CHAPTER VII

Girls and Online Drama: Aggression, Surveillance, or Entertainment?

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Introduction

Drama as a concept is difficult to define. For most scholars and individuals, it generally includes some heightened emotional behaviour or words, some aggressive "lashing out" or attempt to involve others in what is occurring, and some connection to or interpretation of everyday events or words. Drama may include "spreading rumors, social exclusion, and threats of withdrawal of acceptance and love."[1] Drama is often used, especially for young people, as shorthand for what they regard as indirect, relational, and social aggression. According to Coyne et al, relational aggression can best be understood as the behaviour of individuals that intentionally hurts others; however, it can also be understood as inadvertent, with the goal being not to hurt others but to draw attention to oneself.[2] The increasing degree to which internet-connected technologies are incorporated into young people's lives has broadened the sphere within which drama takes place. Not only are the lines blurred between online and offline life in the classroom, but the same has happened in their personal lives. As difficult as the concept has been to define, drama on networked platforms creates new challenges and opportunities for new research.

The goal of this chapter is to query the meaning and purpose of online drama in the lives of young women and girls in order to

provide an understanding of online drama that can inform policy discussions. We use as our data the interviews and focus group discussions from the eGirls Project discussed in other chapters in this volume.[3] 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.[4] 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. Participants agreed to the audiotaping and transcription of the interviews and focus groups, with use of pseudonyms and deletion of all identifying information.[5]

The topic of drama was prevalent in all the interviews and the focus groups. Our participants were acutely aware of instances of drama, were concerned about its negative effects on other individuals and on the social group itself, were intrigued by the various ways in which individuals responded to drama, and were puzzled by the connections between drama online and offline. The distinction between drama and gossip is an important one to address up front. We conceptualize gossip as one potential manifestation of drama, but we do not intend to conflate their meanings. This point will be addressed in greater detail throughout the paper as necessary.

We use three different conceptual lenses or frameworks for analyzing the drama we find in the eGirls focus groups and interviews – the frame of social/relational aggression, the frame of surveillance, and the frame of entertainment – in order to better understand the dynamics and meaning of these dramatic interactions among girls and young women. We chose and created the three separate

frames based on the evidence present in the transcripts. The way the young women used, spoke of, and related to drama seemed to largely fit under these separate conceptualizations. As will be discussed throughout the chapter, they all touch upon different aspects and thus tease out nuances and richness that have their own policy implications. The chapter first examines the connections, as well as the similarities and differences, between online and offline drama; second, briefly reviews the literature regarding drama in the lives of girls and young women through the three conceptual lenses noted above; third, provides evidence from our data that reflects each framework; and finally, concludes with a discussion of how each framework increases understanding of what is occurring when girls and young women engage in (and are exposed to) online drama and corresponding policy implications as we see them.

Online and Offline Overlaps and Disconnects

Drawing lines between online and offline activities generally (and drama in particular) has become more difficult and may soon be impossible. Initially some scholars and commentators envisioned the internet as a "place" separate from the physical world, as reflected in terms such as "meatspace" and "cyberspace." Rheingold reflected on both the positive and negative possibilities of a "virtual community" that contained the prospect of a separate existence from that of one's physical community and offered individuals ways of transforming their identities.[6] Turkle suggested that "life on the screen" offered individuals a space in which to play with different identities, personal styles, and behaviours.[7] Over time it became clear that the online and offline worlds are less parallel universes than ones that intersect and now may be totally integrated, given the ubiquity of online devices and their multiple uses. The advent of the social networking sites, where people connect mostly with offline acquaintances and other people with whom they already share some kind of relationship, means that people expect to see "true" representations.

The fluidity between the online space and other social environments seems to escalate the drama that occurs in one environment and then quickly moves to the other. While one might expect that online personas will now generally depict accurate representations of the offline self, the online version now also has to adapt and contend with technological and emotional limitations in how one can display and interpret content and their meanings, as illustrated below:

> Brianne (age 20): Because you spend the whole—if you're in school with them and you're there and in all your classes, you're already talking to them all day, then you go home and you're still talking to them all day, then it's like, somebody says one thing and takes it wrong, or they're trying to make a funny comment and you don't think it's funny, then the next thing you know, it's like, you're in this big fight. So sometimes you just have to separate, like, your alliances—like, who do you talk to on Facebook or, like, who to chat with. And who to, just, not.

Our respondents, especially the older respondents,[8] were frustrated by the fluidity of drama across the online and offline worlds and identified a desire to separate the two because "there's no proper emotions displayed through Facebook because a lot of things can be very vague and misinterpreted, and that kind of thing I don't like, so generally I try to stay away from serious conversation on Facebook and try to leave it to in person" (Becky, age 19). The key problem in the online environment was the room for misinterpretation and misunderstanding, whereas, "I can look at a person I can see how they act emotionally when I say something verbally and I can catch the mistake right then and there" (Becky, age 19).

