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Article Title

Becoming Through Contiguity and Lines of Flight: The Four Faces of Celebrity-Proximate Assemblages

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Abstract

Prior consumer studies examined consumers in extraordinary contexts role playing and transforming using magical thinking. This study investigates consumers becoming in everyday life using celebrities and explores the dynamic relations between consumers and social media. Individual and group interviews and mobile digital data were collected. Drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) theory of becoming, four faces of celebrity-proximate assemblages were inductively derived to explore the range of dynamic states that can emerge at any moment. The celebrity-proximate assemblage includes the *body without organization* that is virtual and contiguous with diverting assemblages and forms fluid lines of flight with the possibility of disruption. The *developing body* is both virtual and actual and is contiguous with overlapping assemblages and actualizes tentative lines of flight for capacities to experiment in the real world. The *enhanced and regimented body* are also both virtual and actual. The *enhanced body* comingles with other assemblages and actualizes fewer expansive lines that map new capacities. The *regimented body*, however, is captivated by other assemblages and actualizes the fewest and most restrictive lines, which are often life diminishing. Implications for consumer research are explored for this model of becoming and the use of mobile digital data collection methods.

Keywords

Becoming, Transforming, Assemblage, Proximate Assemblage, Celebrity Watching, Contiguity, Lines of Flight, Desire, Body Without Organs, Digital Mobile Methods.

BECOMING THROUGH CONTIGUITY AND LINES OF FLIGHT: THE FOUR FACES OF CELEBRITY-PROXIMATE ASSEMBLAGES

I might even see them two or three times a day on social media, so Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat. I see what they do every day. I feel so connected to them, it's like I know them.... I've also started watching Khloe [Kardashian] more. Have you seen how she's changed? It's incredible. She's made me go to the gym more, I follow her on Snapchat, as well. But it's not just the gym, it's also what she eats, her whole lifestyle, and diet. I can relate more to Khloe because of her transformation, [she] went from this girl that looked like she was just big boned, and tall, and not very attractive. I kind of feel like how she looked before, and I'd really like to change what I look like completely. (Monique, celebrity watcher)

Consumer researchers examine market-level changes driven by consumers (Figueiredo and Scaraboto 2016; Martin and Schouten 2014) and institutions (Giesler and Veresiu 2014).

However, researchers are increasingly exploring how individual consumers become something new (Price et al. 2017). Much is known about how consumers playfully perform using products and retail settings (Goulding et al. 2009; Kozinets et al. 2004; Seregina and Weijs 2016), often resisting culturally dominant meanings through role-playing (Belk and Costa 1998; Thompson and Üstüner 2015) and magical thinking (Arnould and Price 1993; Fernandez and Lastovicka 2011). Consumers prepare costumes, perform character roles, or stage magical experiences in the fantasy worlds of mountain men (Belk and Costa 1998), fan communities (Kozinets 2001), cosplay (Seregina and Weijs 2016), white-water rafting (Arnould and Price 1993), and roller derby (Thompson and Üstüner 2015).

In the opening quote, however, Monique describes everyday changes, from diet and exercise to lifestyle and appearance, all inspired by following celebrities on social media.

Other consumer researchers also examine common changes, such as dieting (Moisio and Beruchashvili 2010) and identity renaissance (Schau, Gilly, and Wolfinbarger 2009).

However, we explore the processes by which consumers assemble new ways of becoming by using social media and following celebrities. Contemporary consumers move nimbly between digital and real-world identities (Schau and Gilly 2003). But how do consumers use and

combine digital and actual resources on different media platforms across their ongoing processes of becoming?

We study how consumers change—which consumer researchers often call transforming and assemblage theorists call becoming. We pose three questions. First, what are the processes by which consumers become? Second, how are consumers affecting and being affected by enabling structures of digital and material objects when becoming in the real world? Finally, does a tipping point exist for consumers when changes pivot from life enhancing to life diminishing? We make three corresponding theoretical contributions. We identify processes and structure rooted in assemblage theory across four states of becoming. We explain how the structure, processes, and interactions change across these states of becoming. We show how the redistribution of agency pivots between productive and reductive states.

Next, we identify gaps in our understanding by exploring research on role-playing and performing (Belk and Costa 1998; Deighton 1992; Seregina and Weijs 2016) and magical thinking (Arnould and Price 1993; Fernandez and Lastovicka 2011). We also review research on our context of celebrity watching. We then theorize consumers' becoming by drawing on concepts from Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) assemblage theory (Canniford and Bajde 2016; Hoffman and Novak 2018; Kozinets, Patterson, and Ashman 2017). This theory of becoming uses the concept of assemblage to explore the ongoing processes of how elements come together and fall apart making it well suited for understanding how consumers change. Finally, we delineate our methods and findings on celebrity-proximate assemblages.

CONSUMERS BECOMING

Consumers' Transforming through Embodied Performance

Consumers as Playful Performers. The dramaturgical turn in consumer research theorizes consumers as performers who have fun experimenting in fanciful commercial

playgrounds (Deighton 1992). Consumers playfully wear different masks to move among multiple and even divergent identities. This approach to consumer role-playing draws inspiration from postmodern theory by emphasizing the multiplicity of identity in which consumers play different characters, experiment with identity, and escape from mundane life (Firat and Venkatesh 1995). For example, consumers at the ESPN Zone escape by role-playing and using props that are carefully staged by ESPN in a cocreated fantasy world; they perform fantasies of class-based and gendered-identity scripts before returning “back to reality” (Kozinets et al. 2004, 666). Similarly, Seregina and Weijs’s (2016) cosplayers change into “hyper” versions of themselves when they don elaborately crafted costumes for make-believe play at comic conventions. Or in Goulding et al.’s (2009) study on clubbing, consumers leave their everyday identities at the club doors and escape into an intense zone of fun that is enhanced by taking the drug ecstasy, dancing for hours, and being swept up by the crowd. But at the end of the evening, these consumers return to their everyday lives, as do the players at the ESPN Zone and comic conventions.

Thompson and Üstüner (2015), however, argue that consumers’ fantasy performances can affect their real lives. They explore how roller derby “Grrrls” use costuming and rough physicality to challenge dominant gendered scripts and aesthetics. A roller derby informant said that in the rink, “You are a completely different person... and it seeps into real life.” Moreover, skaters became “increasingly invested in their personas” (Thompson and Üstüner 2015, 247). Similarly, Belk and Costa (1998) found that some of the mountain men carried home the “buckskinner” aesthetic by displaying the artifacts and artwork of mountain men. *Star Trek* fans occasionally extended their role-playing into everyday life, such as when informants decorate their homes with *Star Trek* products (Kozinets 2001).

Thus, some performances spill over into real life, but we do not know how this happens. Prior consumer research provides some tantalizing clues, but why are some

identities actualized in daily life while others are only escapes or opportunities for experimentation? Our first research question asks: What are the processes by which consumers become?

Consumers as Crafters. Studies document consumers' painstaking research and elaborate handcrafting of costumes and props (Belk and Costa 1998; Seregina and WeiJo 2016). For example, mountain men undertake meticulous historical research (e.g., subscribing and studying the periodical *Muzzle Blasts*), gather items (e.g., leather pouches and pewter mugs), change their appearance (e.g., grow their hair and beards), and master new skills (e.g., learn to hand-stitch, bead garments, and practice "buckskinner" speech patterns) (Belk and Costa 1998). Cosplayers similarly master crafting their costumes by striving for perfection in the smallest of details to represent the "real" character (Seregina and WeiJo 2016, 144). Although cosplayers meticulously reproduce their costumes, their performances are skin deep and far more focused on aesthetic replication of their characters. Mountain men, however, want to perform as mountain men by shooting guns, tanning hides, and making flint fires (Belk and Costa 1998).

The mountain men clearly learn more skills and alter their appearance, but it is unclear how the collections of objects and practices work across a process of becoming. Similarly, consumers imagine using digital resources (Hoffman and Novak 2018), but little is known about how these imaginings work to change the consumer. Although consumers can have new beginnings (Price et al. 2017), we do not fully understand the ongoing processes of becoming, particularly in the context of modern digital lives with a host of new interactive tools (Schau and Gilly 2003). Moreover, these interactive tools are embedded within enabling structures that enlist consumers (Thompson 2019). Thus, our second research question asks: How are consumers affecting and being affected by enabling structures of digital and material objects when becoming in the real world?

Consumers Transforming through Magical Thinking

In their study of white-water rafting, Arnould and Price (1993) find consumers explore new identities moving from passive to active participants. Service encounters involve carefully staged rituals to signal transformations, such as pecking the “kissing stone” for good luck. The researchers emphasize that “magical thinking” underpins these changes by focusing on the role of imagination. Magical thinking involves the “correspondence or conflation between the subjective, internal world and the world of reality” (Nemeroff and Rozin 2000, 5). Fernandez and Lastovicka (2011) also use magical thinking to explain how consumers perform with replica instruments and conflate this as possessing the talent of famous musicians. Although the process of consumer change was not the theoretical focus of the study, the guitarists believed their embodied performance improved when performing with the guitar replicas.

Thus, magical thinking involves both imagining and embodying the performance. Yet extant studies on performative practice tend to focus on either the internalized experience of becoming, such as magical thinking and imagining (Arnould and Price 1993; Fernandez and Lastovicka 2011), or the embodiment of performance (Seregina and Weijo 2016; Thompson and Üstüner 2015). For example, Thompson and Üstüner (2015) suggest that reality comprises the physical expression of doing rather than the internalized imaginings. A theory of the process of becoming thus needs to span *both* imagination and embodiment. This raises an interesting issue of how imagination and embodiment work together to influence consumers’ ongoing changes. Moreover, current conceptions of consumers becoming tend to focus on the positive outcomes, such as escape, self-affirmation, and well-being (Kozinets et al. 2004; Price et al. 2017). But not all changes are life enhancing especially when consumers’ imagination and embodiment are misaligned. Tales of consumer regret after extreme makeovers and cosmetic surgery are daily fodder for the popular press. Thus, our

final research question asks: Does a tipping point exist when changes pivot from life enhancing to life diminishing?

THE CONTEXT OF CELEBRITY WATCHING

Historical Shifts in Celebrity Watching

Consumption of celebrities presents as an ideal context in which to understand the process of consumers becoming something new because celebrity watching reveals “more about what a person hopes to become than it does about what a person already is” (Fraser and Brown 2002, 190). Celebrity watching is a widespread cultural phenomenon that has grown in popularity with the rise of consumer culture and digital media (Hackley and Hackley 2015; Turner 2013). We briefly review four key historical shifts to provide context for contemporary celebrity watching. These intertwined trends are teased apart for clarity.

First, the meaning of celebrity is broadening. Historically, celebrity was ascribed by aristocratic birthright or achieved through heroic feats (Boorstin 1992; Rojek 2001). A new form of celebrity has emerged fueled by media exposure and attained merely by being visible (Rojek 2001). Technology has driven the growth of celebrity watching, first with the introduction of the printing press and rising literacy rates and, more recently, with the Internet and social media; consequently, consumers increasingly watch celebrities who are famous just for being famous (Bauman 2005; Boorstin 1992). For example, an 1898 survey of preteens and teenagers found that none were interested in emulating entertainers. A similar survey conducted in 1948 found that 37% of those in this age group wanted to model themselves after an athlete or entertainer. But in 1986, 90% of teenagers most wanted to emulate an entertainer in polling (Cowen 2000). The democratization of celebrity involves a shift from public figures who were extraordinary and “untouchable” to contemporary celebrities who are more ordinary and “touchable” (Hackley and Hackley 2015; Moraes et al.

2019), and contemporary celebrity watchers follow both (Banister and Cocker 2014; Cocker et al. 2015).

Second, consumers increasingly expect more access to celebrities' private lives. First using etchings and photographs and then television, the graphic revolution increased exposure to celebrities' private lives, which encouraged an intimate sensibility for consumers—sometimes real, sometimes illusionary (Boorstin 1992). This rise of visual media coincided with new realist styles of popular journalism that reported on the quotidian lives of celebrities (Hellmueller and Aeschbacher 2010). Celebrities were interviewed and photographed, often in their homes, revealing the backstage of their private lives (Mole 2007). Consumers' demand for the intimate details of celebrity's lives—especially film stars of the early twentieth century—responded to and fueled this new type of celebrity characterized by visibility and exposure (Boorstin 1992).

Accessibility to celebrities' "real lives"—warts and all—only expanded with the rise of social media (Fillis 2015). Many celebrities document their lives and populate consumers' feeds on digital platforms, such as Instagram and Snapchat. Goffman's (1959) assumption that people modify their presentation of self across different audiences and settings does not necessarily apply in the social media universe (Vitak 2012). Microcelebrities often use social media to promote themselves as a consistent brand for commercial success (Kerrigan et al. 2011; Moraes et al. 2019). Celebrities and microcelebrities strive for consistency in their self-brand across work, public appearances, and home (Khamis, Ang, and Welling 2017). Thus, we turn not to Goffman (1959) but to an alternative performative theoretical lens (Deleuze and Guattari 1987).

