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Becoming school ball-girl: entanglements that matter

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Abstract

This thesis employs a feminist new materialist approach (Barad, 2007) to explore the relations in-between girls, sexuality and the school ball. The aim of the study is to explore the becoming of the school ball-girl through dynamic entanglements of things, bodies, discourses, spaces and imaginings. Previous sexualities research highlights how dominant discourses of gender and sexuality structure girls’ experiences of the schooling practice (Best, 2000; Smith, 2012). Extending these understandings, this thesis considers the possibilities for becoming ball-girl when matter is taken into account. The ball-girl is conceptualised as intra-actively becoming through entangled material-discursive and affective forces, opening-up understandings of the school ball-girl beyond a discursive constitution. Attention shifts to material objects, spatial-temporalities, embodied practices and affective forces: things that may have previously been overlooked.

Forty-one girls (aged 16-18 years) from two urban high schools in Aotearoa–New Zealand participated in the research. Adopting a posthumanist approach to research ‘data’, the study examines entanglements enacted through girls’ talk, photographs and videos. Rather than an isolated spatial-temporal event, the school ball is conceptualised as continually becoming through shifting entanglements of space, time and matter. This theorising troubles popular cultural constructions of the ball as a ‘rite of passage’ or ‘coming of age’ ritual. It endeavours to open up possibilities for imagining the ball-girl in ways that do not rely on linear or developmental logic.

A key contribution the thesis offers is an understanding of ball-girl-bodies as emergent and relational. Becoming ball-girl does not refer to a stable identity or femininity; rather, it is a making and unmaking of bodies that exceeds the discursive and the human. In the reconfiguring of bodies, sexualities are also rethought; rather than an attribute of an individual human body, ball-girl sexualities emerge via entangled human and more-than-human relations. The significance of this understanding of ball-girl-bodies and sexualities is that possibilities and capacities are not wholly constrained by discursive practices, nor are they located in, or do they emanate from, human intention and action. This open-ended potential offers possibilities for new imaginings for what a ball-girl can do and become.
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Introductions

Once a year, thousands of senior students around Aotearoa–New Zealand attend their school ball. Venues are booked, photographers hired, dresses and suits purchased. The school ball is a time-honoured event in New Zealand secondary schooling: in 1991, I attended my first school ball; in 1965, my mother attended hers. This research explores girls, sexuality and the school ball. It is about material things, practices, ideas and imaginings. Employing a feminist new materialist framework, the school ball is conceptualised as an assemblage comprising all manner of ‘things’ (Bennett, 2010): clothing, dates, photographs, high-heeled shoes, hopes and feelings. The aim of the study is to explore how entangled human and more-than-human forces produce what we come to understand as the school ball-girl. In this approach, the ball-girl is not a fixed identity or subject; rather, the ball-girl is conceptualised as an *intra-active becoming* (Barad, 2007). Becoming ball-girl is a dynamic, shifting process where bodies and femininities are emergent and relationally produced. This introductory chapter brings together the assorted threads that have formed the ‘beginnings’ of the thesis: previous research on sexualities and schooling; the social and cultural context of the school ball; and how I came to the topic as a researcher. I introduce the feminist new materialist approach (Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2010; Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010) employed in this thesis and the potential it offers for thinking about the school ball beyond a discursive and human focus. The chapter concludes with an outline of the thesis as a whole.

Girls, sexualities and the school ball

Schools and schooling processes are recognised as key social sites for the production and regulation of young peoples’ sexual and gender identities (Allen, 2005; 2011; Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Epstein, O’Flynn, & Telford, 2003; Kehily, 2002; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Rasmussen, 2006; Renold, 2005). An established body of work demonstrates how sexualities are discursively and materially constituted through a variety of structures and practices, including curriculum and pedagogy (Alldred & David, 2007; Allen, 2005; 2007; Kehily, 2002), daily routines and practices (Pascoe, 2007; Rofes, 2005; Youdell, 2005), spatial and material arrangements (Allen, 2013a; O’Donoghue, 2006) and within student sexual cultures (Kehily, 2002; Renold, 2005). This important work has revealed sexualities and schooling to be a complicated terrain, where young people negotiate a plethora of sexual meanings and positionings on a daily basis. The enduring and pervasive discourse of childhood ‘innocence’ (Egan & Hawkes, 2008; Robinson, 2008), for instance, coupled with the idea that student sexualities need to be ‘controlled’, offer young people multiple, often-contradictory ways for understanding themselves as sexual beings (Allen, 2007). The current study emerges from
my interest in the production and regulation of girlhood sexualities in particular (Egan, 2013; Ringrose, 2013) and I have chosen the school ball as the site for this exploration¹.

In thinking about the ways schools offer girls meanings about gender and sexuality, the school ball provides fertile ground for investigation. It is an event held by most secondary schools across Aotearoa–New Zealand, primarily involving senior students in their final two years of schooling (Smith, 2014). From a Foucauldian (1976) perspective, the school ball can be understood as an institutionalised ritual of governmentality constituted through normative discourses of sexuality and femininity. Previous research has shown how school rituals, such as dances, are charged with sexual meanings: ‘a time of emphasised heterosexuality and . . . increased school control of sexual activity’ (Pascoe, 2007: p.42). This literature illustrates how dominant gender and heterosexual discourses are pervasive forces in the ways the school ball is understood and experienced. In addition to these discursive understandings, the school ball is a diverse landscape of material things, bodies, spaces and corporeal practices. This thesis seeks to account for materiality as co-constitutive forces in the becoming of the school ball. In doing so, the school ball is not solely a product of discursive practices but an entanglement (Barad, 2007) of material-discursive and affective forces.

The school ball is commonly portrayed in the New Zealand media as a ‘Kiwi rite of passage’ (Cronin, 2015: p.10). In this framing, the ball is often referred to as ‘a night to remember’ (Tait, 2014): ‘the most important occasion on the social calendar for year 11,12 and 13 students’ (Murray, 2012: p.10). Ideas such as these are often premised on developmental logic: as one article articulates, ‘for girls, there’s something magical about throwing up your hair, slipping into a pair of heels and having your date show up in a tux. It turns a girl into a woman’ (Tay, 2007). Here, the ball is constructed as a ‘milestone’: a distinct moment and space in time on the trajectory to becoming woman.

Every year, issues related to the school ball emerge in the New Zealand media. Over recent years, issues have included alcohol consumption at ‘after-ball parties’ and consequent prohibiting of these ‘unofficial’ events (Tapaleao & Wade, 2012); the inclusion of condoms in ball packs (Gibbs, 2010); and the banning of same-sex dates (Tait, 2013; Wade, 2011). Media commentary on the school ball often focuses on girls in particular. Newspaper headlines such as ‘Scramble to be the belle of ball’ (Tait, 2014: see Figure 1) and ‘Frock horror as girls turn up in same dress’ (Eriksen, 2012: see Figure 2) offer particular ideas about girls’ engagements with this schooling practice.

¹ The use of researcher’s ‘I’ does not signal an ontologically separate researcher. We might better think of it as an entangled ‘I’, which refers to the entangled state of the researcher in the research process, by which the researcher is also constituted.
Scramble to be belle of ball

Students pack expo even though season still months away

Venes, DJs, photographs and decorations have been hired, dresses have been bought and hair and makeup appointments booked – but school ball season is still months away.

Some New Zealand schools began preparing events last year, others swung into action at the beginning of Term 1 and many students already have all the ingredients required for their big night.

Yesterday Auckland School Ball Expo at Ellerslie Event Centre was filled with secondary school students shopping for everything from upmarket hotel venues, hummerettes and party buses, to magicians, photo-booths and spray tanning.

Event organiser Scott Richter said preparations began earlier each year as schools scrambled to get first dibs on all the elements required.

“Some schools will start preparing the year before,” he said.

“It is starting to get earlier and earlier each year as, mainly the girls, get more and more excited.”

This is one of the things students look forward to when they go back to school from the holidays.

Secondary Principals’ Association president Tom Parsons said school balls were a highlight of the school year.

“Preparation and planning is key to everything these days and coming out of the global financial crisis anything is more and more of a treat being planned.”

Due to the attention that is placed on these events, school management is also being more and more particu- lar that all is as dotted.

Yesterday’s expo, in its eighth year, attracted thousands of students from Waikato, the Coromandel, Bay of Plenty and Northland.

First-time exhibitor Sue Gray, of Hire Plants, said the business was expecting to cater for up to 35 school balls, supplying plants for themes such as Willy Wonka and The Great Gatsby.

“Most of them are happening in June or July so they start getting things rolling along now.”

Events seemed to also be getting more extravagant, she said, “Sometimes the private-school parents come on board and give a bigger free range with a bigger theme than some others.”

Many students already have all the ingredients for their big night.

Early preparation is key for a night to remember

There is more than two months until the Pullman Hotel will be transformed into a night in New York, but a successful Epom Girls Grammar School organising committee started getting their ball rolling in February.

Close to 300 Year 13 students and their parents will attend the May 30 New York State of Mind-themed event at the upmarket city centre hotel.

Tessa Boyd is heading the 15 students tasked with putting the event together, and said most items on the To-do list had already been crossed off.

“We started at the beginning of the year when we first started back at school,” she said. “We split the committee into a few groups so some people organised budgeting, some organised prizes, tickets and posters and the design of them and the right flowers, decorations and the food.”

A DJ has been booked as well as three photographers, four photo booths and enough decorations to turn the hotel into Times Square by night.

She said the final ticket price was not yet known, but would be under $300 for students at the decile 8 public school.

Aside from event logistics, students were also well prepared for the big night. Fellow Epom Girls’ organiser Lucy Armstrong said students booked their hair and makeup as soon as the ball date was announced.

“There are so many people at our school and if you want to go somewhere good like M.A.C. you have to book it if you don’t want to be there.”

Most students already had organised their dresses, said Madeline Kidd. “Most people buy online because there aren’t enough dress shops in Auckland for everyone to have something different.”

Figure 1: ‘Scramble to be belle of ball’. Source: The New Zealand Herald, 20 March 2014
In articles such as these, girls are constructed as heavily invested in the school ball: for instance, excessive spending on dresses and beauty work (Gorrrell Anstiss, 2012; Jones, 2013; 2014) is a common point of conjecture in the media. Enmeshed in this presumed investment is the construction of girls as catty and competitive. The pull quote in Figure 2 exemplifies this construction: ‘They are like bridezillas… girls are so quick to turn on each other, it’s horrible’, states a dress store representative. This commentary on girls’ engagements with the ball is dominated by adult opinion, often stemming from a place of ‘protection’ and ‘concern’ for girls’ wellbeing. Articles like these continually draw or, perhaps, provoke my attention: What do girls think about these articles? Do these media portrayals resonate with their experiences of the school ball?

More recently, media have reported issues such as the policing of girls’ bodies, clothing and ball dates: the headline ‘Catholic girls’ school’s strict ball rules: No cleavage, no backless dresses, no taking off shoes and your date must be serious’ is one example (Bilby & Gaffaney, 2016). The article contributes to recent media commentary where schoolgirls’ bodies and clothing are under surveillance: the reporting of girls being told to lengthen skirts to ‘stop distracting male staff and students’ is another example (Roy, 2016; Rutherford, 2016; Schoultz, 2016). Media have reported student anger in both of these incidents. In the case of...
the school ball rules, an online petition was created to have these rules changed: whether they were successful was not reported. Previous research (Best, 2000; Smith, 2012) has shown girls’ experiences of the school ball are inevitably connected to discourses of ‘appropriate’ femininity. From a feminist poststructuralist perspective, girls can be understood to accommodate and resist dominant discourses in various ways (Weedon, 1987). The current study is interested in how a feminist new materialist approach might provide openings for thinking about girls and the school ball beyond its popular constructions, for instance, as a developmental ‘milestone’ and girls as ‘competitive’, ‘excessive’ and highly invested in the ball.

A feminist new materialist approach to researching the school ball

The aim of the study is to explore the becoming of the school ball-girl through entanglements that matter. Entangled relations of materialities, practices, ideas and affects are examined as dynamic and open-ended school ball assemblages, through which the ball-girl becomes. A feminist new materialist approach (Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2010; Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010) opens up ways of thinking about the school ball-girl as more than discursively constituted. Attention shifts to multiple forces including material objects, spatial configurations, corporeal practices and affective relations, such as feelings, sensations and atmospheres. New questions emerge: What are the possibilities for becoming ball-girl if matter is taken into account? How do human and more-than-human relations limit and extend ball-girl becomings? How do entanglements of material-discursive and affective forces produce particular ball-girl capacities: actions, feelings and desires?

Feminist new materialisms offer a way of emphasising the agential force (Barad, 2007) of school ball materialities – both human and more-than-human. It is a way of accounting for bodies, corporeal practices, objects, spaces and temporali ties not as separate ‘things’ or passive background to the ball, but as co-constitutive in the becoming of the school ball-girl. The aim is to ‘give material factors their due’ in the constitution of discourse and reality (Coole & Frost, 2010: p.3). In this sense, it is not a ‘move beyond’ a discursive construction, but a ‘move to’ a material-discursive understanding of the school ball (Barad, 2014: p.176). Barad’s *agential realist* framework offers a way of understanding the school ball-girl where discursive practices are related to the material world and vice versa: where one is not prior or privileged over the other (the following chapter *Theoretical entanglements* provides a detailed discussion of this idea). Traversing the divide between materiality and discourse provides openings for thinking about the school ball beyond a discursive and human focus.

While the purpose of the research is to explore girls’ engagements with the school ball, it attempts to do so in a way that does not centre or prioritise the human. It is not that the human or human actions are ignored; rather, the human is conceptualised in a ‘flattened’ rather than hierarchical relationship with the surrounding world (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010). The study seeks to ‘highlight what is typically cast in the shadow’ (Bennett, 2010: p.ix):
material things, spaces and affective forces that may have previously been overlooked. Bringing these material elements to the fore is an attempt to avoid the anthropocentrism that normally pervades educational research (Snaza & Weaver, 2015; Taylor, 2016). As Hultman and Lenz Taguchi (2010: p.539) explain, anthropocentric thinking privileges ‘humans and human meaning-making as the sole constitutive force’ of our world; a positioning they argue to be problematic as it ‘reduces our world to a social world and neglects all other non-human forces that are at play’.

An exciting new field of educational research is drawing on posthumanist theories to think about educational practices in ways that avoid humanist and anthropocentric logic (Allen, 2015; Blaise, 2015; Bodén, 2013; Lenz Taguchi, 2010; Lenz Taguchi & Palmer, 2013; Niccolini & Pindyck, 2015; Pacini-Ketchabaw, Taylor, & Blaise, 2016; Ringrose & Renold, 2016; Snaza & Weaver, 2015; Taylor & Hughes, 2016). This emerging research is concerned with thinking about educational practices in relational and non-hierarchical ways, where the human, more-than-human and other-than-human are entangled in knowledge production. As Taylor contends, posthumanist research practices ‘offer a new ethics of engagement for education by including the nonhuman in questions about who matters and what counts’ (2016: p.5, italics in original). In this thesis, the term more-than-human (Allen, 2013b; Blaise, 2015; Lorimer, 2013; Whatmore, 2006) refers to the forces, energies and things that are recognised as not human. Lorimer describes the category of ‘more-than-human’ as ‘the embodied, affective and skilful dimensions of our multispecies worlds that often elude research methodologies preoccupied with human representations’ (2013: p.61). In relation to the school ball, the more-than-human encompasses all manner of materialities, affects and forces – known and unknown. Human and more-than-human elements are understood to affect and be affected by one another (Deleuze, 1988), as they connect or intra-act in continually shifting assemblages. This approach opens up an imagining of the ball in which humans are just one element amid a confederacy of material and affective forces. In short, the school ball becomes a more-than-human phenomenon.

The ball-girl is understood as intra-actively becoming (Barad, 2007: p.180) through material-discursive, human and more-than human entanglements. Such thinking requires a reconfiguring of notions of subjectivity and agency. Within a new materialist ontology, humans, things and other matter are no longer discrete pre-existing entities; instead, they come into being through their relations. The human (and its capacities) are thought of relationally as opposed to being thought of as an independent, autonomous individual. In this approach, the girl and ball are no longer separate entities. The girl becomes with the ball and the ball becomes with the girl (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010): one is not prior to the other. The hyphen in ball-girl denotes this intra-active entanglement. Dissolving the boundary between the girl and the ball provides openings for rethinking the human ‘subject’ (i.e. the ball-girl) not as a fixed being but as becoming – a process not a state (Coole, 2013).
This thesis contributes to a burgeoning area of research exploring schooling, gender and sexualities through posthumanist and new materialist frameworks (Alldred & Fox, 2017; Allen, 2013b; 2015; 2016a; 2016b; Allen & Rasmussen, 2017; Allen, 2017; Cameron-Lewis, 2016; Garland-Levett, 2017; Holford, Renold, & Huuki, 2013; Ivinson & Renold, 2016; Juelskjaer, 2013; Lenz Taguchi & Palmer, 2013; Renold & Ringrose, 2017; Ringrose & Rawlings, 2015; Ringrose & Renold, 2016; Taylor, 2013; Wolfe, 2016). Examining sexualities through relational approaches, such as sexuality-assemblages (Allen, 2013b; Fox & Alldred, 2013), establishes discourses as entangled with material things, spaces, temporalities and affects. These elements are not passive or separate, but mutually implicated in the becoming of sexualities at school (Allen, 2015). A new materialist rendering of sexuality decentres the human by disrupting the idea that humans are the primary site and expression of sexuality. Inspired by such an approach, the current study is interested in thinking about femininity and sexuality as not solely attributable to, or emanating from, the human; instead, these concepts become relational, untethered from the human body and identity (Allen, 2013b; 2015; Fox & Alldred, 2013).

With its focus specifically on girls, the research also contributes to the field of Girlhood Studies (Mitchell, Reid-Walsh, & Kirk, 2008). Since the 1990s, there has been a marked increase in research focussing exclusively on girls and their experiences of girlhood, as opposed to the study of children or women in general. Historically, the experiences of girls have been marginalised due to a lack of consideration of gender issues within youth research and age within the field of women’s studies (Harris, 2004; Kearney, 2009). During the late 1970s and early 1980s, critique of this marginalisation drew attention to the ways girls had been overlooked or misrepresented in studies on youth culture (McRobbie & Garber, 1975) and the impact of sexism on academic analysis and the construction of girls’ social experiences (Chesney-Lind, 1974). Similarly, the field of women’s studies received criticism for marginalising the experiences of girls due to its focus on adult women; girlhood was often viewed as preparation for womanhood, rather than an identity in its own right (Currie, Kelly, & Pomerantz, 2009). Since then, the developing area of Girlhood Studies has drawn feminist researchers from an array of disciplinary traditions and conceptual frameworks, including psychology, sociology, media and cultural studies, to develop a unique and legitimate field of study (Kearney, 2009).

The current study contributes to emerging work bringing posthumanist and new materialist theories into the arena of Girlhood Studies (Renold & Ringrose, 2016; 2017; Ringrose & Rawlings, 2015; Ringrose & Renold, 2016). These theoretical underpinnings offer an ontologically different way of thinking about girls as ‘subjects’ and how we come to conceptually understand ‘the girl’, ‘bodies’ and ‘femininities’. In thinking about femininities it is easy to centre the human – this study is indeed concerned with girls and the capacities they have within the school ball space. However, rather than thinking about girls, their bodies and femininities as stable or fixed entities/identities or purely discursively produced, what might
happen when we think of ball-girl femininities as exceeding the discursive and the human? Thinking about femininities not as something we ‘are’ but as becomings enables an understanding of femininities as multiple, messy and non-linear. They are open-ended, never complete or closed. Becoming ball-girl does not reveal a true or authentic femininity or identity, rather it is a making and unmaking of bodies, through an entanglement of things, forces, discursive practices, histories and desires. Such an approach marks a shift in focus, from what a ball-girl is to what a ball-girl can do and become, and what forces are implicated in these becomings.

**Thesis outline**

This first chapter has introduced the social-cultural context of the school ball and (briefly) the feminist new materialist approach (Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2010; Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010) used to explore the becoming of the school ball-girl. The next three chapters establish the theoretical and methodological foundations of the thesis. The following chapter, *Theoretical entanglements*, outlines key theories and concepts, including agential realism (Barad, 2007), assemblage (Bennett, 2005; 2010; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), becoming (Barad, 2007) and affect (Ahmed, 2004; Deleuze, 1988), that are fundamental to the development of the knowledge produced here. I explain how a feminist new materialist approach provides a specific ontological understanding of girls, sexuality (Allen, 2015b; Fox & Alldred, 2013) and the school ball, and the potential it offers for rethinking this schooling practice.

*School-ball-girl matter(ings)* brings together academic scholarship, media commentary and traditional fairy tale that inform current understandings and perceptions of the school ball. The discussion highlights the ways school balls and proms have previously been theorised and the dominant cultural understandings that cohere around these events. Specific attention is given to the ways girls are constructed in relation to balls and proms. Extending this discussion, theoretical approaches to understanding the materialisation of girls’ bodies are examined. I consider how feminist new materialisms and theories of affect offer a different approach to thinking about girls’ bodies and ‘agency’. These perspectives are brought together, not as mere ‘background’ to the study, but threaded through the thesis and the production of knowledge it offers.

The fourth chapter *Methodological becomings* establishes the feminist new materialist methodological framework underpinning the thesis. I conceptualise the research as an assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Fox & Alldred, 2014) comprising theory-participants-data-researcher. The methodological discussion explores these four connections and discusses how each of the elements might look or ‘work’ within a feminist new materialist approach. I consider how a new materialist ontology has significant epistemological consequences for how we ‘do’ research: for instance, how I understand the human ‘subject’, ‘data’ and how ‘knowledge’ is produced.
Once upon a space and time is the first of three chapters that form encounters with data. This chapter brings together the Baradian notion of spacetimemattering, the concept of assemblage (Bennett, 2005; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) and theories of affect (Deleuze, 1988) to rethink the school ball in relation to time and space. Rather than a fixed space or moment in time, the school ball is understood as a continual process of becoming. I consider how the school ball is intra-actively produced through multiple spaces and temporalities, troubling the idea of the school ball as a milestone or a discrete moment in time along a ‘coming of age’ trajectory (Best, 2000). Space, time and matter emerge as entangled forces, co-constituting what we come to understand as the school ball. In mapping the relations in-between time, space and the school ball, this chapter blurs the conventional borders of the school ball as an isolated spatial-temporal event.

Becoming ball-girl-bodies explores the material-discursive and affective entanglements that produce the ball-girl-body. With a focus on beauty-body practices, the chapter considers how relations limit and/or extend the capacities of ball-girl-bodies: what a ball-girl-body can do and become. Beauty-body practices are examined as material-discursive intra-activity. As such, they are not fixed processes or something simply done to bodies. Instead, beauty-body practices are thought of as multi-linear and affective matterings involving human and more-than-human forces. A feminist new materialist approach to bodies (Barad, 2007) highlights the materiality of the body and other matter as active forces in the becoming of ball-girl-bodies. This chapter argues there is no essential ball-girl-body; rather, bodies are material-discursive phenomena continually becoming through dynamic affective relations.

The final data encounter chapter, Ball-girl-date affections, brings together a feminist new materialist ontology of materiality (Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2010) and sexuality (Allen, 2015; Fox & Alldred, 2013) with theories of affect (Ahmed, 2004; Deleuze, 1988) to examine the affective relations in-between ball-girls and their dates. This approach conceptualises ball-girl-date encounters as dynamic sexuality-assemblages of material objects, bodies, spaces and affects. Material things such as high-heeled shoes and photographs, affective-spatial ‘hot spots’ like the dance floor and school ball entrance, are considered vital forces in ball-girl-date encounters and the becoming of sexuality. A particular focus of this chapter is how affective relations produce ball-girl capacities: actions, feelings and desires. This exploration opens up a space for understanding ball-girl-date relations beyond a human and discursive focus.

In the final chapter, Ever after… an (un)ending conclusion, I bring together the key ideas and arguments in this thesis and indicate the significance of the work. I discuss how a feminist new materialist ontology entails an open-ended potential for the ball-girl: new possibilities and new questions emerge.
Theoretical entanglements

The feminist new materialist approach employed in this study connects with a range of theoretical approaches including: new materialism(s) (Coole & Frost, 2010; Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012), (new) material feminisms (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008; Taylor & Ivinson, 2013), agential realism (Barad, 2007), assemblage theory (Bennett, 2005; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), affect theory (Ahmed, 2004; Deleuze, 1988; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010) and posthumanist research practices (MacLure, 2013; Mazzei & Jackson, 2012; St. Pierre, 2008). While diverse and emerging from different philosophical positions, these theoretical approaches are compatible for the study in their commitment to materiality, enabling an account of both human and more-than-human forces that produce the school ball. This chapter establishes the key theories and concepts underpinning the thesis, specifically agential realism (Barad, 2007), assemblage (Bennett, 2005; 2010; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), becoming (Barad, 2007) and affect (Ahmed, 2004; Deleuze, 1988). I begin by discussing the ontological shift within feminist theory towards thinking about matter differently. I introduce conceptual tools offered by Barad (e.g. intra-action and entanglement) that have helped orient the study’s attention towards matter. The chapter considers how a new materialist ontology reconfigures understandings of sexuality (Allen, 2015b; Fox & Alldred, 2013) from a focus on the human (and individual) towards a relational approach. Lastly, the chapter discusses the possibilities these theories and concepts offer for re-imagining the ball-girl.

Feminist ‘new’ materialisms

Across a range of disciplines, including feminist theory, there is a renewed interest in and rethinking of materiality (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008; Barad, 2003; 2007; Bennett, 2010; Haraway, 2008; Hird, 2009). The theoretical movement termed ‘new materialism(s)’ is instrumental in developing new thinking about matter and processes of materialisation (Coole & Frost, 2010; Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012). The feminist new materialist approach adopted in the thesis is indebted to feminist scholarship within the developing field of new materialisms². Within this broad theoretical movement, feminists have offered an important ‘commentary on the linguistic turn’ (van der Tuin, 2011: p.271) and a rethinking of the status of discourse and language in research practices. Feminist theorists working with new materialist theories use a range of names to denote these theoretical approaches including: new feminist materialism (van der Tuin, 2011), material feminisms (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008), relational materialist (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010), feminist relational materialist (Bodén, 2013) and agential realist (Barad, 1999, 2003, 2007). While these various terms signal different fields and theoretical influences, they share a commitment to theorising matter as co-constitutive with discourse (Taylor & Ivinson, 2013).

² In ‘naming’ the research’s theoretical framework, the term ‘new materialist’ is prefaced by ‘feminist’ in recognition of this lineage.
The emerging field of material feminisms is distinct from the established materialist feminism that emerged out of western Marxism (Hennessy & Ingraham, 1997). The previous theoretical movement was concerned with the materiality of women's lives (i.e. material living conditions) structured through factors such as class and race. What distinguishes the emerging analyses of material feminism or new materialism is 'a keen interest in engagements with matter' (Hird, 2009: p.330, italics in original). These engagements pay greater attention to nonhuman forces, which 'affect who we are and how we (might) live' (Hird & Roberts, 2011: p.115). What might be considered 'new' here, is the conceptualisation of matter as animate or agentic, rather than inert or simply background to human activity (Taylor & Ivinson, 2013). As such, new material feminisms 'constitutes radical ontological rewritings' (Lenz Taguchi, 2013: p.706-707), where nature is inseparable from culture (Hird, 2009). In Barad's work, for instance, 'the entanglement of matter and meaning' dissolves the nature/culture dualism (2012: p.50). Hence Barad uses the term 'naturalcultural practices' (2007: p.32) to signal this co-constitutive entanglement. In the context of this study, it means the possibilities for becoming ball-girl cannot be reduced to either nature or culture as this would presume one is separate to and privileged over the other.

While feminist theory is argued to be undergoing a 'material turn' (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008: p.6), how 'new' a material focus is has been a point of debate (Ahmed, 2008; Davis, 2009; Irni, 2013; van der Tuin, 2008). Jones and Hoskins (2016) remind us that Indigenous ontologies do not differentiate 'culture' from 'nature'. In Aotearoa–New Zealand, for instance, entanglements of human and nature are embedded in traditional Maori thought. Ontologically, human beings and the natural world (e.g. rivers and mountains) are entangled in mutually constitutive relationships. Taylor and Ivinson (2013: p.666) urge us to 'remember that the subject/object split inflicted by the legacy of Descartes is a western ontological problem exported via colonialism'. Within Indigenous ontologies, the 'identity of “things” in the world is not understood as discrete or independent, but emerges through, and as, relations with everything else' (Jones & Hoskins, 2016: p.80). When qualifying the 'newness' of new materialism, perhaps then as St. Pierre, Jackson and Mazzei (2016: p.100) succinctly note, 'the descriptor “new” does not necessarily announce something new but serves as an alert that we are determined to try to think differently'.

New materialist thinking offers significant potential in moving feminist theory beyond what Alaimo and Hekman (2008: p.1) describe as an 'impasse' – a gridlock argued to be a result of the contemporary linguistic turn. While a discursive focus has produced complex and important analyses of the connections between power, language, knowledge and subjectivity, this approach is premised on a language/reality dichotomy, in that reality is entirely constituted through language. As a result, materiality such as the ball-girl-body, become products of discourse. It is a one-way linear process. An increasing number of feminist theorists are seeking to rethink this discursive focus by bringing materiality to the fore (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008; Barad, 2003; Bennett, 2004; Grosz, 1994; 2010; Hird, 2009; Kirby,
Acknowledging the force of matter sparks new questions: how does the materiality of the body and other matter contribute to school ball experiences and corporeal practices? Moreover, how does matter contribute to the production of discourses themselves? These questions posit discourse as no longer prior, or even separate to, the material; instead they become inseparable and co-constitutional, as indicated in the term material-discursive (Barad, 2007).

Conceiving matter as lively and productive disrupts the conventional idea that agents are exclusively human. It fosters an attention to ‘things’ that affect girls and the school ball, which may not be able to be explained discursively. For example, the way entanglements of girls’ bodies and high-heeled shoes can produce affects that may exceed a discursive rendering (see Becoming ball-girl-bodies chapter for this discussion). This potential expands ‘what is counted as relevant’ in the research (Taylor & Hughes, 2016: p.2); what might be considered peripheral in a discursive reading of the school ball now becomes significant. We are encouraged ‘to think relationally with other beings/matter’ (ibid) in a move towards a flattening of human/nonhuman and material/discursive hierarchies. Instead of situating discourses of gender and sexuality at the centre, materialities and more-than-human relations are recognised as productive, co-constitutive forces in the becoming of the school ball-girl.

The writings of Karen Barad (2003, 2007) have influenced the feminist new materialist approach developed in this thesis. Barad brings together feminist philosophy with quantum physics to offer an ontologically different way of understanding the world. Following Barad, the term ‘posthumanist’ signals ‘the crucial recognition that nonhumans play an important role in naturalcultural practices’ (2007: p.32). Barad encourages us to think about the human, and indeed the world, as entanglements: in her words ‘existence is not an individual affair’ (2007: p.ix). Her work provides conceptual tools to not only account for the human and non-human, but also how material and discursive factors are entangled together in the becoming (or mattering) of the school ball-girl. Barad’s theory of posthumanist performativity builds on the important work of Judith Butler (1990; 1993) and Michel Foucault (1976; 1980) to account for the material and discursive in processes of materialisation. Barad’s framework of agential realism and related concepts of intra-action, material-discursive and phenomena are explained in the next section.

**Thinking–doing with Barad**

The research’s feminist new materialist framework is underpinned by a fundamental recasting of ontology and epistemology. Barad (2003; 2007) uses the term onto-epistem-ology to recognise the interdependent and intertwined relationship between being (ontology) and knowing (epistemology). The separation of epistemology from ontology establishes an inherent difference between human and nonhuman, matter and discourse, subject and object. Instead, Barad argues the practices of knowing and being cannot be separated from one another and are mutually implicated: as such, onto-epistem-ology can be understood as ‘the
study of practices of knowing in being’ (2007: p.185). In Barad’s words ‘we do not obtain
knowledge by standing outside of the world; we know because “we” are of the world’ (2003:
(where matter and organisms are kept apart), or ‘Being-in-discourse’ (where everything is
constituted by collectively constructed discourse). ‘Being-of-the-world’ is an entangled state of
interdependence where knowing comes from a direct material engagement with the world.
Humans can be understood as material objects of the world, just like any other beings and
matter (Barad, 2007). Drawing on these theoretical understandings, this thesis applies an
onto-epistemological worldview to understanding becoming in the school ball setting. In this
framing, our ways of being in the world depend on our knowing of it, and our knowing
depends on our being (and continuous becoming) in the world (Lenz Taguchi, 2010). Here,
our meaning making is dependent on the material world around us; we are not separate to
the world but part of it in a process of mutual and intra-dependent becoming. Theorising the
school ball through an onto-epistemological framework acknowledges the entangled research
relations that shape and reshape the phenomena of the school ball and the knowledge
produced (as I shall discuss in the chapter Methodological becomings).

Agential realism is an onto-epistemological framework that ‘provides an understanding of the
role of the human and nonhuman, material and discursive, and natural and cultural factors in
scientific and other socio-material practices’ (Barad, 2007: p.26: italics in original). The
framework is a posthumanist performative approach that acknowledges matter as a dynamic
and productive force. Barad argues language has been afforded ‘too much power’ in how we
come to understand and represent the world (2007: p.132). In response, her agential realist
framework provides an elaboration of performativity where ‘matter is produced and
productive, generated and generative. Matter is agentive, not a fixed essence or property of
things’ (Barad, 2007: p.137). This approach challenges the notion of materiality as either a
given, or mere effect of human agency. Instead, matter is in an entangled relationship with
other matter and/or humans and it is through these entangled relations that new becomings
emerge. Agential realism not only acknowledges that both material and discursive, natural
and cultural factors play a role in knowledge production, but provides theoretical tools to
examine how these factors ‘work’ in-relation. A fundamental concept here is Barad’s notion of
intra-action: it is a key concept applied throughout this thesis, engendering an exploration of
the school ball produced through human and more-than-human entanglements.

Entanglements and intra-action

In order to closely examine the ways multiple relations ‘work’ to produce the school ball-girl,
entanglements are conceptualised through Barad’s (2007) notion of intra-activity. The
concept differs from ‘interaction’, which describes the relationship between distinctly separate
bodies and entities. Intra-activity, on the other hand, is ‘the mutual constitution of entangled
agencies’ (Barad, 2007: p.33), which refers to a relationship between organisms and matter
(human and non-human) where there are no distinct boundaries. Instead, they are in a state of intra-action – a material-discursive process where agencies emerge through their intra-action rather than precede it. In other words, they emerge as an effect of their mutual engagement. In thinking about the school ball, the human and more-than-human emerge through, as a part of, their entangled intra-actions with everything else (Lenz Taguchi, 2010).

For Barad: ‘To be entangled is not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence (2007: p.ix). The school ball event itself, girls, discourses of femininity and all manner of materialities are not individual pre-existing elements, they only become ‘distinct’ in relation to one another through intra-active relations of entanglement.

In this thesis, the term entanglement(s) is used in the Baradian sense, denoting these intra-active and co-constitutive relations. For instance, the becoming of the ball-girl is an intra-active entanglement of bodies, things, discourses, spaces and practices. Theorising the ball-girl as human and more-than-human entanglements can work to dismantle the privileged position of human separability. The concept of entanglement can be applied to not only the becoming of school ball and ball-girl, but also the becoming of the researcher and the research itself. The knowledge that is produced in this thesis is an entanglement of theory, methodology, participants, data and researcher (see Methodological becomings chapter for this discussion). When research is considered an entanglement there is no division between the world and the separate observer – the ‘knower’ and the ‘known’ (Barad, 2007; Lenz Taguchi, 2013). This means the assumed subject/object relationship (and hierarchy) often present in traditional research methods is potentially dismantled (Snaza & Weaver, 2015).

The notion of intra-action provides a reworking of the relationship between discursive practices and material phenomena. Barad uses the term material-discursive to signal an intertwined and mutually constitutive relationship. They exist simultaneously and continuously intra-act in an on-going production (Barad, 2007; Lenz Taguchi, 2010). As Barad explains: ‘neither discursive practices nor material phenomena are ontologically or epistemologically prior. Neither can be explained in terms of the other. Neither is reducible to the other . . . ; matter and meaning are mutually articulated’ (2007: p.152). The idea that the material and discursive (matter and meaning) are mutually implicated in the dynamics of intra-activity, offers a new way to think about the relationship between the materiality and discursive practices associated with the school ball. It opens up understandings of how the material affects our discursive understandings, just as much as discursive understandings affect the material reality around us (Lenz Taguchi, 2010).

The reciprocal and mutual relationship differs to post-structural analyses, where the material (for instance, the body) is constituted through discourse but not the other way around (i.e. in Barad’s reading of Butler’s theory of materialisation). If intra-actions are simultaneously material and discursive in an entangled relation, we can understand why Barad suggests
agential realism provides an understanding of ‘how discursive practices matter’ (2007: p.135). For the current study, it means ball-girl becomings are not limited to accommodating or resisting (pre-existing) discursive norms; rather, becoming ball-girl is a continual process of becoming via on-going relations of material and discursive forces. This approach extends post-structural analyses of the school ball (Smith, 2012) to consider not only how girls are produced in particular ways through dominant understandings, but also how the force of matter is entangled in these becomings.

Conceptualising reality and materiality as discursively produced establishes a material/discursive dichotomy. In contrast, with a new materialist approach both discourse and materiality are accounted for – not as two distinct elements, but as inseparable. As such, the material/discursive binary is potentially dissolved (Allen, 2015a). In this thesis, the term *material-discursive* (Barad, 2007) is used to signify this ontological understanding. Such an approach enables a shift in focus in relation to becoming ball-girl: from materialisation as a product of discursive practices (i.e. produced and regulated via discourses), to recognising materialities and the more-than-human as dynamic, productive forces in the becoming of the ball-girl. It encourages attentiveness towards physical bodies, clothing, high heels, sensations, gut feelings, photographs, atmosphere, corporeal practices and spatial configurations like the school ball entrance and dance floor.

**Conceptualising the school ball and ball-girl as phenomena**

In contrast to understanding the school ball as a fixed moment in space and time or the ball-girl as a discursive subject position, the school ball and ball-girl emerge as *phenomena* produced through agential intra-actions. For Barad, phenomena are constitutive of reality, and ‘it is through specific intra-actions that phenomena come to matter—in both senses of the word’ (2003: p.817). In this sense, phenomena (i.e. the school ball and ball-girl) are agentially produced. As such, there are no relations, or ‘relata’ in Baradian terms, which are pre-existing. ‘Relata’ only exist *within* phenomena; therefore, it is through agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of specific school ball relations or ‘components’ become determinate and that particular embodied concepts become meaningful (Barad, 2003: p.815). The becoming of the school ball and ball-girl are dynamic processes of intra-activity and it is through material-discursive practices that boundaries are constituted. This means ‘functions’ or properties of things can no longer be assumed or taken for granted.

Thinking about school ball practices as intra-active entanglements might reconfigure how we think about causality and agency. In an agential realist account, causal relations are not conceived of as relations between isolated objects where one distinct entity affects another (i.e. linear cause and effect). This is impossible as there is no subject/object divide. Instead, cause and effect emerge through intra-activity. The concept of intra-action also offers a departure from the notion of the intentional and autonomous human subject, for instance, the ball-girl. If individual entities do not pre-exist intra-action, then it becomes impossible for the
human or more-than-human to act on their own or have independent agency. As opposed to agency being an attribute of someone or something, for Barad, ‘agency is a matter of intra-active-acting; it is an enactment’ (2003: p.826). In this framing, agency is not an attribute at all, it ‘is “doing” or “being” in its intra-activity’ (Barad, 2007: p.178). Therefore, agency is no longer aligned with human intentionality or subjectivity, and matter is no longer considered inert and passive. Although, it is not simply a matter of saying material things have individual agency; rather, agency is an emergent quality produced in the entanglements of human and nonhuman. When agency is no longer the domain of the subject, we have a wider scope to (re)imagine what the ball-girl can do and become. What are the possibilities – capacities and limitations – when conceptualising the ball-girl as material-discursive phenomena? How might these possibilities emerge when they do not cohere to, or emanate from, an independent and autonomous human ‘subject’?

If the ball-girl is produced in the intra-active entanglements of material-discursive forces, then intra-actions continually reconfigure what is possible. Here, all manner of things become important and the potential of agency is not foreclosed or restricted to human action or intention. Barad suggests there is a vitality and sense of aliveness to intra-activity and as such agency never ends or ‘runs out’. In Barad’s words, ‘intra-actions always entail particular exclusions, and exclusions foreclose the possibility of determinism’; this means intra-actions can be understood as ‘constraining but not determining’ (2007: p.177). While this opens up possibilities for becoming ball-girl, this does not mean ‘anything or everything [is] possible at any given moment’ (ibid). Instead, possibilities are continually reconfigured through the dynamics of intra-activity – particular ball-girl becomings may be opened up or blocked depending on the material-discursive relations. Hence, it is through specific intra-actions that phenomena – the school ball and ball-girl – ‘come to matter, in both senses of the word’ (Barad, 2007: p.140).

*Agential cuts*

Onto-epistemology entangles ‘what’ is being studied (i.e. the school ball) with ‘how’ it is studied (Bodén, 2016). The phenomena of the school ball and the ball-girl are produced in the entanglements of research elements including theory, concepts, methods and the researcher. To be able to examine the school ball through myriad entanglements, it is necessary to produce provisional ‘cuts’ or separations between the ‘object’ of inquiry, the researcher and theory. Barad (2003; 2007) explains the enactment of *agential cuts* separate what is researched from how it is researched. This cut is not a separation in a permanent sense, but agential separability: a ‘cutting together-apart (one move)’ (Barad, 2014: p.168); or put another way, ‘a cut that differentiates-entangles’ (Barad, 2014: p.175). Here, agential cuts both bring things together and take them apart: they separate and exclude by emphasising the importance of some things and not others, while also bringing practices, things (including the researcher) together in-connection with one another. Agential cuts are not made by an
autonomous researcher but by the larger material and discursive arrangement of which they are a part. The researcher is an agential part of the research assemblage; therefore, they do not do the ‘choosing’ from a place external to the research. A specific intra-action (of which the researcher is part) enacts an agential cut effecting a separation between ‘subject’ and ‘object’ (Barad, 2003). As there is no ontological separability between the observer and the observed, the notion of agential separability is vital as it allows for the possibility of being able to separate something out for analysis.

What is particularly pertinent to the current study is ‘different agential cuts materialise different phenomena’ (Barad, 2007: p.178) or different accounts of the school ball. For example, the visual and verbal data in this thesis performs agential cuts that produce or enact the school ball and ball-girl (this concept is discussed further in the chapter Methodological becomings). In this sense, ‘agential realism is about creating reality, not reflecting it’ (Sauzet, 2015: p.37). The school ball is not fixed or stable, but shifts and flows as multiple realities emerge in the enactment of agential cuts. How the cuts are enacted is crucial to how the phenomena of the school ball and the ball girl are produced. The next section introduces the theoretical concepts of assemblage and affect; these concepts are important as they offer a way to explore how the school ball-girl is produced in the entanglements.

The school ball assemblage

The school ball is conceptualised as intra-active entanglements of material things, practices, spaces and imaginings. In order to explore the complexities of these engagements, this thesis employs the concept of assemblage from both Deleuze and Guattari (1987) and Bennett (2005; 2010) to focus attention on particular affects and capacities within entangled relations. Bennett describes assemblages as ‘ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts’ (2010: p.23). Bennett’s theorising of the assemblage draws particular attention to the ‘active and powerful nonhumans’ (2010: p.24) within assemblages. As an assemblage, the school ball is more than a simple collection of forces or elements; it is the relations or capacities emerging through this entanglement that is of particular interest. In this framing, it is about exploring what the assemblage can do or produce that offers new possibilities and imaginings. A central focus is the capacity of assemblages to enable, constrain or block school ball-girl becomings. The concept of affect (Deleuze, 1988) is useful for examining this potential within assemblages; I explain this concept shortly.