Moreover, our respondents noted that the interpersonal filtering that occurs in the offline world gets lost in online spaces, as individuals do not seem compelled to adhere to the same type of social graces that are expected in offline experiences. As Caitlin (age 19) notes, "Like my friend, she is the worst person on Facebook. She'll be so mean to you on Facebook, but the second she sees you face-to-face, everything's perfect …. " Unlike talking about someone behind their back in offline spaces, such comments on Facebook are generally visible to wider audiences, and the audience—or possibility of an audience—may play a role in the online drama.

Conceptual Lenses

In order to better understand the role, meaning, and implications of online drama for girls and young women, and informed by our focus group and interview data, we use three different conceptual lenses. Each lens highlights somewhat different elements of drama and casts drama in slightly different ways, which we maintain are all important. As noted above, the three lenses are social/relational

aggression, surveillance, and entertainment. We view our analysis as compatible with Marwick and boyd's definition of drama as "performative, interpersonal conflict that takes place in front of an active, engaged audience, often on social media."[9] Each of our lenses taps a component of their definition with the "mean girls" lens focused on the "interpersonal conflict"; the surveillance lens focused on the "in front of," in that a choice is made to actively watch (or put something "in front of" you); and the entertainment lens focused on the "engaged [but sometimes passive] audience." We believe that disaggregating these separate components will help to better understand the phenomenon of online drama and thereby to craft better policy responses.

The social/relational aggression lens is often associated with the "mean girls" construction, which casts drama as interpersonal, even while categorizing it as a particular kind of social phenomenon. As Ringrose argues, the preoccupation with female adolescent relational aggression reflects a postfeminist response to feminist critiques of notions of girls as vulnerable and to critiques of male-biased models of developmental psychology, which resulted in a focus on "mean girls" as the representation of girls' aggression. "Mean girls" bully, gossip, manipulate, exploit, and lead victims to feel ostracized and, in some cases, driven to suicide. Ringrose notes that the result of this line of thinking has been to view girl power and girl aggression in pathological ways based on white, middle-class expectations, and solutions to such meanness also reflected in liberal thinking about preserving white, middle-class femininity.

The surveillance lens takes a broader approach to online drama, seeing it as an instance of general social curiosity, monitoring, and norm-setting, which is facilitated by the architecture of the online world. Online drama involves watching others and watching oneself for purposes of checking on someone in order to hold them accountable or to judge their behaviour.[10] The surveillance lens highlights both the "stalking" that occurs as friends and others actively watch those on social networking sites, as well as the self-presentation and identity formation that involves one watching and judging oneself online.

Finally, the entertainment lens views online drama as something to be watched for its emotive draw or appeal. Uses and gratifications theory from communication literature illuminates the importance of the role of individual motivations for using social

media. One of the main directions of current research employing the uses and gratifications theory focuses on the "effectiveness of different media (or content) to meet an individual's needs."[11] Of the many other gratifications sought by individuals, one is entertainment. In this case, girls and young women literally watch the dramatic unfoldings of their peers' lives and comment on them in much the same way as they would a TV show or movie—for the enjoyment or pleasure it brings. This is sometimes referred to as "stalking," but following someone's activities for entertainment is passive, somewhat akin to "rubbernecking" or watching a fight in a school cafeteria. "Stalking" for surveillance purposes is more intentional and active. Another key aspect of the entertainment lens is the link to gossip. As Fine and Rosnow note, entertainment is one of the main functions of gossip, especially when a friendly relationship already exists between parties.[12]

Once these three frames were conceptualized, we re-analyzed the transcripts and found that each lens drew our attention to different elements of what the girls and young women termed online drama. In the sections that follow, we demonstrate what we found as we turned each lens back to our data. In the final section we compare the frameworks, provide preliminary thoughts on how each lens may add to and better qualify our understanding of online drama, and consider how these different lenses might similarly or differently inform policy discussions.

Social/Relational Aggression Frame

This lens is the one that is most often used in discussing both online and offline emotionally charged interactions of girls and young women. The term itself highlights both the gendered and also the "adolescent" character of the interactions. The term does, however, also convey the sense that such interactions are intended to be harmful or critical—and that there is a target whom one wants to marginalize. The somewhat typical logic is reflected in this exchange in one of our focus groups:

> Abby (age 17): Girls are just so good at pointing out what people are just so insecure about, and feel bad about, like.
> Eve (age 16): We get in your head, we know.
> Abby (age 17): Psychological pain [laughing].

