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Streams of fun and cringe: Talking about Snapchat as mediated affective practice

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Abstract

How do young people interpret and negotiate their sense of being affected in the context of social media use? Our study draws on recent theorizing that views affective practices as discursive, relational, and imbued with power. We specifically address practices that users engage in as they pursue forms of digitally mediated emotional involvement when using Snapchat, an image-based social media application. Our data consist of focus group dialogues with Norwegian students aged 16-19, recruited from schools selected for socio-economic and multicultural diversity. Excerpts exemplify how Snapchat use is not only engagingly talked about, but also affects non-digital everyday interactions. The analysis illustrates how young people's talk about Snapchat deploys various discursive objects that convey promises of happiness and well-being, and affords particular forms of subjectivity. Image-sharing practices, and how they are communicated and felt, are embedded in and reproduce social norms, yet also provide spaces of belonging.

Introduction

In this article, we explore how young people talk about connections between Snapchat use and their sense of being affected. Psychological studies of how people perceive their use of social media have tended to focus on a rather positivistic notion of well-being, in particular as an *effect or outcome* of their online habits (see Castellacci and Tveito, 2018 for a review). Recent psychological literature has had less to say about how people experience, interpret and negotiate their sense of affecting and being affected in the context of social media use. Relatively few studies have approached well-being as an integral part of online activity, i.e., as complex and dynamic interweavings of affects, signs, bodies and digital practices (Döveling et al., 2018). This observation is particularly relevant in contemporary cultures where young people spend large amounts of time using increasingly complex social media applications. While this knowledge gap warrants attention, our aim is specifically to illustrate how studying complexities of young people's engagement with Snapchat connects with understandings of affect as mediated, discursive practice. We draw from critical psychology and cultural studies to consider how such engagement is dialogically co-constructed as moment-to-moment experiences of feeling and belonging, and as such can be investigated as affective practices (Wetherell, 2012, 2013, 2015b) that involve discursively available, emotion-eliciting objects (Ahmed, 2004, 2008, 2010).

Taking a critical psychological approach means paying “attention to the ways people are positioned and the identities and subjectivities afforded by ideologies and discourses” (Martinussen and Wetherell, 2019, p. 105). In contrast to mainstream psychological research, which tends to view well-being as an immutable and clearly delineated quality of psychological experience, we conceive of well-being as an unstable and discontinuous aspect of subjectivity, continuously negotiated by means of affective practices. These include making sense of internal or external dialogue as well as perceptions of intensity located in the

body. In the present study, we analyze excerpts of spoken dialogues between young people discussing their Snapchat practices. Each excerpt draws on distinct aspects of affective practices. Our work contributes to the on-going exploration of “different registers of analysis . . . to fathom the complexity of subjectivity” (Blackman et al., 2008, p. 10).

Features of Snapchat

Snapchat is a photo, video and messaging application designed for smartphone use. Launched in 2011, the app gained rapid popularity worldwide. At the time of writing, approximately six out of ten Norwegian adults use Snapchat, and the proportion of youth users is likely to be even higher (Ipsos, 2018). Snapchat is an instant multimodal communication application that affords image-centered message exchange (Alhabash and Ma, 2017, Veum and Undrum, 2018, Waddell, 2016). When opening the app, users enter directly into camera mode. Text and live location tagging can be superimposed over images or video clips. Snapchat messages are *contemporary* (Bayer et al., 2016) in that users must record any photo or video message immediately before transmitting them. Archived images cannot be sent. This affordance enhances the proximity and presence of the communicative act for senders and receivers. The messages are also *temporary* (Bayer et al., 2016) in that snaps are automatically deleted after the receivers have seen them. The application is therefore commonly characterized as ‘transient’, ‘ephemeral’, ‘disposable’ or as a form of ‘disappearing media’ (Bayer et al., 2016, Charteris et al., 2018, Handyside and Ringrose, 2017).

According to a study of U.S. undergraduate students’ usage of Snapchat, users perceive this social media application as an opportunity to share enjoyable snippets of their everyday life with friends and peers (Bayer et al., 2016). According to one of the participants in this study, a snap is ‘a message in the form of a picture’ (p. 967). Most snaps are reactions to, and constructions of, everyday happenings, particularly through selfies. These are

exchanged as private snaps (from a person to another or a group), or posted in *My Story*, facilitating the snap(s) to be broadcast to all followers during the next 24 hours. Several studies suggest that Snapchat is used to maintain relationships (Piwek and Joinson, 2016, Grieve, 2017). Snapchat is also associated with “sexting” and the sharing of flirtatious sexual images (Handyside and Ringrose, 2017, Charteris et al., 2018, Utz et al., 2015, Moran et al., 2018).

