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Belonging, trust and relationships: Collaborative photography with unaccompanied minors
Sari Pöyhönen, Lotta Kokkonen, Mirja Tarnanen & Maija Lappalainen

Introduction

How can anyone make sense of the life trajectories and the everyday experiences of unaccompanied minors in Finland, as they find their place under new circumstances? How can researchers build relationships of mutual understanding with both adolescents and their counsellors? How can researchers and counsellors gain and maintain the trust of these young people? How can we avoid intimidating them? How can creative and participatory practice, in this case photography, facilitate collaboration in order to go *beyond language*? With these questions in mind, we embarked on a process of collaborative ethnography (e.g. Lassiter, 2005) in a children's home, known as 'a group home for unaccompanied minors' (henceforth group home). The group home is part of a reception centre for asylum seekers, established in 1991, and located in a rural municipality in a Swedish-dominant region of Finland. We use the official, yet highly problematic term *asylum seeker* in this chapter, because it is how the young people are defined according to Finnish legislation (Finnish Immigration Services, 2019). In case of a positive decision on their asylum claims, they would be granted refugee status.

Our insights derive from long-term partnerships with those in the reception centre and the group home. In this reflective chapter, we describe a photography project co-produced by the reception centre with our research team, for which we conducted a linguistic ethnography, *Jag Bor I Oravais* [I live in Oravais]. Ten unaccompanied minors and their counsellors participated in the project, which took place from October 2015 until November 2016. In this chapter, we unpack our theoretical and methodological choices to describe our conscious aims of collaboration, building relationships, negotiating, gaining and maintaining trust. We also reflect on ethically responsible practices and the challenges of undertaking collaborative research with participants who are experiencing vulnerable lives in liminal spaces.

The research team was made up of four researchers: Sari was responsible for co-organising the photography project with Gustaf, a group home counsellor; Maija took part in fieldwork in the

reception centre and the group home; Mirja explored pedagogical and linguistic practices in the local school; and Lotta, joining the project team later on, focused on professional relationships of counsellors and other co-workers in the reception centre.

Guiding Concepts

Belonging is a complex, increasingly used, fluid and flexible concept, as concluded by Lähdesmäki et al (2016). In migration studies, belonging is typically discussed in relation to ethnicity and identity, which according to Anthias (2012: 103), may shift focus away from other social categories, including gender and class, and therefore 'away from the importance of meaning and context as parameters of social life'. In this chapter, we understand belonging as multiple, constructed and contested relationships with people and places. People seeking asylum are living in parallel realities, being *here* and also being *there* (Butler & Spivak, 2007). They are trying to resettle in a new environment - either alone or with their family members - and building new relationships while still awaiting a decision on their asylum claim. At the same time, they maintain relationships with those who remain and they retain memories of the places from which they have been dislocated (Lehtonen & Pöyhönen, 2019). They also experience moments of not-yet-belonging (Anderson et al., 2011) or non-belonging (Holzberg et al., 2018), in situations in which the sense of being part of a community is denied for them. Non-belonging may also be understood as a wilful decision to remain outside a group, and a conscious aim to forget everyone and everything that had to be left behind. These processes of belonging, not-yet-belonging and non-belonging were all present in the minds and lives of the unaccompanied minors we encountered.

Trust is a fundamental concept in studying relationships between asylum seekers and people working with them (including researchers). Moreover, it is an essential element in creating a sense of belonging and relationships, communities and even cohesive societies, as Simmel (1995) argues. According to Sevenhuijsen (1998) trust needs to be studied in relation to other concepts like vulnerability and dependency. Indeed, in many ways asylum seekers are in vulnerable positions, dependent on others' decisions based on the presumed reliability of their stories (Blommaert, 2001). Trust also involves intimacy, high involvement and reciprocity as Marta Bolognani (2007) points out in her research among and with the Pakistani community in the city of Bradford, UK. In this way, trust and belonging intersect.

