

# **The Case of Tumblr: Young People's Mediatized Responses to the Crisis of Learning About Gender at School**

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This chapter presents data collected in an ethnographic study, both online and offline. The focus of my research is young people, and so I carried out most of my observations in schools; both in classes and outside of formal learning school settings. The chapter explains processes of schooling and online engagements by young people as entanglements of learning and identity construction, particularly the ways in which schooling and online learning can be co-constructive, and can permeate the learning and self-expression of gender online. My ethnography develops explanations transversal to the increasing correlations between the expansion of youth technology use and a perceived learning problem, one where the institution of the school and its politics are constructed as being in crisis, out of touch or unrelated to everyday life. Youth around the globe frequently use various Social Networking Sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube and Tumblr, among many others. These platforms intensify the possibilities of visibility, searchability, spreadability and durability of content online<sup>1</sup>. They also act as mediated mirrors of social surveillance, accessible to anyone in possession of a computer and an internet connection, or any connected mobile technology, which radical accessibility marks them as belonging to the public domain, and also blurs our preconceptions about the limits between public and private in everyday life. Due to the popularity of SNSs and the seemingly ease with which young people engage with these platforms, I argue that they have become a site of struggle, possibility and responsibility in which young people are constantly renegotiating their everyday lives and resisting some elements of social life. In discussing these issues, online encounters are understood within the realm of social surveillance, but also as sites of escape from and struggle with social surveillance. Similarly, social networking sites and the virtual as a neoliberal space are also put to work by young people to resist and redeploy school learning. In this article, I will therefore explore ways in which a specific student, Danielle, actively uses her online engagements to re-negotiate constraining gender relations as experienced in school, and how she resists her school's social surveillance of gender by writing

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<sup>1</sup> danah boyd, *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 11.

herself online.

I argue that Danielle engages with SNSs to reimagine and to re-enact a different kind of feminist response-ability, one that seeks to resist the constraining and highly surveilled gender politics of schooling. Deleuze and Guattari's notion of assemblages will be used to theoretically configure the ways in which the virtual, the non-virtual, the social and the cultural entangle in Danielle's narrative<sup>2</sup>. I will elaborate on these arguments by drawing on empirical data collected in early 2016, as part of a doctoral research project conducted in London secondary schools. As part of my ethnographic work in schools I spent two years in frequent contact with students and teachers while developing my fieldwork. This ethnographic phase then continued and became a virtual ethnography for over six months; during this period I further developed my fieldwork by following selected research participants online on various SNSs. The description of this experience and the results of my ethnographic research are presented in three parts: firstly, a section on how SNSs have a surveillant nature but are also used by young people to respond to stifling gender learning and identity construction, which both exposes and makes possible different opportunities of learning which exist on a continuum with schooling practices and experiences; secondly, a section explaining the theoretical constructs used to analyse the data and to think about how young people's learning is becoming increasingly mediated on SNSs; and lastly, a section on the ethnographic data, both from the offline and the online phases of my research. This chapter focuses primarily on online encounters on Tumblr, a microblogging site, and also seeks to explore how the technology itself allows for particular digital affordances which, in the case of Danielle, were enabling and re-constitutive of gender relations across offline and online spaces.

### ***Social Surveillance and Social Media***

The adoption of social media by young people has enabled a different kind of exposure and increased visibility, which in everyday interactions closely resembles surveillance. In this article, surveillance refers to the 'covert, sustained and targeted collection of information about an individual or group'<sup>3</sup>. Crucially, with reference to the networked and entangled nature of social media technologies, surveillance also becomes an organisation of relations.

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<sup>2</sup> Gilles, Deleuze, and Félix, Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Daniel, Trottier, "Interpersonal Surveillance on Social Media," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 37 (2012): 320.

For instance, social media sites such as Tumblr - a microblogging platform where people post text and multimedia in highly customisable and often very artistic blog form, and follow other people's blogs - organise peer relations through the careful surveillance of online friendships, blogs, re-blogs, and the creation of profile content online. These interactions are all part of how surveillance occurs online, by users watching over each other, and this means that the nature of peer relations becomes more surveillant<sup>4</sup>.

