How A Hashtag Matters – Crafting Response(-Abilities) through Research-Activism on Sexual Harassment in Pre-Teen Peer Cultures

Suvi Pihkala, Dr., University of Oulu[1], Finland, e-mail   suvi.pihkala@oulu.fi
Tuija Huuki, Adjunct Professor, University of Oulu, Finland, e-mail   tuija.huuki@oulu.fi

Abstract

This paper examines what research with children can do and become when it intra-acts with a MeToo hashtag, creative methods, experiences of sexual harassment and the making and travelling of Valentine's Day cards. The paper is grounded within a creative research-activist project, *#MeToo Postscriptum,* which aimed to address sexual harassment in pre-teen peer cultures. Analyzing the project, the paper explores how the idea of response-ability manifested in three space-times of the project, and how the material-discursive practices of the project reiteratively reconfigured the conditions of possibilities to respond, react, and act against abusive gendered and sexual child peer cultures. Mapping response-ability through our research endeavours helps theorize the contingent, complex, and entangled ways research-activist methodologies can activate change, enables us to envision response-able practices to counter sexual harassment in young peer cultures, and sensitizes us as scholars and educators to our responsibilities and accountabilities that become recrafted in response.

Keywords: Children, creative methods, feminist new materialisms, research-activism, response-ability, school, sexual harassment

Introduction

This paper is inspired by the recent theoretical-methodological calls by feminist posthuman and new materialist scholars for political and affirmative modes of inquiry (Braidotti, 2013; Strom & Martin, 2017; Åsberg & Braidotti, 2018). In particular, the paper draws inspiration from educational research that seeks to actively open up to the potentials of change and transformation, particularly in research on the gendered and sexual peer relations of young people (Renold, 2018; Renold & Ringrose, 2019). This scholarly work within the growing "PhEmaterialist" collective (Niccolini, Zarabadi, & Ringrose, 2018; Osgood & Robinson,

---

[1] Corresponding Author: Dr. Suvi Pihkala, suvi.pihkala@oulu.fi, P.O. Box 2000, FI-90014 University of Oulu, Finland

2019; Renold, 2018; Ringrose, Warfield, & Zarabadi, 2019) has combined, in a generative fashion, the attention to affect, materiality, and relationality in the social sciences with feminist genealogies in research (Ringrose et al., 2019). In seeking new modes of inquiry, PhEmaterialist researchers have engaged in methodological experiments that move from oral and talk-based methods towards creative, arts-based, and activist approaches (Hickey-moody & Page, 2016; Osgood & Giugni, 2015; Tumanyan & Huuki, forthcoming). In employing creative methods, PhEmaterialist thinking, instead of departing from an individual self or representation, takes relationality, materiality, and becoming as the starting point. Most importantly, scholars in this body of work have strived towards what Karen Barad (2007; 2010) and Donna Haraway (2008; 2016) would call "response-able" research, pedagogy and practice (Renold, 2018; Ringrose et al., 2019; Taylor, 2018). Here, response-ability is underscored by the genealogies of feminist ethico-politics in the practices of knowledge production on the one hand and the post-individual, posthuman onto-epistemologies of decentred agency and relationality on the other.

Weaving connections with these alignments in feminist posthuman and new materialisms, we respond to Renold's (2018, p. 51) invitation to "experiment with what else an engagement with ethico-political methodologies and posthuman activisms can do as we persist in pursuing ever-inventive ways to ethically and creatively craft experience in ways that can spark recognition, imagination, and change." To do so, we report on our *#MeToo Postscriptum* research project from early 2018. The #MeToo Postscriptum was a spin-off project from the second author's—Tuija's—long-term and ongoing research on gender and power in young peer cultures. The project took place during the growing debate around sexual harassment that was reanimated by the rise of the MeToo movement in 2017 (Hearn, 2018; Mendes, Ringrose, & Keller, 2018; Zarkov & Davis, 2018).[2] During the project, we used creative methods to engage with 150 children who were 10–12 years of age to explore and communicate their experiences of harassment in their peer cultures. Although the project was rapidly set up and implemented in a timeframe of only two months, it was grounded in more than a decade of research with children (e.g., Holford, Renold, & Huuki, 2013; Huuki, 2019; Huuki, Manninen, & Sunnari, 2010; Huuki & Renold, 2016). Inspired by child- and youth-led activism in Wales (Renold, 2016), the project aimed to counter sexual harassment in young peer cultures and to tackle and disrupt the practices of silence and normalization by constructing conditions in which children could speak out and communicate their experiences of harassment to decision-makers and the wider public.

Emerging from an interest in generating knowledge and potentially activating change in the realms of public and political debate, the project sheds light on how research merges with activism, becoming research-activism, and co-constitutes conditions for researchers, children, and others to react, respond, and take action against sexual harassment. Drawing on this project, our interest is to examine what research with children can do and become when it intra-acts (Barad, 2007) with a MeToo hashtag, creative methods, embodied experiences of sexual harassment, and the making and travelling of Valentine's Day cards.

For mapping the moments of research "doing and becoming," we are inspired by the works of two feminist theorists: Karen Barad and Donna Haraway. We employ their aforementioned material-discursive and

---

[2] Although the MeToo hashtag gained significant public volume in 2017 when it was taken to use by Alyssa Milano, the hashtag in itself originates back to 2006 when it was founded by black feminist activist Tarana Burke to address sexual violence (see e.g., Zarkov & Davies, 2018).

material-semiotic idea of response-ability; that is, ethics based not on the rational human mind, but rather on the ontological ability of response co-constituted through the intra-active entanglements of human and more-than-human others, such as bodies, objects, discourses, affects, space, and time (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2008). The feminist new materialist ethics of response-ability is grounded within particular and partial material engagements; it is situated, and as such, calls out how "[w]e are all responsible," as Haraway (2012, p. 313) writes, "but not in the same ways. The differences matter—in ecologies, economies, species, lives." Our interest in the present paper focuses on this specifically. We explore how response-ability became manifested in the material-discursive practices of our research-activist project and how such practices reiteratively reconfigured conditions of possibilities to respond, react, and act against abusive gendered and sexual pre-teen peer cultures.

