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## Travelling and sticky affects: Exploring teens and sexualized cyberbullying through a Butlerian-Deleuzian-Guattarian lens

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In this paper we combine the thinking of Deleuze and Guattari (1984, 1987) with Judith Butler's (1990, 1993, 2004, 2009) work to follow the rhizomatic becomings of young people's affective relations in a range of on- and off-line school spaces. In particular we explore how events that may be designated as sexual cyberbullying are constituted and how they are mediated by technology (such as texting or in/through social networking sites). Drawing on findings from two different studies looking at teens' uses of and experiences with social networking sites, Arto in Denmark, and Bebo in the UK, we use this approach to think about how affects flow, are distributed, and become fixed in assemblages. We map how affects are manoeuvred and potentially disrupted by young people, suggesting that in the incidences discussed affects travel as well as stick in points of fixation. We argue that we need to grasp both affective flow and fixity in order to gain knowledge of how subjectification of the gendered/classed/racialised/sexualised body emerges. A Butlerian-Deleuzian-Guattarian frame helps us to map some of these affective complexities that shape sexualized cyberbullying events; and to recognize technologically mediated lines of flight when subjectifications are at least temporarily disrupted and new terms of recognition and intelligibility staked out.

**Keywords:** affectivity; subjectification; rhizoanalysis; assemblage; social networking sites; schools

### Introduction

This paper aims to contribute to applying Deleuzian theory to practical problems in education by looking at problems of understanding and responding to cyberbullying in on-line communities and schools. We combine a Butlerian approach to exploring discursive subjectification with a Deleuzian and Guattarian approach to mapping affective flows. Moving beyond a discursive analytical approach (that is, Davies & Harre, 1990, Ellwood & Davies, 2010), we argue Deleuze and Guattari's thinking helps us understand affect as bound in, but not limited to, discursive signification. The open-ness of what we will call a Butlerian/Deleuzian/Guattarian approach helps us understand both fixity and becoming in how young people navigate conflict and extreme exclusions. In this paper we draw on these lines of thinking and focus the analytical lens to affective processes of becoming and to how an affective tenor of being (temporarily) included and excluded is maintained and shifting when technologies are mediating the processes of bullying.

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To illustrate our points we draw on two data sets focused on young people's experiences at social networking sites, *Arto* in Denmark and *Bebo* in the UK. We bring together two diverse projects engaging in a dual analysis. While aware of methodological limitations in bringing together data from diverse studies, we limit the purpose of this joint analysis to re-conceptualize cyber fights as 'events' across time/space/locations. For this purpose, analyses across the two datasets have proven fruitful in investigating cases which involve a number of different subjects and a number of different technologies. Here we focus on incidences where sexual subjectification happens via networked communications in school and cyber assemblages. Cross-data-analyses have helped us understand the singularities of our own research findings and the commonalities across contexts.

### **Researching cyberbullying**

In this paper we draw on the field of cyberbullying studies and argue for ways to develop a theoretically refined approach to the particularity of bullying when it is technologically mediated. We will first highlight the basic assumption within bullying research (both so-called traditional bullying and cyberbullying); second, we highlight the particularities of cyberlife, and third, we move on to the arguments of why we introduce a theoretical framework to grasp the specificities of technologically mediated bullying. Within bullying research there is a general and widely acknowledged assumption that a number of relative stable positions are at work in cases recognized as bullying. Those would be that of the victim, the bully, and the bystanders (Olweus, 1993; Salmivalli & Nieminen, 2002; Smith, 2009; Smith et al., 2002; Smith et al., 2008). Much work is based on this assumption of stable, individualised positions.<sup>1</sup> Apart from this focus on a recognizable number of positions, it is in addition assumed that these positions are fixed in the sense that a position over time is taken up by the same individual. In the most quoted definitions of bullying this is referred to as exposure to negative action on the part of one or more persons, to patterns of repetition, and intentional harm (Olweus, 1993; Smith et al., 2008). Personalities of individuals play a significant and central role in these definitions of bullying. This classical work was coined by Dan Olweus during the 1970s and has been influential internationally over the past 30 years not only in research but also within the development of local and national intervention programmes (for critical analysis of this, see Schott, 2009; Eriksson et al., 2002).

