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The importance of vibrant materialities in transforming affective dissonance into affective solidarity: How the Countess Ablaze organized the Tits Out Collective

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Abstract

Affective solidarity is important in resisting forms of gender, race, and sexual inequalities. Previous research has highlighted the role of affective dissonance in building affective solidarity, yet most of the literature has been anthropocentric in its discussion of affect. This paper contributes by showing the importance of vibrant forms of matter in inspiring and building affective solidarity. Using affective ethnographic method, the article explores how an independent yarn dyer, the Countess Ablaze, organized affective dissonance at gender discrimination into an affective solidarity movement called the Tits Out Collective. In doing so, she energized resistance and built a powerful affective atmosphere in the global yarn community. The paper shows how the vibrancy of the materialities accelerated the building of the powerful affective atmosphere. The engagement with different materialities enabled a

June 22nd, 2018, I am tired - it has been an exhausting time, marking season, being on the wrong end of organizational change, running two streams at a conference while having no voice thanks to a throat bug, all on top of my usual caring responsibilities. I reach for one of my usual 'pick me ups' - Instagram and its beautiful pictures of yarns, patterns. What will I knit or crochet next? That always calms me. Ooh - there is a post from @harveyknits - I treasure my knit from her Ama Shawl pattern. Such a gorgeous and cleverly written pattern. She is posting something about a '#titsoutcollective' women's movement. What a name! Click through to the Countess Ablaze to find out more? Wowwhat utterly stonking colours - ginger friendly too!! Hey! Wait a minute, that is not right. How dare they behave so poorly with her? That is so insulting. I am furious, that has happened to me, that has happened to many people I know. It is ridiculous, it must stop, I am fed up with this. Ooh what a brilliant way to resist it by creating what you want and helping other people - I am hooked - count me in - let's do this together! I cannot wait for the launch of the #titsoutcollective on July the 1st so I can join in. My imagination is running riot on what I can make with those colours!

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global community of women to participate in shared resistance while honoring their own subjectivities, something previous work has identified as problematic. The paper also contributes by opening a discussion of the costs of organizing affective solidarity, detailing the intensities of leading such movements, that can be exposing and increase vulnerabilities. Therefore, it may be inevitable that affective solidarity is precarious and ephemeral.

KEYWORDS

affective dissonance, affective solidarity, fiber sector, qualitative, vibrant matter

1 | INTRODUCTION

Affective solidarity is important in promoting women's equality, as it strengthens relations between the oppressed and gives impetus for action (Johnson, 2020). Examples of affective solidarity movements that formed to resist oppression include Everyday Sexism (Vachhani & Pullen, 2019), #MeToo (Edwards et al., 2019), and the Pussy Hat Protest (Black, 2017). In each of these examples, women felt dissonance between how they ought to be treated and their lived experiences (Hemmings, 2012). The dissonance created an affective energy leading the women to connect in solidarity to voice their dissonance and challenge transgressions. However, previous research has identified problems in achieving and organizing solidarity, such as subjectivities not being respected (Butler, 1990) and the individualization, privatization, and globalization of contemporary life (Mohanty, 2003). As a result, concepts of solidarity are shifting from attempts at institutionalization (Funke, 2014) to more inclusive ideas that both respect subjectivities and the pursuit of a common political goal (Allen, 1999; Strauß & Fleischmann, 2020). This enables research to focus instead on how dissonance is recognized then transformed into solidarity "against the odds" (Hemmings, 2012, p. 158), aiding progress against oppression. However, so far authors have mainly considered relations between people in this transformation process, and not addressed how non-human actants participate in how affective dissonance is recognized and transformed into affective solidarity. This article takes a new materialist approach (Bennett, 2010) to expand the discussion from its anthropocentric focus by exploring different materialities in the building of creative, vibrant affective atmospheres that attract people's attunement. The intention is to provide a deeper understanding of the transition from affective dissonance to affective solidarity, taking on board a more subtle reading of affect than is present so far in the literature.

Affect is read in this paper as an intensity, that is, not entirely knowable, defying conscious thought (Anderson, 2009); however, we can all feel and radiate intensities in a mood, an atmosphere, something visceral or a "flow of resonances" (Åhäll, 2018). Affect is experienced through social encounters that take place within specific contexts (Seyfert, 2012). Affect entails ambiguities (Anderson, 2014), it is transversal or crosses boundaries (Massumi, 2002), and retains a liminal in-betweenness (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010), making it difficult or even impossible to categorize. For example, although emotion is synonymous with affect (Brennan, 2004), emotion is just part of a wider concept of flows of affect that connect different materialities through social relations (Fox, 2015). Any materiality, human or non-human, has the capacity to affect others and for others to affect them (Anderson, 2014). Seemingly inanimate, mundane materialities can form vibrancies in affective flows (Bennett, 2004). Such flows can unfold in relations in multiple, unpredictable ways (Lakämper, 2017). Flows of

affect emerge in specific spatial and aesthetic contexts, creating affective atmospheres that afford a pervasive feeling more than the sum of materials (Bell & Vachhani, 2019). Affective atmospheres are “palpable and sensory yet imaginary and uncontained, material yet abstract” (Stewart, 2011, p. 445). Affective atmospheres impinge on bodies creating shared affect (Brennan, 2004), although individuals might not experience the affects in the same way. “Far from ‘thingy’, affective atmospheres must be understood as the relational potential for things to act or change in a particular space” (Bissell, 2010, p. 273). Affective atmospheres can contain contradictory flows of affect, and their intensities can swamp social relations (Ahmed, 2014). Atmospheres can have different tonalities, for example, they can be oppressive or uplifting (Johnson, 2020), they are like force fields attracting and repelling, and people attune to them through the senses, different materialities, practices, and rhythms (Stewart, 2011). The paper draws on these ideas to research the following affective ethnography.

