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## CYBERBULLYING, CREEP SHOTS, AND REVENGE PORN: THREE CASE STUDIES IN AUGMENTED SUBJECTIVITY

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As danah boyd (2007), Nathan Fisk (2012), and David A. Banks (2013b) have argued, “cyberbullying” is an over-hyped term; moreover, it has little relevance to the people most likely to experience cyberbullying (Marwick and boyd 2011). At the same time, for all the hype and hysteria, we do not take digitally mediated harassment and abuse seriously in the ways that matter most. Justice department and law enforcement officials, for instance, have little by way of capacity or ability to address online harassment (whether by ex-lovers, anonymous strangers, or between teens)—and that’s when they can be persuaded that an incident is worth addressing at all. Why is it that we paradoxically seem to give digitally mediated abuse too much attention, and yet also fail so profoundly to take it seriously?

We argue that this contradiction results from conflict between ideology and practical knowledge (or what the ancient Greeks called *doxa* and *praxis*). While the negative consequences for victims of cyberbullying, creepshots, and revenge porn are often clear, we have difficulty acknowledging and addressing these issues because our culturally inherited framework for understanding them, and even our language for describing them, is encoded with assumptions that our experiences with or through digital technologies are separate and distinct from the rest of our lives.

This dominant cultural ideology—or *doxa*—is what Jurgenson (2011) has called “digital dualism,” which is a propensity to see digitally mediated interaction as something somehow separate from, and often lesser than, interaction mediated in other ways. Dualism is evident in the binaries we use describe digital technology: online/offline, digital/physical, real/virtual. This standpoint underlies both sides of the attention paradox: Digital dualism gives us the (purported) malignant exceptionality of the digital, which in turn is why digital technologies cause teenagers to abuse their classmates, and ex-lovers to post personal images and information belonging to former partners, and creepy middle-aged men to take surreptitious photographs up women’s skirts. If you ask these dualists, the devil’s in the digital. At the same time, however, digital dualism also

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tells us that digitally mediated interaction is less “real” or meaningful than are other types of interaction, which allows digitally mediated abuse to be brushed off as somehow “less real,” less harmful, or even not abuse at all. Tearing someone’s clothes off against their will is assault, for instance, and yet a surprising number of pundits maintain that posting naked photographs of someone against their will is simply “free speech” (Chen 2012).

Even though a particular *doxa* may be widespread, the beliefs it represents are not necessarily substantiated. Aristotle explains that *doxa* is opposed to substantiated belief (i.e., knowledge). While we have abundant knowledge that demonstrates the digital dualist *doxa* to be erroneous (e.g. Chayko 2008; Gray 2009; Baym 2010; Rainie and Wellman 2012; Tufekci and Wilson 2012), we have yet to articulate a compelling counter ideology that might supplant the dualist *doxa*. (In Aristotelian language, this would be an *endoxa*—a commonly-held belief system that has been rigorously analyzed and determined to be consistent.) In other words, systematic theorization is lagging behind systematic observation. We make an attempt to close part of that gap.

We argue that shifting how we think about what it means to be a person in the 21st century can actually yield a better understanding of phenomena like (so-called) cyberbullying, revenge porn, and creepshots. We draw on work by Katherine Hayles (1999), Allucquère Rosanne Stone (1994), Judith Butler (1988, 1997), and Maurice Merleau-Ponty 1945 [2012] to inform our argument that contemporary (post-)industrial subjects experience *augmented subjectivity*—that they are embodied across an assemblage of flesh bodies, conventional prostheses, and digital prostheses, and that they experience living within one multiply-mediated reality (though one whose varying components are not equally valued). We then bring the augmented subjectivity framework to bear on these three cases in order to shift analytical focus (and: popular attention) off the fact of digital mediation, and onto the lived, subjective experiences of those who are digitally abused. Because the subject’s digital prostheses are part of the augmented subject herself, they must be extended moral regard. Although different media most certainly have different affordances, abuse remains abuse—and must not be overlooked or dismissed merely because of its format.

This paper draws on a previously published theoretical work by the same authors, and applies that framework to three specific cases through textual analysis and close reading of popular media sources.

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