

Doing ethnographic method with babies – Participation and perspective approached from the floor

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Abstract

This article focuses on the insights we can gain about children's participation and children's perspectives by exploring babies' engagements with the researcher and research technology during ethnographic fieldwork in babies' homes. The article argues that attending to what is unplanned, troubling and messy offers opportunities for reflection on how participation and perspectives is done with babies in specific embodied and material research encounters. The article further argues for a *cautious curiosity* towards bringing in the notions of babies' participation and babies' perspectives into the discussion on children's participation and children's perspectives.

KEYWORDS

babies, children's participation, children's perspectives, ethnographic method, troubles

INTRODUCTION

Noah is 6 months old when I visit him and his family as part of a larger research project about babies' everyday culture. While I was watching the video recordings from this visit, I found a clip in which Noah slowly crawls closer to the camera, looks at it intensely and then grabs it with one of his hands. While Noah physically negotiates with me for control of the camera, the camera captures a range of images I never intended it to capture. When watching the video from that moment I can see spinning, hazy and fragmented images of:

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Noah's hand on the floor; A close-up of Noah's mouth; A blurry entanglement of Noah's arm and my hand; The wooden floor in such detail that you can see the dents; The inside of Noah's hand pressed against the camera lens; Noah's dark blue clothes sweeping by; The bottom of Noah's foot and his toes; Images of different parts of the room; My fingers right in front of the camera lens.

This article focuses on moments like this when the babies' engagements with me and/or the camera unsettled me in various ways and affected the ways in which method was done and redone during fieldwork. The idea of the babies' engagements with me and the camera as an example of participation was something that occurred to me after the fieldwork had been done (cf. Kraftl & Horton, 2007) and made me reflect further on *how* babies' participation emerges and *why* I considered specific moments to be about participation. By acknowledging that the babies had both unplanned and unexpected effects on how method was done in practice, I eventually started to wonder: If the engagements with the babies had unplanned and unexpected effects on my method, could their engagements also have similar effects on our understanding of children's participation and children's perspectives?

SENSORY VIDEO ETHNOGRAPHY

This article draws on a larger ethnographic study with the aim of exploring babies' engagements with everyday material culture. Seven families participated in the study. All of them lived in Sweden in cities ranging from small to big and they included at least one child aged between 1 and 18 months.

Most of the fieldwork was carried out in the homes of the babies and their families, and I video recorded both the babies of the seven families participating in the study and three other babies visiting the families while I was there. In total, I video recorded ten babies more extensively and I spent in total around 100 hr with the seven families. The research material includes around 70 hr of video material, 100 images and 60 pages of field notes taken during or after the visits to the families. The study was approved by the regional ethical board, and the anonymity of the research participants was ensured by limiting the access to the research material to the research group and through anonymising all the participants in text. The voluntariness of the adult participants was ensured by recruiting them through the snowball effect and by not providing any compensation for their participation. Ethical considerations concerning the babies focused more on relational aspects rather than formal ones like information about the research and consent. To ensure the welfare of the babies I explained to the parents that they at any time could ask me to leave without having to explain why, for example, if the babies were uncomfortable with my presence. As babies cannot give informed consent themselves, and the parents signed the consent forms on the babies' behalf, I was especially attentive during fieldwork towards how the babies reacted to my presence. For example, I chose not to initiate physical engagement with the babies and when the babies themselves chose to engage with me or the research technology I tried to give them as much control as possible in these engagements.

In this article, I discuss the stories from meeting two of the babies in the study—Alva and Lia. I made four visits each to the two families and Alva was the first baby I visited for the study and Lia was the third. At the time, Alva was around 1-year old and Lia was around 9 months old. Both babies lived with their two parents and were the only child in the family at the time. None of the babies had their own rooms and it seemed like they were both sleeping in their parent's bedrooms. Most of their toys, and other things that seemed to belong to them, were collected in bins or spread out on the floors, mostly in the kitchen and/or the living room. While the babies were engaging with these things lying on the floor the parents could do everyday chores, or talk to me or visiting friends, while still being

in close proximity to the babies. During the time I spent with these two families we spent much of the time in their apartments. However, I also spent time with them at the library, during walks, at the playground, while the moms were running everyday errands, at cafés, at the indoor swimming pool and at a bar.

