Posthuman performativity, gender and 'school bullying': Exploring the material-discursive intra-actions of skirts, hair, sluts, and poofs

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In this article we take off from critiques of psychological and school bullying typologies as creating problematic binary categories of bully and victim and neglecting socio-cultural aspects of gender and sexuality. We review bullying research informed by Judith Butler's theories of discursive performativity, which help us to understand how subjectification works through performative repetitions of heterosexual gender norms. We then build on these insights drawing on the feminist new materialist approach of Karen Barad's posthuman performativity, which we argue enlarges our scope of inquiry in profound ways. Barad's theories suggest we move from psychological models of the inter-personal, and from Butlerian notions of discursive subjectification, to ideas of discursive-material intra-action to consider the more-than-human relationalities of bullying. Throughout the article, we demonstrate the approach using examples from qualitative research with teens in the UK and Australia, exploring non-

human agentic matter such as space, objects and time as shaping the constitution of gender and sexual bullying events. Specifically we examine the discursive-material agential intra-actions of skirts and hair through which 'girl' and 'boy' and 'slut' and 'gay' materialise in school spacetimematterings. In our conclusion we briefly suggest how the new materialism helps to shift the frame of attention and responses informing gendered intra-actions in schools.

Keywords: Butler, Barad, New materialism, Bullying, Gender, Heterosexuality, intra-action, spacetimematterings, agential realism.

Introduction

The breadth of research on bullying in schools (including collections of works such as this special edition of Confero) is a testament to both the high stakes associated with school and youth bullying itself and its so far 'unsolved' status. Youth bullying has been the subject of increasing investment, public concern, political pressure and academic exploration, it remains one of the key educational issues of contemporary times, especially in light of its assumed 'changing nature' with the influx of digital-social technologies. At the crux of the issue, however, are the institutional and experiential realities of the young people at school where exclusion, violence and great distress can manifest in a variety of forms of "ill-health"[87], including what are referred to as academic attrition, depression, self-harm, substance misuse and suicide. At times, it seems as if the complexities of experience and context are lost, however,

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[87] Lenz-Taguchi and Palmer, 2013

within broader academic discussions of bullying, where the focus is often on its definitive nature and potential 'solutions'.

At present, the most influential academic and popular theories, methods and models of understanding bullying stem from psychological frameworks [88]. Much of this literature is concerned with articulating bullying typologies, constructing psychological dispositions of students and fixed personality traits and models of inter-personal relationships to interpret and predict bullying behaviour [89]. We have been a part of sociological critiques of psychological typologies, which are understood to create individual roles and definitional restrictions around victim, bully or bystander, for instance, which individualise, and separate out the relations of bullying into fixed categories that may refuse the messy complexities of social relations in school and beyond[90]. Ringrose and Renold[91] have noted that these categories and identities once solidified can work to pathologize or demonize all the players in bullying dramas, including educators who have not devised appropriate methods to ban bullying from their premises through zero tolerance policies. Indeed, despite the growth of policies and programs, deficit based anti-bullying policies (which locate the problem within the individual psychological subject rather than relate it to external power relations) have not seemed to work to change bullying 'behaviours', which remain common across a multitude of schooling environments[92].

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[88] Rawlings et al, 2012
[89] Olweus, 1978, 1993, 1997
[90] Duncan, 1999, Ellwood and Davies, 2010, Walton, 2005
[91] Ringrose and Renold, 2010
[92] Meyer, 2008, Walton, 2011

A range of contemporary studies have demonstrated that bullying practices should be investigated in relation to context, climate or other spatial and temporal factors[93]. In this article, we want to build on socio-cultural approaches that enable us to explore discursive and material systems of regulation, particularly around gender. First we explore bullying research inspired by the theoretical work of Judith Butler, which demonstrates how bullying is not merely individual or psychological, but made possible through a system of ordered *performances* and repetitions of normative gender and (hetero)sexual *discourses,* centred on enacting complex inclusions and exclusions[94]. We aim to show how theories of gender performativity that have informed bullying research could be enhanced through taking seriously the new materialist Baradian approach to *posthuman performativity,* which shows how discourses can only manifest through context specific material agents. We draw on data from our own studies as well as other's research to rethink bullying through a posthuman performativity lens. In selecting this data we have sought to choose moments that resonate with us, and that hold some kind of affective force,[95] for as MacLure says, "at their most lively, examples have a kind of affective agency – a power to reach out and connect forcefully with the reader, to open up questions, and to summon more than can be said in so many words."[96] Our feeling is that practical examples are what animate and make possible the theoretical discussion.

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[93] Galloway & Roland, 2004, Horton, 2011, Kofoed and Ringrose, 2012, Kosciw, Greytak and Diaz, 2009, Poteat, Espelage and Koenig, 2009
[94] Benjamin, Nind, Hall, Collins and Sheehy, 2003
[95] Here we use affect through a Spinozian and Deleuzian lens highlighting the capacities of bodies and things to affect one another, which can complement the Baradian notions of agency and the mapping of agential human and non-human relations in important ways (see Ringrose and Renold, forthcoming)
[96] MacLure ,2013, pp. 627-628

Butler's discursive performativity

Research informed by Judith Butler has been important in studies of gender, sexuality and education by foregrounding how gender and sex must be denaturalised in order to break through what she calls a heterosexual matrix of power relations[97]. Butler's approach has also helped us to understand discursive norms and regulation of norms through which bullying is said to take place through her theories of discursive performativity. Butler conceptualises gender as an individual 'stylised act' of the body that informs collective systems of meaning and ways of being. In this way gender becomes something that is 'done' (rather than simply is) through habitual repetition of corporeal styles and acts. This understanding asserts that gender is not a pre-existing element, nor is it biologically determined, rather it is enacted as socially and culturally informed expressions (stylised acts), continually produced and reproduced that constitute the fiction of a coherent stable identity and give the illusion of a fixed set of gender norms. In this version of performativity these norms are continually cited and repeated, resulting in both the concealment of norms and the enforcement of their rules. Sex and gender are the "effects rather than the causes of institutions, discourses and practices"[98].

