

Sexuality-Assemblages, Hyphens, and the In-Between

Toni Ingram¹ 

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Abstract

Sexuality-assemblages emphasize a relational more-than-human approach to conceptualizing the becoming of sexuality. This article brings together Fine's notion of "working the hyphen" with a new materialist ontology of sexuality, to explore the space and form of the hyphen within the sexuality-assemblage. In "working" the sexuality-assemblage hyphen, I explore the onto-epistemological space it inhabits, who or what is implicated at this material and metaphorical juncture, and how this shapes the production of knowledge about sexuality. More than a simple connecting device between words, the hyphen is conceptualized as a metonym for the dynamic space in-between assembled elements. The hyphen-space is generative and capacious, enacting important onto-epistemological understandings about research(er) "objectivity," response-ability and ethics integral to a new materialist becoming of sexualities research. More broadly, I consider how a new materialist ontology shapes the form of the hyphen itself, elaborating the view that even the smallest of marks can matter.

Keywords

Barad, intra-action, new materialism, onto-epistemology

Introduction

On first appearance, the hyphen might seem to be a simple understated line, tasked with the punctilious job of joining and separating words. Academic interest in the hyphen has revealed it to be a far more capacious and contentious mark—a call to action to interrogate the relational intricacies between people, things, ideas, identities, and cultures (Fine, 1994; Fine & Sirin, 2007; Hogget, 2008; Jones & Jenkins, 2008; Medovarski, 2002; Stewart, 2018; Wagle & Cantaffa, 2008). The hyphen has been leveraged to signal separation and difference, to act as a gap or bridge, or to forge a sense of unity and fusion. These varied applications suggest the hyphen is neither inconsequential nor banal, but a multifaceted lively mark enmeshed in power relations, histories, personal, and political tensions. This article engages with Fine's (1994) notion of "working the hyphen" to explore the space and form of the hyphen within the context of the sexuality-assemblage (Allen, 2013; Fox & Alldred, 2013). I conceptualize the onto-epistemological space of the hyphen as enacting a form of entanglement and potentiality integral to a new materialist becoming of sexuality. I consider how the researcher is inextricably entangled in the hyphen-space, not as an objective or separate "other" to the research but as ontologically inseparable from the knowledge produced. This ontological frame not only shapes notions of ethics and

research(er) response-ability, but also the shape and scope of the hyphen itself.

The concept of sexuality-as-assemblage underpinning this discussion derives from a new materialist understanding of sexuality as an emergent and relational becoming (Allen, 2015; Fox & Alldred, 2016). While new materialisms are theoretically and conceptually diverse, it can be categorized as an ontological (re)orientation that brings particular attention to the force and liveliness of matter (Coole & Frost, 2010; Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012). New materialisms form part of a larger constellation of theoretical approaches characterized as posthumanism: a dynamic transdisciplinary movement that disrupts notions of human supremacy and an anthropocentric focus in knowledge production (Braidotti, 2013; Wolfe, 2009). Theoretical ideas from Barad (2007), Bennett (2010), Deleuze and Guattari (1984, 1987) and Braidotti (2013), have helped articulate a new materialist approach to sexuality which emphasizes entanglement, materiality, and the more-than-human. Shifting away from an anthropocentric view of sexuality as

¹Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand

Corresponding Author:

Toni Ingram, School of Education, Faculty of Culture and Society, Auckland University of Technology, AR Building, North Campus, 90 Akoranga Drive, Northcote, Auckland 0627, New Zealand.
Email: toni.ingram@aut.ac.nz

located in, or deriving from, an individual human body, a new materialist ontology recognizes all manner of human and more-than-human elements in the becoming of sexuality. Varied forces coalesce to form sexuality-assemblages—dynamic entanglements that can include material objects, practices, ideas, feelings, spaces, and temporalities. In this approach, it is not simply what forces comprise a sexuality-assemblage that is of interest but what these forces collaboratively do or produce when entangled together.

