

## Enacting Posthuman Ethics to Do Academia Differently: Toward an Affirmative Peer Reviewing Practice

Kathryn Strom  
California State University, East Bay  
[kathryn.strom2@csueastbay.edu](mailto:kathryn.strom2@csueastbay.edu)

Tammy Mills  
University of Maine  
[tammy.mills@maine.edu](mailto:tammy.mills@maine.edu)

### Abstract

In this paper, authors use the notion of affirmative ethics to discuss an affirmative peer reviewing practices workshop that presented an alternative vision and tools for conducting affirmative, rigorous peer reviews. Rather than shutting down or hindering potential authors, the reviews sought to provide a supportive experience that produced very different affects. Authors argue that this vision of affirmative reviewing and its practices, which have since been put to work in a special issue and for faculty professional development, present an alternative, affirmative vision for academia that can help to build trans-disciplinary connections and solidarity, as well as establish mentorship as a norm of peer reviewing. Ultimately, these practices offer an example of a process that seeks to do academia differently, in explicitly affirmative, supportive ways.

**Keywords:** \*Affirmative ethics, peer review, higher education, critical posthumanism, affect

### Introduction

*“Publication of this paper will not advance our knowledge in any shape or form, it will just result in other researchers pointing out how bad this study actually is.”*

*“I have rarely read a more blown-up and annoying paper in the last couple of years than this hot-air balloon manuscript.”*

*“The only conceivable contribution this paper can make is by providing the academic community with an alternative to counting sheep.”*

(3 Twitter posts from “ShitMyReviewersSay”, @yourpapersucks)

We (Katie and Tammy) were not the recipients of these harsh comments by the anonymous “Reviewer 2,” but in reading them, our own wounds, barely scabbed over from previous excoriations of our work by peer reviewers, throb in recognition. These individual slices into the flesh of our body of work feed into the larger culture of belittlement and rejection that characterizes academia (Braidotti, 2020). Such toxic conditions leave their mark on academics in material ways, including taking a terrible toll on our mental health (Mountz, et al., 2015; Strom, 2020).

In this paper, we (Katie and Tammy) put Braidotti's (2019a) notion of affirmative ethics to work to examine an alternative peer reviewing process that seeks to do academia differently, in explicitly relational, supportive ways. As such, this process serves as a refusal of the belittlement and rejection culture of academia. As a production of a creative project that the two of us worked on together (Strom & Mills, 2021), we created an affirmative peer reviewing practices workshop. By *affirmative*, we do not mean "positive." Instead, we refer to the Spinozan and Braidottian notion of affirmative as productive or generative (Braidotti, 2019b). Working with this definition, we presented an alternative vision and tools for conducting supportive, rigorous peer reviews. We theorized that reviews created from a mentoring perspective would produce very different affects: rather than shutting down or otherwise hindering potential authors in their revisions, they could open up possibilities for creation. We argue that this vision of affirmative reviewing and its practices, which we've since put to work in a special issue and for faculty professional development, present a different vision for "doing academia differently" in ways that build trans-disciplinary connections and solidarity.

### Politically and Theoretically Locating Ourselves

We are two white women higher educators (teacher education and educational leadership) and researchers with K-12 backgrounds who share a decade-long relationship of working and writing together. Much of our research is oriented toward a posthuman, neo-materialist perspective. A significant portion of our work has also centered on intimate scholarship (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2015; Strom, Mills, & Ovens, 2018) and specifically, self-study of teaching practices. Our research practice involves analyzing ourselves and our practices as assemblages (that is, as part of connected multiplicities of human/non-human, material-discursive constellations). As we map out these assemblages, we identify spaces of agency within the constricting structures of academia and the ways we have worked collaboratively within them to resist and create alternatives. This collaborative work produces "becomings," or relational transformations (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). In past work, we have examined how these continuous and dynamic becomings fold into our multiple subjectivities (as educators, researchers, writers, and critical friends) and influence all parts of our lives, including our pedagogies.

We came together during the late spring and early summer of 2020 to write a "diffractive re-view" of two texts, *Posthuman Knowledge* (Braidotti, 2019a) and *Mapping the Affective Turn in Education* (Dernikos, et al., 2020) for the *Journal of Matter*. By diffractive re-view (Strom & Mills, 2021), we mean reading the texts through each other in a diffractive manner as a way to re-imagine a traditional book review. Diffraction (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2004) is a method of analysis that takes as inspiration the phenomenon of the same name. Scientifically, diffraction refers to the change in light wave patterns that occur when they meet a barrier (or, think of an ocean wave that meets a harbor wall; Barad, 2014). In diffraction as methodology, researchers attend to interferences and the different ways they produce phenomena and subsequent readings of those phenomena, as well as what those readings produce. An important piece of diffraction is the notion of entanglement, or the idea that nothing exists on its own in isolation. From an entanglement perspective, then, research is not something a researcher who exists separate from her research does. Rather, research is collectively produced by a material-discursive assemblage (MacLure, 2017).

