application documents for the two sites.

conditions are not detailed in the following discussion, although individual conditions are indicated parenthetically where this assists understanding of qualitative data.

The following sections present key findings from thematic analysis of qualitative data form the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Note that the following data pertain to a very specific stratum of families with disabled children, comprising: children with the ‘moderate or severe learning difficulties’ assessment; parents/carers with time, transport and capacity to attend playscheme sessions; and children and parents/carers with communication or language capacities to consent to participate. Moreover, as in Ryan’s (2005, 2008) work, the following data are principally framed and narrated by (predominantly female) parents/carers. So while the following data are by no means a complete cross-section of experiences of families with disabled children, I suggest that they do afford a range of affecting insights into diverse experiences of outdoor/nature play-spaces. In particular, I reflect on four key themes which emerged during data analysis. First, I explore ways in which parents/carers discussed multiple social-material ‘barriers’ in recalling outdoor/nature play experiences at the two play-spaces. Second, I highlight the specific emotions (such as ‘dread’ or ‘resignation’) which often recurred in these narratives. Third, I note how parents’/carers’ narratives were often suffused with a sense of ‘failing to live up to’ normative ideals of outdoor/natural family play. By contrast, fourth, I conclude by highlighting families’ sometimes ‘joyful’, ‘hopeful’ and ‘hard-won’ narratives of engagements with outdoor play and urban natures.

[Table 1 about here]

Encountering ‘the usual barriers’

As a point of departure, it is important to note that outdoor play *mattered* for, and was deeply cared-about by, research participants. For example, rather unusually, most surveys were returned with profuse covering notes or marginalia, written by parents/carers, outlining the ‘profound’ value of outdoor family play in terms of positive physical, psychological and social ‘benefits’ or particular ‘special times’.

> “I am filling out this questionnaire because play is so important to us…We have some v.special times when playing outdoors. It is profoundly beneficial for [my son] to get outside in terms of physio, wellbeing, happiness, social skills etc”

However, when describing experiences of visiting The Woods and The Lake, all parents/carers described ‘barriers’. Indeed, ‘barriers’ appeared to be habitually part of the language used to describe these and other local play/nature-spaces. Echoing previous research findings about taken-for-granted ableist exclusions in public spaces, interviewees frequently said that barriers in play/nature-spaces were encountered *‘as normal’*, *‘as always’*, as *‘the usual’* (see Hansen & Philo, 2007 and French & Hainsworth, 2010, on ‘normality’).

> “[The Woods] is a rather poor environment for kids with disabilities – i.e. the usual barriers and not much to do”
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> “[The Woods and The Lake] are very, very limited environments with lots of barriers. As always, things are much better than they used to be but still you find that most places just aren’t set up for disabled youngsters”

The survey asked parents/carers to indicate anything which limited their family’s enjoyment of local play/nature-spaces. Responses relating to The Woods and The Lake are compiled in Table 2. I also present contextual data about parents’/carers’ overall enjoyment of local parks, nature spaces and playgrounds (Table 3): here, comparison is made between parents/carers with disabled children and (drawing on the Borough-wide project) 250 parents/carers from families where no family member had a disclosed disability.

[Tables 2 and 3 about here]

In many respects, the data in Tables 2-3 may seem unsurprising. Certainly, the finding that all participants identified at least one issue which limited enjoyment/accessibility of local play/nature-spaces seems familiar, as does the finding that enjoyment of parks, playgrounds and nature-spaces was substantially lower among families with disabled children than among the wider population (Pyer & Bush, 2009). Certainly, too, the issues listed in Table 2 correspond very closely to the multiple barriers to accessibility reported in extant research on ableisms in play/nature spaces (McKendrick et al., 2000). For, on one hand, parents/carers identified a range of physical, material and logistical 'barriers' as characteristic of play at The Woods and The Lake. For most parents/carers, transport and logistical constraints were an inherent, 'accepted', limiting part and parcel of ('trying our best' to) play at these sites (Pyer & Tucker, 2014, Shelley, 2002).

