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## Young bodies, power and resistance: a new materialist perspective

Pam Alldred<sup>a</sup> and Nick J. Fox<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Clinical Sciences, Brunel University London, London, UK; <sup>b</sup>ScHARR, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK

### ABSTRACT

Portrayals of young people as either victims or perpetrators of errant, aberrant or even dangerous attitudes, desires or behaviours may be criticised for obscuring the relations of power within which young bodies are socially and physically located. However, notions of 'resistance' to power within these critiques remain under-theorised. In this theoretical paper we take a new materialist approach to explore the affectivity of young bodies, and the flows and intensities that produce and reproduce power and resistance, and what young bodies can do, feel and desire. To illustrate young bodies' resistances, we offer the example of the transgressive pro-ana movement that resists both biomedical and social definitions of anorexia. We conclude there is a need to focus upon 'resisting' as an affective movement of becoming, rather than upon 'resistance' as an agentic act, with consequences both for young bodies, theory, research and activism.

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## Introduction

Young people's bodies are generally either celebrated or problematised within social scientific accounts (Alldred and Fox 2015; Renold and Ringose 2013, 247; Youdell and McGimpsey 2015, 124). In the former, adolescence and early adulthood are typified as a period of both 'innocence' and maturation, with children regarded as 'human becoming' (Alanen 1990): unformed individuals possessing great future potential. Children subsequently transition from an under-developed body and identity into an adult mode possessing both physical and social capacities, including capacities for 'mature' sexual relations (Frye et al. 2014; Moscheta, McNamee, and Santos 2013, 51). Such a celebratory perspective also underpins humanistic efforts to support and encourage young people on this journey into adulthood (Veugelers 2011). Problematised young bodies are treated in these accounts, by contrast, either as at risk themselves or as inherently dangerous to others (Foucault 1981, 104; Sharland 2006, 247–248). These negative discourses are notable particularly when it comes to areas of young people's lives such as sexuality, in which young bodies are regarded as a danger to themselves or others (Holland

**CONTACT** Nick J. Fox  n.j.fox@sheffield.ac.uk

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et al. 1998, 194; Mendelson and Letourneau 2015; Ronay and von Hippel 2010). Anxieties over substance abuse, sexting and cybersex (Benotsch et al. 2013; Levine 2013; Mitchell et al. 2014), and the use of pornography by teenagers (Bale 2011) reflect this general unease about young bodies and their behaviour.

Sociologically, these perspectives on young bodies may be criticised for how they generate under-theorised 'empowerment' and 'protectionist' policy agendas respectively, for example in relation to sex education (Alldred and David 2007, 9). Both are based in essentialist, individualistic and anthropocentric conceptions of young people's agency. Both reflect a dualistic social ontology that emphasises either (in the case of celebratory perspectives) the self-actualising capacities of agency or – when it comes to problematising accounts – the determining impositions of social structures (Coffey and Farrugia 2014). More fundamentally, they are based upon implicit theories of 'power' and 'resistance', concepts that have been central to social analysis over the past 20 years (Fox 2012; Turner 1992, 20).<sup>1</sup>

Our aim in this theoretical paper is to offer a more nuanced understanding of the interactions between young bodies and their social and physical contexts, and how these contexts mediate relations of power and resistance. We will draw upon a 'new materialist' perspective (Coole and Frost 2010; Fox and Alldred 2017), which it has been argued supplies social science with an ontological perspective that is transversal to a range of dualisms, including culture/nature, mind/matter, agency/structure and indeed realism/constructionism (van der Tuin and Dolphijn 2010). We shall suggest that by re-theorising power and resistance this materialist perspective provides a means to cut across a dualism that has turned the young body into either a problem or a site of celebration, and underpinned a policy response that seeks to be either empowering or protectionist (Youdell and McGimpsey 2015). We begin by setting out the principles of new materialist ontology, with which some readers may not be familiar, and then apply this framework to develop a materialist understanding of power and resistance. We illustrate this approach briefly using Nick's research into the pro-ana movement, and conclude with a reflection on what a materialist approach means for understanding young bodies, power and resistance.

