Living in the Mirror:

Understanding Young Women's Experiences with Online Social Networking

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Online social media appear to be ideal tools for developing alternatives to the

phallocentric cinema that Mulvey (1975) argued objectified women while subjectivizing men

through adoption of the male gaze. Many have theorized that girls' and young women's capacity

to use online social media to actively assert when they are available and what can be seen

(White, 2003) creates an opportunity for greater control over woman's 'to-be-looked-

atness' (Mulvey, 1975). It also offers opportunities for representing alternatives to

discriminatory stereotypes (Dixon-Scott, 2002; Senft, 2008) and for transgressing socially-

imposed modesty norms (Koskela, 2004) reflective of discriminatory standards that historically

isolated women from participation in the public sphere (Allen & Mack, 1990).

Feminist, critical race, and queer theory scholars (Dworkin, 1974; Lorde, 1984;

MacKinnon, 1987; Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 1992; Butler, 1993; Nussbaum, 1995) have been

writing about in/visibility, objectification, and the impact of otherized identities on the status of

being watched and intelligible for some time. Interestingly, however, attending to these issues as

something more than an add-on is a relatively recent phenomenon in surveillance studies. We

contend that 'doing surveillance studies' in a way that builds on past research requires embracing

the increasing call in the multidisciplinary and rapidly growing field of surveillance studies to

attend to gender and sexuality (Ball, Green, Koskela, & Phillips, 2009; Corones & Hardy, 2009;

Koskela, 2012) and intersecting identity categories such as race and Aboriginality (Mason & Magnet, 2012).

It is frequently noted in the surveillance literature that gender affects who is watched and how that person is constructed by the watcher (Hier and Greenberg, 2009, p. 26). Further, there is a growing body of surveillance literature focused on the ways in which axes of discrimination such as gender, race, and sexual identity and their intersections inform heightened state and institutional monitoring of individuals and groups (Parenti, 2003; Zureik & Salter, 2005; Eubanks, 2006; Hier & Greenberg, 2009; Fisher & Monahan, 2011; Monahan, 2010; Gates, 2011; Mason & Magnet, 2012). To some extent, this path-breaking body of literature meshes well with panoptic accounts of surveillance in which the gaze of the empowered few serves to discipline and disempower the objectified many.

But, as Brighenti (2007) notes, surveillance is experienced across a spectrum of visibility, and the panoptic model fails to account for the socially contested nature of the power relations that contextualize the experience of being monitored, especially in online environments where surveillance is multi-directional and involves both individual and institutional/governmental monitoring (Regan & Steeves, 2010). In this environment, girls' experiences are shaped by competing desires to be seen and to see, on the one hand, and to draw boundaries around what can be seen and how it is interpreted, on the other.

Social media is an especially important area to examine because the gaze that is implicated there is a mediatized one in which the once private social space of bedroom culture (McRobbie, 1978) can be converted into a quasi-public space by commercial interests. Some of the work that has attended to media and gender has focused on the male gaze of the passive

female subject within the realm of film and photograph. However, social media is an interactive space where female presentation can be actively constructed by the user herself through her interactions with her audience(s). This complicates the concept of girls as passive recipients of the male gaze and instead calls for an interrogation of girls as the producers of images for gendered consumption.

Moreover, watching and being watched in online social media implicates not just the potential for the panoptic gaze of the state and private institutions, but a form of synoptic gaze (Mathieson, 1997) in which the many are trained to recognize and watch for a few types of performances and to incorporate those into interpersonal watching of others. However, whether interpersonal watching actually constitutes surveillance is contested within surveillance studies (Andrejevic, 2005; Hier &Greenberg, 2009). Perhaps this is because it has been presumed that interpersonal watching is somehow neutral in terms of the exercise of power, or at least is of less concern in terms of individual rights and liberties than are state and institutional watching. For many otherized groups, however, privately exercised forms of non-institutional monitoring and control founded on discriminatory myths and attitudes have proven equally de-liberating and seem likely to interact with and inform state and institution-based forms of watching (Patel, 2012). We therefore echo the call of Monahan (2009) for a "new line of inquiry into gender and surveillance" (p. 287) that more completely accounts for the effects of political exercises of power in all their forms. Such an account would not "artificially abstract bodies, identities, and interactions from social contexts in ways that both obscure and aggravate gender and other social inequalities" (Monahan, 2009, p. 287). From this perspective, the gendering of surveillance is equally distributed throughout all forms of monitoring, whether of the super-visible who are

targeted for excessive surveillance or of those whose surveillance recedes into the background because it is normalized and taken for granted.

Our chapter will make an initial contribution to the discussions around surveillance and gender and the increasingly complex interweaving of public and private spaces by presenting the findings of a qualitative study that explored girls' and young women's lived experiences of watching and being watched online. We provide a theoretical framework for better understanding the complex negotiation with stereotypes and publicity that this lived experience entails as girls and young women seek to simultaneously pursue social success by embracing the online gaze while avoiding the very real risk of negative social consequences associated with 'too much' exposure. Our results suggest that an account of surveillance that incorporates panoptic, synoptic, and interpersonal forms of watching offers greater potential for better understanding the surveillant forces that tend to undermine the potential for digital media to rupture the male gaze theorized by Mulvey (1975).

Our Methodology

We held six 60-minute semi-structured interviews with six young women and one 60-minute focus group discussion with eight young women in the fall of 2010 who were recruited by advertisements posted on the University of Ottawa's campus. The advertisements sought women between the ages of 18 and 22 who used social networking (blogs, online videos) as a regular part of their social activities and were interested in participating in an interview about their online experiences as women, especially regarding privacy and equality, and the benefits

and risks of online social interaction. Participants were selected on a first-come, first-served basis.