Similarly, the kind of surveillance experienced online is social, since it creates a particular kind of youth sociality and interaction, whereby relations fall within a normalised set of expectations which shape the everyday lives of youths and reflect societal tenets. With reference to social surveillance, this article seeks to explain through Danielle's experiences how young people's online and social media encounters work in myriad ways; how they differ from platform to platform, with some platforms enabling more rigorous and traditional surveilling practices amongst peers, and others affording them a virtual landscape in which to escape and to re-imagine themselves against particular politics of schooling. Therefore, the notion of social surveillance is theorized in this article as polymorphous: both enabled by the emergence and popularity of social media platforms, and also used by young people to extrapolate affordances that allow them to resist and contest, particularly in Danielle's case, some aspects of the gender politics of schooling. To this effect, there is a need to understand that social media virtual spaces as they are discussed here have an 'architecture, very much like the architecture of physical spaces', an architecture enabling 'particular modes of interaction'<sup>5</sup>. This article therefore focuses on Tumblr because the key features of the site - re-blogging, liking blogs and creating blogs tailored to interests - allow for power affordances that create close-knit online communities based on a digital feeling of camaraderie and solidarity, normally centered on a chosen interest. As explored in other parts of this volume, feminist politics occupy and are enacted in numerous spaces which before seemed to be closed off. In this article I explore how, for young people, social networking sites (specifically Tumblr) have become a reclaimed space where they can develop a response to constraining gender politics of schooling as a community, where they can develop response-abilities to the specificities of school experience which demarcate their everyday experiences of learning. With this in mind, in this article there will be tracings of gender actualisations which have become mediated on Tumblr by

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 320.

<sup>5</sup> Zizi, Papacharissi, "The Virtual Geographies of Social Networks: A Comparative Analysis of Facebook, LinkedIn and ASmallWorld." *New Media & Society* 11 (2009): 200.

my research participant; gender is perceived as being what McNay called ‘lived social relations’<sup>6</sup>, and an important function of my article is to situate how my respondent inhabits and renegotiates these lived social relations in Tumblr digital locales.

Whilst the arguments constructing social networking sites as emerging places of social surveillance are persuasive<sup>7</sup>, and to some extent true, they do not allow for further explorations into how they might also afford young people opportunities for self-expression and resistance. Danielle’s case offers insights into how this is actualised on SNSs through the activities involved in identity work, the participation in community web culture and the creation of online content that evidences her learning and resistance to schooling. Theoretically, this article develops a Deleuzean-Guattarian analytical lens by unravelling the lived social relations of Danielle as an assemblage of experience between school and online spaces. The notion of assemblage, to be discussed in the next section, therefore allows the narration of lines of continuity between school cultures, experience and the digital affordances embedded within the locale of Tumblr. Another important part of the argument in this article is the notion of *mediatisation*, which serves to explore how an ever-increasing part of being young is actualised online. In the next section I will begin to trace how these theoretical notions are configurative to the ways in which young people engage with social media.

### ***Suggested Assignments***

- Young people are increasingly exposed to digital platforms, including social media, and there is a great deal of learning happening on these platforms and a great deal of information that is exchanged through them. Pedagogically, social media platforms are ready-made structures inviting analysis; discussing with students how these various platforms work through key features and interactions based on their own experience is a way to analyse these platforms more critically.

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<sup>6</sup> Lois, McNay, “Agency and Experience: Gender as a Lived Relation,” in *Feminism After Bourdieu*, ed. Lisa Adkins and Beverley Skeggs (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> Daniel, Trottier, *Social Media as Surveillance: Rethinking Visibility in a Converging World* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

## *Gender Assemblages of Mediatiation*

The philosophical notion of assemblages<sup>8</sup> is one which analytically binds together and harnesses the experiential and the affective, the temporal and the transformative scenes in the processes of engagement through which young people become mediatized. The notion of assemblages also allows for the development of a more refined approach to understanding the particularity of youth online sociality as a cyber-social composition of organic and non-organic, technological and affective happenings which go beyond individualised positions. The potentiality of the notion of assemblages has also been utilised in other studies, e.g. Coleman and Ringrose<sup>9</sup>, which explores the potential of Deleuzian philosophical notions in investigating aspects of practice across a variety of fields such as education, pedagogy and art. Kofoed and Ringrose<sup>10</sup> have also utilised a Deleuzian-Guattarian framework to explore issues of cyberbullying in teenagers' lives. In my own study the notion of assemblages helps me maintain a recognition that mediatizations on social media have a particular durability and continuity which does not solely exist within individual subjective experiences, nor do they only reside in external factors, technologies or trends, but rather the durability and continuity of social media mediatizations extend and become threaded and entangled among many units which compose the experience of something.