> "The local places are much improved, but it can be difficult to get there in the first place when your child is severely disabled. We try our best, but there are so many barriers you have to accept that getting to somewhere like [The Lake] is a logistical nightmare because of transport difficulties…Everything has to be choreographed, almost like a ballet. Everything has to be planned in advance…If one small thing goes wrong, it becomes nigh on impossible…It needs too much preparation"

Notably, qualitative data from surveys and interviews also contained a considerable focus upon diverse issues posed by microgeographical textures, gradients and materialities of paths and surfaces, and physical configurations of entrances, furniture, kerbs, steps, ramps and handrails for children with diverse sensory impairments and ambulatory/mobility styles.

> "Many children in wheelchairs find it so painful to go over bumps and cracks in the pavement…They just get jogged around so much. Some of them are so sensitive that they'll be pain even if it's something like gravel or bark chippings. Something that you or I wouldn't even notice can be agony for [our daughter]...She can get out of the chair and play, but she totters and is very susceptible to trip hazards on uneven ground"

> "There are so many things…Take something as simple as picnic tables. They never have room for a wheelchair user to sit. That's just one little example. The list could be endless. Just going through doors and gates…getting over steep paths and high kerbs,…things as basic as that"

A further set of widely-reported issues and barriers were constituted by the commonplace abject, layered substances of dirt, 'poo' and litter and the material disorderliness of diverse forms of vandalism.

> "Rubbish is a big issue – Broken glasses/bottles found nearly every day…and so much vandalism, graffiti and dog mess. Not only is this hazardous and disgusting, but also very problematic for [our

> son] who finds any sort of unpredictability or damage very distressing [because of his Autistic Spectrum condition]"

On the other hand, respondents often described how they found the social contexts and interpersonal relations of play/nature spaces as exclusionary in a number of senses. Echoing findings from key research on ableist social exclusions in public spaces many interviewees recounted incidents where they had experienced awkwardness, upset and stress as a result of normative behaviours and attitudes of other users of The Woods and The Lake. As in previous studies, the 'judgemental', 'not understanding', 'uneducated' attitudes of other parents/carers towards the disabled children's diverse playing/performative styles were most frequently highlighted. As in work by Ryan (2008) and Holt (2010), it was evident that taken-for-granted norms of 'proper' conduct in nature/play-spaces were profoundly unsettled by the diverse, characteristic voices, behaviours, and bodily comportments of disabled children (manifest, for example, in many instances where other play-space users had reportedly been 'awkward', 'unhappy' or 'spooked' by children's conditionally characteristic ways of walking, wheeling, tottering, shouting, staring, laughing, dribbling, burping, bumping or clinging).

> "If we go to the park, a lot of parents…have no idea what [children with disabilities] are like and they've no idea how to act around us, so you get some awkward situations, and that can lead to upset…We are made to feel 'abnormal'. People are a bit spooked…because they don't understand. Even seemingly intelligent people can be very, very uneducated and judgemental"
>
> "[Our son] walks and behaves in a different way to 99% of kids in local playgrounds and you can feel people staring or trying not to stare. You do feel judged and out-of-place, like you are spoiling people's day by being there…They do look down their noses at you and treat [son] like he a nuisance or…infectious"

The sometimes 'worrying', 'unacceptable' and 'bullying' behaviour of other children was also highlighted by some respondents, particularly among parents/carers of male disabled children. Normative contemporary anxieties about threats posed by teenagers in public spaces appeared to intersect with some very specific concerns about the risks teenagers pose for diversely-disabled children.

> "You always worry about gangs of older youngsters and bullies…Children with learning difficulties are particularly vulnerable to problems caused by local teenagers and anti-social behaviour"

> "Often older school children play on the equipment making it unsafe for young children…It is really unacceptable. My main fear is kids picking on [my son]. He's huge and looks tough, but he's not streetwise at all, and you know if he comes across the wrong kids, they'll bully him mercilessly…he can't stick up for himself because of his impairment"

Similarly, as in many studies of children's outdoor play, anxieties about lurking, predatory 'strangers' were prominent in many parents'/carers' discussions of the two play/nature spaces, particularly among parents/carers of female disabled children. Again, I note how familiar narratives of 'stranger danger' were recast to emphasise perceived vulnerabilities of disabled children in relation to this perceived threat.