There are many moments from meeting these, and the other babies, that reshaped my way of doing method in different ways. I have chosen to focus on primarily two examples from visiting Alva and Lia because they became especially important in terms of how I approached both the babies and method throughout the fieldwork. Both examples took place during the early stages of the fieldwork, and they unsettled not only my method but also my role as a researcher. Therefore, they required me to make several important decisions that had effects on my method throughout the fieldwork. I also often returned to these moments when reflecting on how we can understand the notions of children's participation and children's perspective when doing research with babies after the fieldwork was done.

During the fieldwork, it was through my engagement with the babies that I became more attuned to the sensory aspects of ethnographic method, and the video ethnography I set out to conduct became a *sensory* video ethnography. Sensory ethnography, as formulated by Sarah Pink (2015), departs from the idea that while sensory experience is often already a part of ethnographic research, the focus on the senses needs to be explicit and follow us throughout the whole research process. Pink (2015) argues that ethnography is a participatory practice rather than an observational practice. The ethnographer's embodied and sensory experience while *being there* during ethnographic fieldwork can be understood as a practice of knowledge production. Moments of sensory learning are, according to Pink (2015), often unplanned and can involve both the researchers embodied experiences and the researcher's attention to other people's practices for example.

Approaching knowledge through this line of thinking within this study means focusing on the embodied and sensory encounters between me and the babies as a valuable part of what it means to do ethnographic method. It shifts the focus from how I as a researcher planned to do method, or the moments when I felt that I succeeded in doing method according to plan, towards how method was done *in practice* within the relationships with the research participants in both expected and unexpected ways.

DOING ETHNOGRAPHIC METHOD IN PRACTICE

More specifically, my focus is directed towards moments when the babies unsettled my methods and my role as a researcher by focusing on the *unplanned, troubling and messy* moments that occurred when doing method *in practice*. This is following John Law's (2004) suggestion that rather than viewing the framework of method itself as provisionally secure, we need to unmake our expectations for security. In this reincarnation that Law (2004) discusses, method will often be a slow, uncertain, risky and troublesome process.

/... / ethnography lets us see the relative messiness of practice. It looks behind the official accounts of method (which are often clean and reassuring) to try to understand the often ragged ways in which knowledge is produced in research. (Law, 2004: 18-19)

Law (2004) argues that methods are productive as they not only describe, but also produce the 'realities' that they are trying to understand. Following this line of thinking, method troubles can be understood as opportunities for gaining insights into the research subject rather than as failures or obstacles (Samuelsson, Sparrman, Cardell, & Lindgren, 2015; Sparrman, 2014). This resonates with Steven

Jackson's (2014) discussion on the notion of *broken world thinking* in which he asks what happens when erosion, breakdown and decay become the starting points for our thinking rather than novelty, growth and progress. The basic components of the notion are the appreciation of both the limits and fragility of the world *and* the ongoing activities of subtle repair that maintain stability (Jackson, 2014). When troubles occurred during fieldwork, the fragility of my methodological approach became visible, not in terms failures or mistakes but rather as inherent parts of doing method in practice. This made me wonder: What happens if we approach troubles as just as necessary and valuable parts of the research process as when doing method aligns with our plans and expectations?

Approaching method in this way also led me to wonder what insights we can gain from approaching notions like children's participation and children's perspectives as fragile, and troubles as necessary for understanding how these notions are done in practice. More specifically, the aim of this article was to explore how unplanned, troubling and messy moments of spending time with babies during fieldwork can trouble and help us rethink children's participation and children's perspectives.

CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION AND CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVES

The very youngest of children have attracted much less attention than older children within the field of child and childhood studies (Alderson, 2008; de Campos Tebet, 2019; Gottlieb, 2000, 2004; McNamee & Seymore, 2012; Ormalm, 2020; Oswell, 2013; Thorne, 2008). There is research concerning babies that engages theoretically with issues like embodiment (Brownlie & Sheach Leith, 2011; Lupton, 2012, 2013a, 2014) and material objects (Landzelius, 2001; Layne, 2000; Nadesan, 2002). There are also some examples of research discussing babies' own engagements with material culture (Lupton, 2013b; Ormalm, 2020) but overall, research focusing on babies' own practices seems relatively rare within the field.

Participatory methods have been important for carrying out research concerning children's participation, agency and voice in line with the rights discourse that emerged with the Social Studies of Childhood and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC; Clark & Richards, 2017). However, the notion of children's participation has been criticised for being conditioned in relation to maturity, age and voice, therefore excluding children who are not able to participate by speaking about their experiences or opinions (Clark & Richards, 2017; Horgan, Forde, Martin, & Parkes, 2017), such as babies. The same can be said for the notion of children's perspectives, which Barrie Thorne (2008) points to in an editorial in the academic journal *Childhood* when suggesting that the journal's focus on children's own perspectives could be one of the reasons why it has published so little about infants.

In other words, while the concept of children's participation might be understood as all-inclusive and all-embracing, it often emphasises *discursive* forms of participation (Wyness, 2013). The need to move beyond the dichotomy between the discursive and the material has been discussed in relation to both participation and voice, with arguments being made for an approach to these notions that entails both the discursive and the material (Eriksson & Sand, 2017; Spyrou, 2016; Wyness, 2013). It is also important to raise questions about the consequences it has for our understanding of pre-verbal children, for example when children's voices and children's perspectives are so closely tied together (e.g. James, 2007; James & James, 2012).

Alderson's, Hawthorne & Killen, (2005) research into the participation rights of premature babies is one example of research moving beyond the idea that children need to speak about their opinions or experiences in order to participate. Alderson et al. (2005) argues that the adults caring for these babies often seemed to be, or understood themselves to be, influenced by the views of the babies when

interacting with them or making decisions on their behalf. The babies in Alderson's et al. (2005) study participate, for example, by affecting relationships, decisions and social assumptions, and they do so through aspects like gaze, crying, emotional relationships and touch, rather than voice. Relationships have also been discussed as an important site for understanding, and for creating opportunities for participation, within the field of early education (e.g. Elwick et al., 2014). Within this field there is growing interest in discussing how we can understand the notions of participation and perspective when carrying out research with babies (e.g. Elwick et al., 2014; Elwick & Sumison, 2013; Salamon, 2015). For example, Elwick et al. (2014:875) frames the encounters between researcher and babies as 'deeply particular, embodied and relational'. In order to create opportunities for babies to participate, they further argue, we need to direct our attention towards the complex and relational encounters taking place in practice when meeting babies in order to allow for reflection on how to approach babies in more participative ways (Elwick et al., 2014). Moreover, in order to understand how the relational and embodied encounters with the babies during my own fieldwork shaped and reshaped my method, it also became important to attend to the emotional aspects of these encounters as the moments I discuss often appeared troubling because of the emotions that emerged for me in those moments. Drawing on Procter (2013), the researcher's own emotions can be understood as epistemologically productive as emotions have an effect on both the research process and therefore also our research findings. Discussing participation more specifically, Kraftl and Horton (2007) argue that participation can emerge both unplanned and through affect, and they point to the importance of discussing *how* participation emerges in specific moments. Besides pointing to the role of emotions in how participation is done, Kraftl and Horton's (2007) line of thinking is also important because it points to how participation not only might be unplanned but also identified as participation first afterwards. This can be understood in relation to Rautio's (2013) argument that participation can be understood as something that happens *anyway*, whether the researcher facilitates it:

It is quite possible to consider, however, that children, like any beings, might not need support in encountering the world and expressing to others something of these encounters – this takes place anyway, all the time. Children might not need adults to provide them with equipment and allocate special spaces and time for participation. They might need an adult to take seriously the things and actions with which they encounter their worlds anyway... (Rautio, 2013:396)

It is also fruitful, I believe, to extend this idea that participation is something that we as researchers do not necessarily have to plan for, or that we as researchers are not in complete control of, to the discussion on children's perspectives. It shifts the focus from what children are saying towards our ability as researcher to attend to the effects that children have on the research process *anyway*. This article, then, is an example of how we can discuss participation and perspective after fieldwork is done, even when these notions were not an explicit part of the research design to begin with.

