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'Wanna trade?': Cisheteronormative homosocial masculinity and the normalization of abuse in youth digital sexual image exchange

Jessica Ringrose^a, Katilyn Regehr^b and Sophie Whitehead^c

^aUCL Institute of Education, Department of Education, Practice and Society, London, UK; ^bSchool of Arts, University of Kent, Kent, UK; ^cDigital Humanities, Kings College, London, UK

ABSTRACT

This paper draws upon a qualitative study with 144 young people in seven different research schools in England, exploring how cis-heteronormative homosocial masculinity practices shape digital sexual image exchange. We examine three types of practices: 1) boys asking girls for nudes (pressurized sexting, which we position as online sexual harassment); 2) transactional nude solicitation (boys sending dick pics and asking girls for nudes, which we position as image based sexual harassment and cyberflashing); 3) non-consensual sharing of girls and boys nude images (which we position as image based sexual abuse, showing the differential impacts with lasting sexual stigma worse for girls). Our findings confirm earlier research that demonstrated homosocial masculinity currency is gained via the non-consensual sharing of images of girls' bodies. We also investigate the more recent rise of male nudes (dick pics) and how a homosocial culture of humour and lad banter tends to lessen the sexual stigmatization of leaked dick pics. We argue providing boys with time and space to reflect on homosocial masculinity performances is crucial for disrupting these practices and our conclusions outline new UK school guidance for tackling online sexual harassment, cyberflashing and image-based sexual abuse.

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Introduction

Driving to Lords,¹ an elite day school for boys, and one of our seven research schools in this study, the research team ended up at the wrong entrance. Google maps had led us to Ladies School for Girls the adjoining 'single sex' girls' school, which sat separated by a huge Victorian iron gate. The material separation of Lords and Ladies school became increasingly interesting to us as we learned about the digital sexual cultures inside Lord's school for boys during our research visits and heard of several episodes of nude images travelling between the two schools (penetrating the iron gate) through youth mobile networks. At Lords, we worked with 13 boys across years 9 and 10 through focus group interviews with groups of 3–4 boys. The interviews involved discussions of social media use and digital images, as well as sharing of screen images if they chose, and drawing experiences of Instagram and snapchat feeds through paper templates we provided. As we discussed intimate image exchanges, the boys explained some of the key pressure points:

Arun: 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

CONTACT Jessica Ringrose Email  j.ringrose@ucl.ac.uk  UCL Institute of Education, Education Practice and Society 20 Bedford Way London WC1H 0AL

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whereas a woman, the girls, I don't think they are as pressured into it [asking boys for nudes]. I think boys just send it [dick pic] and then they ask girls - *girls don't just send it*.

Manjit: I've seen things like where people do trades like nude for nude.

Interviewer: So how does that work?

Sander: And there's like a trust bond like don't, don't share it on the internet cause I've got you. I've got something so I can embarrass you as well.

Arun: [boys] They are less worried but there is still an element of fear in case it gets spread around the whole school like everyone and everyone knows about it is something to be sort of embarrassed about. Like maybe sharing to one or two people isn't, well it is bad but it, it's not as worrying as it is for girls, for boys

Sander: Like when girls send pics I think they send it with their face in it. And I don't think boys always send it with a face. So it's like less recognisable

(Lords year 9 boys Group 1).

In this passage, we can see different types of 'pressure' experienced by boys and girls. Boys are under pressure to get sexual images from girls, and so they pressure girls to send them, which is discussed as a form of transactional trading. The pressure for boys is explicitly positioned as coming from lad culture and statements could be made about boys being 'man enough'. We can also see that even sending images of one's own penis is understood as largely done in a bid to initiate a transactional nude exchange. In addition, we can see that the consequences around these images are discussed as very different; they are more 'worrying' for girls, since they may be more recognizable and if the images spread they will be more 'embarrassing' and 'bad' than for boys.

We wanted to start this paper rather unconventionally with this important discussion from boys in our research as it clearly outlines the dynamics of gendered and hierarchical exchange and differential reception and value of images of girls' and boys' bodies that we'll unpack as we proceed (Ringrose, Harvey, Gill, & Livingstone, 2013; Skeggs, 2005). We will use theories of cisheteronormative, homosocial masculinity to understand sexual image exchange and hierarchies of gendered reward and value. We begin by exploring the practices of asking girls to send nudes, what has been called pressured sexting (Lippman & Campbell, 2014; Thomas, 2018) or non-consensual solicitation of nudes (Döring, 2014), considering how young people make sense of these dynamics and normalize practices of homosocial masculinity, rather than understanding pressuring girls as a form of online sexual harassment (Henry & Powell, 2015). Next, we will explore how homosocial dynamics are also at play in the dynamics of transactional nude exchange, particularly sending unwanted dick pics to motivate trades with girls, which we explore as a doubled form of sexual harassment and cyberflashing. Following this, we explore practices of non-consensually sharing nude images and body parts. Although examples of both boys' and girls' images being shared without their consent were reported across six of our seven research schools, the practices and effects of the girl's nudes being non-consensually shared were very different. We show how heterosexual homosocial masculinity practices create intense pressures for teen boys to share images of girl's bodies amongst the masculine peer group, in order to gain value, recognition and regard. We argue that this behaviour is repeatedly naturalized and rationalized by the young cisheteronormative masculine peer group as a expected homosocial practice, particularly at their age. But we also demonstrate these practices happen in different ways in different school sites, depending on levels of 'e-safety' awareness and variable concerns over their future marketable selves. We also show how, as in a wealth of other research, images shared of girls were subject to far more sexual reputational stigmatization and slut shaming than those of boy's dick pics, with leaked dick pic aftermath minimized through humour and lad banter. Finally, we consider how given a chance to explore homosocial masculinity practices, boys are able to critically analyse competitive pressure in the peer group and construct alternative future narratives. Building on these insights in our conclusion, we introduce guidance for addressing online sexual harassment in

schools developed to clearly understand consent in digital contexts and how and when practices become harassment and abuse.