> Eve (age 16): I don't know, we know how to get into each other's head, it's weird, but like we just know.
> Jacquelyn (age 17): 'Cause we know what would affect us.

The nature and intensity of the social/relational aggression also seem to vary somewhat by the online site itself, some of which is dependent upon specific affordances and limitations of the architecture.[13] For example, in a focus group, one girl (Lauryn, age 17) noted that "a lot of the time, like, on Twitter it will be more like people attacking like your character, like saying like you're so over dramatic or you're such a dummy, you're so like stupid, more stuff like that. Where if it's on Facebook, it's more pictures. It's going to be a lot more, you're fat, you're ugly. It really depends on the situation that you're in." The other girls in the focus group elaborated on this type of interaction:

> Abby (age 17): Yeah, like if someone puts up a picture and they're all dressed up and they have their makeup done, and you put, why are you trying, you just killed, like, their whole ….
> Eve (age 16): Like she felt so happy about those pictures, like, oh, my hair ….
> Abby (age 17): Yeah, like you put the effort in and you think you'll get something good out of it, then they put, why you are trying, for no reason like.
> Lauryn (age 17): But, then no one says anything about it, "why are you trying" and no comments under that.
> Abby (age 17): Because then it looks like you're on the person's side.

There is a distinct power relationship that is being negotiated in these interactions, as this quote from one of our interviews illustrates:

> Eve (age 16): In general, even girls can be like, you know, power-seeking people, when you're like, in a position when you can get more, you're going to go for it, and if you know that you can get into that person's face to get more, you're still going to go for it. Some people will do anything just to go, go push them out of the way or anything. So just to be that tough person you're going, you know, [to] put that other person down and like, push them aside and show them that you, you're tougher.

The power and social aggressive elements of these interactions are related to behaviour that school administrators and policies call cyberbullying. While the parallels are clear, the social/relational aggression frame is meant to help us better understand elements of this behaviour beyond the capacity of most definitions of cyberbullying alone. Through interviews and surveys, a study by Lenhart et al provides evidence that the vast majority of students witness "mean or cruel behaviour on social media."[14] In a recent report by MediaSmarts on young Canadians in the Internet age, 37 percent of students report having been the object of online mean or cruel behaviour, while only 23 percent admit to having done or said something mean to someone else online.[15] Moreover, the report highlights inconsistencies with generally accepted principles about the gendered aspect of online mean and cruel behaviour, stating that boys take part in such behaviour more often than girls. Marwick and boyd point out the ways that young people distinguish "drama" or "punking and pranking" from bullying.[16] They find that the dichotomous and protagonist/antagonist nature and labels that coincide with the latter may be too clear-cut for students. By sticking with terms like drama, punking, and pranking, young people are able to maintain a certain level of ambiguity and avoid prescriptive, adult labels of "bully" or "victim."[17]

With specific regard to the behaviour portrayed by girls, some scholars have also argued that in participating in aggression that is indirect or less obvious, girls avoid being labelled as deviant.[18] Related to this, Oppliger surveys the vast number of typical "mean girl" characters who permeate through TV serials.[19] The TV shows and characters exhibit an element of norm-setting by demonstrating possible models of acceptable behaviour. Our respondents similarly viewed social/relational aggressive behaviour in an explanatory social context, such as advertising and beauty ideals or competition for male attention. They were indeed aware of this as gendered behaviour, positioning and competing for male attention.[20] Regarding gendered responses to interpersonal drama, Paula (age 17) concludes that "boys are a little more direct about it. Like, it's just more, like childish stuff, but girls get more, like mean about it, like, talk about personal stuff online." Others from the focus group agree that girls "backstab" other girls on Facebook, whereas boys will publicly call for offline solutions (possibly altercations) to online drama.

Another reason that our respondents appear to avoid the cyberbullying label is that it seems related to a phase of adolescent development, while drama itself seems to occur across different age cohorts. One of our interviewees (Becky, age 19) explained it as follows:

> like my sister, when she was younger she was cyberbullied, and I'm sure when I was younger, too, I was cyberbullied. You know the reason why I say that is 'cause like, when we were younger, it's because there's generally a lot more drama on Facebook. And [it] has to do back with high school, and if you really don't like somebody, it's easier to say it on Facebook than say it straight to their face …. And with, um, because everybody is so uneducated at that young age, I would say because everybody is more ignorant, they're going to not know to walk away from it, like, they continue to fuel the fire.

