

STUDYING THE CLOTHING OF CHILDREN AS A SITE OF ‘SILENT EMBODIMENTS’
– AN OPENING TO THE FIELD OF ORGANIZATION STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we turn to the clothing of children and argue for a fuller appreciation of this interdisciplinary and underdeveloped research area in the field of organization studies (OS). Here, we approach the clothing of children as a contested, embodied-material site in a broader context of power dynamics, parental-, media-, market- and other influences, where different idea(l)s about childhood, innocence, vulnerability, sexuality, status, class and gender are continuously negotiated. In particular, we show how the clothing of children constitutes a dynamic locus for the entwinement of ideas about aesthetics, embodiment and materiality, and thus offers us an intriguing empirical site where ‘silent embodiments’ underneath material surfaces are teased out.

The empirical material of this paper consists of personal diary notes and memories from our own childhood, as well as our everyday experiences of children’s wear as mothers of toddlers. By using

the method of ‘memory work’, we aim at giving detailed descriptions of the ways in which we are surrounded by ‘silent embodiments’, how these matter to us, and how children’s clothes are inherently present in our everyday lives. We argue that the clothing of children serves as a meaningful theoretical *and* empirical context that could offer valuable insights to OS, and contribute to the literatures on children, materiality and silenced embodiments in our scholarly field. Finally, we offer suggestions and insights into the future empirical study of the clothing of children as a sensory domain in OS. A deeper analysis of the clothing of children has the potential to develop more critical discussions of the (silent) embodied experiences and materiality both in the field of OS, and in contemporary material and consumer culture more broadly.

Key words: *children, silenced embodiment, aesthetics, materiality, surface*

INTRODUCTION

”Children’s clothing serves as a screen on which are projected all kinds of beliefs, anxieties and aspirations about children.” (Bodine, 2003, 60)

How and *why* should we think about children and children’s clothing in the field of organization studies? How does children’s emotionally ‘uncontrollable’ and *dressed* bodies impact on the everyday life of organizations? What could the clothing of children as a seemingly mundane, earthy, and material topic potentially offer to the field of organization studies (OS), more broadly? As a multidimensional, inherently personal and theoretically rich territory, clothing and dress intimately connect material cloth to our skin and bodies¹ (Entwistle, 2009), self-image and the performing of identity and the staging self in the world (e.g. Butler, 1990, 2004; Evans, 2003). Clothes relate to our identities, embodied experiences, and social contexts, more broadly. Acting as something of an intermediate skin, protection or aesthetic surface between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ or ‘us’ and ‘the world’, the type of clothes we wear on the surfaces of our bodies make us *act*, move, perform and feel differently in our bodies. ”It almost seems that to be human is to understand the structure of cloth, its interlacings, and its feltings”, Rippin (2012, 144) suggests. Whereas a myriad of personal

¹ In this paper, we approach bodies not as ‘singular, bounded, closed and fixed, but rather open to being affected and affecting others’ (Blackman et al., 2008 at <http://www.palgrave-journals.com/sub/journal/v22/n1/full/sub20088a.html>, page number not available). Following Blackman et al. (2008), we are interested in ‘what bodies are capable of *doing*’, ‘and what relational connections change and alter bodies as they move and sense in the world’.

experiences, emotions, affects, aesthetic ideals, memories and meanings become woven into the material clothes we wear from day-to-day (Rippin, 2012, 2015), clothing and dress connect closely to intriguing topics such as subjectivity, agency, spatiality, embodiment and sociomateriality in organizational life. As such, it appears surprising that fairly little scholarly attention has been devoted to the topic of clothing and dress among organizational researchers (apart from Huopalainen, 2016; Rippin, 2012).

In this exploratory and open-minded paper, we want to introduce the clothing for children as a novel, meaningful and interdisciplinary research area to the field of OS. Similar to adults, clothes perform multiple roles in the life of children (e.g. Pole, 2007). For instance, clothes might act as powerful means for children themselves to demonstrate, exercise and achieve individual agency² and individuality (see also Pole, 2007), as well as express subjectivity and social or group belonging. To adults and especially to parents, the clothing of children has the potential to communicate adult status, wealth, class or social belonging. In the context of this paper, we focus on the fascinating relationship between the theoretical discussions of cloth and clothing (e.g. Baugh, 2011; Prain, 2014) and the aesthetics of bodies (e.g. Bathurst and Cain, 2013; Bazin, 2013; Dale and Latham, 2015). More specifically, we want to more thoroughly explore the *aesthetics* and *materiality* of children's wear in relation to the *embodiment* of children as intertwined aspects of the clothing of children, which can be considered as discussion openers towards more material, delicate and multifaceted understandings of the dynamics between 'silenced' embodiments and materiality in our scholarly field.

