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# 'Feel what I feel': making da(r)ta with teen girls for creative activisms on how sexual violence matters

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## ABSTRACT

Inspired by feminist new materialist and posthuman activist philosophy, this paper speculates on what happens when data entangles with arts-based methodologies in a school-based participatory activist project with six teen girls (age 15) on gender-based and sexual violence. Mapping the journey of how data become *da(r)ta* and how *da(r)ta* become *d/artaphacts*, the paper follows how the *Runway of Disrespect*, the *Shame Chain*, the *Ruler-Skirt* and the *Tagged Heart* ripple through peer cultures, school assemblies and national policy landscapes. Each journey provides a small glimpse into how bodies, space, objects, affects and discourse 'intra-act' in dynamic assemblages to produce *d/artaphacts* crafted from and carrying experience. The paper concludes to consider the ethical-political affordances of how participatory arts-based methodologies and the im/personal vitality of objects might support young people to safely and creatively communicate and potentially transform oppressive sexual cultures and practices.

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## Introduction

What is at issue is response-ability – the ability to respond (Barad, cited in Kleinman, 2012, p. 81)

In their book, *Thought in the Act*, Manning and Massumi (2014, p. 87) argue that is not enough for research scholarship to only offer critical commentaries on the 'state of things'. Critique continues to play a vital role in better understanding the complex formations of how sexual violence mediates young people's lives.<sup>1</sup> However, like many critical social scientists, I have been exploring what else research on sexual<sup>2</sup> violence can do, be and become in ways that can reanimate matters of social justice and inequality (see Canella, 2015). Part of this journey has involved experimenting with creative and arts-based methodologies informed by posthuman and feminist new materialist activist philosophies (Braidotti, 2010; Papadopolous, 2010; Reicchia, 2010). These will be referred to, from here on in, as *phematerialism*<sup>3</sup> (see Ringrose & Renold, *in press*), that urge a more direct connection with, and responsibility for, how academic research practices come to matter (Barad, 2007, p. 89). Of course, many scholars researching the field of youth and sexual violence work at the threshold of research and activism. Rarely, however, are these practices slowed down and opened up in ways that illuminate and theorize the micro-processes of how change and transformation might occur, or expose and theorize the more-than-human 'politics of affect' (Massumi, 2015) in our research-activisms (De Caeter, De Roo, & Vanhaesebrouck, 2012; Meissner, 2014).

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The practices that orient this paper spring from a research-activist phase from a larger project, titled *Mapping, Making and Mobilising: Using Creative Methods to Engage Change with Young People*. This is a research council funded project and part of the Productive Margins programme, 'Regulating for Engagement'.<sup>4</sup> Collaborating with academics, community partners and artists, one of the aims for this project is to facilitate encounters that can ignite and share the deep creativity, living knowledge and passions of young people living in post-industrial Welsh valleys' communities<sup>5</sup> to come together and co-produce new forms of research, engagement, decision-making and activism. It is a project that recognizes and tries to work with the productive potentialities embedded in communities, but may be hidden, obscured or territorialized by government policies and media representations (Thomas, 2016). This is particularly true of the South Wales' valleys, where confessional tales and statistics of sexual excess and sexual violence are routinely mined and exploited as commercial fodder for edutainment or what is increasingly being referred to as 'poverty porn' (see MTV's *The Valleys*, Tyler, 2015).

In the first phase of the research, 55 young people (aged 14–15), living in Llanmerin (pseudonym), participated in individual qualitative interviews, assisted by geographic information system (GIS) technology to show and share with the research team<sup>6</sup> local areas where they felt safe and unsafe (see Thomas, 2016). These interviews generated talk about sexual safety and their fear and experience of different forms of verbal and physical sexual violence between young people, and between adults they knew and didn't know, including sonic sexual violence (e.g. the beeping of van horns with verbal or gestural sexual propositions, or the sounds of domestic violence through bedroom walls). Three of the 'girls' (their preferred gender expression) who participated in the first phase of the research talked at length about witnessing gender-based and sexual violence on the streets, online and in school. All three were keen to return to a more participatory activist phase of the research, which I called the '*Relationship Matters*'<sup>7</sup> project. This was an unforeseen, unplanned and only partially funded spin-off project from the more formally organized programme of change-making with Citizens Cymru Wales (see the Zebra's action on street lighting, [www.productivemargins.co.uk](http://www.productivemargins.co.uk)). 'The girls' (as they often referred to themselves) were invited to expand the group if they wished, and explore together how the interview 'data' from the first phase of the project on gendered and sexual violence (including their own) might be worked with to effect political change and lend support to the education amendments of the new Violence Against Girls and Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence bill which happened to be progressing through Welsh Government at the time. This was one of those rare moments when research 'findings', change-making desires, national policy development and researcher expertise coalesce.

It is the material, discursive and affective flow of how this research-activist project unfolded that focuses this paper. The aim is to provide readers with a glimpse into what more research can be and become when entangled with phematerialist informed arts practice.<sup>8</sup> Structured through two sections, the paper first explores how *data* generated in an interview-based study on place-based safety and well-being might expand through the use of *arts-based methods* to become *da(r)ta* and subsequently how this *da(r)ta* become *d/artaphacts*.<sup>9</sup> Here, I map the making of the *runway of disrespect*, the *shame chain*, the *ruler-skirt* and the *tagged heart* through a series of lunchtime sessions over a period of 8 weeks. I try to show how bodies, space, objects, affects and discourse meet and mesh in unpredictable ways as participants and I collectively produce objects crafted from and carrying their experience. The second section explores the journey of how these *d/artaphacts* travel into and across school assemblies and the national policy landscape to affect and rupture the status quo – which in this case are the socio-political schizoid terrains of how sexual harassment infuses teen girls' lives as, for example, denial, silence, recognition, pathology, spectacle and normalization (see Renold & Ivinson, 2015). First, however, a *phematerialist* approach to researching teen sexual violence is explored, including some of the key concepts which orient the methodology.