This thesis brings together the concept of assemblage with Barad’s notion of intra-action. In Baradian terms, insights from these different theoretical ideas are diffractively read through one another (See also Lenz Taguchi, 2012; Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). While Barad does not explicitly use the Deleuzio-Guattarian notion of assemblage, the concept is argued to be ‘compatible’ with Barad’s posthuman performativity and concept of intra-action (Ringrose & Renold, 2016: p.222), and have been brought together in a number of studies for varying purposes (Bodén, 2016; Ivinson & Renold, 2013; Mazzei & Jackson, 2016; Renold & Ivinson,
For Bodén (2016: p.40), these concepts enabled a ‘close examination’ of the particular ways in which phenomena, specifically school absenteeism, ‘is produced in human and nonhuman entanglements’. Renold and Ivinson (2014: p.4) bring together the concept of assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) and Barad’s notion of intra-action to theorise girls’ becomings as emerging in the intra-action of ‘socio-material-historical assemblages’ (See also Ivinson & Renold, 2013). For Ringrose and Renold (2016: p.223-224), Barad’s concept of intra-action enabled them to explore the ‘performative “intra-action” between objects, bodies, discourses and other nonhuman things’ within what they theorise as ‘feminist intra-activist research assemblages’. The concept of intra-action in particular, enabled them to draw attention to their own entanglements as ‘feminist-driven researchers’ (ibid). Methodologically, Mazzei and Jackson (2016) bring these concepts together to offer a new way of conceptualising voice in educational research. Instead of thinking about voice as ‘spoken words emanating from a conscious subject’, they theorise a ‘posthuman voice’ emerging ‘within the material and discursive knots and intensities of the assemblage’ (Mazzei & Jackson, 2016: p.1). A unifying feature of this posthumanist work is a decentring of the human: a broadening of what or who ‘matters’ in our research processes and the knowledge produced (Barad, 2007).

The aforementioned studies contribute to an increasing body of work where theorisings from Deleuze and Guattari are ‘put to work’ (Lenz Taguchi, 2012: p.267) with new materialist theorists such as Barad and Bennett. The compatibility of the philosophies of Barad and Deleuze are not uncontested however: Hein (2016) for example, suggests that while Deleuze’s work is often used alongside new materialist theorists, in particular the work of Barad, their ontologies and understandings of matter fundamentally differ. Hein argues, ‘Deleuze’s work can be seen as emphasizing force and creation, whereas Barad’s work can be seen as emphasizing indeterminacy and intra-action’ (2016: p.137). Although as Bodén (2016: p.44) suggests ‘if “the real” in posthumanism is already understood as multiple’ then multiple ontologies are not only operating on the same plane of thinking ‘but also produce new versions of the real in their encounters’. While Deleuzian and Baradian theories may come from different traditions, there is the potential to read texts ‘diffractively’ into each other (Barad, 2007; Lenz Taguchi, 2012) or ‘plug one text into another’ (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013) to produce new ways of theorising and performing research practices (Lenz Taguchi, 2012). Plugging the concept of assemblage and intra-action into one another enables a focus on the emergent properties, capacities and intensities produced in school ball assemblages. This approach opens up understandings of the school ball that do not rely on cause and effect logic (Blaise, 2013). For example, the idea that certain things or practices will have a negative/positive effect on the ball-girl. Within an assemblage, neither elements nor the production of new ideas are pre-determined, therefore it is impossible to know or predict what assemblages can do or produce. Conceptualising the school ball as dynamic assemblages of material things, practices, spaces and imaginings, moves the focus ‘from the rational human
intentional actor to a wider posthuman field of power relations’ (Ringrose & Rawlings, 2015: p.11). Within a posthumanist frame, it is about attending to ‘what happens when heterogeneous things intra-act with force and affect’ (Jackson & Mazzei, 2016: p.105). As opposed to independent things affecting something in a linear cause and effect manner, it is the assemblage itself that produces intensities and capacities. These capacities are conceptualised as affects (Deleuze, 1988) as explained in the next section.

The affective potential of assemblages

Conceptualising the school ball as material-discursive assemblages opens a production of realities that expands not only who and what is important, but how these relations work together to produce particular ball-girl becomings. This thesis engages with theories of affect (Ahmed, 2004; Deleuze, 1988; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010) to account for affective forces that configure in school ball assemblages. Theories of affect are a productive way to explore the intricate and productive workings of assembled relations (Ringrose, 2011), for instance, how sensations, intensities and emotions can shape actions and capacities in the school ball setting. Such an approach understands a body’s capacities to act, feel and desire as produced via relations of affect (Fox & Alldred, 2013). Affect does not belong to specific bodies but flows intra-actively (Barad, 2007). As Seigworth and Gregg (2010: p.1) explain: ‘Affect rises in the midst of in-between-ness: in the capacities to act and be acted upon’. This thesis employs a posthumanist approach to affect (Mulcahy, 2012; Ringrose & Renold, 2016), where affect is also more-than-human — it is spatial and atmospheric — circulating in-between bodies, things and spaces. Affect can be felt when you walk into a room (Anderson, 2009); it may be registered as a bodily feeling, but it can also exceed the body and the human.

While the terms affect and emotion may at times be conflated, within affect theory there are different approaches to their meaning and the relationship between the two concepts. According to MacLure (2010: p.284): ‘affect in a Deleuzian sense is not feeling or emotion. It is a kind of ‘prepersonal intensity’ which may be ‘captured’ and ‘qualified’ (i.e. given qualities) as emotion (Massumi, 2002)’. In this framing, affect can be emotion, however, affect can also exceed or escape emotion. Similarly, Watkins (2006: p.273) describes affect and emotion as both different and similar: ‘they are different in the sense that they belong to distinct modes of existence, but they are similar in that emotion is substantially a product of affect’. Seigworth and Gregg clarify affect as ‘visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing’; for them, affects are ‘vital forces insisting beyond emotion’ (2010: p.1, italics in original). In Ahmed’s (2004) work with affect and emotions, she suggests emotion is not just part of affect but is affect. What is of particular interest to Ahmed is not ‘what’ emotions are but ‘how’ emotions work.

In this thesis, emotion is understood not as an individually embodied feeling or response, but as part of an ‘affective flow that produces bodies and the social world’ (Fox, 2015: p.1). Attention turns to what emotions do (Ahmed, 2004), what actions they perform and what
e/affects follow. In this approach, emotions are conceptualised as affect (Ahmed, 2004); however, affect is also more than emotion (Massumi, 2002). Affect is understood as material (Mulcahy, 2012) in that it ‘registers on the body’ and ‘affects’ other bodies (MacLure, 2010: p.284), yet it is more than human. For example, the affective atmosphere of the school ball can be felt and sensed bodily, yet it exceeds the individual human (ball-girl) body. This thesis is interested in how affect (including emotion) is productive – it does something. Affect can be understood as ‘a “social” rather than psychological construct, affect is used to refer to intensities or energies that produce new affective and embodied connections’ (Mulcahy, 2012: p.11, italics in original). In this framing, Mulcahy (2012: p.12) explains how affect is political ‘in the sense that “power is an inextricable aspect of how bodies come together, move and dwell” (Zembylas, 2007: p.xiv)’. Affect flows through and between assemblages in complex ways; it is not free flowing but cut through with power relations (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). As such, affect can provide a productive way of examining power relations within and between school ball bodies and assemblages. The affective flow of power is a productive force in the becoming of the school ball-girl, both limiting and expanding what is possible. Importantly, affects are not tethered to human intention or agency, nor are they wholly reducible to discursive practices. It is this potential that makes affect a fruitful theoretical entanglement in this feminist new materialist research assemblage.

**A feminist new materialist ontology of sexuality**

The theoretical approaches of feminist post-structuralism and queer theory have been productive in examining the discursive constitution of sexualities within the schooling environment (Allen, 2005; 2011; Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Epstein, O’Flynn, & Telford, 2003; Kehily, 2002; Measor, Tiffin, & Miller, 2000; Pascoe, 2007; Rasmussen, Rofes, & Talburt, 2004; Rasmussen, 2006; Renold, 2005; Sears, 1992). The seminal works of Foucault (1976; 1980; 1983) and Butler (1990; 1993) in particular, have enabled researchers to examine the various discourses circulating in the schooling environment and how these meanings constitute young peoples’ gender and sexual subjectivities. In these studies, sexuality is often located within the human subject or as a discursively constituted subject position for the human to occupy. As Allen (2015: p.2) points out, the focus of these studies ‘has been on what sexuality is and how it is experienced by students and teachers rather than how sexuality comes into being (beyond its discursive constitution)’. Recently, there has been interest in the potential of new materialist perspectives to develop understandings of sexuality that centre the human subject and move beyond a discursive focus (Alldred & Fox, 2015; Allen, 2013; 2015b; Fox & Alldred, 2013; Renold & Ringrose, 2017).

In Allen’s (2015) work on sexualities and schooling, she draws on feminist new materialist ideas to consider what a new material feminist ontology of sexuality might look like. Utilising conceptual tools from Barad (2007), Bennett (2010) and Lenz Taguchi (2012, 2013), Allen reconfigures the way in which we might think about how sexuality becomes at school. Moving
beyond viewing sexuality as discursively constituted (i.e. a subject position), Allen draws on Baradian understandings of matter and meaning to consider how these two elements are co-constitutive in sexuality’s becoming. Allen offers a feminist new materialist understanding of sexuality ‘as emerging through co-constitutive entanglements of and between meaning, practices, material artefacts, humans and things of all kinds’ (2015: p.4). Within this framing, sexuality is not something that belongs to an individual, nor is it a discursive position that individuals ‘take up’, but rather ‘sexuality at school becomes via entangled human and non-human intra-actions’ (Allen, 2015: p.3, italics in original). As such, a feminist new materialist ontology of sexuality theorises sexuality’s becoming as at least materialdiscursive (Allen, 2015). This framing privileges neither matter nor discourse, as they are both mutually constitutive in the production of sexuality. Within a new materialist ontology of sexuality the nature/culture dichotomy is potentially dissolved. Sexuality is not understood purely as nature (i.e. biologically determined) or culture (socially constructed) because neither are pre-existing; instead ‘nature and culture emerge in the moment of their coming into relation with each other’ (Allen, 2015: p.3).

Similarly interested in disrupting the anthropocentric gaze often evident in sexualities research, Fox and Alldred (2013: p.769) draw on Deleuzian concepts such as ‘assemblage’ and ‘affect’ to propose an ‘anti-humanist sociology of sexuality’. This approach understands sexuality not as something attributable to bodies or identities but ‘the affective flow within assemblages of bodies, things, ideas and social formations’ (Fox & Alldred, 2013: p.770).

Alldred and Fox (2015) have applied a new materialist ontology of sexuality to explore young male sexualities. In their work, they draw attention to the affective flow within assemblages (of human and non-human elements) and the sexual capacities this flow produces in bodies and collectivities. What I find enticing about these new understandings offered by Allen (2013, 2015) and Fox and Alldred (2013; 2015) are the broadening of factors and forces that are at play in the production of sexualities: the human, more-than-human, the material and discursive. Examining the school ball via a new materialist ontology of sexuality, reconfigures not only how we understand sexuality, but also the array of forces that form sexuality’s becoming. In this thesis, the becoming of sexuality is a ‘never-ending enfolding’ (Allen, 2015: p.11) of things, bodies, practices, discourses, feelings, sounds, spaces, temporalities and affects that form, and are formed by, the school ball. Here, we can think about sexuality with the concept of assemblage.

**Sexuality-as-assemblage**

Conceptualising sexuality-as-assemblage is a productive way of moving the location and focus of sexuality away from the body and the human (Allen, 2013; Fox & Alldred, 2013; Holmes, O’Byrne, & Murray, 2010; Lambevski, 2005). A sexuality-as-assemblage can comprise all manner of material-discursive, human and more-than-human forces. As Allen (2013: p.6) explains 'sexuality-as-assemblage enables an understanding of the sexual which is more
than discourse, discrete bodies and their identities and occurs in the spaces between intra-
acting human and non-human entanglements’. It is not about ‘being’ but ‘becoming’ and it is
through the intra-action of the components of the assemblage that the becoming of sexuality
occurs (Allen, 2013). Similarly interested in conceptualising sexuality-as-assemblage, Fox
and Allred (2013: p.769) view sexuality as ‘an impersonal affective flow within assemblages
of bodies, things, ideas and social institutions, which produce sexual (and other) capacities in
bodies’. Within both of these depictions of sexuality-as-assemblage, there is a sense of
sexuality that encompasses multiple factors and forces, relationality and affective flows.
These insights are productive for thinking about the becoming of sexuality through school ball
assemblages, where sexuality does not derive from the human (i.e. ball-girl or date) nor is it
reduced to discursive ideas associated with proms and balls, such as themes of heterosexual
romance.

The concept of sexuality-as-assemblage reconfigures notions of sexual ‘agency’. Drawing on
Baradian understandings of agency, Allen (2013: p.11) recognises agency in a sexuality-
assemblage as ‘residing in-between’ elements within the assemblage. Here, agency is not a
property of bodies and entities but a quality that emerges via intra-active relations (Barad,
2007). In Fox and Allred’s (2013) thinking around sexuality-assemblages, they replace the
concept of human agency with the Deleuzian ontology of affect (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987;
Deleuze, 1988). Affect can be understood as the capacity to affect and be affected. An affect
is a ‘becoming’ that can be defined as a change of state of an entity or its capacities
(Deleuze & Guattari, 1987): these changes may be physical, psychological, emotional or
social. Affects can produce capacities (in bodies) and affects are capable of producing further
affects within assemblages (flows of affect). Within school ball sexuality-assemblages both
human and more-than-human relations affect one another, and it is these relations of affect
that produce ball-girl capacities and create conditions of possibility. These understandings
enable resistance to be theorised in ways that do not suggest essentialism or individual
agency, thus attempting to avoid questions of structure and agency (Allen, 2015b; Fox &
Allred, 2013).

In Bennett’s (2005) thinking about agency and assemblages she proposes the idea of
distributive agency, where agency is not centred in a single living being but an assemblage of
living and non-living ‘vibrant matter’ (Bennett, 2010: p.3). The notion of agency of
assemblages draws attention to the distributive and composite nature of agency, which
includes non-human actants. As such, agency crosses the human-nonhuman divide. Bennett
proposes that ‘bodies enhance their power in or as a heterogeneous assemblage’ (2010:
p.23, italics in original). Here, capacity or potentiality for action is distributed across an
‘ontologically heterogeneous field’, as opposed to being solely attributable to, or emanating
from, a human body or human effort (ibid). Thinking about the agentic power of human-
nonhuman assemblages moves us beyond human-centred notions of agency to a distribution
of agentic capacities among beings, entities and forces. Understanding agency as distributed
and emerging via entangled relations reconfigures how we understand the ball-girl, both as a ‘subject’ and what the ball-girl can do and become. As Aldred and Fox (2017: p.658) explain ‘it is not an individual body but the sexuality assemblage that is productive of all phenomena’ and ‘establish the capacities of individual bodies to do, feel, and desire’.

**Re-imagining the ball-girl**

A feminist new materialist approach offers an ontologically different way of conceiving the human subject. Of fundamental importance, is ‘the object of study, the human, can no longer be taken for granted’ (Åsberg, Koobak, & Johnson, 2011: p.214). Recognising the vitality of non-human matter (Bennett, 2010), a feminist new materialist approach reconfigures ideas of subjectivity and agency. For Barad, subjectivity is produced through intra-action, in that individuals materialise through intra-activity. From this understanding, girls are not a pre-existing entity with inherent boundaries, but rather are continually constituted through specific iterative intra-actions. This brings us back to the idea of *being-of-the-world*; individuals, in this instance girls, along with non-humans and things ‘emerge through, and as a part of, their entangled intra-actions with everything else’ (Lenz Taguchi, 2010: p.41). Humans and human bodies are considered (emergent) material objects of the world, just like any other beings and matter.

Feminist new materialism enables a rethinking of femininity in relation to the ball-girl. Femininity is not ascribed to bodies and identities (i.e. a fixed identity or quality that one can reveal or solidify) but emerges via intra-active entanglements. So instead of thinking about ball-girl subjectivity in relation to a ‘feminine’ discursive subject position, we might think about femininity as a performative enactment or an intra-active becoming (Barad, 2007). This approach enables an understanding of how ball-girl femininities might reinforce, supersede or potentially rework pre-conceived discursive boundaries; for instance, expectations to engage in beauty-body work. Coole (2013: p.455) describes a new materialist becoming as ‘ineluctably multiple and complex; variegated, folded, labyrinthine; and multi-dimensional and multi-scalar’. She explains how ‘entities, structures, objects all emerge as unstable, indeterminate assemblages that are composed of and folded into smaller and larger assemblages’; therefore, they are continually reconfigured by their ‘encounters with other provisional constellations’ (ibid). This prompts us to think about the ‘subject’ (ball-girl) not as a pre-existing entity but as an assemblage or material-discursive phenomena. Ball-girl femininities are material-discursive becomings – they are multiple and open-ended. In this thesis, ball-girl femininities are enacted through agential cuts (Barad, 2007) that differentiate and entangle bodies, imaginings, clothing, discourses, beauty-body practices, high heels, feelings, dates and spaces, among other forces.

A feminist new materialist ontology reconfigures the human body. Bodies do not have inherent properties or clearly defined boundaries (Barad, 2007); rather, they congeal or emerge through particular configurings at any given moment. As a result, ball-girl-bodies are
fleeting, temporary and unfixed. This framing moves understandings of ball-girl-bodies beyond discursive subject positionings and understandings of femininity, to a conceptualisation of bodies as materialising via the productive entanglements of matter, practices, affects and other relational forces. Bodies are not solely produced through dominant structural forces such as discourses of femininity. Ball-girl-bodies become emergent, contingent and multiple: they are continually (re)made via human and more-than-human matter, corporeal practices, ideas and affects (flows, energies). The ball-girl-body as matter is not a fixed substance; rather, it is a ‘substance in its intra-active becoming’ (Barad, 2003: p.822): a form of iterative congealment that is on-going, continually becoming anew. In other words, it is not that the ball-girl-body has relations with other things; rather the ball-girl-body is the relations (Coleman, 2009); and it is by examining these relations that new understandings of the ball-girl might emerge.

In sum, the ball-girl-body is a posthumanist body emerging via entangled human and more-than-human forces (Mazzei, 2013). There is no ‘subject’ that exists behind the becoming; such an approach decentres the human. There is no subject/object divide and the body/world do not pre-exist each other. If ball-girl-bodies are not ontologically separate from the world (Barad, 2007) or more specifically the school ball, then bodies become with the ball. Attention is drawn to not what a body ‘is’, but what it does or can do. Here, agency exceeds the individual. Instead, we can think about how a body affects and is affected by other bodies, things and forces (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Therefore, ball-girl-bodies are not passive material that can be shaped by human intention and action – they are not a pre-determined end product. Instead, bodies are continually assembled and reassembled. It is a partial, unpredictable and indefinite process. As such, there is not authentic of ‘real’ ball-girl (body) and it is impossible to know in advance what a ball-girl-body might do or become.
This chapter brings together academic scholarship, media commentary and traditional fairy tale that inform current understandings and perceptions of the school ball. It is an enfolding of ‘things’ that might conventionally be thought of as background to the study. Ontologically, however, this ‘background’ is not neutral or passive. As Bodén (2016: p.15) explains ‘a background is always more than a background, it is an important knowledge-producing apparatus’: this means, ‘what is stressed as mattering’ in this chapter, ‘inevitably affects the production of the phenomenon’, that is, the school ball-girl. This enfolding of previous research and cultural constructions of balls and proms bring together a collection of discursive practices, imaginings, commentaries and opinions. These ‘constructions’ are conceptualised as matter(ings): dynamic articulations/configurations of the world (Barad, 2007: p.151). These school ball matterings are produced through entanglements of research practices, theoretical frameworks, discourses, tradition, public concern and opinion, space and time. Different versions of phenomena emerge depending on relational forces, for instance, how something is researched, or its contextual framing and audience (i.e. the media). The aim of the chapter is to bring together these differential matter(ings), not as separate to the research, but as threaded through the particular version of ‘reality’ this thesis offers.

The chapter proceeds as follows: first it explores how school balls and proms have been described and theorised in existing research. The discussion draws mainly on academic literature from the United States and Aotearoa–New Zealand, where proms and school balls have a longer history than other countries, such as the United Kingdom where it is a relatively new phenomenon (Tinson & Nuttall, 2011). Previous research highlights dominant cultural (discursive) understandings of these events and how young people engage with and negotiate these ideas. Next, I explore popular constructions of the ball and prom in contemporary media and magazines; these recurring themes and imaginings are also traced through historical fairy tale. This enfolding of academic research, media and fairy tale highlights the ways balls and proms are often framed in relation to time and space, for example, as an isolated spatial-temporal event or a ‘rite of passage’ (see Once upon a space and time chapter for this discussion). The second half of the chapter explores the theorisation of girls’ bodies, specifically within the context of sexualities and schooling. The aim of the discussion is to consider theoretical approaches to understanding the materialisation of girls’ bodies: for instance, the work of Butler (1990; 1993), and how new materialist thinking (e.g. Barad’s posthumanist performative framework) extends Butler’s work offering new ways of thinking about the materialisation of ball-girl-bodies. Integral to this discussion is how girls’ bodies and ‘agency’ is theorised in relation to these approaches. Lastly, the chapter considers how theories of affect might also offer alternative ways of thinking about girls’ bodies, ‘agency’ and the school ball.
Proms and school balls

The school ball in relation to femininities and sexuality has received minimal scholarly attention both in New Zealand and internationally (see, for exceptions, Best, 2000; Smith, 2012). Amy Best (2000) conducted an American-based study in the late 1990s exploring the history, culture and customs of the high school prom. Her ethnographic work involved both males and females and utilised a variety of research methods including: in-depth and informal interviewing, narrative analysis, participant observation and the analysis of contemporary films, newspaper articles and historical documents. Drawing on theoretical perspectives from cultural studies, Best sought to document cultural understandings of the prom, how it is defined and socially organised. Characterised as an iconic event in American culture, the prom is often heralded as ‘a night to remember’: a ‘coming of age’ ritual shrouded in themes of self-transformation and romance. Best’s analysis explored young people’s experiences and interpretations of the prom in relation to these dominant cultural understandings.

Best’s study provides a broad, socio-political analysis of the prom, situating young people’s experiences and understandings within the larger cultural terrain. Her approach examines the prom not only in relation to young people’s lives at school, but also in relation to commercial and youth cultures. From this perspective, Best argues proms sustain the circulation of hegemonic cultural meanings and work to secure young people’s participation in dominant social practices. For example, proms ‘championed heterosexuality’ and worked to secure girls’ consent to prevailing feminine norms (2000: p.10). Best defined proms as ‘contentious spaces wherein kids work through central issues surrounding questions of authority, class, diversity, sexuality and romance’ (2000: p.3). The young people in Best’s study read the prom in varied ways; some drew upon conventional narratives such as the notion of a ‘coming of age’ ritual, while others attempted to define their experiences and understandings of the prom in alternate ways. As such, Best argued proms were not uniformly experienced by her participants; gender, sexuality, race and class were recognised as key social factors determining how the space was defined and young people’s varied investments in it. For girls, however, gender appeared to be the prevailing force structuring their understandings and experiences of the prom.

Best’s analysis highlights how popular notions of the prom are structured or produced through gendered discourses. For example, the high school prom is primarily constructed as a feminine space, in that it is girls who are expected, or perceived to, heavily invest in the occasion. In Best’s research, attending the prom was considered a central aspect of being and becoming feminine as it provides girls with the opportunity to ‘solidify and display their feminine identities’ (2000: p.35). Popular practices surrounding the prom worked to secure girls’ investments in ‘body work’ that reinforced norms of traditional femininity. Best argues proms produce ‘feminine subjects by harnessing their pleasure in the project of self-change’ (2004: p.196): for example, fashioning their bodies in order to make a ‘dramatic statement’
became a source of tremendous pleasure for many girls. Best suggests ‘beautification’ work created a space where girls could craft their bodies in ways that were traditionally denied to teenage girls. These ‘adult freedoms’, however, secured girls’ involvement in maintaining traditional feminine norms and their bodies became sites of regulation and anxiety.

Best’s study offers important insights into how young people negotiate dominant cultural discourses and the ways they both accommodate and attempt to redefine these understandings. Although Best viewed the prom as a deeply conformist space, she suggests it is also a site where young people are able to disrupt dominant cultural understandings. Young people do not merely passively absorb the meanings offered to them through prom culture; rather, they have the potential to resist or rework (to a limited extent) these dominant meanings in order to constitute their experiences in alternate ways. Best’s analysis locates agency within the human subject, in the ability to potentially resist or rework dominant discourses of femininity and sexuality. For example, some students found ways to partially reject or resist the traditional ‘trappings’ of the event through the use of style and dress, or ‘playful’ tactics such as irony and parody. Some girls challenged their school’s emphasis on modesty and propriety, in terms of both clothing and sexual expression. Ironically, girls used practices that work to structure their expressions of femininity as potential means of resistance. As such, these moments of resistance were constrained within the prevailing organisations of gender and heterosexuality.

Ontologically, the current study offers a different approach to thinking about agency. Rather than conceptualising agency as something the girl might have or wield, ‘agency’ emerges intra-actively (Barad, 2007) through human and more-than-human relations. A feminist new materialist conceptualisation of agency opens a space for thinking about the force of matter (e.g. bodies and clothing), not as passive objects wielded by an agentic human (i.e. a girl using clothing to subvert traditional discourses of femininity) but as active and lively (Bennett, 2010). This liveliness is not attributed to, or an extension of, human will and action. Ball-girl becomings emerge via entanglements of human, more-than-human, material and discursive forces. As such, the possibilities for becoming ball-girl are not limited to accommodating or resisting dominant discourses of femininity. A feminist new materialist approach allows us to ask what more might be going on here?

The New Zealand context: school balls and formals

There is a paucity of New Zealand-based research that examines the relations between the school ball, girls’ sexualities and schooling. A recent PhD thesis (Smith, 2012) entitled ‘Gender and the school formal’ explores the gendered differences in young people’s preparations for the formal along with how they perform their sexuality and gender on the night. Smith’s thesis draws particular attention to how participants position themselves in

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3 School formal is another name used for school ball in New Zealand
relation to normative gender and sexuality codes, for instance, dominant discourses of heterosexuality, masculinity and femininity. The fieldwork for Smith’s study was conducted in three South Island schools: a co-educational, a single-sex boys and a single-sex girls’ school. Participants included both males and females in Year 13. In addition to young people, Smith explored how teachers and other adults constructed and performed their gendered subjectivities at the formal. The scope of Smith’s research also involved an examination of young people’s alcohol consumption on the night and their navigation of New Zealand’s drinking culture.

Informed by queer theory and poststructural feminism, Smith’s findings support the work of Best (2000) by suggesting the school ball continues to be a heteronormative space. Smith observed there was an expectation for young people to attend the event with an opposite sex partner. The degree to which this was promoted was not fixed; rather, it depended upon the gendered make-up of the school and a school’s policy on sexual diversity (Smith, 2015). Smith suggests the prevalence of heteronormativity was more pervasive at the single-sex boys’ school in comparison to the co-educational and all-girls’ school. Her analysis draws attention to how male participants reproduce discourses of hegemonic masculinity when discussing the idea of taking same-sex partners to the formal: homophobic humour, for instance, was commonly used by boys in both the single-sex and co-educational schools to police and promote heteronormative codes. While heteronormativity is argued to be a ‘dominant force’ in this setting, the continued work of Smith with Nairn and Sandretto (2016) highlight how young people subvert and challenge this heteronormative space, albeit in limited ways. They argue young women subvert normative codes of gender to a larger extent than males, for instance, through challenging conventional codes of feminine dress, or girl couples seen dancing together and kissing. Their work argues gender performances demonstrate how ‘young people are both complicit in and can disrupt normative heterosexuality’ in the school ball environment (Smith et al., 2016: p.593).

In Smith, Nairn and Sandretto’s examination of the school ball as a heteronormative space, a particular understanding of space is employed. Space is not conceived of as something ‘concrete’; rather, Smith, Nairn and Sandretto (2016: p.590) draw on an understanding of space as “complex, changeable, discursively produced, and imbued with power relations” (Johnston & Longhurst, 2010: p.16). They conceptualise gendered displays as having the capacity to (re)produce space. As such, behaviours that enact dominant gendered scripts reproduce school formals as heteronormative social spaces, for example, heterosexual couples kissing and touching on the dance floor. Alternatively, gender performances may subvert or transgress the heteronormative space of the school ball, for example, same-sex couples kissing at the formal, or the wearing of clothing that contravened ‘typical’ gendered dress, such as a girl wearing a tailcoat. The latter example is also argued to highlight how ‘masculinity does not necessarily have to be performed by a male’ (Smith et al., 2016: p.599). Arguing young people are both complicit in and disruptive of normative heterosexuality, the
school formal is considered an important social space where young people can challenge heterosexual/homosexual and masculine/feminine binaries.

In both Best’s and Smith’s analyses, the school ball is constructed as a discrete moment and space in time. The current study employs the Baradian notion of spacetime-mattering, to offer an ontologically different way of understanding the school other than an isolated spatial-temporal event. In this approach, spatiality and temporality are understood as entangled in the material-discursive intra-active relations that make and remake the school ball. As such, space and time are continually reconfigured. Like Smith, Nairn and Sandretto (2016), space is conceptualised as fluid and changeable, however, it is not discursively produced in the sense that discourses are prior. Instead, discourses and spatiality are mutually entangled in non-hierarchical, co-constitutive relations. This means the human (i.e. ball-girl) is no longer located or positioned in space and time, but rather entangled with space, time and matter. This thesis explores how such an understanding might allow an imagining of the school ball that escapes popular narratives constructing the event as a ‘milestone’ or ‘coming of age’ ritual.

Employing a Butlerian theorising of gender, Smith’s work highlights how young people at the school ball become ‘intelligible’ gender and sexual subjects through normative discourses of femininity, masculinity and heterosexuality. Dominant discourses are important for understanding students’ experiences of the school ball and the constitution of ‘acceptable’ and ‘expected’ behaviour, for instance, how girls are expected to look and act. Like the work of Best (2000), Smith’s findings highlight how dominant discourses surrounding the school ball are gendered. For example, the participants’ narratives reveal they thought young women were more harshly judged on their choice of clothing than young men (Grosz, 1994). Female participants spoke of negotiating the fine line between looking ‘attractive’ yet not revealing too much, the latter falls into the treacherous realm of ‘slut’ or ‘skank’. These findings support a number of previous studies (Cowie & Lees, 1981; Currie, Kelly, & Pomerantz, 2009; Kehily, 2002; Raby, 2010) that draw attention to the regulation of girl’s sartorial choices through the ‘slut’ discourse. Smith suggests girls are required to navigate the expectations of traditional femininity; this idea is premised on an understanding of the girl as discursively positioned within an array of discourses of femininity and sexuality.

The current study extends the work of Smith and Best by offering an alternative understanding of girls’ bodies in-relation with/to discourses. By employing Barad’s (2007) posthuman performative account of the materialisation of girls’ bodies, the study seeks to account for the discursive and the material. There is a shift in focus from thinking about the discursive limits of girls, femininity and the school ball, to consider ‘the “material limits”: the material constraints and exclusions, the material dimensions of agency, and the material dimensions of regulatory practices’ (Barad, 2007: p.192). This approach provides openings for exploring how matter might play a part in producing and maintaining discourses that limit
or constrain ball-girl becomings. Moreover, how material forces might potentially reconfigure discursive ideas of femininity associated with the school ball.

**Schools balls, girls and the media**

Dominant cultural understandings of proms and school balls are inscribed through media such as magazines and newspaper articles. These commentaries offer particular meanings about girls and how they engage with this event. For example, recalling the newspaper articles discussed in the *Introductions* chapter, girls are often constructed as highly invested in the school ball, which can lead to excessive and competitive behaviour. These portrayals are often underscored by the perception that the ball is an important ‘milestone’ in girls’ lives (Tay, 2007). A small number of American studies have explored the construction of the prom through prom media, specifically magazines (Mazzarella, 1999; Zlatunich, 2009). In Mazzarella’s (1999) examination of teenage girl magazines, she explores the way they define and market the ‘perfect prom’ through both editorial content and advertising. Mazzarella identifies three prevalent themes in the articulation and marketing of the high school prom: romance, the framing of the prom as ‘the night of your life’, and the potential for ‘perfection’ through physical beautification (1999: p.98). Her work draws attention to the ‘underlying discourses about gender roles, dating, leisure, and consumption’ that are offered to girls via these magazines (ibid). The importance of planning is heavily emphasised in both articles and advertising, from ‘purchasing the right products’ to avoiding ‘prom-date fashion blunders’ (Mazzarella, 1999: p.107); here, physical beauty and the need to ‘dazzle’ a date is an imperative.

*Figure 1 & 2: Seventeen Prom magazine covers*
While Mazzarella identifies important themes framing the portrayal of the prom in magazines, her analysis does not extend to how girls engage with these ideals. As a result, the readers are constructed as passive recipients of the meanings produced within these texts. The work of Zlatunich (2009) attempts to address this construction by not only examining prom media but also how girls negotiate dominant meanings found in magazines. Combining textual analysis with ethnography, Zlatunich interviewed 23 girls before and after their prom, comparing the dominant themes she found in prom magazines with, in her words, ‘the real experiences of girls’ (2009: p.356). For Zlatunich, the ‘real’ is how girls narrated the prom in interviews and her observations as a researcher. Specifically, Zlatunich compared girls’ expectations, hopes and opinions of prom magazines prior to the prom with their ‘actual experiences and their perceptions of the differences between their prom expectations and reality’ (ibid).

Zlatunich’s study extends Mazzarella’s (1999) identification of popular themes in prom magazines, by considering how girls engage with the dominant ideas of ‘the perfect prom’, the expectation to engage in body and beauty work, and heterosexual romance. The scope of Zlatunich’s study focuses on girls’ experiences of the prom in relation to the dominant themes (discourses) produced through prom media. While this approach highlights popular constructions of the prom, it does not capture how girls may define the prom in alternate or differing ways. What Zlatunich’s study does do is challenge the construction of girls as particularly vulnerable to the influence of media, in that the evidence suggests they do not passively accept the ideas of beauty, heteronormativity and romance that pervade these cultural texts. In contrast with Mazzarella’s findings, Zlatunich found the dominant meanings of heterosexual romance and beauty work were not always consistent. On occasions, there was the potential for ‘alternative readings’ to dominant expectations, although this potential was largely due to the use of humour, or ambiguity of photos or text, rather than explicit challenges to the presumption of heterosexual romance and beauty work. Zlatunich found the concept of ‘perfection’ in relation to the prom was both maintained and challenged by prom magazines and their girl readership. The participants demonstrated awareness of the difference between prom magazine ideology and the realities of the actual prom; they were sceptical of the notion that the prom could be a ‘perfect event’, although this reality was met with disappointment by many of these girls. While the ideals of ‘perfection’ were not a lived reality, many girls struggled for them to be.

Zlatunich’s findings demonstrate accommodation of dominant meanings surrounding the prom, but also glimpses of resistance, where some girls challenged these expectations. These moments of resistance are located within the individual girl, in her ability to reject or rework dominant expectations surrounding this event. As such, Zlatunich opens up a space to think about the relationship between girls and the media as one of ‘negotiation’ rather than girls simply being ‘oppressed’ by these texts. Although none of the participants rejected every dominant notion of the prom portrayed in magazines, a small number of girls challenged
particular aspects such as not attending with a male date, or borrowing a dress as opposed to investing time and money into purchasing something new. Zlatunich suggests girls actively negotiate the meanings as opposed to merely passively absorbing the dominant ideas about beauty, romance and heteronormativity. Zlatunich situates girls on a ‘continuum of negotiation and resistance’, with some girls having the ability to reject traditional gender norms more than others (2009: p.371). She argues girls employ ‘strategic selectivity’ when reading prom media, meaning they are able to ‘pick and choose’ what they like from the text and ignore the rest (2009: p.355). Zlatunich posits this ‘strategic selectivity’ enables some level of resistance to the dominant meanings being offered. While maintaining a clear subject/object divide between girls and magazines, this argument destabilises a simplistic and presumed negative effect the media has on girls (i.e. a one-way linear relationship).

Similar to prom themes identified in international media (Best, 2000: Mazzarella, 1999; Zlatunich, 2009), the New Zealand media portray the school ball as a space of ideal heterosexual romance for young woman (Smith, 2014). From a feminist poststructuralist perspective, girls can be understood to accommodate and resist dominant discourses in various ways (Weedon, 1987): an idea Smith (2014) develops in her research in relation to popular cultural and media constructions of the school ball as a romantic space for girls. In contrast to these culturally constructed ideas, Smith found that the female participants in her study did not view the ball as romantic space for them personally; instead, Smith argued it was male participants that were more likely to constitute the ball as a space of heterosexual romance. This finding contradicts the portrayal of the ball as a night of ‘storybook romance’ for young women in New Zealand popular culture and media (2014: p.82). In demonstrating the ways young people both reproduced and resisted dominant cultural constructions of the school ball, Smith asserts students ‘are agentic in shaping their understandings of the ball’ (2014: p.79). Like Zlatunich (2009), Smith (2014: p.82) suggests young women are not simply ‘passively taking up discourses of romance and normative femininity’ presented in magazines and media.

A feminist new materialist framework offers a reframing of the relationship between girls and popular constructions of the ball that emerge in the media. If discourses are no longer prior to becoming ball-girl (as they are now entangled), then there can no longer be a presumed boundary between girls and the media that a relationship of ‘negotiation’ or ‘strategic selectivity’ might suggest. Instead of a clear subject/object (i.e. girl/media) divide, media discourses (cultural narratives) form part of the material-discursive entanglements that produce the ball-girl. This thesis explores how the reconfiguring of girl/media relations might reimagine girls in ways that destabilise or escape common tropes found in the media.

The fairy tale ball

Cultural imaginaries of balls and proms are interwoven with fairy tales like Cinderella. Cinderella is a story of a girl, a magical ball and a handsome prince. It is a tale of
transformation, beauty, enchantment and love. While there have been many incarnations over the years, one of the most familiar versions is based on Charles Perrault’s *Cendrillon* published in 1697. This version introduces the fairy godmother, the pumpkin and the glass slipper; it is the version most recognisable in Walt Disney’s 1950 animated film (Dir., Geronimi, Jackson, & Luske), Little Golden Book (1950; 1998: see Figures 3 & 4); and the story most familiar from my own childhood.

![Figure 3 (left): Walt Disney’s Cinderella (1950) a Little Golden Book](image1)
![Figure 4 (right): Walt Disney’s Cinderella (1998) a Little Golden Book](image2)

In the Walt Disney tale of *Cinderella*, the ball is the pivotal moment where Cinderella and her life are transformed. With the help of the fairy godmother – and of course a touch of magic – Cinderella attends the grand palace ball. Here, she captures the attention of the handsome prince, who like everyone at the ball is struck by the beauty of this mysterious girl. As the story unfolds, Cinderella’s identity is eventually revealed and she goes on to receive her heart’s desire: the prince and her ‘happily ever after’. The Cinderella story is a common theme that permeates popular culture today. The plots of movies often follow a well-trodden path: a girl (or on the rare occasion, a boy), whose beauty and worthiness is unrecognised, undergoes a transformation to emerge from oppression with triumphant reward – often in the form of beauty and romance. In these stories, ‘true’ beauty and worthiness ultimately prevails. Steeped in traditional discourses of femininity, Cinderella stories often portray ideals of feminine beauty, romance and ‘good girl’ femininity (Shannon, 2015). In the Cinderella fairy tale, feminine beauty is inextricable from ideas of recognition, appreciation and self-worth. Cinderella’s ultimate happiness is linked to Prince Charming; the love and attention he bestows on Cinderella affords her the recognition and ultimately the rightful destiny she deserves.
Fairy tales like Cinderella have long been the subject of feminist critique. Writing forty years ago, Minard (1975: p.viii) described fairy tale heroines like Cinderella as ‘insipid beauties waiting passively for Prince Charming’. Similarly, Rowe (1986: p.209) argued ‘fairy tales perpetuate the patriarchal status quo by making female subordination seem a romantically desirable, indeed an inescapable fate’. Yolen (1977: p.22) offers a more considered view of Cinderella, distinguishing ‘America’s Cinderella’ (i.e. Disney influenced by Perrault), from its historical folklore lineage, which she refers to as ‘the true Cinderella’. Yolen suggests feminist criticism should be aimed at ‘caricature’ Cinderellas, such as Walt Disney’s; this version she describes as ‘coy and condescending’, featuring a ‘pitiable and useless’ Cinderella, in contrast to the ‘shrewd’ and ‘witty’ Cinderella of the old tales (1977: p.26). Yolen goes on to argue the ‘mass market American Cinderella’ ‘is a falsification of the magic of the old tales, cheapening ‘our most cherished dreams’: ‘the ability to change our own lives . . . and control our own destinies’ (1977: p.23).

Disney princesses like Cinderella are argued to create and perpetuate ‘princess femininity’ in girls (Shannon, 2015): a socially constructed femininity that accentuates particular beauty ideals (slimness, made-up faces), a kind and gentle demeanour, and a lack of ambition and action. Shannon argues princess femininity is ‘not natural’ but a ‘learned behaviour’ that works to ‘keep women and girls in subservient positions in society, ultimately perpetuating a patriarchal culture’ (2015: p.10). Princess femininity is unattainable as girls remain in a ‘failing sequence of coming up short in regard to princess femininity’ (Shannon, 2015: p.5). As a result, consuming these movies is said to have a profound effect on girls as they enter adolescence. The idea that princess femininity is ‘not natural’ raises a question about what Shannon might consider ‘natural’ femininity to be; unfortunately this is left unexplained. In Shannon’s study, and the majority of studies discussed in this chapter on media, magazines and tales, cultural texts are conceptualised as separate or other to the girl. This is made evident in arguments such as Shannon’s, which are premised on a one-way linear cause and effect relationship; that is, fairy tale princesses affect girls in particular ways, more often than not negatively. Framings such as these establish a clear subject/object divide: each element distinctly separate to the other. As explained, within a new materialist account this theorising would become impossible, as distinct entities are no longer recognised (Barad, 2007). The relationship between girls and literature shifts from one of opposition or one-way cause and effect, to a mutual co-constitutive relationship. In this framing, girls’ bodies and literature such as magazines and fairy tales emerge or become through their relations.

Throughout the development of this thesis, Cinderella has glimmered around the edges, at times catching my gaze, tugging at my thoughts. These nudges sometimes sparked by a participant comment, ‘you get to feel like a princess’; or something on television or a conversation with a friend. As the theoretical framings of the research developed, so did my thinking around Cinderella. Initially, I was drawn to destabilising this cultural figure and the ideas of femininity and girlhood that pervade popular constructions of the school ball. As my
thinking with new materialisms progressed, my thoughts wandered elsewhere – to notions of metamorphosis, enchantment and magic (Warner, 2014). I started to think about the mice, the shoe, and the pumpkin. How these non-human, sometimes inanimate things, are integral to the tale. Mice become footmen; the pumpkin transforms into a grand golden coach. A slipper, made of glass, becomes a pivotal object in Cinderella’s ‘transformation’. What intrigues me is how these happenings – these magical moments – go unquestioned in a fairy tale. As Marina Warner (2014: p.21) explains ‘no one in a fairy tale is taken aback when rocks and trees and streams and waterfalls act under their own volition or shape-shift from one form into another’. We readily accept shoes can be made out of glass, animals can speak, and inert objects have active power.

With these ideas in mind, an alternative way of ‘reading’ or thinking about Cinderella is threaded through this thesis. Prose from Cinderella stories are enfolded with academic analysis of fairy tales, new materialist ideas and visual data. These enfoldings form part of a collection of data snaps: data-researcher (thinking-doing) encounters (I explain these fully in the next chapter Methodological becomings). This twist on the usual framing of Cinderella is a provocation for opening up new ways of thinking about the fairy tale in-relation to girls and the school ball. In line with a feminist new materialist framework, it expands how we might think about Cinderella beyond a discursive reading and ideas of traditional femininity. This thesis does not ignore discourses related to fairy tale Cinderella, indeed they are entangled in ball-girl becomings; rather, it is a way to add a different perspective and provoke new thinking. The new materialist and posthumanist underpinnings of the research demand I (re)consider notions of data, and how I might think and do data differently (Koro-Ljungberg & MacLure, 2013). Cinderella is entangled in this endeavour.

**Sexualities and schooling research**

The second half of this chapter turns to consider the school ball in relation to the broader field of schooling and sexualities research. This section discusses the developing interest in material forces as co-constitutive in the becoming of sexuality at school; the following section explores the theorisation of girls’ bodies with/in the schooling environment. While there are minimal studies specifically focussing on the school ball or prom, there is a significant body of work demonstrating the ways schooling practices produce and regulate young peoples’ gendered and sexual identities (Allen, 2005; Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Epstein, O’Flynn, & Telford, 2003; Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 1996; Kehily, 2002; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Rasmussen, 2006; Renold, 2005). This important work has revealed how ‘official’ and ‘unofficial’ meanings of sexuality and gender are produced through various schooling practices and spaces: for instance, sexuality education curriculum (Alldred & David, 2007; Allen, 2005), spatial arrangements such as the classroom or locker rooms (Allen, 2013a; O'Donoghue, 2006), school ‘rules’ and policy (Raby, 2010), and peer group relations (Kehily, 2002; Renold, 2005).
Theoretically, much of the existing work is informed by the discursive or linguistic turn. As such, sexual meanings and identities are predominately understood as discursively constituted at school (Allen, 2015; 2017). The work of Michel Foucault (1978) has been central in understanding the role of discourses in the constitution of student sexualities within the school setting. Drawing upon Foucauldian theories, Kehily (2002, p.53) suggests schools are ‘a site where a nexus of discourses in relation to sexuality are articulated and struggled over: moral/religious, medical, political, cultural’. This ‘discursive nexus’ can be understood to generate ‘a school’s culture of sexuality’ (Allen, 2009: p.550), or more precisely ‘cultures of sexuality’ as schools do not have a sexual culture in a monolithic sense, but a diversity of sexual cultures operating within them (Allen, 2013a).