What does appear to be different in the online world is that the architecture of the sites plays an important role in how girls and young women engage in drama. As noted above, in one focus group, Lauryn (age 17) drew a distinction between Twitter, where words were the currency, and Facebook, where pictures were more often used to depict the drama. In an interview, Amelia (age 18) pointed out that, on Facebook, making fun of someone or starting a rumour will occur, but that would not be posted on Twitter; instead, on Twitter "you don't see the actual hurt, like, happening but you'll see the effect of it afterwards." The limit on characters confines the role of Twitter in young people's social lives. Although requiring an authentic identity, Facebook allows more freedom in engaging with both friends and acquaintances in a more visual and blatant manner. How open one is, and how much of an overlap one allows between close friends and others, depends on how one sets one's privacy settings. Interestingly, we did not find the girls and young women in our study talking about permissions and privacy settings in the context of their discussions about online drama as much as we expected.[21]

One might expect that the online architecture would be more individually – and identity-wise – based than in the offline world, but as Monique (age 16) noted, groups are able to challenge that by having "a whole group of girls formulating this one text or tweet or whatever. Um, it's a lot more having to do with social standing and

positioning, so you want your friends to be supporting you … we need that support, that social sort of assurance."

Another challenge posed by online architecture is that one might not be communicating with the person one thinks one is communicating with. For example, Cassandra (age 19) noted, "Me and my friend Mariah got into a fight, and she stole my friend Celine's phone and she was texting me off my friend Celine's phone bitching at me, and I'm thinking Celine is mad at me, but it's my other friend."

The girls and young women we talked to identified two ways of dealing with certain kinds of online drama. The first is the quite traditional method of "going to the principal," supplemented by removing oneself from Facebook or unfriending someone. In a MediaSmarts report, students found cyberbullying easier to deal with because it left behind an easy-to-follow trail so often absent in face-to-face bullying.[22] A focus group participant, Keira (age 21), for example, recalled an instance of an online fight where a student printed out an entire conversation in order to bring it and show the high school principal. Unfortunately the MediaSmarts report also noted that students felt that the schools (teachers and other authorities) took many of the general interactions among young people and redefined them as bullying.[23]

Another of our interviewees reported a similar instance when two girls had a "big long fight on Facebook" and printed off the Facebook pages and "ended up taking them to the principal because she was threatening her and threatening to, you know, do things like stab her with a knife if she ever came close." The conflict stopped, not necessarily because the principal intervened, but because "they blocked each other from Facebook … [and] took out the social media aspect" (Becky, 19). The second way of dealing with online drama is also similar to offline methods, that is, by establishing a boundary—"to make it private" (Monica, age 16) by texting or talking face-to-face. This instance of boundary-setting also demonstrates another way in which young people are focused on the importance of audiences. A different MediaSmarts report on online privacy showcases how young people actively block friends more often than family members.[24]

Similarly, after two close friends drifted apart somewhat after going to college, one misinterpreted a subsequent online posting, and the friends resolved it by taking each other off Facebook—as relayed in the following:

> Cassandra (age 19): Um … the situation before college was, I was in college for about a month, and I kind of lost, you know, contact with friends here, you know, busy doing my own thing. And my friend posted something, "Wow, it's amazing how people go off to college and totally forget about their best friends." And I thought it was about me, so I commented, like, I sent her a private message, and I was like, "Is that comment about me because like, you know, why don't you just tell me straight up?" She's like, she didn't comment back. I was like, whatever, I'm gonna delete [her] because I'm not gonna deal with that. And then it just started a big fight.
> Researcher: Now was that a really super close friend?
> Cassandra: Yeah. She, she's my best friend.
> Researcher: Is she still your best friend?
> Cassandra : Yeah. We're, we're friends again.
> Researcher: Yeah.
> Cassandra : But we don't have each other on Facebook.

The social/relational aggression frame emphasizes both the passive and active elements of online drama. As the next sections will demonstrate, this conceptual lens may miss other aspects of online drama.

Surveillance Frame

An expanding literature seeks to understand the nature, degree, and consequences of surveillance activities in online environments, and specifically on social networking sites (SNSs). Scholars, like Koskela, have demonstrated how the traditional panopticon can translate into surveillance of urban spaces and then of cyberspace as well.[25] In the case of online spaces, surveillance is not only practiced by authorities, by those in power or seeking power, but it is also performed by the majority of members of SNSs. In fact, young people talk about Facebook "stalking" as an everyday occurrence. Lampe et al presented a study in which college freshman were surveyed regarding their use of Facebook.[26] After keeping in touch with high school friends, respondents indicated that looking at profiles of individuals they met in offline social situations was the second most frequent reason to use Facebook. This behaviour has been called Facebook stalking, with this type of surveillance constraining the capacity of girls and young women to fully participate online, due to the

possibility of unknown observers and unintended consequences.[27] The surveillance activities described by the respondents include social curiosity, the desire to remain up to date, norm-setting, and identity formation and self-presentation.