The heterosexual matrix of power relations operates through performance of successful, normative 'subjects' as well as abject 'spectres'. Each has an integral role in maintaining the heterosexual matrix. Those that fall within its realm portray normative genders and police boundaries through discursive

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[97] Nayak and Kehily, 1996, Renold, 2006
[98] Salih, 2002, p. 10

and behavioural means. Those that exist outside of it work as a "threatening spectre"[99] "of failed gender, the existence of which must be continually repudiated through interactional processes"[100]. CJ Pascoe's research used Butler to demonstrate how boys continually and repetitively utilised homophobic language and joking rituals to performatively constitute masculinity and the heterosexual matrix, and repudiate the 'threatening spectre' of being gay, or in Pascoe's work, of "the fag"[101]. Rawlings'[102] work similarly showed the ways that high school boys who engaged in any 'girly' activities, such as straightening their hair or refusing to view pornography, faced the prospect of being labelled 'gay' in the wider institutional context of dominant gender and sexuality norms, where heterosexuality is a 'protected zone'[103].

Ringrose and Renold[104] drew on Butler to argue particular bullying practices become acceptable and normative for particular gendered subjects. Tough normative boy is constructed through discourses of 'play fighting' but these are also sanctioned by 'heroic masculinity', where boys are meant to develop a heterosexual stance towards girls to mark themselves out against girls as potential aggressors or protectors rather than equals. The heterosexual matrix has also been conceived as putting girls into binaries of sexual purity or excess to maintain normative dominant heterosexual desirability to boys. Ringrose has also explored how good girls navigate a tightrope of subject positons between 'good girl' and

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[99] Butler, 1993, p. 3
[100] Pascoe, 2007, p. 14
[101] Pascoe, 2007, p. 52
[102] Rawling, 2013
[103] Butler, 1993
[104] Ringrose and Renold, 2010

appropriate levels of sexual 'experience or knowingness'[105]. 'Slut' works as a discursive marker of sexual excess, where girls are shamed through implication of sexual activity which contravenes innocence and respectability. While slut demonstrates a transgression of being 'too' sexual, 'dyke' is often applied to the opposite; not sexual enough or overly-masculine, or failed feminine[106].

Barad's Posthuman Performativity: Intra-acting discursive-material agents

One way school policies have sought to address injurious name-calling and terms, has been to ban words like slut or gay in an attempt to stop sexist and homophobic harassment[107]. We wonder, however, whether a focus on words, something that could stem from a reductionist reading of discursive approaches, is adequate. Would simply changing the terms of reference make a difference that matters? To explore this question, we consider a new materialist approach informed by Karen Barad, which foregrounds "entanglements of discourses, places, materialities and embodied practices in or connected to the school environment"[108]. Barad's work is located in feminist science studies and has inspired a new wave of theoretically driven methodological perspectives in qualitative research in the social sciences, and to our field gender and education[109]. Her framework has breathed fresh life into social science research by offering new theories and methodologies for researching material reality, which suggest in very simple and

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[105] Ringrose, 2013
[106] Payne, 2010
[107] Payne and Smith, 2010
[108] Taguchi and Palmer, 2013, p. 672
[109] Ivinson and Taylor, 2013

straightforward ways that our concepts and research 'apparatuses', as she calls them, create the very phenomena and matter that we seek study. We create phenomena through our intra-action with them.[110]

Rather than simply focus on the performance of discourses like slut or gay that subjectify into discourse 'positions'[111], Barad develops an approach she calls a 'posthuman performativity' which we think complements and extends the thinking offered by Butler around how the performativity of discourses work in intra-action with material agents. Posthumanism has many iterations beyond the scope of the article, but pairing it with performativity as does Barad[112] encourages us to consider the force relations happening ('iteratively' being enacted) through a range of human-nonhuman agents. According to Barad's theory performativity is more than discursive and it is more than human.

The first key notion we want to begin with in introducing Barad is intra-action. In contrast to inter-action where modalities can be separated out, Barad explores intra-action, as profound relationality. Barad's posthuman performativity suggests "discourses and material phenomena do not stand in a relationship of externality to one another; rather the material and the discursive are mutually implicated in the dynamics of

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[110] Barad's research, as with decades of feminist research (see Haraway, 1991), points out the situated nature of knowledge production, troubling notions of objectivity and validity in research encounters. Barad (2008:141) also issues her own challenge to the validity of socio-cultural research which does not account for relational 'intra-actions': "The fact that material and discursive constraints and exclusions are intertwined points to the limited validity of analyses that attempt to determine individual effects of material or discursive factors."
[111] Davies, 2011
[112] Barad, 2008, p. 144

intra-activity". [113] So whilst Butler's notion of discursive subjectification is really useful we need to also see how discursive-material intra-actions and non-human agentic matter such as space, objects and even time shape the constitution of gender and sexual bullying events.[114] The Butlerian perspective helps us understand power through defining how subjectification works through binary heterosexual norms of gender, which designate for instance who is an intelligible boy or girl. But the Baradian perspective enlarges our scope of inquiry in profound ways, suggesting we need to revalue matter alongside discourse. Rather than inter-action or inter-personal, which are dominant frames in bullying research, Barad's concept of intra-action changes our thinking. She draws our attention to the performative 'intra-action' between objects, bodies, discourses and other non-human material things.

