CHAPTER VIII

BBM Is Like Match.com: Social Networking and the Digital Mediation of Teens' Sexual Cultures

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Introduction

Mobile digital technologies cannot be treated like some additional feature in young people's lives. The mobile phone is often more like a limb, rather than a separate object from the posthuman cyborg body.[1] These technologies are "actants" that dramatically re-shape the agentic possibilities of relating between (post)humans.[2] They are radically transforming "cultures of connectivity" with temporal and material effects.[3] Consider, for instance, how these 15-year-old girls discuss the mobile phone in their daily rhythms:

> Interviewer: So how much are you using your [mobile] phone do you think in an average day?
> Monique: Like all the time.
> Kylie: I use it to wake myself up, then I use it to phone Riley or you to see where you are to meet each other in the morning, and then when I get on the way to school I will be texting people from school … I use my phone every second of the day. If I am not using it I feel a bit weird.
> Monique: I use it to go to sleep with my music on.
> Tracy: I talk on my phone all day long.

These technologies are deeply attached to young people's sense of self. Indeed, life could be unthinkable without them. As Jodie (13) put it, "I would die without my Blackberry."[4] Adam (15) explained that once most of his group of friends at his school had Blackberries in 2011, "everyone" had to get one in order to communicate, and it mostly replaced texting and Facebook because it was "portable … always in your pocket," did not require an internet connection, and was more "secret," thus less easily monitored by adults. The technologies of choice change rapidly and are also overlapping, with mobile phone, text, Facebook, BBM, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, Skype, Snapchat, and others variously in use. Unsurprisingly, this multiplication of "24/7" technological plugging in forges new bonds and intense degrees of connection:

> Kylie: My boyfriend, he got me to call him the other day, he stayed on the [mobile] phone for like three hours. That is like half my minutes gone, and then he fell asleep … But do you know what the weirdest thing is, once he fell asleep, I couldn't hang up, because I wanted to listen to him breathing …. What we do is, we drop in and out of sleep.

Staying up all night on your personal mobile phone with your boyfriend, reports of young people keeping Skype on for long durations to be visibly and aurally "in touch," or discussions of ongoing snapchatting photo exchanges throughout the day with one another are just a few examples of the radical or hyper-connectivity[5] of unlimited texts, mobile minutes, and broadband that extend the temporal duration of intimate relations.[6] For example, 15-year-old boys explained how they went about initiating hook-ups with girls on BBM through instant messaging via the "Broadcaster," and Kylie said:

> But, like, our phones play a massive part in relationships. Like phone calls until late hours. Texting, not as much because now we have got BBM. BBM is like Match.com basically, you have got everyone there and it is, like … and people send broadcasts over BBM. Like, there will be a smiley face and then next to the smiley face there will be something like, "Would you have sex with me?" "Would you do this, would you do that?" and then by sending that broadcast, like, the boy will answer it and then you will start talking to them …. Like the question will be, like,

> "Would you have sex with me lights on/lights off. Socks on/socks off. What position? To what song? Condom or no condom?" Stuff like that.

Kylie refers to BBM as like Match.com, and Facebook as "Baitbook":

> Everyone calls Facebook Baitbook, because basically Bait is like everyone can see it, so it is like, if someone was getting like, told, "I'm going to batter you," on Facebook, like, they can print screen it.

These new hybrid terms point to how technological processes are re-shaping and re-mediating teen sociality, connectivity, and sexuality – friendship, dating, intimacy, and conflict.

This chapter specifically explores how these new digital affordances of social media are transforming the gendered and sexual relationalities of networked teens. danah boyd's[7] work has consistently illustrated how much young people "heart" social networking and find digital connections, including flirtation and sexual communication, "dramatic," exciting, and fun.[8] boyd makes tentative suggestions about how youth relationships online are shaped by gender, suggesting that the escalation of "drama" or conflict online is typically viewed as "girls' work."[9] Sexualized rules around representation also involve girls' concerns about looking "slutty" online.[10] However, as Van Doorn notes, social networking research on young people has "largely neglected the gendered and sexual dimensions of SNS participation."[11] This is particularly evident in the neglect of the intersections between three research areas: (1) networked, digital cultures; (2) age, and young teen cultures; and (3) gender and sexual cultures. Exceptions to this neglect are found in research exploring how social media use shapes young people's gender and sexual cultures, such as C. J. Pascoe's research on how platforms like SMS and Myspace mediate gender, sexual, and racial power hierarchies in young people's relationship cultures; De Ridder and Van Bauwel's research on gendered and sexual interactions in teenagers' (age 14 to 18) comments on Facebook; and research on teens' (age 13 to 16) performances of sexualized femininity and masculinity across social networking platforms such as Bebo, Facebook, and BBM by Ringrose and Erickson Barajas in 2011 and Ringrose and Harvey in 2014.[12]

We aim to contribute to these intersecting areas of research by exploring how the technological affordances of mobile media are mediating the gender and sexual cultures of networked teens. Drawing on Kember and Zylinska's work, we approach mediation not as a "transparent layer or intermediary between independently existing entities" such as young people, their Blackberries, and their Facebook profiles, but rather as a vital, temporal process, in which technologies, media, and lives are intimately entangled.[13]