In the interviews and the focus group, we explored, among other things, the types of visual and textual representations the participants used online to express their identity as young women, and the interplay between these representations and the mainstream media representations they see around them. We also discussed their understanding of privacy, gender, and equality in the context of their online activities.   The interview participants were ethnically very diverse, and included an African-Canadian who moved to Canada as a girl, three second-generation Canadians whose families were from Korea, the Middle East and India respectively, a French Canadian and an English Canadian of European descent.

With participant permission, the interviews and focus group were audio-taped and transcribed by the research assistant for our analysis. All identifying information was removed from the transcripts, and pseudonyms were used to identify participants.

Our Findings

I enjoy being visible as a girl online…

Social media and gender were closely linked for our participants and many of them felt that being seen as a girl was a key part of their online personas; as Amber noted, "_it should be really clear if you're male or female_" online. Although they identified a number of signals that separate girls from boys, including pictures of cute things like "puppies," "girlie" mainstream pop culture interests (e.g. _Twilight_), and a heightened interest in both talk and "drama," the most important signal was the photo. As Andrea put it:

[t]hat's the point of Facebook, for people to see who you are. ... I do that through my

picture. ... Probably the pictures is the biggest thing.

Corrine indicated that maintaining an online presence was socially essential. Andrea suggested

that, for some social media users, posting pictures of offline activities lends an air of reality to

those offline events, in a sense validating the person who posted them because she becomes

visible and her activities become real to others:

Facebook kind of makes it real. Like, if I didn't post pictures up on Facebook, I never

really went to the beach last weekend. ... But it's not just about you; it's about everyone

else. I want everyone else to know I was out doing something.

Some of our participants also felt that the visibility afforded by social media brought with

it positive opportunities to garner compliments (Corrine), to seek support at low points (Brenda),

to maintain existing relationships (Tina; Andrea), to rekindle past relationships (Francesca), and

to develop new ones (often at a more rapid pace than might have been the case in real space)

(Dawn). However, they also talked about the ways in which online visibility provided a way to

present a persona that casts aspects or a version of an authentic self in a favourable light, to

"*build a picture of themselves as what they want to be perceived as*" (Jenna) or, as Francesca put

it, to "*present myself in a certain fashion, in a way that I can control in person.*"

... but it's hard work ...

This kind of identity performance, although sought after, was constrained by three main

factors. First, even though participants recognized that online social network users often

engaged in persona construction, some, like Francesca, felt that the people who watched these

performances did not always draw a distinction between the online persona and the actual person:

> *So I think it's just become so much a part of our culture, where it's like, you just want people to associate the face that you have kind of posted on Facebook with who you are. And I think it's an aspect of yourself, but it's not like this is me entirely. And I think people miss that and get that confused.*

Second, our participants felt that they were responsible for managing the expectations and emotional needs of the various audiences who viewed them online, including family, friends, boyfriends, employers, and men giving them unwanted attention. Since taking steps to shape their online interactions – such as ignoring or rejecting friend requests, limiting the visibility of certain kinds of information to certain groups of people as opposed to others, and de-friending people altogether – often resulted in hurt feelings and wounded real space relationships (Dawn; Brenda; Andrea; Francesca), their actions were constrained by worries that they might be cast in a negative light. This created a significant burden, calling for careful attention to their online presentation because missteps could require a high level of energy to repair.

The young women we talked to saw this burden as a highly gendered one because they bore a disproportionate responsibility in terms of relationship maintenance as compared with young men. As Francesca described it, "*Even for myself, I find it much easier to unfriend guys than girls, because I think girls just naturally fear the repercussions, because there usually are repercussions.*" Many of them lamented the ways in which they were held to account as young women for things they said or did online, contrasting this high level of social regulation with the

relative freedom they perceived their male counterparts to enjoy. Amber summarized this by saying:

> *[G]uys can get away with bloody murder compared to girls in social networking. Because, like, no one expects a guy to care, you know what I mean? But they expect a girl to care, so if a girl doesn't care, they just assume that she's doing it purposely, you know what I mean? … they'll be like, "Oh. She must hate me", you know what I mean?*

Third, online visibility was often shaped by commercial metaphors that privilege a view of the self as commodity and of social interaction as entertainment. For example, Dawn said a Facebook profile is "*like a personal ad, yourself. Like, 'I'm a good time; if you're with me, you're going to have fun. Let's go have fun*." Brenda likened her behaviour online to shopping: "*If you're walking down the street, looking in shop windows, and keep going on … That's how I see it. I do, actually, [think of my Facebook profile as a store about myself]*." Tina put it this way: "*It's like a reality show, with people you already know*." Interestingly, all of our participants indicated that young women's social media sites were more interesting than young men's, precisely because they met the criteria for high entertainment value. Sandra told us, "*that is, to be honest, primarily why I go on girls' pages – for that stuff … Oh, you know, what happened at the club last night, or why so-and-so hates so-and-so*."

Given the heavy emphasis these metaphors place on the visual, our participants spent a great deal of time and thought on crafting their online look. Indeed, the visual nature of online media as a whole made it important both to be seen and to not be seen badly. Sometimes "badly" was related to behaviour or activities that could be taken out of context. As Danni explained:

Generally, if I'm doing something and it really shouldn't be recorded for history to

remember, I'll just be like, 'No pictures.' And I'll give them that look, and they won't take

a picture … I just try to keep it, like, if an employer stumbles upon it, they'll be like, 'Oh,

she's just a normal person who has fun.' Not 'Oh, she's a delinquent runaway.'