## New materialism and social theory

In the humanities and social sciences, 'new materialism' has become a shorthand term to denote a range of perspectives that have in common a 'turn to matter' (as opposed to a focus upon texts and language in post-structuralism), and that emphasise the materiality of the world and everything – social and natural – within it. Drawing on a very wide range of disparate philosophical, feminist and social theory perspectives (Coole and Frost 2010, 5; Lemke 2014), the new materialisms recognise materiality as plural and complex, uneven and contingent, relational and emergent (Coole and Frost 2010, 29). Importantly, they do not recapitulate Marxist sociology's 'historical materialism' that regarded an economic base as the foundational driver for social relations. By contrast, new materialists consider that the world and history are produced by a range of material forces that extend from the physical and the biological to the psychological, social and cultural (Barad 1996, 181; Braiddotti 2013, 3; Latour 2005).

The distinctive ontology advocated by new materialist scholars has been described as 'flat' or 'monist' (as opposed to 'dualist'), rejecting differences not only between Marx's

(1971) conception of ‘base’ and ‘superstructure’, but also between ‘natural’ and ‘cultural’ realms, human and non-human, and – perhaps most significantly – between mind and matter (van der Tuin and Dolphijn 2010). By challenging any distinction between the materiality of the physical world and the social constructs of human thoughts and desires, it opens up the possibility to explore how each affects the other, and how things other than humans (for instance, a tool, a technology or a building) can be social ‘agents’, making things happen. New materialist sociology is thus ‘post-anthropocentric’ (Braidotti 2011, 327), shifting humans from the central focus of sociological attention, and facilitating a posthuman sociology that can engage productively with the world beyond the human: with other living things, and with the wider environment of matter and things.

New materialism’s flat ontology also marks the rejection of any sense of social structures (for instance, ‘patriarchy’, ‘neo-liberalism’ or ‘masculinity’) as ‘explanations’ of how societies and cultures work (Latour 2005, 130). There are no structures, no systems and no mechanisms at work in new materialist ontology; instead there are ‘events’; an endless cascade of events comprising the material effects of both nature and culture that together produce the world and human history. Exploring the relational character of these events and their physical, biological and expressive composition becomes the means for sociology to explain the continuities, fluxes and ‘becomings’ that produce the world around us.

To develop the features of new materialism that impact upon power and resistance, we will use the well-developed and widely-applied conceptual framework deriving from Deleuze’s (1988) materialist reading of Spinoza, as developed and applied in the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1984, 1988), by social and feminist scholars such as Braidotti (2006), DeLanda (2006), Grosz (1994) and Thrift (2004), and in empirical social science by Fox and Alldred (2013, 2015), Renold and Ringrose (2011), Youdell and Armstrong (2011) and others. This DeleuzoGuattarian approach is predicated upon three propositions, concerning relationality; agency; and the effects of power and resistance on bodies.

Firstly, new materialism asserts the fundamental *relationality* of all matter: bodies, things and social formations gain their apparent ‘is-ness’ only through their relationship to other similarly contingent and ephemeral bodies, things and ideas (Deleuze 1988, 123; Haraway 1991, 201). Actions and events are *assemblages* (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, 88) of these relations that develop ‘in a kind of chaotic network of habitual and non-habitual connections, always in flux, always reassembling in different ways’ (Potts 2004, 19). For instance a ‘sexuality-assemblage’ accrues around an event such as an erotic kiss, which comprises not just two pairs of lips but also physiological processes, personal and cultural contexts, aspects of the setting, memories and experiences, sexual codes and norms of conduct, and potentially many other relations particular to that event (Alldred and Fox 2015). These relations may be identified from empirical data, from research literature and from our understanding of the social world.

Second, a conventional conception of (human) agency is replaced with the Spinozist notion of *affect* (Deleuze 1988, 101), meaning simply the capacity to affect or be affected. All matter has an ‘agential’ capacity to *affect*, rather than being inert clay moulded by human agency, consciousness and imagination (Barad 1996, 181; Coole and Frost 2010,

2): this assessment de-privileges human agency as the means by which the social world is produced and reproduced. An affect is a 'becoming' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, 256) that represents a change of state or capacities of an entity (Massumi 1988, xvi) – this change may be physical, psychological, emotional or social. Affects produce further affective capacities within assemblages (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, 400), and because one affect can produce more than one capacity, social production is 'rhizomic' (ibid: 7) rather than linear: a branching, reversing, coalescing and rupturing flow.