Homosocial masculinity, transactional sexting, abuse and sexual double standards in image exchange

The concept of ‘homosocial bonds’ was popularized by Eve Sedgwick (1985) who argued that, due to a legacy of patriarchal homophobia, male-male homosociality and homosexuality are diametrically opposed. A growing body of work has examined homosociality as a set of strategies boys and men use to maintain the gender order and uphold male privileges (Bird, 1996; Flood, 2008). In much of this research literature, homosociality is understood as a mechanism that supports and reinforces or extends ‘hegemonic masculinity’ and practices of otherising and objectifying women and girls and the feminine (Connell, 2005). Indeed as McLean (1996) puts it, ‘Male camaraderie or “mateship” is founded on sharing the ritual of masculine identity. The exclusion of women is an integral aspect, and many of these rituals turn out to be destructive or oppressive.’ (McLean, 1996, p. 17)

Researchers have since used this lens of homosocial masculinity to understand how nude images of girls and women have become a form of cultural currency of reward for boys and men in a heteronormative economy of looking in relation to intimate sexual image exchange (Dodge, 2020; Ringrose, Gill, Livingstone, & Harvey, 2012; Salter, 2016; Setty, 2020). A decade ago, researchers Ringrose, Harvey, Gill and Livingstone drew on Skeggs (2005) feminist appropriations of Bourdieu’s classifications of capitals to explore how images of nude bodies gain ‘exchange and use-value in local contexts’ (Ringrose et al., 2013, p. 309), asking:

Why are particular images valuable? Who can they generate value for? Who can they devalue? And how does this involve ideas about gender and sexual morality?

Applying this analytical lens, we found that the high value of girls’ nudes for boys, led to practices of pressure between boys to compete for nudes, which meant some boys repeatedly asked girls for sexual images of their bodies. Importantly, the images only had value when they were shared with other boys to elicit ‘homosocial reward’ (Ringrose & Harvey, 2015, p. 206). Salter’s (2016, p. 2735) showed similarly, the connections between homosocial bonding and misogyny and how the near compulsory sharing of nudes amongst men echoes other past practices such as watching porn or using pin-ups:

The sharing of pornography within male peer groups is an established homosocial bonding practice (Flood, 2008), and the open display of nude images of girls and women has often been used as a way of marking out male segregated public spaces.

More recently, Berndtsson and Odenbring (2020) explored homosocial bonds between boys as the main rationale for why boys solicited nudes to share with one another in their research on youth ‘sexting’ with 45 students aged 14–15. These authors note:

This chase for digital trophies – by objectifying female peers and sharing their intimate digital images without the girls’ consent – can be seen as a male bonding strategy and as a way of achieving high social status among the boys; it can also be understood as a form of gender-based violence directed at girls (Berndtsson and Odenbring 2020: 6)

The authors mention that this trend is not practiced by all boys and it is possible to disrupt this behaviour, but they do not elaborate further. Similarly, Roberts, Ravn, and Maloney (2020) explore homosociality, masculinity and sexting through a small sample of 37 university undergraduate men aged (18–22) in Australia. Their findings confirm earlier research that sexting as a practice ‘prove[s] to be a site where young men navigate being “lads” prioritising homosocial relations over relations with female partners and objectifying women to demonstrate masculine status’ (Roberts et al., 1). Further, even if the men displayed more positive attitudes towards sexual intimacy between men (masculinity inclusive to gay sexual orientation) this did not translate into more positive attitudes towards

women, a finding confirmed by research on hybrid masculinities (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014). As Roberts et al. (2020, p. 17) note: 'positive attitudes towards and relations with other men do not automatically or fully "spill over" into positive attitudes towards women and respectful men–women relations'. The authors summarize their findings by suggesting that men had to perform complex masculinity practices by 'engaging in respectful and committed, romantic interactions with girlfriends, while at the same time being *ready to share* intimate information – or sexts – from casual partners' (Roberts et al., 2020, p. 17, emphasis ours). Mandau (2020) has likewise found a pattern of 'ambivalent' non-consensual sharing of women's nudes as homosocial masculinity practices, where young men are conflicted but participate due to homosocial reward.

Responding to this research studying homosocial masculinity, in this paper we argue that the finding that men and boys must be 'ready to share', despite feeling ambivalent needs to always be reframed. When consent is lacking, this compulsory homosocial sharing needs to be understood and positioned as a form of abuse linked to homosocial reward structures that privilege performing hegemonic dominant forms of masculinity. Legal scholars McGlynn and Rackley (2017) insist that a change of conceptual orientation is needed to frame pressures to share images of girls and women (without their consent) amongst boys and men as enacting image based sexual abuse (McGlynn & Rackley, 2017); which is part of a larger social matrix of gendered power relations online (Salter, 2016) what Henry and Powell (2015) refer to as technologically facilitated sexual violence.

We wish to add further terms to help us think about dominant, hegemonic and idealized forms of masculinity and include the distinction that these practices are 'cis gendered' and 'heteronormative'. Heteronormative is a frame that assumes a natural heterosexual attraction between opposite categories of masculine and feminine (Butler, 1990). 'Cis' gendered refers to 'individuals (those whose gender identity matches the male or female sex category they were assigned at birth) who are assumed to be normative and superior' (Sumerau, Cragun, & Mathers, 2016, in Moloney and Love, 2018). In Butler's heterosexual matrix cis gender binary embodiment maps onto heterosexual desire where oppositional body parts are to determine sexual desire. Bringing these elements together, our theoretical frame aims to explore the interacting categories of cis gender, heteronormative and homosocial masculinities, as all working in tandem to create discursively constituted hierarchical structures (economies) of reward and value in youth digital sexual cultures. Bridges and Pascoe (2014) also usefully suggest that we can see patterns of hybrid masculinity where elements of hegemonic heteronormative and misogynistic masculinity can persist alongside disruptive performances of caring and concern from boys and men. As we will explore, boys can demonstrate awareness of how image sharing is abusive and assaultive, as well as empathy for victims, but still actively participate in cisheteronormative homosocial practices of showing and sharing without consent which normalizes harm and abuse of women and girls.

