Assessing Girls' Online Experience Through a Cyberfeminist Lens:

A Review of Relevant Literature

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Summary

Cyberfeminism is traced from its roots in Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* to its contemporary interpretations through contributions from a range of feminist scholars. The gendered socio-economic precursors to and effects of digitization are discussed; economic disparities facing young women are outlined. The implications of this socio-economic division for girls' on- and offline experience are investigated. Commodity feminism, or marketing to females via ideologies of empowerment, is delineated; celebritization is touched upon through discussions of advertising discourse, wherein girls face a 'consumer-media' culture characterized by sexually suggestive clothing, obesity, eating disorders and obsession with body image. Consumer-media ideology has become a powerful self-formative force in young women, accompanying an unattainable 'thin ideal' in popular media. This ideal is problematized for triggering self-objectification and other negative processes in young women who view objectifying media. The role of the Internet and social networking in formative gender identity processes is examined through the lens of Goffman's dramaturgical model, leading to a discussion of young women's photo and video posting habits in the context of cyberfeminist and filmic theory. Online photo and video sharing is explored in terms of its potential positive and negative effects upon young women. A discussion of the sexualization of and moral panic surrounding girls online ensues; gendered decision making in Canadian sexual assault cases is assessed. The role and effects of peer influence in formative identity processes is established; cyber gender harassment, one of the most considerable risks facing young women who frequent online social networks, is detailed. Extralegal and legal responses to potential risks facing young women online are considered. Although the Internet provides hope for increasing women's agency, this hope will not be realised unless the very patriarchal discourses within which females interact online continue to be questioned.

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i) Introduction – Defining Cyberfeminism

Cyberfeminists generally conceptualize the Internet as a feminist issue (Gajjala 2000 p.120). Scholars (Gajjala 2000; Munt 2001; Clark 2007) agree that Donna Haraway's *Manifesto for Cyborgs* forms the backbone of cyberfeminist discourse, wherein Haraway conceptualizes a contemporary feminism that has moved beyond the traditional binaries and limitations inherent to popular gender and feminist politics. As Haraway writes, "The [theoretical] cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world" (1991 p.150), where human and machine have become fused figuratively in terms of conflated identity and often literally in terms of shared physical space. Cyborgs subvert traditional "informatics of domination" – militarized, commercialized technologies of advanced capitalism (Haraway 1991 p.161) – envisioning cyberspace as a place for unrestricted, transcendent experience (Munt 2001 p.77).

In addition to disrupting conventional patriarchal hierarchies and power interests, Cyborgs also contest the underlying ideologies of broader political structures that assume such power binaries are natural, as opposed to socially constructed, distinctions (Clark 2007; Haraway 1991). Cyborg feminism involves critiquing the hierarchical logic underscoring current social binaries – particularly male over female, hetero- over homosexual, Caucasian over non-Caucasian, and human over animal – and restructuring these dualisms on a socio-political level to address the disparity between them (Clark 2007; Haraway 1991).

Cyberfeminist theorists including Plant have expanded upon the work of Haraway. Plant argues that traditional feminist activism does not suit the current social milieu in which the tools and machines of patriarchy have grown exponentially and unmanageably (2000 p.335). Plant agrees with Haraway that, "The Cyborg stands as a metaphor of feminist subject, a boundary figure that moves across the hierarchical categories of the natural and the artificial […] without positioning technology as a masculine other of women and nature" (Paasonen 2005 p.8). Rather, cyberfeminists share a belief that women should attempt to empower themselves via the appropriation and control of the same virtual technology used by men in ways that continue to express their identities as females (Gajjala 2000 p.121). Plant shares that, "Virtual worlds are not only important because they open spaces for existing women within an already existing culture, but also because of the extent to which they undermine both the world-view and the material reality of two thousand years of patriarchal control" (2000 p.325).

Cyberfeminism can also entail a critical analysis of the Internet and digital technology in relation to feminist thought as well as the analysis of gendered subcultures of digital media and ICT, including their feminist uses and underlying power structures (Paasonen 2005 p.12-13). Cyberfeminism is grounded in irony and uses both humour and seriousness to facilitate contradictory views (Paasonen 2005 p.22). It "is associated with so-called third wave feminism, [also] characterized by irony and diversity but also defined against – and as an other to – feminism" (Paasonen 2005 p.1). Sandova shares this perspective that cyberfeminism is linked to third wave feminism, or feminism that is more closely identified with diverse

ethnicities, religions, and backgrounds, simultaneously embracing contradictions, disagreement and conflict in order to accommodate change and diversity (1995).

Drawing from Haraway, Sandova asserts that, "Colonized peoples of the Americas have already developed the Cyborg skills required for survival under the techno-human conditions, under domination, for the last three hundred years. […] 'Cyborg consciousness' has a long lineage sited in forms of opposition to domination. […] The methodology of the oppressed […] chimes with the Cyborg metaphor, since both represent differential or oppositional consciousness, and both suggest new ways of thinking, acting and living together" (374-377). Munt writes, however, that despite Haraway's intentions, her Cyborg Manifesto was quickly appropriated by cyber-idealists as "the projection of a future untroubled by ambiguity and difference which reconciles mechanism and organism, culture and nature, simulacra and original, science fiction and social reality (2001 p.77). In truth, cyberspace offers no such promises.

Hall, originator of the term 'cyberfeminism', offers that there are two opposing camps of cyberfeminists: liberal cyberfeminists and radical cyberfeminists. Liberal feminists, largely influenced by postmodern concepts of gender fluidity, view cyberspace as a liberating agent free of traditional sexual/gender binaries; radical cyberfeminism is founded upon a framework that acknowledges the reality of male-initiated Internet-based harassment (1996 p.148). While Western cyberfeminists have traditionally adopted liberal views, stressing the potential of the Internet to equalize gender relations and level economic disparity

due to alleged low cost, Gajjala expresses concerns that such perspectives "reduce the problem of inequality in relation to Internet technologies and cyberspace to just a problem of material access to equipment, wiring and technical training [when] the issue of inequality in relation to cyberspacial environments does not stop with questions of material access and technical training" (2000 p.121). Issues of inequality, rather, extend to broader socio-political contexts that impact the building of cyberspacial environments themselves on a cultural level, often furthering the narrative discourse of linear progress within these constructions (*ibid.)*.

Gajjala critiques cyberfeminism for framing constructs such as 'third world' ignorance, identity, civility and 'netiquette' in Westernized, urban bourgeois terms and neglecting to accommodate alternative cyberspacial narratives (*ibid.*). He offers that even online discourses encouraging the participation of women from traditionally disempowered racial or social positions are governed by an ideological benevolence that 'allows' the speech of these othered groups. These cyberfeminist spaces therefore "extend colonial discourses and progress narratives which construct 'third-world' Others as mere consumers of 'first-world' productivity, be it in the form of theory or technology", allowing for only a narrow definition of what it means to be a girl online (*ibid.*).

Notwithstanding that cyberfeminism is founded upon the work of critical scholars such as Haraway, contemporary cyberfeminist discourses often assume a Western, privileged, unified subject. This subject of these discourses has the agency to leave or overcome the media to which she is subjected as well as the ability to

move independently within and act independently of community power structures. These constructions, however, assume a self that possesses agency and the ability to exist independently of community structures, practices and ideologies; ultimately, women who do not fit this archetype are implicitly denied the opportunity to partake in organized cyberfeminist resistance (*ibid.*).

Lara Karaian agrees with this criticism that traditional cyberfeminism is too Western, linear and homogeneous: "If anyone thinks that there's ever been a single unified feminism, they're delusional. Any criticism that rejects complexity in favour of simplification is the real threat to the power of feminism" (Scott-Dixon 2002 p.18). Indeed, it could not be more apparent that online experience is gendered, and feminist scholars have written at length on the gendered nature of the Internet. Consistently, the Internet is decried for portraying women as having access to power primarily via strong men (Hellman 1998 p.197); news media has likewise been criticized for taking a paternalistic tone in news stories relating to the Internet and social networking (Thiel-Stern 2008 *passim*).

Young women online face a litany of potential negative consequences resulting from their online presence, consequences that transverse a wide variety of social spheres. The digital gender divide imparts economic inequalities and has resulted in the very commoditization of feminism itself. Media construction of adolescent female sexuality has led to a widespread moral panic surrounding young women's perceived articulations of sexuality; at the same time, media promotes unattainable, sexualized female ideals that result in further negative consequences

for young women, such as body image or self-esteem issues, eating disorders and cyber gender harassment. Filmic and Cinematic interpretations of young women's posting of images and videos online support these findings. The language used in laws, policies, and decision-making processes relating to women in 'real life' also reflects strong gender biases, as evidenced particularly by legal discourses in Canadian sexual assault cases. Specific groups of women can also be targeted, resulting in the continued entrenchment of existing gender hierarchies.

Amidst many online risks, research has also indicated diverse potential benefits of young women's online presence. Most prevalent are discussions of whether young women's agency can be enhanced via the Internet; several researchers have concluded that it shows considerable potential to do so. That being said, strong concerns still stem from the broader gendered inequalities facing females online; these inequalities restrict the agency an online presence could facilitate. In response to these diverse issues, a wide variety of solutions – both legal and extralegal – have been proposed in terms of next steps.

ii) Gendered Socio-Economic Precursors to and Effects of Digitization

The source of these online inequalities, for many (Crow and Longford 2000; Gajjala 2000; Hellman 1998), stems from the sudden economic and political restructuring which has swept major industrialized countries since the 1970s as a result of widespread digitalization. Crow and Longford describe that the role of new information technologies as a result of 1970s neo-liberal restructuring is profoundly different from the one that is portrayed in popular public discourse, heralding digitization as a purveyor of decreased state involvement, public goods, democratic power, fair(er) market forces, and socio-economic development. Rather, neo-liberal restructuring has resulted in technology playing the role of a polarizing rather than democratizing agent, furthering socio-economic power imbalances increasingly in favour of those who are already powerful (2000 p.208).

