Berriman, Liam, and Rachel Thomson. "Spectacles of Intimacy: The Moral Landscape of Teenage Social Media." *Researching Everyday Childhoods: Time, Technology and Documentation in a Digital Age*. By Rachel Thomson, Liam Berriman and Sara Bragg. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018. 59–76. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350011779.ch-004>>.

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Spectacles of Intimacy: The Moral Landscape of Teenage Social Media

Liam Berriman and Rachel Thomson

For 15-year-old Jasmine, her Blackberry phone and messenger app were a source of intensely mixed feelings. In her first interview with researcher Ester, she described how her Blackberry messenger (BBM) app had become a site of on-going 'dramas' amongst school peers, with arguments quickly erupting and spiralling out of control due to miscommunications. For Jasmine, a key turning point came when her phone was irreparably damaged, leaving her 'cut off' from all social media discussions. During the three months it took to get a replacement phone, Jasmine described how life had been 'so much better' without having to constantly respond to 'everyone's dramas'. Returning to BBM on her new phone, Jasmine decided to limit the number of people who could contact her and to avoid being involuntarily drawn into peer arguments.

In this chapter, we map the contemporary landscape of teenage social media use, suggesting that this is a highly moralized terrain, bringing with it the potential for the spoiling of identities and reputations. Drawing on qualitative interviews with our panel of teenagers about the place of digital cultures in their everyday lives, we identify two underlying moral logics in young people's accounts of their practices: a concern with the imperatives of social media presence and participation, and a concern with the values, 'risks' and

consequences of visibility. Using these two logics as axes, we present a heuristic model that captures the nuanced moral landscape of contemporary social media practices for young people, like Jasmine, including the dangers and potential rewards. Our use of the term 'moral' to describe this terrain refers to the way normative codes of acceptable and unacceptable conduct are challenged by participation on social media – with young people's moral codes sometimes at odds with attempts to govern these new spaces.

Media publics

Like media technologies before it, social media has played a key role in the shaping of publics and ideas of what it means to 'be public'. In the early modern era, the development of print brought into being a reading public that was both particular (the single reader) and collective (the literate) (Altick 1998). In the first half of the twentieth century, the emergence of radio and television in turn brought into being listening and viewing publics who tuned in at the same time each day as 'national audiences' (Lacey 2013; Oswell 2002). As we have moved from live to recorded modes of communication, so too has what it means to be heard/seen/read changed, with publics no longer dependent on synchronicity. Most recently, the internet and social media have been characterized as creating 'networked publics' (boyd 2007) that have collapsed traditional boundaries between public/private and author/reader. Theoretically, this process has been mapped as a shift from the idea of a singular public sphere (and its private corollary) towards ideas of contingent and emergent publics that can be called into being through moments of communicative action (Warner 2005). Alongside a proliferation of publics, Silverstone (2007) has described the increasingly globalized media landscape as shifting towards a convergent 'mediapolis', a single 'moral space ... of hospitality, responsibility, obligation and judgement'.

The idea of children's publics as outlined by Nolas (2015) builds on this body of work to explore how the possibilities of digital communication might inform and invigorate ideas about children's participation, which have been 'narrowly conceptualised as the right to be heard and to be consulted on decisions that affect the child as an interpersonal experience that may only occur at certain institutionally defined moments' (161). Drawing on the work of Mahoney et al. (2010), Nolas encourages us to think of publicness as a quality that cuts across and connects the public, the personal and political and which may be characterized by 'idioms' especially accessible to children such as humour. In contrast to the school councils that operate as a top down mode of institutional participation through which certain children are invite

to speak for others within a constrained field of possibility, Nolas illustrates the idea of children's publics through the communicative actions of 9-year-old blogger Martha Payne's daily photographs of school dinners that caused a national scandal in 2012 (BBC News 2012). By focusing on 'claim making', the forging of new narratives and a reaching towards connection with audiences, it may be possible to think of young people's communicative action in terms of dialogue and debate in invigorating ways.