The Countess Ablaze, an independent yarn dyer in Manchester, United Kingdom, transformed affective dissonance into a social movement based on affective solidarity. The Countess suffered two instances of affective dissonance triggering a sense of injustice, anger, and disappointment. For each instance, she produced a creative response attracting others to join in a powerful affective atmosphere or structure of feeling (Anderson, 2009). Building on her existing relations in the community, she energized an ongoing entanglement of materialities associated with her work, such as her website, yarn dyes, colors, fibers, body, and methods of communicating by social media to invite her customers and the wider fiber community to join her in a social movement called the Tits Out Collective. Her community responded with gusto, sharing their own affective dissonance and connecting in powerful affective solidarity. The way the Countess organized the Collective contains important lessons for transforming affective dissonance into solidarity. Her mobilization of a variety of vibrant matter built a powerful affective atmosphere, intensifying existing affective relations in craft practices (Bell & Vachhani, 2019), engaging people's imaginations and capacities to materialize affect in a creative, productive way, honoring subjectivities with ethical practices. However, the paper also explores how the process was not without cost to the Countess, something not considered in other studies. For example, through organizing the Collective, not only did she feel the affective response, but she also became better known and a relay point (Funke, 2014) for an extended community's affective dissonance. Being a relay point intensified her own dissonance, rendering it more “sticky” (Ahmed, 2004) and put pressure on her as a prominent figure in the fiber community.

I researched the Tits Out Collective using an affective ethnography approach described by Gherardi (2019). It entailed attuning to the flows of affect through and between members of the Collective by employing my senses (Pink, 2012, pp. 113–130; Sumartojo & Pink, 2018). The Countess was at the center of the flows of affect that included people such as the transgressors, her staff, customers, media followers, and wider fiber community, but also colors, yarns, social media platforms and postings. I interviewed the Countess, visiting her business to understand how she organized affect. At the same time, I gathered a variety of materials to consider how people participated affectively in the Tits Out Collective. The affect expanded the Collective to include new members such as me. As both a participant in the Collective and a researcher of the unfolding process, I have reflected carefully on my affective attunement (Gherardi, 2019). I used a combination of thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998), tracing affective flows (Pink, 2012, pp. 113–130) and Anderson's analytics of affect (2014) to fully explore the materials and how they were related, as this was how affect surfaced.

The paper consists of four main sections. First, I review previous work on feminist affective dissonance, affective solidarity, and social media, to show how transformations are discussed and highlighting the anthropocentric focus. Then I consider in more detail the methods I used to research the context and unfolding of the Tits Out Collective. Next, I describe the context, the sector and how the Countess started her business before recounting how the affective dissonance arose, how it became shared, and flowed in affective solidarity. Finally, I discuss the wider implications of the example, contributing by showing the importance of mobilizing a multiplicity of vibrant materials in generating engagement and transforming affective dissonance into meaningful collective action. First, I explore previous work on affective dissonance.

2 | AFFECTIVE DISSONANCE

Affective dissonance occurs when “one’s embodied sense of self does not coincide with the socially constructed version of the self-available to the individual” (Lakämper, 2017, p. 125). Mohanty (2003) theorizes affective dissonance as a disjunction between ontology and epistemology—a difference between one’s felt experience and understanding of wider standards of ethics. For example, experiencing subtle forms of gender discrimination as a feeling in your gut (Ahmed, 2004) in a workplace, that is, in theory meritocratic. Therefore, affective dissonance occurs via bodily encounters (Brennan, 2004); moreover, previous experiences shape how affective dissonance is sensed (Ahmed, 2004). The affective dissonance can evoke feelings of injustice or “rage, frustration, and the desire for connection” (Hemmings, 2012, p. 148) and reconfigure how a person perceives things from that moment forward. Dissonance caused by gender discrimination can entail at least two trajectories (Lakämper, 2017). The first trajectory is for women to internalize the dissonance. Lakämper (2017) argues that recent “self-help” books place the responsibility onto the individual woman to address their own dissonance resulting in affective isolation. Books such as Sandberg’s “Lean In” (2013) ask women to make the best of their situation, rather than recognize that structural inequalities may be involved. An alternative trajectory is to express the dissonance, voice it to others and find people who share the affective dissonance to address the injustice collectively through affective solidarity. Dissonance followed by solidarity can form the basis of a feminist social movement (Hemmings, 2012), as demonstrated in the #MeToo (Edwards et al., 2019) and pussy hat projects (Black, 2017). In both these social movements, materialities such as website, social media and knitted hats were integral to the flows of affect. The flows of affect created the energy for action and progress, and generated an affective solidarity; however, as of yet authors have focused mainly on the senses and relations between human actants, and there is scope to delve deeper into the role of different materialities in exploring affective flows and atmospheres of dissonance, and whether or not they transform into solidarity.

3 | AFFECTIVE SOLIDARITY

Feminist affective solidarity can be defined as the “collective association and sharing of experience” that “challenges women’s isolation, ‘outs’ women’s sense of injustice, and raises hopes that gender relations can, and should, change.” (Sweetman, 2013, p. 218). Affective solidarity is “a form of embodiment and political commitment” (Johnson, 2020, p. 175). Flows of affect help align and intensify relations between people in solidarity (Ahmed, 2004). Feminist affective solidarity movements have won notable successes on suffrage (Tax, 2001), legislation for equal pay, and changed public policy and agencies’ stance on domestic violence (Hanmer & Itzin, 2013; Weldon & Htun, 2013). However, feminist affective solidarity can dissipate through division, with race and class privilege damaging relations, creating fragmentation, and undermining the achievement of collective goals (Mohanty, 2003).