Third, analysis of this relational ontology is micropolitical – at the level of assemblages, affects and capacities, as opposed to exterior forces, structures or systems. Affects within assemblages act on bodies, things and social formations to alter their capacities (to affect other relations in the assemblage) in one direction or another (Duff 2010, 625). Every body, object, idea, memory or other relation can be understood as a *territory*, produced and fought over by an economy (Clough 2004) of rival affects within assemblages. Deleuze and Guattari (1988) describe two types of micropolitical movements that may occur in assemblages. Affect economies may 'territorialise' (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, 88–89) or 'specify' (Fox and Alldred 2017) the capacities of bodies or other relations – things, social formations, thoughts or feelings. Conversely, if an affect economy 'de-territorialises' (or 'generalises') a body, it may open up new possibilities for what it can do, feel or desire. On occasions this may produce a *line of flight* (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, 9) from a current state or identity into a new realm of novel assemblages.

While some specifying affects may aggregate relations (Deleuze and Guattari (1984, 286) called these aggregative forces 'molar'), other affects are non-aggregative or 'singular' ('molecular' in Deleuze and Guattari's (ibid) vocabulary), affecting a single relation in a unique way. So, for example, naming a new pet kitten is a singular specifying affect, while categorising it as tabby or tortoiseshell is aggregative. Sociologically, aggregative forces include systems of thought or discourses, orthodoxies, evaluative categorisations, codifications, cultural norms and so forth (Fox and Alldred 2013, 776; Potts 2004, 20), all of which are mediated within assemblages by the ideas, concepts, thoughts and feelings that affect actions and interactions. Together these two processes of specification/generalisation and aggregation/dis-aggregation constitute the micropolitics of assemblage affect-economies.

With this framework for a new materialist approach established (henceforth, for conciseness, we drop the 'new' qualifier), we are now in a position to apply this ontology to empirical data on young bodies. Our materialist approach will consider young bodies within a 'web of forces, intensities and encounters' (Braidotti 2006, 41) between human and non-human elements that produce multiple specifying and aggregating effects on the bodies of young people, but also, importantly, continual challenges, fragmentations and resistances to these specifications and aggregations. This analysis shifts attention away from human bodies and individuals, on to the intra-actions (Barad 1996, 179) within material assemblages of bodies, things, ideas and social institutions, and focuses upon the micropolitics of constraining forces on bodies, and the capacities these assemblages produce in bodies (Fox 2012; Fox and Alldred 2013). Later in this paper we illustrate how empirical research can be used to identify relations, affect, assemblages and capacities, to provide a micropolitics of bodies. This latter supplies a novel perspective on power and resistance, particularly as they impinge upon young people, but more generally as key aspects of social theory.

## Power: a materialist analysis

Issues of social order and disorder, and of how social continuity is sustained and how change may be effected, depend substantially upon social theories of the connected topics of power and resistance (Boudon 1991; Dale and Kalob 2006). Questions include: what is the nature of power and how does it work? Why and how do people resist power, and where is resistance located? Early sociological ruminations upon power considered it to be a coercive, 'top-down' phenomenon. Weber (1968, 53) regarded power as a dynamic struggle between an individual or group's aspirations to achieve specific goals and others' resistance to these aspirations. Marx identified power in the control exerted by the capitalist class and capitalist state over the means of economic production, at the expense of the working class (Nigam 1996, 9; van Krieken 1991, 9). Later generations of sociologists have drawn on these rival notions, forging Marx-inspired conflict models that have regarded society as an ongoing struggle between the powerful and the dispossessed, while Weberian perspectives have informed sociological studies of social organisation in a complex modern society (Clegg 1990, 157–158). For others, power has been seen as an essential and positive feature of social life. Thus, for Parsons (1963, 232, 236), it was a necessary medium circulating through society, enabling a complex society to work effectively and resistance to be managed.

Post-structuralists deemed such top-down structuralist and functionalist analyses of power and resistance inadequate to make sense of the disparate power relations they saw in modern societies, or to supply a critical and radical stance to underpin struggles for social justice and plurality (Bonnell and Hunt 1999, 8; Dean 2010; van Krieken 1991, 17–19). Notable within this critique was Foucault's (1980) association of power with knowledge, and of technologies of power such as surveillance and archiving records. Foucault's earlier work focused on institutions such as schools, hospitals, prisons and work-places, which he argued incorporated disciplinary regimes of surveillance and body control as a means to regulate and modify behaviour, and to produce 'docile bodies' (Fox 2012, 134–136; Foucault 1979, 11; Lupton 1997, 101). His later work revealed an even more disseminated power, in which citizens policed or governed their own conduct, thoughts and desires against societal codes and ethics, in a range of daily practices such as sexuality, spirituality and diet (Foucault 1988, 18; Rose 1998, 1999).