## Posthumanizing sexual violence and intra-activist research assemblages

The last decade has witnessed a radical shift in the social sciences to reconnect the human subject, and indeed the figure of 'life itself' (Moore, 2011, p. 175) with the meta-physical and affective world. Foundational breaks between the 'natural and social, mind and body, cognitive and affective' (Blackman & Venn, 2010, p. 7) are loosening and a new ethical relational onto-epistemology for reimagining the potential for change is opening up through exciting developments in feminist post-human materialist scholarship (Alaimo & Hekman, 2009; Barad, 2007; Braidotti, 2013; Grosz, 2011, 2008, 2011; Van Der Tuin, 2011). Key here is Karen Barad's radical rethinking of causality, through her concept of 'intra-action'. Barad encourages us not to conceive of change as happening to or from something. Rather, she invites us instead to consider a 'diffractive' approach where meaning is always in process, always mattering and always unknown because 'with each intra-action, the manifold of entangled relations is reconfigured' (Barad, 2007, p. 393, 394). As she suggests, 'there are no singular causes. And there are no individual agents of change. Responsibility is not ours alone' (Barad, 2007, p. 394). In sum, Barad offers us an ethico-political recognition that instead of viewing young people as either needing to be transformed or rerouted from the inside-out or outside-in, we start from how they and we are always already entangled in shifting and dynamic human and more-than-human assemblages.

Drawing on some of the conceptual moves from these phematerialist thinkers, there is now a growing body of research with children and young people, particularly within the field of gender and sexuality education (e.g. Coleman & Ringrose, 2013; Taylor & Hughes, 2016; Taylor & Ivinson, 2013), early childhood studies (e.g. MacLure, 2015) and youth sexuality studies (e.g. Allen & Rasmussen, 2017). Much of this work is generating new methodologies to capture affects and percepts that enable us to see, think and feel differently about the past-present-future gendering of young lives, bodies and imaginings, including research on young sexual violence.<sup>10</sup>

Attending to the more-than-human dynamics of gendered and sexual force relations in young people's lives has been pivotal in shifting to a post-individual and less anthropocentric understanding of 'sexual violence' (see Holford, Renold & Huuki, 2013; Huuki & Renold, 2016; Ivinson & Renold, 2013a; Renold & Ivinson, 2015; Renold & Ringrose, 2016a, 2016b). This posthumanizing of sexual violence connects to and captures the emerging configurations of human and more-than-human power relations – what we might call, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari (1987), 'sexual violence assemblages' (see Fox & Alldred, 2013, 2015; Huuki & Renold, 2016; Renold and Ringrose 2016b). Attending to the more-than-human, and working with rhizomatic and diffractive methodological practices (see Hughes & Lury, 2013; Taylor & Hughes, 2016) makes it possible not only to provide new onto-epistemological cartographies of the sexual discriminations and violences that infuse young people's lives, but also the potentiality for inventiveness through which they survive and sometimes transcend. And it is the 'occurrent arts' (Grosz, 2008; Massumi, 2013) – those arts-based practices that encourage some form of experiential engagement – which have the potential to ignite this inventiveness.

Writing in *Chaosmosis* on the 'new ethico-aesthetic paradigm', Guattari, (1992/2006), p. 106) argues that, 'while art does not have the monopoly on creation', it does have the capacity to invent and 'engender unprecedented, unforeseen and unthinkable qualities of being'. From film-making (Ivinson & Renold, 2016) to body-movement workshops (Renold & Ivinson, 2014), we have collaborated over the years with a wide range of artists<sup>11</sup> to develop creative practices which have the potential to support more emergent ways of working which aim to be sensitive to young people's expressed and nascent desires (see also Renold 2016). Our research practices, much like art, fold out and reciprocate in a continuous, yet always differentiating flow of rupture and relate. As new concepts emerge and become thought, felt and embodied, where possible we work with these new knowledges and try to enliven them further with new 'research-creation' assemblages (see Manning & Massumi, 2014). To date, we have worked with visual artists, musicians, choreographers, sculptors and film-makers. Each time, we learn a little more

about the invocative ways in which arts-based research practice can summon new forms of voicing, thinking, feeling and being to emerge (Harris & Holman, 2014; Hickey-Moody, 2013; Hickey-Moody & Page, 2015; Mayes, 2016; Townsend & Thomson, 2014).

While our engagement project offered a discrete phase for young people to work with professional artists, this paper focuses specifically on theorizing the creative methodological practices inspired by phematerialist ideas, but without professional artistic input. We might call these 'intra-activist research assemblages' (see Renold & Ringrose, 2016a). Joining Barad's 'intra' with 'activism', signals and foregrounds how we are conceiving of the ways change and transformation is always in process, always unpredictable and always a matter of entanglement (the 'intra' of intra-activism) in explicitly political ways (shifting 'action' to 'activism'). It is the making and framing of these intra-activist research assemblages, and our approach to the concept of affect as 'politically oriented from the get go' (Massumi, 2015, p. viii) that focuses the next section.

### Composing semblences and framing: making space for immanent, creative and affective methodologies

A semblance is a placeholder in present perception of a potential 'more' to life. The framing of it determines the intensity or range or seriousness of that potential. (Massumi, 2013, p. 49)

As outlined in the introduction, the 'Relationships Matter' project unexpectedly emerged at a timely moment in Wales' political history of creating the first UK legislation on violence against women and girls (Welsh Government, 2015). Moreover, the project's combined focus on sexual violence, gender well-being and activism directly addressed the schools' own concerns and their wider policies to promote 'healthy relationships', 'student voice' and 'active citizenship'. In consultation with the school safe-guarding team, the project was initially open to the three teen girls who signalled an interest to participate in the engagement/activist phase. The girls then invited a further three friends<sup>12</sup> to form a core, yet diverse group of six girls, with different interests, family networks and responsibilities, relationships to school and school work, and imagined futures. All shared a strong sense of social justice, but no prior experience of activism, knowledge of party politics or engagement with gender- or sexuality-related projects. While these inter-personal relationships and the wider policy context are a central component of the intra-activist assemblages that unfolded, there were other temporal, spatial and affective frames in play that enabled the lunchtime sessions to flow in the ways that they did. This framing is crucial in creating space for what Massumi (2013) refers to as 'semblance' – that is, making the 'more than' or aesthetic 'potentiality' of a thing, or a lived relation, or experience, appear.