The surveillance can be between family members, friends, current or former romantic partners, acquaintances, and so on. The interviews and focus groups most frequently brought up issues of peer surveillance. To a large extent, peer surveillance was based on curiosity. For example, Courtney (age 17) reported, "when you see your boyfriend liking, like, naked girl photos and stuff like that. That's another drama thing to do with photos, is when you can actually see when people like something, and you're like, 'Ohhhh. They like that?'"

This curiosity has been defined by Hartung and Renner as the "desire for new information and knowledge," thus encapsulating a benign element to the behaviour.[28]

Another important motivator in peer surveillance was to be up to date: "Yeah, like, at my locker, my friends will be like, 'Did you hear what this person said to this person last night on Facebook?' and then I'll go on Facebook and check it out" (Paula, age 17). Being up to date also enabled one to check the veracity of what was being talked about: "So I know what's going on. Who's saying what, make sure nobody … so I know the story kinda too, so. When they're explaining back to me, I'll be like, um, you actually said that" (Monica, age 16).

Peer surveillance appears to play an important role in norm-setting amongst a group. For example, Jill (age 20) reported: "A girl, let's say she's – I don't know, with a bunch of guys in a sexual pose, or drinking a lot – 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 …. " The judging that is enabled through peer surveillance can be somewhat harsh without the larger context in which to place it, as Lauryn (age 17) reports:

> Everything on the internet is so easy to judge. Like, if you see, like, a girl, like a picture of a girl, and she's not really wearing that much makeup, like not that much clothes, but automatically in your head you want to think, oh, she's a slut. But in reality, if you get to know her, she might be one of the nicest girls, she may not be a slut at all. Maybe she's just comfortable taking a

> picture like that, so it's like, I think that, like, people, like, judge it a lot, and they stereotype a lot and you don't know that. Just because a girl is taking a picture in a slutty outfit doesn't mean that she's not doing good things in her life …. Like, I wouldn't want people to judge me at high school just off one picture, just 'cause like, you can see some of my boobs. Like, I don't want people to be, like, oh she's such a slut.

Peer surveillance is also related to girls and young women engaging online mechanisms in their identity formation and self-presentation.[29] While it was not originally the case in the 1990s, the majority of well-known and well-used SNSs now require a certain amount of authenticity, thus limiting the degree to which an individual can "try on" new identities.[30] There is, however, a chance to be selective in the information and the identity that is presented on such SNSs. This is relevant for networking sites like LinkedIn that focus on professional identities as opposed to social and personal connections. Similarly, individuals can be selective in the information they share on the sites themselves. If an individual chooses to keep certain details private, the identity may be authentic but not complete. Our respondents, who were clearly conscious of their evolving identities and the appropriateness of conveying different images to different audiences, used such boundary-setting as a way of controlling parental surveillance, in order to restrict their parents' knowledge of the drama in their lives and even their parents' ability to add more drama by their reactions. This is reflected in the two quotes below:

> Beth (age 16): Well, both my parents have Facebook. They never go on it, but they both tried to add me. Well, my mum hasn't, but my dad is pretty cool. But, still, I wouldn't want him seeing … not what I post, but what people post on my wall. 'Cause, like, my family is really tight in that way, and they'd try to, like, do something about it. And I can handle myself. So it's just—I don't really want them getting themselves into something that is my battle.

And:

> Becky (age 19): Um, mine is, it'll show some more than others, because I did modelling and some of the photos I posted

> are boudoir and, ah, I had negative criticism from my mother. Everybody else loved it, but my mother thought it was light porn in her opinion, and I, I understood that if she didn't want to see that, that was fine.

The architectures of the sites allow surveillance to occur in ways that increase the likelihood or intensity of online drama. For example, many sites provide a feature by which you can monitor whether others have read your post/update:

> Catlin (age 19): And they can see when you read it too, now. It used to be, like, you couldn't tell, and now it says "seen" and it tells you what time they saw your message at. So you know if they're ignoring it or not.

Most of our respondents agreed that they "hated" this feature. As another focus group member noted:

> Paula (age 17): … And, like, I hate the new "seen it at 11:something" [feature on Facebook that tells you at what time something has been read], because then you're, like, and then they're going to get mad, if you've just read it and you don't answer.

Some take this feature into account in deciding how to communicate with someone, also allowing opportunities for more drama. One young woman (Jill, age 20), who wanted to wish her ex-boyfriend happy birthday "sent him a short little message on Facebook, so I'd know if he'd read it or not. Because if it was in a text, you never know if it goes through; text is kind of unreliable. And he did read it, and he never responded. And yeah, it kind of hurt to see that he read it and didn't take the time to respond." Another girl who sent a friend several messages about getting together could tell that her friend had read the messages and ignored them but the message sender (Andrea, age 22) noted that "it's good to know, sometimes, how stupid people are [laughter]."