An astute understanding of power and resistance is critical for the pursuit of social change and transformation, and to address injustices or inequalities, whether by practice, by influencing policy, or through activism (Fox and Alldred 2017, 177). However, as we have noted, materialist ontology rejects any sense of 'another level' of structures, systems or mechanisms working behind the scenes to establish order or produce regularities in social life. Instead, it applies a flat or 'monistic' understanding of social ontology, in which it is the events all around us – and nothing else – that produces the social world from minute to minute, year by year (Latour 2005). Consequently, if we are to apply a materialist ontology, power can no longer be treated as an external imposition by economic and social forces upon people's actions and lives, or as some kind of amorphous 'stuff' that somehow permeates the social world and the interactions that it comprises. Power, in materialism's flat ontology, must be *integral* to what goes on in this daily round of events, and must be treated as a disseminated phenomenon, which is revealed and deployed at the very local level of actions and events. In this perspective, phenomena

that sociologists have described as ‘power’ are nothing more nor less than the micropolitical interactions between assembled relations, as they affect and are affected (Braidotti 2013, 188–189; Patton 2000, 52).

So if we are to understand the working of power (and of resistance to power) from a materialist perspective, we need to research its operation locally and *micropolitically*. Rather than ‘explaining’ social processes by claiming the workings of structural or systemic power (Latour 2005, 130–131), this requires a focus upon events, actions and intra-actions between assembled relations. Power needs to be treated as a transient, fluctuating phenomena – a momentary exercise by one relation over another. Only if replicated in multiple events over time and space, does it acquire a more regular patterning, which in traditional sociology has then been seen as a thing in its own right (for instance, as ‘patriarchy’ or ‘neoliberalism’). However, this regularity is illusory: power has continuity only as long as it is replicated in the next event, and the one after that, and may quickly evaporate as and when the affects in an assemblage change.

Thus, for example, the gendered expressions of power and oppression between young people in school settings cannot be explained by invoking abstracted structural forces such as ‘patriarchy’ or ‘hegemonic masculinity’ as explanations. Rather we need to explore the micropolitics of material forces and intensities operating within the daily round of events in and out of the classroom (Alldred and Fox 2015), and how these establish relatively stable social forms. So, for instance, a repeated categorisation (aggregation) of bodies as ‘female’ or ‘black’ supplies the foundation for repeated exercises of power, and indeed the basis for sexism or racism (Fox and Alldred 2017, 63). Such an analysis requires that empirical researchers attend closely to apparent regularities in the dispositions of power (for instance around gender or sexualities), to explore in depth the affects and assemblages that produce and reproduce repeated or consistent capacities in human and non-human, and hence particular manifestations of power.

What then of resistance? Sociologists have always recognised the intimate association between power and resistance – where there is one, there is also the other, almost by definition (Lupton 1997, 102). This opposition of power and resistance has been underpinned by one of sociology’s favourite dualisms, between *structure* and *agency* (DeLanda 2006, 10). Indeed, resistance has sometimes been conceptualised as the response of a plucky human agent, unwilling to be ground down by the coercive powers of social structures or Weber’s (1964, 338) ‘iron cage’ of bureaucracy, or by the daily grind of employed work (Marx and Engels 1952, 52). As such it is foundational to humanistic and romantic conceptualisations of the human condition (Raby 2005, 153), though it is also widely applied in a range of critical and ‘engaged’ social science positions, from feminist, queer and post-colonial activism to post-structuralist and critical realist social theory (Braidotti 2011, 268; Foucault 1980, 56; Game 1991, 29; Raby 2005, 154; Thomas and Davies 2005).

What these disparate approaches have in common, as Raby’s (2005) typology of social models of resistance reveals, is the anthropocentric underpinning to how resistance has been conceptualised, with human bodies – or aspects of human culture such as language – taking centre stage in countering the exercise of power. Such anthropocentrism has been a target for new materialist and posthuman scholars such as Barad (2003) and Braidotti (2013), who have sought to de-centre humans in favour of a more generalised focus upon matter and its affectivity. The new materialist understanding that we have just set out, of power as a nexus of disseminated affects that may be either enabling or

constraining (in terms of the capacities they produce), articulates this post-anthropocentric and posthuman ontology. We would argue that we must necessarily also seek understanding of 'resistance' at this micropolitical level of events and assemblages.

