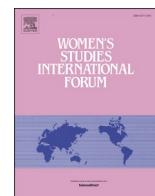


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Young people's experiences of image-based sexual harassment and abuse in England and Canada: Toward a feminist framing of technologically facilitated sexual violence

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A B S T R A C T

This article reports on a qualitative research study Sharing Networked Image Practices (SNIP) among young people. We explore our findings from 37 focus groups with 206 young people aged (11–19) in London and South East England and Toronto, Canada conducted in 2019 and 2020. Drawing on feminist legal and criminological scholarship (Powell & Henry, 2017; McGlynn et al., 2017; McGlynn and Johnson, 2020) we develop a framework to clearly identify how and when image sharing should be constituted as forms of: (1) Image-Based Sexual Harassment (IBSH) (i.e. unsolicited penis images ('dick pics') and unwanted solicitation for nudes), and (2) Image-Based Sexual Abuse (IBSA) (i.e. non-consensual image creation/sharing). We argue that categorizing non-consensual image sharing, showing and distributing as image-based sexual harassment and abuse rather than 'sexting' is an important conceptual shift to enable young people, schools, parents and all relevant stakeholders to recognize and address new forms of technology-facilitated sexual violence.

Introduction: from non-consensual sexting to image-based sexual harassment and abuse.

Over the last 15 years, significant research has focused on the trend of adolescent "sexting"—defined broadly as the exchange of sexually explicit photos, videos, and texts. Primarily due to a lack of standardized definition, this research remains inconclusive and risk-focused (Barrense-Dias et al., 2017; Krieger, 2017). As Krieger (2017) has argued, the conflation of consensual and non-consensual image sharing practices in a great deal of sexting research has led to the common categorization of all youth sexting as risky and harmful (equivalent to abstinence teachings in sex education), as opposed to distinguishing between the wide range of sexting practices when assessing for harm (Ringrose, Whitehead, Regehr, & Jenkinson, 2019; Mishna, 2021; Mishna et al., 2021). Across international contexts, educational approaches to sexting similarly underscore the risks of sexting, and often emphasize the illegality young people's (under 18) creation of nude images (including England and Canada), despite the fact that young people creating these images are unlikely to be prosecuted. Sexting interventions often maintain an abstinence approach that seeks to prevent youth sexting (Dobson and Ringrose, (2015) rather than clearly delineating the difference between

consensual and non-consensual image creation, sharing and distribution, and identifying the latter as forms of harassment and abuse (Dodge & Spencer, 2018; Setty, 2019).

More recently, researchers have pushed to separate definitions of sexting according to degrees of consent (Slane, 2010; Slane, 2013; Krieger, 2017). Non-consensual sexting has been called a variety of terms including: "aggravated sexting" (Johnson et al., 2018; Wolak & Finkelhor, 2011), "secondary sexting" (Del Ray et al., 2019), "pressured sexting" (Englander, 2015), and "coerced but consensual sexting" (Klettke et al., 2019). While this work is important, inclusion of the term 'sexting' in the descriptions of these harmful behaviours maintains the conceptual association of consensual sexting with risk, whereby these non-consensual behaviours are viewed as an unfortunate by-product of consensual sexting (Krieger, 2017).

We consequently argue for eliminating any association between non-consensual image sharing practices and consensual sexting, and instead conceptualizing the non-consensual practices as forms of technology-facilitated sexual violence (Powell and Henry, 2017; McGlynn & Rackley, 2016). To do so we employ two concepts developed from legal and criminological research: 1) *Image-Based Sexual Harassment* (IBSH), an umbrella term under which we analyze unsolicited penis images ("dick

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pics") and unwanted solicitation for nudes; and 2) *Image-Based Sexual Abuse* (IBSA), a term developed by McGlynn and Rackley in 2016 to move beyond the problematic notion of 'revenge porn'. Image-based sexual abuse refers to non-consensual sexual image creating, showing, and distributing of images. These terms IBSH and IBSA have not been used in the majority of youth sexting research, and we advocate a turn to this language to underpin non-consensual behaviour and practices.

By re-conceptualizing non-consensual sexting practices as forms of digital sexual violence, and specifically forms of IBSH and IBSA (or combined IBSHA) we believe that we can focus on identifying and eradicating these harmful behaviours, rather than eliminating sexting—as promoted by the abstinence-only approaches to youth digital sexual cultures. This approach does not advocate the criminalization of young people, but rather, argues that by clearly identifying practices of digital sexual violence and how and when practices constitute forms of IBSH and IBSA, parents, youth, schools, and the community will have better tools to understand and respond to online sexual risk and harms (Dodge & Spencer, 2018; Henry & Powell, 2015).

Theoretical context

As a theoretical framework for this paper, we draw upon feminist criminological and legal scholarship which help us to better understand 'sexting'. 'Sexting' was at first a colloquial term but soon became an object of an increasing body of interdisciplinary research literature (Madigan et al., 2018). Henry and Powell's (2015) influential article 'beyond the sext' was pioneering in attempting to move language beyond the conflation of consensual and non-consensual sexual image exchange that had plagued the new research terrain to focus on sexual violence and abuse. These authors (2017) also introduced the notion of 'technology-facilitated sexual violence' (TFSV) to describe a wide array of online abusive behaviours that depend on digital technologies to facilitate harm, including categories of Online Sexual Harassment (OSH) and Image-Based Sexual Abuse (IBSA). They suggest the TFSV frame helps move us beyond notions of user naivety to focus on gender-based violence as well as to underscore that current language and laws can fail to "capture the social and psychological harm that results from the use of sexual imagery to harass, coerce or blackmail women" (Henry & Powell, 2017, p. 104). In this article, we draw upon this frame considering implications for young people under 18 years of age.