Temporally, for example, holding the sessions in the weekly lunchtime period became significant in many ways. It was the only sustained period of 'informal' time in the school day for young people to be together, albeit in spaces and places designated for, rather than created by them (dinner hall, playground, etc.). Staff rooms are usually not one of these places, so gathering at lunchtime (i.e. in young people's 'free-time') in the 'multi-agency management room' operated as a significant liminal space. This was the room where teachers met with other educational and third-sector professionals to discuss and make decisions from safeguarding issues to curriculum planning. It had status and its relational architecture emphasized this, with a large 15ft X 4ft conference table, tea/coffee-making facilities and lots of surrounding floor space, with expansive windows that you could sit in (and the girls did) overlooking the school entrance and the rolling valleys' hills landscape. The atmosphere (see Anderson, 2009) of the room thus perhaps contained the residues of some powerful affects of potential change. These affects may have intra-acted with the girls' own desires to impact policy and practice and my own embodied knowing to trust in the process that each utterance contained the vibratory potential to become otherwise (outlined below). All of this involved carefully attuning to and sustaining the ways in which multiple frames (e.g. walls, windows, time, government deadlines, ethics etc.) could assemble in ways that worked to contain and tame the chaos that could ensue when potentials are nurtured and unleashed.

As part of the wider project, we are beginning to theorize this process as an *immanent methodology* (Renold, Ivinson, Elliott & Thomas, 2016). An immanent methodology is speculative. It has *semblance* woven through, to provide what Massumi (2013, p. 21), citing Whitehead, calls ‘elbow room’ – that is, making room for an experience to emerge ‘uncramped by the constraint of connectively fitting in’. This can be achieved by co-composing methods and practices that have ‘creative outs’, ‘escapes’ and ‘sink-holes’ (p. 49) built in so that new happenings and affects can surface, and flow (see also Lury & Wakeford, 2012). Over time, with each gathering, a regular rhythm of eating, talking, making and creating seemed to enable the girls to feel safe enough to begin to play with the possibility of what ‘data’ could be/come as feelings travelled in and through objects and other crafted forms of experience.

## From data to da(r)ta to d/artaphact: runways, raps, ruler-skirts and tagged-hearts

Art is about constructing artifacts – crafted facts of experience. The fact of the matter is that experiential potentials are brought to evolutionary expression (Massumi, 2013, p. 57)

### *The runway of disrespect*

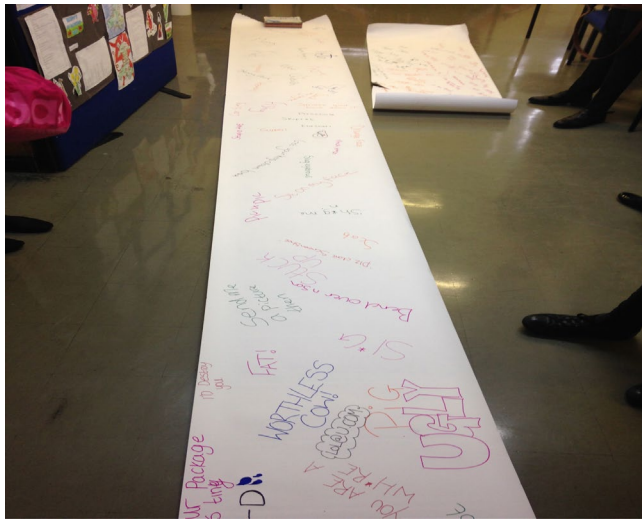
The first audio-recorded session with the girls began with sharing the different ways in which some boys their age, in and out of school, routinely ‘disgusted’ them with rape ‘banter’). They recalled boys shouting to girls across sports halls, playgrounds, parks and streets, ‘I want to smash you in ... smash your pasty in<sup>13</sup>’. They talked about unwanted touching and practices they referred to as ‘grabbing’, where boys ‘slap girls’ bums’ or pull them from behind to sit on their crotch. Corridor culture featured in striking ways here via the practices of human ‘pinballing’ where ‘boys line up each side of the corridor’ and ‘push girls’ back and forth between them, touching them as they pass through (see also Renold & Ringrose, 2016a). The entanglement of the digital with verbal and physical sexual violence focused much of the discussion, including boys’ showing girls ‘rude and disgusting vines’ of sexually explicit imagery on their phones (described by the girls as ‘dirty porn’), and rubbing mobile phone screens displaying pornographic images on girls’ foreheads. They also described how text symbols were creatively ensembled to sexually harass girls, such as a string of letters, numbers and symbols to signify an ejaculating penis into a vagina or anal passage, or a thumbs up emoji which represented ‘masturbation’ and could be tagged to a girls’ facebook image or selfie (see Hasinoff, 2015; Kariain, 2014; Powell and Henry 2017; Renold & Ringrose, 2016; Ringrose, Harvey, Gill and Livingstone, 2013). By the end of the first session the release of words, phrases and emojis into the space via spoken word and onto the flip-chart paper in ink became a powerful refrain and a mode of expression I worked with further.

In a clumsy effort to re-route established teaching practices of mind-mapping, I brought in a large spool of quality paper (1 m × 100 m) to the second session, and rolled it out so that it stretched almost the entire length of the room (approximately 20ft). I scattered coloured marker pens around the edges and emptied the word cuttings of previously transcribed talk<sup>14</sup> onto the table. The girls began to populate the paper, taking inspiration from the cuttings and adding new words and phrases. Indeed, each session began with the rhythmic movement of the roll unfolding, like a celebrity red carpet, in which girls shared experiences that they ‘had never talked about like this before’. This was *their* version of the red carpet! No longer hidden, or taboo, the words were both recognized and respected. As each week progressed, and in the repetition, something shifted. Words that were previously hidden, or heavy with anger and shame, became a little lighter and annotating the roll in each session became ‘fun’.

*Ooo it’s FUN, the insulting comments ...*

*It’s MASSIVE now*

*I can’t keep still! Aghh! (screams out loud)*



**Figure 1.** Runway of disrespect.

The girls seemed to catch themselves in the pleasure and awe of what they were creating. In these moments, we perhaps get a glimpse of when semblance makes an appearance. Something 'more than' the representation of words used to shame and subordinate was happening. Perhaps the roll became a significant expressive refrain that was enlivened with each rolling-out – a movement, which seemed to have a potentially transformative effect, opening itself and the girls up to new elaborations and pathways (Grosz, 2008). Perhaps it was also a 'spilling out spot' (Walkerdine & Jimenez, 2012) that was safe and containing (and could be rolled up and taken away). It certainly seemed to be a process that captured our imagination, and it materialized as our first d/artaphact: 'the runway of disrespect' (Figure 1).