In order to move beyond notions of children's participation and children's perspective as individual, active, informed or even conscious engagements with the research process as such, I approach participation and perspective as done in practice (cf. Spyrou, 2016) and in specific moments and spaces (cf. Jupp, 2008; Malone & Hartung, 2010). The stories I discuss take place in the everyday context of the babies' homes which, as many have noted, is an important site for children's participation (e.g. Horgan et al., 2017; Jupp, 2008; Kraftl & Horton, 2007; Thomas & Percy-Smith, 2010). Alderson (2010), more specifically, argues that it is in the private world of the family that children's participation begins. This argument is especially important when doing research with babies, particularly before they start day care, because they tend to spend much of their time in their homes.

I have chosen to discuss babies' engagements in the research *space*, rather than in the research process, as a way of situating the research in specific spaces and relationships by attending to *where* participation is done and *with what* the babies are participating. Discussing participation within the research *space* then becomes both a way of concretising how participation is done in specific practices and moments and a way of acknowledging that babies practices have effects on the research process whether they are intentionally or even knowingly engaging with the research as such. This also involves opening up for a discussion on materialities that are not limited to child–adult relationships but also include non-human materialities like chairs, floors and research technology (cf. Bradley, Sumsion, Stratigos, & Elwick, 2012; Elwick et al., 2014; Spyrou, 2016). For example, the use of a camera during fieldwork was central to understanding how method was done in practice and how we can understand children's participation and children's perspectives when conducting research with babies. Through this approach, I move away from the idea that children's participation or children's perspectives require children to be able to communicate their experiences, wishes or opinions through spoken or written language (cf. Woodhead, 2010). Instead, I shift the focus towards how babies participate and take part in creating perspectives in unexpected, spontaneous and possibly even unimaginable ways, whether they fit neatly into how we think about these notions (cf. Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008).

RELOCATING TO THE FLOOR

The following scene is from my first visit to Alva and her family, which also was the first visit to the families during my fieldwork. At this point, Alva is almost a year old and she can move by herself by dragging herself forward on her bottom. In this scene she is sitting, and moving around, on the kitchen floor while engaging with the many things lying around.

Scene 1: I am sitting on a chair next to the kitchen table, trying to find a position from which to film that captures what Alva is doing on the floor. From where I am sitting, the camera mostly captures the top of her head and very little detail when it comes to facial expressions and hand movements. Since I cannot easily move from where I am sitting, crammed in between the kitchen table and a cabinet, I end up filming her from behind every time she turns her back to me. Alva has been occupied with the things on the floor for a while before she turns her head and looks up at me. I quickly realize that I – and the camera – are literally looking down at her from above.

In this moment, a blurry feeling of insecurity emerged in me because of the distance and height difference that my position on the chair created between Alva and me. I felt disconnected from what I was filming because I was looking at Alva from *above* and *out of her reach*. The camera and I were both located at a height that was inaccessible to the baby, in the sense that it was not easy for her to either look at or engage physically with us. In that moment, Alva's gaze from below troubled my method by making me question how I was positioning my own body and the camera in relation to her. The uncomfortable feeling that emerged in this trouble eventually led me to relocate to the floor, where I either had the camera in my lap or resting on something at about the same height as my lap. In this moment, gaze became a participatory practice that changed how relationships and method were done within the research space (cf. Alderson et al., 2005). Even though Alva did not physically engage very much with me, and usually kept a distance, she now at least had the possibility to do so and she could more easily look at me and the camera. This can be understood in relation to Pink's (2015) discussion on participant sensing, which she describes as a form of ethnographic learning:

... where the ethnographer often simultaneously undergoes a series of unplanned everyday life experiences and is concerned with purposefully joining in with whatever is going on in order to become further involved in the practices of the research participants. When we participate in other people's worlds we often try to do things similar to those that they do (although we might not fully achieve this) or play roles in the events, activities, or daily routines that they invite us to participate in. (Pink, 2015:101)

In relation to the babies, doing similar things became important for creating opportunities for them to participate more specifically in terms of movement. During the rest of the fieldwork I chose to *move with* the babies as much as I could, for example by staying at their height. If they were on the floor, I was on the floor. When they sat in their highchair, I sat on a chair too. Relocating to the floor meant that I moved closer to the space in which the babies themselves were located. Drawing on Kindon (2003) this could be understood as trying to *look nearby* rather than *look at* the babies. Being able to look nearby the babies in this case meant that I needed to rethink not only the gaze of the camera but also the materiality of my own body and the environment.

Managing the camera is dependent on how I manage my body, and because my body is an adult body, filming at the babies' height was not always a comfortable position. As most of the babies in my study were moving around, for example by dragging themselves forward on their bottoms, I tried my best to do the same while attempting to keep the camera relatively stable. When planning for fieldwork I reflected on how to use the camera—for example contemplating whether I should bring a tripod—but I never reflected on how to manage my adult body in relation to the height of filming. Relocating to the floor meant that I became more aware that my gaze was, and always had been, both partial and dependent on the materiality of my body (cf. Haraway, 1988).

Alva gazing back at me mattered because it pulled me, the camera, and my method down to the floor. The change in height also changed the relationships between me, the camera, the environment and the babies. It opened up possibilities for a different kind of participation that can be understood as unplanned, spontaneous (Hultgren & Johansson, 2019; Jupp, 2008; Kraftl & Horton, 2007), and done through factors like closeness, gaze and touch, rather than 'voice' (cf. Alderson et al., 2005). I went into the field with the idea of getting a broader view of what was happening around the baby than I actually managed to capture, especially after relocating to the floor. The images the camera captured from the position on the floor rarely gave a broader view of what was happening *around* the baby—as the images appear when filming from above and from a further distance—but it did to a greater extent capture what was *in the perspective* of the baby.

Here, the positions of bodies and technology inevitably become entangled with the perspectives that are created. These perspectives can be understood as both *done* in these specific moments and relationships, and continuously *redone* throughout the research process. Perspective, then, is neither singular nor stable but rather a multiplicity of perspectives in movement. In this position on the floor the camera seemed, at least to some extent, to mimic the baby's possible experience of her surroundings. For example, the height differences when located at the floor, the height of the gaze and the limited field of sight, the surrounding sounds that often had no visible source, the fragmented bodies coming in and out of the field of sight, and the dependence on material objects (like chairs, strollers or other human bodies) to be able to change the field of sight.

Relocating to the floor did not mean that the differences or asymmetries between me and the babies in any way dissolved, if anything, they became more apparent. When looking nearby (Kindon, 2003) the babies with the camera, the adulthood of my own materiality suddenly emerged as problematic and as something that no longer fitted my method. I could suddenly feel the materiality of my own gaze as I was in a position that made my body bump into things, struggle to keep pace with the baby, and ache

after sitting down on the floor for a long time staring down at the camera. The uncomfortableness I felt when Alva gazed up at me became not only a moment for redoing my method but also an important moment for reflecting on my own position and materiality as an adult.

LETTING GO OF THE CAMERA

The following scene takes place on the first day I meet Lia and her family. Lia was around 9 months old at the time, and she could move by herself by crawling as well as by walking when holding on to furniture and other people. In this scene, we have just arrived at the apartment of Lia and her family.