We begin by providing a short overview of the #MeToo Postscriptum and by situating our study within the contexts of gender and sexual harassment in children's peer cultures. We will then elaborate on our theoretical-methodological approach by beginning with the notion of response-ability. In the analytical section, through the methodological practice of "thinking through connections" and "moving with response-ability," we contemplate three space-times of our research-activist project. First, we examine how the MeToo movement activated our research on sexual harassment. Second, we examine how the embodied experiences of sexual harassment were reiteratively reconfigured through the intra-active entanglements of children and Valentine's Day cards, and finally, we explore how the children's creations elicited further invitations to respond as they merged with the wider constellations of change-making.

Mapping response-ability as it traversed our research-activist project helps us theorize the contingent, complex, and entangled ways research-activist methodologies can activate change and helps us re-engage with the material practices essential for response-able research and practice. The current paper contributes to the explorations of how educational research can matter by slowing down to consider the fleeting moments when research merges with activism and activates change. Doing so is a practice grounded in an attempt to cultivate response-ability that challenges us to continuously rework ethically sustainable practices to counter sexual harassment in child peer cultures.

The Research-Activist Setting: #Metoo Postscriptum

Since the MeToo hashtag went viral in 2017, sexual harassment has been brought to public attention, into the realm of political debate, and into everyday activism in a widespread, if also contested, manner (Hearn, 2018; Mendes et al., 2018; Zarkov & Davis, 2018). Beyond the media coverage of harassment by high-profile perpetrators, the attention drawn to the prevalence of sexual harassment has also engaged decision-makers (Måve, 2018). This is the case in Finland, where the MeToo movement inspired politicians to contemplate actions to eradicate sexual harassment in Finnish society (Parliament of Finland, 2017). Although the movement has highlighted the urgent need to acknowledge, voice, and systematically address sexual harassment, as scholars who are closely engaged with research on abusive gendered and sexual power relations in child peer cultures (e.g., Holford et al., 2013; Huuki & Renold, 2016; Pihkala, Huuki, & Sunnari, 2019), we noticed how the public and political debate on sexual harassment had remained mostly blind to its manifestations in the everyday lives of children (see also Renold, 2013).

The #MeToo Postscriptum took place during this time of extensive public debate around sexual harassment. In reaction to this debate, our project was designed and implemented in early 2018 by the

authors and five student teachers. The core of the project was built around creative Valentine's Day workshops in schools in a city in Finland. The participating classes were recruited by contacting the head of education in the city administration, who circulated email invitations among local schools. Once confirmed, the children and their legal guardians were provided information about the research and were asked to sign a consent letter.[3] This consent, although the premise for participation, was open to ongoing negotiation. Therefore, we aimed to construct a space that enabled the participants to withdraw at any time and to negotiate their own ways of participating in the research and the workshops. For example, for a few of the participants, this meant that they took part in the workshops but did not share their cards in the campaign.

Over a period of three weeks, we held seventeen two-hour workshops with single-sex groups of children. The grouping of children by assumed gender was aligned with the accustomed and dominant practices of the schools and was also informed by our previous experiences of working on sensitive issues with children. Most importantly, we were familiar with the difficulty in addressing gender and sexuality issues in Finland, where they are often silenced and remain unaddressed. Our previous experiences had informed us that, because of the unaddressed and sensitive nature of these topics, addressing issues related to gender and sexuality in mixed groups can cause children to feel anxious. Often, this anxiousness affects the children so that they begin to enforce dominant modes of gender expression (Huuki, 2019). Because it was not possible for us to address the children's experiences of gender within the scope of our research, so as to work with and rework gender dichotomies and to enable such spaces that foster the children's abilities to engage with sensitive topics, the groups were divided by assumed gender with our approach during the workshops, remaining sensitive to diverse gender expressions.

The workshops began with an activity of "Hot Seats" that engaged the children in an embodied manner with topics related to—and framed by us as—gender and power, friendship and relationship cultures, and issues that might feel safe, fun, painful, or confusing in those relation(ship)s. These articulations were based on research and selected to acknowledge the often ambivalent and normalized ways that harassment permeates children's peer cultures. Importantly, they helped us focus on the hidden, silenced, and normalized manifestations of sexual and gendered abuses of power that remain too often unaddressed in studies among children (Gillander Gådin, 2012; Gillander Gådin & Stein, 2019; Meyer, 2009; Renold, 2013; Stein, 2007; Sunnari, 2010). Theoretically, we approached such conflicting flows of pain and pleasure in children's gendered and sexual peer cultures with the notion of sexual harassment.[4]

After exploring the themes together, we told the children about the campaign and invited them to create Valentine's Day cards. They were asked to write about their experiences of harassment as postscripts in their cards and to choose a member of the Finnish Parliament to whom the card would be addressed. Each card included a short note, such as "I have been pressured to snog or to grab a girl by the butt," "One boy always came too close it was upsetting," or "One boy tried to kiss me, chased me around and when I

---

[3] The #MeToo Postscriptum project complied with the ethical principles and procedures outlined for the project in question, which has been approved by the Ethics Committee of Human Sciences at the University of Oulu. Beyond such formal ethical procedures, the project was invested in exploring the diverse ways in which research ethics matter in our practices of inquiry, particularly the ways we as research-activists can actively foster conditions for ethically sustainable encounters.

