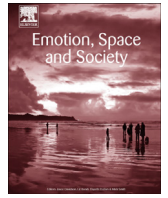




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Affective schoolgirl assemblages making school spaces of non/belonging

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I draw on a filmic study with former Australian schoolgirls. I focus on their desire for belonging in secondary school spaces and the ways that belonging was mediated through shame and restricted educational outcomes. This work examines everyday schooling as undergoing a process of affective non/belonging through filmed intraviews (Kuntz and Presnall, 2012). It questions the ways that power relations operate to re/create spatial differences as reductive. Intra-actions re/counted demanded the materialisation of particular *types* of schoolgirls within marked spaces, demonstrating the making of difference as entangled Baradian (2007) cuts productive of exclusions. Enacting improvisations 'to fit' enabled some of the female participants to endure these spaces but others removed themselves from educative pathways. Some bodies were worn down, and others found ease of movement. The filmic methodology employed accounts for shifting 'multiple instances', revealing a multiple and conflicting reality (as mattered meaning). The virtual viewer *becomes with* the research in affective intra-action that is materially consequential. The re/active documentary methodology (Wolfe, 2016a) accommodates a multiple non-linguistic affective recognition of relationality, a sameness *in* difference. This is a move to a Baradian response-ability that may reconfigure what appears as *common sense* in education, in the present.

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1. Introduction

This paper continues a discussion on the ways that shame, as an affective feeling of non/belonging, is re/created *with* educational spaces through filmic accounts of former Australian schoolgirls (Wolfe, 2016b). It discusses the mobilisation and enactment of power relations that evoke shame and produce gender inequalities in school spaces. The reader should, if possible, engage with the clips attached to this paper in order to fully comprehend the non-linguistic shift made in this research towards theories of affect, and the ways that the research itself, in its dissemination, is entangled in a Baradian timespacemattering. Barad's agential realism, framed through quantum physics, situates time, space and matter in an iterative intra-active performativity of what may come to matter. My empirical research and diffractive analysis adds to new materialist research in education (Bodén, 2015; Davies, 2014; Kuntz and Presnall, 2012; Ringrose and Renold, 2010; Taylor, 2013; Taylor and Ivinson, 2013) through a creative approach that

attempts to re/think autonomy, agency and freedom as relational, ontological conditions. I account for what Youdell and Armstrong (2011) have previously called 'affective choreographies' that shift focus from individual subjects to 'collectivities and the event ... [as] anti-subjectivation' (p. 150), and focus on Barad's insistence that agential participation in phenomena demands an ethical accountability for the consequences of that event (Rouse, 2016).

The experimental empirical¹ study included a qualitative online social media survey (153 participants), individual, semi-structured, filmed interviews (14 participants sourced from the survey and including the researcher), a film production of 3 × 30 min episodes (Wolfe, 2015), and a focus group of participants that reviewed the film and research process (11 participants). This study explored the female experience encountered while attending Australian secondary schools and sought to provide insights into why entrenched gendered pathways for schoolgirls still persist despite implementation of gender equity programs and extensive gender

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¹ Empirical here is understood as a post-structuralist account of exploring possible connections as opposed to binaries, where nothing is sedimentary and everything is entangled and of consequence (St. Pierre, 2013).

research in Australia over the past forty years. This filmic research sought to ontologically reframe the discussion through using explicit non-linguistic methods that do not simply reiterate the concept that the research is calling into question. It attempted instead to open up a dialogical approach, bringing theoretical notions together in the making of the present. The non-linguistic communication that is the embedded film clips is what Haraway et al. (2015, p. 14) call “otherwords and wordings [that] help us reimagine our current urgencies, and perhaps open up a possibility of collaboration and of research”.

During the research, the intergenerational participants reviewed their own and others' filmed responses. Individually and collectively they deconstructed their own intraviews, moving to new understandings, as some power discourses at play became visible during these pedagogical intra-actions. Pedagogical intra-actions are events where participants engage in *thinking* with themselves (filmed intraviews), others, data and things within the context of the research in order to create new meaning. In this way co-participants dialogically remade the past, present and future. Re/membering was altered and multiple truths emerged as context changed. This method is messy and unpredictable and the ‘feelingthinking’ (Massumi, 2015, p. 91) continues in encounter with the viewer of this work, making new meanings.

The participant groups were selected to allow consideration of post-feminist (Ringrose, 2015) assumptions that gender equity has not only been achieved over time in education, but even exceeded. This assumption is framed against the reality of ongoing gender inequity for females in everyday life. A comparison was sought regarding negotiations of feminine attributes as embraced by two generational groups, and ways this was re/productive of reductive assemblages of inequity. The older generation was selected because educational researchers have claimed that ‘the 1970s–1990s was an era of significant and well documented social change for countries such as Australia, and gender reform in schools was one part of that’ (McLeod and Yates, 2006, p. 30). The second generation selected was recent graduates from secondary school. For a full methodological account see Wolfe (2016a).