Third, celebrities and consumers use social media for greater two-way exchanges (Cashmore 2014; Hamilton and Hewer 2010). Initially, relationships between celebrities and their fans were theorized as one-way, parasocial relationships (Horton and Wohl 1956). Yet,

parasocial relationships do not hold when fans and stars can communicate directly on social media (Hellmueller and Aeschbacher 2010). Conceptions of the consumer audience as “gullible dupe[s] suckered by the wiles of artful celebrity-manipulators are blown away” (Cashmore 2014, 83). Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat, allow for direct, two-way communication (Khamis et al. 2017). Thus, relationships among celebrities and their audiences have intensified, increasing feelings of intimacy, reducing distance, and even collapsing boundaries (Banister and Cocker 2014; Hellmueller and Aeschbacher 2010). These two-way celebrity-consumer relationships can vary from being positive and aspirational to antagonistic and can even culminate in “hate watching” (Leonard and Negra 2018, 220). Hate watchers take pleasure in responding with disdain to touchable celebrities who are often the subject of intense media scrutiny (Banister and Cocker 2014; Leonard and Negra 2018).

Finally, consumers increasingly view celebrities and microcelebrities as potential role models. Heroes are defined by their achievements, celebrities by their media persona and visibility, and role models by their influence (Fraser and Brown 2002). The influence of role models is socially mediated, and television and social media are powerful sources of mediated influence (Fraser and Brown 2002). Consumers can access celebrities by streaming daily through various devices. Yet it is the very ordinariness of modern celebrities, sometimes devoid of talent other than their significant ability to self-promote, that increases consumer identification (Hackley and Hackley 2015). Reality TV also fosters the belief that anyone can be famous (Khamis et al. 2017). The rise of reality TV is an extension of this voyeuristic interest in the intimate lives of other people. Programs, such as *Big Brother* and *Survivor*, recruit ordinary people revealing the most raw and intimate details of their lives. The consumer reasons, “I could be like them.” But the real world influence of this increased identification is unclear.

The Enabling Infrastructure of Social Media

Digital platforms—such as Instagram, SnapChat, and TikTok—are increasingly the medium through which consumers interact with celebrities (Fisher 2020). Celebrity watchers are enrolled in ecosystems of intersecting social, cultural, and technological networks, which means they become part of an interconnected network of entities (Hoffman and Novak 2018). Thus, processes of consumers becoming are contingent on these broader relations within the domains of family, religion, politics, and socio-cultural life (Thompson 2019). Digitally-archived images are a wellspring for avid celebrity watchers and “become part of the connective tissue of the participatory and affective network” (Salovaara 2015, 105). The social media platform Pinterest exemplifies this “intense engagement” as consumers collect celebrity-inspired images (Phillips, Miller, and McQuarrie 2014, 634). The addictive nature of Pinterest is aptly called “digital crack for women” (Dvorak 2012, n.p.)

Contemporary celebrity watching occurs within an enabling infrastructure that is predominantly technological. Consumers become posthuman as they “meld with the machine” (Fisher 2020, 96)—they are cyborgs enrolled in a socio-technological infrastructure in which social and cultural influences interact with technological interfaces (Puar 2012). This infrastructure links the material—such as cell phones, laptops, and celebrities, to the digital—such as social media platforms, Google search engines, hashtags, and visual memes.

In these enabling infrastructures, agency is unequally distributed throughout the network (Buchanan 2015; Thompson 2019). Power imbalances exist between the celebrity-watcher and the socio-technological networks of which they are a part. Some network nodes are more heavily trafficked and more powerful (Salovaara 2015). Google search engines are powerful network builders controlling elaborate digital matrices of keywords. Moreover, social media have systems of control coded into the platform through predictive analytics that curate specific content for individual consumers. In platforms, such as Instagram, never-

ending positivity is encouraged as “unhappy moments are curated out of existence... [thus] the platform controls women as they unknowingly control themselves (Fisher 2020, 95). Consumers are enrolled into modern day Potemkin villages as they scroll, like, share, and pin with seemingly freewheeling agency on platforms that provide a smooth and frictionless interface to endless content. Embedded within these social media ecosystems, consumers seek escape from the tedium of daily life; “[i]t’s hard to feel pain when you’re having so much fun” (Fisher 2020, 95). But these systems of control are created to conceal and deceive—users often do not understand their implications.

Nevertheless, social media ecosystems have distributed agency that can subvert. For example, marginalized people often use social media systems to be informed, to connect, to organize, and to protest (Lim 2018; Steinburg 2016). Social movements, like #BlackLivesMatter, offer possibilities for change leading to real world protests and even policy reforms, such as the U.S. Death and Custody Reporting Act (Steinburg 2016). The trajectories of social media narrative constellations are emergent and move in unpredictable directions, such as the backlash of the #AllLivesMatter movement (Salovaara 2015). Indeed, consumers can leverage socio-technological networks and market resources to “challenge other constraints and sources of subordination that govern their lives” (Thompson 2019, 15). Leeway exists in the posthuman infrastructure of celebrity watching for agentic change—but these social actors are never working alone in this interconnected social media ecosystem (Fisher 2020; Salovaara 2015).

Bauman (2005) notes that celebrities “provide a sort of glue that brings and holds together otherwise diffuse and scattered aggregates of people... celebrities are so comfortably at home in the liquid modern setting: liquid modernity is their natural ecological niche” (50). Thus, we explore assemblage theory to conceptualize celebrity watching as part of this social

media ecosystem. We use the term celebrity-proximate assemblage to capture how celebrity watchers are part of this dynamic social media ecosystem.

ASSEMBLAGES AND BECOMING

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, French scholars Deleuze and Guattari (1987) introduce the concept of assemblages to theorize the omnipresent tendencies of stability and instability (Adkins 2015; Marcus and Saka 2006; Roffe 2016). An assemblage is Janus-faced with two opposing tendencies of change and stability, much like the Roman god sitting at the threshold simultaneously looking forward and backward. An assemblage is *both* the ongoing process of organizing and bringing together heterogeneous bodies, objects, ideas, and territories, *and* it is the arranged structure of these elements (Livesay 2010; Nail 2017). Assemblages as processes are “complex flows, connections and becomings that emerge and disperse relationally between bodies.” Assemblages as structures are a “multiplicity of unstable organic and non-organic elements each invested with the capacity to transform the whole” (Kennedy et al. 2013, 46). This capacity to “transform” arises from the distributed power relations that exist among the elements of assemblages (Thompson 2019).

Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of becoming is a useful lens for understanding celebrity-proximate assemblages and their role in consumer change. Nevertheless, this theory is not for the faint of heart. As one critic bemoans, *A Thousand Plateaus* is “one of the most obscure, most irritating, most fluffy of all of the theoretical texts I have encountered” (Hertz 2016, 147). To manage these challenges, we limited our use of assemblage theory to four concepts that were most relevant to the process of becoming. We offer caveats for how we translated these concepts to make this theory more accessible and recommend recent interpretations when tackling this theory (Adkins 2015; Colebrook 2002).

Assemblages are not random, accidental collections (Buchanan 2015, 2017). Rather, assemblages are alloys—multiplicities—that come together in deliberate arrangements to

create new capacities (Livesay 2010; Nail 2017). Deleuze and Guattari use the concepts of stratification, de-stratification, and re-stratification to explain how energy is invested, withdrawn, and reinvested into assemblages (Holland 2013)¹. Assemblages are continually congealing (i.e., stratification and re-stratification) and falling apart (i.e., de-stratification); they are always being made and unmade (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Desire, a central concept in this process, is a productive energy that forges new connections between assemblages through experimentation to create new assemblages with new capacities (Kozinets et al. 2017).

Our first research question explores the processes by which consumers become. Extant consumer studies also explore how assemblages come together and fall apart. Researchers use assemblages to understand social phenomena as dynamic, hybrid, and relational (Canniford and Bajde 2016; Epp, Schau, and Price 2014; Parmentier and Fischer 2015). At the market level, Kozinets et al. (2017) focus on networks of desire and the almost limitless adaptability of food and its presentation on social media. In the context of food blogging, they argue that technology bends the energy flows of consumers' desire towards the "ideologies of technocapitalism" (679). Martin and Schouten (2014) show how grassroots communities of practice assemble to mobilize a new minimoto market. At a community level, Parmentier and Fischer (2015) explain how brand audiences dissipate. Fans use digital tools to reframe, remix, and reject elements of the brand assemblage reducing its relational capacity with a wider audience.

¹The terms territorialization, deterritorialization, and re-territorialization are often used in consumer studies employing assemblage theory and arise in *Anti-Oedipus* (1980)—the precursor to *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987)—to respectively capture energy investment, withdrawal, and redeployment (Holland 2013). The territorialization terminology focuses on the stasis/change of the elements of the assemblage (Adkins 2015). In contrast, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari use the terms stratification and de-stratification to also represent the processes of actualization—moving along a continuum from virtual to actual (Holland 2013). This terminology also captures the stasis and change of *both* the substance (contents) and form (configuration) of the assemblage.

At the family level, Epp et al. (2014) investigate how technologies—such as live streaming and audio/video apps—help families maintain important rituals when separated by distance and time. Family assemblages are de-stratified and re-stratified through the coupling of new technologies fueled by desires to maintain family bonds. The authors present five practice trajectories for transitioning from co-located family practices to technology-mediated practices. These trajectories unleashed imaginative capacities and generated new family practices. Not all new family assemblages are maintained, such as when linkages with new technologies fail and the assemblage comes apart. Our research explores this becoming at the individual level—embedded within social media ecosystems—conceptualizing these trajectories as lines of flight and seeking to understand how they work as consumers change (Deleuze and Guattari 1987).

Extant studies offer insights into processes and outcomes of assemblage de-stratification and re-stratification at macro (i.e., market) and meso-levels (i.e., community networks and family practices). These studies explore the facilitators of becoming—such as desire (Kozinets et al. 2017) and the resulting relational and imaginative capacities (Epp et al. 2014; Parmentier and Fischer 2015). These studies stop short of explaining how and why individual consumers change—such as cosplayers and roller derby grrls—by delineating the process of becoming. Thompson (2019, 15), for example, argues that researchers “ignore the transformative interactions, tensions, and compatibilities that arise *among* culturally proximate assemblages.” As such, we focus on celebrity-proximate assemblages that have different relational capacities.

Our second research question explores how consumers affect and are being affected by enabling structures of digital and material objects when becoming in the real world? Hoffman and Novak (2018) draw on Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) work to explore assemblages formed through interactions in the Internet of Things. They focus on how

consumers' interactions with smart technology, such as Alexa and self-driving cars, form and evolve over time. By contrast, we focus on celebrity-proximate assemblages to explore relational capacities that both restrict and expand. We build on this past research and more fully develop how the nature of the interactions change across different states of assemblages.

Our final research question asks if a tipping point exists at which consumer changes move from life enhancing to life diminishing? Consumer studies of assemblages view potential negative outcomes through the concept of betrayal (Canniford and Shankar 2013; Parmentier and Fischer 2015). Betrayals arise when assemblage elements are incoherent or misalign with desire (Canniford and Shankar 2013; Parmentier and Fischer 2015). For example, Epp et al. (2014) conceptualize betrayals as *failed trials* when consumers unsuccessfully experiment with new technology assemblages. These assemblages are unstable lacking key technological resources, skills, and imaginative capacities and fail to produce an assemblage that can reassemble family practices to enhance family life. Similarly, Hoffman and Novak (2018) identify self-reduction as a mechanism that produces negative outcomes. The consumer is diminished through their interactions within a stagnant assemblage that locks them into repetitive interactions and limited capacities. These studies draw attention to the reductive possibilities of consumption assemblages but do not fully theorize how assemblages become life-diminishing.

We draw on assemblage theory and examine how interactions with celebrity assemblages affect ongoing processes of becoming. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) developed an elaborate and novel theoretical vocabulary and, depending on the task at hand, concepts can be pragmatically employed (Malins 2004). For example, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) refer to an assemblage without organization as a “body without organs;” for clarity, we use the term “body without organization” as synonymous with their original term. We focus on four central concepts from their work that relate to becoming: the *body with organization*, the

body without organization, lines of flight, and desire. As we critically analyzed empirical findings on celebrity watching, these concepts emerged as relevant to understanding consumers' interactions with celebrity assemblages. We draw on Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) original work and contemporary interpretations (Adkins 2015; Colebrook 2002).

Deleuze and Guattari offer new ways of conceptualizing the human body that move beyond mind/body dualisms (Stark 2017). Drawing on Spinoza, the body is defined by doing rather than being, and by its affects and action rather than its identity. Becoming is when heterogeneous elements come together and interact to form something new (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). "The body cannot be thought of as the origin or final point of identity because embodied individuals are enmeshed in active processes of engagement with their surroundings" (Stark 2017, 73). Thus, the body is a collective project, not an individualistic one; it is a body that does not discriminate between "human and the nonhuman, the organic and the inorganic or the natural and the artificial" (75). Relations of power circulate through the body (Nail 2017), flowing and re-balancing as the assemblage connects and re-connects. Agency is distributed across the entire network of interconnected and overlapping assemblages (Buchanan 2015; Hoffman and Novak 2018; Thompson 2019).