A major critique of second wave feminist solidarity was that it privileged the concerns of white women of privilege (Allen, 1999), leading authors to argue that affective solidarity was impossible (Butler, 1990). However, more recently the concept of solidarity has been revisited and reconfigured. Contemporary theorists have tried to incorporate ways of respecting subjectivities with affective solidarity, resulting in more inclusive definitions of solidarity (Vachhani & Pullen, 2019). As a result, joining together to address shared goals is again seen as a useful way of combatting inequalities, providing it is undertaken with care (Segal, 2013), underpinned by respecting different intersectional subjectivities (Mohanty, 2003). This is recognized as a difficult task, and much work has been devoted to finding ways of navigating through the complexities of honoring another’s subjectivity (Hemmings, 2012).

Three areas that have emerged as ways of addressing the difficulties of respecting subjectivities are the politics of experience, empathy, and reflection. Vachhani and Pullen’s work on the Everyday Sexism Project (2019) highlights the power of posting individual accounts of sexism for all to see, an example of what Phipps (2016) termed the politics of experience. They also see empathy at the heart organizing affective solidarity, ethically, although other authors have argued that we can never fully understand another’s subjective position (Hemmings, 2012),

making full empathy very difficult to achieve. Empathy risks reproducing inequalities of power relations and overlooks people's different capacities to reciprocate in sharing (Mohanty, 2003). A way of surfacing difficulties in respecting different subjectivities is through reflection and self-critique, before stepping forward to "bear witness."

The final way authors have suggested addressing the problems of achieving empathy and presuming another's subjectivity is self-critique through reflection (Hemmings, 2012). Only after self-reflection should people step forward to "bear witness" in solidarity rather than claim empathy (Boler et al., 2014). Dean (1998) devised reflective solidarity to help: "The concept of reflective solidarity is rooted in the idea that feminist solidarity must include two moments: ... 'opposition to those who would exclude or oppress another andmutual recognition of each other's specificity'" (Dean, 1998, p. 5). How might that be achieved in practice? Walters and Butterwick's (2017) work on decolonizing feminist solidarity offers useful insights from addressing inequalities in South Africa. They argue there are three moves to achieving a feminist solidarity: stepping forward, standing with, and staying connected. The moves are not linear but can overlap, unusual in the discussion on transforming dissonance to solidarity that seems mostly linear. Bearing witness still takes place within the context of unequal power relations and differing subject positions. Therefore, affective solidarity is likely to be precarious, requiring continual self-reflection and careful organizing to respect differences and inequalities.

The thinking on feminist solidarity bears similarities to those underpinning social movement theories. Funke (2014) investigated the dynamics and temporalities of social movements, noting that theorists have focused on a linear progression from a small movement to eventually a goal of institutionalizing solidarity. He argues that might be a false goal, as contemporary social movements are necessarily rhizomatic (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980). They need to have multiple entrance and exit points, no centralizing hierarchical power structure, and can accommodate multiplicities of subjectivities and futures. Although contemporary movements are necessarily complex and lacking in organization, there are "patterns of interaction and mechanisms of collaboration" (Funke, 2014, p. 30). He does not use the concept of affect, but speaks of "passion" and "emotion" as important in collaboration and dissonance leading to splits and spin-out organizations. Central to organizing social movements are "relay" points that intensify communication. In electronics, relays are devices that amplify signals from a distant transmitter to extend the coverage of the signal. Funke (2014) argues that activists, groups or protests can act as relays in social movements. They can energize and extend a social movement, such as feminism. For me, the idea of relay points seems similar to that of "vibrant matter" (Bennett, 2010). Exploring relays puts the emphasis on how connections are made, like Anderson's way of analyzing affect (2014). The discussion on affective solidarity seems focused on social relations, although materialities such as posts of experiences of sexism are mentioned, the connection between affective solidarity and materialities remains under explored.

One area where materialities are considered in the literature but not named as such is social media. Whereas solidarity in earlier feminist movements relied on traditional media and embodied encounters, contemporary feminist social movements are global communities facilitated through social media (Munro, 2013). The recent examples of feminist affective solidarity, such as the Pussy Hat Protest, #MeToo and Everyday Sexism made use of social media as a means of relaying communication and generating connections (Vachhani & Pullen, 2019). The next section reviews previous research on how social media can amplify these connections.

4 | AFFECTIVE SOLIDARITY AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Contemporary social movements of affective solidarity benefit from the speed and global coverage afforded by social media. Different software offers options in reconfiguring affective relations. Websites spread the message of the Pussy Hat Protest and Everyday Sexism, whereas #MeToo started on MySpace. These media helped countless women voice their affective dissonance. Forms of social media such as Web 2.0, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook offer direct, rapid communication bypassing conventional media. However, they are similarly enmeshed in power relations (Edwards et al., 2019) and political agendas (Baer, 2016; Harp et al., 2018). Social media promotes dialogue and can

reinforce affective glue for solidarity, if used skillfully. Work on social media is “connective labor” (Boler et al., 2014), it requires frequent input of appropriate content. There has not been much research on the lived experience of using social media (Edwards et al., 2019). Social media offer the benefits of voicing affect and creating visibility for critical issues, but they also have a downside. Participants can become targets for people who oppose them (Paasonen et al., 2015). Posts on media can be dangerous for women, feminism has attracted misogynist backlashes (Melo Lopes, 2019) and evoked empathy (Kay & Banet-Weiser, 2019). Naming and shaming a wrongdoer can lead to the transgressor attracting support, not the victim. Social media may appear quick and immediate but maintaining a presence takes energy and time that might detract from other activities. Social media could complicate feminist organizing, rather than making it “easier to manage” (Edwards et al., 2019, p. 14).