Scene 2: I sit down on the living room floor to unpack the camera and Lia immediately crawls towards it. I flip over the screen so that she can see herself in the camera's small screen. Lia looks at the screen for a short while before touching the camera with her fingers. After a while she grabs the screen with her whole hand and pulls the camera towards her. Both her mom and I intervene to make sure she does not break the camera. When I take out and attach the power cord for the camera to the wall outlet, she immediately approaches the cord too and puts it in her mouth.

During the time I spent with Lia over the course of the next few days, her interest in the camera and the power cord fluctuated but was always more or less present. She usually went back and forth between engaging with objects and people already present in the apartment and with me and the technology I had brought with me. Her interest in approaching me seemed initially sparked by the camera (and maybe that is all it was!) and the first couple of times she made physical contact with me she crawled up onto my lap, sat down, and immediately reached for the camera. When sitting in my lap, Lia was suddenly in the same position as me and we were looking down at the camera from the same perspective. Where Lia had previously been located, in front of the camera, there was now a baby's world without a baby in it. Rather than accepting the role of being the one in front of the camera being filmed, Lia finds a way to position herself on the opposite end of the camera where it becomes difficult—and at times even impossible—for me to film her. When she grabs the camera she is literally taking control of the perspective of the camera and the images it captures. She is zooming herself in and out of the image, cutting herself and part of the environment out of the image and changing the direction of the perspective by changing the direction in which the camera is filming. Lia's engagements also add images that would not have been captured otherwise, for example, by directing the perspective of the camera towards me. When doing so, she is pushing me into the position in front of the camera and into the position of being filmed. Lia's participation with the camera during these moments is not only re-shaping the images of *her* but is also making *me* visible in the images that the camera captures. While my position on the floor made the materiality of my body feelable within the research space, Lia's position in my lap made the materiality of my body visible within the research material long after fieldwork was done.

During the visits to Alva and her family, the strategy to *move with* the babies down to the floor mostly created fairly clear images of what she was doing since she did not engage with either me or the camera very much. In the encounters with Lia on the other hand, the opportunities for engaging with me and the camera were so often, and strongly, utilised that I began to worry about the usefulness of the material. The engagement with Lia led to a much larger portion of the film than before being what best can be described as a blurry mess (see Figure 1).

It was not only the images that turned out to be messy but also my own role as a researcher. I could not slowly reposition myself and the camera when Lia grabbed it. Instead, I had to make quick

in-the- moment decisions about how much engagement with the camera I could allow so she did not physically break the camera. Confronted with this blurry mess, I was struggling to make sense of the diffuse, slippery, elusive and emotional world (Law, 2004) that emerged in these encounters. When Lia engaged with the camera with such determination, a blurry feeling of insecurity about how I positioned myself and the technology in the room emerged. When Lia crawled up onto my lap and reached for the camera, I realised that I had no idea or pre-formulated strategies about what to do with *so much* closeness. The strategy of looking nearby (Kendon, 2003) brought me *closer* to where Alva was located while still leaving enough distance between us to maintain the separation between her as a research participant (that is, being filmed) and me as a researcher (the one filming). This strategy was reshaped in Lia's engagement through not only bringing me closer to her but also enabling her to be in the exact same position as me. Rather than looking nearby, I was suddenly rather looking with Lia and Lia was looking with me. At times I even found myself engaged in *looking struggles* when both of us were trying to take control of the camera at the same time.

I never prepared for the feeling of losing control of the research technology and the research process in the encounters with the babies. In these moments, my ideas about method struggled to find common ground with how the practices of method emerged in unexpected and complex ways out in the field (cf. Law, 2004). I tried to rethink my approach until I realised that while I was struggling with the practical aspects of filming in all this closeness, Lia literally brought the research subject—babies everyday culture—right into my lap and I was about to miss out on that. While the insecurities that emerged from Alva's gaze pulled me down to the floor, the insecurities that emerged when Lia grabbed the camera urged me to stay there.

