CHAPTER VI

"Pretty and Just a Little Bit Sexy, I Guess": Publicity, Privacy, and the Pressure to Perform "Appropriate" Femininity on Social Media

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When McRobbie and Garber first coined the term "bedroom culture" in 1976, they were attempting to create a theoretical framework to explore girls' resistance to restrictive cultural tropes around gender.[1] Subculture studies of the time largely ignored girls, and instead focused on the ways that boys resignified public spaces for their own cultural purposes. As a corrective, McRobbie and Garber located girls' cultural practices in the private space of the bedroom, and argued that girls were free there to pursue their cultural goals by reading magazines, talking to each other on the phone, trying on clothes, listening to music, and fantasizing about pop idols.[2]

By locating resistance in the privacy of the bedroom, McRobbie and Garber were challenging the assumption that equality cannot be advanced in the private sphere,[3] particularly because privacy too often shields abusive men from public accountability for violence against women.[4] However, girls in the 1970s had less access to the public sphere than their male peers because, as girls, they were subjected to a higher degree of parental control.[5] The bedroom therefore provided an alternative space where girls could access mainstream cultural products and communications technologies (like radios) in private, and use them to construct potentially more empowering identities.[6] Conceptualizing the bedroom as a resistive space accordingly put privacy and communications into dialogue with equality

in productive ways. Privacy could promote equality by providing a boundary that enabled girls to enjoy a personal, personalized, and intimate socio-technical space,[7] where they could retreat from the pressure of the public sphere, produce their own cultural meanings, and potentially challenge restrictive stereotypes.

When Lincoln revisited McRobbie and Garber's work in the early 1990s, she argued that the bedroom continued to be one of the few places where girls could enjoy this sense of "a room of one's own,"[8] Lincoln's research participants—much like McRobbie and Garber's—went there to chat with friends, talk about romantic relationships, and experiment with clothes, makeup, and hairstyles. In this regard, the bedroom was still a private place to which girls could retreat to find "respite from the public world" and play with the cultural capital available to them to experiment with their identities. However, Lincoln argued that the bedroom of the 1990s had become a hybrid space, with attributes of both the private and the public spheres, and that this hybridity was ultimately empowering for girls because it increased their access to publicity.

Lincoln supported this conclusion with two lines of reasoning. First, she suggested that the technologies of the day made the boundaries around the bedroom more permeable. Personal televisions, music players, mobile phones, and the internet provided girls with a way to "cross over" into the public sphere and access an "immense" range of cultural choices from which to "pick and mix" as they went about the business of identity construction.

Second, since girls enjoyed more access to the public sphere than their counterparts in the 1970s, they used photos and other memorabilia of their participation in parties, concerts, and other events to record their "cultural interests … biographically on their bedroom walls." In this way, the bedroom became an important site where they could "document their 'coolness' through active participation in the public sphere of the pub or club." Lincoln concluded that the public and private spheres accordingly "interact[ed] simultaneously as bedroom culture," and that this intermingling made it possible for girls to take a more active role in the shaping of their "social- and cultural-life worlds."[9]

As the variety of personal networked media have grown, a number of other feminist scholars have also celebrated the emancipatory potential of technologies that blur the lines between the private sphere and the public sphere, in the hope that this blurring

will create liminal spaces where girls can increasingly control their visibility[10] and break discriminatory stereotypes.[11] The promise, as Reid-Walsh and Mitchell articulate, is that these "semi-private places of creativity and sociality [will become] sites of 'virtual bedroom culture'"[12] that are "separate, private and safe" and under the control of the girls themselves.[13] Moreover, unlike the girls of the 1970s, who largely consumed pre-packaged media products, today's girls can, it is hoped, become media producers and distributers in their own right, "subverting the public/private binary that has historically limited girls' experiences."[14] From this perspective, the potential for resistance is amplified by networked technologies because the virtual bedroom is no longer relegated to the private sphere so long associated with repression; indeed, the benefit is that these technologies provide girls with unrestricted access to the public sphere. As Kearney concludes, by creating and posting media content, "contemporary female youth are not retreating to private spaces; they are *reconfiguring* such sites to create new publics that can better service their needs, interests, and goals.[15]

In this chapter, I explore the qualitative findings of the eGirls Project to test these assumptions against the lived experiences of girls and young women living in Ontario, Canada. When the eGirls Project was initiated, one of the aims was to map the variety of ways that girls could perform emancipatory identities on social media. However, the findings identify a complex and contradictory set of affordances and constraints that open up some opportunities and shut down others. This has further complicated the already complex task of creating and inhabiting emancipatory feminine identities, because mainstream stereotypes are now embedded by commercial interests into the sociotechnical spaces that girls inhabit. This makes it more difficult for girls to retreat into a private sphere where they can try on a variety of identities with few or no social consequences. I conclude that equality can be better promoted by protecting the privacy of the virtual bedroom from commercial interests that seek to replicate the kinds of stereotypes that constrain girls' enjoyment of the public sphere, and providing girls with more tools to control who has access to the virtual traces of themselves that they leave on social media.