Image-based sexual harassment

As noted, Powell and Henry (2017, p. 156) use the concept of 'Online Sexual Harassment' (OSH) to describe unwanted sexual behaviour online, which they note is an imprecise term. They differentiate four types of online sexual harassment: 1) sexual solicitation; 2) image-based harassment, 3) gender-based hate speech; and 4) rape threats. Our focus is on the first two categories. Since the sexual solicitation we explore is also *image-based* (e.g., asking for nudes), we categorize both solicitation for nudes and being sent unwanted sexual images (e.g., dick pics) as forms of image-based harassment, the term Image-Based Sexual Harassment (IBSH).

'Cyberflashing' is another term used in the England to describe unsolicited dick pics (Thompson, 2016). McGlynn and Johnson (2020) have recently informed a UK Law Commission report (2021) that recommends criminalising 'cyberflashing' (UK Gov, 2022). Legal barriers to prosecuting perpetrators under such proposals remain, however, as proof would be needed regarding intent to cause harm. The term 'cyberflashing' is somewhat limited conceptually as it insinuates a context of men exposing their genitals with exhibitionist intentions. As research has found that men and boys have varying motivations to send

unsolicited dick pics, including sending images to arouse the recipient or to initiate a transaction (Oswald et al., 2019; Salter, 2016), we will situate cyberflashing as a form of IBSH, noting that this is a wider umbrella term.

Small scale studies have explored adult women's experiences of receiving dick pics (Amundsen, 2020) and experiences of young women over 17 years (Mandau, 2020). Our study contributes to this growing area of research by investigating experiences of young people under 18 in receiving unwanted dick pics (Ringrose et al., 2021, 2022; Ricciardelli & Adorjan, 2019). We consider the young person's connection to the perpetrator, the actual or presumed age of the sender and whether the contact is known in real life or only on screen, questions that have received little attention thus far (Gámez-Guadix & Mateos-Pérez, 2019). We use the concept of IBSH to highlight these interactions are harassing and cause harm and are distinct from other forms of online harassment.

As noted, we use the concept of IBSH to also describe the harassment of others for sexual images, sometimes referred to as 'sexual solicitation'. Our findings focus on girls being harassed for nude images, also referred to as "pressured sexting" (Lippman & Campbell, 2014; Thorburn et al., 2021), "coercive sexting" (Kernsmith et al., 2018) or in the context of relationships, "commitment manipulation" (Drouin et al., 2015). Research has consistently shown that girls are more often coerced by boys to send sexually explicit images than vice versa (Kernsmith et al., 2018; Ouytsel et al., 2017). We explore these 'pressuring' behaviours as forms of image-based sexual harassment, as well as the ways in which solicitation for nudes can be *accompanied* by unsolicited dick pics through "transactional" propositions in which boys and men send nudes (i.e. dick pics) and prompt girls to send a nude back (Salter, 2016). We identify this as a type of doubled image-based sexual harassment (solicitation combined with unwanted sexual images) that operates within homosocial reward systems among boys and men (Mandau, 2020). Moreover, this harassment may be connected to further harm, since enhancing masculinity and related social status often involves sharing, showing, and/or distributing girls' nude images non-consensually with peers, as evidence of sexual conquest, which we classify as a form of Image-Based Sexual Abuse as we discuss next.

Image-based sexual abuse

Image-Based Sexual Abuse includes new offences that address non-consensual distribution of sexual images, often popularly referred to as 'revenge porn', such as the UK's criminal offence of "disclosing private sexual photographs and films with intent to cause distress" (Criminal Justice and Courts Act, 2015). McGlynn and Rackley (2016) suggest revenge porn is a misnomer given sexual images are non-consensually created and shared for much wider reasons than revenge. The term "porn" could be disrespectful to survivors and can perpetuate discourses of victim blaming. For these reasons McGlynn and Rackley (2016) have called for such practices to be labeled 'Image-Based Sexual Abuse' (IBSA), which they argue should be understood as a form of TFSV.

In the Canadian context, these practices are termed "nonconsensual distribution of intimate images", defined as everyone who "knowingly publishes, distributes, transmits, sells, makes available or advertises an intimate image of a person knowing that the person depicted in the image did not give their consent to that conduct, or being reckless as to whether or not that person gave their consent to that conduct" (Criminal Code, s. 162.1(1)). This focus on non-consensual distribution regardless of intent to cause distress is useful, as it focuses on the harm that the loss of control over personal images can cause, re-traumatizing survivors of sexual violence by creating technology-facilitated cycles of abuse that are perpetuated each time images are viewed (Regehr et al., 2022). Digital distribution is not necessary to fulfil the elements of this offence,

so *showing* images on phone screens to others without consent is captured. We argue that the term IBSA is a better term for understanding these phenomena, however, as it emphasises these actions are forms of abuse.

The majority of IBSA research has focused on adult women and publicly distributed images (Bates, 2017; Henry & Powell, 2015, 2017; McGlynn et al., 2017), rather than framing non-consensual creating, showing and distributing of images among young people as IBSA (see Powell, 2012; Mandau, 2020, for an exception). Our research addresses this gap, by exploring the peer-to-peer contexts and gender norms surrounding IBSA for 13–18-year-olds. We conceptualize young people's experiences of non-consensual image sharing practices as IBSH and IBSA, exploring how IBSHA relate to each other and exist on a 'continuum' of gender-based sexual violence in young people's digital sexual cultures (Kelly, 1988). Our overall aim is to contribute to feminist research scholarship on digital sexual violence among young people under 18 years of age, through evidence from two national contexts.

Current study

The purpose of the Sharing Networked Image Practices (SNIP) project was to gain knowledge about how young people understand, produce, and share digital images as part of their everyday engagement with social media. First in England (six schools in greater London and one school in South East England) and later in Canada (one school and two youth organizations in Toronto), we conducted "SNIP mApping workshops", an innovative methodology that combined guided focus group discussions with arts-based research practices to generate critical dialogue and reflection on how young people create, share, and receive images online. Ethical approval was gained from our respective universities, to work with young people in focus groups. The ethical procedure involved explaining issues of group confidentiality and young people generated their own pseudonyms during the research encounters and used them when speaking to facilitate anonymity. All data have been further systematically anonymized including removing reference to school or organization names or location identifiers.