Our analysis combines this understanding of mediation with recent work on the affordances of digital technologies, examining these affordances, not as separate entities, but as part of what Kember and Zylinska term the "lifeness of media – that is, the possibility of the emergence of forms always new, or its potentiality to generate unprecedented connections and unexpected events."[14] boyd summarizes how mobile digital media platforms are characterized by common elements of "Persistence: the durability of online expressions and content; Visibility: the potential audience who can bear witness; Spreadability: the ease with which content can be shared; and Searchability: the ability to find content."[15] To take just a few examples we discuss in the chapter: the new visibilities around performing gender and sexuality online include the ability to display one's relationship status in a variety of ways, for instance, through a profile image of an engagement ring. Being visibly tagged in "sexy" images can be both affirming and anxiety provoking, for example, when an unknown older girl tags herself in a sexualized image she posts on your Facebook wall. The sharing or "spreadability" of sexual images works in highly gendered ways.[16] Sexually "suggestive" images of teens' bodies can operate as commodities, but girls' bodies are treated very differently than boys' bodies in the networked peer group. The searchability of contact information for forging new intimate relations (flirting/dating/hooking up) can be seen as fun and exciting, but also as risky and threatening in gender-specific ways that extend into offline experience.[17] The "persistence" or duration of online talk and images can also be highly gendered and sexualized: one can come to "regret" posting a range of content; we show how sexually explicit content shapes teen peer relationships long after the moment of sharing online.[18]

Methodology

We draw on a research project that mapped experiences of digital sexual communication among economically and racially marginalized young people in London.[19] The project worked in depth with a total of thirty-five young people aged 13 to 15 in two school communities in inner city, multicultural, London schools in 2011. Our methodology included conducting initial focus groups, where we asked young people to "walk us through" their online and mobile phone practices. Young people were then invited to "friend" our Facebook research account.[20] We conducted weekly observations of account activity on selected Facebook profiles for three months. Finally, we returned for in-depth individual interviews with twenty-two case studies.

Below, we explore four of these case studies in detail, examining how social networking practices enable new flows of connectivity[21] and new mediated temporalities.[22] We demonstrate that these flows are constituted through gendered and sexual discourses of performing idealized forms of masculinity and femininity. We explore the power relations in play where digital practices mediate binary and hierarchical forms of gendered and sexual differences.[23] As we have noted, however, it is critical that online and offline are not understood as distinct arenas, following Van Doorn's argument that

> it is becoming increasingly difficult to separate bodies, gender and sexuality from the technological networks that give them form and meaning. Conversely, media technologies cannot be apprehended without accounting for the embodied and gendered use cultures that imbue them with significance by mobilizing them within larger everyday networks both virtual and concrete.[24]

Kylie

Kylie is a 15-year-old white British girl in Year 10[25] at Ashburton High School, which is located in a mixed borough with both high-income and low-income catchment (area from which students can attend the school). One of the first things that struck us about Kylie was that her Facebook profile image was of her engagement ring, which did

an enormous amount of "visibility" work signalling the sought after, concrete heterosexual commitment she had with Jake, her boyfriend. As with many teen relationships, the issue of when to "have sex" was paramount in Kylie's discussion in the interview, and she proudly recounted Jake saying "With you I don't need it, like you entertain me in other ways" and "Like with them [other girls] he says, 'It was all about sex, with you I could wait like 100 years.'" Kylie placed Jake's waiting and commitment to her in explicit contrast to weaker girls who "love attention" and give boys mixed messages:

> And a lot of girls get touched up when they don't like it because over BBM or Facebook or something they will be, like, "Oh when I see you I will do this" and they don't ever do what they say they are going to do. So a lot of boys get annoyed and they are just like, "Oh but you said—" and it is just like "Yeah, but now she is saying no sort of thing" but you can understand where they are coming from, why they are getting angry … I think what boys are on now is how many girls they can do this with and how many girls … it is like the porn on the phones again, it is all a competition. It is the same as how many girls they can get … there is a girl in Year 7, she used to get touched up a lot, but she loved the attention, so it was like the boys always used to do this game, where they would see, like, what parts of her body they could touch. So it started off with, like, bending her over and slapping her bum, and then now it is like terrible, they will like pull her backwards and touch her vagina and that and, like, she just sits there and laughs and I am like, I go all red in the face, because I get all embarrassed for her ….

This dialogue indicates the complex intermeshing of how being in touch online and what gets said on BBM or Facebook relates to "touching up" in the corridors at school. Kylie suggests that there are some girls that are saying they will do things online, which gets boys "annoyed" when they "say no." Kylie also says these aspects are a competitive game for boys in her peer group, going on to discuss an example where Jake's friend Dwayne shows them an image of a girl's breasts:

> When he showed Jake he was like … "I don't see the point in them doing that," and he is like, "I would never ask Kylie for

> a picture," because he is like, "Why am I going to put it on my phone so then when my friends go through my phone they see my girlfriend?" And I was like "exactly" and then Jake's friend is like, "Oh no, come on man that would be live, like showing everyone," and I was just standing there and I was like, "No." The boys, like, they don't hide nothing, they will talk about it in front of you, and they will talk about having sex with a girl, they will tell you everything, they will be, like, "Oh yeah she was dirty, she didn't wash," like they proper don't care what they say in front of you. And it is just like giving the girl a bad name, and then the really bitchy girls in my year will go back and tell her, "Oh you're a tramp, you don't wash," and stuff like that. And it is just like, but you first have to sit there and think, did he actually have sex with her?