### **The ruler-skirt**

The thing felt is fringed by an expanding thought-pool of potential that shades off in all directions. (Massumi, 2013, p. 50).

The process of how data became da(r)ta, that is, for experiences of sexual violence to be expressed in ways that enable them to shape shift and expand out 'in all directions', can only be speculated, never known. It is near impossible to map why one concept, percept or affect might gather speed in ways that carry it forward, while others dissipate. One such 'chance intrusion', as Massumi refers to these moments, was how the d/artaphact of the ruler emerged.

In the very first meeting, one of the girls shared with us how 'some boys, they use rulers to lift up girls' skirts' (e.g. if they were bending over a desk to reach for a book, or pick up their school bag). No sooner had the words been spoken, than one of the other girls had materialized the event in ink, in bold capital letters: 'RULER TOUCHING'. Attuned to the energies in the room, I invited the girls to imagine what else the ruler could do and they very quickly connected with its quivering potentiality. Posters, statues, paper mache figures stabbed with rulers were conjured, and word-image play opened up this act to a wider patriarchal force of 'ruled/ruler' talk:

*Ruler touching!*

*Emma: We could bring in some rulers, do something with those rulers ... do something else with them?*

*We could do/*

*Emma: Change their meaning/does that make sense?*

Yeah

*We could do a poster for that (makes the action of sticking a ruler up a skirt) like/ with a ruler*

*We could do a statue or something*

Emma: *A statue made out of rulers?*

Yeah

*Yeah like paper maché and stick rulers/ through it*

*Rulers are used for ... rulers are used for measuring not touching*

*(Laughter)*

*Yeah because the boys touch, like they touch you with the rulers*

*And up her skirt*

Emma: *and there's the word rule in ruler*

*Rule her*

*RULE HER!! (louder)*

*Rule her with your ruler*

If art is 'to make felt an effect' (Massumi, 2013, p. 37) and open up proto political spaces for 'new collective assemblages of enunciation' to emerge and form 'out of fragmentary ventures' and 'risky initiatives' (Guattari, 1992/2006, p. 120) then the ruler event was one of those moments. Here was an object, glowing with vibrating 'thing-power' (Bennett, 2010, Allen, 2015) – its human-non-human vitality sparking lines of flight into what else the ruler could be and become. This seemed to be of those moments when 'things-in-the-making cut their transformational teeth' (Massumi, 2015, p. ix). Turning us over and over-turning the hidden everyday practices of sexual violence in young peer

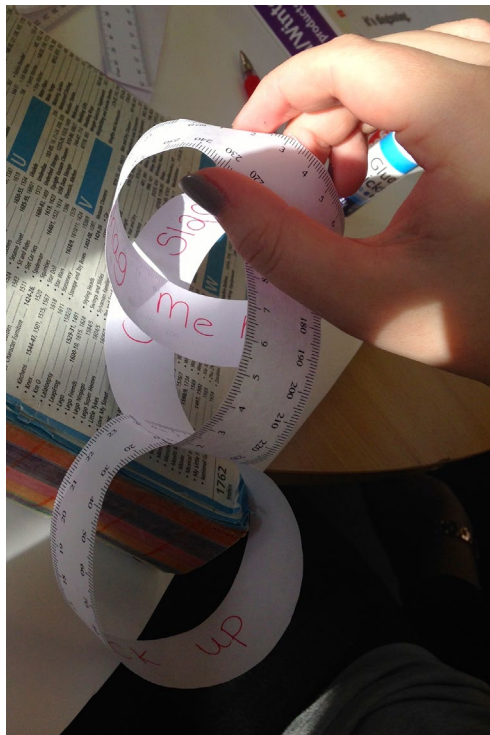


Figure 2. Shame chain.





Figure 3. Graffiti ruler.



Figure 4. Ruler-skirt.

cultures (see Stein, 1995, 149, 'Friday flip up days' in elementary school), a series of conscious and unconscious associations unfolded as the girls' 'small story' connected with larger, deeper histories (Davoine & Gaudillière, 2004). These associations perhaps included the ways that girls' experiences of sexual violence are often ruled out (e.g. normalized or silenced); how neo-liberal schools are not 'measuring up' with their narrow focus on targets and testing; and how gender categories are and have been regulated and 'ruled!' ('rule her, RULE HER, rule her with your ruler'). In one explosive moment, we are taken by surprise and surprise ourselves with how the ruler and its associations tumble out in ways that connect the immediate experience with deeper historical legacies of patriarchal forces. As Walkerdine, Olsvold, and Rudberg (2013), write about in their theorization of the intergenerational embodied transmission of trauma, this was a moment where 'history walked in the door'. And very quickly, we all wanted to bend the rules, rewrite the rules, and here was an object which could matter-realize (Braidotti, 2013) this vision.

The following week, the girls wrote comments that sexually shamed girls on printed paper rulers (that I brought into the session). These paper rulers turned into paper chains to connect with how sexual violence shackles them (see Figure 2). I also brought in over 30 bendy acrylic rulers and an array

of multi-coloured *Sharpies* (felt tips that could permanently mark the rulers) which the girls, much like the 'Runway of Disrespect' then graffitied (see Figure 3).

From a ruler-poster to a ruler-monster to ruler-bunting, the girls discussion turned to embodying and wearing the rulers: first a jacket, then a cape, the gladiator style ruler-skirt was born (Figure 4). What had once been a phallic object used to violate girls' bodies was now pulsating with the capacity to change and transform. Crafted from experience, the ruler-skirt became a d/artiphact that in its multiplicity (there are over 20 rulers in the skirt), returned fluidity and movement to the stiff reality of enduring and normalized sexual violence. And with each step, as the rulers glisten in the light, and swish and slap together, they call us into action. The skirt seemed to become a d/artaphact that simultaneously tells the world something has happened/is happening.