The surveillance lens highlights the ways in which policing what people are doing, or whether they are responding, or how they are responding can accentuate and intensify what is occurring online. One can use the architecture or technical capacities of online sites to manipulate online drama in ways not easily possible offline. The

policy perspective associated with this lens would logically focus, not on the behaviour of girls and young women, but instead on the policies of the online sites and how much control they afford the user in use of these technical capacities. The next section offers a third frame for viewing online drama – with yet another policy perspective.

Entertainment Frame

An individual's motivation for media use can in part be seen to drive each of the three lenses and the type of drama and the ways they are involved in drama. This may be especially the case when delving into the entertainment lens. In a study looking at Facebook gratifications specifically, Zhang et al identified entertainment as one of the most important.[31] Their study, however, characterized Facebook entertainment as a way of killing time, escaping from work or pressure, or enjoyment through playing games and other applications. In this respect, the present study underlines the need for future research to include aspects of audience engagement and a more well-rounded concept of entertainment in the understanding of online drama.[32] Enjoyment from watching drama unfold may be a way to either kill time or escape work or pressure, but being interested in the dramatic lives of others is specific in a way not well examined in the literature up until now. After watching drama unfold, spectators then have something to talk about further. As pointed out above, gossip is considered entertaining, especially when the parties all know each other.[33] Furthermore, it should be noted that while gossip is so often associated with girls, recent scholarship demonstrates the tendency to gossip remains high across one's lifespan regardless of gender.[34]

Our respondents describe how they glance or browse through posts on social networking sites to see what others are doing. This seems similar to "channel-surfing," not targeted or looking for something specific, but flipping through to see what might be of interest. In this way, they are looking for what is entertaining, and acting as an online spectator, as indicated by the passage below:

> Chelsea (age 17): If it's really hardcore drama, like, I will sit there and wait 'til it ends, because I'm, like, sitting there with my bowl of popcorn, I swear to you. It's happened before. But there are just some nights that I'll look at it and I'm like, I just move on. But then there are other nights when I'm like, "Ooh, look at this." Researcher: And what kind of stuff catches your eye like that?

> Chelsea : It's, like, mostly, like, the people I know or the people, like, acquaintances … like, I know them by face, and I'm like, "Oh my God, I can't believe they're saying that." Like, it's not complete strangers; that's just not fun. Like, I don't know them; I don't know their story. So it's more likely, like, just friends. Or not friends, or if they're friends the next day, or what they're doing.

The fact that young girls and women have large numbers of friends or followers on their social networking sites has not gone unnoticed and is sometimes criticized by peers.[35] But the entertainment lens highlights a somewhat different aspect of the extent of one's friends or followers. As one of our respondents observed, it is not uncommon for students to have friended every other student in their grade. Our interviews and focus groups indicate that the motivation behind having so many friends may be in part due to the passive entertainment these friends provide the user. One of the main reasons girls may find online drama as entertaining as they do is because they are often only loosely affiliated with the persons involved. The same may happen in offline spaces when a fight breaks out and students gather around. Those who are invested in the situation, or are close friends, will likely step in and get involved. The passive spectators will want a good view of what is happening and the entertainment value is enough to remain connected to certain figures online:

> Andrea (age 22): Like, okay. Sometimes on Facebook—I was actually talking with my friends about this the other day, too. There are, like, those people that when you're looking at your newsfeed, you're not friends with them in person, but you think they're really entertaining on Facebook, so you keep them. And kudos if they do that to you too, but they'll post something really funny … they keep their Facebook really updated with what their life is. And that's kind of … it's like, oh, it's awful that I'm saying this, but it's like a reality show, like, on your Facebook. And you can see, like, what's going on. And it's sadly interesting.

Again, we see the theme of Facebook "stalking" as entertainment:

> Cassandra (age 19): Yeah, in college, I added them on Facebook, you know, do the whole Facebook stalking, look at their pictures, you know, check out their main page, whatever.

Researcher: And what's the point of all that?
Cassandra : I don't know. You're bored. You just like stalking ….
Researcher: Entertainment again?
Cassandra : Yeah. Entertainment, like, I don't know, 'cause everybody forgot what outdoors is. So, or picking up the phone. While the majority of people would value entertainment as a passive activity, there are also those individuals who are entertained by being a part of the activity. Starting drama out of perceived boredom was also an underlying theme throughout some of the interviews.
Cassandra (age 19): All my friends. All my friends flip out publicly. They, I don't know ….
Researcher: That's gotta be a lot of drama ….
Cassandra : Very.
Researcher: Why do you think they like it [drama]?
Cassandra : Small town, nothing to do. You know, like, if you're not in a club, if you're not on the internet, if you're not in school, if you're even doing something you shouldn't be doing. So like, drama keeps them entertained.