Methodology

In January and February of 2013, researchers with the eGirls Project held a series of interviews and focus groups with girls and young women between the ages of 15 and 22. All participants used interactive online media (such as social networking, blogging, and/or user-generated video sites) as a regular part of their social lives. Half of our sample resided in an urban Ontario setting and half resided in a rural Ontario setting.[16]

We interviewed six girls aged 15 to 17 and six young women aged 18 to 22. An additional twenty-two participated in four focus group discussions, as follows: (1) seven girls aged 15 to 17 living in the urban setting; (2) five girls aged 15 to 17 living in the rural setting; (3) six young women aged 18 to 22 living in the urban setting; and (4) four young women aged 18 to 22 living in the rural setting. A professional research house recruited our participants on the basis of sex, age (either 15 to 17 or 18 to 22), and location of residence (urban or rural). While participants were not recruited on the basis of self-identification with regard to other aspects of their identities, such as race, ethnicity, gender identity, or sexual orientation, our participant group included members of racialized, linguistic, and various religious groups.

In the interviews and the focus groups, we explored, among other things, the types of visual and textual representations the participants used online to express their identity as young women, and the benefits and pitfalls they experienced on social media. We also asked for their views on the issues and policy responses focused on by policymakers (as identified in the review of federal parliamentary debates previously reported upon and summarized above).

With participant permission, the interviews and focus groups were audiotaped and transcribed by our research assistants for analysis. All identifying information was removed from the transcripts, and pseudonyms were used to identify participants.[17]

Life in the Virtual Bedroom

The findings indicate that social media have indeed provided girls with opportunities to shape the identities they inhabit in the public sphere in emancipatory ways. All of the participants reported using profiles on various sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Tumblr) to

extend their networks, and to pursue their professional or political goals. A social media presence was universally seen as a useful way to cultivate professional relationships with (prospective) employers and clients. For example, 19-year-old Cassandra used a Facebook page to promote her new aesthetics business, providing detailed descriptions of the products and services she offered to solicit clients. Other girls used social media for social and political activism, and a number indicated that certain sites, like Twitter, were an easy way to keep informed about the issues of the day. Accordingly, the hybridity inherent in networked technologies gave the participants a window into the public sphere, and a door through which to enter that sphere for their own purposes.

For a few of the participants, social media were also a satisfying outlet for the type of creative expression that Kearney described.[18] Again, the hybridity of the space was key here. The pleasure came not only in using media tools to produce their own content, but also in sharing with others what they created in private. For example, 16-year-old Clare indicated that she frequently videotaped her hands while she played her own arrangements of rock songs on the piano and posted the videos on YouTube. Because she played by ear, a number of people contacted her to comment on the arrangements and ask her for the music she had composed. Fifteen-year-old Emily was very proud of a graphic art logo she created to help promote an online campaign against social injustice. And Cassandra posted pictures of ceramics she painted. The ceramics were so popular that friends and family asked for particular pieces and began to commission her work for pay. Reflecting on this, she noted, smiling," … On my other profile, like my normal profile [for family and friends], every day, I've pictures of the canvases I paint; I've pictures of drawings that I drew. All the artsy fartsy things I do to my room."

Although most of the participants saw themselves as consumers of media content rather than as producers, all but two of them posted photos on a regular basis and all had either frequently commented on others' photos or had others comment on theirs. This activity spanned platforms and most participants had ongoing access to their profiles through portable devices, like smartphones and tablets. Again, the hybridity of these spaces meant that this experience could be very satisfying. Watching videos on YouTube, listening to music, and following their own "random" interests (from celebrities and fashion to pets, food, and dancing cats) on social media provided our

participants with an opportunity to privately collect cultural capital with which to experiment. They would then appropriate elements of this cultural capital to "try on" new, less child-like identities, and then publicly display them to friends through the photos they posted. When friends responded positively, the publicity afforded by social media increased their confidence. As 17-year-old Alicia noted, "It's nice to know that, like, people actually, like, care type of thing and like, they wanna know, like, stuff [about your life]." Accordingly, photos posted on social media played a central role in the task of becoming a teenager and adult, and posting and perusing photos was by far participants' favourite online activity.

However, when participants mentioned posting photos of themselves, a surprising number of them immediately placed a *caveat* around this practice, expressly indicating that they did post photos, *but* they did not post anything "bad," "inappropriate," "crazy," "rough or greasy," "trashy," "sleazy," or "scandalous." Rather than opening up space for new performances of femininity, social media came with a clear and vigorously enforced set of social rules about acceptable ways of being a girl.[19] Alicia's comments were typical: when asked about her photos, she responded by saying:

> There's usually nothing … bad [laughter] … I'd be like, oh, make sure I'm appropriate when I'm speaking, but I'm usually, like, I'm not bad … I don't know, like cleaner, type of thing… . no, my pictures are usually good. So … well, like, it's usually just like a face shot of, like, me and people or, um, like nature or, like, the weather or, like, my family, so like, it's never anything that bad.

