‘Snapchat’, youth subjectivities and sexuality: Disappearing media and the discourse of youth innocence

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Abstract

Research on youth subjectivities and disappearing media is still in its infancy. Ephemeral technologies such as Snapchat, Frankly and Wickr offer young people opportunities for discursive agency, harnessing teenage discourses of social positioning. These media facilitate social mobility in teen peer contexts by providing a medium for dynamic and shifting relationships. The transmission of digital images can enable a social flexibility that has a significant impact on youth subjectivities where discursively constructed relational identities are brokered through cyber technologies. We tackle the question “what discourses are evoked and produced in the discussion of disappearing social media?” by exploring two parents’ accounts of their children’s use of this media. We also examine a discourse of innocence that surrounds teens’ use of social media and, in particular, ephemeral applications, by sexting and cyberbullying. We engage in the debate on the use of ephemeral social media to consider the discourses influencing youth subjectivities and the nature of networked publics.

Introduction

Over the last decade, media images disseminated through mobile technology have become a ubiquitous conduit of teen peer culture (Buckingham, 2008). While visual images are used to capture and record the banality of everyday life (e.g. a plate of lunch) on social media, emerging technologies are increasing the dissemination of youth culture. Social media platforms “continuously assemble identities, cultural practices and social spaces in relation to one another” (Carah, 2014, p. 137). Ephemeral media applications, with disappearing data facilities such as Snapchat, Frankly, Wickr, Blink and Glimpse, are harnessed by teenagers to both appropriate and disseminate teen culture and to negotiate their projects of self-formation. Like other graphic capturing software (Instagram or Tumblr) these media provide

a mechanism for teens to constitute (and re-constitute) themselves in teen discourse – to see and be seen. We highlight the importance for educators to be cognisant of the applications that young people use as culture conduits and the discourses that they constitute. We do not employ discourse analysis in this paper as a form of linguistic analysis, but rather in a Foucauldian sense:

> as games, strategic games of action and reaction, question and answer, domination and evasion, as well as struggle. On one level, discourse is a regular set of linguistic facts, while on another level it is an ordered set of polemical and strategic facts. (Foucault, 2000, p. 2)

A discourse can be seen as a characteristic way that a group of people communicate (their ways of saying, doing and being) in order for their shared view of the world to be constituted and confirmed (Gee, 2011). They are frameworks of meaning that cohere and do not only reflect the social world, but also serve to construct it (Alldred & Burman, 2005).

In the social world, ephemeral messaging enables the user to capture images that are designed to be shared only temporarily. With the growing popularity of this media among young people, there has been a surge in the development of these media that incorporate a self-destruct mechanism. These media provide a conduit for teen cultures in networked publics. boyd (2014) conceptualises networked publics as virtual spaces that are constructed through the intersection of people, technology and practices. These blended spaces are produced through both the use of networked technologies and the imagined projection of community.

In a preliminary move to an exploration of ephemeral messaging with school-age students, we share data that we gained from parents. Parents oft-times look from the outside at a networked world of teen peer relationships. Set in an Australian regional context, the

researchers explore the discourses around teen use of ephemeral media and, in particular, the discourses evoked by parents.

Deploying mobile technologies, increasingly youth display and distribute images of their own and others' bodies (Ringrose, Harvey, Gill, Livingstone, 2013). Disappearing media provides a vehicle for youth self-objectification that can constitute both a site of pleasure and sexual liberation (Gill, 2007) and coercive "technology-mediated sexual pressure" (Ringrose, Gill, Livingstone & Harvey, 2012, p. 7). Applications such as Snapchat, Frankly, Wickr, Blink and Glimpse provide a social landscape through which teens surveil themselves and others. In addition to a (self) surveillance discourse there is also a pervasive "discourse of innocence" (Robinson & Davies, 2008, p. 344) that overlays teen media use, and in many instances, provokes moral panic in adults around how teens engage with disappearing media.

We commence with an outline of the literature corpus regarding ephemeral media, in particular in relation to the ubiquitous "neoliberal malaise" of our times (Graham, 2011, p. 664). We provide a detailed account of key discourses - innocence, surveillance, cyberbullying and sexting - that are linked with the use of disappearing data applications. In the latter half of the article samples from interviews are used to explore how parents evoked these discourses to describe their children's use of ephemeral media. We then consider wider implications of these discourses in relation to youth ephemeral media use.

