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Title: What does it mean to ‘feel at home’? A pluralistic qualitative study of the experience of ‘feeling at home’.

Introduction

This paper presents the results of a qualitative collaborative pluralist study of the experience of ‘feeling at home’. The study was conducted by members of the Experiential Research Group (ERG) whose aim is to develop qualitative research strategies with which to explore the relationship between discursive and phenomenological aspects of experience. Our conceptual starting point is that experiences are always socially constructed as well as subjectively experienced, and always involve a felt sense. We use our own experiences as data, and we analyse our written accounts of these experiences with a view to gaining a better understanding of the interface between the phenomenological and the discursive.

In an earlier paper (Ahmed et al. 2023) we shared our reflections on methodological aspects of the study and the challenges and opportunities offered by adopting a collaborative pluralist research design. In this paper we focus on the insights we have gained about the experience of feeling at home. We present the results of our analytic engagement with the aim of clarifying the parameters and dimensions that characterise this experience and the conditions and contexts within which it may arise.

The paper opens by situating our study within wider literature concerned with the experience of ‘home’. We provide a rationale for our focus on the experience of feeling at home, and review similar studies. This is followed by an account of the study design

and the procedures we adopted for data collection and analysis. Presentation of the results takes the form of a series of themes, each of which captures a dimension of the experience. Together, they illuminate how the experience of feeling at home is socially produced and they identify the conditions which seem to be required for this experience to be accessible to people. We conclude the paper by making a start on delineating the conditions necessary for feeling at home to be possible. Finally, we present some brief methodological reflections and suggestions for future research.

Literature review

The notion of home is a complex and multidimensional construct extensively examined across various disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, psychology (including psychotherapy and therapeutic practice), human geography, history, gender studies, architecture, housing research and philosophy (Dolezal, 2017; Easthope, 2004; Hill 1996; Kottler, 2015; Mallett, 2004).

Where research has focused on 'feeling at home', this has been predominantly in relation to a physical space or geographical location and how this may impact how home is understood. There has been a broad range of spaces or locations referred to when considering 'feeling at home', from nursing homes and care facilities (Chen, et al., 2021; De Veer & Kerkstra, 2001; Rijnaard et al., 2016) colleges (Stephens et al., 2015) the wilderness (Løvoll et al., 2020) to more broader concepts such as nation states (Dolezal, 2017) borders, homeland and migration (Boccagni & Vargas-Silva, 2021; Dawson & Rapport, 2021; Fortier, 2020; Mitzen, 2018) as well as in relation to

other forms of being such as experiences of homelessness (Bormanis, 2019), and enduring severe long-term illnesses (Öhlén et al., 2014). Thus, the idea of home can encapsulate cultural norms intertwined with personal aspirations, recollections, and sentiments and it can serve as a symbol of belonging and attachment (Hill, 1996) stemming from interpersonal connections and our inherent vulnerabilities. Crucial to the formation of our identities, the notion of home manifests diversely among individuals, shaped by their unique life experiences (Dupuis & Thorns, 1998; Easthope, 2004; Gurney, 1997).

Across the various disciplines, researchers have drawn on a range of ideas such as Bourdieu's concept of Habitus; Tuan's formulation of Topophilia (e.g. Easthope, 2004) and the concept of 'ontological security' (Dolezal, 2017; Dupuis & Thorns, 1998), amongst others to understand home. Feminist researchers have argued that much research that examines the idea or meaning of home, tends to assume that home is a concept that is gender neutral which is a consequence of a lack of women's voices in the research. When research does focus on women's voices, the way home is understood is very much gendered and often can be highly complex and ambivalent for women (Dolezal, 2017; Gurney, 1997).

Moreover, within contemporary Anglo-European discourse, the concept of home is delineated as a private domain distinct from the public sphere. The public sphere is commonly linked with professional endeavours and various social, political, and non-familial interactions, whereas the private realm of the home is characterized by familial

bonds, caregiving relationships, intimacy, a sense of belonging (Ahmed, 1999), and security (Dupuis & Thorns, 1998).