Within cyberbullying studies there is widespread agreement that specific characteristics characterize cyberbullying. First is anonymity, that is, the possibility of hiding the identity of the sender and to blur the number of subjects involved. This is also referred to as 'disinhibition' (Shariff, 2008), where young people borrow each others' phones, use each others' profiles (whether with or without the acceptance of the owner of the profile), or the practice of sending messages collectively, for instance, four people agree upon a message that is sent in the name of one of them. Thus there is uncertainty of the correspondence between the name displayed on the screen and the actual sender (Kowalski & Limber, 2007; Shariff, 2008; Spears et al., 2009). In addition, there is general agreement that the impossibility of escaping derogatory messages is crucial in understanding cyberbullying. There is no sanctuary, as Kowalski and Limber put it (2007, p. 23). The fact that cyberbullying can occur at any time raises the experience of vulnerability. A third characteristic of cyberbullying

is the possible infinite audience that can witness the evaluations posted online (Shariff, 2008). It makes a difference whether a negative evaluation is witnessed by and commented on by close peers or by possibly ‘the whole world’. A fourth trait of cyberbullying is how a distinction between in and out school activities is blurred (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Slonje & Smith, 2008) because messages are sent during classes and recess and late at night, by and to classmates. Boundaries are less clear. We would like to add a fifth trait: the non-simultaneity of emotional intensity in cases of cyberbullying. Technologies slow down and accelerate the pace of communication in such a way that communication is characterized by non-simultaneity in emotional intensity (Kofoed, 2009a).

In this paper we focus both on the individuals and on social and cultural aspects of the becoming of individuals, groups and the organisation of schools. In our view, bullying is a social rather than an individual phenomenon. In developing this perspective we build on the findings and assumptions of the first generation of bullying research, and embed this in a larger pool of possible interrelated complex constituents. The basic assumption is that the socio-emotional condition of a child is important in ways in which bullying is constituted, maintained and changed; but social-emotional conditions are not the only forces enacted in cases of bullying. Recent research illustrates that a number of interacting forces are producing the phenomenon of bullying. Such forces are social and cultural, material and technological, historical and affective (Kofoed & Søndergaard, 2009; Ringrose, 2010; Schott, 2009). These assumptions are based on theoretically informed empirical analysis and suggest that the explanatory power is not limited to the socio-emotional capacity of an individual. The point of departure is that these diverse kinds of forces must be taken into consideration in the specificities of every local context. We thus argue for generating a complexity-sensitive knowledge of bullying that does not reject simplicity, but takes into careful consideration the number of forces that possibly interact in cases of bullying (Kofoed & Søndergaard, 2009).

Cyberbullying therefore requires complex theoretical and methodological approaches. In addition, other researchers suggest the importance of studying the interface and relationship between on-line and off-line phenomena (Patchin & Hinduja, 2009) like bullying and cyberbullying, viewing each as informing one another so we can better understand how the internet is ‘reconfiguring’ young people’s social experiences (Kofoed, 2008; Livingstone & Haddon, 2009).

### **Outline of theoretical approach**

Bronwyn Davies (1990), a key poststructural theorist in educational research, has offered important theoretical tools in understanding discursive positionings of subjects in social contexts, drawing on Foucauldian analyses (see also Walkerdine, 1991; Ellwood & Davies, 2010). Davies and others (see Ringrose & Renold, 2010) have recently offered a discursive analysis of school violence and bullying, using Foucault and Butler to explore how ‘the real world is produced through the mobilisation of statements (enonces) or things said about violence in schools’ (Ellwood & Davies, 2010, p. 86). As Ellwood and Davies suggest, discourses are ‘not merely spoken words’ but involve –

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... signification which concerns not merely how it is that certain signifiers come to mean what they mean, but how certain discursive forms articulate objects and subjects in their intelligibility (2010, p. 86).

135 They use this analysis to look at how discourses of bullying mark out some subjects as individually pathological with bad intentions, and other subjects as having a good 'consciousness' in educational contexts. Similar arguments were presented by Ringrose and Renold (2010) in their Butlerian analysis of how bullying was constituted as pathological for both boys and girls in school, whereas much everyday  
140 cruelty was noted as unremarkable 'normative' gender play for children.

We want to build on this discursive analysis of bullying with an affective approach to understanding cyberbullying. We will join up further concepts from Butler's theories of subjectification, with the thinking of Deleuze and Guattari, whose philosophy offers ways of analysing the movement of affect and bodies through their theories of immanent becoming.  
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It is crucial to begin with a nuanced analysis of subjectification derived from Butler's body of work on gender/sexuality. Butler develops a post-Lacanian framework to argue that sex/gender is constituted through a subjectifying 'heterosexual matrix' (1990, p. 151) where performing certain normalized and idealised gender norms render the subject as gender 'intelligible' or 'unintelligible.' Exploring cyberbullying through this line of thinking helps us to argue that cyberbullying is also a set of discursive processes where certain subject positions are annulled, and derived of intelligibility. In cases of cyberbullying, we argue, some lives become (temporarily) unliveable and threatened with unviability (Butler, 2004). Teen's lives become unliveable for shorter or longer periods of time due to, for instance, hate groups on Facebook, fake profiles, daily evaluations of body sizes and body forms, sexual preferences, or alleged wrongdoings during school life. We assume that the viability of the subjects involved in the analysis is dependent not only on themselves individually, but on each other, and on the social norms that reign in the settings and situations in which they find themselves. What seems to be shared by the subjects in the cases studied in this paper is the experience of being 'threatened with unviability' (Butler, 2004, p. 3). Butler reminds us that –  
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165 Some lives are grievable, others are not. The differential allocation of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved and which kind of subject must not, operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human: what counts as a livable life and a grievable death? (Butler, 2004)

