

Teenagers, sexualities-education assemblages and sexual citizenship: a new materialist analysis

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To cite: Alldred, P. and Fox, N.J. (2018) Teenagers, sexualities-education assemblages and sexual citizenship: a new materialist analysis. In: Kamp, A. and McSharry, M. (eds.) *Re/Assembling the Pregnant and Parenting Teenager*, pp. 219-242. Oxford: Peter Lang. ISBN: 9781787075146

Abstract

In this chapter Alldred and Fox explore teenage pregnancy, sexualities education and sexual citizenship using a new materialist toolkit of assemblages, affects and micropolitics. They use data from two studies to study the impact of different sexualities-education assemblages (constituted around teachers, school nurses and youth workers) upon the sexual and non-sexual capacities produced in young people. These capacities – for instance, a capacity to assert rights to express specific sexual desires or a capacity to manage fertility proactively – contribute inter alia to young people’s (sexual) ‘citizen-ing’. Alldred and Fox conclude by assessing the wider implications of these assemblages for sexual citizenship – in the context of the continuing emphasis upon educational approaches to address issues of non-normative sexualities including teenage pregnancy and parenting, and the opportunities for an alternative nomadic citizenship of becoming and lines of flight.

Introduction

The moral panic over teenage pregnancy that informed UK policy since the end of the last millennium (Alldred and David, 2010) has subsidised. In 1999, UK Prime Minister Tony Blair declared that

Teenage mothers are less likely to finish their education, less likely to find a good job, and more likely to end up both as single parents and bringing up their children in poverty. The children themselves run a much greater risk of poor health, and have a

much higher chance of becoming teenage mothers themselves. Our failure to tackle this problem has cost the teenagers, their children and the country dear. ... As a country, we can't afford to continue to ignore this shameful record (Social Exclusion Unit, 1999: 4).

Blair thus prefaced the report of the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) to Parliament that established the UK government's Teenage Pregnancy Strategy; a strategy that drove policy for the following decade. The SEU report asserted three causes for the UK's high teenage pregnancy rates (the highest in Western Europe): low expectations by teenagers concerning their life prospects, ignorance about sex and relationships, and mixed societal messages around sex and contraception (ibid: 7). The solutions, set out in its action plan, focused upon better sex education in and out of school, improved access to contraception and sexual health advice, and targeting high risk groups and young men. This strategic plan had as its underpinning an aim to reduce 'social exclusion' by encouraging teenage parents to return to education and providing assistance for child care (ibid: 8-9).

Almost two decades later, this Strategy appears to have had a remarkable impact upon the incidence of teenage pregnancy. By 2008, the under-eighteen conception rate had fallen by 13 per cent to a twenty-year low, with births down 25 per cent (Department of Health, 2008: 4). Ten thousand teachers and nurse were trained to deliver Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) in schools, school and college-based contraceptive and sexual health services increased radically, and measures were in place to assist young mothers to attend college with help for childcare costs (Teenage Pregnancy Independent Advisory Group, 2010). Latest official figures show a continued fall, with teenage conceptions of 21 per 1000 women aged fifteen to seventeen, its lowest levels since records began in 1969 (Office for National Statistics, 2017) and massively down from the rate of 46.6 per 1000 in 1998.

Whether this dramatic decline in teenage pregnancy is down to the Strategy's educational focus is, however, in doubt. Funding for the Strategy was cut off in 2010 with the election of the Tory/Liberal Democrat coalition government (Skinner and Marino, 2016, 539). Recent analysis by the Cochrane Collaboration indicates no measurable effect of school-based sexual and reproductive health educational interventions in reducing teenage conceptions, though

there is some evidence that incentivising school attendance may have an effect (Mason-Jones et al, 2016: 2).

In this chapter we want to step away from cause and effect models of education and teenage pregnancy. Instead, we examine how the UK's Teenage Pregnancy Strategy's framing of teenage pregnancy and motherhood in terms of education and exclusion bears upon issues of citizenship and sexual citizenship. The provenance of the Strategy within the Labour government's Social Exclusion Unit is deeply significant, as non-normative parenting has long been blamed for social breakdown and exclusion, as well as societal ills from drug abuse to poor educational achievement (Armstrong, 1995; Weeks et al., 2001: 157). By implication, pregnant and parenting teenagers are either excluded – or exclude themselves – from the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. The Strategy aims to draw such excluded individuals back into economic productivity and self sufficiency, and defines this as social participation and inclusion (Alldred and David, 2010: 26; Kidger, 2004; cf. Tapia, 2005 for a US perspective).