[4] Theoretically, we understood and approached sexual harassment in the context of our research-activism as indicating various forms of sexual abuses of power in children's everyday peer cultures and social worlds. It also denotes the normalized heterosexisms circulating in young peer cultures, media, and wider social and cultural discourses (Renold, 2013).

stopped, he held my head and said 'head up, we're kissing now'" (see Figure 1). The cards would be delivered to the members of Parliament on Valentine's Day and would be shared with the public to elicit discussion and disrupt the silence pertaining to gendered and sexual abuses of power in child peer cultures.
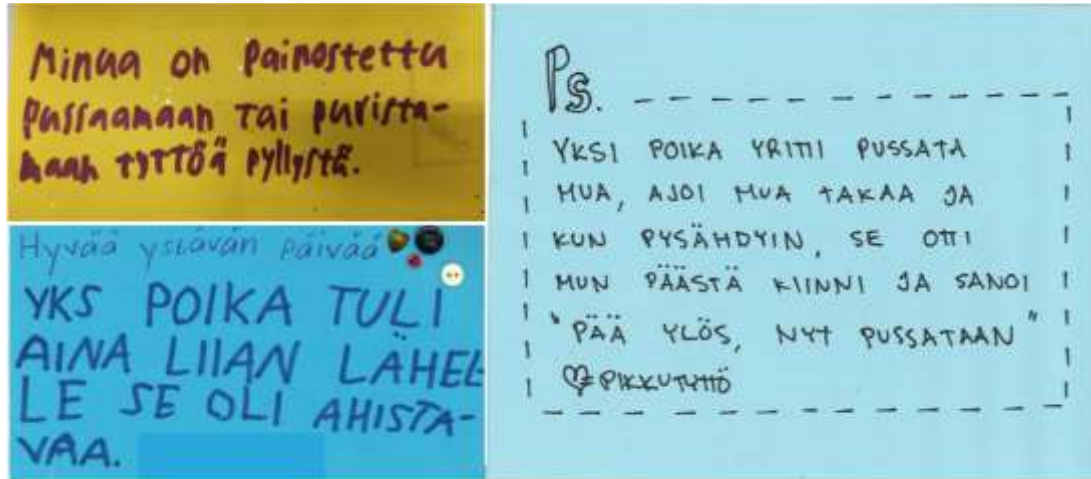

Figure 1. Collage of excerpts of Valentine's Day cards from the research data.

Parallel to the workshops, we also collected childhood experiences of peer harassment from student teachers and faculty members in a pop-up stand that we set up in our university café in the Faculty of Education (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Pop-up stand in a university café. Picture from the research data.

In total, the research team collected and sent over 200 cards that were individually addressed to each member of the Finnish Parliament. A selection of the postscripts and cards was published on our campaign website (Huuki & Pihkala, 2018). A press release was put out just before Valentine's Day, resulting in extensive coverage of the campaign in public and commercial media outlets. In the following weeks, Tuija also engaged in several interviews for radio, print media, and national television.

The research project generated rich data. The children's postscripts and discussions during the workshops offered nuanced accounts of their experiences of gender and sexual harassment. The audio-visual recordings from the workshop engendered vivid insights into the uses of creative methods for addressing sensitive topics with children, such as on the subtle ways working, moving, and engaging with the space, materiality, and affects can enable past experiences to be articulated and shared and the ways the compositions of different modalities can—through reiterations and repetitions—carve out space for resistance and change (e.g., Pihkala et al., 2019). Furthermore, research notes and audio-recorded reflections of the researchers and student teachers captured parts of the process of assembling and implementing the project. This process was then reiterated in the current paper through a collective, analytical mode of "storying."

Theoretical Foundations: Feminist New Materialist Ethico-Onto-Epistemology

Along with a growing body of feminist new materialist scholars in education (Niccolini et al., 2018; Osgood & Robinson, 2019; Renold, 2018; Ringrose et al., 2019; Taylor & Hughes, 2016), our work draws inspiration from Karen Barad's (2007) ethico-onto-epistemology of agential realism. For Barad (2007), the world is an ongoing reconfiguring: bodies, objects, abstractions, matter, meaning and even space and time do not pre-exist their relating, but rather, they materialize—or come to matter—through ongoing, iterative intra-action. No causality exists beyond this intra-activity. This thinking, along with theories of affect, becoming, and more-than-human relationality (Braidotti, 2013; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Massumi, 2015) has had profound implications for practice, pedagogy, and inquiry in social sciences. For feminist new materialists, as Osgood (2019b. p. 87) summarises, this translates into having an objective "to bring the human, non-human and more-than-human into investigations giving them equal weight but retaining a feminist conviction to the goals underpinning research."

One of the central threads running across feminist new materialisms is the ethico-politics involved in this relational complexity. Objects, bodies, abstractions, histories, and futures are entanglements that are reconfigured in particular apparatuses of being and becoming that they reconfigure in turn (Barad, 2007). This means that our practices in and as part of these entanglements have materializing effects. This has ethical implications. As Barad (2007, p. 235) maintains, "[p]articular possibilities for (intra-)acting exist at every moment, and these changing possibilities entail an ethical obligation to intra-act responsibly in the world's becoming, to contest and rework what matters and what is excluded from mattering." This play of what matters and what is excluded from mattering is at the heart of the relational ethics proposed by Barad (2007) and Haraway (2008). Through the notion of response-ability, Barad and Haraway have foregrounded how, through our relationality, "we" (humans and more-than-human others) are always already ethically and politically implicated in and complicit with the world in its becoming. Responsibility and accountability with and for the world must, therefore, be understood as an ontological relationality of response, "not an obligation that the subject chooses but rather an incarnate relation that precedes the intentionality of consciousness" (Barad, 2010, p. 265).

Sidestepping anthropocentrism and refraining from universal moral reasoning, the feminist posthuman and new materialist ethics of response-ability, which is grounded on ongoing trouble, uncertainty (Haraway, 2016), and indeterminacy (Barad, 2007), challenges us to move beyond moral injunction. It enables attention to the "condensed instance[s] in which capacities, affective flows, sense-abilities, and relational response-ability are enfolded in an entangled connectivity occurring across space and time" (Taylor, 2018, pp. 94–95). Feminist conviction in such more-than-human relational ethics includes an important note that response-ability is both an ontological, incarnate relation and an obligation to care and cultivate the conditions of co-flourishing (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2008; 2016).