The Body with and without Organization

Assemblages have dual and opposing forces that fluctuate between an *organized body* and a *body without organization*. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 4) critically state: "One side of a mechanic assemblage faces the strata, which doubtless makes it a kind of organism [organized body]...it also has a side facing a body without organs, which is continually dismantling the organism." Thus, the assemblage is conceptualized as having two faces with the tendency toward organization moving to re-stratification, and the tendency toward the body without organization moving to de-stratification. Our research builds upon this key

insight of the Janus-faced assemblage by exploring four faces of celebrity-proximate assemblages.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) conceptualize the assemblage as an organized body that is self-regulating—structuring and binding heterogeneous materials to form a working mechanism (Ringrose and Coleman 2013; Smith 2018). We know the organized body by its structure—how its components are ordered and connected at any specific moment (Buchanan 1997; Coleman 2008). A tree is an exemplar of a self-regulating body; it is “a marvel of a stable, hierarchical organization” (Adkins 2015, 23). The organized body is stratified; it is like a tree situated to spread out its branches and leaves to capture the maximum sunlight in a specific territory. The stratification of an organized body, however, is temporary. Bodies are always becoming, as they move between being more or less stratified (Adkins 2015).

The assemblage is conceptualized as a *body without organization* (BwO) when it is de-stratifying—a body becoming free from organizational logics and structures and, thus, without the relations and interactions to bind its heterogeneous elements together or hold it in place. As the body without organization becomes more unstructured and interactions are unstable, it is full of virtual and unrealized possibilities (Adkins 2015)². As such, the body without organization represents all that an organized body *could* do but is constrained by stratification and structural logics (Buchanan 2017; Smith 2018). Imagine a toy box brimming with a jumble of toys, costumes, books, blocks, puzzles, and so on. These items are disorganized and unconnected but hold potential for what they might become if combined. Combining objects and ideas from the toy box creates new assemblages—interacting elements form a sailing boat on the ocean, a monster in a cave, or a giant bird gliding on the wind—until the connections are broken and the items are returned to the toy box. Similarly,

² Deleuze and Guattari use “virtual” to refer to potential that can shift to become “actual” (Coleman and Ringrose 2013). We only use the term virtual to refer to this potentiality and otherwise use the term digital to avoid confusion.

the body without organization represents the full potential of an assemblage before being stratified and limited into an organized body (Fox 2002).

Lines of Flight

Lines of flight are the body's interactions with other assemblages (Deleuze and Guattari 1987) or what Epp et al. (2014) call practice trajectories. Lines of flight are latent paths for becoming that open “new ways of becoming, thinking, working; creating new and productive assemblages/connections” (Leith 2016, 8). Thus, assemblages change by actualizing virtual lines of flight to become real, but no end destination necessarily exists. Lines of flight span all scalar levels from molecular to individual and societal to global (Price and Epp 2016; Roffe 2016). Like nested Russian dolls, lines of flight can interact at any scalar level—thus, challenging traditional micro/macro boundaries (Canniford and Bajde 2016).

When the assemblage solidifies lines of flight to other assemblages then new relational capacities may arise (Deleuze 1990; Price and Epp 2016). A relational capacity refers to what can be produced as an assemblage interacts with another assemblage at this connection (Price and Epp 2016). An assemblage is constituted of heterogeneous elements and the dynamic interactions among them (Coleman 2008). Thus, assemblages change when they form new interactions (lines of flight) with other assemblages, as new relational capacities and power distributions are created (Markus and Saka 2006). To activate the relational capacity of a line of flight requires a “third term”—a “something else” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 274). This “something else” is an “extreme contiguity” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 173)—the cultural, social, or physical proximity that allows the boundaries of bordering assemblages to be breached and for lines of flight to solidify into actualized interactions (Thompson 2019). We use the concept of *contiguity* to capture different bases for

creating lines of flight, drawing entities together and “through which one becomes” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 272).

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) suggest that the body without organization has more lines of flight because it is free from the structures and logics that define the organized body. The body without organization promiscuously interacts with wildly diverse assemblages—each new virtual line of flight having its own relational capacities. Thus, virtual lines of flight circulate between the body without organization and contiguous assemblages creating the potential for change (Buchanan 2017). Lines of flight are most often temporary and inconsequential—merely ephemeral imaginings (Fox 2002). Some lines of flight, however, become actualized and are more stable interactions with other assemblages.

Lines of flight are critical pathways for consumers becoming yet have received little attention in consumer studies. Weijs, Martin, and Arnould (2018) argue lines of flight “challenge current assemblage configurations... enlisting objects, events, signs, ideas, and utterances to produce new spaces of thought and action” (254). Epp et al. (2014) find evidence that lines of flight (i.e., practice trajectories) unleash material and imaginative capacities to become. But are all contiguities and lines of flight the same?

Desire

For Deleuze and Guattari (1987), desire directs this perpetual becoming. This desire is not filling a void (Belk, Ger, and Askegaard 2003). Instead, desire is a productive energy fueled by a perpetual drive to change (Adkins 2015; Hietanen, And  hn, and Wickstr  m 2019; Kozinets et al. 2017). From this perspective, desire is a flow of energy with the potential to expand what a body can do (Colebrook 2002).

Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) philosophy of becoming focuses on *what a body can do* within new lines of flight, rather than what a body can do within its current interactions. Lines of flight guide and channel the flows of desire (Malins 2004; Seely 2013). Thus, desire

is a disruptive energy that flows through lines of flight creating capacities and enhancing what a body can do. A body is not limited to the capacities of a single line of flight. Rather, assemblages are multiplicities, “temporary selections of a whole host of intersecting and diverging lines. As assemblages combine with one another these intersecting and diverging lines generate some new lines, as well as blocking other lines” (Adkins 2015, 121). Thus, what a body can do is contingent on complex multiplicities of lines of flight.

We know nothing of a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, either to destroy that body or be destroyed by it, either to exchange actions and passions with it or to join with it in composing a more powerful body (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 257).

To understand what a body is capable of, one must ask: What are the lines of flight that currently constitute this body and what can it do now? What other lines of flight are possible? What could the body do if it merged with other assemblages? It is only by evaluating the potential effect of an assemblage that one can know its capabilities (Deleuze and Guattari 1987).

Lines of flight can be unleashed, *mapping* new pathways to contiguous assemblages that expand relational capacities (Atkins 2015; Colebrook 2002). Yet, not all lines of flight create relational capacities that expand what a body can do. Rather, a line of flight may reduce relational capacities—such as outlining an exact reproduction of another assemblage. These lines of flight restrict potentialities by *tracing* paths that already exist (Atkins 2015; Hoffman and Novak 2017). Lines of flight that trace a path to a single entity create a “gross delimitation of becoming itself” (Buchanan 1997, 87).

A map has multiple entryways, as opposed to the tracing, which always comes back ‘to the same.’ Mapping has to do with enhancing relational capacities whereas the tracing always involves an alleged ‘competence’ but only reproduces what already exists (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 12–3).

Hietanen et al. (2019) refer to this tracing as the dark side of desire, in which desire is violent, unstable, and sinister in “*find[ing] enjoyment in repression*” (3) [emphasis in original]. They

argue that this form of repressive desire creates lines of flight that trace, shutting down other desires. We found evidence of both mapping and tracing lines of flight to celebrities that generate different outcomes depending on the lines of flight and the distribution of agency, which are explored following our explication of the methodology.

METHODOLOGY

We collected data across three analytical phases. The first author conducted initial interviews and field work to better understand the context of celebrity watching. We gleaned two insights that shaped subsequent data collection. First, celebrity watching often occurs with friends, so we expanded individual interviews to include group interviews with friends. Second, celebrity watching takes place on social media—so our methods went mobile.

Informants and Sampling

We sampled millennial women because they are the most active celebrity watchers—54% are active on social media platforms (Euromonitor International 2014). We selected women who celebrity watch for 10 to 120 minutes daily on social media and sampled for variability in intensities of celebrity watching. We first interviewed in New York City, home to many celebrities. We expanded sampling to Australia and the United Kingdom because celebrity watching occurs primarily on global social media, such as Instagram and Snapchat (Miller et al. 2016). Celebrities like the Kardashians have broad appeal, but our sampling generated differences in the microcelebrities followed. Still, the four emergent states of assemblages held across all three countries. In total, we interviewed 41 women using snowball sampling for interviews and hiring a research firm to recruit consumers for mobile digital methods. The firm sampled from a panel of over 2,000 consumers using on our sampling criteria (see table 1).

Data Collection

Initial Field Work and Interviews. When investigating one's own culture, it is common to manufacture distance. For both researchers, celebrity watching was a novel context. Therefore, we needed to educate ourselves about common celebrities, popular social media, and online hangout sites. In the four initial interviews, the lead author negotiated researcher positionality by putting the informants in the role of expert and asking naive questions: "Which celebrities are currently most popular?" "Why are they famous?" "What are your preferred ways of watching celebrities?" The lead author took a celebrity-watching bus tour in New York City. This experience exposed the mundane nature of the insights consumers sought most, such as seeing the cafés specific celebrities frequented and discovering their favorite coffee. Insights at this stage led to group interviews with friends and mobile digital methods (Murthy 2008).

Individual and Friendship Group Interviews. The interview questions were semi-structured and evolved across data collection (Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton 2013). After probing the women's social media practices on celebrity following, our questions explored if and how they applied these insights in daily life. The interviews lasted between 90 and 120 minutes and were audio recorded and transcribed. One year later, we revisited two informants who had high intensities of celebrity watching to refine our emerging theorization.

The sociality of celebrity watching emerged as an important insight from the preliminary in-depth interviews. Informants texted celebrity snippets to friends, such as an image or screenshot copied from social media. Friends then digitally discussed the images. As such, we purposefully combined in-depth and friendship group interviews. We interviewed five friendship groups of between two and four women. Unlike a formal focus group, these friendship interviews were lively back-and-forth exchanges in which the women demonstrated the practice of celebrity watching. For example, during these group interviews, women discussed removing unworthy celebrities from their digital collections. We

interviewed 24 celebrity watchers using a combination of 12 in-depth and five group interviews spanning naturally occurring groups of friends across 14 women.

Mobile Digital Methods. Our methods went mobile since celebrity watching often occurs on smartphones. We asked an additional 17 millennial women who were frequent celebrity watchers to create digital diaries for in-the-moment insights. A market research firm identified these women and provided them with a mobile app for uploading digital images, as well as giving and receiving texts. We assigned these informants a combination of open and specific tasks using the mobile app. In open tasks, informants uploaded any digital content that was of interest to them, such as in-the-moment digital diaries of screenshots of celebrity social media, websites, text messages, and WhatsApp conversations with friends about celebrities. These screenshots were accompanied with explanations. In specific tasks, informants shared images of their favorite celebrities, responded to researchers' probes, or created and shared Pinterest boards about their favorite celebrities and why they follow them. Digital informants participated over a two-week period across three or four tasks depending on their interest, and we used two-way text-message "chat sessions" to probe the meaning of their digital uploads.

The digital methods provided rare real-time accounts of the informants' experience of celebrity watching as it unfolded at home and work, on trains, and during leisure time. We gathered participants' digital data "to enter into private worlds—worlds to which the researcher would ordinarily have no access" (Liebenberg 2009, 448). Participants took the lead by explaining the meaning of their digital images and screen shots, ranging from images of little moments of escape from their workplace routines to real time reactions to their favorite celebrities during reality TV shows. We received ethical approval for this research from our institutional review board. Informants were compensated at the standard rate for market research in each location.

 Insert Table 1 about here

Analysis

We used NVivo to organize the multimodal data of interview transcripts, photographs and images, mobile digital images and texts, and field notes (Jewitt and Kress 2003). Initially, we conducted an intra-textual analysis to code each informant's data using data-driven (inductive) codes. We focused on all of the informant's data to gain an overall understanding of her celebrity watching practices. In addition, we wrote theoretical memos to capture emergent themes. We iteratively expanded these memos as data collection and analysis progressed and new theorizations emerged. During the second analytical phase, we conducted an inter-textual analysis tacking across informants to identify patterns and divergences across concepts and theory-generated themes; we revised and developed our theoretical interpretation across dozens of iterations. We continued this hermeneutical process until the concepts and relationships stabilized and were at a sufficient level of abstraction to develop theory (Gioia et al. 2013; Thompson 1997).

CELEBRITY-PROXIMATE ASSEMBLAGES

We found four faces of celebrity-proximate assemblages with different tendencies toward change and stability. We provide a deeper understanding of the process by exploring the structure, process, contiguity, lines of flight, and desire for each; for analytical purposes, we separate these components that actually work together. The *body without organization* (BwO) is a celebrity-proximate assemblage that moves toward change forming many fluid lines of flight with celebrity assemblages. However, a celebrity-proximate assemblage can partially stabilize into a *developing body*. The developing body experiments by forming many tentative lines of flight with celebrity assemblages. A celebrity-proximate assemblage can

also re-stratify into an *enhanced body* that does more. The enhanced body maps new capacities of what the body can do by actualizing expanded lines of flight to celebrity assemblages. Finally, a celebrity-proximate assemblage can become a highly stratified assemblage by tracing restrictive lines of flight to specific celebrities. This is the *regimented body* that re-stratifies with fewer capacities. We distill these four faces of the celebrity-proximate assemblage into an image for didactic purposes analytically freezing the dynamic processes of becoming. This metaphor of four faces importantly focuses attention on the transitions arising from contiguities and lines of flight that can pivot in an instant. Importantly, this becoming is not linear. The four faces of the celebrity-proximate assemblage are dynamic and emergent states, contingent on the nature of the moment-to-moment assemblage contiguities and lines of flight that form in-between.