While digital media holds the offer of enabling the emergence of new kinds of publics, it is also implicated in the transgression of the private. Thompson draws attention to the way that emergent publics operate as 'spheres of information and symbolic content' which are 'detached from physical locales' creating 'territories of the self' which are 'constantly challenged' creating 'a new battleground' that is highly moralized and where 'established relations of power can be disrupted, lives damaged and reputations lost' (Thompson 2011, 64). Writing about the scandals of Victorian Britain associated with the rise of the popular novel, literary historians Chase and Levenson suggest that controversies can be understood as 'paradoxical spectacles of intimacy' where 'the stress of popular sensation' provides a mechanism through which 'private life' can be known and shared (Chase and Levenson 2000, 6). For the historian, it is evident that these scandals were 'energising ... inciting insightful discussion of authority and sentiment'. Contemporary sociologists have pointed to reality television (Skeggs 2009; Tyler & Bennett 2010) and social media (Ringrose et al. 2013) as key spaces in which moral personhood is contested. Skirmishes on the borders of privacy are – by definition – spaces within which popular morality is contested and where identities can both be displayed and concealed (Miller 2011). These are the 'dramas' that Jasmine experiences through BBM.

Risking privacy and privatizing risk in an age of social media

The notion of 'risk' is a dominant theme in discussions of childhood and youth (James & James 2008; Thomson 2013), with young people simultaneously constituted as a group 'at risk' *from* others, but also as a risk *to* others. James & James argue that this agenda has led to a closer alignment between notions of risk and protection, with children and young people increasingly framed as 'in need of protection *from* risk' (114: emphasis in original). In contemporary public discourse, the internet emerges as a key site for discussions around risk and protection, with early concerns about grooming and paedophiles increasingly replaced with concerns over young people's capacity

to sexualize themselves. The New Labour government-commissioned 'Byron Review' (2008) captures these doubled edge notions of youth 'at risk' and 'risky' youth, focusing on the promotion of digital literacies as a solution, including raising awareness of the unforeseen consequences of internet display for their future reputations. Young people's management of privacy has also emerged as a topic of concern in public (Valentino-Devries 2010) and academic discussions (Lincoln 2012; Marwick et al. 2010; Robards 2010), including the concern that the public display of personal data may risk both present and future reputations.

A key voice within these debates in the United States has been danah boyd (2014) who has published numerous accounts on young people's online privacy practices. In juxtaposition with research focused on safety and risk, boyd's work offers an account of how teenagers and young people make sense of privacy within an increasingly digitally mediated environment. boyd treats young people as experts of online privacy and as capable of developing sophisticated practices and techniques for managing digital content. Adopting a 'youth centred' approach, boyd has observed how the increasing regulation and surveillance of young people's 'offline' public spaces (see Valentine 1996) has led them to pursue social media as an 'alternative' public space to escape the intrusions of 'concerned' adults.

However, young people's 'networked publics' have emerged with their own sets of challenges for managing privacy. Boyd (2014) describes how the affordances of networked technologies, such as the persistence of online data, has meant that past conversations and content can resurface in later life with potentially negative consequences. The 'spreadability' of content has also made it difficult to maintain control of what is being shared and with whom. Perhaps of most immediate concern to young people is what boyd describes as 'context collapse' – where networked publics bring together people from different parts of their lives, including family, friends, co-workers etc. Boyd's account raises important questions as to how we conceptualize the meaning of 'privacy' and 'public-ness' for young people at a time of social and cultural transformation where social and digital media are increasingly ubiquitous and media landscapes are uneven and dynamic. For example, Marwick and boyd (2014) and Fisk (2016) observe that those interactions adults conceptualize as bullying may be reframed by young people as 'drama'. This more 'slippery' terminology, which echoes Jasmine's comments at the start of this chapter, allows for ambiguity of meaning and the kinds of complexities of agency impossible within the rubric of victim/perpetrator associated with a child protection approach.

Yet risk continues to shape public discourse on young people's use of social media in profound ways. Andrew Hope (2014) argues that our ability to have an informed debate about children online is subverted by four factors: the

discursive construction of e-kids (as vulnerable); the muting of young people's voices (not asking about what happens in practice); the responsabilization of students (making the work of privacy a private business) and finally, a diagnostic inflation of risk through realist discourses – leading to a conflation of different kinds of risks – for example, those associated with content and contact. The EU Kids Online projects has been doing the painstaking work of mapping the digital lives of 25,000 children across twenty-five European countries, and confirms that many users are 'underage' for the platforms and apps that they are using and lack the skills to control privacy settings (Livingstone & Helsper 2013). Yet, among 9–16-year olds, self-reported harm is low (12% reported being 'bothered' by something online) and although exposure to mild risk is common (e.g. mean comments on Facebook), severe risk (e.g. grooming) is rare. This research reveals a complex picture of risk with 'some aspects of the online world draw in certain groups of young people that would normally be less at risk offline. Girls and those who are digitally but not socially confident are likely to migrate to cyberbullying, and those who are either digitally confident or sensation-seekers are more likely to take contact risks' (Livingstone & Helsper 2013: 6).