As we began to work on this project, multiple converging elements formed a material-discursive assemblage with us. These included COVID-related fear and stress, violence aimed at people of color protesting their oppression, unpredictable and wildly disparate socio-economic factors, among others, producing our dark outlook, feeling little hope and optimism for the future. However, as we worked together over Zoom, we noticed that joy was slowly emerging for us, again generated by multiple material-discursive elements comprising an assemblage producing us in particular ways. These elements included our meetings; our shared history and knowledge of each other; and our learning about affirmative ethics and posthuman perspectives, which emerged as we read and shared the texts and as we creatively wrote our diffractive re-view. Ultimately, this assemblage produced a pattern of difference, our ideas about doing academia differently, which were sparked and fleshed out during this time.

### **Posthuman Perspectives: Affect and Affirmative Ethics**

This paper is broadly framed by critical posthuman perspectives, and more specifically by affect and affirmative ethics. Critical posthumanism (Braidotti, 2019a) is a worldview that disrupts dominant, Eurocentric ways of knowing, doing, and being. These dominant Eurocentric logics, which continue to underscore modern western thought, are characterized by rationality, dualism, individualism, essentialism, universalism, objectivity, one-to-one correspondence, and human supremacy (Braidotti, 2013). Instead, this perspective offers a set of shifts to a vital materialist perspective—that is, a relational, dynamic way of seeing the world. While the central referent of reality in Eurocentric thinking is individual humans with complete agency, in critical posthumanism, the central referents are assemblages or constellations of connected human, non-human, material, and discursive elements (Strom & Viesca, 2021). In these assemblages, humans do have agency – but so do numerous other forces and factors (Bennett, 2010), including power and affect (Dernikos, et al., 2020).

Affect, as we use it here, differs from a more traditional understanding of affect (drawn from psychology) as emotion or feelings. Instead we draw on a Spinozan understanding of affect as forces or energies that *create* feelings and emotions. Affect is the thing that makes feelings feel (Shouse, 2005), something that moves us in some way (Hickey-Moody, 2013), and increases or diminishes our capacity to act (Massumi, 2015). Spinoza (1994, p. 154) described this force as “affections of the body by which the body’s power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections.” Deleuze and Guattari (1987) further interpreted Spinoza’s definition of affect as pre-personal, precognitive force-relations that emerge with/in becomings. In other words, affects come to matter *in relation to* whatever we are assembled with (Massumi, 2015). Affect, then, as part of an assemblage, will produce a particular ethic that moves bodies to act in certain ways.

The reigning affects of late capitalism, Braidotti (2019a) suggests, are anxiety and exhaustion, set against the larger backdrops of the ever-more-austere neoliberal university and escalating global crises of poverty and planetary devastation. In the face of the often-toxic environment of academia and the vastness of global suffering, we can become paralyzed. The antidote, Braidotti argues, is to use these conditions as a site for knowledge production for doing differently. She calls this posthuman praxis “affirmative ethics.” Affirmative ethics does not ignore or gloss over “negative” affects like pain, trauma, and suffering. Rather, it directly engages with them, reworks them, transforms them, to produce different knowledges,

subjectivities, and ways of living together and relating to each other (that is, ways of becoming-otherwise). In the relational generation of new affective capacities, we create adequate understandings of ourselves, each other, and the world (Braidotti, 2019a).