The ephemerality of Snapchat messaging has features in common with face-to-face conversations, since messages dissolve after the communicative act (Charteris et al., 2018, Jeong and Lee, 2017). Furthermore, Snapchat emulates attribution of mental states, empathy and perspective-taking (Jeong and Lee, 2017), as the visual affordance seemingly allows receivers to see the world as the sender represents it. This is among the features that distinguish Snapchat from video chats offered by applications such as Skype. Snapchat enables users to temporarily share their own gaze, albeit often a strategically constructed one, with designated – and possibly multiple – others. In contrast to Instagram and Facebook, Snapchat operates without any ‘like’-function or comment sections. The visual and ephemeral quality of Snapchat communication nevertheless functions within an attention economy intending to capture and enhance the interest of the user (boyd, 2014, Charteris et al., 2018). Commodified images produce fascination and allure which again feed into contemporary capitalism, as “everyday life becomes a cavalcade of aesthetically charged moments” (Thrift, 2008, p. 13). Snapchat thereby operates as a technology that affords and fuels imagination of the self as well as others. People use such applications to develop online relationships as well as working on an objectified self, and its presentation, within virtual social fields (Gillespie et al., 2018). Snapchat is therefore profoundly embedded in a neoliberal economy, in which the subject is converted to an object that can be valued and assessed (Heidkamp and Kergel, 2017).

Finding that young people experience both “positive” and “negative” feelings in the context of social media, several studies have argued against an either-or model in which use of social networking sites primarily supports or reduces affective or relational well-being. Using a mixed-methods approach, Weinstein (2018) examined how daily interactions with social media apps, including Snapchat, related to the experience of affect among young U.S. adolescents. For instance, interactions may facilitate closeness, but also alienation, and although practices of self-expression contribute to affirmation, they also involve worries about being judged by others. Young people regularly reported feeling an obligation to reply, and thus maintain social bonds, but also feeling overwhelmed by the number of received snaps, and guilt over not responding to all. A focus group study by Vaterlaus et al. (2016) investigated how young U.S. adults perceived Snapchat use to affect their interpersonal relationships. Participants identified a number of opportunities and challenges for interpersonal relationships. One opportunity identified was being able to communicate emotion more precisely. The image-based interface enabled further development or strengthening of relationships that were previously limited to talking or texting. Interpersonal challenges have been found to include the risks of jealousy, annoyance, intergenerational conflict, infidelity and cyberbullying (Vaterlaus et al., 2016, Utz et al., 2015).

Well-being as affective practice

Mainstream psychological literature regularly depicts well-being as a predominance of happy rather than unhappy feelings, and positive cognitive evaluations of one’s circumstances (Diener, 2012, Kahneman et al., 1999). In contrast, and relevant for our thinking about young people’s affective engagement with Snapchat via their smartphones, Sara Ahmed (2004, 2008) has made the point that happiness is neither a decontextualized subjective feeling, nor an inherent property of objects. Instead, happiness is *promised* through closeness to certain

objects. Promises of happiness direct people toward certain types of objects, as though these objects are indispensable components of well-being. Ahmed has addressed particularly the shared reference to and reproduction of such “happy objects” in the context of social bonds and culture. Not only do groups cohere around these objects, but people are “asked to reproduce what we inherit by being affected in the right way by the right things” (p.12). Consequently, Ahmed (2008) considers happiness as a form of sociability, and emphasizes how social bonds can be formed and maintained when the same objects make different people happy: When we feel good in the context of such objects, “we are aligned; we are facing the right way. We become alienated – out of line with an affective community – when we do not experience pleasure from proximity to objects that are attributed as being good” (p.11). In this way, certain objects gain affective value as they circulate in a given culture, signifying the good life, while other objects lose value when emotions such as hate or fear become “stuck” to them (Ahmed, 2010). Ahmed’s account clearly eschews the “truncated subjectivity” (Binkley, 2011, p. 378) depicted by mainstream research and positive psychology, by demonstrating how experiences of emotion and well-being are part and parcel of affective economies.

Our study is informed by related critical psychological thinking about what affect can “do”, in particular “how people construct subjectivities and identities... what versions of self are being made... [and how] these versions [are] accomplished” (Martinussen and Wetherell, 2019, p. 111). We have been particularly inspired by Wetherell’s (2012, 2013, 2015b) insistence on the interwovenness of discourse and affect. In this framework, emotions are situated in dialogical as well as societal orders, and affective practices are seen as intersubjective activities that involve bodies and feeling states in addition to the exchange of signs. Central to our analysis, the concept of affective practice “draws attention to the dialogic and relational negotiation of affect and emotion where people work together to make

emotional sense” (Martinussen and Wetherell, 2019, p. 109). By involving talk and shared meaning-making, affective practices are inherently relational, but also imbued with power (Wetherell et al., 2015, Wetherell, 2012). Affective practices therefore recruit as well as produce effects on bodies and minds, including emotions, moods and perceptions.

Importantly, what distinguishes affective practices from social practices in general, is “human activity where emotion is a specific and principal focus of the practice” (Wetherell et al., 2018, p. 5).