As a brief illustration of how power and resistance may be understood from within this materialist approach, and what opportunities this ontology supplies, we now examine the micropolitics of power and resistance in Nick's empirical study (Fox, Ward, and O'Rourke 2005) of resisting young bodies in the 'pro-anorexia' or 'pro-ana' movement.

### Illustration: resistance and the pro-anorexia assemblage

Anorexia nervosa is a medical diagnosis most often applied to young females who use fasting and stringent food restriction to achieve a radically slim body shape (Wolf 1991). It is perceived by health professionals as a highly dangerous condition; by social psychologists as a problem of self-esteem, identity development or familial relations; and by social scientists and feminists as a reaction against Western cultural preoccupations with female body shape and/or patriarchy (Bordo 1993). The pro-anorexia or 'pro-ana' movement is a radical and largely socially-unacceptable response to these perspectives that subsists within a shadowy world of semi-underground chat rooms and web sites. It has suffered a powerful media backlash, being characterised as encouraging 'normal' and 'healthy' girls and women to adopt anorexia as a glorified diet (Dias 2003; Doward and Reilly 2003).

Nick's ethnographic study of pro-ana Internet communities and websites during the 2000s (Fox, Ward, and O'Rourke 2005) offered a sociological analysis of the movement as a challenge to, and a rejection of medical, social and feminist models that regard anorexia as a condition to be 'cured'. It focused on the pseudonymous '*Anagrrl*' website and forum, which – despite having been closed down (subsequently re-opening under different names) several times – was a thriving, supportive and lively community at the time of the research. The users – who posted on a daily basis to multiple 'threads' – were overwhelmingly female, mostly between 17 and 20, in full time education or working part time, and predominantly from the US, UK, New Zealand and Australia. The data collection approach used was 'virtual participant observation: the project's research officer subscribed to *Anagrrl*, announced her 'presence', and explained that she was researching Internet web fora supporting weight loss. She participated actively in the forum, asking questions of message board participants; some responded to the questions via the message board (posts quoted below are verbatim), while others chose to e-mail her directly, leading to in-depth online interviews; a total of 20 participants were interviewed by these various methods.

This study found that participants in the pro-ana movement saw anorexia as a legitimate way to assert some control over the problems and troubles of daily life, and one that could be sustained while at the same time remaining physically healthy. In a disturbed life, the 'anti-recovery' perspective of the pro-ana movement provided its members with a safe and positive place to share experience and gain further insight into their condition, away from the specifying and aggregating judgements, gaze and scrutiny of parents, boy-friends, husbands and the medical profession. The site offered an array of information relating to anorexia and the pro-ana movement, recipes to promote healthy anorectic eating, advice on nutritional supplements to sustain well-being, and so-called '*thinspiration*': photographs of slim celebrities to inspire and sustain anorectic behaviour. An



asynchronous message forum provided a busy interactive area where participants exchanged ideas, provided support and shared experiences, achievements and perceived failings. It was described by some participants as a 'sanctuary' where they were not continually pressured to eat and gain weight, while the website creator 'Lily' described pro-ana as a means to enable participants to take an active role in living with what society considered a debilitating, dangerous and shameful disease.

This data has been fully reported elsewhere (Fox, Ward, and O'Rourke 2005), and we do not recapitulate the analysis here; instead we consider the data in terms of the 'pro-ana assemblage' and the possibilities for resistance that it provided to those in the movement. To this end, and following the DeleuzoGuattarian ontology outlined earlier, we compare and contrast 'anorexia-assemblages' and 'pro-ana-assemblages. Close reading of the data from Nick's study and elsewhere may be used to populate these assemblages with their relations and affect economies.<sup>2</sup> So, for example, the interview data and the literature provide us with the human and non-human relations within an 'anorexia-assemblage'. This comprises at least (and in no particular order):

body – personal troubles – food – diet – social environment – cultural forces – significant others

This assemblage produces various capacities to do and feel in anorexic bodies: most immediately weight loss, but also control over the body and possibly a means to escape from personal troubles. This, for example, was one respondent's reflection on the capacities (for people to care about or attend to her, or to be more attractive) that anorexia had produced in her body:

I'm adopted, and my whole family is white, while I'm Asian. I had/have a lot of issues circling around feelings of abandonment, which I partially translated into 'no one loves me ... not even my real parents' type stuff. I know it might not be true, but it's the way I internalised stuff. I wanted to have people care about me ... even if it was just boys on a physical level. And I did get a lot more attention. And it felt awesome. So I guess that's it. Partially to be more aesthetically appealing, partially [because] I didn't feel I was good enough for anyone to care.