Nevertheless, the existing body of literature concerned with ‘home’ is not directly pertinent to the scope of this paper, primarily as the former predominantly examines home as a physical location or spatial entity. While there exists some phenomenological inquiry into home as an experience or an encounter, such scholarship is concerned with the varied manifestations of how individuals perceive and engage with ‘home’, emphasizing the interplay between self and environment (Mallett, 2004). Distinguishing between being at home and feeling at home, as expounded by Carriere (2013), underscores that these represent two distinct phenomena. Thus, our focus in this paper will be specifically directed towards exploring the experiential aspect of feeling at home. Our research is interested in the phenomenological expression of “feeling at home” (“I feel right at home…”; “this makes me feel at home…”) without there necessarily being a (direct) connection or reference to a space or location that might be considered a home.

Method

Our approach is one of analytic pluralism, a qualitative inquiry approach that combines several methods of analysis applied to same data set. The different readings are perceived as complementing each other in order to produce a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of interest (Clarke et al., 2015). We met as a group of researchers and discussed the emerging analysis at monthly meetings.

We used a method of data collection that is similar to memory work (Haug,1987; Crawford et al., 1992) in that we used our own experiences to generate data in the form of written accounts of the phenomenon under investigation. Our method had nine steps. In step 1, we decided on a trigger to prompt our writing and agreed that the accounts should be a memory of a recent moment in which we recognized an experience of 'feeling at home', or conversely, 'not feeling at home'. We did not set a minimum or maximum word length and did not stipulate how soon they should be written after the experience. Seven accounts were produced (Step 2)

Box 1: Example of an account produced in step 2

> As I cycled down a quiet one-way street on the pavement enjoying the spring sunshine and slight breeze, I was suddenly enveloped by a strong smell of freshly washed laundry. It was a really intense smell which completely replaced the previous smell of fresh air and subtle scent of blossom coming from trees and front gardens. It felt like I had entered a kind of laundry-cloud which excluded all other smells. Although surprising and unexpectedly intense, the sensation generated a feeling of familiarity and at-homeness. A feeling of things being as they should be, of all being well and in their rightful place. The freshness of the smell was pleasant and reassuring somehow. It made me aware that although I had really enjoyed the previous ambience of cycling outdoors in the fresh spring breeze, this had not generated this sense of feeling 'at home'. It did not feel as settled and containing as the laundry smell did. Settled in the sense of safe and reassuring.

Over a six-month period, we conducted individual qualitative analyses of each account which produced 49 separate analyses. Members chose a method of analysis in line with their research interest or experience. The methods chosen included Critical Discourse Analysis, The Listening Guide, Descriptive Phenomenology, Interpretative

Phenomenological Analysis, and Dual Focus Analysis (phenomenological and narrative analysis) (Step 3).

Following the production of the individual analyses of the accounts, we met as a group to discuss. The author of each account was invited to respond to the insights and interpretations offered (Step 4).

Box 2: Example of a reflection in step 4

> I found the analyses quite compelling to read. This felt somewhat different to reading analyses of others' accounts, in the sense that there was a heightened sense of their power to 'illuminate' the experience, as it was my experience and I knew that I hadn't been conscious of what was being described in the analyses, either during the experience, or while writing about it. In that sense it felt a bit like the process of therapy in offering a new understanding or reframing my experience.

At this point, we were becoming increasingly interested in a reflexive engagement with the research processes as they were unfolding, and we each wrote about our experiences and positioning in the group and our identities that were pertinent to the topic of feeling at home. (Step 5). The result of these reflections was summarised in Ahmed et al. (2023).

Box 3: Example of step 5

> …I don't know whether to assume that this is something internal to me, a lucky accident, or whether it is because I represent a particular identity…It might also partly be because I have learnt which contexts work for me and those that don't and have learnt to avoid places and situations in which I will not feel at home…I feel at home at my age now in many more situations or contexts that I did when I was younger…

The reflexive stance led to us thinking and writing further about the ontological and epistemological assumptions that we each held (Step 6).

Box 4: Example of step 6

> …Ontologically, my approach conceives of people as meaning-making creatures who use language to tell stories about their experiences which help them understand themselves and their experiences, to make decisions and take action. The way people experience themselves and their sense of themselves is to a large extent the product of their meaning-making activities. The resources people use to engage in their meaning-making activities are socially shared and their availability is shaped by social, cultural and historical forces. So there is a critical realist basis to this conceptualisation. Finally, stories are told both the self and to other people.