Studies such as EU Kids Online suggest a highly dynamic picture, where the affordances of new technologies are enacted by young people as intensive users within an uneven landscape of access and support. Livingstone and colleagues note that high digital literacy does not protect against risk in a simple way. 'Risk' is higher in wealthier countries with greater press freedom, more broadband, more computers and longer schooling, and children who are vulnerable offline are also vulnerable online (Livingstone & Helsper 2013). The EU Kids Online study also found that most young people stick to parental rules, but that the nature of parent-child relationships depended on many things, including the speed at which online access was taken up. Patterns of parental-child interaction are shaped by these synchronicities, enabling researchers to distinguish a typology that characterizes families' situations within differing national contexts and socioeconomic and technological landscapes.

The aim of this chapter is, following Hope (2014), to contribute to a research agenda that goes beyond 'the promotion of personalized responsibility for e-safety for all' to one that 'engages more positively with digital rights'. Our starting point for this research is an account of everyday rather than problematic social media use, which is focused on young people's reports of their own practice. As such, this work sits alongside a growing body of research that suggests teenagers are concerned about privacy and are actively involved in negotiating the affordances of a rapidly evolving social media environment (Livingstone 2008; Marwick et al. 2010). In the rest of the chapter, we explore the privacy concerns expressed by young people as they move between

face-to-face and online communications, including their underlying moral logics. Drawing on a cultural studies model, we seek to understand young people within and beyond a rubric of cultural and political production, engaged in making and responding to audiences. Following Carpentier (2011), we are attentive to the operations of access, interaction and participation, using a focus on 'spectacles of intimacy' to provide clues as to what is at stake and how new forms of value are being generated and exploited.

Mapping the moral landscape of teenage social media use

In our initial pilot work with teenagers, we explored key questions relevant to the study, including outlining typical daily routines, enquiring how they would feel about sharing online and offline activity with a researcher and exploring the kinds of self-documentation that they may already engage in. These pilot interviews, proposed as a way of us feeling our way into fieldwork, were highly generative and revealed elaborative ethical codes and language for thinking about privacy and mediating personal boundaries. The model presented in this chapter is informed by analysis of interviews with teenagers, and seeks to make sense of the diversity of their practices and emotional investments in social media as well as how they spoke about this practice, revealing distinct moral discourses linked to peer negotiations and parental/institutional governance.

Similar to Ito et al.'s work of identifying 'genres of participation' in young people's media use (2010, 14), we have mapped a landscape of media practices along different axes of participation and value. However, in contrast with Ito et al.'s more descriptive typology of young people's media practices, we have sought to elaborate an analytic model that explores both the different kinds of reported *practices* that young people engage in as well as the *emotional investments* associated with this activity. This enabled us to pay attention to some of the underlying issues that gave rise to worry, pleasure, excitement and dread. In attempting to make sense of what we heard from a small, diverse, and far from representative group, we have created an analytic model that plots practices and feelings along two axes, representing on the one hand a continuum of participation and, on the other, a continuum of in/visibility. We have characterized the map as 'moral', suggesting that these practices are contested because they are mechanisms through which private life can be known, giving rise to debate about appropriate and inappropriate conduct and revealing broader formations of authority and sentiment.

FIGURE 4.1 *Moral map of teenage social media use*

Here, we introduce the model (see Figure 4.1), mapping within it a set of practices and characterizing four quadrants, distinguished by the kinds of 'spectacles of intimacy' that are realized or imagined in the accounts of different young people interviewed, and which may themselves represent different cultural positions that young people may inhabit or move between over time. The quadrants include (in clockwise order) high participation/low visibility (personified by the figure of 'the geek'), high participation/high visibility (personified by 'the internet celeb'), low participation/high visibility (personified by 'the victim/incompetent'), and low participation/low visibility (personified by 'the fan/lurker'). Like young people's media worlds, the model is highly contingent and 'works' for a moment in time and within a particular social and geographical location – yet, we hope, provides a way into thinking through the spectacles of intimacy involved.