Recently, educational researchers have turned their attention to the spatial dimensions of schooling (Allen, 2013a; Evans & Davies, 2011; Ingrey, 2012; O'Donoghue, 2006; Paechter, 2004) considering how student identities are developed, constructed and performed within schooling spatial contexts. Spaces like the playground (Allen, 2013a; Paechter & Clark, 2007), corridors (O'Donoghue, 2006) and school toilets (Ingrey, 2012) are conceptualised as significant in the performance of sexual and gendered identities. Allen (2013a) argues spatial and material arrangements are complicit in the larger project of schooling that works to deny young people as sexual subjects and/or contain their sexual expression. Almost all space within the schooling environment is designated as ‘non-sexual’ (Epstein & Johnson, 1998; Youdell, 2005): classrooms, for instance, are de-sexualised spaces (Allen, 2007), sites marked for academic learning where student sexuality must be managed and controlled. The construction of school spaces as ‘non-sexual’ is policed through school rules detailing appropriate student conduct in these ‘non-sexual’ spaces; these rules attempt to shape how students utilise schooling spaces and their embodied practices within it.

Informed by this literature, the school ball can be understood as a schooling practice and space steeped in meanings of gender and (hetero)sexuality (Allen, 2006; Quinlivan & Town, 1999; Smith, 2012; 2014). Normative discourses are particularly pervasive: for instance, ideals of female beauty, feminine respectability and heterosexuality are intimately connected to both the performance and policing of girls’ sexual and gendered identities. These dominant discourses may reinforce or sit in contention with other meanings constituted within the sexual cultures of schooling. For example, the expectation for young people to embody normative gendered discourses at the school ball, such as ‘hetero-desirable masculinity and femininity’, might sit in tension with the constitution of schools as ‘non-sexual’ spaces (Smith et al., 2016: p.589). This framing constitutes the school ball (and sexuality and gender) as discursively constituted, as evident in Smith (2012) and Best’s (2000) research.

More recently, there is developing interest in the potential of new materialist thinking ‘to imagine a new ontological scene’ (Allen, 2016: p.4) for sexualities and schooling research (Allen & Rasmussen, 2017; Allen, 2017; Renold & Ringrose, 2017). Allen maps ‘a “new”
ontology of *sexuality at school* where the human is no longer privileged as the only site or expression of sexuality, nor is sexuality solely discursively constituted (2015: p.1, italics in original). Instead, sexuality at school is conceptualised as *becoming* via entangled human and non-human intra-actions (Allen, 2013; 2015). In Allen’s words ‘sexuality at school is a never-ending enfolding of non-human, human, practices, objects, affect, motility, discourse, nature, smells, sound and other earthly elements’, known and unknown (2015: p.11). This ‘never-ending enfolding’ is a changing and open-ended process where conventional boundaries of subject/object, human/non-human, nature/culture are dissolved. This theorising offers a different approach to the discursive constitution of sexualities that underpins much of the existing school ball/prom literature. Employing posthumanist and new materialist thinking, the current study (re)conceptualises the school ball and sexuality as continually becoming through lively assemblages of multiple forces, including but not limited to discourse. For example, the chapter *Ball-girl-date affections* examines ball-girl-date encounters as sexuality-assemblages comprising bodies, gendered norms, spatial configurations and material objects like photographs and high heels. This approach provides openings for rethinking ball-girl sexualities in ways other than discursively constituted. Sexual (and other) capacities are not reduced to discourse or the human body, but produced relationally through affective forces.

Accounting for non-human forces in the becoming of sexuality disrupts an anthropocentric focus, which privileges humans as the sole constitutive force of sexualities at school (Allen, 2015). Things that have gone unnoticed or considered peripheral in sexualities and gender research become of interest, for instance, space, time and material objects such as mobile phones, clothing and furniture (Allen, 2013a; 2013b; Taylor, 2013). Thinking about the school ball, new questions emerge: What happens when we explore the school ball as human and more-than-human entanglements? What or who becomes of interest that might have previously been ignored? The work of Taylor (2013: p.688), for instance, demonstrates how ‘mundane materialities of the classroom’, such as a chair, pen and t-shirt, become ‘vital players through which gender gets done’. Similarly interested in often overlooked material objects, Allen (2013) draws attention to the ways mobile phones are intra-actively entangled in the becoming of sexuality at school. Here, mobile phones are an example of how matter previously considered passive or unremarkable can be considered ‘active and vital’ in-relation with other human and more-than-human forces (Allen, 2015: p.12). It is not that material objects such as mobile phones have an independent agency; rather, it is through relations or intra-activity (Barad, 2007) of human and more-than-human entanglements that agency occurs. More specifically, it is through this intra-active, open-ended process that sexuality becomes (Allen, 2013).

Barad’s concept of intra-action has enabled Ringrose and Rawlings (2015) to consider the more-than-human relationalities of gender and sexual bullying at school. They argue material agents, specifically hair and skirts, ‘are central to the intra-active process through which the bullying phenomena around gender and sexuality materialise’ (2015: p.13). Ringrose and
Rawlings explain how attending to both the discursive and the material can rethink analyses of bullying beyond the discursive and conscious intentional human subject. Taking materialities into account enables them to ‘think more-than-discursively’ (Ringrose & Rawlings, 2015: p.17) about the material practices that co-constitute bullying acts such as slut-shaming and homophobic harassment. Gender is understood as relational and performed or produced through ‘dynamic intra-acting material agents’ (ibid), and like the work of Taylor (2013) and Allen (2013), matter that may be considered ‘resolutely mundane’ is shown to possess ‘surprising material force’ (Ringrose & Rawlings, 2015: p.28).

Theorising girl bodies with/in the schooling environment

Feminist research has persuasively shown how dominant discourses shape the ways female bodies are understood, experienced and regulated. The work of Foucault (1980; 1983) has been particularly useful for feminist researchers’ analysis of the power relations evident in the disciplinary practices on the female body (i.e. Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993). From a Foucauldian perspective, discourses work to structure the ways in which bodies are disciplined and understood: for instance, bodies are regulated in accordance with social and cultural ideas of beauty and femininity. This work has drawn attention to the ways women actively regulate their own bodies and those of others through, for example, bodily ideals of slimness (Bordo, 1993). Influenced by Foucault, Butler (1990; 1993) explored the relations between gender, subjectivity and the materiality of the body. Butler’s theory of gender performativity suggests bodies are continually constituted through practices that mark them as male or female. In this approach, gender is conceptualised as a product of styles and techniques, such as dress and adornment, as opposed to being an essential quality of the body. For Butler, gender is a matter of ‘doing’ – it is the performative effect of reiterative acts. Butler (1993: p.xii) links gender performativity to the materialisation of bodies in that regulatory norms work in a ‘performative fashion to constitute the materiality of bodies and, more specifically, to materialize the body’s sex’.

Theoretical understandings offered by Foucault (1977) and Butler (1990; 1993) recognise the inseparability of the body and discourses of gender and sexuality. Here, the materiality of the body is understood and shaped through discursive meanings. Theorising the body in this way has been a deliberate attempt to shift the focus from the biological body to wider cultural, social and historical factors (Frost, 2011; Grosz, 1994). This approach has opened up possibilities for understanding gender, sexuality and the body beyond biological reductionism and essentialist categorisations of the ‘nature’ of the female body. The materiality of the body becomes significant (or accounted for) through sociocultural meanings and practices. Butler’s theorisation of the ‘heterosexual matrix’ (1990) enables us to examine heterosexuality as a pervasive force in the constitution of ‘appropriate’ performances of masculinity and femininity. Butler’s work highlights how normative discourses, such as heterosexuality, have a profound influence on the production and regulation of gender and sexual subjectivities. For example,
Smith (2012) draws on Butler’s theory of the heterosexual matrix to demonstrate the pervasive force of heterosexuality within normative gendered codes at the school ball.

Butler’s approach has been productive for thinking about the ways schooling practices play an active role in the surveillance and regulation of girls’ bodies (Allan, 2009; Happel, 2013; Pomerantz, 2006; 2007; 2008; Raby, 2010; 2012; Renold, 2005; Youdell, 2005; 2006). School dress codes are one example where schools regulate girls’ clothing and bodily exposure. In Shauna Pomerantz’s (2007) analysis of girls’ style and clothing, school dress codes are considered one of the many invisible practices that schools employ to organise young women’s sexuality and femininity. Sartorial ‘rules’ offer girls understandings of what is deemed ‘appropriate’ in relation to their bodies and the schooling environment: for example, what aspects of their bodies are considered ‘acceptable’ to be seen and what ‘should’ be hidden. Through the regulatory practice of school dress codes, certain forms of female sexuality are normalised, such as ‘good girl’ (white, middle-class, heteronormative) femininity (Pomerantz, 2007). School dress codes that promote modesty are argued to perpetuate the idea of girls’ bodies as dangerous and needing to be controlled (Lesko, 1988). Girls being told to lengthen their skirts to ‘stop distracting’ male students and teachers (Roy, 2016; Rutherford, 2016; Schoultz, 2016) is an example of the ways girls’ bodies continue to be constituted as ‘dangerous’ and ‘problematic’ in the schooling environment.

Schooling practices, such as dances and school balls, foster the regulation and surveillance of girls’ bodies (Best, 2000; Smith, 2012). At these events, the presentation and deportment of girls’ bodies comes under intense scrutiny from peers and adults alike. Girls are required to dress and present their bodies in accordance with the ‘acceptable’ norms of this social situation: for instance, the wearing of a dress and make-up are constituted as ‘normal’ and expected practices for girls. The parameters of what is expected at the school ball may differ from what is deemed ‘acceptable’ in other schooling spaces: for example, school uniform ‘rules’ governing hair and the wearing of make-up at school. The work of both Best (2000) and Smith (2012) have shown how discursive practices structure the ways girls’ bodies are understood and experienced in the context of the school ball or prom. By highlighting these discourses, we can think about the ways dominant meanings are attributed to the bodies of girls: how bodies are constituted as ‘intelligible’ or ‘non intelligible’ in relation to feminine beauty ideals (Butler, 1990). Building on these insights, the current study explores the force of matter as co-constitutive with discourse in the materialisation of girls’ bodies. In this framing, there is no divide between matter and discourse. The work of Barad (2003; 2007) is crucial to this endeavour.

Extending the work of Butler, Barad offers a different understanding of the materialisation of the body, where both the discursive and the material are accounted for. In contrast to a linguistic or discursive approach, Barad calls for feminists to ‘take account of how the body’s materiality—for example, its anatomy and physiology—and other material forces actively matter
to the processes of materialization' (2003: p.809, italics in original). Barad’s framework of agential realism provides the basis for her post-humanist performative account of the production of material bodies. In Barad’s reading of Butler, she suggests Butler’s theory of performativity is limited as it ‘ultimately reinscribes matter as a passive product of discursive practices’ (2007: p.151). It is not that Butler denies the materiality of the body, but by conceptualising matter as a product of discourse, Butler ‘fails to recognise matter’s dynamism’ (Barad, 2007: p.64). For Barad, matter (i.e. the materiality of the body and other material forces) are an active force in the process of materialisation.

Barad’s approach offers a new understanding of the relationship between discursive practices and material phenomena. Matter is considered ‘a discursive production in the posthumanist sense that discursive practices are themselves material (re)configurings of the world’, and it is through these continual (re)configurings that boundaries, properties and meanings are differentially enacted (Barad, 2007: p.151). The idea that discursive practices are material (re)configurings of the world means discursive practices are always material, just as materiality is always discursive: this mutual entailment occurs through the dynamics of intra-activity (Barad, 2007). The concept of intra-activity dissolves a conventional divide between the material/discursive (or nature/culture). As such, Barad’s account of the materialisation of bodies avoids reinscribing the nature-culture dualism, which Barad suggests Butler’s account inadvertently enacts.

By not privileging the discursive over material, a Baradian approach opens up the possibilities for considering ‘who or what comes to matter’ (Barad, 2007: p.35) in the becoming of the school ball-girl, including the human and nonhuman. This further extends Butler’s theory of materialisation, which Barad argues exclusively focuses on human bodies and social factors. For Barad, the focus is not just on the materialisation of human bodies but the materialisation of all bodies – human and non-human. In Barad’s words, ‘agential realism takes account of the fact that the forces at work in the materialization of bodies are not only social, and the bodies produced are not all human’ (2007: p.33-34). An agential realist approach offers a different way of thinking about how the ball-girl-body might be understood, produced and experienced. Rather than a linear model of causation where power relations (and discursive practices) produce the body in particular ways – the relationship is reciprocal, multi-directional. As outlined in the previous chapter, Barad understands bodies not as objects with clearly defined boundaries and properties, but as ‘material-discursive phenomena’ (2003: p.823). This means bodies emerge through intra-active relations of multiple elements.

A developing number of studies employ Barad’s theoretical ideas to explore girls’ bodies in relation with schooling environments (Lenz Taguchi & Palmer, 2013; Ringrose & Rawlings, 2015; Ringrose & Renold, 2016). In contrast to thinking about bodies as purely discursively produced, these studies are premised on ontological understandings of the body that emphasise relationality. Lenz Taguchi and Palmer (2013) explore ‘the entanglement of
architecture, materialities, bodies, discourses and discursive practices’ in the co-constitution and enactment of girls’ school related ill- and well-being. In their work, ‘things’ often perceived as ‘the fixed material backdrop of human agency’ are (re)considered ‘strong co-constitutive agents’ (Lenz Taguchi & Palmer, 2013: p.672). Instead of thinking about the body of the girl as an object with ‘inherent boundaries and fixed properties’, Lenz Taguchi and Palmer draw on an ontological understanding of girl bodies as *phenomena* (Barad, 2007). Through this approach, girls’ ill- and well-being is conceptualised as ‘material-discursive intra-active enactments’ (Lenz Taguchi & Palmer, 2013: p.673). A ‘panicking girl body’ is understood as ‘an event of an entanglement of multiple performative agencies’ (ibid) including discourses, embodied practices and materialities such as schooling spaces.

In her analysis of bodies, objects and classroom spaces, Taylor (2013: p.689) draws on Barad to develop ‘a material feminist analysis of the body in the “fullness of its materiality”’. In order to demonstrate this, Taylor ‘takes forward’ Barad’s (2007: p.170) argument that ‘bodies do not simply take their place in the world . . . rather “environments” and “bodies” are intra-actively constituted’ (2013: p.688). Her analysis highlights how objects such as clothing do ‘powerful yet usually unremarked material-discursive work . . . in installing gendered practices through their entanglement with bodies and spaces’ (2013: p.698). The chapter *Becoming ball-girl-bodies* engages with these ideas to conceptualise girls’ bodies as *phenomena* (Barad, 2007) emerging through the material-discursive and affective entanglements of beauty-body practices. This discussion highlights the materiality of the body and other matter, such as high-heeled shoes and fake eyelashes, as co-constitutive in the becoming of the ball-girl-body. The ball-girl-body has no ontological status prior to its relational or intra-active production (Barad, 2007); therefore, it is the relations that produce the phenomena of what we come to understand as ball-girl-bodies. Underpinning this approach is a shift in focus from what a body *is* to how bodies *become*.

**Body as becoming**

Researchers have become increasingly interested in thinking about the body in terms of *becoming*, rather than *being* (Budgeon, 2003; Coffey, 2013; Coleman, 2008; 2009; Fox, 2012; 2016; Grosz, 1994; Ivinson & Renold, 2013). Employing Deleuzian and feminist theory, Coleman (2008; 2009) develops a feminist approach to understanding bodies as *becomings*. In Coleman’s words ‘the term “the becoming of bodies” refers to a conviction that bodies must be conceived as processes which are constantly moving rather than as discrete, autonomous entities’ (2009: p.1). For Deleuze, a body is not an independent entity but in process – always becoming through the connections it makes with multiple and different bodies (human and non-human). In this approach, the body is inseparable from its relations with the world (Deleuze, 1992). Bodies are no longer autonomous bounded beings but are constituted relationally; for example, the girl body does not pre-exist relations but becomes via continual and open-ended connections with other bodies, things, ideas and practices. In this framing,
the binary distinction between subject (i.e. the girl) and objects are no longer viable. Bodies are assemblages of all manner of things, human and more-than-human, and it is through these entangled relations the body is constituted or becomes.

Both Deleuze and Barad propose a relational perspective of bodies. In a Baradian framing, we can think of bodies as intra-actively becoming via an array of forces. In this framing, there is no ontological separation between bodies, discourses and other relations. I draw on Barad to conceptualise the ball-girl-body as agential. This approach enables an understanding of the ball-girl-body as becoming in particular material-discursive configurings in any given moment. Ball-girl-bodies materialise through intra-actions, and ‘it is through specific agential intra-actions that the boundaries and properties of the “components” of phenomena become determinate and that particular embodied concepts become meaningful’ (Barad, 2003: p.815). What emerges as ball-girl ‘femininity’, for instance, is unstable performative phenomena (an enactment) rather than a fixed attribute of bodies. Such an approach provides a way to account for varied and multiple becoming of ball-girl-bodies and forces us to pay attention to ‘which kinds of matter, human and non-human, matters’ (Taylor & Ivinson, 2013: p.667). Thinking about relations as productive of the ball-girl-body offers a rethinking of agency and what a ball-girl-body can do.

Girls’ bodies and ‘agency’

Feminist analyses that employ a Butlerian/Foucauldian approach to bodies have largely understood agency as inseparable from subjectivity and that the individual operates as an effect of power, for instance, through discursive formations (Coole, 2005; Frost, 2011). If the subject is constituted through discursive practices, then agency lies in the potential for discourses to be undermined, subverted and reworked. This conceptualisation of agency has enabled researchers to document girls’ subversive and resistant practices to hegemonic gendered and sexual scripts (Allen, 2003; Gonick, 2003; Harris, 2004; Hauge, 2009; Jiwani, Steenbergen, & Mitchell, 2006; Kelly, Pomerantz, & Currie, 2005; Renold & Ringrose, 2008; 2011). In this body of work, girls are recognised as social agents who both participate in and challenge gender inequalities. For example, in Raby’s (2010) analysis of school rules, girls can be understood to both reproduce and contest school dress codes and the regulation of normative gender and sexuality. Raby’s study showed many girls were critical of school dress codes and how they were enforced; yet at the same time they were scornful of their female peers who wore revealing clothing. Raby suggests girls simultaneously challenge, reproduce, negotiate and strategically use the meanings constituted through this regulation. These findings not only highlight the fine line girls are required to negotiate between ‘attractive’ and ‘provocative’, they also demonstrate how girls actively negotiate the contradictory discourses of girlhood through simultaneous resistance and reproduction.

As detailed earlier in the chapter, studies exploring the school ball and prom (Best, 2000; Mazzarella, 1999; Smith, 2012; Zlatinuch, 2009) highlight how girls negotiate dominant
discourses of femininity; this negotiation often a combination of both accommodation and resistance. This literature has been valuable for providing examples of girls' behaviours or speech that challenge pervasive structural forces, such as heteronormativity and discourses of traditional femininity. In these analyses, agency coheres around human action. A feminist new materialist approach offers a rethinking of girls' bodies and agency beyond notions of human will and intentionality (Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2005). Barad, for instance, conceptualises agency as emergent via intra-action. In this framing, agency does not reside in the individual subject or restricted to possibilities of human action; instead, capacities are produced through particular material-discursive arrangements. As such, Barad argues the space for agency in an agential realist account is larger than Butler's performative account would allow. 'Cut loose from its humanist orbit' (Barad, 2007: p.177), agency is distributed over non-human and human forms. In a similar vein, Bennett's (2010: p.21) theory of *distributive agency*, offers an understanding of agency as a 'confederation' of human and non-human forces within assemblages. These new materialist framings of agency undermine an anthropocentric approach, which emphasises humans as exclusively productive of the social world (Fox & Alldred, 2017)

A developing number of researchers are drawing on feminist new materialist framings of agency (Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2010) to examine the capacities of girls' bodies in-connection with other matter (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010; Ivinson & Renold, 2013; Renold & Ivinson, 2014; Ringrose & Renold, 2016; Taylor, 2013). In their work with girls in a South Wales Valleys' community, Ivinson and Renold (2013) theorise girls' experiences of agency through Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of *becoming* (See also, Renold & Ivinson, 2014). They connect this concept with material feminisms (Barad, 2007) to conceptualise girls' becomings as emergent within ‘assemblages comprising moving bodies, material, mechanical, organic, virtual, affective and less-than-conscious elements’ (Ivinson & Renold, 2013: p.704). Here, agency or ‘becomings’ are thought of as emergent in-between elements such as girls' bodies, places, water, mud and bikes. Ivinson and Renold (2013: p.717) argue ‘body-movement assemblages afforded girls different kinds of agency’, not in the sense of human will, but as becomings involving ‘fluctuating affects experienced as gradations on a spectrum of agency from empowering to disempowering’.

In Hultman and Lenz Taguchi’s (2010) relational materialist approach, they draw on Deleuze (1990) and Barad (2007) to think about agency as a quality emerging in-between different bodies, for instance, a girl and sand. Agency does not belong to either, but emerges through their mutual engagements and relations involving muscles, hands, the force of gravity, grains of sand, surface areas and buckets. This approach decentres the human and troubles the notion of a distinct human/non-human and subject/object divide. Rather than a subject that is ‘autonomous, unitary and coherent’, the subject emerges or becomes as ‘an effect of an event on a relational field’ (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010: p.531-532). Engaging with these ideas, the current study employs feminist new materialist framings of agency to think about
ball-girl capacities as emerging through entanglements. For example, the chapter *Ball-girl-date affections* explores how sexuality-assemblages produce particular bodily capacities for the ball-girl (Fox & Alldred, 2013). In this approach, sexual (and other) capacities are not produced by, or located within, an individual agentic subject; instead, capacities emerge via flows of affect within assembled relations.

**What can a body do? A turn to affect**

The idea of bodies as processes (i.e. becoming) rather than stable entities invites a shift in focus from what a body is, to what a body can do (Coleman, 2008; Deleuze, 1988). Deleuze (1988) offers a way to think about how relations between bodies and other ‘things’ produce affects. For Deleuze, bodies are defined not by what they are but by their affective capacities. These capacities are not pre-existing but are produced via relations within assemblages. From Spinoza’s *affectus*, Deleuze and Guattari theorise affect as ‘an ability to affect and be affected’: a pre-personal intensity that can augment or diminish a body’s capacity to act (Massumi, 1987: p.xiv). If bodies are defined by their capacity to affect and be affected, then affect ‘refers to what bodies are and are not capable of’ (Mulcahy, 2010: p.13). Alldred and Fox (2015: p.4) draw on this idea to consider how affects in sexuality-assemblages produce specific bodily capacities ‘to act, to feel or to desire’. In this thesis, relations of affect create conditions of possibility for what a ball-girl-body can do and can become.

Theories of affect are useful for thinking about the ball-girl-body in ways that are not limited to language and discourse. Characterising ‘the turn to affect’ in body-studies, Blackman and Venn (2010: p.9) suggest theories of affect offer a ‘rethinking of the concept of embodiment’ which ‘take us beyond discourse and the social construction of bodily matters’. Clough (2008: p.1) argues ‘the turn to affect’ points ‘to a dynamism immanent to bodily matter and matter generally’. While affect can be registered bodily as intensity (Mulcahy, 2012), affect is not restricted to, or contained within, the human subject or body. Affect is relationally produced and ‘happens in and between and through bodies and things’ (Ringrose & Renold, 2014: p.773). As such, the capacity of a ball-girl-body can ‘never be defined by a body alone but is always aided and abetted by, and dovetails with, the field or context of its force-relations’ (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010: p.3). In this sense, ball-girl bodily capacities are not limited to discourse nor do they derive from an individual human body.

Conceptualising a body as becoming through relational forces (including affect) reconfigures how we might conceptualise agency or resistance in relation to the ball-girl-body. Bringing together a new materialist approach to the body with theories of affect (Deleuze & Guattari, 1984; 1987; Deleuze, 1988), Fox and Alldred (2016: p.125) theorise ‘the resisting young body’ where bodily capacities for ‘resistance’ are produced relationally rather than being an agentic quality pertaining to the individual body. This relational perspective of power and resistance draws on Deleuzo-Guattarian theories of affect, assemblage and territorialisation. These concepts enable Fox and Alldred to explore ‘the affectivity of young bodies, and the
flows and intensities that produce . . . what young bodies can do, feel and desire’ (2016: p.125). Replacing a conventional understanding of (human) agency with a focus on the capacity to affect and be affected (Deleuze, 1988) enables Fox and Alldred to theorise ‘resistance’ as an affective movement within assemblages. Attention moves away from a solely human focus (and the idea of bodies having agency) to explore the ways forces circulate in an assemblage to produce capacities for human bodies. Such an approach conceptualises bodily capacities as shifting from moment to moment, depending on the material relations and affectivities within the assemblage. In this framing, ball-girl capacities are never fixed or pre-determined.

Concluding–continuing thoughts

The enfolding or ‘cutting together-apart’ of academic scholarship, media and fairy tale in this chapter has produced particular configurations or understandings of girls, bodies and the school ball. These different perspectives (or matterings) are formed through theoretical frameworks, research methods, literary style, context and audience, folklore, history, public concern and commentary. This collection of academic studies, media and fairy tale might conventionally be considered in the past. The ontological foundations of the thesis would suggest however, ‘the past is never finished . . . we never leave it and it never leaves us behind’ (Barad, 2007: p.ix). As such, this research does not have a clear beginning, nor is there an end to previous studies, literature and media commentaries that are entangled in the becoming of the thesis. I began this chapter by thinking about how different versions of phenomena emerge depending on ‘who or what is entangled within the research’ (Bodén, 2015: p.22). This chapter has considered the entanglements of previous research, media and fairy tale; I now turn to consider how the processes of research – methodology, theoretical concepts, participants and researcher – shape the becoming of the thesis and the perspective of the school ball it offers.
Methodological becomings

The research undertaken in this thesis is an assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Fox & Alldred, 2014) comprising multiple elements, including (but not limited to) theory-participants-data-researcher. A relational approach recognises elements of the research as entangled: they are not isolated with fixed boundaries, nor do they necessarily flow in a pre-determined linear sequence. The following methodological discussion is organised in relation to these four connections: connecting with theory, with 'data', with researcher and with (human) participants. I discuss how each of these elements might look or 'work' within a feminist new materialist methodological framework, drawing attention to the ways these elements affect and are affected by one another, often in co-constitutive relationships (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Through this framing, the research methodology can be understood as becoming (Koro Ljungberg, 2012); it is open to revision and change through multiple, known and unknown connections. In connection with theory for instance, there have been significant theoretical developments during the research that have opened up new paths and new thinking for me, the researcher. The coming chapter explores these developing connections and becomings and how they are implicated in the production of knowing.

A new materialist ontology has significant epistemological consequences for how we 'do' research, for instance, how we understand the human 'subject' and how 'knowledge' is produced. In what follows, I consider how posthumanist theories attempt to move research practices beyond humanist and anthropocentric approaches that are usually associated with qualitative social and educational research. Drawing on a range of posthumanist concepts and theories, such as posthuman voice (Mazzei, 2016; Mazzei & Jackson, 2016) and the materiality of language (MacLure, 2013), I explore how the research 'methods' might 'look' from a posthumanist perspective, how the 'data' might work and how other relational forces such as the researcher are understood. The latter part of the chapter provides methodological details of the (human) participants involved in the research and the research methods used to garner girls' thoughts and experiences of the school ball.

While the discussion is organised into four sections (elements of the research), it is important to note these elements are messy and fluid. ‘Data’, for instance, are not separate to ‘theory’ and ‘researcher’; instead, they are relationally entangled with other material-discursive and affective relations, such as ethical principles and ethics committees, university strictures and guidelines that form part of the research-assemblage. The methodological language and labels used for these elements (i.e. data) are also unstable. I engage with these labels tentatively, cognisant that they bring their own histories, meanings and connections with theoretical ideas and disciplines (Koro-Ljungberg, 2016). As I grapple with methodological language, the chosen labels may also be considered in a state of becoming: their meanings may shift and alter as they form new connections with theoretical concepts discussed in this
chapter. The meaning (and function) of ‘data’, for instance, is dependent on other concepts in the research assemblage (e.g. ‘language’, ‘voice’) with which they are entangled (St Pierre, 2013). In short, these labels are not fixed, nor am I fixed on them.

Connecting with theory

The research methodology is an ‘active theoretical assemblage’ (Taylor, 2016: p.21) that is continually becoming. Originally, the research was shaped by the question: how are girlhood sexualities discursively and materially constituted through school ball culture? The framing and wording of the research question reflected a feminist poststructuralist approach, with which I was familiar. Situating the study at the intersection of girlhood studies and research examining the ‘sexual cultures of schooling’ (Allen, 2005; Allen, 2011b), I was interested in how girls understood and negotiated discourses of gender and sexuality in this schooling space – a space where traditional gendered discourses are particularly pervasive. While interested in how girls interpret and engage with dominant discourses, I also wanted to explore the embodied and material aspects of the school ball, including the materialisation of girls’ bodies in this space (Butler, 1993). In an attempt to ‘capture’ the material along with the discursive, the research was initially conceived with a visual methodology (Pink, 2012; Rose, 2003). This approach was inspired by recent research using visual methods to garner understandings of young people, sexualities and/or schooling (Allan, 2006; Allan & Tinkler, 2015; Allen, 2009; 2011a; 2017). The multiple research methods employed in the current study were designed and conducted in this methodological space, including participant-generated video and photographs, focus group discussions, individual interviews and observation.

At the analytical stage of the research, connections with posthumanist and new material feminist thinking became significant. As useful as a (feminist) poststructuralist approach is in providing analyses of how gender and sexuality are constituted, I became more aware of some limitations of a discursive approach. The research data brought the rich materiality of the school ball to the fore: bodies, hair, clothing, beauty-body practices and architectural spaces. These material forces provoked me to consider what more can be thought here (Allen, 2013; Blaise, 2013). Furthermore, I wanted a way to account for the affective forces – the atmosphere, feelings, intensities and sensations – that could not be explained by the discursive alone. The seminal work of Barad (2003; 2007), Bennett (2010) and Lenz Taguchi (2010) captured my interest, along with edited collections bringing together thinkers within new materialisms (Coole & Frost, 2010) and material feminisms (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008). Emerging publications employing new materialist thinking in relation to sexualities (Allen, 2013; Fox & Alldred, 2013), girlhood (Ivinson & Renold, 2013; Lenz Taguchi & Palmer, 2013; Renold & Ivinson, 2014) and schooling (Juelskjaer, 2013; Taylor & Ivinson, 2013; Taylor, 2013) were both provocative and enticing. I was drawn to the developing theorising of
sexuality-as-assemblage (Allen, 2013; Fox & Alldred, 2013) and the exciting potential this offered sexualities research.

As I encountered the empirical materials, significant questions emerged: What can I do with this data? Or more importantly, what does this data do to me? I entered a fluid methodological space (Koro-Ljungberg, 2016): a space of theoretical conceptual uncertainty and experimentation. It was both daunting and exciting. My first foray into ‘data analysis’ was a deliberate experiment and modest attempt to think otherwise in relation to data and theory. It was a kind of ‘plugging in’ to use Jackson and Mazzei’s (2012) idea: a process of using theory to think with data or using data to think with theory. It was also an attempt to push myself as a researcher out of my comfort zone, or what I came to affectionately call my ‘cosy feminist poststructuralist slippers’. During these data-researcher encounters, high-heeled shoes made their presence felt: in MacLure’s words they ‘glowed’ and reached out to grasp me (2013). As material objects, high-heeled shoes are deeply entangled with discourses of femininity; however, there was also something about high heels and the ways they were enacted in the data that exceeded purely discursive readings. High heels did not appear merely passive objects; they did something. And I was intrigued. Thinking of them as ‘actants’ (Bennett, 2010) or performative agents (Lenz Taguchi, 2010) opened up a way to conceptualise high heels as entangled with the human in a ‘sticky web of connections’ (Bennett, 2004: p.365); this seemed to get closer to their potential or dynamism as research data.

The appeal of new materialist thinking lies not only in terms of how it differs from feminist poststructuralism, but also their commonalities. Posthumanism is suggested to intersect with ‘the anti-foundational insights of feminism and post-structuralism concerning the multiplicity of identity, the mobility of meaning, and the contestability of knowledge’ (Taylor, 2016: p.7). Rather than renouncing such concerns, posthumanist theories build on these important insights by including the non-human, things and materialities. This thesis draws on new materialist thinking not to dismiss insights from feminist poststructuralism (for instance, the power of discourses in the ways ball-girl-bodies are understood or deemed ‘acceptable’); rather, I am drawn to the ways new materialist ideas can enhance analyses by acknowledging ‘the forces, processes, capacities and resiliencies with which bodies, organisms, and material objects act both independently of and in response to discursive provocations and constraints’ (Frost, 2011: p.70). Such an approach does not prioritise culture over nature – something that may be implicitly done in discursive analyses (Coleman, 2014).

There is something undeniably alluring about this burgeoning area of feminist scholarship. Feminist new materialist thinking is experiencing its own becoming – following its own logic, it is something that is not, or can never be, fully formed. This becoming of ‘new’ thinking and knowledge is appealing in relation to the academic requirements of a PhD; in the case of my
university, in order for a PhD degree to be awarded, it must satisfy a range of criteria including that it ‘is an original contribution to knowledge or understanding in its field’ (University of Auckland, 2016). Conceptualising (PhD) research as an assemblage is not separate to or ‘above’ these academic strictures and expectations. The requirement to make an ‘original contribution’ may be entangled in the methodological decisions we make as doctoral researchers. Rethinking the relations in-between theory, researcher, data and participants has raised pertinent questions in regards to the PhD thesis ‘process’ and the expectations of academic conformity and linearity. In discussing the methodological decisions I have made, I am speaking from an anthropocentric position. Considering the posthumanist endeavours of the study, the irony is not lost on me. The expectation to make methodologies and research decisions explicit makes this anthropocentric discussion hard to avoid. Making these methodological decisions explicit, however, also acknowledges the researcher as entangled in the research-assemblage. As a researcher I do not stand outside the study, or the data, or the theory (Barad, 2007); I am an entangled force within the research-assemblage, becoming-with (Lenz Taguchi, 2012) the data, the research methodology and so forth. I do not consider these methodological shifts and developments an indicator that methodology and methods have in some way failed; rather, thinking about methodology as becoming has allowed room for surprise and change (Koro-Ljungberg, 2016).

Posthumanist methodological thinkers such as MacLure (2013a; 2013b), Koro-Ljungberg (2010; 2016), Hultman and Lenz Taguchi (2010), St Pierre (2008; 2013a) and Mazzei’s work both independently (2013; 2016) and in collaboration with Jackson (2012; 2016) have been particularly influential in the development of the research methodology. Their writing and thinking has prompted me to ask questions about and of data: What counts as data? What might data do? What is possible to know? The coming section explores these pertinent questions. Posthumanist methodological ideas have challenged assumed relationships between data and participants, data and researcher, data and theory. A posthumanist framework demands a fundamental shift in the analytical approach to data, forcing me to be aware of an anthropocentric gaze (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010), alongside tendencies to slip into a representational reading (MacLure, 2013a) and the seductive allure of telling a cohesive and linear narrative (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). Within the affective flow of the research-assemblage, elements affect and are affected by one another, for instance, data’s energy may shift and transform research (Koro-Ljungberg, 2016) or theory may alter data or how it is ‘analysed’. The research questions have been made and remade throughout this methodological ‘journey’ (Koro Ljungberg, 2016: p.3): multiple paths have been taken, visits to other methodological places and theoretical spaces, (un)expected decisions made. Connecting with theory opens new possibilities for thinking and doing – theory interrupts, unsettles and offends (MacLure, 2010). Through these productive capacities, new school ball-girl imaginaries emerge.
Connecting with ‘data’

Data becomes within particular ontological, epistemological and methodological structures (St. Pierre, 2013a). Therefore, the meaning and function of data varies depending on theoretical understandings of other related concepts such as ‘reality’, ‘truth’, ‘knowledge’, ‘language’ and ‘voice’. Within a feminist new materialist methodology, these understandings evoke a particular approach to data. This section considers: What counts as data? What is our relation to it? How does data work? (MacLure, 2013b; St. Pierre, 2013a). Rather than using the term ‘analysis’, perhaps the idea of ‘data encounters’ may be better. Encounters with data reflect the relational approach to data underpinning the research, and the idea that data has a force of its own. In conventional qualitative approaches, data is often treated as passive matter waiting to be selected, organised and interpreted by an ontologically separate researcher (Lenz Taguchi, 2012; MacLure, 2013a). In contrast, a new materialist ontology posits data as neither passive nor separate from the researcher.

Data and researcher are understood as entangled, acting upon one another in particular ways. As MacLure argues, data have their own way of ‘making themselves intelligible to us. This can be seen, or rather felt’ (2013: p.660). A photograph, for instance, might ‘provoke a reaction from me that is not simply of the mind, or totally articulable’ (Allen, 2015b: p.6): perhaps a bodily response or gut feeling. Data play games on us (Koro-Ljungberg, 2016) or perhaps with us; data ‘glow’ (MacLure, 2010:p. 282) and reach out to grasp us (MacLure, 2013b). Far from passive, data can ‘annoy and haunt’ (Allen, 2015b: p.8), ‘disconcert’ and create a sense of ‘wonder’ (MacLure, 2013b), while always remaining ‘somewhat mysterious, unknown and tentative’ (Koro-Ljungberg, 2016: p.46). With these provocative and unruly capacities, data are understood as a constitutive force, affecting the researcher as much as the researcher affects the data (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010). A reciprocal, co-constitutive relationship exists between data and researcher, where neither are pre-existing or privileged over the other.

Within this non-hierarchical relationship, it is impossible for a researcher to determine what data might ‘mean’ or represent. Representational logic assumes there is a primary reality out there to be found, and that it can be accurately represented through language (St. Pierre, 2013b); both of these notions are untenable within new materialist thought. In contrast to representational approaches, materialist ontologies prefer a ‘flattened’ logic (De Landa, 2002; Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010) where discourse and matter are mutually implicated in the unfolding emergence of the world’ (MacLure, 2013a: p.660). Language no longer holds an elevated position of giving meaning to the world; instead, language is one element within an array of entangled forces and intensities. As such, data are not a reflection of ‘reality’. Rather, data enacts becomings produced via assembled material-discursive relations. There can be no revealing or uncovering the ‘truth’ of data, but ‘an uncovering of a reality that already exists among the multiple realities being enacted in an event’ (Lenz Taguchi, 2012: p.274-275,
In this exploration of the becoming of the ball-girl, data enacts multiple ball-girl ‘realities’.

An agential realist framework suggests reality (or realities) are never independent of the ways they are researched (Barad, 2007). This means the school ball and ball-girl as phenomena become in-relation with data, method, methodologies, research questions, researcher, participants, theory and so on. Verbal and visual data enact specific material-discursive assemblages through which the school ball-girl becomes. Data performs agential cuts to produce or enact the school ball-girl as becomings. Barad’s concept of the ‘agential cut’ is a process of both separation and entanglement (2007: p.140). As an analytic practice, agential cuts ‘separates out “something” – an object, practice, person – for analysis from the on-going flow of spacetimemattering’ (Taylor, 2013: p.691), while simultaneously entangling the researcher ontologically within the phenomena produced. Different agential cuts produce or enact different phenomena: as Barad explains ‘bodies differentially materialize as particular patterns of the world’ (2007: p.176) due to the enactment of specific cuts and reconfigurings. The visual and verbal data entangled in this thesis perform these provisional and temporary cuts producing a ‘temporal freezing of the phenomenon’ (Bodén, 2015: p.195). For example, a photograph enacts an agential cut that brings material forces to the fore: bodies, objects and spatial configurations, or an interview might be considered a provisional cut (Bodén, 2015) that can allow for analysis of elements of a phenomenon. Conceptualising data as ‘cuts’ and ‘becomings’, data are not fixed, nor are we simply manipulating, selecting, or standing behind data to let it ‘speak for itself’ (Mazzei & Jackson, 2012). Data are always entangled, as are all other elements of research.

*Encountering visual images*

A new materialist methodology requires researchers to ‘think’ and ‘see’ differently in their encounters with data. Encountering visual images such as photographs and video, for instance, it is easy for my gaze to be drawn to and centre on the human. Such an approach prioritises the human over other elements. In order to challenge this anthropocentric gaze, a *relational materialist* approach to visual data is employed (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010). It is an approach that ‘flattens’ human and more-than-human forces and conceptualises them as ‘connecting and overlapping in a relational and horizontal field’ (2010: p.530). In line with this endeavour, some photographs have captions which detail ‘connections within image’ (Benozzo, Bell, & Koro-Ljungberg, 2013: p.311), for instance, ‘shoe-leg-dress-gender norms-movement…’: the hyphen in-between each element indicating the relational and non-hierarchical understanding of these forces. Hultman and Lenz Taguchi suggest we read a photograph *horizontally* and think of bodies and things as ‘doing something to each other simultaneously’, each transforming ‘as an effect of the intra-actions that emerge in-between them’ (2010: p.530). In this framing, neither the human or non-human have individual agency,
rather ‘agency’ in a relational materialist approach is a quality that emerges ‘in-between’ different bodies and other relations.

In addition to foregrounding material elements, photographs convey discursive meanings, ideas and imaginings, perhaps even glimpses of an affective atmosphere (mood and feelings). In an agential realist sense, school ball photographs are understood as material-discursive phenomena intra-actively produced in connection with material forces (bodies, camera, spatial elements), gendered discourses and traditional ideas associated with the ball, the photographer, viewer and mode of dissemination (internet and social media). School ball photographs are affective-material events comprising multiple relations – many of which cannot be ‘seen’ in the image. Pyry suggests a photograph ‘brings forth things that are more than a mere representation’ such as ‘a live relationship with the photographed space and practical knowledge connected to it’ (2015: p.155). There is a ‘thing power’ (Bennett, 2010) or vitality to photographs that far exceeds representation, that is, what the photograph simply shows. Within an agential realist conceptualisation of photographs, who is taking the photo, the camera, how photographs are shared and who views them are co-constitutive, entangled forces (Warfield, 2016).

Enacting a ‘diffractive analysis’, Lenz Taguchi and Palmer discuss how, in their encounters with data, forces (including the researcher) would ‘link, connect or collide with another, and produce something new or different’ (2013: p.675). In this sense, a photographic image can intra-act with other data, perhaps a ‘fragment’ from an interview or an observation from the researcher: for example, material objects in photographs overlap or intra-act with discourses, materialities and emotions enacted in interview fragments; as multiple performative agents they collaboratively enact femininities and the ball-girl (Lenz Taguchi & Palmer, 2013). In this approach, text (i.e. a participant comment) does not represent an image, nor can an image be understood to represent text. Thinking, seeing and knowing are not isolated processes; instead, they are entangled as different forces come together and affect one another (Barad, 2007).

*Language, voice and the ‘subject’*

Within a new materialist methodology, there is a decentring of the rational ‘knowing’ human subject. The ‘subject’ (i.e. ball-girl) is not positioned as the source of meaning, as there is no stable subject behind words or data. As explained, the school ball and ball-girl become through or alongside the data. With this decentring of the human subject, methods such as interviews must be rethought (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010; Mazzei, 2013b; St. Pierre, 2008). Conventional approaches to interviews often centre the human; it is assumed their narratives or voice ‘speak the truth of consciousness and experience’ (Mazzei and Jackson, 2009: p.1). This privileging of the human subject, combined with humanist representative logic, posits a humanist voice that, as MacLure describes, ‘knows who she is, says what she means and means what she says’ (2009: p.104). This rational and coherent voice is
privileged as ‘authentic’ data that expresses or reveals an individual’s true and ‘lived’
experience.

In what Jackson and Mazzei (2013: p.262) term their ‘methodology-against-interpretivism’,
they suggest we need not give up on the interview as method; however, we do need to make
specific assumptions regarding data, voice and truth. This requires researchers to question
what we ask of data as told by participants: for instance, Jackson and Mazzei posit interview
data as ‘partial, incomplete’ and ‘always in a process of retelling and remembering’ (2013:
p.262). Drawing on Baradian understandings of performativity, Jackson and Mazzei (2012)
suggest narratives can be viewed as enactments rather than descriptions. They posit
narration as a performative practice – this idea acknowledging the entanglement of the
discursive and material in girls’ tellings. As opposed to being a representation of ‘reality’,
narration (language) is understood as ‘material articulations of the world’ (Barad, 2007:
p.139). As girls discuss the school ball, multiple forces and intensities are implicated in these
‘material articulations’, including space and time (Juelskjaer, 2013) and the researcher
(Bodén, 2015). Narratives/language are material-discursive intra-activity; therefore, thinking
about girls’ narratives as data is to understand them as open-ended and continual
becomings.