> "I worry about kidnappers. You hear stories about [The Woods]. Strangers are a big risk. This is a big problem for our area and I do worry about my daughter. Because of her disability she is extremely vulnerable. If anyone meant him any harm he would be very vulnerable indeed"

It was also notable that dogs – and the 'unsympathetic', 'uncaring' attitudes of dog-owning families – were sometimes highlighted as part and parcel of the social barriers encountered at the two sites.

> "Places like [The Lake] – we love them places, but…you're always worried there's a dog around the next corner. Dogs are a massive issue…You have kids who are absolutely fearless, and they'll be having a great time, but then a little Yorkshire Terrier will appear and they'll be petrified; it can really upset some of them…particularly for kids in wheelchairs who are lower to the ground, but the owners are so uncaring"

While the issues in Table 2 tally with many previous studies of accessibility in play/leisure spaces, in the remainder of this paper I will particularly highlight some key disjunctures between these data and ways in which such 'barriers' have conventionally been theorised in much existing literature. For example, one observation is that such 'barriers' are very often neatly reported, categorised, separated and analytically subdivided by researchers as *either* physical *and/or* social barriers to accessibility. However, it is instructive to note that parents'/carers' accounts typically described multiple forms of barrier together, via quickfire narrative combinations evoking the specific, complex, co-occurring, co-constitutive features (see Holt, 2003, 2004, 2010) of the two sites.

> "There's so much rubbish and dog mess everywhere and the environment isn't very safe. So many things. Our children are so dependent that a lot of places are just too dangerous…because of all the problems and all the anti-social behaviour and the level of paths is a chronic problem. Absolutely chronic. Something as small as a little kerb, or a lip in a doorway…they would be in agony if they went over that in their wheelchairs…Toilets are a big issue too. A huge issue. Park toilets are notoriously bad anyway, but if you've got a child in a wheelchair, then you have got problems…and even silly things like bushes…hanging onto paths can be a massive barrier"

I also note that, although such issues are conventionally labelled as barriers to *accessibility*, they were rarely described as such by participants in this research. Rather, they were more frequently described as barriers to 'fun', 'comfort', 'relaxation' or 'trust'. Moreover, they were described as existing or persisting *despite* substantial improvements to accessibility at the two sites: so, for instance, The Woods could be described as simultaneously deserving 'full marks for accessibility' but '0/10 for fun'.

> "Things have improved [at The Woods and The Lake] in the last couple of years, and I'm grateful for that, but it is still incredibly difficult. There are still barriers. It is still profoundly difficult for us to relax and be comfortable, for a whole lot of reasons. So despite all the work…from our perspective we'd have to give them full marks for accessibility but more like 0/10 for fun"

> "It's the same with anyone, if you don't trust a place you get a bit stressed,…the less stressed out you are, the more you can relax and have fun. For us it is still not possible to trust local parks even though they are very good now from an accessibility point of view…If you don't trust a place, you can't play there, simple as that"

Feelings **of outdoor play**

I suggest that the recurrent centrality of terms like 'fun', 'comfort' and 'trust' in respondents' comments signals the importance of affects/emotions for understandings of social geographies of disabilities (see Holt et al., 2013). Indeed, it was notable that most participants responded to open survey and interview questions in a very particular way, describing how they 'felt' in outdoor play/nature spaces, and articulating some specific 'feelings' which were closely and characteristically associated with The Woods and The Lake.

> "Sometimes, we'll be up [at The Lake] and we're tired of pushing and pushing [wheelchair], and the kids are fed up because everything is taking so long, and you're feeling like 'is it worth it?'"

> "It's murder! Just the effort of getting [to the Woods] and getting around once we're there. By the time you get there you're feeling exhausted and people are already getting fed up…and being there doesn't give you a good feeling"

Two particular feelings recurred frequently in parents/carers narratives. First, many respondents used the language of 'dread' to describe the prospect of visiting local play/nature spaces.

