

Beware: You may be next

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WO girls were secretly caught on camera by schoolmates having a tryst in a cubicle of a school toilet. The schoolmates then shared what they had seen with others. In the nature of things viral, this could have spread further.

Psychologist Daniel Koh was spot-on in identifying the two key disturbing elements in this episode, first reported in *The Straits Times* last Friday.

The first is that the intimate encounter took place in a public place (albeit a toilet cubicle) and between two girls – which, as Dr Koh put it, was “something society may not accept yet”.

Youngsters used to sharing their personal information freely on social net-

working sites may not realise it, but most people prefer that intimate acts not be carried out in public places. The details of this incident are not altogether clear, but it is evident that the students were indiscreet in the extreme, and their behaviour beyond the bounds of acceptable moral conduct. The school is to be commended for its counselling of the students.

The other aspect that disturbed Dr Koh – and should disturb all Singaporeans – is that the incident was caught on camera secretly by other students and then circulated.

It used to be that a wrinkle of the nose and a turning away of the head was the automatic response to intimate

behaviour stumbled upon. These days, Generation Y is more likely to whip out a mobile phone or other device to record the event, and then share it with others.

In fact, in the recent tragic case in the United States of Rutgers University student Tyler Clementi, a room-mate had deliberately filmed his intimate encounter with another man and then streamed the video over the Internet. Mr Clementi jumped to his death days later.

A generation has grown up inured to the public sharing of private information, eroding their sense of what should be kept private. This generation needs to understand the harm inherent in the

senseless violation of others' privacy for the entertainment of oneself and one's friends.

They need reminding that part of what makes us human and distinct from the apes is our instinct and desire to protect our private selves from the prurient unwanted gaze of others.

No one is immune these days from the ubiquitous electronic eye wielded by all with a camera phone. The only safeguard is personal: a sense of propriety in public conduct, and a respect for others' privacy in not secretly recording and then publicly sharing what was clearly intended to be private. After all, the next person caught on camera may be yourself.