Alldred and David (2010) argued that the Labour government's educational focus reflected the increasing individualism and conditionality of the UK welfare contract, and an increasing desire to mould citizens rather than tackle the conditions of their lives. Rather than understanding young parents' needs through a social welfare model, focusing on the relative poverty of young people, and young parents specifically, intervention was focused on change at the individual level—as prevention of teen pregnancy and 'support' for teenage parents. Reducing teenage pregnancy is part of the strategy for combating social exclusion. Social inclusion rather than equality is the aim, and is defined by participation in paid work (or training or education towards this). Education becomes an important tool for trying to change individual behaviour. This is floridly revealed in the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy, in which sexualities education became a key tool.¹ This emphasis on educational approaches to sexual citizenship continues, with a new framework for 'Relationships and Sexuality Education' in UK primary and secondary schools being legislated as we write.

Citizenship has been conceptualised as the foundation for 'modern claims to liberty, equality, rights, autonomy, self-determination, individualism, and human agency' (Nyers, 2004: 203);

though it has been criticised conceptually as ‘the worn out offspring of liberal humanism’ (Shildrick: 2013: 153). ‘Sexual citizenship’ has assessed societal recognition of sexual diversity (Weeks, 1998: 35), participation in markets and public life (Evans, 1993: 8) and access to rights of sexual expression and identity (Monro, 2005: 155-162; Richardson, 2017: 211).² It has been applied conceptually to study ‘the balance of entitlement, recognition, acceptance and responsibility’ (Weeks et al, 2001: 196) of different sexualities in a variety of settings (Ammaturo, 2016; Mackie, 2017); of co-habitation and parenting (Plummer, 2001: 238); but also as a rallying cry for sexual activism and resistance (Weeks et al, 2001: 197-8). In all these aspects, citizenship has a central bearing upon teenage pregnancy and parents.

Our approach to exploring sexual citizenship as *materially assembled* is novel. We shall use data from two studies of school-based sexualities education conducted by Pam to explore the production and reproduction of sexual citizenship and sexual citizens. We apply a new materialist, micropolitical ontology and methodology to explore the impact of different models of sexualities education (constituted around teachers, school nurses and youth workers) upon the sexual and non-sexual capacities produced in young people. These capacities – for instance, a capacity to assert their rights to express specific sexual desires or a capacity to manage their fertility proactively – may contribute *inter alia* to their (sexual) ‘citizen-ing’. This relational perspective offers opportunities to step beyond notions of belonging and exclusion/transgression (Ryan-Flood, 2009: 2; Taylor, 2011: 588), and a binary opposition between ‘citizens’ (so defined by their inherent, acquired or ascribed rights or social identities) and those excluded from this attribution (Sabsay, 2012: 610).

A relational framework would instead explore sexual citizenship as emerging from the material network or assemblage of bodies, things (such as money, property), collectivities (communities, nation-states), norms and values, legal and policy frameworks, and ideas (nationality, belonging, democracy). It would concern itself with the micropolitical flows between these assembled elements (Koster, 2015: 225): a bottom-up exploration of the continued and ‘rhizomic’ production and reproduction of ‘the sexual citizen’. Concerns with *which* sexual identities are incorporated within sexual citizenship and which are excluded shifts to an investigation of how the micropolitical processes at the interface between sexualities and the social world produce ‘citizenship effects’ of inclusion and exclusion,

security and insecurity, legitimation and transgression. It opens the door, theoretically and practically, to a ‘nomad citizenship’ that can ‘serve and foster the enrichment of life internally or locally, rather than thrive on and foster external threats’ (Holland, 2006: 202, see also Shildrick, 2013). This replaces concern with belonging with an open-ended becoming (Braidotti, 2013: 169), lines of flight rather than boundaries and closure (Alldred and Fox, 2015b; Friehe and Smith, 2016).

The structure of the chapter is as follows. First we set out the new materialist framework for our analysis of sexual citizenship, with specific reference to sexualities and sexualities education. We then look at empirical data from the two studies of sexualities education, and analyse these in terms of the *sexualities-education assemblages* that they reflect. We conclude by assessing the implications of these assemblages for sexual citizenship, in the context of the continuing emphasis upon educational approaches to address issues of non-normative sexualities such as teenage pregnancy and parenting, and the opportunities to constitute instead a nomadic citizenship of becoming and lines of flight.

A new materialist perspective

The new materialism that has emerged in the humanities and social sciences since the millennium shifts focus away from post-structuralist concerns with textuality and social *construction* (Coole and Frost, 2010: 7; Taylor & Ivinson, 2013: 666), to assert a central role for matter within processes of social *production* (Barad, 2003; DeLanda, 2006). Drawing on a very wide range of disparate philosophical, feminist and social theory perspectives (Coole and Frost, 2010: 5; Lemke, 2014), these new materialisms recognise materiality as plural and complex, uneven and contingent, relational and emergent (Coole and Frost, 2010: 29).