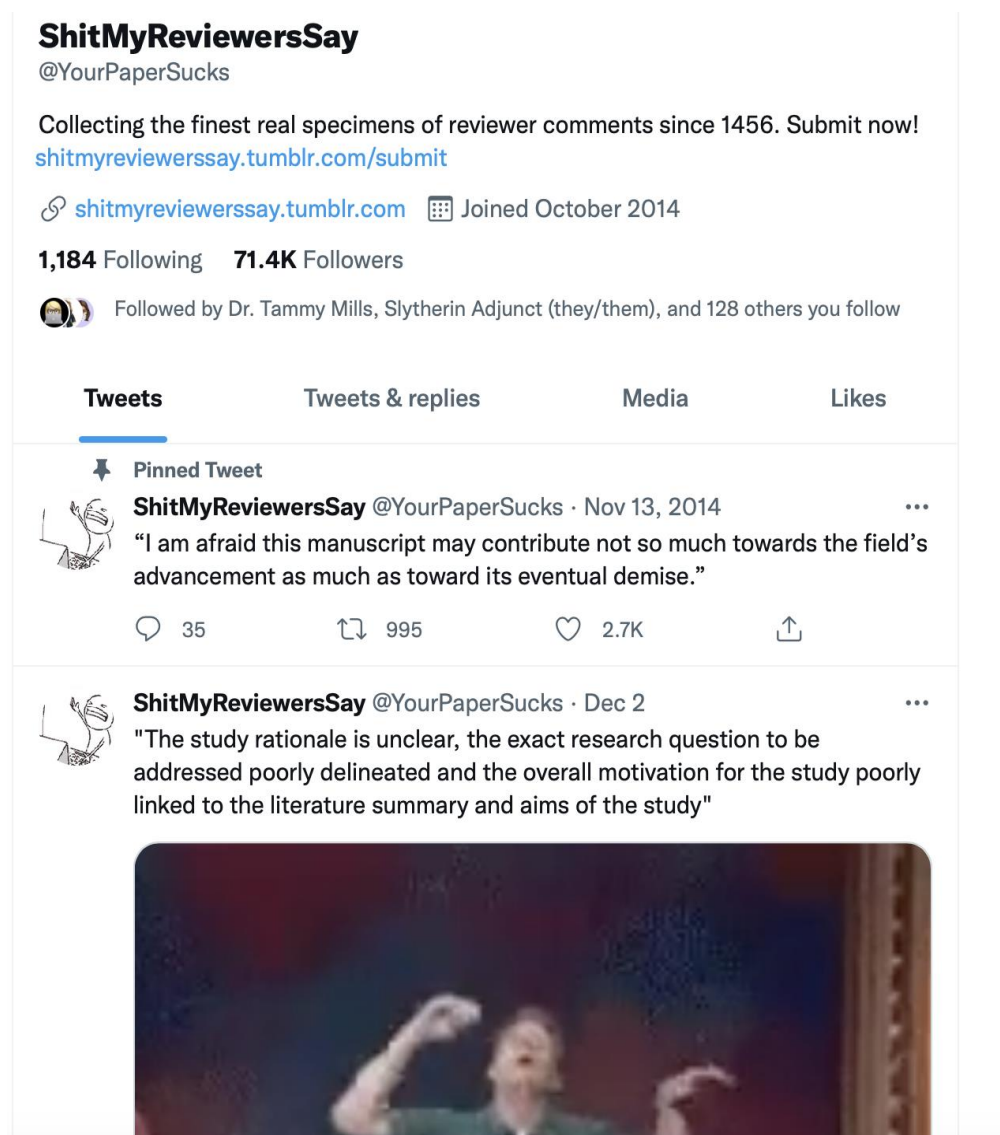
We feel a particular urgency for the need of an affirmative ethics given the present emphasis, particularly in education, on ideals of ruthless individualism and the sole valuing of productivity and profit (Davies, Somerville, & Claiborne, 2017). These ideals, and the ways they inform the human-centered, individualistic, neoliberal system and structures that make-up our respective institutions, produce us in particular ways that are often decapacitating. However, as we read *Posthuman Knowledge* and *Mapping the Affective Turn* and discussed affect and affirmative ethics, we began to think of ways that academia could be done differently. In particular, we started to explore ways that we could re-work our practice and shape it into something more affirmative: something that emphasizes the role of materiality, affects, and bodily capacities, rather than centering human subjects with static agencies and linear and hierarchical notions of power.

### **Reworking Negative Academic Affect through Affirmative Ethics: A Workshop**

A catalyst for this understanding, which we have continued to develop over time, was a conversation in which we realized that a current project we were working on could be a possible productive space for experimenting with the enactment of an affirmative ethics. Our conversation started with a discussion of a problem we were facing in the project, which was just getting underway. We, with another long-time colleague, were guest-editing a double special issue of a refereed journal which put complex, non-linear theories to work examining different facets of teacher development. We had thirty articles for which we needed to recruit reviewers with expertise at the juncture of theories of complexity (such as posthumanism) and teacher development. Because posthumanism is just emerging as a theoretical area of interest for teacher education scholars, there were few experienced reviewers who could do this, and in the midst of a global pandemic, we were unsure who might be available. As a solution, we came up with the idea of reaching out to early career folks and advanced doctoral students who may have had limited or no experience reviewing, and to offer them a workshop. Guided by the idea of enacting an affirmative ethics in academia, we decided to design the workshop to engage with the affects of peer reviewing and propose an alternative, affirmative process to rework and transform the practice of critique and peer review.