However, most of the time, our participants worried about being seen "badly" when a photo of

them posted online was uncomplimentary or highlighted what they saw as their "bad" physical

features.

Moreover, all of our participants acknowledged that this focus on looks was highly

gendered. Whereas the guys they knew could get away with posting goofy or silly pictures, girls

had to be very careful about the image they presented; and all but one of our participants told us

that they spend a great deal of time selecting profile pictures and other photos to post online to

make sure that the photos they post will be well received by others. Some coopted stereotypical

representations of girls and women from mainstream media and reproduced them; others

disparaged those who did so. But all of them acknowledged the power associated with a

sexualized self-presentation online.

The most commonly referenced image in this discussion was the 'duckface,' the over-the-

shoulder self-portrait profile shot of a girl with cheeks sucked in and lips puckered[1]. A number of

our participants explicitly rejected this kind of image. For example, Danni lamented, "*Why do*

you really have to do that to yourself?" While some of our participants thought such online

behaviour was "immature" or "stupid," many others described young women who post duckface

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[1] Duckface pictures were often associated with bikini shots or "bathroom mirror" shots, and the profile aspect on the shot was seen as a way to look "skinnier."

shots, bikini shots, and sexualized images of themselves as "confident" and "popular"[2]. They

told us that this kind of identity performance was a way to get "validation" and social success.

As Amber put it, this image matches "*the typical female – always has her hair done, always has*

her makeup done, always has, like, matching outfits and still tries to go out partying even though

she's 26 and getting married. Whatever."

… at least for other girls…

At the same time that they refrained from problematizing this type of power, treating it as

a given, a number of them placed caveats when they talked about this kind of femininity. For

example, after a long discussion of why young women choose to portray a narrow stereotypical

version of femininity online, Danni backtracked, disclaiming an expertise in this kind of

performance because:

> *… my close female friends generally aren't like that … So when I say the stereotypical*
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> *stuff, it's not so much my own close friends. It's the outside circle of that, where it's just*
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> *acquaintances I know, or what I've seen online, 'cause there's a website called*
>
> *antiduckface.com or something. It's just people have sent in their own pictures of friends*
>
> *making the face, and then whoever is receiving them is just judging them and being like,*
>
> *"Why?"*

Amber distanced herself from this presentation by likening herself to boys: "*Guys are a*

lot more like me in their approach to Facebook, like, it's kind of just there." Interestingly, she

placed this caveat almost immediately after admitting that she posts duckface shots on her own

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[2] Ironically, the participants in the focus group were also quick to label a girl who did so as a "slut."

social media sites. When trying to explain this apparent contradiction, she linked pressures on

girls and women to post sexualized images directly to mainstream media stereotyping:

> *And I'll admit, like, sometimes I do it, but just because I don't know what else to do,*
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> *because everyone else poses this way, so I just assume that I should pose this way …*
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> Question: Is there pressure to be like that on Facebook?
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> *I think that's why they do it, really, quite frankly. But then again, that's why most people*
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> *do what they do, right? They see models wearing Dolce and Gabanna and they're like,*
>
> *'Oh, D&G!' And then, yeah. They just kind of want to do what they think is cool.*

At a later point in our interview, Amber again linked girls who post a high number of photos of

their boyfriends on social media to media stereotypes:

> *… Hollywood culture's so deeply embedded in females' psyches that I think a lot of them*
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> *truly believe that they need a boyfriend … But I don't think that it's really that healthy,*
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> *being in one of those relationships. It's just got the bling and lustre of a Hollywood*
>
> *romance. I think that's what they try to work out in real life, then I think they realize that*
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> *it doesn't work out. Like, the epitome of this is the sparkly vampire. 'Cause he sparkles*
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> *… It doesn't matter that he's cold and dead.*

… unless that's inconsistent with my other goals …

Other participants described the ways in which they struggle to distance themselves from

this sexualized image of femininity in order to make room for some other kind of self – student,

professional, fun girl, or a girl who is "*more like, 'Hey, that's cool', versus, like, "Hey, that's*

hot'" (Amber). Natalie's story is particularly evocative in this regard. She prefaced her

comments by telling us that, when she was a child, no one paid any particular (negative or positive) attention to her or how she looked, and she was free to dream about growing up and becoming a doctor. However, things changed when, as she began to post pictures of herself on Facebook, people would post comments publicly praising her because she was very beautiful. She explained, "*I was like, 'I want to get these comments, that'd be nice.' I don't think I initially started that way, but once you start getting the comments, you sort of start feeding into that a bit … then it became something I'd be conscious about.*" Image became so important to her that she would only post photos that had been taken by a professional photographer.

The attention Natalie received because of her physical beauty became a barrier to her other dreams. Before she went through puberty, she "*just focused on school. It was never like, 'That's the pretty girl,' or this or that. And then things changed. And so I still had that old mentality of, I want to be a doctor. And it's kind of conflicting.*"   It was only through her reflections during our interview that she began to question this. She told us: "*I've been asking myself why I never realized that [I could be pretty and a doctor] until now. I think when I was younger, it was always it has to be one or the other; it can't be both.*"

Natalie's solution was to remove any photos of herself from social media except group shots, and to actively monitor photos in which she was tagged. She also did not post information about her relationship status. Others, like Corrine, reported a similar concern about "*being perceived as something I'm not,*" and shared a reluctance to post photos or their relationship status because it was difficult to control how they were perceived by people who were monitoring their sites.