In figure 1, the horizontal axis captures how an assemblage moves between tendencies of de-stratifying and re-stratifying, moving between virtual and actual. The vertical axis captures the extent to which the energy of desire is more and less constrained. The BwO is represented by the left side of the figure in which contiguities with diverting assemblages form fluid lines of flight—as desire is less constrained in this space of potential. In the upper right quadrant, the developing body has contiguities with overlapping assemblages and begins actualizing some tentative lines of flight as the energy of desire is temporarily invested. Also on the right side, the enhanced and regimented bodies are increasingly stratified and actualize lines of flight to fewer celebrity assemblages because the energy of desire is more invested and focused. But the enhanced body has contiguities with comingling assemblages forming expansive lines of flight with greater capacities. The regimented body has contiguities with captivating assemblages forming restrictive lines of flight with fewer capacities. An assemblage can constantly change in structure and

articulation yielding different capacities; this figure provides a snapshot of four faces of a celebrity-proximate assemblage that are analytically useful.

 Insert Figure 1 about here

Table 2 theorizes the four faces of a celebrity-proximate assemblage that emerged—the BwO, the developing body, the enhanced body, and the regimented body. Figure 1 and Table 2 are best read in tandem to orient the reader to the four sets of findings that follow.

 Insert Table 2 about here

The Body without Organization

Structure and Process. The celebrity watchers are enrolled into heterogeneous networks of digitized celebrity assemblages found on social media platforms (i.e., Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Snapchat, Instagram) and celebrity websites. Microcelebrities are most attractive, such as local musicians, reality TV stars, TV hosts, sports “WAGs” (i.e., wives and girlfriends), models (e.g., Victoria’s Secret models), stylists, and celebrities made famous through YouTube vlogs and Instagram feeds (see table 1, focal celebrity column). The celebrity watchers’ digital collections contain text and images on fashion, careers, work habits, lifestyle, diet, fitness, family, and relationships (see table 1, elements collected column). These elements form un-stratified collections of “snippets of daily life” (Audrey), obtained across “a wide variety of celebrities” (Lilly) that span diverse facets of their lives.

But a collection of celebrity elements is not an assemblage. To be an assemblage, the elements must interact in new ways (Adkins 2015). A-list celebrities of considerable talent, such as Beyoncé or Reese Witherspoon, exert attraction on the celebrity watchers. But celebrity-proximate assemblages are far more likely to form with B-list and C-list celebrities. These microcelebrities have gravitational pull because the digital elements of their lives are

ubiquitous and seemingly unfiltered. Social media images and videos are powerful attractors as microcelebrities avail the mundane intimacies of their lives on social media in a “raw, natural state” (Carly). Monique explains that Snapchat generates interactions through images that draw the women close.

Before Snapchat I never felt like this. I think it’s the videos. It’s a lot more real. They don’t pretend to be something that they’re not. It’s not like watching them on TV on their show, where it’s all edited and changed and that sort of stuff. It’s just completely raw. It’s just real, real life, real time.

Celebrities’ social media exerts an attraction based on its perceived veracity: “it’s coming straight from them—it’s a real behind-the-scenes view which makes it appealing” (Emma).

The BwO coalesces briefly when celebrity watching is a daily fun pastime (“junk food for the mind” [Melanie]). For example, Milly follows many celebrities for fun; as she says in her digital diary, “OMG Joe Jonas is hilarious.” Here, Leila captures this state as the BwO is fluid and nomadic.

I guess I just like to snoop too. All the parties, who’s hanging out with who.... A lot of these stalks do lead on a never-ending journey though. You start with one person and then end up 5 people deep and wonder what you are doing with your life. I think you have gone too far with the stalking when you end up on a celebrity assistant’s aunty—as in you end up on someone’s page who is completely irrelevant to what you were initially looking at (emphasis added).

The BwO is de-stratified, interacting fleetingly with other assemblages only to let them dissolve and quickly fall back into a primordial soup. Here, Leila is part of a BwO that is not actualized beyond the social media session.

Contiguities and Lines of Flight. Celebrities’ quotidian life attracts: “If they post things that are more their everyday lifestyle, I think they are easier to connect with (Falisha).” Scarlett explains how this works by arguing that social media is a “bridge” between “two very different worlds” of “celebrities and normal people.” This bridge to the mundane aspects of celebrity life creates the closeness—the contiguity—for lines of flight to form (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). *Diverting* contiguities exist between the BwO and celebrity assemblages.

For the BwO, lines of flight are fluid as they are yet and may never be actualized in real life. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) call these “virtual” meaning they have the potential to be actualized. Through an ongoing flow of daily social media feeds and updates, celebrity watchers are temporarily enrolled into the immediacy of celebrity life on social media, with its mundane and gritty elements. Fluid lines of flight arise among these contiguities—“the sort of glue that brings and holds” (Bauman 2005, 50) these virtual assemblages together. In figure 2, for example, Klara’s digital diary includes candid photos of Kylie Jenner’s skin blemishes, videos of pranks played on her family, and behind the scenes details of her photo shoots. As Snapchat photos and text flow through her social media throughout the day, Klara as BwO becomes and un-becomes.

 Insert Figure 2 about here

Fluid lines of flight increase imaginative relational capacities—what the women can do in this assemblage. These lines of flight enroll Monique to imagine herself in *their* clothes, at *their* bars, and with *their* dogs.

I find their normal lives interesting—you get to know their personalities. The things that I’m most interested in is [*sic*] what sort of style they are wearing, what clothes, where they’re shopping, where they’re going to eat and for drinks, and who their friends are. And their dogs, because I love dogs [laughs].

Imaginative capacities arise in the assemblage because of the nature of the contiguity—close enough to women’s lives that they can imagine, yet interesting enough to divert.

Desire. The women are stratified into the repetitive rhythms of their real daily lives. But the BwO can draw in the women—cellphones are close at hand and social media is just a click away—and new lines of flight may go in unanticipated directions (Adkins 2015; Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Kozinets et al. 2017). A line of flight could unleash imaginative capacities that might disrupt often through pleasure:

I think I enjoy watching them [Kardashians] because they're ridiculous and really entertaining.... If I'm bored at work, it is a break from what I'm doing. I get the feeling, like if it gets to three o'clock in the afternoon and I've not been on Instagram, oh, I need to take five minutes for myself. I'll have a cup of tea and I'll look at Instagram. I'll think it's going to be a quick thing and then I'll end up on it for 40 minutes—I do find myself sometimes lost in their social media. (Anna)

Anna is enrolled in the BwO, “lost in their social media,” full of potential and without consequences other than a lost 40 minutes.

For some informants (see table 1, BwO), the desire for disruption centers on celebrity watching as an engaging pastime. In her digital diary, Greta has fun with her friends: “We mostly talk in real life about the Kardashians ☺☺ and the funny stuff they do. We get entertainment from it and it’s distracting.” Similarly, hate watching distracts. In their group interview, Hannah, Robin, and Megan take obvious pleasure in their shared disdain for some celebrities. Megan asserts how some celebrities are “really stupid” and Hannah concurs: “She seemed so dumb. She just seemed really up [with] herself. She’s so annoying.” But social media networks provide an endless flow of celebrities for the BwO: “...you just move on (Hannah). Yeah, replace them with someone else (Robin). Find someone else (Megan).” Social media enrolls all the women daily as a BwO. But the majority of women are enrolled along the de-stratified/re-stratified continuum stabilizing a celebrity-proximate assemblage to varying degrees.

The Developing Body

Structure and Process. The developing body is a celebrity-proximate assemblage that actualizes to experiment in the real world (see figure 1, upper center quadrant). This assemblage still includes the women and the enabling infrastructure of their cell phones, laptops, and various social media platforms. But the interactions among the developing body and celebrity assemblages are actualized.

The material elements of the developing body may be identical to those used by celebrities: “Oh my god, Kylie Jenner’s makeup artist used this foundation on her. I have to

get it so I can look like Kylie Jenner” (Penny). But most are inexpensive reproductions that are close enough to genuine elements for experimentation: “I’ll usually just copy the pieces” (Jennifer). The material elements of the celebrity-proximate assemblage are heterogeneous including fashion accessories (Amber), wigs (Monique), home décor (Monique and Eliza), hairstyle and color (Melanie), eyebrows (Molly), vacations in celebrity holiday hotspots (Jennifer), and clubs and bars frequented by celebrities (Emily), to name only a few.

The developing body de-stratifies and re-stratifies. For example, Rachel describes how the developing-body-with-Jennifer-Aniston and the developing-body-with-Kim-Kardashian both enhance her social confidence: “I have always felt a connection [laughs] with Jennifer Aniston, I’ve always been on her side. My hair color is very similar to hers. I also look like Kim Kardashian when I have my hair up because it makes my eyes go up a little bit.” As the developing body, Rachel becomes confident within both lines of flight de-stratifying and re-stratifying: “Sometimes I can be really casual [Jennifer] and sometimes I can be really sexy [Kim].” Here, celebrity watching affects social competence. Within different developing bodies, the women are more beautiful, stylish, or confident.

Contiguities and Lines of Flight. The contiguities of the developing body arise among celebrity assemblages that *overlap*. The elements of overlapping celebrity assemblages exude a “magnetic attraction” (Rachel) far greater than the diverting contiguities within the BwO. Informants use the emic term “relatability” to capture this contiguity often based on overlapping physical similarities, such as age, face, and body type, but also based on overlapping aspects of lifestyle, life stage, or career. Amber follows fashion bloggers who “wear mainstream brands and they’ll go to shops that I shop at... They go to university and they meet with their friends on the weekends, and they’re just starting out on a new career... It seems really mundane, but it’s relatable.” In her digital diary, Anya also shares Instagram and Snapchat posts of the fitness gurus that she follows who have “relatable and attainable”

lives (see figure 3). Within this developing body, lines of flight are tentatively actualized to see if the new elements—whether it is kale or a stronger physique—affect becoming healthy.

 Insert Figure 3 about here

The developing body as a celebrity-proximate assemblage actualizes many tentative lines of flight reducing the distance and “contrast between celebrity and everyday people...this person is [just] a person” (Jennifer). For the developing body, lines of flight also form between overlapping celebrity assemblages “that you want to be” (Indiana). Carly-becoming-Lady-Gaga has lines of flight to existing overlap (“she’s really short. I looked up how short she was. I worked out that I was like a centimeter taller”) and potential overlap (Lady Gaga “is really healthy and fit...and I’m trying to live a healthy lifestyle”). An image of Lady Gaga emerging from a yoga studio on social media sends Carly-becoming-Lady-Gaga to attend Bikram yoga classes expanding the overlap.

The developing body experiments with lines of flight—stabilizing those that enhance relational capacities and dissolving ones that diminish relational capacities. For example, Rachel is also a developing-body-becoming-successful that has lines of flight to entrepreneurial celebrities—such as Jessica Alba and Kate Hudson—to enhance the relational capacities within her career as she is a bartender wanting to become a bar owner.

But some celebrity-proximate assemblages reduce relational capacities. The developing body may not work within some lines of flight:

I got sucked in buying one of those slim teas. Oh, it’s pretty big with celebrities. You see them always posing with them and they’ve got their great bodies and you’re like, ‘Oh my God, it’s because they’re drinking that tea!’ I’m like, I’ll get me some of those teas, but it makes you feel terrible (Alex).

This tea was a laxative and Alex was “on the toilet the whole day” diminishing capacities.

Desire. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) argue one can only know what a body can do through experimentation. This celebrity-proximate assemblage overlaps with celebrity elements channeling energy affecting self-confidence and other people: “Today is just a blah day and no one will pay me attention. Then I’ll put the makeup on and the clothes—the expensive celebrity stuff—and walk out the door and all of a sudden everybody’s, “Hi! Hi!” (Rachel). The developing body experiments with lines of flight to expand capacities for confidence and success. As Emily explains: “You put your celebrity face on and you’re fierce, you just go out and conquer the world.”

Many of these developing bodies has lines of flight to career and celebrity assemblages. When making real-estate deals, Jennifer’s Celine bag, expensive accessories, and celebrity-like attitude coalesce to become the real-estate-agent-being-successful.

[If] I’m meeting specific clients—so basically my Celine bag. I know exactly what to pull out. It’s because I’ve seen my favorite celebrities wearing them. To try and be like them—it 100% works. You just put on all your stuff that’s expensive and you just have that celebrity attitude and have that look and everything changes. You put on your face. You put on this outfit, and you feel different. You do. You totally feel different. I totally transform.