Here we can see how technology enters into and mediates a set of material and affective gender relations in local and specific peer cultures, travelling back and forth between online and offline spaces. Jake is negotiating pressure around having images of Kylie's body to show to other boys, something constituted as more "live" than the flesh-and-blood Kylie "standing there." Kylie also talked about how popular boys could have "20-30" images on their phone, but her distress centres more on the culture of hostile slut-shaming[26] around girls' sexual activity (connected to and implicated within the photos). She discusses boys calling girls "dirty," which would circulate (spreadability) and how "bitchy'" girls will call those girls "tramps." This narrative complicates boyd's discussion of online conflict as "girls work" (implying that girls are the primarily bitchy agents). Rather, we see much more complex sexual culture and gendered power relations where digital images sought after by boys create a range of competitive and relational issues around sexually appropriate femininity and aggressive and "protective" masculinity. This is not to undermine the findings that girls were understood to be "really bitchy'" to each other (online and offline). But boys' involvement in stimulating competitive heterosexualized feminine aggression through open discussions of girls' bodies, sexual encounters, and collecting and comparing digital images of girls' bodies (as well as professional porn, etc.) adds greatly to our understanding of teen "drama" through an understanding of the performances of masculinity and femininity online.[27]

Kylie also described Jake and his friends monitoring what girls could wear offline:

> Kylie: Yeah, because like, today I have come in with a skirt on. Like, if you look, my skirt is not even short, but because I haven't got no tights on, one of his friends is like, "Oh look at your chick, what's she doing?" He [Jake] come over to me and he is like, "Couldn't you have worn tights?" and I was like, "No, it's hot, why do I have to wear tights, I'm wearing shorts." He is like, "Let me see," and I lifted it up to show him and he is like, "What are you doing man? Pull your skirt down," and I was like, "But I've got shorts on there," and he was like, "Yeah but all my boys can see" … And he gets all moody …
> Interviewer: What would that mean for the other boys? They would think you were a …
> Kylie: They would be like, "Oh she's a little slag," and then he would end up getting angry and having a fight with one of them …. [Jake] thinks he is possessive, like everyone is like, "No you're not, you are just protective," and I tell him, "You are not possessive" … but when he is feeling down and upset, like, he will be, like, "Yeah but I tell you what not to wear and stuff like that" … I do feel that he loves me back and that so … if he don't like my skirt, I won't wear it for him, because I don't want him to feel uncomfortable, sort of thing.

Kylie narrates a form of masculine regulation and "possession" over girls' bodies, suggesting that anger and control are signs of love.[28] Jake's version of masculinity is a "protect and shield your body" from others' view: he does not want his girlfriend to display her body online in images or offline at school. This operates against and in relation to a predatory version of masculinity performed by Jake's friend Dwayne, where the capture and display of girls' bodies through digital images/video become commodities to be possessed, traded (spread) amongst boys for homosocial reward or "ratings,"[29] described further by Kylie:

> Basically with the boys it is a competition, who can get the most revealing picture or the biggest breast girl … and the girls send them as like, "Oh if you go out with me we could probably have sex or I could do stuff" … a lot of girls in this neighbourhood

> don't have respect for their self …. I don't defend boys, yeah, because of what they do at times, they exploit girls and that, but if a girl is telling you, you can put this picture up if you want and then sends it, then obviously the boy is going to like … because she is one of the most popular girls … if I have got a picture of Jenny (13) it is like they have completely won the competition sort of thing.

Kylie suggests boys compete in ways that "exploit" girls, but she also defends boys through a sexual double standard where girls who put up pictures are read as not "respecting" themselves. Kylie went on to say she was sick of boys' "messing with our heads," which gave girls "low self-esteem," although she positioned younger girls like Jenny as more vulnerable to older boys' mind games than the more seasoned 15-year-olds. Kylie positioned younger boys as the most desperate to get an image because of hormones and their "excitement" over girls' "developing" body parts. We want to continue exploring these age-specific understandings of how teen boys attempt to intra-act with girls' bodies through social media and at school, turning next to a 13-year-old girl's accounts of these practices.

Cherelle

Cherelle is a Black British 13-year-old girl. She is living in an economically deprived area surrounding Langthorpe College, a school that is gated with security cameras and high barbed-wire fencing. As we have been discussing, BBM was the dominant social media environment that the young people were using in 2011 in the research schools, and Cherelle related multiple times how much she loved BBM as a way to stay in touch with friends and to make new friends, saying she couldn't "put her phone down." With Blackberry you have a profile image like Facebook, but contacts are added by circulating a pin number, along with a description to the user's friend network, suggesting they add them: this is called a pin "broadcast," which is interesting because it requires some type of description of the user to be broadcast around the network. Cherelle described the importance of the body parts and the physical appearance of Black girls in particular as being big tits, big bum, working through digital media practices[30] in the descriptions that circulated on BBM:

> If it is a boy and a girl told a boy to BC their pin, then they will say, "Oh she has big tits and a big bum and she's fit[31] and if you get to know her, she's nice" … It's mad.