This chapter, through assemblage theory, proposes to go beyond focusing solely on the individual or on the structure of digital technologies to address Danielle's networked and shared nature of experience on Tumblr. This post-Cartesian approach could map out the interconnectedness between young people, digital technologies and what they allow the individual. This approach is post-Cartesian in that it is not solely subjective, nor is it solely objective, and it is trying to push beyond binary oppositions between individuals and technology as well as the more traditional

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<sup>8</sup> Gilles Deleuze, and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Rebecca Coleman, and Jessica Ringrose, *Deleuze and Research Methodologies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Jette Kofoed, and Jessica Ringrose, "Travelling and Sticky Affects: Exploring Teens and Sexualized Cyberbullying Through a Butlerian-Deleuzian-Guattarian Lens," *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 33, (2012), 5.

binary between agency and structure. French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, working in collaboration with Félix Guattari, elaborated on the notion of ‘machinic assemblage,’ defining these fusions and intermingling of elements in this way:

‘On a first, horizontal, axis, an assemblage comprises two segments, one of content, the other of expression. On the one hand it is a mechanic assemblage of bodies, of actions and passions ... On the other hand it is a collective assemblage of enunciation, of acts and statements of incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies. Then on a vertical axis, the assemblage has both territorial sides and reterritorialized, which stabilise it’<sup>11</sup>.

Consequently, assemblages are transformative happenings, open coalitions between, in the case of my study, the young people themselves and the external elements encountered, explored, used and internalised whilst using technologies. With reference to the earlier part of the quote above, on assemblages comprising ‘two segments, one of content, the other of expression’ I point to how, through assemblage theory, I can uncover not just the ways in which young people use social media platforms or digital technologies but also the ways in which these materials and technologies have generated new ways of seeing and acting in their world. Moreover, on the assemblage having ‘both territorial sides and reterritorialised’, I point to how Danielle has assembled-with the new fields of power that Tumblr uncovers in order to respond differently to her school culture and to her everyday experiences of schooling.

Therefore, assemblage theory asks us to think about new human becomings which open up new possibilities. In the case of this chapter, the offline and online tracings in the narrative of Danielle’s experience materialise new response-abilities in the field of gender actualisation, amongst many other factors. The somewhat subversive culture of Tumblr, the intermingling of online content creation and the experiences of school cultures with opportunities for actualising cyber-resistances all compose the ‘assemblage Danielle’. These sensitisations of human experience through assemblage theory create a multidisciplinary openness which I want to use to understand Danielle’s experiences.

Another important part of the analysis presented here involves dealing with the notion of ‘mediatisation’, yet in doing so it is important to differentiate between ‘mediation’ and

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<sup>11</sup> Gilles, Deleuze, and Félix, Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 88.

‘mediatisation’. The notion of *mediation* comprehends the ways in which meaning is constituted. We live in a mediated world which becomes primarily mediated through language, but which also is increasingly re-mediated through digital technologies that permeate everyday life, as argued by Pink<sup>12</sup>. Increasingly, ‘there is no question that many, even all, dimensions of society are now *mediated* by digital networked technologies in ways that matter’<sup>13</sup>. When youths enter online spaces and share their interests, personal details and preferences, they are mediating themselves online; they are writing themselves an organised identity within an already-organised digitally-structured technology<sup>14</sup> and a publicly surveilled space which can be utilised in many ways by the individual, but which can also become utilised.

Yet, there is another important process, *mediatisation*, and this process underwrites the way in which online communication becomes appropriated by a certain group and not just how communications happen or become circulated. Arguably, the notion of mediatisation differs sharply from mediation, as mediatisation involves a ‘wider transformative logic or mechanism that is understood to do something...(that is, to mediatize)’<sup>15</sup>. The term ‘mediatisation’ then comprises an understanding that involves a socially and culturally transformative process of becoming which characterises young people’s cultural life through media.