On the other hand, monitoring was both taken for granted and part of the pleasure of social media. There was widespread agreement among our participants (Jenna; Tina; Amber; Danni; Corrine; Brenda) that social media users place each other under a form of surveillance, again often as a form of entertainment. As Jenna put it, with respect to what some referred to as "stalking": "*Everyone does it. And we all know that we read each other's profiles.*" According to Kim, those who post more expose themselves to more surveillance: "*The downside, I guess, is really that the more things you post, people will kind of check your profile. […] These days, everyone says, 'I'm stalking you on Facebook' with kind of a sense of humour.*"

… away from family and unwanted male attention …

The ready visibility of social media also enabled monitoring by family members and made it difficult to maintain an appropriate separation between the various social roles our participants played, from girlfriend, to friend, to employee, to daughter. As Tina noted with respect to being questioned by family members about comments she had posted about breaking up with her boyfriend:

> *And I was like, "Oh my goodness, you can't have me on Facebook anymore." This is getting ridiculous, you know? Like, I babysit your kids. This is a part of my life that you shouldn't be seeing.*

Online visibility also created the possibility of attracting unwanted male attention. A number of our participants agreed that young women were at greater risk of stalking[3] by unknown older men and, thus, ought to guard their online privacy more carefully than young men (Francesca; Amber; Parvati; Andrea; Corrine). Others, like Francesca, found this "creepy." However, they all reported a high degree of resiliency in this regard, typically unfriending or deleting boys or men they did not know, though a number of them did express concerns for younger girls. As Corrine put it: "*And I know, like, my 15 year old cousins who are really pretty, like, they have Facebook too. That really weirds me out ... Guys can just stalk them; can just go through their pictures and look at them ... Obviously you're young and really impressionable.*"

... and my girlfriends ...

Our participants' greatest concerns about surveillance, though, related to being watched by other girls in their social circle (Corrine; Andrea; Danni; Tina; Francesca) because being watched opened them up to harsh judgment. As Corrine put it, "*I hate [Facebook] because you're putting yourself with girls; you're putting yourself out there to be judged all the time. And it's just...I don't know, private things become so public, for you to be judged on it.*" Interestingly, putting yourself out there was seen as a way to gain validation, but the very act of seeking validation created vulnerabilities. Corrine explained, "*I see on Facebook that girls are seeking*

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[3] A notable exception to the idea that young men were unlikely to be stalked was Corrine's speculation about her boyfriend: "*[My boyfriend] probably just uses it to watch me. [I guarantee] if there was a guy in a picture with me, he'd probably stalk that guy to find out. I know he has done that before.*"

that attention more, and seeking that approval, and judgment on their looks, more than guys are. And that alone just makes them more vulnerable."

Once again, this dynamic was highly gendered and girls were held to a much higher standard than boys. As Brenda put it: "*If a guy cheats on a girl, everyone's going to be like, 'Oh, he's such a dick,' right? But then it kind of fades away. But if a girl cheats on a guy, it's like, 'Oh my God, what a slut, what a whore' – blah, blah, blah. That reputation will follow her for the rest of her life.*" Moreover, those strategies that were markers of confidence and popularity noted above – the duckface and bikini shots – also opened up the possibility of being labelled a slut, as did having "too many friends", a public profile or simply displaying attention-seeking behaviour.[4]

> *[Girls seem like sluts] if they have, like, a ridiculous amount of friends – also, like, very attention-seeking. So I think guys notice it too ... ['Attention-seeking' and 'slut'] are not synonymous, but they often go hand-in-hand, I'd say* (Natalie).

... so I need privacy ...

Perhaps as a result, our participants suggested that young women were more likely than young men to have privatized social networking pages (Andrea) and to spend considerably more time crafting their postings, photos, and online personae (Dawn; Corrine). Because of this, privacy took on heightened importance as it was a tool to exercise some level of control over both self-presentation and audience interpretation, allowing them to "pick and choose" who had

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[4] For a fuller discussion of this dynamic, see Bailey, Steeves, Burkell, and Regan (2013).

access to what information about them (Amber, Francesca, Kim) and thereby avoid getting

"*screwed by what you've posted online*" (Brenda).

... and I have to be more careful than boys ...

However our participants defined privacy and their related concerns, many quite clearly

articulated the struggle with selectively maintaining privacy in the context of online social

networking. For example, Francesca told us:

> *It's difficult sometimes, because when you're deciding ... what information to post up,*
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> *you want to be able to kind of keep your friends up to date. ... But then again, you always*
>
> *have to be – or I try to be cognizant of the fact that other people could be viewing this*
>
> *information. So it's difficult, because I feel like there's kind of a cap on how much you can*
>
> *say, even though this is your page and this is, you know, your domain.*

Moreover, our participants felt that this process was more complicated for girls than for

boys for several reasons. Most of our participants believed that girls were likely to be more

active on social networking sites than boys (Brenda; Andrea), more likely to engage in gossip

and "drama" online (Vecepia; Tina; Andrea; Kim), and were likely to disclose more information

about and photos of themselves (Brenda) in an effort to "prove" themselves or gain approval or

validation (Brenda; Francesca). As Francesca put it:

> *I've never encountered a girl that has not had Facebook, ever. Which is surprising.*
>
> *Whereas with guys, it's kind of like black and white, and I'm not that shocked. ... And I*
>
> *don't know why, but I think girls get trapped into that, and kind of wanting to prove to*
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> *other girls, I would say, even more than proving to guys, that, you know, 'I'm your equal.'*

Some of our participants speculated that the less emotional or dramatic online social networking practices of young men at least partially explained why young men were both less likely to stalk and to be stalked online by their peers than were young women (Sandra). To the extent that boys were less subject to online scrutiny than girls, Corrine speculated they were much less likely to have to "be as careful" as girls about what they posted.