### *The tagged heart*

Art is created, always made, never found, even if it is made from what is found. This is its transformative effect – as it is made, so it makes (Grosz, 2011, p. 189)

Not all 'felt effects' can be articulated through words. Some experiences form part of an 'unthought known' (Bollas, 1987) – that is, they can be felt corporeally, but are too painful to talk about. Some of the girls talked about events (such as girls being followed, or sexually propositioned to perform sexual acts for money or food) that left them word-less and choked, with 'lumps' in their throats, 'turned stomachs' or 'just numb'. They talked about keeping 'feelings in' that they wanted to express outwards. Attuning to their desire to both feel and express, I spontaneously told them about an activity that took place the previous year with a group of academics and artists (see [futurematters.org](http://futurematters.org)) experimenting with arts-based methodologies.<sup>15</sup> I invited the girls to express their feelings not through words but through marking the (ruler printed) paper as I read out some of the transcribed word-cuttings from our previous sessions. The girls seemed puzzled but intrigued, and what followed was a magical process that enlivened us all as matter and affect entangled in ways that none of us could have predicted. After much scrunching and tearing I asked the girls 'what was it was like, ripping up the paper?' (Figure 5):



Figure 5. Paper feelings.

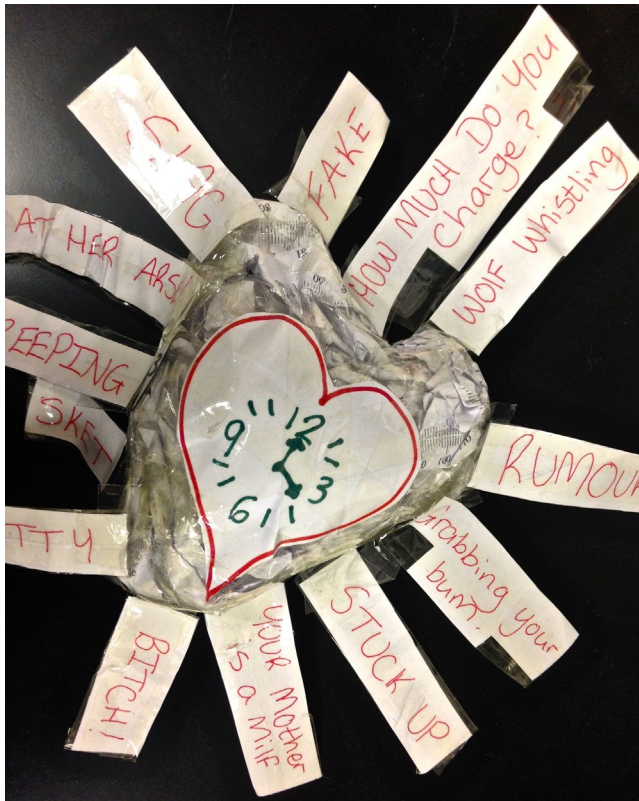


Figure 6. Tagged heart.

*It's like, it's better to get your anger out on something.*

*It's like a sense of relief for me.*

Emma: *A sense of relief?*

*Yeah ... how you react like ... your feelings ... rips them up and crumples them up until there's practically nothing left and you're left in pieces. And I reckon using paper is actually a good way of expressing that.*

Emma: *So you're thinking about your feelings inside the paper?*

*My feelings ARE the piece of paper.*

Emma: *Are the piece of paper?*

*Like crumpled up, torn up into little tiny pieces.*

We were left with piles of torn pieces of ruler-paper (Figure 5). Acutely aware of how these pieces were carrying powerful affects we discuss what to do with them. Some girls wanted to hold on to them. Others wanted to bin them. One of the girls expressed her ambivalence, likening the act to 'chucking my feelings away'. I swiftly interject to explore what else we might do with the pieces, and suddenly one glance at the green recycling bin seemed to spark the following dialogue:

*Recycle them!*

*Yeah, so you're doing something good with ... so you're ... something good ...*

Emma: *Well, we've got sellotape (sticky-tape), I've got some prit-stick (glue) ... I've got colours.*

*Stick them all back together.*

*It's going to be hard because*

*Nothing can*

*Nothing mends*

*Oh my god, why don't you stick them together into a shape of a heart?*

*Oh yeah.*

*Emma: What made you think that? Just then?*

*Because she was on about feelings, her feelings and ...*

*You can't really fix a heart.*

*I know but it won't be ...*

[after taping all the torn pieces into the shape of a heart, they decide to decorate the outside]

*You could put like a crack down the middle. Split down the middle.*

*Emma: You can.*

*So like all broken hearts can be mended, it might take time like but ...*

*We could draw a clock*

*Emma: A clock?*

*Yeah, because it takes time.*

In the space of 30 minutes, the girls 'recycled' and sutured their torn paper to create a powerful d/artaphact, which they later called, 'The Tagged Heart' (see Figure 6 above). This was a heart that carried feelings of numbness, emptiness, anger and relief. The words: *slag, fake, how much do you charge?, wolf whistling, rumour, grabbing your bum, stuck up, youth mother's a MILF, bitch, fatty, sket, beeping, look at her arse*, ruler-like, fan out from the heart. Cracked clock faces decorated the outside, splitting time and signalling that not all feelings or 'broken hearts can be mended' with time.<sup>16</sup>

Over 8 weeks, a series of d/artaphacts were created. Each emerged from a spontaneous process, enabled through putting semblance into our intra-activist methodology and trusting in where the unexpected could take us. These d/artaphacts vibrated with the intensities of experience, but were they ready to travel into and intra-act with other change-making assemblages?

## When d/artaphacts affect: putting semblance into local and national assemblies

Art requires something else. It requires framing, decontextualisation, a transport elsewhere, a movement (Grosz, 2011)

Nothing happens in assemblies ... let's do an assembly!

### *Feel what I feel: affective intra-activisms*

During the 'Relationships Matters' lunchtime sessions, as da(r)ta were becoming d/artaphacts, the girls and I were learning implicitly (i.e. affectively) and explicitly (i.e. when those affective embodied knowings began to be thought-felt and sometimes, articulated through discourse) about the expressive qualities of matter and its transformative potential. Enlivened by the process, the girls seemed ready to share in ways that they had initially rejected. From early declarations that 'nothing happens in assemblies', they were now keen to awaken the deadening apathy of the morning assembly.<sup>17</sup> They talked about wanting other students to 'feel what we feel'-from wanting other students to connect to how it 'feels' to be subjected to everyday sexual violence that is so often ruled out as 'banter', to how they felt in the sharing and making of their d/artaphacts. However, they also wanted students to have the chance to participate in the 'Relationship Matters' campaign for a 'better and real relationships education'. Introducing semblance and embodied interactivity was central to our process.

