April 2008; available at http://tinyurl.com/qs2ejt). Despite the age restrictions imposed on many social networking sites, children may simply lie about their age to gain access. Girls, in particular, use the Net to express their sexuality:

A trawl of social network sites revealed the shocking, highly personal content youngsters are uploading for all to see. They include a 15-year-old girl whose profile picture, which can be viewed by anyone, focuses on her breasts. Another 15-year-old is pictured sitting provocatively, exposing her breasts and bare legs up to her thigh. And we found one 16-year-old girl who is seen posing in her underwear in dozens of photographs. (*Sunday Mercury*, 14 April 2008; available at http://tinyurl.com/qs2ejt; cf. Koskela, 2006; Jewkes, 2010a)

The pervasiveness of images of young women asserting their sexual agency on networking sites and on YouTube may be unsettling but it is arguable that they are simply using a new channel to express what is essentially 'normal' adolescent behaviour, especially in a culture which increasingly attaches more emphasis on the desire to look, to be watched, and less stigma to nudity, intimate confession and explicit material in published diaries and blogs. The open displays of sexuality by young women that one encounters on social networking sites are arguably the inevitable consequence of a surveillance-rich and surveillance-tolerant society (as discussed in Chapter 8). In today's 'celebrity culture' women are urged to live up to prevalent feminine codes regarding their domestic roles, body shape, dietary habits, dress sense, sexuality and sexual performance. While, for some, this imposed self-surveillance may result in negative responses including disgust and shame at their failure to live up to these ideals, for others, the ability to make public their private bodies via webcams, phone cameras and social networking sites may constitute empowerment, albeit nonetheless a form of 'obedience to patriarchy' underpinned by a 'pervasive feeling of bodily deficiency' (Bartky, 1988: 81–2; cf. Coleman and McCahill, 2010).

Concluding thoughts

This chapter has discussed a range of 'cybercrimes' and included more detailed discussion of two very different case studies. At the beginning of the chapter, we considered the role that the Internet is playing in the development of China as an economic and cultural super-power, briefly dwelling on issues as diverse as cyber-warfare and citizen journalism. In the latter part of the chapter we reflected on young people's sexual experimentation online; the freedoms it affords them that they may be denied in other spheres of life, and the deviant and criminal consequences that can result. These examples illustrate the extent

to which the evolution of the Internet may be characterized as a 'chronicle of contradiction' (Curran, 2010). From its military origins and the massive investment put into its development by a US government seeking military and technological superiority over the Soviet Union during the Cold War, to the 'hippy', liberal counter-culture in which the World Wide Web was conceived in the 1980s, and the era of deregulated media in the 1990s which allowed the newly commercialized Internet to flourish, the history of the Internet has combined paradoxical influences and outcomes. In its post-military phase, it amalgamated the values of academic science, American counterculture and European public service ideals. But having come to public life as a profoundly democratic concern it eventually had to offer itself to commercial interests and, then, to private and state bodies who wanted to use it for surveillance of populations (Curran, 2010). Vestiges of the counter-culture ethos remain intact and arguably are evident in the sexual and political freedoms afforded to users, as described in this chapter. But it is also true that the liberty and democracy that many of us take for granted have more negative, even sinister, connotations.

Summary

- This chapter has discussed two examples of online activity that raise urgent social, cultural and political questions and illustrate some of the complexities and paradoxes inherent in our uses of the Internet in the 21st century: namely, its facilitation of democracy and freedom on the one hand, and repression and risk on the other. Our focus could have been any number of online behaviours that would illustrate the contradiction and dilemmas thrown up by the Internet, but the two chosen – its role as a conduit of power within China and between China and the West; and its radical reformulation of the ways in which children and young people communicate, interact and negotiate sexual relations – are in keeping with broader themes that underpin this entire book.
- Like so many other issues examined throughout this volume, the Internet crystallizes social attitudes towards youthful deviance, and highlights both the ambiguous status occupied by adolescents (simultaneously infantilized and adultified) and also the paradoxical relationship between young people as victims and, conversely, as offenders or deviants.
- Chapter 9 has also offered a broad introduction to the types of activities that may be described as 'cybercrimes'; including electronic theft and abuse of intellectual property rights; hate crime, invasion of privacy, defamation and identity theft; eBay fraud; hacking and loss of sensitive data; child pornography and online grooming.