Utilising interviews within an agential realist account of school absenteeism, Bodén (2015)
discusses interviews as ‘enactments of agential cuts’: ‘An interview can be described as an
agential cut that in a quite harsh, but yet temporary, way freezes the entanglements of a
phenomenon’ (p.195). These cuts are provisional and allow for analysis of the various
elements within the phenomenon. Different cuts produce different realities (Barad, 2007) or
different perspectives of the school ball-girl. The researcher is entangled in the enactment of
agential cuts, not as the doer or chooser of these cuts, but because they are entangled in the
larger material-discursive arrangement (research-assemblage) of which these agential cuts
are made. As Bodén (2015: p.195) explains, ‘the questions asked, the time, place, and space
of the interview; the voices heard or unheard; the actions recognized or ignored—the where
and when and if of the interview—will enable some intra-actions and impede others’.

The interview itself can be thought of as an intra-active event (Bodén, 2015; Kuntz & Presnall,
2012; Stender Petersen, 2014) or an assemblage (Mazzei, 2013b) comprising language,
things, spaces, temporalities, bodies, environmental factors and affective forces. The
interviews for this research were conducted in the schooling environment; as such, they were
produced in-relation with school structures such as girls’ timetables, responsibilities,
architectural spaces like the classroom or meeting rooms, the location of other student or
teacher bodies in relation to these spaces, smells and sounds within the school environment.
Intervews were often concluded due to the school bell, or occasionally a teacher would walk
past or enter the interview space. In this sense, the length of an interview, the sound of
footsteps, an open or closed door ‘can matter’ (Stender Petersen, 2014: p.42) in the
production of data. Some participants had school commitments related to the ball, such as being a head girl, or they were on the school ball committee responsible for planning and organising the event. These forces are entangled in the becoming of the interview. As such, language or participant ‘voice’ is just one element within these assembled relations producing the phenomenon of the school ball-girl.

In thinking about what interview method-data might do, it is important to clarify the conceptual understandings of voice employed in the research. With a rethinking and decentring of the rational humanist subject – where does this leave voice? (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013; Mazzei, 2016). Rather than conceptualising voice as emanating from an individual subject, Mazzei (2013: p.732) reimagines voice as ‘an enactment among research-data-participants-theory-analysis’. Inspired by Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of Body without Organs, Mazzei theorises a Voice without Organs: ‘a voice thought as an assemblage, a complex network of human and nonhuman agents that exceeds the traditional notion of the individual’ (2013: p.734). It is a voice without a subject; there is no individual person or participant in an interview to which a single voice can be linked – everything is entangled – researcher-participant-data-theory-analysis. This posthumanist voice is ‘uncontainable’ – not bound to a singular body or by discursive and material binaries (Mazzei, 2013: p.739). Mazzei’s posthumanist stance towards interview data decentres the humanist subject and opens up a way to acknowledge the array of forces and intensities (human and more-than-human) that are entangled in the interview and data produced.

The idea of voice without a subject (Mazzei, 2016) reconfigures how we understand narratives and what they can do. Mazzei moves to envision ‘narratives’ as ‘the collective assemblages of enunciation, not a product of individual statements, or people, or pasts, but of duration and becomings’ (2016: p.159, italics in original). She calls them ‘lines of articulation’ that ‘do not narrate a past or an experience, they present the past in an entanglement of bodies, histories, classrooms, spaces, accents, futures, clothing’ (ibid) among other things. Here, entanglements of human and non-human exist on the same plane, neither one prior to the other. In the production of material effects, notions of subject and time are ruptured. Mazzei suggests this as a way for inquiry to resist the temptation of representation: if lines of articulation are not situated in linear time or specific locales, then it becomes impossible for them to represent individual ‘experience’. In this thesis, instead of using the term ‘narratives’ for verbal data, the term ‘fragments’ (MacLure, 2013a) is used to refer to these ‘collective assemblages of enunciation’ (Mazzei, 2016). Moreover, in conceptualising voice without a subject, words are not attributed to individual subjects (i.e. participants or researcher). Following each fragment, I have included details such as the year level, the method through which the fragment was generated (i.e. focus group, individual interview or video diary), and the number of voices within the fragment (including the researcher); however, comments are not attributed to individual names/persons, nor are the comments from the researcher differentiated from participants.
Encounters with interview data involve thinking about the network of connections and forces that produce the *Voice without Organs* (Mazzei, 2013) or *voice as becoming* (Mazzei, 2016). Rather than conceiving voice as a ‘thing’, attention turns to how voice functions (Mazzei, 2016): what ‘knowledge’ is produced? In my encounters with interview data, I am not looking for cohesive ‘narratives’ that can be articulated or organised into a set of shared experiences. Nor am I concerned whether ‘narratives’ are true, valid or consistent; whether they can be generalised to other contexts; or how well arguments hold together (MacLure, 2013a). These issues become irrelevant when there is no essential experience or individual voice. In this approach, new questions emerge: How does interview data work? What does this text or data produce? (Colebrook, 2000; St Pierre, 2001; Lenz Taguchi, 2012). How does voice as a ‘collision of forces’ (Mazzei, 2013: p.737) produce ball-girl becomings?

In a new materialist methodology, the status of language is reconfigured (MacLure, 2013a). As MacLure articulates ‘in the material-discursive assemblage’, we ‘cannot expect language to work in the old ways that were given by discourse . . . or at least, not only in those ways’ (2013a, p.663). In her argument for non- or post-representational research practices, MacLure calls for attention to the ‘materiality of language’: ‘its material force and its entanglements in bodies and matter’ (2013a: p.658). For MacLure, language becomes just one element within an assemblage of forces and intensities: ‘words collide and connect with things on the same ontological level, therefore language cannot achieve the distance and externality that would allow it to represent . . . the world’ (2013a: p.660). Like Mazzei’s *Voice without Organs*, language is not confined to, or purely emanating from, an already constituted speaking subject. Language is entangled with yet also exceeds the body, affecting other bodies, perhaps other participants in the interview or the researcher.

A material approach draws attention to the ‘bodily entanglements of language’ that emerged in interviews, such as girls’ sighs, groans, coughs, chuckles and laughter (MacLure, 2013a: p.664). Shifting bodily positions, hand gestures, raised eyebrows, screwed-up faces, feelings and sensations are further examples of language ‘issuing from the body; being impeded by the body; affecting other bodies’ (MacLure, 2013a: p.663). As girls discussed the school ball, utterances would often spark laughter, groans, expressive verbal and non-verbal signs of (dis)agreement. Accounting for these materialities means paying attention when sensations and intensities such as humour, mockery and disgust form part of the data. In order to challenge representational thought, MacLure argues we need to resist the urge to ‘interpret’ or dismiss these intensities, and instead ‘tangle with the materiality of language’ in an attempt to disrupt generalities, meanings and themes (2013a: p.665). Such an approach reconfigures not only how we understand language but also what counts as data. How can attending to these ‘bodily incursions into language’ (MacLure, 2013a: p.664) reconfigure interview method-data and the ‘knowledge’ produced?
Like MacLure (2013a), Mazzei and Jackson (2016) call for attention to be given to the materiality of voice (language). In doing so, they situate voice in an ‘agentic assemblage’: a ‘thing that is entangled with other things in an assemblage (Deleuze & Guatarri, 1987) that acts with an agential force (Bennett, 2010)’ (2016: p.1). These entangled things could be discursive signs, objects, utterances, bodies and spatial-temporalities; in the intra-activity of these material-discursive relations voice is (re)configured. Situating voice within an agentic assemblage (Bennett, 2010) posits a posthuman voice as ‘vibrant and agentic’ (Mazzei & Jackson, 2016: p.3). As an assemblage, it can act with a force to create new becomings and different conceptions of voice. As different forces enter assemblages, new becomings and assemblages are formed, perhaps one of critique. Voice is not attributable to a person, rather it is something that becomes in the entanglements of things – human and more-than-human, material and discursive. Positioning voice in the agentic assemblage enables an approach that decentres the intentional human subject and distributes agency among all elements within an assemblage (Bennett, 2004). This ‘entangled voice’ (Mazzei & Jackson, 2016: p.2) moves data analysis beyond a representational account, challenging taken for granted assumptions of what voice ‘is’ and what voice ‘can do’ in educational research. It requires a rethinking of interviews and attention to how elements, including voice, are connected in particular ways.

These insights urge me to think about the materialities, both predicted and unpredicted, that were part of the focus group and individual interviews: the classroom, furniture, paper, pens, lunches, the audio-recorder in the middle of the table. Documents such as newspaper article clippings, folded ball letters to parents fished out of school bags. Environmental factors such as the temperature of the room, lighting, bodies inside and outside the classroom, the school bell, timetables, sounds outside, bodily responses and feelings. Mobile phones inserted themselves into the interviews in various ways – the sharing of photographs of dresses, shoes, shopping and the ball itself. I also communicated with girls often via text to arrange interviews and the sharing of pictures. All of these material elements form part of the production of knowing – the becoming of what we understand as data and the ‘knowledge’ produced on the school ball-girl. Acknowledging the ‘materiality of fieldwork’ (Childers, 2013: p.599) takes seriously the ways materialities are entangled in the construction/becoming of phenomena (Bodén, 2015). The methods employed in this research bring together assemblages of human and more-than-human, discursive and the material. It becomes clear humans are not the only participants in the research.

**Data snaps – data-researcher (thinking-doing) encounters**

Conceptualising data as becoming has inspired me to engage with data differently. Instead of thinking about data as ‘passive objects’ that I have collected, sorted and analysed (Koro-Ljungberg & MacLure, 2013: p.219), my encounters with data recognise data’s ‘liveliness’ (Taylor, 2013: p.691) and capacity to choose or ‘work on me’ as researcher (Koro-Ljungberg,
I am inspired by Koro-Ljungberg’s call for researchers to engage creatively with data, to find our own ‘methodological amplifiers, interpretive ruptures, and creative spaces’ (2012: p.808). This call for engaging creatively with data is motivated by a desire not to capture what data ‘is’ or what it means, but rather to consider ‘what else can we do with data; and what does it do to us?’ (Koro-Ljungberg & MacLure, 2013: p.220). With these provocative questions in mind, I create my own ‘variations of data’ (Benozzo et al., 2013), which are referred to as ‘data snaps’. The word ‘snap’ is used here in an emergent, lively sense – they are a mattering – produced through entanglements of researcher, participant, computer and other (un)known material and affective forces. Data snaps might be thought of as ‘data-in-the-making’ (Springgay & Zaliwska, 2015: p.138) that emerge from my questioning of data (what it can do) and my relationship with it.

Data snaps are data-researcher (thinking-doing) encounters. These encounters involve the use of computer creative software (Photoshop, InDesign, AndreaMosaic) to generate a fragmentation, layering, blurring, a blowing apart of photographic data. Data snaps may work to interrupt our usual ‘perceptive style and habits of seeing’ (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012: p.134). For example, a blurring or layering of images may disrupt or subvert an anthropocentric gaze by making it is impossible to discern an individual (human) body or bodily features. Other snaps are an enfolding of photographic image with song lyrics or prose from Cinderella fairy tales and academic thought (as mentioned in the School-ball-girl matter(ings) chapter). We might think of these snaps through Barad’s (2007) concept of diffraction where the photograph, song lyrics, Cinderella prose and academic text are read through one another to produce something new. For me, data snaps are an attempt to ‘open up data, to diffract it, and to imagine what newness might be incited from it’ (Lenz Taguchi, 2012: p.270, italics in original). This ‘newness’ does not refer to new meanings about girls and the school ball; rather, it signals an interest in data ‘for what it produces, how it moves and for how it can be lived and sensed by researchers’ (Benozzo et al., 2013: p.309). In their creation, I find myself as researcher co-implicated in the becoming of data.

This creative engagement is inspired by recent work rethinking the notion of data (Allen, 2016a; Benozzo et al., 2013; Brkich & Barko, 2013; Holmes & Jones, 2013; Koro-Ljungberg & MacLure, 2013; Koro-Ljungberg, 2013; Otterstad & Waterhouse, 2016; Springgay & Zaliwska, 2015). This exciting work challenges the often taken-for-granted ideas about what data is, its role in research, and our relationship to it as researcher. In Springgay and Zaliwska’s (2015: p.139) creative experimentation with visual images, they explain how ‘rather than approach an image for what it might contain, we allowed it to live a new life, one that implicates us’. Relinquishing the desire to impose meaning on the images, Springgay and Zaliwska ‘learned to think about the images as more-than’ (ibid). For me, data snaps are an attempt to think about the ‘more-than’ of data: more-than a photograph, more-than a moment in time, more-than ‘truth’ or ‘reality’. Data snaps signal a letting go of data as an object of representation or
something separate to the researcher. They are a way to recognise and evoke the uncontainable and endless potential of data.

**Connecting with the researcher**

In detailing the research-assemblage it is clear the researcher is inextricably entangled: theoretical decisions, ethical considerations in relation to human participants, selecting and conducting research methods, encounters with data and the ‘knowledge’ produced. As explained, this entanglement is not one where I am an independent subject intervening in the research process (i.e. creating questions, selecting data); this framing would suggest the phenomena produced are a consequence of an intentional, autonomous researcher. In Baradian terms, as a human (and researcher), I am not a fully formed, pre-existing subject, but an ‘agential part of the material becoming of the universe’ (2007: p.178). This means as researchers, we are not outside of the phenomena produced. Instead, we are part of the material arrangement or ‘agential cuts’ that enact phenomena; it is about ‘understanding the world from within and as part of it’ (Barad, 2007: p.88). This refers to Barad’s onto-epistemology where the practices of knowing and being are mutually implicated and interdependent.

We are not only part of the ‘apparatus of knowing’ but we also experience our own becomings through the dynamics of intra-activity (Mazzei, 2013a). As the researcher becomes-with (Lenz Taguchi, 2012) the research, all manner of material-discursive and affective forces are implicated: memories, feelings, material things, spaces, discursive practices associated with being a female, a doctoral researcher, a teacher, a feminist, a student, and so on. During my own high schooling, I attended three balls: these memories and feelings are entangled with other forces, perhaps affecting the questions I asked or did not ask, my laughter and agreement in interviews, data that have grasped me or data that has been left out. These forces overlap with the pleasures and struggles of being a doctoral researcher: grappling with analysis-data, with theory, with supervisory feedback, with feelings of frustration, bewilderment and satisfaction. Becoming-researcher is entangled with material things: stacks of journal articles, handwritten notes, highlighters, a computer screen bordered with post-it notes – reminders, ideas and notes of encouragement, draft writing, supervisory feedback – handwritten annotations and coloured comment boxes on the screen, depleted pens, large glasses of wine, text books, the embodied-spatial sensations of home, library, conferences and university spaces. These material-discursive and affective forces are entangled (to varying extents) in research-researcher becomings, in ways that may be both unsettling and productive. Research is about entanglements. It is about mutual and co-constitutive becomings. The knowledge produced on the school ball – what is written in this thesis – is an intra-active becoming: as I am as researcher. As Barad would suggest: is it that I have written this thesis or has it written me? Perhaps, “we” have “intra-actively” written each other’ (2007: p.x). The practice of writing this thesis is ‘an iterative and mutually constitutive working out, and reworking, of (ibid) both thesis and myself as researcher.
If then, we as researchers become-with the research, then what are the responsibilities of the researcher? In a Baradian sense, issues of responsibility and accountability are thought of in terms of ‘what matters and what is excluded from mattering’ (2007: p.184). Agential cuts enact different phenomena (Barad, 2007) or, put another way, material-discursive intra-activities enact phenomena in different and situated ways (Lenz Taguchi & Palmer, 2013). Our engagement with the world as researchers has consequences (Barad, 2007), perhaps new realities or new ways of being, which are particularly significant in relation to feminist and political endeavours. However, as Hultman and Lenz Taguchi argue, ‘what we do as researchers intervenes with the world and creates new possibilities but also evokes responsibilities’ (2010: p.540). Our (in)ability to acknowledge the materialities in the methodological process of research is critical to how a phenomenon is constituted (Bodén, 2015: p.193), for instance, the materialities that are part of the interview method will enable some intra-actions and impede others. Ethically, we need to consider the material consequences these differential matterings have for the agents involved, for instance, the conclusions we might draw and what these might produce (Lenz Taguchi & Palmer, 2013).

Accounting for things and matter – whether human or non-human – is suggested to promote a more ethical practice (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010). This includes the entangled embodied researcher. It is not that the researcher needs to reflect on their positioning in the research (in a self-reflexive manner) and account for this influence, as this would imply they are at a distance from the research in order to be able to make these observations and judgements. Rather, it is thinking about the researcher as part of the research-assemblage, affecting and being affected by other relations. As Barad argues, ‘knowing is a matter of part of the world making itself intelligible to another part of the world’ (2007: p.185). We are part of the material-discursive intra-actions through which phenomena are constituted. Moreover, as researchers we are ‘made and unmade’ through this intra-activity: we ‘become something else in the process’ (Mazzei, 2013a: p.777). What is of interest is not what we become, but how these becomings form connections within the research-assemblage, and how these connections affect the production of knowing.

**Connecting with (human) participants**

This research involves an array of ‘participants’ – many of them more than human. Materialities such as objects, spatial arrangements and architecture are entangled with human bodies in the becoming of the school ball-girl. The following section provides methodological detail of the human participants in the study: specifically, who they were, recruitment and ethical considerations. As human participants enter the research-assemblage, new connections and relations form, for instance, with schooling spaces, principals, teachers, researcher-participant relations, ethical principles and ethics committees. Forty-one girls aged 16-18 years voluntarily took part in the research. As the school ball is an event for senior students, participants were in their final two years of secondary schooling:
either Year 12 (21 participants) or Year 13 (20). Participant ethnicities were self-identified including: New Zealand European/Pakeha (27), Maori (3), Sri Lankan (2), Chinese/Korean (1), Indian (1), European (3), Chinese (2), European/American (1), NZ/German (1).

**Research sites and recruitment**

Participants were recruited from two state-funded secondary schools (Years 9–13) in Auckland, New Zealand. One school was co-educational with a decile ranking of 10 and the other an all-girls school with a decile ranking of 9. In New Zealand, decile rankings are used as an indicator for government funding and show the extent the school draws their students from low socio-economic communities (Ministry of Education, 2016). Decile 1 schools have the highest proportion of low socio-economic students while decile 10 have the lowest; the lower the school’s decile, the more funding they receive. A school’s decile ranking does not conclusively indicate the overall socio-economic mix of the school or reflect the quality of education the school provides. While both schools were designated high decile, they had diverse ethnic and socio-economic student populations. The schools were located in different areas within the urban Auckland region and selected through both design and chance.

Initially, I aimed to recruit one secondary school for the study and approached schools I thought might be receptive to the research. I received a positive response from two schools and decided to include both as they varied in terms of their location and school composition, in that one was an all-girls school and the other co-educational. I use the pseudonyms Co-Ed High and All-Girls High when referring to the schools.

In order to recruit (human) participants, consent to approach students was sought from each school’s principal, who was given a Letter of Access to Student Participants (see Appendix D) outlining the research, along with a written Consent Form indicating their approval to approach students. Once consent had been obtained, I then liaised with the teacher in charge of the school ball committee: a group comprising both staff and students who were responsible for organising the ball event. The role of this teacher was to initially inform students of the research and invite them to attend a meeting with the researcher. The teacher was also a third party if a participant wanted to discuss any issues raised during the research with someone other than the researcher (as discussed shortly under ethical considerations). Recruitment also involved the dissemination of a research flyer (see Appendix A) in student-centred locations around the school, such as senior common rooms. This flyer advertised the research and invited students to attend a meeting to discuss the project in more detail. Senior students also shared this flyer on their Year 12 and 13 Facebook pages. I met with interested students at a specified classroom during their lunch break; during this meeting I discussed the research, explained the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form (see Appendix E) and answered any questions. The discussion outlined the aim of the research and detailed the various ways students could choose to participate, such as through interviews and/or sharing visual images (see Appendix B for visual data flyer). I also explained issues such as
anonymity and that participants had the choice of how their visual data could be used, for
instance, by being shared in written publications or viewed solely by the researcher.

Ethical considerations and approval

Approval for the research was sought and granted from the Human Participant Ethics
Committee at the University of Auckland (See Appendix G). A key concern of the ethics
committee is to ensure the research process does not compromise the emotional and
physical safety of the human participants. The ethics approval process involved the
submission of an application form that outlined justification for the research, participant
sample and data methods. A Letter of Access to Student Participants (School Principal),
Participant Information Sheets (Teacher and Participant) and the related consent forms (three
in total – see Appendices D to F), interview schedules (see Appendix C) and recruitment
poster (see Appendix A) were submitted for the approval of the ethics committee. Upon
submitting the ethics application, the research was granted conditional approval upon minor
revisions and the provision of further documentation. These amendments primarily addressed
the following key ethical considerations, which I outline below: minimising the risk of
participant harm, recruitment, the ability to withdraw information and anonymity.

Research involving girls’ thoughts on gender and sexuality can be considered ‘sensitive’ as it
is a topic that delves into the ‘private sphere’ of girls’ lives (Lee, 1993). When conducting
‘sensitive’ research, participants may be more at risk of experiencing emotional harm
(Liamputtong, 2007). In order to minimise potential harm to participants, I was required to
confirm to the ethics committee that a high priority would be placed on verbally
communicating all support options that were available for participants, in the event that
emotional or other issues arose in connection with the research: these support services
included the school counsellor, liaison teacher and the helpline service Youthline. In addition
to verbally communicating the support options, they were also outlined on the Participant
Information Sheet. During the ethics approval process, an additional support person was
added: a teacher from each school was made available should students have any issues they
might want to discuss with someone other than the researcher. In both schools, this teacher
was also the person who initially informed students of the research. Originally, the research
design involved the researcher speaking to students and inviting them to take part in the
research; however, this ‘direct approach’ was not one ‘typically favoured by the committee’; as
such, the ethics committee asked whether it might be possible for a third party (e.g. staff
member) to initially inform students to minimise the risk of coercion. This staff member would
then invite interested students to attend a meeting with the researcher to hear more about the
project. Although this suggestion was an attempt to minimise coercion, it could be argued that
this strategy was also problematic. There was a high probability the students knew this
person as they work at the school. As such, this existing student-teacher or student-staff

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4 Extracts from University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee correspondence
relationship may be implicated in a student’s decision to participate in the research or not. Nevertheless, in accordance with the ethics committee’s advice, I chose to introduce the liaison/support role and a Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form was created (see Appendix F).

In choosing to participate in the research, participants were given the option as to how they wanted to be involved. For instance, they could choose to participate in a focus group discussion, individual interview and/or visual data methods – photographs or video (the coming section provides a detailed discussion of these methods). This flexibility gave participants some control over their involvement in the research project. In order to minimise the risk of harm, participants were able to withdraw from the research at anytime without explanation. They also had the ability to withdraw information provided both visually and in individual/focus group interviews up until a specified date. Students who participated in individual interviews were also given the opportunity to edit the interview transcript – indicating their preference to do so on the consent form. All individual interview participants opted to do so. While students were over 16 years old and able to give their own consent to participate in the research, the ethics committee asked for comment regarding advising parents of the research and allowing them to ask questions. It was agreed parents could be informed of the research and this process would be managed by the school in accordance with their communication procedures.

Like all research, issues of confidentiality and anonymity are particularly pertinent (Wiles, Crow, Heath, & Charles, 2008). Research participants were informed of the extent to which anonymity and confidentiality could be assured in publication and dissemination of data. As focus group interviews involve the simultaneous participation of more than one person, confidentiality could not be guaranteed; however, participants were actively encouraged, in the Participant Information Sheet and at the start of each focus group interview, to maintain confidentiality of the information shared under these circumstances. Participants selected the composition of focus group interviews; they were often groups of friends and knew each other well. In accordance with the research’s theoretical approach to participant voice, individual participants are not named (as discussed in the section: Language, voice and the ‘subject’). Pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the participating schools, and the names of locations and surrounding schools have also been changed.

The use of visual methods raises particular issues in regards to anonymity (Allen, 2015a). When working with visual materials, such as photographs and video, the practice of anonymisation of individuals is problematic, if not impossible (Banks, 2001). When viewing photographs and video diaries, participants and locations are recognisable and identifiable. The issue of anonymity is a key ethical issue and source of contention and conflict for visual researchers (Wiles, Coffey, Robinson, & Heath, 2012). For many researchers, decisions regarding anonymity involve balancing consideration of participants’ rights to be seen and
heard with a researcher’s responsibilities to protect participants (Wiles et al., 2012). In order to make an informed decision, participants were fully informed both verbally and in writing (Participant Information Sheet) as to how this visual data would be used and disseminated: photographs and video stills might be included in written reports and publications, or shown in conference presentations. Participants elected whether their visual data could be included in written reports and publications, teaching and conference presentations, or whether this data was only to be viewed by the researcher. Participants indicated this choice in writing on their Consent Form. While initially I planned to present the visual data in its entirety, and obtained approval from both the ethics committee and participants to do so, I have ultimately decided to blur faces to conceal participant identity. This has been a difficult decision, and one that has ultimately rested on my lack of control of images (and potential harm this might cause participants) once they have been released or shown in their entirety. The identification of participants may have unpredictable consequences that exceed my control as researcher and the intended use of images. If participants are identifiable, this could also inadvertently identify the participating school. This possibility presented a conflict in regards to ensuring anonymity to the school.

Research ‘methods’

The research employed a range of methods including visual – participant-created photographs and video (Allen, 2017; Pink, 2012), observation (Punch, 2005), focus group and individual interviews (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999; Michell, 1999), to produce an overlapping and entangled collection of data. I use the term ‘method’ tentatively and recognise labels such as these have conceptual and historical connections with particular theoretical disciplines and research methodologies. I am using the term in a way that acknowledges method as a technique, practice or process (Springgay, 2016). It recognises an approach to research that includes planning and design, in keeping with the ethical and academic requirements of PhD research; however, while recognising methods as planned, they also have the capacity to exceed or resist organised or linear structures. Methods can be conceptualised as becoming in that they are ‘temporary structures that are being regenerated again and again’ (Koro-Ljungberg, 2016: p.80). As such, methods may accomplish something planned or something unanticipated.

In its becoming, methods form connections that create data. The methods employed in this research do not independently produce understandings of the school ball-girl; rather, they overlap and connect with other relations such as the researcher, feminist new materialist theory, participants and spaces to intra-actively produce the phenomenon studied. Bodén (2016: p.56) theorises these entanglements as ‘empirical productions’, which emphasise the way empirical materials do not pre-exist our engagements – they are not simply waiting ‘out there’ to be collected. With this view, empirical productions do not end when a recording device is switched off: they are ‘continuously created and engaged with during writing’
as they connect with theory, other data, researcher memories and other (un)known forces. Creative engagements with data in the form of Data Snaps are an example of the endless production of data: the layering of photographic images, for instance, creates a ‘new’ image and may provoke new thinking.

The methods employed in this research were designed to garner girls’ thoughts both before and after the school ball. The fieldwork predominantly began with focus group discussions and individual interviews prior to the event. Girls shared their thoughts after the ball through focus group discussions, video diaries and email conversations. The majority of visual data was shared following the event. The fieldwork lasted seven months in duration including pre- and post-school ball data collection.

**Focus group interviews**

Focus group methods have been used by a number of researchers to explore sensitive topics such as sexuality (Allen, 2005; Farquhar & Das, 1999; Frith, 2000; Jordan et al., 2007) as they can provide conditions where participants feel more comfortable talking about sexuality-related topics (Frith, 2000). As the dynamics of the focus group involve the mutual sharing of thoughts and experiences, this can enhance participant comfort and encourage the contribution of their perspectives, particularly if there is an element of commonality among the group. Depending on how focus groups are facilitated, they can also offer the potential of being participant led, where participants steer discussion in directions that interest them (Frith, 2000). Here, the role of the researcher becomes less of an interviewer and more to facilitate and record group interaction (Punch, 2005). As part of new materialist social inquiry (Fox and Alldred, 2014), interviews and observations are useful in identifying relations within assemblages and how participants may be situated within them. The focus moves from human-centred actions or experiences that are represented as ‘reality’, to the affective flows and capacities produced through assembled relations. Relations may include time and space (Juelskjaer, 2013), the human and more-than-human, material and discursive (Bodén, 2015).

Focus group discussions offered a public presentation of girls’ thoughts and ideas surrounding girls, femininity and the school ball (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999): for instance, how they defined and experienced the event; what they felt was expected of girls attending the ball; the material and corporeal practices they engaged in. The discussion was a ‘public presentation’ of their thoughts in that it was a group discussion: the sharing of their ideas is in front of and in conjunction with their peers. In addition to verbal ‘narratives’, focus group interviews also captured sighs, laughter, scoffs, groans and singing. Focus group discussions connected participants with one another and the researcher. As explained earlier, these connections also involved more-than-human relations such as the schooling space, material objects, timetables and bells. The participants were invited to participate in focus group interviews either before and/or after the school ball. The focus groups conducted prior to the ball generated a sense of girls’ expectations, feelings and imaginings, ball preparations and
embodied practices forming the lead up to the ball. For many of the Year 12 participants, the coming ball was their first; the Year 13 students had mostly attended the ball the year prior. As a result, their focus group discussions also included memories and reflections on previous experiences and their thoughts on the current ball. The post-ball focus groups garnered girls’ thoughts and experiences after the event: what they liked or disliked, whether it was what they imagined, what they would do differently next time, or if there would even be a next time.

Common points of discussion included clothing, dates, girls’ imaginings and expectations, preparations, the financial cost of the ball, beauty-body practices, ball talk, pre- and post-ball plans (see appendix C for interview questions). The discussion also involved a collective brainstorming activity (on large communal paper) that invited participants to write or draw what they felt was expected of girls attending the ball. These expectations pertained to how they felt they should look, dress, feel or behave. Lastly, the focus group discussion invited participants to respond to the dominant ideas or themes surrounding the school ball that emerge in the media. This discussion was stimulated by examples from media or popular culture, such as newspaper articles (see examples in the Introduction chapter) or movies. In total, 33 participants chose to participate in a focus group discussion: 14 focus groups were conducted in total, 10 before the ball and four after. Focus group interviews were held at a convenient location at school, usually empty classrooms or student meeting rooms, and were scheduled in free periods or lunchtimes. Participants sat around a small cluster of desks and the interviews usually lasted 45 minutes to one hour.

Individual semi-structured interviews/emails

Participants were given the option of an individual semi-structured interview. Three participants opted for this method and the interviews were all conducted prior to the ball. All three participants had been to a school ball before, so the discussion included both the previous and current school ball: their memories and thoughts on last year’s ball, whether the ball lead-up – their feelings, expectations, preparations, engagements in corporeal practices – was similar or different to last year. Individual interviews were held at school and lasted approximately one school period (50–60 minutes). There were also eight students who shared their thoughts after the school ball via email. Two of these students had participated in an individual interview; the other six had participated in a focus group discussion prior to the ball, but were unable to attend a post-ball discussion due to timetabling or sickness. Instead, they opted to email their thoughts, often in conjunction with the sharing of visual data.

Visual data – video and photographs

Participants were invited to share their thoughts and experiences of the school ball through video and photographs. Visual methods have primarily been marginalised in educational research, which has typically relied on number and word-based methodologies (Prosser, 2007). Using visual methods in relation to schooling and sexuality is considered even more
unorthodox (Allan & Tinkler, 2015; Allen, 2011a). While the use of visual methods in education remains largely an unconventional method, Allen (2011a; 2017) argues photo-based methods can offer qualitatively different insights into how sexual meanings are constituted at school than more traditional data collection methods. For example, photo methods have the potential to capture the embodied and material manifestations of sexuality (Allen, 2011a). Allan and Tinkler (2015: p.8) similarly advocate for the potential of visual methods in the field of gender and education: they note how visual methods have ‘productive links’ with feminist new materialist theories as they have the potential to ‘allow researchers to focus on what is not yet seen or said (i.e. not already constituted in discourse)’. The work of Lenz Taguchi and Palmer (2013), Allen (2016a; 2016b; 2017) and Hultman and Lenz Taguchi (2010) are recent examples of this work.

The last decade has seen an increase in research that explores images generated by the participants themselves (Guillemin & Drew, 2010). Inspired by this trend, the current study employs the use of participant-generated video and photographs, as opposed to images taken by the researcher. Such an approach offers girls an alternative means, other than verbal, for sharing their understandings and experiences of the school ball. Visual methods can show embodied-material and affective elements of the school ball that may not be captured through verbal interviewing, for instance, facial gestures, body language and movement in the case of video. These elements are entangled with material ‘things’, practices and spaces. The use of visual methods enables the research process to extend beyond the schooling environment. While the interviews took place at school, the majority of photographs and videos were taken outside of school. This is particularly useful, as the school ball is not confined within school boundaries. The school ball and its entangled relations move within and beyond the immediate school setting, entering places such as homes, bedrooms and shopping malls.

In addition to photographs, participants had the option of sharing their thoughts and experiences of the school ball with video. This could be in the form of ‘video diaries’: short videos recorded on mobile phones before, during or after the ball. As an audio-visual medium, video provides rich data containing embodied visual clues about girls’ experiences of the school ball. Haw and Hadfield note ‘video allows for the analysis of a social phenomenon at increasingly finer levels of granularity’ (2011: p.26). As opposed to a static image produced by a photograph, video offers a moving image capturing verbal and non-verbal data: behaviours, interactions, facial expressions, material elements and speech. These human forces are entangled with the more-than-human, including objects, lighting, spaces and sounds. While the increased use of video in the social sciences is well documented (Banks, 2001; Pink, 2001; Prosser, 1998), there has been minimal use of participant-generated video ‘diaries’ within the fields of girlhood and/or sexuality studies. Notable exceptions include Holliday’s (2004) examination of queer identities and a small but developing number of studies examining girls in relation to their everyday lived experiences.
(Bloustein, 1998), social class and femininity (Pini & Walkerdine, 2011), tweens and popular culture (S. Jackson, Vares, & Gill, 2013), gender, identity and place (Ivinson & Renold, 2013; Ivinson & Renold, 2016). To date, there has been no research exploring the school ball (or prom) utilising video as a visual method. In total, 21 participants chose to participate in the visual data method (photographs and/or video). The sharing of photographs was the preferred form of visual data: 17 girls shared photographs (a total of 108 photos were received): 4 girls shared videos (recorded footage totalling 19 minutes).

Observation

The research involved observations of school ball committee meetings (involving students) and the school balls themselves. These observations were unstructured; my aim was to look and listen, observing the events as they naturally unfold (Punch, 2005). The observations gave me a feel or sense of the event and atmosphere, and the opportunity to see and talk to participants. Visually, I observed the venue: how it was organised, the entrance, dance floor, decorated tables, photography stations and booths, the lighting and decorative features. I watched the way ball attendees entered the ball, their movement around the school ball space, the visual array of clothing, corsages, bodies, hair and make-up. I could hear music, the hum of human voice and movement in-connection with the architectural space. Certain things caught my attention – perhaps sparked by a participant comment in the interviews: sartorial choices, beauty-body practices, high heels, dates, facial expressions and bodily movements. Choosing to simply ‘soak up’ the atmosphere, I did not take any photographs or make any recordings. In this study, my preference for the visual data was that it was generated and shared by participants themselves. I made observational notes after the ball: things that I found interesting or resonated with participant comments. These notes do not suggest an external observer that is separate and ‘looking in’; rather, these notes are produced through my engagements with the school ball setting – my actions, feelings and memories. I attended three school balls in this observational capacity: two balls at All-Girls High (separate Year 12 and Year 13 balls) and one ball at Co-Ed High (Year 12 and 13 combined).

Concluding—continuing thoughts

Conceptualising the research methodology as becoming accounts for its capacity to shift and change in ways that are productive and generative. If we think about theory-participants-data-researcher as relational and entangled, then data (and data encounters) become infinite and multiple (Koro-Ljungberg, 2016). With this view, research is always unfinished and perhaps open to new interpretations. Through continual (re)configurings new possibilities for conceptualising the school ball-girl emerge. The thesis now turns to encounters with data to explore some of these possibilities.
“You’ll have only till midnight,”
the Fairy Godmother said.
“At the stroke of twelve, the spell
will be broken, and everything
will be as it was before.”
(Walt Disney, 1998)

“The past is never left
behind, never finished
once and for all.”
(Karen Barad, 2007)

In a fairy tale “the world does
not operate as we know it: time
and space shrink and stretch”
(Marina Warner, 2014)
Once upon a space and time

Unlike fairy tales, where time can shrink, bend and stretch (Warner, 2014), conventional time is usually considered linear – made up of discrete consecutive moments. This chapter brings together the Baradian notion of spacetimemattering, the concept of assemblage (Bennett, 2005; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) and theories of affect (Deleuze, 1988) to rethink the school ball in relation to space and time. Rather than an isolated spatial-temporal event, the school ball is understood as a continual process of becoming through shifting entanglements of space, time and matter. This chapter considers how the school ball is intra-actively produced through multiple spaces and temporalities, troubling popular constructions of the ball as a milestone in a ‘coming of age’ trajectory (Best, 2000). Establishing the entanglement of space, time and matter opens up possibilities for imagining the school ball-girl in ways that do not rely on linear or developmental logic. Through the continual (re)configuring of spacetimematter, the ball-girl is not situated in a particular moment in time but entangled with space, time and matter.

The chapter begins by introducing the theoretical approach that opens up a rethinking of space and time. Drawing on Barad (2007), I consider how the ‘past’, ‘future’ and the ‘now’ are threaded through multiple school ball spacetimematterings. This discussion draws attention to the ways girls’ memories, hopes and imaginings enact the ‘past’ and ‘future’ as already part of the ‘present’. Here, the ball-girl is produced through intra-active relations, where space, time and matter are overlapping co-constitutive forces. Entangled with spacetimematter are an array of affective forces (feelings, intensities) that circulate in-between bodies, practices and imaginings: for example, I theorise ‘effort’ not as something emanating from the human, but as a powerful affective force that emerges in the entanglement of things, discourses and embodied practices. In addition to these affective forces, I consider the multiple spatial-temporalities that co-constitute the school ball, troubling the notion of the ball as ‘just one night’. Lastly, the chapter explores the affective materiality of atmospheric space and the force it exerts in school ball-girl becomings.

Theorising entanglements of space and time

This chapter is premised on an understanding of time and space as relational and entangled (Barad, 2001; Massey, 1994). From the field of human geography, Doreen Massey’s (1992) influential work posits an understanding of ‘space-time’ in which time and space are inseparable. Moving beyond conceptualisations of space as static and subsequently opposed to, or devoid of, time, Massey argues space is constituted out of social relations. Social relations are inherently dynamic, and as such it becomes impossible to conceive of space as a ‘flat’ or static surface. The conceptualisation of space as produced through social relations means space is imbued with power relations, something Massey refers to as a kind of ‘power-geometry’ (1994: p.149). Social relations of space are interpreted and experienced differently,
depending upon one’s positioning within them, thus constituting the plurality or multiplicities of space-time. In this framing, space is always in the process of being made and remade, it never ends or closes. Massey’s theorisations are particularly productive in thinking about the relationality, multiplicity and openness of space and time. Rather than being independent or separate ‘things’, space and time are understood as dynamic and relational forces in the becoming of the school ball.

Barad’s (2007) agential realist framework extends Massey’s work. Not only are time and space relational, but space and time are produced through the dynamics of intra-activity. This means time is not understood as a given externality or a ‘succession of evenly spaced individual moments’, nor is space merely a ‘container’ for things/people to inhabit; rather, the dynamics of intra-activity constitute the making and marking of space and time (Barad, 2007: p.180). If temporality is constituted through iterative intra-actions, then time only makes sense in the context of specific phenomena; like time, phenomena are produced through agential intra-actions. Time is no longer universally given but is articulated or made through various material practices (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012). For Barad, spatiality is produced through intra-actions that enact specific boundaries. Through the reconfiguring of boundaries, notions of ‘interior’ and ‘exterior’ are reworked (Barad, 2001); the on-going process of the material (re)configuring of boundaries continually (re)structures spatial relations. This continual (re)making of space and time suggests intra-actions do not occur in space and time but are of space and time.

Baradian understandings of space and time displace the usual sense of time as chronological. What we take to be ‘past’, ‘present’ and ‘future’ are no longer separate or sequential; rather they are entangled with one another. Barad describes the making and marking of time as a ‘lively material process of enfolding’ where ‘the past and the future are enfolded participants in matter’s iterative becoming’ (2007: p.181). This means there is no inherent determinate relationship between ‘past’, ‘present’ and ‘future’, nor do they follow one another in a linear fashion. In this entanglement or intra-activity, the ‘past’ is no longer determined or pre-existing, nor does the ‘future’ progressively unfold; rather, the ‘past’ and ‘future’ are continually reworked through the dynamics of intra-activity. By drawing attention to these temporal entanglements, time is no longer static or linear, but a relational force in ball-girl becomings.

In an agential realist sense, matter is not a fixed substance but a ‘dynamic intra-active becoming’ (Barad, 2007: p.170). Matter is productive and implicated in the production of space and time, a process Barad refers to as ‘spacetimemattering’ (2007: p.179). Space, time and matter are produced together in one on-going movement: they are overlapping, intertwined and co-constitutive forces. Barad’s reframing of space and time as spacetimemattering offers a way to think about spatiality and temporality as co-existing forces in the becoming of the school ball-girl. Bodies (the ball-girl for instance) are not located or
positioned within school ball space, rather bodies, space and time are materialised through the dynamics of intra-activity, more specifically spacetimematterings. Establishing the entanglement of space, time and other matter blurs conventional spatial and temporal borders of the school ball. Rather than a fixed space or moment in time, the school ball is continually becoming anew. This reframing of the school ball provides openings for understanding the ball-girl differently; rather than conceptualising the school ball as a ‘coming of age’ ritual that ‘turns a girl into a woman’ (Tay, 2007), ball-girl becomings are constantly reconfigured by multiple and non-linear spacetimematterings.

**Re-assembling the school ball: past–present–future**

Following Barad, the ‘past’ and ‘future’ are considered intra-actively entangled in girls’ enactments of the school ball and mutually implicated in the becoming of the ball-girl. The past and future are key components in the school ball spatial-temporal assemblage in that they are always already part of the ‘present’. Vestiges of the past and future permeate participants’ talk about the school ball: memories of seeing older sisters go to school balls; perceptions of the ball imbued with history, movies and fairy tales; the hope that the ball will be special and memorable. In a Baradian sense, we might think of it as ‘re-turning (to) the past’, not a returning as in reflecting on the past, but a ‘re-turning, turning it over and over again, tasting the rich soil from which ideas spring’ (Barad, 2014: p.184). Rather than time unfolding in a linear fashion, girls’ imaginings of the ball, their expectations and memories, move across, beyond and in-between past, present and future. The following fragments enact this flow of multiple tenses and temporalities:\(^5\):

*So what are the positive things about the ball?*

*The dancing [laughter], like the dancing would probably be the best bit*

*And like the excitement of like getting ready*

*Yeah [multiple]*

*Getting ready, the pre-ball and taking photos all together is so good*

*Mmm [multiple]*

*Like that bit is exciting*

*Yeah the photos are pretty good*

*You kind of like have talked about it your whole lives kind of thing, like going to your ball*

*Yeah seeing my sister go to hers, like, I was always like ‘oh I want to go to my ball’*

*Yeah, so exciting*

*(Year 13, focus group, 3 voices)*

*How long have people been talking about the ball?*

*About half way through last year [laughter]*

*Since Year 9! When you’re in Year 9, I know lots of students, I was one of those students, don’t judge me [directed towards other participant], like they look forward to, they see the ball*

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\(^5\) As explained in the previous chapter, this research employs a posthumanist approach to voice (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013; Mazzei, 2013; 2016). For ease of reading, a new line signifies a new voice; however, words are not attributed to individual names or persons (i.e. participants or researcher), nor are the comments from the researcher differentiated from participants. The details following each fragment denote the year level of participants, method through which the data fragment was generated, and the number of entangled voices (including the researcher).
as part of becoming a senior, and they look forward to it because everyone talks about it, they see it happening, they see their big sisters or they see photos and they’re like oh this is a really big glamorous event, when is that ever going to happen again? Like I think that’s why people try so hard, you get to pretend that you’re sort of famous, do all the glamorous glitzy stuff at the cost of spending so much money

(Year 12, focus group, 3 voices)

The multiple temporalities and spaces enacted here include: references to childhood, beginning high school, balls attended by siblings, preparations, getting ready, the evening of the school ball and sharing photos after the ball. Tenses and temporalities shift within each fragment, times bleeding through one another: what the ball is, ‘part of becoming a senior’, was, ‘you kind of like have talked about it your whole lives’, and will be, ‘a really big glamorous event’. The past and future materialise via girls’ memories, both actual and potential. The past surfaces as girls recall looking forward to and talking about the ball since childhood or the beginning of high school (Year 9 – four years prior). Seeing older sisters attend the ball or viewing ball photos on Facebook fuels this anticipation. One voice declares ‘being one of those students’ who have looked forward to the ball since beginning Year 9. Memories enact not only the past but also the future, in that the school ball holds the promise of potential memories. The ball is considered a rare event and therefore ‘memorable’ and ‘special’ for some girls: as one participant notes, ‘when is that ever going to happen again?’ The ball provides the opportunity for whole year groups and friends to come together. Many girls articulated this as a particularly positive and special aspect of the ball, especially Year 13 students who were in their final year of schooling.