Importantly, however, the new materialisms do not recapitulate historical materialism, and the material factors implicated in producing the world and human history extend far beyond the structural forces regarded as the drivers of social change in the classical Marxist materialism (Edwards, 2010: 288). The world and history are produced by a range of material forces that extend from the physical and the biological to the psychological, social and cultural (Barad, 1996: 181; Braidotti, 2013: 3). In this schema, elements as disparate as a mountain, the wind, a tiger, a human, a thought, desire or feeling, a ‘discourse’ or an ideology

may all be regarded as constituent parts of a relational material universe that interacts, assembles and disassembles continually to produce the flow of events that comprise the world, history and lives – including human sexualities. The new materialisms thus cut across distinctions between mind/body (Braidotti, 2011: 311); appearance/essence (Widder, 2012: 23), and thus also between ‘reality’ and ‘social construction’.

Given the interests of readers of this collection, we shall set out the principal features of a new materialist approach (henceforth, for conciseness, we refer simply to ‘materialism’) in relation to sexualities. Our efforts to develop a materialist approach to empirical social study of sexuality and sexualities education have used the powerful toolbox of concepts deriving from Gilles Deleuze’s (1988) reading of Spinoza, as developed and applied in the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1984, 1988), by social and feminist scholars such as Braidotti (2006), DeLanda (2006), Grosz (1994) and Thrift (2004), and by social researchers such as Fox and Alldred (2013, 2014), Renold and Ringrose (2011) and Youdell and Armstrong (2011). We have drawn also on insights from Braidotti’s (2011, 2013) development of a posthuman philosophy and ethics of engagement that steps beyond the dualisms of nature/culture, man/woman, human/non-human to open up all kinds of possibilities for ‘becoming-other’ (ibid: 190), including possibilities for sexualities.

Sexuality has been regarded by biological and medical scientists and by many social scientists as quintessentially an attribute of an organism, be it plant, animal or human. This perspective defines an essentialist and anthropocentric model of sexualities, an outcome of which has been to define quite narrowly what counts as sexuality and sexual identity, for instance in a simplistic classification of sexualities in terms of gendered objects of desire (Lambevski, 2004: 306). Consequently, practitioners of non-normative (heterosexual, monogamous) sexualities have been labelled as bad, mad or ill, and punished/analysed/treated according to essentialist perspectives by the law, medicine, psychotherapy and other social agents (Alldred and Fox, 2015a).

Against this anthropocentric backcloth, materialist authors have offered an alternative conceptualisation of sexuality (Beckman, 2011; Braidotti, 2006; Holmes et al., 2010; Lambevski, 2004, Probyn, 1995, Renold and Ringrose, 2011; Ringrose, 2011). Braidotti

(2011: 148) describes sexuality as a ‘complex, multi-layered force that produces encounters, resonances and relations of all sorts’, while Deleuze and Guattari (1984: 293) state quite bluntly that ‘sexuality is everywhere’: in a wide range of interactions between bodies and what affects them physically, cognitively or emotionally, from dancing or shopping to state violence or authority. Inspired by these arguments, we have used the materialist perspective that underpinned them to develop an approach (and ontology) that situates sexuality not as an attribute of a body (albeit one that is consistently trammelled by social forces) but within a new materialist understanding of a ‘sexuality-assemblage’ (Alldred and Fox, 2015b; Fox and Alldred, 2013). This assemblage comprises not just human bodies but the whole range of physical, biological, social and cultural, economic, political or abstract forces with which they interact: as such sexuality-assemblages bridge ‘micro’ and ‘macro’, private and public, intimacy and polity.

In this view it is not an individual body but the sexuality-assemblage that is productive of all phenomena associated with the physical and social manifestations of sex and sexuality, including the norms and values that produce culturally-specific versions of ‘sexual citizenship’. Sexuality is ‘an impersonal affective flow within assemblages of bodies, things, ideas and social institutions, which produces sexual (and other) capacities in bodies’ (Fox and Alldred, 2013: 769) – capacities to do, feel and desire. We will now swiftly consider the conceptual framework required to establish this materialist perspective on the sexuality-assemblage, with specific reference to teen pregnancy and parenting.

First, the sexuality-assemblage asserts the fundamental *relationality* of all matter: bodies, things and social formations gain their apparent ‘is-ness’ only when in relation. Rather than taking the body or thing or the social organisation as a pre-existing unit of analysis, we look instead at the fluctuating assemblages that coalesce to produce both events and the apparent reality of the relations that they comprise. For example, an event such as a teenage conception assembles not just the two parenting bodies but also relations that may include sexualised media, alcohol, social spaces, sexualities-educators and classes, contraceptive devices and techniques, mobile phones, family and friends, health professionals and so forth (Fox and Bale, 2017). As noted in the introduction, bodies and things do not possess fixed

attributes (relations of interiority), but instead gain capacities as they assemble with other materialities (relations of exteriority).