Sample

In England, we conducted 25 focus groups in seven highly diverse secondary schools in greater London and South East England in June and July 2019. The groups were separated by age and self-identified gender (into girls and boys) apart from three mixed gender groups. Groups were comprised of two to twelve participants per group. We worked with 144 young people aged 11 to 18 (including 88 girls, 55 boys, one gender fluid young person). The majority of participants were less than 15 years of age, creating a unique data set with children who in the UK are under the age of sexual consent (16) and under the legal sexting age (18).

In Canada 12 focus groups were conducted in one school and two organizations in Toronto. The focus groups were divided according to age and self-identified gender and comprised two to nine participants per group. We worked with 62 young people aged 12 to 19, including seven groups of girls and five groups of boys. Three further focus groups at an organization and a school were arranged but were put on pause due to COVID-19. Table 1 outlines the pseudonyms, types, and locations of the various institutions in which we conducted research, as well as relevant focus group information.

Table 1
School and fieldwork sites and participants.

Name	Type	Location	Focus group	Age range	Genders
England					
South East London Community School – (SELC)	Mixed state secondary	South East London	1 2 3	12–13 14–15 14–15	12 Mixed (4 boys, 8 girls) 7 girls 6 boys
North East London Academy – (NELA)	Mixed state secondary	North East London	4 5 6 7	11–12 12–13 13–14 14–15	7 girls, 1 gender fluid 2 girls 3 girls 5 Mixed (2 girls, 3 boys)
Central London Mixed Comprehensive One (CLC1)	Mixed state secondary	Central London	8 9 10 11	12–13 12–13 14–15 14–15	5 boys 8 girls 6 girls 6 boys
Central London Mixed Comprehensive Two (CLC 2)	Mixed state secondary	Central London	12 13 14 15	13–14 13–14 14–15 14–15	4 girls 3 boys 4 girls 2 boys
South West Independent School for Girls (SWISG)	Girls independent with mixed 6th form	South West England	16 17 18 19	12–13 13–14 14–15 16–17	8 girls 8 girls 8 girls 8 Mixed (5 girls, 3 boys)
North West Independent School for Boys (NWSB)	Boys independent	North London	20 21 22 23	13–14 13–14 14–15 14–15	3 boys 3 boys 4 boys 3 boys
South East Independent Boarding School (SEI Boarding)	Mixed independent	South East England	24 25	12–13 12–13	8 girls 10 boys
Canada					
Toronto Independent School (TIS)	Mixed independent secondary school	Toronto	26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34	16–17 16–17 12–14 12–14 14–16 12–14 12–13 13–15, 17–18	5 girls 3 boys 4 boys 3 girls 7 girls 9 girls 2 boys 6 boys 3 girls
Toronto Organization serving Underserved communities Mixed (TOUM)	Mixed Not-for-profit organization	Toronto	35	16–18	7 girls
Toronto Organization serving Underserved communities Girls (TOUG)	Girls Not-for-profit organization	Toronto	36 37	16–19 13–14, 16–17	9 girls 4 girls
Total			37		206

Data collection and analysis

In both the British and Canadian contexts, the workshops began with facilitators showing images taken from advertising in public spaces and celebrities' social media accounts, followed by open-ended questions about participants' perceptions of how bodies are portrayed in popular culture. The images shown were changed slightly between the two locales, to include advertising the participants might have encountered in public spaces in each location. We then inquired about the norms and rules around taking and sharing images in general and asked how participants made and shared images of bodies on their phones and devices.¹ The interview prompts were broadly similar to achieve comparability of responses across both studies. All the authors were involved in conducting the research with author one visiting Canada to participate in conducting the first few focus groups there.

In England, the focus groups were conducted in classrooms with one focus group conducted in the school library. In most of the focus groups, a member of the research team was paired with a facilitator from the sex education charity collaborating on the research. In three focus groups in two schools, teachers were in the room, which did not appear to deter the participants' engagement. In Canada, focus groups were conducted in private rooms at each location, and were approximately two hours in length. Across both sites, discussions were digitally recorded with participant consent and transcribed verbatim. To ensure confidentiality, participants used pseudonyms, and transcripts were anonymized. In England, Manual thematic coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used and in Canada NVivo qualitative software was used to organize the data (Richards, 1999).

Through a process of sustained discussion and comparison of themes across our data we have drawn upon the analytical feminist framework of technology-facilitated sexual violence to focus on two conceptual themes in this paper: image-based sexual harassment and image-based sexual abuse. It is important to note that our findings cover a wider range of young people's experiences and views about image sharing practices we do not have space to discuss here, including ideas and mind maps about improving digital sex and relationship education; and student drawings of sexualized content received (see for instance, Ringrose, Whitehead, Regehr, & Jenkinson, 2019).

Findings

Theme 1: image-based sexual harassment

Girls' experiences of IBSH—i.e., receiving unsolicited sexual images and unwanted solicitation for sexual images—were widespread and normalized across both contexts. In the British context, an astonishing 75.8 % of girls had received a dick pic, with the majority of these 'unwanted', and 74 % of the girls had been asked for a nude image. We collected this simple statistic by asking for a show of hands in each group and this represents the total number across the groups, although the rate varied somewhat between groups. Girls in England reported receiving unsolicited sexual images and unwanted requests for nude images on a regular, sometimes daily, basis and described a normalisation process of "getting used to" these practices as "normal" and "common" for their age. A year 12 (16–17) mixed gender group discussed their acceptance of these behaviours, which started when they signed up to Snapchat: "It's so common, it's not shocking anymore, you just get on with your

life, . . . [You] laugh and then you carry on" (SWISG, FG21).