Crow and Longford share that ubiquitous computing has come at the expense of certain populations, among them, women: "Digital restructuring has been integral to the broader processes of post-Fordist economic and political restructuring, which have been informed by a polarizing logic of shifting economic and political power increasingly in favour of powerful economic actors in the private sphere at the expense of the state, women, workers and citizens in general" (2000 p.210). Although digital restructuring has unquestionably contributed to increasing disparity, corporate and state discourses have mythologized digital restructuring in such a way that it seems "inevitable, universally beneficial, and gender neutral" (Crow and Longford 2000 p.210; Gajjala 2000 *passim*).

Crow and Longford then critique digitization through a cyberfeminist lens, concluding that there is a marked gendered division of labour within this new information economy (2000 p.215), a trend also noted by Hellman (1998), Munt (2001) and Gajjala (2000). This division is the partial result of a broader media message that the development of skills for high-status jobs is not for racialized populations or females, resulting in girls who do not contemplate futures or girls who contemplate their futures but are not optimistic about them (Hellman 1998 *passim*). Taking a Foucaultian stance and conceptualizing power relations as actions upon others' actions as opposed to acts that are directly and immediately assertive, Hellman interprets this message as a form of patriarchal control, implying that by enacting this form of power upon females' lives yet still providing them with the illusion that they are making free choices, powerful men gain feelings of recognition, superiority, and, perhaps most importantly, retain control (1998 p.199).

Additionally, Crow and Longford describe that digital technology also produces gendered divisions of labour by overrepresenting females in traditionally inconsequential aspects of the information economy, such as housework, telework, and part-time employment, occupations that in Canada that are usually accompanied by fewer statutory benefits and sometimes none at all (2000 p.216). This digitally mediated gendered division of labour is linked to statistical evidence that women do, in fact, constitute the majority of workers employed in these jobs; negative effects of digital restructuring in terms of employment incomes, benefits, and job security will therefore continue to fall disproportionately upon them (*ibid.*).

Crow and Longford also offer that high-tech employment is seeing what they term 'technological masculinism'. While "men increasingly dominate decision-making positions with regard to computer hardware and software and creative positions […], those for whose use and surveillance much of this digital technology is being designed are low paid, increasingly vulnerable part-time workers within advanced capitalism, as well as the army of women workers on the global assembly lines of the developing world" (*ibid.*). Complicating this issue even further, Twenge describes that as the status of females has increased over the last few decades, cultures have also increasingly valued instrumental/assertive traits that are stereotypically masculine (2009 p.338). At the same time, expressive/communal traits more stereotypically associated with women have been systematically devalued, resulting in a paradox of progress where women's status is increasing while traits traditionally ascribed to them are becoming socially devalued (*ibid*.).

Gajjala summarizes the economic problem facing women in relation to cyberfeminism as it is currently operationalized, particularly in developing countries. He writes that current cyberfeminist perspectives draw implicit, almost causal links between modernity, machines, and female liberation, reproducing modernist dichotomies that situate 'tradition' opposite 'modernity' and individual rights/interests opposite community goals, rules and practices. These constructions further the idea that modern technology will liberate women from the constraints of stereotyped 'traditional' oppressive structures when, in reality, these constructions themselves are "rooted in narratives that glorify modern scientific processes that laid the ground for notions of modern economic [patriarchal] growth" (2000 p.123).

This economic growth is often still at the expense of women in particular: Hughes writes that in one instance, "Japanese men were smuggling women into the US from Japan to provide [illicit sexual Internet-based] services for men in Japan" (2002 p.144). Snuff films, facilitated by the ease of use and distribution of the Internet, are enhanced through new digital techniques such as shockwave flash and advances in audio/video streaming, becoming more realistic and widespread through the spread and amelioration of technology, further contributing to the devaluation of women (Hughes 2002 p.140).

Modern economic growth is also reflected online by corporations and Internet Service Providers who, as Paasonen describes, launch female-specific products, programs and services targeted towards an archetypal female Internet user (2002 p.90). Services for women, she suggests, including official initiatives on women and the Internet, assume gender difference as a given, either based on genes, learned behaviour, evolution, or 'common sense' knowledge. As a solution to this presupposed difference, the Internet is often 'customized' in the form of web spaces designed for women with the goal of meeting their allegedly specific needs (2002 p.95). Paasonen describes some of the problems with this 'customization':

> 'Female spaces' on corporate web sites seem to be defined through very familiar axis of embodiment (menstruation, reproduction, motherhood) and femininity as a set of values, characteristics and practices (sharing, caring, emotions, social skills, mutual support). The shared experiences of women are depicted in pastel colours, with images of neatly attired, able-bodied women of various ethnic backgrounds smiling side by side. The diversity [has] obvious limits and the sites do not give space to a redefinition of gender and/or femininity" (2002 p.96).

She continues, describing that some initiatives are advertisements for the companies behind them, citing Tampax, Libresse and Always as examples (2002 p.89). Some corporations attempt to profile themselves as ‘woman-friendly’ as a method of attracting new customers, generating profit by ensnaring new female users as well as via advertisement income (*ibid.*). Gajjala shares that, “Intercultural communication in cyberspace is driven through an agenda of commercialization that is implicitly and explicitly digitally Darwinistic, emphasizing the survival of the fittest, as well as the consumption of brand names” (2004 p.47)

iii) Commodity Feminism

Even more considerably, post-industrial consumer culture is often marketed towards females via ideologies of empowerment, stressing economic well-being, personal independence, and sexual agency, a phenomenon that Dworkin and Lerum (2009 p.254) have termed 'commodity feminism'. Anita Harris extensively explores commodity feminism, tracing 'grrl power' from its roots in punk and indie music, where female artists meant to communicate anger. 'Grr', she relates, literally stood for growling and expressed rejection of patronizing male attitudes towards female musicians (Shields Dobson p.126). However, it was the Spice Girls' sexy, upbeat reworking of this concept in the mid-late 1990s that was appropriated so readily in marketing strategies thereafter, prompting simultaneous revolutions in 'girl culture' product advertising and academic feminist discourse (*ibid.*)

Feminism has become accepted within pop culture industries as an effective and fresh way of driving the consumption of products and services. Harris describes that, "Feminist discourses of empowerment and strong, assertive femininity are now sold to girls as consumable products, and identity transformation through consumption has been inscribed as the primary form of female power. The message being promoted in girl-powered icons and advertisements is that young women can and should 'have it all'" (*ibid.*). Analysis of advertisements for products with a female target audience indicates that femininity marketed as passive, submissive, and dominated by men no longer 'works' and consequently is abandoned in favour of a new, youthful femininity. In this new femininity, empowerment is closely linked

to consumption through often direct associations between particular products/services and young women being role models, assertive, strong, confident, or otherwise 'in charge' (*ibid.*). Femininity is packed via 'feminist' role models such as Alanis Morissette, Avril Lavigne, Sarah Jessica Parker or Kate Moss (Banet-Wiser 2004 p.120; Hallstein, Shugart and Waggoner 2001). Consumption, here, is presented as a shortcut to power. As Munk observes, "If you want to sell anything to the Girl Power crowd, you have to pretend that they're running things" (1997 p.134).

Banet-Wiser (2004 p.119) and Brookes and Kelly (2009 p.599) interpret this mainstream embrace, particularly in marketing, of 'girl power' as a restabilization of new gender categories, where new gender stereotypes are simply entrenched in the place of old ones and females do not actually gain any real agency. There is a contradiction between commercial media visibility and the production of empowering 'girl culture': female media visibility itself is not necessarily a form of empowerment since the images it presents can be disempowering, objectified, stereotyped, et cetera. (Banet-Weiser 2004 p.136; Brookes and Kelly 2009 p.599). Various feminist scholars have concluded that liberal feminism has become adapted into mainstream media culture while radical, third-wave feminism faces the same challenges that 'girl power' faces to break away from the mainstream media 'girl image'.

Senft links cyberfeminist market relations to the online management of emotional states, where females may fake particular character attributes without

personally identifying with the roles they are playing, or where they may engage in 'deep acting' and attempt to more strongly identify with the feelings/images they are trying to project (Senft 2008 p.9). Senft qualifies this acting as labour, since, regardless of whether it is conscious or unconscious and whether a girl enjoys it or not, it requires effort. In this way, women are drawn into the labour market whether they want to be a part of it or not simply by partaking in online interactions at all. This relationship becomes duly complicated when financial exchanges are involved, as in the case of paid chat rooms, webcams, or even online customer service positions. As Senft summarizes, "When deep gestures of exchange enter the market sector and are bought and sold as an aspect of labour power, feelings are commoditized" (2008 p.9).

iv) Celebrity and the 'Unattainable Thin Ideal'

A natural partner of commodification is celebritization and celebrity worship. Senft explores the intersection of cyberfeminism and celebrity, particularly in the context of online webcams, where girls explain in one instant that they are dissimilar to television stars yet simultaneously insist that by opening their lives to pubic scrutiny, they are also not 'ordinary' girls (2008 p,26). In this way, the Internet is a means through which girls may simultaneously distance themselves from and bring themselves closer to aspects of celebrity, such how many hits a profile or webcam receives, or how many friends a girl has on Facebook. According to Senft, "On the web, popularity depends upon a connection to one's audience, rather than an enforced separation from them. Most people in technoculture know full well that they aren't really celebrities. […] In fact, this anxiety about not being known, this tension between the conviction that one is known and not known, is a key component of the celebrity mode of subjectivization" (*ibid.*). A relationship between intense celebrity worship and negative body image in adolescence has been noted; this correlation disappears with adulthood. Quasi-social relationships with celebrities with 'good' bodies have been found to contribute to negative body image. (Barber et al. 2005 p.17)

Numerous scholars identify a contemporary 'consumer-media culture', primarily concerned with sexually suggestive clothing, obesity, eating disorders and overall body image that has become a powerful influence in self-formative processes of adolescents (Brookes and Kelly 2009; Hellman 1998; Manago et al. 2008). This

consumer-media culture is also underscored by a competitive discourse in advertising, where girls are encouraged to conceptualize themselves as winning competitions with their peers, particularly in terms of attaining body ideals such as being prettiest or thinnest. This discourse is reflected not only in print media but across other forms of media as well (Hellman 2008 p.197).