In this paper, we will also consider how homosocial imperatives influence the practices of producing and sending dick pics amongst young people in our research. There is a growing recent literature that records an increase in cisgender boys and men producing and distributing nude imagery of their own bodies (dick pics) although most of this research is with participants over 17 years old or adult men (Mandau, 2020; Oswald, Lopes, Skoda, Hesse, & Pedersen, 2019; Roberts et al., 2020; Salter, 2016). Some of this research has looked at dick pic sending as transactional. In a recent survey of over 1,000 men, Oswald et al. (2019) found the dominant motivation for sending dick pics was linked to a transactional mindset where the sender hoped to receive something in return. Salter's work (Salter, 2016) explored how 'the exposed masculine body' was used in the deployment of sexual harassment, when unsolicited dick pics were sent in a bid to initiate a transaction. Mandau's (2019) research likewise reports that men perceive the sending of dick pics as a way of getting nude pictures in return from girls. Amundsen (2020) found in her study of adult women's experiences of receiving dick pics that many did not define this practice as abusive, something we also found in our research where teen girls have internalized accepting homosocial masculinity practices as normal. Responding to this we define unasked for dick pics as cyberflashing

(McGlynn & Johnson, 2020) and combined with pressuring girls for nudes argue it's a doubled form of online sexual harassment.

A wide range of studies have looked at the non-consensual sharing of 'sexts' (Döring, 2014; Walker et al, 2019), but only a few studies have looked at homosocial masculinity as shaping differential effects of when nudes of girls/women or nudes of boys/men are shared beyond the intended recipients without consent.² Salter (2016, p. 2732) for instance, pointed out that if men's nudes were 'leaked' they could suffer reputational damage, but this would not be as severe as for girls and women. Ricciardelli and Adorjan (2018) and Haslop and O'Rourke (2020) likewise describe how a framework of lad banter and humour attached to the 'dick pic' minimizes negative social consequences if and when they are shared beyond the intended recipient, as well as leading to a perceived reduction to being able to position receiving unsolicited dick pics as intimidation or harassment. Gendered dynamics and sexual double standards around nudes mean, therefore, that the impact and response when nudes of girls are shared non-consensually (IBSA) is far worse for girls than boys (Ricciardelli and Adorjan, 2018; Naezer & van Oosterhout, 2020; Ravn, Coffey, & Roberts, 2019). Following this research, we explore how homosocial masculinity operates to buffer the reputational damage of leaked dick pics for boys. In our final data section, we explore, however, how boys in our research started to trouble the logics of homosocial exchange, reward and prestige around girls' nudes, and motivations for sending dick pics, when they are given the time and space to reflect and explore masculinity performances.

Methodology

This paper draws on data from a research project in which we explored digital sexual image sharing practices amongst young people aged 11–18 at seven different secondary schools in the UK. In total, we spoke to 144 young people about their experiences of sending and receiving sexual images and content online.³ The sample included 88 girls, 55 boys and one gender fluid young person; in addition one of the older boys openly identified as gay. It is important to underscore that the majority of our research was with aged 15 and under which may have contributed to the fact that we had only a few participants who openly identified as gay or non-binary and we did not ask them to identify their gender in the discussions; rather our interest is in how they navigate normalized discourses of 'compulsory' binary gender, specifically cis-gender, heteronormative masculinity (Bragg, Renold, Ringrose, & Jackson, 2018). We collected the data through small focus groups where participants could refer to content on their phone if they wanted to and we culminated with a period of writing down and drawing things they experienced online and wanted to share.

After starting with a series of images designed to spark discussion about selfies, sexts and experiences managing sexualized content online we moved into discussions of how and when unsolicited and non-consensual content appears. From there, we initiated in-depth discussions about how sexual images of girls' and boys' bodies are created, perceived and shared. We also provided templates of social media app screens and asked the young people to draw their experiences. In some cases, further comments emerged based on the drawings they produced. The participants also created recommendations about online interactions and consent based on their own experiences. In this paper, we will focus on the discussion which preceded the drawing activity. Throughout the data collection process, we closely followed the strict ethical protocol from our university ethical board, including signed informed consent and anonymization of all data (including the images). We also began the focus groups by establishing ground rules of respect and confidentiality and a trained sex education facilitator or a teacher were always present along with members of the research team during the focus groups. A more detailed breakdown of participants of our study can be seen in the table below, we used single gender focus groups to enable the discussion of sensitive topics, but not all of the young people were cisgendered or identified as heterosexual; in

several cases the teachers advised a mixed gender focus group for either convenience or it followed the structure of the young people's friendship groups.

School name	School type	Location	Year groups	Genders
South East London Community School – (SELC)	Mixed state secondary	South East London	Year 8 Year 10 Year 10	12 Mixed (4 boys, 8 girls) 7 girls 6 boys
North East London Academy – (NELA)	Mixed state secondary	North East London	Year 7 Year 8 Year 9 Year 10	8 Mixed (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	Year 7 Year 7 Year 9 Year 9	5 boys 8 girls 6 girls 6 boys
Central London Mixed Comprehensive Two (CLC 2)	Mixed state secondary	Central London	Year 9 Year 9 Year 10 Year 10	4 girls 3 boys 4 girls 2 boys
Swans Independent School for Girls	Girls independent with mixed 6 th form	South West England	Year 8 Year 9 Year 10 Year 12	8 girls 8 girls 8 girls 8 Mixed (5 girls, 3 boys)
Lords Independent School for Boys	Boys independent	North London	Year 9 Year 9 Year 10 Year 10	3 boys 3 boys 4 boys 3 boys
South East Independent Boarding School (SEI Boarding)	Mixed independent	South East England	Year 8 Year 8	8 girls 10 boys
South East University	Public research university	South East England	Undergraduate First year	6 Mixed (4 girls, 2 boys)

Our data analysis involved using feminist discourse analysis (Lazar, 2005) to isolate discourses of cisheteronormative homosocial masculinity (Moloney and Love, 2018). Our study is important in that we explore how cis heteronormative masculinity discourses emerge in discussions across the peer groups with boys, girls as well as gender variant young people. We explore how masculinity practices and discourses shape and inform the peer-to-peer relationships and group dynamics in profound ways including how girls internalize and normalize these discourses.

Findings

Homosocial reward and pressured sexting: Girls solicited to 'send nudes'

As we explored above homosocial dynamics of pressure have led to boys pressuring girls to produce and send images to boys and men (Ringrose et al., 2012; Thomas, 2018). In one study, as many as 50% of participants said that they sent photographs because of social or relational 'pressure' (Englander, 2012). In order to understand these patterns of solicitation and heterosexual homosocial masculinity reward economy in this research, we asked how many girls across each age group had been asked to send nudes. In total, 62 out of 88 (70%) of the girls we spoke to had been asked for nudes with the proportion of girls increasing as the age increased. We used a series of prompts to generate discussion that led participants to discuss the dynamics of image exchange, which then led us to be able to ask: 'how common is it for somebody to say, 'send me a pic?' In every group at least one but typically more of the girls had been asked to send nudes:

Sadie: I think it's quite common with our age. There are people that I've never met, and they'll be like oh send me a pic, and I'll be like, I'll just block them, on Snapchat, because you don't know who they are. (Swans Year 8 girls).