The intent of this article is not to offer an empirical analysis of a specific sexuality-assemblage and the understandings it might generate; these analytical discussions can be found elsewhere (see Alldred & Fox, 2015; Allen, 2013; Fox & Alldred, 2013; Fox & Bale, 2017; Holmes et al., 2010; Ingram, 2022; Janak & Bhana, 2023; Janak et al., 2023; Lambevski, 2005; Renold & Ringrose, 2016). The focus of this article is more methodological in nature—a theoretical curiosity about the material and metaphorical space of the hyphen within the sexuality-assemblage. At times, a hyphen is used as a visual written mark to join things and ideas within sexuality-assemblages, for instance, ball-girl-date (Ingram, 2022), sex organ-arousal-object of desire (Fox, 2011). A hyphen also appears in related terms such as material-discursive and onto-epistem-ology (Barad, 2007) signaling a co-constitutive form of entanglement. Although not all writing about sexuality-assemblages uses the hyphen, nor do I suggest it should. My interest in the hyphen goes beyond grammatical; the hyphen can be thought of as a metonym (Medovarski, 2002) for the dynamic space in-between elements within a sexuality-assemblage. In this sense, the hyphen is not only a connector of words or things, but “denotes a relationship at work” (Zink & Burrows, 2008, p. 262). I consider what this relationship looks like at an onto-epistemological level and how this relational hyphen-space shapes the production of knowledge about sexuality. To advance this discussion, the next section elaborates three key themes from existing scholarship: the hyphen has a marker of connectivity, difference, and possibility. These themes provide the article’s point of departure for considering the sexuality-assemblage hyphen and the methodological ideas it helps enact in a new materialist becoming of sexualities research.

The Hyphen at Work

Michelle Fine’s (1994) well known essay, “*Working the hyphens: Reinventing self and other in qualitative research*,” has been instrumental in prompting closer examination of the methodological and theoretical potential of the hyphen in various research(er) relations. Fine examines the hyphen which exists between the Self as researcher and the Other as participant. She characterizes the Self-Other hyphen as the moments in which the researcher (Self) and researched (Other) are “knottily entangled” (Fine, 1994, p. 72) and

calls for qualitative researchers to self-consciously “work this hyphen” to critically examine how researchers speak “of” and “for” Others and its consequences. Fine’s interrogation of the Self-Other hyphen brings a critical gaze to notions scientific neutrality, universal truths and the role of the researcher in knowledge production. As Fine explains:

By *working the hyphen*, I mean to suggest that researchers probe how we are in relation with the contexts we study and with our informants, understanding that we are all multiple in those relations. I mean to invite researchers to see how these “relations between” get us “better” data, limit what we feel free to say, expand our minds and constrict our mouths, engage us in intimacy and seduce us into complicity, make us quick to interpret and hesitant to write. (p. 72)

Scholars from a range of research contexts and disciplines have taken up Fine’s call, and in doing so, have illuminated the tensions and politics enmeshed in varied relationships including researchers on a research team (Jones & Jenkins, 2008), the relationship between cultures (Stewart, 2018), personal identities (Fine & Sirin, 2007; Zaal et al., 2007), and insider-outsider (Humphrey, 2007). Wagle and Cantaffa (2008), for example, interrogate the intersection between researcher identities (e.g., gay, white, woman, and Latina) and qualitative research, arguing as qualitative researchers “our lives ‘at the hyphen’ matter throughout our research processes. How we negotiate the hyphen establishes the limits and possibilities in a given research context” (p. 155): for instance, shaping the research questions, how the researcher might be perceived by participants, and the impact this might have on establishing rapport or shaping participant responses. Wagle and Cantaffa make the point that researcher identities are so inextricably entangled with the research, the distinction between who is the researcher and researched becomes blurred. “Working the hyphen” thus becomes an opportunity for reflexivity to recognize a researcher’s standpoint and positionality, a point to analyze power relations and the flow of influence in the research process.