This juxtaposition between "good" photos and "bad" photos resonated strongly with all of our participants. There was also a real consensus about what constituted a "bad" photo. The 15- to 17-year-old girls who participated in the urban focus group put it this way:

> Lauryn: … the classic, like, girl, like, pictures at your webcam and you're bending over like this just to see, you can see right down your shirt ….
> Eve: … girls are, like, squishing their boobs together or something [group laugh]. And like, bending over and they're, like, I don't know, trying to turn sideways or whatever 'cause it looks bigger this way [group laugh]. Yeah.

> Lauryn: Or like taking a picture and people being like, oh, like, I like your hair, and they'll take it from behind, but in reality you know they're doing it so you can see their butt ….

Photos of girls involving alcohol, smoking, or drugs were also seen to be problematic. Although many of the participants indicated that they did drink or smoke, they were very careful about posting any photos that showed them doing so, to avoid being "trashy" (Amelia, age 18). Young women 18 and older, in particular, were careful to keep their profile pictures "neutral," and would use privacy controls such as untagging photos in which they were dancing or behaving in a sexual manner (Jill, age 20) in an attempt to control the flow of those images beyond a trusted circle of friends and/or family. Accordingly, although social media gave them access to the public sphere, they were very careful about how they represented themselves there, to avoid being seen as "bad" girls, replicating the traditional divide between "good" girls, who do not act in overtly sexual ways or engage in male pastimes like drinking or smoking, and "bad" girls, who do. They also saw it as their responsibility to police their image—and often the images of other girls—to ensure that photos conformed to highly gendered behavioural norms.

The most restrictive regulation involved the display of the feminine body. "Too much" exposure was universally recognized as "inappropriate"; this included "cleavage" (Alicia), photos without "a lot of clothes" (Clare), that are "way too revealing" (Nicole, age 16), "sexual pictures" (Emily, age 15), or pictures of a girl "pose[d] in suggestive ways" (Clare). Alicia illustrated the difference between "good" and "bad" photos by drawing a finger across her chest, literally encoding the difference on her body:

> Clothing-wise, like, I don't know, like I feel right now, well I'm not really showing anything but like, um, my friend, like, I'm pretty sure she would just use this blue shirt [drawing a line close to her nipples] and I put this top underneath [drawing a line at the top of her cleavage].

When I asked her what was "bad" about showing so much cleavage, she indicated it was "something people could take in the wrong way."

This taking things in the "wrong way" was highly gendered. Whereas boys were free to post shirtless photos or show off their abs, photos displaying a girl's body would be read differently:

> … Girls, we have to, like, um, cover ourselves more than guys, so, like, I find that, like, um, if you were to look at a picture of a girl, like, um, with just like, uh, like a crop top or something and then a guy with no top, I don't know, they're kind of similar but the way you would look at it would be different … people will talk. (Alicia).

All the participants indicated that they paid a great deal of attention to selecting appropriate photos to post because the talk generated by a poor display was often incredibly harsh, especially among the teenagers. Girls who exposed too much skin were quickly labelled "sluts," "whores," and "trash." Even girls who admitted they posted these kinds of pictures tended to judge themselves harshly. Cindy (age 20), who indicated that the "duck face" (a particularly reviled pose where a girl turns her face sideways and sucks in her cheeks) was "totally my go-to," burst out laughing when she talked about posting pictures of her boyfriend and said, "I'm one of those girls. I hate it. I'm one of those girls … I hate it when girls post [those kinds of pictures]." She later qualified, "But I don't go too, too overboard." For example, she described photos taken of her wearing lingerie as part of a modelling photo shoot as "not scandalous by any means … Like, nothing was showing, you know, but I wouldn't put that one on Facebook …. That's just way too much."

To complicate things further, girls were not judged by their male and female peers solely on the basis of what they displayed, but also on their presumed motivations for posting the photo. Again, the conversation among the 15- to 17–year-olds in the urban setting is illustrative:

> Monique: There's a difference between, like, flaunting it and, like, actually just ….
> Abby: Being yourself.
> Monique: Having it there because you have boobs [group laugh], like we all have boobs, but yeah. But there's a difference between wanting to show them to the whole world and you can still be respectful to yourself, you know ….

> Lauryn: … you can, like, totally tell when someone's doing it on purpose or it just so happens to be the picture [others agree]. Yeah, like, you can tell by like the angle, like, they're taking the picture, if you're constantly taking all your profile pictures from up here so you can see down your shirt, like, you can tell, like, you know which girl's, like, doing it on purpose and which girls aren't.

Girls who did it "on purpose" were variously described as "insecure," "self-absorbed," "annoying," "conceited," "bragging," "desperate," or "attention whores."

At the same time, "good" photos were often marked by features that also showed up in "bad" photos. A "good" photo was described as one in which a girl's hair and makeup were perfect, and her body was displayed to emphasize her breasts or lips and to make her look thinner. Girls who trashed the duck face in one moment would later talk about various duck face photos they had posted of themselves in the past, because "it makes your cheeks look thinner and your lips look bigger" (Cindy, Jill).