Looking around this group of eight girls the researcher asked: 'How many people has this happened to?' Seven of the eight girls raised their hands. This typical scenario highlights the normalization of girls being solicited to send sexual images. Girls would often then move onto to what they do to handle the experience (typically block them) reflective of the social and educational discourse which responsabilises girls as neoliberal, self-surveilling subjects (Albury & Crawford, 2012). We found that the great majority of girls blocked but did not report these requests and brushed it off as something you just had to get used to.

Many requests for nudes were from unknown men or boys in their networks on Snapchat and Instagram, but girls were also asked by users that they termed 'friends of friends' or known boys at school. They also discussed multiple girls being asked for nudes by the same boy simultaneously. This came up on numerous occasions and was exemplified by a girl at Swans Independent School for Girls who explained that a boy had asked her for a nude and then it transpired that he was 'going around asking everyone' and had made the same request to 15 separate girls.

In this situation, the participant outlines how, after telling peers that she had been solicited for nudes, they responded by saying 'oh he's been going around asking everyone', and the girls suggested this was a 'phase' for boys, normalizing the 'boys will be boys' discourse (Ringrose, 2013). As with Amundsen's (2020) adult women, the girls do not identify this pressure as a form of online sexual harassment.

Invitations were often couched in lad banter and humour (Haslop & O'Rourke, 2020):

Soraya: Some of the boys, the younger boys now, the way they will do it, they'll be like – 'send nudes!' And there's lots of memes and like funny jokes about it, so it's like advertising it kind of But they actually want you to.

Cali: or there'll be like a hidden message, and they just make it funny so lots of people are posting it, they don't really like focus on the message, they just focus on how funny it is.

Here the girls navigate a range of ways they are asked to send nudes, and humour is a way to normalize requests. They are learning to navigate the cultural fabric of lad banter which couches requests, which are meant to be received as funny although the girls deflect this and say the message to send something is still clear.

Dick Pics as transactional gendered objects of exchange and doubled forms of harassment

As with other research, we found that boys requests for nudes from girls are often framed as transactional (Salter, 2016; Oswald, 2019; Mandau, 2019). In our study, as mentioned 70%, of the girls we spoke to had been asked for a nude but often this request was initiated through being sent a dick pic:

Tia: Somebody sent me messages like saying wanna trade? And at first, I didn't know what trading meant, and they was like send each other things Send other pictures of, you know, I just blocked them. (Year 10 girls SELC)

Tia says 'wanna trade?' is used to request an exchange of sexual images. In these cases, the initial sending of the dick pic functioned as a bargaining tool which senders framed as deserving of reciprocation. An even higher proportion of the girls in our study – 78% – had received an unsolicited dick pic. Girls discussed receiving transactional dick pics from strangers online as well as from romantic or sexual interests the girls knew. This can be seen in the exchange below from Year 8 girls at CLC1.

Rebecca: 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 sent, or oh if you love me, you'll send it back to me.

Sara: Yeah, if you don't want me to break up with you, or something like that.

Rebecca: They'll send one and be like now it's your turn.

Ruby: That's the worst one.

Interviewer: How often do you think dick pics are sent with the aim of getting something back?

Sara: All the time.

Rebecca: That's the main point of it, they don't do it and just be like 'enjoy'.

LAUGHTER

Ruby: They'll want one back.

The girls highlight the word 'enjoy' ironically with the implication that dick pics are not sent with the expectation of the girl's enjoyment of the image. The year 10 boys at SELC confirmed similarly that boys pressure girls to send as well as showing a keen awareness that when boys send images to initiate a trade this is not really 'wanted':

Omar: Usually the girls send them, but certain girls get pressured.

Interviewer: Why do you think usually girls [are asked to] send more?

Omar: Because girls are less horny.

Jamal: Might get pressured.

Interviewer: Why would they send more if they're less horny?

Marcus: Because their man asked them for some.

Omar: They don't really want it that way.

Jamal: *They don't want no nudes from the man basically.*

Omar: *Obviously they'll want it, yeah, but like they don't really, I can't explain.*

Interviewer: When you say less horny, are you saying because the men are more horny so they want pictures more?

Omar: Yeah. (Year 10 Boys SELC)

In this passage, Omar and the other participants naturalize the idea that boys are 'more horny', which is used as a way to explain why girls are asked to send images by boys but not vice versa. The boys explicitly say that certain girls get 'pressured' but they also go back and forth on the idea of whether girls want nudes or not saying they don't want them; they want them and they don't really. This indicates the confusion and uncertainty they have in making sense of what girls want, perhaps not having considered this before. This passage also indicates an awareness of consent but this is pre-empted by the imperative to gain images of girls' bodies.

The gendered exchange economy of non-consensual image sharing/ Image based sexual abuse

Homosocial masculinity and the imperative to show/share/compare girls' nudes

After getting nudes, the normalization of sharing these nudes amongst the boys in their peer group was ubiquitous. We repeatedly heard descriptions of a cis-heteronormative homosocial masculinity

economy in which sexual images of girls' bodies functioned as a form of currency between boys across all schools:

Interviewer: So what do you think about sharing images privately on snapchat or Instagram or whatever the platform may be?

Dominic: People screenshot it and send it and stuff.

Kye: Yeah exactly. But I still think most people would do more on private images to one person than they would put on a story or something. Yeah.

Dominic: Cause if you do send a nude it's almost inevitable that it's going to be sent to at least one person.

Savinder: Or they'll like save it. Because if it's, if you're taking a picture from your camera roll, all right, and sending it then it's in the chat and they can save it in the chat without actually like screenshotting it or anything. (Lords Year 9 Boys Group 2).