Our participants identified a number of strategies for exercising this degree of care. Corrine sought to maintain a clear boundary between her social networking presence, which was the public part of her life, and her private existence:

> *I'm really careful about the private part of my life, keeping it separate from the public part of my life. ... You're not going to see these private parts of my life right on my Facebook. Just like I don't want people seeing me a in a bikini; I'll save that for later. Once you get to know me, maybe you can see me in a bikini.*

Indeed, a number of our participants consciously developed their online personae in light of concerns about how different audiences would react to their self presentations. As Dawn put it:

> *I feel like my persona at school or work or socially is different from my persona at home, like, with my parents and stuff. And now what I'll get a lot of is family members adding me on Facebook... So, I'll have a lot of, sometimes, I'll have to go to my friends and be like, "Okay, who can see what?" And then it's like, okay, these people can see everything, these people can see some stuff, these people can see just enough that they don't think I'm hiding anything from them, but not really see anything at all. ... So, for me, 'cause my online personality feels more like the me that I am every day than the me that I am to my*

parents, or, like, my extended family sort of thing, I feel that this would be…it's censored

me, but it's true me, although it's censored.

Similarly, in light of her concerns about employer monitoring, Francesca worked to "*make sure that I always consistently put out a professional representation of myself.*"

For many of our participants, presentation of their online personae meant consciously limiting not only what they posted on their own pages, but also on those of their "friends" (Andrea; Francesca). As Kim articulated, "*I really watch what I post. … Like, I question myself, like, three times about it, and I see if it's really non-confidential.*" Others policed content by de-tagging photographs of themselves or requesting that others do so (Brenda; Andrea; Corrine; Kim). Francesca described a more nuanced form of content control, which effectively limited accessibility without the need for complete self-censorship:

Sometimes, like, my friends and I will just kind of- not necessarily write stuff in code, but, like, we'll just be very careful about what we say. Like, a lot of times, we just naturally have nicknames for everything, … so if I want to write a message about something and I don't necessarily feel like writing a private message, it's still private enough that only this person can understand, which is my goal.

Our participants also identified a number of privacy mechanisms aimed at limiting their audiences, including: ignoring or declining new "friend" requests; deleting "friends" (Amber; Sandra, Tina); deleting Facebook altogether (Corrine); maintaining a private profile only (Corrine); and adjusting privacy settings to block certain "friends" from seeing certain kinds of content (Dawn; Amber; Francesca). As Amber noted, in relation to concerns about employer monitoring, "*I contemplated taking [my Facebook page] down, deleting it all together, but I*

decided not to. I kept it. I took down some pictures and things that I thought would incriminate

me, like, unacceptable social things. But I keep it private. You can't search me. I 'Googled'

myself and nothing really comes up."

Francesca noted that social networking sites can be structured in ways that may

complicate individual deliberation about what to post: "*I feel like it's so structured for you, and it*

makes assumptions that you have a favourite quote, et cetera." Similarly, Dawn noted that other

than one free text box below the profile picture, "*there's always, like, instructions on what you're*

supposed to be doing there. Like when you go to put a picture up, it's like, do this, do this, do

that, do that ...." Very practical considerations may also limit the efficacy and attractiveness of

these information and audience control strategies, since, as Kim put it, "*why is it so complicated?*

... It's set for default that you're going to show everything. So you really have to go through and

check things by yourself; figure it out by yourself before you can, like, be sure about it."

The complication associated with making these adjustments was not worth the time for

some of our participants. As Amber said, "*A lot of it is like…I'm busy. I just can't be bothered to*

sit down and filter all my pictures and all my friends. It's just too much work. You just kind of put

it at the back of your mind. Facebook really for me consists of, like, twenty people constantly,

kind of thing. The rest of them are just kind of there."

.. but that doesn't mean I'm being treated unequally …

Notwithstanding consistent identification of the ways in which gender affected privacy

and interpersonal watching differently for young women than for young men online, most of our

participants felt there was no issue of inequality online, save for the potentially greater exposure

to stalking by unknown men (Kim). As Brenda said, *"I don't really think I've been treated unfairly online because I'm a girl. I don't really think I've ever been hassled because I'm a girl."* Dawn expressed similar sentiments, but suggested that the same might not be true for girls living outside of the "Western world", where she perceived monitoring would be greater.

When probed on what online equality would look like, however, a few of our participants reflected back on the gendered costs of online visibility discussed above and suggested:

> *I think online equality would look a lot like, I guess, just regular equality. Where I wouldn't have to spend time thinking about what I could and should put on Facebook, and I could just put on any picture that I think makes me look good. ... That, to me, would be online equality, where I wouldn't be thinking about things a million times before I put up a simple picture (Andrea).*

> *I would think [that women are less equal than men online], just because I see that we have to try so much harder. Like, everything else in the world, like, I feel like I have to try harder to be perceived as not the ditzy MySpace girl, or try not to be portrayed as the girl who's trying not to be the ditzy MySpace girl, you know? It's really tricky for me. Whereas I feel like my guy friends just created a Facebook account, and it was easy. They don't get judged as much on their stuff. So yeah, I definitely think there's an issue of equality (Corrine).*

I find [equality online] an interesting question to try and answer, because I've never seen

it, so it's hard to kind of, like, really kind of even know where to start. ... I really can't

even imagine, which is kind of scary. I can't imagine equality online (Francesca).