Her approach helps us reframe essential bullying questions slightly differently by asking 'which life is viable, which conflicts grievable?'. By grievable we mean the sense in which conflicts matter or can be recognised and therefore addressed and 'grieved' in the everyday, mundane world of school policy and practice. We need to think about how liveability or grievability becomes manifest in specific social time/space contexts like schools, and in relation to particular gendered and sexualised cultural norms, which regulate and discipline young people's bodies via the 'heterosexual matrix' (Renold & Ringrose, 2008; Ringrose & Renold, 2010).  
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175 Butler's emphasis on gender normativity is crucial for our analysis, but we are concerned about the teleological reduction in some poststructural accounts that subjects are simply captured and/or fixed within the structural/discursive order

180 (Blackman et al., 2007). We are drawn to conceptual moves that are foregrounding  
the messy complexity of affects, and attempting to break down binaries between  
'body and mind' and 'reason and passions', offering 'a complex view of causality'  
(Hardt, 2007). A body of thought often referred to as the 'affective turn' (Clough &  
Halley, 2007) encompasses attempts to theorize 'both our power to affect the world  
185 around us and our power to be affected by it, along with the relationship between  
these two powers' (Hardt, 2007, p. 10). We hope to contribute to a move towards an  
'affective turn' in trying to map out some of the affective complexities that shape  
what is recognized as sexualised cyberbullying events.

190 In thinking through an affective lens to understanding cyberbullying, we develop  
the terminology of 'travelling and sticky affects', drawing on Butler's theories of  
subjectification and Deleuze and Guattari's (1984) theories of affect. According to  
Colman (in Parr, 2005, p. 11) –

Affects in a Deleuzian-Guattarian understanding 'is the change, or variation, that  
occurs when bodies collide, or come into contact. As a body, affect is the knowable  
product of an encounter [. . .], yet is also as indefinite as the experience of a sunset,  
transformation, or ghost'.

195 This understanding of affect as change and 'becoming' through relational affective  
processes helps us to qualify but also trouble poststructuralist assumptions of  
processes of subjectification (Davies, 2006; Kofoed, 2007; Søndergaard, 2002)<sup>2</sup> and  
is useful in staging the type of nuanced empirical analysis of processes of inclusion  
and exclusion we are aiming to make. In particular, we include Brian Massumi's  
200 interpretation of Deleuze's concept of affect. Here affect is described in terms of the  
intrinsic connection between movement and sensation.

Feelings have a way of folding into each other, resonating each other, interfering with  
each other, mutually intensifying, all in unquantifiable ways apt to unfold again in  
action, often unpredictably. (Massumi, 2002, p. 1)

205 We thus understand affect to be intensities and sensations that fold and change in  
both unforeseen ways, and predictable ways (Kofoed, 2010; Staunæs & Bjerg, 2011).  
We set out to investigate these (un)predictable foldings and becomings in empirical  
data.

210 The term 'sticky' emerged out of our analysis of cyberbullying events, and we use  
it to refer to force relations which (temporarily) glue certain affects to certain bodies;  
'travelling' in contrast, refers to the relational lines between subjects and the  
promiscuity and flowing nature of affects.<sup>3</sup> By following (through analysis of data)  
when affects stick and travel, we can qualify situated processes of subjectification and  
215 complex manoeuvrings of positionings in empirical research findings. There are  
points of overlap and resonance in Butler's and Deleuze and Guattari's approach so  
that fixation occurs through processes where subjects are regulated and disciplined  
through heterosexual norms in ways that relate to Deleuze and Guattari's notions of  
bodily capture through force relations.

220 Deleuze and Guattari also use the notion of 'assemblages' to think about the  
relationships between bodies and the flows of affect through space and time. Assem-  
blages have been described as social entities or 'wholes whose properties emerge  
from the interactions between the parts' (De Landa, in Tamboukou, 2009, p. 9).

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225 The specific relationships and connections between bodies form assemblages, but the  
body itself is also an assemblage which interacts with and has various capacities to  
affect other bodies and other scales of assemblages: 'A body's function or potential  
or "meaning" becomes entirely dependent on which other bodies or machines it  
230 forms an assemblage with' (Malins, 2004, p. 85). Bodies interact with and plug into  
technological machines creating whole new assemblages and new rhizomatic  
movements. Affect flows via these connections, and subjectification happens, shaping  
affective possibilities. But affect may also exceed the discursive power of subjectifica-  
235 tion. Because we are focusing on the cyber or virtual space, our analysis will centre  
on bodily-technologically-mediated affective flows and subjectification. To summar-  
ize, the notion of assemblage helps us to think about how bodies and parts of bodies  
interact with non-human technology forming 'affective assemblages' of various  
scales and intensities (De Landa, 2006) that interact with and mutually affect one  
another in complex ways (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Massumi, 1987; Kofoed, 2009a;  
Ringrose, 2010).<sup>4</sup>