In the Canadian context, many girls (across all age groups) also reported receiving unsolicited sexual images and/or videos, in the form of dick pics, or knowing someone who had received them. One girl in grade 9 (14–15) explained that she could be having a "simple conversation" and "out of nowhere on Snapchat . . . they'll send me a picture, and it's just their dick. They're just like, I'm so hard right now, and I'm just like, I didn't ask" (TOUG, FG37). Such experiences were again described as a common phenomenon. For example, a group of girls (17–19) all indicated that they had received unsolicited sexual images, with one participant claiming: "Oh, I have a WhatsApp chat filled with it" (TOUG, FG36). In Toronto, many girls reported receiving requests for nude and semi-nude images, with several participants characterizing the requests as persistent. One girl in grade 11 (TIS, 16–17) stated, "so many people ask me for nudes, and I'm just like, I don't send nudes. It's not how I work".

Boys were also asked if they had received unwanted nudes, and reported that they did. In England it was primarily through group chats on Instagram through which they were sent links to click on to see "free" nudes of women, which would direct them to other sites to pay for porn, but very few discussed being sent dick pics, with the exception of an older 17 year old gay-identified teen in England. In Canada, while the majority of the discussions explored girls receiving unwanted sexual content, one girl (13–17) explained that her male friend was receiving non-consensual nude images from a girl he knew and "was really uncomfortable" but did not want to block her because he did not want to be "rude" (TOUG, FG37). In addition, one boy (16–17) in another focus group described feeling "coerced" into sending sexual images to a girl, as he felt "forced to reciprocate" when a girl he knew sent him unsolicited sexual images (TIS, FG27). In line with the British context, boys also discussed receiving unwanted nudes and links to porn from bot accounts.

Most of the discussions focused on girls' experiences of receiving dick pics however, and distinctions in the data emerged between different categories of their relationships to the people sending the images and requests for nudes: adult strangers, friends of friends, and known boys.

Adult strangers

Across the research, the most common senders of unsolicited dick pics were adult strangers. In London and South East England girls claimed that they often were added and sent messages on Snapchat by "grown up men", sometimes from other countries, who would send them "pictures of their dick" or videos masturbating. For example, a year 8 (12–13) girl described her experience of an "old man" contacting her by video on Snapchat and asking if she wanted him to open his trousers, while he was "rubbing his belly". The participant described how the man was using a girl's account, which exemplifies how social media platforms facilitate TFSV by allowing users to easily hide their identity. In the Toronto context, several girls described receiving unsolicited sexual images from adult strangers—describing them as "creepy old men." One participant described an instance when she was 10 or 11, and "this random older man" texted her on an App called Kik, and "suddenly he sent me a picture of his private area, saying that's what he looked like" (TOUM, FG35).

In addition to unsolicited sexual images, girls in England commonly discussed receiving unwanted requests for nude images from older men. In a mixed year 8 (12–13) group, girls described how unknown users would ask for specific images of body parts, such as images of their toes or "bum," and videos recording them sucking their toes (SELG, FG1). Likewise, year 7 (11–12) girls explained that one has to be safe on the Internet because people in their forties or fifties will pretend to be 16 and request sexual images (NELA, FG4). According to several participants, these requests often came in the form of a 'transactional' dick pic proposition (Oswald et al., 2019), in which "random," "older" men would send an image and then ask for one in return or request a "trade".

Many participants described reacting negatively to the unwanted

¹ In the England, participants brought their mobile phones and devices to the workshops and were encouraged to share some of their social media images such as selfies that they liked; and later any content that they had found problematic. Following the discussion part of the focus group, we asked the participating young people to draw on social media templates (Venema & Lobinger, 2017) some of the experiences they had discussed, in this article, however, we analyze only the focus group interview data in this paper.

sexual images and request from adult strangers. In England, young people often positioned both unwanted dick pics and unwanted requests from “paedos” and “perverts” as “disturbing”, “disgusting” and something “you don’t want to experience at this age.” Likewise in Toronto, girls expressed feeling “disgusted” and “uncomfortable,” and referred to the unsolicited images as “unpleasant”, “gross” and “inappropriate for [their] age”. In addition to this feeling of disgust, some girls in Toronto and London and South East area reported feeling “nervous” and “scared” in response to the IBSH. For example, in England a girl in year 8 (12–13) describes her negative reaction to receiving her first unsolicited dick pic from a stranger: “I was scared. My dad was sitting next to me, so I was just... like I don’t want mum to see this. I cried. I was swearing down the phone, so uncomfortable” (SELC, FG1). Among the couple of instances of unwanted solicitation from adult strangers in Toronto, the participants described feeling scared, and one grade 8 (13–14) girl who was repeatedly asked by a man for nudes said “I didn’t think he was ever going to leave me alone” (TOUG, FG37). She then took the step of deleting her photos on social media, because she “didn’t want to keep anything up after that happened”, indicating the long-term impacts of this harassment (TOUG, FG37). Similarly, another girl (12–14) stopped posting images after she posted a picture of her on the beach “in shorts and a crop top” and “creepy old men started DMing me ... hey pretty girl... so now I don’t post anything”. (FG29) Interestingly, despite saying they were ‘disgusting’ some English participants understood receiving dick pics as a sign of popularity and status. For example, in a group of year 8 (CLC1, 12–13) girls, one girl who was a competitively ranked dancer stated: “obviously, my Snapchat has a massive score, which means loads of people have me as a friend, which means a load of paedophiles can send stuff to me.” When asked why she received so many unsolicited nude images, her friend explained that it was because “she’s a really well-known person.”

Friends of friends

A common trend across both contexts was girls’ experiences of IBSH from those they identified as boys under 18 who they only knew via social media, i.e., not known in person. When discussing her experiences of receiving unsolicited dick pics, one girl (14–16) in Toronto stated: “Yeah. I think even from the people I know, it’s always mutual friends. I’ll know someone or they know someone. I don’t think I’ve ever gotten anything from directly a friend”. (TIS, FG30). Girls also described receiving unwanted requests for nude images from boys they only knew online. For example, a year 10 girl (14–15) in London described an instance in which a boy from another school, with shared mutual friends online, asked her and fifteen other girls for nude images (SWISG, FG18).