For some researchers, the hyphen can function as an important marker of difference, not only between researcher(s) and participants, but also co-researchers and cultural identities. The work of Jones and Jenkins (2008) interrogates the politics of the indigene-colonizer hyphen in the context of cross-cultural (Māori-Pākehā¹) co-researcher relations. The indigene-colonizer hyphen recognizes ethnic and historical difference, it also signals a relationship of power, inequality, cultural dominance, and privilege. In working the indigene-colonizer hyphen in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, Jones and Jenkins suggest the hyphen both joins and separates, marking a space of struggle and tension within the research setting. Here, the hyphen is generative in the marking and making of relations: “The colonizer-indigene hyphen always reaches back into a

shared past. Each of our names—indigene and colonizer—discursively produces the other” (Jones & Jenkins, 2008, p. 4). For Jones and Jenkins (2008), the hyphen functions as “a character in the research relationship,” worthy not only of necessary attention but protection (p. 5). They are cautious of the ways the hyphen—as a marker of difference—has been erased, softened, or denied, perhaps to advance a research goal of shared values, to minimize difference or encourage a sense of unity. Yet, for Jones and Jenkins, the hyphen is a powerful and productive site of methodological work, and as such, should be retained. Their argument conveys a sense of the politics enacted by the hyphen: a “relationship at work” that is enmeshed in difference, power, and historical/political tensions.

When the hyphen functions as a marker of difference, it can work as a “gap or bridge” between ethnic groups to capture the intricacies of the bicultural and intercultural space (Stewart, 2018a, p. 767). In conversation with Jones and Jenkins (2008) and Bell (2014), Stewart (2018a) adopts the term “intercultural hyphen” as a model for biculturalism within the context of indigenous-settler (Māori-Pākehā) relations in Aotearoa-New Zealand. The hyphen in each of these three terms, Māori-Pākehā, indigenous-settler, Aotearoa-New Zealand, draws attention to what connects the two entities including politics, perspectives, and tensions. Stewart (2018a) articulates the hyphen as a symbolic gap or bridge that captures “the paradoxical nature of the intercultural space” (p. 767): the paradox referring to the varied and shifting levels of (dis)engagement across the intercultural space represented by the hyphen. As a gap or bridge, the intercultural hyphen encapsulates a sense of difference and connectivity. It also evokes a space of learning and potentiality: “the ‘something new’ of a bicultural relationship” that Stewart (2018b) characterizes as irreducible to either cultural group but emerges in the intercultural space. As such, Stewart echoes Jones and Jenkins (2008) and advocates for the importance of recognizing and working with hyphens and their inherent politics, intercultural, and otherwise.

Within these examples from existing scholarship, the hyphen primarily functions as a connector, juncture, or space between ontologically separate entities, for instance, individual people or cultures. Fine’s ongoing work with Sirin (2007), however, uses the hyphen to develop the concept of *hyphenated selves*: a theoretical and methodological framework for exploring the nexus between an individual’s multiple identities. In their research with Muslim-American youth post 9/11, Fine and Sirin (2007, p. 17) use the notion of hyphenated selves to help understand the complex lives of youth as they navigate their multiple identities within political and culturally contentious environments (see also, Katsiaficas et al., 2011; Sirin & Fine, 2007; Zaal et al., 2007). The hyphenated selves framework reveals “the contentious nature of living on the hyphen” (Fine & Sirin,

2007, p. 19): a “lively, tension-filled, viscous and porous space” that at times becomes a point of tension and contradiction, and at other times, fusion (Fine & Sirin, 2007, p. 23). Methodologically, the concept of hyphenated selves invites narratives of multiplicity (Katsiaficas et al., 2011), offering a way of attending to the complexities experienced by youth negotiating multiple identities amid contentious political and social spaces.