For another, the potential line of flight from troubles was more radical:

I don't want to die to escape my ed [eating disorder], I want to die to escape life. But, I'm trying to meet life head on, I use my ed to bolster me through. But, I know if I ever let go I will never make it as far as I was meant to be.

Beyond the 'core' of relations in the anorexia-assemblage noted above, there may be many other relations in the assemblage. For example, if an anorexic person come to the attention of parents and health professionals then biomedical ideas, re-feeding diets and regimes, treatment strategies, health facilities and even genetics may become part of the assemblage; if involved with psychotherapy or counselling, the assemblage may include psychological perspectives on self-esteem, empowerment, social development and so forth. However, the data from the study suggested that while the people in the pro-ana movement may have been previously caught up in these medical, psychological or feminist assemblages, their involvement in the movement drew them into a distinctive pro-ana assemblage with very different flows and specifications. Based on analysis of the interviews to reveal relations and affects, a pro-ana assemblage may be summarised as:

body – food – diet – pro-ana philosophy – other anorexic people – thinspiration – recipes – health

While medical, psychological and feminist assemblages aimed to help sufferers to recover from an illness by gaining weight and addressing the underlying causes of disordered eating, this pro-ana assemblage afforded people with anorexia a capacity *not* to recover. Now the objective was to maintain both low body weight and good health, through a balanced diet and the use of dietary supplements, and within a supportive environment of like-minded people who recognised anorexia as a legitimate response to the troubles of daily life, as one interviewed respondent remarked:

I joined a pro-recovery site and they were all trying the proper support in a recovery type position - but they had an article on pro-ana and I looked into it - at first just to get some triggering pics and stuff, but came across this site and have found on the whole that the support I receive on there is much better than the support I received on the other . . . . Maybe one day I will be "ready" for recovery but i certainly am not yet - and I am sick and I like to know there are people out there who feel the same way as me.

Another respondent reflected on the guiding philosophy behind pro-ana:

We should not be in favour of the disease that kills thousands of girls a year, rather in favour of the girls and boys who have this horrible disease and help them the best way they can . . . whether it be by giving support to start another fast or advice on the 'healthiest' way to handle low calories.

The materialist ontology we are using here seems particularly appropriate in a case study where 'matter' is so central: for anorexic people the body is 'matter out of place' (Douglas 1984), and losing body mass is a means (as one participant put it) to 'sink from view', out of lives that seem fraught with troubles. Whereas relations in biomedical or other traditional approaches to resolving anorexia aim to specify and thereby reverse these desires, the physical and conceptual relations in the pro-ana assemblage produce different circulations and flows of matter that supply the capacities to keep pro-anas alive and anorexic.

This materialist analysis provides an empirical means to delve inside the differing anorexia and pro-ana assemblages, to understand in detail what kinds of relations between human and non-human they mark out, and in particular to examine the differing movements of power and resistance that they represent. We can discern two micropolitical movements of resistance operating in this case study of pro-ana. Participants in the study described anorexia as itself a resistance: a micropolitical way for young people to gain some degree of control over lives beset by outside forces (powers) about which they could do little. Anorexia may be understood micropolitically as an alteration in the affect-economy of the food-body assemblage that enabled young people control over at least one element of an environment that was otherwise uncontrollable and oppressive.

Secondly, the practices and perspectives of those involved in the pro-ana movement were a reaction against forces within the mainstream that attempt to re-specify people with anorexia back into a normative body shape through feeding or psychotherapy. If anorexia is a resistance against life and its troubles, becoming-anorexic produces a new onslaught of material forces that impinge on the anorexic body, ranging from concerned family to medical interventions. What this case study revealed was a novel response to this battery of forces. Rather than becoming 'expert patients' within a medical or

biopsychosocial explanatory model of anorexia, pro-anas used the re-specifications provided by the pro-ana resources (recipes, thinspiration, support) to oppose material forces that would lead to weight gain, and to establish both an alternative way of being anorexic *and* a 'line of flight' away from the troubles of daily life.