The developing body can do more, experimenting with lines of flight among overlaps with celebrity assemblages to direct energy flows to these “killer business women” (Sabina). Yet, the developing body temporarily re-stratifies. The developing body may change in a Cinderella moment, but the experiment ends when the assemblage comes apart—the clothes come off, the hair comes down, and the makeup is removed.

Failed experiments also disassemble. Following Kylie Jenner, Monique actualized lip injections within her celebrity-proximate assemblage.

When Kylie first had her lips done—this is going to sound really bad—I had my lips done because I thought, “Oh my god, Kylie, she looks amazing!” It’s changed her so much. That was before the video came out about how different her whole face looked. She said she only had her lips done, but it was everything else as well. Yeah, that was almost a distraction for everything else that she was doing [to her face]. Because of that, I did my lips... After I did it, I was just like, why have I been so stupid? Who does that? You look like an alien.

This line of flight actualized into a reductive assemblage and the lip filler was dissolved. Moreover, some of these developing bodies are experiments that last weeks, but most are short-lived trials. For example, Monique as a developing body was enrolled in Khloe Kardashian's daily fitness regimen for more than six months; however, Carly stopped yoga classes after three weeks.

As we explore next, an assemblage can highly stratify becoming restrictive. Developing bodies, however, form in the tension and balance between stability and change. The developing body experiments with minor changes stratifying small additions that can enhance capacities: "I separate it. I do have my style. I get tips and hints off celebrities...I don't go over the top with it. I think that's when you're wanting to be them, which I'm not" (Melanie). As we explore next, a developing body interacting with only one celebrity-proximate assemblage can stratify and become rigid: "It's so easy to get sucked in if you become obsessed with one person." As developing bodies, Emily and Melanie intermittently break from the enabling structure of social media so "my life isn't totally revolving around celebrity watching (Emily)" and, thus, these celebrity-proximate assemblages come apart.

The Enhanced Body

Structure and Process. The enhanced body is organized and does more (see figure 1, far right side). Here, the celebrity-proximate assemblage is composed of virtual and actual elements and interacts with fewer celebrities. The enhanced body is increasingly actualizing interactions and re-stratifying a more stable celebrity-proximate assemblage.

The enhanced body is composed of many genuine elements, such as the actual luxury brands, products, retailers, and lifestyles used by focal celebrities. Yet, these elements are accessible—including entry-level designer handbags, cosmetics, protein supplements and fitness products, Spotify playlists, body modifications, and so on. For example, as a native Welsh speaker, Zara-becoming-beauty-blogger adopts the accent of celebrities from the

television series *Made in Chelsea*, which is a posh English accent of London's exclusive Royal Borough of Chelsea. Or, Indiana-becoming-indie-musician interacts with many genuine and accessible elements including vintage clothing, an imported leather jacket common among musicians, facial piercings, tattoos, dramatic "indie" gestures (i.e., constantly sweeping her hair from her eyes), playlists matched to musicians she follows, attendance at indie concerts; as an enhanced body becoming-indie, she becomes enrolled in a musician's lifestyle and even breaks from college life. But this celebrity-proximate assemblage actually includes the local indie musicians with whom Indiana closely interacts at music venues.

Yet, the enhanced body is still open because interactions with new celebrity assemblages are possible. For example, Robin and Molly were completing university and moving into the professional fields of medicine and filmmaking, respectively. Upon graduating, Robin-becoming-celebrity-surgeon followed a new celebrity plastic surgeon to the stars: "You know who I follow now on Snapchat—the real Doctor Miami. He's a plastic surgeon. You're like fully watching him do surgeries." She interacts with Doctor Miami for new professional skills of her becoming-celebrity-surgeon assemblage. The enhanced body de-stratifies and re-stratifies as new interactions are formed and reformed with different celebrities. The meaning of celebrity watching is career competence, which evolves with career and life changes.

Contiguities and Lines of Flight. The enhanced body is enrolled in the actual networks of market-mediated and social-cultural assemblages and is often part of the focal celebrities' assemblages in real life. Thus, the enhanced body is a celebrity-proximate assemblage with *comingling* contiguities among celebrity assemblages sharing elements across permeable boundaries (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Physically comingling may impart new capacities—small and large. Zara moved into an apartment near one of her focal celebrities: "I've bumped

into her quite a few times.” Or Molly wears the actual items worn by her local celebrities by scouring secondhand stores. Here, the relational capacities are minor.

But when the enhanced body has lines of flight that expand into new professional networks, then significant new relational capacities can emerge. Expansive lines of flight form between Sabina, as an enhanced body, comingling with the assemblages of combat sports celebrities. In figure 4, Sabina “puts in extra time at the gym” as she shares the training ethic of the elite combat fighters that she follows. These sports celebrities “upload pictures four times a day that will all be of them practicing—seeing such dedication to their craft reminds me to put in the same level of work.”

Insert Figure 4 around here

Indiana, Molly, Robin, Hannah, and Zara are enrolled in an expanded body that actualizes expansive lines of flight to comingling with local celebrities within their career networks and, thus, the boundaries between the enhanced body and their focal celebrity assemblages are less distinct. This enhanced body and the celebrity assemblage comingling and “fuse at a certain point. The lines are really blurred (Molly).” As an enhanced body, Indiana is part of the local music network and interacts with famous local musicians and producers: “I’ve spent two years working my way in this city to get into the good crowd and meet the right people.” Similarly, Molly interacts with locally-famous musicians and filmmakers in NYC: “there’s a community of pseudo celebrities in New York that I—I wouldn’t say I’m embedded in that community, but I’m part of it. I’m friends with some of them...one of my friends he just got into this film festival.” The enhanced body comingling in physical venues with local celebrities within a celebrity-proximate assemblage that often increases professional capacities. This physical and social proximity allows the enhanced body to literally become part of the celebrity’s assemblage.

Desire. In the enhanced body, desire is invested in mapping new career lines of flight to become an independent star. Indiana, Molly, Robin, and Zara are becoming-musician, becoming-film-maker, becoming-celebrity-doctor, and becoming-social-media-influencer. The enhanced body is a celebrity-proximate assemblage that is re-stratifying to a body that can do more.

For example, as an enhanced body becoming-fighter, lines of flight form between Sabina and Ultimate Fighting Champion Ronda Rousey's shared work ethic. During a real-time digital discussion using text messages, Sabina shared how energy flows through this amalgamation, such as Ronda's voice encouraging her (see figure 5).

 Insert Figure 5 about here

This is an expansive line of flight as Sabina becoming-fighter enhances her professional capacities to "get out there and do it." This enhanced body is energetically mapping to celebrity Ronda Rousey who broke down institutional barriers to women participating in the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC).

Ronda Rousey...she inspires because she did the impossible. Dana White [male head of the UFC] was quoted as saying that women will never be in the UFC. The only person in the whole world to change that was Ronda Rousey. And when she did it, it wasn't so she could have a belt, she already had the Strikeforce belt. She did it for the girls like me who were putting in more blood, sweat, tears and time into our training, even though we had nowhere to go because women just weren't seen as capable of being pro-fighters.

The enhanced body does more because boundaries between assemblages are permeable allowing elements to comingle in new ways, such as becoming a professional fighter. Indiana as an enhanced body interacting with musicians who have mastered their craft, opens up new lines of flight to become. For example, she was invited to Nashville with its extensive networks of musicians and new opportunities to comingle and further change her career assemblage. These enhanced bodies actualize lines of flight with celebrity

assemblages to challenge structural barriers (Thompson 2019)—such as male domination within the fields of surgery, film, music, and sports³.

Some of the women were becoming microcelebrities. Zara’s nascent success as becoming-beauty-blogger is evidenced by manufacturers sending her luxury products to review, Pinterest’s London headquarters inviting her to a party, and her over 18,000 followers. These women leverage social media infrastructures with varying success to create enhanced bodies that may also distract, overlap, or comingle with followers and fans.

The Regimented Body

Structure and Process. The regimented body is a celebrity-proximate assemblage that is highly stratified and constrained (see figure 1, right lower side). The regimented body interacts with the fewest celebrities; for example, Eliza and Audrey follow just one or two celebrities. Regimented bodies narrow to the social media of select celebrities and their products, brands, retailers, lifestyles, and relationships. Nevertheless, the regimented assemblage can always dismantle at any moment. Social media is just a click away. For example, Jaqueline pivots to the BwO with ease, “I’m always sharing Instagram pictures with my friends through the Instagram message feature! We always talk about the pictures they post/the outfits they wear! ...We just love to get inspiration from different celebrities, we can see their style and insight on their life.”

Within regimented bodies, however, the women interact with the genuine brands, especially luxury ones. For example, Jasmine hunted down and purchased expensive designer shoes that are identical to those worn by Rihanna. Eliza buys designer labels worn by her focal celebrities, the Kardashian/Jenner sisters and Roxy Jacenko, including high-end

³ Female Fellows are 13% of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons; female film directors in Europe are 24%; female artists in the music industry are 21.7% (Royal Australasian College of Surgeons 2020; Joseph 2018; Smith et al. 2019).

cosmetics, accessories, and clothing by Chanel, YSL, Givenchy, Hermès, Victoria Beckham, and Balmain, to name a few.

The regimented body is increasingly homogenous as it stratifies to one or two celebrity assemblages and closes interactions with other celebrity assemblages. For example, enrolled in the Kardashian/Jenner celebrity assemblage—Eliza repetitively re-stratifies shopping for the same luxury brands and layering purchase upon purchase.

I've definitely spent more money than I've earned the past two years—I've got a real fetish for designer stuff. It's a massive issue actually. Shoes are my new fetish—designer shoes. Apparently, I've got an out of control shoe issue. I don't think that I do. But one of my pet hates about shopping [is] I have to hide my bags in the car. I can't let my parents see them because they think that I have some problem. I don't. I might spend a bit, I just literally am obsessed. YSL is my top. I've just bought two new pairs of YSL shoes and their matching corresponding makeup.... And Chanel, I got my first Chanel wallet and bag.

The meaning of celebrity watching for the regimented body is to consume like a celebrity.

Contiguities and Lines of Flight. The regimented body is a celebrity-proximate assemblage with *captivating* contiguities among celebrity assemblages because the regimented body “can’t stop” (see figure 6). Lines of flight form between the regimented body and the most famous and least accessible celebrities, such as becoming-Lady Gaga, becoming-Ariana Grande, and becoming-Kim-Kardashian.

Insert Figure 6 about here

Eliza is enrolled in Pinterest with more than 7,000 pins of her two favorite stars categorized into boards. This regimented body has carpal tunnel syndrome due to repetitively scrolling through thousands of pins: “So I had to buy a mouse. I didn’t stop. I am obsessed (Eliza).” Similarly, Carly is captivated by her celebrity Pinterest collection: “Oh my God. I might stop. I can’t stop though. You can never stop. The pins never come to an end.”

Like enhanced bodies, regimented bodies are celebrity-proximate assemblages that actualize fewer lines of flight that narrow and coalesce. Yet, the regimented body is a

celebrity-proximate assemblage that may be detrimental to actualize. For example, Eliza is enrolled in the Kardashian/Jenner assemblage, reality stars who are famous for buying, wearing, and endorsing luxury brands. Yet, Eliza works in retail and cannot spend like the Kardashian/Jenner sisters. Moreover, celebrity assemblages are constantly changing, which makes it difficult for the regimented body to trace lines of flight to new luxury elements:

I'm always like, "Oh my God, Kylie Jenner has another Givenchy handbag and I don't have it and that is not fair..." they just really increase your expectations... I earn a bit but I spend a lot. Perhaps I shouldn't be spending what I spend. I just feel like it's just such a normal thing.

The Kylie Jenner celebrity assemblage continues to evolve, and Eliza as regimented body continues to actualize captivated by shopping and consuming. But Eliza, as a regimented body, is a partial tracing of this celebrity assemblage given her income.

The regimented body has the unusual relational capacity of stalking. The regimented body has lines of flight into focal celebrity's private lives, rather than accessing digital elements or working within professional spheres. Carly organized a hotel stay just one floor below Lady Gaga. Eliza stalks Roxy Jacenko and her two children, who live a glamorous life in a penthouse suite at the InterContinental in Sydney. Eliza uses social media to follow Roxy and her young daughter Pixie in real-time and then physically stalks them in Sydney:

I follow them a lot. I'm in Sydney all the time. So I always try and look out for them at the InterContinental Double Bay. Whenever I'm there, I'm like, "Where are they?" She always takes photos around Sydney [posting on social media in real time]. You know where she's out and about. So I follow them around a lot.

Eliza as regimented body is an uninvited gatecrasher into Roxy Jacenko's celebrity-family assemblage. Unlike the enhanced body, the regimented body is unable to comingle with focal celebrity assemblages as these A-list lives are relatively inaccessible.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) warn that it is possible to create a cancerous assemblage that uncontrollably proliferates stratification—layers upon layers of organization (Adkins 2015). The regimented body actualizes restrictive lines of flight to just one or two celebrity

assemblages, allowing “the fascist inside ... to increasingly organize [their] lives” (Adkins 2015, 106). As regimented bodies, Eliza and Carly are increasingly re-stratified within this assemblage and de-stratification is difficult. Eliza reflects on being caught within the regimented body: “It's just the way it is now. It's just what happens now. I try and control it, but I can't.”