There was a similar ambiguity about sexualized photos. Although photos that went "too far" opened a girl up to harsh judgment, a "good" photo was one in which a girl looked "pretty and just a little bit sexy, I guess. That's it" (Kathleen, age 20). "Not like a stripper, like" (Monica, age 16) but thin, attractive, and fit: "Personally, I mean, if I have a crappy smile and if I'm standing the wrong way and I have a bulge hanging over somewhere, I'm not going to—it's vain, but I'm not going to put that up on Facebook" (Emily, age 15).

Accordingly, the line between "good" photos and "bad" photos was often a very hard one to define, and the fact that a photo would be seen by others on social media increased the potential for a harsh judgment. As Monica (age 16) summarized, "Well, some people are fine, just put whatever on there. And it's like if you don't like it, don't look at it. But other people are very conscious of their, like, worry that they'll get crap or something."

"Getting crap" was not limited to girls who transgressed the line between "good" and "bad" photos. It also included girls and young women who did not fit within the idealized norm of feminine beauty or behaviour. For example, 17-year-old Lynda indicated that a photo of a girl who was not thin would attract "something rude." She spoke of a friend who posted a photo on social media and was

told, "'I understand why you're so self-conscious about your weight. If I looked like you, I would be too.' That's horrible." She went on to explain:

> Lynda: Like, if a girl puts a picture up without makeup on or something, people could attack her, like, that even people she doesn't know could see it.
> Researcher: What do they say?
> Lynda: I don't know. Some people would call her ugly or something if you don't wear makeup. Or they'll just attack her for that…. They could attack their appearance, or the way you act or relationships with guys, being with guys…. Like, they could say the way you look in general or, like, clothes you wear or lack of clothes you wear.

Keira (age 21) spoke of a girl in high school who did not follow the crowd, who was "just bash[ed]" by a boy on social media:

> I think it was about how she looks. What she was wearing. She had a very authentic look, and she was never really scared to say what she wants or act in any way that she wants. But—oh, man, I think it was mostly about her looks, maybe what she normally wears…. Anyway, it was just bizarre.

Simply posting too much information about herself could open a girl up to judgment, especially if she violated traditional feminine norms around passivity and privacy. Interestingly, even though social media has a public-ness about it, girls who failed to maintain a certain degree of privacy online were subjected to criticism by their peers. Jill's comment exemplifies this:

> I used to have this girl on Facebook, and she'd just write everything. "Off to the mall, then going for a nap," "Just woke up from the nap, off to the bathroom," just totally personal. And I knew I wasn't the only one who thought this. I had to delete her; it was just, like, so annoying. It was like, why do you feel the need to write these things on Facebook? I don't need to know that you left your house …. if you're posting, like, extremely specific little details, like, personal things: "Off to get my hair cut," "Off to do my nails," things like that. It's just a little too much.

In like vein, Nicole posted a photo on Ask.fm, a site that she described as "probably the most horrible thing I've ever seen in my life." The questions she received were mostly telling her she was pretty and nice, but some asked her, "Why are you so attention seeking?" As she pondered her experience, she indicated, "I have never thought of myself as attention seeking compared to some other girls … it just sets you apart from other people. 'Cause to me, attention seeking is that one person who's on Facebook 24/7, putting pictures of themselves and is just searching for things they can do to hear their name more, you know …. But I never thought of myself as that."

This kind of self-reflection was common among the participants. They described social media as a place where they faced an incredible amount of judgment and pressure, especially about their bodies: a place where girls are open to criticism because they are too fat, too made up, not made up enough, expose too much cleavage (and are therefore "sluts"), don't expose enough cleavage, have too many friends (and are therefore "desperate"), and/or don't have enough friends (and are therefore "losers"). The oppressive need for attention to detail, to present that "just right" image, was often exhausting, especially for high school students. As Cindy notes, "Being made fun of, high school is brutal, I hated high school for all the cattiness and, uh, the judgment."

Even though the participants were quick to judge girls who posted "bad" photos on social media, they also had an empathetic understanding of why "other" girls would do so. They all commented on the pressure created by the unrealistic representations of beauty that are embedded throughout mainstream media. Emily described it this way:

> Barbie, that's pretty, that's the perfect example that everyone uses. So like Barbie, top models, and everything, we all see—we always see those kind of [people], they're all amazing, … [on] magazines or television and stuff like that, it's mostly really, really awesome people and, like, they're really pretty and really like skinny and everything, they're perfect.

Moreover, they are also uniformly underweight. As Monica noted, "Well, magazines and stuff, it's like weight loss is the whole idea of 'get into your bikini bod by the summer'. That's all they support. They don't support anything else. Not everybody in the world is

ninety pounds kind of thing." Clare agreed: "Um, uh, in like the tabloids, I guess, they like kind of freak if somebody gains five pounds. It's kind of ridiculous."