As part of this article, ‘mediatisation’ is conceptualised as a ‘process whereby communication media become in some respect more ‘important’ in expanding areas of life and society [and, specifically ...] how institutionalized technologies of communication expand in extension and power’<sup>16</sup>. In the case of Danielle, her experiences of gender actualisation were crucially mediatised on Tumblr; that is, they were increasingly and substantially effectual online. Therefore, the notion of mediatisation is ‘a sensitizing concept that offers a general sense of

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<sup>12</sup> Sarah, Pink, *Situating Everyday Life* (London: Sage, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> Peter, Lunt and Sonia, Livingstone, “Is ‘Mediatization’ the New Paradigm for Our Field? A Commentary on Deacon and Stanyer (2014, 2015) and Hepp, Harvard and Lundby (2015),” *Media, Culture & Society* 38(2016): 463.

<sup>14</sup> Jennifer, Corriero and Liam, O’Doherty, “Digital Expressions and Networks Shape Intercultural Opportunities for Youth,” *Intercultural Education* 24 (2013): 494.

<sup>15</sup> Nick, Couldry, “Mediatization or Mediation? Alternative Understandings of the Emergent Space of Digital Storytelling.” *New Media and Society*, 10 (2008): 376.

<sup>16</sup> Johan, Fornäs, “Mediatization of Popular Culture,” in, *Mediatization of Communication: Handbooks of Communication Science*, vol. 21. ed, Knut Lundby (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2014) 484.

reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances, sensitizing the researcher about where to look rather than defining precisely what exists in advance of social scientific investigation’.

I therefore propose that the mediatisation of youth is characterised by Winfried Schulz’s<sup>17</sup> four core dimensions of mediatisation – mediatisation as extending human capacities for communication through time and space, mediatisation as substituting prior or direct social activities or experiences with mediated ones, mediatisation as amalgamating primary and secondary (or interpersonal and mass-mediated) activities, and as accommodating social activities and institutions to media logic. The phenomenon of being young is increasingly mediatised; online friendships, online learning, entertainment and gaming are only a few of the ways in which youth is increasingly mediated, and in the case of Danielle, important acts of resistance and gender actualisation are possible because of the ways in which these aspects of youth have assembled with digital technologies.

These human-cultural-technological entanglements suggest that it is ‘becoming increasingly complex to separate bodies, gender and sexuality from the technological networks that give them form and meaning’<sup>18</sup>. New media technologies are not apprehensible if we do not contextualise them within the embodied and gendered cultures that permeate them with new fields of power which then become appropriated by young users, and this is also a part of mediatising/ed assemblages. I argue that this contextualisation then raises serious questions about the traditionally-gendered human subject whose boundaries are understood to be contained and explained by the subject’s subjectivity and agency. Firstly, there is a need to explore response-abilities generated by new digital media more closely, since they can be very varied and highly responsive to specific events. As we shall discuss, Danielle’s response-abilities are intrinsically conjunctional to school politics; Danielle’s response-abilities are then extended and evidence in her Tumblr engagements as I will discuss. Her sense of agency and her subjective experience is entangled with the online but is also responsive to what she perceives are restrictive school politics; however, these politics of schooling have also enabled her to develop innovative responses to assert her own identity through

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<sup>17</sup> Wolfgang, Schulz “Reconstructing Mediatization as an Analytical Concept.” *European Journal of Communication*, 19 (2004): 89.

<sup>18</sup> Niels, Van Doorn, “Digital Spaces, Material Traces: How Matter Comes to Matter in Online Performances of Gender, Sexuality and Embodiment.” *Media, Culture & Society*, 33 (2011): 536.



digital learning and online identity work.