Throughout the paper, we intend to show *what* the clothing of children as an underdeveloped research area could potentially 'offer' to more recent debates within critical organizational research, especially those concerned with the developments of aesthetics, embodiment and materiality in our scholarly field. Also, we wish to reflect more thoroughly upon the topic of children as neglected embodied subjects in OS, and as consumers of clothing and fashions more broadly (Pole, 2007), well aware of the conflicting idea(l)s that clothing for children might express. We also refuse to strictly divorce the academic study of clothing from our own lived and embodied experiences of

² Here, we view agency as a sense of self-assertion and reaching beyond the (bodily) limits produced by the cultural norms and expectations we are surrounded by (Satama, 2017). In other words, we stress the dynamics of subjectivity; to us, the individual can act and gain a sense of agency despite being constrained by surrounding norms, structures and societal expectations.

dress and adornment (see also Downing Peters 2014). Therefore, we will in the context of this paper experiment further with the topic of clothing by reflecting upon our own childhood memories and experiences of clothing and dress, as well. Also, our experiences as mothers to toddler boys –who have inevitably familiarized us with the multi-meaningful and inherently commercial world of small children’s’ clothing and fashion – are teased out in the context of this paper.

It is, of course, difficult to conceptualize children in the context of this paper, or to distinguish children from adults. What distinguishes children from adults? We work from the assumption that multiple ideas, practices and experiences construct our (adult) understandings and perceptions of children and childhood³ in debates of material and consumer culture, and we believe that clothes play a vital part here. Also, we believe that children inhabit a plurality of consumer worlds, surrounded by controversies. As human beings, children are often seen as vulnerable, immature and *protected* subjects that lack agency (Vänskä, 2012, 2017). ”Conceptualizations of the child as asexual, pure and incorrupt enjoy considerable longevity (see Carlson, 2012; Kincaid, 1998)”, write Spišák and Paasonen (2016, 3–4). Also, representations of childhood are loaded with a plethora of expectations: any family wants to secure children the best possible childhood, both socially and materially (Raijas and Wilska 2008, 249). Childhood, as we know it in a Western context, involves a lot of hopes for a happy, innocent period, based on a balanced adult life and identity.

Much like O’Brien (2003, 375), we question the ‘adult’–‘child’ distinction and approach childhood as a social construction, ”delineated by boundaries that vary across geography, religion, politics, time, culture and society, and across class, race and gender”. So, rarely is it simply biological maturation, for instance, that accounts for this distinction. In this paper, we argue that the domain of clothing is of value especially in illuminating and mediating societies’ attitudes towards children and dominant ideals about childhood, as well as in illuminating the embodied experiences of children themselves, for instance, by saying something meaningful about the significance of clothing to the lives of children.

So, rather than seeing children as a united group or merely and exclusively as vulnerable subjects within consumer culture, we approach children as *active* consumers of clothing and fashion, who

³ In this paper, we work from the assumption that childhood is a temporary ”non-natural, non-unified category”, and there is a plurality of childhoods (Jordanova, 1990). In fact, O’Brien (2003) speaks of the *histories* of childhood, a range of histories, ”which demonstrate the erratic or non-linear evolution of the image of childhood (Jenks, 1996)”.

often knowingly construct self-identity (Pilcher, 2011) and fashion themselves within a broader context of parental-, media-, market- and other influences. We acknowledge the importance of bodily movements and many other agents, both human and non-human, present in shaping children's agency. Also, we acknowledge the emphasis on protection, comfort, sustainability and practicality in dominant discourses on the clothing for children, especially in a Nordic context (e.g. Roivainen, 2017). Also, we acknowledge the various age groups of children, and the significant roles they play in 'fashioning' the children.

An important question to address at an early stage of this paper is the following: *why* do we choose to address *children's* clothing rather than "just" (adult) clothing? What difference does an explicit focus on children as the wearers and bearers of material clothing objects make, here? To begin with, it strikes us that people are quick to dismiss, ridicule and underestimate the importance of (adult) clothing, fashion and dress as scholarly topics (e.g. Huopalaainen, 2016). The topic of children's clothing is likely to be seen as even more ambivalent and thus unimportant. For us, children's clothing opens up a thrilling avenue for further understanding children's silent embodiments beneath all the material surfaces, and it also offers novel insights into the discussions of bodies and materiality in organization studies more generally (e.g. Dale and Latham, 2015; Orlikowski, 2007). As Dale (2005: 649) writes, social processes and structures and material processes and structures are *mutually enacting*. This is a relevant point of departure in this paper, too.

Historically, the topic of (children's) clothing has held low status in academia (Roivainen, 2017). In this regard, we find this "feminized" and subordinated topic relevant to finally address further within our scholarly community. Today, however, children's consumption of fashion and clothing has become an "increasingly socially and culturally significant phenomenon" (REF). In fact, clothes have always acted as powerful economic status-markers, and clothes are powerful markers of social advantage or disadvantage (Bodine, 2003). "Children's social worlds are increasingly constructed around consuming", Schor (2005, 11) wrote long ago, and today, large numbers of workers provide goods, services and consumer experiences for children, including carefully branded clothes and fashion objects. Also, clothes are interesting to research as they are present in our everyday lives. Clothing "accompanies the child all day, every day at school", as Bodine (2003, 53) puts it.