It is within this context that I conducted my study of the Countess Ablaze and the Tits Out Collective. Affect forms a key part of the literature on building affective solidarity, but the discussion focuses on human actants—it seems rather anthropocentric and does not yet address the ambivalences and unboundedness of affect. Although affect is not entirely knowable or definable, it is possible to study it by exploring intensities, tracing flows in and surrounding materialities, that form affective atmospheres. Whereas authors have been sensitive to the subjectivities of marginalized groups, there has been little research on more central actors in the process. What is it like to organize and become entangled in multiple flows of affect in leading a social movement? Previous work has highlighted the enabling and constraining roles of social media, but is yet to address whether other forms of matter are enabling or constraining. The next part of the paper discusses how I addressed these questions.

5 | METHODS

The research takes a materialist ontology (Gherardi, 2019) by studying affect in emplaced, ongoing entanglements of human and non-human actors, with the researcher being part of the entanglements (Anderson, 2014; Sumartojo & Pink, 2018). Therefore, at regular intervals, I reflected on being both a participant in the Collective and a researcher (Gherardi, 2019; Sumartojo & Pink, 2018), to uncover my standpoint. I first encountered the Tits Out Collective through being a participant. A designer I follow, Maddie Harvey, posted on Instagram her involvement in the Tits Out Collective. Although at first I attuned as a participant, I then switched to being an academic researcher. But later through reviewer questions I have reflected again on my affective attunement, deepening my awareness of the flows of affect. The garments I created from the Collective offer an ongoing affective autoethnographic engagement (Sumartojo & Pink, 2018).

The Countess started and organized of the Collective. She set the rules and hosted the web portal that mediated the event. I obtained her permission to study the process and after gaining ethics approval, concentrated on learning her perspective. The Countess and I agreed a date to visit her studio for me to interview her. Two interviews lasting an hour and a half took place on the same day. One of the Countess' staff was present working in the space and contributed her views about her experience of the Tits Out Collective during the second interview. The interviews helped me understand the context of the business and how it evolved. Then the Countess recounted her experiences during and after the Collective events, telling me about what was happening behind the social media posts for her and her staff. I learned how and why she organized the Collective the way she did. I heard more of how overwhelming the process was, highlighting the costs to the Countess, making a deep affective impression on me, making me not want to add to those costs.

In addition to the primary research, I carried out secondary research on social media posts. I searched using terms related to the Collective for online materials such as webpages, podcasts, and posts from Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. The Countess curated links on the collective on her website (Ablaze, 2018a), providing a useful starting point. The varied materials helped me explore the range of flows between and beyond the other participants in the Collective, I was limited only by my language skills. The data gathering process turned into an example of affect inadvertently being objectified and made into a target (Anderson, 2014). Activities such as

obtaining ethical approval and gathering information to piece together timelines and relationships risked reducing affect into objects. The searches resulted in a rich variety of sights and sounds, depicting colors, yarns, items of clothing, and texts connected to the Collective. My target was to obtain as full a collection as possible, while still being attuned to the fleetingness of affect. Furthermore, methods such as thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) had a similar effect, such as how I analyzed the materials to produce such as the representations of breasts in Figure 4, and a list below. Themes I identified included clothing items, colorways, charities, and Tits.

Retuning to affective experiences of being with the Collective (Gherardi, 2019) helped me sense the atmosphere composed of the different spatialities and socialities (Sumartojo & Pink, 2018, p. 39) of human and non-human actors. Attending to the flows of affect by paying attention to combinations of bodily capacities, structures of feeling and objectification helped me describe a patterning of the affective life (Anderson, 2014). Affect surfaced more clearly at the intersections between materials, such as yarn color, yarn name and maker context, or voice, words, and video setting. For example, the Instagram live videos of the Countess were of her talking with energy to the viewer in a conversational way from her studio, with its background of vibrant yarn. Maddie Harvey's posts contained images of her work and related items of importance to her in her day-to-day life, such as a woman's march, revealing more of her as a person. I have given the Countess and Maddie Harvey drafts of the paper to see if I have represented them appropriately. The following two sections weave together the various materials I gathered to research the Tits Out Collective.

6 | THE CONTEXT

The fiber community consists of a wide variety of makers who create and dye yarn, design patterns, and make accessories that crafters use to make finished goods by applying techniques such as knitting, crochet, or weaving. Across the globe, the fiber community has transformed over the last 20 years as handcrafts have enjoyed a renaissance. A sector perceived as pale, staid and old has attracted younger, more diverse participants (Harrison & Ogden, 2019). The dominant transnational textile producers have been joined by a growing number of small and micro businesses, introducing knitters like me to new possibilities for color, texture, design, and community. Yarn dyers apply colors to different fibers by hand, selling via their own websites and Etsy. The majority of yarn dyers identify as women. It is difficult to obtain information about the sector, the UK Craft Council thinks the numbers are too minor to research, despite there being over 10,000 hand dyed yarn items for sale on Etsy by UK makers in September 2019. The dyers range from individuals selling items sporadically, to regular businesses with extensive ranges. The Countess Ablaze is an example of one of the newer entrants to the community, dying vibrant-colored yarns from her growing independent business.

While the community has evolved, some things have stayed the same, especially the tradition of altruism and charity giving. Early examples included knitting for soldiers at war, and more recently, items for premature babies or the sick and vulnerable. There have been a series of more politicized activities to resist oppression, for example, in 2012, the Knitting Nanas mobilized opposition to natural resource exploitation in New South Wales, Australia (Kuhn, 2016), and in 2017, the pussy hat movement organized a global protest against the misogyny of US President Trump (Black, 2017). The sector is not without its problems, especially in diversity and inclusion (Hardman, 2019). The next section of the paper describes the Countess' business before moving on to trace the unfolding affective dissonance preceding the Tits Out Collective.