In this chapter, we seek to highlight how belonging and interpersonal trust are created and negotiated between the unaccompanied minors, counsellors and us as researchers through photography. We focus on *translanguaging* (García & Li, 2014; Blackledge, Creese et al., 2018; Sherris & Adami, 2018) as a way of understanding how participants draw from their full communicative repertoire – including linguistic and other semiotic resources (e.g. Kusters et al., 2017). We consider how

photography allows communication across modes and enables topics that might otherwise stay hidden because of a lack of trust and possibility for reciprocal relationships. For us, translanguaging practices are not simply multilingual practices, but more like pathways towards epistemic solidarity (van der Aa, 2017), conviviality (Rymes, 2014), and socially sensitive active listening (Sabaté i Dalmau, 2018) with young individuals when they are telling their stories about their lived experiences and feelings of forced displacement in spatial and social isolation (Rouvoet et al., 2017).

Context: working with unaccompanied minors in a group home
We established contact with the reception centre in Spring 2015, starting our fieldwork in Autumn the same year. At that time over 2,300 unaccompanied minors fled to Finland from war zones and inhuman conditions (Finnish Immigration Service, 2016). Over the course of our research there were over eighty young people in the reception centre, almost all of them were boys aged 14-17 from Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia.

The adolescents only stayed in the group home until they received the final decision for their asylum claims. If granted asylum, they would then move to another group home and live there until they reached eighteen years of age, which is the age of majority under Finnish legislation. If their case was not yet decided when they turned eighteen they were usually placed in the reception centre with other adults.

Each minor had a personal trustee who did not work in the reception centre and whose role was to act as legal guardian. Counsellors, including other co-workers in the reception centre, were therefore not directly involved in the asylum process. The counsellors felt this to be a relief, as it would have complicated their relationships with the minors.

Individuals working with asylum seekers strive to balance between bureaucracy, organisational loyalty, compassion, and responsibilities (e.g. Eggebø 2012; Wettergren 2010) This type of work therefore requires a 'special kind of flexibility' as Berg (2012) puts it. But it also requires the ability to maintain a professional relationship with 'clients'. In our study, we found out that at times it was difficult both professionally and emotionally for the counsellors to support minors in the group home, and, moreover to make the place a home for them. Feelings of 'being at home' would require close and lasting relationships with emotional attachment (Yuval-Davis, 2011). There were also conflicting views among the counsellors about whether they should raise hope or even attempt to develop a sense of belonging for the adolescents in the group home. As one counsellor, responsible for the group home administration, states:

> "I think that there is no need to put down roots in this place, it cannot be so... We all have
> roots in some place ... They have their own family there somewhere ... Okay, if they really put

down roots in this place... and then they move from here and when they come over here or call here no one knows these persons... because over here the staff and all the kids are different. ... This might sound strange, but I do not want these young people to get roots in this house."

This interview took place on the final day of the co-worker's professional career before her retirement, and she defined it as a counsellor's testimony on how to stay in the profession and manage the changing situations in the group home. She told her story to Sari, who herself had lived in a children's home for six years, and thus had personal experience of what it means to grow up under the child protection regime in Finland. It became clear that waiting for a decision, being dependent on others, and, at the same time, trying to fulfil the dreams of their parents or other relatives and continue their lives in the same way as any teenager, was challenging for the group home residents. It was also difficult for the counsellors, who had observed the process multiple times previously, and yet had to carry on in their roles as professional workers. At times it was emotionally demanding to visit the group home because of the realities that both the adolescents and counsellors were experiencing. Our role as researchers was to listen carefully and actively, but also to understand when the time was not right for posing questions or initiating conversations.

At the time of our research it took approximately one year for the unaccompanied minors to receive a final decision on their asylum claims. The atmosphere in the group home changed from one of anxious anticipation to extremes: a cheerful joy when a decision was positive; feelings of devastation when negative. In addition, the legally binding medical age testing procedures caused significant anxiety, as they were considered neither accurate nor fair by the counsellors and by the minors themselves. For example, one Afghani boy, D, was required to move to an adult unit, despite the fact that he knew that he had not yet turned eighteen. He felt very insecure: too young and too small to live with adult men. The counsellors were concerned about this decision, but they did not have the power to appeal against it.