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of this consumer-media culture has been the creation of an unattainable 'thin ideal', where "both women and men [overestimate] the thinness of body type preferred by others of same-sex and opposite-sex" (Gunther et al. 2007 p.576), even if their own preferences are not as extreme as they imagine others' to be. Girls who are aware of this thin, sexy ideal show tendencies to internalize it and believe that it is important to meet the expectations it presents (Good 2003 p.427). While boys are faced with a 'muscular ideal' (Alasker, Knauss and Paxton 2007 p.393), the body image ideal presented to girls through media images emphasizes thinness. The disjoint between this unattainable, idealized thin body and 'actual' female bodies results in stronger body dissatisfaction that increases in tandem with body size of a particular subject (Harper and Tiggemann 2008 p.649).

This unattainable thin ideal has been associated with a variety of potentially harmful consequences for young women. Research suggests that exposure to such media images is associated with increased rates of eating disorders among adolescent girls (Becker et al. 2011; Levine and Murnen 2009; Lopez-Guimera 2010), although scholars disagree as to whether this link is directly causal or merely

a variable risk factor (Levine and Murnen 2009 p.9; Lopez-Guimera 2010 p.387). Thiel writes:

> Girls sometimes yearn for an impossible ideal of perfection in the eyes of their parents and peers, and develop both emotional and physical problems, such as eating disorders, as a result. The media's world of adolescent girls is often characterized as particularly feminized – a world where physical beauty, sexual attractiveness, and product consumption supersede intelligence and creativity. These girls yearn for an unattainable perfection and niceness that is at odds with their desire to simply 'be themselves', whether that may mean letting physical flaws or less than nice behaviours prevail (2005 p.180).

Limited research (Tiggemann, Wade and Wilksch 2006) suggests that increased media literacy may present a viable prevention-based approach to lessening these risks.

The internalization of media images has been identified as the strongest predictor of body dissatisfaction in young women (Alasker, Knauss and Paxton 2007 p.353); media is targeting progressively younger girls via advertisements and programming messages (Hellman 1998 p.196). Girls show higher body dissatisfaction, internalization and pressure than boys; girls also show increased body dissatisfaction following media exposure while boys do not. Likewise, girls also report strong pressure from media to be thin while boys report limited pressure to be muscular (Alasker, Knauss and Paxton 2007 p.353).

Exposure to thin-idealized women can produce vicarious experiences of objectification, leading to self-objectification amongst young women consuming objectifying media (Harper and Tiggemann 2008 p.651). The consumption of objectifying media has been linked to decreased satisfaction in adolescent

relationships due to triggered processes of partner objectification, which increases upon the consumption of objectifying media. Although men and women equally engage in partner objectification after viewing such media, there is a stronger correlation between self-objectification and partner-objectification amongst young men than amongst young women (Jaworski, Ramsey and Zurbriggen 2011 p.449).

Mazarella asserts that, "Girls in general are coming of age in a more dangerous, sexualized and media saturated culture. They face incredible pressures to be beautiful and sophisticated, which in junior high means using chemicals and being sexual" (2005 p.2). She also describes physical appearance as an important aspect of young women's identity (*ibid.*). A study by Kalpidou, Costin and Morris found that perceived attractiveness of girls' Facebook friends correspondingly boosted or detracted from the profile owner's own and perceived level of physical attractiveness and desirability (2011 p.183).

According to Thiel-Stern, girls rely upon media to gain authoritative knowledge to mark how young women are 'supposed' to be. Girls can interpret these fictionalized symbolic boy-girl interactions as a reality to which they should aspire; however, these interactions are often unrealistic gender portrayals, resulting in idealized and internalized social roles that young women are typically unable to fulfill (2008 p.9). In the process of negotiating this unattainable female ideal, Thiel-Stern mentions that girls may invest themselves in the cultural constructions of the 'perfect' girl, the 'mean' girl, or the girl who uses sexuality to get what she wants (*ibid.*).

Meanwhile, Azzarito writes that female archetypes that seem empowering at-a-glance, such as the 'future girl' who is socially, academically, and economically successful in part due to her participation in male-dominated areas like activity and sport, are restrictive in the types of women to whom they grant agency. 'Future girls', for example, require cultural capital that is not attainable for a large cross-section of women, often those from racial or religious minority groups. Moreover, this stereotype neglects to consider many of the sociocultural or psychological barriers preventing women from freely accessing these spheres in order to become an integrated part of them at all (2010 p.270).

v) Gender, Formative Identity Processes and the Internet

The relationship between identity formation, the Internet and gender has been explored at length. Phillips defines identity as "social not merely in the sense of being relational; it is also social in the sense that it is negotiated. We do not stride into the social world as wholly formed individuals. Nor are we putty in the hands of the collective. Instead, we become who we are in relation to others, as others become themselves in relation to us" (2009 p.304). From this perspective, there are multiple gender ideologies that differ from society to society; these gender ideologies are in turn used to motivate and interpret behaviour, thereby helping to define what is and what is not socially meaningful (2009 p.266-272).

Bryson merges this fluid concept of identity with Goffman's dramaturgical model, a theatrical metaphor where time, place and audience define human actions and identities are "performed" rather than pre-determined (Goffman 1959). He frames the public performance of identity through the contributing influences of interactivity and community (2004 p.240). Through a Goffmanian lens, the Internet can be considered an important interactive community forum through which identity is negotiated. Blogs and social networking sites are discursive online spaces in which girls can exchange comments, trade social capital, build emergent identities, and, in effect, perform a variety of social roles (Bryson 2004; Chittenden 2010; Senft 2008). Thiel identifies the Internet as a subcultural site for identity play and as an unrestricted space that may ascribe elevated social status to young

women (2005 p.186), also noting that it is a key paradigm for identity negotiation (2005 p.190).

Kelly, Pomerantz and Currie describe how they "found girls bending and switching gender to improvise nonconformist femininities and learning to express parts of themselves that they had been made to feel were taboo offline, [also] practicing initiative taking in heterosexual relationships" (2011 p.22). Harris claims that this process of identity transformation becomes a performance in itself, displaying and publicly performing a somehow dysfunctional 'old self'. In the case of online webcams, this reinforces the notion that girls were 'normal' until the advent of cameras into their lives, thereby constructing the exposure of girls' private selves as paths to success and self-realization (Dobson 2008 p.128). Senft agrees that girls perform different identities online, describing how girls may display particular character attributes without personally identifying with the roles they are playing. They may also engage in 'deep acting' and attempt to more strongly identify with the feelings/images they are trying to project (Senft 2008 p.9).

Phillips submits that adolescence is a crucial time for the development and construction of identity, cautioning that two cultural shifts are deeply impacting identity negotiation in technologized society. First, increasing surveillance allows for individual members of society to be observed, monitored and recorded with the potential for these individual observations to be disseminated on a widespread basis, for example, to advertising agencies, policymakers, or media outlets. Statistical norms, produced through these observations, are then enforced upon

individuals who are subsequently labeled and treated according to their relationships with these manufactured normative standards (2009 p.308). Essentially, then, surveillance "alters both the structure of visibility and the structures of meaning making. It renders us visible – it identifies us – in relation to the norms it produces" (*ibid.*). Manago et al. share Phillips' sentiments, noting that the public nature of virtual self-presentations generates labels and introduces feedback mechanisms by which adolescents legitimize images as aspects of identity (2008 p.446).

Labels are primarily not the result of self-perceptions but are enacted by others; likewise, identity is not self-derived but is the result of various integrations from social networks (Senft 2008 p. 52). Spivak thusly urges what she terms 'strategic essentialism', where individuals generate new names for themselves to promote feelings of shared empowerment and contestation in order to 'reclaim' a particular identity. Providing the example of 'women of colour', Spivak describes how using language to reclaim identity can simultaneously embrace a wide variety of different people while deliberately questioning what the term itself even means, since identity is a fluid construct. 'Of colour' is at once specific enough to elicit group identification and broad enough that even identifying group members are forced to critically examine their own understandings of the term. Underlying strategic essentialism is the notion that no label can ever fully describe one's identity, yet the aforementioned positioning of catachrestic identity is urged as a way of building alliances between disempowered populations (*ibid.*).

Gender identity is likewise a performed construction (Thiel 2005 p.184); a discourse manifested in linguistic social interactions and text (Bucholtz 2003 p.55) that is reinforced through day-to-day actions and internalizations (Hellman 1998 p.199). Girls have reported that online activities allow the 'rehearsal' of different identities before trying them out in an offline context, where they felt greater apprehension regarding perceived gender expectations (Kelly, Pomerantz and Currie 2006 p.3). Lara Karaian applies negotiated identity to postmodern feminism, describing that traditional dichotomies such as male/female, active/passive, et cetera are abandoned in favour of a complex, fluid concept of identity. Instead of simplistic differences between the sexes, postmodern feminism focuses on the differences *within* the sexes (Scott-Dixon 2002 p.19).

Research on women and the Internet has displayed a methodological and conceptual tendency to conflate sex with gender, comparing research findings between female and male research subjects in terms of identifying or better understanding presupposed gender differences (Bryson 2004 p.239). Often, a focus on this gender binary construct eclipses other relevant socio-cultural factors such as sexual orientation, age, race or economic standing. This is particularly troubling for women who comprise ethnic minorities, are economically disadvantaged, or identify as non-heterosexual. Bryson urges that the Internet, which he perceives as a meditative cultural tool, should be used as a productive lens to examine how women use digital technologies and then educate them on how to empoweringly assert their minority statuses within online communities of minority practice, effectively 'queering the status quo' and expanding the totalizing boundaries of conventional

online space (2004 p.239-240). No insight, however, is offered regarding how this might be accomplished for women who lack the capital required to actively participate within these online discourses, a considerable problem facing the very groups whose empowerment Bryson supports.