Desire. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) argue that becoming is a dangerous venture because “there are no guarantees of where the becomings might lead” (Adkins 2015, 147). The regimented body is an assemblage that restricts what the body can do. Regimented bodies channel desire to become the focal celebrity assemblage: “I want to be her” (Audrey). The regimented body is invested in tracing a celebrity assemblage—rather than mapping a new celebrity-proximate assemblage with new capacities.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) contend that lines of flight can be life diminishing, which is the case in the regimented body. Carly is a regimented body becoming-Elle-Woods (i.e., Reese Witherspoon’s character in the movie *Legally Blonde*). Carly arrived at her friendship group interview fully dressed as Elle Woods, sporting various shades of pink in her clothing, books, drink bottle, pens, hair accessories, and handbag, as well as emulating Elle Woods’s perky and self-confident attitude, giggles, high-pitch tone of voice, and self-depreciation. Carly never broke from being-Elle-Woods in the interview. This regimented body replicated the assemblage of Reese Witherspoon as a movie character, leaving little room for Carly-becoming something new.

These celebrity assemblages bear little relevance to the women’s capabilities and career trajectories. They lack key elements of the focal celebrity’s assemblages—they do not have musical talent, a singing voice, or a genetically-blessed figure—no matter how many designer bags they buy. Energy is blocked when celebrity-proximate assemblages trace lines of flight. Carly-becoming-Elle-Woods belies her own razor-sharp wit and did little to

enhance what she could do as a marketing assistant or in any other sphere of her life. Carly-becoming-Elle Woods diminishes her bank account: “[I] end up with a lot of stuff I’ve got to sell [on eBay] just because I need the money and I’ve spent too much money.” Within the regimented body, lines of flight narrow and capacities diminish. But, of course, at any moment the assemblage could dismantle.

As Eliza-becoming-Kardashian, luxury shopping and credit card debt spiral out of control. Lines of flight to sleep and exercise are broken, as Eliza-becoming-Kardashian spends evenings on Pinterest and stopped exercising: “The only time I run is between stores during sales. Shopping is my cardio.” Within these regimented bodies, they do not create a social media presence to become micro-celebrities with the capacity to affect others. Instead, their celebrity-proximate assemblages are increasingly stratified to inadequate tracings of unattainable celebrity assemblages. The affect of tracing is a downward cycle of disappointment and envy: “I’m jealous of the celebrities I’m obsessed with (Jasmine).” Eliza does not energetically expand her potential to be a celebrity, she traces to become Kardashian: “I want it to be real, so I think of it like it actually is.”

DISCUSSION

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) conceptualize an assemblage as both the collection of elements that comprise the assemblage, as well as the compositional processes of de-stratifying and re-stratifying (Livesay 2010). Drawing on interviews and mobile methods, we build on these insights by theorizing the emergent properties of different contiguities, lines of flight, and desires as assemblages continually become.

The four faces of assemblage framework better explains how assemblages continually come together and fall apart (see figure 1 and table 2). Specifically, the BwO is virtual and contiguous with many diverting assemblages, forming fluid lines of flight with capacities to disrupt the stratification of daily life. The developing body, however, has both virtual and

actual elements with contiguities to overlapping assemblages, actualizing tentative lines of flight for capacities to experiment in the real world. Failed experiments reveal the limits of the developing body and successful experiments encourage new capacities, which are sometimes re-stratified. The enhanced and regimented body compositionally have both virtual and actual elements. The enhanced body comingles with other assemblages actualizing fewer expansive lines that map new capacities of what the assemblage can do. The regimented body is captivated by other assemblages actualizing the fewest and most restrictive lines. The regimented body traces repetitively to assemblages unsuccessfully re-stratifying and unleashing few capacities, which are often life diminishing.

Next, we explore how understanding the nature of contiguity and different lines of flight can better explain how assemblages dynamically become. The celebrity-proximate assemblages that we studied primarily worked through the existing socio-cultural and technological enabling infrastructures. In particular, the celebrity watchers were enrolled in a social media ecosystem that they embraced. However, some of the celebrity watchers enrolled in the enhanced body leveraged this ecosystem with varying success to “challenge other constraints and sources of subordination that govern their lives” such as “opportunity foreclosing gender norms” (Thompson 2019, 15); but far more celebrity watchers were subordinated within this enabling infrastructure. Thus, we also explore productive and reductive faces of these celebrity-proximate assemblages as agency is distributed and redistributed. Finally, we conclude by conjecturing about assemblages in the celebrity domain with greater agency and more potential to subvert.

The Four Faces of Assemblage as a Broader Explanatory Model

Our conceptual model resolves tensions in extant research on performative practices that assumes performance rests on either imagining (Arnould and Price 1993; Fernandez and Lastovicka 2011) or embodying (Thompson and Üstüner 2015). The four faces of an

assemblage integrates virtual (i.e., imagining) and actual performances in becoming (i.e., different embodiments through the developing, enhanced, and regimented bodies). Importantly, we contend that transitions among the BwO, developing body, enhanced body, and regimented body are not linear. Rather, “an assemblage is never still, encouraging different capacities from moment to moment depending on the assemblage’s passing composition and articulation” (Kennedy et al. 2013, 48). The four faces of the celebrity-proximate assemblage are dynamic states that can emerge at any time—across imagined and embodied states, contingent on the nature of the moment-to-moment assemblage contiguities and lines of flight that form in-between.

Our theoretical framework builds upon practice trajectories (i.e., lines of flight) theorized by Epp et al. (2014) in their study of families reassembling online practices. Interestingly, little evidence exists for the BwO in their study of family assemblages. Our model theorizes the BwO as having many fluid lines of flight. But it is the very incorporeal nature of this face of the assemblage that makes it so difficult to study. Indeed, Epp et al. ambitiously combined both family diaries and interviews “given the impossibility of observing these practices directly” (83) because new family assemblages emerge online in real time. Our evidence for the BwO, in part, arises because of our methods. Other researchers may not have observed the BwO because their methods—such as interviews, digital diaries, or surveys—do not directly capture these data. We suggest that researchers consider mobile data methods using smart phones to understand the de-stratifying processes of the BwO.

For example, digital diaries can capture consumers’ intense social media mining in real time. In-the-moment text messaging and image sharing among friends can also provide evidence of the BwO’s emergent capacities to disrupt. We find that the BwO in celebrity watching follows many fluid lines of flight with diverting contiguities that are generally

harmless disruptions. However, future research might explore variations in the agency of the BwO to the extent that this virtual entity might subvert, control, or restrict consumers. For instance, future research might use these methods to explore new phenomena, such as doomsurfing and doomscrolling, in which social media users spend extreme amounts of screen time having lines of flight to dystopian news stories and information. We conjecture that this might be a BwO that diverts through sadness, fear, and the spectacle of annihilation (Bradshaw and Zwick 2016); or it might be a regimented body re-stratifying repetitively and unsuccessfully in a radically uncertain ecosystem.

However, evidence for the developing body existed in the processes of families re-assembling practices. Epp et al. (2014) found that families experiment through “trial and error” (88) with new assemblages of practices as they use technology to span the distances that divide them—this is the developing body. But theorizing the nature of the contiguities and lines of flight helps explain how the developing body works. The developing body is contiguous with overlapping assemblages. Tentative lines of flight form with the capacity to experiment. We see evidence of the developing body in those family practices that easily translated because of overlaps between old and new assemblages. For example, as couple Seth and Kayla managed their long-distance relationship, a new assemblage emerged around the contiguity of watching their favorite television shows remotely. But the couple likely experimented with other overlaps (i.e., other television shows, times, activities) before finding a new family assemblage that worked. Similarly, the Knox family experimented with this technology getting “used to seeing things from afar” (93) and reassembled an overlapping Thanksgiving ritual using iChat.

The developing body is an important but undertheorized face of an assemblage that emerges as overlapping contiguities of assemblages form tentative lines of flight. The research on consumers experimenting in fanciful playgrounds could be re-theorized as

developing bodies experimenting (Kozinets et al. 2004; Seregina and Weijs 2016), but we do not know the result of these trials because the studies focused on the extraordinary contexts of ESPN retail stores and fan conventions rather than mundane settings in which changes might re-stratify. Moreover, these trials often fail (Epp et al. 2014), result in assemblages of betrayal that are misaligned with desires (Canniford and Shankar 2013; Parmentier and Fischer 2015), or, in our study, turn out badly (e.g., slimming tea). We theorize that these lines of flight have the potential to change the assemblage. But emergent capacities, productive or reductive, are unknown *a priori*: “you don’t know what you can make...so experiment” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 251). We argue that negatively framed “failed trials” and “assemblage betrayals” are more productively conceptualized as inevitable experiments as assemblages de-stratify and re-stratify.

Our model is also useful in explaining how assemblages re-stratify. In Martin and Schouten’s (2014) study of minimoto riders, enhanced bodies emerged over time comingling human and material elements. For these assemblages, it is not through overlap but through blending that assemblages re-stratify becoming increasingly stable. Mini bikes “actively resist being ridden by an adult” (861); as such, humans make material modifications: “First we bought handlebars, higher seat, more power... I’m turning it into a bigger bike so I have more control. Taller, more power, more room to throw your foot out, bigger footpegs so you can keep your feet on” (Mike, 859). Human and machine assemblages merge on the track, as bikes are customized and human bodies adapt to bespoke modifications as stunts are practiced. Human-machine-track assemblages re-stratify: “You feel safe. You’re not going to get thrown off...It takes practice. It took some time to get comfortable” (Jeff, 859-60).

But our model also explains the captivating contiguities that appeared in minimoto assemblages, as evidenced by minimoto riders calling it “the most addictive thing I’ve ever done” (Brian, 860) and that “you just can’t let go” (Gretchen, 860). Interacting with

minimoto ecosystems—the bikes, the track, the community—generate capacities for “serious fun” (Nick, 860). Minimoto bikes demand maintenance, repairs, and modifications with the allure of even more fun. Irrespective of cost, the minimoto ecosystem captivates consumers who are increasingly enrolled and disciplined. But at any moment, an engine transmission can fail and the assemblage dismantles, or a BwO can emerge as modification possibilities are imagined for stock minibikes. Next, we explore how the distribution of agency creates this potential for productive and reductive assemblages.

Distributed Agency in Celebrity-Proximate Assemblages

In their study of food bloggers, Kozinets et al. (2017) find that technological ecosystems exert such a “gigantic gravitational field” as to bend consumer desire (679). They suggest that power within these assemblages is redistributed away from human agency to the agency of the social media ecosystem. Similarly, all the celebrity watchers were enrolled in an ecosystem that they accepted. In particular, the regimented face of the celebrity-proximate assemblage yields power to the vast socio-technological ecosystems within which they are enrolled. This interaction was captivating—a gravitational pull; as celebrity watchers report, “I can’t stop.”

The regimented body is enrolled in a social media ecosystem that is life diminishing due, in part, to a loss of agency as consumers are captivated. Agency is redistributed from the celebrity watcher to the social media ecosystem. Moreover, the regimented body bends desire to the pull of a single celebrity assemblage and traces and retraces lines of flight to re-stratify in a destructive pattern to a derivative assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Hietanen et al. 2019). This face of the assemblage is cancerous, as consumption proliferates to trace an exact reproduction (Adkins 2015). In this context, the regimented body cannot become the replica; this celebrity-proximate assemblage is missing the elements that make their focal

celebrities famous—such as Lady Gaga’s musical talent. The desire to trace is “futile as one cannot simply purchase their way into the elite club of Kardashians” (Fisher 2020, 97).

However, in the enhanced body, agency is more distributed across the assemblage as consumers become productively enrolled in the socio-cultural and technological ecosystems of surgeons, film makers, musicians, and UFC fighters. The enhanced bodies are celebrity-proximate assemblages that interact to blend and merge for new capacities. As the enhanced body is becoming-surgeon, becoming-filmmaker, becoming-indie-musician, and becoming-UFC-fighter, the ecosystem is leveraged as they are part of assemblages that overcome salient cultural and structural barriers, such as gender bias (Fisher 2020; Salovaara 2015).

Thus, the distribution of agency in the assemblage helps explain the productive and reductive aspects of celebrity-proximate assemblages. We found that enhanced bodies comingle the celebrity watchers’ capabilities with celebrity assemblages to extend what they could do within this assemblage. The regimented bodies are captivated and instead yield agency to unattainable celebrity assemblages. Future research might explore how to redistribute agency within the assemblage to enhance life. For example, adolescents’ capabilities are still emerging, suggesting that they may be more vulnerable to yielding agency to the gravitational pull of the regimented body. In our findings on enhanced bodies, the celebrity watchers interacted in cycles of imagining and experimenting with new incremental possibilities and actualities, incorporating material elements that worked and rejecting elements that did not work. Following Deleuze and Guattari’s admonition, they worked with a file rather than a sledgehammer (Stark 2017).