As Dominic says it is 'almost inevitable' that a nude will be sent to at least one person, although more likely in a private message to another boy rather than a story – which would be a more public display which they understand as connected to logics around revenge pornography (McGlynn & Rackley, 2017). The way in which the participants snowball their responses about what is likely to happen demonstrates a shared understanding about screenshotting and saving girls nudes to show and/or sending images in private chat messages to others. This is because the status can only be attained if the boy has demonstrably proven that they have received nudes from girls.

At CLC 1 School, an alternative, mixed state school with students from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds they start to develop a rationale for why masculinity demands this performance of showing girls' nude images:

James: 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.

Interviewer: Would you say that's common?

James: I don't know how to explain. It's not even popularity just like attention or respect. Not really respect but ...

Interviewer: What would you say, would you say people are impressed by that kind of thing?

James: Not really impressed but they'll pay attention because you got them. (CLC 1, year 9 boys)

Here we see that nudes garner attention which is connected to 'respect', as the students grapple to explain the status accorded when boys secure girls' nudes. This cis-heteronormative masculinity performance is a key element of gaining homosocial regard in the digital context which boys must navigate and typically accept as normal even if they don't directly participate in the exchange economy themselves. We can see a form of socio-cultural pressure being experienced by boys to secure nudes. The key point we wish to emphasize here is that a lack of consent is built into this pressured homosocial dynamic in what Dobson, Robards and Carah (2018) call the 'digital intimate public' of social media, signalling how intimacies transform in networked semi-publics. Attention and regard from male peers trumps all other forms of 'digital intimacy' such as the relationship with the girl sending the image, compromising consent and ethics (Dobson, 2018). The images operate like an extension of locker room talk (Ricciardelli and Adorjan, 2018) forming a material currency to perform cis heteronormative masculinity. Like other forms of value recognition, the owner has to display it and show and share proof of the image in order to gain status (Ringrose et al., 2013). James' comments also show us how normalized and even trivial and expected these practices have become. We discussed the intentions behind such practices further with the boys at Lords:

Interviewer: When people show images either by sending them or just showing them on their phone in real life, do you think there's any intent to cause harm there?

Jamie: Nah.

Joe: It's like, social.

Anwar: I don't think people actually intend to cause harm.

Interviewer: What are the intentions?

Anwar: Just to show their friends that they received them.

Joe: Yeah.

Jamie: To get gassed.

Anwar: Yeah. I think it's seen almost like other like, well other like sexual acts ... it's similar to receive nudes.

Joe: Just something to be proud of, I guess. (Lords, Year 10 boys group 2).

Here, we see Joe overtly describe the act of showing nudes of someone else as 'social'. Jamal says that people show their friends 'to get gassed', referring to lad banter forms of regard and kudos between male peers (Haslop & O'Rourke, 2020; Salter, 2016) and Joe says the image is 'just something to be proud of'. The boys' comments highlight again how nudes of girls form a kind of social currency amongst boys. Rather than understanding these images as private and sharing with others as violating consent (McGlynn and Rackley (2017) the boys' perception of these images focuses on the use value for themselves and other boys (Ravn et al., 2019; Ringrose & Harvey, 2015; Skeggs, 2005). The lad banter and desire to 'get gassed' jettisons understanding or awareness of privacy or consent.

It is also critical to note here that the exchange value of images is relative to the school ecosystem and the particular cis heteronormative homosocial masculinity cultures in play. The relative reward around images and the digital sharing is carefully judged according to site-specific risk. These risks were experienced differently in the independent boys school as well as the mixed elite boarding school where we spoke to 8 year eight boys who seemed to have received more media literacy education about online privacy and risk than other groups. These young people expressed heightened concern that being caught with nudes could jeopardize their future. Consider the statement from the below participant who stated he wanted to be prime minister:

Well there are, in the future, more recently, jobs are, people, like CEOs of companies ... and when people are coming to get jobs they'll look them up on social media and are trying to find positive things that will back their um, points, hire them into the company, but if they go on social media and they find like nudes ... chances are the company won't hire them. (year 8 boys SEI Boarding)

Similarly, the boys in the elite boys' school were keenly aware of the relative risks associated with being found in 'possession' of nude images, as can be seen below.

Jamie: I think it's like the difference between seeing it in real life [on your phone] and sending it. In real life is there's no like record or evidence of it ... in social media, you can save it, you can screenshot, you can do like many things with it.

Here we can see Jamie suggesting that showing others' photos on your phone rather than sending them digitally allows for the homosocial 'kudos' to occur without the 'record or evidence'. The boys explicitly mitigate the risk of getting in trouble through a digital footprint of non-consensual distribution, by showing another person their phone in-person, which acts as a loophole because 'there's no like record or evidence of it' being shared. These exchanges highlight how homosocial reward disregards digital consent and how risk is navigated in contextually specific ways amongst different groups of boys.

Sexual double standards around responses to IBSA: girls get shamed – boys get 'a bit of stick'

In our study, boys often sent dick pics over the sharing platform, Snapchat, where images are only available for a short time then disappear. Girls reported not wanting to screenshot or record a nude sent from a boy over Snapchat as the sender can see that the image has been saved and so the girl would either be seen as liking the image and opening themselves to further harassment; or to be deemed 'a snake' for the implication she could use it against the sender:

Grace: Boys it's like a trophy, for girls it's like shameful to share.

Lucy: For boys it's kind of like, it heightens them up, they are like oh I got a girl.

Hailey: It's normalised with boys to like to behave that way, I think. (year 9 girls, Swans)

This group discuss how girls' nudes are used as 'trophies' of masculinity amongst boys as that 'heightens them up', directly referring to masculine status and prowess (Berndtsson and Odenbring, 2020). They also use the language of normalization to describe boys behaviour, which implies a level of awareness amongst the girls about sexism or sexual double standards. But like Amundsen (2020) there is a lack of awareness of these practices as abusive and little reporting. These girls went on to recount a typical story of a close friend of theirs whose nudes had been 'leaked':

Lucy: Our friend kind of sent a nude and it went around the whole school.

Hailey: They screenshot it and sent it to one of our friends, who showed everyone.

Grace: It got shared everywhere, so and now pretty much everyone knows her, and it's like if you never met her it's just 'the girl with the nude' . . .

In this case, as in many we heard across the schools, there were few repercussions for boys whose images were shared, but lasting reputational 'damage' for the girl, as was explained by year 10 girls in Swans:

Zara: I feel like if like, if like a guy, if his nudes get leaked like it doesn't really matter that much, but then for a girl she'll be made to feel like a slut.