Letting go of the control of the camera—and to some extent the research process—at moments like this was important because it allowed me to follow the babies' practices and movements in the moment rather than steering the process in certain directions. It meant that I needed to take a deep breath



FIGURE 1 Fragments of the blurry mess recorded by the camera

when my ideas about method started to tremble, approach the trouble that emerged with curiosity and even put the camera down to attend to the baby crawling up onto my lap. When bringing a part of her everyday culture into my lap, I argue, Lia also participated in her own sensorial, embodied, stubborn and messy way in shaping my method and research material. She also showed me how participation can be done in unexpected and spontaneous ways. Would this lead to new insights or contribute to the research I was doing later on? I did not know. What I rather came to realise was that it did matter in those specific moments because it changed the way I related to the very people I was doing research with—the babies.

TROUBLING BABIES' PARTICIPATION AND BABIES' PERSPECTIVES—A METHODOLOGICAL REFLECTION FROM THE FLOOR

In my encounters with Alva and Lia, the notions of participation and perspectives did not emerge as important concepts because they were part of my initial research design or plan. Rather, they emerged as method troubles that disrupted the ways in which I attempted to do method during fieldwork. I chose to focus on these troubling moments because I did not want to clean up the mess or immediately reroute when facing disruptions in the research space (cf. Law, 2004). Instead, I wanted to explore the important insights that can be gained by asking what we as researchers can learn about our own ways of thinking when we instead choose to dwell on the disruptions.

While the notions of children's participation and children's perspectives implicitly include babies, since they too are children, babies are not as often as older children explicitly addressed in research concerning these questions (e.g. Alderson, 2008; Oswell, 2013; Thorne, 2008). Therefore, I want to argue here for what I call a *cautious curiosity* towards bringing the notions of babies' participation and babies' perspectives into the discussion on children's participation and children's perspectives. This means attending to how these notions emerge in both similar and different ways when conducting research with babies. While I argue that it is important to discuss the notions of both participation and perspective in relation to babies' engagements in the research space, it does not mean that I believe that babies are necessarily participating or taking part in creating perspectives on the same premises as older children or adults. Because of the strong ties between the notions of children's participation, perspective and voice, and because of the limited research on babies in connection with these notions, it is important to engage critically with how, why and whether these notions are meaningful when carrying out research with babies.

This article does not seek to simply add babies' own ways of participation to the understanding of participation more broadly by stating something along the lines of: 'Look! Babies are participating too, just in different ways!' Nor does it seek to claim that by simply shifting the focus towards the relational, embodied and emotional aspects of research we can capture babies' own perspectives too. Instead, I argue that in order to take babies' engagements in the research space seriously we need to stay curious by asking how participation and perspectives emerge in specific research encounters with babies. At the same time, we also need to stay cautious by continuously questioning how encounters with babies might serve as critical points for questioning what these notions mean to begin with.

That being said, the rest of this article explores what curiosity towards what the notions of babies' participation and babies' perspectives could mean if we attend to the babies' own troubling engagements within the research space.

How we understand both babies' participation and babies' perspectives need, I argue, to be discussed in relation to how babies choose to position, move and engage in the research space. The

troubles I have discussed show that participation, for babies as well as for researchers, neither need to be intentional or informed nor require verbal or written language. This might be messy and difficult to plan for. It might even emerge in forms that could not have been imagined beforehand. It is also material and sensorial in multiple ways when babies gaze at, touch and even taste the research technology.

To understand these babies' participation within the research space, it was first important to follow Kraftl and Horton (2007) and ask what babies' participation looks like in these specific moments. The babies did not choose to participate by informed or necessarily even intentional engagement with the research project *as such*; they can rather be understood as participating as their practices within the research space had different effects on the researcher, the research method and the research material. Looking at me, rarely looking at me, smiling, being quiet, pulling, grabbing, softly touching, crying, staying at a distance, turning their back towards me, (seemingly) showing a lack of interest in me and/or the research technology, crawling up onto my lap, running in a different direction—all of these practices shaped how ethnographic method was done and, I argue, how we can understand the ways in which babies' participation and babies' perspectives emerged in these encounters.