These varied “workings” of the hyphen reveal a generative space of critical engagement, reflexivity and accountability in the research process. Cunliffe and Karunanayake (2013) propose the notion of *hyphen-spaces*, not as a marker of boundaries but as “spaces of possibility” to better understand tensions and connections within researcher/respondent relationships (p. 365). They contend hyphen-spaces are “fluid relational spaces in which boundaries between researcher-researched are blurred, influence is mutual, and multiple meanings articulated and worked out” (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013, p. 368). These relational spaces involve power relations, identity work, the politics of positionality and difference, thus how we work these spaces is integral to ethical research decisions. Gently holding this idea and related threads of connectivity, difference, and possibility, I now ask what “spaces of possibility” a hyphen might enact within a sexuality-assemblage? What does connectivity, difference, and possibility look like in this onto-epistemological space? And, importantly, what might this mean for conceptualizing the role of the researcher within a new materialist becoming of sexualities research?

Sexuality-Assemblages and the Hyphen

A sexuality-assemblage entails an ontological reorientation for understanding *how* sexual meanings, practices, and identities get produced. Drawing on Barad’s (2007) framework of agential realism and concept of *intra-action*, Allen (2015) conceptualizes sexuality as intra-actively becoming via an array of human and more-than-human relations. This approach provides an expansive frame for understanding the becoming of sexuality beyond a discursive and human focus. Barad’s concept of intra-action is integral to an agential realist understanding of entanglement. As opposed to the more familiar notion of “interaction” which usually denotes a relationship between individual or separate entities (e.g., interaction between two discrete human bodies or between a human and a material object such as clothing). Intra-action denotes a process of entanglement where agencies/entities are not ontologically separate or prior, and instead, emerge through their mutual engagement or entanglement. Intra-activity does not assume prior existence of any one thing or body, whether that be human or nonhuman; instead, it is through their entanglement (intra-activity) that the boundaries, meanings and properties of “things” emerge.

Applying this idea to sexuality-assemblages, sexuality emerges intra-actively through entangled relations which means sexuality is not a pre-existing property of an individual human body, nor can sexuality be thought of purely as nature (i.e., biologically determined) or culture (i.e., socially constructed). Conceptualizing sexuality as emergent via human and more-than-human intra-actions, expands the scope for attending to who or what plays a role in its continual becoming. It also invites understandings of the shifting capacities of sexuality-assemblages, what assembled relations might collaboratively do and produce, including what they might open up or constrain.

Similarly interested in a new materialist reconfiguring of sexuality, Fox and Alldred (2013, 2016) draw on Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concepts of assemblage and affect to theorize sexuality as the product of flows of affect within sexuality-assemblages. Like an intra-active approach, sexuality is not an attribute of an individual human body or identity, instead, it is the sexuality-assemblage which "establish the capacities of individual bodies to do, feel, and desire" (Fox & Alldred, 2016, p. 658). A sexuality-assemblage could form around an "event" such as a kiss or a crush (Fox & Alldred, 2016; Holford et al., 2013; Huuki & Renold, 2015) entangling an array of forces, such as bodies-lips-past experiences-social and sexual norms-personal attributes-dating conventions-spatial-material contexts. A kiss not only draws together two bodies, but a plethora of cultural, material, discursive and other forces, and it is through "an impersonal affective flow" in-between the assembled relations that sexuality is produced, including sexual capacities, actions, desires, and identities (Fox & Alldred, 2013, p. 769). This perspective attends to the material workings of power and the micropolitics of sexuality-assemblages where, as Alldred and Fox (2015) succinctly note, "how sexuality manifests has little to do with personal preferences or dispositions, and everything to do with how bodies, things, ideas and social institutions assemble" (p. 5). While Allen's and Fox and Alldred's approaches differ in their theoretical underpinnings, both posit a new materialist understanding of sexuality as becoming in the *in-between* space—the space I conceptualize as enacted by a material or metaphorical hyphen.