To us, the intriguing entwinement between a silenced embodied dimension and a material dimension makes research about children's clothing intriguing. Also, children remain under-explored agents in OS, and the embodied dimension holds tensions and contradictions related to innocence, vulnerability and sexuality. In researching the clothing of children, one has to reflect further upon the silenced and immature bodies of children, which raises ethical and moral stakes. Within OS, the adult business world has been widely studied from a variety of different perspectives, leaving children's worlds largely neglected and under-explored. This appears slightly surprising, given that children are present and *active* in a number of organizations, as well as present in consumer- and material cultures more broadly. Whereas researchers in OS (e.g. Tyler, 2009; Kavanagh, REF) have noticed that the domains of work, management and organizations continue to be approached and treated as fundamentally and exclusively *adult* spaces, also organizational research has traditionally maintained a clear distinction between the adult and children's world. The "serious", normative and masculine spaces and practices of organizations have traditionally been labelled as adult, leaving little room for other than normative working bodies or child-centered and "childish" research topics. Today, clothing and dress are well-researched topics especially in the academic discipline of *fashion studies*, and there is a growing literature on dress also in the field of OS. In this realm, children have remained neglected, too. Within OS, Rippin, Warren and Short (2016) have studied experiences of dress among female professionals, and Rippin (2007, 2009, 2012) writes beautifully about the performative, emotional and personal experiences of cloth. However, whereas previous research has largely focused on the experiences and practices of dress among working professionals, less is known about the complex domain of "non-work", including children's wear and children's own embodied experiences of clothing.

This paper is structured as follows. The first part focuses on the emerging theoretical discussions of clothing, and the clothing of children in specific. The second part of the paper intends to open up a space for organizational researchers to reflect upon the future possibilities of researching the clothing of children, and more specifically, to take a look at its wider potentiality in understanding the embodied, emotionally-driven side of our actions that is often 'hidden' behind the surfaces of the clothes we (or our children) wear. Hence, we focus here on the relationship between silenced embodiment and materiality. The paper concludes with a discussion of what our sensory-based descriptions and analytical findings of the clothing of children could offer the field of organization studies, more broadly.

APPROACHING THE SURFACE OF THE BODIES THEORETICALLY

Clothing at the intersection of embodiment and materiality

In this paper, we wish to pay fuller attention to the intriguing relationship between human and non-human contributions by addressing the relationship between silenced embodiment and a particular form of materiality: clothing. Specifically, clothing intertwines sociomateriality and embodied action. Here, we work from the assumption that “we cannot study ‘materiality’ without studying social relations”, as Hawkins (2015, 954) puts it. Consequently, we do not limit our analysis of clothing to the materiality of clothing. Rather, we acknowledge the *active* relationship between clothing and human agency and embodiment. Despite their primary and task as our “second skin” adorning our bodies, clothes and dress are often taken-for-granted in our lives. Clothes are *material* objects made out of fabrics and cloth. As previously expressed, we highlight the relationality between the agency of clothing and the agency of human beings, arguing that also clothes have agency, and thus, have the power to shape, influence and determine human action. Also, clothes render visible interesting philosophical questions that blur the taken-for-granted distinctions between human and non-human agency. For instance, where does a human body actually begin and “end”, or where does dress or clothing ‘take over’? Thinking about it, where are the boundaries of the body in fact located, and what kind of surfaces are clothes, really? In this regard, the realm of clothing has the potential to show us how embodiment and materiality become inherently intertwined.

“Humans are constituted through relations of materiality — bodies, clothes, food, devices, tools, which, in turn, are produced through human practices”, Orlikowski (2007, 1438) once wrote. Embodiment⁴ is mobilized through the *active* and acted upon body (Dale, 2001). Both adults and children actively shape their social worlds through clothing and dress, and both children and adults become shaped, constrained and affected by material clothes and clothing consumption more broadly (James and Prout, 1997). Dressed, clothed and adorned *bodies* have an intimate, active and complex relationship with materiality, fashion, body politics, self-performance, weight

⁴ Here, embodiment is understood as the experience of possessing a body that moves and feels (Noland, 2009: 105) and captures lived, subjective experiences of inhabiting a body that is capable of engaging in various activities of organizing in motion. Coaten and Newman-Bluestein (2013, 677) view embodiment as ‘the experience and awareness of the lived body. Moreover, I view the body as both material and social, as ‘a culturally fabricated physicality in which matter and meaning are inextricably linked’ (Meriläinen et al., 2013, 6).

management, staged performances and various *embodied* practices. Today, especially "women's bodies are the subject of stringent discipline from 'inside' and 'outside'", Dale (2001, 5) reminds us. Researchers have for long discussed clothing consumption as a social practice through which multiple meanings and subjectivities are articulated and socially performed. Through clothes, we (subconsciously and consciously) present ourselves to the world.