Ulrika Wernersjö (2015) reported similar findings from her research into feelings of home and belonging among young unaccompanied minors in the Swedish countryside, but with somewhat different interpretations. She concluded that the young people participating in her study did not feel that the relationships with the adults working with them were necessarily close or trusting. Despite most of the minors describing staff members at the group home as 'nice', they did not fully trust the adults working with them. For example, communication between the legal guardians (who usually had several minors to represent) and the minors often involved weekly discussions, but only containing information regarding official matters, such as issues related with schooling. The young people in

Wernesjö's study also reported that they seldom kept in contact with their legal guardians after they turned eighteen years of age and did not officially need to be guarded by an adult anymore. Wernesjö (2015) states that such distant relationships and, indeed, the lack of lasting relationships may ultimately contribute to feelings of not being at home and of non-belonging.

In Wernesjö's (2015) study the group home was not a 'home' in a traditional sense to the participants. Instead, it was a homely place, in which the participants were encouraged to feel a sense of belonging through relationships and shared activities. As shown in Wernesjö's study and in ours, belonging and trust are negotiated through interactions and they require significant time commitments (Kaukko & Wernesjö 2017; Turtiainen 2012; Wernesjö 2015).

As researchers we had been investigating (forced) migration in Finland for a number of years, from our different disciplinary perspectives (critical sociolinguistics, adult migrant language education, intercultural communication). A number of the reception centre counsellors suggested we focus our research on unaccompanied minors in addition to adults seeking asylum. We considered this suggestion with care, aware that it would be extremely challenging - both methodologically and ethically - to gain the trust of these young people. Bearing these emotional tensions in mind, we sought to ease the pressure on the young people by making methodological decisions, including not to conduct formal interviews. Our rationale was that these young people had already had to respond to many kinds of questions posed by police, immigration authorities, social workers, their legal guardians and their teachers. We therefore suggested that we undertake a photography project, which might also enhance the adolescents' wellbeing and, at least, temporarily develop a sense of belonging in their new circumstances, while establishing a common ground for meaning making during the research process.

In the following sections we reflect on the processes of undertaking this project, including the collaborative relationships which developed through photography. Our data are a series of fieldnotes and recordings of conversations between researchers and those involved in the project. In doing this we aim to shed light on aspects of doing interdisciplinary research in contexts of migration with vulnerable young people, offering our insights and foregrounding shared experiences.

Methodology: Collaborative photography
Working with one counsellor, Gustaf, we started to plan a photography project together. At that time Gustaf was in his early sixties, a Swedish-Finnish bilingual, with Swedish as his stronger language, as he often pointed out. Prior to working in the group home Gustaf had been a professional photographer working in his own studio on portraits and commissioned photographs and taken part in several photography and art exhibitions.

Sari and Maija met first with Gustaf in September 2015. He brought a drawing of a snail - given to him by a very young girl - to the initial meetings. The girl's sister had said that she should not give the drawing to Gustaf because she assumed that he would lose it. Gustaf showed us the drawing with pride, explaining that he had carried it with him at all times ever since. For us, the drawing represented a concrete example of the challenges in gaining trust of a young person who had been let down by adults on multiple occasions before. It also illustrated both the kind of attitude required to build trust and close relationships and the challenges in dealing with the emotional stress that these kind of relationships inevitably present. The snail became a symbol of our collaboration with Gustaf.

During our first meeting, he described his understanding of the photography project and the need to involve both the minors and counsellors. Gustaf had previously taken part in a course on 'empowering photography', a concept developed by Miina Savolainen and registered therapeutically-aligned pedagogic method aiming to empower individuals, groups and communities. We were also aware of this method and knew that it had been used for example in a project with girls living in a children's home (Savolainen 2008). We wanted to use this approach in our own research project because, as Savolainen explains:

> Empowerment is a process which comes about in social interaction. To function, the method does not require verbal process. The change it produces is often a feeling of intimacy and commitment that stems from the experience of being understood. It is an ability to listen another human being with deeper concentration and a growing experience of your own ability to show love and respect for the close ones.

(http://www.voimauttavavalokuva.net/english/menetelma.htm)

We agreed that it was important not only to empower the minors but also the counsellors and to establish a mutual and respectful relationship between them. A common language was not always easy to find in the group home, both literally and metaphorically. Taking photographs together would – we hoped - help the counsellors to understand more about the young people and what they were going through. Our role as researchers was therefore to facilitate, and to listen to both the young people and the counsellors.