She went on to mention the idea of "linking up" or meeting the people she's made contact with online, depending on their "personality" and whether they are "nice":

> If the person can't see your picture properly, they say "Can you send me a picture of your face, so I can see you clearly?" and sometimes they can be very nasty, saying, "Can I have a picture of your tits?" or stuff like that, and yeah, sometimes they will get upset and overact and maybe delete you. But that's alright, but when you are linking someone, they want to know what you want to do when you link. But most boys will say, "We are gonna lips and hug and stuff," and, yeah, just go to the park and do stuff and, yeah, that's what most people do.

Cherelle relates interactions with boys around being asked for images and discussions of meeting to "lips" (kiss) and hug, in ways that imply fun banter. She also describes how sometimes conflicts emerge over "nasty" photo requests. She was particularly concerned around issues of "searchability" through locatable "facts" about her being posted:

> When I lost my BBM, there is some girl in Year 10 and I told her to BC my pin … she put lots of facts about me … so I had lots of adds, and then for example, a boy, he said, "Oh you're peng" that means, oh you're pretty and stuff, and, "where do you live?" I said, "[area] but I hang around [other area]." They said, "Oh I live in [area]." "Okay, so what school do you go to?" they said [X school] and then he was all like, "Oh do you want to link?" I was like, "Maybe," and he said, "What would you do if we linked?" and I said, "I dunno," and then he said, "Oh would you give me blows?" that means suck my dick? and I was like, "No not really," and then he said, "Why?" and I said, "Because I'm not like that," but he became furious …. I just ended up deleting him because of what he is saying … boys get really serious because they just get really angry at the time and say, "Do it,

> there's nothing to it. Oh you are pissing me off, I know where you live you know," and they will try for it in any type of way, even if they don't even know you.

Cherelle felt that too much location information had exposed her in relation to a sexually aggressive boy who asked her "would you give me blows" and threatened her "I know where you live," a form of masculine aggression she discussed further:

> Cherelle: Well, I know lots of times I've been asked, and sometimes I will say, "No," and they will say, "Okay," and they will be, like, nice to you, and then they will ask again, and then they will put pressure on you and stuff like this, and I will just be, like, "I'm sorry I don't want to," and they will say, "Why?" and I will say, "I just don't want to," and they will say, like, "There's nothing wrong, like, all you need to do is just suck on it," and I will be like, "But I don't want to do that," and just keep going and put the angry face on BBM and dedicate their status to you in a negative way.
> Interviewer: Like, say what kind of thing?
> Cherelle: Like, "Oh this girl is pissing me off."
> Interviewer: And do they say it to you, or do you just kind of know?
> Cherelle: You know, you can tell … I just delete them.
> Interviewer: Okay, and do they ask you in person? …
> Cherelle: Oh, people in our school? … Some boys would say, oh whatever, and sometimes they would just get your head and go like that [motion to push down head], but like you come up quick and just say, "Get off me," but yeah, that is as far as it goes.

The relations between being online and asked to perform a blow job and having boys post something negative about the refusal is greatly complicated here by knowing the contact as part of the wider peer group at school. Cherelle describes being physically approached on the playground and her head being pushed down towards the boys' groin. Despite saying "that is as far as it goes," Cherelle recounted other stories of boys "rushing" (running up to) girls and pushing them over, "touching them up" on their "tits" and "bum," and "daggering" them (dry humping them from behind or front):

> Interviewer: So do you really feel concerned about them, or do you just think, no, they are not really going to do anything to me?
> Cherelle: I feel concerned most of the time, because I'm okay with the boys now, because before, if I said something on BBM or Facebook and they got upset, I just like got into little arguments, like they would say, "Watch tomorrow, gonna rush you," and this stuff. And tomorrow they will just floor you and kick and run, all this. But yeah ….
> Interviewer: They do. So you have been beaten up by a boy?
> Cherelle: Yeah, not like really hard and stuff, but like they will kick me, I have got punched quite a lot of times and yeah ….
> Like they [boys] rush people. Like they beat them up for no reason and just loud and, yeah … you walk past and, like, a boy will pass, and they will squeeze your bum or something, and like, just touch your tits ….

What is critical here is the impotency of "deleting" a known contact if they are also part of your school peer group. The issue is not simply online searchability, persistence, or duration of information, since the complex gendered and sexual relations of the peer group bleed into the material, physical offline material space of school:

> Cherelle: Like when Kamal first started school, he used to hang around with Veronica and me, so I became good friends with Kamal, because he was quiet then, but then he met the boys in our year group who are popular and stuff, and then he started hanging around with them and he became the same and worse.
> Interviewer: Like how, like what do they do?
> Cherelle: Like every boy that I have on BBM, well not everyone, but most have put nasty pictures … a girl naked or on top of a boy. The pictures, what you will find on a dirty boy's display picture, is either of him or his penis and a girl sucking it, or a girl naked or a dirty cartoon, things like that …
> Interviewer: Oh yeah, dirty cartoon. I wanted to ask you about this one. So this one is from Kamal?
> Cherelle: Oh gosh …
> Interviewer: Because you commented on it [on Facebook] … I was just wondering what you thought about that?