Rather than remain at the abstract level, we want to begin to explore how these concepts change our analysis of bullying through empirical examples. Take this extract where Ringrose and Renold[115] explored how a boy William was bullied for his long feminine hair at school:

> Lucy: William Brown, he's got long hair, like girl long hair, about that long, all blond. Gwyneth walked past him and as a joke she just like
> Gwyneth: I just like went like that to his hair like/ (makes flicking motion).
> Lucy: Because you touched his luxury flowing locks! (Laughing)
> Faiza: He … got up, grabbed her, my, her neck and smacked her against the wall and then she couldn't breathe, that's how boys

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[113] Barad 2007; 149
[114] For a similar analysis exploring bullying intra-actions in neo-liberal university contexts see Zabrodska et al, 2011.
[115] Ringrose & Renold, 2010, pp.580-581

> react. And then, and then I was there, I saw everything and I told
> a couple of boys in my year who are like the hard boys.
> Lucy: So I told this boy called Patrick Dunsmuir and they had the
> guts to go up to William Brown and teach him a lesson.
> JR: What did they do?
> Faiza Physically or mentally (laughing)?
> Lucy: They pulled him!
> Girls: (all laughing).
> (Cardiff School 1, Year 9 girls).

In previous analysis we explored how William's discursive heterosexual masculinity was challenged by a typical discursive strategy of being subjectified as 'a girl'. We did not, however, pay adequate to the material agent of the hair and the flicking motion and the way that 'luxurious flowing locks' flowed off of Lucy's tongue (something that stuck and 'glowed' in Jessica's memory)[116] to denote the wrong type of boy (hence a girl) in ways that challenge his heterosexual masculinity. By neglecting the hair, which marks William 'like girl' and focusing on the discourses solely, the analysis misses the material agents at work.

Barad introduces another term for getting to grips with posthuman performativity and matter, which helps us understand something we may call a bullying event (and indeed everyday life) as emplacing such phenomena in their "spacetimematterings" a concept attempting to explicate how:

> … time and space are produced through iterative intra-actions
> that materialise specific phenomena, where phenomena are not
> 'things' but relations. Mattering and materialising are dynamic
> processes through which temporality and spatiality are produced
> as something specific.[117]

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[116] see MacLure in Ringrose and Renold, 2014
[117] Juelskjaer, 2013. p. 755

To restate the shift we are signalling, William becomes non-heterosexual boy 'girl' through the intra-actions between the girls and his long luxurious hair, the discursive (masculinity) is constituted via the material (long luxurious hair), the spatial (the school playground) and the temporal flow of events. Very simply put, this phenomena *is more than discursive*: Intra-activity refers to how "discourse and matter are understood to be mutually constituted in the production of knowing"[118] Here we can see how intelligibility emerges from the practice of mattering; the agentic force of the hair, of the playground, of the sounds and feelings in that particular moment. To use 'spacetimematterings' a word which has been produced by the mashing together of three different words, is to acknowledge that these concepts are infinitely overlapping, interlaced, and co-constitutive.

Bullying through this lens can be seen as coming into existence as we materialise it- as particular discursive and material agents intra-act in particular space-time-matterings. We see a material connectivity- as an action is performed on one, changes are caused in another. What is also highly significant, however, is how intra-acting components have agency. Indeed, a further key idea from the posthuman performativity perspective is the notion of "agential realism". "Agential realism" helps us attribute agency to matter and to the relations between actors and matter. As Barad notes,[119]

> … agency is not aligned with human intentionality or subjectivity. Nor does it merely entail resignification or other

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[118] Barad, 2007. p. 149.
[119] Barad, 2008, p. 144

> specific kinds of moves… agency is a matter of intra-acting; it is
> an enactment, not something someone says or does.

The posthuman performativity approach helps us to rethink agency, by re-valuing the agency of non-material actors. This approach shifts attention away from the rational human intentional actor to a wider *posthuman* field of power relations. The approach grants agency to matter and nature in ways devalued through humanist logics. Thus is it posthuman (or more than human) in that it displaces attention away from the individual, psychologically driven human agent typical in psychological models of bullying (one individual bullies another) in order to explore a range of intra-acting agents, materialities and spacetime contexts through which events designated as bullying emerge. These events also emerge in research as differential matterings - where what is considered important is separated or 'cut' (in Baradian terms) from what is not.[120]

This is not to say bullying matters are non-human, or that human psychological motivations are irrelevant, rather we are shifting emphasis to show how the individual intentioned human agent is only one part of the performative intra-actions of what becomes known as bullying phenomena. Again, the shift is away from the conscious intentional and wilful human master and human bound agency towards a more complex view of a range of intra-acting material and discursive actants with varying levels of agency in particular configurations.

To continue to illustrate this new way of thinking about agency and non-human agents consider further examples from

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[120] Hughes and Lury, 2013

Ringrose and Renold's[121] bullying research on girls calling each other names like tart (and slut):

> Carrie (age 10): I'm not being horrible but have you seen Trudy's skirt, it's her five year old sister's' and it's like up here (draws an invisible line well above her knee) … when she bends down you can see her bum … some people say she's a tart (Cardiff School 2, Year 6).

> Faiza (age 14): At one stage Katie was dressing up in skirts the length of her knickers dressed like that, with like nothing there and she would be all really weird, in other words, she made herself small. It was like, O she walked past a boy and she goes, 'O he fancies me'.
> (Cardiff School 1, Year 9).

These examples were explored as "typical modes of heterosexualised regulation and intersubjectively negotiated power hierarchies among girls [that] tend to not be categorised as bullying" but are significant in how sexual competition and shaming emerges amongst girls.[122] However, our framework did not enable us to engage with a powerful non-human material agent through which the possibility of these dynamics emerged – the skirt!