Second, a sexuality-assemblage must be analysed not in terms of human or other agency, but by considering the assembled relations' ability to *affect* or *be affected* (Deleuze, 1988: 101). Within a sexuality-assemblage, human and non-human relations affect (and are affected by) each other to produce material effects, including sexual capacities and desires, sexual identities and the many 'discourses' on sexualities, reproduction, teenage pregnancy and so on; these affects are qualitatively equivalent regardless of whether a relation is human or non-human. Importantly for the study of sexuality, desire is itself an affect (rather than some essential quality of a body, no matter how culturally shaped), to the extent that it produces specific capacities to act or feel in a body or bodies, be it arousal, attraction, sexual activity, rejection or whatever. An assemblage's 'affect economy' (Clough, 2004: 15) can be understood as the forces shifting bodies and other relations 'from one mode to another, in terms of attention, arousal, interest, receptivity, stimulation, attentiveness, action, reaction, and inaction'.

The affective micropolitics of sexualities

This emphasis on affect economies and the changes they produce in relations and assemblages provides a dynamic focus for the micropolitical study of sexuality assemblages, including teenage pregnancy and parenting. We may ask what a body can do within its relational assemblage, what it cannot do, and what it can become. What sexual capacities might be produced in bodies by a particular assemblage of things, ideas, norms, policies and other bodies? Assemblage micropolitics, we suggest (Fox and Alldred, 2017: 32) can be explored in terms of two affective processes: 'specification' and 'aggregation' which we now summarise briefly.³

Specification may be understood as an affective process within a (sexuality) assemblage that produces specific capacities in a body or thing; other affects may *generalise* capacities, opening up new possibilities and limits for what a body can do. Sexual arousal, attraction, preferences and conduct can be understood as particular specifications produced by affects and desires within a sexuality-assemblage. So a kiss may specify a body into sexual arousal.

Yet that same kiss – say from a new lover, might propel a body into new possibilities such as polyamory or a new life begun elsewhere, what Deleuze and Guattari (1988: 277) called ‘a line of flight’. Similarly, a pregnancy will undoubtedly specify the biological, social and cultural capacities of a teenager or for that matter any mother, though these capacities may both close down and open up possibilities for action and interaction.

Aggregation, meanwhile, reflects those affects in assemblages that act similarly on multiple bodies, organising or categorising them to create converging identities or capacities. In the field of sexuality, ideas and concepts such as love, monogamy, chastity or sexual liberation, prejudices and biases, and conceptual categories such as ‘women’, ‘heterosexual’, or ‘perverted’ all aggregate bodies, as do the categories of ‘mother’ and ‘teenage mother’. By contrast, other affects (for instance, a gift from a lover, or a smile from a new-born child) produce a *singular* outcome or capacity in just one body, with no significance beyond itself, and without aggregating consequences. Singular affects may be micropolitical drivers of generalisation, enabling bodies to resist aggregating or constraining forces, and opening up new capacities to act, feel or desire.

Exploring the micropolitics of sexuality, sexualities education and sexual citizenship in terms of affective movements in assemblages radically shifts the focus of attention. From a materialist perspective, sexuality needs to be seen not an attribute of an individual human body, but as an impersonal web of intensities and flows of matter, powers and desires within and between bodies, things, ideas and social institutions, producing sexual (and other) capacities in these different materialities. How sexuality manifests has little to do with personal preferences or dispositions, and everything to do with how bodies, things, ideas and social institutions assemble. Specifying forces produce body compartments, identities and subjectivities, ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’; and shape sexual desires, attractions, preferences and proclivities according to the particular mix of relations and affects in an assemblage. Sexual codes are culture-specific aggregating affects that establish the limits of what individual bodies can do, feel and desire in specific sociocultural settings, and shape the eroticism, sexual codes, customs and conduct of a society’s members, as well as the categories of sexual identity such as ‘hetero’, ‘homo’, polyamorous, queer and so forth (Linstead and Pullen, 2006: 1299).

These specifications and aggregations mean that while sexuality is a generalising, multiplying, branching flow of affect between and around bodies and other relations, that has the potential to produce any and all capacities in bodies, and indeed ‘subversive and unforeseeable expressions of sexuality’ (Beckman, 2011: 11), the flow of affect in the sexuality-assemblage is continuously subject to restrictions and blockages (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984: 293). Thus specified, sexuality loses its potential, channelling desire into a relatively narrow range of sexual capacities linked to conventional desires. This, sadly, is typical within a contemporary society trammelled by codes, norms and expectations into sexual specification and aggregation⁴, though always still with the possibility of subsequent generalisation or line of flight. This tension inheres within the processes described by feminists and queer theorists concerning sexual and intimate citizenship which we summarised earlier.