In the current paper, thinking and moving with response-ability engenders heightened attention and attunement regarding how condensed moment-by-moment material doings activate new modes of mattering. We examine how the unfolding intra-acting sites and spaces of human and more-than-human others of our research-activist project were co-constituted by, and were co-constitutive of, reiteratively reconfiguring abilities and invitations to respond. More specifically, as underpinned by the research-activist investment in a change towards socially just relationships, we explore how such moment-by-moment material doings reconfigured conditions of possibilities for the children and adults to address and share experiences of sexual harassment and how such moment-by-moment doings activated micro-processes of

change against abusive gendered and sexual child peer cultures. As researchers, we understand that we are not separate from these practices of mattering. In the entangled practices of knowing and being, "we" are not standing apart, looking from afar, but rather, we are caught in messy, implicated, connected, and embodied ways (Osgood, 2019a; Taylor & Ivinson, 2013).This prompts ongoing responsibility and accountability with respect to the matterings we help enact.

Analysis as Plucking Out Fibres, Following Threads

In seeking to view our research-activism as a process, our analytical approach is inspired by Donna Haraway's (2016) call for speculative and promiscuous modes of thinking. Inspired by her work, we pluck out "fibres in clotted and dense events and practices...try to follow the threads where they lead in order to track them and find their tangles and patterns" (Haraway, 2016, p. 3). Hence, analysis becomes a simultaneous act of picking a "thread" to hold, value, wonder at and care for; and making new patterns. The thread we chose is the MeToo hashtag, which, in our new materialist framework, became understood as a "sticky object" loaded with muddled histories (Haraway, 2008)—histories of sexual harassment and its resistance—carrying affects (Kofoed & Ringrose, 2012; Renold, 2018), and inviting and enabling a response (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2008).

As an approach, following the hashtag was not about capturing the hashtag as a discursive object. Rather, our interest was in carefully and curiously feeling our way around the spaces and times within the processes of our research-activism, pausing and following a thread when something seemed to occur, such as a small shift, a resonance, trouble, reaction, or response that reworked and reconfigured the phenomena of sexual harassment "otherwise." In the analytical sections of the current paper, such resonances, troubles, reactions, and responses inhabit three space-times of research-activism, beginning with the merging of research and activism and the planning of the Valentine's Day card campaign, continuing in the children's Valentine's Day card workshops, and (un)ending with the children's cards going public.

For each of the three space-times, we attended to the moments of response as they materialized in the entangled intra-action of human and more-than-human others. Each analytical pause illuminates response-ability in the material-discursive practices of contingent and complex everyday sites and spaces of research-activism. Thinking with response-ability prompts us to move with responsibility and map how response-ability is reiteratively recrafted to relay the conditions of possibilities to react, respond, and take action against sexual harassment. Employing Haraway's (2016) compelling proposal of string figuring, we might imagine these space-times as knots. Each knot is co-constituted by the relay of a string. Each knot invites and enables a response. Each knot co-constitutes new patterns of becoming—and each knot also recrafts our responsibilities and accountabilities as researchers and activists. We will return to these patterns of recrafting and relay in the concluding notes.

Knots of Response(-Ability)

Reconfiguring Concerns, Engaging Trouble

The idea for the #MeToo Postscriptum was conceived during a moment by the TV. It was a moment impinged by the MeToo hashtag, which Tuija had followed and engaged with in social media. The hashtag

had also been noticed by a politician who called for a timely political discussion on sexual harassment in the Finnish Parliament. While Tuija was watching the broadcast of the debate, MeToo, merging with the political debate, materialized anew as it merged together with her research with children in relation to gender and power (Huuki & Renold, 2016), eliciting her close knowledge of the promising results of arts-based methods and youth-led activism on gender and sexual cultures in Wales (Renold, 2016). This extensive description captures some of the crowd and companions in this encounter with the hashtag, an encounter that we understand as both inherited with rich histories and reaching towards what might be. The moment by the TV resonated with Tuija as a sense of responsibility to engage the public debate on the mostly ignored connection between sexual harassment and gender and power in child peer cultures and to develop new modes of practice for engaging children in safe and ethical ways to explore and speak out on their experiences of sexual harassment. In this intra-active encounter, inspired and affected by the hashtag, research merges with activism in generative ways, inviting us to take action.

Inspired by the existing and emerging work, propelled by the public debate, and wanting to act upon the acute possibility of engaging in that debate, Tuija recruited Suvi and the student teachers to form the core team for the #MeToo Postscriptum project. This team then co-designed and implemented the project, including the details of the campaign and workshops. Rather than straightforward and easy, the material-discursive practices of planning unfolded as intra-active encounters with histories of acceptance and denial related to sexual harassment and our growing tentative curiosity and commitment in exploring creative and activist methods. As mundane as they were, the material-discursive practices of planning had a materializing effect.

At the time of our research-activism, issues of gender, sexuality, and power in childhood were rarely explored or addressed in families, schools or teacher education in Finland. Echoing this culture of silence, some of our team members were only now discussing the phenomenon of sexual harassment in pre-teen peer cultures for the first time. This made firmly present the histories of how gender and sexuality have been and can be framed, discussed, and addressed in our mutual engagements with the topic. Because of the silence and settled structures of gender and sexuality, we often felt anxious and uneasy navigating the ways gender, sexuality, and power can or cannot be addressed while remaining committed to formulating ways of addressing them that might enable ethically sustainable change. For example, the anxieties and unease were present when we communicated and articulated our campaign to teachers, children, and parents in the consent and information letters. We opted to use the notion of sexual harassment very cautiously. Knowing the affective charge and unarticulated role of sexual harassment in the context of childhood, we acknowledged how—as a notion—it might potentially raise objection and elicit contestation, hindering the children's possibilities to participate. Therefore, we carefully contextualized the project within wider abuses of power in peer cultures. Unease also pertained to workshop planning, during which we made the decision to hold the workshops in single-sex groups. As we learned during our project, it is difficult to choose articulations and practices that enable the response of the other, when, at the same time, other lines of flight might be blocked.