240 Deleuze and Guattari are also interested in power and force relations in ways that  
resonate strongly with Butler (and Foucault). They outline the 'affective' capacities  
of bodies to 'affect' each other (Coleman, 2008) in either 'life affirming' or 'life  
destroying ways' (Bonta & Protevi, 2004). This resonates in important ways with  
Butler's notions of liveable and grievable lives. We are interested in when lives  
become at least temporarily un-liveable through the life-destroying affects circulating  
245 in networked peer assemblages in cyberbully events. This therefore constitutes the  
ethical axis, and we aim to map this in our data analysis (see also Ringrose, 2010;  
Kofoed, 2005). In theorizing power, Deleuze and Guattari (1984, 1987) develop  
further language to understand the flows of affect in relation to whether affective  
effects either align with or disrupt what they call the 'molar' (i.e. normative) lines or  
250 power formations (Jackson, 2010). They suggest that rhizomatic, molecular 'lines of  
flight' can break off from molar (normative) identities and power formations and go  
in new directions (Deleuze & Guattari, 1984; Renold & Ringrose, 2008; Tamboukou,  
2008). But lines of flight are also readily re-couped back to the norm (Deleuze &  
Guattari, 1984; Renold & Ringrose, 2008). These concepts help us in mapping what  
255 is happening or 'becoming' in particular cyberbully events and relations. We show  
how the fixing of affects onto bodies happens in sexualised ways in our data, but also  
illustrate how affects do not flow or 'travel' or stick in only predictable ways. Indeed  
in the second part of our data analysis, we point to examples where the sexual  
subjectification of cyberbullying exceeds the discursive regulation through complex  
flows and molecular lines of flight where the affective assemblages end up 'queering'  
260 (that is mix-up, complicate and subvert) conventional meanings of gendered norms  
(see also Renold & Ringrose, 2008).

### Methodology

265 As noted, we draw on two different studies, one in Denmark and the other in the  
UK, which are exploring teens' uses and experiences of social networking sites  
(SNSs). While one study focused on cyberbullying as an analytical focus, the other  
focused on friendship and conflict in digital peer groups more generally.  
The Denmark study focused on the uses of the SNS Arto, and the UK study  
looked at young people's uses of the SNS Bebo. In the studies, teenagers and



270 technologies have been followed across a number of sites: in the classroom, in the  
schoolyard, into the streets, over into the park, following the technologies, into the  
chat rooms, through the cell phones and back into the classroom. Thus the local sites  
extend into the national and global and back again to the micro networks of the  
275 schools. In the Danish-study, the choices of field schools were based on specific cases  
of cyber bullying. Some incident had been reported to the police or the head of the  
school as cases of cyberbullying. In the UK study, more general dynamics of teen's  
digital engagement were mapped but when specific events and incidences of conflict  
were recounted, they were addressed in individual interviews and followed online.  
280 The Danish study is based on eXbus's research (a Copenhagen based research project  
on bullying: Exploring Bullying in Schools). The data consists of qualitative  
fieldwork including observations, virtual fieldwork, school based fieldwork, inter-  
view, drawings and written essays from five schools in the vicinity of Copenhagen.  
Grades 4–7 are addressed, though the excerpts analysed in this paper stem from  
285 Danish grade 7 (14 year olds). The UK research was a study of 'Young people's uses  
of social networking sites' was conducted in 2 UK schools in rural Suffolk and urban  
London, across UK grades 9 and 11 (14–16 year olds). The data consisted of in  
school and on-line observations, focus group and individual interviews. For this  
paper we draw on data from 14 and 15 year old girls.

### Analysis

290 When exploring both datasets, there seemed to be overarching issues of heightened  
intensity and sexualised content of name-calling. This heightened intensity is  
expressed throughout the interviews in an ongoing negotiation of who is to blame  
and in sexualized name-calling such as: fat slag, whore, slut, bitch, khaba (whore in  
Arabic). Reflections throughout the interviews are characterized by high speed and  
295 high emotional pitch. The transcripts present a whirlpool of sexualised drama and  
affectivity, all of it rife with the contradictions of living sex and gender in the  
temporality of teenage life. We will address these issues by recounting three  
assemblages in which three cyberbully events are staged. The following will introduce  
these assemblages and the subjects involved.

300 Celia (girl aged 14) and Saad (boy aged 14) are 7<sup>th</sup> graders. On the Danish social  
networking site, Arto, Saad posted an evaluation which according to their peers  
point at Celia, though no names were mentioned. It said:

Fuck u, and your bitch ass crew. U bitch, you can put your opinion up your hairy ass.  
The day we became friends was the worst day of my life now that I realize how fucked  
up people can be. It was fucking nice to get you out of my life you have been a waste of  
305 time. Someone like you shouldn't be anyone's friend. You are so ugly, you think that you  
are perfect and beautiful. Khaba! No way!! You are uglier than ugly!!!! Die slow!!!