### **Engaging with Negative Affects of Peer Review**

We began the workshop by asking participants to go to the profile of “Shit My Reviewers Say” on Twitter (see **Figure 1**), browse the tweets, and choose a comment to share that affected them in some way.



**Figure 1. Profile and Tweets from “Shit My Reviewers Say”**

Spurred by advances in late-stage capitalism, over the last several decades, academia has shifted to neoliberal structures and ideals (Davies, et al., 2017). This shift has transformed the roles, perceptions, and practices of the educators, researchers, and reviewers practicing within institutions of higher education (Davies, et al., 2017; Lund, 2018; VanMarle, 2018; Hodgins & Mannix-McNamara, 2021). The neoliberalization of academia has also produced a competitive, cut-throat model of rejection in which critique is often weaponized and used as a gatekeeping mechanism that excludes particular knowledges and methods (Hodgins & Mannix-McNamara, 2021). Describing the harm of the process, Ellingson and Sotirin (2008) note that while peer review might serve as quality control to some extent, it also “enables a strict policing of the field, disciplining anyone who tries to move outside accepted (sexist, racist, classist, etc.) boundaries with their scholarship” (p. 38).

In turn, this weaponizing of peer review has produced negative affects as part of the process. Affect, as stated earlier, is a force that moves us (Manning, 2016), diminishing or augmenting our capacity to act (Massumi, 1987). The affects of rejection, coupled with negative/judgmental critique of work, diminishes our bodies in multiple ways: by contributing to low confidence and imposter syndrome, inducing or worsening writing paralysis, and/or impacting mental and physical health (Berg, Huijbens, & Larsen, 2016; Enslin & Hedge, 2019). Although there is a general dearth of studies on the affective productions of peer review, a few empirical works document the ways these processes diminish capacity. For instance, Day (2011) and Horn (2016) both report that non-constructive peer reviews cause stress and result in lower productivity.

In just the opening activity of the workshop, participants offered a glimpse of the ways the affects generated by these unkind and non-constructive comments might move researcher-bodies in diminishing ways. After several minutes browsing the comments, everyone copied and pasted their chosen tweets in the chat. A few volunteers shared why they chose it, how it affected them, or what it made them think about. Although some of the content was rendered humorous by its pairing with pictures or gifs, the affects the participants described were serious. For some, the reviewer comments produced memories of times they had their own work denigrated, while for others, reading them evoked fear and trepidation of submitting manuscripts for peer review.

One participant chose a reviewer comment that offered a critique of a paper's completion, indicating that the paper seemed more of a "pitch for possible research" than an actual completed study. This comment struck a chord in her because at the moment, she was writing a conceptual piece. She had to publish something to have on her CV as she entered the job market, but was still in the process of completing her dissertation, so she could not yet use that data. Her conceptual manuscript, she reflected, could be seen as a "pitch," and the review evoked fear that she could get a reviewer response that was similar. Another participant shared a comment that opined that the paper under review was only suited for a lower-impact journal. Keenly aware of the academic neoliberal value for publications in journals with higher impact scores, this stoked her worries about whether her own research would be accepted in such journals, which was required to satisfy her institution's tenure requirements. These affects gesture to the ways that peer review comments can affect bodies in ways that diminish their capacity.

### **An Affirmative Alternative**

After spending time debriefing how the comments had affected the participants, we made our argument: *we can choose to do this practice of academia differently, to rework and transform some of the negative effects that the peer review process creates, through affirmative reviewing.* We proposed that such an approach would take a mentoring lens and offer the same feedback in terms of content, merely shifting to communicate that content in a mode that is simultaneously supportive and forward-looking. Rather than tearing down or belittling the author, the review would use language and mobilize affect to point out the productive aspects and potentialities, and offer specific, concrete advice for strengthening other parts.

Before we jumped into the implementation of these principles, we first wanted to establish a common understanding of the content of a peer review. First, we were aware that most academics who serve as peer reviewers receive no preparation to do so—neither from the journals requesting the reviews nor from their doctoral programs (Horn, 2016). Accordingly, we

focused on demystifying the “what” of the peer review process by providing and discussing a reviewer guide (see **Figure 2**, below) that provided a set of seven criteria, with accompanying questions for each. We emphasized that reviewers should use the questions to evaluate each criterion while reading the paper. If an element was missing or needed improvement, specific suggestions for how the author could address or improve it should be given; if the element is particularly strong, the reviewer should note why this element was a strength of the paper, what feelings it evoked for them, and be sure to add it to the review as a positive highlight.

## **REVIEWER GUIDE**

### **Introduction/Framing**

- Does the study address a necessary and significant research problem?
- Does the author spell out the aims of the article?
- Does the author provide an “at-a-glance” description of the project, including the research purpose and/or research questions?