Their first interruption to the school-assembly-as-usual was to ensure that the first point of contact was with their d/artaphacts. This was achieved in a number of ways. First, the 17ft 'Runway of Disrespect' was rolled out and a barrier was created with the chairs, to re-orient the students as they entered the hall to walk by, look down on and read the runway before taking their seats. Next, two slips of paper and a coloured felt tip was placed on each of the 150 student chairs: one slip had the printed rulers on



Figure 7. heART activism.

one side and the heading, 'we need a healthy relationships education because ...' on the other. This slip connected directly to the policy discourse and campaign. The second slip was blank. This chair–pen–slip assemblage we hoped would signify how we wanted students to participate at both an individual and collective level. Finally, the PowerPoint screen projected a super-size image of the Tagged Heart, and two large heart shaped foil helium-filled balloons were gently swaying mid-air.

Over the next 20 minutes the girls presented a co-produced script with interactive elements. They introduced myself as 'Professor Renold' and their participation in the 'Relationship Matters' project and campaign. They then took it in turns to share the process of how the lunchtime sessions unfolded and culminated in the creation of their d/artaphacts. Throughout the presentation, students were invited to listen, watch, read, touch and feel each d/artaphact. Moreover, (and this was unplanned) in every invited coming-together of student and d/artaphact, the girls seemed to be modelling consent-in-process, or what we have theorized elsewhere as becoming-consent (Huuki & Renold, 2016): 'would you like to ...'; 'you don't have to if you don't want to ... or if it makes you feel uncomfortable' etc. Individual volunteers were invited to sound out the words and phrases 'that shame us' by reading the chain, and lifting up the rulers of the ruler skirt. This wasn't easy to achieve, as words were hidden on the inside of the chains, in personal hard-to-read handwriting or appeared back to front (on the rulers) – a process that mirrored how difficult it could be to talk about sexual harassment in school and which the girls made explicit in their invitation.

Other interactions worked at inclusivity. The Tagged Heart was passed around the assembly hall, and, in awareness of how the tagged heart was created, students were asked to 'look after our feelings' because 'these are our feelings'. Indeed, contrary to one of the girls' initial fears that the heart might get 'trashed' (the rubbish bin surfacing again) the heart was passed from student to student, very carefully, remaining intact, touched by and touching over 300 students. Towards the end of the assembly, students were invited to participate in the 'Relationship Matters' activist campaign and share their thoughts in writing on 'why they think a real relationships education should be mandatory for all schools in wales'. Many students did comment and their words were shared in lobbying letters and the ensuing action (see below). Students were also invited to comment on what they felt about the assembly, which brought forth a wide range of comments, from supporting the girls' campaign, disclosing specific experiences of sexual harassment, messages of apology and regret, and seeking advice on particular issues. Finally, as the assembly drew to a close, students were invited to stamp on the 'Runway of Disrespect' as loudly

and as forcibly as they wanted to, thus embodying the girls' call to join them in stamping out sexual violence in schools and communities. This final entanglement was carefully planned to inject fun, movement and energy in ways we hoped might generate a lightness of being-becoming activist on a serious weighty issue. It was also a moment in which students could participate in and thus connect with the girls' own affective embodied practice of creating through and with experience.

In one short morning assembly, students participated in activities that not only illuminated experiences that rarely enter the formal world of schooling, but were called upon, by students, and a university professor to become part of a political action. While there were some gasps and giggles on the way into the hall, as soon as the presentation unfolded and the d/artaphacts were revealed, a wide-eyed wonder-wall of silence and gaping mouths ensued. Without a doubt, the assembly was indeed one 'risky initiative' (Guatarri, 1992/2006:120). The fear of being publicly shamed, gossiped about or trolled online for addressing sexual violence (as other teen activists have been, see Keller, 2015), for the issues raised to be censored and blocked, or simply for students to be apathetic, were real concerns for all of us. However, these fears did not appear to materialize.<sup>18</sup> While we will never 'know' why, it is possible to speculate that it had something to do with openly sharing the process of how each d/artaphact was created, having the full support of the head teacher and 'senior management', inviting young people to become change-makers with them (which may have resonated with the rich and annually celebrated historical legacy of radical revolution in the area). This was not 'finger pointing' 'blame and shame' politics or pedagogy (Kenway and Willis with Rennie and Blackmore 1994), but an invitation to feel, touch, share and become part of a potentially change-making process.

### *D/artiphact as political enunciator*

It is often through the process of detachment and deterritorialization when micro revolutions can bubble up and proliferate. As Deleuze argues, 'detach and deterritorialize a segment of the real in such a way as to make it play the role of a political enunciator' (1992/2006, p. 131). The ruler-slips, the hearts, and the ruler-skirt, as 'segments of the real', did indeed detach and journey their way into a piece of direct political action and evidence-gathering – pushing the affective buttons of policy makers in a last ditch attempt to turn around a bill which was failing to respond to the voices and experiences of young people (Figure 7).<sup>19</sup> The timeliness of the bill's final stage coincided with Citizen Cymru's<sup>20</sup> young people's assembly in which young people were provided with an opportunity to experience direct action. Nurturing the inventively interactive creations of our *Ruler-heARTefacts* we seized this opportunity and invited 40 other young people from urban and rural south wales to join our 'Relationship Matters' campaign. The annotated ruler slips from the Welsh valleys met hundreds more ruler slips from Cardiff (as I had opened up the 'Relationship Matters' activism project to two other schools). Three slips were pasted to hang from a cut-out heart inside a red valentines card, which included a clear message listing their/our education recommendations. The card also included a policy poem, with lines written from each participating school, titled 'It's Not Too Late'. The last line of this poem powerfully extended the hegemonic 'healthy relationships' discourse of 'respect' and 'consent' to the policy-making process itself ('policy-making is about respect and consent too'). Each card was sealed with a lipstick kiss, (an incredible moment of gender fluidity as boys, men, girls and women took part in this practice), personally addressed to every politician in Wales, and hand delivered to the National Assembly for Wales at the Senedd in Cardiff Bay. Indeed, the kiss connected our local action to the global Violence Against Girls and Women campaign, *Red My Lips* and an additional reminder of what else a kiss can do (see Holford et al., 2013).