Secondly, where does the human body end and the technological body begin? Given the inextricable relations between humans and machines that are in this study represented by new media technologies, other questions arise when we consider that the experience of gender and the performance of gender can now extend into spaces other than concrete physical environments. Where then is embodied subjectivity located? Is it possible to continue to speak of a contained subject with a singular human agency? Is it perhaps more useful to ground understandings of the subject within ideas of distributed agency ‘which recognises agency as a process that is allocated to humans as well as non-human actors who depend on each other...it might be productive to approach online social practices as belonging to a larger assembly of everyday post-human activities’<sup>19</sup>. This has also been suggested by Rogowska-Stangret in her article for this volume, where she calls for an analysis of individualisation that tries to explore how subjectivity is relational. I argue that by recognising the potential of gender actualisations online as performed by Danielle, we can see that there is a de-territorialization of gender practices which goes beyond the territory of an agent, or of a self-governing human body as they become assembled and mediated on the digital space of Tumblr, yet, all this is still harnessed to the organic realities of schooling.

### ***Tumblr and Enabling Affordances of Resistance***

Danielle is female, fifteen years old, and from London; she attends a mixed secondary school in south west London. I conducted an ethnography at Danielle’s school for over a year, both in classes and out of classes; this phase then progressed into an ethnographic interview with Danielle after she volunteered to participate in the research. The ethnographic phase continued online, whereby I kept in contact with Danielle online via various platforms, including Tumblr, for a period of three months. Danielle is an avid Tumblr user; she engages by using all the key features that the site offers, which include microblogging as well as following, liking and re-blogging other people’s blogs. As I will argue, many of Danielle’s mediated resistances are found on Tumblr. As an SNS, Tumblr has a certain streak of virtual oddity surrounding it, partly because the user-generated content is perceived as edgy or cutting-edge, with features that seem to facilitate supportive and encouraging networks. To this effect Gross writes about Tumblr, ‘a mysterious new

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<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, 536.

culture has been born. We are like ancient Egyptians. We communicate with pictures, we worship cats, and nobody understands us'<sup>20</sup>.

This paraphrases a post that was reblogged many thousands of times on the blogging site Tumblr. While the site doesn't have pyramids, pharaohs or slaves, it does indeed have a distinct cultural identity setting it apart from networks like Facebook and Google+. Danielle also finds Tumblr distinct from other media and describes it as, "weirdly wonderful"; "I love it (...) I've had it since I was twelve. You can post GIFs, video edits, pictures, you can pretty much do anything on Tumblr, it's like weirdly wonderful, I post more original stuff on there than I do on Twitter but I also reblog people's things. It's basically like a blog website, but maybe more public, less private than a blog. They're mainly for fandoms, photography or flaunting weird interests maybe".

For Danielle, Tumblr is an "awesome" platform; one which compensates for missed learning opportunities at school and one which also becomes a site for resistance, as we will explore later. Danielle's first comments on Tumblr point to how she perceives the site as a place where she has learnt; she explains: "It's really important to me, I've learnt a lot, like a lot, from being online and from people online, like school falls short". Youth online learning has been a developing topic in academic educational research<sup>21</sup>. Interestingly, digital learning goes beyond understanding the act of learning as something that occurs only cognitively; it seeks to explain how the very digital means through which learning happens on connected networks, mediated activity and communication affordances re-shapes individual learning<sup>22</sup>.

With regards to young people, the digital tools channeling and enabling digital learning, such as laptops, tablets and mobile phones 'are embedded in the contemporary youth cultures as mediators that promote unique learning opportunities<sup>23</sup> (Ünlüsoy et al, 2013: 523). This is delineated in Danielle's narrative about Tumblr when she says; "I'm on it a lot, because I've got the app on my phone, so it's like, so immediate and fun". The accessibility and portability of this

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<sup>20</sup> Michael, Gross, "What Makes people Click?", *Current Biology*, 23 (2013): 1.

<sup>21</sup> Sandra, Calvert and Barbara, Wilson. *The Handbook of Children, Media, and Development*. Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2008.

<sup>22</sup> Elaine, Tan. "Informal Learning on "YouTube": Exploring Digital Literacy in Independent Online Learning," *Learning, Media and Technology*, 38 (2013).