In both these movements of resistance, a materialist analysis requires that we focus upon the micropolitics of the assemblages within which anorexic bodies are a part. However, in each, we conceptualise resistance not as a 'negative' reaction to power; instead it should be seen as an *enhancement* of body capacities to act or feel. These capacities are the outcomes of introducing new affects into assemblages, in ways that reduce existing forces ('power'), and open up new possibilities for action and subjectivity, of becoming-other and lines of flight away from earlier constraints on capacities. Like power, resistance is processual and transitory, and fully part of material affectivity. We explore this assessment further in the concluding section.

### Discussion: resistance and micropolitics

This illustration suggests that from within the materialist perspective that we have developed here, both power and resistance may be understood as part of the same phenomenon: namely, as reflections of event/assemblage micropolitics. 'Power' and 'resistance' must be explained in terms of the particular relations in events, with no recourse to 'another level' of social structures or mechanisms where power circulates and against which resistance acts. What has conventionally been termed 'resistance' may be understood in terms of a flux of affects that produces micropolitical effects contrary to power or control (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, 216), whether as organised or more haphazard and random resistance – moments as well as movements. This analysis of resistance in terms of affects complements our earlier assessment of 'power' in terms of the affects between assembled relations: power and resistance are differing aspects of the affective flux between relations in particular assemblages; all events are consequently sites in which both 'power' and 'resistance' may be discerned.

Furthermore, a shift away from regarding ontologically-prior entities (for instance, a body, food, a skinny celebrity, a social institution) as sources of power or resistance means recognising instead that such relations (human and non-human) gain their capacities to act consequent upon other relations and affects within a particular event or action. Resistance is not a state of being, but something that is processual and transitory. This undermines both anthropocentrism and notions of a fixed or stable reality in which power is asserted and resistance mounted. The fluctuating character of assemblage micropolitics acknowledges that 'power' and 'resistance' wax and wane, shift and reverse continually. Consequently we need to seek and explore resistance not in social movements or in political or philosophical propositions, but in the fluctuating micropolitics of daily actions and encounters between people, things and social formations.

The pro-ana example that we have used in this paper illustrates this. Events are shaped by transitory affects such as pressure upon an anorexic person attending a family meal to eat (which might be labelled as an exercise of 'power'), or the use of thinspirational images to help a person fast (labelled as 'resistance'). These labels offer the impression of much more concerted social processes, whereas often the flux of forces in assemblages can shift the capacities of bodies or collections of bodies from moment to moment. Analysing

an event in terms of its affects, capacities and consequent micropolitics requires us to move beyond these shorthand concepts to focus upon affects, and to unpack precisely how relations intra-act in assemblages and what the consequences are for the capacities of both human and non-human relations. As a person moves from an 'anorexia-assemblage' event (such as a family mealtime when they try to avoid eating) to a 'pro-ana assemblage' event (for instance, an online discussion an hour later about how to manage hunger pangs), the fluctuating affect economy between bodies, food, diets, family members, thinspiration and so on shifts (specifies) bodily and other capacities from moment to moment.

This micropolitical assessment requires some caution however, as it would be simplistic to substitute 'power' with specification and aggregation, and 'resistance' with movements of generalisation and dis-aggregation. Though specification and aggregation are often the means whereby relations in assemblages assert control and thus power over other relations, we cannot assume that resistance is always associated with generalisation and dis-aggregation. For example, anyone can trade with anyone in the contemporary 'neoliberal' free market, meaning that a capitalist market-place is actually a radically generalised space, in contrast to other social arrangements such as feudalism (Deleuze and Guattari 1984, 222). Resisting the forces of the free market in such circumstances may actually entail individual consumers aggregating together and self-specifying as a 'workers' collective' that refuses to accept the anarchy of the marketplace.

It is therefore more accurate to see power and resistance as dual fluxes that permeate all assemblages, a shifting balance that is never finally settled. Defining a certain affect as an assertion of power or an effort at resistance is less important than assessing the capacities that these affects produce. Rather than presenting certain events as examples of coercive or disciplinary power, and others as instances of resistance, the task of a materialist sociology is to bring its micropolitical concepts and tools to bear upon the daily actions and encounters between people, things and social formations. We can ask of any affect: does it close down capacities or open them up?