7 | THE COUNTESS ABLAZE

The Countess Ablaze is the business name for Lyndsey Blackwood, taken from her stage name when she performed burlesque with bright red hair. She began her business in 2011 after she was widowed and bringing up her daughter

alone in her 20s. She experimented by dyeing small lots of yarn in her kitchen sink at home and selling them on Etsy. Initially, she did not tell her family she had started a business. She especially enjoys the dyeing process and is known for her vibrant color combinations, the results of her technical skills and imagination. As her business grew, she moved into a studio, then two successive larger premises in the Northern Quarter of Manchester. Although the Countess had a keen interest in computer programming at school, she read Classics at university. Her experiences influence her creativity as do ideas from other sectors such as the fashion industry and contemporary political events. The names of her yarns are as evocative as her vibrant colors, going beyond the usual color or gauge description. For example, she named an early color series “The 12 Caesars” after Roman emperors, and yarn varieties “Lady Persephone” and “Tia Merino.” Her groupings of yarn colorways called “rebel batches” are like fashion house collections; in that they are mostly available for a fixed time. There is a limited range of repeating colorways. She also runs a box scheme where subscribers receive regular parcels of exclusive dyed yarns. The Countess describes her business as evolving by her overcoming fear and implementing her ideas in small and not so small steps.

The Countess developed her own website to display her work and process transactions <https://www.countessablaze.com>. She grew a social media presence through posting on her website blog, YouTube, and Instagram. The posts are not simple selling transactions of the vibrant-colored yarn, they are performances. At first Lyndsey believed the Countess was a work persona she assumed for media, then she had an epiphany that it was not, it was all part of her. She is very engaging; her energies and warmth affect her followers and customers. The Countess is incredibly open about her past and present. She acknowledges on her website (Ablaze, 2019a) that she has high functioning Asperger's, hidden illnesses and undergone deeply traumatic experiences in her past. The Asperger's means she can focus intensely on detail and inventing different colorways is a creative release. In contrast, social encounters can be very taxing for her especially in high volumes. There is always a risk of a full meltdown and the Countess needs to manage her studio space and take breaks from work, shutting off social media to be capable of continuing. The website is clear about how to interact with the Countess and the business, there are rules to follow, for example, the number of people who can enter the studios at one time (Ablaze, 2019b).

The Countess' premises may contain enticing colorful displays, but it is not a traditional yarn shop. Initially the Countess worked alone. Over time she has hired six staff and takes pride in managing her “Blazin' Squad,” several of whom also have Asperger's syndrome. Most yarn retailers have staff who are knitting or crochet enthusiasts, whereas the Countess hires people with a creative background to bring fresh ideas into the business. Initially staff had limited roles, however over time these have expanded to dye yarn, develop colorways, and make posts on social media on behalf of the business. Through years of posting engaging items, she has built a global following in the fiber community numbering over 96,500 on Instagram in September 2019. It is within this business context that the affective dissonance occurred.

8 | TRANSGRESSIONS

In February 2018, a person who was consulting for another local business approached the Countess with a proposition. If she would provide the yarn, equipment and labor, the other business would run a charity event to raise funds for the homeless. The person was enthusiastic and engaged the Countess' interest as she had previously run charity events for the homeless herself. However, the Countess has a rule about not agreeing to anything without seeing the proposition in writing and asked for a proposal. The person sent the proposal he had prepared for the other business. The proposal indicated the other business was struggling, and to give it a financial boost, they could host a charity event and invite the Countess' customer base who would spend money with the business. The person offered the lure of “exposure” for the Countess, but she calculated the cost to her business of participation would be about £1000. The proposal was also derogatory about the Countess' customers, arguing that the event organizers could make more money by providing “shit tea and tray bakes” for her middle-aged female clientele and their girlfriends. The Countess was furious that the person could be so insulting about both her



FIGURE 1 The Countess and the Colourways “Shit Tea and Traybake” (right) and “ifwantexposureillgetmytitsout” (left)

business and customers. The proposal indicated that men would benefit financially from the women's kindness. Being offered exposure instead of payment happens regularly in small businesses, especially those in the creative industries (Shinybees, 2018). The condescending misogyny in assuming the business was a hobby for someone wealthy, not a serious source of income for the Countess and her staff was also very irritating. Finally, using charity as a mask for profit-making appalled the Countess. The person had not done his research about how the Countess conducts her business. The Countess has a reputation for saying no to giving free skeins because she has had poor experiences in the past with bogus events. She discussed the proposal with her squad to see if she was overreacting and they confirmed she was not. She did not take part, instead she channeled her anger into creating two yarn color varieties entitled “shit tea and traybake” and “If I want exposure I'll get my tits out.” The price of every skein included a £3 donation to the charity “Women's Aid.” The two yarn colors are depicted below in Figure 1.

The yarns were an enormous success, selling over 1000 skeins and contributing over £3,000 to charity. The muted flecked cream “shit tea” colorway sold fewer skeins than the vibrant oranges, pinks, and purples of the “titsout” colorway. Other people learned about the story and shared the Countess' dissonance—her experience soon resonated with the community. People did try to investigate the identity of the person who proposed the charity event, but the Countess refuses to “name and shame” the person.

The skeins' popularity did not go unnoticed, especially the vibrant “titsout” colorway. Another dyer bought the yarn and posted a picture of themselves knitting the colorway. Then they started selling a remarkably similar colorway themselves, profiting from plagiarizing the Countess' work. Members of the yarn community alerted the

Countess whose dissonance was revisited and intensified. The plagiarist stole her intellectual property and subverted potential donations to charity. The colorway had become an iconic symbol of an affective atmosphere that had grown in the community. Instead of putting up with poor treatment, two women had left abusive partners and other business women now resisted undercharging for their work. Again, the Countess did not name and shame the perpetrator. She did not want to wreck other small businesses, give them publicity, or expose them to the wrath of the Internet. For a second time, she channeled her dissonance in a creative manner that included others.