Many participants described how girls would commonly add people on social media that they have never met. A year 9 (13–14) girl in London described her experience with this phenomenon:

“Once there was this guy on Snapchat, I didn’t know him but I thought my friend knew him, so I accepted his follow request and then on his story it was like who wants to see my big...you know, and then I saw like a text from him . . . and it was a picture of his like dick.” (SWISG, FG19).

A girl (14–16) in Toronto described a similar instance in which accepting friends-of-friends online led to her friend being solicited for nude images:

“I know this girl she just adds whoever adds her. She just adds them back on Snapchat because if they’re like mutual friends with someone else. . . But then that person started to ask her if she would send naked pictures of herself. That happens a lot because you don’t really know them. So, even if another person is friends with them that you know, you can’t really trust them.” (TIS, FG30).

In these quotes, the girls point out that a false sense of familiarity and trust is created by the shared mutual friend, as “you don’t really know” the users in their networks. Girls in both England and Toronto explained that this degree of separation from the girls’ immediate school or peer

group is the reason why “random boys” often felt more comfortable sending unsolicited images. In Toronto, one girl (16–17) described the logic behind requests for nude images coming from ‘mutuals’ more so than known boys:

“If you send it to someone you don’t know, it doesn’t matter, because if they say no, it’s not embarrassing for you. But if it’s someone at school and then people are going to be like, that’s so trashy, and I can’t believe he asked for nudes.” (TIS, FG26).

This participant explained that the nature of their distanced digital connection offers a degree of anonymity, which serves to protect the perpetrator from the potential social repercussions and “embarrassment” of asking for nude images in the immediate school peer group. When responding to unsolicited dick pics from these semi-known contacts, some girls (aged 14–16) expressed reluctance to report behaviour to their mutual connection:

“If I’m friends with them [the mutual friend], close friends, I’ll send them a screenshot of the message and I’ll say, hey, what’s going on. But if I don’t know the mutual particularly well, if it’s someone who is in my grade or I go to the same school with that I don’t particularly have a relationship with, I kind of feel uncomfortable putting them in a position where I am attacking their friend.” (TIS, FG30).

In both contexts, these behaviours were normalized. When discussing receiving unsolicited dick pics from these semi-known boys, one girl in England explained that girls “just kind of get used to it after a while, they [girls] don’t really think of it as being harassed”. In a year 9 (13–14) focus group, the girls described a similar instance in which a boy was “asking loads of girls for nudes.” They then stated, “That’s just what boys are like though, isn’t it?” and, “It happens all the time.” (SWISG, FG19) These remarks demonstrate the normalisation of girls being sexually harassed by boys that are semi-known and approach them through mutual contacts in the social media network.

Some girls described instances in which their response led to further abusive behaviour, such as shaming both privately and publicly. In Toronto, a girl (13–17) described being asked for nudes from someone with whom she thought she shared a friend, and being punished for not complying:

“A guy texted me one time, and I thought he was my age. I thought he knew me from one of my friends . . . He talked to me nicely at first . . . Then he asked me to send him nudes, and I was like no and everything. Then he was Muslim too. He was saying he was Muslim and I’m Muslim so he started shaming me saying I’m showing my legs because I was wearing shorts in a picture one time. He was saying, you’re not wearing a hijab . . . but it’s like, you’re mad because I didn’t want to do this with you. How is that my fault?” (TOUG, FG37).

In London one of the girls similarly refused to send nudes after being sent a dick pic that was intended to be transactional from a ‘friend of a friend’. He retaliated by putting her name on an Instagram ‘expose’ page claiming she sends nudes to boys. Her friends reasoned he did this because he felt ‘rejected.’ (SWISG, FG 16)

Known boys

Across our sample, girls discussed receiving dick pics and unwanted requests for nude images from peers, friends, romantic or sexual interests and partners. This context of IBSH often involved a very different set of dynamics than strangers or semi-known contacts, as girls described how managing these behaviours within the peer group can be much more complex and potentially difficult than dealing with the content from unknown or semi-known boys and men. A common challenge was the degree of pressure involved when the request is by a sexual or romantic partner. Year 10 (14–15) boys discussed how “certain girls get pressured... because their man asked them for some” (SELC, FG3). Girls in year 8 (12–13) also recounted relationship pressures on girls to send nudes:

“Girl 1: I had a friend, yeah, and her boyfriend must have sent her a dick pic, and then he carried on trying to pressure her to send one, I feel that’s what happens the most, these boys try and pressure them like into sending it back, because oh I send, or oh if you love me you’ll send it back to me. Girl 2: Yeah, if you don’t want me to break up with you, or something like that.”

Girl 1: They’ll send one and be like now it’s your turn.

Girl 2: That’s the worst one.” (SWISG, FG16).

Here we see a ‘transactional’ dick pic (Oswald et al., 2019) being sent with the request to ‘send one back’ showing just how closely interlinked these forms of harassment can be in the networked peer group. Boys in year 9 (13–14) described how dick pic sending can be done primarily in a bid to get nudes back from girls:

“Girls are more pressured into it kind of... I think the boys are just like maybe a joke that can go around the school with other boys. Like saying, oh, you’re not like you’re not man enough if you don’t have any pictures . . . I think boys just send it [dick pic] and then they ask girls - girls don’t just send it.” (NWISB, FG20).

We can see that sending dick pics is closely connected to the pressure for boys to obtain nudes so that they can be considered ‘man enough’ in the peer group, while girls do not seem to have the same competitive pressure to share nudes of boys in their friendship groups.

In Toronto, a couple of girls relayed situations in which individuals in their peer group, including friends, and potential romantic or sexual partners sent them unsolicited dick pics. One girl (17–18) explained that she once received an unsolicited dick pic from a boy she was “almost dating”. In this instance, the participant described feeling “shell shocked,” and saying that the nature of their relationship meant that she could not just “block and forget it.” Other participants discussed how receiving unsolicited dick pics from friends or romantic interests and/or partners created more challenges because of the impact on their relationship.