Engaging with the histories of gender, sexuality, childhood, and power on the one hand, and the conviction to cultivate conditions for new lines of flight on the other, required ordinary praxis of care and response. In the context of the mundane work of planning, response-ability materialized and became co-constituted in the entanglements of the affectively charged MeToo, child peer cultures, children, research and education,

and affective traces of the past. Here, response-ability can be understood as responsiveness and sense-ability that enables one to be affected and moved by an event. Response-ability involves the ability to "shift modes of being, doing, and thinking" (Taylor, 2018, p. 95); it involves a practice of engaging with the sedimented structures of what can be or cannot be said and moving with the research in ways that could cultivate response-ability. Here, response-ability is simultaneously about an openness in the present and about commitment and investment in a specific future, in our case change and transformation in child peer cultures.

Constraints Enabling Minor Gestures[5]

Throughout the weeks after the planning, multiple research-activist encounters took place. During the workshops, the children engaged in creative activities that were planned to enable them to explore and communicate their experiences of sexual harassment in peer cultures. Each workshop afforded possibilities for the children to address phenomena that are rarely talked about but that nonetheless permeate their lives as unwanted, hurtful, or disturbing—yet also ambivalent—practices and as normalized everyday sexisms (Renold, 2013). Our aim was to design a safe space for the children to explore sensitive matters and enable small shifts of change to occur in the children's experiences of sexual harassment. We understood such small shifts as minor gestures (Manning, 2016, p. 1): "the gestural force that opens experience to its potential variation." For us, a minor gesture worked as a concept that allows exploring the subtle changes in the children's experiences of sexual harassment. The gesture is minor in that it leads the flow elsewhere than towards the major (Manning 2016, p. 7), in this case, to the normative ways of denial, silence, obfuscation and pathologization of sexual harassment in children's peer cultures.

To co-design for such small shifts, we employed the notion of "enabling constraint" (Manning & Massumi, 2014; Massumi, 2015). Enabling constraint is a conditioning for emergent processes (Manning & Massumi, 2014, p. 93). In our approach, the concept of enabling constraints sets a particular field for visioning and imagining. It did not suggest a free pass for anything goes, but rather made a commitment to organize the project and workshop around the topic of sexual harassment through carefully and purposefully planned activities that might enable free-flowing and safer spaces for the children to explore the ecology of experience (Manning, 2016; Manning & Massumi, 2014) related to the pressures and pleasures of gendered and sexual peer cultures. Contemplating the children's minor gestures as they occurred through such "constraints" also enabled us to capture how moments of response-ability emerge through the entanglements of creative practices, embodied knowing, affects, and materiality.

During the workshops, the children began by engaging in the activity of Hot Seats. Student teachers read research-based statements and the participants responded by switching seats or remaining in place. Every now and then a topic might slow us down for a bit. New statements then invoked a reaction, sometimes silence, sometimes a shuffling of chairs as a signal of agreement. As researchers, we could sense and feel affective resonances reverberating in the room, which materialized as joking, sniggering, silence, fooling-around, joy, and sometimes unrest; something seemingly opening up and then closing down. For example, in some of the boys' workshops, this unrest spread into the bodies-in-circle when the boys got pulled into

---

[5] The title draws from Erin Manning's (2016) notion of "minor gesture" and the notion of "enabling constraints" as discussed in Manning and Massumi (2014) and Massumi (2015).

the contradictory tensions of, on the one hand, reasserting masculine credentials and, on the other hand, exploring and expressing anxieties about cultures of sexual harassment.

As the workshops progressed, the participants moved to their desks to create Valentine's Day cards and, towards the end of the workshop sessions, to write about their experiences of harassment in the postscript sections of the cards. Most of the participants wrote postscripts on their own, while some replicated mutually discussed concerns, and a few did not write anything at all. Sometimes, the children explored the story behind the postscript with us. Sometimes, the postscript was quickly slipped to the stack of completed cards (Pihkala et al., 2019) that were piling up and waiting to be sent for others to read, see, and feel as part of the campaign.

Working with Barad's (2007) assertion that each intra-action matters, we can imagine the patterns woven in the meeting room and the threads carried through our engaged practices of research-activism being passed on and received in these encounters during the workshops. Then, in the flow of the workshop sessions, we captured the ways in which child-bodies, researcher-bodies, chairs, pens, cards, space, pain, pleasure, confusion, and courage intra-acted and reiteratively reconfigured embodied experiences of gender and sexual harassment for a response. Here, thinking with response-ability works to draw attention to the minor alterations and ripples engendered via the intra-actions of children, researchers, playful freedom, and creative activities. Over the course of the short timeframe of each workshop, the subtle shifts lingered, circled, and iterated, ultimately "sticking" to others, such as bodies, atmosphere, sometimes a moment of shared discussion or a slip of paper. This allowed potentially unspoken experiences[6] to be recognised, re-assembled and become entangled as part of wider, shared, change-making assemblages against sexual harassment.

We assert that sexual harassment is a phenomenon that circulates affectively in peer communities through people, spaces, and material objects in ways that are not easily verbalized or perceived. In circulating through space, time, and matter, it can also become "otherwise." The enabling constraints, affects, and iterations of experience imprinted in the postscripts reconfigured sexual harassment in ways that opened up possibilities for the children and others to respond and take action against sexual harassment. As the ability to respond, response-ability cannot be returned to the individual child. Rather, it draws into focus the more-than-human relational complexity within which and through which the embodied experiences of sexual harassment become re-aligned and open up to becoming otherwise. Moreover, the understanding that encounters with the cards occurred within the frames of enabling constraints recrafts our responsibilities and accountabilities in dynamic ways—and in different ways. We are not all able of response in the same way, and the enabling constraints we as research-activists aim to construct can enable—and constrain—us with differentiating effects. While aiming to construct conditions that are both safe and enabling of such minor gestures, we understand that what is opened up and what is closed down cannot be known in advance, nor can we know how those gestures reanimate and reconfigure after we have left. Although we are able to—and have the responsibility to—construct continuums to support the children beyond our engagements and expertise (e.g., ensuring access to student welfare services or the school psychologist), scratching the surfaces of such sensitive and unaddressed experiences of gender and

---

[6] Going beyond the scope of the current paper, such experiences will not be analysed in more detail here. However, excerpts of the children's experiences have been collected in the campaign website (Huuki & Pihkala, 2018) and analysed in other works by the authors (e.g., Pihkala et al., 2019).

power involves trouble that cannot be solved by the meeting room table, nor contained in the space-time-frames of our project. This is the nature of response-ability. Response-abilities "can obligate us in ramifying webs that cannot be known in advance" (Haraway, 2016, p. 132).