The *materiality* of clothing is interesting to reflect upon further. Questions of matter and materiality appear vital to the realm of clothing, and here, they are not treated as static, solid, naturalistic and given. Different to a traditional view of materiality that treats material objects as 'identifiably discrete; they move only upon an encounter with an external force or agent, and they do so according to a linear logic of cause and effect' (Coole and Frost, 2010, 7), we work from the assumption that materiality *materializes* and 'matter becomes' (rather than 'is'). 'Materiality is always something more than "mere" matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable', as Coole and Frost (2010, 9) remind us. Various processed fabrics perform and move differently on the human body, and fibres, the smallest components of cloth, usually determine the behaviour of cloth. As fabrics perform and feel differently, a designer's choice of fabric, combined with techniques of cutting, shaping and draping, determine how a garment will fall and feel on a moving human body. Fabrics perform vivid non-human agents that do not always obey human will or perform in the ways a human desires. Moreover, matters of colour, aesthetics, details, structure, form and shape are always interrelated in clothing, and form also intimately relates to the structure of the wearer. Designers as the makers of clothes often strive to *balance* a garment through fabrics by creating or negotiating forms that look good and make wearers feel good, too (Huopalainen, 2016). Through fabrics, designers create clothes with movements, contrast and expand textures and play with fluidity, structure and shape (Baugh, 2011).

Despite a rich and ever-growing literature on adult embodiment⁵ within the field of organization studies (see for example Bathurst and Cain, 2013; Dale, 2001; Riach and Warren, 2015; Valtonen, 2013), children's lived, imagined, disciplined and performed bodies have remained surprisingly invisible and overlooked in our field. Why are we still talking so little about children's embodiment, and why do we think it matters? Our scholarly field has arguably privileged the study of ideal, able

⁵ In this paper, we distinguish between the concepts of body and embodiment. More specifically, we view...

bodies and agency that confirms to the specific (masculine) adult norm. Therefore, children's bodies have remained neglected and under-explored. In a similar manner that adult and child worlds are better kept apart, distinctions are often made between adult and child embodiment. In this paper, we question the stability of the categorizations of 'childhood' and 'children' and the distinctions that are often made between an 'adult body' and a 'child body'.

As a material object, clothing defines and shapes us humans and our actions and movements through times and spaces, as well as communicates our individual identities alike other forms of sociality do (Knorr Cetina, 1997). The distinction between the adult and children's world that seems typical for OS is arguably also maintained by children's clothing (Roivainen, 2017). Whereas clothes for adults often represent and intend to communicate professionalism or work identity as the business suit typically does, we might commonly think of children's wear as desired, for example, to have their own bright colours and designs that are cheerful and childlike. School ethnographers (Eckert, 1982, 1989; Foley, 1990; Goodwin, 2000) have noted "the role of clothing in delineating and reinforcing social hierarchy".

In order to establish a ground from which to approach the clothing of children both theoretically and empirically, we first need to reflect upon the interrelated notions of clothing, dress, fashion and fabrics. What constitutes a dress, garment or a piece of clothing to begin with? How does a piece of clothing *feel* on the human body, and what is the difference between clothes and fashion? To us, the concepts of fashion, dress, clothes and the body are always intimately intertwined. Most of us are part of a powerful and ever-changing global fashion system: fashions and clothing engage almost all of us, whether we want it to or not. We all need to cover our skin to some extent or dress (up) in our everyday lives, although, of course, this does not apply to everyone, everywhere in the world (Huopalaainen, 2016). Here, we position fashion as a broader and more including concept than dress or clothes, here seen as the material yet moving – both physically and emotionally – objects we wear. In other words, we view fashion *not* as a direct synonym to clothes, dress, style or consumer trends, but as a profoundly hybrid, symbolic and communicative phenomenon that dictates or affects what we wear. What we call fashion and eventually wear as clothes, then, is a rather

complex mix of individual taste preferences, styles,⁶ technologies, commercial decisions, felt experiences, comfort, dominant ideals, moving influences and, to some extent, uncertainty and serendipity.

Plenty has been written about fashion, dress and the body (e.g. Bordo, 1993; Entwistle, 2000a, 2000b; Grimstad Klepp and Rysst, 2016; Harvey, 2007). This diverse literature shares an understanding of ‘the fashioned body’ (Entwistle, 2000a) or the adorned body as no natural or neutral construct, but rather as a representation co-performed, moulded, controlled, produced, performed, cultured, classed, sexualized and gendered in a variety of different ways (e.g. Butler, 1993, 2004; Skeggs, 2004). Dressing and dress, then – as a verb and a noun – indicates how the ‘self’ is always in a state of self-mediation, expression and representation, and this activity is determined by fashions, King and Vickery (2014) explain. In line with these thoughts, we view dressing as a situated practice centered around the body, an activity in which the body is constantly present and active, although often ‘hidden’, which in our view, makes the relationship between the clothes and the aesthetics of the bodies thrilling and worth exploring.