If we turn to posthuman performativity, agency is not simply located in human, nor is it to be found in the performative space between the discourse (slut shaming) and the subject interpellated as a tart (e.g. Trudy). With Butler, agency is discursive and can be found in the possible failure to be fully subjectified by discourses in this case 'slut' as injurious term.[123] However, with Barad agency is not restricted to discourse and

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[121] Renold, 2010
[122] Renold, 2010, p.586
[123] see Youdell in Ringrose, 2013, p. 71

the possiblility of resignifying discourses (like slut or gay) through performative failures and ruptures.[124] Rather, material agents (hair and skirts!) are central to the intra-active process through which the bullying phenomena around gender and sexuality materialise. And therefore they are important in considering the meanings and possibilities of 'agency' and the potential for social (discursive-material) change.[125] In short, the agentic force of the skirt intra-acting with the body in spacetimematterings need to be taken into account in understanding many incidences of sexual shaming girls as sluts as we explore as we continue.

Of course an agentic skirt creating 'slut' only makes sense in relation to the larger extended 'apparatuses' of knowledge-making at work.[126] As Lenz-Taguchi & Palmer (2013) note Barad's idea of: '[A]apparatuses are macroscopic material arrangements through which particular concepts are given definition, to the exclusion of others, and through which particular phenomena with particular determinate physical properties are produced'. [127] So for instance if we think of the history of the skirt and the long held culturally, class and race specific notions of feminine sexual respectability[128] we can begin mapping the contextual specific meanings of this agent in what

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[124] see Youdell in Ringrose, 2013, p. 71

[125] See also Pomerantz and Raby's (forthcoming) analysis of girls' dynamic agency using Barad's notion of intra-action to consider the construction and performance of 'smart' girlhood.

[126] Barad, 2007

[127] See also Barad, 2007: 142, for the relationship between the concept of apparatus in Barad's work and assemblage in theories like actor-network and those influenced by Deleuze and Guattari (see Coleman and Ringrose, 2013) is important to reflect on. In our view apparatus is much like assemblage, a way of explaining configurations of power relations and arrangements. The point is to unpack the components of the apparatus or assemblage that 'matter' (Barad, 2007)

[128] Skeggs, 2005

might be called bullying events where girls are sexually shamed. Below we continue to explore how our analysis of bullying shifts through consideration of the material-discursive intra-actions and apparatuses of skirts and other material agents like hair.

Sluts and Lesbians: The discursive and material intra-actions of Skirts, Hair, and Makeup

In addition to bullying research, youth studies have explored the power of clothing and uniform to enforce school rules[129] and Girlhood Studies scholars have pointed to historical and cultural contexts of sartorial control over girls and women's bodies[130]. But we wish to put a Baradian, materialist spin on this, suggesting skirts exist as the ultimate material objects that can be stylised, read and embedded with meanings for girls in schools[131].

In the UK context of the uniform and the compulsory wearing of skirts, this wearing takes on new aspects of control enacted through the force of the skirt to indicate appropriate attire, and the possibility of attending and inhabiting school space. For many girls, the wearing of skirts as uniform is a school and social requirement; an object of academic-social and gendered legitimisation. Indeed, there is no choice for girls in many school settings but to operate within the relations of power that the skirt dictates, with the power to read sexual intentionality onto girls:

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[129] Raby, 2012
[130] Duits and Van Zoonen, 2006
[131] See also Renold and Ringrose, forthcoming and Jackson, forthcoming for more new materialist discussion of skirts.

> Ffion: People would maybe have a first impression of us (as slutty) because we dress like we do –
> Rhian: Then they just like assume that maybe if they are wearing a short skirt or whatever, or short shorts, they just assume, 'Oh yes she is probably a slut' sort of thing, if she has got her bum hanging out
> Ffion: People think we are sluts because/
> Ffion: We always mess around like go into town, like 'Put your slutty legs on, your slutty jeans' as a joke, just because we get called a slut for no matter what, so we talk about putting your slutty legs on.
> (Cardiff School 3, Year 10 girls).

The previous analysis of these passages concentrated on exploring how the girls negotiate *the discourse* of being called a slut, so that the orientation is towards the poststructural deconstruction of how discourses of class, race and sexually appropriate conduct operate to position or read girls as sluts (they are subjectified into slut position). What happens, however, if we pay more attention to the skirt, and use an intra-active analysis of the apparatus of the body-bum-in skirt walking around in town space, making an *impression*? Impression refers to the relational acts of being and looking, if we take a feminist materialist approach. Rebecca Coleman[132], using Barad and Deleuzian analytics, theorizes looking as a material process of becoming—so looking is not simply representational but an actual material and affective set of relations through which people and objects come into being – or become. And what about 'putting your slutty legs on'? How can the legs themselves become 'slutty' in skirts or jeans? And through which intra-actions in the wider apparatus does this occur?

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[132] Rebecca Coleman, 2014

The historical contingencies of the skirt through which looking is mediated must be foregrounded. The skirt on the girl body is a material agent through which the possibility of sexuality is made manifest through a wider 'apparatus' [material arrangements through which particular concepts are given definition][133]. Previous research has explored the fetishization of skirts (schoolgirl uniform skirt, cheerleader skirt etc) in relation to pornification or sexualisation[134] as well as peer dynamics where girls police each others' skirts[135]. In these UK specific research examples there is an apparatus of being ladylike in British schools[136]. For instance Allan[137] reported during her fieldwork in an elite girl's private school the numerous times:

> I was told that uniforms were regularly checked so that skirts could be adjusted to 'acceptable' and 'appropriate' lengths, that the girls were chaperoned during school discos to prevent any 'unsightly behaviour'.