Infecting Response-Ability within the Wider Constellations of Change-Making

As the Valentine's Day cards became entangled with the research-activist constellation—that is, when they were compiled, curated, and communicated for decision-makers and to the public— they became agential, or, to echo Renold (2018, p. 38), da(r)taphacts "crafted from and carrying ... experience." Moreover, we argue that the cards did not merely carry experiences; they also carried, crafted, and co-constituted invitations for response, and will continue to do so.

Although we had limited opportunities to trace the cards as they travelled, there is value in speculatively thinking with the traces that we did recognize. One such trace brought us to the pop-up stand in our university café. The stand was embellished with excerpts from the children's postscripts and featured a brazen "#MeToo Postscriptum" as its heading. The stand invited passers-by to slow down and pause. It asked them to craft their own Valentine's Day card and to write a postscript of their childhood experiences of harassment. During the few weeks that it was up, people acknowledged the stand with curiosity, ambivalence, and even dissent. Some of the passers-by sat down, created a Valentine's Day card, and wrote a postscript in it. One of them, a colleague of ours, noted that she was surprised at how difficult it had been to do so. We understood the sentiment because it had been difficult for us as well. As discussed elsewhere (see Pihkala et al., 2019), following that sense of difficulty or unease might lead us to many places: it can lead us to the discomfort of disclosing something that is painful, personal, or of the past; it can lead us to the shame that gets "stuck" to us and constrains our movements and keeps us silent; and it can also lead us to the pain that—despite its immobilizing force—prompts us to speak out.

The week before Valentine's Day, the research team gathered again in a meeting room with stacks of prepaid envelopes, printed-out cover letters, and cards: the colourful cards, glittery cards impossible to touch without them leaving little sparks of glitter everywhere, cards from the children's workshops, cards written in a university café, cards crafted by us. At least one unique card was placed inside each envelope that was addressed to a member of the Finnish Parliament. During the following weeks, the postscripts continued to travel as the campaign website, the press release, and subsequent news articles were published in national and local media outlets. We were contacted directly by people who had encountered our project, but we also received silence. Only two reactions from Parliament reached us. Nonetheless, we understand that it is impossible to know what affects or effects the cards carried, and with that hope, the silence was perhaps not so silent at all.

In going public, the cards became entangled with wider apparatuses that enabled subtle shifts, imagination, and change, as illustrated above. But the cards were also entangled with apparatuses that enforced habitual ways of knowing and being, thus blocking movement. For example, as the politicized MeToo hashtag was combined with childhood and as research and education was combined with activism, the campaign seemed to challenge the conventional and accustomed ways of how childhood and sexuality and education and activism are "allowed" to be aligned, which generated contestation, protest, distance, and difficulty. As another example, in the public sphere, the cards, postscripts, and campaign became entangled with the wider social and cultural terrains of ambivalence, interests, and affects. Attention-seeking

headlines capitalized on the children's experiences (see Gråsten, 2018), and in going public, the researchers encountered the antagonizing and oppressive cultures that bloom in social media comment fields. Resonating strongly with our experiences of speaking about gender and power in public, we find a connection here to the wider practices of silencing at work: by making perceptible for others the constancies of sexism and sexual harassment (Ahmed, 2016), the campaign becomes framed as "making a fuss" (Stengers & Despret, 2014), or as an annoying disturbance to the happiness of others (Ahmed, 2010).

The point we want to make here is that, in travelling to new constellations of human and more-than-human others, the cards had the capacity to not only carry experiences, meanings, and materials across kinds (Haraway, 2016), but also to issue invitations to respond; to infect processes of flourishing, to borrow from Haraway (2016). Considering the three analytical takes, we might speculatively theorize that the MeToo hashtag activated research. Further, the creation and circulation of Valentine's Day card postscripts became condensations of—or knots in—larger patterns of gender, sexual harassment, trauma, trouble, and change. For example, the pop-up stand, in combination with the hashtag, cards, and postscripts, issued an invitation for the passers-by to respond to the children's experiences; respond to one's long-forgotten childhood experiences that had been sensed, felt, and carried as lingering imprints in the body (Barad, 2010); and respond to the thousands of tweets tagged with the MeToo hashtag. Perhaps they also issued an invitation for the scholars and future teachers to respond and counter the neglected and normalized everyday realities of harassment that still take place in schools (Gillander Gådin & Stein, 2019).

Enabling the children's experiences to travel first to the university café and later to the public works in a mode of sharing stories and cultivating conditions of co-flourishing. Researchers, passers-by, and the public become response-able in these moments when neglected experiences, pains, and shared histories and interests coalesce, re-align, and issue new invitations to know and engage otherwise. In doing so, they can potentially disrupt the habitual flows of force that constrain the possibilities of imagining and enacting ethically sustainable alternatives for oppressive gendered and sexual cultures. It is these realignments that reiteratively rework new modes of mattering.

We argue that response-abilities are infectious (Haraway, 2016); they can potentially infect the response of the intentional and occasional "other" (e.g., decision makers and passers-by), and can also recraft our responsibility and accountability as researchers with respect to the children as we pass on and relay their experiences to the inarguably ambivalent domains of the public. In this time of populist and antagonistic public discourses, neoliberalism, and post-truth agendas, there are powerful flows of force that prevent the activation of ethical and political movement in relation to gender and sexuality. This issues a more insistent call to "do something" and to relay stories (Haraway, 2016) both in research and activism, and within research-activism, and to ceaselessly scrutinise the ethico-political complexities involved when we do so.