Sadie: 'It's a lot worse, like if a girl was, because then people are like oh my God, she's such a slag, she's such a whatever else.

Dani: they might even put him up to it, he might get encouraged for it, like that's so cool, you have confidence in sharing everything, but with a girl . . .

Boys can be encouraged to send dick pics, without 'much' consequence if 'leaked', but girls' would be shamed; which was also apparent in a story that emerged in one of the Year 10 focus group with boys from Lords independent boys' school. As discussed in our introduction, we heard of multiple instances of nudes moving digitally between the boys' school and the adjoining girls' schools

Tim: There's definitely one instance in our school that I can think of. And it went quite big of this girl. And uh, she sent like quite a few pictures that were really like bad to boys . . . well two boys who . . . then kept them and do show other people and then she's had quite a bit of, not hate, but people don't really want to be friends with her anymore after they found out that it was her.

As the boys begin to narrate this story, an imbalance in the perceived value of and implications of 'leaked' images emerged. They relate that one of the boys also sent images to the girl and 'his private areas' were distributed 'between all of the girls' school', and he then responded by sending her images to his friends. This was their response when asked how the peer group in both schools reacted:

Interviewer: So what did boys think about that? Like what was their attitude towards like him?

Tim: Bit weird.

Sean: He got a bit of stick for it.

Tim: People almost took the mic out of him a bit like ah you did this and it got shared . . . And especially with the person they did it with . . .

Sol: Because the girl was known for already doing stuff like that. Constantly. .There was another case of it . . . sending pictures of exposed areas to boys, she'd always do that.

Tim: Yeah . . . she was a bit of um . . .

Sean: Desperate.

The girl here is positioned as having a known reputation for 'doing stuff like that', as 'desperate' for sending nudes, and as a result people no longer wanted to be her friend. The impact of the boy's nudes being sent around the girls' school is discussed as minimal, however, 'he got a bit of stick'. Indeed, all of the comments about his images are mitigated with phrases like 'a bit' to minimize critique or stigma. The fact that the boy sent a nude photo is framed as a joke with potential for 'lad banter' rather than a serious topic of discussion or a basis of social stigma and rejection. This correlates to the other research findings which show how sexual double standards apply to potentially protect leaked dick pics through the supportive homosocial economy of humour and lad banter (Haslop & O'Rourke, 2020; Ravn et al., 2019). Further, the 'stick' encountered by the boy seems at least in part, connected to the 'type of girl' he has done a transactional share with. The girl's reputation as a known sexter sexually stigmatizes her. The onus is placed on the girl's reputation, rather than the boys engaging in non-consensual sharing and 'showing other people'. We see clear sexual double standards in how images of boys and girls bodies and understood and reacted to by the young people.

Boys identifying and troubling the competitive homosocial masculinity exchange economy

As we have been discussing the gendered dynamics of cis heteronormative, homosocial reward economy creates contexts of differential reward around images of girls and boys bodies and work to mask patterns of harassment and abuse in the peer groups. When boys were given the opportunity to discuss these scenarios at length, they demonstrated an explicit awareness of the demands of homosocial performativity in relation to image exchange. This can be seen in this year 10 group at SELC School.

Interviewer: Why is it [sending images] different [depending on age]?

Omar: Because as an adult like you should be mature enough and responsible enough to make your own decisions, like knowing that you could trust the person that you send that to.

Interviewer: And people your age?

Marcus: When you're our age you've got people like that will just send it to all their mandem.

LAUGHTER

Jamal: I think it's a level of maturity, because if you like, if you send it to someone, you choose to send it to someone, you're like I'm gonna trust you with this picture, and if that person is mature to say cool, I won't send this to someone because this could have like some mixed consequences, that's on them like, at the end of the day if you're sixteen, sixteen, fifteen, you shouldn't be sending videos, if you're an adult you're mature enough and responsible enough to choose the person who you are sending videos to. (SELC year 10 boys)

In this discussion, the boys are discussing the socialized norms of their age group. They suggest that people of their age will inevitably send an image to all their 'mandem' – a slang term referring to a group of friends who are men or boys. In using this term, the participants knowingly articulate the homosocial group relations that demand sharing, and that they derive humour from, as they

collectively laugh. By their logic they are young and therefore it is obvious that the male peer group will be more important to them than girls, and they are not mature enough to be trusted, something that might develop when they become adults. Thus, despite seeming to understand that non-consensual sharing might be harmful to the girls, they quickly use default common-sense logic of girls being responsible for the content they make or send so if it gets out – ‘that’s on them’. If we examine this in relation to structures of homosocial reward, we can see how boys protect each other from the implications that their behaviour is abusive. They also naturalize boys as immature, a ‘boys will be boys’ attitude and put the responsibility for harm protection back onto girls. This discussion clearly demonstrates the need for clearer language to reflect the abusive nature of coercion and non-consensual distribution particularly amongst younger boys.

As in Ravn et al.’s (2019) study, some of the boys demonstrated empathy with girls and constructed unwanted dick pics as ‘disgusting’ and ‘bad’ for girls. In CLC2, a mixed comprehensive with extremely diverse groups of young people, the year 10 boys discussed girls not liking dick pics and finding them ‘scary’ and one boy, Zayan, told us about his experience of being with a friend who was a girl when she received an unwanted image:

Zayan: Yeah and I was with her and someone sent a pic and she showed me it was disgusting. She did not react positively towards it. It was pretty bad. (CLC2, Year 10 boys).

The researcher conducting the focus group recorded a sense of genuine sadness not only because his friend had to experience it, but because most girls have had this experience and most dislike it and often find it frightening and disgusting in the moment of reception. Another group – Year 10 boys at SELCS – described the comments about girls who have had their images shared as a form of ‘verbal assault’:

Interviewer: So you all said you have seen a picture that someone’s passed around of a girl’s body.

Jamal: Yeah.

Interviewer: How frequently, is that like a one-off or has it been a few times, or ... ?

Jamal: Every day.

Interviewer: Every day, really?

Kwasi: Yeah, and certain, like depends, if you have like thousands of people watching your story that means more people are gonna be sending it in.

Interviewer: So how are those pictures of girls’ bodies that are shared without their consent, treated by people?