On clothing and embodied experience

‘The dress that you wore for that rite of passage will always carry that trace every other time you wear it. Wash it, scrub it, hang it out in the burning bleaching fading strafing sun, iron it, press it, bleach it, dye it, cut it up, cut it down, change the hem, change the buttons, it will make no difference. That experience remains imprinted on it. In it. You wear the experience again’. (Jo in Rippin, 2012, 144)

In line with Jo above, we acknowledge that material clothes are saturated with emotions and affects. Clothes, textiles, fabrics and materials tell us multiple stories, help us make sense of our lived experiences, and bring us together (Prain, 2014). Clothes play an important role in telling narratives, evoking affects, protecting our skin and armoring us (Rippin, 2015). They play significant roles in our lives (Rippin, 2012; Prain, 2014) and historically, different fabrics and textiles have carried different statuses in situated contexts (Baugh, 2011; Rippin, 2012a). "Rarely

⁶ Style is another notion closely connected to fashion. Following Hebdige (1979), I view style as (intentional) communication through bodily adornments over a longer period of time than perhaps more short-lived and cyclical fashions. Style could also be viewed as a materialization of bricolage, or the outcome of performative acts through which consumers modify, assemble, combine and act towards specific activities and objects.

are textile works simply end products – they are saturated with narrative, from the chain of events that led to their creation and the choice of materials used to the stories told by the pieces themselves, and finally to the accounts shared by those who have experienced an emotional reaction to these artworks”, Prain (2014, 10) articulates. How clothing objects appear, appeal, look and (intend to) *feel* on the moving body matter hugely.

We work from the assumption that touch and tactility intersect with the everyday actions of dressing and experiencing clothing, and our understanding of the haptic includes touch, kinaesthesia and proprioception (Garrington, 2013). In a context based on fabrics, textures and bodily experiences, the idea of the haptic sense (e.g. Classen, 2005; Garrington, 2013) is greatly important. In the context of clothing, touch and tactility are, it seems, fairly neglected areas of affect. This might come as a surprise, given that tactility and sensuous relationships are *formed* through our everyday experiences of clothing; we are entirely reliant on touch, sensing and feeling physical materials as we wear something. Again, this goes for both adults and children.

Designers create garments by interacting their creativity and imagination with fabric, texture, shape, form and surface, by feeling 'from the inside' or by training their eyes to sculpt while regarding matters of taste and aesthetic judgement as important throughout their work (Baugh, 2011). Fashion buyers and consumers, then, are often drawn to the magic or enchantment of certain material objects (Gabriel, 2005, 2011); they must aesthetically encounter, sense and touch the garments they buy (e.g. Entwistle, 2009, 2010). These encounters are always embodied, tacit and affective, particularly as affect is inherently material (Massumi, 2002). 'Yarn is both rough and smooth; soft and hard to the touch; it is symbolic of warmth, passion, joy', Vachhani (2013, 96) exemplifies. The sensuousness of fashionable objects and materials, the softness of fabrics such as silk or wool, the tactility of yarn, the density of cloth or the feeling of crispy cotton on one's skin not only evoke (pleasurable) feelings and invite action; they create affective relationships and subjective value to both consumers and makers themselves (Vachhani, 2013). Such affective relationships appear central not only to the fashionable world but to cultures of making more broadly, as they provide self-identity, meaning and sensuous relationships with objects (Vachhani, 2013; see also Rippin, 2007, 2009).

Interestingly, the sensuous qualities of clothing and especially its appeal to touch has remained relatively under-explored both theoretically and empirically. Perhaps this disregard could be attributed to the low-status of the sense of touch in comparison to more dominant senses (e.g. vision). Unlike the other senses, touch "acts upon the world as well as registering the action of the world on you", Connor (2004, 263) suggests. Vachhani (2013) reminds us of the considerable literature on touch in feminist theory, philosophy and literary theory (e.g. Connor 2004; Sedgwick 2003; Taussig 1991). Taken together, clothing might help us to capture the felt, sensual, bodily and expressive ways of knowing that go way beyond rational, disembodied and logical (economic) knowledge. In order to gain deeper understandings of the lived experiences central to clothing, we need to address aspects of affect. Our next section discusses the centrality of children's clothing in the social sciences more broadly, and the field of OS in particular. We will attempt to provide answers to the following questions: why is the study of the clothing of children relevant for the field of OS in particular?