Concluding Notes: Recrafting and Relaying Response-Abilities

Haraway (2012, p. 312) writes, "Each time a story helps me remember what I thought I knew, or introduces me to new knowledge, a muscle critical for caring about flourishing gets some aerobic exercise." Plucking out fibres and following the threads, as we have done in this paper, was an exercise for the muscles that are vital for making research with children matter in the world. To respond and contribute to the need to slow down and take stock of our practices (Renold, 2018; Ringrose et al., 2019), we map out some of the benefits and difficulties in such exercises.

There are multiple ways of telling and relaying a story, and there are multiple reasons why a story might be needed to be relayed. In our case, the short story could be that the #MeToo Postscriptum enabled the children to address and communicate parts of their lives that most often remain side-lined in educational settings or are addressed exclusively within a normative regulative framework. With its activist agenda, the intervention enabled the children to become part of a wider change-making apparatus against sexual harassment, allowing their voices to be heard through anonymized postscripts. The project also reminded decision-makers and others of this often-hidden phenomenon.

With the understanding and hope that research-activism activates in more complex and entangled ways, this paper offered a longer account of the project. Inspired by the contingent, complex, and entangled material-discursive practices of response, we traced the sticky, muddled hashtag tentatively backwards and sideways, at the same time acknowledging that we are always differently situated and partial in our tentative wanderings. We made ethico-politically motivated pauses in purposefully selected moments when something seemed to happen during the process of designing and implementing the campaign and with the children as they engaged with the campaign in the workshops. In the final analytical section, following the hashtag brought us back to the public media landscape within which the postscripts and the cards eventually merged. We argue that thinking with response-ability, that is, by attending to the human and more-than-human intra-actions co-constituting conditions of possibility for new modes of mattering, enables us to value and engage in generative ways with everyday encounters where the possibilities for response, reaction, and action become reconfigured and co-constituted. As explored in the present paper, response-abilities are not just peppered here and there. Rather, response-abilities travel, iterate, and weave webs that relay and recraft invitations to react, respond, and take action. In other words, ethico-political potentiality inhabits "each meeting" (Barad, 2007).

Attuning to the subtle shifts and happenings of research-activism prompts us as scholars, educators and activists to hear, sense, feel, think, and become-with (Haraway, 2008) the transformative capacity in children as they explore and communicate what matters for them in their peer cultures. This means co-composing conditions in which the children can escape the restrictive domains of silence, denial, pathology and normalization to rework gender and sexual power relations in safe and creative spaces and through safe and creative methods. It also prompts us to seek ways to respond to and then relay the minor gestures that materialize through such practices and follow where they might lead and what they might teach. As we have attempted to illustrate in this paper, this entails finding generative, ethical ways of working with both the troubling histories and presents as well as the futures that we hope to change. This work involves arduous material doing in the meeting room, and a sense of discomfort and unease, but also response-ability with and for affective resonances—sparks of imagination—that pile up, travel, and reiteratively reconfigure subtle shifts of change.

Acknowledgements

References

Ahmed, S. (2010). *The promise of happiness.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822392781

Ahmed, S. (2016). Introduction: Sexism – A problem with a name. *New Formations*, *86*, 5–13.
https://doi.org/10.3898/newf.86.introduction.2015

Åsberg, C., & Braidotti, R. (2018). Feminist posthumanities: An introduction. In C. Åsberg, & R.
Braidotti, (Eds.), *A feminist companion to the posthumanities* (pp. 1–22). Cham: Springer.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-62140-1_1

Barad, K. (2007). *Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and
meaning.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822388128

Barad, K. (2010). Quantum entanglements and hauntological relations of inheritance: Dis/continuities,
spacetime enfoldings, and justice-to-come. *Derrida Today*, *3*(2), 240–268.
https://doi.org/10.3366/drt.2010.0206

Braidotti, R. (2013). *The posthuman*. Cambridge: Polity.

Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1987). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophreni*a (trans. B. Massumi).
Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Gillander Gådin, K. (2012). Sexual harassment of girls in elementary school: A concealed phenomenon
within a heterosexual romantic discourse. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 27(9), 1762–1779.
https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260511430387

Gillander Gådin, K., & Stein, N. (2019). Do schools normalise sexual harassment? An analysis of a legal case
regarding sexual harassment in a Swedish high school. *Gender and Education*, *31*(7), 920–937.
https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2017.1396292

Gråsten, H. (2018, February 2). Lapset kertovat karusta seksuaalisesta häirinnästä: puristelua, jahtaamista
ja "vitsillä" soitettuja raiskausuhkauksia [Children tell about rough sexual harassment: Groping,
chasing and prank calls with rape threaths]. *Iltalehti*. Retrieved from
https://www.iltalehti.fi/kotimaa/a/201802102200734456

Haraway, D. (2008). *When species meet.* Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press.
https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822373780

Haraway, D. (2012). Awash in urine: DES and Premarin® in multispecies response-ability. *WQS: Women's
Quarterly* 1–2, (40): 301–17. https://doi.org/10.1353/wsq.2012.0005

Haraway, D. (2016). *Staying with the trouble: Making kin in the Chthulucene.* Durham, NC: Duke University
Press.

Hearn, J. (2018). You, them, us, we, too?...online-offline, individual-collective, forgotten-remembered,
harassment-violence. *European Journal of Women's Studies, 25*(2), 236–246.
https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506818765286

Hickey-Moody, A., & Page, T. (2016). Making, matter and pedagogy. In Hickey-Moody, A. & Page, T. (Eds.),
Arts, pedagogy and cultural resistance: New materialisms (pp. 1–20). Lanham, MD: Rowman and
Littlefield.