Again, the visibility of social media was implicated, because it tended to focus attention on

looks, and require girls to choose between being "pretty" and "nice," and being anything else.

Natalie put it this way:

[J]ust as in real world, you know, how a lot of times compliments are nice and welcomed,

I think that Facebook equivalent of that, for example, is people commenting on your

photos and saying, 'You're so pretty; you're so this.' It's just another avenue to kind of

get that, admiration, I guess I would call it? Which again would feed into their own egos,

as opposed to guys who might seek that in other domains and venues.

Discussion

Our findings illustrate the dynamic ways in which young women socially construct their

online identities (Phillips, 2009; Bronstein, 2013) and rely on social media to care for and

manage their social relationships (Shade, 2008). Our participants approached social media as

performative spaces where they could experiment with identities by crafting culturally

meaningful, coherent, intelligible, and recognizable narratives; and configure those identities

within a network of social relationships (Cover, 2012). Their ability to see and be seen on social

media was consciously embraced as a way to affirm themselves and connect with others.

However, in spite of their self-reflexive engagement with online visibility, their

performances were shaped and constrained by broader social narratives around femininity,

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narratives in which "physical beauty, sexual attractiveness, and product consumption supersede intelligence and creativity" (Thiel-Stern, 2005, p. 179). These narratives focus on the sexualized feminine body and draw from media representations that provide what Thiel-Stern calls authoritative knowledge of how girls are supposed to be (Thiel-Stern, 2008). Our findings accordingly suggest that, even when young women are the creators of their own online representations, their agency is exercised within a social environment that continues to privilege stereotypical images of how they should see themselves and present themselves to be seen by others, and that this creates a gendered burden that complicates their online interactions.

Certainly, as Brighenti (2007) reminds us, "It is no mystery that the asymmetry between seeing and being seen is a deeply gendered one – often, a sexualized one. In modern western society, typically, the male is the one who looks, while the female is the one who is looked at" (p. 330). The male sexualized gaze is particularly potent for girls as they move from childhood to adolescence. Hauge (2009) suggests that a direct negotiation with heteronormative discourses around sexuality is the primary marker of the shift from girl child to young woman. As such, our participants reading of markers like makeup, clothing, and boyfriends to signal femininity online demonstrates their facility with the heteronormative ideal, as does their ready acknowledgement of the link between the sexualisation of this pretty, thin feminine body and social power (Hellman, 2008). In this sense, the online world duplicates the offline world (Van Doorn, van Zoonen, & Wyatt, 2007), as girls are required to negotiate with the "untroubled" status (Hauge, p. 301) of the type of body that is assumed to be most privileged by the male gaze.

However, our findings suggest that social media not only replicate the centrality of this binary classification (Manago, Graham, Greenfield, & Salimkhan, 2008), they *amplify* it, in three

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inter-related ways. First, the commercial surveillance that drives social media intensifies girls' interactions with media representations and restructures the environment in ways that privilege heteronormative performances of girl. Second, the surveillance of family members and peers creates a gendered burden to care for and manage others' expectations; managing this burden is complicated by the ways in which that same surveillance breaks down the boundaries between performances of various identities, particularly because the demands of mainstream performances conflict with other identities they inhabit (like daughter and employee). Third, the visual nature of social media alienates the feminine body through the hyper-visibility of the *image* of the body; this makes the body an object of judgment that is subject to scrutiny by others and the self, and exacerbates the negative effects of failed performances. In the following section, we discuss each of these dynamics in turn.

Commercial surveillance and the mediatization of online spaces

Our participants' use of styles and fashions to project a feminine identity in online spaces is consistent with research that reports that media images provide the "raw material" (Bovill & Livingstone, 2001, p. 3) with which young people construct their identities. McRobbie (1978) first identified the importance of the bedroom as a private social space in which girls appropriate and experiment with this raw material. Steele and Brown suggest (1995) that, "for many teens, the bedroom is a safe, private space in which experimentation with possible selves can be conducted" (cited in Bovill & Livingstone, 2001, p. 3). The benefits of bedroom culture are accordingly tied to the ability to retreat from scrutiny and to try on various ways of being away from the judgments of non-intimate others.

However, McRobbie's early work also emphasized how this experimentation "has been led, exploited even, by powerful commercial interests in the fashion and music industries" (1978, pp. 2-3). Certainly, our participants were aware of, and lamented, the mainstream media representation of the 'attractive' female body that saturates entertainment and marketing content (Thiel-Stern, 2008). However, a number of them also readily appropriated and reproduced these images in efforts to make themselves intelligible to others, even when they expressed disdain for their narrow representation of femininity. Moreover, they reproduced them on social media typically programmed to default to 'public' and that open up the virtual bedroom, and the performances that take place there, for others to see.

Westlake (2008) suggests that these kinds of "fluid performances, which may look like exhibitionism, are energetic engagements with the panoptic gaze: as people offer themselves up for surveillance, they also resist being fixed as rigid, unchanging subjects" (p. 21). But the ability of the panoptic model, where the few watch the many, to explain on its own this kind of performativity is limited by its disciplinary focus (Hier, 2003), which positions the watched as passive and the gaze as inherently disempowering (Brighenti, 2007). We suggest that our participants' active engagement with media representations can be better understood as a product of the interaction of panoptic and synoptic surveillance, where the many watch the few.