Three approaches to sexualities education

We turn now to the substantive concern of this paper, to address how sexualities education among young people (including its practices, framings and messages concerning teenage pregnancy and parenting) contributes to the social production of sexual citizenship. The data that we subject to materialist analysis is taken from two studies conducted by Pam. The first was the two-year Sex and Relationship Education Policy Action Research (SREPAR) study, funded by the UK Department of Education and Employment as part of its strategy to use Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) to reduce teenage pregnancy (Alldred & David, 2007).

Interviews were conducted with ~~17~~¹⁷ ~~seventeen~~^[N1] teachers with responsibility for SRE and ~~15~~¹⁵ ~~fifteen~~ school nurses serving ~~17~~¹⁷ ~~seventeen~~ secondary schools and their feeder primary schools. The second study was the ‘Sites of Good Practice’ study conducted in 2009, during which Pam interviewed ~~12~~¹² ~~twelve~~ youth workers engaged in sexual health work with young people. Data from these studies have been reported elsewhere (Alldred and David, 2007; Alldred, 2017).

In this section we summarise findings from these two studies in terms of the differing material assemblages associated with the practices of teachers, school nurses and youth workers. For each group we paint a brief pen-picture of their material practices, before

moving to analyse the differing sexualities-education assemblages that they reveal. We use this analysis to identify the capacities for sexual citizenship that each produces in the bodies of young people, and consequently for teenage pregnancy and teenage parents. Our method of analysis differs markedly from a traditional qualitative approach. Applying the new materialist conceptual framework described earlier, the first step is to identify by close reading of the data the range of relations that assemble around events such as a sexualities education class. Close reading of the data can also supply understanding of the affective movements that draw these particular relations into assemblage (for example, a teaching affect that transmits factual information to school students). These movements (including the specifications and aggregations described in the previous section) constitute the affect economies that surround bodies in sexualities-education assemblages. They produce particular micropolitical effects in young people, so from this analysis we can gain insight into the consequences of different assemblages for the capacities produced in young people – what these bodies can do (for instance, producing a normative moral sensibility about sexual actions). For a fuller account of this methodology, see Fox and Alldred (2015).

At the time of the SREPAR study, Government guidance to UK state schools (DfEE, 2000) located SRE within a ‘values framework’, to help school students deal with ‘difficult moral and social questions’, to ‘support young people through their physical, emotional and moral development’ and teach the ‘importance of values and individual conscience and moral considerations’. For the teachers interviewed, SRE took place within the context of the wider educational environment of the school, and a national educational context of a defined curriculum of academic subjects. The latter underpinned an ‘achievement agenda’ that aimed to improve educational aspirations and engagement as a means to reduce social exclusion. This context, the study found, had severe knock-on effects upon the delivery of SRE. As a non-examined subject – and one that (like PE and manual crafts) addressed bodies rather than minds – it was of low status, and had to compete with academic subjects for timetable space. This was most marked in schools with high levels of academic achievement.

Low status meant less staff training and material resources for SRE, which impacted on staff confidence. Many teachers interviewed during the study saw SRE as a dubious response to societal moral panics about sexualisation and teenage pregnancy, and were uncomfortable

about being drawn into a moral agenda. They regarded discussions of sexuality with children and young people as a parental responsibility, and only reluctantly accepted their own contribution to SRE. Even those who supported the SRE agenda resented having to take time to prepare a class in which the materials were potentially controversial, particularly as parents have the right under the UK law to withdraw school students from SRE classes. Some (particularly older and male teachers) considered that teaching about intimate and personal matters around sexualities could impact negatively upon their day-to-day relationships with school students and parents. According to one teacher ‘You’re a form teacher and you don’t just want to go in and suddenly talk about sex’. Many teachers in the study resisted involvement in SRE, which for many was an unwelcome add-on to their subject specialism, and one where they considered they lacked educational expertise, adding to their anxieties about teaching SRE classes. One said:

(Teachers) feel underprepared for it. Being under-prepared for it is horrible: I think the biggest fear as a teacher in a situation like that is being asked a question that you just don’t know how to answer.

These data enable us to locate teachers’ engagement with SRE within a sexualities-education assemblage comprising at least the following relations (in no particular order).

Teacher – school students – parents – information – minds – bodies – curriculum – workload – colleagues – ‘achievement agenda’ – classroom – tabloid newspapers – public outrage – resources – models of education and development – teachers’ attitudes and sexualities

These relations assemble as a consequence of a powerful ‘educational’ affect, by which information/knowledge/values are passed from SRE curriculum to teacher to school student. However, there is a broader affect economy at work here, constituted from the contexts noted above concerning schools’ and UK Government’s orientation toward educational achievement, the limited staff, resources and time allocated to SRE as a non-academic subject, societal moral attitudes towards sex and sexualities, and perceived negative consequences of teenage pregnancy/parenting. These latter affects all tended to constrain the

capacities of teachers to deliver effective SRE in schools, and hence the policy for SRE, sexual health and pregnancy reduction. For the students, the affect economy of this assemblage marks out both a *specification* (in terms of a particular teacher-led perspective on sex and sexualities) and an *aggregation* (locating sexuality within a top-down moral framework) of their capacities. This has an impact for their sexual citizenship, which we discuss (along with the other assemblages) in the following section.