> Cherelle: I was looking through his pictures and then I saw that, and I was like, that is disgusting. I was talking to him about most of his pictures on the phone, and yeah, and he said, "Oh why are you acting like it's all that and stuff," and I was like, "It's disgusting and it's on your Facebook," and he was like, "Yeah, and?" … But most boys just don't think that is, they don't take it seriously, they take it like it is just normal.
> Interviewer: It is interesting because you said, "LOL ouch," and he says, "Cherelle knows," and then you realize that and you said, "Shut up," right?
> Cherelle: … Like we was really close, but that was then … when he started to change, that is when I saw this picture.

Cherelle mentions a friend in her year group (Kamal) and discusses boys' nasty, dirty pictures online. The interviewer then brings up a sexually explicit cartoon image on Kamal's Facebook page that Cherelle had commented on. The image was of a naked black man entering a white, blonde haired woman from behind who is crying. The comments on the photo were mostly "Lool" and "wooooow," but Cherelle said "O:Lord," to which Kama replied "Cherelle knows," and Cherelle replies "LOL shut up, Kamal." Cherelle suggests the digital image is connected to how she felt Kamal "started to change." To continue discussing these relationship dynamics we turn next to Kamal.

Kamal

Kamal is a Black British boy (14), who transferred recently to Langthorpe College. As a newcomer to the school, Kamal was negotiating his relationship with different peer groups and worked hard in the focus groups and the individual interview to perform a kind of "older," "popular," hard masculinity. As part of this bravado, he proudly displayed his topless body on Facebook, saying about one image of his back muscles that got forty-two likes on Facebook: "wow this picture is good I think it should go on Facebook!" Kamal is negotiating the "visibility" of displaying his own developing body. Posting and tagging images of girls' bodies was also part of performing popular masculinity. Recall that Kylie mentioned some boys had up to thirty images of girls on their phones as signalling high popularity. Kamal claims to have thirty such images, also positioning the images as part a competition:

> Kamal: Because sometimes when you and your friend could have a competition of how many girls you can get and … just compare how much pictures you get.
> Interviewer: So then do you go to your mates, "Look at this, I've got thirty pictures."
> Kamal: No. I go, "I've got bare pictures of girls here," and then when they say, "How much?" I will tell them how much, but I won't really show them.
> Interviewer: You won't really show them?
> Kamal: No, I will show them, but like, where they will, like, hold my phone and look at it and try to go through the next ones, which might have a girl's face in it, for example … I won't let it out of my possession … I wouldn't want them to know who the girl was, because like, I would only do it for someone I didn't like, and I wouldn't have a picture of someone I didn't like, so yeah.

We interpret Kamal as performing a heteronormative, desirable, and conquering masculinity through making a show of possessing such images. But Kamal also describes a kind of "heroic" masculinity code of honour working through new media practices here. By not revealing the faces of the images of the girls he's been sent, he is attempting to demonstrate a form of power to "expose" or reveal a girl's identity online.[32] However, it is not clear whether Kamal does know the girls in the images. For instance, Kamal's BBM profile image was an image of a girl's breasts, which he claims is his girlfriend, but then says no one actually knows who it is because it is "just her bra without her head." Images are deployed to construct an older and knowing form of masculinity in conditions that are less certain than possibly claimed. Kamal also talked about tagging himself in the images of girls on Facebook:

> Kamal: If I like the picture I could tag myself in it, and then it will come to my profile. I could make it my profile picture … it all leads to ratings, because he's got that girl on Facebook and she's nice and how did he get her, they just want to find out, things like that.
> Interviewer: And what do the girls think if you tag yourself in their pictures?

> Kamal: Nothing, sometimes they will un-tag you, if they don't want you to tag them. But by the time they get to know that you are tagged in it, you could have made it your profile picture already. They can un-tag you from it, but then you have still got the picture.

Tagging allows for connectivity and digital attachment to other girls' profiles, although Kamal suggests it is not usually girls he is friends with offline whose images he tags himself in. It is thus not clear if the thirty images he claims he has on his phone have been sent to him or he has simply saved them to his phone. Kamal explains how the negotiation of asking for images from girls you know is actually quite difficult and complex:

> Kamal: Well, you only get pictures from girls that like you or your girlfriend, yeah. That is like mostly the only time you will get pictures …
> Interviewer: Do some people say "No, I'm not sending you a picture"?
> Kamal: Yeah.
> Interviewer: And do you say, go on go on go on, or do you just go away?
> Kamal: No, I will ask why first. And if they don't give me a good reason then I can see that they don't really want to talk about it, so I just change the subject.
> Interviewer: What counts as a good reason?
> Kamal: Like when they go, like for example, they will go, "Because you are not my boyfriend," then that means that some people will do a wink face … and that is like okay, she wants you to move to her, like she wants you to be her boyfriend. Because she doesn't trust you as a friend, but she trusts you as a boyfriend, if that makes sense?