310 The ways in which Celia reflected upon the event suggested that she – in this  
pronunciation – was rendered unintelligible and unviable in the fixation. Throughout  
the interviews, this evaluation on Arto stands out as particularly important and  
sticky – and the school positioned Saad and Celia as involved in cyberbullying as  
bully and victim, respectively. The chain of events started like this: Saad texted Celia  
admitting that he looked at her breasts. The breasts seemed to be the point from

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where things take speed. Cecilia replied that this was perfectly all right. Rania became aware of Saad's gaze at Celia's breasts. She altered between judgments of it being gross and wanting such attention herself. More girls got involved in the confession. Rania encouraged Celia to ask Saad whether he checked out Rania's breasts as well. Celia declined but left her phone on the table when going to the toilet. Rania and the others girls texted Saad and asked him if he fancied Rania's breasts also – in Celia's name. Saad got upset. And from then on the messages were exchanged at high speed. The desires, competition and gazing at breasts travelled and informed the heightened sexual force of the entire teen school assemblage. Breasts, the preference for them and the desire for desired breasts accelerated after Saad's first text message and culminated in the above evaluation.

These sexualized affects seemed to travel among the peers, with a range of affects upon more bodies than those immediately involved. Envy, fear, distrust, embarrassment seemed to travel among the subjects involved in ways that allowed envy to merge into fear, into embarrassment, into relief, into indefinite affects. It did so because technologies were both detached and attached to specific bodies which ruled out the possibility of definitively linking subjects to messages. Celia's cell (mobile) phone was associated with her when her name was displayed in the receiving phone, yet finger's belonging to other bodies quickly keyed messages in her name.<sup>5</sup> Such detachment created new possibilities for virtual subjectification and we need to map both the fixity and the travelling of affects.

The main reason for the unequivocal agreement that this evaluation addresses Celia is the pronunciation of 'Khaba', which means whore in several Arabic dialects. As we go on to argue, terms like whore, slag and slut are not innocent pronouncements, but are affective terms which hold the power to (hetero)sexually subjectify. Khaba 'stuck' to Celia because it left no doubt in the minds of her peers that she was the one, due to the local connotation of Khaba as 'Moroccan'. Celia's body was read as ethnic and racial Other, particularly Moroccan, in relation to the associated Danishness and whiteness of many of her peers. In this on-line evaluation, 'Khaba' is both gendered, sexualized, and ethnic-racialized and appears to be the final referent that rules out the possibility that the evaluation which refers to 'you' and not a named subject, could refer to any of Celia's white peers. It apparently left no situated doubt that 'khaba' pointed at Celia who sensed how other affects and pronouncements might travel, but how this particular pronouncement wouldn't travel, but stuck to her body, her position and how it produced affects of discomfort and unease that stayed with her and temporarily made life unviable.

**Temporarily unliveable lives**

Our second example stems from the UK study in which we will focus on a significant affective event – a cyber and physical fight ostensibly between two girls, Louise (15) and Marie (15). Louise, was socially rejected through the SNS Bebo – she was no one's top friend, her romantic 'interest', Jay, would not formalize their relationship on their Bebo sites, and she was apparently called a 'fat slag' online by one of her 'friends', Marie. Marie was described as saying Louise went 'round with everyone' and 'tried to get with everyone's exes' in an instant messaging exchange. The virtual conflict erupted into 'real' violence the morning after the online interactions around 'fat slag', when Louise attacked Marie at school and was thereafter positioned as a

360 violent bully with anger management problems by the school. The following excerpt  
is from a group interview with Louise, Marie and 3 other girls in their grade.

L: An MSN<sup>6</sup> argument . . . It would just travel down the line and then it will get to my friend and it would be like ‘Oh yeah, I know her’ and then it would just like... be like me . . . I would be stuck in the middle . . . We’ve literally been in a fight before because things have been . . . said that’s like, one of my mates told me on MSN that she called me a fat slag and everything like that so then I . . . waited for her outside before school one day and I said ‘Why are you saying this for?’ and . . .

M: She punched me in my back.

L: I punched her in the back, she razzed in my face, she tried walking away, I grabbed her, punched her again, everything right, because all these things that people say to . . . wind people up . . . she sits there and cries their eyes out, right and I beg to differ that I will never, ever do it again and I promise . . .

M: Because you love me!

L: I love you! But the things that people say they don’t realise what, how much trouble it can actually cause.

M: Like people were saying to me that, ‘Well, she’d been saying that she don’t like me, she hates me, she’s never liked me’ and then they were saying to her, I’d been calling her a fat slag, I’d been calling her this . . .