The ways in which Alva and Lia participated in the research space were connected to aspects such as distance, closeness, pace, gaze and touch rather than voice. While the distance Alva kept between herself and me kept the boundaries between our positions intact, these boundaries collapsed in Lia's engagements with me and the camera. The basic requirements for even being able to film my research participants—that they stay in front of the camera and allow me to keep control of it—are overturned by Lia. Filming and being in control of what the camera captures became connected to questions concerning who gets to be in control of distance, closeness, pace and touch within the research space. How can we think about quick or slow participation? Pushy participation? Disruptive participation?

Alva's participation at some distance, on the other hand, meant that the camera could, at least to some extent, capture images of what was in the perspective of the baby because she was not physically engaging with the camera. Exploring babies' perspectives by asking what is in the perspective of the baby makes it possible to discuss the notion of perspective as materially located within specific research encounters and specific research technologies. Drawing on Haraway's (1988) notion of vision as embodied and always coming from somewhere became a way for me to approach the materiality of perspective by reflecting on where the perspective is done and with what. The materiality of perspective then needed to be situated in relation to aspects such as bodies, environment and height. The role of the camera and its relationships with the bodies within the research space is central in this discussion in order to explore how we can understand the notion of perspective as simultaneously discursive and material (cf. Spyrou, 2016; Wyness, 2013) and move beyond the understandings of children's voices, and perspectives, as authentic or as individual possessions (cf. James, 2007; Komulainen, 2007; Spyrou, 2011, 2016). Babies' perspectives, then, do not refer to perspectives in terms of something that the babies have, possess or necessarily even express, but rather point to how babies themselves are taking part in constructing different perspectives within material, embodied and sensorial research encounters.

While asking what is in the perspective of the baby was fruitful in order to explore what babies' perspectives could mean when participation is done at some distance, Lia's engagement with me and the camera came to trouble this approach. In this encounter, the camera rather captured the baby's engagements with the perspective of the camera and the image *itself*. My feeling of losing control in those moments emerges because there is a conflict between my expectations and Lia's engagements with me and the camera in practice. In the blurry images this encounter created, babies' perspectives could rather be understood as emerging as a disruption of my perspectives as a researcher on how to do both ethnographic method and research relations. Both my method and the research relations could here be understood as fragile and under reconstruction, for example because the perspective of the camera becomes unstable in a literal sense. Exploring babies' perspectives as something that emerge

within these relations means that the notion is not only unstable but also deeply particular (c.f. Elwick et al., 2014) as the different babies had different effects on the camera perspective. These effects also at times shifted between visits. Coming back to Lia for a last visit a couple of months later she could not care less about the camera. Instead I did my best keeping up with her while she was running through the library while the camera mostly captured the back of her head.

If one way of understanding babies' perspectives is in terms of a disruption to our expectations or perspectives as researchers, babies' perspectives might not only trouble how we are doing method, but might also create feelings like worry, insecurity or uncomfortableness for the researcher. When starting my fieldwork, I kept thinking that feelings like this would fade away with time as I refined my method. However, they did not fade away, but rather continued to create both similar and new troubles during fieldwork. By attending to these troubles as necessary and valuable parts of doing ethnographic method, I came to realise that they could also be a site for critical reflection. In order to understand how babies participated and how we can understand babies' perspectives, it was crucial *not* to clean up the mess, sideline the troubles or take a leap over the disruptions. Moments like this have been important in order to approach babies' participation and babies' perspectives as something that emerges in moments when our methodological ambitions and plans are in trouble and our role as a researcher becomes uncomfortable. This, I argue, is important because it acknowledges the fragility of these notions along with the method we use to do research with or about them. By approaching this fragility as a necessary and valuable part of research, I believe, we can keep both our method and the notions of babies' participation and babies' perspectives under construction by also acknowledging and appreciating the mess and troubles that comes along with them.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research data are not shared.

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How to cite this article: Orrmalm A. Doing ethnographic method with babies – Participation and perspective approached from the floor. *Child Soc.* 2020;34:461–474. <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12380>

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