The clothing of children as a meaningful research area to OS

How can we understand and approach contemporary clothing of children? Whose taste and style preferences do children's clothes generally express and what kind of affects and emotions do children's clothing objects become associated with? Children's bodies are often thought of as *contested*. We still know fairly little about *how* 'fashionable' children's bodies are constructed, and how they might influence decisions about how caregivers later choose to fashion, dress and protect their children through these affective objects (see Rafaeli and Vilnai-Yavetz, 2004). Whereas the market for children's fashion and clothing has witnessed rapid growth in recent years (Vänskä, 2017), researchers have for long worried about how children and their caregivers are branded and marketed to (Langer, 2002; Cook, 2004; Tyler, 2009).

Which features have been considered important in children's clothing, and what could they possibly tell us about the complex interrelationships between aesthetics, embodiment and materiality in the contemporary material culture? Children's clothing links to the influence of consumerism, gender, vulnerability, innocence, social class, the presence of commercial forces, the negotiation of femininities, masculinities and sexuality. Through clothing objects and accessories that are

informed by certain fashions and fashion codes, children 'do' and perform children, or young girls/boys in a specific spatial and geographical location. Academic fields such as marketing and consumer behavior have long studied topics such as children's brand preferences, knowledge of commercial intent and 'consumer socialization' (REF), but less attention has been given to the production of children's clothing or children's own experiences of clothing and embodiment within OS. As an interdisciplinary and scholarly overlooked topic, the clothing of children could tell us more about themes such as the construction of children's identities, the 'hidden' meanings of children's bodies behind the 'surface', contemporary constructions of childhood, or children becoming part of consumer culture more broadly. This paper has provided an opening for a deeper analysis of the contemporary controversies and constructions of children through fashionable dress and surface.

Arguably, it is commonly said that children should feel comfortable, be allowed to play, get dirty and move around in their clothes. Simultaneously, children are in a vulnerable position in relation to adults. After all, it is adults that design and produce clothes to children that later become associated with fashion, status, gender, emotion and affect. For instance, Vänskä (2012) has studied how children are fashioned in powerful media representations, and how multiple media discourses produce particular, sexualized child bodies. Bodine (2003), then, shows how school uniforms and common dress might function as a protected space of childhood, literally offering younger girls material protection from being sexualized, or younger boys protection against tough and violent images and fashions. To be continued...

The embodiment of children

How do we attempt to re-represent children's changing bodies, their cultural images, and movement?

METHODOLOGY

As researchers, we have always appreciated craft, and we believe our wardrobes have always said something about us, who we are, and in a sense, who we want to become at a particular time and space.

The autoethnographic material used in this paper has been gathered in personal diaries in 2017. For us, autoethnography as a method worked as a reflexive practice, a method in which two ‘critical friends’ regularly discussed together with an intention to produce novel methodological insights to the field of organization studies, as well (see Gilmore and Kenny, 2015: 73). For example, when writing this paper together we realized that research could be viewed as a relational and not as an individual endeavor, as the tendency in academia seems to be (Hardy et al., 2001). In a similar way, viewing writing a scientific research paper as an embodied process (Essén and Winterstorm Värlander, 2012; see also Valtonen et al., 2017) allowed us to question the tendency to appreciate only the intellectual (and hence) disembodied dimensions of academic research practices.

In practice, we started to write our diaries in the beginning of 2017 after initially discussing together about the (research) topic of children’s clothing and the silenced embodiment of children. We mutually agreed on writing all kinds of thoughts related to our early memories related to our own clothing as children on one hand, and thoughts related to the clothing of our toddler boys on the other. In the summer 2017, we then met to discuss our diary notes and reflections on them together, following loosely the idea of a ‘pair interview method’ (Gilmore and Kenny, 2015: 61) and more precisely the method of ‘memory-work’ (e.g. Fraser and Michell, 2015; Onyx and Small, 2001), which is “a feminist social constructionist method in that it breaks down the barriers between the subject and object of research” (Onyx and Small, 2001: 775). The method of ‘memory-work’ (e.g. Fraser and Michell, 2015; Onyx and Small, 2001) breaks down the barriers between the subject and object of research” (Onyx and Small, 2001: 775). In memory work, the idea is to analyze collectively individually written memories of everyday experience (Onyx and Small, 2001: 773; 775). By applying memory-work as a method, we realized how we were not alone with our experiences as mothers of toddlers and hence, experienced ‘spontaneous growth’ during writing this paper as well (see Fraser and Michell, 2015: 334).