The entertainment lens reveals that, although our respondents may be using language that evokes surveillance images, for example, voicing a desire to "keep up with" certain drama, the respondents are acting more as spectators of people and events, and are watching more passively for their own entertainment. The following exchange well illustrates this:

Researcher: [Laughter] So what kind of things would like, what sort of things do you feel you need to be kept in the loop about?
Amelia (age 18): Um, gossip, like, what's happened on the weekend, like, usually for the past little while I haven't been able to go, uh, 'cause I've had car troubles, so I have been, haven't been out. So like I'll use Twitter for, as in, fill me in with what's going on at parties or something, if there's been drama or if somebody breaks up or [laughter] something, just stupid small town gossip kind of stuff.
Researcher: [Laughter]
Amelia : Just like teenagers, it's pretty ridiculous, but that's what it is.
Researcher: But it's fun?

> Amelia: Yeah.
> Researcher: And, and so um, what, are you comfortable giving an example of a recent drama that you heard about on Twitter?
> Amelia: Um yeah. There's typically, it's a lot of, kinda relationship stuff. Like there's couples who break up and get back together all the time and it's just, it's ridiculous. [laughter] Um, usually that's like, they'll like just, like, post something about, like, oh why do you do this to me like. Blah, blah, blah, like breaking up, and just kind of small things, where they're complaining about it and then, you know, maybe a day later or two days later they'll post something like, oh I love you so much, like.

The entertainment lens highlights the seemingly more benign aspects of online drama where usually the spectator is involved only passively. In this sense drama serves the same purpose that gossip often does—what's happening now, or did you hear what so and so said or did. Online drama is fodder for speculation, analysis, and discussion among spectators who are participating in what they see as an engaging, enjoyable pastime, sometimes without consideration of the potential impact on the people who are under observation.

Discussion

Each of the lenses highlights a distinct aspect of online drama and reveals the complexity of the intentions and interactions of those involved in such drama. Online drama is not merely social aggression. Nor is it simply monitoring and evaluating one's own or others' behaviour or personae. Nor is it only for amusement or leisure. In this respect, all three lenses are able to better inform our nuanced understanding of how young women engage in online drama and offer some guidance as to possible policy responses and consequences of those responses.

The three lenses also draw attention to the gendered elements girls and young women see in online drama, and how they talk about online drama. Our participants tend to describe other girls in stereotypical ways, sometimes applying the "mean girl" label while letting male aggression go uncontested as just "boys being boys." They also identified meanness as being associated with social power, the high school clique that excludes and operates in both online

and offline settings. The surveillance lens is similarly described in gendered terms – parents and others judging behaviour or pictures based on stereotypes or expectations, with drama usually being a negative reaction if a girl strays from the norm. The entertainment lens also engages with stereotypical elements of female behaviour and interests, with links to gossip and the passive enjoyment that comes from drama.

Comparing what is emphasized as one focuses each lens on our participants' discussions about online drama reveals not only the nuances of each lens but the contrasting policy implications. As discussed earlier, the social/relational aggression lens emphasizes elements of power and antagonism – behaviour that is generally accepted as needing to be prevented or deterred in order to protect those who might be targets. But as the MediaSmarts report points out, there is a tendency in schools and policy discussions to define most dramatic interactions among youth as bullying.[36] Similarly, the earlier research of Barron and Lacombe on the media and policy responses to the murder of Reena Virk in 1997 and the resulting "moral panic" about the "nasty girl" point to the policy tendency to see a need for social control and repressive measures.[37] This frame may be the default for policy discussions because it is relatively easy to understand, as it relies on familiar stereotypes[38] and it addresses the potential negative effects that such behaviour might have on others. But it is a paternalistic and punitive response that assumes the behaviour is "bad" and that not only involves regulation by authorities but also puts responsibility on girls and young women to regulate themselves.[39]

As we analyzed the comments of girls and young women using the surveillance lens, it became clear that the surveillance they were talking about was less that of authority figures, parents, and teachers, and more "peer surveillance" or "lateral surveillance"[40] that serves social purposes for both small group formation and cohesion, and for self-development. In general, a surveillance definition of the policy problem emphasizes policy solutions involving the technical capacities of online architectures, as well as notices featuring what to do under certain circumstances and outlining conditions under which one should be cautious. The surveillance definition also shifts attention to surveillance by those with a more controlling or self-interested intent than the curiosity we find motivating peer surveillance. Our analysis leads us to conclude that if we use the surveillance lens to

inform public policy, policies need to recognize that the architecture itself creates new opportunities for drama, as well as intensifying drama already taking place, and that policy should be directed not to the motivations of the girls and young women who are watching or being watched, but to the practices of the companies designing and hosting the sites.