L: So either way everything’s been getting twisted . . . this MSN argument and it turned out to be a punch-up between me and her although you didn’t hit me.

M: No . . .

L: For some strange reason. If I hit you, why didn’t you hit me back?

M: Louise! Look at me . . . Then look at you!

L: What are you trying to say, that I’m fat and ugly?

M: No, you’re not fat . . . you’re taller than me . . . I’m a midget . . . I’ll Die!!

390 The excerpt illustrates the affective flow underway – rumour flows through friend networks vis-a-vis SNSs and instant messaging. The fight is described through spatial dynamics like gossip ‘travelling’ and girls ‘being stuck in the middle’ and everything getting ‘twisted’. Bodily responses of ‘razzing’, grabbing, punching and crying are described. And affective states such as blame, hate, love, envy, despair are moving around through the discussion. Marie’s suggestion that she would likely ‘die’ in any further physical encounter with Louise, is at one level a turn of phrase, but at another a description of an affective state of dread and anxiety, which sits in relation to the excitement of heightened affective states like ‘love and hate’ propelling the fight.

395 As in the assemblage of Saad and Celia and peer group, it becomes exceedingly difficult to bifurcate the experiences into the classical two subject positions of bully/victim. Such an analysis would miss the affective fabric and the speed, and prevent us from further conceptual work on the complex daily affective processes of inclusion and exclusion.

400 As with Celia and Saad, sexualized affect forms the fabric of this assemblage, where desires for inclusion and mechanisms of exclusion circulate and produce insecurity that moves amongst the peer group with various effects. What we find crucial about this assemblage is again a point of fixation. Louise was accused of going ‘round with everyone’ and trying to ‘get with everyone’s exes’. In relation to the ‘heterosexual matrix’ of competitive power relations of the school space (Renold & Ringrose, 2008), the subjectification is meant to work to literally put her in her place. By calling up corporeal abjectness (fatness) (see Kristeva and Butler, in Ringrose &

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Walkerline, 2008) and classed discourses of moral suspicion – sexual impurity (slagness) and being ‘loose’, Louise’s self-assemblage in the school culture was at once fixed *and* rendered unviable, so the effect was at least temporarily life-destroying. Like Khaba, the Moroccan variation of ‘whore’ stuck to Celia, ‘fat slag’ stuck to Louise in particular, as the overweight and therefore unjustifiably desired and desiring teen in their peer group.

As has emerged throughout the paper, the pejoratives around whore and slag work as points of fixation in both a discursive sense, but also in aligning with molar power formations so that fat slag restricted Louise’s movement leading to hardenings of segmentations fixing her, a form of affective and bodily capture. The effects of this were an affective intensity so extreme that Louise literally physically exploded in the school yard when she attacked Marie. This physical violence worked to further fixate her as abject feminine subject, since she became positioned as a ‘bully’ through the behavioural interventions set in motion in the school.

There is also a great deal of movement within the peer assemblage, however, the displacement of the affective rush and drama of the altercations are also described through the narrative as shifting among a wider group as Louise talked about what ‘people were saying to me’ and ‘people were saying to her’ (Marie), just as Celia talked about how the evaluations were witnessed and commented upon by her peers. We find the so-called ‘infinite audience’ that witnessed the evaluations in cyber space (Shariff, 2008). There was generalized uncertainty and instability about the knowledge circulating via the electronic circuits, so Louise repeatedly referred to a mass form of ‘lying’, where Celia referred to an ‘unknowing’ about the origin or end point of the words which circulated about her. We see a generalized sense of anxiety and unease at the insecurity of whom and how many witnesses the exchanges include.

**Subversive potentials**

So far we have shown how Celia and Louise were kept in place and how these assemblages involved ‘pinning’ to a ethnic-racialised, gendered and classed screen (Deleuze & Parnet, 2002) or grid of positions (Massumi, 2002) and how Celia, Saad and Louise were delicately balancing these pinnings and renegotiating the affective tenor. In the following we will show – even if not for long – how such pronouncements could also be subverted. The pejorative, molar identities like whore and slag were not completely closed, with some girls attempting to negotiate the sexual signification of these signs, queering (so a disruption of the affective capture of fixed gender regulations) through ‘lines of flight’ that became possible in the virtual SNS assemblage. In the next examples we explore the subversive potentialities that were afforded through the technological platform and assemblage of the social networking site. This illustrates more fully how social networking sites may create new affective conditions for manoeuvring sexual bullying in intriguing ways.

Daniella (14) from the UK study, had been called a ‘slut’ by ‘loads of people’ at her school the previous year. This resembles the interactions among Celia and Saad. Daniella’s way of negotiating ‘slut’, however, differed in some ways from Celia’s negotiations, perhaps representing a more radical line of flight. In part as a response to the sexual bullying, Daniella adopted ‘slut’ as her user name for her Bebo profile, while her friend Nicole used the user name ‘whore’. Daniella discussed how her use

of slut in the digital space of the SNS was a direct response to sexualized bullying from ‘older girls’ at school.