> "Daughter is visually impaired. I am frightened she will tumble…To be honest I dread going to these places because you just know that so many things can happen"
>
> "A lot of the [local outdoor play] places, there are so many problems, so many unknowns. We have had so many negative experiences that…I dread it"

Second, many respondents also described a feeling of 'resignation' – or sometimes a feeling-resigned-to-particular-feelings – to characterise their relationship to The Woods and The Lake.

> "You have to accept that you can't get a drink in the café…and there will be accessibility issues…and things like that…You have to accept that people will look at you and you'll be made to feel like modern day 'lepers'. You just resign yourself to it"
>
> "We are resigned to the fact that we'll always feel like outsiders when we visit [The Woods and The Lake]. You just learn to accept that this is the way of the world"

I want to highlight, here, another subtle departure from many existing accounts of ableist barriers in outdoor play/nature spaces. For while many studies have suggested the emotional impacts of such barriers, and families' *memories of*, and *responses*, to emotive incidents, in this research parents/carers appeared to be more preoccupied with, and affected by, anticipations of *future* frustration, upset and disappointment. For example, parents/carers often talked resignedly about the inevitability of future situations where 'disability' 'surfaces' and *matters* (Ryan, 2008), with substantial emotional 'aftermath' or 'knock-on effects'.

> "You just know issues will crop up…For example…our kids will pinch, squeal and shout, or grab out, or get up to all sorts of behaviour, it's nothing malicious, but a lot of people get alarmed by it. So automatically you've got an 'us and them' situation, and that's no fun for anyone. It might be over 'in the blink of an eye', but incidents like that have a big aftermath in terms of how we're feeling"
>
> "To be honest, you are waiting for the next thing to kick off. Something will always happen…it might be an accident, or accessibility problems, or other people reacting in an unhelpful way…and that takes the fun out of a day out. You just know *something*'s going to happen"

Anticipation of, and *apprehensiveness* about, future incidents thus emerged a key constituent of the ongoing, everyday constitution of disablisms (Holt, 2004) in relation to outdoor play/nature spaces. For parents/carers of diversely-disabled children, the likelihood of future 'incidents' of emotional 'escalation' in public spaces was anticipated with particular anxiety. Again, the language of 'dread', 'likelihood' and 'inevitability' recurred in such anticipations.

> "[Our daughter] can be playing quite happily and suddenly something will spook her, and it can devastate her. And suddenly a trip that's supposed to be a nice day out becomes very stressful for everyone…When you go out, you just know at the back of your mind there's a likelihood that something will happen to cause upset…and escalate into a big incident that will cast a shadow over the day, where it can take a while to get over it"

> "You just know you'll get situations where [son will] go up to someone in a park, just to say hello and check everything out, and you'll get people, right up to the most respectable looking people, being abrupt back at them. And that knocks them back. It ruins it for them…I dread that kind of incident because it can have a serious knock-on effect"

In this context, the performative strategies of parents/carers in managing outdoor play in outdoor play/nature spaces (Ryan, 2008, 2010) were typically described in terms of feelings of 'watchfulness', 'tension' and awareness that 'the next situation' would, inevitably and imminently, be 'just around the next corner' or 'about to blow up'.

> "If we go to the park things need to be quite controlled. Everything needs to be checked out and planned in advance. You can't leave anything to chance. You can't just turn up and start playing. You don't want any nasty surprises to spoil the fun…You've got to be really on the watch-out…The next problem…is probably going to be literally just around the next corner"

> "[When planning outdoor play] you have to be prepared for the fact that, if something upsets [son], it can be the smallest thing, he has a tendency to suddenly decide he don't want to be there, and he'll go into a 'position' and freak out…So everyone is tense because things can…blow up in a matter of seconds…[Disabled children] need to be watched very closely. You find yourself getting quite obsessive at watching things. You need to be able to anticipate a problem, and deal with it before it becomes a problem"

Planning visits to play-spaces also evidently entailed a significant degree of emotional management on the part of parents/carers, in order to control 'exasperation' and avoid getting 'getting hopes up'.