Next, we began the process of integrating our findings (without having a specific goal for what this might produce). Each of us wrote a reflection of what we had learned about feeling at home from f the seven analyses of each account. This generated 42 'integrations' (6*7= 42 as one member was on a maternity leave). We wanted to see whether it would be possible to identify some common qualities of feeling at home. We

also wanted to delay the imposition of any one meaning or theoretical lens until the latest possible moment, striving for a bottom-up pluralistic approach for as long as possible. It was important that all our perspectives and voices were included in order to have confidence that these analyses would be both coherent and inclusive (Step 7).

Box 5: Example of step 7

The analyses understand feeling at home as an embodied, lived experience of feeling calm, settled and content. It is conceptualised as a solitary and highly personal experience. It comprises a sense of familiarity, safety and reassurance, of being contained/ held by something familiar, of being in harmony with the world. Specially, it comprises a sense of things being 'right' and as they should be. There is also a paradox between this feeling of familiarity, and feeling at home being an intense, surprising and unexpected experience that can be 'triggered' by something and demands awareness, that can catch you by surprise.

The penultimate stage of the analysis involved moving to a higher-level analysis in which we each took one account and amalgamated the six integrated analyses of that specific account (generated in Step 7). This generated seven amalgamations (Step 8). Through this we noticed that a number of analytic themes seemed to be recurring and that these resonated with Ashworth's (2016) Lifeworld Dimensions. These were; *moodedness, relationality, selfhood, temporality*, *embodiment, place and space,* and *discourse*.

Box 6: Example of step 8

Moodedness: The overall feeling-tone of the experience is gently positive – there are feelings of calm, contentedness, familiarity, safety, and reassurance – all feelings that suggest harmony with the world. These feelings are intensified with the smell of laundry which 'lifts ´ the experience into something richer and intense. There is a strong sense of 'fittingness', of things being right and as they should be.

Temporality: The experience is surprising and unexpected, a fleeting moment that is triggered by a shift in the world – the laundry smell. So, in terms of duration, feeling-at-home can be a transitory discrete period.

Embodiment: This is an overtly embodied experience. The breeze and sunshine are felt, there is an awareness of the scent of blossom in the air and the sense of feeling-at-home is triggered by an intense smell of laundry.

Place/space: The spatiality of this experience is both private and public. It happens in the public space of a street (with attendant social norms etc.) but is a solitary event.

Selfhood: There is a sense of agency and purpose (decision to vote and journey home) which shifts to a sense of the unexpected and unplanned – the event of the laundry smell is outside of her control.

Discourse/language: The language used 'discloses ´ an experience which shifts from being enjoyable and pleasant to something richer and more enveloping which grounds her in the world – in this moment and place. The intense smell of laundry invokes ideas about cleanness which gives rise to discourses about renewal, possibilities of fresh starts and safety/reassurance.

The final stage was to elaborate our findings centred on each of these themes. Each analytic theme was drafted by one author and then discussed together by the group to shape it into its final version (Step 9). These became our findings (see below).

Findings

We describe each of our seven themes in turn, using Ashworth's (2016) life-world dimensions as sub-headings. We draw on our data to illustrate the claims we make about the meaning and purpose of each theme, and we reflect on the contribution they each make to the experiential-discursive phenomenon of 'feeling at home'.

Moodedness

Moodedness speaks to how the situations that we find ourselves in always have an affective character. This phenomenological concept proposes that moods are both *constitutive* of who we are and *disclosive* of the world we live in – that is, moods tell us something about our experiences because we are always affectively involved in the events of our lives. Moods are not simply subjective and private states, rather they are "the irremovable lenses through which the world is made manifest to us, yet they are rarely the focus of our attention" (Elpidorou & Freeman, 2015, pg. 664).

The affective character of our accounts of feeling at home are imbued with a strong positive valency and tone. Feelings of happiness, contentment, peacefulness, warmth, and gratitude are pervasive despite the very different contexts in which the feelings arise. For example, being in the pub with friends is described as "feeling happy, at ease" and that "things felt light and frivolous". The family home is a place where one can feel "content", "loved, welcomed and wanted" whilst the London Underground is somewhere "I felt safe".