Edwards cautions that girls require spaces where they are able to learn and try out new identities without self-censoring. These safe spaces, she believes, are crucial to the full discovery and development of self (2005 p.5). The framing of identity online is a symbolic process (Edwards 2005 p.16), where 'digital drag' – appearing online as a different identity than one's offline identity – has implications for the performativity of identity in 'real life' (Senft 2008 p.34). Senft argues that since all identity is performative, there is always significance in performing one identity over another, so the particular identity chosen by a girl online is never arbitrary (2008 p.35).

Moreover, social networking itself is a major facilitating agent in the identity formation of youth (Shade 2007 p.1). Four unique aspects characterize social networking: persistence, or the indeterminate recording of online posts; searchability, whether by/for those with similar or dissimilar interests or attributes; replicability, or being able to copy and paste online content into different contexts; and invisible audiences, or the presence of anonymous online viewers of posted content (*ibid.*). As a result, the online experience of identity formation is unique to that of 'real life', with a multitude of associated benefits and potential risks to young women that will be explored duly.

vi) Filmic Theory and Girls' Online Images

Senft explores what she calls 'telepresence', or the media-enabled feeling of 'really' being with someone else, even over a considerable distance. Telepresence is facilitated by several factors, including interactions' perceived realness, intimacy and immediacy, as well as level of sensory and psychological immersion (Senft 2008 p. 55-66). Senft's inclusion of sensory and psychological immersion as qualifiers for the 'realness' of online interactions are particularly noteworthy, perhaps unintentionally paralleling telepresence with substance addiction. The almost addictive quality of online interactions is further identified by Shade (2007 p.65) and delineated by Senft:

> "When people speak of a technology being 'addictive,' what they really mean is that it is highly immersive, so much so that it cuts into other activities in their lives. The kinds of interpersonal engagement that online technologies make possible can be extremely immersive even when sensory stimuli are impoverished. Consider the reader of a comments thread who compulsively refreshes the page to keep the conversation going, or the web surfer who loses all sense of time while following a meandering trail of hyperlinks" (2008 p.63).

Echoing Donna Haraway's concept of the Cyborg, Senft notes that, "Cyborg ontology allows affinities beyond the real or even the human. […] Why should our bodies end at the skin?" (2008 p.37). She describes Turkle's related conceptualization of computers as "objects to think with" (1995): "People conceptualize not just their computers, but themselves in terms of windows overlaid on a single screen. […] These conceptualizations represent a rejection of the modernist notion of a holistic self in favour of a postmodern view of identity as

multiple, fractured, and segmented" (2008 p.21). Senft expands upon Turkle's view of a fluid self that is fused with technology to propose that webcams are a means of expressing identity online, referencing a LiveJournal user to strengthen her perspective: "Posting to my journal is like taking a picture of inside, a record of how I feel at the moment that I am writing. If I don't write it, it is gone" (*ibid.*).

While extensive research has been aimed at the webcam craze of the late 1990s/early 2000s, the widespread influence of social networking has resulted in ubiquitous online photo sharing, a phenomenon that has yet to be studied in great detail. Many elements of webcamming, however, are applicable to online photo sharing (Senft 2008; White 2003). White relates that, "The presence of a camera, varied web site elements, blurred or static-infused views, delivery problems, and operators who resist spectators' demands" are only several of the elements shared between webcams and the posting of online photo or video content; moreover, webcam feeds and photographs may be posted in similar contexts in terms of variable privacy controls and potential viewing audiences (2003 p.8). As Koskela reinforces, "The quality of both private and public cameras can vary a lot without making a significant difference to social practice" (2004 p.211).

Allyson Mitchell believes that "there are two basic ways of engaging with pop culture. The first is to be media literate and selective with pop culture. […] The second is to use it […] to make your own pop culture. Rip it apart and re-fashion it; cut and paste the words so that they tell a story about your existence, not someone else's" (Scott-Dixon 2002 p.18). The posting of photos online can serve a variety of

functions, many of which are integral parts of identity formation. Photos play a role in identifying and portraying 'real life'; they can provide an artistic outlet; they are a forum through which girls can negotiate sexuality; they accommodate social experimentation; they offer resistance to the new media industry; they can foster community identification; or can simply provide entertainment (Senft 2008 p.43).

White synthesizes online webcam viewing with film theory, which stipulates that a given distance is required between webcam operators and viewers in order to constitute voyeurism, a process whereby individuals gain pleasure from covertly observing others (2003 p.14). Whether the viewing of online photos and videos can be considered voyeurism is debatable, since "the unfinished and incomplete aspects of [online image] viewing suggest that the spectator is too close to see [the subject]. The spectator often obtains partial views because the [female subject] is near the camera lens. At times, the spectator's reflection seems to be conjoined with the operator's image, [which is enhanced when] both users, the spectator and operator, are engaged with the computer" (*ibid*.). White has stated that online images function as mirrors "onto similarity and difference, because they can propel spectators to see the way that they must seem in front of the computer. This suggests that the spectator is involved, or even intricately bound up, with versions of his or her own image [particularly when] computer and webcam spectators are intimately close to the screen or even too close to see" (White 2003 p.8).

Female spectators' identities are conceptualized as inseparable from images of body and bodily processes. The extreme proximity from which online images are

viewed presents a potential risk to young women, then, because “computer spectators become wrapped up in the image, rather than being able to grasp the whole representation” (White 2003 p.14). Audiences of online images can identify with the characters they perceive therein, even seeking out social or sexual interactions through these incomplete representations. In this way computers are, as Haraway suggests, extensions of individual identity, evidenced by the failure of viewers of online images “to distinguish where the subject ends and the object begins” (*ibid*.). White assumes that as computers become increasingly incorporated into a diverse range of situations, the privileging of a distant male subject will become increasingly less feasible, because ubiquitous computing will result in “the diverse valuation and functionality of the computer [leaving] the spectator uneasily shifting between privileged seeing and an abject near blindness” (2003 p.8).

Mulvey has also discussed females’ contributions to the formation of the patriarchal unconscious from a filmic standpoint, describing the symbolic representation of the female form in images and videos:

> She first symbolises the castration threat by her real absence of a penis, and second thereby raises her child into the symbolic. Once this has been achieved, her meaning in the process is at an end, it does not last into the world of law and language except as a memory. […]Woman's desire is subjected to her image as bearer of the bleeding wound, she can exist only in relation to castration and cannot transcend it. She turns her child into the signifier of her own desire to possess a penis. […] Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning (1975 p.6).

vii) The Role of Agency in/Effects of Posting Images Online

Agency is a frequently discussed aspect of girls' online photo sharing, although whether agency is actually gained or lost through this process is the subject of contentious debate. Koskela argues that online photo sharing facilitates girls' participation as active subjects in the circulation of their own images. By posting photos online, girls engage in 'counter-surveillance', a process whereby they criticize traditional tools of surveillance used by potential oppressors, contrary to conventional resistance movements that oppose surveillance entirely (2004 p.199). Via personal photo sharing, girls play direct roles in the collection and distribution of their own visual depictions, "demonstrating ownership and reclaiming the copyright of their own lives" (*ibid.*), making the active choice to present their private lives publicly.

Koskela continues, describing two social paradigms that characterize digital society: the regime of order and the regime of shame. A regime of order refers to the ways in which society regulates individuals, gathers knowledge, surveils, and maintains control. A regime of shame includes the internalization that occurs as a result of this control, having a basic inherent need for privacy, and enforcing a docile, meek and obedient female social norm (2004 p.207). The process of online photo sharing challenges both of these regimes. The exhibitionism involved in posting photos in a quasi-public setting liberates individuals from the need to hide that characterizes the regime of shame. Further, showing everything can be interpreted as a form of liberation since if everything is exposed, there is nothing

left to capture. In this way, the surveillance goals of the regime of order are also challenged (Koskela 2004 p.208).

White contributes that regardless of whether girls design profiles and sites through which their bodies appear as erotic objects allowing an external gaze – either male or female – they are still actively asserting control over when they are available and what can be seen (2003 p.16). In this way, girls are encouraging spectators to 'enter' into their own personal environments and the posting of online content can be considered an assertion of personal agency, countering the Western assumption that "what goes on inside the home is private" (Bailey 2009 p.292). Koskela agrees, writing that, "The idea of empowerment is not depending on the act of looking/seeing but the act of presenting" (2004 p.211).

Koskela takes a closer look at exactly what online agency entails. It cannot simply involve who is looking, she reasons, since in presenting their private lives on the Internet, posters are aware that anyone may see this posted content. Likewise, it cannot involve whether or not one is looked at all, since empowerment is found in the act of presenting, not in the act of seeing. Further, she finds that agency is not dependent upon the form of media through which images are posted, nor can it depend solely upon whether content is posted voluntarily, since online surveillance can still affect voluntarily posted content, thereby decreasing the agency of those who posted it (*ibid*.). A partial answer, Koskela suggests, could be that agency lies in "what, how and when [online content] is controlled by the person(s) whose images are circulated" (*ibid*.).

Although girls have some control over which images of themselves are circulated online (ie, by taking the pictures or not taking the pictures in the first place), Koskela cautions that exactly how these pictures will be used and disseminated is beyond girls' control, warning that, "They obviously can be used for repressive purposes as easily as for empowering purposes" (*ibid*.). There mere fact that online photos can be used for undesirable purposes such as control, surveillance, sexualization, slander, or other forms of exploitation should not necessarily be interpreted, however, as a loss of agency for girls. Koskela explicitly states that these concepts themselves need to be re-operationalized in a sense that allows girls the greatest possible agency: "This is precisely the point of the phenomenon: to reject the regime of shame means rejecting the traditional understanding of objectification. […] When it comes to 'alternative' image production loaded with resistance, [online photos] clearly have their potential" (*ibid*.). Plant, however, takes a more pessimistic stance, stating that the current track of cyberfeminism might deny girls agency altogether: "The goals of the women's liberation movement will evolve automatically in the course of feminization and digitization and this does not necessitate – or even enable – political agency" (Paasonen 2005 p.11).