> "You need to know how to get the most out of a day, as well as how to prevent any situations…Part of that is about managing expectations. You can't go promising you're going to have a fabulous fun day out. You just need to chill out, and have a controlled day, and *hope* you

> have a good time…It is about keeping your own emotions in check. As a parent, you might be totally exasperated, having the most s****y time but you can't let that show. You mustn't let your own feelings spoil the experience for the kids"

Many parents/carers described how they had actively made a decision to limit visits to local outdoor play/nature spaces to forestall the possibility of future 'incidents'. Thus the avoidance of designated play-spaces – and sometimes the avoidance of outdoor play more broadly – emerged as a relatively commonplace and taken-for-granted strategy. For many families, this avoidance particularly pertained to specific times, events or scenarios; for others, however, a blanket avoidance of spaces like The Woods and The Lake was posited as a rational strategy to mitigate against future 'heartbreak'.

> "We have a rule – if we're unsure, we don't go…For a lot of places…you have to think twice before you go there...As a general rule we wouldn't go [to The Woods or The Lake] just to avoid any heartbreak"
>
> "As a parent I can never relax when we go to the park – things could happen…A lot of parents [with disabled children] would tend to avoid some of the local [play/nature] places"

Feelings of 'failure'

Frequently, parents'/carers' anticipations of future sadness were closely intertwined with a sense of 'failure' or, more precisely, a sense that they would (be made to) feel 'like a failure' when visiting outdoor play/nature spaces. This was typically articulated in terms of the taken-for-grantedness and inevitability – 'you just *know*' – of feeling this way.

> "It's really difficult if it's a sunny day…with lots of people out [at The Woods or The Lake]…and you're there feeling like a bit of failure while everyone else is having a lovely day out"
>
> "You just know that something will happen or someone will react [to us] in a way that makes you feel like a failure"

Most frequently, this sense of failure was described as a feeling of 'being made to feel' that one is 'not living up to' ideals of parenting in public spaces. While this kind of feeling – whereby connections are made between children's non-normative behaviours and parents'/carers' perceived (in)competence (Ryan 2010) – has been fairly well reported in specific relation to children and young people with emotional and behavioural differences, in this research similar feelings were reported by parents/carers of diverse range of conditions and capacities.

> "A lot of…kids in wheelchairs love racing around, really whizzing around, but you can't do that in the park. It just wouldn't fit in…If we let [son] do that at [The Lake] we'd be made to feel like we weren't supervising him properly, like we were irresponsible parents"

> "To a lot of people, [son and daughter] do seem quite alien…Their behaviour does seem bizarre to your average person…We do see them getting shunned quite a lot. Parents are the worst…Kids will pretty much deal with anything you throw at them, so after a bit of 'get to know you' they'll play with our lot, no problem. But it's the parents. They're the ones who are like 'come on, we've got to go now' when we turn up…It's a horrible feeling, being made to feel like that, like you're not living up to people's expectations"

As in work by Holt (2010) and Ryan (2010), microgeographies of embarrassments, tuts, looks (or *looks away*) and gossip were described as some tangible manifestations of intractable normative ableisms – or their experience of 'not living up to' an 'ideal' – in relation to parenting and behaviour in public spaces.

> "Other parents have no idea how to cope with [my son] – it sometimes becomes a big issue…I find it hard when you see the dirty looks we get for daring to play in 'their' playground, or when they talk about us behind our back. It's embarrassing. If they've got something to say, they should say it to my face and accept that not everyone can live up to their ideal world where everyone is a 'happy camper' with no problems"

Notably, too, many parents/carers were acutely and affectingly aware of ways in which ableisms in outdoor play/nature spaces intersected with other norms and exclusions. For example, some respondents described how their feelings of 'failure' as parents/carers of disabled children was compounded by 'people looking down' on them because of their accent, clothing, accessories or other markers of social class (cf Holt, 2010, p.33, Skelton & Valentine 2003).