Gustaf then introduced the idea of the photography project to his colleagues and the boys, ten of whom decided to participate. The boys all lived together in a flat, administered by the reception centre and owned by the municipality. This arrangement was a temporary solution as there was no space in the group home itself. It was also a practical solution to include only these ten boys in the project, since Gustaf was also based in the flat.

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In this initial project stages we established that the overall aim of the photography project was to offer the adolescents the opportunity to express themselves through visual images, find their own (valuable) things, and make these visible both to themselves as well as to the surrounding community. Our conscious choice of 'empowering photography' shares similarities with the photovoice technique (Wang & Burris, 1997), which has been widely used in collaborative photography projects (e.g. Chase, 2017). Therefore, by giving young participants cameras and asking them to document their lived experiences together with their counsellors, we were seeking to capture a perspective that might otherwise be overlooked (e.g. Chase 2017; Sanders-Bustle 2003) by themselves and by others around them.

The group home was provided with two digital cameras. We agreed with Gustaf that the only instruction was for the boys to take photographs together with their counsellors of the places and spaces which were meaningful to them during their time in the group home and local area. There were no 'correct' or 'incorrect' ways of taking photographs, and the boys could to take part in the photography project voluntarily, removing themselves if and whenever they wanted. Gustaf's photographic expertise and his position in the group home led to his role gaining increasing importance. He was able create a space of understanding and respect. But having a personal interest to the topic can lead to challenges in drawing the lines between the personal and professional, as demonstrated here by Gustaf:

> "well, actually he (one of the boys) was home alone, and I did not know how to start taking photographs with him, so we went to clean the sauna. I have learned know that cleaning the sauna is not part of our (counsellors') duties, but it is the janitor that takes care of it (laughs)"

At first Gustaf was slightly concerned about the quality of the photographs. Were they good enough for our research? Were they good enough artistically? We had several conversations about this and encouraged Gustaf to make space for the boys and the counsellors to take photographs in their own style. We came to realise that Gustaf's standards were high, but also that the boys wanted to practice new skills while identifying places and spaces that were meaningful for them. In that sense, our collective aims and aspirations complemented each other.

Over the course of the thirteen months of the project, taking photographs tended to be mainly a part of the boys' leisure activities, although they were also able to take photographs in their local school during the day. Gustaf encouraged the boys and their counsellors to continue to engage. He took boys in smaller and bigger groups, and sometimes on an individual basis, careful of the time available and the boys' moods. Working together to take photographs enabled Gustaf and the boys to discuss their feelings more openly and it seemed to enhance a certain level of emotional disclosure. He would notice how the boys reacted and he would ask about things that they considered good or bad, joyful

or upsetting. Photography sessions were also used as a reward, for example if the boys did well in school or behaved according to the house rules. This was in contrast with the ethos of the project, but it was not our place to criticise the practices of the group home.

Data: creating belonging and trust

Over the course of our project, we observed the ways in which the circumstances in the reception centre seemed to change every month with a constant flow of new arrivals and lack of space. During our first visit, one boy slammed his bedroom door in our faces. Sari, conscious of her own personal experiences in a children's home, understood the boy's behaviour. She remembered that when adult visitors came to the home it often felt like being a monkey in a zoo. In a similar vein, we – as researchers - did not belong in the group home and were naturally considered as complete outsiders at the beginning.

We understood the importance of waiting for the right moment, either chatting with the counsellors in the kitchen or following the boys as they played computer games in the living room or watched Arabic and Persian television series. We allowed the boys to act first. The counsellors frequently acted as mediators - asking the boys about their school day or how to translate a particular word. Football was a safe topic, since most of the boys liked it and played football themselves. We never asked anything about their journey to Finland, about their family situation or any other previous experiences. Moreover, the boys never started a conversation about these matters, but they openly talked about their future dreams with a sense of hope and a firm desire to move on in their lives. They were also curious to know about our families and our work as researchers.