Bodily sensations can also be an important component in generating the moodedness of an experience. Whilst cycling on a spring day and being aware of and enjoying “fresh air and the subtle scent of blossom”, a strong smell of freshly washed laundry transforms the experience into something more intense and present which ‘feels like’ feeling at home.

Despite the positive affective resonance of the descriptions, feeling at home is unstable and contingent, and can be unsettled quite easily by a shift in perspective and circumstance. So, a hotel room in a chain of frequently visited hotels becomes “an airless hermetically sealed box” in contrast to how it was experienced as a “safe haven” from an unwelcoming city the night before. Similarly, it is possible to feel at home because of the sheer familiarity of a place (“my eyes feel at home, recognize the sights, the shops, the gardens”) and because of memories (“of giving birth to my son here, of refurbishing the flat”) whilst simultaneously *not* feeling at home because of people, social relations, and expectations (“I always have to be on my toes”).

One way of explaining the moodedness of feeling at home is as an experience of *rightness* where “[R]ightness is at once the core feeling of positive evaluation, of coherence, of meaningfulness, of knowledge” (Mangan, 2001, pg. 4). On this reading, feeling at home is at least in part, a ‘feeling-of-knowing', that the experience is one of completeness and fittingness.

Relationality

Relationality acknowledges others as a central part of our experience in the world, and is interested in the relevance of others, and includes relationships with people who are with us in the moment, or relationships held within a memory that triggers the experience of feeling at home.

Often, the relational experience that is described involves a close connection to other people. For example, feeling part of something that is shared ("shared humour", "shared history and memories", "a shared future") and feeling a sense of belonging ("the warmth of feeling connected, affection for the people around me"). In a sense, intimate relationships with other people are the substance of which home is made, these relationships are the bricks and walls of home: "my actual home across the road felt less real, less like home than the people around me". Feeling at home is built, by the warm relationships with others and the way they make us feel: "my family are here, my daughters in particular and my husband. So, I feel loved, welcomed, wanted." Feeling at home can also be a solitary experience; the encounter with the smell of freshly washed laundry happens when alone, though memories of others are implied in the feelings of familiarity it generates.

The centrality of relationships was demonstrated also by way of contrast, in experiences with other people in which one feels 'out of place'. A dirty city centre and noisy people bombard the self with unwanted impressions and stimuli, leading to feeling "distinctly not at home". Polite relationships and feeling constrained and self-conscious mean "I never felt at home there". More broadly, being a foreigner in the UK and feeling at odds

with dominant cultural norms mean “I never really feel at home when I speak English. I always feel like I understand the words people say but not the subtext”. To feel at home is to feel accepted and understood, to speak a similar language, both literally and metaphorically. Conversely, a different position within the dominant culture (as second-generation British) allows for an experience of feeling at home in a city full of immigrants who speak different languages and have different codes of dressing: “I had the thought then, that this felt like home, amongst the different languages and people from other places”.

Feeling at home then is often a relational experience of feeling connected, loved and understood by other people. And the opposite is also true, as not feeling comfortable in the presence of other people can feel distinctly not at home.

Selfhood

Feeling at home allows for a self that can be authentic, rather than caught up with self-presentation/ management, or stuck in situations where one feels silenced. It is a self that feels loved and accepted, experienced as existing in a familiar or secure environment and fundamentally safe from harm.

This sense of oneself may be reflected through relationships with other people who are sharing a familiar setting and the social practices associated with it, such as drinking in the pub with friends. There is connection to the self and the possibility to ‘be’ oneself in a truthful or authentic way.

In comparison, feeling at home can also arise when alone. Solitude may be necessary because others create discomfort through the need to be interacted with, and the requirement for a particular self to be presented. An internal connection to the self becomes possible when alone, in contrast with external disconnectedness and displacement. Safe from intrusive others, the self can be reached (“In the hotel room I was able to shut out the world including people - hardly anyone knew where I was. I felt cocooned after being ‘out in the world’”). In such cases the relationship to self is the foremost concern and the ‘wished for’ state is to be free of obligation. Feeling at home is within the self and there is an active, effortful journey made to get there.