<sup>23</sup> Asli, Ünlüsoy, Mariëtte De Haan, Kevin, Leander, Beate, Volker. "Learning Potential in Youth's Online Networks: A Multilevel Approach," *Computers & Education*, 68 (2013): 523.

mobile technology affords Danielle numerous cyberspatial opportunities, opportunities which have value to her because of how much she feels she has learnt on this platform. When I enquired further and asked Danielle what she has learnt on Tumblr, she replied:

“my school is...teaching things about...like, PSHE stuff, they feel that we don't really need to know any of this stuff, I've learnt almost everything from Tumblr because they have lots of, like, sexuality posts (...) anti-homophobic, and anti-sexist blogs, there are lots of feminists on Tumblr too. I use it a lot, like everyday I'm on it, it's like a sort of cool place to air your opinions and rant a little bit. I rant about school because PSHE stuff is so pointless. My friend follows me on Tumblr and she runs her blog on this sort of stuff, because she's pansexual and she posts things along those lines, she's made me think a lot about this”.

Danielle expressly talks about her disappointment that school falls short when teaching about or discussing issues around sexism, homophobia, and sexuality. Danielle's learning on the platform of Tumblr is directly oppositional to that of her school's. As Danielle perceives it, she has been exposed to this content online, and it is this online content, including her friendships within the network, that have helped her to reflect on these issues. As a consequence, Danielle has become more critical of her own school practices; this is evident when she says, “I think (...) it's helped me quite a bit because (...) it's taught me things like, I've learnt things, which have also made me think about myself, and (...) question school a bit more about, things my school hasn't taught me”. Danielle has both internalised and mediated some of her virtual discoveries in this participatory web culture.

In Danielle's experience there is an obvious rupture between the socio-cultural landscapes of school and of Tumblr, a rupture marked by the failings of school to address issues around gender, sexuality, homophobia and sexism. To this effect, Ringrose argues that ‘both online and school spaces are shaped through commodified gendered and sexualized norms and idealizations, which ‘striae’ the space’<sup>24</sup>. The striation of space indicates the relational states that characterise a place and implies that something happens in a particular way: ‘striated spaces are hierarchical, rule-

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<sup>24</sup> Jessica, Ringrose, “Beyond Discourse? Using Deleuze and Guattari's Schizoanalysis to Explore Affective Assemblages, Heterosexually Striated Space, and Lines of Flight Online and at School,” *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 43 (2011): 602.

intensive, strictly bounded and confining'<sup>25</sup>. In Danielle's experience the striation of school occurs within a relation of power that she finds disempowering and neglectful, yet the online (i.e. her Tumblr engagement) re-contextualises, re-addresses and enhances her ability to respond to these striations of space. This is further evidenced in Danielle's narrative; as she says, "my school is rubbish at teaching anything in relation to this. They haven't even started to brush against issues around consent, bisexuality, homosexuality (...) and that sort of thing and I've learnt it all from Tumblr". In understanding these issues it is important to map out the continuity of these lines of resistance, criticality and experience as they occur offline within the school context and become extended and transformed online, within social media cultures.

Furthermore, as a site of mediated resistance for Danielle, Tumblr digitally sustained ways and affordances which problematised her own identity but which also helped to materialise it in direct opposition to her school approximations around gender and sexuality. Danielle discusses some of this in the next extract; "we haven't even been taught this, we were just told once that there was straight and there was gay and there's nothing in between (...) I thought that doesn't actually really apply to me (...) Tumblr taught me even things, like, transgender, pansexual, panromantic, biromantic, gender fluid (...) So (...) it's changed the way I look at myself but it also (...) shows up how other people feel awkward about this sort of stuff". In this respect, Van Doorn<sup>26</sup> explains that 'online articulations of gender, sexuality and embodiment are intricately interwoven with people's physical embeddings in everyday life, as well as the new media technologies they employ to extend digital experiences into digital locales'. For Danielle, the everyday school culture which she experiences as limiting and undermining her own gender identity, described by her as being "biromantic asexual", has become digitally entangled with Tumblr, enabling her to digitally and materially interface her resistance to school politics through this gendered mediation of 'coming out' on Tumblr, as illustrated in the three images to follow. Danielle's older profile from June 2015 only displays her name, (anonymised by me) and her profile nickname on Tumblr, under a picture of her favourite Youtuber Dan Howell (see Illustration 1). Conversely, in later profile posts from November 2015 and early 2016, Danielle blogged a short five-lined passage which mediates her

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<sup>25</sup> Maria, Tamboukou. "Machinic Assemblages: Women, Art Education and Space," *Discourse*, 29 (2008): 360.