However, the lack of consensus on what the term *affect* – and by extension, *affective practice*, refers to, provides less than firm foundations for analytic work. According to Gibbs (2010), contemporary scholars within cultural studies tend to theorize affect either in a Deleuzian sense as intensity and potential (Massumi, 1995), or as deriving from Tomkins’ (1978) perspective on affect as a primary biological motivational system (Sedgwick, 2003). Wetherell (2012, 2013) has criticized especially the Massumian perspective for dispensing with discourse, while Martinussen and Wetherell (2019) among others have pointed to limitations of the discrete affect approach offered by Tomkins’ work. Finding a middle ground in these literatures, we consider affect as bodily perturbation originating in encounters between bodies and objects (widely understood). Emotion, in contrast, refers to the subjective labelling of psychological states or physiological responses, drawing on discursively available categories (Barrett, 2014). In this empirical work, we are particularly interested in tracing “positive” affect expressions (e.g., fun and laughter) in order to critically assess what such affect might be doing. Specifically, we aim to illustrate how the production of value (cf. Ahmed, 2004) can occur through the types of affective practices suggested by Wetherell. According to Wetherell (2012), what is in circulation is not abstracted forms of affect or emotion, but socially embedded practices that engage bodies and feeling states. We approach this with the understanding that everyday dialogical sequences carry normative potentials (cf.

Wetherell, 2012). As we will demonstrate, interactions may entail that emotions are recruited for normative purposes that are not necessarily recognized by the interlocutors.

Method and data analysis

To study how young people in Norway engage affectively with Snapchat, we conducted focus groups (Marková et al., 2007) with school students aged 16-19 in the Oslo area. We recruited 23 participants from four schools selected for diversity in terms of their socio-economic context and the multicultural student body. We conducted six focus groups, with each group made up of three or four participants and lasting for approximately one hour. All conversations took place in Norwegian. We audio-recorded, fully transcribed, and anonymised all interactions. For the purpose of this study, data excerpts have been translated to English. Ethical approval was granted by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data.

Oslo's more affluent western areas have a far lower proportion of migrant residents than the eastern areas, where some neighbourhoods are sufficiently multicultural that only very few white students attend some of the schools. Because of this context, we sampled purposively from schools with many students from migrant families, as well as schools where most students have Norwegian-born parents. The focus groups were also diverse in terms of gender, with two groups being mixed gender, two groups women-only, and two groups men-only.

The goal of the focus groups was to provide forums for participants to talk freely and spontaneously about their engagement with Snapchat. In order to investigate affective practices, we were interested in how they talked with one another, and the affective content of their talk. Focus group participants were invited to discuss what they snap, how they felt in relation to the practice of snapping, and to talk about particularly memorable Snapchat experiences.

We initially coded the entire data set with regard to topics, emotions and interaction patterns. Thereafter, we selected dialogical sequences that referred to objects of happiness or promises, expectations or negotiations of emotions. Participants' names have been replaced with pseudonyms that reflect their gender and cultural background. The quoted excerpts also feature the names of two researchers (Lisa and Emil, *anonymized for review purposes*) with the understanding that the data have been co-constructed through our interactions with participants. Two related research questions guide the analysis: What is affect doing in the context of participants' engagement with, and talk about, Snapchat? What opportunities for subjectivity emerge through participants' discursive engagements with Snapchat?

Analysis and discussion

In this study, we were particularly interested in the practices that young people engage in as they strive for some kind of digitally mediated affective engagement. Many of the participants expressed some exhaustion with the relentless 24/7 demands of receiving and responding to snaps. As one participant, Kaja, stated: "Many times I just don't open it [the snap] because I can't be bothered". Kaja constructs the snap as affecting – the intensity it produces is bothersome for her to manage. Nevertheless, most participants emphasized the centrality of Snapchat in their everyday life. Snapchat functions through a process of exchange and repetition – a process of endlessly reproducing chains of connection. But why? Why bother, if not for the expectation of some kind of affective engagement (Paasonen, 2015), or maybe, to quote Ahmed (2008), a promise of happiness?

Pleasure from proximity to objects

We begin our analysis with a rather straightforward example of how certain objects become constructed as "happy" through an interaction between a researcher and participants. The

following excerpt is from a focus group consisting of teenage boys. The dialogue provides an illustration of how a variety of objects are constructed as suppliers of good feelings, in the context of a possible online encounter:

Excerpt 1

- 1 LISA: Let's say you exchanged snaps with someone else or with each other. Does
2 it make a difference?
- 3 SAMUEL: Yes, if you've never met the person before and you meet them on
4 Snapchat, or if that's where you first start chatting
- 5 LISA: Is that what one does, meeting people that one doesn't...
- 6 SAMUEL: Yes, you can find people on Instagram, and then it's like: 'Yo, what's your
7 name on Snapchat?'
- 8 MIKAEL: Mhm
- 9 LISA: When does one do that? When does one find people...
- 10 SAMUEL: When you meet girls.
- 11 MIKAEL: Yes, for example.
- 12 SAMUEL: I've received messages, and it has been like, 'What's your name on
13 Snapchat?' and then, 'add me'.
- 14 LISA: Ok, and then one starts to snap? Is that how it goes?
- 15 SAMUEL: Yes, but I have a girlfriend. As a rule I don't do that.
- 16 LISA: But it is an example of how one can start to...
- 17 SAMUEL: Yes.
- 18 LISA: How does it feel to receive a message like that?
- 19 SAMUEL: Well it's nice (*koselig*). It's good (*hyggelig*). People are interested in
20 snapping with you. Usually that means they want to get something more
21 out of it.

During this sequence, the participants talk about the process of starting to exchange snaps after meeting a new person through Snapchat. One participant, Samuel, describes receiving such a message as *koselig* and *hyggelig*, which are culturally specific Norwegian expressions for enjoyment, shared well-being and having a good time. He describes how receiving an image provides a momentarily positive emotional experience. Here, the images and messages shared via Snapchat constitute the immediately proximate objects (Ahmed, 2008) that carry promises of happiness. An obvious, but largely unspoken assumption is that these happiness-providing snaps are intrinsically nested within social media apps and smartphones. Apps and phones are not affectively neutral devices, but constitute technological

objects that promise happiness. Further, the representation of the person who is interested in exchanging snaps constitutes yet another happiness-promising object. Sharing via snapping is therefore a complexly nested affective practice, as an array of happy objects coexist as social goods accumulating positive value through being exchanged (Ahmed, 2008).

In building up the above scenario of a person whose initial Snapchat contact led to the participant experiencing positive emotions, the dialogue puts various provisos in place: Samuel says he would not usually do this if he had a girlfriend, and the dialogue reflects a shared understanding that the new Snapchat partner is a girl. The participant aligns himself with normative forms of heterosexual desire and understands snaps received from a girl as good objects, objects that promise happiness and are therefore ascribed value. However, the imagined Snapchat interlocutor is not merely a passive supplier, she too is constructed as a desiring subject, wanting to obtain something from the exchange. The dialogue indicates how promises of “getting something out of it” might justify prolonged snapping activities. A possibility of well-being is constructed by means of positive connections (Vaterlaus et al., 2016) and affective “jolts” of positive feeling (Paasonen, 2015).

In this excerpt, the researcher explicitly probed for the participants’ emotional responses. We now turn to a dialogical sequence that constructs emotions and embodied affect through negotiated practices.

The selfie as embodied affective practice

Participants talked in detail about selfie-related practices, seemingly taking and sending endless images of themselves: their faces, parts of their faces, particular facial expressions, particular hand gestures, their genitals, and other parts of their bodies. This observation is in line with other researchers’ suggestions that most snaps are reactions to everyday happenings by means of selfies (Bayer et al., 2016, Piwek and Joinson, 2016, Utz et al., 2015).

Participants in our study often took the opportunity during focus group discussions to hold their phone up to demonstrate exactly how they take selfies, how they think it is best to take selfies, how they do not take selfies, how they used to take selfies, how they have seen other people take selfies, and so on. These embodied moments in the dialogue seemed to engage participants, despite their repetitiveness. These were instances that involved "the comfort of repetition; of following lines that have already been given" (Ahmed, 2008, p. 12). Shortly after the interviewer asked if there are right or wrong ways to take selfies, Samuel explained: "I don't think there's any formula ... Everything is totally random ... you don't think about it. It makes no difference to me." A little later, while participants were still talking about their selfie practices, the following emerged:

Excerpt 2

- 1 TOBIAS: Often, if you're on the bus snapping with someone
- 2 ASGEIR: You don't sit like this. ((stretches arm outwards, mimics taking a selfie))
- 3 TOBIAS: And you stand like this.
- 4 LISA: Why?
- 5 ASGEIR: Because then you basically look like an idiot. If you're sitting like this and
- 6 take a selfie on the bus
- 7 LISA: Hasn't that been a common thing to do?
- 8 TOBIAS: No, nobody does.
- 9 LISA: You never used to do it?
- 10 TOBIAS: No.
- 11 SAMUEL: It's just because it's not socially accepted. If it had been, people would had
- 12 done, for sure. One hundred percent.
- 13 LISA: What happens then, if...
- 14 SAMUEL: It's because of trends. There'll always be trends, and it's become a trend.
- 15 LISA: And how does it feel to see someone do it?
- 16 TOBIAS: I just watch... why do you do it?
- 17 ASGEIR: I might take a snap of that person and write something nasty about that
- 18 person ... like, what a jerk, or something. Because I don't think it's normal,
- 19 it's strange to see a person on the bus suddenly get up and take a selfie, sort
- 20 of.
- 21 LISA: Ok, so it's not normal.
- 22 MIKAEL: I think it's okay.
- 23 ASGEIR: I think it's okay, sort of, but it's a bit strange
- 24 SAMUEL: I don't care.
- 25 ASGEIR: I won't exactly walk up to him and ask him to quit.
- 26 TOBIAS: ((Laughs))
- 27 ASGEIR: But it's still a bit of a strange thing to do.