Turning to the school nurses, the SREPAR study found that this group regarded themselves as sexual health experts, with a major part to play in the campaign to reduce teenage pregnancy rates. They considered that their role was supplying up-to-date, accessible medical information that empowered school students to make informed decisions, without moral judgment. As one nurse commented

What I'm interested in is: at the point they got pregnant, had they got all the information that they needed? Could they have prevented it had they wanted to? Whatever choice they make, as long as it's an informed choice and they make it because it's what they want to make, I've no problem with it. [...]

Most nurses in the study had responsibility for a secondary school and four primary schools, typically teaching classes for school students between ~~11~~ eleven and ~~14~~ fourteen years, and offering drop-in sessions for individual consultations. Unlike teachers, they felt confident about their skills, communication and use of teaching aids and reported positive school student responses to a 'no-nonsense' teaching style (for instance, a competitive 'condom test' to engage boys in learning about safe sex). However, nurses were rarely involved in curriculum design, and were often underused. One nurse described being 'allowed' to sit in a 'cupboard' to run her drop-in, while another said school students 'had to brave a corridor of power' to knock on her door.

The sexualities-education assemblage in which school nurses are relations may be summarised as:

School nurse – school students – diseases – bodies – other health professionals – biomedical model of sexual health – medical information – teenage pregnancy reduction agenda – STIs – condoms – teaching staff – school spaces – school rules

These relations assemble as a result of a ‘health promotion’ affect that educates young people’s minds and bodies into safe, healthy practices. Nurses generally embraced the UK Teenage Pregnancy Strategy as a framework within which to teach about safe sex. However, the study reveals a second powerful affective movement in this assemblage. Whether nurses conducted whole class sessions or individual consultations, they described young people as their clients, and their provision as young person-, rather than school-centred. This client focus ascribed agency and decision-making capabilities to young people possessing legitimate needs for health and sexual health information. Granting young people both sexual and moral agency recognised their potential to be moral and sexual decision makers, and to see the role of sex education as enabling them to make informed life choices. This contrasted with teachers’ accounts, in which school students were passive in the face of external pressures to be sexual, and devoid of agency or sexual desire themselves.

Once again, the affects in this assemblage *specifies* school students’ capacities, by placing sex and sexualities within a health register, and an *aggregation* to practice sex rationally, safely and healthily, according to health promotion principles. However, the professional/client relationship is a *singular* non-aggregating affect that acknowledges them as sexual decision-makers in their own right. The significance for sexual citizenship will be discussed in the concluding section.

The youth workers in the Sites of Good Practice study provided sexual health and relationships work in youth groups and schools, and one-to-one work with young people. Both practices were framed as supporting young people’s well-being, and reflected the general youth work principle of ‘giving people the choice and the chance to make informed choices’. Youth workers increasingly are being invited into schools to contribute to SRE, recognising their expertise in engaging with young people on a range of topics. In the study, youth workers provided sex-positive accounts, addressing the positive contributions sex might make to relationships or well-being, alongside the risks to health or self-esteem. One

youth worker describes his aim as being ‘... to get young people talking about sex and relationships ... to get young men to take responsibility towards young women they see in relation to relationships, consent and sexual health.’ Another explained his role as:

raising young people’s awareness of the range of decisions and choices open to them around sex and offering opportunities for discussion and debate on the implications of particular choices; offering learning opportunities for young people to develop their capacities and confidence in making decisions ... respecting young people’s choices and views, unless the welfare or legitimate interests of themselves or other people are seriously threatened.

The relations in this sexualities-education assemblage may be represented as follows:

Youth worker – young people – youth work principles (voluntarism, participation, equality, social justice) – information – services and resources – autonomy and agency – learning opportunities – responsibility – sexual subjects – schools and teachers

Unlike the assemblages around teachers and nurses’ SRE work, here the principal affect is not around information transmission, but instead seeks to support and resource young people to make active decisions about sex and sexualities. Youth workers in the study engaged with young people as sexual subjects who were potentially sexually active, with desires, fantasies and experiences. Sexuality was a subject for discussion, not to minimise risks such as STIs or pregnancy, but as a means to enhance positive experiences and relationships, in both present and future selves.