Kamal suggests that girls want to have some sort of trust in you as a boyfriend before they will send an image to you, which is actually a much harder negotiation to sustain. These discussions all point to the discrepancy between having images on your phone and actually having a known girlfriend in the peer group. While Kamal's Facebook wall had many interactions with girls, and images of him posing for photos with girl friends, recall that Cherelle has challenged Kamal's

physical harassment and his posting of "dirty" pictures on Facebook and Blackberry, positioning this as linked to a negative change in their friendship. The complex relations entangled with such images became apparent when we discussed the sexually explicit cartoon on his Facebook page. Kamal became defensive, saying at first that it was just funny and "boys' sense of humour is better than girls'," but when the interviewer presses him about why it is funny, because the woman is crying, Kamal said "I don't know" four times and cracked his chewing gum. Later the interviewer returned to the cartoon image:

> Interviewer: Do you think about that person and image, them being a person, or like what do you think? What do you think she is thinking?
> Kamal: She is enjoying it. It is a way of expressing feelings, yeah …. Like people get hurt, yeah, but that like, they enjoy getting hurt, because they know how it will feel next time or like see, erm, like they enjoying it. Not like they were enjoying getting hurt the next time, but next time they will know what it feels like and they will like be prepared.
> Interviewer: So like just generally like sex being painful then, like that prepares them for that?
> Kamal: Yeah.
> Interviewer: Do you feel that as a picture that is really realistic, as a picture of sex?
> Kamal: No.
> Interviewer: Why don't you think it is?
> Kamal: Well, for one, it is a cartoon, two, the people don't look real, like, yeah. It just looks unreal, but then it looks funny, but real at the same time. Do you get what I'm saying?
> Interviewer: Yeah, I get it. But I'm still not entirely sure what is funny about it. Maybe it is just because, as you were saying, not quite sure.
> Kamal: Because people just find other people's pain funny. They find things like that funny.

This cartoon is just one of many forms of sexualized (and other) images that circulate in teens' social media networks which have a "disgust," "shock," or "gross out" joke factor.[33] On the one hand, the image is not real and this is part of what is suggested makes

it humorous. On the other hand, Kamal's comments that girls are preparing for pain in sex seem to imply a connection to "real" life. The relation between fantasy and reality in sexual images (e.g., in animated, professional, peer-produced pornography) is an important space for further discussion around gendered power in youth sexual cultures.[34] Given it is a black man on top of a white woman, there are also complex racialized, sexualized power dynamics at work in discussing this representation in a research encounter, which need to be understood in the context of wider discourses of racism and "othering" of Black masculinity and sexuality. The interview was conducted by a white woman, in the context of a school in which there were high levels of digital surveillance, including disciplinary processes around sexualized content accessed at school. This raises complicated and difficult questions about the power dynamics of a white woman researcher discussing this particular image with a Black teen boy. Our focus in this chapter, however, is how the image works in relation to the girls in his school-based friendship group. Recall that Cherelle said the image was nasty and changes her feelings for him, in concert with the sexual aggression he displays in the school space, something Kamal also defends as a "funny" aspect of male ratings that girls don't mind:

> Interviewer: Yeah, so does that happen quite a bit, like people just getting touched up in the corridor?
> Kamal: Yeah.
> Interviewer: What is going on there?
> Kamal: Like boys just touch girls' breasts and their bums and that.
> Interviewer: And what do the girls reckon about that?
> Kamal: Nothing, most girls don't mind it.
> Interviewer: How can you tell which girls mind it and which don't?
> Kamal: Because say, for example, I touch a girl's breasts, if she doesn't say like stop or don't touch me, then she doesn't mind it …
> Interviewer: How does it work?
> Kamal: It is like for example, my friend and my girlfriend, yeah. My friend will do that to my girlfriend, yeah. My other friends would rate him for that, because it is my girlfriend and I am

> going out with her. So obviously like I won't get angry, but I will go and do the same thing to his girlfriend.
> Interviewer: Okay, what do the girlfriends think about all of this?
> Kamal: Nothing, they just think it is funny.

The interview illustrates a pattern across the 13-year-old boys, where having access to girls' bodies both online and offline is normalized into a humorous aspect of "lad culture."[35] There is a homosocial[36] exchange where touching up of girlfriends is a jokey form of rivalry between the boys, as they navigate entry into competitive hierarchical masculinity with unclear boundaries around embodied (sexual) consent.[37] Many young people were critical of the practice and girls were often angry, but they also made excuses, such as Kylie and others who said it was the Year 8 boys' "crazy" hormones. Next, however, we explore some of the differences in how these relations of power manifest with older participants, considering the case of popular older boy, Kaja.

Kaja

The final case study we want to explore is Kaja, a 15-year-old boy also from Langthorpe College, whose family emigrated from a South Eastern European country[38] before he started school. Kaja described himself as "known" and popular and, like other boys, discussed how ratings came from being seen as brave and able to cope with violence. For instance, Kaja discussed having been robbed once for his phone, and talked about the importance of being "known" and confident in avoiding such situations. For Kaja, like Kamal, being able to display hard muscularity and sexual prowess was also key to being powerful, describing himself as "beautiful" and sought-after by girls. For instance, after Kaja's BBM pin was broadcast, a 21-year-old young woman added him on Facebook and started sending him pictures of her breasts. Also like Kamal, Kaja discussed having a folder of around thirty pictures of girls' breasts on his phone:

> Interviewer: And what are they – like what is, like, the purpose of keeping them all?
> Kaja: I don't know, they are just on my phone. But I don't watch them unless I am showing someone …

> Interviewer: So, like, you have got them on your phone and so, that is just so that you can say, "I've got thirty pictures on my phone"?
> Kaja: Kind of, like say other people they are like, "Oh I got this girl to do this," I will be like, "Look at my phone" …
> Interviewer: So do you keep it on your phone so you can just go …
> Kaja: Evidence. Yeah.