- 28 LISA: But what do you feel, is it...
29 MIKAEL: It's cringe.
30 TOBIAS: Yeah, that's a good word for it.
31 MIKAEL: It's like goosebumps.

Even while several participants claimed that there is no right or wrong way to take a selfie, this topic elicited a long stream of talk sprinkled with descriptions like “strange” and “not normal” in reference to people whose selfie practices were perceived to transgress norms. Young people’s descriptions of their selfie practices offer a vivid example of the “body and the talk [being] woven together and co-constituted in the moment” (Wetherell, 2015a, p. 87). In this excerpt, although Samuel says that the process is “totally random” and later reiterates “I don’t care [how it is done]”, Tobias and Asgeir are markedly engaged in the process of discussing and demonstrating how taking a selfie is done appropriately, how it is done strangely, and how they feel when they see it done the wrong way. These two participants engage in a discursive process of meaning-making where feelings of strangeness are evoked, and people who take the “wrong” approach to selfies become “jerks” and “idiots”. Taking a selfie is presented as affective practice; as “an in-between, relational phenomenon” in the context of which “[s]ubjects cannot be disentangled from objects, or individuals from their situations” (Wetherell, 2015b, p. 158). The young man on the bus, observing another’s selfie practice, is affectively entangled, in relationship with the person whose selfie practices move him to “take a snap of that person and write something nasty”. In such a moment, versions of the self are accomplished, and particular subjectivities are composed (Martinussen and Wetherell, 2019). Asgeir appears to be sufficiently entangled in, and moved by, this situation that he and another participant, Tobias, elaborate on this for several turns in the focus group. Meanwhile, the other two participants, Samuel and Mikael, make only minimal comments that they do not find such distinctions important. Nevertheless, Mikael successfully introduces the notions of “goosebumps” and “cringe” to identify a normative and explicitly

embodied response to the scenario. Goosebumps signify a form of intensity largely attributable to the autonomous nervous system (Benedek and Kaernbach, 2011), whereas a cringe is a more culturally complex performance (Havas and Sulimma, 2018). In this excerpt, particular kinds of (strange, nasty, cringeworthy) subjects are produced through the workings of affective practices which are clearly both embodied and dialogical.

This exchange provides one example of how the specific affordances of Snapchat have an impact on what young people choose to share, how they present themselves (Handyside and Ringrose, 2017) and how they make sense of such affective practices. However, the primary focus of this dialogue remains on a hypothetical scenario. In the next example, we will exemplify how a memory of a specific, emotion-laden snap becomes an object of negotiation and gives rise to further affective practices unfolding in the here-and-now of the focus group.

Posing

The following dialogue took place after we had introduced the topic of snaps that might stick in memory. A male participant, Bradley, suggests a turn take by inviting his classmate Abdi, the other male participant, to offer an account of a snap he remembers.

Excerpt 3a

- 1 BRADLEY: Do you have a snap you remember?
- 2 ABDI: Me?
- 3 EMIL: Yes.
- 4 ABDI: Yes, there's this snap where I was in... in [country], so in Africa, and
- 5 where....
- 6 BRADLEY: You mean with the football team?
- 7 ABDI: We were with our football team. So, and that's my home country, you
- 8 know. So like one where we took a kind of picture where... Or it was a
- 9 video, where like... At night we walked around and... Yeah, we just had a
- 10 good time (*koste oss*). I remember it really well.
- 11 EMIL: You walked around and had a really good time?
- 12 ABDI: Yeah, rode a motorbike and...
- 13 EMIL: Sorry, what did you say? Rode a motorbike, yeah

- 14 ABDI: Yeah, and some stuff. Swimming and stuff. Really nice.
 15 EMIL: So the memories... You filmed it, but it was an experience. You were... it
 16 wasn't just something you saw, you were in it, were there, on the
 17 motorbike maybe. Yeah
 18 ABDI: Yeah. You're riding, like you're driving, right, and you like record the
 19 video like this ((shows with hands, as if holding handlebar with one hand,
 20 and the smartphone with the other))
 21 BRADLEY: And then you turn the camera, right?
 22 CELIA: ((Laughs))
 23 ((Everyone laughs loudly))
 24 EMIL: What?
 25 BRADLEY: Well first he films, you know, that he's riding the bike, and then he turns
 26 the camera and just ((mimics the turn with hands, and makes a pose)) and
 27 then he turns it back.
 28 EMIL: Do you think so?
 29 BRADLEY: Yes, he does.
 30 CELIA: ((Laughs a little))

In this excerpt, after some hesitance (line 2) Abdi calmly narrates a memory of recording a video snap at night in a location categorized as an African country. Abdi situates the experience as relationally attached, through constructions as “we”, “our football team”, “my home country”, which all suggest a sense of belonging. His description “we just had a good time” includes a somewhat untranslatable Norwegian expression (“*koste oss*”), which refers to an embodied, and often shared, sense of enjoying and relaxing. Here, the memory of the actual experience is merged with, and appears to override, the memory of the snap (cf. Gillespie et al., 2018). Abdi’s underscoring of “really” (line 10) accentuates the construction of this scene as a profound and therefore affect-laden, happiness-producing memory.