She explained teachers reprimanding girls for how they wore their uniforms and net ball skirts if they did not adhere to the appropriate standards of appearance. One girl was told if she wore her netball skirt home she could provoke builders and other perverts. As Allan[138] explains:

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[133] Lenz-taguchi and Palmer, 2013.

[134] Whilst a history of the skirt is beyond the scope of the paper see for instance discussion of girlhood, skirts and sexualisation in Walkerdine, 1990; Duits and Van Zoonen, 2006; Pomerantz, 2008; Jackson, 2015

[135] For more discussion on girls' aggression to one another related to heterosexual comeptition, embodiment and clothing, see for instance Currie et al., 2007; Ringrose, 2008

[136] Allan, 2009

[137] Allan, 2009, p. 150

[138] Allan, 2009, p. 150

> … the teacher appeared to cite a number of discourses (the protosexual, erotic little girl, the perverted older man and the innocent child; see Walkerdine 1999; Jones 2004), and in doing so positioned the girl in very specific ways, all of which rested heavily on certain classed, gendered and sexualised expectations of respectability.

However, if we think more-than-discursively, about the wearing of a skirt as an intra-active material-discursive set of relations we re-evaluate the skirt as agential in these assembled power relations - the skirt as carrying the signifying (discursive) and real (material) force at the same moment these happenings emerge, as also seen in the next example:

> Irina: There is a lot of girls in the school that wear very short skirts. Like they wear the same skirt since Year Seven. They don't bother changing it. A lot of girls from this school have that reputation as well of being sluts and things like that. I think it is mostly girls from Year Eleven, I mean the ones that have just left and Year Nines, Tens than years below. I had a couple of friends who were actually doing that, like there was that Polish girl again, Gabriella in this school she was in Year Eleven, she just left, and there was a couple of accidents with her like teachers apparently found her in the toilets with boys, she was wearing short skirts, you know, she was kissing in the corridors and then people just have a bad reputation about her. They are saying she is a slut and she doesn't respect herself. I mean I kind of agree with some of those statements, because it is like, and I think those girls shouldn't get upset about it because I mean they have to do something to get this kind of reputation. I don't know, I know I wouldn't do it. I would think it was embarrassing, I mean I respect myself and I just think it is very weird for girls to do it.
> Int: How do you feel about it, like do you ever feel sorry for them? Do you ever feel what is it that they need that they are looking for?
> Irina: I don't know. I just think that they want it, it seems like they want it because they do it every day. They wear short skirts, you know, they hang around with boys. When they see them

they kiss them on the cheek, they like give them little clues that
they are interested in boys kind of thing.
(Irina, Year 10, London School 1).

We have chosen (cut) this slice of data here where the interviewer (Jessica) tries to explore how Irina *feels* about the girls and *what she thinks girls want* from boys, focusing on the intentional human and psychological rendering of the phenomena. This side-steps the non-human agency of the skirts and the intra-actions with the uniform policy, the bullying policies and so on. Irina, however returns repeatedly to the skirt as something integral to the sets of desires and forces being evoked. Irina suggests that some girls don't 'bother' changing their skirt since year seven. The temporal presence of the skirt acts along with its changing spatial presence. Its coverage (covering less of their legs/bum) and location (in the toilets with boys) implicates its significant agentic force upon the wearer.

Without a material lens we miss the embodied and reduce dynamics to the purely psychological. Reviewing this and many other data on the skirt we want to argue through a feminist material and posthuman performativity lens that many objects (in this case skirts) are typically dismissed or reduced in importance as material force agents in contemporary feminist research. If these objects continue to be dismissed, their agential intra-action in spacetimematterings – in this case material practices that produce the phenomena of a slut are not recognized.

Many school strategies are implemented that seek to change human actors but may not trouble (or even recognise) the presence and power of these non-human agents. For instance, in another recent school-based account girls discussed being under

pressure to keep buying very expensive new school uniform skirts when their bodies grow, since the skirt can't reach to cover their legs. Another example involved a boyfriend insisting that his girlfriend wear tights despite the hot summer so her legs didn't show to be looked at by his male friends. In all these cases we need to unpack how the material agents intra-act in the situation; whether a skirt is shorter, longer, worn with tights, or without tights, and also what the skirt actually covers, each materialise subjects into appropriate girl – or not. A short skirt is an immediate constitutive force of girls with 'reputations'; unproblematically linked with a lack of respect for oneself, and for going into toilets with boys according to Irina. The short skirt's presence requires additional mediation—perhaps of tights, or shorts, but its location transforms a girl's body. As Lenz-Taguchi and Palmer[139] suggest, this reading shows that:

> … the primary ontological unit (e.g. the body of the girl) is no longer an object with inherent boundaries and fixed properties, as in classical physics and philosophy. Rather, the ontological unit is understood as a phenomenon; defined as 'the ontological inseparability/entanglement of intra-acting "agencies"' [140]

The potential of objects to 'act' is often minimised in favour of culture, discourse and language [141]. Conversely we are illustrating that skirts are not only signifiers of meaning, they are material agents of femininity that intra-act in specific school apparatuses of meaning and matter including other material agents:

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[139] Lenz Taguchi and Palmer, 2013
[140] Barad, 2007, p. 139
[141] Alaimo & Hekman, 2008

> Linda: It happens all the time. Every second person you've got, like, you wear your skirt too short and everyone will just turn around and call you a slut.
> Alice: Yeah everyone… slut's so common
> Linda: Yeah
> Jennifer: Like, we never do our hair for school or our makeup, we're just not those kind of people, and like, one day we'll do it and they'll go, 'oh who are you trying to impress?'
> Linda: Yeah
> Alice: Yeah, definitely, that happens to me as well
> Jennifer: And it's just like, well maybe I just wanted to do my hair for once? (laughs) You know, I washed it last night or something, and everyone automatically thinks that you're trying to impress someone or get a boyfriend or something
> Linda: Yeah that's true.
> Jennifer: Especially for us sporty people who couldn't care what we look like
> (Year 10 female students, Wilson High, Australia).