Other positive aspects of online photo sharing not necessarily directly related to agency are identified in several studies. Colley praises the potential of photo messaging to maintain relationships between girls to a greater extent than boys (2010 p.348). Gonzales and Hancock have found that exposure to self-presentation on digitally mediated environments such as Facebook – for example,

viewing one's own profile – can have a positive influence on self-esteem, contrary to the findings of prior research (2011 p.79). Shade assesses that positive identities and femininities can be asserted by posting positive personal profiles that contain pictures of non-traditional gender attributes and positive behaviours, although a variety of respondents expressed doubts as to how alternative femininities could be expressed via social networking, particularly Facebook, due to rigid design, content and social restrictions (2008 p.72).

As significant as the potential benefits associated with posting online photos are the potential harms. Harper and Tiggemann link image sharing to women thinking about their physical appearances from the viewpoint of a critical observer, which can be activated both through word primes and through the anticipation of a male gaze (2008 p.650). Azzarito adds that unrealistic stereotypes render female bodies docile and celebrate female bodies that lack 'masculinity', trends that are reflected throughout contemporary media (2010 p.261).

viii) Sexualization

Several concerns have been raised regarding women's posting of sexualized online images and, both in terms of females' physical safety and in terms of negative consequences to greater feminism. Women as well as men display a tendency to objectify women more than they objectify men (Hargraves and Strelan 2005 p.707). White has also opined that girls can display 'too much' of themselves through online image taking, implying that female Internet users facilitate patriarchal sexual norms and enable traditional spectatorship by freely "offering themselves up" (2003 p.10) to a male gaze.

Digital technologies have also enabled the creation of images that do not need professional processing, thereby eliminating the risk of detection inherent to illicit images. In this way, technology has made it easier for people in general, and particularly men, to become producers of pornography. As Hughes summarizes, "Formerly men used to have to remove themselves from their community by three levels to find extreme, violent pornography. First, they had to go somewhere physically, then know where to go, then know how to find it. The Web makes it very easy to get that far removed very quickly" (2002 p.139). It is worth noting, however, that pornography should not necessarily be considered disempowering for women. Representations of control do not necessarily equal representations of power, and as Paasonen points out, "All kinds of pornography revolve around scenarios and fantasies of control: the virgin and seducer, the student and the teacher, the slave and the master, [...] in straight and queer pornographies alike" (2006 p.416).

Chaterjee views pornography as a site of performance where multiple sexualities may be played out and recreated, at times effectively subverting heteronormative sexualities and roles, identifying cyberpornography as unique from other forms of pornography since it can be produced and consumed anonymously and is readily accessible to those with technology (2000 p.91). MacKinnon has also stated that, "As pornography saturates social life, it […] acquires the […] status of its latest technological vehicle, appearing not as pornography, but as books, photographs, films, videos, television programs and images in cyberspace" (2005 p.352). Since cyberpornography engenders new subjectivities, new corporealities are also implicit, echoing Haraway's conclusions regarding the human/non-human binary: namely, that there might not be one at all (Chatterjee 2000 p.90).

Despite considerable interest by feminist scholars, discourse around adolescent female sexual desire and bodily pleasure associated with sexuality is limited. Females are traditionally objects of male desire, which has resulted in a Western societal focus on attractiveness. Little attention has therefore been given to women's sexual agency and embodiment of sexual desire, which has historically been accepted as a positive aspect of male sexual identity and a natural part of male sexual development (Welles 2008 p.31). Dworkin and Lerum have illustrated that media promotes a message of 'healthy sexuality' based on Western sexual rights as opposed to those recognized by the World Health Organization: the right to sexual pleasure, not necessarily with another person; the right to emotional sexual expression; and the right to sexually associate freely (2009 p.259). This

Westernized message concludes that "girls and women cannot hope to benefit from sexual self-presentations and representations, and that this will inevitably lead to an 'unhealthy' sexuality" (*ibid.*).

Bailey has noted, however, that pornography can be retooled in more empowering ways for women, citing research by Davis, Cornell, and Royalle. Davis advocates for pornography depicting sexuality as a component of a broader social discourse including healthy interpersonal relationships; Cornell has suggested that women can explore prospective sexual identities through transformative sexualities presented in pornographic media. Royalle, finally, believes that erotic materials can be empowering when their working conditions permit the individual portrayed as submissive to be in control, for example, in sexual fantasies where women are acting out their own fantasies as opposed to those of dominant men (2009 p.296-297).

Inequalities relating to females' sexuality pervade various sociocultural spheres, including legal ones. Ehrlich explores the adjudication of Canadian sexual assault cases, determining that they are underscored by interpretive cultural frameworks that reproduce gendered inequalities and legitimate male violence. For example, complainants are frequently questioned in such a way that assumes their access to unlimited, freely chosen options, often transforming their strategic responses to sexual aggression into inadequate acts of resistance (2003 p.660). She concludes that, "Whether or not androcentric definitions and understandings of rape or sexual harassment are actually encoded in law, the interpretation and characterization of events in such cases are overwhelmingly directed toward

interrogating and discrediting women's character on behalf of maintaining a considerable range of sexual prerogatives for men" (2003 p.644).

It is not surprising, then, that these inequalities carry over into cyberspace. As a result, much research has been conducted on the potential negative consequences of female sexualization online, although Azzarito describes that sexualized media can be used to positively define and compliment female bodies in opposition to specific, narrow, heteronormative male representations (2010 p.264).

Before examining the potential negative outcomes of the sexualization of young women online, it is worth exploring moderating influences upon the effects of media sexualization. The negative influence of sexually objectifying media is only likely if individual characteristics make women more susceptible to media influence; Clark and Tiggemann therefore caution that it is illogical to conclude that exposure to appearance-focused media is directly related to body dissatisfaction (2006 p.628). Rather, they state that exposure to appearance-focused media is indirectly related to conversations about appearance amongst peers, which in turn may affect body image through the social influence they exert (*ibid.*). Dworkin and Lerum identify that interpersonal interactions can be a 'protective factor' against sexualization and objectification resulting from commercial media (2009 p.252).

Ethnicity is also a likely contributing factor to the enhanced awareness of dangers related to sexuality among adolescent girls, such as pregnancy or abuse. As a result, racialized populations are theorized to be more resistant to media pressures than Caucasian, middle-upper class girls (Cole and Kaplan 2003; Durham

1999; Nakamura 2002). Finally, Aubrey notes that girls with higher self esteem are less willing to expose themselves to sexually objectifying media in order to avoid the negative risk – lower self esteem – of exposure to objectifying content. In much the same way, Cole and Kaplan have identified that girls have a tendency not to want to read media about girls' achievement (2003 p. 151). This implies an awareness on behalf of girls in general regarding the potential of sexually objectifying media to lower self esteem (2003 p.159), directly opposing earlier findings that suggest girls are unknowledgeable about their own sexualities and how to handle sexual situations, despite their tendency to have strong opinions on subjects related to sexuality (Cole and Kaplan 2003 p.141).

There are a variety of potential negative consequences of media sexualization of young women. Media sexualization has been linked to self-objectification, internalization of media ideals, negative body image, and increased rates of eating disorder (Becker et al. 2011; Harper and Tiggemann 2008; Levine and Murnen 2009; Lopez-Guimera 2010). Kelly, Pomerantz and Currie identify sexist prevailing online rules of romance, sexually harassing men and boys, and general disrespect towards women as similar dangers facing girls online (2011 p.22). Disconcertingly, despite the extensive online identity experimentation in which young women engage, their altered or emergent sexual or gender identities are not taken up as political to further any broader cause for female agency (*ibid.*).

Thompson suggests that potential dangers facing girls as a result of sexualized behaviour could stem from a deeper notion that female sexuality is

something that should be managed/restrained and that empowered female sexuality is something to fear. This 'Lolita effect' masks the way that Lolita's empowerment is derived from her very synthesis of youth and sexuality, implying that "the repression, surveillance or control of sexualized behaviours serves to control and discipline girls and female sexuality, or interferes with the transitional period from girl to woman" (Thompson 2010 p.397; Welles 2005). As Thompson illuminates:

> Sexuality is rarely presented to children as something positive. Instead, We have become increasingly led to believe that paedophilia is rampant and that we live in a society where childhood is objectified, sexualised and capable of being 'lost'. Of course, there are justifiable worries, but sexualization practices may function to keep girls 'in their places' as objects of sexual attraction and beauty, significantly limiting their free thinking and movement in the world. […] Similarly, anxieties over girlhood and sexualization could function to delay empowerment. (2010 p.397)

ix) Moral Panic: Demonizing Young Women in Social and Legal Spheres

One can conceptualize the change from girl to woman as accompanied by physiological markers; the age at which a girl experiences them can varyingly conflict with social constructions of adulthood depending on cultural and legal context. As a result, girls can be left waiting for these physiological markers to intersect with socioculturally approved adulthood, resulting in a liminal state of transition between girl and woman. This liminal period is defined through comparatively looser social norms and structures; during this time, girls have historically been considered more vulnerable or in danger, as well as more dangerous to others (Thompson 2010 p.397).

As Thompson elucidates, "Visceral reactions of horror at the sexualization of girls, and attempts to limit sexualised behaviour amongst girls, might constitute an attempt to mitigate the social danger" (*ibid.*) presented by this liminal period. There is, as a result, a moral panic about young women in public space (Thiel-Stern 2008 p.2). Thiel-Stern parallels this moral panic with discourses surrounding public dance halls during the late 19th and early 20th century, specifically in terms of their use by girls and young women. In dance halls, a detectable moral panic surrounded young women who were publicly seen dancing; in modernity, girls are problematized for posting self-revealing photos and videos on the Internet. Both scenarios contain a threat that female participation in public spheres can lead to advances, whether wanted or unwanted, from males (2008 *passim*).