### **Conceptual Framework**

- Does the author clearly describe a theoretical or conceptual frame with appropriate detail and references?
- Is language accessible, with all concepts adequately explained? (This may apply to other sections as well?).
- Is the theoretical or conceptual frame clearly connected to, and appropriate for the project being discussed in the paper?

### **Literature Review**

- Does the author provide a synthesis of related research that has been conducted on the topic?
- Is it clear how the study in this article builds on this literature and/or addresses a research gap?
- Are references appropriate, and include up-to-date scholarship?

### **Methodology**

- Are the study design and methods appropriate to address the research question?
- Is the methodology clearly described with appropriate references?
- Are the data sources and collection procedures discussed with adequate detail?
- Are participants and their selection criteria described adequately?
- Is the setting and/or any relevant contextual information offered in adequate detail?
- Does the author clearly describe the analytic procedures?
- Does the author offer a discussion of trustworthiness and/or limitations?
- Does the author practice reflexivity/politics of location?

### **Findings**

- Do the findings clearly connect to the research questions?
- Are the findings presented in an organized and clear way?
- Are the claims made in the findings substantiated with appropriate evidence?

**Discussion**

- Does the author provide a discussion of the findings from their theoretical perspective?
- Does the author discuss the findings in conversation with other related research?
- Does the author offer conclusions that are substantiated by the findings?
- Does the author offer implications and/or recommendations for practice, policy, and/or research?
- Is the contribution of this study clear?

**Writing & Organization**

- Is the writing clear and accessible?
- Does the paper follow the conventions of the journal in terms of format, citation, spelling, grammar, etc.?
- Is the paper appropriately signposted for the reader – for example, does the author provide the reader with a guide-map regarding the structure of the article? Are there clear topic sentences, transitions, and other verbal cues?
- Do the sentences of each paragraph/section build logically?

**Figure 2. Reviewer Guide****Analyzing an Affirmative Peer Review**

After we built common understanding regarding the expectations of the content of a review, we broke into small groups and asked participants to read a sample review that Katie had received for a recent article she had submitted to a journal focusing on affect. The journal specifically asked its reviewers to adopt an affirmative lens for reviews. The two reviewers had taken this seriously: Katie found it to be the most supportive review she had ever received. In groups, the participants first read the reviewer comments, and then discussed the following questions:

- What are the characteristics of the review? What are the “reviewer moves” that you see?
- How do you think this differs from a “standard” peer review?
- If you were the author receiving this, how do you think it would make you feel? What are the affective possibilities?

The first reviewer move encompassed the reviewer situating herself in conversation with the work she was reviewing, while simultaneously commenting on the relevance of the manuscript in light of current context. The reviewer began her comments thus:

*I sit down to write this review in the midst of the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic. While the author of this essay situates their reflections in their personal experiences in 2018, their title could not be more timely, as many of us in academia are struggling with how to learn from “lost months” of research while navigating high levels of anxiety and dread. I*



*begin with this remark not to devalue the key situatedness of the essay but to state how relevant it is to read their words at this particular historical juncture.*

Throughout the comments, the reviewer continued to make connections between her own experiences and affects and that of the reviewer. For example, responding to the statement “I fell in love with rhizomes in my teacher education doctoral program,” the reviewer noted, *“This statement warms my heart, as I now work in a Department of Teacher Education and I can see how students desperately need to encounter some of the posthumanist theories discussed by the author in order for future teachers (and consequently future pupils and citizens) to become critical thinkers.”*

In addition, the reviewer also offered tangible ways to improve the manuscript. For example, in an area where the affect of shame is mentioned, the reviewer suggested that Katie continue to push her theorization of this idea while also taking into consideration specific works on shame in affect studies. As another illustration, the reviewer recommended that some of the theories that Katie had described at the start of the essay be integrated throughout, offering examples of how she might go about this. She wrote, *“For example, on page 8 the author states ‘I don’t know any of this literature anymore’ but they were actually feeling all of it, which is a way of knowing, as the author claims, so maybe there could be short references to feeling D&G, feeling Braidotti, feeling Barad, without words.”* Participants noted the discussion of affect and personal connections, as well as the very explicit suggestions and overall supportive tone, as elements that set this apart from typical reviews they have received (and the dominant narrative around peer reviewing). As we closed the activity, one of the participants exclaimed that, as she read the review, she felt like the reviewer was giving the author a hug. This comment associating a review with a comforting sensation gestures to the different affective possibilities of affirmative peer reviewing.