Disappearing media and neoliberalism

In recent years there has been significant shifts in the ways we consider information in that it can be seen as both disposable and short term (Kotfila, 2014). Disappearing media hone the recipient's focus due to the fact that the images expire after a set time. boyd (2014) labels this as an attention economy where technologies are created to capture and sustain the interest of users. Embedded in neoliberal relational practice, this attention economy works on multiple

levels. Through manipulating technology, corporate marketers capture consumer attention. Likewise, it could be argued that young people employ technologies to market themselves to peers using the countdown tool of Snapchat that captures attention to images in a way that is not achieved through other media. Attention is highly focused for a set time period and teens can present images of ideal selves (at times extremely humorous) to pique the interest of peers (boyd, 2014).

The potential to transform social relationships has long been ascribed to a range of technologies (Slack & Wise, 2007). However, as Buckingham (2008) argues, it is problematic to assume that technology is entirely shaped by existing social relationships as value free with no inherent qualities. Technologies have inherent affordances:

> … largely shaped by the social actors and social institutions that play a leading role in producing it, and in determining where, when, and how it will be used, and ways in which these different media or modes of communication are used, and they ignore the complex and sometimes quite contradictory relationships between media change and social power. (Buckingham, 2008, p. 12)

Embodied conversation has always been ephemeral in that words disappear into air as soon as they are spoken (i.e., unless they are recorded, they are lost). Teens have always used language to obfuscate and to demarcate difference from prevailing adult discourse (boyd, 2014). The ubiquitous nature of image sharing perpetuates teen culture in a way that transcends traditional conversational methods. The timer mechanism of ephemeral media, that puts pressure on the receiver to 'view it or lose it' before it is automatically deleted, creates a heightened focus on the image. As we have highlighted previously, disappearing media have been positioned by technology companies as underground tools that can enable users to evade detection (Charteris, Gregory & Masters, 2014). We are interested in how,

through ephemeral messaging applications, teens can be selective to both solicit and evade the gaze of others.

Disappearing media supports teen underlife. Drawn from the work of Goffman (1961) and Gutiérrez, Rymes and Larson (1995), we use the term underlife to describe the range of activities that young people engage in when they distance and co-produce themselves from the dominant regimes within their contexts. Moreover, young people construct underlife through their social steganography when they send messages in teen discourse that those 'not in the know' cannot read. Social steganography is a process of hiding information in plain sight. These messages are apparent to those 'in the know' and meaningless to those who are not (boyd & Marwick, 2011). Social steganography excludes people who are not part of the cycle of teen gossip -namely parents, teachers, and peers who are outside their immediate social sphere (Marwick & boyd, 2014). There may be many reasons for youth to conceal underlife. We posit that one may be that social steganography is a response to the discursive constructions of youth innocence and the associated adult surveillance.

Discourse of childhood innocence

Through ephemeral media we can see a collision betwen discourses of youth sexuality and youth innocence. Childhood is a discursively and socially constructed concept, although "modernist, universal, biologically fixed understandings of childhood [are] primarily perpetuated within developmental psychology" (Robinson & Davies, 2008, p. 344). Drawing on Foucauldian theory, Robinson (2013) proposes that modern childhood is a period of 'extreme surveillance' that is constituted in the name of protecting innocence. In the process, this surveillance regulates and maintains the established order of adult–child relations of power.

> Protection, often framed in the best interests of the child, is a powerful means of individual and social control. The regulation of childhood through discourses of innocence and protection is perpetuated not just through social practices, but also through government and legal policies and legislation that impact on the way that children are viewed and treated in the family, in schools, and more broadly in society. This institutional process of regulation operates to establish powerful 'regimes of truth' that act to classify, discipline, normalize and produce what it means to be a child – as well as, what it means to be an adult and good citizen subject. (Robinson 2012, p. 260)

Describing childhood innocence discourse as hegemonic, Robinson and Davies (2008) argue that "what adults consider appropriate knowledge for children, what children should know, often in the name of protecting childhood innocence, is a critical component of this construction" (p. 344). Hegemonic childhood discourses construct a binary between the worlds of the adult and the child as a hierarchical power: "In this binary, children are socially constructed as innocent, immature, dependent, and the powerless 'other' in relation to the independent, mature, powerful, critically thinking and 'knowing' adult" (Robinson 2002, p. 345). Jones (2011), in her sexuality policy analysis, notes two prominent child constructs: "the 'romantic child' whose innocence must be protected and the 'knowing child' whose innocence is not tainted by the information seen as necessary for development" (p. 371). "'The knowing child'…has an awareness of sexuality… may have sexual desires [and] yet is still considered 'pure'" (Jones, 2011, p. 381). As Robinson (2013) points out, "dominant discourses that constitute sexuality in adult-centric frameworks operate to dismiss children's sexual subjectivities by viewing activites of sexual expression more as normal aspects of children's play" (p. 111).

