The discursive construction of gay teenagers in times of mediatization: youth's reflections on intimate storytelling, queer shame and realness in popular social media places

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## Sample

51 teenagers between 13 and 19 years old from Dutch-speaking Belgium, 33 girls and 18 boys (with their sexual identity unknown)

# Abstract

New media applications such as social networking sites are understood as important
evolutions for queer youth. These media and communication technologies allow
teenagers to transgress their everyday life places and connect with other queer teens.
Moreover, social media websites could also be used for real political activism such as
publicly sharing coming out videos on YouTube. Despite these increased opportunities
for self-reflexive storytelling on digital media platforms, their everyday use and
popularity also bring particular complexities in the everyday lives of young people.
Talking to 51 youngsters between 13 and 19 years old in focus groups, this paper
inquires how young audiences discursively constructed meanings on intimate storytelling practices such as interpreting intimate stories, reflecting on their own and other
peers’ intimate storytelling practices. Specifically focusing on how they relate to
intimate storytelling practices of gay peers, this paper identified particular challenges
for queer youth who transgress the heteronormative when being active on popular
social media. The increasing mediatization of intimate youth cultures brings challenges
for queer teenagers, which relate to authenticity, (self-) surveillance and fear of
imagined audiences.

# Outcome

"Discourses on homosexuality were attached to media cultural complexities in popular social media places. Accepting/supportive and silently homophobic discourses were built around cultures privileging heterosexuality, which were more concerned with authenticity in mediated places when it comes to being ‘honest’ about your sexual identity. Silent homophobia is seen as a discourse that is not supportive or accepting towards gay identities, but strongly privileges heterosexuality. Mediatized complexities in queer teenagers’ everyday lives could not be sufficiently understood without contextualizing particular cultural contexts of homosexuality-themed language, ranging from homohysteria to a gay-friendly culture. None of the participants relied on discourses of
homohysteric cultures, which reproduce strong homophobic language. But rather departed from a cultural context privileging heterosexuality, while others relied on gay-friendly cultures. Discourses of silent homophobia have a clearer intent towards privileging heterosexuality mostly through gender policing, possibly resulting in a negative social effect. This is in strong contrast to the discourses that rely on gay-friendly cultures, which deconstructed binary oppositions such as straight/gay and masculinity/femininity. This leaves queer teens with a complex set of norms and dilemmas of how to behave in popular social media places when thinking about peer group acceptance and what to do about coming out online." (De Ridder Van Bauwel, 2015, pp. 785-790)