<sup>26</sup> Niels, Van Doorn, "Digital Spaces, Material Traces: How Matter Comes to Matter in Online Performances of Gender, Sexuality and Embodiment." *Media, Culture & Society*, 33 (2011): 532.

gender identity as 'bi' (see Illustration 2); this is also re-materialised in her profile details as they appeared in early 2016 (see Illustration 3).

Illustration 1 Danielle's older Tumblr profile page, June 2015.

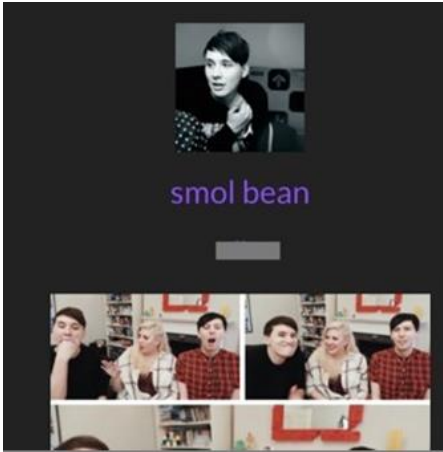


Illustration 2 Danielle's Tumblr post on her identity, November, 2015



Illustration 3 Danielle's Tumblr online profile, January, 2016



There is a tangible relationship between the digital and physical instances of Danielle's materialisation of her gender identity on Tumblr. Danielle encountered a politics of schooling which, when interjected with her Tumblr online engagements, seemed constraining and restricting, since Tumblr offered the capacities that she was looking for to express her own views on gender and on her own identity, as we can see from the images in the previous section. The later online actualisations, digital learning and interactions on Tumblr served as an example of the 'immaterial potential of the virtual': the possible-online which did not seem possible offline, which in Danielle's

narrative became ‘materially actualised in the form of digital objects’<sup>27</sup> such as pictures, text and imagery - in the form of her post, her profile changes, and her online identity work. This identity work is by no means static, nor finished, and continues online and offline; it continues in a space that Danielle retraces and striates with friends and family: “everyone on Tumblr is like accepting and stuff, so I can be more open about stuff. I’ve great friends on Tumblr. Like my mum says that this stuff is unreal, how much I know and the words I come up with. So lately we’ve talked about me being biromantic asexual and she’s also learning from me”.

This mediatisation of resistance to school politics and gender-materiality online became embodied on the digital space of Tumblr, yet these mediatisations are also entanglements of school culture, the affordances of Tumblr, and Danielle’s experiences. This mediated assemblage has relationalities, temporalities, and intensities which traverse both school and online socio-spatialities in Danielle’s story. Through the ‘specific time/space events’ as explored in the article it is possible to explore how ‘the internet, including instant messaging and social networking sites, appears to intensify existing affective relations’<sup>28</sup> which encompass the actualisation of gender in Danielle’s experience. The online content on Tumblr and her own identity work have opened up new responsibilities for Danielle to resist constrained learning at school, access feminist knowledge online and forge an identity for herself which seemed at odds with her school’s culture.

### ***Suggested Assignments***

- The chapter lends itself to being discussed in schools and in educational environments where the teaching of issues around gender and sexuality might be opaque or neglected. The content might be openly discussed with an audience of young people who are familiar with using social media platforms, such as Tumblr.

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<sup>27</sup> Niels, Van Doorn, “Digital Spaces, Material Traces: How Matter Comes to Matter in Online Performances of Gender, Sexuality and Embodiment.” *Media, Culture & Society*, 33 (2011): 534.

<sup>28</sup> Jessica, Ringrose, “Beyond Discourse? Using Deleuze and Guattari’s Schizoanalysis to Explore Affective Assemblages, Heterosexually Striated Space, and Lines of Flight Online and at School,” *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 43 (2011): 602.

- In order to generate lively analyses and debates, students can be split into two groups; with one group to be asked to discuss and list the ways in which social networking sites might be used as instruments of social surveillance and the other group to discuss and list the ways in which social networking sites might be liberating, informational and empowering.
- Further questions might include: what kinds of knowledges are disseminated online on the social media networks known or used by students? How are these various knowledges disseminated through the various networks? How do these knowledges vary from the systems of knowledge as experienced in educational institutions?

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