D: I didn’t know what you would think, because like my username is slut . . . but I don’t mean it as like I’m a slut. Because if you look down on my friends list . . . One of her . . . [Nicola] her username is Whore . . . We have this little thing, like she’s my slut, I’m her whore. Because loads of people used to call us it, so we just thought whatever, we’ll just be them then. And like one day we just found a background like it, and we were like, oh, that’s quite nice. And people are like, why have you got slut . . . and it’s like, I don’t mean it like that. But ‘cos I didn’t know, like if you read it if you’d be thinking, o my god!”

J: So you mean that people used to say that you were a slut . . . what do you mean by that?

D: Well, ‘cos our group, like some people, like older girls that saw us, like with someone would be like, oh you slag or you slut because . . . just because they didn’t know us, but just because they wanted to insult us . . . ‘Cos we used to really care about it, and then we just got a bit like oh I don’t care anymore . . . we just got used to it, and then . . . I don’t really know what happened but it was just a random thing of where we were just like . . . she’s my whore and I’m her slut. Whatever! Get over it. And then she’d say the same.

In the previous examples we have been exploring how terms like slag or whore stuck with an affective force that made the girls’ lives temporarily unliveable. What is striking about the example of Daniella was how something new was happening via the technological assemblage of the SNS. The SNS appeared to afford a virtual space, and affective movement and molecular lines of flight away from the pejorative bodily capture of ‘slut’. Through taking up these positions on their SNSs, Daniella and Nicola were shifting the possibility of the injury through this signifier, they were partially re-signifying and queering the notions of slut and whore, as Daniella explicitly repeated: ‘She’s my whore and I’m her slut. Whatever! Get over it’. This ‘queering’ of the notions of ‘slut’ and ‘whore’ happened through the girls proclaiming they were each others’ whore and slut, rather than the conventional meanings that tied these markers as prostitution, sexual promiscuity or sexual servicing.

Researchers (Atwood, 2007) have shown how the meanings of ‘slut’ are shifting, and may have new currency as ‘cool’ and ‘sexed up’ ways of performing a feminine sexuality in the larger popular ‘sexualised’ media contexts in the West. A Deleuzian-Guattarian analysis builds on this, to show the specific ways the affective meanings, directions and force of slut and whore are manoeuvred here, so using ‘slut’ is not simply reactive but puzzling, blurring boundaries and affirming new meanings. It is a rhizomatic, molecular *becoming* of a specific sort where the coercive, molar line of ‘slut’ is opened up (at least temporarily), allowing for play and joy, and strengthening of the affective bonds between Daniella and Nicola. This manoeuvring is not, however, without constraints

Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari’s theories of becoming are not simply about an ontological move to pure positivity, as some commentators mistakenly suggest (Gilbert, 2004). Deleuze and Guattari’s writings caution us to not build up an analysis to find a grand political re-signification or a conscious ‘mockery [and] disrespect to the dominance of heterosexuality and the power of norms’, suggesting instead shifting ‘the focus to the micro, the molecular: singular acts and practices of a

non-referential nature' (Nigianni, 2009, p. 4). Bearing this caution in mind, we find that there was a queering in the case of Daniella and Nicola, but that it was an unstable one. Later Daniella ended up erasing the experiment with digital slut changing her on-line identity in what seemed to correspond with the end of her heterosexual dating relationship with the popular and attractive Sam. Perhaps slut proved too difficult a subject position to occupy and stretched the meanings when Daniella was outside the protective space of a known heterosexual union with a popular guy at school?

A range of possible additional complex factors limit the possibilities of manoeuvrability around fixed, sticky sexualized signifiers, and constrain subjects via their affective meanings and force. Norms of beauty, or erotic capital (Hakim, 2010), which tie into issues of class and race need to be addressed and tie together our three analyses. Part of the possible reason that Daniella was able to move around with the notion of 'slut' was because her physical body aligned with many of the norms of whiteness and beauty in Western media contexts. Daniella's body carried markers that highlighted her desirability, and she was dating a popular boy during the first part of the research. Some of her freedom to harness the 'cool' 'sexy' factor of 'slut', lay in her positioning as a desirable girl in the school on-line and off-line assemblage. In contrast, the cyberbully event where Louise was called 'fat slag', worked to position her as undesirable (fat) and also low class (slag) chasing after other girls' property (boys). Louise's bodily qualities of largeness were marked out as abject in relation to ideal feminine norms of young, small petite-ness (Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008; Søndergaard, 2009) and fixed her as undesirable, although she did try to speak back in general ways to these attacks via her Bebo page.