MySpace and Facebook have been identified as places where young girls can 'get into trouble' if they "articulate sexuality, [post] suggestive or provocative photos of themselves (or others) or [use] sexually explicit language. Following Cohen's typology for a moral panic, [media uses the] repetition of alarmist language, fallacies, and snappy headlines to reproduce [this] ideology" (Thiel-Stern 2008 p.20-21). Media constructs social networking as a specific threat to youths and particularly to adolescent girls; in turn, the stereotype of a Western, heterosexual, middle class, passive girl is reinforced. This image also serves as a warning for young women who attempt to publicly assert their sexuality, which Thiel-Stern sees as a control strategy of conservative political forces (Thiel-Stern 2008 p.22). Even if the connection between girls' posting of provocative photos and their being taken advantage of or attacked online is not necessary to further a news story, she reiterates, "It does serve to place girls in the role of the victim. It seeks to punish them for their articulation of sexuality" (Thiel-Stern 2008 p.22-23).

Much in the same way, women who have accepted the 'natural and unquestionable' rhetoric that girls must be protected help reinforce this moral panic. The media, Thiel-Stern continues, is equally as guilty for not questioning this blind assumption. Again linking social networking to dance halls at the turn of the century, she describes how, once again, something that is enjoyable to most girls is portrayed as something that is capable of ruining their reputation, often simply by their mere participation in it at all (Thiel-Stern 2008 p.20-23). This portrayal once again perpetuates ideologies that reinforce upper class, heterosexual, Western values.

The media frames news reports on Internet crime in a way that paints women as victims of the Internet. Newspaper articles on girls' social networking has suggested that sexual predators will be more attracted to girls as a result of them posting sexually provocative photos, contributing to a troubling 'she asked for it' mentality (Thiel-Stern 2008 p.21). These stories integrate alarmist language, fallacies, snappy headlines, and exaggerated stereotypes to further enhance the moral panic they perpetuate (Thiel-Stern 2008 p.21; Welles 2005 p.31).

Thompson partially ascribes the moral panic around youth and girls' sexualized behaviour to an 'adult-centric' perspective held by the powerful majority, where "adults assume that children share the same meaning they attribute to particular behaviours and understand those behaviours on adult terms" (2010 p.396). In truth, youth do not necessarily understand what they do or mean in the same terms as adults; in this way, children mimicking adult sexual behaviours can be interpreted as a performance of adulthood where the youths in question do not understand the sexual implications and adult context of that behaviour (*ibid.*). As a response, social anxiety regarding the surveillance and control of children's behaviours can be "understood as an attempt to 'child' children, undermined by children's attempts to 'adult' themselves, contributing to parents' and adults' feelings of lack of control and their [resulting] emotional reactions." (*ibid.*]. Sexualized behaviours, then – including posting images or content on social networking sites – are widely considered inappropriate for children, even though this appropriateness itself is defined by adults and based on negative constructions of sexualized behaviours as potentially dangerous to youth" (*ibid.*).

Ringrose writes that the developmental psychology model of feminine aggression is a postfeminist discourse that illustrates how girls are pathologized through models of girlhood that lack context and assume girls are a homogeneous group. These discourses have contributed to a conceptual displacement from girls as vulnerable to girls as mean in mainstream pop cultural images (2006 p.405). These 'mean girl' constructions are related to postfeminist gender concerns regarding the power and success of middle-class girls. According to Ringrose, "Regulatory strategies emerging to manage mean girls are examined as oriented toward maintaining appropriate modes of repressive, white, middle-class femininity. When 'other' girls do figure in to the mean girl story, it is through sensational incidences of isolated girl violence, held up as a dangerous risk of uncontained feminine aggression" (*ibid*.). Young femininity, in this way, is carefully monitored and regulated through the race- and class-specific categorizations of femininity that, as radical cyberfeminists observe, continue to produce normative, or mean, girls and deviant, or violent, girls (*ibid*.).

A variety of other female gender stereotypes have been identified. Coleman and Ross describe that sexual scripts in hip hop media, including music videos, project negative gendered racial stereotypes that support these scripts themselves. Music and video in this vein reflect a material focus, conveying status as a sexual commodity, producing two emergent sexual female archetypes. The first, known as the 'gold digger', includes women who pursue higher status men in order to achieve material gain; the second, the 'video girl', includes women who use sexuality as a tool to help them access and enjoy success within the entertainment industry (2011

passim). Ter Bogt et al. assess that girls' preferences for hip-hop and hard-house music are associated positively with these gender stereotypes while preferences for classical music are associated negatively with them, implying that preferences, rather than exposure to content, are associated with attitudes towards gender stereotyping (2010 p.844).

McRobbie, meanwhile, writes that we have entered a post-feminist society where fashion and beauty have superseded traditional patriarchal authority, resulting in the concurrent emergence of new female gender stereotypes. He describes the 'phallic girl' who enjoys sexual liberation only formerly enjoyed by men; the Western, independent 'career girl'; and the 'global girl' factory worker of the developing world (2007 p.718). "Underpinning this attribution of capacity and the seeming gaining of freedoms," he explains, "is the requirement that the critique of hegemonic masculinity associated with feminism and the women's movement is abandoned" (*ibid*.). This neglect has resulted in a new sexual contract that has become fully integrated into popular culture and political discourses, effectively "restabilizing gender hierarchy under the guise of government taking it upon itself to 'look after' young women" (*ibid*.).

Such restabilized gender hierarchies can further be seen in decisions made in Canadian sexual assault cases, much in the same way that they are permeated by interpretive cultural underpinnings that legitimate male violence. Alternative voices struggle to emerge within such frameworks, where debate is almost entirely framed by terms of reference of the controllers and critical examination of dominant vs.

alternative definitions therefore does not occur (Ehrlich 2003 p.667). Further, the linguistic coding of these dominant ideologies constrains complainants' own linguistic practices. Ehrlich makes the connection that female agency is dependent upon constricting external realities such as that of a courtroom:

> Not only did dominant perspectives obscure and/or render invisible complainants' acts of strategic agency – ie, did not allow them to 'shine' – they also produced them as subjects who had not acted strategically [in response to unwanted sexual advances from a male]. Questions, as we have seen, can mold or exert control over the forms of answers. And in response to innumerable questions, […] the complainants cast themselves as agents who were ineffectual: their performances of strategic acts within the 'external reality' were transformed into performances of ineffectual acts of resistance within the linguistic representations of the 'courtroom reality'. And, without effectual and appropriate resistance, the dominant discourse (re)framed the sexual activity as consensual (2003 p.667).

Ehlrich continues to describe how 'coerced' identities such as these parlay stereotypes of aggressive, active masculinity and victimized, passive femininity. In the case of sexual assault cases, he interprets that witnesses and complainants were involuntarily coerced into their subject positions by a legal discourse that constrains women's possibilities for representing their strategic agency, reflective of a broader social one that does the same (2003 p.668).

Legal discourses can suppress specific groups of women as well via the language they employ, usually further subjugating those already in disempowered groups. As Hawthorne submits,

> The problem of invisibility of lesbians in India, for example, is indicated by the omission of the word lesbian from the glossary of an otherwise useful handbook, A Guide to Your Rights: Legal Handbook for Sexual Minorities in India. The glossary does include bisexual, homosexual and transgender. I point out, however, that this is not exclusive to Indian organizations, since

the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) in the USA in 2005 had precisely the same kind of omission from its list of keywords for conference presentations. The keyword list included Sexuality, the Body, Identity, Homosexuality and Transgender, but not Lesbian. Many Australian women's and gay organisations habitually leave out lesbians. This is about shame (2011 p.1).

x) Social Networking, Peer Association and Identity

The Internet has become fully integrated into the day-to-day lives of young women, primarily serving social and entertainment functions rather than educational ones (Shade, Porter and Sanchez 2005 p.504). Girls between 12 and 17 are the fastest growing group of Internet users (Mazzarella 2005 p.2), although media effects on identity, such as an 'appearance culture' of related media and peer influence, have been observed among girls as young as age nine to 12 (Clark and Tiggemann 2006 p.628). Girls use media differently than boys, being more likely to use email and instant messaging while boys are more likely to play online games or download music (Mazzarella 2005 p.2). Mazzarella interprets these differences as girls engaging in a 'best friend' culture, dominated by social relationships and interactions (*ibid*.).

There have been a number of positive effects associated with the use of the Internet by girls for communicative purposes. Increased community, social involvement, and psychological well-being have been identified by Costin, Kalpidou and Morris, who also reveal that students with low self-esteem benefit from using social networking sites such as Facebook because in doing so they expand their social capital (2011 p.183). Likewise, girls who are more introverted feel less restricted by online interactions, resulting in increased extroversion, particularly in the context of cyberbullying (Shariff and Gouin 2006 p.29). Moreover, Facebook has been found to foster positive social adjustment and attachment to post-secondary institutions in students using it during college/university years. In a reverse of anti-

social effects that have been associated with having many Facebook friends during earlier adolescence, having many Facebook friends throughout post-secondary years creates opportunities for students to connect with one another and to simultaneously connect with campus life for activities (*ibid.*).

Research has tended to focus on the negative effects of young women's communicative online interactions, effects that are seemingly many and diverse. Durham recognizes that girls use social media to reconstruct heterosexual ideals pertaining to physical appearance, including goals of marriage, motherhood, and the promotion of homophobia. While race and class are listed as contributors to the construction of these frameworks (Nakamura 2002), peer context was the one in which emergent gender identity was primarily consolidated via the referencing of acceptable sociocultural standards of femininity and sexuality (1999 p.210). Within the context of social networking, Shade outlines that girls face peer pressure and 'superficial' friendships (2007 p.4).