### **Constructing an Affirmative Review**

Our model of affirmative reviewing frames feedback along four dimensions: strengths, affects, potential, and concrete suggestions for moving forward. As a sample process, we suggested the following: read the manuscript, making notes not about (1) areas of strength, (2) ideas or wording that affect the reader in some way, (3) elements that have promise and can be built on, and (4) places that need to be strengthened. Then, using the reviewer guide provided (or one provided by the journal), compile notes for each category.

In communicating feedback affirmatively, language is extremely important for creating a feeling of mentoring and support. To support participants in understanding how to use language to create these feelings, we offered examples from a review of our own. First, we examined examples of language communicating strong, compelling, powerful aspects for the paper. For instance, as an example of identifying strengths, we wrote: *“The article is well-written and works creatively with non-linear concepts. The vignettes will be especially helpful and accessible for practitioners.”* We then turned to examples of how we articulated what had affected us and drew us in, making personal connections to the idea: *“In the article, authors hint that the policy and the frameworks themselves are agentic actors in the coaching assemblages. I found myself fascinated by this idea—it made me remember how district policy was a very influential force shaping practices when I myself was a coach. Consider bringing this out a little more in your discussion.”*

An important mentoring move includes identifying areas of potential, and providing possible pathways to actualize it. As an example, we wrote, *“This article offers a lot of promise in terms of approaching professional development from a complex, non-linear stance. To build on this, authors need to more clearly state the argument the article makes, as well as articulate the rationale for the study in the introduction.”* To clearly communicate this future-oriented stance, we purposefully used words/phrases such as “promise” and “build on.” As a second example, we identified a novel idea that we felt offered potential, made a suggestion for a way forward, and used a question to help scaffold for the author:

*The author’s use of the ideas of mapping and tracing, as applied to coaching/professional development, is novel and offers a lot of potential for producing a complex analysis. To strengthen, connect the concepts of mapping and tracing a bit more tightly to the examples of practice. Is the argument that the vignettes are maps, and they demonstrate the hybridity that occurs from translating the ideas into practice? Make this more clear.*

A fourth, and perhaps most important, element includes providing specific guidance for strengthening the paper. In doing this, it is powerful to highlight strengths, and position the suggestion for improvement as building, similar to the ways we discussed areas of potential. For instance, in the paper we reviewed, the authors proposed that coaching resulted in “hybridization”—the ideas aren’t taken up in “pure” form, but are negotiated in relation to particular contexts and morph accordingly. To demonstrate this idea, the authors provided coaching vignettes which they “untangled” to discuss the complexity. We offered the following: *“The idea of ‘untangling’ coaching vignettes and ‘reweaving into vibrant hybridity’ with a rhizomatic perspective is excellent. The vignettes, as written, need more detail to demonstrate the hybridization that is occurring. The authors state that the hybridization happened, but more thick description about the coaching and connected practices needs to be added that provides evidence to support that argument.”*

As a second illustration, in the following comment, we pointed out that the authors’ theoretical discussions are an area of strength, and suggested that they also should integrate empirical literature on the topic addressed. To help the author get started on the revision, we also directed them to specific citations to explore:

*The author(s) do an excellent job discussing the theoretical concepts and engaging with the professional development literature in the beginning of the paper. In sections where you are critiquing linear thought and discussing alternative non-linear perspectives regarding teacher learning, make sure that you cite not only theoretical works, but also point to empirical teacher education studies who employ non-linear approaches to teacher learning/development/practice. Some possible works you may want to consider include [citations] ...*

We also recommend that, prior to submitting the review, reviewers should carefully read through their comments to ensure they are balanced. That is, they should be simultaneously affirmative, supportive, and rigorous. Examine each area that mentions a need for potentiality/strengthening. Ensure that the language is specific and constructive and that concrete suggestions are provided so the author has a path for moving forward for the revisions.

## Discussion

Using affirmative ethics to guide a peer review offers a way of doing academia differently for both the researcher and the reviewer. Learning to identify strengths, offer multiple paths for possible change or different perspectives, and provide constructive feedback, in the form of mentoring, helps the reviewer shift away from a competitive, neoliberal view of academic service. Instead, the process becomes more collaborative and as something that facilitates their own, and others', contributions to the strengths of the field or the journal. For the researcher/writer, it provides further opportunities for learning, for deeper understanding of concepts and theories. It also opens pathways for comments and conversation back to the reviewer that may offer different perspectives, thereby creating further learning opportunities for both. Ultimately, affirmative peer reviewing is a reframing from reviewing as critiquing and closing down to providing support to expand/build, which opens up to new possibilities.