In London, a girl in year 9 (13–14) at CLC school told us about an incident in which a boy who was her friend sent her a dick pic and video of him masturbating. In this instance, the participant chose not to block them ‘because they were friends’. Indeed, a bit later in the discussion she added that this has happened with other boys in their friendship group saying their being “friends” made it much more difficult to address:

“I think it’s worse when it’s somebody you know, because like say they are your friend, and you’ve trusted them, and you guys were really good friends, and they do that, it’s just like, personally I think it’s more of a big deal.” (CLC1, FG10).

Following this statement, she described the challenges involved when the boys go to the same school because you “have to see them every day” and be reminded of what they did. The nature of the schooling environment being unsafe for girls who must continue ‘working’ alongside perpetrators (who may have been friends) is salient, and points to the urgency of understanding these acts as harassment (Ofsted, 2021). In Toronto one girl (16–17) described a similar instance in which a friend from her elementary (primary) school asked her to send a nude image:

“This has happened before where you’re friends with someone for a long time and then they sort of ruin the friendship by asking for intimate pictures, you don’t know what to do, right? . . . If it’s someone that you’ve built a long-term friendship with and then they just ask for those images of you or send you videos of them spinning their junk and stuff, you don’t really know what to say because 1) you don’t want to ruin the friendship that you’ve built for so long, but 2) you also don’t want to send them. For me personally, I don’t want to send them. So, you’re kind of stuck in a spot.” (TIS, FG26).

This participant felt she had to moderate her own behaviour going forward, for fear that he would misread her actions as an invitation to

send her further unwanted content (TIS, FG26). Another girl (13–17) described receiving these requests from boys they knew, and the common exchange that would take place after the request:

“I’ll be like, dude, I’m not into that. If you want to be my friend, I’m fine, but I’m not into that sort of thing.”

They’ll be like, either they’re going to be fine and they’ll be like, okay, sorry, I won’t do it again, but they have to be nice to do that or loyal to do that. But a lot of other times, they’ll block me if I don’t send them nudes. So many guys will block you if you don’t send them nudes.” (TOUG, FG37).

This reaction could be punishment or it could be an indication of the boys feeling embarrassed or rejected, which came up in the London schools as well, as two girls recounted a similar episode of being blocked when they didn’t respond to a transactional dick pic from a boy at their school.

Significantly across both contexts, because these practices are so normalized, it was the exception for participants to understand them as forms of harassment. By categorizing these forms of solicitation as technologically facilitated sexual violence, and specifically image-based sexual harassment including being propositioned (sometimes through being sent a dick pic or masturbation video) and then further aggression (being blocked, getting additional negative comments or being publicly shamed) if they do not comply, we can better identify these practices as harmful and can better strategize how to support young people to manage these experiences.

Theme 2: image-based sexual abuse (IBSA)

Image-based sexual abuse can be connected to harassment but has different legal implications because it is the act of creating, showing, or distributing an image (both distributed digitally and shown in-person) of someone else without consent. While IBSA came up frequently in the focus group discussions in England, very few participants in the focus groups said they had directly experienced IBSA. Rather, they spoke at length of incidents in their school that were known and served as cautionary tales around nudes being shared beyond the intended recipient. Similarly in Toronto, young people were familiar with this practice, although none said they had directly experienced it themselves. These lower reporting rates may be impacted by participants’ unwillingness to disclose that they had sent nudes, particularly with peers present, or their lack of knowledge of their images being shared.

Unlike the instances of IBSH, which included adult strangers as perpetrators, the examples of IBSA discussed were exclusively perpetrated by peers. This is again likely partly because these were the cases that they knew about from their school environments and peer interactions which had gone wrong, resulting in images being ‘leaked’ and ‘exposed’ (see also Ringrose & Harvey, 2015). Indeed, the threat of exposure was a strongly articulated fear among young people who argued that you couldn’t trust anyone with your images.

We found that the saving or screenshotting of images with the intent to share them beyond the intended recipient was normalized among boys and girls, but understood to be more likely to be perpetrated by boys. In both England and Toronto, boys discussed the tendency to ‘screenshot’ images, saying mostly they were sent as ‘private images to one person’ or the image would be saved to their camera roll automatically if it came in a WhatsApp chat. In Toronto, we also found a normalisation of images of girls being saved without consent, by screenshotting or using apps to store images. According to one girl (16–17): “Guys screenshot girls’ photos all the time” (TIS, FG26). In addition, London participants talked about software called ‘the vault’ used to save nude images to Snapchat without alerting the sender” (16–17-year-old girl, SWISG, FG20). Similarly, one girl (16–17) in Toronto discussed how boys would use an app to store nude images of girls:

"I remember in Grade 7 there were these guys and they would be huddled in the corner during recess. . . There was this one guy who was a hockey player down in the community ...and he would just get so many girls' nudes without even asking for them. And he would have it all saved in his calculator app. He would even just be on the playground with a bunch of the other hockey friends around him. And they would be like, wait a second, and they would see like a girl in Grade 8 nude. And this guy was like, oh, I have it already. Do you want to take a look? And they would show all their friends." (TIS, FG26).

Here, the homosocial masculine peer group is clearly described, as the perpetrator is "huddled in the corner [...] with a bunch of the other hockey friends". This aligns closely to Dodge's (2020) discussion of nudes being traded like 'hockey cards' in their Canadian research.

Furthermore, this quote highlights the trend of boys showing images in-person to their male peers—which was found in both country contexts. For example, the year 10 (14–15) boys at SELC (FG 3) explain the logic behind showing nudes in person: "there's a difference between seeing it in real life [on your phone] and sending it. In real life there's no like record or evidence of it". In addition to showing images in-person to their peers, participants in both England and Toronto discussed the normalisation of images being distributed digitally, either through private messages or group chats. A year 9 (13–14) boy in England stated: "if you do send a nude. it's almost inevitable that it's going to be sent to at least one person" (NWSB, FG21). A boy (13–18) in Toronto, similarly, describes this normalisation of digitally distributing images with other people:

"I think that [sharing images] is quite prevalent. I remember even as early as Grade 9 people would share intimate images that they had received from other people. Not widely, but they would not stay between a direct individual to individual exchange." (TIS, FG33).