> "You do feel a bit of a failure. There is a clique of 'yummy mummy' types and it is almost like 'people with this kind of stroller can go in this bit of [The Woods] and everyone else has to go over there, as far away from the [play equipment] as possible, out of sight'"

> "It is a sad fact that most people look down on families who do not live up to an 'ideal'…if your child can't do things that most kids can do, or if they don't behave in a certain way, or if they aren't wearing the right labels, or if they don't speak in a certain way, then you are made to feel like you don't belong at [The Lake]"

Other respondents described how their feelings of ‘out-of-place’-ness in outdoor play/nature spaces were compounded by (typically gendered) norms about childhood ‘cuteness’ and bodily appearance.

> “We are very aware that [daughter] does not look like a normal cute little girl. There is a lot of pressure to conform to a certain body image and fashion, and all the rest of it. Just because she looks a little bit different, we are made to feel out of it”
>
> “[Son] can’t play the same as other lads his age, and he looks different physically so there is always that barrier between him and the other children, and between us and the other families”

Most respondents were keenly and very specifically aware of their ‘failure’ to ‘live up to’ contemporary (and, in their words, ‘normal’) ‘ideals’ of children’s outdoor play. Thus it was sometimes explicitly explained that, in ‘failing’ to afford rich, active, ‘normal’ outdoor play experiences, parents/carers felt deep sadness at their failures to ‘live up to’ contemporary norms of childhood per se. Feelings of ‘missing out’ on ‘normal’ childhood and family experiences recurred widely in this context.

> “It makes me sad that [daughter] is not able to participate in normal outdoor play with her peers. I know she is missing out, and that makes me feel like a bit of a failure”
>
> “When I think about what we can and can’t do at places like [The Lake and The Woods], it feels like [son] is missing out a lot of the things that a normal child should be able to take part in. But that’s the dream world…It feels like we are failing, like we are depriving him of opportunities and not living up to the norm”

Many parents/carers articulated a strong sense that they ‘should’ be playing outdoors with their children (mobilising many arguments, rhetorics and data familiar from the review which opened this paper). They therefore felt ‘pain’ that it was ‘not possible for us’, or sadness that their attempts to ‘do our best’ could never quite ‘match up to’ this obligation. That is, the *idealisation* of outdoor play was, itself, a kind of barrier or problem for many of the families consulted.

> “In an ideal world I know we should be spending more time playing outdoors, with all the evidence about learning and development and so on, but sadly that is simply not possible for us because of the practical challenges of managing [son’s] condition day-by-day”
>
> “It can be painful to think about all the things we miss out on, compared to other families…As a family we do our best to give [daughter] opportunities to get out to experience a wide range of

> play and learning experiences, but we're never going to match up to what other families can do, or what we'd like to do in an ideal world"

Similarly, some respondents described how they were 'all-too-aware' of the importance of childhood engagements with nature, but worried that their own visits to outdoor play/nature spaces like The Woods and The Lake were not 'adequately' rich, positive, rewarding or creative. Thus, again, a pervasive *idealisation* of play in natural spaces was experiences as exclusionary and problematic by many respondents.

> "We are all-too-aware of the evidence about benefits of visiting natural environments and we want our children to have those kinds of benefits, but when we have tried to visit places like [The Woods or The Lake] we have had a frustrating time,…miserable, really if I'm honest"

> "I read these things about the wonderful, rich experiences that we are meant to be having…getting in touch with nature and it doesn't match the reality. What we do feels inadequate sometimes...In reality, those kinds of experiences are not accessible to families like ours"

Reflecting on these comments, I draw parallels with MacPherson's (2009) observations about the dissonance between visually-impaired walkers' embodied experiences of landscapes vis-à-vis their participation in normative ideals of natural landscape. She argues that the mismatch between these walkers' fidelity to their personal experiences versus their feelings of obligation to participate in contemporary social-cultural norms constitutes and experience of stress and anxiety. Similarly, in this research, I noted a tendency for parents/carers to compare their own experiences (unfavourably, disappointedly, poignantly) with a sense that they ought to be conforming to contemporary ideals of play and nature, especially given their perceived importance to 'normal' or 'good' childhood. In the context of this research, then, normative contemporary discourses about the value of children's outdoor/natural play were widely experienced as a source of anxiety, sadness, inadequacy and 'missing out'.