Most of the conversations in the group home between the counsellors and the boys took place in Finnish. There was an explicit policy among the staff members to speak in Finnish in the group home to support the boys' language learning. The boys were placed in a Finnish-medium school in the Swedish-dominant municipality. This, according to the reception centre directors, was due to the fact that the Finnish Immigration Services, the national agency coordinating asylum policies, required local authorities to provide schooling of unaccompanied minor asylum seekers in Finnish, even in Swedish-dominant areas. Learning Finnish would enable more opportunities to settle in Finland should a positive decision be received (Pöyhönen et. al. (2018) explores the monolingual norms at play in more detail).

Contact with the boys was therefore established slowly. Our monthly fieldwork in the reception centre would involve coffee-table conversations about the project and about life in general, with Gustaf usually taking the lead and showing photographs from his laptop. During one coffee-table conversation, shown below in excerpt 1, we discuss about photographs and how they came into being. The conversation takes place three months after we started the project. Coffee is served in the living

room by Carita, one of the group home counsellors. Gustaf's laptop is on the table and he is showing photographs and talking to researchers Sari, Mirja and Maija and a graduate student Sirkku about the photography sessions. Two boys, M and H, are playing FIFA16 with Sari's son who is roughly the same age. Gustaf tells us about an Afghani boy, P, to whom he was allocated as a counsellor. P was feeling particularly anxious, as he had been waiting for a decision about his asylum claim for a long time. Gustaf was also nervous, because he knew about the decision, but was not allowed to disclose it because he was not his legal guardian. They had visited the local beach to take some photographs and take their minds off the challenging situation:

	Finnish: standard font
	English: *Italic*
Gustaf:	yeah and then we continued the journey and immediately on the beach he started to take photographs of the rocks and the waves
Mirja:	clearly he has a different way of looking at things, or I mean, not different, but a special way
Gustaf:	[…] and then he took photographs of us, maybe because he was asked. But then he asked me to take photographs of him on the beach and
Sari:	were these photographs before or after the decision?
Gustaf:	they were before, yes. and I asked him why did he want to go to the beach and he said that he comes here whenever he feels angry, but I also assume that he also comes here when he's sad, or whenever he just feels like it
M:	to be alone
Gustaf:	to be alone and think and
Sari:	*do you have a place where if you feel sad or angry that you would like to go, is there a place, I go to the woods with my dog try to kind of breath and calm down, do you have such place where you would like to go*
M:	*yeah, I'm going beach*
Sari:	*Yeah*
Sirkku:	*Beach*
Mirja	*yeah yeah*
Gustaf:	*you could also go to the beach I think it's in Oravais it's a very good place because there you can be alone and*
M:	*no good*
Gustaf:	*not alone?*
M:	*Yeah*
Gustaf:	*you have a friend with you*

M: *no, all of my friends are coming in (the main group home) to see*

<div align="right">Excerpt 1: coffee-table conversation with M about the beach</div>

Gustaf explains how P started to take photographs of the rocks and waves on the beach, and how he asked Gustaf to take a photo of him while he was sitting on the beach. Mirja comments on the artistic quality of the photographs and the inner feelings they relieved, and Sari asks if the photographs were taken before or after the decision on P's asylum claim. In the middle of the conversation M, a Somalian boy, a fluent speaker of English, joins the conversation, and offers an explanation for why P wanted to go to the beach, suggesting that he wanted to be alone with his thoughts and feelings. This comment invites Sari to ask M, in English, if he too has such places where he can go by himself. She shares her own experiences of the need to be alone in a forest with her dog. M mentions the beach too, but not the local beach, as Gustaf suggests, and he states that being alone is "no good". He would rather be with his friends.