There is a strikingly embodied quality to the sequence following Abdi introducing his memory. After one of the interviewers directs attention to how Abdi did not merely record an interesting event, but was instantaneously capturing his own experience, Abdi demonstrates the combined and embodied actions of driving and filming. Through hand and arm movements he shows the focus group how he held the smartphone while driving, thus emulating his forward-oriented flow of experience through the lens. By simulating his posture he brings the materiality of both the motorcycle and camera as well as the physical

actions of simultaneously operating them into the focus group room. This snap memory is *moving* in a very concrete manner.

Next, Bradley suggests that Abdi must have turned the camera, and thus made a video selfie while driving. Bradley's demonstration for the focus group is embodied, and takes Abdi's own embodiment as the point of departure: Bradley shows with his hands and makes a pose which is intended to be a caricature of Abdi. He is introducing a new imagined scenario, in which Abdi interrupts the flow of being on the motorcycle, moving from filming what is in front and thus digitally preserving his present experience, to instead making a selfie footage. In Bradley's "alternative scenario", attention is directed to the face, and the facial expression of Abdi, humorously mimicked by Bradley.

This complex turn, we argue, constructs Abdi as more self-conscious than his presentation to the focus group is suggesting. Furthermore, Bradley's turn represents an implicit enforcement of a face-centered Snapchat norm among youth. The embodied display of taking-a-selfie-even-when-riding-the-bike suggests a form of neoliberal visualization of the body, in the shape of the ubiquitous selfie pose (Giroux, 2015, Veum and Undrum, 2018). Taking selfies has recurred as a topic in the focus group discussion, but has now become an ambiguous object of seemingly playful exploration. Bradley's turn can also be seen as a disruption of the positive affect involved in Abdi's narrative of the flow experience. This subtle form of discursive repression (Billig, 2006) suggests how subjectivities are shaped - or challenged - by discourses that value ritualized surface presentation over idiosyncratic experience and memory, producing an "ideal image of the entrepreneurial self" (Heidkamp and Kergel, 2017, p. 104). We also note that the turn-taking sequence demonstrates how Bradley takes space as his previously more quiet classmate is talking. Importantly, while suggesting a redirection of attention in the sense that his classmate in actuality might have turned the camera, Bradley himself redirects the flow of attention of the focus group: both

topically only to the selfie or face-image, but also relationally, away from Abdi. While Abdi is being gently mocked for potentially having diverted attention to himself, this is exactly what Bradley is doing.

For whatever reason – maybe endorsement, recognition, or surprise - this “interruption” creates amusement in the group, first taking the form of loud laughter among all participants, which is a clear sign of affect at work. Following Celia’s second laughter, the dialogue continues:

Excerpt 3b

- 31 EMIL: Have you seen it many times? Is it a memory, have you put it on your
 32 memory list?
 33 ABDI: Yes, when he does like this? ((imitates Bradley’s gesture))
 34 EMIL: Well I was thinking about the actual video, but...
 35 ABDI: Like if he has a pose?
 36 BRADLEY: No, do you often watch the video?
 37 CELIA: ((Simultaneously)) No, that you have watched it?
 38 ABDI: If I look at the video?
 39 EMIL: Yes.
 40 ABDI: It pops up now and then.
 41 EMIL: Okay. It sound like a really nice memory.
 42 ABDI: Mhm. Really nice (*hyggelig*), actually.

Abdi does not deny the suggestion that he made a pose, possibly because the interviewer takes the conversation in a somewhat different direction. In fact, Abdi gets stuck with the topic of posing. Not catching the interviewer’s intention to return to the motorbike scene, he assumes twice that the question refers not to his own motorbike ride, but to whether Bradley often poses in the manner he does in the interview. What seems to happen here is that Abdi is recruited into the face-focus introduced by Bradley, and they both become affectively entangled by it. The affective stickiness (cf. Ahmed, 2004) is particularly evident in line 33, where Abdi performs a second-order imitation of Bradley’s imitation, and by his statement in line 35. Bradley ultimately helps Abdi out, as does the interviewer and Celia, co-constructing a return to the motorbike memory.