Over the coming weeks, we pro-actively co-ordinated and participated in national media coverage, including a twitter campaign, and the d/artaphacts were assembled and reassembled online and in person across various events. While we cannot concretely 'evidence' the impact of our campaign (as neoliberal universities might have us do, and which is a topic for a future paper), private and public oral and written communications from a number of politicians to myself and the young people, suggest that 'a real buzz' (personal communication, Jocelyn Davies, Assembly Member) was created in the corridors

of power as members received their cards. Indeed there was a dramatic u-turn in the policy-making process at the ninth hour and as the campaign gained public recognition (see Renold 2016 for a fuller account of this activism acted as a catalyst for the co-produced resource 'Agenda: A Young People's Guide to Making Positive Relationships Matter').<sup>21</sup>

'Politicality' argues Massumi (2013, p. 173), 'is always on its leading edge, affective' and this phematerialist activism perhaps touched the policy-makers and intra-acted with the policy-making assemblage at just the right time. Each card perhaps enabled every assembly member and indeed the wider patriarchal policy machine not only to feel the immediate relation of young people's experiences, but perhaps also enabled them, like the girls, to re-experience and affectively connect to a deeper unconscious knowing of how the historical legacies of gender-based and sexual violence endure.

### **Conclusion: posthuman ethics and the extra-beingness of objects in creative activism on sexual violence**

Inspired by Guatarri's (1995/2005) 'ethico-aesthetic' paradigm and Barad and Braidotti's feminist posthuman ethics of response-ability, the *Relationship Matters* project experimented with *phematerialist* methodologies to explore what else researching sexual violence with young people might do, be and become. The first half of this paper tried to illuminate the process of co-composing research-activist encounters, with semblance built in: that is, providing enough 'elbow room' to enable the girls to communicate experience in ways that allow the unexpected to emerge. Attuning to the situated and temporal dynamics afforded by the regular lunch-time sessions, we found ways for the personal, (via talk and interview transcripts) to loosen its grip on the subject, as 'data' became darta (e.g. ruler graffiti) and darta became d/artaphact (e.g. ruler-skirt). This process of detachment seemed to afford a different coming together of experience – a 'matter-realisation' (Braidotti, 2013) of experience. Each week deepened our trust in the vitality of our emergent d/artaphacts and what they might be/come. We began to witness and feel the affective 'thing power' (Benett, 2010) of these more-than-human d/artaphacts and their potential to enable young people, practitioners and indeed politicians to connect the 'here and now' of experience with deeper (unconscious) historical and embodied knowings of how sexual subordination through violence has endured (and continues to endure) over time. Crafting their experience through objects and other embodied materialities also seemed to augment their/our ability to articulate and share oppressive sexual practices and cultures that didn't immediately fold back and lock into the personal and confessional.

The second half of the paper attempted to speculate on how the d/artaphacts travelled into public institutional and political landscapes. In this section I was keen to explore how d/artaphacts might expand our ability to engage others in 'responding' to what we/they are already a part of. In many ways, and crucial for any activist collaboration with young people, was paying attention to the ethical relationality of the process. This was about attuning to a posthuman ethics and exploiting the affordances of how d/artaphacts might take on a quality of what Massumi (2013, p. 133), drawing on Deleuze calls, 'extra-beingness'. Extra-beingness, is when a form of life, (which in this case encompassed teen girls' experiences of sexual violence), comes into being, but not 'in person'. Rather, it is an experience or desire (e.g. the desire to end gendered and sexual violence) that is perceptually felt in a qualitative, relational and more-than-human way. The d/artaphacts, perhaps yielded an 'extra-beingness', that connected directly to felt experience and expressed a much-needed im/personal vitality which simultaneously enabled previously hidden sexual cultures to surface yet through objects created through and for political change. Of significance, was attempting to map the micro-moments of how each d/artaphact carries the affective residues of the process in ways that can be thought-felt.

Endeavouring to map the emergence of each d/artaphact and its journey is challenging. It demands a leap into what can only be gestured towards, and tentatively speculated. This paper is but one attempt to express how some of the im/personal affective-material-embodied entanglements that unfolded in the different phases and stages of the project as d/artaphacts rippled through peer groups and policy landscapes (see also the girls' reflections of this process, Libby et al. [in press](#)). I hope, in some small way,

the paper has begun to open up and address wider concerns of how, as Guatarri cautions, the focus of the political often lacks 'the site' (e.g. school), 'the immediate relation' (e.g. im/personal affect), 'the environment' (e.g. welsh valleys), 'the reconstitution of the social fabric' (e.g. young people's activism on sexual violence) and the 'existential impact of art' (e.g. the ruler skirt). Indeed, the process, which could never have been planned in advance, seemed not only to provide a powerful affective engagement with which to enliven and rupture the 'state of things', but it did so in ways that rearticulated 'the notion of politics as an engagement with matter' (Bratich & Brush, 2011; Meissner, 2014, p. 36). This is a process where affective connections run deep, yet reach out and exceed the specificity of the girls' own experience, their d/artaphacts, and our intra-activist assemblages. The challenge is how to continue<sup>22</sup> 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.