Within a sexuality-assemblage, the work of the hyphen is two-fold: it works as a connector of forces *and* as a marker of a dynamic relational space, whether that be one of intra-activity (Allen, 2013) or the flow of affect (Fox & Alldred, 2013). Understanding *how* the hyphen connects in an ontological sense is key to conceptualizing this relational space. When sexuality is understood as emerging intra-actively, the hyphen enacts a connection between relational forces—spaces, things, ideas, bodies—not as separate pre-determined entities but as agentially entangled (Barad, 2007). Within an agential realist approach, entities come into being (as material-discursive phenomena) through their

mutual engagement or intra-action. This means the boundaries between elements in the sexuality-assemblage become porous and they only become distinct through specific materialized/materializing relations (intra-activity). Therefore, the hyphen does not signal conventional boundaries between discrete entities, rather it enacts a point of fusion in an intra-active sense—an entangled ontological inseparability. The hyphen becomes a capacious space, a point of relational connectivity that implicates far more than its adjoining words. We get a sense here of the potential and dynamism of the hyphen-space within a sexuality-assemblage, not as a marker of boundaries but as "spaces of possibility" (Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013, p. 365), where there is something lively and dynamic happening in the in-between.

My use of the term *in-between* is both purposeful and ontological. In Ingold's (2015) fascinating exploration of the life of lines, he remarks on an ontological difference between these two terms:

"Between" articulates a divided world that is already carved at the joints. It is a bridge, a hinge, a connection, an attraction of opposites, a link in a chain, a double-headed arrow that points at once to this and that. "In-between," by contrast, is a movement of generation and dissolution in a world of becoming where things are not yet given—such that they might then be joined up—but on the way to being given. (p. 147)

Ingold's articulation of the in-between as a dynamic space of movement and becoming resonates with a new materialist ontology of sexuality. The sexuality-assemblage hyphen enacts an in-between space of fluidity and possibility, and it is in this in-between space, the becoming of sexuality occurs. Hence, it is not simply what forces form a sexuality-assemblage that are of interest, but what these forces do when entangled together in the in-between.

The form of connectivity a hyphen enacts in this in-between space has implications for how we conceive notions of difference. When a hyphen acts as a gap or bridge (Stewart, 2018), difference is often characterized within a relationship between two distinct entities: for instance, the difference between two positionalities such as researcher and participant (Fine, 1994) or indigene and colonial settler (Jones & Jenkins, 2008; Stewart, 2018). In contrast, a sexuality-assemblage hyphen enacts ontological entanglement where connectivity occurs within a process of intra-activity. If things are not ontologically separate, what might this mean for understanding notions of difference? Does the hyphen signal an erasure or softening of difference? Or is the notion of difference even relevant to the sexuality-assemblage hyphen? Taking Fine's (1994) concept of the Self-Other research hyphen as a starting point, Allen et al. (2014) consider difference among a research team from a new materialist perspective. As opposed to conceiving

difference between researchers in terms of identity (i.e., pre-existing qualities such as gender, ethnicity or sexuality), difference is conceptualized as a matter of relating intra-actively (Barad, 2007). This ontological rethinking of difference draws on the notion of intra-action as the marking or making of difference, rather than difference pertaining to independent or prior existence. For Allen et al. (2014), an intra-active configuring of difference helps them “move beyond thinking about differences in terms of ‘what’ we are (male, female, European, lesbian) to a consideration of who we are” (p. 121): The *who* emerging in the coming together as a research team via an in-between space they characterize as “meeting at the crossroads” (Allen et al., 2014, p. 123). In their rethinking of difference within a research team, there is the potential of something new emerging relationally, something unknowable or unpredictable in advance. In their words: “Our difference is not ours alone, but produced in our becoming present to each other and in this way exceeds us” (Allen et al., 2014, p. 128). Again, there is a sense of possibility here, something dynamic and generative happening in the in-between.

Thinking about this idea in the context of a sexuality-assemblage, differences become made and remade through the process of intra-activity. “Things” do not begin with a set of given or fixed differences, rather it is through the relational entanglements within sexuality-assemblages—the in-between—that differentiation occurs. The hyphen enacts an ontological mattering of difference that is situated, contingent, and relational. This means the hyphen neither demarcates difference as ontologically prior, nor does it soften or erase difference, rather, it enacts an alternative understanding of how difference comes to be. Decisions on whether to hyphenate or not within a sexuality-assemblage become irrelevant when premised on a goal of recognizing pre-existing difference. Instead, we are encouraged to think less about the qualities of what lies on either side of the hyphen and think more about the in-between space of possibilities a hyphen enacts.