The full sequence demonstrates an complex string of affective practices that struggle to create an intersubjective understanding of what is going on (Marková et al., 2007), both in the past and in the present moment. What is semiotically passed around is not so much verbal labels of emotion, as negotiated ways in which the narrated images are understood. Crucially, this negotiation is not merely a cognitive dialogic process, but unfolds in a playful, relational push-and-pull that is both affective and affecting. In these two excerpts, we see more than the mere transmission of feeling. The happy memory is challenged and somewhat tainted. We can observe a local order of power involved in friendly bickering between two classmates. We also notice normative undertones of how sharing a cherished inner-world moment collides with demands and expectations of showing face. The sign of the self-face is widely circulated, and has accumulated high value in the affective economy (Ahmed, 2004). Here, we witness not only the face as an ephemeral image-sign, but also a choreographed body-sign: The pose demonstrates how an explicitly embodied practice might stickily interfere with the flow of ongoing (yet snapped) experience.

The excerpt also illustrates how Snapchat cannot straightforwardly be reduced to a hypergeneralized (Valsiner, 2014) notion of “social media”. Snapchat mediates by being intertwined in multiple affective-semiotic acts: as camera, as video images, as an affordance for particular types of facial poses, and as memories, concretely by use of the “memory” function. Snapchat allows preservation and sharing, but at the same time, discursive norms related to social media capture and shape lived experience as well as its memory, mediation and narration.

Enjoyment is a serious thing: Humour, friendship, and identity

In the following excerpt, four young men aged 17-19 years talk about the names they give each other and their other friends on Snapchat. One participant, Rani, explains that he has

nicknames for “most” of his snapchat contacts “so they aren’t recognized by others, when I get snaps”. He goes on to contextualize his wish for privacy by depicting a scene where he is sitting at a table with other people, his phone on the table allowing the others to identify senders of in-coming snaps: “if it says for instance ‘my handsome, white friend’ ((giggle)), then nobody knows who that is except for me. So it’s a bit kind of mysterious.” This talk about nicknames elicits a lot of laughter, and prompts some demonstrations of a dance move from a music video. Our interpretation of the following excerpt takes into account that all four participants in this focus group have grown up in Norway, but have at least one parent who has moved to Norway from a non-Western country. These participants are themselves likely to be positioned as ethnic Others in relation to a Norwegian majority norm. We are particularly interested in the negotiation of Othered subjectivities through the workings of affective practice.

Excerpt 4

- 1 LISA: But do you have nicknames for each other?
- 2 HADAR: Yea::h, I call him ((referring to Rani)) the Ugly God.
- 3 ((All participants laugh))
- 4 LISA: Ugly... ?
- 5 RANI: God.
- 6 HADAR: God.
- 7 RANI: ((Laughs))
- 8 LISA: Ok. You’re laughing ...
- 9 RANI: I’m dying. ((High-pitched laughter)) Most insane nickname. It’s a bit
- 10 HADAR: That’s why I call him that, because it...
- 11 RANI: It’s insane bro.
- 12 HADAR: It’s just funny.
- 13 LISA: Is it funny?
- 14 HADAR: Yes.
- 15 LISA: Do you find it funny, then?
- 16 RANI: Yes, yes, yes, I have a nickname for him too.
- 17 LISA: Ok, and that is?
- 18 RANI: Twenty-one...
- 19 HADAR: Twenty-one Savage.
- 20 RANI: It’s a rapper
- 21 HADAR: Artist.
- 22 LISA: But Ugly God, is that a rapper too?

- 23 RANI: Yes, he's an artist too.
 24 [...]
 25 ((All laugh))
 26 HADAR: And, he has a dance to one of the songs that, this...
 27 LISA: Is it?
 28 RANI: What?
 29 LISA: You're the one who has a dance?
 30 HADAR: Yes, it's a kind of a thing. You know when he listens to music, he goes like
 31 this ((shows arm movement)). Like a drop-thing. And the artist Ugly God
 32 usually...
 33 AMER: Does the same, if you like...
 34 HADAR: So it turns out funny.
 35 [...]
 36 LISA: You, do you use nicknames, Dao and Amer?
 37 DAO: Yes, I have... I have two, at least, Snapchat friends that I have nicknames
 38 for.
 39 [...]
 40 RANI: They're just funny nicknames.
 41 HADAR: But it's like, they're nicknames, but like, it's nothing secret.
 42 AMER: It's more for the sake of humour.
 43 HADAR: Yes.
 44 DAO: Yes, humour.
 45 [...]
 46 HADAR: Have it a bit... spice things up, since it gets a bit boring, kind of.
 47 RANI: ((Laughs))

Online privacy can be understood as an ongoing, complex relational and contextual boundary-setting activity (Marwick and boyd, 2014, Livingstone, 2008). Snapchat offers novel approaches to accomplishing privacy beyond those provided by more 'conventional' social media applications such as Facebook and Instagram (Utz et al., 2015). The excerpt demonstrates how the extent of privacy is up for negotiation. Rani and Hadar construct the ever-presence of Snapchat and other people's nosiness as reasons for concealing the real names of their contacts. In contrast, they construct such boundaries as less of an issue for Dao and Amer, reducing their nicknames to be "just funny" and "nothing secret". Through their talk and their Snapchat practices, Rani and Hadar emerge as young subjects who value their own privacy, not only in their everyday snapping activities, but also within the focus group dialogue where they subtly diminish the importance of the two other participant's nickname practices.