Discourse of 'the gaze'

It is a major feature of neoliberalism that members of society are both under surveillance and also positioned to morally report on the behaviour of others (Davies et al., 2005; Davies, 2006). As Davies (2006) notes:

> …the panopticon emphasizes the vulnerability to the gaze of the ones who are gazed at. The gaze is a permanent but discontinuous process. The ones gazed at can always be observed, but do not know when they are being observed. The desired end is that the recipients of the possible gaze do all the work of correcting themselves for themselves. (p. 501)

Ephemeral media provide individuals with visibility in networked publics (boyd & Marwick, 2011). Networked publics are public spaces that are restructured by networked technologies (boyd, 2010). They are the "imagined collective that emerges as a result of the intersection of people, technology, and practice" (p. 39). They allow people to gather for social purposes and enable people to liaise with others beyond close friends and family. The associated emphasis on seeing and being seen can be likened to Foucault's (1977) model of panoptical (all seeing) surveillance -the surveilling "gaze" originally conceptualised in political reformer Jeremy Bentham's penitentiary panopticon. The prison panopticon consists of a central observation tower enclosed by a concentric ring of outlying cells (Sewell & Wilkinson, 1992). We are, however, not the first authors to forge a link between technology and the surveilling gaze.

According to Simon (2005), "in a world where vision is increasingly attenuated, dispersed and mediated through communication technologies, it is the prior panoptic sorting rather than to vision that we must attend" (Simon, 2005, p. 4). Gill (2008) uses the metaphor to frame the technology itself as panoptic rather than applying the notion to the teen culture of self and peer surveillance: "Panoptic technologies can be seen to regulate teen bodies by constructing them as neoliberal subjects, captured by a global market regime of consumerism" (Gill, 2008, p. 442).

The self-profiling of young neoliberal subjects (who are responsible for their own success and wellbeing) correspond with a collective vision for community that is facilitated and enacted through media technologies. For many young people, social representation is relatively high stakes and therefore recognition by peers as socially desirable is a significant issue. Disappearing media provide specific affordances that shape social engagements within the spaces. They allow new types of interaction and new social dynamics. In this article we are interested in how disappearing media technologies afford evolving forms of social interaction.

Ephemeral technologies enable young people to develop subjectivities that are recognisable to their peers. This is an engagement with the 'panoptical gaze,' as a form of self-surveillance. Youth use disappearing media to invite the gaze of others and also to scrutinize themselves (Charteris, Gregory & Masters, 2014). Robinson (2013) notes the influence of Foucault's technologies of self on children: "[C]hildren are encouraged to self-manage their own bodies and to comply with state regulations of appropriate citizenship - that is, take responsibility for his/her own success and wellbeing as a neoliberal subject" (Robinson, 2013, p. 74).

Self and peer surveillance are apparent when youth position themselves as commodities by soliciting 'likes' on Facebook pages on the basis of appearance. It could also be argued that youth commodification is visible in Instagram when value is placed on the number of 'hearts' an image receives, or in Snapchat in regard to the number of people who view a shared image. In cyber cultures, Ringrose (2011) points out, there are "normative forms of gendered and sexualised visual self-representation…[that] must be managed in the construction of a semi-public digital sexual subjectivity" (p. 102). boyd's (2010; 2014) research indicates that young people operating in networked publics (as publics that are restructured by networked technologies) find the space for digital flirtation and sexual communication invigorating.

Sexting Discourse

Sexting can be defined as the electronic transmission of sexually provocative or explicit images or videos between mobile devices mostly, but not always, containing someone known to the sender and/or receiver (Draper, 2012, Lenhart, 2009, Lippman & Campbell, 2014). A portmanteau word, sexting has received much media attention in recent years with the increased use of mobile technologies to share images. Ringrose, Gill, Livingstone and Harvey (2012) frame sexting as a wide range of practices:

> Sexting may include boys asking girls for photos in their bra, bikini or with naked breasts etc.; boys claiming to have such photos on their phones; girls and boys sending sexually explicit messages over the phone or internet; the negotiation of sexual propositions on digital devices; the accessing and recirculation of pornography on phones; and the use of sexually explicit photographs on Facebook… (p. 24)

There is a heightened panic around sexting discourse that is aligned with mobile media (Hasinoff, 2015). It must be noted that sexting is not a gender-neutral practice. Ringrose, Gill, Livingstone and Harvey (2012), in their pilot study on the role of mobile technologies within peer teen networks, note that sexting "does not refer to a single activity, but to a range of activities which may be motivated by sexual pleasure" (p. 7). Sexting can be a practice that is shaped by the gender dynamics of peer groups. Ringrose, Gill, Livingstone and Harvey (2012) note the imperative of inclusion in social networks has a powerful influence on young people.