Onto-Epistem-ology and the Production of Knowledge

The ontological entanglement enacted by a hyphen is evident in conjoined terms such as material-discursive and onto-epistem-ology (Barad, 2003). When sexuality is understood as an emergent intra-active becoming, materiality and discourse (matter and meaning) are mutually co-constitutive (Allen, 2015). The hyphen does not signal an either/or relationship as this would rely on binary logic, instead, the hyphen enacts an “and” or “with” in the form of intra-active relationality. The same logic applies to the term onto-epistem-ology which refers to the inseparability of knowing and being. For Barad, a separation of epistemology from ontology assumes an

inherent difference between matter and discourse, human and nonhuman, subject and object. Onto-epistem-ology, on the contrary, can be understood as “the study of practices of knowing in being,” where we are not simply outside observers of the world, but part of the world in its ongoing intra-activity (Barad, 2007, p. 185). Knowing and being occur in the same moment, forcing us to acknowledge researchers as thoroughly entangled in the becoming of the research.

Revisiting Fine’s (1994) Self-Other hyphen, she argues qualitative researchers are always “implicated at the hyphen,” yet this “knottily entangled” relationship is often ignored or denied under the guise of researcher objectivity and distancing (p. 72). While Fine does not position her argument within a new materialist ontology, her point resonates with an onto-epistemological framework where the researcher is inextricably entangled in the production of knowledge. Fine’s (1994) call for researchers to self-consciously work the Self-Other hyphen foregrounds our complicity and accountability in the process of Othering: “how researchers have spoken ‘of’ and ‘for’ Others while occluding ourselves and our own investments” (p. 70). How we speak for and about the participants in our research has consequences and researchers are neither neutral nor separate from the knowledge we purport to produce. For Barad (2007), ethics is entangled with knowing and being, it is about “accounting for our part of the entangled webs we weave” (p. 384). Barad (2007) characterizes this as a post-humanist ethics—an ethics of worlding—which is not understood in terms of a responding to an exterior/ised other, but about “responsibility and accountability for the lively relationalities of becoming of which we are a part” (p. 393). Objectivity in an agential realist sense, does not derive from a position of exteriority (i.e., an inherent separation between the observer and observed), rather, objectivity is understood within a framework of intra-action that enacts agential separability. A specific intra-action (of which the researcher is a part) enacts an agential cut, which allows for the possibility of being able to separate something out for analysis. Barad explains the enactment of agential cuts separates what is researched from how it is researched: the cut is not a separation in a permanent sense, but agential separability: a “cutting together-apart (one move)” (Barad, 2014, p. 168). Different cuts enact different phenomena, thus objectivity becomes a matter of accountability for what materializes, for what comes to be. Not in the sense that we (as researchers) choose these agential cuts, but because we are a part of the material arrangements (intra-activity) that enact them.

Fine’s argument that researchers are implicated at the hyphen holds true in a new materialist framing of sexuality-as-assemblage. Although, we are not implicated at the hyphen as an external or separate entity, we are implicated in the sense of being ontologically entangled in the

hyphen-space—the in-between. Working the hyphen in a sexuality-assemblage entails recognizing the blurriness between researchers and participants within the research process, acknowledging “our own messy, implicated, connected, embodied involvement in knowledge production” (Taylor & Ivinson, 2013, p. 666). It entails being ethically response-able for how realities are produced, what has been cut in or out of emergent phenomena (Barad, 2007). This “cutting” might be shaped by the research aim, questions, theory, participants, methodological assumptions about “methods” and “data”—what they can do and what is possible to “know.” In a new materialist ontology, reality is never independent from how it is researched. As Allen (2019) reminds us: “Sexuality as an object of investigation is not a separate entity out there in the world that method uncovers. Sexuality materializes in intra-action with method” (p. 290). The research, researcher, methodology, and the nature of sexuality itself are ontologically made together. This means the researcher is neither external nor do they exist prior to the methodology (i.e., methodology is something they implement), rather “researcher and methodology intra-actively *be-come* simultaneously” (Allen, 2019, p. 290). Being implicated at the hyphen is thus a matter of ethical and ontological entanglement.

