

Watch where you point that camera



BY SIA LING XIN

FOR undergraduate Kathy Chow, the uproar over recent cases of cyber-bullying has hit close to home.

First, there was Rutgers University student Tyler Clementi, whose roommate and another student allegedly used a hidden webcam to record him having intimate relations with another man.

The two students broadcast the footage live on the Internet, which led to Mr Clementi's suicide.

Then came Singapore's own scandal: A video clip featuring two Anglo-Chinese Junior College girls purportedly having a tryst in a school toilet.

According to media reports, the duo has left the school, and at least nine others involved in spreading the clip have faced disciplinary action.

As a typical Generation Y, tech-savvy person, Ms Chow has filming devices – her camera phone and point-and-shoot camera – with her most of the time.

And she is guilty of using them to shoot her fair share of **compromising** video clips and photographs.

"I have a picture of a friend with her face bloody after a nose-bleed, kneeling in front of another friend, as though she was being forced to perform oral sex on him after she had been beaten up," she said.

"My friends did not want to pose for the picture initially, as they felt that it was demeaning and would reflect badly on them, but (my friends and I) **cajoled** them into posing, and they reluctantly agreed," she added.

She also has clips of friends crudely impersonating teachers, making rude jokes and making obscene gestures.

Now, Ms Chow wonders what would happen if these images and clips were leaked to people outside her group of friends, or what would happen if the images went viral.

"Not only would the subjects of the clip be embarrassed," she said, but who knows how they may later react. There would definitely be an impact on the subjects' families.

There would be **repercussions** for everyone involved – from herself, to the school she is in.

It is a sobering thought for Ms Chow, who now says that "these clips might be posed for and filmed with the consensus of the subjects, but we can never know how the public will view them", or what the fallout might be.

Yet this is the dilemma of the digital age. When almost every person possesses the technology for capturing, then manipulating and uploading any sort of footage onto the World Wide Web, one can expect an influx of home-made videos that could potentially ruin reputations, and even lives.

Ms Jean Williams, a psychologist in private practice, told *my paper* that as such technology becomes increasingly common, people tend to forget about the impact that these devices can have.

"We snap dozens of pictures and upload them every day, and sharing such information becomes part and parcel of life. But this leads us to forget how damaging certain pictures might be," she said.

One teacher, who teaches in a secondary school in the west and wished to remain anonymous, said she has cautioned her students on filming others or allowing themselves to be filmed, "even if it may seem to be **harmless** at that moment".

She added: "You never know how the information may be used, and it's practically impossible to erase it. Once it gets out there, it's out there, forever."

Such is the power of technology.

Although much has been done to educate the public on the dangers of cyber-bullying, it mostly looks at how victims are affected (from how to identify the signs that someone is being bullied, to where to seek help).

But I feel that what the public also needs is the view of the "aggressor" in such situations. It is not as simple as pointing a fin-

ger and identifying the "bully". What needs to be addressed is the fact that what initially appears as a joke could later put everyone's reputations on the line.

And people – especially those like Ms Chow – need to realise that though we are now so used to capturing images of events around us, it is no excuse for carelessness, or callousness.

The best thing to do is not record something that could later be uploaded, of course. So, think before you hit "Record".

The question, for those like Ms Chow, is whether they will now hit "Erase".

myp@sph.com.sg

HELPDESK 我的字典

Compromising: 使为难的
shǐ wéi nán de

Cajoled: 哄骗 hǒng piàn

Repercussions: 影响 yǐng xiǎng

Harmless: 无害的 wú hài de