The conversation above is a typical example of the conversations we had during the project with Gustaf as mediator and M jumping into the conversation while other boys and counsellors are in the living room listening, knowing what we are talking about, but not necessarily joining in. Yet, there is at least an ephemeral sense of conviviality and belonging. M seems to enjoy being in the company of the researchers and counsellors, but when conversations turn to his own feelings (and turn to Finnish), he appears reluctant to talk, as the following excerpt (2) shows. M, it turned out, was a very good pupil. He liked studying, but did not particularly like the school he went to, because he felt he was a few years ahead of the others. That was likely to be the case, because pupils in the school had very diverse school experiences, if any, before they fled to Finland. M wanted Gustaf to come to the school to take some photographs of him over there:

Finnish: standard font
English: *Italic*

Gustaf: and you had the camera with you because, hmm, but you didn't take that
           many photographs, I took more, but you were happy that day (pause) or?
Sari: did you have a good day?
M   #
Gustaf: you can by the way tell me like my sons say to me at home "you can be quiet,
           I can speak on behalf of myself" (other adults laughing) so that kind of
           problem
Sari: did you have a good time? (pause) was it nice when you had Gustaf with
           you?
M: yeah

Gustaf: yes, but one day you said, when I asked that what is good at school so what
            did you reply? (pause) you said that everything is bad

M:
            [it is a] small school here

                                        Excerpt 2: coffee-table conversation with M about school

During the fieldwork and visits that followed, we started to get to know M slightly better. He often
came to greet us with a long list of questions about studying Information Technology in higher
education. His idol was the physicist Steven Hawkins and he knew several of his quotes by heart. He
also showed us video clips from TED talks on language learning strategies and setting life goals: "a
drowning man cannot learn to swim" was one example of a motivational statement he had learned. He
was convinced that if he focused on studying he would succeed in the future. We found it inspiring to
talk with him. He called himself "little professor", referring to Mirja and Sari and to his own
aspirations to become a scientist:

            Finnish: standard font
            English: *Italic*
M: I am a little professor
Gustaf: little
M: professor
Gustaf: little professor
M: yeah
Gustaf: yeah
            [---]
Gustaf: yes, I heard that you were thinking of this one thing, and I thought to myself
            that 'ahaa, yes'. I cannot remember what it was, but I just remember thinking
            that this is not how every regular little boy would instantly think
M: little Finnish, difficult for me to understand
Sari: yes, but you're not any regular little boy

                                        Excerpt 3: the 'little professor'

It was increasingly evident that the photography project had many positive outcomes and created
coherence within the group home. Together the boys planned locations and tried various techniques
following each others' examples. There were fewer conflicts among the boys in the group home
during the project, which the counsellors noticed with pleasure. However, the close relationships
between the counsellors, particularly with Gustaf, also reflected a typical group phenomenon where

'outsiders' find it challenging to join the group or feel as part of it. Gustaf recalls a situation with one of the young people, H:

> "This morning I thought of how thankful I am that this (photograph) turned out like this…this H (watching at H's photo on the screen). I thought that finally I got a kind of photograph where he sits and watches a football game. A Real Madrid game that is. OK, all the boys think that Real Madrid is the best team. But still, I thought that it is a good picture. Yet, nowadays he seems to be somewhat out of the group, alone. And I think that he was a bit jealous that others got so much attention."

By December 2015, just three months into the project, the boys had already taken several hundreds of photographs, from which they selected two – three each for a shared photo album, adding some lines of thoughts linked with the photographs. M added the 'drowning man' sentence to his photographs. P chose two: "Miksi me olemme tässä maailmassa?" (Why are we in this world?) and "It hurts when you try to make things RIGHT, and all they can see in you is WRONG." D, who had to move to the adult unit, wrote about his feelings. H wanted to write that his favourite football team is Real Madrid, which at first might seem superficial. But, through his photographs he could now be seen in the same way as any other adolescent boy, not just an unaccompanied minor, whose presence was quite often gendered, racially-profiled and securitized when with his friends (see also the case of Latino adolescents in Barcelona, Block & Corona, 2014).

The majority of the photographs chosen by the boys and their counsellors, were in the form of 'selfies' and group portraits. At first, we were worried about protecting anonymity, but soon we understood that this was exactly how the boys wanted to represent themselves - with their names and faces - and it also aligned with the 'empowering photography' method and existing visual culture (Pink, 2007). Selfies brought us back to the notion of empowerment (see also selfies as a source of empowerment, Gomez Cruz & Thornham, 2015) and for whom this project was all about. However, collectively we made a decision not to reveal participant identity in research papers.