Are there times when consumers benefit by losing agency within a regimented body? Future research might explore beneficial reductive capacities that emerge within such an assemblage. For example, consumers suffering from celiac disease may thrive within a regimented body in which they enroll into a tightly circumscribed ecosystem of restaurants

and safe meal options that have been researched and trialed. Their home world may re-stratify to a small food preparation space using few brands and only color-coded dishware to avoid cross contamination. In this case, ceding agency within a regimented body protects consumers' health; moreover, the developing body is threatening given the real health dangers of failed experiments. Many consumption behaviors are maladaptive, such as substance abuse, binge eating, or compulsive gambling. In such cases, regimented bodies might be life enhancing by actualizing fewer lines of flight to newly captivating elements, such as support groups and narrow, safe routines.

Liberatory Potential of Celebrity-Proximate Assemblages?

Kozinets et al. (2017) question whether the liberatory potential of socio-technological enabling structures to destabilize culture is superficial. To this end, Hill, Canniford, and Millward (2018) investigated the Stand Against Modern Football (StandAMF) campaign and found that digital social movements can challenge powerful corporate interests and logics. This social movement enrolled in the technological infrastructure to expand communication from horizontal networks of many-to-many to multi-scalar interactions with mainstream media and powerful political agents to affect change. Similarly, "Je suis Charlie" activism, following the massacre at the offices of Charles Hebdo, illustrates how distributive agency works through enrolment and mobilization of a global social media movement across different scalar levels. Specifically, hashtag analysis demonstrated how #JesuisCharlie became a participatory assemblage organizing and building a vast geographic network (Salovaara 2015). Such social media movements can affect significant and lasting change in the real world, such as the "We are all Khaled Said" social media movement. For example, the Arab Spring revolts that led to the ousting of President Mubarak illustrate a shift in the distribution of power within Egyptian society, which is reflective of the shifting distribution of agency within the complex sociotechnical system (Lim 2018). Thus, evidence exists that

social movements—from #BlackLivesMatter to #MeToo—can harness socio-technological ecosystems to actualize positive changes.

But can an individual as an enhanced body wield gravitational force to affect socio-technological ecosystems, especially in the celebrity domain that seems more focused on supporting and monetizing the status quo? Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister of New Zealand, is a political celebrity. Ardern posts live Facebook videos inviting citizens into the intimacy of her home. As an enhanced body, she provides opportunities for fans to comingle, such as mom jokes with gritty details (e.g., the aroma of nappies) and, in a relatable faded green sweatshirt, advises citizens on pandemic behavior: “Stay at home, break the chain and you’ll save lives.” This enhanced body is enrolled in a government system with policies that force political coalitions and, within this ecosystem, Ardern uses social media to create a new “politics of kindness” (Cave 2020, n.p.). The affect of Jacinda Ardern as enhanced body is evidenced by posts with over five million views. But clicks, followers, and views are not always an indication of power redistribution toward the individual. Future research might explore if enrolment in Ardern’s Facebook politics of kindness affected New Zealand citizens’ stay-at-home practices, and certainly the opening of their economy offers indirect positive evidence.

Alternatively, consider artist/feminist Amalia Ulman who covertly played a fictitious Instagram influencer, performing of a series of popular female tropes, such as the wellness goddess, and even performed an Instagram meltdown. This enhanced body subversively leveraged social media to manipulate fans for four months. Yet Ulman faced severe public backlash when she announced to her over 90,000 followers that this was a hoax; “when the devouring tides turned against Amalia, they had the power to swallow her whole” (Fisher 2020, 99). The ebb and flow of power is complex and constantly unfolding—Ulman may

have been vilified in the social media ecosphere but she received acclaim as a cutting-edge performance artist in the artworld (Ruigrok 2018).

CONCLUSION

Although lines of flight have been touched upon in the consumer research literature, we theorize the nature of the contiguities from which lines of flight are formed and their number and type, which helps explain the ongoing processes of de-stratifying and re-stratifying as assemblages change. Our research followed consumers across their mundane lives using unique mobile digital methods and interviews. We found and refined four faces of celebrity-proximate assemblages. By following consumers in their digital lives, we revealed a BwO brimming with potentialities that has been undertheorized likely due to limitations in the methods used. Moreover, the developing body is an important state in which potential capacities are explored through trial and error. The enhanced and regimented bodies were stabilizing states of assemblages re-stratifying to fewer assemblages. But agency was distributed throughout the enhanced body assemblage whereas agency in the regimented body was more concentrated in the social media ecosystem. We encourage future research to explore when the regimented body might be life enhancing despite agency being ceded from the human to the socio-technical ecosystems within which it is enrolled.

Data Collection

The data were collected by the first author from 2015 - 2017. The study participants reside in the US, UK, and Australia. The first and second author discussed and analyzed the data collaboratively. All notes and data are currently stored in a secure digital location, under the management of the first author and according to the research ethics and data storage requirements of the University of Melbourne.

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Table 1
Informants

Informants	Methods	Job	Social media	Focal celebrities	Elements collected
Body without Organization					
Anna (London)	Interview (Skype)	Law intern	Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, websites, <i>Daily Mail</i> website	Reality stars from <i>Made in Chelsea</i> , Kardashian/Jenner sisters, Princess Catherine, Victoria Beckham	Daily & social life, fashion & style
Candice (Bristol)	Interview (Skype)	Youth worker	Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Facebook	Watches a range of celebrities, Taylor Swift, actresses from <i>Orange Is the New Black</i>	Daily & social life
Darla (Melbourne)	Digital diary	Full-time job	Instagram, Facebook	Rihanna, music artists, Kylie Jenner	Daily & social life, fashion & style, fitness
Elisa (Melbourne)	Digital diary	Full-time job	Instagram, Facebook, blogs, Tumblr	Fashion bloggers, Bruce Springsteen, Taylor Swift, Emma Watson	Daily & social life, fashion & style, food
Falisha (Melbourne)	Digital diary	Part-time job	Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat	Kylie Jenner, Selena Gomez, Kardashians	Daily & social life, families, fashion & style
Greta (Melbourne)	Digital diary	Student, part- time job	Snapchat, Instagram	Models, Kardashian/Jenner sisters	Daily & social life, families, fashion & style
Isla (Melbourne)	Digital diary	Part-time job	Instagram, Snapchat, Buzz Feed, Pinterest	Emilia Clarke, Kardashian/Jenner sisters, Emma Watson, Beyoncé, other movie/television celebrities	Daily & social life, families, fashion & style, career success, work ethic
Lilly (Liverpool)	Interview (Skype)	University administration	Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, <i>Daily Mail</i> website, <i>OK</i> , ITV News	Wide variety of people and television presenters, Kardashians	Fashion & style, daily life, health & fitness
Maeve (Melbourne)	Digital diary	Student, part- time job	Facebook, Instagram, websites	Kendall Jenner, local B-list celebrities, celebrity models	Daily & social life, families, fashion & style, fitness
Maria (Melbourne)	Group interview	Graduate student	WeChat, Instagram	Beckhams, Lucky Blue Smith, Tyra Banks	Fashion & style, career success, business acumen, family & social life
Martha (Melbourne)	Group interview	Graduate student	Instagram, Twitter, websites	Wide variety of celebrities, Taylor Swift, Gigi Hadid, Kardashians	Daily & social life, fashion & style, travel, career success, business acumen
Megan (Melbourne)	Group interview	Interning optometrist	Twitter, Facebook, Reddit	Kanye West, local C-list celebrities, Taylor Swift	Social life, fashion & style, career success
Milly (Melbourne)	Digital diary	Student, part- time job	Instagram, Snapchat	Wide variety of celebrities, Emma Roberts, Blake Lively	Daily & social life, fashion & style

Penny (Melbourne)	Group interview	Undergraduate student	Instagram, Snapchat, <i>Daily Mail</i> website	Kardashians, Victoria's Secret models, local B-list celebrities	Social life, fashion & style, career success, business acumen, health & fitness
Susan (Melbourne)	Group interview	Graduate student, part-time fashion journalist	Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter	Fashion industry celebrities, models, Victoria Beckham	Daily & social life, fashion & style, family life
Developing Body					
Alex (Melbourne)	Group interview	Undergraduate student, part-time job	Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook	Kardashian/Jenner sisters, Victoria's Secret models, local B-list celebrities	Daily & social life, fashion & style, health & fitness, career success, business acumen
Aliyah (Melbourne)	Digital diary	Part-time job	Instagram, Snapchat	A wide variety of celebrities, especially Kardashian/Jenner sisters	Daily & social life, fashion & style, body change
Amber (New York)	Interview	Marketing executive	Instagram, Twitter, online magazines	A wide variety of celebrities, focusing on Kim Kardashian, Amal Clooney, and Rachel Bilson	Daily life, fashion & style, career success
Anya (Melbourne)	Digital diary	Part-time job	Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat	Fashion bloggers, Kardashians, celebrity models	Daily & social life, fashion & style, fitness
Dana (Melbourne)	Group interview	Graduate student	Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook	Victoria Beckham, Taylor Swift, Gigi Hadid, Kendell Jenner	Daily & social life, fashion & style, family life, career success
Emily (London)	Interview	Administrative assistant	Instagram, <i>Daily Mail</i> website, Pinterest	Millie Mackintosh, Victoria Beckham, local television presenters, Caroline Flack, Kardashian/Jenner sisters	Daily & social life, fashion & style, family life, career success
Evie (Melbourne)	Digital diary	Full-time job	Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat	Kim and Khloe Kardashian, sports celebrities	Daily & social life, fashion & style, family life, career success
Jennifer (New York)	Interview	Freelance real estate agent	Instagram, Twitter, websites, TMZ app, Yahoo celebrity section	A wide variety of celebrities, Kardashian/Jenner sisters, Kendra Wilkinson-Baskett, Kate Hudson, Jennifer Lawrence	Daily & social life, fashion & style, celebrity attitude, career success, business acumen, intimate details
Klara (Melbourne)	Digital diary	Student	Snapchat, Instagram	A wide array of celebrities, Kylie and Kendall Jenner, Emilia Clarke	Daily & social life, fashion & style, family life, career success
Leila (Melbourne)	Digital diary	Full-time job	Instagram, Snapchat	Kardashian/Jenner sisters, broad range of musicians, actors, fashion models, and designers	Daily & social life, fashion & style, family life, career success
Melanie (Melbourne)	Group interview	Full-time retail	Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat	Zac Efron, Kardashian/Jenner sisters, Adele, local celebrity Lara Bingle	Daily & social life, fashion & style, family life

Monique (London)	Interviews (2)	Owner of a salon	Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Facebook, <i>Daily Mail</i> website	Kardashian/Jenner sisters, UK reality TV celebrities, Victoria Beckham, Princess Catherine	Daily & social life, fashion & style, business acumen, health & fitness, pets
Nicole (Melbourne)	Group interview	Graduate student	Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, Perez Hilton website	Taylor Swift, Victoria Beckham, Kardashian/Jenner sisters	Daily & social life, family, fashion & style, music, travel, career, business acumen, intimate details
Rachel (New York)	Interview	Bartender	Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, celebrity watching websites	A wide variety of celebrities from movies, music, and sports	Daily & social life, fashion & style, intimate details, career success, business acumen
Scarlett (Melbourne)	Digital diary	Student	Instagram, Snapchat	Victoria's Secret models, musicians, Kardashian/Jenner sisters	Daily & social life, fashion & style, families
Tamara (Melbourne)	Digital diary	Student, casually employed	Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube	A wide variety of celebrities, Kardashian/Jenner sisters	Daily & social life, fashion & style, family, fitness
Enhanced Body					
Hannah (Melbourne)	Group interview	Graduate student	Snapchat, Instagram	Local C-list celebrities, such as WAGs, Kylie Jenner, Taylor Swift	Daily & social life, fashion & style
Indiana (Melbourne)	Group interview	Musician, waitress	Instagram, Facebook, YouTube	Musicians and singers, focusing on Ellie Goulding, Charli XCX	Career success in music industry
Molly (New York)	Interview	Graduate student, film maker	Celebrity watching websites, Twitter, Instagram	Rihanna, Ciara, Chloë Sevigny, former stars of <i>The Mickey Mouse Club</i> and Disney	Daily & social life, fashion & style, career success, business acumen, celebrity attitude, star quality
Robin (Melbourne)	Group interview	Medical practitioner	Instagram, Tumblr	Local C-list celebrities, such as WAGs, Taylor Swift	Daily & social life, fashion & style, career success
Sabina (Melbourne)	Digital diary	Student	Instagram, Snapchat	Ronda Rousy, Kendall Jenner, Khloe Kardashian	Daily & social life, fashion & style, family, career success, work ethic, fitness & training
Zara (London)	Interviews (2)	Graduate student, beauty product blogger	Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, websites, magazines	Reality stars from <i>Made in Chelsea</i> , Ellie Goulding, Taylor Swift, Kendall Jenner, Gigi Hadid	Daily & social life, fashion & style, pets, health, fitness, diet
Regimented Body					
Audrey (Melbourne)	Digital diary	Student	Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube	Ariana Grande, Kylie Jenner	Daily & social life, fashion & style, family, career success
Carly (Melbourne)	Group interview	Public relations assistant	Websites, Instagram, Facebook	Lady Gaga, Katy Perry, Pink, Princess Catherine, Kardashian/Jenner sisters	Daily & social life, fashion & style, career success, business acumen
Eliza (Melbourne)	Group interview	Retail management	Pinterest, Instagram, blogs, <i>Daily Mail</i> , Hollywood Life	Local C-list celebrities, Kardashian/Jenner sisters	Daily & social life, fashion & style, intimate details, celebrity attitude, career success, business acumen