Traces of history, tradition and fairy tale emerge in girls’ imaginings of the school ball. These perceptions are entangled with affective forces such as excitement, as well as expectations and ambivalence. The following fragment is one example:

I’ve got sort of high expectations but then ‘cause I’m helping organise it, I’m sort of like… mmm…maybe not
Expectations in what kind of way?
Like ‘cause you see all this American commercialised stuff and then you like think it’s going to be like the movies, and then you’re like, my ball must be like that
Mmm [multiple]
I think everyone is sort of different, like some people are fine with spending, having quite a low budget and making it work but some are like ‘oh this is the dream’
Go all out
Go all out and be a princess
Yeah [laughter]
And that’s ok

(Year 12, focus group, 4 voices)

Residue from childhood stories and movies emerge in comments such as ‘you think it’s going to be like in the movies’ and ‘go all out and be a princess’. Images from television and fairy tales enter the assemblage as ‘material-discursive imaginaries’ (Lenz Taguchi & Palmer,
2013: p.680); one participant notes how ‘American commercialised stuff’ can influence perception and expectations of the ball. These images from television and stories intra-act with bodies, clothing, talk and emotions, for instance, feelings of uncertainty and critique:

Well it doesn’t really appeal that much, it just seems a bit you know, materialistic and the reason behind it has sort of gone with the years as well, like, it just doesn’t have the same value that it used to. It’s, I don’t know, also it’s really expensive and I don’t know whether I care enough to spend that much money

Mmm
And it’s ridiculous the amount of worth people put into things like this, cause yeah
For one night it’s a bit too much, I put worth into it, but not that much worth

(Year 12, focus group, 3 voices)

Ripples of history emerge in this fragment where imaginings of the school ball are imbued with historical resonance: one participant declaring the ball was ‘materialistic and the reason behind it has sort of gone with the years’. School balls in New Zealand have been a school tradition for senior students for many years (Tay, 2007; White, 2007). The history of this event is not prior and past, but rather materialises in and as current balls. Historical legacies of the event are part of the array of ideas and concepts that form the contemporary school ball. In the fragment above, vague historical notions of the ball infuse current imaginings: ‘it just doesn’t have the same value that it used to’. As such, this participant was undecided as to whether she was going to attend the ball and if she cared enough to ‘spend that much money’. Imaginings of the school ball are entangled with feelings of both excitement and ambivalence:

I’m definitely going. I’m really excited [laughter]

Same
So you always knew you wanted to go?
Yup, I always like looked at everyone, they posted their ball pictures and I just always thought, oh my gosh! I really want to go, get all my make-up done and look really pretty
Even when I first started high school I was like oh my gosh, yes this is like the start of when I’m going to be able to go to the ball, high school is when you go to the ball, this is exciting [agreement and laughter]
[groan] Oh my gosh
[laughter]
So this is your first ball. Do you know what to expect? Or what do you hope for?
I’m not expecting much, I’m completely opposite, I didn’t like never thought about the ball, it’s just like, Meh [shrugs shoulders], yeah I might go, it’s more the fact that everyone is going that I might go, like if a few of my friends weren’t going I’d just hang out with them instead
I guess the only expectations we can have is from looking at other people’s photos from previous years and like just hearing about what they say, and everyone that I know that’s been to a ball, they say it’s really amazing and stuff, so it’s always a good time
I have like a massive expectation, I want it to be so amazing [group laughter] but everyone I talk to is ‘oh it’s really boring and the food is really bad’
Oh yeah I’ve heard the food is terrible
And there wasn’t anything to do and like all this stuff
I'm setting my standards really low, so I'll probably be amazed once I get there, I'll be like oooh
Actually that's a good idea

(Year 12, focus group, 4 voices)

This fragment enacts multiple temporalities (past-present-future) and feelings of anticipation, excitement and ambivalence, these affective forces intra-actively entangled with memories, imaginings and expectations. Mutual enthusiasm for the ball, ‘oh my gosh! I really want to go’, mixes with a lack of enthusiasm, ‘it’s just like, meh, yeah I might go’. The utterance ‘meh’ and accompanying shoulder shrug succinctly convey her ambivalence towards the ball. The participant explains how she has very low expectations and, like some others, did not wish to spend a large amount of money on the occasion. This ambivalence was evident not only through verbal comments but also bodily responses. As the first two participants laughed and talked about looking forward to the ball since starting high school, the third lets out an audible groan and accompanying ‘oh my gosh’: the tone of this utterance manifesting a sense of bafflement and friendly mockery.

This affective bodily response is an example of the materiality of language where ‘language is in and of the body; always issuing from the body; being impeded by the body; affecting other bodies’ (MacLure, 2013: p.663). As the groan issues forth from her body, I imagine her eyes rolling in accompaniment; both affective bodily responses to her peers’ animated and enthusiastic talk about the ball. The participant’s groan and ‘oh my gosh’ evoked laughter from the ‘enthusiastic’ participants, further adding to the flow of affect (Fox, 2013). The phrase ‘oh my gosh’ was uttered by all three girls during the conversation, but for some it enacted a sense of enthusiasm and delight. ‘Oh my gosh’ moments can be understood as an affective response of the body (Mulcahy, 2016); the affective force, perhaps excitement or ambivalence, varied depending on other entangled relations. Bodily entanglements of language (MacLure, 2013) such as laughter, groaning and exclamations ‘meh’ and ‘oh my gosh’ produce feelings and sensations that circulate in and among this discussion: humour, anticipation, ambivalence, excitement, bewilderment, indifference and jovial mockery. These sensations or affective forces articulate the material force of language and its entanglements with body and matter (MacLure, 2013).

School ball as becoming: one night and more

In developing an understanding of the school ball as becoming, this chapter is concerned with the ways the school ball moves across, beyond and in-between multiple temporalities (i.e. past-present-future) and multiple spaces. Exploring the entangled relations of space and time, the school ball is not merely ‘one night’ confined to, or defined as, a few hours in which girls inhabit the physical space of the school ball venue. Rather, the school ball is produced through material-discursive relations, and depending on the relations the school ball can be both one night and much more. In this next section, school ball preparations and ‘build up’ are
examined not as separate to the school ball (in time or space) but as spacetimematterings, through which the school ball and ball-girl become. Furthermore, preparations encompass materialities (bodies, clothing, things), places, discourses, ideas and imaginings, all of which are implicated in the production of space and time.

Within a new materialist ontology, it no longer makes sense to view the school ball as an isolated temporal and spatial event. Conceptualising the school ball as spacetimematterings blurs spatial-temporal boundaries: there is no longer a clear divide between the lead-up to the ball, getting ready on the day, the actual ball itself, post-ball conversations and the viewing/sharing of photos. Instead, they are relational intra-active forces that collaboratively enact the school ball. Such an approach troubles the school ball as an event set in chronological time or limited to a specific physical space. The following fragment enacts this blurring of temporal and spatial boundaries as girls discuss school ball preparations and their parents’ thoughts about the ball:

*My mum liked coming around with me and trying on the dresses and stuff, and then but my Dad is like 'why is this so expensive?' Because it’s the school ball! It's just a disco’ [imitating Dad’s voice]. It is not just a disco. He doesn’t understand what it means to a girl*

*I went away with my Mum and we got the dress together, I paid for it and when we got back I showed it to my Dad, and he asked ‘how much did that cost?’ and when I told him he was like ‘that is so expensive’, but I didn’t really think about it*

*It’s interesting that you said he doesn’t get what it means to a girl, so what does it mean? What doesn’t he get?*

*It’s just like one thing, but for a girl it’s like all the preparation, all the organisation, it’s all build up, so for someone to just say ‘oh it’s just one night’, yeah it’s just one night but it’s one night of the result of everything that’s happened: all of the pressure, all the organisation, all the prep, all the hair, make up, and yeah*

*(Year 12, focus group, 3 voices)*

In this enactment, the school ball is more than an isolated spatial-temporal event with clear boundaries, that is, the school ball venue or a clearly defined point in time. As one voice explains, ‘it’s just one night but it’s one night of the result of everything that’s happened’: the pressure, organisation, preparations and other entangled forces. These elements are not independent of the ball, they are intra-active forces in its becoming. Preparations are a particularly salient aspect of the school ball: shopping; choosing what to wear; planning hair and make-up; pre-ball preparations; organising dates, transport and post-ball activities. These preparations can begin months in advance and are an example of the ways the school ball encompasses multiple spatial-temporalities.

Ball preparations extend across numerous spaces: school, girls’ homes, cars, shopping malls, beauty/hair salons and online spaces such as retail websites and Facebook. They involve multiple human bodies: friends, parents, siblings and professionals such as hairdressers and make-up artists. School ball preparations are assemblages of things, bodies, spaces, feelings, embodied practices and other affective forces. These relations are not separate, but
part of spacetime matterings which make and mark space and time itself (Barad, 2007). Consider the entanglements in the following photographs: multiple temporalities (hours, days, months before the ball), spaces (girls’ homes, bedrooms, bathrooms, the school ball venue), human and more-than-human matter (make-up, nail polish, furniture, bodies, decorations):

**Figure 1:** Home-girl-sister-hands-chair-lips-bathroom-pencil-hair-light-day of ball…

**Figure 2:** Nails-red polish-hand-table-night before ball…

**Figure 3:** Ball venue-decorations-tables-carpet-school ball committee-months prior to ball…

**Figure 4:** Make up-brushes-false eyelashes-bag-laptop-beauty work-desk…
A new materialist engagement with these photographs encourages the multiple spaces, temporalities and more-than-human matter to ‘rise to the surface’ (Allen, 2015: p.12). The captions above indicate some, but not all of these entangled relations. Engaging with these photographs diffractively (Allen, 2015; Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010), the materiality of these ‘things’ overlap with discourses of femininity, participant comments, preparations and responsibilities, and my own memories of attending the ball (both as a teenager and as a researcher). Figure 1 shows the day of the ball; a human body (participant) sitting in a chair at home; another body (her sister) leans in; a lip pencil-hand configuration applies make-up. I recall the participant feeling pleased her sister did her make-up as she ‘trusted her’ more than someone she did not know. Figure 2 depicts a bottle of red nail polish enveloped by a hand with bright red nails; light glints off the thumb nail; the nail-polish-hand configuration casts a shadow on the wooden surface where another small bottle of polish rests; the participant has added the text ‘painting nails night before the ball’.

A member of the school ball committee shared the photo in Figure 3, which was taken during a visit to the school ball venue a few months prior to the ball. The image shows the conference centre, table centrepieces that will be used on the evening; these material elements entangled with responsibilities of being on the school ball organisational committee. When I look at this image, I recall the evening of the ball – the atmosphere, lighting and decorations – I am surprised it is the same place. Figure 4 depicts an array of make-up, a laptop and desk; a participant has added the text ‘make-up time’ to the image. The material objects and text in this photograph overlap with ball preparations, beauty-body practices and ideas of feminine beauty. Emerging through entangled relations, the school ball becomes a never-ending enfolding of spaces, temporalities, objects, discourses and affective forces. It is a material-discursive and affective process that is always in a process of becoming.

In thinking about the school ball as a material-discursive-affective process, school ball talk emerged as a powerful affective force. Extensive ball talk permeated the material schooling environment such as classroom spaces and senior common rooms: What are you wearing? Have you got your dress? Are you taking a date? These discussions are entanglements of bodies, discourses, spaces and things, for instance, mobile phones were used to peruse websites and share photos of dresses, shoes and hairstyles. This talk generated bodily feelings and reactions such as excitement, boredom and stress; these emotions enter the material-discursive assemblage of ‘getting ready’:

*It’s quite stressful I find, when people bring it up every conversation though, cause I don’t have a lot organised*

*Mmm I find it quite boring sometimes*

*Yeah and when you don’t have a lot organised and people go on about how they’re got everything sorted, it’s sort of like, oh my god, like some people have had everything sorted from the first day of this year*

*(Year 12, focus group, 2 voices)*
I remember like, because the ball is in August, people were saying that like MAC make-up was booked out months in advance, and in a way that, because everyone was so prepared that stressed me out a little. Wait, should I be as prepared as these people? Like they were talking about their dresses, and I was not even… I don’t know what’s up

I have an internal this week, I’m not focussing on make-up!

It’s ridiculous, a lot of it is just build-up.

Is there as much build up in Year 13 as Year 12?

I think we’re more chill about it

(Year 13, focus group, 3 voices)

These fragments enact the affective relations in-between girls, bodies, talk, schooling commitments, emotions, beauty practices and ball preparations. Girls noted how all the talk could become ‘boring’ and also create a sense of pressure to get organised – a sense that time was limited – this affective force inducing feelings of stress. Make-up appointments at places such as MAC, for instance, were booked out months in advance; one participant commenting how this was ‘quite stressful’ and left her feeling unprepared, these feelings also intra-acting with a desire to meet school commitments and internal assessments. The expectation to ‘make an effort’ was a powerful force circulating within affective relations: making an effort to look different to how they normally look at school; making an effort to have fun on the night and so forth. Effort is conceptualised not as something located within or emanating from the human subject, but as an affective force or intensity emerging within the entanglement of things, clothes, bodies, discourses, spaces, imaginings and embodied practices. Affect, in the form of effort, is found in the intensities and resonances that circulate and pass in-between bodies, both human and non-human (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010).

The affective force of effort is an intrinsic part of the social-material-discursive fabric of the school ball, co-constituting a sense of ‘build up’. Build-up is itself an affect – a vital force that can make us feel, think and act in different ways. It does not reside in subject or object, but forms part of an affective flow that produces bodies and the social world (Fox, 2015). This ‘build up’ forms, and is formed by, a multitude of feelings, from anticipation and excitement to boredom, anxiety and worry. These emotions are one element within a broader flow of affect (Ahmed, 2004; Fox, 2013), which also includes material-discursive embodied practices, things and ideas. ‘Effort’ and ‘build up’ can be understood as affective forces shaping the becoming of the school ball-girl in particular ways. I argue here that the affective relations of bodies, things and practices are threaded through or flow among multiple spacetimematterings (Juelskjaer, 2013). As such, space and time are understood as always-already affective (Anderson, 2006); affect does not happen after an ‘event’ but rather enacts space-time. Or, in Baradian terms, affect is part of the intra-activity of spacetimemattering, where components (spatiality, temporality, affect) are produced in one on-going movement.

The next section returns to consider the affective force of effort, how it produced and could be 'felt' in the atmosphere of the school ball.
Continuing to think about school ball preparations as entangled forces in the becoming of the school ball, several girls noted how the lead-up to the ball was ‘the fun bit’:

Getting ready was fun, make up and hair, as I don’t normally get an opportunity to do that, pre-ball with friends was fun, but then the actual ball I couldn’t really walk, my heels hurt, and like I didn’t dance. I sat there and it got really boring towards the end, but having the photos was nice, they looked nice. It was fun, worth it, but the actual event wasn’t like this amazing thing, it was kind of boring

Not like you see on American movies when it’s like, ‘oh my gosh, dancing with my crush’ [laughter]

(Year 13, focus group, 2 voices)

This fragment enacts multiple spatial-temporalities including ‘getting ready’, the pre-ball and the ‘actual event’. Activities conventionally categorised as ‘prior’ to the ball, for instance, the styling of hair and make-up, and having photos taken were considered more fun than the ‘actual’ ball itself; this participant’s enjoyment and physical movement at the ball hampered by high heels and sore feet. Rather than being separate to the ball, these ‘events’ or components are intra-actively entangled in girls’ recollections and experiences of the school ball as a whole. Pre-balls were a common part of the ball and occurred just ‘prior’ to the ‘actual’ ball. They were informally arranged by groups of friends and usually held at someone’s house. Parents were commonly invited and appeared an integral part of pre-ball celebrations.

What do you do for pre-balls? Go to someone’s house?
Yeah just eat some food and talk to people
It’s so much more for the parents’ benefit
Yeah
Like my mother was really annoyed that I didn’t go to one last year, she was like, ‘I wanted to go and see all the people in their dresses Kate, you’ve let me down’. I’m sorry. Wow ok!
[laughter]
Because they go along too don’t they?
Yeah [multiple]
It is just for the parents
Yeah, I like prefer the pre-ball to the actual ball, like the food, you get to have whatever food

(Year 13, focus group, 5 voices)
The ball itself involves only students, their dates and school staff, so the pre-ball enabled parents to be part of the festivities. Parental involvement is a further intra-active element in the school ball assemblage. The photographs above create a sense of the overlapping material-affective forces: home, parents, food and drinks, cameras, feelings of surprise and enjoyment seeing friends dressed up, meeting friends' dates, standing and smiling for photographs. Affective dynamics involving parents also emerge in the following fragment discussing parents' involvement in the ball:

*They love it. They love seeing us getting all dressed up and everything*
*Yeah [multiple]*
My mum loves taking photos, ‘Olivia stand over there’
Oh my god, my mother was like crying, so bad, she cries
Parents really love it I think
Yeah it’s exciting for them as well, they get involved, due to like the pre-ball and stuff which is nice as well.
What do you think they like about it?
Just seeing us, it’s kind of like a point in their like, you know, your life when you do, you’re finally come to your ball, so I think it’s kind of exciting for them, seeing you look all pretty, yeah

(Year 13, focus group, 4 voices)

Participants’ recollections of last year’s ball enact a flow of affect involving parents’ reactions to seeing them ‘all dressed up’: feelings of pride, excitement and tears, taking lots of photos; these affective relations are not separate to the ball but entangled in school ball becomings. This analysis offers a different perspective of the school ball in relation to space and time. The notion of the school ball as a specific moment i.e. ‘one night’ or confined spatially to the school ball venue is destabilised due to the multiple intra-acting material-discursive-affective relations. The on-going (re)configuring of relations challenges the notion of time as linear and unrelated to bodies, space and other matter. This perspective enables understandings of the school ball as more than discursive; it is also material, spatial, affective and temporal.

The affective materiality of atmospheric space

This final section turns to the school ball event itself – the evening that is the culmination of months of effort, pressure and preparation. In an attempt to bring an affective and materialist approach to thinking about this ‘space’ or environment, the following discussion explores the school ball atmosphere as produced through entangled material-discursive-affective relations or multiple spacetimematterings. Affective qualities circulate within the assembling of bodies of all types, human and more-than-human (Deleuze, 1988), offering an understanding of atmosphere that moves beyond the discursive. Various kinds of affective intensities are mobilised or threaded through entangled spacetimematter (Juelskjaer, 2013; Ringrose & Renold, 2016). Thinking about spacetimematter relations as affective, the discussion considers the affective qualities of the school ball atmosphere and how this atmosphere might exert a force in ball-girl becomings.

The term atmosphere is commonly used to denote mood, feeling, ambience or the tone of a space or place (Anderson, 2009). Atmospheres can be perceived as sensory and emotional experiences – the ‘feel’ of a place. While atmospheres can be felt or sensed, they are not exclusively personal experiences or states-of-mind; atmospheres are located in-between experiences and environments (Bille, Bjerregaard, & Sørensen, 2015). For Böhme (1993), atmospheres cohere in-between subject and object; they are not solely attributable to or located in either. Böhme suggests an atmosphere is not free floating but ‘something that proceeds from and is created by things, persons, or their constellations’ (1993: p.122). Atmospheres in this sense are relational; they emerge through the intermingling of bodies and
matter (Bissell, 2010). As such, the boundaries between object and subject are blurred. In a Baradian sense, we could think of the school ball atmosphere as intra-actively produced. Atmospheres are not pre-existing, nor are they independent of the relational forces that produce them.

Atmospheres can also be understood as affective. The concept of affective atmospheres (Anderson, 2009; Bissell, 2010) highlights the ‘affectively charged quality of certain spaces and places’ (Healy, 2014: p.36). Affect in relation to atmosphere is defined more broadly than emotion; it is a force, a capacity to affect and be affected (Deleuze, 1988). Affective atmospheres encapsulate not only the emotional feel of a place but also what may be possible: ‘the store of action-potential, the dispositions, the agencies, potentially enactable in that place’ (Duff, 2010: p.881-882). The potential for things to act or change is relational (Bissell, 2010). Bissell suggests thinking of an affective atmosphere as ‘a propensity: a pull or charge that might emerge in a particular space which might (or might not) generate particular events and actions, feelings and emotions’ (2010: p.273, italics in original). Affect flows through the school ball environment in-between bodies and other matter producing particular capacities or possibilities for ball-girl-bodies, such as feelings and actions. In this sense, affective atmospheres actively constitute or produce space (Anderson, 2009). We can understand affective atmospheres as exerting a force in the becoming of the school ball and ball-girl.

Affect is relationally constituted which means affects do not reside in individual places or bodies but rather in the dynamic and relational interaction of places and bodies (Massumi, 2002) or rather intra-action (Barad, 2007). Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, Anderson (2009: p.80) suggests atmospheres are generated by bodies of multiple types: human, nonhuman, discursive, ‘affecting one another as some kind of “envelopment” is produced’. As such, affective atmospheres occur across human and non-human materialities and in-between subject/object distinctions (Anderson, 2009). In thinking about the school ball atmosphere as affective and relational, consider the intermingling (intra-action) of things, people and spaces in the following image:
Applying a relational materialist reading to this photograph (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010), my attention is drawn to matter of all kinds: furniture, lighting, bodies, clothing, decorations and architecture. The image is dense with material objects: human and more-than-human. My gaze is drawn to the bright twinkly lines, warm-coloured at the top of the image. I can see clusters of balloons intermingling with the lights that hang like streamers, embellishments to help create a festive occasion, a celebration. I imagine a festive, celebratory feeling accentuated by the effort that has been made to decorate the space. There are clusters of furniture – tables and chairs – drawing human bodies into groups under glowing fairy lights and balloons. I imagine a vibrant energy emanating from these configurations of metal, wood, fabric and flesh.

There is a large space in the middle of the room, a smooth hard surface as opposed to the surrounding soft carpet. There are human bodies gathered on one side of this smooth square space; they are located at the front of the image close to the camera. I see human matter/bodies, clothing, jewellery, a mobile phone, accessories and corsages intermingling. The lighting is dimmer in this space compared to the rest of the room. The bodies are positioned differently: feet, legs, arms and heads at varying angles suggesting movement, dancing. I see glimpses of bare feet – shoes have been removed. I can imagine the feel of the hard surface underneath. There are big smiles and hands in the air – these signals fuse with the glittery lights and balloons to further radiate a celebratory feeling. My gaze looks more closely at the clothing in this mobile configuration: long formal dresses, lace and glittery ornamentation. Each dress a unique configuration of style, colour and fabric: when in-relation...
to a body it covers or expose arms, back or shoulders. There is one tuxedo. Out of all the human bodies in this cluster there are two, perhaps three that are aware of the camera’s existence – they smile and look directly at the camera. This image gives us a glimpse of the affective atmosphere of the school ball where affective qualities are produced in the entanglement of things, bodies, energies and spaces.

The ball-girl is not situated in an atmosphere but part of the atmosphere (Bille, 2015), they are inextricably entwined with an array of material-discursive-affective forces. Earlier in the chapter, I considered ‘effort’ and ‘build up’ as intra-active forces in school ball preparations that shape the becoming of the school ball-girl in particular ways. The affective force of effort is also entangled in spacetimematterings involving the school ball itself, permeating the atmosphere as a potential or charge that could be sensed or felt. The following fragment enacts the affective scene of effort, build up and feelings of happiness which produce a collective ‘buzz’:

*I think the good thing about the ball is that it’s a nice experience, everyone is dressing up and it’s just something you don’t do very often, so it’s just a nice change*  
Yeah  
*And there’s also a lot of build up for it as well, like you hear about from Year 6, about this big event*  
I think my favourite will be just seeing the change actually, just watching everyone kind of like put some effort into it, I know that sounds real materialistic, but it’s great to see someone change and like put effort into something that makes them look fantastic and hopefully they will enjoy looking fantastic so they will be happy to be there, kind of thing  
Yeah  
*So then if they’re happy, their happiness will feed onto someone else and eventually everyone will be happy and it’ll make for a great time. Hopefully. That is my view*  
A good buzz going around  
*(Year 12, focus group, 2 voices)*

This ‘buzz’ can be understood as an affective quality emerging from the assembling of bodies, effort, material-discursive practices and things. It is an affective force registered as a felt intensity – as one voice explains, effort produces the capacity to look fantastic, this produces feelings of happiness, then this happiness will *‘feed onto someone else and eventually everyone will be happy’*. Another participant further elaborates on this collective happiness as *‘a good buzz going around’*. As an affective atmospheric quality, ‘buzz’ is ‘something distributed yet palpable, a quality of environmental immersion that registers in and through sensing bodies whilst also remaining diffuse, in the air, ethereal’ (McCormack, 2008: p.413). This buzz is a quality felt through sensing bodies. Affective qualities such as happiness and a buzz can be understood as emanating from bodies yet not reducible to them (Anderson, 2009); something felt (in individual bodies) yet it belongs to a collective situation/space.
These series of images are stills from a video taken by a participant at the school ball. The images capture the physical space of the ball: the dance floor, clusters of bodies, glittering strings of lights, moving bodies, clothing - a tuxedo, a sparkly dress. As they are stills from a video, the images are at times blurred due to the movement of bodies and camera. I can hear music, laughter, the music changes to a new song, there is cheering and singing coming from the dance floor. The camera focuses on two participants; they are laughing, smiling and nodding their heads in time with the music. A male body enters the frame, moves in and looks directly at the camera. These images convey the materiality and ‘feel’ of the space through the warm twinkle lights, smiling laughing faces and dancing bodies. The collection of forces generates an affective charge – an energy that is intra-actively produced among lighting, bodies, facial expressions, sounds, movement and space.

Earlier, this chapter discussed the affective force of effort, where making an effort to look different and have fun on the night circulated as an affective force among and in-between bodies, things and imaginings. ‘Seeing the change’ in people was often cited as a favourite part of the ball. While one participant notes, this focus on the aesthetic ‘might sound
materialistic’, in a sense it speaks to the very materiality of becoming ball-girl – it is an embodied process involving fleshed, moving, thinking, feeling bodies. Effort is constituted as something you could see and feel, both in individual bodies but also as part of a larger affective ‘buzz’ circulating in the school ball atmosphere. In an agential realist sense, the school ball is making itself intelligible in ways that constitute effort as an affective intensity – a ‘buzz’ that collaboratively enacts the school ball space and ball-girl. This affective force is intra-actively entangled with other forces and intensities, for instance, temporalities, girls’ imaginings, memories and hopes:

**What do you hope the ball will be like?**
*Really memorable*
*Mmm [multiple] Yeah*
*First ball, sort of like, it probably will be something you’d remember*
*Yeah and for the right reasons sort of, just a good atmosphere like when you walk in you want it to be really pretty, like wow, this is going to be an amazing night when you first walk in […]*
*And you want it to be special, like you want to feel special, like what you’re wearing, how you look, and how it’s so different to what you normally are, so, you definitely want that like, ‘cause that’s why I go to the ball so I can dress up. I don’t know whether that’s the same with everyone else, um but that’s what I think, that’s what a lot of girls want to do on the night, not so much dance but look good*
*Look pretty*
*The preparation for it is the fun bit yeah*
*It’ll be cool just having most of our year altogether*
*I think it’ll be a special night, our year all coming together*

*(Year 12, focus group, 4 voices)*

Hopes, feelings, physical appearance, the chance to ‘look pretty’ and being together with friends enact the school ball as ‘special’ and ‘memorable’. The affective qualities of an atmosphere can function as a powerful disciplinary force. ‘Buzz’ is part of an affective flow that produces ball-girl-bodies, shaping actions and capacities. While atmospheres may be invisible, they are not inert or passive. Bissell (2010: p.272) suggests atmospheres ‘are forceful and affect the ways in which we inhabit these spaces’. Girls were expected to not only ‘make an effort’ in terms of ‘looking different’ (as I shall discuss in the following chapter), they were also expected to have a good time and not be a ‘downer’:

**Were there any other expectations for the ball?**
*Be happy I guess, have a good time, yeah*
*And is that expectation from the school or each other?*
*Kind of both*
*But if there was one sad friend you’d be like, oh my god, just cheer up*
*Yeah that would be frustrating*
*It’s a ball come on, be happy*
*Then the teachers have to deal with it as well, and they don’t want to either, it’s kind of their night as well, like ‘cause it’s their girls from their tutor class and stuff like that so, yeah*
*Does it have like a celebratory feel to it as well, like a celebration?*
Yeah cause it’s our last year, it’s special,
Kind of sad

(Year 13, focus group, 3 voices)

Thinking about affect in relation to spaces enables us to consider what the ball-girl can do rather than what she is. Bissell (2010: p.284) suggests ‘through the movement of affect, dispositions become fostered and bodies become primed to act in different ways’. With this view, we can understand the affective atmosphere of the school ball as co-produced by and producing the ball-girl. Being ‘sad’ and not having a good time was considered frustrating as it potentially impacted on both student and teacher enjoyment of the ball. The expectation to ‘not bring the mood down’ is echoed in the following fragment:

I feel like in some ways, you kind of want to hide, if you’re not having a good time you kind of want to hide it, unless all your friends are having a bad time and then you just sit and mope around all together, like sitting around a table, that’s fun. But if you’re not having as much fun as everyone else and they’re all having fun, it’s kind of expected, like you expect yourself to not bring the mood down on everyone else. I’m going to write it, you’re expected to have fun. You’ve put all this effort into it so if you’re not having fun then there’s something wrong with you, or something you brought, or your friends, it’s not the actual thing they organised

(Year 13, focus group, 1 voice)

Here, mood or feelings do not adhere to the school ball itself, but are produced in the configuration of individuals, friends or ‘something you brought’ – perhaps a date – that affects behaviour (see Ball-girl-date affections chapter for this discussion). There is a co-constitutive and entangled relationship among affective intensities, feelings, moods and the affective atmosphere of the school ball. I have already suggested that feelings, things, materialities intra-actively produce spatial-temporalities and the school ball atmosphere; conversely, the affective atmosphere also affects bodies in particular ways, for example, the expectation and individual responsibility to have a good time. As one participant notes, if someone is not having a good time ‘you kind of want to hide it’, an expectation she placed on both herself and others.

Thinking about the affective practices on the night draws attention to the relations in-between space, time and affectivity. Affective intensities are not separate to, but threaded through, entangled spatitematter. Conceptualising spatitematterings as affective enables an understanding of the school ball atmosphere that is more than human and more than discursive. As this chapter argues, the school ball is an assemblage of multiple materialities, including space and time, and the human and discursive are just two components within this dynamic configuration. The atmosphere of the school ball is produced through entangled material-discursive and affective relations that are continually being reconfigured. This atmosphere occurs across human and more-than-human materialities and exerts a force, creating conditions of possibility. The atmosphere does not occupy the school ball space; rather, it is intra-actively produced by and produces the school ball and the ball-girl.
Concluding–continuing thoughts

During the recruitment stage of the research, I contacted several school principals inviting their school to take part. The response from one principal in particular has remained with me throughout the research. While politely declining the invitation to take part in the research, the principal made the comment that he ‘would rather our girls spent more time on their homework and less time thinking about this event that lasts but one evening’. It was not the declining of the research that bothered me; rather, it was the sentiment towards girls that was conveyed in his comment. To me, his comment conveyed ideas about girls’ perceived investments in the school ball and their homework responsibilities; dominant cultural ideas of the school ball as ‘but one evening’. His comment resonates with popular (gendered) constructions of girls and school balls within the media, for instance, the perception that girls are highly invested in the ball, which can lead to excessive and competitive behaviour (Tait, 2014). I was left with the feeling that something was being missed here.

In the continual (re)configuration of space, time and matter, the school ball is not simply ‘just one night’. The school ball is produced through multiple material-discursive and affective relations: preparations, the ‘build up’, embodied practices, memories, imaginings, friends, family and various spaces are all entangled forces in the becoming of the school ball. Through this lively network of relations, the school ball is always in process of change and is productive of multiple becomings (spacetimematterings). Therefore, it no longer makes sense to think of the ball as a fixed time and space; rather it becomes a constellation of multiple spatial-temporalities. Blurring its customary spatial-temporal borders opens up possibilities for reimagining the school ball beyond popular cultural narratives, such as a ‘coming of age’ milestone or ‘rite of passage’. This, in turn, offers a rethinking of the ball-girl beyond linear and developmental logic. Becoming ball-girl does not occur in space and time; rather, ball-girl becomings are continually reconfigured with space, time and matter.
'And when the glitter of the four thousand chandeliers fell upon her, she was so beautiful that everyone there was amazed'
(Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, 1812)

'Reading the Grimms can feel like a dreamscape where faces from different times are all jumbled, assembling and disassembling, crystalizing and melting, moving in so close as to lose focus and then evaporating'
(Marina Warner, 2014)

'Bodies are not objects with inherent boundaries and properties: they are material-discursive phenomena'
(Karen Barad, 2007)

Images: Five layered selfie pics
Becoming ball-girl-bodies

Human bodies are dense lively networks of muscles, skin, blood and bone. They are also fleshy clusters of more-than-human matter, ideas and feelings – some conscious, some not. The coming chapter explores entanglements that produce the ball-girl-body. Previously, school balls and proms have been theorised as a space where girls are able to ‘solidify and display their feminine identities’ (Best, 2000: p.35). This approach is premised on an understanding of bodies as produced or materialised through particular norms of femininity. Employing a feminist new materialist approach to bodies (Barad, 2007), the following discussion considers the materiality of the body and other matter as active forces in the becoming of ball-girl-bodies. In this framing, discursive practices associated with beauty and the feminine body are not prior or pre-determining; instead, discourses are understood as intra-actively entangled with material forces to produce (or enact) the ball-girl-body. Such an approach opens a space for understanding ball-girl-bodies differently: bodies are not wholly reduced to social scripts and bodily capacities are never fixed. With a focus on beauty-body practices, this chapter considers how relations limit and/or extend the capacities of ball-girl-bodies: What can a ball-girl-body do? What might a ball-girl-body become? (Alldred & Fox, 2015; Allen, 2013; Blaise, 2013; Coleman, 2009)

The chapter begins by establishing the ontological understanding of bodies and beauty-body practices that underpin the analysis. In doing so, the discussion teases out some of the material-discursive and affective forces that intra-actively produce beauty-body practices: material objects, bodies, feelings and ideas of feminine beauty. By attempting to dissolve the subject/object divide, conventional ‘boundaries’ of the human body are blurred. Relations in-between girls’ bodies and material objects such as high heeled shoes, false eyelashes and stick-on bras are examined. The discussion explores how the force of matter, both human and more-than-human, continually reconfigures how beauty-body practices are understood and experienced. Exploring beauty-body practices as material-discursive intra-activity opens up ways to think about what the ball-girl-body can do, where bodily capacities do not derive from, nor constitute, human intention and action. Lastly, thinking about beauty as an embodied affective process draws attention to the way beauty and ‘feeling pretty’ emerges as an affective feeling rather than simply a discursive positioning. These affective forces (feelings, sensations) are not simply a product of beauty-body practices; rather they form part of the affective flow that produces both beauty-body practices and the ball-girl-body.

The agential ball-girl-body

Over recent decades, feminist research has paid significant attention to the ways dominant discourses shape how female bodies are understood, experienced and regulated (see Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 1993). This important work has shown how discourses create a powerful range of meanings, structuring how we think and speak about bodies. Bodies are disciplined in
accordance with social and cultural ideas of beauty and femininity, and these regulatory discourses constitute bodies as intelligible or non-intelligible. It is through this lens that language and discourse are seen to have material effects. The materiality of the body is understood and shaped through discursive practices and meanings. While examining the discursive has been immensely productive for feminist research, the materiality of the body only becomes accounted for through sociocultural meanings and practices (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008). As a result, the body and other matter are often constructed as passive products of discursive practices, in that it is only through discursive practices bodies and matter are constituted as intelligible. While this approach draws attention to the ways norms, power relations and language produce or materialise girls’ bodies and material objects, the potential agency of matter and the material world is overlooked.

In contrast, a feminist new materialist approach considers the materiality of the body (and other matter) as active forces in the process of materialisation (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008; Barad, 2007; Coole & Frost, 2010). Following Barad’s (2007) post-humanist performative account of the production of material bodies, neither the discursive nor the material is privileged in the materialisation of the body; instead, meaning and matter are in a relationship of mutual entailment. As Alaimo and Hekman suggest, the body can be an ‘active, sometimes recalcitrant force’ (2008: p.4). Rather than a linear model of causation where power relations produce the body in particular ways, the material-discursive relationship is reciprocal and multi-directional (Barad, 2007). Employing a Baradian account of the materialisation of bodies, ball-girl-bodies are ‘material-discursive phenomena’ (Barad, 2003: p.815). This framing understands the ball-girl-body as agential (Siverskog, 2015). The body of the ball-girl is not a pre-existing object with clearly defined boundaries and properties; rather, ball-girl-bodies are known and experienced (or become) through intra-active relations of multiple elements and forces. The coming discussion focuses on beauty-body practices as intra-active forces in the becoming of ball-girl-bodies. Corporeal practices involving hair, make-up and shoes are examined not as something the ball-girl does, but as material-discursive intra-activity.

Conceiving beauty-body practices as intra-active processes offers a rethinking of the relationship between discursive practices (of beauty and femininity) and the material ball-girl-body. Bodies are the result of intra-action; therefore, the material and discursive are ontologically inseparable. Conceptualising the ball-girl-body as becoming (or agential) enables understandings of bodies that exceed discourse. This framing opens up new ways of thinking about what might be possible for ball-girl-bodies. Analytic attention turns to ‘matters of practices, doings and actions’ (Barad, 2007: p.135). These dynamic non-linear processes open up ways of understanding what the ball-girl-body can do, where bodily capacities do not derive from, nor constitute, human intention and action: as evident in analyses where agency is located in girls’ capacity to resist or challenge dominant discourses of femininity. A feminist new materialist approach reconfigures how we think about bodies and notions of agency. In a
In a Baradian sense, agency is a force emerging in-between elements such as material and discursive (matter and meaning). In a similar vein, agency can be understood to emerge via assemblages that are made up of all manner of material-discursive relations (Bennett, 2005; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). These approaches posit an understanding of agency that is not located in or ascribed to the individual (i.e. ball-girl), but is an emergent force or becoming.

In exploring the becoming of ball-girl-bodies, attention is drawn to affective relations (Ahmed, 2004; Deleuze, 1988) threaded through agential processes of mattering. Examining affective relations is argued to raise new questions for feminist research (Coleman, 2009), moving analysis beyond the understanding that certain things or practices have negative effects on bodies. Instead, relations are theorised as productive of particular affects (as explained in the Theoretical entanglements chapter – see section Re-imagining the ball-girl). These affects, perhaps feelings or actions, may limit or extend the becoming of ball-girl-bodies. Affective forces are intra-actively entangled with corporeal practices, things, bodies, cultural norms and expectations to produce or constrain ball-girl-bodies in varied ways, for instance, structuring the ways bodies might look, how they move and what they can do. In thinking about the agential ball-girl-body, consider the intra-acting material-discursive and affective relations in the following fragment: dresses, dancing, make-up, friends, feelings of enjoyment and surprise:

What are you looking forward to… the good things about the ball?
Um, the dancing is fun
Dancing
I do enjoy a good dance
Looking pretty
Yeah, I just like dressing up real nice
Taking good photos
Cause you never get the chance to dress up like that fancy, for anything else, so you can just get dressed up and ‘I feel so pretty’ [laughter]
Seeing everyone is actually a highlight because everyone looks good
Especially because like people like us who don’t wear heaps of make-up to school, or people you only see in your sport teams, you don’t usually see them dressed up real nice, and then you see them at the ball and you’re like…
Whoa! (in unison)
Damn! Is that the same person?
Some people it’s actually hard to recognise, like wow! Wowee
(Year 13, focus group, 4 voices)

This discussion details aspects of the ball participants are looking forward to: dancing, ‘looking pretty’, ‘dressing up real nice’, ‘taking good photos’, their enjoyment and surprise in seeing both themselves and their peers looking different. These ‘highlights’ can be understood as material-discursive practices entangled in the production of ball-girl-bodies. Material-discursive entanglements involve: evening dresses, make-up, beauty practices, body work, their own bodies, bodies of friends, everyday bodies at school, sporty bodies, looking
and feeling pretty, discourses of femininity, beauty ideals, photos, seeing others and being seen. Comments such as ‘Whoa!’ ‘Damn’ and ‘Wow!’ create a sense of the affective forces – feelings, emotions and sensations. These material-discursive and affective components form dynamic shifting assemblages that co-constitute and enact ball-girl-bodies as material-discursive phenomena. Ball-girl-bodies are inseparable from material things, practices and discourses: they form an interdependent relationship, always affecting and being affected by one another (Barad, 2007; Lenz Taguchi, 2012). As a result, ball-girl-bodies are unstable, emergent phenomena continually (re)assembling at any given moment. We can think about these matterings as productive, producing capacities for what the ball-girl-body can do or become in particular moments. This on-going process means there is no authentic or ‘real’ ball-girl-body and it is impossible to know in advance what a ball-girl-body might do or become.

This following snap is created through the layering of four selfie photographs: each photograph of a different participant. By adjusting the opacity of the photographs, the images fuse and meld into one another – boundaries are blurred. The data snap preceding this chapter is another example of this idea. By changing the opacity levels and the order in which the photographs are layered, a new image is created – a new mattering. This mattering does not resemble a fixed ‘real’ ball-girl-body; instead, the ball-girl-body continually becomes anew with each adjustment, each layer.
Like the agential body, beauty-body practices are dynamic, fluid and unstable. Understood as material-discursive intra-activity, they are open-ended processes of mattering emerging through messy webs of human and more-than-human relations and flows of affect: things, ideas, feelings and physical sensations. In this chapter, ‘data’ (photos, interview fragments) perform agential cuts to produce or enact the material-discursive embodied practices girls engage in. Understanding beauty-body practices intra-actively attends to the productive entanglement of more-than-human materialities, including the relational forces of ‘things’ such as make-up, clothing and high-heeled shoes. The following images enact a sense of the
materiality of hair, make-up and beauty work by bringing material objects, both human and more-than-human to the fore (Allen, 2015):

Human bodies in these images are in a state of inseparableness with matter such as beauty products, nail polish, camera, spatial-temporalities and photographs. These materialities are entangled in material-discursive assemblages that include other overlapping forces and
intensities, for instance, feelings of excitement and anticipation, beauty ideals, gender norms, the beauty industry and advertising. Figure 2 depicts an array of make-up products and implements nestled together in opened cases: plastic bottles, tubes and containers of foundation of varying shades, several clear plastic packets of false eyelashes, other smaller containers of make-up, brushes and tissues. Light streams in from a window of one of the girl’s homes; there is partial body – a make-up artist – arm, hand and torso. I can recall the participant who shared this image talking about the excitement of getting ready, the enjoyment of having a professional do her make-up and the physical sensation of wearing false eyelashes.

Figure 3 shows bright pink painted nails – possibly false – a hand, fingers, partial leg, denim jeans and sofa. The glossy pink of the nails draws my attention; the intensity of pink sparks ‘sensations of’ pinkness (Springgay, 2016: p.77): ideas of femininity, prettiness and the gendering of colour. The shiny pinkness accentuates the length of the nails, elongating the hand. Figure 4 is a photographic collage made by a participant. It includes four smaller photographs depicting various head-hair configurations: the bottom two images are of a participant; the human body in the top images is unknown. The participant has added the text: ‘Hair inspiration! ‘Ball day!’ to the collage. This collage enacts a sense of the planning and research that are entangled in beauty-body practices. I am reminded of participants’ talk about ball preparations: deciding what to wear, ideas for hair and make-up, the expectation to make an effort to look different. These photographs can be understood as specific agential matterings or material-discursive configurations that exist in a particular given moment. Beauty-body practices are not fixed but continually become anew through on-going agential matterings.