Costin, Kalpidou and Morris find that girls' quantity of Facebook friends is a better indicator of social adjustment than is time spent on Facebook, describing that having 300 or more Facebook friends is an indicator of higher introversion, lower academic success, lower social adjustment, and lower perceived social attractiveness than having fewer Facebook friends, a trend that reverses after high school (2011 p. 183). Much in the same way, upper-class students reporting high emotional connections to Facebook also reported lower self-esteem. Those beginning their first year of post-secondary education with many Facebook friends

also reported lower emotional adjustment throughout their post-secondary careers (Costin, Kalpidou and Morris 2011 p.187). The obvious implication is that Facebook, like Internet use, does not fulfill emotional needs (Costin, Kalpidou and Morris 2011 p.184).

Girls themselves note a variety of concerns regarding potential negative consequences of social networking. First, many fear the future ramifications of posting incriminating content online in terms of future employment and higher educational success (Shade 2007 p.6; Shade 2008 p.69). Additionally, some girls dislike "how time consuming social networks are, [...] that 'there's a lot of drama on Facebook', [...] [and the] social obligation to answer various posts, wall messages, and friend requests" (Shade 2007 p.4). Others question the nature of 'friending' people on Facebook, problematizing the link between viewing strangers' profile pictures, clicking a button, and referring to them as 'friends'. Still more question the motives of males who have excessive amounts of female Facebook friends (*ibid.*).

xi) Cyber Gender Harassment

Online social networking has become a forum through which anonymous groups may target minorities – most notably women, people of colour, and those who are economically disadvantaged. These groups can target individuals through defamation, threatening violence, or technology-based intrusions that silence and destroy the privacy of victims (Keats Citron 2009 p.1). As strategic response, female victims go offline or assume gender-neutral pseudonyms, even at the expense of the increased social and economic opportunities associated with a greater online presence: "Although online harassment inflicts the most direct costs on targeted individuals, it harms society as well by entrenching male hierarchy online" (Keats Citron 200 a p.375).

Cyber gender harassment has therefore been studied extensively (Keats Citron 2009; Shariff 2008; Shariff and Gouin 2004; Dodd 2001). Keats Citron expands that its victims are female and harassment is usually targeted towards particular women. Moreover, this abuse "invokes the targeted individual's gender in sexually threatening and degrading ways" (2009 p. 378). Alarmingly, girls themselves are often the perpetrators as well as the victims of cyberbullying, trends that are also reflected among adults (Shariff and Gouin 2004 *passim*). Keats Citron exhaustively describes the potential consequences of female cyber gender harassment.

First, through the experience of online gender harassment, women's every-day agency is undermined. Online sexual threats can "literally, albeit not physically,

penetrate" (Keats Citron 2009 p.13) women's bodies, exposing their sexualities and promoting messages that harassers are in control of the physical safety of targeted women. This loss of agency can transcend online spheres; for example, one young woman "stopped going to the gym because her anonymous harassers encouraged her law school classmates to take cell phone pictures of her and post them online" (*ibid*). This loss of agency perpetuates the loss of autonomy that females experience in retail and economic spaces, resulting in women's continued inability to attain professional goals. Women's work may also be impaired directly by cyber gender harassment, for example, via the hacking of feminist websites or the online encouragement of employers not to hire women (Keats Citron 2009 p.386).

In cases where women feel pressured to hide their gender online, harm is inflicted to women's identities as women. Even girls who present themselves as female may engage in stereotypically male behaviour as a strategy to avoid online abuse. Girls online may downplay stereotypically feminine attributes while exaggerating stereotypically male ones in order to deflect Internet-based attacks (*ibid.*). Cyber gender harassment may objectify young women in a way that harms their self-esteem and dignity. This internalization may prompt physical symptoms including eating disorders, depression, and suicide –similar symptoms experienced by women undergoing workplace sexual harassment (*ibid.*). Other 'real life' consequences of cyber gender harassment may also include threats to women's physical well being, for example, in cases where women's home addresses are posted with suggestions that they have rape fantasies, leading to cases of offline stalking and sexual assault (*ibid.*).

Cyber gender harassment takes place within a broader misogynistic Internet culture where women are assumed to naturally have the risk of being harassed and where abusive commentary is taken as a given danger of online participation. As a result, it is often trivialized both by the public and law enforcement who deem that cyber harassment is "harmless teasing that women should expect and tolerate, given the Internet's Wild West norms of behaviour" (Keats Citron 2009 p.373). Downplayers of online harassment claim that targeted individuals have alternate means to protect themselves, such as going offline or asking webmasters to remove offensive content, when this is not necessarily true. Dodd finds that although women often want to confront sexist remarks online, in practice many may remain silent because of concerns related to self-presentation, where girls fear negative repercussions at the hands – or words – of men (2001 p.566).

Women online do form a sort of captive audience, often left without means of avoiding cyber attacks, short of completely shutting down the websites on which they have an online presence. Likewise, women cannot escape harassment by others on third-party sites like Facebook or Twitter. Although such harassment is inescapable, "women who maintain an online presence should not be required to forego it in order to escape harassment, just as women should not have to quit their jobs or leave their homes to insulate themselves from sexual harassment or domestic violence" (Keats Citron 2009 p.376). Through the failure on a macro level to recognize that these harms present a unique threat to women and have legitimate social meaning, abusive behaviour toward women is promoted and tolerated (*ibid*.).

Shariff and Gouin have identified that schools perpetuate hierarchies of power in a similar way, latently endorsing cyberbullying by refusing to address it in school curriculums (2004 p.33). Counterspeech and retaliation have both been alternately praised and discredited as methods of dealing with the problems presented by cyberbullying, where counterspeech attempts to empower harassed individuals via the denunciation of attackers' harmful behaviour and where retaliation is actually 'lashing out' against this behaviour. Keats Citron, however, describes that targeted women are unlikely to engage in either of these strategies lest the wrath of their attackers is stirred, since they lack a strong online community to support their efforts and partaking in either strategy would ultimately do little to change potential employers' opinions that they attract unwanted attention (2009 p.397-298).

xii) Extralegal Responses

In terms of non-legislative means of addressing the risks associated with young women's online presence, the promotion of feminist identity shows some promise. Senft alludes to political theorist Nancy Fraser's argument that women respond to their exclusion from public spheres by establishing sites of counter-politics in order to habitually critique and strengthen democratic relations. Cyberfeminism, then, can be considered a counter-public that encourages the critical evaluation of women's work and politics (Senft 2008). Feminist women experience a more positive body image because of their increased ability to critique cultural norms related to body image and subsequently overcome the unattainable thin ideal presented in modern media (Murnen and Smolnak 2009 p.186). Likewise, women with increased past exposure to feminism report greater feelings of a shared fate with other women and less negative evaluations of feminism, prompting stronger feminist identification (Purcell and Reid 2004 p.759).

Bucholtz shares that feminist textual analysis involves a discussion "not only of how gender is represented within the text, but also of how the text draws the reader into its ideological framework and of how, through raised awareness, the reader can resist these representations and underpinnings" (2003 p.56). While media appears to promise readers one thing, it in truth provides them with something quite different; identifying these contradictions is the core of critical feminist discourse analysis. Power relations can be found in every aspect of society and therefore all social discourses should be examined critically (2003 p.57).

Potential indicators of feminist identification in young women include a strong social identity as a woman, awareness of sexism, and gender-egalitarian attitudes (Arias and Leaper 2011 p.475). While negative stereotypes conceptualizing feminism as unfeminine or unsexy can detract from girls' willingness to identity as feminist (*ibid.*), girls who violate expectations and break stereotypes online do not enhance negative attitudes towards women (Bailenson and Fox 2009 p.147). That being said, women who disidentify with traditional feminists – often due to an unfamiliarity with feminist history and perspectives – are more likely to embrace cyberfeminism as a feminist alternative (Paasonen 2005 p.15-18). Lara Karaian identifies that an advantage to cyberfeminism is its capacity to unite vastly different feminist traditions: "If anyone thinks that there's ever been a single unified feminism, they're delusional. […] What needs to happen is education about the effects of globalization and consumption. People need alternatives" (Scott-Dixon 2002 p.18).

Media literacy initiatives have been proposed as a possible means through which greater media awareness and higher long-term self-esteem can be promoted, although immediate self-objectification has been forewarned as a possible negative consequence of these interventions (Choma, Foster and Radford 2007 p.581). Rural women seem to be somewhat more aware of certain negative consequences of Internet use, generally setting social networking profiles to higher privacy settings than their urban counterparts, although both urban and rural men set their privacy settings at the same rate (Gilbert, Karahalios and Sandvig 2010 p.1367).

A considerable challenge is that girls display a tendency to change topics of conversations to boys and to be drawn to online media that involves representations of males (Cole and Kaplan 2003 *passim*), despite their tendencies to prefer women as friends (Gilbert, Karahalios and Sandvig 2010 p.1367). Girls also displayed an interest in reading articles that related to abusive relationships (Cole and Kaplan 2003 p.151), perhaps in an attempt to self-educate. Cyberfeminist responses to this online male focus involve empowering young women while concurrently redefining female and adolescent sexual norms. As a potential source of hope, sites where users are permitted to post their own content – including Facebook – are more likely to offer civic material and facilitate a broader range of ICT knowledge and skills; therefore, social networking itself may be enabling the empowerment of young women through such education built into self-productive platforms (Baldwin-Philippi 2006; Banet-Wiser 2004).

Baldwin-Philippi et al. encourage website designs that address girls less as consumers or potential employees and more as emergent Internet citizens (2006 p.771). Twenge recommends that groups aiming to empower girls and women decrease their emphasis on instilling instrumental and assertive traits in young women, whereby patriarchal discourses are replicated through the latent devaluation of traits that are expressive or communal. Instead, the value of expressive and communal traits, in addition to instrumental and assertive traits, should be parlayed to both genders (2009 p.338).