These slut moments hold important implications for bullying policy and understanding. As girls attempt to negotiate complex and high-stakes positions of sexual availability (enough, but not too much), desirability, and social popularity, the intra-actions with material agents: hair and makeup, are again discussed as key in trying to '*impress*'. Making too much of an impression can also mark them as slut, as the 'sporty' girls reflect on how they are policed when they do their hair or makeup for school. Typical school practices that attempt to combat gendered bullying have focused on the word slut (or gay); banning words to stop harassment. A posthuman performativity lens shifts attention to recognise the material forces that intra-act with the discourse. In this case the posthuman materialities of the skirt, hair and make-up work together to produce the dynamical force of what has been called slut-shaming[142]. What we are arguing is that we require more materially engaged research practices that

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[142] Ringrose and Renold, 2012

consider how more-than-human agents are made and unmade through these complex intra-actions of materiality and discursivity[143]. In considering a further example we note the absence of girly hair in producing heterosexually desirable femininity:

> Vic: So what would happen if a girl came to school and she had just cut all of her hair off?
> Jennifer: oh (gasps)
> Kathryn: Oh!
> Linda: Oh my god.
> Bec: It would be the biggest…
> Linda: Just like a girl in our science class, her hair is like, it's in a bob!
> Alice: It's beautiful, it's really cute
> Linda: And one guy said something about a dyke hair cut
> Alice: He said, 'why did you get a dyke hair cut?'
> Kathryn: Oh!
> Bec: Someone said that to you!
> Jennifer: Yesterday someone said that- cos my hair's up to here now, I cut it, it was up to here and now it's up to here or something, and he was like 'you look like a lesbian with your new hair' and I was like 'Yeah thanks, dickhead'. (Year 10 female students, Wilson High, Australia).

Hair is not simply representational but material, and we feel the force of its power through the gasp—the sucking in of air, when hair is imagined not to be there! The hair is a material object through which a lesbian (un-sexy-feminine) subjectivity is formed in absence. The girls' visceral reaction ('oh my god!'), its location "beneath the skin, in matter, in cells and in the gut"[144] gives a clue that particular sorts of hair are integral orientations and constitutive forces of normal gendered and sexual feminine subjectivity. Non normative sexuality is materialised here by the

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[143] Jackson and Mazzei, 2012
[144] MacLure, 2010, p. 2

intra-actions of material (hair), the discursive (lesbian) and the space (science lab) and recent time (yesterday), which perhaps affords it greater affective and immediate force. Rather than privileging either the discursive or the material which have traditionally been posited as dichotomous, we suggest that each of these material elements hold agency, and that matter could and should be taken seriously alongside discursive mechanisms[145], as we discuss in our conclusions.

Gays and Poofs: Intra-acting looks, hair, muscles and footy

As we can begin to see from the examples above, posthuman performative analyses displace the centrality of the human, and disrupt any hierarchies that position the human as the most definitive or powerful actor. Instead, they recognise that various 'things' have agency. Here, 'things' comes to mean anything— any object, body, space, time or matter. Indeed in most cases it is the power of material feminisms that they do not seek to delineate or demarcate between these categories. Such an intervention would again situate the human voice as a definitional authority, rather than simply another agent within an infinite landscape of human-nonhuman actors.

In this final section we seek to contribute to this shift, and cast our view towards the actors that have life, and force, and consequential affect away from us as strictly enlightened human actors. From looking at the particular actor of the skirt, and the constitutions that it contributes, we can move forward to look at the particular spacetimematterings in Australian schools that

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[145] Alaimo and Hekman, 2008

constituted the use of 'gay' and other pejoratives fixed within non-normative male sexualities.

Studies have in the past examined the utilisation of 'gay' and its pejorative variations (faggot, poof, etc.) as powerful and widespread discursive tools for policing masculinity [146]. Specifically, these terms have been examined through discourse as a form of gender policing around heteronormative masculinity. However, while research and institutional based reviews of these are concerned solely with the linguistic and discursive, they have again often neglected an acknowledgement of the non-human material agents and conditions. This is not to say that these moments are unimportant, indeed words or phrases can often be the "the only indicator for staff that homophobia is happening, not seeing the multitude of ways that homophobia permeates the school environment"[147]. What we seek to contribute here, however, is a re-conceptualisation of these environments as not purely or even mostly discursive/ linguistic, but a product of the myriad human-nonhuman agential intra-actions constituting particular spacetimematterings.

In the preceding extracts we illustrated that girls were forced to navigate complex and numerous 'rules' where corporeal agents (like hair and skirts) intra-acted with discourses to constitute them as 'slutty' – when the discursive material intra-actions (skirt-body) produced them as *too* sexy in the wrong ways. Gender, as illuminated by the posthuman performativity lens, is relational in striking ways, given boys in contrast were likely to be produced as 'gay' if they were too girly and not heterosexually desirable or manly enough Similarly to girls,

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[146] Chambers, Loon and Tincknell, 2004, Lahelma, 2002; Pascoe, 2007
[147] Witthaus, 2006, p. 24

hair, both on their head and on their bodies, was a critical material agent:

> Jennifer: … actually on the excursion the boys were straightening their hair and everything, and us girls were just chucking it up in a bun, not even doing anything about it, and the boys were actually straightening their hair and putting gel in it, and we were just like 'youse are boys!'
> (laughter)
> Jennifer: But like, yeah
> Alice: And like, how some boys shaved their legs
> (group gasps)
> Bec: What!
> Jennifer: Oh, I don't get that!
> Linda: Some people, guys will tease each other like, 'oh my god you're so gay you're shaving your legs' and stuff like that
> (Year 10 female students, Wilson High School,Australia).