Cassandra argued that "everything in ads is more directed towards girls" and girls are encouraged to buy products to look like "all those beautiful women who have all these professional people doing their hair." Cassandra went on to say that girls are told, "'If I get this, I'll look like Halle Berry.' And you get this, you're like, 'Oh my God, I'm not looking like Halle Berry.' So you're trying everything …. So I don't know, girls are just … I don't know … just have to look good …. It's just the way we work, I guess …. "

Again, this pressure is highly gendered. Participants argued that girls are not only subjected to more messages about their bodies than boys are, they are also taught to compete with each other for male attention. And the way to win the competition is to emulate the kinds of femininity that they see performed in media. As Emily noted:

> Emily: There's more pressure for the girls [than] for the guys, um, there's a lot of pressure which is put on the girls, and we often see it on the television and everything like that ….
> Researcher: Television and what else? What else is "everything like that"?
> Emily: So, uh, and us girls, we're trying to be like that because we know guys are more interested in those kind of people and everything, um. So we're really more, like, aware of that, but also the guys, the guys, they – them, um, then it's, um, I don't know, they're more at ease about themselves.

Alessandra (age 21) pointed the finger at music videos, movies, television shows, and magazines. For example, music videos "have a man, who is perhaps fully clothed or maybe has his shirt off, he's rapping and then next to him are women in bikinis. OK. So the women are just objects, they're just complementary, he's the centre focal point and the women are just ornaments around him." In like vein, Alessandra also said:

> What does *Cosmo* tell you about being a woman? That your whole, that being a woman is about how well you can please guys. Like, uh, how to look beautiful in the summer, how to

> please your man, 101 ways to I don't even wanna mention it. You know, so I'm thinking that, OK, to be a good woman I need to know how to do all these disgusting acts, I need to know how to be beautiful, I need to know how to lose weight, that's a big important one, if you're not skinny then no one is going to love you, that's what every magazine is about, "'oh she gained ten pounds'."

Interestingly, participants indicated that social media only makes the pressure to be "beautiful" worse. The "like" function means that each image they post is judged by their peers, and certain images are more likely than others to receive positive attention, especially from boys. Being "pretty" and "a little sexy" will attract a certain level of approval, but girls who post revealing or highly sexualized images are likely to receive the most likes: "I used to think, oh cool, I got ten likes and then you look at the girls who look revealing and they have fifty [from guys] and you're, like, oh I wonder why" (Nicole).

The peer surveillance they experienced also taught them to look for external male validation, and the easiest way to attain that validation was to conform to gendered stereotypes. This was best illustrated by their discussion of confidence. When asked why girls would take the risk of harsh judgment by posting a lingerie shot or some other sexualized pose, the response was universal—it was because the girl was "confident." But when their understanding of confidence was probed, they explained that once a girl posts a shot like that, she will typically watch it closely. If it receives at least ten likes in the first ten minutes, then the girl is confident. If it does not, then she immediately removes the photo and feels humiliated.

However, even when girls successfully attract male attention, the attention itself often sets them up for conflict with other girls. As Cassandra explained:

> They are going to get feedback like, "Wow, you're hot." Definitely from guys. "Wow, you're sexy!" "Damn, what I would do if I was there," and, like, all that kind of stuff. And from girls, you're gonna get, um … from their best friends, probably, "Oh my God, you look gorgeous! You look so skinny!" And you're gonna get from girls that don't like her, "Wow, you're a slut!" you know, like, "You're nothing but a whore!" like, "Put some clothes on!" So like, it's different. It depends on who's gonna comment.

Jill illustrated how this could easily escalate into conflict:

> "A girl, let's say she's, I don't know, with a bunch of guys in a sexual pose, or … has tons of booze around her, or something. Someone will write a comment that will be, like, kind of subtle but showing that it's inappropriate, and a lot of people will join in, and you can get, like, up to seventy-five comments and everyone's joining in and fighting."

This competition between girls can be intense and highly personal. When Cassandra was in high school, for example, she was "desperate" to be friends with the group of people she considered to be the most popular, and did "everything"—paying close attention to selecting fashionable clothes, carefully applying makeup, and mimicking fashionable hairstyles—to fit in. A schoolmate posted a comment on a photo of her on the social media page of one of the popular girls, saying "Hahaha, love having friends that make you look good." When she asked the popular girl what it meant, she was told, "Oh, I have you around to make me look good because you're bigger than me and you're uglier than me." Cassandra, who was 14 years old at the time, was so devastated that she "struggled with depression … started cutting, that kind of stuff."

The presence of "more girls everywhere … trying to put, like, the prettiest girls on magazines and stuff" (Lynda) on social media also increases the pressure to conform to the stereotype. Monica noted, "I don't know, sometimes, it'll make you feel like crap. It's like, just again setting in, why can't I look like that? Why can't I be like that? Why don't I have these friends? Why am I not popular? And just drains everybody else." Even when the image is "fake," the public approval garnered through a high "likes" count engenders insecurity: " … [T]here's [city] girls on Facebook … they'll have like five hundred likes on some of their pictures and … I'll sit there and like notice it at first and be, like, this person has to be fake 'cause they're so pretty and they're so Photoshopped … but whenever you see them on Facebook you're, like, oh my God, they are so flawless."