This creative study attempts to make visible how gender equity within educational research (that targets and measures the schoolgirl) may be productive of what it names. It follows that what educational researchers research and the concepts and apparatuses they use in these measurements matter in the ethical sense as a Baradian two-fold ‘what comes to matter’. Gendered subjectivity in this work is re-situated from focus on the discursive ‘to be of spacetime-mattering’ (Juelskjaer, 2013, p. 754, original emphasis). It does not discount the power of discourse but highlights that objects and things do not only represent conceptual content but are a material articulation of intra-action that ‘encompasses both meaning and what is meant’ (Rouse, 2016; para 5). Ringrose (2015) identifies statistical and bio-political research in education as a ‘stranglehold of compulsory gender binaries that dictate gender ‘roles’ and ‘behaviours’ but also normalise these binaries as a legitimate realm of inquiry’ (p. 394). Hey (2006, p. 440) has also been critical of research performance as ‘an incessant replication of norms that materialise that which they govern’. Following prominent educational researchers (Rasmussen, 2006; Ringrose, 2012; Ringrose and Renold, 2010, 2012; Youdell, 2006), I urge educationalists to critically question epistemic claims regarding reductive sexed/gendered capacities relating to the sciences (Fine, 2010) and acknowledge that scientific studies are not a neutral lens as ‘scientific practices enact their objects of investigation and have material effects on the bodies they study’ (Pitts-Taylor, 2016, pp. 11–12).

In Australia, the gender pay gap has been steadily increasing over a twenty-year period, reaching a low in 2004 of 14.5%, and

currently at 16% for full time workers (Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2015; 2017). While this state of play remains unchallenged within educational research as mattering, equity in education (as mandated in education policy, see Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs, 2008) will continue to be impeded for both male and female bodies. The links between gender and stereotypical occupations has also been well established (Forgasz et al., 2014) and materialises in differential opportunities and unequal remuneration for female bodies. This marginalisation begins at school with affects of non/belonging. Female participation in so-called masculine subjects and trajectories remains a major concern of educational researchers, policy makers and governments. Females are under-represented in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), and this deficit has been described as an educational ‘leaky pipeline’ or a ‘gender filter’ (Blickenstaff, 2005, p. 369). My feminist concern is that female under-representation and/or non-participation due to affects of non/belonging limits equity and, often, quality of life.

This research is an attempt to counter a growing non-belonging felt by adolescents within education systems that creates inequity that may risk students’ very lives.² It responds creatively to Barad’s (2015) and Haraway’s (2016) call for response-ability – a call that discounts theories and philosophies ‘besotted by individualism in theory and method’ (Haraway, 2016, p. 19) but instead attempts to illustrate the ways that things and living beings become with each other and render each other capable. Thiele (2016) argues that Barad’s ethical entanglements are an urgently needed deconstruction of reductive positivist ontologies of presence that fail to account for the consequences that Baradian cuts³ of difference make. Barad places ethics in fore of meaning making and knowledge production, and her agential realism is a call for ‘attention to the tissue of ethicality that runs through the world’ (Barad in Dolphijn & van der Tuin, p. 70 quoted in Dolphijn, 2016). She incorporates the research apparatus as firmly entangled with the research outcome. The object of study can never be removed from the agencies of observation (and visa-versa) and, as such, measurements necessarily extend rather than resolve or collapse entanglements (Barad, 2007). Dolphijn (2016) describes intra-action as ‘only [...] contractions in a surface’ (para. 14). This illustrates how forces move matter (as a base material of all things) to a complicated ‘epistemological individuality’ (para. 14) in transition.

2. Spacetime-mattering

Feminist new materialism research identifies and emphasises material relationships between things, and how things come to matter or are mattered into existence (Sellberg and Hinton, 2016). I utilise Barad’s (2007) reconfiguration of dynamics within her theory of agential realism to consider the ways that shame affects students through ‘ontopistemological’ (p. 43) relation; where the negotiations of shame (as a material affect) dis/allow students to not only exist in educational spaces but also access modes of education that impact on quality of life. I work with Barad’s ontopistemological thinking and her conceptions of intra-action, diffraction, and agential realism. Using these terms is both

² While intentional self-harm accounts for a relatively small proportion (1.9%) of all deaths in Australia, it accounts for a greater proportion of deaths within specific age groups. Similarly for females, intentional self-harm deaths comprise a higher proportion of total deaths in younger age groups compared with older age groups (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015).

³ Barad’s (2007) relational ontology, as the core of her theory of agential realism, investigates the material discursive boundary-making practices (as agential cuts) that produce ‘objects’ and ‘subjects’ and other differences out of, and in terms of, a changing relationality (p. 93).

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