Consequently, the affect economy in these youth work assemblages was both *generalising* and *singular* (non-aggregating) and produced a different and potentially wider range of capacities in young people than those discussed previously, including sexual autonomy, sexual responsibility and a respect for sexual diversity. Young people become materially affective within these sexuality assemblages, opening up possibilities for their current and

future sexual expression. We now turn to consider the implications for sexual citizenship of this assemblage, along with the two others discussed earlier.

Discussion: assembling sexual citizenship

Sexual citizenship has conventionally been located as a concept that bridges public and private domains (Evans, 2013 64; Plummer, 2001: 238; Richardson, 2017: 212; Weeks et al, 2001: 197; Weeks, 1998: 36), linking the world of experience, embodiment and identity with the social, economic and political forces of markets, the law and governance. The new materialist approach we have developed in this chapter approaches this intersection *micropolitically*, addressing the relationality that produces capacities in bodies, things, institutions, cultures and abstract notions. Specifically, we have examined the material micropolitics of sexualities education, drawing out the different assemblages and affect economies that emerge in three differing professional approaches to sex and relationship education, and the capacities that these produce in bodies. We wish now to address how the micropolitics of these assemblages and capacities contribute to sexual ‘citizen-ing’, to the emergence of young people with material capacities that mediate their engagement with the social world, and hence to issues around teenage pregnancy and parenting.

We have shown how the different material settings of sexualities education (including the inputs of different professionals) can have profound impacts on the sexual capacities produced in school students. As has been noted, each of the three assemblages analysed produced capacities in young people in relation to sex and sexualities. The first assemblage that we explored – the ‘teaching assemblage’ – revealed an uncomfortable encounter between a profession tasked with educating young minds and a top-down agenda to control their fertility; delivered by often unwilling and anxious staff within strict time constraints. The capacities of students that emerged from this conflicted affect economy were specified and aggregated into a particular social and moral context for sexual behaviour and reproduction.

The ‘health-assemblage’ that we analysed next reflected a very different professional focus upon sexual health, in this case delivered by enthusiastic professionals who saw an opportunity to use their expertise to engage students-as-clients to promote safe sex and the Government teenage pregnancy reduction strategy. Once again capacities were specified and

aggregated: into a biomedical understanding of sex and reproduction, and the knowledge and skills for healthy, safe and – if possible – non-procreative sex. However, the professional/client model adopted by nurses was singular and non-aggregating, opening up potential for a move away from the biomedical model and toward individual decision-making. Finally the ‘youth work-assemblage’ was shaped by a professional ethos based upon a commitment to young people as partners in learning and decision-making, and to helping young people develop their own values (National Youth Agency, 2004). Young people were treated as autonomous and potentially sexually-active, and this affect was generalising and singular, encouraging capacities of sexual autonomy, responsibility and sexual diversity, and hence a potential ‘line of flight’ from the kinds of specification that the other SRE assemblages produced.

These three material assemblages thus have profoundly different effects on students’ capacities, including procreation and parenting. Some capacities are constraining, locating sex and sexuality within narrow framings; others are expansive, opening up potential for sexual exploration and becoming. However, it is facile simply to celebrate the latter and condemn the former. After all, knowledge of sexual health, contraception and the moral codes surrounding sexuality in one’s culture are valuable capacities that can limit negative consequences such as unwanted pregnancy or a criminal record; neither of which is likely to be an unmitigated line of flight. On the other hand, sex and sexuality have been the subjects of specification and aggregation for millennia (Foucault, 1981) and we need to be vigilant to counter those assemblages that unintentionally impose specifications and aggregations upon sexualities.

We would argue that the value of this micropolitical analysis of assemblages is in the innovative insight it offers into sexualities education and sexual citizenship, both broadly and in relation to teenage pregnancy. Earlier we noted that, according to (new) materialist ontology, social production is an emergent outcome of the affective assembling of relations and the capacities these produce – there is no ‘other level’ of structures or mechanisms at work in this ontology (DeLanda, 2013: 51). Consequently, ‘sexual citizenship’ (and citizenship more generally) needs to be conceptualised as an emergent property of the material flux of affects between humans, things, social collectivities and ideas. This

posthuman flux produces capacities in all these elements: in what a (sexual) body can do, feel, think and desire, but also in things such as condoms and contraceptive devices or dating apps; in organisations such as schools and health services; in social institutions such as the law, marriage and the family; and in abstractions and social constructs such as monogamy, nationality and democracy. Sexual citizenship – with all its consequences for pregnant or parenting teenagers – is one of the emergent capacities of this assemblage of diverse materialities.

This supplies the connection between sexualities education and sexual citizenship. By examining the material relations within SRE, we can discern capacities engendered in young people (such as safe sex, responsibility in sexual relationships or acknowledgement of sexual diversity) that permeate beyond the immediate contexts of a class activity or a group discussion, to produce impacts (often highly normative) upon the capacities of young people as participants in a society and a culture. The sexualities education assemblages we have described – and the knowledge, skills, subjectivities and identities these variously produce – contribute not only to young people’s capacities to participate or not participate in sexual encounters, but also to the wider social context within which human sexualities are located (Tapia, 2005).⁵ This includes the ‘public’ face of sexualities that sexual citizenship scholars have examined.