Viewing these photographs through a relational materialist perspective (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010), the human is no longer prioritised. Instead, attention is given to all kinds of matter including the more-than-human forces that co-constitute beauty-body practices. This ‘different style of seeing and thinking’ expands the possibilities of understanding the ball-girl-body as ‘emergent in a relational field’ (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010: p.527): the ‘relational field’, in this instance, is the material-discursive intra-activity of beauty-body practices within the school ball assemblage. The focus is not what beauty-body practices do to ball-girl-bodies; rather, attention turns to how bodies, things and practices form reciprocal co-constitutive relationships. This approach reconfigures the relationship between cultural norms and the body beyond a linear, one-way process (i.e. cultural norms producing or materialising the ball-girl-body), to a relational emergent process that is multi-directional and co-constitutional. I continue this line of thinking in the next section, which explores the relations in-between high-heeled shoes and the ball-girl.
High heels and the body: Rethinking the subject/object divide

The high-heeled shoe is a potent and enduring symbol of femininity (Gamman, 2001; Jeffreys, 2005). From Cinderella and her glass slipper to four-inch Jimmy Choo stilettos in the television series Sex and the city, high heels are inextricably linked with ideas of female beauty, desirability and sexuality. The relations between high heels and female sexuality have been examined across a broad range of disciplines and theoretical paradigms. This literature is often premised on a clear separation between women’s bodies as subjects and high heels as objects. For instance, biomedical research has examined the effects of wearing high heels on female gait and perceptions of attractiveness (Morris, White, Morrison, & Fisher, 2013); anthropology and evolutionary studies have explored the function of high heels in attracting mating partners (Fisher, 2005; Smith, 1999); and psychoanalysts have examined high heels as an object of fetishism (Freud, 1927). High-heeled shoes have also been a source of debate within feminist scholarship amid enduring questions of whether high heels oppress or empower women (Jeffreys, 2005; Walter, 1999).

The following discussion offers a rethinking of the subject/object divide in relation to female bodies and high-heeled shoes. Rather than conceptualising bodies and shoes as separate entities, ball-girl-bodies emerge through, and as a part of, entangled intra-actions with high heels, other bodies, discursive practices and the school ball environment. It is an approach that recognises high-heeled shoes as vital forces (Bennett, 2004) in the becoming of ball-girl-bodies.

Figure 5: Shoe-shopping

Figure 6: Purchased-shoes
At the time of the research, high platform heels were popular and worn by many girls attending the school ball. The photographs shown in Figures 5 and 6 capture the materiality of high-heeled shoes – the style, structure and curve of the arch, colour, textile and length of the heel. Figure 5 was taken during ball shoe shopping; Figure 6 shows the shoes a participant chose to purchase and wear to the ball. These images help create a sense of the materiality, or indeed the vitality (Bennett, 2010), of high-heeled shoes. Understanding the practice of wearing high heels as material-discursive intra-activity, we might think about how high heels intra-acting with a ball-girl-body have the capacity to affect the body in multiple ways: movement, gait, bodily composition and posture, physical sensations and other affective embodied responses (i.e. feeling confident, sexy, uncomfortable). The capacities produced are dependent upon the intra-active relations within high heel-ball-girl-body assemblages: for example, a girl’s existing height, whether she is taking a date, gender norms and ideas of feminine respectability. Relations within assemblages produce affects in the ball-girl-body; for instance, increased height was novel and appealing for some girls, yet for others it produced feelings of anxiety about being taller than their male date (See Ball-girl-date affections chapter for this discussion).

In an attempt to offer a material and affective reading of the practice of wearing high heels, consider the entanglement of human and more-than-human matter in the following photograph:

*Figure 7: High heels-dresses-legs-feet-nail polish-rug-jewellery-floor...*
Applying a traditional anthropocentric gaze to this photo, I might notice the lower half of girls’ bodies (the subjects) wearing and displaying for the camera a range of high-heeled shoes (objects). From this perspective, girls are constituted as the active agent and the high heels passive; therefore, agency lies with the girl who manipulates the high heels. This style of seeing is premised upon the subject/object binary. In contrast, working within a feminist new materialist framework, attention is drawn to the more-than-human aspects in the image (Allen, 2013; Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010). There are high-heeled shoes of varying styles, colours and shapes; the high heels converge towards the centre of the image, drawing my gaze in. Each shoe is made from different materials: smooth or textured to the touch; glittered, black, white; buckles, thin straps, thick straps, large wide heels, stiletto heels, platform heels. The high-heeled shoes intra-act with bodies; we see partial glimpses of feet, ankles and legs. There is also one bare foot peeping through at the upper centre of the image. Each high-heeled foot is positioned at its own unique angle towards the camera, exhibiting a distinct perspective. There are dress fabrics of different layers, textures (organza, satin), pattern and colour (cream, blue, black, white, fluorescent green). The fabrics drape and hang at various angles. Glimpses of bodies emerge from under the fabric. Some toenails are painted: red, white. There is carpet – a mat of multi-coloured fibres with fringed edging, polished wooden floorboards. Some high heels touch the surface of the carpet – others do not.

A new materialist ontology offers a different understanding of high heels, bodies and their entwined relations; boundaries between material objects (things, bodies) become porous and less distinct. Bodies, human and more-than-human, are entangled with other bodies, things and matter. Elements in this image can be thought of as performative mutually intra-active agents (Barad, 2007; Lenz Taguchi, 2010): the high-heeled shoes, bodily matter, fabric, carpet, flooring are in a state of inseparableness; they are overlapping, intra-acting forces in the becoming of ball-girl-bodies. As a result, the distinction between subject-object is blurred. The traditional hierarchy between ‘subject’ and ‘object’ is flattened; we could say the high-heeled shoe wears the girl as much as the girl wears the high-heeled shoe. The ‘wearing’ is not something the ball-girl does, rather it is produced relationally and takes place in-between the high heels, the girl and other entangled relations. Wearing high heels is therefore understood as material-discursive intra-activity; and it is through intra-active relations the ball-girl-body as phenomena materialises. The next section examines high heel-ball-girl-body relations and how these entanglements limit and extend the capacities of ball-girl-bodies.

High heel-ball-girl entanglements

As high heels, dresses and bodies overlap and relate to each other, they are doing something to one another simultaneously (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010); or, as Barad (2007) would suggest, it is a case of matter making itself intelligible to other matter. In a Deleuzian sense, we can think about how they have the capacity to affect and be affected by each other. The
high heels, girls, dresses all become different as a result of the intra-action. The high heels in the previous photograph (Figure 7) would look different if they were sitting upon a shelf or in a shoebox (see Figures 5 and 6 for instance). They would evoke a different look if worn with a short tight dress as opposed to a long flowing gown. High-heeled shoes modify the matter in to which they come into contact. The body is taller; posture is altered. The lower back and chest are pushed forward and the centre of gravity shifts. Corporeal movement – walking, dancing and standing – will feel and look different. We get a sense here of what Bennett (2010) might mean when she suggests ‘things’ are able to perform actions, produce effects and alter situations. Consider, as an example, the a/effects produced in the following fragment:

Are you wearing heels?
Yeah, and cause I dislocated my knee a few weeks ago, I probably shouldn’t, I mean, like I’m fine to wear heels if I strap my knee and that’s fine because I’m wearing a long dress, but I guess I was thinking, why do I have to wear heels? Why can’t I just wear flat shoes? But then, I guess I want to feel tall for the night, like when I wear them I think wow, everything looks so different. I was wearing them in the house and like the fridge looked so different when I went to look in it, and like gee, and I’m like as tall as my dad and I’m thinking this is what things look like at your height, this is so weird.

(Year 13, individual interview, 2 voices)

Thinking about high heels as a performative agent (Barad, 2007; Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010) or an actant (Bennett, 2010), we can understand how in the mutual entanglement the girl-body is produced differently, in comparison with wearing flat shoes for instance. In this fragment, a participant discusses the decision to wear high heels to the ball and appears keenly aware of the effect high heels have upon her body: for example, the stress they put on her injured knee and the ability to be taller. While this participant did not normally wear high heels as she considered them impractical, she was planning to do so on this occasion. This fragment enacts the potential to ‘feel tall for the night’ as particularly alluring and indeed provides a new perspective of the surrounding world. In wearing high heels around the house, the participant explains how she saw her home, for instance, the contents of her fridge, from a whole new perspective – one that she seemed to find both novel and ‘weird’. In this sense, we can see how ‘things’ can alter our thinking (Lenz Taguchi, 2010); in this case high heels offer a glimpse of her world from her Dad’s perspective.

As the participant considers her decision to wear high heels to the ball, she wonders ‘why do I have to wear heels?’ This question can be read through discursive practices of femininity and sexuality that configure in the high heel-ball-girl-body assemblage. Discursive practices such as dominant understandings of ‘appropriate’ or ‘desirable’ femininity enter the assemblage influencing how high heels and girls come into connection. Discursive practices can be easily traced through the girls’ comments around high-heeled shoes. The following conversation is a typical example of the gendered norms that were enacted in girls’ discussions:
Everyone is expected to wear heels
Yup [several girls in unison]
I remember Josie last year was going to wear flats and everyone was like…hmmm
Oh, Caroline wore flats but only because she’s really tall, but they were like sandals so…
It’s sort of the not wanting to be taller than your date thing for…
Oh yeah, that’s an issue for the tall girls
I just wanted to be a bit taller so I was happy to wear them
I just wanted an excuse to buy a pair of shoes [laughter]

(Year 13 girls, focus group, 4 voices)

Here, both possibilities and tensions are produced in the mutual entanglement of girls’ bodies, high heels, discursive practices and the school ball. While the wearing of high heels produces possibilities, such as being ‘a bit taller’ and the buying of new shoes, there were also limitations: notably the expectation to wear high heels at the same time as being expected to be shorter than their (male) date. These expectations articulate with dominant gender discourses and social norms of femininity. Discursive practices intra-act with high heels, bodies and the school ball to define what counts as meaningful. We can see this enacted in the example of Josie and the collective ‘hmmm’ she received upon stating she was going to wear flats to the ball. Following Barad’s (2007) concept of posthumanist performativity, material phenomena and discourses are not separate from one another. As Lenz Taguchi (2010: p.5) points out, if ‘intra-actions are simultaneously material and discursive in an intertwined relation’, it therefore ‘matters what notions and beliefs are at work in our intra-activities with the material world’. Discursive practices in relation to femininity, masculinity, sexuality and high heels are implicated in the becoming of the ball-girl-body; however, rather than being privileged, they are considered co-constitutive of ball-girl-bodies as material-discursive phenomena. This approach prompts new questions: what happens when we also think about the materiality of the shoe or the materiality of the body? How might material forces potentially rework or sustain discursive norms?
Figure 8: Video still sequence

In Figure 8, the video still sequence shows a hallway, bookshelf and front door, light streaming in through the windows, reflections of light on the polished floor. It is the morning of the ball; a participant practises walking in high heels; she walks down the hallway, turns, and walks back towards her friend (another participant) holding the camera. I can hear a ‘clunk clunk’ sound as the high heels and floorboards meet. The participant holding the camera speaks: ‘We’re practising walking, to just make sure we don’t fall over when we actually go to the ball’. They swap roles: the second participant walks down the hallway while the other films. The participant walking comments, ‘I think it should be ok, but I think though, if I fell over I’d be ridiculously embarrassed, and that wouldn’t be good’. They both laugh.

The material conditions of the ball require ball-girl-bodies to stand, walk and dance. Girls frequently talked about the physical discomfort and pain they experienced wearing high-
heeled shoes: as a result, it was common for girls to remove their shoes during the ball to allow for comfort and ease of movement. Recalling the earlier photograph of shoes, bodies, dresses and floor (Figure 7), I remember the bare foot peeping through. In the following fragment, a participant explains how she removed her shoes frequently throughout the ball:

Yeah I did, soon as I got in there pretty much, then I kept putting them back on and off. For the photos I had them on, and sometimes when I went and danced I had them on, but most of the time I had them off

(Year 12, focus group, 1 voice)

The materiality of the body intra-acting with high heels affects the ability to be able to walk and dance comfortably. The physical discomfort produces varied feelings (affective responses) including a dislike for high heels, relief upon taking them off and pride at being able to keep them on. While many girls removed their high heels in order to move freely, other girls enacted a sense of achievement in being able to keep their high heels on all night:

Your feet get ruined [groan in agreement]
Yeah they're like so sore
Yeah but I didn't take mine off all night
Yeah neither, I was so proud of myself
Yeah that was my goal
When I took them off, that was like the best feeling of my life
Mmm [multiple]
Yeah everyone like takes them off at the ball
Yeah [multiple]
But not me, I refused to do that
Yeah that's not a good look

(Year 13, focus group, 4 voices)

In this fragment, there is the enactment of ‘appropriate’ femininity and ‘classiness’ in girls’ determination to keep high heels on all night. While these participants noted it was common for girls to take their shoes off at the ball, and indeed shared in the commiseration of ‘sore’ and ‘ruined’ feet, they were determined not to take their shoes off. Enmeshed in this ‘goal’ are ideas about feminine respectability; for these girls, taking shoes off was ‘not a good look’, these ideas articulating with classed and gendered discourses of ‘being a lady’ and being ‘classy’. The idea of classiness and being ‘ladylike’ was frequently cited in girls’ brainstorm of what they felt were expected of girls attending the ball. The ‘lady’ discourse has deep historical roots and still has an enduring and powerful presence in the lives of girls today (Allan, 2009). Taking high heels off, or the determination to keep them on, are material-discursive embodied practices that enable and constrain ball-girl-bodies in particular ways. Taking heels off potentially breached rules of feminine respectability (in some girls’ eyes) yet enabled the ball-girl-body to move around the room and dance more freely. Sore feet restricted girls’ bodily movements and often resulted in more time spent sitting down, as opposed to dancing or walking around. The following fragment further highlights these
entangled affective forces as girls wrestle with the desire to be comfortable and a sense of achievement in being able to keep high heels on all night:

Yeah, you can dance so much better without them
At the Kalsey ball I couldn’t jump or do anything, and … just bopping up and down, My friend Hannah and I, we took off our shoes and just went and danced, and then when they said last song, we ran back and put them on, and Caro [her date] said, why did you do that? Cause I wanted to feel like I lasted [laughter]
So you just had a little intermission break?
Yeah for like half the night [laughter]

(Year 12, focus group, 3 voices)

Like the participants in the earlier fragment, these girls note how ‘it’s a pride thing to say you left your heels on’. The physical discomfort produced by high heels, however, impinged upon dancing, restricting movement to ‘just bopping up and down’. As a result, these participants took their shoes off to go and dance. Laughing, she retells how they ran back and put them on for the last song so she could ‘feel like I lasted’. Here, the body is not passive; the materiality of the body is an active force in the becoming of the ball-girl-body and high-heeled shoes. It is not simply an accommodation or rejection of discursive expectations to wear high heels; there is more at play here. Thinking about the practice of wearing high heels as material-discursive intra-activity helps account for (some of) the more here, for instance: the school ball environment, the dance floor, the desire to have fun and dance, the materiality of the body and high heels, physical sensations of discomfort and freedom, the expectation to be ‘respectable’, feelings of pride, frustration and satisfaction.

**Blurring material-discursive ‘boundaries’**

Examining how beauty-body practices are understood and experienced, the materiality of the body and other matter cannot be ignored. While feelings of physical discomfort prompted many girls to take their high heels on and off at the ball, there were two girls in the research who chose not to wear them at all. Both girls expressed immense dislike for high-heeled shoes due to discomfort and difficulty walking:

*I’m not wearing them, I refuse to wear them. I’m very anti high heels. I can’t walk in them, I can’t do anything in them, so I’m just wearing like…*

Chucks

Yeah I’m not kidding, I’m either wearing my black Chucks or my black Vans

(Year 12, focus group, 2 voices)

In this fragment, a participant declares she is ‘very anti high heels’ and talks about her plan to wear Chucks or Vans to the ball instead. Chucks (Chuck Taylors) are a widely popular sneaker shoe produced by Converse; similarly, Vans are another brand of sneaker style shoe. This participant did indeed wear Chucks to the ball – buying a new pair especially for the occasion. I recall her coming up to me on the evening of the ball; with a big smile on her face she proudly lifted the bottom of her dress to show me her Chucks. I recall laughing and
asking if her feet were comfy; she responded with a resounding ‘yes!’ In a post-ball interview, she shared these thoughts:

*It was really nice, like everyone would be like, ‘let’s go take off our shoes’, I’d be like ‘okay’, so it was really nice, and people would be like ‘are you wearing Chucks?’ and I was like yeah and I’d lift up my dress. Cause no one knew and they were like ‘why aren’t your feet sore?’ Cause I’m not wearing high heels!*  

(Year 12, focus group, 1 voice)

Wearing Chucks instead of high heels increased bodily comfort and freedom of movement throughout the ball. Sore feet were avoided and the ball-girl-body was not encumbered by having to sit down or take shoes on and off. While easily undetected due to a long dress, the wearing of Chucks evoked both envy and surprise from her peers:

*Heaps of people were like ‘I wish I wore Chucks’, and I was like ‘why didn’t you?’ And you kind of had the people who were like, ‘why are you wearing Chucks?’ But it was all right What did you say to them? I was like, ‘you go home and have sore feet’ [laughing]*  

(Year 12, focus group, 2 voices)

Brushing off any negative comments this participant was so pleased with her decision she planned on wearing Chucks again the following year. These fragments enact ball-girl-bodies in ways that do not strictly cohere to dominant expectations of girls attending the ball and traditional norms of femininity (i.e. expectation to wear high heels). Here, there is a reworking of gendered discourses. This capacity emerges through multiple forces: the materiality of shoes, bodily sensations and movement, previous experience wearing high heels, emotions, confidence, clothing and the school ball space. Agency does not reside in the individual but emerges in the high heel-ball-girl-body assemblage (Bennett, 2004). These material-discursive and affective forces are intimately connected to what the ball-girl-body can become, and importantly what a ball-girl-body can and cannot do.

Choosing not to wear high heels to the ball might be conceived as ‘resisting young bodies’ (Fox, 2016): ‘resisting’ being an affective movement rather than individual agency. The new materialist approach to power and resistance posited by Fox and Alldred (2016: p.128) suggests the capacity for ‘resisting’ emerges through ‘material forces and intensities’ within various assemblages. The affective movement is not stable, it flows and shifts as relations assemble and reassemble in new open-ended matterings. The wearing (or not wearing) of high-heeled shoes is a material-discursive and affective practice. It is not simply that discursive forces produce wearing of high heels as normal and expected (although that is definitely apparent), and these discursive ideas affect bodies in a one-way direction; it also works the other way around. The materiality of the shoes and the body, sensations, (dis)comfort and emotions are entangled in both the becoming of the ball-girl-body and the material-discursive practice of wearing high heels. Therefore, it is impossible to think of high
heels as an object that either empowers or oppresses the human ‘subject’, as this would suggest a linear model of causation and a subject/object binary. Instead, high heels and bodies are entangled, both affecting and being affected by each other.

Body-matter entanglements are productive. The force or vitality of matter (Bennett, 2010) continually (re)configures beauty-body practices and how they are understood and experienced. In the following post-ball conversation, two participants reflect upon the beauty-body practices they engaged in for the school ball and what they would do differently next time:

_Not wear fake eyelashes_
Yeah
Ooh they feel horrible [face screwed up]
And then they start to fall off
During the night I wanted to like [rip sound and motion] take them off
As soon as I got home, I ripped them off. I couldn’t handle it anymore
Yip so next time no fake eyelashes for me
Yip no thanks, it’s so much better to just have, I’d rather have lots of mascara on than these things that feel weird and weigh down your eye. That was not fun.

(Year 12, video diary, 2 voices)

Discussing the experience of wearing fake eyelashes to the ball, these participants enact the false eyelashes-ball-girl-body encounter as ‘weird’ and ‘horrible’. The human intention behind false eyelashes is their ability to augment or enhance the human body (i.e. to lengthen eyelashes and enlarge eyes); however, the effects of this false eyelashes-ball-girl-body encounter exceed human intention. This particular mattering includes, but is not limited to, the weight and materiality of false eyelashes, the heat and movement of the body, glue, eyelid, the school ball environment, temperature, sensations and feelings in that particular moment.

_Figure 9: Skin-hair-eyebrows-eye-iris-pupil-make-up-false eyelashes_

The weight and feel of false eyelashes make an impression through bodily sensations, while simultaneously the body orients and affects the false lashes. When attached to the body, false eyelashes move differently, they come into contact with glue, skin, heat and moisture, producing different affects. As the false eyelashes ‘start to fall off’, this detachment from the
human body suggests a certain efficacy that defies human will and intention (Bennett, 2010). The force and vitality of false eyelashes (and the body) renders matter productive and unpredictable in the becoming of beauty-body practices. As a result, ball-girl-bodies and beauty-body practices, such as wearing false eyelashes, cannot be understood or known in advance.

As material-discursive phenomena, ball-girl-bodies are not contained to an individual human body and the boundaries of living flesh and skin. Instead, ball-girl-bodies are made up of lively matter of all forms – some human, some not. False eyelashes are one example of entangled more-than-human matter; silicone/gel breast enhancers are another:

I got those stick-on bra things [...] like yeah [laughing]. By the end of the night, cause I was like sweating and stuff, they had fallen off. My boobs had disappeared. I looked like I was flat cause they were down here… but yeah, my Dad picked me up in the car and I got in and I was like ‘ugh’! I just took it off and oh it was such a relief, it was pretty much falling off anyway

I don’t think I’ll ever really be using them again, they’re sitting up on my bookshelf, and you and Georgia came around the other day and you were like ‘oh nice boobs’. Like they’re just up there, I don’t know what to do with them. You can’t put them anywhere, or fold them because they stick to each other

(Year 12, focus group, 1 voice)

In these fragments, a participant recalls the ‘stick-on bra things’ she wore to the school ball. Rather than a traditional bra that goes around the body, she is referring to a backless self-adhesive bra that covers the breasts (also commonly referred to as ‘chicken fillets’). The participant explains how after an evening of dancing, sweating and moving ‘they had fallen off, my boobs disappeared’. Laughing, she re-enacts the feeling of taking them off as soon as she got in the car. They currently sit on the bookshelf in her bedroom, which raises the question of what are they now? Are they simply an inert material collection of gel, plastic and worn adhesive substance? Or are they more? They do not appear passive; their unruly sticky qualities means the participant does not know what to do with them – hence being on the shelf. Do they need to be attached to a human body to be ball-girl-boobs? The comment from her friend ‘oh nice boobs’ might suggest not. These three body-matter entanglements involving shoes, fake eyelashes and stick-on bras blur the conventional ‘boundaries’ of ball-girl-bodies. They are not wholly constrained by regulatory gendered discourses or contained within a physical human body. In short, ball-girl-bodies exceed discourse and are not exclusively human. This theorising fosters an attunement towards the multiplicity and open-ended potential of ball-girl-body becomings, not in the sense that everything and anything is always possible, rather how boundaries are continually reconfigured via on-going relations of human and more-than-human, material and discursive forces.

‘Feeling pretty’: Beauty as an affective process

This final section explores beauty as an embodied affective process (Coleman & Moreno Figueroa, 2010). It is interested in the way beauty emerges as a feeling (Colebrook, 2006)
where the concept of ‘pretty’ is more than simply a discursive positioning. *Becoming-pretty* is argued to be an intra-active affective process where ‘feeling pretty’ is an entangled element in the becoming of ball-girl-bodies. In Coleman and Moreno Figueroa’s (2010: p.358) analysis of beauty as hope, they propose affect as a productive way of examining beauty as it ‘emphasises not only content but also process’. By this they mean that in addition to examining specific beauty practices, ‘it is also important to see beauty as an embodied social, cultural and economic process’ (ibid). This approach supports Colebrook’s (2006) assertion that feminist politics would benefit from a pragmatic approach to beauty, moving beyond questions of whether beauty is ‘good’ or ‘bad’ for women; Colebrook suggests questions that consider how beauty is ‘defined, deployed, defended, subordinated, marketed or manipulated’ may prove more productive for feminist politics (2006: p.132). Conceptualising beauty as an affective process provides a way to think about the affective embodied dynamics inherent in becoming ball-girl-bodies.

The concept of beauty is personal and political; it is also undeniably material. In thinking about the concept of beauty in relation to ball-girl-bodies, the expectation and desire to ‘look good’ is central. This process involves an array of material-discursive embodied practices that intra-actively produce ball-girl-bodies in particular ways, for instance, wearing make-up, false eyelashes, the styling of nails and hair. The following fragment draws attention to the ways girls enact ‘looking good’ or ‘pretty’ as a felt quality:

*What are the positives about the ball?*

*Finding a dress that looks nice*

*Getting to like, feel like you’re looking good*

*I feel pretty* [singing]

*Having an opportunity to get your make-up done and like expressing yourself, cause like at school you have to wear a uniform and no one really knows like what sort of stuff you’re into, so you can choose, if you go to the ball you can show what your opinions are*

*And like seeing all your friends dressed up as well, it’s really nice, it’s like you normally see them in school uniform or sweaty sports gear, so it’s nice*

*Getting nice photos to keep, not that mine were nice but*

*Yeah I think like a fun night with your friends is always exciting*

(Year 13, focus group, 5 voices)

In this discussion, girls identify ‘getting to like feel like you’re looking good’ as a positive aspect of the school ball. A participant follows this comment by singing ‘I feel pretty’ from the musical West Side Story. This idea of ‘feeling pretty’ resonates with the opening conversation in this chapter, where girls share their thoughts on what they like about the ball: they state ‘cause you never get the chance to dress up like that fancy, for anything else. So you can just get dressed up and I feel so pretty’. The utterance ‘I feel so pretty’ was expressed in a light-hearted jovial singing voice, not dissimilar to the cheery enactment of the song. The concept of ‘pretty’ appears to be expressed as a feeling rather than a fixed attribute associated with someone’s identity.
Feeling ‘pretty’ is an affect produced in the intra-activity of various matter – where things affect and are affected by other matter. The intra-action of bodies, beauty-body practices such as wearing make-up, having make-up professionally done by a make-up artist, the styling of hair, long formal ball dresses, corsages, painted nails, along with discursive beauty ideals associated with femininity, produce the affective response of ‘feeling pretty’. Pretty in this sense is associated with dominant understandings of femininity and beauty, such as having painted nails, wearing make-up and a dress. The ways girls enacted ‘feeling pretty’ through their cheery light-hearted utterances, such as singing West Side Story’s ‘I feel pretty’, evoked a sense of playfulness and ‘dress up’, perhaps even a sense of artificiality.

This snap is a layering of a participant selfie with ‘I feel pretty’ lyrics. The selfie image shows the ball-girl-body ready for the ball; there are multiple material forces of hair, fake eyelashes, make-up, nail polish, dress, corsage and jewellery. There is a sense of playfulness emanating from this selfie pic that resonates with the affective performance of ‘feeling pretty’ expressed...
by girls in the earlier fragments. This sense of playfulness also emerges in the following comment:

So yeah I think most girls are just like ‘oh yeah I want to look my best, this is my one occasion a year where I get to like go all out and be the most ridiculous’, but it’s nice, it’s nice. You get to feel like a princess, if that’s what you’re into […] so yes, don’t know how I feel about that one but yeah, I’ll get to dance with all the princesses so that’ll be fun [laughter]

(Year 13, individual interview, 1 voice)

Here, a participant enacts the school ball as one occasion where you can ‘go all out and be the most ridiculous’. Through this flow of affect, ‘you get to feel like a princess, if that’s what you’re into’. The embodied beauty practices associated with the school ball produces the affective responses of ‘feeling pretty’ and feeling ‘like a princess’. These affective qualities circulate in-between bodies and other materialities, such as clothing, shoes, beauty-body practices and photographs. There is a sense of whimsy and temporality to this enactment of ‘feeling pretty’; it is not a permanent state, nor does it reveal an ‘authentic’ feminine self. Rather, it is an affect produced via particular spacetimematterings, similar to the idea of effort as an affective force that was proposed in the previous chapter (Once upon a space and time). ‘Feeling pretty’ is just one component within a broader ‘flow of affect’ (Fox, 2015) that constitutes ball-girl-body becomings. ‘Feeling pretty’ as an affective relation works to limit or expand the becoming of ball-girl-bodies. The affects of ‘feeling pretty’ function to direct ball-girl-bodies towards certain objects and practices. Here, affect is what ‘sticks’ or sustains the connection between particular ideas, values and things (Ahmed, 2010): in this instance, beauty practices and things associated with traditional norms of femininity and gendered beauty norms. This connection is evident in the expectation that girls would wear make-up to the ball and the embarrassment or shame someone might experience if they did not:

I think people would laugh at you if you didn’t wear make-up
Mmm [in agreement]
What about someone who isn’t into make-up?
You wear make-up; if you’re not into make-up, you don’t go to the ball

(Year 13, focus group, 3 voices)

These enactments clearly articulate dominant discourses of feminine beauty as co-constitutive forces in the becoming of ball-girl-bodies: As one participant notes, ‘if you’re not into make-up, you don’t go to the ball’. The corporeal practice of wearing make-up is an integral element in girls’ enactments of ‘feeling pretty’ and the capacity to ‘look different’. The idea of ‘looking different’ emerged frequently in girls’ discussions. Conceptualised as an enactment, ‘looking different’ is produced through multiple relations including beauty practices such as wearing make-up:

What are good things about the ball?
Um, I guess it gives you the opportunity to try looking different, cause I know especially for me and quite a few of my friends we don’t really, I don’t really know how to apply make-up
that well. I’ll put mascara on or a bit of foundation but never so like nicely as at the ball. So like last ball was the first time I had ever seen myself with full-on make-up, so that was quite nice to try something new. Um, yeah I don’t know really, I guess it’s just you get to try looking different to how you usually do

(Year 13, individual interview, 2 voices)

In this fragment, ‘looking different to how you usually do’ is enacted or produced through material-discursive relations of bodies, make-up, ‘usual’ beauty-body practices, and the feeling of trying something new. One participant talks about how she usually wears only a small amount of foundation and mascara; therefore, seeing her self with ‘full-on make-up’ was novel and different. ‘Looking different’ is not an attribute of a particular body, for example, a body that changes from one state to another; rather, it is an enactment produced through particular configurations. The enactment of ‘looking different’ involves multiple temporalities and bodies, such as a girl’s ‘usual’ everyday-body, school-girl-body and the ball-girl-body. One body is not prior to the other; instead they are inseparable and mutually dependent on one another. Neither body is fixed or stable, they are continually reconfigured depending on affective relations.

Specific material-discursive configurations or entanglements produce particular ways of seeing and knowing bodies. ‘Looking different’ is a specific form of embodiment (or enactment) co-constituted through boundary-making practices that distinguish the ball-girl-body from the everyday-body and school-girl-body (Barad, 2007). For another participant, having make-up applied by a professional, not having ‘fluffy hair’ and wearing fake eyelashes are material-discursive practices that collaboratively enact the ball-girl-body as ‘looking different’. These productive practices are entangled with, and produced through, affective forces such as ‘making an effort’ and ‘feeling pretty’. These affects are intimately connected with and shaped by dominant discourses of feminine beauty: for instance, the expectation that girls would wear make-up and style their hair for the occasion.

While pervasive, expectations and beauty norms are just one element within a broader flow of affect that produces beauty-body practices and the ball-girl-body. Consider the affective dynamics in the following discussion:

There’s a huge expectation to make an improvement to yourself
Oh yeah, hard, like everyone is like ‘oh I need to look better than what I do normally’
[scoff] Screw that, I always look good [group laughter]
In terms of making that effort and looking better, you mentioned make up…
Your hair and even your dress
Losing weight
Oh my gosh, so many people are talking about that
Everyone is fasting for the ball
I’m not
Hell no

(Year 12, focus group, 4 voices)
This conversation details various expectations surrounding the becoming of ball-girl-bodies: the expectation to wear make-up, to ‘make an improvement to yourself’ and ‘look better than what I do normally’. These expectations form part of the affective process that also includes material-discursive relations of hair, make-up, dresses, beauty norms, dieting, body image and body satisfaction, affective bodily responses such as a scoff, laughter and feelings of indignation. Conceptualising bodies as becoming, ball-girl-bodies are produced through but not determined by their relations with other things (Coleman, 2009). Capacities and constraints are contingent and situated. While some girls may feel pressure to lose weight and fast before the ball, others may not, as evident with dismissal of dieting and refusal to lose weight in this fragment. This ‘resistance’ is an ‘affective movement’ or process (Fox & Alldred, 2016) within a particular ball-girl-body-beauty assemblage. Agency is a quality or capacity that emerges ‘in-between’ wider relations including the material (Barad, 2007; Bennett, 2004). In the intra-action of bodies, corporeal practices, feelings, ideas, values, body image and confidence, the ball-girl-body materialises in ways that may destabilise beauty norms and expectations, for instance, rejecting the idea the female body needs improvement through make-up and dieting.

Becoming-pretty and ‘looking different’ are intra-active affective processes comprising materialities, gender norms, feelings and corporeal practices. It is through these dynamic configurations that ball-girl-bodies materialise as ‘looking good’. More than simply how a body looks, these enactments involve bodily feelings and sensations. Indeed, becoming-pretty and ‘looking good’ are felt intensities; these feelings are powerful affective forces in the becoming of ball-girl-bodies. Ball-girl-bodies are multiple and become in-connection with other girl-bodies, such as everyday-bodies, sport-girl-bodies and school-girl-bodies. There is no essential girl-body; rather, bodies are material-discursive phenomena continually becoming through dynamic affective relations. This means bodily capacities are also unfixed; possibilities and constraints are continually (re)configured through material-discursive and affective entanglements.

**Concluding–continuing thoughts**

By exploring beauty-body practices as material-discursive intra-activity, this chapter has mapped the ways discursive practices are entangled with material bodies, things, corporeal practices and affects to collaboratively enact the ball-girl-body. This approach extends feminist post-structural thought to think not only about how girls’ bodies are produced through discursive forces, but to pay attention to the force of materiality in these becomings. Approaching beauty-body practices as material-discursive entanglements establishes them as relational practices. They are not uni-linear processes where something is simply done to bodies; rather, they emerge as multi-linear and affective matterings involving human and more-than-human forces. Inspired by Barad, we can think of the ball-girl-body not as a ‘fully formed, pre-existing’ subject, but rather as ‘intra-actively co-constituted through the material-
discursive practices they engage in’ (2007, p.168). As such, bodies are inseparable from the practices, spaces and materialities that produce them.

A feminist new material framework offers a way of thinking about beauty-body practices and ball-girl-bodies as becoming-with one another. These entangled and mutual becomings extend relations between girls’ bodies and materialities, such as high-heeled shoes, beyond the subject/object divide. Understanding boundaries between material objects (things, bodies) as porous helps dismantle one-way linear cause-and-effect logic. Instead, entanglements of bodies, things, practices, ideas and affects are understood to limit and/or extend ball-girl-body becomings in specific ways. Affective flows within assemblages may sustain connections in-between bodies, traditional feminine norms and beauty ideals, yet at other times may emerge as ‘resistance’ – an affective movement (Fox & Alldred, 2016) that can destabilise gendered bodily norms and open up new becomings for ball-girl-bodies. Conceptualising ball-girl-bodies as becoming means they are open-ended, never complete or closed. They become multiple and messy. Becoming ball-girl is a making and unmaking of bodies, through an entanglement of material things, affective forces, discursive practices, histories and imaginings.
“The Prince didn’t leave Cinderella’s side all night. They danced every
dance together. As the lights dimmed and sweet music floated out
into the summer night, Cinderella heard the clock begin to chime.”
(Walt Disney, 1998)

“This is the elemental landscape of
wonder, humming with invisible forces
and other-than-human creatures”
(Marina Warner, 2014)

“Thing-power: the curious ability of
inanimate things to animate, to act, to
produce effects dramatic and subtle”
(Jane Bennett, 2010)

Images: Two participant photographs
Ball–girl–date affections

Themes of romance permeate cultural imaginaries of a ball or prom (Best, 2000; Mazzarella, 1999; Smith, 2014). These enduring cultural meanings have firm historical literary roots: Cinderella of course, met her handsome prince at the ball (Disney, 1950; Perrault, 1697), as did Lizzie and Mr Darcy in Pride and Prejudice (Austen, 1813). In many a Jane Austen novel, balls are portrayed as lavish affairs brimming with potential suitors – or at least the ‘good’ ones are. This magical connection between a ball and romance remains a popular trope in contemporary literature (Downing, 2014; Eulberg, 2011) and movies. High school love stories often cohere around, or culminate in, the night of the prom: Never been kissed (1999), Prom (2011), Pretty in Pink (1986), Footloose (1984, 2011), 10 things I hate about you (1999) and Twilight (2008) are just a few examples. The portrayal of the ball in teen magazines is similarly infused with themes of romance (Mazzarella, 1999; Zlatunich, 2009): these portrayals primarily adhere to heterosexual and gender norms, such as boy asks girl, romantic gestures and slow dances.

Such themes construct having or being a date as a signifier of ‘appropriate’ femininity in the social space of the ball. In Best’s analysis of the American prom, she argues there was considerable pressure to have a prom date: for girls, having a date was ‘internalized as a means to both measuring feminine self-worth and to solidifying their heterosexual identities’ (2000: p.68). Best’s analysis associates having a date with the expression or ‘solidification’ of a feminine ideal constituted through dominant discourses of femininity and heterosexuality. Steeped in themes of romance, Best argues ‘proms champion heterosexuality’ (2000; p.10). Numerous studies support these findings by establishing schools, and rituals such as the ball, as heteronormative spaces (Allen, 2006; Ferfolja, 2007; Pascoe, 2007; Quinlivan & Town, 1999; Rasmussen, 2004; Smith, 2014): this work highlights how dominant discourses of heterosexuality and femininity constitute particular positionings for girls within this schooling practice, for instance, a presumed investment in having and/or being someone’s date.

Instead of thinking about ball-girl and date dynamics as solely positioned within discursive forces, this chapter examines ball-girl-date relations ‘as encounters between ontologically diverse actants, some human, some not, though all thoroughly material’ (Bennett, 2010: p.xiv). This approach conceptualises ball-girl-date encounters as more than a relationship between two people as individually determinate entities; instead, they can be thought of as posthuman encounters (Braidotti, 2013) or “more than” encounters (Springgay, 2016: p.77) comprising human and more-than-human relations. Employing a new materialist approach to sexuality, the following discussion explores ball-girl-date encounters as sexuality-assemblages (Allen, 2013; Fox & Alldred, 2013), where ball-girl sexualities are emergent rather than an attribute of individual bodies. In this framing, sexualities are dynamic becomings (Allen, 2015) that emerge via affective-material ball-girl-date relations. This
chapter draws attention to the ways things, spaces, bodies and affects work as ‘entangled material agencies’ (Taylor, 2013: p.6) in the becoming of sexuality (Allen, 2015) and the school ball-girl.

A new materialist approach to sexuality marks a shift away from an anthropocentric frame of reference where sexuality derives from, or is an attribute of the human body; instead, sexuality is relational, emerging through flows of affect within sexuality-assemblages (Fox & Alldred, 2013). In this framing, ‘how sexuality manifests has little do with personal preferences or dispositions, and everything to do with how bodies, things, ideas and social institutions assemble’ (Fox & Alldred, 2017: p.102). This means aspects of sexuality – desires, attractions, bodily capacities, sexual codes, customs and conduct – emerge through affective relations. The focus of the chapter is not simply what forms sexuality-assemblages (i.e. bodies, things, school ball spaces and ideas), but how affective dynamics within ball-girl-date assemblages create conditions of possibility for ball-girl-bodies to act, feel and desire (Fox & Alldred, 2013). Here, affect is a force or intensity that flows through and in-between bodies and things, enhancing or diminishing capacities to act (Ringrose & Coleman, 2013).

Flows of affect produce ball-girl capacities, including but not limited to emotions. Following Fox (2015), emotions are understood to form part of a broader affective flow, in-between bodies, other entities (human and more-than-human) and the social. A relational approach to emotions is useful in thinking about how emotions (including those conventionally classified as sexual and not) play a part in producing the school ball-girl. The focus is not on what emotions are but what they do (Ahmed, 2004b). Emotions are not simply bodily responses to particular events, but have a capacity to affect (Fox, 2015). For example, emotions and feelings may propel a ball-girl to do something (an action or decision), which may then produce further affects within the assemblage.

The chapter begins by conceptualising the importance of a date as an affective-material process, produced through relational forces such as friends, expectations and imaginings. I consider the vitality of school ball photographs: not just what a photograph shows, but how the taking-sharing-viewing of photographs are productive forces in ball-girl-date encounters. Photographs are both a product of affect and also productive of ball-girl capacities (feelings and actions). Exploring assemblages of girls, dates, high heels and discursive practices, the chapter considers how the flow of affect delineates particular bodies (i.e. tall-girl-bodies in relation to short-boy-bodies). Here, feelings of anxiety and sympathy ‘stick’ (Ahmed, 2004) to certain bodies generating particular capacities and constraints. The final section explores spatial-material arrangements, what I call ‘hot spots’, such as the school ball entrance and dance floor, and how these relations restrict or generate particular actions, movement and feelings for the ball-girl. Collectively, this chapter considers how a new materialist approach to sexuality might provide openings for (re)imagining ball-girl sexualities in ways that escape popular narratives.
The becoming of ball-date (un)importance

At both participating schools, ball dates were optional and could include female and male dates from inside or outside of school. Dates ranged from boyfriends to close female and male friends, ball swaps⁶ and set-up dates⁷. There were also participants who chose not to take a date but instead to attend the ball with a group of friends. The following discussion explores the becoming of date (un)importance through relational forces. Contrary to popular romantic constructions of the ball, the importance of a date is not fixed or (discursively) presumed. Instead, the importance of a ball date is a material-affective process produced through multiple forces including friends, imaginings, photographs, relationship status, expectations and historical legacies associated with the ball. The following fragment introduces some of these affective relations, including expectations, friends and feelings:

So is it a big deal – taking partners?
I think it depends on who you talk to
Yeah
It also depends on what your expectation is, cause like it’s not like if you didn’t have a partner everyone would be like ‘oh my gosh, you’re so lame’. But lots of people want to have a partner, cause like the whole prom thing, they want to have a date and be like ‘oh my gosh, let’s go together’
And like some people I talk to and I’m like ‘oh yeah I’m not going with anyone’ and they’re like ‘oh my gosh we need to find you a ball date’ and I actually don’t really care. Going by myself is fine, but yeah some people like have this idea in their head that it’s a ball, you have to go with someone, but nah
Just go in groups, groups are more fun
Yeah
And like people even though they’re in couples they will all go together, there will be couples and there will be people on their own

(Year 12, focus group, 4 voices)

In this discussion, the ball-date becomes (un)important via an array of forces: prom culture portrayed through movies; girls’ imaginings and expectations of the ball; friendship group dynamics, ‘oh my gosh, we need to find you a date’; and feelings of ambivalence, ‘I actually don’t really care’. These entangled forces generate a sense of ball-dates as important for some girls and not for others. This varied importance is a material-affective process or intensity that shifts and changes depending on particular forces and affects. For example, affective relations in-between girls and their friends could increase or diminish the desire to take a date. If most people in a friendship group were going with or without a date, these collective dynamics could produce a sense of pressure or expectation for girls to follow suit. Consider the affective forces of pressure and judgement in the following fragments:

Is there pressure to take a partner or it feels fine?
I feel like there is in some aspects, um, like when all your friends are taking one and you’re the only one not taking one. We had one of our friends last year not take someone and she

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⁶ Ball swaps are a reciprocal arrangement where two students from differing schools attend each other’s school ball.
⁷ Set-up dates were often arranged through friends and the students may or may not have known one another.
got… I feel like she didn’t get crap about it, but she got ‘oh you’re not taking anyone? Ok’ kind
of thing

(Year 13, focus group, 2 voices)

I know a couple of girls, a girl group, and one of the girls does want to take a date, but
everyone else in the group isn’t taking a date, so she’s getting pressure not to take one
Yeah
She wants to take one but all her friends aren’t taking one, so she feels like her date will be
uncomfortable and all her friends aren’t taking dates and they’re making her feel
uncomfortable because she is…
They’re like ‘oh we want it to be just friends’

(Year 12, focus group, 2 voices)

These fragments enact a sense of pressure or expectation in relation to what the majority of
the friendship group were doing: that is, taking dates or not. Affective connections in-between
ball-girls, dates and friendship group dynamics include: peer judgment, uniformity, and
pressure to conform to the group, feeling conflicted or uncomfortable. These affects circulate
in-between bodies, spaces, ideas and social relations as a collective force that produce ball-
girl capacities and desires: in this instance, the desire to take a date or not. Desire is
understood here as an affect (Deleuze & Guattari, 1984) rather than an essential quality of a
body; as affect it ‘produces specific capacities to act or feel in a body or bodies, be it arousal,
attraction, sexual activity, rejection’ (Alldred & Fox, 2015: p.4), in this instance, the desire to
take a date or not. This theorisation of desire shifts sexual desiring from a ‘yearning for an
“object of desire” . . . into a productive force capable of transforming bodies, social formations
and ideas’ (Fox & Alldred, 2017: p.101). Rather than being pre-determined or discursively
produced, the importance of a ball-date becomes fluid and contingent.