Visibility Axis: The horizontal axis of this diagram relates to a young person's degree of visibility via digital media. In a recent paper on the transformation of online/offline identities, Miller (2013) describes how we have witnessed a shift from mediated environments where anonymity was the norm (e.g. chat rooms), to one in which we are increasingly expected to share and display information about ourselves (e.g. Facebook). Though by no means a hard and fast rule, *opacity* and 'presentation of the self' are emerging as new norms for

mediated social interactions. The latest social media trends adopted by young people have also increasingly placed 'visibility of the self' as their central logic. From Instagram and the 'selfie', to the ephemeral Snapchat and YouTube vlogging – young people's media practices are increasingly visually orientated, with 'the self' and the body framed firmly at their centre. Consequently, this axis of the diagram explores how young people's media practices shape the degree of a young person's visibility (or invisibility). The axis of visibility also ties into debates around privacy, with increased visibility leading to fresh concerns around young people's online exposure and concerns that they are 'broadcasting' themselves. Our discussion focuses on how and in what ways young people reflect on their own visibility and the significance of local and more abstract or imagined audiences, including how they weigh the risks and opportunities of increased visibility, and how visibility and invisibility may not always be voluntary choices.

Participation Axis: The vertical axis of this diagram relates to the *forms* of media participation undertaken by young people. This axis does not separate between 'more' or 'less' active forms of participation, but rather, delineates between different participatory modes of 'production' and 'consumption', treating both as implicated in the creation and generation of value. At the top of the end of the scale, we have those young people who seek to position themselves as producers of content or attempt to harness the value of themselves *as content* (e.g. vloggers). At this end of the scale, value and success are defined through the cultivation of audiences and the measurement of viewing figures. The pinnacle of this scale is characterized by young people as a form of celebrity status, such as YouTube stars. At the reverse end of the scale, we have those young people who primarily identify as content consumers and who largely participate in the tagging, curating, sharing, following and liking of content created by others (both media corporations and other young people). Though these young people are not directly involved in the *production of content*, they are still heavily implicated in the *production of value* – circulating and sharing, and ranking and arranging, content generated by others. These are by no means exclusive categories, but rather, serve as an indicative scale of how young people's participation can variously be involved in the creation of value through different modes of production and consumption.

In the rest of this chapter, we introduce each domain, explaining the practices involved and illustrating with examples drawn from interviews. All these examples are taken from our teenage sample (ages ranging from 10–15), capturing an age-sensitive set of cultural practices. While our sample was highly heterogeneous, the media resources and practices were common across the sample (if expressed in idiosyncratic ways) and firmly distinct from the media practices of our panel of 7–8-year olds.

Low participation/ High visibility: 'The incompetent/victim'

This domain embodies the alarming side of social media – the creation and display of intimate material and the loss of control of this material resulting in personal exposure and shame. Examples within this domain make up the very spectacles of intimacy that characterize much public debate in this area, such as sexting and cyberbullying – with material shared in moments of intimacy then revealed to wider, unsympathetic audiences. A key issue arising from this domain is the absence of consent, with material extracted and exchanged under false premises, epitomized by 'fraping', where a person's online identity is hijacked without their permission. Less extreme but also frustrating is the experience of being tagged in photographs and the creation of a digital footprint through the activities of others. This domain reveals the impossibility of non-participation – that one does not have to create an online persona, it is something that can be created by others. Activity in this domain also reveals the creation or extraction of value within the overall 'attention economy' of participation/visibility. The self and the body are sources of value, which in turn can be objectified and circulated by others. In research on sexting, Ringrose et al. (2013: 312) write about the affordances of 'persistence, manipulation and uncertain audiences' associated with the combination of camera and social media technologies. When circulated in a peer group, a sexualized image becomes a cipher for sexual reputation – potentially, an intimate gesture consensually shared, but also potentially dangerous, exposing them to judgement and ridicule through practices of rating and boasting – giving rise to questions such as 'why are the images valuable, who can they create value for and who can they devalue?' (2013: 309).