Feeling at home, then, is an agentic state, in which it is possible to move, create and engage with one’s world. There is agency in making a hotel room familiar with personal objects, seeking connection with the outside world by looking for green space, or withdrawing from the external world into a space that can be controlled. There is an active seeking out of a sense of internal connection, inner expansion and groundedness in a space in which one is the only inhabitant.

At other times, this sense of self may be experienced less as a deliberate act, and more like being pulled into a more intense state than the one before (“It felt like I had entered a kind of laundry-cloud which excluded all other smells. Although surprising and unexpectedly intense, the sensation generated a feeling of familiarity and at-homeness”). In this experience, the agency might be in not resisting or in allowing the

unexpected sensation to come over the self, like a surrendering to something, or admitting the sensation into oneself.

This is contrasted with experiences of feeling constrained and restricted, or, excessive and out of place when in the presence of certain obligations or certain others: “I always feel here too noisy, too noisy, too much. I try to turn myself down. I try to say less, be quieter, but I always come out as ‘too much’, too much opinion, too much movements, never the right movements.” To feel at home, then, necessitates that one can be oneself without being experienced as different from the norm (in this case, the British cultural norm of understated conduct), or, feeling that one fits.

When feeling at home, the sense of self is experienced as unburdened, agentic, at ease with itself, whilst when not feeling at home, the self is constrained, not free or autonomous.

Temporality

Feeling at home is often a fleeting and ephemeral sensation, a temporary state. It may last a few seconds, minutes, or a whole evening, though across all our accounts, it is a sensation with a beginning and an end.

Feeling at home can be experienced quite suddenly and unexpectedly, or it can be facilitated, for example by organizing the space in a certain way. But even within the same location, the feeling can be limited and lost. The hotel room that felt safe and cocooning, can later be experienced as suffocating. As a sensation, it cannot be forced

or fully controlled. Instead, it is an experience that is often encountered as a suspended moment in time: “It’s a time of peace and I feel content for a few minutes until my mind creates another demand”.

Feeling at home can be triggered or invoked (like a moment of recognition) by a cognitive or embodied/ sensory memory. Such memories may be connected to one’s biography, and triggered by something that happens in that moment, for example, smelling fresh laundry.

Embodiment

The body is implicated in feeling at home. Pleasurable emotions associated with feeling at home, such as a sense of relaxation and warmth, have an embodied quality. When feeling at home, one can breathe (deeply) and let go (of tension).

Not feeling at home is also an embodied experience which can involve a sense of tension and of feeling constrained. The body feels tense and vigilant, breathing is shallow, there’s a sense of holding things in, of being ‘on one’s toes’ and not being able to let go.

Parts of the body, remember a place or a smell and thus reconnect the person with embodied memory traces that speak of feeling at home: “Walking the streets of where we used to live, my feet feel at home. They know the pavement, the corners, the zebra crossing. My body remembers the sensation of walking here 12 years ago.” This then generates a sense of calmness, of feeling settled and content.

Place and Space

There was a dynamic relationship in the accounts between places/ spaces and the feelings that emerge within, or because of them. The shifting nature of how different places are experienced was reflected in the shifting emotions experienced by those in them, from relief and comfort, to unease and feeling unsettled.

. Some accounts described indoor spaces of safety, calmness and familiarity - a 'bubble' suspended in time without the external disruptions of the world. These were protective and intimate spaces inside, to help escape the outside.

There were also psychological dimensions to the notion of 'open' and 'closed' spaces, e.g. public or outdoor spaces such as the tube or the mountains elicited feeling at home, but the experience was distinctly a private or solitary one and therefore, in some ways, 'closed/ inside'. Space was sometimes manipulated to create the experience of feeling at home, as in making the hotel room feel home-like through spreading one's personal belongings, actively shutting out external roles, responsibilities, and noise and engaging in relaxing activities and rituals. A 'closed' space can also quickly shift from being experienced as cocooning to suffocating. In this way, feeling at home and not feeling at home chase one another, helping to elucidate each other.