The cyberbully event of fixing Celia as 'khaba' has points of similarity and difference to the cases of Daniella and Louise. Celia's body, like Daniella's, carried signs that aligned her with idealized versions of femininity, though racialised differently, because Celia was not white. These signs were the basis of attack on her on Arto. Recall how Saad was accused of looking at Celia's breasts and that he protested saying even though Celia thought she was 'perfect and beautiful', she was 'uglier than ugly' and 'Khaba'. Yet where Daniella was able to use her body signs to play around with 'slut', the specific cultural and racial nature of the Danish school community formed an assemblage where 'khaba' was more difficult to manoeuvre; and we speculate this may have been because 'khaba' carried affective racialised and sexualised force and intensity different to that of 'slut'. In this way 'Khaba' was racialized, like 'slag' was classed, and there was less scope for resisting these notions, or for re-claiming a 'sexy' and cool identity out of the identity of 'slut', as we saw with Daniella.

## Conclusion

In this analysis we have attempted to show how, rather than the singularities of either bully, victim, or by-stander, we find conflict dispersing via 'travelling affects'. Desires, positions and subjects are displaced, dispersed and moved around. Technology mediates desires, blurring the ownership and accelerates the circulations of affects within assemblages that apparently have no 'outer border', as Conley (2009) puts it. Our analysis shows how cyberbullying happens as conflicts move through and are

mobilized via a larger assemblage than the limited number of individuals involved in the eventual exchange, *and* affects are charged with meaning and content.

It is the sexualized charge that circulates through the teens, and it is sexualized 'order words' (Cole, 2010), 'Khaba' and 'fat slag', that are introduced into the flow and which work to re-fix and harden an injurious and regulatory sense of sexual abjectness. The effects of the sexualized order words are both fixity and further displacement, particularly an anxiety again for the girls in the peer groups about where these signifiers might land next time they are deployed in the assemblage. If the 'cartographic task ... aims at mapping the composition of lines inherent to every assemblage' (Bergen, 2010, p. 36), it is our job as cartographers of youth affect and deconstructors of the phenomena of 'cyberbullying' to outline the intensities of 'khaba', 'fat slag', and 'slut'. As we have been exploring, whore and fat slag work as molar gender identities foisted onto various girls to capture and discipline them through heterosexually striated, coercive space, and the affective effects are moments that render the girls involved as unviable and make school life at least temporarily unliveable, drawing out the implications of Butler's theories of (hetero)sexual subjectification. What Deleuze and Guattari also allow us to explore is how subjects negotiate such fixity, with surprising effects. What is important and what needs to be noted in overviewing the analytical points we are making, is that by using the combined theoretical tools we have elaborated, we can make detailed mappings of the ways affects travel and stick and are maneuvered in *specific* school assemblages. These mappings differ from the insights that would be available to us in either understandings of 'bullies' and 'victims' or even in discourse analysis that illustrate discursive positionings.

In closing, our approach contributes to research on sexualised cyberbullying by allowing us to see how different sexualized signifiers do not all subjectify in the same ways, or hold the same affective force. Indeed, there is differential scope for moving, disrupting and queering injurious sexual identifiers, depending on the raced, classed and encultured specificities of the encounters within a particular school, on-line and off-line assemblages, and meanings in wider popular culture, as we have illustrated. The approach we've outlined continues to challenge us to map these rich complexities of how affects travel across temporalities, between bodies, through in/significant evaluations and technologies. We believe mapping this movement of affect helps us to understand desire, technologically mediated exclusions, and the multiple affective permutations of becoming in school life in more nuanced ways.

## Notes

1. In psychological accounts analysing a bullying event in time, the positions of victim and bully tend to be positioned in a binary and this formulation tends to pathologize both positions (see Ringrose, 2008). Where movement is suggested is the risk that the victim could become the bully.
2. There is considerable debate around the possibilities of bringing Butler and Deleuzian approaches together. We, like others, do not see these approaches as inimical and seek to build up a dialogue between the theories through the interweaving of specific theoretical concepts that help us understand the relational processes of subjectification through an affective lens (see also Hickey-Moody & Rasmussen (2009) and Renold & Ringrose (2008)

for feminist and educational discussions of working at the interstices between Butler and Deleuze).

3. Sara Ahmed in her work elaborates how 'what sticks' operates (Ahmed, 2004). There are obvious similarities between Ahmed 2004 and our analysis, which is in part inspired by her creative work on affect. However, our theoretical framework is directly conceptually organised around describing how concepts from Butler, Deleuze and Guattari help us to understand the movement of affect in our empirical research accounts.
4. For a longer discussion of the concept of 'affective assemblages', see Ringrose, 2010.
5. Recent research has discussed the exchange of sexually explicit content (text and images) on mobile phones or online as a phenomenon of 'sexting' (see for instance, Lenhart, 2009; Livingstone et al., 2011). The notion of 'sexting' is certainly provocative if defined widely, as it can help us think about how specifically *sexualised* affects are circulating through mobile technologies.
6. MSN refers here to the instant messaging 'chat' feature.

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