The imaginary occupant of this quadrant is an abject figure: incompetent – a digital media user without the knowledge to make themselves safe – and a victim of those who persuade or trick them into sharing intimate information. This is the territory imagined by e-safety logics (grooming, bullying and exploitation), with young people encouraged to be wary about sharing information and incited to be vigilant about privacy settings and circumspect about digital footprints. As Marwick and boyd (2014) observe, young people avoid locating themselves within such discourse of victimhood, eliding the significance of painful encounters with cautionary tales of others. In our project, 13-year-old Claire voiced some of these concerns in response to a question as to whether she posted any material on the social media platform 'Vine':

No, I just watch, because ... I think. I usually do something and I think I'm really cool, and then I'll look back and think 'that's really stupid'. So I try

not to post too much online, in case I regret it. We always get shown that cyberbullying stuff can affect you later in life – if you bully or get bullied [...] They showed this job interview where a person went for a job, and they looked them up online and found all these things about them, that they'd done to this person who was really innocent. And they said 'you're not getting the job because you're a really horrible person, and you have bad people skills'. So I try not to post too much.

Claire distinguishes herself from others who 'tend to put themselves out there'. She explains:

'I don't post much. I'm mainly tagged in things. I think it would be a bit embarrassing, because there are things like, where my friends ... well not my friends, but people ... they swear or whatever. It's mainly ok, but there's just ... some embarrassing photos of me that I've been tagged in. Nothing too bad. If it was just my wall. If it was my news feed there would be a lot of stuff, but that's not to do with me.'

So although Claire is neither an 'incompetent' nor a 'victim' her overall social media profile is informed by the dangers of being visible, encouraging a circumspect relationship with social media.

Low visibility and low participation: The fan or 'lurker'

This quadrant is largely characterized by more cautious practices of limiting online visibility and avoiding uninvited and unwanted public attention. This can be an active choice, with some young people expressing a desire to avoid the potential risks of a more public online presence and audience. However, young people might seek wider audiences and publics, but find that their online presence draws little attention and remains largely unnoticed. In this latter case, invisibility is not a voluntary choice, but signifies the inability to secure and cultivate a public audience. For the most part, media participation in this group consists of activities that deliberately avoid exposure to wider public attention. By commenting, following, liking and reposting, these young people consume content posted by others, but rarely contribute any substantial content about themselves. This is not to say that they do not participate in the creation and production of value. On the contrary, their attention and promotion of content is highly valued and sought after by both corporate and amateur media producers.

During our discussions with young people, we met many who might be located within this category. In the following example, we focus on just one

person. Aliyah, a 14-year-old girl from a Muslim background, is largely a cautious social media user. She tends to avoid using her Facebook account and characterizes her social media practices as follows:

Facebook is for school [. . .] I don't really go on it 'cos it's really boring now [. . .] usually school fights happen through Facebook and stuff like that.

Instead, she opts for more private forms of mediated communication with her close group of school friends – using the phone messenger application 'WhatsApp' to arrange meet-ups and to share news and gossip. Over the past year, she has also increasingly used Twitter as one of her main social media platforms, using it to keep up-to-date with news about celebrities and popular music artists. As massive fans of the boy band Union J, Aliyah and her friends keenly follow the band members' various social media accounts. Aliyah watches out for breaking updates from the band so that she can either be the first to share it with her friends via WhatsApp or to retweet it to her Twitter followers.

Aliyah's media practices attempt to avoid making herself too publicly visible. By maintaining a cautious distance from Facebook, she seeks to avoid becoming embroiled in public conflicts amongst her school peers. The more private channel of WhatsApp provides an intimate and secure space amongst trusted peers between whom there is an implicit trust that conversations are private and are not for wider circulation. On the social network Twitter, Aliyah is largely a 'lurker' – primarily recirculating Tweets shared by others, rather than posting her own. Within her group of friends, Twitter also provides an important means of 'stalking' celebrities. As Aliyah describes:

Aliyah: This new British Band came out, and we all kind of stalked them.

Researcher Liam: What does stalk mean?

Aliyah: Like look at what they Tweet, so my friends are going to [airport] today 'cos they found out the band are coming home, they're coming back from some other country they went to. So they're coming back and they're going to stalk them.

For Aliyah and her friends, being a successful researcher, or 'stalker', of other people's digital footprints is a highly valued skill and practice. Stalking offers a playful means of keeping track of their favourite band and occasionally provides the opportunity to engineer face-to-face encounters in offline public spaces. Aliyah has yet to join her friends on one of these trips, but eventually hopes to do so. For now, she derives pleasure from the anonymity afforded by Twitter whilst 'stalking' her favourite bands, maintaining a wary distance from the more public visibility courted by those e-celebs that she devotedly follows.