In these ball-girl-date-friend assemblages, the ‘decision’ to take a date shifts away from the
notion of an autonomous agentic ball-girl to flows of affect within assemblages comprising
multiple forces. Ball-girl-date encounters draw together not just two people, but personal and
cultural contexts, norms of conduct, aspects of the setting, including practices like having your
photo taken:

Why do you reckon it was a bigger deal last year to take a date than this year?
I guess the image of having a guy to take probably, and the photos. I don’t know though, I
don’t know what it was for me. It was probably just that my friends, like one of my friends had
a boyfriend so she was taking him, and you know I guess that was kind of a pressure for me,
to be like the only one in the photos who didn’t have someone standing beside them, that was
a stress for me

(Year 13, individual interview, 2 voices)

This fragment enacts a sexuality-assemblage comprising ball-dates, friends, photographs,
feelings of pressure and stress, ‘the image of having a guy to take’ and not wanting to appear
other or the odd one out. The notion of ‘image’ in this fragment (i.e. ‘the image of having a
guy to take’) is understood as a projected or perceived persona, itself an affect. It is an
impression or perception produced through varied relations: materiality of a ball-date,
discourses of heterosexuality and femininity, and girls’ imaginings. Within a sexuality assemblage, human and more-than-human relations affect (and are affected by) each other to produce material e/affects (Alldred & Fox, 2015). For this participant, the desire to take a date was intensified in-relation to school ball photographs: the thought of being ‘the only one in the photos who didn’t have someone standing beside them’ created a ‘kind of pressure…a stress’. In this ball-girl-date-photo assemblage, the photograph can be understood as an object that amplifies affective forces (Niccolini & Pindyck, 2015), specifically the desire to take a date.

![Figure 1](image)

This snap captures a material, and in this instance gendered, configuration: bodies are positioned next to other bodies; one arm from each body wrapped around their date. It is a fragmented photograph: a filter obscures the finer details, preventing the gaze from being drawn to clothing and facial expressions. Yet an impression remains; or rather, emerges through the configuration of bodies, gendered historical legacies of the ball and our perception/memories/ideas as the viewer.
The physical arrangement where bodies are positioned as (heterosexual) couples plays an affective role in the intensity of the ball-girl-date-photo encounter. In this sense, the positioning of bodies captured by a photograph are not simply positioned in space and time but of spacetime in a specific affective spacetime mattering (Barad, 2007). The prospect of standing in a photo and being the only one without a date is an ‘affective moment’ (Mulcahy, 2012: p.16) that triggered feelings of pressure and not wanting to feel different; these affective feelings generate a desire or motivation to have a date. As a material-discursive object, the (male) ball-date holds symbolic (discursive) value in the projection of a particular ball-girl persona as heterosexually desired–desiring. This persona is inextricably connected with enduring cultural understandings that construct the ball as a space for heterosexual couplings in particular. The ways girls and dates get imagined in these constructions is constrained by dominant structural forces, such as discourses of femininity and heterosexuality, these imaginings remaining stable over time. The type of femininity that emerges within this ball-girl persona (i.e. as part of a heterosexual couple) is produced via material-discursive forces including photographs, ball-date bodies, friends, cultural imaginings and expectations associated with the school ball.

While the material presence of a date can be a powerful intra-active force in the production of a particular persona or the enactment of a particular femininity, it is not entirely fixed. The following fragment reworks ideas of femininity typically constituted through ball-girl and date relations:

Are you taking a partner?
Well I took one last year, but um, this one is a bit complicated for me because I want to take a date but then I’m kind of like, I’m head girl, do I want to have that image? Or do I want to be the strong independent woman, you know like. I’m still trying to figure out if I want to take one or not

(Year 13, individual interview, 2 voices)

In this fragment, a participant considers whether she wants to take a date and have ‘that image’ (i.e. being part of a couple), or whether she wants to go on her own and be ‘the strong independent woman’. This participant was Head Girl and her leadership role is entangled in this ball-girl-date assemblage. In contrast to going with a date, going solo enacts a sense of independence, pride and strength. In one way, this could be understood through Best’s (2000) approach as expressing a particular feminine identity, however; it is not one produced through taking a date. Indeed, it is the opposite. In this fragment, what is enacted as a feminine ‘ideal’ is reimagined.

If the importance of a ball-date is an affect that emerges via intra-active relations, then it remains open to change. For example, on several occasions participants at All-Girls High commented that taking a date held greater importance the previous year; this year there was less stress about ball-dates and more girls were going on their own:
Well last year, everyone was like I want to take a date, but this year, less people are, like, more people are just 'ah nah, I’ll go by myself’

I think it’s, if you don’t have someone that you will really feel comfortable with and enjoy it, then there’s no point in taking them

Yeah [multiple]

I think last year lots of people took dates that they weren’t, like…

They got set up

Yeah and they sort of have to look after them and it put a dampener on the night

If they don’t have any friends or whatever

(Year 13, focus group, 3 voices)

Having to ‘look after’ a date could hamper girls’ enjoyment of the ball and restrict their freedom to move around and spend time with their friends. Girls in Year 13 were particularly cognisant of how ball-girl-date dynamics could ‘put a dampener on the night’: this awareness often a product of their experiences at last year’s ball and feelings of frustration, annoyance and ambivalence. Remembered feelings of discomfort and the responsibility to ‘look after’ or ‘baby-sit’ someone enact ball-dates as problematic or a hindrance. These feelings appeared heightened if they did not know the ball-date well, or if the date did not know many people at the ball. Entangled in ball-girl-date encounters is the expectation and responsibility to be a ‘good date’. As another participant explained, ‘you kind of have to baby-sit them a bit, like you don’t want to make them feel too lonely, but you don’t want to like bring them everywhere with you, you still want to see your own friends’. This sense of responsibility can work to contain girls’ bodies, in particular their movement and freedom within the school ball space. This constraint was not fixed however, but shifted depending on other relations in the ball-girl-date assemblage. For example, the pressure of feeling like you had to ‘baby-sit’ a date was reduced if the date had friends at the ball who they could spend time with. This new configuration afforded the ball-girl more freedom to spend time with their own friends.

The affective relations within ball-girl-date assemblages can be experienced as both positive and negative. While they may constrain girls to dominant school ball norms (i.e. attending with a [male] date), they may also enable girls to go on their own, be ‘the strong independent woman’ and have ‘more fun’ with a group of friends. Thinking about ball-girl-date encounters as material-affective assemblages, the focus is not simply on whether dates are important in the phenomenon of the school ball-girl, but how dates become (un)important in the entanglements with material things, ideas, spaces and affects.

The affective-materiality of the school ball photo

This thesis conceptualises school ball photographs as material-discursive phenomena, intra-actively produced in connection with material forces (i.e. bodies, camera, spatial elements), gendered discourses and traditional ideas associated with the ball, the photographer, viewer and mode of dissemination (i.e. internet and social media). We can conceptualise these relations as a sexuality-assemblage that ‘accrues around an event’ (Alldred & Fox, 2015: p.4),
in this instance, the photograph. Consider the various material-discursive relations that are entangled in the following image:

![Figure 2: Ball-girl-date-dress-suit-corsage-gendered discourses-photographer-viewer…](image)

Material elements include: clothing – a formal gown, suit and tie; a wrist corsage; two human bodies that are positioned closely to one another, an arm from each body is wrapped around the other body, smiling faces looking directly at the camera; glittered gold backdrop; soft diffused lighting which simultaneously creates shadow, sparkly highlights and shape. These material elements (i.e. things I can see) overlap with discourses and cultural understandings associated with the school ball, such as romance and heterosexual couplings; the camera, photographer and school ball space; the viewer and our memories and feelings. There is a ‘thing power’ (Bennett, 2010) or vitality to photographs that far exceeds representation, that is, what the photograph simply shows. Imagine, for instance, what the two bodies in the above photograph might see and hear: the click of the camera, flicker of the flash, the photographer and comments they might make, the crowd of people waiting to have their photograph taken. Within an agential realist conceptualisation of photographs, who is taking the photo is a co-constitutive force. At all three balls, there were professional photographers taking photos of ball attendees. The majority of professional photographs were taken in set-up spaces with a backdrop (as seen in Figure 2, 3 and 4). Students pose for these photographs, often with a queue of people watching. The photographer frequently prompts students with comments or instructions to pose in certain ways. The following two photographs are typical examples:
Figure 3 shows two bodies, a red curtain and carpet; human arms are spread wide, palms open. The female body faces the camera/photographer; the male body is slightly turned towards the female body, legs bent and arms extended. Figure 4 shows a group of friends as coupled male and female bodies; the bodies are positioned close to and orientated towards one another, each female is holding the male’s tie pulling it towards them. Male hands are left dangling or placed in pockets. The facial expressions range from surprise, defiance, playfulness, embarrassment, confusion and boredom. As one of the viewers, I am also entangled in this affective-material event. When I look at this photograph, I cringe. The photo does something to me (MacLure, 2013). I recall listening to the photographers at the balls I observed, their comments and prompts to students. As I look at the faces in the photograph, some students appear light-heartedly going along with the photographer’s prompts, others look embarrassed. I wonder how old is this photographer? What do the photographed students think of this photo? Did these students choose this pose or did the photographer prompt it? My hunch is the latter. Ontologically, I am not a neutral observer. There is no separation between the viewer (myself) and the viewed: as Hultman and Lenz Taguchi (2010: p.537) explain, ‘we can never read the data in order to unfold “what actually happened”;’ rather, it is a ‘reading with the photograph’ in my encounter with it.

The sharing and viewing of school ball photographs are inextricably entangled in ball-girl-date-photo encounters. Consider the flow of affect in the following discussion, when a participant connects the importance of a date with parents and the sharing of photographs with wider family:

*Do you think it’s like, the whole thing about the date, it’s so much just so our parents can see the photos of you, and ‘oh look a date’, so they can send it to my family?*

*Oh my gosh, my mum took so many photos of me last year I know*

*I got messages like ‘you looked gorgeous at your ball’ and I was, ‘how did you know?’ Because your Mum was sending them all out?*
So embarrassing
[sighs and laughter]

(Year 13, focus group, 4 voices)

This fragment connects ball-girls and dates with parents taking and sharing photographs with family, gendered norms and emotions. Here, photographs emerge as lively and mobile; they do something. The taking, sharing and ‘movement’ of ball photographs elicit an array of affective forces, for instance, parental pride ‘oh my gosh, my mum took so many photos of me last year’, participant embarrassment and laughter. School ball photos evoke responses from family, such as ‘oh look a date’ and ‘you looked gorgeous’, these comments enacting beauty ideals and traditional norms of femininity. This ‘viewing’ of photographs is a productive force in the becoming of both the photo and ball-girl (Allen, 2015; Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010).

There is a public nature to ball photos that cannot be overlooked: this includes the sharing of photos by ball-girls and parents, but also the public sharing of professional photographs taken at the ball. At all three balls I attended, the digital photographs taken by a professional photography company are shared with students via a website where anyone, including me, could access, view and download the photographs. Students had no control over the photos uploaded, nor did they have the power to edit or remove images they did not like. One photography company also had a live feed uploading ball photos to the company’s Facebook page throughout the evening of the ball. For some girls, the lack of privacy and control over photographs generated feelings of discomfort. As one participant explained, ‘this random can see your photo before you do and that makes me uncomfortable’: these feelings form part of the affective flow within the affective-material event of a photograph. For another participant, these feelings were intensified in-relation with the photographer prompting ‘uncomfortable poses’:

Last year, the photographers, one of them was really unusual and he wanted us to do all these really weird like uncomfortable poses, like ‘make it look awkward’, ‘I want an awkward family photo’, and it was just really weird. I didn’t want that to be put on the internet. And then he made us do these really weird poses and stuff, and it was so weird the pictures that we got out. And you never got to see what the pictures looked like before they put it up, and that kind of stressed me out

(Year 13, individual interview, 1 voice)

Here, photographs – how they are taken and shared – materialise as a source of stress and potential embarrassment. These feelings are affect – a product of a particular configuration of an ‘unusual’ photographer, his prompts for ‘really weird poses’, digital photography and modes of dissemination, and the participant’s lack of control over pictures that are put on the internet. Of course, photographers are just one force in the becoming of a photograph, students also move and choose poses of their own volition. They stuck out their tongues, pulled faces, looked surly and turned their backs to the camera:
A ball photo is not simply reducible to what it shows (i.e. two girls in long dresses with their backs to the camera). There is far more at work here. Photographs are both a product of affect, and also productive of ball-girl affective capacities (feelings and actions). They do something. Photographs are woven through many of the ball-girl-date encounters discussed in this chapter. In the previous discussion, photographs were an affective force in the desire to take a date. The next section revisits high heels and their productive entanglements with photographs, ball-girls, dates and the becoming of gendered bodies.

High heels, gendered bodies and ‘sticky’ affects

Ball-girl-date encounters involving a male date draw girls into a broader assemblage of gendered norms, in particular heterosexual bodily gendered ideals. From a relational materialist standpoint, gender is no longer taken for granted or a fixed given; instead, gender becomes ‘naturalized in the entanglements’ (Bodén, 2013: p.1125). A prevalent gender norm within ball-girl-date encounters was the expectation that girls would be shorter than a male date. This expectation was intensified when entangled in assemblages with high-heeled shoes and photographs. While the possibility of increased height was enticing for some girls, for other girls (and some boys) this capacity induced feelings of anxiety and embarrassment. The following fragment explores this material-discursive and affective predicament:
Oh yeah be shorter than your date [writes this on ‘what’s expected of girls’ brainstorm]
Everyone is freaking out about that, like you can only wear this [much] higher heel because like then you’ll be taller
Yeah some people are like ‘oh I’m going to have to wear flats’
Yeah like um this guy is going with this girl as friends, and he’s like ‘oh my god she’s already taller than me, now she’s wearing heels, I’m so embarrassed’ blah blah blah
Oh so the guys have said it too?
Yeah [multiple]
Yeah they think they’re less masculine if the girl is more whatever

(Year 12 girls, focus group, 4 voices)

This conversation enacts an array of affective forces: ‘freaking out’ about being taller than a male date, embarrassment and boys feeling ‘less masculine’. These affective feelings are not individually produced; instead they emerge via particular configurations of high heels, bodies, the social setting, (hetero)sexual codes and customs, gendered masculine and feminine ideals. As an actant (Bennett, 2010), high heels produce a taller body, and this altered ball-girl-body has the capacity to affect and be affected by other bodies, in particular a male-date-body (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). It is not that high heels have negative effects on the bodies of girls (or boys for that matter), as within a feminist new materialist ontology there are no clear lines of division between bodies and high-heeled shoes. Rather, it is via the affective relations within assemblages of bodies, high heels, heterosexual norms, discursive practices and the school ball setting that particular ball-girl capacities or constraints emerge.
Thinking about how bodies become gendered through the expansion and limitation of affective capacities (Coleman, 2009) enables an understanding of the ways affect can participate in the regulation of social and gender norms (Ahmed, 2004). As affect, feelings of anxiety over being taller than a male date contain some bodies and secure femininity within gendered norms. These norms are constituted in a binary with masculinity. There is a gendered expectation of how a girl/boy couple should look and this appears particularly intensified when bodies are in-relation with the school ball and photographs. This intensification is entangled with historical and traditional ideas surrounding the space, imaginings and the expectation of achieving ‘the right look’ for the heterosexual couple, the sharing and viewing of photographs by family and friends. The following fragments enact these entangled forces including social gender norms, imaginings and photographs:

**Well you see couples and you just assume that the guy is supposed to be a decent amount taller than the girl and it’s just like how the projected couple is supposed to be, you know, so it’s weird if you see them like the same height or the girl taller**

* (Year 13, focus group, 1 voice)

**Why do you think it’s an issue if the girl is taller?**

**Because you want to look good**

**Like you want to complete the look, if you look taller than your date then your whole look doesn’t matter as much cause people will look at the photo and go ‘oh look, she’s a head taller than him’._*

* (Year 12, focus group, 3 voices)

In these enactments, being taller than a male date diminishes or threatens a girl’s ability to ‘look good’. Looking the way ‘the projected couple is supposed to be’ refers to what a body can do or might become. The ‘right’ look is an intensity that ‘hooks’ girls (Niccolini, 2016: p.231) into gendered norms, placing restrictions around what a body can do in this particular spatial-temporal moment. Achieving this ‘right’ look is relational. A taller girl-body is only problematic when in-relation with a male date-body and discursive norms of femininity; this was not an issue or anxiety for girls who were attending the ball with female dates or going on their own. A body can be understood as becoming through connections it makes with multiple and different bodies (Coleman, 2009) (See also chapter Becoming ball-girl-bodies); therefore, it is not that a taller girl body is problematic on its own, but it is in the intra-activity of a tall-girl-body, short-boy-body, high heels, photos, discourses of femininity and masculinity, school ball imaginings and affective intensities (e.g. embarrassment, shame, emasculation), that the tall-girl-body becomes problematic. These entangled relations constrain ball-girl becomings in particular ways: in this instance, the production of girls’ bodies as ‘acceptable’ in ways that conform to and shore up gendered norms.

Feelings of anxiety over being taller than a male date involve an entanglement of multiple temporalities. Following Massumi (1995), affect can be understood to draw the future into the present through the entanglement of fear and threat. For example, the threat of emasculation or embarrassment causes fear in the present, more specifically an anxiety over potentially
being taller than a male date. Massumi suggests that without the presence of fearful feelings, or anxious feelings in this instance, the threat (e.g. of emasculation and embarrassment) would have no hold on the present. Threat in the future and anxiety in the present are ‘indissociable dimensions of the same event’ (Massumi, 2005: p.36). As such, the event is ‘a matter of multiple time-spaces’ (Clough, 2009: p.49). In a Baradian sense, this can be conceptualised as a spacetimemattering, where not only the present and future are inextricably entangled, but also the past. As girls discussed the anxiety over being taller than a male date, they drew my attention to historic gendered ideas of masculinity and femininity they felt regulated male and female bodies in this space:

Going back to girls and the whole height thing, what do you think that’s about? Like wanting the guy to be taller?  
Um wanting them to be like… they want to be superior, have the power  
It’s the whole sexist thing that goes way back  
For girls it’s just this expectation, idea about that’s how it should be  
That the boys are tall and muscly and protect you and stuff like that  
[groan] oh my gosh, I’ll protect myself  
And it’s an aesthetic thing as well, like if you take the pictures and then the girl is taller than the guy, then like I don’t know it’s just weird for both parties. It’s ingrained in the culture I guess  
You just pick them up  
Just lie on the floor [laughter]

(Year 12 girls, focus group, 4 voices)

This fragment enacts the entangled relations of high heels, bodies, photos, gender discourses, and the flow of affect that links them: cultural and social gender norms, expectations, feelings of unfairness and mockery of these ideas. The ‘past surfaces affectively’ in girls’ talk (Ivinson & Renold, 2013: p.1) as they trace the historical roots of these gendered power relations: ‘it’s the whole sexist thing that goes way back’. Here, the ‘past’ and the ‘future’ are entangled forces in producing the ‘present’ moment. The affective capacities of the ball-girl-body become organised and produced in socially and culturally recognisable ways (i.e. girl-body shorter than male date); these gendered becomings emerge in assemblages that contain vestiges of the past (Ivinson & Renold, 2013). Discussing the gendered historical expectation that ‘boys are tall and muscly and protect you and stuff’, affect registers bodily (MacLure, 2010; Mulcahy, 2012) through a participant’s groan and exclamation of ‘oh my gosh, I’ll protect myself’. The tone of voice, facial expressions (rolling of eyes) and use of humour ‘you just pick them up… just lie on the floor’ produces a subsequent flow of laughter. These affective responses (indignation, mockery, humour) entangled with human bodily matter and other materials (high heels) bring ‘an affective assemblage into effect’ (Mulcahy, 2012: p.18, italics in original). One effect in this assemblage, even if momentarily, is the unsettling of traditional gendered discourses that males should be taller and females are in need of protection.
Affect works to delineate particular bodies (Ahmed, 2004a), in this instance, tall-girl-bodies in relation to short-boy-bodies. The anxiety that circulates does not reside in bodies; rather, it ‘sticks’ to bodies within the flow of affect. Thinking about affect as ‘sticky’ offers a way of understanding elements as ‘bound together’; some forms of stickiness can create blockages to movement; however, this ‘transference of affect’ (Ahmed, 2014: p.91) can also give rise to new capacities for thinking and doing (Mulcahy, 2016). In one way, this affect ‘fixes’ (Ahmed, 2004) and problematises tall-girl-bodies, particularly in-relation to gender norms; however, affect is productive, in that it can orient and incite bodies towards specific actions. Affect also travels. Through Ahmed’s notion of ‘affective economy’ (2004a), she proposes an understanding of emotions (as affect) that not only ‘stick’ but also ‘slide’. In what she calls the rippling effect of emotions, feelings of anxiety or tension (over being taller than a male date) move sideways onto boys’ bodies. Consider the shift of affect in the following fragment:

Yip I’ve heard a lot of people say that ‘oh he’s a bit short’, like one of my friends Tyler, he wanted to come, and everyone is like ‘oh I don’t want to take Tyler because I’m already taller than Tyler, then I can’t wear heels’. So it’s a big thing for a few of the girls [laughing]. I do feel bad for short boys in ball season

(Year 12, focus group, 1 voice)

Here, short-boy-bodies become sites of social tension: their bodies are read as a threat to girls’ ‘freedom’ to wear high heels. There is a sense that short-boy-bodies can take something away from girl bodies (Ahmed, 2004a) and vice versa (i.e. threat of emasculation). This is an affect that delineates particular bodies from other bodies. For some girls, especially those who were arranging ball dates through friends or ball swaps, a tall partner enabled them to wear shoes of their ‘choosing’. A taller date created a different scenario than that created by a short date – different intra-activity. The capacities for what a body can do changes. Within this flow of affect, the date is potentially problematic and therefore altered, rather than the shoes. Put another way, the anxiety or affect clings and attaches to particular bodies not high heels. A discursive reading of this example might suggest girls are conforming to gendered norms (i.e. wearing high heels) and shoring up hegemonic masculinity (tall males as desirable); however, how might thinking about this scenario through concepts of affect show us something more in this high heels-ball-girl-date encounter?

Within a sexuality-assemblage, human and more-than-human relations produce sexual capacities and desires: attraction, sexual activity, rejection and so forth (Fox & Alldred, 2013). In this framing, what is considered a desirable male date is produced via relations and affects within the sexuality-assemblage. Desirability and what is perceived as attractive is relational. A different assemblage can alter what might be considered desirable in a male date: for instance, if the male and female were in a relationship, then as one participant stated ‘it wouldn’t be the end of the world’; however, if it was ball-swap situation, which involved girls ‘choosing’ their date, then most girls would choose not to be taller. Similarly, the anxiety over height seemed to be intensified when in-relation with the school ball and its unavoidable
photos: a different space and setting might not produce the same affects at the same intensity. We get a sense of what Fox and Alldred (2017) might refer to when they say the manifestation of sexuality has little to do with personal preference, and everything to do with how relations assemble. The meanings associated with tall-girl-bodies and short-boy-bodies are not fixed, rather they emerge in-relation with things (i.e. high heels, photos), space and affect. This framing shifts the notion of inherent properties of material bodies, to bodies that become intra-actively.

In thinking about ‘sticky’ affects, a feeling of sympathy also attached itself to male bodies. In the previous fragment, a participant concludes by light-heartedly expressing ‘I feel bad for short boys during ball season’. The enactment of sympathy works to situate short-boy-bodies as other. A sense of sympathy also emerged when another participant discusses how she chose to compromise her shoe choice in order to spare her partner’s ego:

Oh he’s only a tiny bit taller than me, so I was like I can’t really do that to him, be taller, cause it happened at another ball with a couple of friends, the girl was this tall… So I spared his ego. Next year I’m going to go solo and going to go really high [laughing]

(Year 12, focus group, 1 voice)

Here, the expression of sympathy in the form of ‘sparing his ego’ was used as justification for not wearing ‘really high’ shoes to the ball. Laughing, the participant proposes that next year she would forego the date enabling her to ‘go really high’. This brings us back to the allure and ‘thing power’ of high heels. Rather than being an inert object, high heels are an agentic force in this ball-girl-date encounter producing particular affective capacities. These capacities can undermine or reconfigure discursive understandings of the school ball, for instance, the idea that a ball date is an important or intrinsic part of the school ball experience. Meanings associated with ball-dates shift and change depending on the sexuality assemblage, for instance, the ball-date can become desirable, problematic or an object of sympathy.

Affective-spatial encounters

More than a mere backdrop to ball-girl-date relations, spatial arrangements and practices, such as the school ball entrance and dance floor, can intensify or produce particular affects within ball-girl-date assemblages. I conceptualise these carefully staged spaces as affective-material ‘hot spots’ where affects circulate around and through bodies, school ball spatial configurations and practices. Within these sexuality-assemblages, specific material affects for bodies emerge, which restrict and generate particular actions, movement and feelings. The following fragment introduces a few of these affective dynamics:

Some people think it would be embarrassing walking in without a date, like I definitely think that doesn’t even matter, no one would care but some girls would feel…
I feel like it would be awkward, like unless you were in a relationship with them or friends with them, it would be awkward
Yeah [multiple]
Like pressure to have to dance with them and have photos, I can’t be bothered with that.
Yeah, you were friends with Matt so it was all good
If random people asked you, and I don’t know how to spend a whole evening with you. That totally happens
I remember last year Luke asked me and I just had to be like, nooo. Like I didn’t have an excuse but I had to say no
It was sad when one of our friends said yes to a friend and then ditched him the entire night, and he was kind of like left ‘oh I wanted to have a dance with my date, she said yes but she’s just kind of ditched me’ so that gets kind of sad

(Year 13, focus group, 4 voices)

This fragment enacts multiple affective relations within ball-girl-date encounters: embarrassment at walking in on your own, (un)comfortable conversations, feeling awkward if you do not know your date well, sympathy for dates left sitting on their own, pressure to have photos and dance together. One participant recalls being asked to last year’s ball, to which she declined, ‘I didn’t have an excuse but I had to say no’. There is an affective force here that registers as a feeling or intensity that exceeds language (Massumi, 2002). It registered bodily as ‘I had to say no’ – perhaps a gut feeling – it was a force that propelled this participant to act (say no), even though she did not have (or need) a specific reason. Ball-girl-date encounters can produce certain expectations and responsibilities, for instance, having to dance and have photos together. These expectations could be enjoyable or potentially awkward.

In this fragment, a participant notes that some girls might think it embarrassing walking in without a date. At all three balls I observed, entering the ball was a slow and highly visible process. Students formed a line, were greeted by and shook hands with the principal and head pupils. Teachers were positioned around the entrance collecting tickets and welcoming students: this role also functioned to observe and identify students who may be intoxicated. At two of the three balls I attended, there was a photographer stationed at the entrance capturing people as they entered the ball, as evident in the following photographs:
These photographs depict the entrance to the ball adorned with dragon figurines reflecting 'the orient' ball theme. The entrance is well lit with overhead lighting and spotlights. A black strip of carpet leads attendees into the school ball space. In the background there is a queue of people, they are shaking hands and being greeted by the welcoming party. Behind the photographer is a large ballroom filling up with students, dates and teachers. As students walk into the ball, they are asked to pause and a photo is taken. At another ball, after being greeted by the principal and head students, ball attendees entered the ball via an escalator descending into the middle of the ballroom. As ball attendees came down the escalator,
bubbles floated down from the ceiling, and a photographer waited at the bottom to capture the ‘moment’ of their arrival. In both these examples, the photographs were uploaded to the photo-sharing website for all students to view and access.

The school ball entrance is not something simply situated in space, but is a spacetimemattering that constitutes the making or marking of space and time itself (Barad, 2007). Entering the ball is an affective-material event involving multiple bodies (entering, greeting, watching and waiting), spatial-material objects (open doors, entrance carpet, stairs, escalators, decorations, a camera), atmosphere (lighting, bubbles, music), bodily sensations and impressions. The school ball entrance is a ball-girl-date material ‘hot spot’, where an array of affects emerge through spatial-affective relations: for instance, embarrassment of showing up without a date may be intensified in this particular moment due to the dynamic forces producing this event – photographer, public sharing of photographs, queue of people waiting to enter the ball, the greeting party and those who have already arrived observing people entering the ball.

Like the school ball entrance, the dance floor can intensify or produce particular affects within sexuality-assemblages. The dance floor is a spatial-material arrangement that brings human bodies together with other bodies, music and lighting, practices such as ‘romantic’ slow dances, and expectations (i.e. to dance with a date). At all three balls, the dance floor was centrally located in the school ball space. Music was primarily popular music played by a DJ or a live band, with only a couple of slow dances during the evening. The dance floor is not simply a physical space that bodies inhabit; rather, it is a spatial relation that materialises through the dynamics of intra-activity or the process of spacetimemattering (Barad, 2007). As such, bodies, the dance floor and time emerge in the ‘moment’ of coming together.

![Figure 9](image-url)
The top quarter of this photograph shows lights, decorations, lanterns, a disco ball, tables and seated bodies; the rest of the photograph depicts the dance floor, a mass of moving-dancing-swaying-smiling-sweating-waving human bodies; two bodies in particular raise their hands and look directly at the camera.

Dancing was often cited as a fun part of the evening, yet the dance floor also emerged as a complex space in-relation with ball-dates and slow dances. Traditionally associated with imaginings of couples and romance, slow dances are an intrinsic part of popular movies that portray the ball as a romantic space. While there were only a few slow dances, they emerged as an affective-material practice that sparked a complex range of affects and feelings: from awkwardness and panic to a (re)configuring of the romantic couple slow dance:

*I think they played one slow song last year*  
*And we danced as a group [*laughter*]  
*That was when I got a bit panicked, I was like oh ok, everyone has got their ball partners*  
*I wasn’t going to slow dance with my date. There were some awkward slow dances last year*  
*Yeah when people who didn’t really go out, then got asked to slow dance and it was really awkward. I mean people ask you to slow dance to fast songs and you’re like no, stop*  

*(Year 13, focus group, 4 voices)*

*Apparently at slow dances there’s always that big group of people just swaying around, hugging each other, a slow dance is not necessarily just two people, with their dates, having the moment of their lives, it’s so overrated*  

*(Year 12, focus group, 1 voice)*

These comments open up the meaning of slow dances beyond notions of couples and romance. As one voice suggests, a slow dance is not necessarily ‘just two people…having the moment of their lives’. Slow dances, at least in the traditional sense, could be ‘awkward’, or, as evident in the first fragment, could induce feelings of panic if everyone else has ball partners. Feelings of awkwardness in-relation to slow dances are intensities or affects that traverse bodies, circulating in and between bodies on the dance floor. The change in music creates a shift in the air, sparking an affective response. These affects generate further affects and new capacities. In this example, the affective-spatial arrangement of the dance floor enables a particular form of collective activity that reconfigures the material-discursive practice of a slow dance. Here, the dance floor, bodies, music, slow dances and atmosphere come together in ways that disrupt ideas of the ball as a romantic space. In contrast to the countless teen movies that feature the prom in all its romantic glory – grand gestures, first kisses and slow dances – the majority of participants in this research did not construct the ball as a romantic event:

*Oh my god, balls are the most unromantic thing ever*  
*Yes*  
*Like I don’t see how?*
Yeah the music they play, like they play party music, they don’t play even remotely romantic music, like the majority of the time. They play like one or two slow dances. It’s what you’d play at a normal party, like just on the weekend. So I guess that takes away the awkwardness of having a lot of slow dances, but there are still some. And like I remember noticing a lot of girls walked off with their dates when the slow songs came on, but our friends just stayed.

(Year 13, focus group, 2 voices)

The dance floor, party music and the small number of slow dances, come together to enact the school ball as ‘the most unromantic thing ever’. This resonates with Smith’s (2012) research that found girls rarely constituted the ball as a site of romance. In this fragment, ideas of romance (or lack thereof) were connected to the style of music, that is ‘party music’ as opposed to ‘romantic music’, and very few slow dances. The school ball dance floor is not fixed as a romantic or non-romantic space, nor do I want to suggest this space is devoid of sexual intimacy and touch. Rather, the dance floor is an affective-material ‘hot spot’ where flows of affect generate particular actions, movement and feelings. Consider the affective forces in the following fragment where participants discuss couples ‘getting frisky’ on the dance floor:

Ughh, couples at the ball, ughh
Sorry
Oh no you were fine but oh my gosh, on the dance floor, some couples…
Oh wow!
Oh, getting frisky
They were getting very close and personal on dance floor. And I just found it kind of awkward, I felt slightly disturbed,
Like if you do that there’s nothing wrong with you, but it was just very… open and in view
Yes
And I think a lot of people weren’t like ‘oh I wish I had a date like that’, it was more like ‘oh that’s really awkward, what are those people doing?’

(Year 12, post-ball video diary, 2 voices)

This enactment can be conceptualised as an ‘affective moment’ (Mulcahy, 2012) where affect flows through and in-between bodies and the spatial-materiality of the dance floor. Observing couples ‘getting frisky’ on the dance floor elicits affective responses of feeling ‘kind of awkward’ and ‘slightly disturbed’. Dance floors are a complex and contradictory scene – while they can present an opportunity for bodies to get ‘very close and personal’, they are also a space that engenders a rethinking or destabilising of the popular constructions of the ball as a romantic space for couples. Keeping in mind, bodies are not simply situated in time and space (Barad, 2007), but are part of the very making and marking of space and time; as such, meanings associated with the ball, dates and slow dances are continually reconfigured. Rather than constructing the school ball as a predominantly romantic space that some students may accommodate or resist, school ball spaces are messy and contradictory: they are affective-material configurations that produce particular affects and capacities within ball-
girl-date encounters. Like the ball-girl, school ball spaces are always coming into being (becoming) – never fixed or finished.

**Concluding–continuing thoughts**

Ball-girl-date relations are affective-material encounters – multi-body, affect-laden affairs encompassing material things, spaces, bodies, ideas and feelings. Exploring these encounters as sexuality-assemblages highlights forces that might conventionally be considered background or peripheral: more-than-human forces, spatial-material configurations and practices. Material things such as high-heeled shoes and school ball photographs, affective-spatial ‘hot spots’ like the dance floor and school ball entrance, are considered vital co-producers in sexuality-assemblages, and it is through flows of affect that ball-girl (sexual and other) capacities for action, feeling and desire emerge. Attending to affective forces within ball-girl-date encounters has enabled a focus on ‘affective moments’: entanglements that produce pleasures, annoyances, niggles, gut feelings, attraction, awkwardness, desires and anxieties: capacities that might conventionally be described as ‘sexual’, yet also those not necessarily considered sexual at all (Fox & Alldred, 2017). A new materialist approach provides openings for rethinking conventional ‘boundaries’ of sexuality, for instance, as linked to identity and the human body. Understandings of sexuality and the school ball shift from a narrow individualised sexuality, to extending far beyond the human. For example, the desire to take a date is not (discursively) presumed, nor is it simply a matter of personal preference; rather, dates become (un)important through entanglements of material things, ideas, spaces and affects.

This chapter concludes with a fragment and photograph that captures the more-than-human potential of ball-girl-date encounters:

*By the way you do not need to have a date*

*You don’t need to have a date*

*I didn’t have a date but there were cardboard cut-outs and I was happy to call them my date*

*Yeah people brought Kanye West and Kim Kardashian cut-outs to our ball*

*I loved those people who did that*

*I think they were more popular than actual human beings at the ball*

*(Year 12, video diary, 2 voices)*
At Co-Ed High, a student brought life-size cardboard cut-outs of Kanye West and Kim Kardashian to the ball. During the evening Kim and Kanye mingled around tables, were seen on the dance floor and seized every photographic opportunity: Figure 10 is just one example. In this photograph taken by the professional photographer, two participants stand either side of Kanye. He is dressed for the occasion in a grey suit with a lavender pocket chief tucked into his breast pocket; a ball-girl-hand gently rests on his shoulder; one ball-girl gazes at the camera with a smile, while the other looks at Kanye, lips puckered ready to plant a kiss.

Kanye is a complex configuration of layers of pulp, fibre, chemicals, ink and plastic. Standing at 5 foot something tall, he appears confidently relaxed with his hands in his pockets and a permanent smile. It did not appear to matter that Kanye was shorter, nor did he require babysitting during the evening. He had plenty of friends to keep him company and looked great in photos. I can understand why the cardboard cut-out dates were so popular: in one participant’s words, ‘more popular than actual human beings at the ball’. This sentiment succinctly conveys the essence of this chapter: ball-girl-date encounters are complex configurations of material things and forces, of which humans are just one small part.
Ever after… an (un)ending conclusion

This final chapter opens with a data snap that cuts together visual images from the research. The participant photographs are arranged in such a way that a mosaic photographic image is formed. By bringing together images in this fashion, it becomes difficult to perceive the girl (and original photo) as a separate or individual entity. For me, the ‘new’ image gets to the very heart of the thesis – the idea that the ball-girl emerges through, and as part of, entangled intra-actions with school ball things, spaces, practices, ideas and affects. In a traditional sense, this chapter does the work of a concluding chapter: I bring together key ideas and arguments, and indicate the significance of the work. At the same time, in keeping with the study’s ontological foundations, I acknowledge this chapter is not an ending in a finite sense. A feminist new materialist ontology entails an open and unknown potential of the school ball-girl. As such, this chapter is both a conclusion and an opening to new possibilities and new questions.

School ball entanglements

The school ball is an intra-active entanglement of materialities, ideas, practices and affects. Examining the school ball as material-discursive entanglements widens the scope of who and what matters in this schooling practice (Barad, 2007): material things (clothing, shoes, photographs), multiple human bodies (friends, dates, family, hair and make-up professionals), spaces (homes, shopping malls, beauty salons, school, online spaces), discursive practices (feminine beauty ideals and expectations) and affects (intensities, sensations and feelings) are all implicated in the becoming of the school ball. A feminist new materialist ontology provides productive openings for (re)conceptualising what the school ball can be and
become. Meanings associated with the ball are not reducible to language or discourse, nor are humans and human meaning-making considered the sole constitutive force in how we come to understand the school ball (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010). There is a shift from an anthropocentric frame of reference that focuses on the human, to thinking about the more-than-human forces – things, sensations and intensities – that exceed the human. This re-orientation helps to dissolve conventional human/nonhuman, material/discursive and subject/object divides. When binaries are collapsed, hierarchies become flattened. A wider, ‘flattened’ landscape provides openings for reimagining the school ball beyond popular cultural narratives.

This thesis reconceptualises the school ball in ways that rupture spatial-temporal boundaries. The school ball is not an isolated spatial-temporal event; instead, the school ball is a continual process of becoming that occurs across multiple spaces and temporalities. Barad’s agential realist framework has provided a way to establish the entanglement of (school ball) space, time and other matter. In doing so, I have argued the school ball is more than simply ‘one night’ confined to, or defined as, a few hours in which girls inhabit the physical space of the school ball venue. When the school ball is produced through material-discursive entanglements, spatial-temporal boundaries become blurred. For example, school ball preparations and ‘build-up’ are not separate to the school ball; rather they are *spacetimematterings* (Barad, 2007) through which the school ball becomes. Choosing what to wear, planning hair and make-up, organising dates, pre-ball events, transport and post-ball activities – these preparations form dynamic assemblages of things, bodies, spaces, feelings and embodied practices that co-constitute the school ball.

The school ball can be conceptualised as an assemblage where multiple spaces and temporalities are intra-acting in the same ‘moment’. The ‘past’ and the ‘future’ are considered intra-actively entangled in girls’ enactments of the school ball: memories of seeing older siblings go to the ball; imaginings of the school ball imbued with history, movies and fairy tales; the hope that the ball will be special and memorable – something to look back on fondly. Memories, imaginings and expectations move across, beyond and in-between ‘past’, ‘present’ and ‘future’. These multiple temporalities are not linear or separate to one another; rather, the past and future are an agential part of the present ‘moment’ (Barad, 2007). Such an approach opens up a way to think about space and time not as something fixed or external, but as co-constitutive in the becoming of the school ball. Time is no longer static or linear, nor is space a container which we inhabit; rather, space and time are being continually (re)made and it is through these open-ended changing configurations the school ball becomes.

Theorising the school ball as a spacetimemattering disrupts popular constructions of the ball as a milestone or discrete moment in time in a ‘coming of age’ trajectory. Ontologically, the school ball is no longer situated in space and time, but rather of space and time (Barad,
This approach makes space for things that may have been previously ignored or considered peripheral in a discursive analysis, for instance, material objects, temporalities, spatial configurations, embodied practices and affective atmospheres. The human and the discursive become just two components within the dynamic entanglements that produce the school ball. In this sense, the school ball is a more-than-human phenomenon. It is not a fixed thing, space, or experience. It is this unending potential that opens up ways of imagining the school ball that disrupt or escape popular notions of what the school ball is and can be. When the phenomenon of the school ball is understood in this manner, new ways of understanding the ball-girl (beyond a discursive constitution) also become possible.

**Becoming ball-girl**

The school ball and ball-girl are entangled becomings. As Barad (2007: p.ix) writes, there is ‘no independent, self-contained existence. Individuals do not pre-exist their interactions; rather, individuals emerge through and as part of their entangled intra-relating’. This means both the school ball and ball-girl come into existence through their entangled relations: they emerge or become with one another. The possibilities for their becoming are multiple. Like the school ball, the ball-girl is an intra-active becoming – a process as opposed to a fixed ‘subject’. This thesis has examined the becoming of the ball-girl through the intra-active entanglements of material-discursive, human and more-than-human relations. As a result, the concept of becoming ball-girl encompasses far more than an individual human body, a subject position, identity or discourse.

The dynamics of intra-activity continually reconfigure what is possible – what the ball-girl can do and become. There is no essential or fixed ball-girl or ball-girl-body. Employing a Baradian account of the materialisation of bodies, the ball-girl is conceptualised as material-discursive phenomena. In this framing, the body of the ball-girl is not a pre-existing object with clearly defined boundaries and properties; rather, ball-girl-bodies are known and experienced (or become) through intra-active relations of multiple elements and forces. By exploring the entanglements that produce the ball-girl, bodies become inseparable from the practices, spaces and materialities that produce them. In this thesis, visual and verbal ‘data’ have performed agential cuts to produce or enact the material-discursive embodied practices girls engage in: entanglements include material objects, multiple bodies, spatial-material configurations, ideas and imaginings, embodied practices and feelings.

If the ball-girl is intra-actively produced then the material and discursive become ontologically inseparable. This is significant because it entails a rethinking of the relationship between discursive practices and the material ball-girl-body. Understanding materiality and discourse as mutually entangled provides an opening for extending previous analyses of girls and the school ball that have tended to focus on the materialisation of girls’ bodies through discursive practices (Best, 2000; Smith, 2012). In this thesis, beauty-body practices have been explored not as something the ball-girl does, but as material-discursive intra-activity. Here, discourses
of femininity and beauty are not prior or pre-determining, nor are they ignored; instead, discourses are understood as intra-actively entangled with material forces to collaboratively enact the ball-girl-body. Material-discursive entanglements involve an array of forces including: dresses, make-up, shoes, their own bodies, bodies of friends, everyday bodies at school, the affective forces of ‘looking good’ and ‘feeling pretty’, discourses of femininity and beauty, school ball photographs, seeing others and being seen. Mapping these material-discursive and affective entanglements offers an ontologically different understanding of bodies and beauty-body practices. An important aspect of this approach is an understanding of the capacities of ball-girl-bodies as not wholly reduced to dominant discourses of femininity. In discursive analyses, possibilities are often framed in relation to the accommodation and/or resistance of discursive feminine norms such as beauty ideals. Feminist new materialisms help open up an understanding of ball-girl femininities as emergent and relationally produced, where possibilities include, but are not limited to, discourse.

Discursive practices in relation to femininity, masculinity and sexuality are implicated in the becoming of the ball-girl-body; however, rather than being privileged, they are considered co-constitutive of ball-girl-bodies as material-discursive phenomena. Material objects, such as bodies, clothing and high-heeled shoes, are entangled with corporeal practices, gender discourses and social norms: each element is a co-constitutive force in the agential process of ball-girl-body mattering. Take for instance, the discursive expectation to wear high-heeled shoes to the ball. Examining the wearing of high heels as a material-discursive intra-active process has opened up a way to consider the material dimensions of regulatory practices. The materiality of the body intra-acts with the materiality of high-heeled shoes to produce physical e/affects and sensations, such as increased height and physical discomfort. Theories of affect have been useful in illustrating how these affects generate particular feelings (affective responses) and capacities for the ball-girl: for example, physical discomfort prompted girls to take their shoes on and off during the evening, or not wear them at all; they experienced feelings of relief upon taking high heels off and pride at being able to keep them on. Increased height could spark anxiety over potentially being taller than a male date – this anxiety ‘sticking’ to and problematising tall-girl and short-boy bodies. These affects can (re)produce gendered norms, yet also work to undermine or reconfigure traditional gender discourses: this potential emerges through multiple relations and flows of affect. As such, material objects like high-heeled shoes are recognised as vital forces (Bennett, 2010) in the becoming of ball-girl-bodies, as is the materiality of the body.