Kwasi: They just get mocked.

Jamal: Yeah, they get verbally assaulted.

Interviewer: How, what do people say?

Omar: People call them hoes and sluts and stuff.

Here we can see a very different social media ecology than the elite boys’ schools discussed above. In this context, the boys are referring to ‘bait out’ (Davis, 2018) ‘expose’ pages where people send in images of nudes to publicly shame the individual – what is commonly referred to as revenge porn (and what we call image based sexual abuse). What was notable about this exchange is the boys use the words ‘verbally assaulted’, which is one of the few times a language of abuse or harassment came up in the interviews. This shows an understanding of harm in these normalized practices associated with heterosexual homosocial logics of digital image exchange. We argue that these moments, where boys identify abuse and demonstrate empathy, need to be explored and worked within educational environments, to enable them to challenge the normalization of cis heteronormative homosocial logics of image exchange.

For example, in the independent boy's school Lords, an all-boys environment, the boys seemed particularly adept at recognizing the competitive homosocial pressure that was being exerted by other boys. In the reflection period, Arun and Sander in year 9 discussed how pressure exerted upon girls was actually caused by competitive pressure between boys:

Arun: I think girls are more sensitive about their body than boys. So, like if they don't want to do it, they shouldn't be peer pressured into sending nudes . . .

Sander: Why are you doing it? I think most boys are actually being pressured by other boys. If you think it's not right, then you shouldn't do it. (year 9 group 2)

Likewise in one of the year 10 groups the boys reflected back upon heightened pressures in year 9 and becoming aware of competitive homosocial masculinity status and a change in their attitude:

Sol: Year 9s that are moving from a point where, you're moving from a younger child to being more like an adult at that point you're feeling hormones and that's very confusing. So, when you see like a sexual image that your friends got, you're thinking, oh this is cool, like I wish I got something like this.

Tim: And then when you look back at it like a year later, you're like, it's just a bit weird...

Sol: To show off.

Sean: Yeah to seem cool.

Sol: Like ah look I got nudes from this girl.

Tim: Yeah, but now I think people started realising that it's not about that.

Sol: Yeah, completely. Not about that.

Sean: It's like a lot of boys last year were just interested in basically getting with as many people as they could but now a lot of those people have got into long-term relationships

Tim: There's just more to girls than just their nudes and bodies. Their personality and character are what matters (Lords, Year 10 group 1).

Here the boys begin to dissect their own attitudes and values around what is 'cool' and offer a strong statement that there's more to girls than nudes. Opening up a discussion like this in a group context also created space for Sol to individually reflect on his own experiences of being in the 'cool' and 'popular' group through having gotten nudes:

Sol: Reflecting on what I was like last year . . . 'don't think people who receive nudes are cool or gain popularity in the long term by having them,' . . . make your own rules about where your boundaries are. Don't listen to everyone else's. Like, if someone says, oh, I'd send a nude to this girl . . . like when if you feel that you trust them enough then do it. Just kind of make your own set of boundaries. (Lords, Year 10 group 1)

Opening up a discussion of boundaries for boys and a questioning of what is of value and getting them to reflect on their 'ambivalence' around sending and receiving nudes (Mandau, 2020) is critical in disrupting the normative logic of heterosexual masculinity performances in the homosocial exchange economy of youth sexting. Sol talks about developing one's own rules, about receiving and sending nudes, but we need to push discussions like these further to be explicitly defining abuse and foregrounding consent. It is exactly these nuanced elements that we feel need to be highlighted across the board for young people as we conclude.

Conclusion: Recognizing Online Sexual Harassment

In this paper, we have explored how sexual image exchange is organized through cis heteronormative homosocial masculinity norms, discourses and reward structures, which legitimize abusive behaviour in youth digital sexual cultures. Across all seven research sites we encountered a normalization of girls being repeatedly asked to send nudes but this was rarely understood as

abusive. We also found transactional logics of girls being sent unsolicited dick pics as a means to generate trades, given the end goal was to attain nudes as part of homosocial reward structure, and we saw that boys were aware that often these images were not wanted from girls, and rarely problematized this. Girls discussed not wanting to be pressured for nudes or receive unwanted dick pics, but much like adult women in Amundson's (2020) research they did not position the norms of repeated solicitation or being sent unwanted dick pics as sexual harassment. They blocked senders but didn't typically report boys for fear of being called a 'snake', a finding about girls' inability to either understand experiences as harassing or have avenues to report and address abuse that we argue must be addressed by schools.

We also discussed how while both girls and boys' images were shared non-consensually (Döring, 2014) something reported in six of the seven schools, these practices are highly gendered and homosocial masculinity structures mean there is worse sexual stigma for girls. Girls were at more risk of being mocked, called a slag and slut or desperate, if their nudes were publicly 'leaked' or 'exposed'; a persistent trend of sexual double standards, which has been well documented in the research literature for a decade. (Dobson & Ringrose, 2015; Naezer & van Oosterhout, 2020; Ringrose et al., 2012, 2013; Setty, 2019; Thomas, 2018). In contrast, the repercussions for boys' dick pics being 'leaked' were less likely to lead to sexual stigma since these encounters were couched in humour. The homosocial dynamics of lad banter work to minimize and excuse embarrassment for boys (Haslop & O'Rourke, 2020).

We demonstrated how non-consensual sharing of girls' bodies in images can take different forms – from posting publicly to private sharing or showing in-person on one's mobile device. We also showed how homosocial risk and reward regarding image exchange varied across different school contexts. In the elite environments, boys had been given greater digital literacy training to minimize their digital footprint and protect their future selves; they felt that possession of a girl's nude could get them in trouble. The boys spoke about learning ways to show images without jeopardizing each other, such as showing their phone screen rather than sending digitally, and they did not position showing images on their phones as non-consensual and therefore abusive. In the disadvantaged state schools, different patterns emerged. Boys were part of wider social media networks through which they participated in expose pages where images of girls were sent in to enable mass public distribution, and to purposely to shame the sender – an act which is explicit 'revenge porn' and illegal in the UK context (McGlynn & Rackley, 2017). The boys recognized these sites as problematic pointing out the girls were 'verbally assaulted' on these sites, but they were accepted as part of the digital sexual media sphere.