Low visibility and high participation: ‘The geek’

This quadrant is configured by the coincidence of low visibility and high participation, characterized by practices that involve the creation and sharing of original content that do not rely on or reveal the identity of the creator. Examples reported to us include a range of strategies for narrating or voicing over extant material including ‘let’s play’ short films that capture live gameplay and the narration of the players; animations that are played over audio recordings; homemade music and accompanying videos. Although closely associated with a boy subculture of gaming, we found girls were also engaged in these kinds of practices, creating YouTube content, animations and fan fiction. What is distinctive about these active social media users was the entrepreneurial character of their practice, with ‘play’ reenvisioned as a form of economically rewarding work. By gaining an audience, young people are aware that they *could* capture advertising and corporate sponsorship. The dream is to ‘go viral’, establishing a career as a cultural creator. In the face of a need to build a credible professional identity, as well as the necessity of taking risks in the kinds of content created, young people are aware of the need to make careful decisions as to how much they reveal about themselves and seek comfort in forms of display that maintain anonymity. This is performed at many levels, but includes the use of ambiguous screen names, a shying away from photographs of the self, and pleasure in the creation and exploration of false identities and disguise. Andrew, a 15-year-old white middle-class boy explains that he communicates with friends via Facebook, but by posting content on his own YouTube channel, he can ‘communicate with people I don’t personally know [. . .] Some friends subscribe, others are from forums I use, some are just random people with the same interest in games’. When asked whether he ever records himself he replies:

Not so much myself. Haven’t ever recorded myself and posted it on YouTube. I’m a little shy and have confidence issues – I don’t think I’d be good talking to a camera [. . .] Some YouTubers can talk off the top of their head. Mainly I do videos on games, animations, music. I make some music for YouTube. It’s just public, unlike Facebook with privacy settings. [. . .] It depends how much content you put with yourself in it. If you do a lot of videos recording yourself and your face, people would recognise you in the street. That’s if you have a big enough following. If, like me, you have about 86 subscribers, and without your face in videos, it’s unlikely many people would know who you are. So you can take some precautions to keep private on YouTube, even though it’s public.

As a serious gamer and a would-be musician and video maker, Andrew feels he must try and be noticed by making his content visible to the corporate players of the internet. For example, he tells us that he posts pictures to a company's profile page who might 'respond if it gets enough interest. People can like comments and those with the most go to the top of the page. It's a good way to ask big companies a question'. Making your content open to evaluation is also risky, as negative comments are visible and permanent records of failure. Added to this, the difficulty of distinguishing local and abstract audiences creates the potential for a 'spectacle of intimacy' in which schoolboy and professional identities spoil each other:

YouTube is public, but I get embarrassed showing people stuff I'd made. You create content which you're happy for people you don't know seeing. They come up to you and say 'why did you do this' and criticise what you've posted. But it's different with people you know. They can say 'I don't like this, it isn't good'. I try to post quality stuff, but people might not see it that way. With people I don't know I think 'are they being serious?' You can get the type of person who says 'this is terrible' but not say why. [...] More often people are rude, especially if it's serious stuff. If you're not careful you can get negative comments. If it's bad enough, you can get their YouTube account suspended. Or people can down vote it and mark it as spam. So technically it's public, anyone can see your YouTube.

The logics associated with this quadrant are of the cultural entrepreneur: creating content and carefully building audience and reputation. There is a high level of control attempted, yet the problems of 'context collapse' (boyd 2007) associated with public platforms such as YouTube create many challenges and ethical complexities. The adoption of alter egos and pseudonyms appears to be a protective strategy, allowing the risk-taking that is necessary for creativity while also developing a recognizable brand and audience. We found young people operating within the quadrant could experience high levels of anxiety and fear of ridicule as well as spending enormous amounts of time cultivating their online projects to the extent that local and face-to-face worlds could suffer and parents might step in to limit what was framed as obsessive or addictive behaviour. Indeed, such intensive investments of time and labour might already begin to mirror the precarious conditions faced by those media professionals seeking to make a living in the creative economy (see Campbell 2013; Gill & Pratt 2008; McRobbie 2011). Nevertheless, despite the costs involved, young people seriously engaged as producers of popular content were admired by others suggesting the ascendancy of the producer identity over that of consumer in young people's values.