Mathiesen (1997) offered his analysis of the synoptic gaze as a corrective to surveillance theories that fail to take the role of the mass media into the account of surveillance in late modernity. He suggested that the top-down form of panoptic surveillance is mutually constructed with and by a synoptic form of monitoring that habituates the many to "seeing, and thereby contemplating, the actions of the few" (Hier, 2003, p. 404). For our purposes, this model

helps account for the monolithic presence of mainstream media representations of femininity in online spaces, because synoptic surveillance encourages large numbers of people to concentrate on something in common. This common focus amplifies the importance of media representations because they come to dominate the visual domain and accordingly act as shared cultural capital that is easily appropriated by and intelligible to others.

However, it is important to note that the panoptic affordances of social media work to reinforce the ways in which the synoptic gaze is encouraged to focus on sexist commercial messages. Social media are structured by commercial imperatives that embed mainstream media images directly into the social environment (Grimes & Shade, 2005; Steeves, 2006). But, by seamlessly collecting personal information from and about their users, online platforms not only synoptically privilege heteronormative images of femininity through the ubiquitous placement of advertising and sponsored content; they also monitor how girls respond to these messages and reconstruct the online social environment to magnify their impact. Accordingly, panoptic and synoptic forms of surveillance merge in ways that reinforce existing social relations (Hier, 2003). As our findings illustrate, mainstream representations reproduced in social media thereby take on new life and set the stage for narrow, stereotypical performances of femininity.

To create space for others kinds of identities, our participants were also quick to place caveats that distanced them and their friends from these representations, providing a window into the complicated and contradictory terrain they are required to navigate. By complying enough with the dictates of mediatized images of femininity, they sought to create a sense of self that was socially acceptable and intelligible to others; by complying too much, they feared that space for other kinds of identities would be shut down.

This was best exemplified by their narrative around sluts, who were deemed "too much" – they paid too much attention to makeup and clothing, placed too much focus on their boyfriends, were too overt in their sexuality, and were too public online. The fear of over-reaching, of trying too hard, of going too far in the emulation of mainstream tropes, meant that our participants walked a tightrope between being sexy enough but not too sexy, seeking to occupy an acceptable feminine subjectivity that incorporated mainstream elements of sexualized display while avoiding the label "whore" (Hauge, 2009, p. 301).

Accordingly, as much as the visibility afforded in online spaces provides an opportunity for identity play, that visibility is also perilous because the line between success and failure is razor thin. As Brighenti (2007) notes, "Visibility is a double-edged sword: it can be empowering as well as disempowering ... concentrations of visibility-as-power always attract their highly visible nemesis of downgrading and 'fall'" (p. 335). Our participants' identity experiments online were therefore fraught with difficulty, as they sought to avoid the humiliation that follows if young women fail to fit themselves into the narrow norms associated with mainstream, commercialized tropes.

Interpersonal surveillance and the burden of care

The consequences of failure are also magnified by the surveillant nature of the space. Although successful performances by our participants were rewarded with compliments and social support, it was difficult for them to segregate unsuccessful performances because they were seen by so many intended and unintended audiences. The difficulty of segregation encourages the performance of identities that "remain closely related to the binary gender

system" (van Door, van Zoonen, & Wyatt, 2007, p. 143) because they are easier to inhabit and explain to others.

Privacy strategies were accordingly important to our participants because the inability to erect boundaries between audiences detracted from their ability to perform different identities. They found it difficult to deal with family members who could monitor their relationships, especially with boys, and overreact to behaviours, like the duckface, that were consistent with mainstream tropes. All participants expressed concerns about employers who could misinterpret photos of drinking or partying. They also found it tiring to be held to account by girlfriends, who could take things out of context and create drama.

Privacy regulation fails to respond to young women's needs for control over boundaries because it is preoccupied with the collection of personal information. The point of social media is to be made visible through the flow of information about oneself; the point of privacy in this context is to assert control over when and how that visibility is interpreted by various audiences. Simple regulatory responses that focus on (non)consensual disclosure of information miss the point.

But compartmentalizing performances was only a partial solution for our participants. The visibility afforded by social media was tiring because it was gendered; they were monitored in ways that their male peers were not, simply because they were girls in the public sphere. On the other hand, being seen badly was equally gendered, as they were held to account for any missteps where they failed to take others' feelings into account because, as girls, they were expected to respond to and placate the emotions of others. Accordingly, the care and control

afforded by surveillance collapsed into each other, as monitoring for pleasure or monitoring for control both reinforced performances that conform to gendered expectations.

The panoptic model of surveillance often struggles to explain this kind of experience, because it has "fostered a disproportional focus on the disciplined individual who lives under the panoptic gaze to the neglect of the observer in the metaphorical inspection tower" (Hier & Greenberg, 2009, p. 22). From this perspective, the panopticon is a "technology of power for society as a whole, regardless on any specific application" (ibid.). However:

> … power does not circulate equally, and blurring the distinction between the relations of domination and subordination … has the effect of relavitizing historically recurrent asymmetries of power and surveillance at the expense of understanding visualization and perception as relations of power (p. 23).

Competing models, like the surveillant assemblage proposed by Haggerty and Ericson (2000), better describe the nodal nature of online information flows but, by equating synopticism with a partial democratization (given the way the many can now watch the few), the assemblage over-emphasizes the power of the many and fails to fully account for asymmetric monitoring (Hier & Greenberg, 2009, pp. 19-20). Some surveillance scholars have, accordingly, tended to dismiss interpersonal surveillance as an apolitical form of voyeurism, or visibility without consequence. But visibility is "a relational social process … that is conditioned by vested material interests and desires" (p. 24). As such, theories of surveillance must account for the spectrum of visibility, especially in online spaces, where negotiation of public and private space is increasingly complex and where synoptic, panoptic, and interpersonal forms of surveillance interact and magnify each other.