> Few teenagers wish to be excluded from the sexual banter, gossip, discussion or, indeed, from the flirtatious and dating activity endemic to youth culture. But to take part is to be under pressure – to look right, perform, compete, judge and be judged. Much of young people's talk, therefore, reflects an experience that is pressurised yet

> voluntary – they choose to participate but they cannot choose to say 'no'. (Ringrose, Gill, Livingstone & Harvey, 2012, p. 7)

In her exploration of teen girls' sexual identity in social networking sites, Ringrose (2011) argues that teen girls can be agentic when they navigate sexualisation online. She observes that in semi-public cyber spaces "[y]oung people must continuously negotiate and make choices around which images and words to use to construct and perform their sexual identities (Ringrose, 2011, p. 101). Further, Ringrose (2011) highlights how the idealised sexualised image in the form of sexy online 'selfies' can lead to an expectation of perfectionism that translates to face-to-face relationships as well. This suggests that online subjectivities can exert an influence beyond cyber space in that social media affords a vehicle for the governmentality of the gaze.

Cyber-harassment

In the shadow of the rich proliferation of complex networked publics lie the ugly communications that negatively broker power and cause hurt. Joining other researchers who write of the convolution of social media that include contentious practices of sexting (Hasinoff, 2013) and cyberbullying (Kofoed & Ringrose, 2012), we consider the sociological complexity surrounding ephemeral media use in particular in regard to cyber-harassment. Cyber-harassment can be defined as "threatening or harassing email messages, instant messages, blog entries or websites dedicated solely to tormenting an individual" (Cox, 2014, p. 277).

Commentators have found that social media use can be linked to harassment, bullying and even violence (Ringrose et al., 2012; Lippman & Campbell, 2014). Ringrose et al. (2012) found that it is more likely for boys to harass girls than the other way around. The situation is exacerbated by the gendered norms of popular culture, family and school, which fail to

recognise the problem or to support girls. “Teen girls are called upon to produce particular forms of ‘sexy’ self display, yet face legal repercussions, moral condemnation and ‘slut shaming’ when they do so” (Ringrose, Harvey, Gill & Livingstone, 2013, p. 305). Slut shaming can take the form of cyber-harassment. boyd (2014) writes:

> When teens are hurting offline, they reveal their hurt online. When teens’ experiences are shaped by racism and misogyny, this becomes visible online. In making networked publics their own, teens bring with them the values and beliefs that shape their experiences. (p. 24)

Teen sexuality and gender-based harassment are not new issues, yet ephemeral media can provide more potent affordances for these practices. The evasive nature of the media makes it more difficult for outsiders to recognise and detect. Messit (2014) points out that this sort of abuse “is sinking further below the surface as teens harness new technology and more creative methods. These stealthier attacks leave targets mentally and emotionally taxed, carrying around a terrible secret, out of adult view” (p. 53). Technology is not neutral and it can “facilitate the objectification of girls via the creation, exchange, collection, ranking and display of images” (Ringrose, Gill, Livingstone & Harvey, 2012, p. 8). Although it is it is widely acknowledged that applications like Snapchat can provide a vehicle for cyber-harrassment, we are cautious not to demonise ephemeral media in themselves. The media reflect and at times magnify existing practices, for instance slut shaming (Ringrose, 2010; Ringrose & Renold, 2012). By addressing discourses in parents’ accounts of their teens’ use of disappearing media, the research described herewith explores adult constructions of teen life worlds.

The Research

This research explores the discourses that emerged through two parent's descriptions of their teenage daughter's use of ephemeral messaging media. As the research is embedded in a poststructural ontology, we do not see a small sample as an issue. We do not set our two participants up as typical or set out to provide accounts of their lived experiences through data saturation (Baker & Edwards, 2012) but rather frame the discourses produced through the interview process. Neither do we use the sample to frame new discourses around disappearing media. Rather, we conducted the two interviews with parents, Maddie and Louise (names changed for ethical reasons), and then explored how their experience of their children's ephemeral media use related to social media discourses located in the literature.

Maddie is a parent of three teenagers, two sons (12, 14) and one daughter (16). Louise has two daughters in their early teens (12 and 15). We undertook a lengthy semi-structured interview with the two parents, separately. As we have highlighted, the sexualised nature of social media use in teens is gendered. Maddie and Louise expressed particular concern about their girls' experience with Snapchat. The transcribed interview and data samples were selected on the basis that they encapsulated the main discourses inherent in the transcript that were pertinent to girls' wellbeing. In our initial reading of the transcript, we paid close attention to the 'language in use' or what James Gee (2011) describes as 'small d' discourses. Through this initial reading we began to frame key 'big D' discourses to consider the wider socio-political inferences to be gained from the analysis. Returning to the literature on childhood and emerging technologies, we explored the meanings to consolidate the macro 'big D' discourses further. In the following, we examine these macro discourses that are produced through Maddie and Louise's accounts of their children's disappearing media usage. Forging links with feminist theory, we critically analyse how these parents describe their children's teen peer relationships in networked publics.