In several of the England focus groups, the boys discussed sharing images of girls with their male peers to garner social reward. The year 10 (14–15) boys at CLC 1 school explained: "people ask for nudes just so they can show their friends like ah I got this girl to do this and send it to me ah look I'm sick." Moreover, the NWSB, year 10 (14–15) boys group explained that boys did not intend to cause harm when they showed images. Rather, they described the motivations as "social," whereby they show their friends to "get gassed" (i.e., show off) and referred to the nudes as "just something to be proud of" (FG 22). We can see how nudes of girls form a homosocial currency among boys, garnering regard and kudos from their male peers (Salter, 2016; Haslop & O'Rourke, 2021; Mandau, 2020). While the boys may not intend to cause harm, there is a clear disregard for the fact that these images were intended to remain private, and consent is entirely bypassed when showing each other these images on their phone screens (McGlynn & Rackley, 2016).

The dynamics of girls showing and digitally distributing nude images of boys' bodies tended to be quite different. We found in the British case that girls may share nude images of boys with close friends to commiserate when they are sent unwanted dick pics. Other episodes conveyed by participants included a story of their friend, a girl who had convinced a boy to send dick pics promising she'd send something in return then "ghosted" him and bragged about the conquest to her friends; and a girl who still had an image of her ex-boyfriend's penis on her phone, which her friends labeled as 'weird'. The dynamics of girls sharing dick pics were less accepted as normal behaviour by peer groups (Naezer et al., 2021).

Both boys and girls in the England focus groups explained that girls rarely shared dick pics as a form of relationship revenge or to gain status. For example, one year 10 (14–15) girl stated: "So where the boys, if you broke up or something the boys would probably expose you, or show their friends, send it to their friends. With the girls they'd keep it to themselves or delete it" (SELC, FG2). The lack of IBSA perpetration around dick pics being shared beyond the intended recipient in our research could be partly explained by the lack of social reward for girls

involved in non-consensually sharing penis images among their female peers, and their belief that girls 'cared more' about boys (SELC, FG2). Other girls (aged 12–13) explained that they didn't share dick pics because of a sexual double standard: "for boys it's like a trophy, for girls it's like shameful to share." (SWISG, FG 16). This quote clearly indicates the lingering sense of shame and stigma that can be connected to girls openly discussing their involvement in sexting (Albury & Crawford, 2012; Ringrose and Renold, 2016). Furthermore, a Toronto boy (13–18) speculated that since "90% of the time, pictures that men send to other women are unsolicited, this initial non-consensual dynamic leaves 'no incentive for these women to screenshot it' and share further as they had not wanted to receive the image in the first place and don't want to see the images 'ever again', let alone 'show it off' to peers" (TIS, FG33).

When discussing the experiences of girls and boys who have had their image shared, participants concurred that girls faced greater social consequences. Year 10 (14–15) boys in England agreed that girls who had had their images shared were 'verbally assaulted' and called 'hoes and sluts and stuff' (SELC, FG3). Similarly, girls described the gender differences involved in experiences of IBSA saying while boys would be praised and 'encouraged' as being 'cool for having confidence to send dick pics' girls would be shamed. As these 14–15-year-olds from SELC said, "It's a lot worse, like if a girl was [to send nudes], because then people are like oh my God, she's such a slag, she's such a whatever else." Participants in year 10 (14–15) from NWSB (FG, 22) described an episode in which both a boy and a girl's images were shared publicly after the relationship ended, and it was the girl who had more negative lasting consequences. While the boy 'got a bit of stick' and people 'took the mic out of him a bit', the girl 'had quite a bit of hate' and lost friends because as they said, "the girl was known for already doing stuff like that. Yeah...she was a bit Desperate." The girl is discussed as a 'desperate' repeat offender, implying promiscuity, whereas the character of the boy is not in question. None of these practices were framed by the participants as forms of image-based sexual abuse.

Conclusion

This paper has used the feminist framework of technology-facilitated sexual violence (TFSV) to better understand harmful image sharing practices among young people (Powell and Henry, 2017). Drawing on our research across two national contexts, we offered image-based sexual harassment (IBSH) as a specific concept to identify how unwanted images (e.g., dick pics) can be used in harassing ways and how young people can also be harassed for nude images. We argued that the non-consensual sharing, showing, and distributing of nudes should be classified as what McGlynn and Rackley (2016) term image-based sexual abuse (IBSA).

Across the Canadian and English contexts, teen girls receiving unsolicited dick pics was a common experience corresponding to a documented increase in cyberflashing toward adult women in recent years (Amundsen, 2020; Oswald et al., 2019; Salter, 2016; YouGov, 2018). Across both locations, girls reported receiving the majority of unsolicited dick pics from adult strangers, who they referred to as "paedos", "perverts," and "creepy old men." The most common platform was Snapchat, which requires a user to turn off the privacy settings to achieve high 'snap scores', but doing so enables anyone to send them images. Responses to dick pics were varied, but most girls positioning this unwanted sexual content as "disgusting", "disturbing" and "inappropriate". The negative reactions align with Burkett's (2015) qualitative study with girls calling dick pic senders "creeps" and "weirdos" (p. 848); Marcotte et al.'s (2021) study of adult women participants who described being "grossed out" and feeling "disrespected" and Mandau's (2019) study of aged 17 and above participants who found dick pics "repulsive," "shocking," and "intrusive". Despite having negative reactions, our participants tended to block and ignore rather than report predators and almost never identified these practices as forms of harassment, indicating that they are normalized. As we noted earlier the

participants described these practices as something you “get used to” (SWISG, FG19). In addition, some London girls regarded receiving dick pics from strangers (including adults) as a sign of popularity and desirability, a finding that offers a unique contribution to our understanding of how girls internalize harassment as normal and even something positive. As with women and girls' interpretations of other forms of masculine sexual aggression, like catcalling, as evidence of attraction (Mendes et al., 2019), we argue that interpreting an uninvited dick pic as evidence that one is attractive to men and boys demonstrates internalisation of sexist, ‘patriarchal’ norms of predatory masculinity (Bonilla et al., 2020).