Cindy indicated that that kind of "perfection" is discouraging because "you're like, oh man, I don't look like that. Um, but I could someday, you know, but you just, you don't right now. So you might get down on yourself because of that." She felt that the ubiquitous presence of diet ads, weight loss tips, and other "beauty aids,"

on social media, as well as pages posted by models and clothing companies, created an overwhelming desire to "change my body." Cindy was particularly upset when she found this type of content on Pinterest. For her, "it's a page where you can post things you wish you could have or you wish you could do or places you wish you could go to, so it's, it's great. But it's awful at the exact same time … also kind of sad because a Pinterest page is for a diet and weight loss." She concluded, "I think social media is great at giving girls this fantasy world but at the same time I think it's also really easy to sort of make them feel really bad about themselves."

Revisiting Privacy, Publicity, and Equality in the Virtual Bedroom

The eGirls findings suggest that girls' experiences on social media are complex and contradictory, in ways that both reflect and reiterate themes raised by Milford and Kanai in earlier chapters in this volume. At first blush, the participants' descriptions of their profiles resonate strongly with Lincoln's description of the bedroom as "a haven of memorabilia"[20] that "tell[s] stories of a teenage girl's youth cultural interests and, ultimately, cultural identity."[21] In addition, the hybridity that Lincoln celebrates enables girls to project a carefully constructed self-image into the public sphere. The emancipatory potential of this hybridity is most easily realized in the world of work; our participants were confident about their ability to use social media to present themselves as (potential) employees and entrepreneurs. This is a particularly encouraging use of social media, especially given the fact that in 2012 there were 950,000 self-employed women in Canada[22] and just under half of all small to medium-sized enterprises were entirely or partly owned by women.[23]

However, when the eGirls participants stepped out of the role of economic actor and sought to express themselves and interact socially as *girls becoming women*, the crossover between the private and public domains in the virtual bedroom opened them up to harsh judgment if they failed to conform to a very narrow performance of a sexualized – but not too sexualized – female body. The participants' preoccupation with the gendered body and sexuality is "unsurprising, as gender and sexuality to some degree determine our conception of adolescence."[24] As Levy-Warren points out, the work of middle adolescence in particular is to integrate the change from a relatively

ambiguous body to a post-puberty body that is unmistakably shaped in a gendered way.[25]

Their interest in popular culture is also unsurprising; it is well established in the literature that "media and popular culture offer social discourses that play a key role in [adolescent] identity construction."[26] However, the harsh judgment the participants were exposed to in the public sphere was not mitigated by networked access to the sphere, or the fluidity between the private bedroom and the public social media site. I would suggest that the easy flow between private and public amplified the potential for conflict and constraint, for two reasons.

First, the crossover is not limited to the girls themselves. The relative privacy of the early days of the internet provided girls with liminal spaces where they could avoid surveillance and the appropriation of voice, primarily because adults did not think to look for them there.[27] However, through a confluence of policies that promote the commercialization of online spaces and policies that seek to "protect" girls from online risks, girls are now subjected to high levels of online surveillance.[28] This surveillance, especially on the part of parents and school administrators, constrains the kinds of identity experimentation available to them on social media,[29] particularly because the corporate design of the sites makes it increasingly difficult to control which audience sees which performance.[30] In other words, the hybrid nature of the space makes it easy for adults to ignore the "Do Not Enter!" sign on the virtual bedroom door, especially in the name of safety, and invisibly watch girls as they go about the business of identity play. This shuts down the potential for transgressive and resistive performances because girls are unable to obtain the privacy they need to individuate.[31]

Second, although social media do provide girls with easy access to a wide range of popular culture products, they also provide commercial producers and marketers with easy access to the girls themselves. Intense commercial surveillance appropriates the cultural products girls publish there and uses the insight they provide into girls' insecurities and dreams to steer social interaction on the site[32] through commercial practices like native advertising and behavioural targeting. This not only reproduces the mainstream media stereotypes that are linked to poor body image[33] and the sexualization of girls,[34] it embeds these stereotypes directly into girls' sociotechnical environment. This constrains girls' ability to "pick and mix"[35] the

cultural images to bring to the bedroom, and instead enables the corporation housing the social media site to wallpaper the images of its choosing directly onto the bedroom wall. This is particularly troubling because the power of these stereotypes may be amplified on social media since girls are encouraged to inhabit them there, much as they do the virtual avatars in video gaming that have been linked to lower self-efficacy[36] and higher acceptance of rape myths.[37]

The eGirls participants were well aware of the negative effects of media stereotypes and sought to avoid gendered conflicts by walking the fine line between "a little bit sexy" and "slut." However, as Durham notes, adolescent girls are under a high degree of social pressure to conform to "the norms of femininity" and typically judge themselves through the lens of peer acceptance.[38] It is accordingly

> … unreasonable to expect adolescent girls—who are developmentally at a life stage in which social and peer approval are of paramount importance—to be able to produce individually oppositional readings of media messages that would translate into a coherent and robust lived opposition. Isolation is the ultimate terror in girls' lives: peer approval plays an inordinately important role in their socialization.[39]