Data collection - the Interviews

The parental data on their experience of their daughters' use of ephemeral media highlight discourses of innocence, the gaze of the networked public, sexting and cyber-harassment. We provide a detailed account of the each of these discourses and explore how the parents evoked these discourses to describe their children's use of ephemeral media.

Childhood innocence

Louise frames her children as innocents who are either ignorant of cyber sexual interplay or 'shocked' by images that seen on disappearing media.

> I don't think [my 15 year old, Penny] minds the abs [abdominal muscles], but I think… well, she did make the comment that, 'damn you see a penis and they shock you. Damn you see a penis for the first time.' She made that comment. She doesn't even like heavy kissing and on television really tame sex scenes. She is running for the hills (Louise).

Maddie positions her daughter, Jamie, as a 'knowing child' (Jones, 2011) in that she is both innocent and knowledgeable of her sexuality. There is the binary of innocent and non-innocent in Maddie's suspicion that Jamie is disseminating "sexy shots".

> Another thing was that I've gone into Jamie's room these holidays late at night and its in the winter (laughs) I walk in there and the light is on on her phone and she's dressed in her little miniskirt and crop top, she's dressed taking photos… and I said, what are you doing? 'Oh, nothing, I just want to show my friends what I look like in this outfit'. And I'm thinking like male or female. It was very interesting… I know… but so I definitely know she's taking sexy shots. I don't know if she's taking them now that she's got a boyfriend. I don't know that stuff. (Maddie)

Walking into the room and asking who the shots are for could be seen as an act of surveillance on Maddie's part. The hierarchical power relation described by Robinson (2002)

is apparent in Maddie's concern to potentially intervene in the dissemination of 'sexy shots'. Maddie's comment, that she does not know if Jamie is taking these images now she has a new boyfriend, could suggest that she credits Jamie with her own decision making and is not surveilling her.

The gaze of teen networked publics

Both parents spoke of their children' projections into networked publics. Jamie shared 'selfie' images with her mother and Maddie describes how Jamie co-constituted a panoptical discourse through her media production.

> If we're in the car and she's a lot on the phone, she will take, if she can, 50 selfies within 50 kilometers and send them to all different places and she's really into the selfie thing... You'll see photos of her pulling faces and then all her friends pulling faces. (Maddie)

Louise relates the gaze to peer social status and socio-economic positioning of the young women in that those who are worth watching are projecting lifestyles to be aspired to. This highlights the attention economy of networked publics where high status individuals are accorded attention – both soliciting and being rewarded by the gaze.

> I've noticed - there are some people, who are very profiled and I think it's a special class thing too. Because I've noticed that the girl who goes on holidays, who goes on a cruise, who goes here, there, every week… who goes to festivals. She has this really high profile life. There's a lot of interest in how they market themselves to their peers in that way and I've noticed that …there's a lot of peer interest over [this girl]… My daughter said [that] she doesn't even take any notice of half of the snaps – if people are not interesting. She does not really look. She's very interested in looking at her own following. 'Who's following me?' 'Who's interested in me?' (Louise)

The security of disappearing media can be deceptive when young people save images that were intended to be ephemeral. Rather than a transitory gaze, the images can remain as an unwelcome data trail.

> She said that quite often kids ask if they've got 'snapsave' and she said that there would be less dissemination of some of these images if they actually knew how easy it was to record it. If you open up the software on computers, you can actually hold it there indefinitely. It doesn't disappear at all. So, while kids say, 'does it disappear?'… You can circumvent that by clicking snapsave or using computers to download images. So, I thought it was really interesting. (Louise)

Sexting – gaze on the male

Both parents reported that Penny and Jamie had received explicit images from boys.

> She has had a lot of nude shots sent to her of boys and she was actually telling my son last night about that and I happened to be walking down the corridor. They had shaved and sent her the picture. (Maddie)

> She said that lots of boys do screenshots of abs and she gets abs shots… [S]he said that boys can use their abs to get girls. (Louise)

Louise commented that the swapping of explicit images appeared to be normalised – it was a different teen peer culture to her own where images of this kind would have been extremely taboo. The practice of 'tuning' as a grooming practice suggests a link between teen sexting and sexual behaviour (Temple & Choi, 2014).