Feeling at home may involve activating embodied memories of a place and internally reconnecting with these. However, whilst familiarity with a place may generate feeling at home, it is not always sufficient. Feeling at home can disrupt typical understandings of what home is, for example, feeling at home in a place that is no longer home and/ or in

a place that one is visiting. Conversely, there are familiar places where one does not feel at home. In this way, feeling at home is not the same as ‘being at home’.

Discourse

An understanding of feeling at home can be further developed by considering how accounts of feeling at home are constructed. The phrase itself, commonly used by English speakers, is already imbued with the assumption that those using it tacitly understand what *home* means when the phrase is used, whatever the context or situation. One person’s feeling at home may be different from another’s, but both people will understand what it refers to. So even before accounts of feeling at home are analysed, there may be assumptions about how the phrase may refer to feeling, for example, comfortable, ‘fitting in’, feeling content etc.

When taking a discursive lens to analysing accounts of feeling at home, one can start by seeing each of the ‘fractions’ (e.g. *moodedness*, *relationality*, *embodiment*, *selfhood* etc.) identified as discourses. For example, within *relationality* there is arguably a normative discourse that being around people (or pets) you feel close to contributes to feeling at home, and some of the accounts reproduce this discourse:

> *...my family are here, my daughters in particular and my husband. So, I feel loved, welcomed, wanted.*

However, in some accounts, there is also resistance to this idea, in that being away from family members, being amongst strangers (including those who speak different languages/ languages one does not understand), or being by oneself can also contribute to feeling at home:

The park or the mountains are of course familiar but there I feel connected to the world, grounded maybe. They are also places I can be on my own.

Often what is invoked in these apparent contradictions to normative ideas about relationality (in this case), are other discourses, for example, about the self; feeling oneself in some way, be it in relation to embodied sensory feelings of calm, contentedness, relaxation due to a smell, being in nature, away from people/ certain family members etc. The idea of being oneself is more important than being around other people. A discourse of an 'authentic self' is afforded primacy, even when constructs of relationship are invoked.

Associating a physical space with feeling at home is a commonly reproduced assumption, including in accounts of actual home ("So it is whilst I am literally 'at home', in my house"), or not being at home ("And yet, I feel so relaxed here, exactly because it is not home and will never be home"). In some accounts the fluidity of where might be considered home changes depending on other factors (negative memories, physical environments that feel unsettling versus those that feel calming). In some of these cases, when this idea is resisted or contradicted, there are challenges to a sense of feeling oneself.

Discussion

The aim of this paper has been to gain a better understanding of how the experience of 'feeling at home' comes into being and under what conditions it arises experientially and discursively. We hoped to begin to delineate, in a systematic fashion the conditions that

need to be in place for us to ‘feel at home’. In addition, we sought to capture something of the meaning and significance, as well as the ‘felt sense’, of feeling at home. In the ‘Findings’ section we presented the insights we gained about how ‘feeling at home’ may come into being, and we traced how moodedness, relationality, selfhood, temporality, embodiment, place/space, and discourse play their part in this process. Now, we reflect on our findings by considering what they tell us about the structure and conditionality of the experience of ‘feeling at home’. We also discuss some of the wider social and theoretical implications of our findings.

Our analysis suggested that the experience of ‘feeling at home’ has a positive tone and valence which, however, can be fragile and unstable due to shifts and changes in the conditions which facilitated it. In temporal terms the experience was, often fleeting, and even where it was longer-lasting, it always had a beginning and an end. The felt-sense of ‘feeling at home’ was characterised by a freedom from tension, and a sense of calmness and relaxation. Familiarity with one’s surroundings and a sense of safety was part of this felt-sense. Locations and settings within which the experience arose varied greatly, including indoor and outdoor settings, public and private locations and solitary and shared spaces. When ‘feeling at home’, the self was experienced as free, authentic, agentic and grounded. Solitary and shared versions of the experience involved feelings of closeness (to self and/or others), connection (to self and/or others), and belonging (to places, environments, and/or people). The experience coalesced around normative discourses and cultural conceptual repertoires which were either mobilised and embraced or resisted and challenged (or a mixture of both). Either way, they shaped accounts of our experience and constructed versions of what it means to ‘feel at home’.