To avoid this isolation, a number of our participants chose to leave social media—especially Facebook—for extended periods of time. By reasserting the firm boundaries around the bedroom as a site of private creativity and reflection, they were able to tone down the "drama" and avoid both the surveillance and the ridicule[40] that marked their experiences in online spaces. In many ways, going off line re-establishes the conditions of Lincoln's bedroom as a space where "the teenager can exert control over what level of 'the public' can filter into the bedroom space"[41] through zones "oriented by the social activities that take place within the space."[42]

When this retreat is a conscious rejection of the politics of the public sphere, it can be emancipatory in its own right. As Harris writes:

> Rather than seeing young women's retreat back into the private as a simple failure of access to or possibilities within the public, I would suggest that this has been an active choice on the part of young women refusing to participate in particular constructions

> of girlhood. Specifically, they are rejecting the commodification and depoliticization of girl culture.[43]

However, we can also expand the potential for resistance by regulating the corporations that design, control, and mine the sociotechnical spaces that girls inhabit. Requiring corporations to provide girls with better technical tools that allow them to control the lines between their multiple audiences will help them better manage the fluid movement of cultural capital between the private sphere of creativity and identity play and the public sphere of performativity and resistance. Restricting native advertising and behavioural targeting on social media will help insulate girls from the negative effects of media stereotyping and push back against commercial surveillance. But perhaps most importantly, we need to create non-commercial sociotechnical spaces where girls can express themselves and project resistive identities into the public sphere.

The lessons of the virtual bedroom remind us of the resilience of both patriarchal restrictions and girls' ability to challenge those restrictions. Simple access to the public sphere has not been a complete corrective, because the commodification of online spaces privileges a narrow performance of "appropriate" femininity in order to be recognized in a "visual/gendered economy of representation for unknown numbers of watching others."[44] By focusing on empowering girls to control when they move from the private sphere to the public sphere and carving out commercial-free zones, we may be better able to realize the potential of the virtual bedroom to position girls as resistive media producers and distributors.

Notes

1 Sian Lincoln, "Teenage Girls' 'Bedroom Culture': Codes Versus Zones," in *After Subculture: Critical Commentaries in Contemporary Youth Culture*, eds. Andy Bennett & Keith Kahn-Harris (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004), 95; Jacqueline Reid-Walsh & Claudia Mitchell, "Girls' Web Sites: A Virtual 'Room of One's Own'?," in *All About the Girl: Culture, Power and Identity*, ed. Anita Harris (New York: Routledge, 2004), 175.

2 Angela McRobbie & Jenny Garber, "Girls and Subcultures," in *Resistance through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*, eds. Stuart Hall & Tony Jefferson (London: Harper Collins Academic, 1976), 112.

3 Anita Harris, "Revisiting Bedroom Culture: New Spaces for Young Women's Politics," *Hecate* 27:1 (2001): 131.
4 Jena McGill, "What Have You Done for Me Lately? Reflections on Redeeming Privacy for Battered Women," in *Lessons from the Identity Trail: Anonymity, Privacy and Identity in a Networked Society*, eds. Ian Kerr, Valerie Steeves & Carol Lucock (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 165.
5 Reid-Walsh & Mitchell, *supra* note 1 at 175. There are indications that girls continue to be subjected to more parental control than boys when it comes to accessing networked media (see Johnson, Chapter XIII). Navigating parental control with respect to media may be particularly challenging for girls from some immigrant families (see Ndengevingoma, Chapter IV).
6 Angela McRobbie & Jenny Garber, "Girls and Subcultures," in *Feminism and Youth Culture: From Jackie to Just Seventeen*, ed. Angela McRobbie (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1991), 112.
7 Lincoln, *supra* note 1 at 95.
8 It is, however, interesting to consider, whether, and if so, how, the "postfeminist discipline through feminine surveillance" that Kanai suggests in Chapter III frames girls' self-representations online was also operational in the less mediated bedroom space theorized by McRobbie & Garber, and later by Lincoln, *supra* note 1.
9 Lincoln, *supra* note 1 at 95–103.
10 Michele White, "Too Close to See: Men, Women and Webcams," *New Media & Society* 5:1 (2003): 8.
11 Teri Senft, *Camgirls, Celebrity and Community in the Age of Social Networks* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 84; Krista Scott-Dixon, "Turbo Chicks: Talkin' 'bout My Generation: Third Wave Feminism Is Comfortable with Contradiction Because That's the Only Way the World Makes Sense," *Herizons* 16:2 (2002): 16; Hille Koskela, "Webcams, TV Shows and Mobile Phones: Empowering Exhibitionism," *Surveillance and Society* 2:2/3 (2004): 211.
12 Reid-Walsh & Mitchell, *supra* note 1 at 174.
13 *Ibid.*, at 174.
14 Mary Celeste Kearney, "Productive Spaces: Girls' Bedrooms as Sites of Cultural Production," *Journal of Children and Media* 1:2 (2007): 127.
15 *Ibid.*, at 138, emphasis in original. For further analysis of these claims, see Milford, Chapter II and Kanai, Chapter III.
16 For a rural/urban comparative analysis, see Burkell & Saginur, Chapter V.
17 Our rural adult focus group included Catlin (19), Laura (18), Trish (18), and Brianne (20). Our rural minor focus group included Courtney (17), Chelsea (17), Paula (17), Beth (16), and Josie (16). Our urban adult focus