Affirmative reviews also have the potential to produce embodied affective responses that are different from the norm. Often typical peer reviews produce anxiety, stress, and/or lowered confidence, which can result in diminished capacity. For example, the author may put off revisions, or decide not to pursue them at all. We argue that affirmative reviews have the potential to move bodies differently in relation to their research. For instance, when Katie received the review she shared in the workshop, she not only felt supported, but also excited to get started on her revisions. Thus, her bodily capacity was augmented.

On a micro-level, these different affective productions serve as lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). They are temporary disruptions of the larger neoliberal system that are recaptured and disciplined to fit the status quo. However, upon that recapture, lines of flight shuffle the system and produce change. Although perhaps minute, many lines of flight continually reshuffling the system can reach critical mass for transformative possibilities. Therefore, if reconstructed over time, these tiny reconfigurations of power relations can contribute to the establishing of a different way of doing academia. That is, as micro-moments of affirmative affect increase our relational capacity at the micro-level, they have the potential to help transform the neoliberal university at a macro-level. Over time, these lines of flight can contribute to the creation of a collective academic care culture marked by relationality and interdependence, rather than individualism and market principles (Bozalek & Winberg, 2018).

We encourage scholars to help create these lines of flight to disrupt the rejection culture of academia by reviewing as often as possible from an affirmative stance. However, we also acknowledge that this is not an insignificant time commitment, since affirmative reviewing takes longer than a more traditional review (although, as a bonus, the act of reviewing also improves our own writing). We also encourage scholars to find ways to create lines of flight for doing academia affirmatively by examining their own areas of influence with regard to peer reviewing. In particular, those who hold editorial roles or plan to serve as guest editors of special issues can have an exponential impact in this area by directly asking reviewers to adopt an affirmative stance (and reading the reviews to ensure they have complied). We have used the following language:

### Special Issue Review Instructions

The Guest Editors respectfully request that peer reviewers complete their review from an affirmative stance. To that end, we ask that all comments are:

- **Situated and Accountable:** speak from your own location as a scholar.
- **Constructive:** point out areas of improvement and clearly suggest how to improve them.
- **Specific:** use concrete, descriptive language; include evidence from the paper when necessary.
- **Balanced and Sensitive:** Highlight both strengths and areas of improvement; avoid judgment.

Another sphere of influence for lines of flight toward a relational culture of care in academia includes doctoral courses. As noted earlier, reviewers almost never receive preparation for quality peer reviewing (Horn, 2016). Faculty working in PhD or EdD programs should consider teaching students elements of affirmative reviewing, and offer them practice doing it. For example, faculty might embed an assignment to conduct a peer review of another student's paper using a rubric that provides guidance for affirmative reviewing. These are all ways that we might collectively contribute to creating an affirmative version of academia in our everyday work.

### Conclusions

Although the practice of peer review is important to the research process, reviewer comments often produce negative affects that contribute to the larger rejection culture of academia (Allen, et al., 2020). In the short term, these can hinder scholars' publishing and cause stress (Day, 2011; Horn, 2016), and in the longer term, they can play into larger patterns of imposter syndrome, poor mental health, and other types of harm for academics (Allen, 2020). In this paper, we have offered one way to disrupt these toxic conditions through engaging in an affirmative peer reviewing process. Such a process is a form of what we call "and, and, and" reviewing: that is, this process provides reviews that are thoughtful *and* constructive, that are affirmative/strengths-based *and* rigorous *and* help the author improve through direct mentorship.

Taking on the neoliberal system of academia (or indeed, any macro-level power system) may seem like a Sisyphean task, and we are not saying that affirmative reviewing alone will transform it. However, scholars *do* have power at the micro-level through activities like peer reviewing. Their reviews can contribute to reproducing the toxic rejection culture of academia – but they can also subvert these conditions and help transform the negative affects that so often flow from peer review. Over time, if enough academics move to an affirmative, relational orientation and enact it through peer reviewing and other spheres of influence, we *can* do academia differently.