Of course, young people’s capacities are not simply an outcome of the assemblages we have analysed here: what a young body (or young ‘citizen’) can do sexually will be a consequence of all the events, actions and interactions that together constitute a life, from sexual encounters, interactions with peers (Alldred and Fox, 2015b), engagements with sexualised media and pornography (Fox and Bale, 2017), interactions not normally considered sexual (Austin, 2016) and so on. There will be a myriad of specifications, aggregations, generalisations and dis-aggregations of capacities that together produce ‘the sexual’ and the phenomena that comprise ‘sexual citizenship’. This suggests a research agenda to explore the wider micropolitical production of sexual citizenship in events sexual and non-sexual.

However, the value of a micropolitical analysis of sexuality-assemblages extends beyond mere scholarly interest, or a conceptual re-thinking of sexual citizenship to suggest practical

applications. If we can ‘reverse engineer’ assemblages such as the educational support and development of young people we looked at in this chapter to understand their micropolitics and the capacities they variously produce, the same ontology may be used to ‘forward engineer’ or re-design these and other assemblages to foster positive sexual and other capacities in participants. This opens the way ~~to~~ [pro-actively to design](#)^[N2] interventions and developmental engagements that move far beyond conventional sexualities education, to open up opportunities both for sexual lines of flight and for safe, healthy, diverse and responsible participation in the sexual and sociological world. Such a perspective re-makes notions of sexual citizenship (and citizenship more generally) beyond normative and value-laden constructs.

This perspective cuts across both top-down initiatives to reduce teenage pregnancy and parenting *and* liberal arguments that situate these latter as individual choices or exercises in autonomy or transgression. Sexual citizen-ing is not to be regarded as simply an act of human agency or resistance to force or discourse. Rather it is the more-than-human becoming of sexuality-assemblages that come in all shapes and sizes, and that encompass both normative sexualities and those that conventionally have been excluded from full citizenship, from homosexuality to bisexuality, trans, fetishes and BDSM (Monro, 2005: 155-162), as well as pregnant and parenting teens. From such a perspective, citizenship can never be a neat process whereby bodies are either assimilated into a cultural milieu or cast out as transgressive, to plough their own counter-cultural furrow (see also Ryan-Flood, 2009: 186; Taylor, 2011: 588). It has not escaped our attention that this assessment may be applied beyond the confines of pre-teen and teenage education, to all members of a society or culture.

In conclusion, we have applied in this chapter a materialist approach to analyse the sexualities-education assemblages associated with the UK Teenage Pregnancy Strategy, and have demonstrated how these assemblages articulate with notions of citizenship and sexual citizenship. This form of analysis enables both proactive interventions to support sexualities education and sexual citizenship, but also establishes a broader agenda for research, policy and activism that engages with the public and private dimensions of sexualities and the complex sexualities-assemblages of contemporary societies that produce the social,

economic, political and psychological manifestations of human sexualities and reproduction, including teen pregnancy and parenting.

Notes

1. At the time of the Strategy, school-based Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) curricula were structured around three themes: attitudes and values, personal and social skills, and knowledge and understanding. This structure foregrounded and legitimated particular values, allowed contentious statements to be presented as fact, and articulated certain individual qualities as skills to be developed. Thus, for example, in the ‘Knowledge and Understanding’ theme, the final two topics were ‘learning the reasons for delaying sexual activity, and ‘the benefits to be gained from such delay, and the avoidance of unplanned pregnancy’ (DfEE, 2000: 5).

2. Plummer (2001) prefers the term ‘intimate citizenship’, and this terminology perhaps encompasses the issues of reproduction and parenting more obviously than ‘sexual citizenship’.

3. These terms are founded upon DeleuzoGuattarian concepts of ‘territorialisation/de-territorialisation’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 88-89) and ‘molar/molecular’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984: 286–8) respectively.

4. [Arguably teenage pregnancy and parenting also transgress cultural codes, norms and expectations concerning children and sexuality, as well as moral attitudes that link sex and parenting to adulthood and ‘stable relationships’ \(Alldred and David, 2007: 2-4; Bay-Cheng, 2012: 64-66; Luker, 1996: 10\).](#)

5. Though in the studies we have reported in this chapter we have focused on the production and reproduction of embodied human capacities in sexualities education classes, elsewhere we have explored in greater detail the broader affectivity of sexualities education (Alldred and Fox, 2015b, Alldred et al, 2016) and indeed the posthuman production of sexualities more generally (Fox and Alldred, 2013).

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