group included Keira (21), Donna (19), Jill (20), Andrea (22), Ashley (18), and Kathleen (20). Our urban minor focus group included Vicky (17), Eve (16), Abby (17), Jacquelyn (17), Lauryn (17), Monique (16), and Jane (16). Our rural adult interviewees were Cassandra (19), Becky (19), and Amelia (18). Our rural minor interviewees were Monica (16), Lynda (17), and Nicole (16). Our urban adult interviewees were Alessandra (21), Mackenzie (20), and Cindy (20). Our urban minor interviewees were Alicia (17), Clare (16), and Josée (15).

18 Kearney, *supra* note 14 at 138.

19 A finding remarkably similar to those discussed in Kanai, Chapter III.

20 Lincoln, *supra* note 1 at 102.

21 Lincoln, *supra* note 1 at 96.

22 Statistics Canada, "Labour Force Survey," (Statistics Canada, 2012).

23 Sonya Gulati, "Canada's Small and Medium-Sized Business Owners: Diverse Society in a Microcosm," *TD Economics Special Report* (2012).

24 Meenakshi Gigi Durham, "Constructing the 'New Ethnicities': Media, Sexuality and Diaspora Identity in the Lives of South Asian Immigrant Girls," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 21:2 (2004): 142.

25 Marsha H. Levy-Warren, *The Adolescent Journey: Development, Identity Formation, and Psychotherapy* (New York: Jason Aronson, 1977), xvii.

26 Durham, *supra* note 24 at 141.

27 Harris, *supra* note 3 at 132; MediaSmarts, *Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase I: Parent and Youth Focus Groups* (Ottawa: MediaSmarts, 2000), 23; MediaSmarts, *Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase II: Focus Groups* (Ottawa: MediaSmarts, 2004), 15.

28 Valerie Steeves & Jane Bailey, "Will the Real Digital Girl Please Stand Up?," in *New Visualities, New Technologies: The New Ecstasy of Communication*, eds. Hille Koskela & John Macgregor Wise (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2013), 43; see also Bailey, Chapter I; Milford, Chapter II; Kanai, Chapter III.

29 Valerie Steeves, *Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Talking to Youth and Parents about Life Online* (Ottawa: MediaSmarts, 2012), 4.

30 Valerie Steeves, *Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Online Privacy, Online Publicity* (Ottawa: MediaSmarts, 2014), 36.

31 Valerie Steeves, "Swimming in the Fishbowl: Young People, Identity and Surveillance in Networked Spaces," in *Digitizing Identities*, eds. Irma van der Ploeg & Jason Pridmore (London: Routledge, 2015, in press).

32 Valerie Steeves, "It's Not Child's Play: The Online Invasion of Children's Privacy," *University of Ottawa Law and Technology Journal* 3:1 (2006): 174; Valerie Steeves, "The Watched Child: Surveillance in Three Online Playgrounds," in *Rights of the Child: Proceedings of the International Conference, Ottawa 2007*, eds. Tara Collins, Rachel Grondin, Veronica Pinero, Marie Pratte & Marie-Claude Roberge (Montreal: Wilson & Lafleur, 2008), 118.

33 Shelly Grabe, Monique L. Ward & Janet Shibley Hyde, "The Role of the Media in Body Image Concerns Among Women: A Meta-Analysis of Experimental and Correlational Studies," *Psychological Bulletin* 134:3 (2008): 460.
34 Rebecca L. Collins, "Content Analysis of Gender Roles in Media: Where Are We Now and Where Should We Go?," *Sex Roles* 64:3–4 (2011): 295.
35 Lincoln, *supra* note 1 at 98.
36 Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz & Dana Mastro, "The Effects of the Sexualization of Female Video Game Characters on Gender Stereotyping and Female Self-Concept," *Sex Roles* 61:11–12 (2009): 808.
37 Jesse Fox & Jeremy N. Bailenson, "Virtual Virgins and Vamps: The Effects of Exposure to Female Characters' Sexualized Appearance and Gaze in an Immersive Virtual Environment," *Sex Roles* 61:3–4 (2009): 148.
38 Meenakshi Gigi Durham, "Articulating Adolescent Girls' Resistance to Patriarchal Discourse in Popular Media," *Women's Studies in Communication* 22:2 (1999): 222.
39 *Ibid*.
40 Kandy James, "'I Just Gotta Have My Own Space!': The Bedroom as a Leisure Site for Adolescent Girls," *Journal of Leisure Research* 33:1 (2001): 74.
41 Lincoln, *supra* note 1 at 96.
42 Lincoln, *supra* note 1 at 97.
43 Harris, *supra* note 3 at 133.
44 See Kanai, Chapter III.

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