In May 2016, our project team was invited to take part in an exploratory workshop as part of a participatory visual methods seminar in Jyväskylä. Gustaf and Sari presented the project together, with the boys, M leading, giving their own impressions about the project and answering questions posed by academics. In addition, some of the photographs were included in a workshop exhibition. Written feedback from the one-day exhibition was collected, with one of the comments stating: *"A great project. Good boys! It told wonderfully, how words can be marginal if you want to say something meaningful. Thanks and [give us] more!"*

With this highly positive feedback from the exploratory workshop and after the boys received their photo albums, Gustaf and Sari began to consider a larger photography exhibition in the neighbourhood in which the group home was located. This required significant input from Gustaf to curate the exhibition and we researchers wanted to make sure that the boys understood the potential publicity this would bring. In late autumn 2016, two photography exhibitions were organised in two local libraries, allowing easy access for local residents to see the exhibition, and possibly put themselves in the boys' positions.

Gustaf worked very hard on behalf of the boys to create the exhibition, as he had in his previous career. Although the concept of 'empowerment' underpins our project, it is important to consider *whose* vision was represented in the final exhibitions. Although the boys had participated in the project for a number of months, and some of them had already moved from the group home, only three boys attended the exhibition openings. The other attendees were counsellors, local officials and residents. We understood that physical presence might have been overwhelming for some of the boys, and we appreciated how the counsellors protected their wellbeing.

YLE TV news in Swedish reported on the exhibition, and the vice director of the reception centre was interviewed, together with Gustaf and H. We found out from the library workers that the exhibitions had received enthusiastic feedback, with people from the local area recognising many of the places in which the photographs were taken. Moreover, and more importantly, the boys were seen as individuals with names and faces - young people, with fears, joys and dreams. The dual role was heavy for Gustaf and embedded so much emotional work that later on he had to take some time off from work. Could we as researchers have been able to stop this happening? There is certainly an important lesson to be learn for future co-produced projects.

Concluding discussion
In this chapter, we have critically reflected upon a collaborative and co-produced project and have showed how creative and participatory practice can open pathways to lived experiences of young accompanied minors. Working *with* research participants in vulnerable life situations was nothing new to us (e.g. Lehtonen & Pöyhönen, 2019; Pöyhönen et al. 2019). What was new, however, was the collaborative process of meaning making through photography (e.g. Banks, 2001; Pink, 2007) and combining the photographs with tiny fragments of conversations and stories told in social interactions, through which belonging and trust were not self-evident but needed to be frequently negotiated. "If we try, we can fly", said one boy during the photography project. This way of co-producing research was certainly worth trying.

All of the boys involved in the project have now moved away from the group home, and Gustaf himself has retired. Two of the boys, P and M, have kept in touch, and described the project positively

in later conversations with Sari. For others, the project was probably a way of passing time and a distraction from worrying about the outcome of their asylum claims. It might have even been something they did not really enjoy but nevertheless joined in since everyone else – including those they looked up to – was involved in the project too. We cannot therefore honestly say that taking part in the project was a voluntary process for all the participants. There was even an incident during which one of the boys explicitly expressed his disappointment that they had been spending their time wandering in the woods and at the beach instead of learning something useful like Finnish. What we can say though is that the boys and the counsellors were able to collect shared visual memories of the time spent in the group home. Based on our multi-sited fieldwork, we learnt to know that the boys had caring professionals around them both in the group home and in the school.

Linguistic anthropologist Jenny-Louise Van Der Aa (2017) uses the concept of 'epistemic solidarity' to describe the act of creating a space in which one is open to a particular type of story: the story that the participant wants to tell. The long-term partnerships (e.g. Baynham & De Fina, 2016) which we built through our collaborative ethnography as ways of gaining trust enabled us to create such a space. In our experience, the stories were waiting to be told and the spaces needed to be created for the unaccompanied minors to be able to do this in their own time and in their own way. Up until this point, because of their circumstances, it had been a life-saving strategy for the adolescents not to trust anyone (see Turtiainen, 2009). Having positive attitudes towards the people with whom one works with is, of course, important. But our project demonstrates that a positive attitude is not enough: building trust and relationships between researchers, young asylum seekers and people working with them is a more complex process, which requires long-term commitment.

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