The need for "evidence" related to systems of popularity in which proof of sexual desirability and experiences could be materialized in images, which could be shared with other boys:[39]

> Kaja: … if they ever say I'm a virgin I will just prove it to them.
> Kaja: We all get ratings. It is stupid, but I don't know. We are going to grow up then.

The images are a type of visibility and persistence that form a commodity, directly related to proving sexual activity and getting "ratings," which are desired as part of the peer economy of gendered value, despite the claim that they are immature and "stupid." Kaja positions ratings, and the images, as a youth cultural practice, bounded to a particular moment, but powerful nonetheless in terms of the requirement to provide "proof." All images were not equally capable of providing such proof, however. As we saw earlier, the value of the image relates to the popularity of the girl:

> Kaja: Well, say if I got a popular girl to do it, that looks like one of those girls who wouldn't do it, then it would make me look even better. But …
> Interviewer: How would she look like a girl that wouldn't do it?
> Kaja: Just the way she acts and that, innit.
> Interviewer: So, you have got to spell it out for me.
> Kaja: The way she dresses, the way she talks to boys.
> Interviewer: So what way of dressing and talking to boys would mean you wouldn't think she would normally do it?
> Kaja: Like girls in this school, yeah, their skirts are really high, so you would know, that would give you a hint that they want attention …

> Interviewer: So if someone was wearing short skirts she would be more likely to send you a picture?
> Kaja: Yeah, from my opinion.

Kylie described how girls' skirts are monitored and evaluated as codes of sexual appropriateness, with sexual "easiness" read onto displaying more legs as a sign of sluttiness. Kaja says a girl with a short skirt is more likely to send an image, but those seen as less "attention seeking" would be more highly valued conquests. Images exchanged between people already in a relationship were much more acceptable, since Kaja said that "random" girls who sent images to boys they were not "going out with" would get called "slags." However, Kaja also went on to explain how he explicitly did ask for images from girls he was not in a relationship with:

> Kaja: If I think a girl has got a nice body, yeah, I will just flirt with her and say, "Yeah you should write my name," or something like that, yeah. But if she does trust me, if she will do it for me, she will just say at the start, "Don't expose me."
> Interviewer: And is she right to trust you then?
> Kaja: Yeah.
> Interviewer: Because you are not going to expose her?
> Kaja: No.
> Interviewer: Like but don't you have to show the pictures to get ratings?
> Kaja: But she don't know that. My friends are not the type of people—they see the picture—but it is not like I'm going to send it to them or anything. It is not published, I'm not going to show it to the whole school.

This passage illustrates how Kaja feels it is acceptable to ask a girl to trust him and send an image to him, despite being clear that he will show his friends on his phone, although he is not sending it around or "publishing" or "exposing" it to the whole school. To "expose" a girl's image online is a form of digital "visible," "spreadable" and "searchable" sexual "stigma" that can be attached to images of teen girls' bodies, thus mediating gendered relations and "sexual double standards" in new ways.[40]

Even if girls posted the images themselves, they were subject to the possibility of shaming around the images. Recall the 21-year-old

who started sending Kaja images of her breasts. Two similar images from another "older girl" were displayed on Kaja's Facebook page. One image is a close-up of a girl pushing her cleavage together with "Kaja owns" written on it in marker pen, and his friends responded by saying it was a "fat man." There was a second image with the breasts in greater relief to show the size and waist, which got positive responses from his friends. Kaja was concerned, however, about being tagged in the image because he said the girl lived far away and was older, and also because the breasts were potentially undesirable (seen as a fat man rather than female breasts):

> Kaja: So she put the picture up [on Facebook] and tagged me. But she is from far, like she has no shame. I don't even know where she lives, she says she lives far.
> Interviewer: In London far?
> Kaja: No, out of London.
> Interviewer: So does it matter if she tags you. Is that, like, good?
> Kaja: I don't really care. It is nothing that I ain't seen before.

The way that Kaja defends against association with the image is to call the girl "shameless," implying her lack of sexual respectability. But also it seems part of the construction of heteronormative popular masculinity of collecting images that he must follow a conquest dynamic where boys solicit the images. Girls who aggressively express their own sexual interest by self-posting and tagging are less valuable than "innocent," "respectable" girls, whom Kaja places into the category of "friend" and potential "girlfriend":

> Interviewer: And like so, do you have friends that are girls that you are not flirting with and stuff?
> Kaja: Yeah, a lot of friends …
> Interviewer: And you wouldn't ask them for pictures?
> Kaja: Nah.
> Interviewer: So like what is different with those?
> Kaja: They respect theirselves.
> Interviewer: So do you think, then, the girls that are sending the pictures don't respect themselves, then?
> Kaja: They can't be respecting themselves if they are taking pictures of their body and whatever, naked.

> Interviewer: What makes you say that? Could they like looking at a picture of themselves? Because you posted a picture up of your six pack right on Facebook, what is different about it?
> Kaja: That's a good question. I don't know. It's just different.
> Interviewer: Different because they are a girl?
> Kaja: Yeah, different because they are a girl.
> Interviewer: So what does respecting yourself look like for a girl?
> Kaja: [Embarrassed laugh] Dress appropriately, act appropriately.