This is not to suggest the hyphen-space in the sexuality-assemblage is devoid of politics and tensions. I am cognisant when writing about a sexuality-assemblage, what appears in the assemblage relies on the researcher’s ability to name it. The limits of language are palpable here. Lenz Taguchi (2020) makes an important point that while striving for a postanthropocentric and nonrepresentational research practice, “the body and matter comes to matter merely in the way *we*—as humans—seem to be able to discursively describe it and thus articulate it or (re)present it. In this way anthropocentrism stares right back at us” (p. 39, italics original emphasis). What we name or identify in a sexuality-assemblage is limited by our perspective, language, expectations of coherence, and readability; yet the identified (named) elements in a sexuality-assemblage form only part of the potential relations at play. Perhaps, we might think of the hyphen as enacting the *more* in the sexuality-assemblage, holding a space for what has been left out, what is unknowable or unnameable in advance. The *more* that avoids being “pinned down” by human recognition and language.

Concluding Thoughts

As a material written mark, a hyphen is constrained by linear writing conventions, rules of punctuation, sentence structure and text direction (e.g., left to right in the English language). Yet, to reduce a hyphen to a linear way of thinking feels reductive and does a disservice to the shape and scope of the hyphen this article has sought to reveal.

Drawing on Ingold’s (2016) taxonomy of lines, we could think of the sexuality-assemblage hyphen as a *thread* that connects and entangles, perhaps more akin to a root structure or rhizome. Although, this might posit the hyphen as always something physical or tangible in world—something you can see or touch. We might also conceptualize the sexuality-assemblage hyphen as a *ghostly line*: a ghost of a line that is more abstract and incorporeal, such as lines of latitude and longitude or survey lines. Ingold (2016) notes how ghostly lines “have no physical counterpart in the world,” yet this does not mean they don’t have “very real consequences for people’s movements,” in his words: “Looking up at the night sky, we imagine the stars to be invisibly connected by ghostly lines into constellations. . . only by doing so can we tell stories about them” (p. 50). Perhaps then, the question is less about what hyphens look like, and more about what kinds of stories they help tell?

Returning to the idea of intra-activity, if relations come into being through their connection, then the same logic can be applied to the hyphen. In this article, the hyphen intra-actively comes into being through an assemblage of theory, concepts, research and researcher. Working the hyphen is an intra-active becoming which means the capacities and politics of the hyphen shift and change depending on the relations—the agential cut. Conceptualizing the hyphen as emergent through relations speaks to the hyphen’s dynamism and elusiveness. As Ingold (2016) eloquently notes, “it is in the very nature of lines that they always seem to wriggle free of any classification one might seek to impose on them, trailing loose ends in every direction” (p. 52). Different theorisings produce the hyphen differently, which means the hyphen is unknowable in advance. This unknowability contributes to the hyphen’s potentiality and capaciousness. It also pushes us to think about how marks matter, not in a representational pre-existing sense, but as agential cuts: As Barad (2007) reminds us, even the smallest cuts matter.

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ORCID iD

Toni Ingram  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0013-0185>

Note

1. Pākehā is a term commonly used in Aotearoa New Zealand to denote non-Māori New Zealanders of European descent.

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Author Biography

Toni Ingram is a senior lecturer in the School of Education, Auckland University of Technology (AUT), Aotearoa New Zealand. Toni’s research is situated in the areas of girlhood, gender, sexualities and schooling. Her work critically examines the role of schooling practices in the production and regulation of young people’s gender and sexualities. Toni’s current work is informed by feminist new materialisms, affect theory, and posthumanist methodological approaches.