‘Really loving’ outdoor play

As discussed, previous research about disabled children and young people’s play/leisure has overwhelmingly foregrounded the multiple barriers to accessibility which characterise too many outdoor/natural play-spaces. Similarly, as I have shown in this paper, parents’/carers’ discussions in this research typically and repeatedly emphasised feelings of sadness, dread, frustration, anxiety and the inevitability of ‘heavy hearts’, ‘hard work’ and ‘failures’. However, I feel it is really important to recognise that this was not the only way in which parents/carers talked about outdoor/natural play-spaces. For, in interstices and asides within their overwhelmingly poignant, ‘thwarted’ narratives, parents/carers also disclosed some quite different feelings in relation to The Woods and The Lake. Despite the many reported barriers to fun, despite the deeply-felt sadnesses of ‘not living up to’ contemporary norms of parenting, play and childhood, despite their resigned, avoidant acceptance of inevitable future ‘incidents’, most respondents did describe local outdoor/natural play-spaces in more hopeful terms. Even whilst describing how they experienced and anticipated all manner of ‘heartbreaks’ and ‘headaches’ in these spaces, parents/carers could usually describe ‘special’ moments of ‘joy’, ‘family love’ and ‘quality time’ at The Woods and The Lake.

> “Although I have pointed out many problems that we struggle with, we do have some joyful quality time at [The Woods]”
>
> “Visiting [The Lake] is very challenging for us…but we also remember moments of family fun and love,…some special memories for us”

Similarly, there was often a sense that ‘heavy hearts’ could be endured and families’ collective ‘hard work’ of “negotiation, mediation and management” (Ryan 2008, p.732) could sometimes ‘pay off’ to afford ‘brilliant’, albeit fleeting, moments and smiles which ‘make it all worthwhile’. As such, in spite of many experiences and anticipated ‘knock-backs’, most families remained hopeful of future happiness in local play/nature spaces.

> "Real hard work is needed for us to visit any of these places…but sometimes it can pay off. 9/10 times it can feel hopeless. That one time when things go well might be rare, but it makes it all worthwhile"

> "We experience so many knock-backs and disappointments [when visiting The Lake] and sometimes think 'never again', but sometimes we have a really brilliant visit…that keeps you going, despite all the knock-backs and heartache"

While barriers to accessibility were not the only things discussed – and reacting to barriers was not the only thing that families did – in relation to local play/nature spaces, it should be noted that discussions of hopeful, joyful moments were always already qualified by a sense of the logistical effort and multiple lines of 'sheer hard work' required to facilitate play.

> "We did have a wonderful day at [The Lake] during [school holidays] that is really special to my heart...Things just clicked…[but] I mean, we are talking sheer hard work to make it happen. I was a nervous wreck"

More positive accounts of outdoor play were also qualified by a sense of the gradual process which families 'had to go through' before they could 'feel comfortable' in local outdoor/natural play-spaces. This process of coming to 'trust a place is OK for us' was often 'fraught' and years-long.

> "We've had to go through a lot of trial and error before we can feel happy and…comfortable at [The Lake and The Woods]…To get to the stage where [we] trust a place enough to chill out and have fun, it's a slow step-by-step process, a real gradual thing. You've got to have that patience, and build it up and up, over a few visits"

> "It takes time to trust that a place is OK for us…It takes a huge amount of trust before [son] can [be] happy to play next to anyone else. He is seven now. We have been going up to the [Woods] every summer, and things have got quite fraught on many occasions, and it is only now really that we can go there and have a good time"

Descriptions of joyful playful experiences at The Woods and The Lake were also invariably qualified by a sense that 'anything can happen'; positive experiences were no guarantee of future happiness in these spaces. Indeed, most parents/carers presumed that the unpredictable social-material mutability of outdoor/natural play-spaces meant that they should permanently 'expect the unexpected' and 'prepare yourself for disappointment' in future.

> "You have to be able to adapt all the time. You've got to get [to The Woods or The Lake] and see what happens. It's never the same…So we have to manage our expectations. We might have a

> great time but on the other hand, anything can happen and we have to be on the defensive and be prepared for disappointments”

I also note that these more positive accounts were overwhelmingly described in terms of being ‘apart’ from – or ‘out of the way’ of, ‘unnoticed’ by – what parents/carers sometimes described as ‘normal’ playing families. Again, a poignant sense of otherness from – and ‘not living up to’ – normative family outdoor/natural play recurred even as parents/carers recalled some of their happiest experiences at local outdoor/natural play-spaces.