In this spacetimemattering, we can see the corporeal materialities of hair (or absence of hair) on the boys' body intra-act with discourses of heteronormative femininity and masculinity. We see the boys in a particular place (the school excursion) where conventional 'rules' of the classroom are no longer in place, and as such new relationalities and apparatuses where objects and meanings can collide and make meaning. The girls call up their own hair-do as a specific actant in this environment, where "chucking it up in a bun" is OK, but when the boys' hair intra-acts with straighteners and gel in their hair these objects and their effects do not successfully align to create hetero-masculine embodiment. Binary gender expectations are invoked and applied to the presence or absence of these agents.

Like the example in the previous section with William, long, straightened hair is too styled and too hetero-feminine. Also like

Jennifer's short hair above, the no hair on boy produces laughter and gasps, affects that contribute to the materialisation of the hairless body as funny, or strange, or unknowable. The material act of shaving and having no hair are a set of material-discursive-corporeal relations that are unintelligible intra-acting relationalities of how to do hetero-teen boy bodies ("I don't get that").

Previous literature has shown the importance of sporting prowess in demonstrating normative masculinity [148]. This phenomena was also on show at both Wilson and Grove High Schools in Australia. Gayness, as the oppositional force of normative hetero-masculinity, could be materially produced in a range of ways that related to the look, personality, dress, walk and talk of the boy; and was often linked with the common denominator of sport as seen below:

> Vic: ... you were talking about students who might be excluded because they were perceived to be gay or because they actually were, is that because the other kids see them as behaving in a certain way or looking a different way, or doing different activities or anything like that?
> Kate: Their look, their personality, they might not be the norm of what fits in here, they might be a little bit different in how they dress, how they walk, how they speak. You know, just... all those
> Jeremy: With the girls all the time, not a footy player
> Kate: Yeah, not a footy player. Friends with all the girls, yeah. That stuff.
> (Teacher focus group, Grove High School, Australia)
>
> John: ... there's still that, you've gotta live up to that male role model. If boys show any weaknesses there's always these connotations under people's breath of 'gay' or you know, 'poof'

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[148] Kehler and Atkinson, 2013

> or anything like that. But it's not as bad as it used to be, it's not… I think at this school… but there's still that, any boy who sort of shows like a strength in the artistic area or some other field, they're still not fitting in with that typical Australian macho sporting hero like that, and the other kids do tend to look down on them
> (Teacher focus group, Wilson High School, Australia).

It is no surprise that sport, and particularly a highly physical, male-dominated and aggressive game (they are referring to rugby league and Australian football in these examples) intersects with socio-cultural meanings of gender and sexuality. Emma Renold's[149] work examined what it took for boys to perform a sanctioned heteronormative masculinity, including the role of football/ sport, being tough and participating in/ naturalising violence and the continual repudiation of femininity and academic performances.

We are now aiming to explicate more fully the material as well as discursive elements of these performances, the human and non-human dynamics of posthuman performativity. In these examples, 'poof' (Australian derogatory slang for gay man) represents the meanings and knowledge that are produced from and within the agential intra-actions. The word poof has a materiality itself as being empty and soft rather than hard and filled with matter—it is a gendered apparatus of meaning that goes even further to represent and re-constitute the emerging reality. A 'poof' is an embodied mattering and knowledge, someone (or even something) who has failed to become 'hard'.

As Barad reminds us "apparatuses are dynamic (re)configurings of the world specific agential practices/intra-

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[149] Emma Renold, 2005

actions/performances through which specific exclusionary boundaries are enacted" [150]. Poof-y comes to matter here through a long history of discursive-material intra-actions around the 'look', 'the walk', the practice of being 'artistic', and the (relative lack of) capacities involved in practicing 'footy' and friend relations (rather than heterosexual relations) with girls. There is no specific boundary or closure for these matterings, and although the participants above offer particular examples of looks, walks, practices, bodies etc., these are difficult for them to encapsulate in a strict or definitive way. What we can see, however, is that through the *absence* of the materialities like muscles, hair or capacity for footy *gayness* could be invoked:

> Bec: Um, someone who is not confident or a jock,
> Linda: Yeah
> Bec: Can just be thought of as being gay. Like it's very easy just to, just if they're not... if you're not full on, like sport,
> Jennifer: [speaks over] Muscley, yeah
> Bec: Muscley
> Linda: [speaks over] Yeah they're obsessed with how big their arms are these days
> Jennifer: [speaks over] Popular, good looking... you're gay.
> Linda: They're like, all about the gym
> (Year 10 female students, Wilson High, Australia).