Girls across both contexts also reported receiving unsolicited dick pics from known boys (i.e., peers, friends, romantic or sexual interests and partners) and like Ricciardelli and Adorjan's (2019) research where this was seen as ‘boys being boys’ (p. 569), girls were resigned to and tolerated this harassment because it was so “common”. Across both country contexts we found that these scenarios with known peers were often the most difficult for girls to navigate, however, as they faced additional challenges when they received an unsolicited image from a boy they know, as it is less easy to “block and forget”.

In addition to receiving unsolicited dick pics, girls frequently described receiving unwanted requests for nude images and/or videos. Girls in England explained that it was common for “middle-aged men” to pretend to be 16 and request sexual images. These findings align with Gámez-Guadix and Mateos-Pérez's (2019) survey of youth (12–14 years) in Spain which found that over one in five girls reported receiving sexual solicitation from adults, significantly more commonly than boys. Interestingly, this trend was not reflected in the Canadian findings, as very few participants discussed instances of adult strangers requesting nude images.

Across both contexts, girls also experienced harassment for nudes from ‘friends of friends’ they had accepted as followers online. This finding represents a unique contribution to the literature, as it introduces a new group of perpetrators that has emerged due to the combined anonymity, visibility and connectivity afforded by social media (Boyd, 2014). By connecting users with shared (but unverified) ‘mutuals’ ‘followers’, the social media platforms increase access to young people's accounts, consequently increasing the opportunities to engage in harassing behaviours (Project deShame, 2017).

Girls described feeling more duress however, when the request was from a known sexual or romantic partner, corresponding to research on gendered ‘pressures’ (Ringrose et al., 2013; Lippman & Campbell, 2014) and commitment manipulation (Ouytsel et al., 2017) used to solicit nudes. These tactics were evident in our findings in both Canada and England, and we identified further types of harassment and shaming if girls did not comply with requests, which often left participants visibly upset with considerable stress.

We found additionally that sometimes nude requests and unwanted penis images were combined, since girls in both countries reported receiving ‘transactional dick pics’—although, this trend was more pronounced in the England data. This aligns with recent research that has highlighted motivation to send dick pics is primarily to receive nude pictures in return from girls (Salter, 2016, 2017; Mandau, 2019; Oswald et al., 2019). We argue this convergence illustrates a *double form* of image-based sexual harassment involving *both* cyberflashing (dick pic images) and soliciting/pressuring girls for nude images.

Unlike the instances of IBSH, which featured a range of perpetrators, the examples of Image Based Sexual Abuse discussed in our study were exclusively perpetrated by peers. Particularly boys in the English focus groups identified pressures to gain and then share the images of girls with each other (other boys), to achieve homosocial ‘kudos’ and reward from the heterosexual masculine peer group. The desire to impress one's ‘mates’ or be seen as ‘man enough’ drives boys to pressure girls for nudes, and sometimes sending transactional dick pics is part of this proposition (see also Mandau, 2020). If boys do get a girl to send a nude we also heard in some groups, that showing or sharing these images to their peers was

necessary as proof (Ringrose, Harvey, Gill, & Livingstone, 2013; Berndtsson & Odenbring, 2021; Dodge, 2020; Setty, 2019). We also saw that some boys justified sharing images with each other as ‘social’ and as ‘fun’ rather than as causing harm, which Hayes and Dragiewicz (2018) suggest is a form of naturalized masculine “entitlement”.

While girls did share dick pics with each other, the reasons for sharing were different - participants pointed out that since dick pic images were often sent non-consensually in the first place, they were often quickly deleted or blocked rather than kept or shared, and showing friends was often for commiseration. The participants explained that dick pics were less likely to be widely shared as girls couldn't get the same ‘trophy’ (Berndtsson & Odenbring, 2021) type reward from the images of boys' penises and, on the contrary, being known as a willing recipient of dick pics could sometimes be shameful for girls. Moreover, the fallout of the non-consensual sharing and showing of nude images was described as worse for girls, which aligns with previous research on how girls commonly face slut-shaming (Ringrose, Harvey, Gill, & Livingstone, 2013; Ringrose & Harvey, 2015; Ricciardelli & Adorjan, 2019) and victim-blaming (Mishna et al., 2021; Lippman & Campbell, 2014) and their images are shared more widely in the peer group as a whole, including by other girls (Naezer & van Oosterhout, 2021; Dodge, 2020). As the participants explained, boys who were publicly outed as sending dick pics could be praised as ‘cool’ and ‘confident to share’ whereas girls whose images were publicly circulated were called ‘slags’, ‘hoes’, ‘sluts’ and ‘desperate’.

To conclude, in this paper we have demonstrated that IBSH and IBSA are highly gendered and connected practices. Men and boys pressuring and soliciting girls to send nudes in the first place (sometimes through a transactional dick pic) – image-based sexual harassment – sets the conditions for non-consensual showing and sharing of girls' nudes – image-based sexual abuse. Both stem from aggressive and predatory, homosocial masculinity practices (Hayes & Dragiewicz, 2018; Mandau, 2019) and competitive, heterosexual peer hierarchies (Ringrose & Harvey, 2015) with more harmful effects for girls. We have shown, therefore, that not only are forms of image-based sexual harassment (cyberflashing and nude solicitation) often interlinked practices, they can lead to image-based sexual abuse. Unfortunately, without the proper tools to identify these behaviours as image-based sexual harassment and abuse (IBSHA) we found that most young people accepted these behaviours as the norm. Further research is necessary to identify educational interventions that could support a culture shift and better supports for young people. We have suggested, that outlining the conceptual tools to recognize and identify IBSH and IBSA is critically important as part of this shift. Naming when and how practices are harassing and abusive is a first step in enabling us to understand and address the specific ways that technology is creating new avenues for sexual violence in contemporary youth cultures.

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