Our methodology combined focus group discussion with a drawing and reflection period, where participants created mind maps and top tips for change.⁴ Whilst the focus groups were an excellent vehicle for generating discussion, we also acknowledge that focus group methodologies can present a limitation in that they can encourage uniformity of responses since participants perform their gender identity to the wider group (Nayak & Kehily, 2006). With this in mind, we found that sustained engagement with the boys through our talk and arts-based methods and reflection period, opened space for some participants to critically engage with masculinity and gender identities. Some were candid about the competitive pressures they faced from other boys; and others articulated that they had come to challenge their own earlier desires to secure and trade nudes of girls' bodies to be 'cool', suggesting they had become 'more mature' and less susceptible to heteronormative masculinity peer pressures than when they were younger. When boys reflected on these practices, they did often identify gendered power inequities, and empathize with girls and women; and some were able to problem solve what might need to change. However, sadly, these were only brief glimmers in the research encounters. The rituals of 'mateship' which depend on otherizing women (McLean, 1996) and the prioritizing of homosocial bonds and gaining esteem and regard through sharing women's nudes found in Roberts et al. (2020) research with adult men, was also a trend in our research. We therefore suggest that a framework that understands how boys and men are capable of (re) negotiating their positions of power as new hybrid hegemonic masculinities evolve (Bridges &

Pascoe, 2014) is important, but we also need to go beyond identifying masculinity practices as ‘ambivalent’ (Mandau, 2019) and point out when and how they are perpetuating forms of harassment and abuse. Moreover, individual men or boys challenging these discourses, does not necessarily lead to wider culture shifts, which are desperately needed.

To address this, as we conclude, we suggest that policymakers, researchers and educators must build on these types of reflective discussions with boys and young men and develop resources and tools to help young people understand cisheteronormative homosocial masculinity and its propensity to enact and legitimize harassment and abuse as normal. Stakeholders working in education contexts and with young people must shift the language applied to discussions around sexual image exchange. We advocate for a framework that clearly distinguishes between consensual image sharing, and harassment and abusive practices. We also argue that a shift towards the language of online sexual harassment and the categories of ‘image based sexual harassment’, ‘image-based sexual abuse’ and ‘cyberflashing’ is needed (McGlynn & Johnson, 2020; McGlynn & Rackley, 2017).

To this end, collaborating with our charitable partner, School of Sexuality Education, which delivers feminist sex education in UK Schools, we have co-designed resources and policy guidance on online sexual harassment for schools (School of Sexuality Education, et al., 2020). The guidance focuses on three types of online sexual harassment: 1. Unsolicited sexual content received online (including image based harassment and cyberflashing); 2. Image-based sexual abuse; 3. Sexual coercion, threats and intimidation online. A series of graphics in the resources outline the steps through which consent is violated and trust broken by both sharing images without the explicit consent of the sender but also sending images that are unwanted. A section on gendered harms and power, uses an intersectional approach to suggest a cross curricular and whole school approaches that pays attention to masculinity and homosociality such as exploring:

- How phenomena such as ‘slut-shaming’ and ‘gay-bashing’ stem from the same norms of performing idealised masculinity (sexually dominant and heteronormative) and femininity (passive and virginal).
- How boys, in an effort to be ‘manly’ might be more likely to feel pressured to non-consensually share sexual images of another young person.

The guidance is a starting point in shifting the direction of the gaze in schools onto the site of privilege and entitlement – that of cisheteronormative homosocial masculinity practices. Providing a vocabulary that highlights cisheteronormative homosocial masculinity performances and acknowledges how these cultural reward systems and performances *systematically* ignore or overturn consent in the context of digital sexual image exchange is a critical first step in providing educators and young people better tools to challenge the normalization of harmful, coercive and abusive behaviours.

Notes

1. All names are pseudonyms.
2. Some sexting research has claimed there is no differences reported in the ‘sex’ of images shared non-consensually claiming boys and girls do this at equal ‘rates’ (Madigan, Ly, Rash, Van Ouytsel, & Temple, 2018). This research is conceptually and methodologically flawed by conflating sex and gender, and by a failure to frame non-consensual image sharing practices in relation to gendered patterns of sexual harassment and abuse. It follows they have not explored the gender specific impacts and consequences of image based sexual abuse in the peer groups.
3. We also worked with a mixed gender group (6 participants) in first year at one university, bringing our sample up to 150 young people, but we do not include this data in our analysis in this article.
4. Please see (Ringrose, Whitehead, Regehr, & Jenkinson, 2019) for a fuller discussion of the arts based methods and drawings.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

This research involves human participants and ethical approval was attained by University of Kent, Research Ethics Advisory Group '0531819 - Gender, Social Media and Young People's Uses of Digital Technologies: A Follow On Study'

Informed consent was collected from all participants; informed consent from parents was collected for all participants under 16 years of age.

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Notes on contributors

Dr Jessica Ringrose is Professor of Sociology of Gender and Education at the UCL Institute of Education. She teaches and researches in the areas of gender and sexual diversity and equity in education, with a focus on youth digital intimacies and sexual cultures and innovative feminist qualitative, participatory research methodologies. She has undertaken collaborative funded research on these topics with colleagues in UK, Canada, USA, Australia, New Zealand and Europe. She is the 2020 Recipient of the Distinguished Contributions to Gender Equity in Education Research Award, from the American Educational Research Association, which recognizes her commitment to educational advocacy work, community impact, and making research matter beyond academic audiences.

Dr Kaitlyn Regehr is the Deputy of Innovation for the Division of Arts and Humanities Senior Lecturer in Media Studies and Digital Culture at the University of Kent, where she has been awarded the Vice Chancellor Early Career Knowledge Exchange Award. Her research interests include gender, diversity and digital culture, and involve high impact forms of dissemination through engagement with government bodies and the media industry including BBC1, BBC3, iTunes, Discovery Network, The Guardian and more. She has carried out commissioned research in collaboration with the Mayor of London on gender and advertising and the Government of Scotland on masculinity and incel radicalisation.

Sophie Whitehead is a PhD student in the Digital Humanities department at King's College London. Her research is funded by the London Interdisciplinary Social Science Doctoral Training Partnership, and it examines the discursive, material, and affective conditions which facilitate teen online sexual harassment and associated cultures of masculinity. She also works as a sex education specialist with the charity, School of Sexuality Education.

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