Finally the entertainment lens—curious spectators observing online drama as they would a TV show—appears at first to reveal rather benign reasons and effects of online drama, with little justification for policy intervention. However, the parallels between online drama and reality TV are hard to miss. The lure of online drama seems to be encouraged by the celebrities of reality TV, as the "housewives" of wherever TV shows illustrate.[41] If this is indeed the case, then the entertainment lens may provide a justification for a policy response, which draws attention to the need for the media to show greater responsibility and leadership on these issues. In general, however, the entertainment lens reveals that girls' and young women's somewhat passive browsing of online drama is primarily a social mechanism for gathering information about how those in or close to their social group think, feel, and are behaving—a realm where policy intervention would not be justified.

Our analysis overall provides evidence that the online drama that girls and young women engage in and observe is not merely a simple, one-dimensional phenomenon. Instead it is a complex social activity that intersects with offline lives, evolves over time as participants mature, and serves personal, interpersonal, and group purposes. Policy discussions need to take the various lenses into account and not default to what may be considered a somewhat simplistic view of online drama as "mean girls" or social aggression.

Notes

1 Sarah Coyne, Jennifer Linder, David Nelson & Douglas Gentile, "'Frenemies, Fraitors, and Mean-em-aitors': Priming Effects of Viewing Physical and Relational Aggression in the Media on Women," *Aggressive Behavior* 38 (2012): 141, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/ab.21410/abstract>.

2 *Ibid*.

3 See Steeves, Chapter VI; Bailey, Chapter I; Burkell & Saginur, Chapter V; Heath, Chapter XIV.

4 For a rural/urban comparative analysis, see Burkell & Saginur, Chapter V.

5 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).

6 Howard Rheingold, *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1993).

7 Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997).

8 We also noted that rural girls were more likely to try to resolve issues offline than online: Burkell & Saginur, Chapter V.

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13 See Bailey, Chapter I.

14 Amanda Lenhart, Mary Madden, Aaron Smith, Kristen Purcell, Kathryn Zickuhr & Lee Rainie, "Teens, Kindness and Cruelty on Social Network Sites," *Pew Research Center cruelty on social network sites*, 9 November 2011, <http://www.pewinternet.org/2011/11/09/teens-kindness-and-cruelty-on-social-network-sites>.

15 Valerie Steeves, *Young Canadians in A Wired World, Phase III: Online Privacy, Online Publicity* (Ottawa, Media Awareness Network, 2014), 11, 25, <http://mediasmarts.ca/sites/mediasmarts/files/pdfs/publication-report/full/YCWWIII_Online_Privacy_Online_Publicity_FullReport.pdf>.

16 Marwick & boyd, *supra* note 9 at 14.
17 *Ibid*. at 11.
18 Rachel Simmons, *Odd Girl Out*: *The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011).
19 Patrice A. Oppliger, *Bullies and Mean Girls in Popular Culture* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2013) 95.
20 See Steeves, Chapter VI, and Bailey, Chapter I.
21 See Bailey, Chapter I and Heath, Chapter XIV, for a discussion of technical architectures facilitating conflict.
22 Lenhart et al, *supra* note 14; MediaSmarts, *Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Talking to Youth and Parents about Life Online Executive Summary* (Ottawa, Media Awareness Network, 2012), 5, <http://mediasmarts.ca/sites/mediasmarts/files/publication-report/summary/ycwwiii-youth-parents-summary.pdf>.
23 Lenhart et al, *supra* note 14 at 37.
24 Valerie Steeves, *Young Canadians in A Wired World, Phase III: Online Privacy, Online Publicity,* (Ottawa, Media Awareness Network, 2014), 26, <http://mediasmarts.ca/sites/mediasmarts/files/pdfs/publication-report/full/YCWWIII_Online_Privacy_Online_Publicity_FullReport.pdf>.
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33 Raake & Bonds-Raake, *supra* note 11 at 163.
34 Hartung & Renner, *supra* note 28 at 8.
35 Steeves, *supra* note 24; Bailey et al, *supra* note 27.
36 Valerie Steeves, *Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Cyberbullying: Dealing with Online Meanness, Cruelty and Threats*, (Ottawa: Media Awareness Network, 2014), 10, <http://mediasmarts.ca/sites/mediasmarts/files/pdfs/publication-report/full/YCWWIII_Cyberbullying_FullReport.pdf>.
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