Finally, Senft believes that society should “stop conceptualizing child sexuality in terms of danger and/or play” (2008 p.90). Instead, she suggests redefining childhood sexuality through categories of risk and pleasure, focusing on the risks and pleasures associated with certain forms of interpersonal communication that may at times be interpreted as sexualized. In addition, she endorses a decreased focus on ‘paedophile danger’ and ‘identity play’ as mechanisms through which the risks and benefits of sexual development can be understood, noting that this binary is too restrictive to accommodate an empowering sexual identity for young women (2008 p.90-96). Welles also believes that sexuality should be reconceptualized. As she writes, “The media stresses the importance of sexual desires. Researchers suggest that a young woman’s ability to be conscientious about and fully present in her sexual experiences is correlated with her ability to act as an agent. The ability to make responsible and self-affirming sexual decisions is a crucial act of agency” (2008 p.31).

xiii) Conclusions – Legal and Privacy Implications

Cyber gender harassment in particular has prompted several researchers to propose legal solutions to the potentially harmful consequences associated with online expressions of femininity. Even if their perspective is somewhat idealized, seemingly envisioning the online utopia of gender equality that is typical to liberal cyberfeminist ideologies, many subscribe to the philosophy that “law has an important role to play in detrivializing cyber gender harassment and […] can educate the public about the serious gendered and systemic harms that gender harassment inflicts, [transforming] online subcultures of misogyny to those of equality” (Keats Citron 2009 p.404). Bailey and Telford indicate that law-school based cyberfeminist studies can promote open spaces for discussions on “women’s relationships with communication technologies, technology’s impact on equality for women, and feminist strategies for approaching questions about whether, and, if so, how, to legally regulate communication environments such as the Internet” (2007 p.243).

Notwithstanding this, criminal law “often discounts harms that disproportionately affect women […] historically target[ing] gender-specific harms only to the extent that they [resemble] harms suffered by men” (Keats Citron 2009 p.392). While some legal strategies accept women’s harmful experiences as routine aspects of daily living, others refuse to recognize harms where women in theory could have mitigated the resulting injury. Still others refuse to acknowledge that

certain types of conduct are harmful at all, due to the unique norms inherent to particular environments (2009 p.392-395).

Keats Citron fears that legal responses to cyber harassment may follow a similar path, cautioning that in order for these responses to be successful, the trivialization of cyber gender harassment must be curtailed. She warns that a potential consequence of such trivialization is the underenforcement of criminal law in matters related to online harassment (2009 p.402). On top of this, victims may face difficulty in pressing charges against anonymous posters; as a solution, 'traceable anonymity' – or online anonymity unless a judge demands disclosure – is suggested. Keats Citron describes that, "Victims of online mobs face a de facto statute of limitations of less than 60 days, far less than that applied to other plaintiffs with similar claims. Traceable anonymity would not betray our commitment to anonymous speech if site operators and ISPs refuse to reveal a poster's identity unless a court order [demands] it" (2008 p.61). In this way, online privacy of posters can be maintained at the same time that online harm to women is prevented.

Inextricably linked to legal solutions to online problems are similar issues of privacy. Steeves describes Westin's theory of privacy, sharing that, "Privacy norms are present in virtually every society. Although these norms vary from culture to culture, 'a complex but well-understood etiquette of privacy is part of [every social] scenario.' From this perspective, then, privacy is inherently social – it is a part of the way in which social beings interact" (2009 p.196). Allen has claimed that, "Women

are particularly vulnerable to privacy problems because they are perceived as inferiors, ancillaries, and safe targets and that women's privacy is sometimes probed by others who implicitly assume that daughters, pregnant women, mothers, and wives are more accountable for their private conduct than their male counterparts" (2000 p.1178).

MacKinnon has also discussed privacy issues inherent to the digital production of pornographic materials. She writes that, "As pornography saturates social life, it also becomes more visible and legitimate, hence less visible as pornography. Always the abuse intensifies and deepens, becoming all the time more intrusive, more hidden, less accountable, with fewer islands of respite. In the process, pornography acquires the […] legal status of its latest technological vehicle" (2005 p.352). This being said, Bailey has established that, "The arguments that the identity 'woman' is socially constructed primarily in terms of sexual accessibility and submission to men, and that pornography is instrumental in creating and maintaining this sexual and gender hierarchy, [have] stirred intense controversy in the feminist community" (Bailey 2009 p.294). Further, pornography can become conflated with racist stereotypes where racial myths are subsequently used to stereotype women, in the process sometimes justifying sexual violence against women. It is clear, then, that "sexual emancipation through women-centered representations of sexuality depends upon much more than simply combating imagery of gendered dominance and submission" (Bailey 2009 p.297); legal strategies for young women must adequately negotiate these complex issues of privacy and sexuality.

Allen, in a similar way, has accepted that flouting privacy can be liberating for women, especially if it gains them other social capital (Bailey 2009 p.291). Women's displays of their naked bodies can function as rejections of Koskela's 'regime of shame'; further, they can counter the unattainable female idea projected ubiquitously throughout Hollywood media (*ibid*.). Such displays, however, can solidify patriarchal ideologies about men having unrestricted access to the bodies of females. Bailey notes that opposing Allen's viewpoint are "Others [who] have suggested that traditional underpinnings of private and public spaces and strangers and intimate may not map onto multimedia projects" such as webcams (*ibid.*).

Steeves critiques Westin for suggesting that social isolation is the most complete form of privacy one can achieve, because this leads Westin to conclude that privacy in its purest form is asocial. The restriction of information thusly becomes a form of individual protection from the strains and risks presented by social interactions, particularly as individuals move farther away from intimate circles of 'perfect privacy' to larger spheres of general social interaction where privacy is lessened. As girls progressively self-monitor the flow of online information, the goal of privacy becomes to keep information on the internal side of the boundary between these two extremes; in this way, privacy can also become antisocial (Steeves 2009 p.200). Quickly, privacy becomes something that can only be fully maintained by complete social withdrawal, since disclosure directly results from the trustworthiness (or lack thereof) of intimate others and the general public to respect the restrictions upon disclose one has chosen to enforce. It follows that "any social interaction therefore poses a risk to privacy" (Steeves 2009 p.201).

Instead, Steeves suggests that individuals must negotiate competing spheres of privacy and social participation in tandem while managing content they post online (2009 p.200). In doing so, girls "develop mechanisms that allow [them] to control the consequences of [their] interactions in ways that do not disclose more than [they] are willing to reveal as [they] move out of the solitude" (*ibid.*). Shade identifies a trust on behalf of girls in terms of Facebook privacy settings and controls that in theory could lead to their increased personal disclosure online, although willingness to divulge personal information varies depending on a wide variety of environmental factors (2007 p.6).

Phillips advocates policy intervention in these and similar issues: "Intervention at the level of policy, especially policy that addresses these nascent commercial logics, might now determine whether ubiquitous computing and surveillance are useful mostly for the replication, reentrenchment, and amplification of existing power relations, or whether the infrastructure might be available for novel, even transgressive and transformative, coalitions" (2009 p.310). Currently marred by systemic inequalities pervading the criminal justice system, such as those noted by Ehrlich in Canadian sexual assault cases (2003), the law could play a prominent role in renegotiating privacy to a pro-social virtual context, once again restoring "the social roots of Westin's conceptualization of privacy states and functions" (Steeves 2009 p.200).

Phillips also submits that ubiquitous computing – the widespread distribution of computers throughout physical space – has resulted in a surveillant

environment where corporations and state agencies have been clear about their intent to use technology to normalize and police populations via ‘anticipatory seeing’ to derive abnormal events from backgrounds of normalcy (2009 p.308-310). Solutions involving such anticipatory seeking should be critical of why particular behaviour is deemed ‘abnormal’ as opposed to different in a positive, empowering context as well as conscious of their potential privacy invasions. In terms of preemptively identifying legitimate harms, anticipatory seeking could show promise; however, anticipatorily identifying aggregate groups without first examining the ideological frameworks underscoring their very construction may be an imprudent method of harm reduction.

Cyberfeminism is complex and politically charged, with diverse layers of meaning, historical underpinnings, actors, and social implications. Haraway has always recognized these complexities. She cautions that these concepts and any potential solutions to problems they face should reflect the intricacies of as many of their contributing relationships as possible:

> The international women's movements have constructed 'women's experience', as well as uncovered or discovered this crucial collective object. This experience is a fiction and fact of the most crucial, political kind. Liberation rests on the construction of the consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression, and so of possibility. The Cyborg is a matter of fiction and lived experience that changes what counts as women's experience in the late twentieth century (1991 p.149).

Haraway finishes the *Cyborg Manifesto* by reasserting the two central points of her essay. First, universal, totalizing homogenization, such as that suggested in most media depictions of women, misses most of reality. Second, the boundaries of daily

life, including interpersonal interactions, should be reconstructed to accommodate technology in positive aspects, since technology on its own is not necessarily bad. On the contrary, “As well as a matrix of complex domination…science and technology are possible means of great human satisfaction” (1991 p.181).

Indeed, Haraway seems right. The Internet does provide positive, agency-granting opportunities and benefits for young women. Unless, however, the patriarchal nature underscoring the very discourses within which females interact online is questioned and steps are taken to equalize gender relations online, females may be unable to fully gain agency. Phillips has agreed that:

> We must look at how we actually do get along. Because we do get along. In myriad ways and every day, we act ourselves. We get out of each other’s way, we mind our own business, we live and let live, we are strategically intransigent, we watch our backs. I suggest we look carefully at the conditions and resources that permit us to do so, try to discover how the information environment is implicated in those activities, and so develop new paradigms for democracy, sociability, and self-determination” (2009 p.318).

Technology is an inseparable part of adolescent female identity and it is not necessarily possible or prudent to reverse this trend. Instead, in an ideal world, technology could be integrated with young women’s day-to-day lives in such a way that they are empowered and fairly represented, in the process “building and destroying machines, identities, categories, [and] relationships” (*ibid*.) to challenge the very notions of what it means to be a woman in digital society. In this way, it might be possible for women too gain agency through cyberfeminism, rather than cling to the futile and disempowering “utopian dream of the hope of a monstrous world without gender” (*ibid*.).

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