CHILDREN'S 'SILENCED EMBODIMENT' – SOME PRELIMINARY ANALYTICAL REFLECTIONS

In the following empirical examples, we wish to illustrate the topic of children as consumers of clothing and fashion (Pole, 2007) by considering the place of our own bodies and embodied experience in the research process, as well. More specifically, we reflect on our diary notes from both our own early childhood and from our experiences as mothers of dressing up our toddler boys from day-to-day. The following example renders visible a privileged Western girl picking and wearing a branded outfit to school at an early age, which perfectly shows how children's fashion links to the influence of consumerism, gender, social class, the presence of commercial forces, the negotiation of femininities and sexuality, as well as the researcher 'doing' young girl informed by certain fashion codes in a specific spatial and geographical location:

Allow me to take you on a trip down my memory lane to my first day at elementary school in the city of Helsinki in mid-August 1991. Like so many other seven-year-olds in Finland on that particularly important day, I was a well-groomed girl with butterflies in her stomach, equipped with a brand new, over-sized purple backpack walking to the neighborhood school in Helsinki with her mother. My dad would otherwise have joined us, but he worked as a lawyer for a multinational company and travelled on business close to 150 days each year. As a day typically sentimental for any child and her parents, I remember my important day through experiences of dress. Back then, my elegant 32-year-old mother and sartorial role model had bought me a set made up of a knee-length dress and a button-up cardigan, one designed by Japanese Kenzo Takada. First presented on the Kenzo adult Spring/Summer catwalk in 1988, if I remember correctly, and later modified for part of the label's children's wear collection in the early 1990s, this fashionable outfit represented something extraordinary to me. It was, indeed, something special.

The pattern of the fabric portrayed large fuchsia poppies dancing on an intensely olive green surface, thus beautifully playing with complementary colours. Like mother, like daughter, I fell for the strong expression and proudly wore my Kenzo to school accompanied by white knee-high lace socks in white leather strap sandals. I performed girl, and I certainly performed 'fashionable' girl. I loved the dress and the excitement and expectations I still attach to it. Since this early act of (self-)fashioning and displaying myself through dress in the early 1990s, my fascination for the matter of fashion has only grown.

Growing up in the 1990s in Finland, a time defined by a severe economic crisis, I normally did not wear branded designer gear to school. Also, my mother rarely purchased an expensive outfit for me to 'show off' or to enhance status. Rather, with her eye for aesthetics, beauty and detail – something I believe I have inherited – my mother was moved by the strong and colourful expression she encountered, one rather typical for Kenzo. Again, this episode illustrates that fashion performs an intimate *affective* domain, an embodied-material encounter and a mixture of subjectively felt and shared experiences. My outfit sold at seventy percent off but was still a fairly expensive luxury item. Nevertheless (and perhaps exactly for this reason), my mother instantly knew she had to have it. If a Kenzo dress once seduced my mother to act and made seven-year old me

feel smart, confident and pretty, this material object today remains a treasured possession that evokes affection, memories and carries along the history of a girl who (usually) loved going to school. As such, it appears justified to say that fashion and dress say something very interesting about our affective relations and personal experiences, cultural contexts, memories, processual identity and communication – or performativity, affection, desires, consumer cultures, class, materiality and our society as a whole. (Astrid's notes)

In line with recent approaches to the (adult) human body (e.g. Noland, 2009) as a complex admixture of the cultural, the social, and the biological, we view children's bodies as relational, 'unfinished' (Shilling, 2003), dynamic, shifting and ever-changing. These vulnerable and immature bodies are socially constructed and gendered via various historical, socio-cultural, and political processes (e.g. Parviainen, 2011). In other words, children's bodies *become*. We work from the assumption that the child's body represents a body with multiple and sometimes conflicting meanings: it is uncontrollable, leaky and 'lacking' (compare e.g. Van Amsterdam, 2015), yet frequently positioned as angelic, pure and innocent. The following diary notes render visible the various meanings attached to the clothing of our toddler boys and to the consumerism of the children's clothes around us:

I love the idea of recycling children's clothes! There are so many great flea markets focusing only on children's clothes in our neighborhood, and I visit them weekly. My own mother told me there were none of them when I was a child. So, something must have changed. Perhaps the consumption of children's clothes has rapidly gone up? Still, the time that a child can wear a piece of clothing before it is already too small is so short. That's why I make really great 'discoveries' when going to the flea markets specialized in children's clothing. I love the feeling of finding a beautiful piece by some small design brand, such as the Swedish brand Mini Rodini – and with half a price to that of the new ones. You kind of get hooked up in that feeling of seeking, looking around and discovering. (Suvi's notes)

How are children's bodies *constructed* in contemporary western societies and organizations – for instance – through material dress and the surfaces of clothes, as well as through 'other dominant social constructions of what it means to be a child' (Tyler, 2009, 57)? What kind of bodies are produced through contemporary children's clothing, and how do these bodies become *fashioned*, *gendered* and *classed* across particular socio-historical contexts? We notice that idea(l)s and practices related to children's silenced embodiment are subject to competing imperatives, as the following diary note exemplifies:

I love dressing up my toddler. It's a kind of reflection of how I want him to appear to the outside world –

feeling as a proud mother of a handsome little man, that's the greatest sensation of all. On the other hand, I feel pressures from the world around me about clothing my child in a 'proper' way; for some mothers around me it seems to be a total field of clothing battle: who has the most beautiful cloth for the baby or for the toddler? Who owns and uses the small design brands the most? That's distressing. (Suvi's notes)