In talking about this, the participants also express a form of relational embarrassment: they frame this naming practice as both funny and silly. It is OK to let a friend know: I see how you move, I like you, I have named you after someone we admire; but it seems important to these participants to set some boundaries around this practice. Perhaps there is a risk in this affectionately playful interaction among young male friends. Nevertheless, this practice of naming prompts a great deal of emotional engagement, it seems an expression of closeness among the participants, and they seem to feel a requirement to laugh at it, distance themselves from it a little, and say that it is really just silly.

Aside from a great deal of laughter, the words that give us clues about the affective engagement here include: “funny”, “insane”, ”for the sake of humour”, ” I’m dying”, “most insane”, and ”spice things up, since it gets a bit boring”. Furthermore, the use of a performer’s stage name to reference a friend on Snapchat opens space for dialogical affective engagement – a playful camaraderie. Referencing a musician they appreciate can provide a chance to pay a friend a compliment (I think you are cool, like this rapper) and to express an attentiveness to one another (I have noticed you dance a bit like him). These young men use the opportunity of Snapchat to play with naming, with one another, with humour, with mobile phone technology, and with their bodily movements. This provides an acceptable way to build their closeness with one another, facilitated by shared happy objects (Ahmed, 2008).

This analysis suggests that the affective practices unfolding here allow young men to negotiate particular subjectivities that are specifically located in relation to gender, age, and racialization. They do this as they playfully explore closeness, build relationships, and use humour to help set relational boundaries. These young men are building connections with one another in a context where they are ethnic minority youth in Norway: a country where there is a very strong sense of national identity as being homogenous and tied to whiteness. These young men have chosen a Black rapper to identify one another in their Snapchat naming

practices. While these young men are exploring what is possible with regard to Black youth subjectivities, they are playing with Snapchat, playing with words, and playing with one another and crucially, they are crafting a space for themselves as a new generation of Norwegians. Other researchers have pointed to the playfulness of the Snapchat interface as an interpersonal resource (Piwek and Joinson, 2016, Utz et al., 2015), and what we see in our data is clearly playfulness with purpose. We understand this as a way of creating an affective space where it is possible to belong (*citation anonymized for review purposes*), as racially minoritised young men in the less affluent suburbs of Oslo. These research participants are, at the same time as coming into being as young adults, finding ways to *feel at home* whilst being a meaningful ‘other’ (Minh-ha, 1997). This is a generation where apps such as Snapchat are part of identity projects through which the affective practice of belonging while being ‘other’ is managed with a degree of humour and playfulness.

Conclusion

By analysing focus group interactions, where young people talk in quite animated ways about their engagement with Snapchat, we have highlighted affective practices involved in speaking about and relating to social media. Snapchat offers a buoyant way for emotion-eliciting objects to be passed around, and is therefore intensely affective, relational, and affecting for young people. The first excerpt illustrated how young people’s dialogues about Snapchat can deploy various objects that convey promises of happiness and well-being. The three following analyses demonstrated how young people actively set out possibilities as well as boundaries of their affective communities with regard to Snapchat practices. Each of these negotiations of possibilities can also be read as a negotiation of youth subjectivity.

The dialogue excerpts illustrate how Snapchat is not only engagingly talked *about*, but also how such applications *affect* everyday conversations and practices. Clearly, image-

sharing practices, and how they are spoken about and felt, are embedded in and reproduce social norms. While most participants referred to shared pleasure in proximity to ephemeral objects mediated by Snapchat, they also negotiated, problematized and challenged emotions as they emerged through interaction. Each of the final three dialogues exemplify the risks of getting “out of line with [the] affective community” (Ahmed, 2008, p. 11), and becoming an alienated subject. In so doing, participants skillfully maneuvered around the dangers of failing to follow “lines that have already been given” (p. 12).

We have illustrated how everyday interactions about Snapchat use implicate complex affective practices that reproduce privileged subjectivities and keep others at bay. The very frequent use of selfies is a defining feature of Snapchat, and norms of self-presentation in this context were particularly affectively entangling for some of the participants. The dialogues demonstrated how affective practices such as cringing and ridiculing contribute to maintaining social norms which are critical in the production of youth subjectivities. Such normative practices can be talked about in ways that bind some young people together while potentially setting others apart. In particular, fun and humour can be recruited for regulatory purposes associated with neoliberal accumulation of affective value. Our analysis also demonstrates how playful engagement with Snapchat offers opportunities to negotiate otherness and alienation, and to craft spaces of belonging.

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