This question addresses those foundational sociological questions that we are considering in this paper, concerning order and disorder, continuity and change. Our analysis has effectively dissolved both sides of the power/resistance dualism, resolving both into the flows of affects between material relations that make assemblages do whatever they do, and the micropolitical processes of specification/generalisation and aggregation/dis-aggregation. This materialist, DeleuzoGuattarian ontology has three radical consequences for the way power and resistance are studied. First, it disconnects a theory of power and resistance from a simplistic opposition of 'human agency' and 'social structure', as in much conventional sociological analysis. Second, by replacing an emphasis upon ontologically-prior entities (for instance, a body, food, a skinny celebrity) with a focus on the ways an event or an action draws disparate relations into assemblage, it places in question notions of a fixed stable reality in which power is asserted and resistance mounted. Third, attention to the micropolitics and microphysics of assemblages means that all that needs to be understood about power or resistance can be explained in terms of the ways any relation affects or is affected, that is, in terms of the forces circulating in assemblage and the consequent capacities that are produced in assembled relations, including human bodies and subjectivities.

We do not deny of course that there may be continuity to social processes (for example, the troubles with living described by the pro-ana young people in the illustration) – continuities that have led social scientists to develop concepts such as neo-liberalism, patriarchy, biomedicine, hegemonic masculinity and so on to describe power structures and systems. But rather than presenting events as examples of coercive or disciplinary power, what may be important is to document how transient assemblages are stabilised, what material forces enable certain relations to consistently specify others, and how bodies are forced to resist in more and more obscure and desperate ways.

This paper set out to explore young people and resistance but we conclude by commending phraseology that emphasises ‘resisting’ as a process, an affective movement, rather than ‘resistance’ as some kind of agentic attribute of a body.<sup>3</sup> We would argue in conclusion that this perspective on power and resistance forges a way beyond realist and constructionist accounts. It overcomes the theoretical limitations of realism that tend to essentialise young people and their bodies either as problems or as sources of resistance, and the epistemological relativism of post-structuralism or constructionism that constrains direct engagement with policy or activism founded in essentialism.<sup>4</sup> Nor does it privilege ‘micro’ and resistance over ‘macro’ and power, or vice versa.

The value of the materialist approach rests in understanding humans as part of a material, micropolitical field, and their capacities as always contingent, produced and reproduced by the ever-changing fluxes in assemblages. The materialist ontology we have used here supplies opportunities to explore the materialities of young people’s lives, to make sense of the affects in the events and actions in their lives, and to document the how, where and what of resisting bodies (cf. Skott-Myhre 2002). At the same time, it sets up a materialist basis for us to engage with policy and activism<sup>5</sup> (Fox and Alldred 2017), to confront oppression, exploitation and violence, inequalities and injustices, and to consider the possibilities for affective movements that may produce radical becoming-other (Bignall 2010, 23–24) or ‘lines of flight’ (Patton 2000, 66).

## Notes

1. As Raby (2005) has noted – the precise meanings of these terms have varied widely, contingent upon the ontological commitments of their users, from idealism to realism, and from essentialism to post-structuralism.
2. See Fox and Alldred (2015) for a fuller description of this new materialist data analytical method, whereby empirical data and other sources are read closely to provide details of relations and affects in assemblages and the capacities these produce.
3. Post-structuralism questioned the idea of a coercive ‘top-down’ power, arguing instead the power in the contemporary world is disciplinary or governmental, productive of subjectivities and dispositions (Fox 1993, 27–28; Foucault 1979; Rose 1999). We consider that the materialist perspective we have developed to analyse young bodies in this paper goes further, to criticise as reification a notion of power as something that ‘acts on actions’ (Foucault 2000, 340), and similarly to question ‘resistance’ as a ‘thing’ that stands against this reified power.
4. See, for example, Fox and Bale (forthcoming) on the opportunities afforded by a materialist approach to ‘sexualisation’ to move beyond both realist campaigns to protect young people from sexualising media and pornography, and constructionist critiques of these campaigns as paternalistic and de-politicised.
5. A monist basis for activism must necessarily step away from any conception of agentic activists struggling against structural or systemic oppression (as conceptualised in conflict theories and critical realism). Both power and activist resistance operate micropolitically – at

the level of events. As we have argued earlier in this paper; both are transient, fluctuating exercises of affectivity by one relation over another; apparent regularities or continuities in power (for instance, patriarchal power of one gender over another, or a 'hegemonic' masculinity at work in boys' interactions) depend upon continued replication of particular affects between assembled relations. This perspective on activism indeed treats power as far less intractable, and chimes with activist arguments to 'think global, act local' (Fox and Alldred 2017; Bignall 2010; Svirsky 2010).

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