These examples begin to show the connections between bodily acts, and the spaces that these acts and bodies exist within, the material objects that surround human agents, and the multitude of other factors that both embody and materialise gender and (hetero)sexuality. It is not, moreover, as one reviewer worried that we are saying the hair or muscles are not human! Rather that the posthuman performativity approach helps us think

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[150] Barad, 2007, p. 134

outside the psychological orientation of the human intention model where we target desire to harm boys by bullying them as 'gay'—to shift to explore the discursive and material intra-actions through which gay materialises in context. Here masculinity is performed and produced through the dynamic intra-acting material agents of bigness, arm muscles (and performative obsession with this), and something described as being 'full on sport' or being 'all about the gym', a spacetimemattering where the presence of the gym lingers upon the body—here perhaps it is clear to see how non-human aspects of a location and activities (at the gym) intra-act with the body to create masculinity. Particular sports were a powerful material force in their intra-actions *with the body*; its presence even disrupted the agential potential of shaved body hair:

> Linda: Some of the sporty guys will do it [shave their legs] because of taping
> Jennifer: Yeah
> Linda: And then they'll get teased
> Alice: But then some guys just do it, just cause,
> Linda: Yeah
> Alice: And then they're like well that's cool, like most people that do it 'oh he's cool', so it doesn't really matter.
> Jennifer: If you're jock, like you're sporty or you're muscley, like, whatever you do, you're gonna be a god
> Linda: Yeah
> Jennifer: But like, if someone that was smart, and like, not attractive to like, you know, the girls at school or whatever, and they shaved their legs, it'd be like this big deal like, 'oh what a poofter', you know?
> Linda: Yeah
> Jennifer: But if a jock did it, 'oh he's so cool let's all shave our legs'
> (Year 10 female students, Wilson High, Australia).

Here we see the oppositional discursive and embodied positions of jock and gay are established through the intra-actions of sport and the material agents of muscles. "Practices, doings and actions"[151] operate as constitutive material forces in producing what is cool (intelligible) and what is gay (unintelligible). Shaving of leg hair if connected to the right sporting activity can actually create the jock through these specific intra-actions and spacetimematterings. The agential parts of bodies—hair and muscles—themselves are corporeal presences that intra-act with other agents – so the taping of legs through a sporting activity is what enables the sporty male as 'god' to emerge. These complex choreographies matter—the gym, taping, shaving—the co-constitution of these material and discursive agents are part of a wider apparatus of masculinity that constructs the cuts and boundaries that 'matter'. Through this lens of material feminism and posthuman performativity, what we may see as resolutely mundane (the presence or absence of body hair or the way someone may walk) is instead illuminated as possessing perhaps surprising material force[152].

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[151] Barad, 2007 in Taylor, 2013, p. 688
[152] Taylor, 2013

Conclusion

In this paper we questioned the efficacy of traditional, psychological understandings of bullying. We reviewed the importance of a Butlerian discursive approach, which shows how heterosexualized discourses regulate gender through the variable performance of norms around girl and boy. We suggested that this discursive focus is limited theoretically and practically, considering problems with policies that try to target and ban 'bullying' words (like slut or gay) as the sum of what needs to change in school spaces. We discussed the importance of the posthuman performativity lens in moving us further to attend to the intra-actions of non-human agents, materialities and discourses to produce what comes to be known as bullying phenomena and events in schools across geographic and temporal contexts. We argued that thinking through the complexities of how slut, lesbian, gay and poof work in specific discursive-material intra-actions with skirts and hair and other material agents as part of a wider apparatus of relations can help us to understand force relations differently[153]. For instance, better grasping the intra-actions around the material skirt and the discourse of the slut, could lead to a review of uniform policies, and the gendered spaces and school rules that regulate girls' bodies. Greater attention to the material-discursive intra-actions of hair, muscles and football through which jock, gay and poof intra-actively come into being, could inform sporting policy practices that celebrate the fit, heroic masculine body in physical education to the detriment of other forms of being boy.

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[153] See also Davies, 2014 for an analysis of re-thinking early childhood and anger amongst boys differently and diffractively through Baradian and Deleuzian lenses.

Indeed, it is crucial to use these theoretical insights that help us rethink the phenomena of bullying in ways that reframe our research practices. For instance what does it take to shift research away from the deficit model of making better anti-bully policies to re-dress (!) problem behaviour, to supporting young people who are actively challenging gender and sexual inequalities (and other material injustices like racism) in their schools? We have been exploring the potentials afforded by feminist clubs and groups in UK secondary schools[154]. Some of these groups became active as a result of school rules around uniform and particularly non-uniform days where girls' body-clothes intra-actions were sanctioned: "2/3 of girls were sent home for inappropriate clothing... with no attention paid to the boys and we objected and the group was born"[155]. These groups worked to engage with (hetero)sexism at their school through a range of material-discursive intra-actions including producing feminist leaflets, recreating the Tumblr meme 'I need feminism because' and transmitting it through one of the school's television systems, and using social media like Twitter and Facebook to communicate their 'feminist' views about everything from body image to sexist school rules [156]. Particularly interesting is how these intra-actions worked to change cultures of heterosexist masculinity, when for instance through engaging with the feminist leaflet some boys openly declared themselves to be feminists. One group of boys created their own 'Who needs feminism' posters, material signs they were photographed holding up that said things like "I need feminism because being interested in fashion doesn't make me less of a man". "I need feminism because boys <u>DO </u>cry and that's OK."

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[154] see Ringrose and Renold, forthcoming
[155] London school 2, Year 10 girl
[156] London School 2

In closing, then, we wish to return to Barad's important statement that "each intra-action matters, since the possibilities for what the world may become call out in the pause that precedes each breath [or the gasp in our research interview!] before a moment comes into being and the world is remade again"[157]. In our view, Barad's approach helps us to rethink the entire conceptual field of bullying and how we bring meaning to life in our research processes by making clear that we as researchers create the phenomena we study through the theoretical concepts and methodological procedures we use. Thus there is no self-evident bullying reality or incidents out there waiting for us to discover, no objects that are already existing, rather we intra-actively create what we research as bullying incidents, behaviours and events through an entire apparatus of meanings we bring to bear in the process. For us, as we have begun demonstrating, this means there is plenty of scope for finding new ways of intra-acting with school spaces to remake the discursive-material context of gender and sexual matterings.

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[157] Barad, 2007, pp. 184-185

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