> I think there's a lot more than meets the eye. I don't think it's sexually frowned upon as it would be in when I was a child. I think it's actually very legitimised in those teen peer circles. She also made a comment that boys try to 'tune you' for nudes. So, that's part of the ritual of warming you up and building a relationship and then trying to get

> a nude. They start with an emoticon. She said they start asking questions and then they ask for nudes and try to 'hook up' with you that way. (Louise)

Sexting - A double standard

The sexting discourse alluded to by the parents suggests a sexual double standard that also emerged in other significant studies (Lippman & Campbell, 2014; Ringrose et al., 2014; Walker, Sanci & Temple-Smith, 2013) research. Louise describes how girls who sent explicit ephemeral images were seen as 'a bit slutty' or 'vulnerable' by Penny and her peers, whereas boys who engaged in the same behaviour (sending penis images) were perceived as 'confident'. Nevertheless, Louise questions this stereotype and wonders how mores around sexual images have changed from her youth when she expresses surprise that the 'level-headed' girl across the road was doing it.

> Penny made a comment that you get a reputation as being a bit slutty or a bit vulnerable when you've been sending nudes. So, perhaps there's that sort of perception. But I wonder about that, because she also said to me recently that the girl across the road sent a topless picture. And this is the most level-headed girl. But she's done it. So, it must be a lot more than meets the eye in terms of how popular it is to do this. I don't think [sending body images] actually is so frowned upon as it would be in our era. (Louise)

Louise said that Penny was aware of the specific body preferences of boys she knew. Her comment to Louise can be associated with a male gaze that reifies certain body types -a perceived preference for slender girls.

> And [Penny] made the comment that boys like 'thigh gaps' and 'box gaps' and they want girls who are skinny and they love girls with bones and it's really gross. She said

> that boys who are really confident send the ‘dick pic’ first. She said that boys were not afraid - so confident. (Louise)

The dissemination of male genital images was linked with the action of confident individuals. The ways that bodies are objectified reflect traditional gendered dynamics of body judgement. Louise also highlighted that, in her conversation with Penny, they discussed how boys can receive notoriety from disseminating images and by going first they can instigate a trade. The ‘nude for nude’ exchange can reveal an imbalanced coercive nature of gender relations.

> I said, well, what happens when [Snapchat] is not used very well? She said ‘when someone screenshots it and sends it around everywhere’, and I said, ‘well, what sort of pictures’ and she said, ‘nudes’. And I said, ‘why do girls send them?’ She said, ‘boys do too. It’s mostly boys.’ [I said]‘Why do boys send them?’ She said, ‘I think in order to get some fame.’ And she said they say they will send ‘nudes for nudes [and] I’ll go first’. (Louise)

Although notoriety may be a possible reason for the dissemination of these images, there may be more coercive reasons. Walker, Sanci and Temple-Smith (2013) found that in their research, images of boys’ penises were shared with girls as a motive to coerce girls to send an image in return. Walker et al. highlight that this is yet another form of pressure experienced by girls to produce and send images to boys.

Cyber-harassment

Maddie and Louise described a link between disappearing media and cyber-harassment. While Maddie suggests that the behaviour of repeatedly requesting explicit images is cyberbullying or cyber-harassment – it is uncertain whether Jamie would read it like this because she ‘really liked him’.

> But in the holidays she had a lot of trouble with an older boy she was keen on and he was bullying her to have pictures of her. So, that was through Snapchat and he assured her that because [it is] self-destructive that he wouldn't post [the] images. And so she was contemplating it and she really liked him. She really wanted to go out with him. (Maddie)

Maddie reports that the disappearing media was used as both a surveillance device and a means to elicit images.

> Jamie really wanted to go out with him. He [the older boy] was controlling her. Because she had two other boys, who were really nice kids, and I was telling her to go out with one of them. And he, through Snapchat, was telling her 'don't go out with them' and checking up on her all the time - saying, 'so, you haven't gone out with these other guys' and 'don't go out with them'…. [He was] just controlling her and so then he was asking for photos all the time, pestering her about it. (Maddie)

Louise describes how Penny received a nude image that was disseminated through her school as an example of images that keep circulating. She questions whether sharing such an explicit story is relevant to the research- a further illustration of the adult taboo around the sexualisation of girls' bodies.

> So I said, tell me about when they circulated. And she said, well, when they're circulated it dies down after a while but it depends on how bad they are. And I said, what do you mean by bad? And she said, there's this girl in Year eight and this Year twelve boy tricked her into sending nudes. He asked nudes for nudes. So she sent a really gross one. And I said, well what do you mean? And she said, open vagina, but it was so weird.
>
> (Louise turns to interviewers) - Are you sure I should go down this path?