High visibility and high participation: The internet celeb

The fourth quadrant is characterized by activities that demand high levels of visibility and participation. The quintessential member of this category at present is the 'YouTuber', who gains a degree of e-celebrity status through their video blogging activities. In the case of YouTube, high visibility is realized through visual exposure in front of a camera (Miller & Sinanan 2014). In contrast with the media producers described above, the young people in this group seek to gain notoriety through the cultivation of 'self as content'. Whether describing their daily lives and relationships, performing sketches or pranks, or reviewing media and products, vloggers aspire towards the generation and cultivation of a loyal audience. To achieve fame, a trade-off must be made in which the security of anonymity is surrendered for the opportunity to be seen and heard by others. For this group, the value of their activities emerges not at the moment of production but rather accumulates through the attention of their audience.

Though none of the young people in our study could be regarded as achieving high levels of attention in their content production, many of them discussed and idolized those YouTubers and Tweeters who had achieved e-celebrity. Fourteen-year-old Abi, an avid YouTuber viewer, has started to run her own channel with a friend, and spoke knowledgeably and enthusiastically about the world of YouTubers:

There's this thing on YouTube, like YouTubers, there's loads of them and *that's their job, they just get paid to make videos*, all these skits and things ... some do pranks, some do advice, some do things about their life.

For Abi, the potential to transform a hobby or interest into a viable 'career' is the ultimate reward of being a successful YouTuber. Here the term 'playbour' (an amalgamation of play and labour) (Kücklich 2005) seems particularly apt as a way of describing the transformation of something that starts out as 'just for fun' into something that can generate economic value. For many, however, this remains a pipe dream and the likelihood of attracting the attention of a wider audience remains slim. As such, this group of young media users also represents an aspirational category in which becoming a successful YouTuber is the new dream profession of working/not working. As Abi describes of one YouTuber:

he is like a professional so they're really lucky because they don't have to get up and go to work [...] So now everybody wants to be a YouTuber because it's a super easy job, but you get paid really well.

Though Abi reveres the success of certain YouTubers, she also remains cautious of the potential risk arising from greater audience exposure. When asked about potential negative comments and ‘trolling’ from viewers, Abi presented a blunt ethical position that to upload a video is to invite all types of audience exposure:

I think when people are being mean on YouTube it’s kind of like, you shouldn’t have uploaded the video then.

In regards to her own channel, set up with her friend, she describes how ‘no one watches it, which I don’t mind because then no one’s being mean!’

Although we find celebration of the possible benefits that might arise from becoming a famed YouTuber, there is little sympathy for the forms of negative exposure to which you might expose yourself. The decision to trade in anonymity for public recognition must be carefully weighed, with the onus for weighing risk placed firmly on the individual.

A cultural economy of spectacle

Touring these four quadrants of our model captures a moment in time of the UK teenage media landscape, a common culture, where the affordances and logics associated with different applications are realized in different ways, yet fall into recognizable patterns when mapped against axes of visibility and participation. Our choice of these axes was informed by the emotional investments of our young informants – these were the themes that they stressed upon in their accounts and which made sense of their practices. Yet, in mapping practices against these axes, we were struck by the relative (un)inhabitability of the different quadrants and the kinds of reputational and physical risks associated with them. Many of these figures form part of a cultural imaginary embedded with distinct modes of value that label them as either figures to be celebrated or derided. Similarities may be drawn here with Tyler and Bennett’s (2010) discussions of the productivity of ‘celebrity chavs’, moral figures operating as ‘a key vehicle through which value is distributed in public culture, and ... instrumental in practices of distinction-making between individuals and groups in everyday life’ (389).