Jasmine Melbourne)	Digital diary	Part-time job	Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter	Rihanna, Kardashian/Jenner sisters, Bella Hadid	Daily & social life, fashion & style, family, career success
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Table 2
The Four Faces of Assemblages

	BwO	Developing Body	Enhanced Body	Regimented Body
Structure	Many virtual elements that are heterogeneous	Many virtual and actual elements that are heterogeneous	Virtual and actual and some genuine elements that are homogenous	Virtual and mostly genuine and unattainable elements that are homogenous
Process	De-stratifying	De-stratifying and re-stratifying	De-stratifying and re-stratifying	Re-stratifying repetitively
Contiguities	Diverting	Overlapping	Comingling	Captivating
Lines of Flight (# and type)	Many fluid lines	Many tentative lines	Fewer expansive lines	Fewest restrictive lines
Desire	Disrupt	Experiment	Map	Trace

FIGURE 1
CELEBRITY-PROXIMATE ASSEMBLAGES

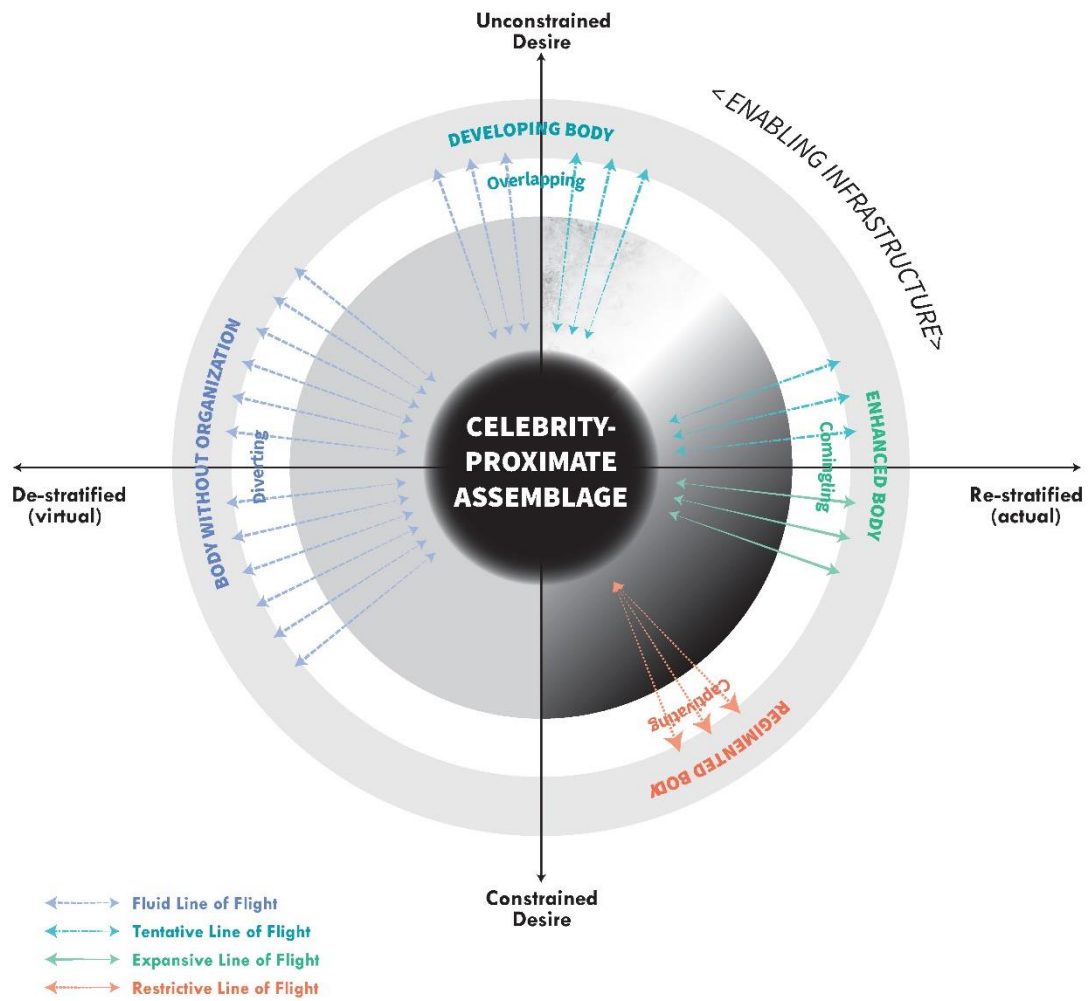


FIGURE 2

DIVERTING CONTIGUITY FOR MANY FLUID LINES OF FLIGHT



Klara:

I have Kylie Jenner of Snapchat. I can see what she's doing throughout the day. And who's she with. Sometimes it's cool to compare her personal life to how she is presented in the magazines or 'Keeping Up With the Kardashians'. Sometimes she pranks her boyfriend or family. Or she films parts of her house or how long it takes her to get ready for events. Or even what happens behind photo shoots.

I guess Kylie is presented as another Kardashian, a model, a cultural icon. And sometimes on her snapchat she presents herself in a similar manner. But other times she seems like a normal teenager. She takes photos and videos of herself without make up on or singing with her friends.

Today on snapchat Kylie asked people to ask her questions via Twitter and she would answer them on snapchat. She answered as many as she could wearing no make-up, in her PJs, and nothing done to her hair. I've had a couple of celebrities on snapchat and she seems to be the only one to engage with her fans in that way.

FIGURE 3
OVERLAPPING CONTIGUITY FOR TENTATIVE LINES OF FLIGHTS

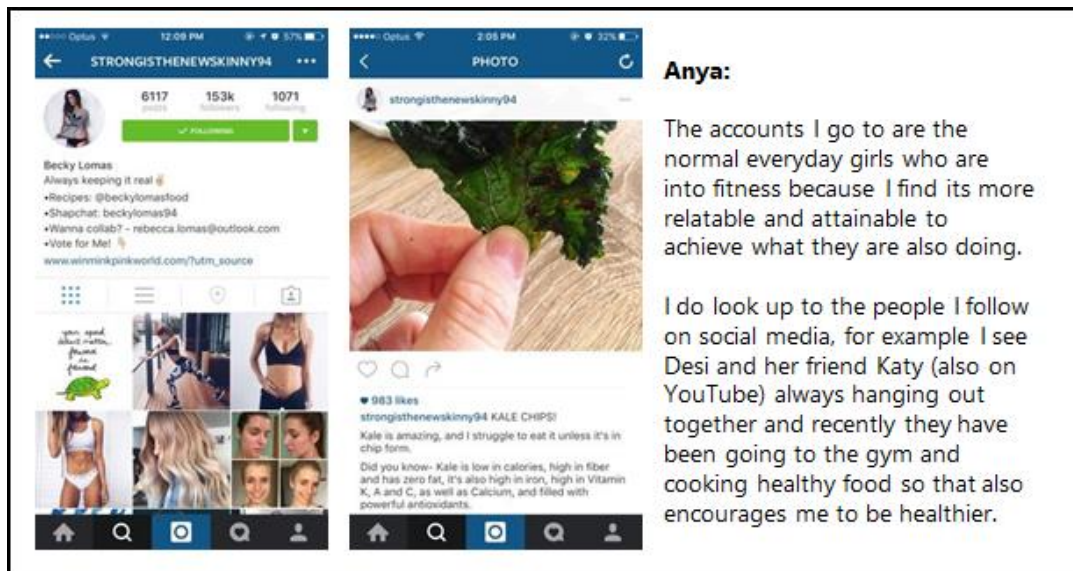


FIGURE 4
COMINGLING CONTIGUITY FOR EXPANSIVE LINES OF FLIGHT

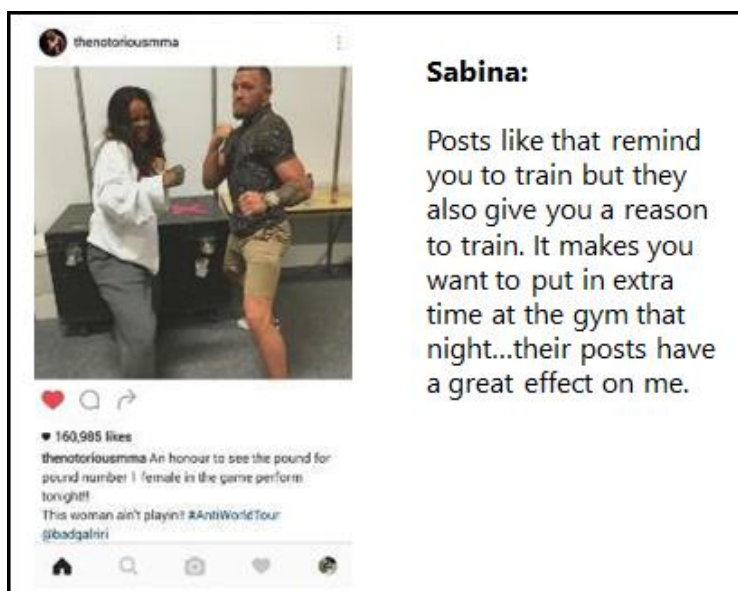


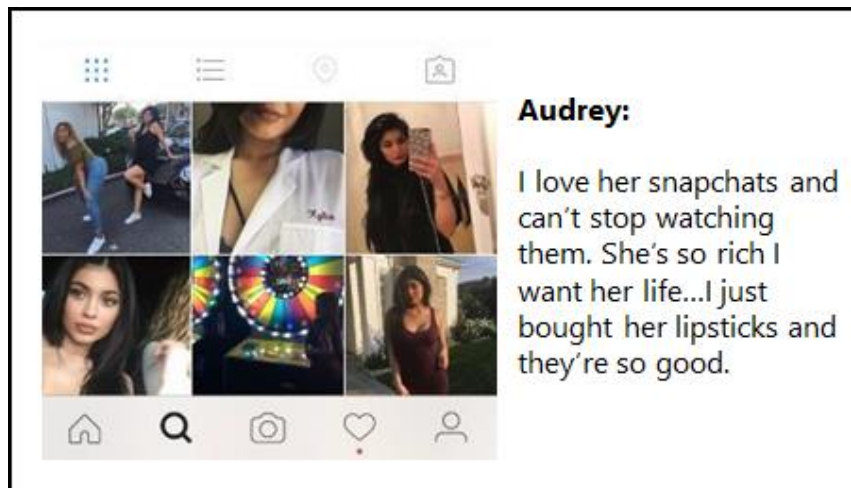
FIGURE 5
THE ENHANCED BODY THAT DOES MORE



Sabina:

She is like a little voice
[in my head] going 'hey
slacker, what are you
doing? Your dreams are
possible now so get out
there and do it'.

FIGURE 6
CAPTIVATING CONTIGUITY FOR RESTRICTIVE LINES OF FLIGHT



Headings List

- 1) **CONSUMERS BECOMING**
- 2) Consumers' Transforming through Embodied Performance
- 3) *Consumers as Playful Performers*
- 3) *Consumers as Crafters*
- 2) Consumers Transforming through Magical Thinking
- 1) **THE CONTEXT OF CELEBRITY WATCHING**
- 2) Historical Shifts in Celebrity Watching
- 2) The Enabling Infrastructure of Social Media
- 1) **ASSEMBLAGES AND BECOMING**
- 2) The Body with and without Organization
- 2) Lines of Flight
- 2) Desire
- 1) **METHODOLOGY**
- 2) Informants and Sampling
- 2) Data Collection
- 3) *Initial Field Work and Interviews*
- 3) *Individual and Friendship Group Interviews*
- 3) *Mobile Digital Methods*
- 2) Analysis
- 1) **CELEBRITY-PROXIMATE ASSEMBLAGES**
- 2) The Body without Organization
- 3) *Structure and Process*
- 3) *Contiguities and Lines of Flight*
- 3) *Desire*
- 2) The Developing Body
- 3) *Structure and Process*
- 3) *Contiguities and Lines of Flight*
- 3) *Desire*
- 2) The Enhanced Body
- 3) *Structure and Process*
- 3) *Contiguities and Lines of Flight*
- 3) *Desire*
- 2) The Regimented Body
- 3) *Structure and Process*
- 3) *Contiguities and Lines of Flight*
- 3) *Desire*
- 1) **DISCUSSION**
- 2) The Four Faces of Assemblage as a Broader Explanatory Model
- 2) Distributed Agency in Celebrity-Proximate Assemblages
- 2) Liberatory Potential of Celebrity-Proximate Assemblages?
- 1) **CONCLUSION**
- 1) **REFERENCES**