Each version opens up as well as closes down subject positions and possibilities for experience and action, and each includes some actors and excludes others. For example, the description of the feelings of inclusion, closeness and belonging that characterised our experiences of ‘feeling at home’ (for example, whilst sitting by the fire in a pub talking with friends) imply and, therefore construct, a space literally and experientially ‘outside’ of this experience (for example, the space outside the pub where people pass by or look through the window at the cosy scene, or the place at the next table where someone is sitting who is not a part of the group of friends) and, therefore, also construct the possibility of the experience of exclusion. The latter is brought into being by the existence of the former; in other words, one person’s experience of ‘feeling at home’ potentially constitutes another person’s experience of being excluded.

Our accounts indicated that in order to feel at home there needed to be a sense of familiarity with the setting, surroundings and/or the present situation. Familiarity could be experienced at a pre-conscious embodied level, through our bodies recognising smells, sounds and shapes. However, although familiarity seems to be a necessary condition for ‘feeling at home’, it was not sufficient; our accounts included descriptions of feeling distinctly not at home in familiar surroundings. In addition to familiarity there needed to be a sense of safety as well as a sense of fittingness and rightness, of things being as they should be. Regarding the felt sense of safety, although we did not take physiological measures, our experience of our bodies as being ‘dialled down’ implies that when we felt ‘at home’ physiologically we were in the nervous system’s parasympathetic ‘rest-and-digest’ state, signalling and reinforcing the sense that all is well and that it is safe to relax. When feeling at home, there was no need to ‘be on our

toes', to 'look over our shoulders' or to 'hold our breath'. We could let go because it felt safe to do so. This observation is perhaps not surprising given that the primary purpose of the physical home (or the nest, the den, the burrow, etc) for all animals is to provide a place of safety. Both human and animal homes function as refuges that keep their inhabitants warm and dry and protect them from intrusions and predation. Our association of 'feeling at home' with 'feeling safe' takes these meanings beyond their material origins but retains the notion that it is not possible to 'feel at home' and 'feel at risk' at the same time. Perhaps this is why the occurrence of domestic violence is so very disturbing as a phenomenon and so very distressing for those who experience it. To experience abuse within the very setting that we expect to provide safety is, by definition, traumatic. Indeed, our analysis of our accounts of our experiences of 'feeling at home' indicated that feeling at home often takes the form of a relational experience of feeling connected, loved and understood by other people. It is the connection we feel with others that makes us feel at home with them. We experience a sense of 'us', of sharing a world with these others, without the fear of being rejected, hurt or 'othered' by them. This speaks to a sense of safety and security which enables us to 'be ourselves' to feel at home with ourselves. It was also possible to feel connected to oneself in a solitary setting where the surroundings (e.g. nature, a cosy hotel room) provided a sense of safety and groundedness.

Feeling at home' could also be produced as a result of deliberate actions taken to bring it about or it could come 'out of the blue' and as a surprise. In the former, we exercise agency by engineering our surroundings in such a way as to facilitate the experience, for example by making a hotel room familiar with personal objects, or by seeking out a

favourite spot in nature. In the latter, the experience is triggered by something unexpected such as the smell of laundry on a summer's day, or by reading a passage in a book which uses language that felt safe and familiar. This suggests that agency can be implicated in very different ways in the experience of 'feeling at home'. However, although deliberate steps can be taken to enable the experience, there is no guarantee that it will actually arise or that it will last as long as we would like it to. A location that is experienced as safe and comforting in the past may not feel that way on a future occasion. Subtle changes in the setting as well as differences in what we bring to the situation (e.g. in terms of mood, levels of arousal, internal dialogue) can derail our attempt at producing the experience. Simply put, 'feeling at home' cannot be forced.

The driving force behind this collaborative project was to think about and work towards a better understanding of how the interface between experience and discourse might be bridged in a piece of qualitative research. Although this paper is concerned with what we have learnt about the experiential and discursive event of feeling-at-home, it nevertheless illustrates what a commitment to both experience and discourse might look like. For example, the description of our analytic process conveys a sense of how we utilised the specific perspectives of each group member through an organic non-hierarchical way of working with the material. In terms of our research backgrounds and interests, we are variously spread across the experiential-discursive continuum and throughout we attempted to maintain a stance of openness to and genuine engagement with alternative viewpoints so that both the experiential and the discursive worked together in productive tension.