The Countess decided to create a movement she named the Tits Out Collective. The movement progressed at great speed. Within 10 days, she established a collective event. She announced the Tits Out Collective on June 22 on Instagram TV, 20 min after thinking of it, without informing her staff. She wanted to address the theft head on and said the yarn dying community do their best work collectively. Within the 12-min broadcast, people started to join in by posting supportive comments the Countess read out, accelerating momentum.

The main idea behind the Collective was that makers could get their Tits Out too. They could sell their interpretations of the two charity colorways through a portal on the Countess's website for the whole of July 2018. They had access to the colorway dyes and had to follow the rules including making a £3 donation or similar proportion of their sales to a charity of their own choosing. The Countess was flooded with people interested in participating, mainly women. Within the first 24 h, 21 people had signed up. To participate, they had to contact the Countess by email. The emails frequently included their own accounts of being exploited, for example, being ripped off in the name of charity and not taken seriously as businesswomen. Some of the emails were harrowing, triggering Post Traumatic Stress Disorder for the Countess. The Countess had to set up a Google form to manage the volume of emails and gather the information she needed for the portal. People sent images expecting the Countess to have time to alter them to meet the requirements. Her husband helped set up the portal on her website which the Countess intended to be very egalitarian, with images for the goods on sale, not brands or company names to give the smaller makers an even chance of obtaining business. In less than 10 days, a total of 287 participated in the portal from 22 different countries. The portal went live on July 1 with the special launch video (Ablaze, 2018b). The Countess edited the video and did not sleep for 48 h prior to the launch. The portal is depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2 shows the equal-sized, colorful images of the maker's contributions, not their names. Buyers could scroll through the images and click through to the participants' site. The Countess did not take a fee for conveying other company's products. Visitors to the portal did look elsewhere on the site and buy the Countess' yarns.

The twin transgressions resonated in the community, and many more people participated in the Collective through buying items in the portal. People had experienced being treated poorly and ripped off especially through kindness:

It's not just that it's not OK to be asked, it's that when I say no, cause I will say no, some people don't take it well when a woman says no. Were supposed to be nicer. We're supposed to be... and this was where the Countess was mentioning like sexism. And this is to me where it really comes into play. Like, you know, we're expected to be nice. We're expected be kinder. We're expected to be more accommodating and supportive. We're expected to do all these things without asking for payment and I think that is more expected that a man will add a price tag for his time. So, I had some very negative experiences to telling some people off for asking me to work for exposure. So that definitely doesn't make things easier (Newin, 2018).

The quote shows how women run businesses in an oppressive affective atmosphere of gendered expectations. If the businesswomen tried to resist the atmosphere, they faced a negative backlash. The Collective enabled a positive response that people embraced. Other makers publicized the Tits Out Collective event, spreading the news to people beyond the Countess' community. Podcasts, website blogs and social media posts ensued. For example, an Instagram post from the pattern designer Maddie Harvey offered 75 copies of a pattern she had named after a fictional rebellious character, depicting the finished item in an interpretation of "Tits Out" colorway.



FIGURE 3 Shawl the Author Knitted in “IfIwantexposureIllgetmytitsout...manners please” yarn version by Woolkitchen with Badge by Countess Ablaze

Returning to the portal event, the participants channeled their affective energies into their own forms of protest and charity support. There was a wide variety in their creative expressions of solidarity for the Tits Out Collective, for example, in the way they exposed their “Tits” in the Instagram posts, yarns and jewelry (Figure 4), from the birds, to the shape, to the resistance in the word no:

The Collective enabled women to respect their own subjectivities while linking and multiplying the affective flows. An example of this was through naming the items on the portal. The Countess invited people to add their own ending to “If I want exposure I’ll get my Tits Out.” Some names aligned with the Countess, others did not:

- The kick in the kidneys.
- Tit-kat.
- Painting flowers white never suited my palette.
- Graffiti overlay version.
- Skywhale edition.
- Rock your tits off.
- Witch’s tit.
- Vegas showgirls.
- Would you like a spritz.
- Let’s all get our tits out and f*ck the crab.
- Ligonberry tits.
- Knit mitts for me tits.
- Sock it to M.E.
- Knitty knockers.
- Witch tits come out of the broom closet.