Visuality and the body

Brighenti (2007) suggests that surveillance scholarship can move forward by examining the ways in which the field of visibility structures social relations. She argues that visibility lies at the intersection of relations of perception and relations of power (Brighenti, 2007, p. 324). In this sense, visibility is always political. So when "something becomes more visible than before, we should ask ourselves who is acting on and reacting to the properties of the field, and which specific relationships are being shaped" (p. 327).

This is particularly important for members of equality-seeking communities, who have an ambivalent relationship to visibility. Communities that fall below the "fair threshold of visibility" (p. 329) become invisible and are accordingly marginalized (Lorde, 1984). Indeed, this marginalization was the early concern of feminists who first encountered the Internet as a male-dominated space (Richards and Schnall, 2003). Female participation was seen as the corrective; girls and young women could wrest equality in online spaces by eschewing norms of modesty and making themselves visible (Koskela, 2004). However, communities that are pushed above the fair threshold of visibility are also at risk (Moreno, 2008); being super-visible can lead to paralysis and a loss of control over one's own image:

> It is a condition of paradoxical double bind that forbids you to do what you are simultaneously required to do by the whole ensemble of social constraints. ... Clearly, one's positioning behind or beyond the thresholds of fair visibility raises the problem of the management of one's social image in one's own terms. Therefore, when philosophers and political activists support the claims for recognition put forward by minority groups,

one should be aware that the very social relationship producing recognition can produce

denial of recognition, too. Distortions in visibility lead to distortions in social

representations, distortions through visibility (Brighenti, 2007, p. 329).

Our participants' experiences suggest that the gendered gaze operating in social media can push

young women into the realm of super-visibility, where their performances are easily distorted by

the mainstream tropes through which others – and the girls themselves – interpret those

performances. Again, the synoptic nature of social media helps to exacerbate visibility: the

synopticon "embraces the visual in the most emphatic manner because the synopticon is

thoroughly visual and visualizing" (Hier, 2003, p. 405).

The emphasis placed on photos also amplifies the visual aspect of online performances.

Senft (2008) notes that photos are an integral part of gender signification in online spaces. Our

participants certainly spent a great deal of time and effort crafting their online image and

carefully presenting themselves. But the contested nature of the feminine body also meant that

their displays opened them up to judgment both on the part of others and on the part of

themselves. The risk of judgment became something of a disciplinary force as they self-

monitored their performances to remain intelligible without crossing the line.

Harper and Tiggemann (2008) note that image sharing encourages girls to think about

their bodies from the perspective of a critical observer, in a sense alienating them from their

embodiment so they can engage with the image of their body from the perspective of the male

gaze. This effect is amplified in social media by the visual nature of the medium; girls' online

identities are crafted for consumption by viewers who read visual cues that are understood within

a commercial lexicon. Because of this, photos are less an "expression of a reflexively chosen

identity" than a commodity that can be understood within a "consumerist visual representation of society as a catalogue" (Schwarz, 2010, p. 163). Here, we see another effect of interpersonal surveillance in online social media as participants learn to embrace marketing surveillance mechanisms on a micro level (Andrejevic, 2005).

Ringrose and Renold's findings about offline performativity in the United Kingdom apply here:

> [Girls] must now perform a 'post-feminist masquerade' where they are subject to more intensified technologies of bodily perfection and visual display as 'feminine subjects' in a current 'fashion and beauty' system that privileges oppressive forms of idealised white femininity (Ringrose & Renold, 2012, p. 461). [5]

Once again, the potential for a lived equality recedes.

Conclusion

Ironically, the very constraints placed on young women online – the heteronormative tropes embedded in commercialized social space, the gendered nature of the surveillant gaze within interpersonal surveillance, and the over-visibility of the feminine body – were not seen by most of our participants as impinging on their equality. Instead, "the compulsory hypersexual embodiment that dominates popular celebrity culture [was packaged] as a form of sexual, feminine liberation" (Ringrose & Renold, 2012, p. 462) and gender injustices – the heavy management burden described by our participants and the sense that boys 'get away with

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[5] The findings of Finn (2011) about ordinary Americans' post 9/11 staring at women racialized as South Asian similarly underscore the intersecting influence of race and gender in lateral forms of surveillance.

murder' – were re-instated in ways that became invisible to them as matters of equality. Perhaps most importantly, our results suggest the urgency of further developing surveillance studies in a way that better accommodates the inter-relationships of panoptic, synoptic, and interpersonal modes of watching that coalesce to undermine the emancipatory potential of online social media for girls and young women. Our participants described a world in which the struggle for "the visibility without which [one] cannot truly live" (Lorde, 1984, p. 43) was played out under the spotlight of a commercially crafted white, middle-class, and hyper-heterosexual gaze that privileges a very circumscribed understanding of girlhood and womanhood. The panoptic and synoptic forces that privilege this gaze and the performances it favours train the watched both to internalize its norms into their understandings and assessments of self (Gandy, 2000) as part of a strategy to remain intelligible, and to interpersonally surveil others according to its norms. Until the inter-relationships between panoptic, synoptic, and interpersonal forms of surveillance are better understood and accounted for, it will be difficult to tailor successful strategies for intervention. Without such strategies, freedom and equality for girls and young women in online environments (as in offline environments) seem highly unlikely to follow.

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