In our model, quadrant 1 is, in identity terms, uninhabitable: a space of bullying, exploitation and humiliation. It is also an implicitly gendered space, showcasing the extraction of value from the circulation of sexualized images, and a space into which the unsuccessful would-be e-celebrity can fall in the face of failure to establish an audience beyond the local network of those

who control sexual reputations. If we reflect on why so much attention is given to this space and the consequences of this, we can understand it as a site of moral warnings for new players or for 'fallen' e-celebs. In a twenty-first-century 'moral map', this is the land of the lost that is a warning to all, but especially perilous to young women who not only risk professional reputations in the future, but also sexual reputations in the here and now. Many of the practices of invisibility adopted in quadrant 2 can be understood as responses to the dangerous spectacles of intimacy represented by quadrant 1 and amplified in the popular media and e-safety discourses. Yet, interestingly, we also learn how young people are experimenting with and enjoying invisibility – something striking in a commercial context where personalization and revelation are incited. Practices such as the 'stalking' of e-celebrities involve realizing the potential of group identities such as the 'fan' and the 'swarm', while connecting offline adventure (meeting with other fans, traveling to 'witness' celebrity), with the development of online community and the power of collaborative research. Quadrant 3 represents a moral high ground – defined by controlled display and public creative risk-taking, anticipating the future while attempting to enjoy the present. This may be a destination point in a developmental journey or an aspirational figure facilitating induction into a new economy of content creation and circulation. Unlike the celebrity of quadrant 4, the geek does not risk a public downfall into the land of the lost, but rather, the kinds of risk that Livingstone et al. associate with the 'digitally confident or sensation-seeker'. In terms of their practice, most of the young people we spoke to were on the left-hand side of the figure, and moved between quadrants 2 and 3. Yet all knew about quadrants 1 and 4 with the dream job of e-celeb and the perils of a spoiled identity powerfully linked in the cultural imaginary.

The moral space represented by the model has been monopolized by e-safety discourses that have sought to define and govern acceptable models of young people's public participation and visibility on social media. In *Framing Internet Safety* (2016), Nathan Fisk illustrates how this moral economy has been dominated by adult (policy makers, parents, journalists, law enforcers) attempts to frame themselves as knowing best how young people should inhabit media publics. He suggests that a focus on risks to future reputation has served to inflate concerns about what gets posted online and has largely been used to justify greater surveillance of young people's online activities by adults. In addition to inflating certain concerns and risks, e-safety discourses have also led to some aspects of young people's social media participation becoming hidden from view and left un-interrogated. As observed in our moral map, social media is also a public space whose architecture is owned by commercial giants (Facebook, Google etc.) who encourage young people to imagine themselves as cultural entrepreneurs (Instagrammers and YouTubers)

investing in their own future economic value. However, the primary economic benefactors of this media landscape are the commercial firms who profit from the content hosted on their sites by harvesting user data to generate targeted advertising. As Fisk argues, e-safety discourses 'largely eschew any critical discussion of mass data collection, advertising practices, digital labour or alternatives to Western concepts of intellectual property' (2016: 188) – instead focusing on the moral responsibility of the individual to cultivate good models of citizenry for their future employability.

Our model is a heuristic device that captures the moral landscape of contemporary teenagers in a tradition of moral maps that encapsulate, represent and mediate moral uncertainty in changing times. It may be best understood as outlining a developmental journey, from the dangers of entry into social media through to strategies for making social media work for you (Robards 2012). Within this landscape, young people are driven by a dual emotional imperative: seeking to navigate between the potential emotional pleasures derived through praise and recognition, whilst simultaneously attempting to avoid the anxiety and distress of being exposed to criticism and derision. The map has an underlying political economy, sorting and distinguishing the ways in which value is extracted, circulated and harvested. Content created through intensive media practices (e.g. taking and sharing a photograph) are absorbed into extensive systems of value judgement and appraisal (e.g. 'likes' and resharing). Exclusion also plays an important role in this moral imaginary, through figures of ridicule and pity. However, there are also hints of how these forms of abjection may be 'resisted and recuperated in forms of counter-political speech' (Tyler, 2013: 5). Perhaps most clearly, the map shows the analytic salience of the axes of visibility and participation – both deeply ambiguous terms in their own right – giving rise to contested hierarchies and new analytic strategies for moving beyond binaries of active production and passive consumption (Carpentier 2011). That 'spectacles of intimacy' can be generative gives insight into the tangled relationship between publicity and the generation and destruction of value. Our analysis suggests we are inevitably required to risk our privacy, yet this risk need not be privatized, nor must it rely on or trade in abjection. Young people are constantly experimenting and realizing the affordances of social media, combining these creatively with face-to-face socialities, and trading off visibility and participation. This is an arena that deserves attention and critical reflection as a site of politics as well as play, and as a starting point for a new kind of public engagement beyond 'e-safety'.