Holford, N., Renold, E., and Huuki, T. (2013). What (else) can a kiss do?: Theorizing the power plays in young
children's sexual cultures. *Sexualities, 16*(5/6), 710–729.
https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1363460713487300

Huuki, T. (2019). Collaging the virtual: Exploring gender materialisations in the artwork of pre-teen children.
Childhood, 26(4), 430–447. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0907568219862321

Huuki, T., Manninen, S., and Sunnari, V. (2010). Humour as a resource and strategy for boys to gain status in the informal field of school. *Gender and Education, 22*(4), 369–383. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540250903352317

Huuki, T., & Pihkala, S. (2018). #MeToo postscriptum. Retrieved from https://metoopostscript.wordpress.com/

Huuki, T. & Renold, E. (2016). Crush: Mapping historical, material and affective force relations in young children's heterosexual playground play. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, *37*(5), 754–769. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2015.1075730

Kofoed, J., & Ringrose, J. (2012). Travelling and sticky affects: Exploring teens and sexualized cyberbullying through a Butlerian-Deleuzian-Guattarian lens. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 33*(1), 5–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2012.632157

Manning, E. (2016). *The minor gesture.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822374411

Manning, E., & Massumi, B. (2014). *Thought in the act: Passages in the ecology of experience*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. https://doi.org/10.5749/minnesota/9780816679669.001.0001

Massumi, B. (2015). *Politics of affect.* Cambridge: Polity.

Mendes, K., Ringrose, J., & Keller, J. (2018). #MeToo and the promise and pitfalls of challenging rape culture through digital feminist activism. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, *25*(2), 236–246. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506818765318

Meyer, E. J. (2009). *Gender, bullying, and harassment: Strategies to end sexism and homophobia in schools.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Måve, I. (2018). *One year after Me Too: Initiatives and action in the Nordic and Baltic countries.* Retrieved from https://www.nikk.no/wp-content/uploads/One-year-after-Me-Too.pdf

Niccolini, A. D., Zarabadi, S., & Ringrose, J. (2018). Spinning yarns: Affective kinshipping as posthuman pedagogy. *Parallax*, *24*(3), 324–343. https://doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2018.1496582

Osgood, J. (2019a). Becoming a "mutated modest witness" in early childhood research. In C. Schulte (Ed.), *Ethics and research with young children: New perspectives.* London: Bloomsbury. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350076495.ch-010

Osgood, J. (2019b). Materialised reconfigurations of gender in early childhood: Playing seriously with Lego. In J. Osgood & K. H. Robinson (Eds.), *Feminists researching gendered childhoods: Generative entanglements* (pp. 85–108). London: Bloomsbury Academic. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781474285810.ch-005

Osgood, J., & Giugni, M. (2015). Putting posthumanist theory to work to reconfigure gender in early childhood: When theory becomes method becomes art. *Global Studies of Childhood, 5*(3), 346–360. https://doi.org/10.1177/2043610615597160

Osgood, J., & Robinson, K. H. (Eds.). (2019). *Feminists researching gendered childhoods: Generative entanglements.* London: Bloomsbury Academic. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781474285810

Parliament of Finland (2017). *Eduskunta kävi ajankohtaiskeskustelun seksuaalisesta häirinnästä [Parliament of Finland had a topical debate about sexual harassment]*. Press release. Retrieved from https://www.eduskunta.fi/FI/tiedotteet/Sivut/ajankohtaiskeskustelu-seksuaalinen-hairinta.aspx

Pihkala, S., Huuki, T., and Sunnari, V. (2019). Moving with touch: Entanglements of a child, Valentine's Day cards, and research–activism against sexual harassment in pre-teen peer cultures. *Social Sciences*, *8*, 226. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci8080226

Renold, E. (2013). *Boys and girls speak out: A qualitative study of children's gender and sexual cultures (ages 10-12).* Cardiff, Wales. Retrieved from http://www.childcom.org.uk/uploads/publications/411.pdf

Renold, E. (2016). *Agenda: A young people's guide to making positive relationships matter.* Cardiff, Wales: Cardiff University. Retrieved from www.agenda.wales

Renold, E. (2018). "Feel what I feel": Making da(r)ta with teen girls for creative activisms on how sexual violence matters. *Journal of Gender Studies, 27*(1), 37–55. https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2017.1296352

Renold, E. and Ringrose, J. (2019) JARing: Making phematerialist research practices matter, *MAI: Feminism and Visual Culture*, Summer Issue 4. Retrieved from: https://maifeminism.com/introducing-phematerialism-feminist-posthuman-and-new-materialist-research-methodologies-in-education/

Ringrose, J., Warfield, K., & Zarabadi, S. (Eds.). (2019). *Feminist posthumanisms, new materialisms and education.* London: Routledge.

Stein, N. (2007). Locating a secret problem: Sexual violence in elementary and secondary schools. In L. O'Toole, L., J.R. Schiffman, and M.L. Kitter Edwards (Eds.), *Gender violence: Interdisciplinary perspectives* (pp. 323–332). New York, NY: New York University press.

Stengers, I., & Despret, V. (2014). *Women who make a fuss: The unfaithful daughters of Virginia Woolf* (Trans. by Knutson, A.). Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press.

Strom, K. J., & Martin, A. D. (2017). Thinking with theory in an era of Trump. *Issues in Teacher Education*, *26*(3), 3–22.

Sunnari, V. (2010). *"I cannot speak about it:" Physical sexual harassment as experienced by children at school in Northern Finland and Northwest Russia.* Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag.

Taylor, C. A. (2018). Each intra-action matters: Towards a posthuman ethics for enlarging response-ability in higher education pedagogic practice-ings. In R. Braidotti, V. Bozalek, T. Shefer & M. Zembylas (Eds.). *Socially just pedagogies: Posthumanist, feminist and materialist perspectives in higher educatio,* (pp. 81–96). London: Bloomsbury. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350032910.ch-005

Taylor, C. A., & Hughes, C. (Eds.) (2016). *Posthuman research practices in education.* New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137453082

Taylor, C. A., & Ivinson, G. (2013). Material feminisms: New directions for education. *Gender and Education*, *25*(6), 665–670. https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2013.834617

Tumanyan, M., & Huuki, T. (Forthcoming). Arts in working with youth on sensitive topics: A qualitative systematic review. *International Journal of Arts through Education*.

Zarkov, D., & Davis, K. (2018). Ambiguities and dilemmas around #MeToo: #ForHow Long and #WhereTo? *European Journal of Women's Studies*, *25*(1), 3–9. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506817749436