Children's clothing modifies the bodily behavior and activities of children. For example, the ideal of a playful, physically moving and abundant outdoor child has been a key factor in Finland. For this reason, practical outfits made of technical materials are guided by children in outer skirts. At the same time, outdoor clothing has also equaled the movement of girls and boys. We recognize this aspect in our own lives, too – as the following diary notes illustrate:

I don't know why, but it is often the woman who decides which clothes the child is going to wear the following day. I keep myself away from those mothers who dress their girls in pink from head to toe. In dressing up my child, I want to diminish the gendered messages of the colors of the clothes. For instance, I love buying yellow coats and overalls to my boy. It's a kind of gender neutral color, and a happy color – transmitting a message of a cheerful, happy child beneath the yellow surface, I have realized now. (Suvi's reflections)

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

This paper has addressed the clothing of children as a theoretically important and empirically rich and meaningful topic – as a serious and legitimate matter *beyond* superficial, 'feminine' and frivolous. We delved into the social dynamics between children as embodied subjects and the material world, and argue for a fuller appreciation of the clothing of children as a multidimensional research area in OS. Given that the topic of children and the clothing of children are situated at the margins of OS, we intended to show how the realm of children's clothing opens up novel perspectives both to the study of aesthetics, embodiment and material culture within OS, and develops our perceptions of childhood and children in OS more broadly. Specifically, this paper shows how the aspects of the clothing of children can be combined with other relevant theoretical discussions in organization studies and in this way, show interrelations between them and the aesthetic aspects of organizational life.

What difference has an explicit focus on the clothing of *children* made to our analysis of aesthetics, embodiment and materiality in OS? To begin with, we have demonstrated how work and

organization continue to be thought of as *adult* domains. Whereas children have remained largely absent in critical studies of organization and work (Tyler, 2009), organizational researchers have tended to ignore how images, representations and experiences of children and childhood actively shape organizations, too.

In specific, our paper contributes to the existing literatures of clothing, dress in organizations (e.g. REF) and materiality of the bodies (e.g. Dale and Latham, 2015; Orlikowski, 2007) by exploring the unique empirical context of children and the meanings attached to their clothing to act as a ‘critical case’ in which to explore more profound embodied aspects of human life beneath the surface. As such, it contributes to the few studies in organizational scholarship that investigate the presence of children in organizations. By addressing the significance of childrens’ bodies in a specific domain of creative work, this paper challenges disembodied and over-cognitived approaches to work in the field of organization studies (Pullen and Vachhani, 2013; see also Strati, 2016: 253).

Conceptually, our paper thus serves as an empirical exploration of how clothing, the surface and the embodied experiences and knowledge beneath the clothes are translated into action and what this means in a workplace context. Hence, this paper contributes to a more practical, agentic understanding of how embodied aesthetics are ‘done’ in organizational settings and further nuances the micro-actions of the children’s bodies on the move.

Methodologically, our paper utilizes autoethnographic research material and the method of ‘memory work’ and as such is an illuminating methodological account of *how* one engages aesthetic sensibilities in the field. By so doing, our paper aims to develop an argument for putting two ‘critical friends’ to discuss together and where this could lead to, for example to a more profound understanding of how we can know organizational action empathetically.

Specifically, this paper has argued that the clothing of children offers fruitful insights into the conceptualization of interrelations between aesthetics, embodiment and material objects in organizations, as well as opens up critical discussions concerning the ‘silent embodiments’ beneath the surfaces. But how are we, after all, to understand the interrelationships between aesthetics, embodiment and materiality in more dynamic and nuanced ways? The above contributions are likely to be helpful to organizational researchers interested in the everyday lived experiences of organizational members, and life in organizations. Exploring *how* our ‘below the radar’ actions

manifest at the level of the body is likely to be helpful to ethnographers and other ‘close readers’ of organizational action – the tiny nuances of gesture, movement, proximity, and so on tell us much about the inner states and degrees of power that people perceive they have in different settings. By exploring these nuances in the world of children opens up a refreshingly new avenue to the discussion of embodiment in organizations (compare e.g. Pullen and Vacchani, 2013; Ropo and Sauer, 2008; Strati, 2016). We often do not know what our bodies show – and this paper helps us to see this more clearly. As such, our paper could be of interest to researchers of strategy-as-(material)practice, gender researchers and those concerned with other marginal members of organizations other than children (such as minority ethnicities or sexualities), researchers looking at how specific events are played out through the ‘dressed bodies’ – leadership in meetings, public staged events, etc. and importantly, how these relate to the backstage rehearsals that they build up (and later inform).

Wider conceptualizations of bodies and embodiments are welcome to the field of organization studies. The complexity and diversity of children’s embodiment has been significantly overlooked in the field of organization studies. As researchers, we have tended to ignore the bodily practices and idea(l)s related to children’s embodiment, how these matter and have become subject to competing imperatives, as well as how children’s embodiment actually impacts on the everyday life of different organizations and adults in various ways.

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