## Notes

1. There have been some vital critical feminist and queer interruptions of the ways in which concepts such as 'premature sexualisation' (Egan, 2013) and 'sexual bullying' (Lenz Taguchi & Palmer, 2013; Ringrose and Rawlings, 2015; Ringrose, 2013; Schott & Søndergaard, 2014) have come to dominate the policy terrain across many countries in the global North in ways that flatten out and obscure sociocultural contours and differences that perpetuate an individualizing logic that creates and attaches blame and shame to 'victims' and 'perpetrators'.
2. Throughout this article, I refer to 'sexual violence' as an imperfect catch-all term to encompass a range of unwanted looks, comments, gestures, images, touches, sounds and feelings observed or experienced by the girls as explicitly sexual (e.g. being called a 'whore') or implicitly sexual (e.g. being 'wolf-whistled at') in some way. While much of the sexual violence described could be conceptualized as heterosexual violence, some of the verbal sexual abuse could also be conceptualized as anti-gay and transphobic (e.g. the pejorative use of 'lezza' or 'manly' to hurt or shame). Sexually abusive comments were also implicitly or explicitly classist, racist, ablest, fatist etc. (e.g. 'fat', 'ugly', 'tramp', 'orange', 'slut', 'gypo', 'chav' etc.). It is not the aim of this paper to provide a taxonomy of intersectional sexual violence categories, and in many cases, most experiences exceed any simple classification. The term 'sexual violence' is thus used to gesture towards the possibility of all of the above (and more), while recognizing that all observations and experiences are located by young people who have identified throughout using the gendered category 'girl' and girls who also self identified as 'white Welsh'.
3. 'Phematerialism' became the twitter hashtag for the network collective and event, *Feminist Posthuman New Materialism: Research Methodologies in Education* (see Ringrose, Hickey-Moody, Osgood & Renold, 2015 – see this short documentary that captures moments throughout the day: <https://vimeo.com/140407753>). Phematerialism is used in this paper both as an abbreviation and a way of foregrounding the entanglement of scholars interested in working with new feminist materialist and posthuman ideas. The 'ph' is pronounced 'f' so that sound and letter formation bring posthuman and feminism together in one expression.
4. For details of this multi-phase ESRC/AHRC funded project and the Productive Margins programme, see <http://www.productivemargins.ac.uk/projects/mapping-making-mobilising/> (ES/K002716/1).
5. For a fuller account of the post-industrial context of the South Wales valleys, please see Thomas (2016).
6. The research team who conducted the GIS qualitative interviews in this first phase included: Eve Exley, Eva Elliott, Gabrielle Ivinson, Emma Renold and Gareth Thomas.
7. In consultation and with permission of the 'Relationship Matters' project participants, the transcribed verbal data used in this article is not attributed to any individual participant. This is to protect the individual participant identities being linked to specific quotations.
8. This paper has been intentionally written for an audience interested in theorizing research activisms in participatory projects with young people. It will, hopefully, be one of many, as there are many moments in this process to be explored and theorized further. It is clearly, however, an academic journal article and only one mode of communicating our practice and the processes and concepts that inform our practice. We also make research-creations that can materialize our methodologies, through reassembling or creating new d/artefacts, from films to art-books. Many of these are co-composed with young people. Other ways of communicating include events (e.g. workshops) and artefacts designed with artists to further materialize our phematerialist methodologies. For further details, please see [www.productivemargins.co.uk](http://www.productivemargins.co.uk).
9. 'd/artaphacts': the ph replaces f to emphasize the posthuman nature of how art is crafted from human and more-than-human experience (and encourage a move away from fixed and knowable 'facts'). 'Da(r)ta' is retained to make transparent the entanglement of data and art in the production of an artefact, or d/artaphact.
10. For example, in our own research, we have explored how teen girls' entanglements with bikes, skate-boards, mud, horses, water, trees and other objects in various landscapes and digital terrains enabled them to survive and



sometimes rupture the often violent patriarchal forces of the social status quo (Iverson & Renold, 2013a, 2013b; Renold & Iverson, 2014, 2015).

11. The artists I have worked with for this project include, Jên Angharad, Heloise Talbot-Godfrey, Seth Oliver and Rowan Talbot.
12. All participants identified as 'white-welsh' and 'girls'. They had been very keen to include their 'boy' friends because they are 'as annoyed as we are about some of this stuff'. However, none of the boys showed up at the lunchtime sessions, and after the first couple of meetings, the girls stopped asking them along.
13. Pasty was used as slang for vulva and 'smash' was a term used for 'rough sex' (communication with participants).
14. With the girls permission and encouragement, I transcribed the girls' talk (both from this first session and selected anonymized examples from the GIS phase) and cut up sentences and phrases which captured feelings (e.g. 'it's really 'disgusting' 'it made me feel uncomfortable') and modes of sexual violence (e.g. 'I'd have your mam'). This redistributed experience from the personal to the collective, and operated as an important ethical move to protect the identities of students, teachers and community members. The thinking-feeling behind this decision was twofold: first, to explore the materialization of experience through language and open up words to the more-than of what they could be and become and secondly to keep in flow the sticky affects of shame (Ahmed, 2010) that can often return to attach on specific individuals.
15. In one of our 'future-matters' sessions we tasked each other with expressing in non-discursive ways our sense of what futures and time meant to us. While many of the academics and visual artists picked up utensils to draw with, the choreographer, Jên Angharad, picked up her paper and rolled and dived on it, her movement marking the paper with crumples.
16. Significantly, not all the pieces found their way into the heart. As one of the girls said: 'they're the parts of the broken heart that never got mended'. These pieces went into the recycling bin.
17. The students led two morning assemblies to Year 7, 8 and 9 students (age 11–14).
18. The safe-guarding officer was wholly supportive and committed to the project. When we showed him the runway of disrespect in advance for his consent to share with students in the lower school, he commented that these words are heard everyday and we need to find ways of raising awareness and addressing the damage they cause.
19. Indeed, I have worn and continue to wear the ruler-skirt in presentations on gender-based and sexual violence research at key government and cross-party groups, and it creates more of an 'impact' than any conventional powerpoint presentation as audience and speakers watch it swing, hear it slap, and bend down to touch and read the graffitied rulers.
20. Citizen Cymru Wales is a registered charity that 'builds diverse alliances of communities organizing for power, social justice and the common good'. They have members from over a hundred organizations, including young people.
21. Watch one of the assembly members, Jocelyn Davies, talk about the impact of the Valentine card research-activist practice informing the educational amendments to the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Act (2015) here: <http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/news/view/339289-impact-on-policy-award-welsh-government-with-the-school-of-social-sciences> (accessed 8 July 2016).
22. Throughout the project, and since the passing of the Act, the girls have shared their story and d/artaphacts in different ways as and when different opportunities have become available. Their ruler skirt continues to be worn at youth-led, practitioner, academic and policy-maker events. They have made a short film, 'Words Won't Pin us Down' which features as the middle section in 'Graphic Moves' (productivemargins.com) and is widely shown at these events. They have developed their d/artaphacts which have been exhibited in various arts venues (see productivemargins.com). Together we have written up their project as a case-study in the new practitioner guidance for Whole Education approaches to 'healthy relationships' (Welsh Government, 2015b) and submitted this case study to the Women and Equalities Select Committee's (2016) Inquiry into Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence in Schools as evidence on the importance of creative approaches to sex and relationships education. Some of the girls have been key participants in the new bi-lingual Welsh Government online toolkit *AGENDA: A Young People's Guide for Making Positive Relationships Matter* (Renold, 2016) and others have since joined a new mixed-gender project, 'Under Pressure?' to develop their ideas further by working with sound, movement and a glitch-art App. They are currently expanding their case study in a forthcoming book chapter (Libby et al. *in press*) so that they can share their reflections in their own words for an academic and practitioner audience.

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