This way of working reflects Ricoeur's (1976, 1981) ideas of distanciation (a critical mode) and appropriation (a mode of empathy/understanding) which sees these two ways of working as a dialectic rather than a synthesis. With appropriation, we seek to open up possible worlds of meaning and it is only through this mode that we are able to take up a critical position (Langdridge, 2004). Similarly, this position aligns with Yanchar's (2015) distinction of people as either existential world-disclosers or epistemic world-constructors although we suggest that people operate in the world as both. The experience of 'feeling-at-home' was our starting point and we reached an understanding of the various experiences through language whilst acknowledging that although we exist outside of language, we come to understand through it. Thus, contained within our experiential descriptions, there were multiple possible meanings within a limited range of constructions.

Our commitment was to a pluralistic approach which aimed to produce knowledge through a genuine engagement with each other's epistemological and theoretical perspectives which meant that our process was inevitably rather painstaking. Each step of our analysis was a result of careful reflection and a slow movement of 'feeling-towards' what the next step should be. After completing step 7 we judged that our analyses did indeed reflect all of our perspectives and we felt comfortable in finally framing our findings theoretically (step 8). This led us to draw on the lifeworld dimensions proposed by Ashworth (2016), dimensions which became relevant for us through the analytic process and which we believe provide a way of including the various positions we occupy on the experiential-discursive continuum. This step which we called an 'amalgamation' showcases not just the outcome of a series of processual

steps which was inclusive of the various positions we held; it also allowed these positions to remain recognisable. Thus, it affirms the integrity of different emphases whilst bringing them into a working harmony.

In this paper we have offered some reflections on what it means to ‘feel at home´. We have identified some essential experiential qualities that characterised our experiences of ‘feeling at home’ (a positive tone and valence; in-the moment fleetingness; a sense of calmness and relaxation; feelings of closeness, connection and belonging; a sense of fittingness and contentment). We have identified some key conditions which need to be in place for the experience to arise (familiarity; a sense of safety; a certain amount of agency; connection to self and others; freedom from tension; available discursive resources to construct version of ‘feeling at home’ that do not exclude the self). As such, we have begun the work of delineating the experiential and discursive structure of ‘feeling at home’. Future research could advance this project by exploring the experience in different social and cultural contexts. We are aware that our research group has a relatively privileged relationship with the notion of ‘home’ (in the sense that we have easy access to the conditions of its emergence) and that our accounts of the experience were generated and, therefore, speak to this context. It would be interesting (and important) to see how ‘feeling at home’ may be brought into being within different, and perhaps more challenging conditions (e.g. within institutional settings, amongst dislocated people and communities, among homeless people, etc). A promising next step might be to conduct a formal concept analysis (e.g. Walker & Avant, 2019) of ‘feeling at home’ which would involve a systematic examination of the use of this notion within the extant literature, with the aim of specifying the fewest number of defining

attributes or characteristics that point specifically to the concept of interest while simultaneously distinguishing it from other related concepts. Part of this clarification would involve an examination of the conditions that need to be in place for the concept in question to manifest as well as the consequences associated with it (eg. which emotions and behaviours it might give rise to). It would be interesting to see to what extent the results of such a formal analysis might echo our own findings regarding the conditions required for the experience of ‘feeling at home’ to come into being.

Our research suggests that feeling safe and relaxed is a pre-condition for the experience of ‘feeling at home’, and that a sense of things being ‘right’ and ‘as they should be’, are a further expression of the contentment that comes with feeling at home. A question for future research that arises from these observations might be to explore what differentiates the experience of ‘feeling at home’ from the experience of boredom.

We have been fortunate to be able to take our time and allow our project to evolve, to work with each other in a way that respected differences of opinion and approach, and that sought to include, and integrate, diverse perspectives. In other words, we were able to indulge in ‘slow scholarship’ (Karkov, 2019). This, in turn, has enabled us to ‘feel at home’ in our research group, and for this we are grateful.

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