## References

- Allen, K. A., Donoghue, G. M., Pahlevansharif, S., Jimerson, S. R., & Hattie, J. A. (2020). Addressing Academic Rejection: Recommendations for Reform. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 17(5), 19.
- Barad, K. (2007). *Meeting the universe halfway: Quantum physics and the entanglement of matter and meaning*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Barad, K. (2014). Diffracting diffraction: Cutting together-apart. *Parallax*, 20(3), 168-187.
- Berg, L., Huijbens, E., & Larsen, H. G. (2016). Producing anxiety in the neoliberal university. *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe Canadien*, 60(2), 168-180. doi:10.1111/cag.12261
- Bozalek, V., & Winberg, C. (2018). The ethics of care and academic development. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 32(6), 1-5.
- Braidotti, R. (2013). *The posthuman*. Polity.
- Braidotti, R. (2019a). *Posthuman knowledge*. Polity.
- Braidotti, R. (2019b). Affirmative ethics and generative life. *Deleuze and Guattari Studies*, 13(4), 463-481.
- Braidotti, R. (2018). Affirmative ethics, posthuman subjectivity, and intimate scholarship: A conversation with Rosi Braidotti. In K. Strom, T. Mills & A. Ovens (Eds.), *Decentering the researcher in intimate scholarship* (pp. 179-188). Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Davies, B., Somerville, M., & Claiborne, L. (2017). Feminist poststructuralisms and the neoliberal university. In N. Denzin & M. Giardina (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry in neoliberal times* (pp. 87-103). Routledge.
- Day, N. E. (2011). The silent majority: Manuscript rejection and its impact on scholars. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 10, 704-718.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1987). *Capitalism and schizophrenia: A thousand plateaus*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Dernikos, B., Lesko, N., McCall, S. D., & Niccolini, A. (2020). *Mapping the affective turn in education: Theory, research, and pedagogy*. Routledge.
- Ellingson, L. L., & Sotirin, P. (2008). Academic aunting: Reimaging feminist (wo)mentoring, teaching, and relationships. *Women and Language*, 31(1), 35-42.
- Enslin, P., & Hedge, N. (2019). Academic friendship in dark times. *Ethics and Education*, 14(4), 383-398. doi:10.1080/17449642.2019.1660457
- Haraway, D. J. (2004). *The Haraway Reader*. Psychology Press.
- Hickey-Moody, A. (2013). Affect as method: Feelings, aesthetics and affective pedagogy. In R. Coleman & J. Ringrose (Eds.), *Deleuze and Research Methodologies* (pp. 79-95). Edinburgh University Press.

- Hodgins, M., & Mannix-McNamara, P. (2021). The neoliberal university in Ireland: Institutional bullying by another name? *Societies*, 11(2), 52-72. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc11020052>
- Horn, S. (2016). The Social and Psychological Costs of Peer Review: Stress and Coping with Manuscript Rejection. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 25(1), 11-26.
- MacLure, M. (2017). Qualitative methodology and the new materialisms. In N. Denzin & M. Giardina (Eds.), *Qualitative inquiry in neoliberal times* (pp. 48-58). Routledge.
- Massumi, B. (1987). Notes on the translation and acknowledgements. *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia* (xvi-xix). University of Minnesota Press.
- Massumi, B. (2015). *Politics of affect*. Polity.
- Mountz, A., Bonds, A., Mansfield, B., Loyd, J., Hyndman, J., Walton-Roberts, M., ... & Curran, W. (2015). For slow scholarship: A feminist politics of resistance through collective action in the neoliberal university. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 14(4), 1235-1259.
- Lund, R. (2018). The social organisation of boasting in the neoliberal university. *Gender and Education*, 32(4), 466-485.
- Pinnegar, S., & Hamilton, M. L. (2015). Knowing, becoming, doing as teacher educators: Identity, intimate scholarship, inquiry (Vol. 26). Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing.
- Shouse, E. (2005). Feeling, emotion, affect. *M/C Journal*, 8(6), 26. <http://www.journal.media-culture.org.au/0512/03-shouse.php>
- Spinoza, B. (1994) *Ethics and other works: A Spinoza Reader* (E. Curley, Ed. & Trans.). Princeton University Press.
- Strom, K., Mills, T., & Ovens, A. (Eds.). (2018). *Decentering the researcher in intimate scholarship: Critical posthuman methodological perspectives in education*. Emerald Group Publishing.
- Strom, K. J. (2020). Learning from a 'lost year': An autotheoretical journey through anxiety and panic. *Capacious: Journal for Emerging Affect Inquiry*. Retrieved from: <http://capaciousjournal.com/?fbclid=IwAR0U9k1UiTWBrd-8umJHsKOD7Om5QWt1IXPmwqy73F-3FSLpjQKgs3hLnJk#Article-0>
- Strom, K. J., & Viesca, K. M. (2021). Towards a complex framework of teacher learning-practice. *Professional development in education*, 47(2-3), 209-224.
- Strom, K., & Mills, T. (2021). Affirmative ethics and affective scratchings: A diffractive re-view of posthuman knowledge and mapping the affective turn. *Matter: Journal of New Materialist Research*, 2(1), 200-223.
- Van Marle, K. (2018). Life is not simply fact: Aesthetics, atmosphere and the neoliberal. *Law and Critique*, 29, 293-310. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10978-018-9232-0>