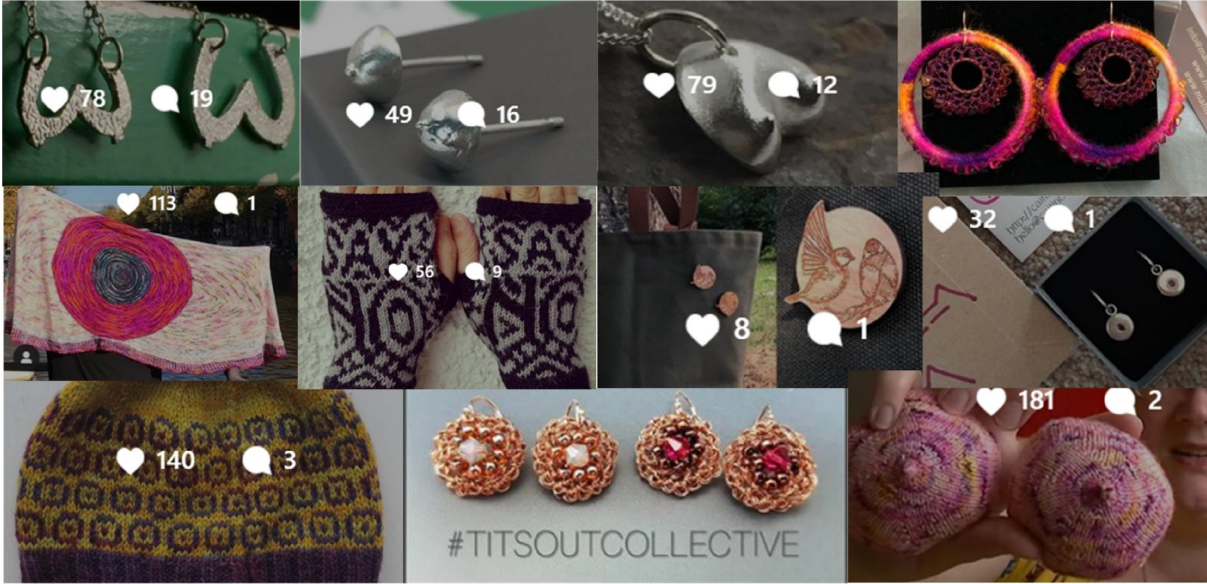


FIGURE 4 Representations on Instagram of Tits Sold on the portal

Themes include feisty women like witches, rock music, disease, animal charities, and breasts. Participating in the Collective led makers to attract more engagement from followers and raised awareness of their work. The month-long event had an intensity of energy that took its toll on the Countess with her Asperger's near the surface. It was exhausting and emotional, as she recounts in the finale live telecast (Ablaze, 2018c). In it the Countess asks for people to be colleagues not competitors and to not plagiarize other people's work. "Outright plagiarism is for the lazy and uninspired and there is no need for it." The sales through the portal contributed £55,291 to charity during the month, although that did not include six participants who did not submit their total in time. It rose between £350 and 400,000 for the businesses and people who participated. The movement is still raising funds by making money for businesses and charity as some sellers did not stop once the month was over. The Countess mentioned in the finale video she was going to have a week off after the event; however, she continued to be exhausted by the experience long after. She retreated from making posts, becoming less visible, then withdrawing from Instagram. Leading the collective gave the Countess long lasting exposure in the community which she found difficult to accommodate while running her business. It further raised her profile resulting in people approaching her to lead other resistance movements.

9 | DISCUSSION

The Tits Out Collective is an example of a transformation from affective dissonance to affective solidarity that energized a global community with intensity and speed. Whereas previous studies of affective solidarity have focused on the relations between humans, this paper highlights the importance of combinations of both human and non-human vibrant materials (Bennett, 2010) in energizing affective atmospheres and generating an affective solidarity that respects subjectivities. The different materialities such as yarn types, colors, patterns, items, and media posts enabled subjectivities to be expressed, reinforcing rather than undermining the affective solidarity (Mohanty, 2003).

The Countess organized affective dissonance into affective solidarity through her responses to the transgressions, drawing on her existing affective craft skills and the community she had worked to establish (Ahmed, 2004). The Countess got her tits out voicing her dissonance (Hemmings, 2012), taking a risk, and inviting others to do likewise. Producing the special color ways, naming the yarn evocatively and developing the portal contributed forms of vibrant matter (Bennett, 2010) that led to both effervescent affective solidarity and unknowable, unpredictable effects. She was able to do this because she had already established an engaged, affective community through her skills at mobilizing materialities, such as her vibrant colorways, naming practices, embodied openness, and professional staging of social media encounters. Therefore, when she voiced dissonance, she had a strong capacity to affect others (Anderson, 2014). The flows of affect existed before the two transgressions; the responses created vibrant additions (Bennett, 2010). Other members of the community had similar experiences, the dissonance was shared, and generated flows of affect composed of a mix of emotions and things unknowable (Fox, 2015). The flows spread outward to her colleagues, then a growing part of the fiber community who bore witness, joined in solidarity and supported the Countess (Walters & Butterwick, 2017) via engagement with the colors and yarn. The second transgression further multiplied the flows of affect, extending them to involve a wider community. The Countess organized the affect through performing connective labor (Boler, 2014) and creating object-targets (Anderson, 2014) such as the portal event that vibrated enabling creative responses. The Countess made her dye colors known and developed rules that enabled the ethical respecting of subjectivities (Dean, 1998; Vachhani & Pullen, 2019) so that individuals made active choices about what to create, which organization to donate to and the level of their participation. Through active choices on colorways, which items to make, naming the items, presenting the items and which charity to support, the different materialities rapidly extended the community and enabled the affective solidarity to vibrate with energy while enabling subjectivities to be respected.

Some participant's choices aligned with the Countess's feminism, others flowed in different directions, for example, health and environmental interests, broadening the scope of the Collective. The multiplicity of flows could appear to dilute the force of the collective, but they added strength to the affective atmosphere (Anderson, 2014; Seyfert, 2012), furthering the affective solidarity. Prior to the Tits Out Collective, the affective atmosphere in the fiber community was fragmented and weak. Working for "exposure" and offering free patterns undermined development (Hesmondhaugh, 2010), making the sector attractive for clumsy predators like the first transgressor. The Tits Out Collective helped energize a global community to reconfigure that atmosphere and construct one more consistent with their creativities. The Collective atmosphere offered relational possibilities for things to change (Bissell, 2010). The affect was sticky (Ahmed, 2004) with the colors and made artifacts continuing to re-energize participants, such as myself. The community reciprocated and intensified the affective solidarity and the affective dissonance. The Collective swamped the Countess with affect that continues to stick to her (Ahmed, 2014). Her organizing of affect was proactive in creating solidarity and reactive to foreclose forms of dissonance, leading me first to consider further the direction of affect, then the risks of exposure.