> So it was so weird. She had it shaved and had a little box of hair in her vagina and there was little square of orange hair and you could imagine, yeah I'm starting to go in... I was thinking as I was sitting - I was thinking you're describing those pictures. So, I decided that instead of being the parent coming down I thought I would just be the parent who wants to know. (Louise)

The incident also posed a dilemma for Louise, as she knew her daughter had viewed these problematic images that were disseminated without the girl's consent. It was illegal activity, in that the young woman was under the age for sexual consent and the images could be construed as child pornography.

Louise reports that she is amazed that in Penny's teen life world there are 'appropriate' nude shots and 'inappropriate' ones. The shots of genitals are evaluated on aesthetics and girls who get the code wrong become objects of ridicule with their images circulated further.

> And I said, well, how do you know about this? She said I saw it. And I said, 'how did you get to see it?' And she said, someone had it. It's not the person that she sent it to and so I asked, there's some that are okay to see? And she said, 'there was this weird angle'. (Louise gestures holding her hand down with an imaginary camera tilted at a high angle) … [She said] If you want to do it place the whole camera here. (Louise holds an invisible camera in above her head with the camera angled at low angle downwards). [Penny said] Who wants to see a vagina anyway? (Louise)

Penny also tells Louise that she bluffs about owning nudes in order to blackmail others to leave her alone.

> She made the comment that people who have got your nudes can hold it over you, because you're really vulnerable to them. And she said it's easier to say, 'I have your nude. So, that if they piss you off - they know you have their nude. It's just so much

easier to just pretend you do.' So, a kid who doesn't necessarily have a library can actually pretend she does in order to have power in that cyber environment. (Louise)

Discussion

Ephemeral media facilitate underlife discourses and challenge the childhood innocence discourse that that the two parents articulated. We saw this in Louise's report that Penny talked to her about receiving a penis image and Maddie's account of walking into Jamie's room at night when she was photographing herself. Discussing childhood innocence discourse, Robinson (2013) cautions that there is a danger in desiring to protect our children as the necessary information may not be conveyed for them to be equipped to protect themselves. As children face worlds so different to their parents, an informed child can make educated choices while the uninformed will be drawn toward the mysterious and unknown (Robinson, 2013). Children who are connected to networked publics are saturated in information and therefore can become immersed in discourses that parents may not understand or see as inappropriate. While it can be perilous to restrict children's knowledge to preserve their 'innocence', the secretive nature of ephemeral messaging conceals what young people do know and that may be threatening to adults who desire to protect their children.

Disappearing media in the attention economy both perpetuate and focus a panoptical gaze. It is well documented that the social media can enable teens to "'stalk' one another by searching for highly visible, persistent data about people they find interesting" (boyd, 2014, p. 13). However along with focusing the gaze, disappearing media excludes those who are not invited into the discourse community - e.g. parents, teachers, others who do not fit into the clique. It adds a level of complexity to networked publics by making teen practices potentially less visible. Practices of social steganography, that used to occur through social media such as Facebook, are more clearly honed so that messages can be aimed at a target

audience very specifically without others seeing. Thus, there is a paradoxical connection between the surveilling gaze and ephemeral media. It can offer some degree of privacy if the images are not retained by the recipient through screen capturing software. When images are captured, kept, disseminated and recirculated however, it can be hurtful and damaging for those involved, as recounted by Louise.

Through its invisibility, ephemeral media provides a discourse conduit that can perpetuate asymmetrical power relations. The discursive accounts of the parents seem to echo the concern that through disappearing media use teen peer networks can "be an extension of a sexualised culture that places pressure on young women to present themselves in sexual and objectified ways" (Walker, Sanci & Temple-Smith, 2013, p. 698). Both the literature, as discussed and analysis of parent discourse suggests, cyber-harassment through disappearing media is a gender issue. Both parents reported that undue pressure was placed on the young women to share nude images. This sharing had potentially negative social repercussions if the images were unexpectedly saved. Ringrose et al. (2013) found that boys could gain peer popularity through sending and showing pictures of girls' bodies, in Louise's story, boys projected images of masculinities to solicit attention from girls. This corresponds with Ringrose et al.'s (2013) observation that we are increasingly witnessing the "objectification and 'sexualisation' of men, through widespread consumption of images of idealised 'sexy' masculine bodies" (p. 306). It should be noted that we did not discuss stories from parents of boys in this article. On the basis of our engagement with the disappearing media literature and our study, we advocate further research into boys' use of ephemeral media.