The forces of human and more-than-human matter continually reconfigure how beauty-body practices are understood and experienced. For instance, it is not simply that discursive forces produce wearing high heels as normal and expected (although this is clearly apparent), and that these discursive ideas affect bodies in a one-way direction; it also works the other way around. The concept of intra-action (Barad, 2007) has provided a way to account for the
materiality of the body, and how things such as shoes or fake eyelashes, sensations, (dis)comfort and emotions are entangled in the becoming of the ball-girl-body and beauty-body practices. This ontological understanding shifts the relationship between cultural norms and the body from a linear, one-way process (i.e. cultural norms producing or materialising the ball-girl-body) to a relational emergent process that is multi-directional and co-constitutional. One implication of this approach is that it steps away from reductive arguments following cause and effect logic. For example, it becomes impossible to think of high heels as an object that either empowers or oppresses the human ‘subject’, as this would suggest a linear model of causation and subject/object binary. Instead, high heels and bodies are intra-actively entangled, both affecting and being affected by one another. This opens up a way of thinking about beauty-body practices as dynamic, fluid and unstable, emerging through messy (and sticky) webs of human and more-than-human relations and flows of affect.

Ball-girl-bodies are in a state of inseparableness with matter such as beauty products, stick-on bras, spatial configurations, school ball photographs and other human bodies (i.e. friends, dates). The subject/object divide is dissolved and the traditional hierarchy between ‘subject’ and ‘object’ flattened. By dissolving the subject/object divide, conventional ‘boundaries’ of the human body are blurred. The boundaries between material objects (things and bodies) become porous and less distinct. In this sense, ball-girl-bodies are not contained to an individual human body and the boundaries of living flesh and skin. This framing shifts the human ‘subject’ from a central or privileged position to one where human and more-than-human matter are given similar importance. This rethinking of the human body requires a new conceptualisation of agency. In a Baradian sense, agency is a force emerging in-between elements such as material and discursive (matter and meaning). Agency is not located in or emanating from the individual (i.e. the ball-girl), but is an emergent force or becoming.

An agential realist approach (Barad, 2007) and theories of affect (Deleuze, 1988) have enabled a shift in focus from an autonomous human, where bodily capacities derive from human intention and action, to thinking about how ball-girl capacities and limitations are produced relationally. Affect is a force or intensity that flows through and in-between bodies and things, creating conditions of possibility for ball-girl-bodies to act, feel and desire (Fox & Alldred, 2013). One example discussed in this thesis is the affective force of effort: the expectation to ‘make an effort’ to look different and have fun on the night. Effort is not something located within or emanating from a self-contained, intentional human subject; rather, it is an affective force emerging through the entanglement of things, bodies, discourses, imaginings, spaces and embodied practices. The affective force of effort circulates through and in-between bodies, both human and more-than-human, to produce further affects and capacities, such as a sense of ‘build-up’, or an affective ‘buzz’ in the atmosphere. This build-up and buzz form part of the affective flow that produces the school ball and ball-girl.
‘Feeling pretty’ is another affective relation that works to limit or expand the becoming of ball-girl-bodies. As affect, ‘feeling pretty’ directs ball-girl-bodies towards certain objects and practices, such as gendered beauty practices and norms. Affect, however, exceeds discourse; and it is this potential that opens up new possibilities and capacities for ball-girl-bodies. If ball-girl capacities are affectively produced, then possibilities for the ball-girl are not wholly reducible to discursive practices. While pervasive, expectations and beauty norms are just one element within a broader flow of affect that produces the ball-girl. This means ball-girl capacities and constraints are contingent and situated. Affective flows within assemblages may sustain connections in-between bodies, traditional feminine norms and beauty ideals, yet at other times may emerge as ‘resistance’ – an affective movement (Fox & Alldred, 2016) that can destabilise gendered bodily norms and open up new becomings for ball-girl-bodies. A new materialist approach to power and resistance posited by Fox and Alldred (2016: p.128) suggests the capacity for ‘resisting’ emerges through ‘material forces and intensities’ within various assemblages. The affective movement is not stable: it flows and shifts as relations assemble and reassemble in new open-ended matterings.

A feminist new materialist approach to sexuality and theories of affect has opened up a way to conceptualise the relations in-between ball-girls and dates differently. As opposed to a relationship between two ontologically separate (human) entities, ball-girl-date encounters are lively tangled webs of material things, bodies, spaces and affects. Ball-girl-date encounters have been examined here as sexuality-assemblages (Allen, 2013; Fox & Alldred, 2013) comprising material objects (school ball photographs, high heels), friends, parents, spatial-material arrangements (dance floor, ball entrance), practices (taking-sharing-viewing photographs, slow dances), expectations, imaginings and feelings. Affective relations within sexuality-assemblages produce capacities for the ball-girl, perhaps restricting or generating particular actions, movement and feelings. This thesis has argued ball-date (un)importance is an affective-material process or intensity produced through relational forces, which means the importance of a date can shift and change depending on multiple forces and affects. For example, the affective connections in-between ball-girls, dates, friendship group dynamics and photographs can enhance or diminish the (affective) desire to take a date to the ball. What is significant about this argument is the importance of a date is not pre-determined or discursively presumed. The ‘decision’ to take a date or not to the ball shifts from the notion of an autonomous agentic ball-girl’s choice to an effect of flows of affect within ball-girl-date sexuality assemblages. This theorising offers an alternate way of thinking about dates, from whether ball-dates are important, to how dates become (un)important through material-discursive and affective relations.

Flows of affect within sexuality-assemblages produce ball-girl capacities including emotions. Emotions are not simply a bodily response to particular events, but have the capacity to affect (Fox, 2015); they do something (Ahmed, 2004). This affective potential posits emotions as more than individually experienced; they circulate in-between bodies and other human and
more-than human forces to form part of the broader affective flow that produces the school ball and ball-girl sexualities. Attending to affective forces has highlighted ‘affective moments’: entanglements that produce pleasures, annoyances, anxieties, ambivalence and gut feelings. I have explored how feelings, both positive and negative, are entangled in ball-girl becomings, often giving rise to new affective capacities and desires, for instance, the desire to take a date or not to the ball, or reconfiguring material-discursive practices such as slow dances. These affective capacities may conform to gender and sexual norms, yet can also disrupt popular cultural understandings of these events, such as the presumed investment in having and/or being someone’s date, or the idea of the ball as a ‘romantic’ space.

A feminist new materialist framework reconceptualises the girl in-relation to the school ball. The girl ‘as we know her as a humanist subject, becomes undone’ (Hultman & Lenz Taguchi, 2010: p.531, italics in original). We can think of the ball-girl as a ‘posthumanist body’ emerging via entangled human and more-than-human forces (Mazzei, 2016: p.153). This framing moves the ball-girl beyond discursive subject positionings and understandings of femininity to a conceptualisation of ball-girl femininities as materialising through the productive entanglements of human and more-than-human matter, embodied practices, ideas and affects. We can think about these matterings as productive, producing shifting ball-girl capacities, feelings and desires. The ball-girl becomes unstable, emergent phenomena continually (re)assembling at any given moment. This does not mean anything or everything is always possible; rather, limits and (im)possibilities are continually reconfigured within the assembled relations. This on-going process means it is impossible to know in advance what a ball-girl might do or become.

**Conceptualising the ‘new’**

A conclusion often entails answers derived from questions like ‘what does all this mean?’ ‘What do we now know about girls and the school ball that we did not know before?’ These questions become redundant within a feminist new materialist onto-epistemology, as they are premised on a separation between ‘the knower’ and ‘object to be known’ (Allen, 2016b: p.10). An agential realist framework posits knowing and being as occurring in the same moment; therefore, there is no ontological distance between the knower (researcher) and the known (girls and the school ball). As the researcher, I am entangled in the becoming of this research. Therefore, I cannot stand back, look upon the data and give meaning to it – this is something a traditional representational account might offer, yet is impossible within a feminist new materialist approach. This unending and unknown potential may sit uncomfortably with some readers and the conventional expectations of a conclusion; however, it is this open-ended potential that forms part of the ‘new’ that a feminist new materialist approach opens up (Allen, 2016a). In Barad’s words, ‘the “new” is the trace of what is yet to become’ (2007: p.383). This ‘newness’ is not nameable or representable because feminist new materialism ‘renders it
indeterminate’; instead, we might think of this ‘newness’ as creating ‘a space where something new can emerge’ (Allen, 2016a: p.8, italics in original).

Methodologically, a feminist new materialist framework has generated an alternative perspective to a representational reading of the school ball. Posthumanist and new materialist thought has opened up ways of understanding participant photographs and voice that attempt to decentre the human ‘subject’. It has opened a space for me to think differently about data and my own relationship to it as the researcher. This thinking has prompted me to engage creatively with data, pushing the methodological boundaries of what it is and can be. *Data snaps* (my own variations of data) are data-researcher (thinking-doing) encounters. They constitute a move away from a representational reading by disrupting the idea that I have the ability to capture what data ‘is’ or what it means. These data-researcher encounters demonstrate a lack of ontological separation between ‘being’ and ‘knowing’ (Barad, 2007). The lack of separation can also be applied to the subject of the thesis, ‘the school ball-girl’, and the thesis itself. The ball-girl and this thesis do not exist as individual distinct elements; instead, they are inextricably entwined.

The school ball as phenomena and the methodologies for researching the school ball are always entangled. They can only be distinguished from one another through provisional or temporary cuts. This thesis constitutes an agential cut in the on-going reconfiguration of the school ball. It is the cut that enables me to write about the phenomenon of the school ball-girl. Different agential cuts produce different phenomena (Barad, 2007) and this situatedness entails an ethical responsibility. As Hultman and Lenz Taguchi write, ‘what we do as researchers intervenes with the world and creates new possibilities but also evokes responsibilities’ (2010: p.540, italics in original). For Barad, ethics is entangled with knowing and being: ‘ethics is about accounting for our part of the entangled webs we weave’ (2007: p.384). Or, as Taylor and Ivinson (2013: p.666) put it, ethics involves taking seriously ‘our own messy, implicated, connected, embodied involvement in knowledge production’.

As researchers, ‘being ethically responsible is being aware of how realities are produced – what is cut out of or into phenomenon’ (Bodén, 2016: p.76). In relation to this thesis, the research assemblage has produced the school ball-girl in a specific way. What has been cut in or cut out of the phenomenon has been shaped by the research aim and questions, theory, the data that reached out to grasp me (MacLure, 2013) and the reciprocal, co-constitutive relationship that have formed my encounters with this data. If reality is never independent from how it is researched, these forces contribute to what matters and what is excluded from mattering. In a sense, these forces might contribute to what conventionally might be described as ‘limitations of the research’: there are boundaries that have been enacted. For example, as feminist poststructuralist thought shaped the ‘beginnings’ of the thesis, the research methods employed are conventionally humanist and qualitative (i.e. participant-generated photographs and video, focus groups, interviews and observation). The
questioning of whether humanist qualitative methods are useful or indeed appropriate for posthumanist research is ongoing (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013; Mazzei, 2013; Weaver & Snaza, 2016; Springgay 2014). While I have attempted to conceptualise data within a posthumanist framework, it is important to acknowledge these methods cohere around and are generated by the human. Here, the humans (participant/researcher) have decided what is worth speaking about and what is worth taking photos of. This inevitably shapes, and places limits on, what has come to matter in the research: what or who has been acknowledged and excluded, where the research could go and not go. There are invariably known and unknown forces and places that have been ‘cut out’ of this research affecting the perspective of the school ball it offers.

A feminist new materialist ontology has significant implications for how we think about and do sexualities and education research. Barad’s ethico-onto-epistemology is ‘provocative and generative for education because it forces us to pay attention to which kinds of matter, human and non-human, matters’ (Taylor & Ivinson, 2013: p.667). For Hultman and Lenz Taguchi, attending to ‘things and matter, usually perceived of as passive and immutable, . . . can be understood as promoting a more ethical practice’ (2010: p.540). Within educational research, this might entail an increased ‘attentiveness’ to students’ relations with things and spaces in schools, not as separate entities, but rather to what ‘emerges in-between’ (ibid). This thesis is an example of increased attentiveness to the relations in-between girls and the things, practices and spaces that co-constitute the school ball. Rather than conceiving girls as separate to these things, the ball-girl is understood as emergent in the in-between. Here, agency is no longer tied to the human subject or the workings of discourse; it is a move towards non-anthropocentrism, where humans no longer reign supreme.

This thesis contributes to a developing body of work attempting to ‘think-feel Otherwise, about the “more-than” of sexualities and education research’ (Renold & Ringrose, 2017: p.548). A feminist new materialist approach alters not only how we come to understand sexuality, for instance, as an assemblage rather than individually located (Allen, 2013; Fox & Alldred, 2013) but also the becoming of sexuality at school (Allen, 2015). As Renold and Ringrose (2017: p.548) state, ‘finding new ways to capture the ruptures, ripples, and regulations of contemporary young sexualities is no simple task, and demands ever inventive ways of doing research and being a researcher’. This thesis is concerned with girls, sexuality and the school ball, but also the very doing of sexualities research: it ponders Renold and Ringrose’s pertinent questions of ‘what else sexuality education research can be . . . and what (else) research into young sexualities can do’ (ibid). It ponders these questions in relation to feminist new materialisms and the potential it offers for thinking-doing sexualities research.

The aim of the research is to think about the ways in which particular entanglements matter in the becoming of the school ball-girl. Neither the school ball nor the girl, are distinct entities that precede one another; instead, they emerge through their intra-action. The concept of
intra-activity reformulates traditional notions of causality and opens up alternatives to popular narratives that are premised on cause and effect logic. Thinking back to the newspaper articles in the opening chapter, girls are often constructed as highly invested in the school ball, competitive and excessive. These portrayals of girls are produced or shaped through social and discursive factors, such as traditional norms of femininity and beauty. The girl is also understood as an ontologically distinct entity engaging or interacting with the school ball event. A new materialist ontology steps outside of arguments where cultural practices are seen to produce material bodies in a one-way fashion; this becomes impossible, as they are no longer ontologically distinct. Conceptualising the school ball-girl as intra-actively becoming through material-discursive entanglements, takes into account a broader array of forces (other than social and discursive): for instance, material dimensions, material constraints and material possibilities. Accounting for school ball matter (including bodies) compels us to think of causation differently and to consider anew the location and potential for agency. It offers a more nuanced approach to thinking about the regulation of girls in-relation to this schooling practice: the constraints, capacities and possibilities.

Becoming school ball-girl is a matter of entanglement; as such, each intra-action matters. What matters is inextricably linked to questions of ethics. All bodies, including but not limited to human bodies, come to matter through the dynamics of intra-activity. This has significant implications for notions of responsibility and accountability. Intra-activity determines what is ‘real’ and what is possible: possibilities are opened up and others are foreclosed. With each intra-action, the entangled relations are reconfigured. As a result, Barad suggests ‘there are no singular causes. And there are no individual agents of change. Responsibility is not ours alone’ (2007: p.394). Accountability and responsibility are rethought in terms of what matters and what is excluded from mattering. As Davies (2016: p.9) explains, ethics ‘is a matter of questioning what is being made to matter and how that mattering affects what is possible to do and to think’. Ethics, in this sense, is about mattering. It is about entanglement. It is not simply what or who has come to matter in this thesis, but how each intra-action matters in the continual becoming of the school ball-girl.

Lenz Taguchi reminds us ‘productions of knowledge are also productions of reality that will always have specific material consequences’ (2012: p.278). What are the political and material consequences for rethinking the ontological foundations of girls, sexuality and the school ball? Where sexuality is not connected to identity, the human body or the human individual? Where the school ball is a more-than-human phenomenon and the ball-girl-body is temporary and fleeting, continually reassembling at any given moment? A feminist new materialist ontology disrupts what we understand the school ball to be. When thought through Baradian concepts of intra-action and spacetime mattering, the school ball is no longer confined to the physical space or evening of the school ball. How might this rendering reimagine the role of the school ball in the becoming of sexuality at school? What implications might there be for sexuality education, where ‘sex ed is not, nor has it ever been, confined to
a teacher standing in front of a room of students, talking about sex’ (McClelland & Fine, 2017: p.212). How might this way of thinking be fruitful in how schools organise and conceive these events?

A feminist new materialist approach not only asks new questions, it demands new ways of asking them. With this potential, existing language may be inadequate. A new vocabulary is required (Braidotti, 2013). As Jones and Hoskins (2016: p.82) point out, ‘current debates demand new language in order to produce or find something else’: terms like ‘thing-power’ (Bennett, 2010) and ‘intra-action’ (Barad, 2003) are examples of new terminology created by theorists ‘to encounter a material world quite different from that assumed in dominant western epistemologies’ (Jones & Hoskins, 2016: p.82). These terms are more than mere words; they are conceptual creativity that open spaces for the something new to emerge. Bennett (2010: p.108) argues ‘we need not only to invent and reinvoke concepts . . . but also to devise new procedures, technologies, and regimes of perception that enable us to consult nonhumans more closely’. How might we do this?

For Jones and Hoskins, it requires we ‘reach towards something that exceeds language: an attitude, a sympathy, a feeling, an openness’ (2016: p.83, italics in original). For me, this openness is a shift from a ‘hard reductive gaze’ on the individual girl ‘to a softer and widened attentive gaze that includes that which takes place in the spaces in-between’ (Lenz Taguchi, 2010: p.58). This has not always been an easy task – resisting an anthropocentric gaze can be difficult, as can avoiding the seductive tendency to slip into a representational account and say what this all means. As a researcher, my encounters with data have shifted significantly throughout the thesis. It has been a complicated, challenging yet ultimately exciting methodological journey, and one by its very ontological ‘nature’ is not finished. There is an excess that cannot be written and ‘captured’ by words. This excess circulates in-between you the reader, me the researcher, the participants, data and theory – an endless lively configuration of things, ideas and sensations. And it is this very excess, this liveliness, that conveys the possibility of the ball-girl’s endless becoming.
Appendices

Appendix A

SCHOOL BALL DIARIES RESEARCH PROJECT

Girls aged 16 and over are invited to share their thoughts and experiences of the school ball. Whether you're going, not going, or undecided, you can participate in a number of ways:

- PARTICIPATE IN FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS AND INTERVIEWS
- CREATE YOUR OWN VIDEO DIARIES

Find out more at www.schoolballdiaries.co.nz or by coming along to a meeting:

Or contact the researcher directly:

Researcher: Toni Ingram
(Faculty of Education, University of Auckland)

Phone/text 021 152 2137
Email t.ingram@auckland.ac.nz

Approved by the University of Auckland human participants ethics committee on 19/12/2013 for (3) years, reference number 010 809.
Share your thoughts and experience of the school ball using photos or ‘video diaries’.

Short video clips are a great way to visually and verbally share your reflections and experience of the school ball...

**BEFORE**

The day of the ball...

- Getting ready, clothing, hair etc...
- 3 things someone should know about girls and the school ball...
- What are you wearing?
- Is there anything you find challenging or annoying?
- What makes a good date?
- What are you looking forward to?

Your reasons for going or not going?

What do you like about the ball?

If you could give advice to someone who hasn’t been before, what would you say?

**AFTER**

- Highlights
- Would you do anything differently next time?
- Share your favourite pics from the day.

Submit your **video diaries** easily to Toni at: toni_64da@sendtodbbox.com

**Photos (with captions)** can be emailed to tingham@aubkland.ac.nz

Contact Toni on 021 152 2137 with any questions.
Appendix C

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Before discussion:
The focus group interview will begin with the researcher thanking the participants for their participation and giving a brief overview of what the focus group will involve (combination of questions and collective brainstorming activity to generate ideas). The researcher will discuss and encourage confidentiality and also use examples to fully explain what this may mean i.e. not passing on things said in the focus group via text or internet sites such as Facebook. The audio recording equipment will be checked. At this time, participants will also be able to choose a pseudonym if they would like to do so.

Part 1: General questions about the School Ball

1. Tell me about your school ball.
   Prompts: When is it? Where is it being held? What year levels are attending?

2. Have you decided if you are going to the school ball?
   Prompts: Establish who is going or who may be undecided, not attending.

3. Why have you decided to attend/not attend?
   Prompts: Establish reasons for attending/not attending. Positive/negative elements.

4. Has anyone been to a school ball before? If so, what was this like?
   Prompts: Did they attend school ball last year or another school's ball? What did they like or dislike about it? Has this influenced their decision to attend this year's school ball or not?

5. Is the ball an important part of the school year?
   Prompts: Is there much talk about the ball at school? What makes it significant/not significant? Does everyone attend? Why might people choose not to go?

6. For those attending the school ball – what are you looking forward to? What are the positive things about the school ball?
   Prompts: Gain a sense of positive aspects, how girls describe this event. This could include more than actual ball itself – preparations, pre or post balls.

7. Is there anything you are finding challenging, frustrating or annoying?
   Prompts: What do they find problematic? Annoying?

8. Has your school put any rules in place around the school ball? What do you think of these?
   Prompts: Rules in relation to clothing? Behaviour? How are these rules known? Explicit or implicit?

9. For those going to the ball - are you taking someone to the school ball?
   Prompts: Ideas around notions of ‘romance’. Is a ‘date’ important? Can people bring opposite and same-sex partners? Is there an expectation that partners will be opposite sex? What do schools say?

10. Have you made any plans leading up to, just before or after?
    Prompts: What other events/practices make up school ball culture? Getting ready for ball, preparations – who are these done with? Pre and post ball activities. Actual school ball may not the only event that encapsulates ‘the school ball’.
Part 2: Collective brainstorming activity

On a large communal piece of paper, participants will be invited to write or draw their ideas in response to the question: What is expected of girls attending the school ball?

Prompts: In terms of clothing, the way they look, behave, act, if they take a partner, pre-ball preparations.

This brainstorm will provide the impetus for further discussion where participants will be invited to explain and discuss the ideas generated.

Additional questions/prompts in relation to participant ideas:
1. Where does this expectation/these expectations come from?
2. Is this something that is important to you?
3. How do you feel about this expectation?
4. What do your parents think about the ball? Do any of these expectations come from them?
   Prompts: How do parents understand school ball? Are there any differences or similarities with girls’ constructions of event?
5. What about teachers - do they mention the school ball at it?
   Prompts: What messages come from teachers? Is it important/not important? What is considered acceptable/not acceptable? How does school ball culture enter the classroom?
6. Are you happy with the way it’s being organised? Would you do anything differently?

Part 3: School ball and the media

The last part of the focus group discussion will invite participants to respond to dominant ideas or themes that emerge in the media. This discussion will be stimulated by using examples from the media or popular culture.

1. Share some of the articles that have recently been in the newspaper or magazines and invite girls to share their responses to it.
   or
2. Play a short scene from a movie that portrays school ball/prom to promote discussion i.e. Glee ‘prom’ episode.

Prompts: What do girls think about prevailing discourses often associated with this event i.e. ‘night to remember’, ‘romance’, ‘right of passage’.

Additional questions:
1. How does society view school balls?
2. Is this perception correct?
3. Do you see much in magazines about the school ball?
4. Do you think the NZ school ball is different to the American prom?
INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

**Before discussion:**

Individual interviews will begin with the researcher thanking the participant for their participation and time. Participants will be reminded that the information given during this interview is confidential and the audio recording equipment will be checked.

The structure of the individual interview will depend on whether the participants have participated in the video diary aspect of the research.

**Girls who attend the school ball – Post ball interview**

How was the school ball?

1. Were there any highlights?
2. Was there anything you didn’t like or would change?
3. Video Diary follow up discussion (if applicable) – see questions below.
4. If you could give advice to someone who hadn’t been before what would you say?

For girls who produced Video Diaries (in order to help focus the questions the researcher will have viewed the video diaries prior to the interview)

1. Tell me about your video diaries; this discussion could include showing the video diaries, participants will be invited to share any thoughts as we view them.
2. Additional questions about any particular aspects the researcher would like to explore further or clarify.
3. How did you find making them? Prompts: Was it enjoyable, interesting, easy, hard?
4. Was there anything you would have liked to have included but didn’t?
5. Researcher will ask participant about aspects of the video diary they would like more explanation about e.g. where meaning was unclear or more information is required.

**Girls not attending the school ball – Pre/Post ball interview**

Girls who are not attending the school ball will be invited to participate in any of the research methods. This could include a focus group discussion with other girls not attending, producing video diaries and/or individual interview.

**Pre-ball interview (either focus group or individual interview)**

1. What do you think about the school ball?
2. Why have you decided not to attend? Prompts: Is it their choice? If so, what has influenced their decision? What do they find problematic? Expectations?
3. Would you be interested in attending the ball if it was different? What changes would you make?

If this is done as a focus group interview it will include:

4. Collective brainstorming activity – see Focus Group Interview Schedule.
5. School ball and the media discussion – see Focus Group Interview Schedule.

**Post-ball interview**

1. Questions from pre-ball interview schedule if this is only interview and conducted after the ball.
2. Video diary questions – if applicable
3. How do you feel now the ball is over?
4. How do you feel about your decision not to go to the ball?
LETTER OF ACCESS TO STUDENT PARTICIPANTS
(SCHOOL PRINCIPAL)
Principal
School
Address

Project title: Girlhood, Sexuality and the School Ball
Name of Researcher: Toni Ingram

Dear [name of principal]

My name is Toni Ingram and I am undertaking a Doctoral Degree at the Faculty of Education, University of Auckland. I am also a qualified and experienced teacher. Currently, I am undertaking a research project exploring Year 12 & 13 girls’ experiences of the school ball. This study seeks to examine how girls – whether attending the school ball or not – understand and define this event. It is particularly interested in girls’ thoughts and perspectives about the meanings of femininity and sexuality surrounding the school ball. Findings will generate a deeper understanding what this event means to girls today.

In order to fully capture girls’ thoughts and experiences of school ball culture, this research employs a multi-method design. This involves a number of research methods that the participants can choose to participate in.

Research methods include:

- **Focus group interviews** (group discussion): involving three to six year 12-13 girls, who they feel comfortable talking about this topic with. The interview will be approximately 45 minutes to one hour and will take place with me at school in the weeks leading up to the school ball.

- **Self-generated video diaries** (before and after the school ball): participants will be invited to ‘show’ and ‘tell’ their thoughts and experiences of the school ball using short video clips or ‘video diaries’. These will be filmed by the participants in their own home.

- **Individual interviews** (before and after the school ball) with me, which will be approximately 30 minutes – 1 hour long. This interview will discuss participant’s thoughts about the school ball before or after the event. It will also provide an opportunity for participants to discuss their video diaries (if applicable).

- **Observations**: in order to gain a fuller sense of school ball culture, I would like to be able to observe the following activities: school ball committee meeting/s (involving students), assemblies in relation to the school ball and the school ball itself. The role of the researcher will be purely observational, no photographs or recordings will be taken.

I would like to obtain your consent to invite year 12 and 13 girls (girls aged 16 and over) to participate in this research. This invitation will be extended to girls through advertisements and verbally by an appropriate teacher nominated by yourself. After this initial invitation, girls will be invited to attend a meeting with the researcher where the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form will be discussed in detail. Students will also have the opportunity to ask questions.
All girls aged 16 and over are welcome to participate in the research – this includes girls both attending and not attending the school ball. A copy of the participant information sheet each student will receive is enclosed to provide more information about the project. Participant participation is entirely voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any time. Fake names will be used for both the school and participants, names of locations will also be changed in order to protect the school’s identity.

With participant’s written consent, visual data such as video (stills and actual) may be used in the written report, publications and conference presentations. It will also be possible for a participant to take part in the video diaries but not have their video shown as part of future presentations on findings i.e. visual material from this participant will only ever be viewed by the researcher. Due to the public nature of focus group interviews, confidentiality cannot be assured (participants will be alerted to this in the PIS). While confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, participants will be actively encouraged to maintain confidentiality of the information shared under these circumstances.

Participants will be required to give written consent if they choose to participate in the research project. They will also select which research methods they would like to participate in. As the participants are over the age of 16, parental/caregiver consent will not be required. I also seek assurance from you that student grades and assessment will not be affected by their participation or non-participation in this research – this assurance will be communicated to the participants. The research will be carried out during break or non-class times in a convenient location at your school. The video diaries will be produced by the girls in their own time at home. The length of time needed is between 1-5 hours depending on what methods the girls choose to take part in.

Information gathered will be analysed and a final report will be submitted for assessment for Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Auckland. Findings may be published, presented at conferences and/or used for teaching purposes. Your school is welcome to receive any future publications that may eventuate from this study. The audio/video recordings, transcripts and consent forms will be stored securely and then destroyed after six years.

If after reading the participant information sheet you have any questions or wish to know more before deciding whether or not to allow access to students to participate, please do not hesitate to telephone me on (021) 152 2137 or email at t.ingram@auckland.ac.nz. You can also contact the supervisor of this research Dr. Louisa Allen via the details below.

Supervisor: Dr. Louisa Allen, Associate Professor
64 9 623 8899 ext 85140
le.allen@auckland.ac.nz
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Head of School: Dr. Carol Mutch
+64 9 623 8899 ext.48257
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Epsom Campus
Faculty of Education
University of Auckland
Private Bag 92601
Symonds Street
Auckland

For any queries regarding ethical concerns you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 09 373-7599 extn. 87830/83761. Email: humanethics@auckland.ac.nz.

If you agree to us approaching the students, please sign the enclosed consent form. Thank you for taking time to consider this project.

Yours sincerely
Toni Ingram

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE
ON 19/12/2013 for (3) years. Reference Number 010809
CONSENT FORM TO APPROACH STUDENT PARTICIPANTS FOR RESEARCH: (SCHOOL PRINCIPAL)

This consent form will be kept for a period of six years.

Title of project: Girlhood, Sexuality and the School Ball

Name of Researcher: Toni Ingram

- I give permission for the principal researcher, Toni Ingram, to invite year 12 & 13 girls to participate in this research project.
- I assure the students that student grades and assessment will not be affected by their participation or non-participation in this research.
- I understand the research will be carried out during break or non-class times in a convenient location at school. Some aspects of the research (participant-generated video diaries) will be conducted outside of school.
- I understand the data (transcripts and recordings of interviews and focus groups) will be kept for six years, after which time they will be destroyed.
- I understand the information gathered will be analysed and submitted in a report by the researcher. This thesis will be assessed for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from University of Auckland.
- I understand the findings may be published, used in conference presentations and/or for teaching purposes.

YES/NO (please mark one clearly)

Signed: __________________________ Name: __________________________ Date: __________________________

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 19/12/2013 for (3) years, Reference Number 010809
Appendix E

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (Participant)

Project title: Girlhood, Sexuality and the School Ball
Name of Researcher: Toni Ingram

My name is Toni Ingram and I am currently doing a Doctoral Degree at the Faculty of Education, University of Auckland. I would like to invite you to take part in a research project about the school ball.

This project is interested in girls’ thoughts and experiences of the school ball. It is particularly interested in what girls think about the meanings of femininity and sexuality surrounding this event. All girls aged 16 and over are welcome to participate – this includes girls who may or may not be attending the school ball.

Taking part in the study involves (one or more of the following):

- **A focus group interview** (group discussion) with three to six year 12-13 girls, who you feel comfortable talking about this topic with. The interview will be approximately 45 minutes to one hour and will take place with me at your school in the weeks leading up to the school ball.

- **Self-generated video diaries** (before and after the school ball) – participants will be invited to ‘show’ and ‘tell’ their thoughts and experiences of the school ball using short video clips or ‘video diaries’. These will be filmed by yourself at home.

- **Individual interview** (before and/or after the school ball) with me, which will be approximately 30 minutes – 1 hour long. This interview will discuss your thoughts about the school ball after the event. It will also provide an opportunity for you to discuss your video diaries (if applicable).

Participation in this study is voluntary – this means you only take part if you want to. You can also choose which parts of the research process you would like to take part in i.e. just the focus group discussion or individual interview, video diaries and individual interview, or all three parts of the research. You can choose to participate in any aspect of the research – whether attending the school ball or not. All opinions are welcome. You will have the right to withdraw from the research at any time. The principal has provided his/her assurance that participation or non-participation in this research will not affect your school learning, standing or grades.

Focus group and individual interviews will take place during break or non-class times at a suitable place at school i.e. spare classroom. Or if you prefer, these can take place at a location outside of school where you feel comfortable i.e. local café or your home.

The focus group (group discussion) will be audio-taped and written up by the researcher with your written permission (i.e. you agree if this is okay). You will be asked to organise yourself into a group for the focus group discussion with people you feel comfortable talking about this topic with. You can leave the focus group at any time without giving a reason. Because of the way focus groups work, the recording cannot be stopped. However, you have the option of leaving at any time or not replying to a question. You will also be able to withdraw any comments made during focus group discussions up until November 30th 2014.

The video diaries will be filmed in your own time at home. A video camera will be provided if needed. These can be submitted to the researcher at any time during the research process via text, email or in person (i.e. using a memory stick).
The individual interview will also be audio-taped and written up by the researcher if you agree (in writing). You can ask for the recording to be stopped at any time. You can also leave the individual interview at any time without having to give a reason. You will have the opportunity to edit your individual interview transcript and can indicate this choice on your consent form. The things you have said during the video diaries or individual interview can be taken out of the research up until November 30th, 2014.

In addition to the focus group interviews, video diaries and individual interviews, the researcher will also be observing the school ball and any related meetings and assemblies. This is to gain a sense of how the school ball is organised and to garner the general atmosphere surrounding the event.

If information provided in the focus group and individual interviews is reported/published, this will be done in a way that does not identify you as the source. Pseudonyms (fake names) will be used for participants and the school. You will be able to choose your own fake name. Place names and other things that might reveal who you are will also be changed. As the focus group interview involves more than one person, confidentiality (privacy) of a person’s identity cannot be assured for certain. The most the researcher can do is to strongly encourage all participants to maintain confidentiality (not tell people what was said in the discussion). This will be discussed at the start of the focus group.

Due to the visual nature of the video diaries, anonymity cannot be assured. With your consent, stills from the video diaries may be included in the written report and subsequent publications. With your consent, video diaries may also be shown in conference presentations. You can also choose to take part in the video diaries but not have them shown as part of future presentations of the findings. This means your video diaries will only ever be viewed by the researcher.

Information gathered will be analysed and a final report will be written and assessed for a Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Auckland. A copy of this report will be available at the University of Auckland library. Findings may be published, presented at conferences and/or used for teaching purposes.

If you tell the researcher something that means you or someone else might be in danger, the researcher will have to tell someone about this risk. If the interviews raise any questions or you would like to talk about any matters further, the school counsellor will be available for you to talk to. Or you can also call Youthline 0800 376 633. If you have any issues or concerns about the research project itself and would like to discuss these with someone other than the researcher, [name] will be available to talk to.

Thank you for your time and help in making this study possible. If you would like more information about this research project please phone me on (021) 152 2137 or email t.ingram@auckland.ac.nz. You can also contact the supervisor of this research Dr. Louisa Allen via the details below.

Supervisor: Dr. Louisa Allen, Associate Professor
64 9 623 8899 ext 85140
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APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 19/12/2013 for (3) years. Reference Number 010809.
CONSENT FORM (Participant)  
(This form will be held for a period of six years)

Project title: Girlhood, sexuality and the school ball  
Name of Researcher: Toni Ingram

I have read the Participant Information Sheet and understand the nature of the research and why I have been selected. I have been able to ask questions and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that participation in this research is voluntary. This means I only take part if I want to.

- I agree to take part in the research.
- I understand I am free to withdraw participation at any time, and to withdraw any data traceable to me up to November 30th 2014.
- I wish to take part in: (please circle)  
  Focus group discussion  YES/NO  
  Video diaries/photos and individual interview  YES/NO  
  Individual interview  YES/NO

- I understand the principal has given their written assurance that participation in this research will not affect my grades or assessments.
- I understand that I am able to take out the things I say in the focus group discussion, individual interview and video diaries up until November 30th 2014.
- I agree that the focus group and interview will be audio taped and transcribed by the researcher.
- I understand that recording can not be stopped during the focus group, however I can choose not to answer a question.
- I agree for the individual interview to be recorded. (Please circle as appropriate)  YES/NO
- I would like the opportunity to be able to edit the transcript from my individual interview. (Please circle as appropriate)  YES/NO
- I understand that the recording can be stopped at any time during the individual interview.
- I understand that the data will be kept for six years, after which they will be destroyed.
- I understand that the identity of schools and participants will remain confidential and fake names will be used.
- I understand that confidentiality (privacy) cannot be guaranteed in focus groups, however focus group participants are encouraged to maintain confidentiality (not tell other people what was said).
• I understand if the researcher becomes concerned either myself or someone else is in danger or at risk, they have a duty to tell someone.

• I agree not to tell other people anything discussed in the focus group.

• I agree that the information gathered will be analysed and submitted in a report by the researcher. This thesis will be assessed for Doctor of Philosophy from University of Auckland.

• I agree that the findings can be published, used in conference presentations and/or for teaching purposes.

• I agree/do not agree (circle one) my video diaries can be shown and used in written reports and publications, and shown in teaching and conference presentations.

• I understand if my video diaries are used in publications my identity will not be anonymous.

• I understand that if the discussion raises any concerns or questions I can talk to the school counsellor, the researcher or I can phone Youthline 0800 376 633.

Name: ____________________________

Email: ____________________________

Phone: ____________________________

Signed: ____________________________

Date: ____________________________

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 19/12/2013 for (3) years, Reference Number 010809.
PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (Teacher)

Project title: Girlhood, Sexuality and the School Ball
Name of Researcher: Toni Ingram

Dear [name of teacher],

My name is Toni Ingram and I am currently undertaking a Doctoral Degree at the Faculty of Education, University of Auckland. I am also a qualified and experienced teacher. Currently, I am undertaking a research project exploring Year 12 & 13 girls’ experiences of the school ball. This study seeks to examine how girls – whether attending the school ball or not – understand and define this event. It is particularly interested in girls’ thoughts and perspectives about the meanings of femininity and sexuality surrounding the school ball. Findings will generate a deeper understanding of what this event means to girls today.

In order to fully capture girls’ thoughts and experiences of school ball culture, this research employs a multi-method design. This involves a number of research methods that the participants can choose to participate in.

Research methods include:

- **Focus group interviews** (group discussion): involving three to six year 12-13 girls, who they feel comfortable talking about this topic with. The interview will be approximately 45 minutes to one hour and will take place with me at school in the weeks leading up to the school ball.

- **Self-generated video diaries** (before and after the school ball): participants will be invited to ‘show’ and ‘tell’ their thoughts and experiences of the school ball using short video clips or ‘video diaries’. These will be filmed by the participants in their own home.

- **Individual interviews** (before and after the school ball) with me, which will be approximately 30 minutes – 1 hour long. This interview will discuss participant’s thoughts about the school ball before or after the event. It will also provide an opportunity for participants to discuss their video diaries (if applicable).

- **Observations**: in order to gain a fuller sense of school ball culture, I would like to be able to observe the following activities: school ball committee meeting/s (involving students), assemblies in relation to the school ball and the school ball itself. The role of the researcher will be purely observational, no photographs or recordings will be taken.

The principal has given their consent for year 12 and 13 girls (girls aged 16 and over) to be invited to participate in this research. Girls will be invited to participate through advertisements placed around the school and verbally by yourself if you choose to consent. All girls aged 16 and over are welcome to participate in the research – this includes girls both attending and not attending the school ball.

During this verbal invitation to participate in the research, you will be required to give a Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form to each participant. A copy of the Participant Information Sheet each student will receive is enclosed for your information. Participant participation is entirely voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any time.
After students have been informed of the research (by yourself) they will be invited to attend a meeting with the researcher to hear more about the project. During this meeting the researcher will go through the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form in detail. Participants will also have an opportunity to ask any questions. In addition to informing students about the research project, I seek your permission to be a neutral third party students can approach if they have any issues regarding the research and would like to discuss these with someone other than the researcher.

Participants will be required to give written consent if they choose to participate in the research project. They will also select which research methods they would like to participate in. As the participants are over the age of 16, parental/caregiver consent will not be required. The principal has given their assurance that student grades and assessment will not be affected by their participation or non-participation in this research. The research will be carried out during break or non-class times in a convenient location at school. The video diaries will be produced by the girls in their own time at home. The length of time needed is between 1-5 hours depending on what methods the girls choose to take part in. Fake names will be used for both the school and participants, names of locations will also be changed in order to protect the school’s identity. With participant’s written consent, visual data such as video (stills and actual) may be used in the written report, publications and conference presentations. It will also be possible for a participant to take part in the video diaries but not have their video shown as part of future presentations on findings i.e. visual material from this participant will only ever be viewed by the researcher. Due to the public nature of focus group interviews, confidentiality cannot be assured (participants will be alerted to this in the PIS). While confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, participants will be actively encouraged to maintain confidentiality of the information shared under these circumstances.

Information gathered will be analysed and a final report will be submitted for assessment for Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Auckland. Findings may be published, presented at conferences and/or used for teaching purposes. Your school or yourself are welcome to receive any future publications that may eventuate from this study. The audio/video recordings, transcripts and consent forms will be stored securely and then destroyed after six years.

If after reading the Participant Information Sheet you have any questions or wish to know more before deciding whether to be a teacher liaison person for this research, please do not hesitate to telephone me on (021) 152 2137 or email at t.ingram@auckland.ac.nz. You can also contact the supervisor of this research Dr. Louisa Allen via the details below.

Supervisor: Dr. Louisa Allen, Associate Professor
le.allen@auckland.ac.nz
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Symonds Street
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+64 9 623 8899 ext 85140

Head of School: Dr. Carol Mutch
mutch@auckland.ac.nz
Epsom Campus
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For any queries regarding ethical concerns you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 09 373-7599 extn. 87830/83761. Email: humanethics@auckland.ac.nz.

If you agree to be a liaison person for this research project, please sign the enclosed consent form. Thank you for taking time to consider this project.

Yours sincerely
Toni Ingram

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 19/12/2013 for (3) years. Reference Number 010809.
CONSENT FORM (TEACHER)

This consent form will be kept for a period of six years.

Title of project: Girlhood, Sexuality and the School Ball
Name of Researcher: Toni Ingram

- I agree to take part in this research in a ‘teacher liaison’ role.
- I understand I will inform students of the research project and verbally invite them to take part.
- I understand after the initial invitation given by myself, interested students will attend an information meeting with the researcher where they will hear more about the research and have an opportunity to ask questions.
- I agree to be a neutral third party students can approach if they have any issues regarding the research and would like to discuss them with someone other than the researcher.
- I understand the information gathered will be analysed and submitted in a report by the researcher. This thesis will be assessed for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from University of Auckland.
- I understand the findings may be published, used in conference presentations and/or for teaching purposes.

YES/NO (please mark one clearly)

Signed: __________________________
Name: __________________________ Date: __________________________

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 19/12/2013 for (3) years. Reference Number 010809.
MEMORANDUM TO:

Assoc Prof Louisa Allen
Critical Studies in Education

Re: Application for Ethics Approval (Our Ref. 010809)

The Committee considered your application for ethics approval for your project entitled Girlhood, Sexuality and the School Ball.

Ethics approval was given for a period of three years.

The expiry date for this approval is 19-Dec-2016.

If the project changes significantly, you are required to submit a new application to UAHPEC for further consideration.

In order that an up-to-date record can be maintained, you are requested to notify UAHPEC once your project is completed.

The Chair and the members of UAHPEC would be happy to discuss general matters relating to ethics approvals if you wish to do so. Contact should be made through the UAHPEC Ethics Administrators at humanethics@auckland.ac.nz in the first instance.

All communication with the UAHPEC regarding this application should include this reference number: 010809.

This is a computer generated letter. No signature required.)

UAHPEC Administrators
University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee

c.c. Head of Department / School, Critical Studies in Education
    Ms Toni Ingram
    Dr - Airini

Additional information:

1. Do not forget to fill in the 'approval wording' on the Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms, giving the dates of approval and the reference number, before you send them out to your participants.

2. Should you need to make any changes to the project, write to the UAHPEC
Administrators by email (humanethics@auckland.ac.nz) giving full details of the proposed changes including revised documentation.

3. At the end of three years, or if the project is completed before the expiry, please advise UAHPEC of its completion.

4. Should you require an extension, write to UAHPEC by email before the expiry date, giving full details along with revised documentation. An extension can be granted for up to three years, after which a new application must be submitted.

5. If you have obtained funding other than from UniServices, send a copy of this approval letter to the Manager - Funding Processes, UoA Research Office. For UniServices contracts, send a copy of the approval letter to the Contract Manager, UniServices.

6. Please note that UAHPEC may from time to time conduct audits of approved projects to ensure that the research has been carried out according to the approval that was given.
References


doi:10.1080/13534645.2014.927623


Jones, N. (2014, May 27). Must-have accessory this ball season: Lots of cash. The New Zealand Herald


Roy, E. A. (2016, April 11). Schoolgirls in New Zealand told to lengthen skirts to 'stop distracting male staff and pupils'. *Guardian UK*


Schoutz, R. (2016, April 10). Students told skirts need to be lowered to 'stop boys from getting ideas'. *The New Zealand Herald*


doi:10.1080/01596306.2016.1143451