Previous work on the directionality of affective dissonance has discussed introjection, where women have internalized dissonance adding to isolation (Lakämper, 2017). The authors encourage women to voice dissonance and join in affective solidarity to support resistance (Black, 2017; Edwards et al., 2019). However, the example of the Collective opens a discussion of additional directions for dissonance, with the previous paragraph showing the force of materialities in affording constructive, enabling flows of affect, rather than introjection. Moreover, the Countess resisted channeling the flow backwards to the transgressors, whom she has consistently refused to "name and shame." There are important reasons to "name and shame," it draws attention to the wrong doing and may prevent it happening again. Alternatively, "naming and shaming" might invite flaming and trolling (Paasonen et al., 2015) or weaken solidarity by invoking "himpathy" or misplaced sympathy for transgressors. Transgressors might appropriate the identity of a victim (Kay & Banet-Weiser, 2019), generating a backlash that fragments the affective solidarity (Melo Lopes, 2019), especially more vulnerable members. "Rage is full of feminist possibility, but also of risk—and these risks of rage are not evenly shared by all women" (Kay & Banet-Weiser, 2019: p. 607). The paper contributes by extending the discussion of risks, because the organizers of affective solidarity also incur risks, in the shape of a sticky (Ahmed, 2004) continuing raised profile and association with a movement, when they might want to develop and move on.

Whereas authors on affective solidarity have rightly focused on ways to address the repressive effects of internal power relations in previous feminist affective solidarity movements (Mohanty, 2003; Walters & Butterwick, 2017), power is never zero sum, or unidirectional (Foucault in Gordon, 1980) and the paper contributes by showing how even in positive affective solidarity movements that respect subjectivities, organizing them can take a toll on the individuals involved. The transgressors offered the Countess "exposure" or nothing. The Countess voiced "if I want exposure I'll get my tits out" as an act of resistance, similar to the Femen movement (O'Keefe, 2014). The process of "exposure" is another example of multiple flows of affect, composed of knowable and unknowable phenomena (Anderson, 2009; Fox, 2015; Lakämper, 2017). People who have tits know some of the vulnerabilities and possibilities of getting them out in public. Exposure has a risky downside, but this is lessened if channeled through materialities or objects (Anderson, 2014) like those depicted in Figure 4, and if part of a collective. However, I would argue that the risk is intensified for those attempting to organize flows of affect. Echoing her burlesque past, the Countess runs her business by revealing and concealing herself so she can manage her health and wellbeing. She reveals much information about her past on her website and in her social media posts, to a certain extent exposing herself. Her openness enables affective relations between the Countess and her community (Massumi, 2002). She conceals herself through setting rules about access to her studio, having private spaces within her studio, managing social media holidays that create periods of time for her to regain energy. The Tits Out Collective with its swamping of affect left her feeling over-exposed and vulnerable, because the flows of affect were unpredictable and unmanageable. She became a relay point for the affect (Funke, 2014), intensifying dissonance for her and creating another form that stuck with her (Ahmed, 2004). Restricting availability makes

sense given the unknowable, unpredictable, two-way nature of affect (Lakämper, 2017). Organizing the Tits Out Collective raised the Countess' profile in the fiber community, exposing her as a leader, not a dyer, not all of which was welcome. She had set time limit on the Collective to bound the process and exposure, but the unboundable nature of affect meant the boundaries were breached. The Countess' leadership role and prominence continued. An example occurred later in 2018 Knit Now magazine held its annual awards. The Countess did not feature in the nominations for the category Charity Hero, leading to a backlash from the community and the magazine included her in subsequent rounds. The voters gave her the prize but the Countess felt uncomfortable about the acclaim. She sent a fellow fiber crafter to the awards ceremony in her place, and she has spread the task of making media posts on the business' behalf with her staff. The Countess has been invited to lead other people's ideas for solidarity movements since the Collective formally ended but has refused. She may design another event in future. Any event will again build links within the community but she envisages it to be smaller.

Given the intensities of affect and the capacities needed to lead affective solidarity, a series of activities seems more realistic, similar to recent conceptions of solidarity (Strauß & Fleischmann, 2020), that address the individualization, privatization and globalization of contemporary life (Mohanty, 2003). Instead of viewing ephemeral movements as a failure, they are more in keeping with Funke's (2014) idea that social movements are necessarily rhizomatic (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980), offering multiple entrance and exit points. An implication for affective solidarity is that movements are unlikely to become institutionalized: no bad thing as it avoids the problem of repressive power relations (Mohanty, 2003).

10 | CONCLUSION

Affective solidarity remains important in resisting forms of gender, race, and sexual oppression. Previous research has highlighted the role of affective dissonance in building affective solidarity, yet most of the literature has been anthropocentric in its discussion of affect. This paper contributes by showing the importance of vibrant matter in inspiring and building powerful affective solidarity. The combinations of vibrant matters helped honoring subjectivities, something previous work has highlighted as problematic for solidarity. The vibrancy of the materialities accelerated the building of a powerful affective atmosphere. The multiplicity of flows of affect added nuance and depth to the affective atmosphere, extending the reach of the affective solidarity. Ironically, many of the processes useful for developing affective solidarity unfold in such a way as to add risk and vulnerability for the leader, reconfiguring dissonance into overexposure. The vibrancies that enabled the affective solidarity now position the Countess in a leadership role she would rather others assume. Prospective leaders of affective solidarity would do well to understand that materialities serve a key role in building affective atmospheres if configured to respect subjectivities. It may be inevitable that affective solidarity is precarious and ephemeral.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No conflict of interests to declare.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The social media data analyzed for the paper are available to anyone. The interview data is available on request to the author because of ethical considerations.

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