> “We try to find a little place for ourselves off to the side of the main play area, where we can get on with things our own way and go unnoticed really, so we are not getting in anybody’s way”
>
> “It is easier if we keep apart [from other playing families]…if we try to mix it with normal play activities there is a lot of potential for tension and upset, so it’s easier if we keep to ourselves”

Nevertheless, within these parameters, respondents recounted a wide range of moments when times spent at The Woods and The Lake could be ‘really loved’. Typically, these moments entailed making small, personalising, material-affective modifications within these outdoor/natural play-spaces. Thus, for instance, the addition of a favourite blanket or cuddly toy could ‘transform’ these play-spaces and, perhaps temporarily, overcome aforementioned barriers to play, relaxation and comfort.

> “We’re always learning…Like we had a moment down at [The Lake]…We’d had a nightmare getting ready, and everyone was stressed out,…we were nearly ready to call it a day but [partner] had the idea of spreading [son’s] blanket on the ground and that transformed it. It transformed the whole day. All of a sudden he really loved it, rolling around [on the blanket] and laughing”

Moments like these were described by parents/carers as tangibly ‘keeping us going’ through ‘all the hard times’ and in spite of the ‘inevitability’ of future challenges, sadnesses and disappointments.

> [Recalling a visit to The Woods:] “Just the smile on his face…We were all smiles. Moments like that, you don’t forget. It keeps us going. You store it up…All the hard times we have, you have to think back to those smiles”

Conclusions

This paper has foregrounded the qualitative experiences of families with disabled children in relation to two particular purpose-refurbished accessible outdoor play/nature spaces. Despite the diverse range of disabilities and family backgrounds engaged in this study, participants were remarkably consistent in describing these sites as, predominantly, spaces of hard work, sadness, dread, resignation, inadequacy, and barriers to fun. I suggest that these data prompt three sets of questions.

First, the accounts presented here direct attention to the complex, multiple ways in which diverse mind-body-emotional conditions intersect with play practices and, specifically, with design(at)ed play/nature spaces. The empirical and social-material-emotional details of these intersections emerged as centrally important for participants, yet it remains true that the qualitative experiences of diversely-disabled people are relatively absent from contemporary popular and academic discourses relating to leisure, play and outdoor spaces. Like Holt (2010), Ryan (2008) and Worth (2013a) I therefore conclude by calling for sustained and extended geographical research to explore the constitutive significance of mind-body-emotional differences for the everyday mobilities, transitions, socio-spatialities – and intergenerational lives, loves and politics – of diverse children and young people.

Second, I suggest that these data demand more critical and careful theorisations of outdoor play and nature: acknowledging multiple experiences, identities and perspectives; allowing for the possibility that normative discourses of outdoor/nature play can serve to marginalise experiences and playing bodies which 'do not live up to' contemporary ideals. In conducting this research I was particularly saddened by parents'/carers' fears and expectations of not 'living up to' contemporary ideals of outdoor/nature play, to the extent that these anxieties frequently constituted forms of 'dread' and 'resignation' which foreclosed play itself. I therefore call for further research exploring ways in which children and young people's experiences are tangibly affected by normative metanarratives of disability (Worth 2013b), nature and play – and underpinning, typically-universalising, potentially-exclusionary contemporary ideals of childhood and youth (Skelton & Valentine 2007).

Third, despite the many sadnesses reported through the paper, I would particularly still-attendant hopefulness, highlighted in the final section of the paper. Such accounts of 'getting-on-with' everyday-geographies – with joy, love and special times – unsettle and allow for thinking beyond common working assumption that barriers to accessibility are the principal way in which play/nature spaces are encountered by disabled children and their families. It simply strikes me that many existing accounts of disability and outdoor/natural play permit too few opportunities to reflect upon these joyful, hopeful geographies of 'keeping going'.

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