It should also be noted however that debates around adolescent sexting can be seen as an extension of general debates around sex education and sexual values and in sexting discourse girls are positioned as "asexual, hypersexual and sexually victimised" (Doring, 2014, para, 57). Hasinoff (2015) also argues that the issue with sexting are not new and have been

challenged by activists and researchers for decades - issues of sexual violence associated with a rape culture, victim-blaming and systemic inequalities. Further she posits that while "panicking about deviant girls, predators, and pornographers is attractive because it sells papers [, it] does not challenge mainstream views of gender and sexuality" (p. 9).

Amid the moral panic and castigation associated with technologies that afford youth to express sexuality, disappearing media can offer a potent resource that reveals how young people express themselves. Maddie and Louise talked of ephemeral media practices that were embedded in everyday life and intimate youth relations. They spoke of a world where their children were active in constructing their networked publics. Like a range of other writers, we advocate an empathetic approach suggesting that social media affording a visibility can enable us to learn about youth culture, as a means to engage with and understand it (boyd, 2014; Hasinoff, 2013). This is particularly relevant to parents if teens and educators who are working with teen discourse communities in schools and provide information and instruction on cyber safety.

> The internet mirrors, magnifies, and makes more visible the good, bad, and ugly of everyday life. As teens embrace these tools and incorporate them into their daily practices, they show us how our broader social and cultural systems are affecting their lives... As a society, we need to use the visibility that we get from social media to understand how the social and cultural fault lines… affect young people. And we need to do so in order to intervene in ways that directly help youth who are suffering. (boyd, 2014, p. 24)

Ephemeral media offer a useful and rich social affordance especially when we look at the creativity of image sharing. Young people are increasingly becoming proficient in new 21st century skills of "media production" (Hasinoff, 2013, p. 454) when they construct, adapt and disseminate images of their own creation through their peer networks. We concur with

Gannon's (2008) critique of discourses on young people and information technologies, in that she sees that cyber sites can be "agentic spaces" particularly for girls (p. 371). Through an open-minded analysis of ephemeral media use, we can learn about power relations of teen peer culture.

> Rather than trying to stop or regulate young people's use of ephemeral messaging, we can learn from them by exploring how social media can offer long-lasting insights into the discursive use of power and the negotiation of identity formation, status negotiation, and peer-to-peer sociality (boyd, 2007, p. 1).

While disappearing media such as Snapchat may be seen as intended for 'sexting' or other sensitive content, it was not the case in Roesner et al.'s (2014) research. Most of their 127 Snapchat-using adult respondents reported that it is useful for non-sensitive (for example funny) content. We see that further research mapping teen use of disappearing media would be useful as, being an emerging technology, there is little literature in this area. Perhaps this would provide a balance in that some of the generative uses could be explored.

As adult researchers, obviously we are not immersed in teen discourses and cannot read teen social steganography. We understand that what teens elect to tell a parent is interpreted and restoried by the parent and then is restoried again through the research process. Within the parent/teen power dynamic, the teen is very unlikely to disclose anything personally damaging that will locate them in a bad light. They may or may not choose to share information with their parent, depending on the relationship at the time when the conversation took place. Constructed through power relations between the adult and child, it is unlikely a young person would want to own up to at-risk behaviour with a parent. Additionally a parent is likely to represent their child in a certain way within the interview context. For this reason we do not present parents or teens as essential selves but rather as unstable and multifaceted subjectivities. Voice collected through interviews can only be

"partial, incomplete, and always in a process of re-telling and re-membering" (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. ix). Through our analysis of the parent voices, we forge links between discourses, subjectivities and wider trends that pertain to disappearing media. While we cannot claim that the nature of ephemeral media use or the discourses revealed through the parental account in this article are applicable beyond this research context, we note that there is synergy with the literature cited (boyd, 2014; Ringrose et al., 2012).

Conclusion

While there is an expedited process of peer exploitation evident in these stories, there are also examples of youth agency. Rather than taking a polemic stance on emerging media to demonise its use among young people, we see opportunities for parents to have conversations with their children about their media use and to learn about the networked publics that frame their world. These networked publics are youth-driven and adults can be educated by children about the ways that new technologies influence social relations. Like Ringrose (2011), boyd (2014) and Hasinoff (2015), we caution against knee-jerk reactions to teen use of social media. Digital sexual subjectivities are not a new thing. Teens are experimenting as much as they have always done except this exploration is now taking place in visual cyber contexts (Ringrose, 2011). The technological affordance of disappearing media supports opportunities for students to constitute agentic discursive identities yet it also magnifies and intensifies pressures on teens through commodifying their bodies as they market themselves for the gaze of others. The parents' accounts in this research highlight how taboos around young women's sexuality, coupled with the discourse of innocence, can even exacerbate the potential for cyber-harassment to take root in networked publics through disappearing media.

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