There are several paradoxes here. Kaja draws distinctions between the shameless girls out there and the girls that he is "friends" with and respects. Kaja wants to ask (good-looking) girls for images, yet a girl needs to already be in a relationship for a picture to be more acceptable. Kaja seems aware of some of the contradictions around naming what makes girls "respectable." An unknown girl who takes a naked image and sends an image of herself to Kaja is read very differently from Kaja asking a girl he likes for an image, which emerges again when Kaja describes another older girl sending an image with "Have sex with me" on her body:

> Interviewer: So like how do you feel when somebody sends you that picture?
> Kaja: Just makes me even more big-headed …
> Interviewer: Does it make you think, do you look at that and think, right I'm going to have sex with her?
> Kaja: Yeah, kind of.
> Interviewer: Because that seems like a request?
> Kaja: Yeah, I can have sex with her, but I wouldn't. She has probably had sex with a lot of people.
> Interviewer: And that bothers you?
> Kaja: Yeah, I don't want to catch nothing. I wouldn't risk it …
> Kaja: She don't respect her body. People's, a lot of stuff has been in her and that is just …

Kaja seems to be negotiating a set of complex, defensive relations around the image. On the one hand he says it makes him feel "big-headed" and he later says he likes getting the image. Indeed, the image, made especially (and labelled personally) for him, signifies his personal desirability in a different way from the images Kamal discusses tagging on girls' Facebook pages above. However, despite

this bravado, being tagged in images with sexual propositions from an older woman may be actually discomfiting for Kaja, who is operating with a more traditional form of morality around sexual activity, femininity, and masculinity, given he condemns the girl who sexually propositions him through an image as likely diseased, someone he could never have a relationship with:

> Kaja: Not all girls, but see girls like that, yeah, if I had sex with them, [pause] I wouldn't want to go out with them again … say, if I am out with her … people would be, like, "Oh, that is the girl I had sex with, she sent me this," and I will be like, "What?" And you have just got to know these things, innit.
> Interviewer: So it is more likely what other people think, kind of thing?
> Kaja: Yeah, yeah. But girls like this, I wouldn't love. I don't know why, I just wouldn't love. I wouldn't have respect for them.

For Kaja, the digital image implying sex marks the girl as easy, slutty, and unable to garner respect and love. As we saw with Kamal, these same rules are not applied to boys' topless images, however: thus we see how the images mediate newer formations of older formations of sexual double standards around feminine sexual activity and respectability and masculine prowess via the circulation and relative reward and/or judgements of social media images.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored how new digital affordances of new media and social networking practices are mediating and reassembling youth sexual cultures. Many of the examples are reminiscent of older patterns of sexualized (and racialized) difference making and gendered power relations in teen peer cultures.[41] Perhaps what is "new" about new media is how the digital affordances add more layers – extra temporal, spatial, affective, and performative dimensions – to how gendered and sexual power relations, embodiment, and identity work in teens' now networked peer cultures. Kylie's (15) case study underscored issues of new visibility in negotiating and performing her relationship with her boyfriend online and offline. We discussed having to manage desires for photos of girls' bodies, which would render the girl more "live," in line with Kember and

Zylinska's[42] arguments about the new forms of liveness and vitality emergent through new media practices. We also looked at how the enduring inequitable gender relations of sexual control over girls' bodies played out through dynamics of protective vs. predatory masculinity *vis-à-vis* this technology. Possessive "boyfriend" is now performed in relation to whether or not or how you display sexualized images of girls and your girlfriend online and judging and monitoring girls in the schoolyard as well.

Our data with Cherelle (13) allowed us to foreground how new practices of performing feminine desirability are emergent in being asked for images of your body through social media platforms. These negotiations were often fun, yet this was blurred by risks,[43] given that some broadcasts and requests led to lack of control over personal information, and to a material and embodied threat of being found in your neighbourhood. Moreover, e-safety policies about "deleting" online contacts are not helpful for coping with problems of being "touched up," as well as sexually harassed at school via social media from known boys in the peer group.

Kamal's (14) case study showed how popular masculinity is performed (or attempted) via the ambiguous possibilities of digital tagging (connecting) and collecting images of girls' bodies (visibility with material affective force as commodities that persist) afforded by new media technologies. We also explored how the persistence of Kamal's pornographic cartoon image, as well as how his attitude to ownership and access to "touching up" girls' bodies offline shaped his friendship with girls in his peer group like Cherelle.

Kaja's (15) case showed the digital affordances of being able to "expose" girls' images as sexually stigmatizing (a practice that combines online visibility and spreadability). Kaja performs a traditional form of masculinity by carefully negotiating his relationship to explicit images and texts from older girls, defending against attachment to un-"known" girls through sexual shaming. What is new is that it is the image itself that marks the girl as slutty through codes that imply sexual intent—older norms of female sexual respectability[44] are re-mediated through this technology—rules about online display that were not applied to boys' body images.

Thus, this chapter has begun a discussion of how digital affordances shape the possibilities of connectivity and relationality in young people's gender and sexual cultures. There remains, however, great scope for exploring how the new affordances of visibility,

searchability, spreadability, and persistance of social media may also present spaces for reworking age-old gender and sexual inequalities in ways as yet unforeseen.

Notes

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29 "Ratings" is a complex system of value and recognition, in which boys could gain by being "hard," brave, sexually active, etc. For a more detailed discussion see Harvey & Ringrose, *supra* note 27; Ringrose & Harvey, s*upra* note 12.

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