Olave Baden-Powell Society
World Association of Girl Guides & Girl Scouts

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The Cyber World

2 billion
SOCIAL MEDIA USERS

1.59 billion
MONTHLY ACTIVE
FACEBOOK USERS

400 Million
MONTHLY ACTIVE
INSTAGRAM ACCOUNTS

320 million
MONTHLY ACTIVE TWITTER
USERS

Statista, 2016
The Cyber World

Technology is now in their OS

Text Messaging
Twitter
Instagram
Instant Messaging
YouTube
Social Networking
Webcams
Snapchat
Navigating Cyber World

- Developmental characteristics of youth are not consistent with freedom in online world

  dependency, growth, change
  vs.
  autonomy & freedom

- Autonomy & freedom usually increase in university

  Liau, Khoo, & Ang, 2008
Definitions

- Gendered bullying/cyber bullying
  - Bullying behavior that operates to maintain & assert dominant cisgender norms of heterosexual masculinity & femininity

- Sexualized bullying/cyber bullying
  - Bullying of a sexual nature that results in unwanted sexual attention that makes the recipient feel humiliated, uncomfortable, or, demeaned

- Also labelled harassment, aggression, discrimination
Gendered & Sexualized Bullying

- Commonplace in the lives of children & youth
- Girls targeted twice as much online as boys
- Gendered & sexualized cyberbullying is disproportionately experienced by girls & LGBTQ2SA-identified children & youth
Gendered & Sexualized Bullying

- Aggression towards girls has been described as ‘rampant online’
- Perpetrators tend to be boys
- Severe sexualized cyberbullying can be a risk factor for suicidality among girls
- The distress can discourage girls from online participation
Increasing evidence of contradictory messages girls receive in socializing & self-presenting online

Have to walk a fine line between performing gendered expectations of beauty & hypersexuality while not appearing to be a “slut” or “trying too hard”

Limited research on young children's experiences of gendered & sexualized bullying
  - Assumption behaviors emerge primarily in adolescence

Evidence that girls who sext considered irresponsible & slutty
  - Even when they sent sexts in response to male pressure

Our findings suggest that sexualized bullying of girls begins very young
The Double Bind

- Media-driven environment pressures girls to be popular, party, & be sexually attractive
- There are pressures to self-objectify in self-presentation online
- Pressures to send explicit images of themselves to boys & men
- Culture where girls harshly judge other girls' online behaviour & self-presentation
- Rejected &/or punished for being “slutty”
- Criticized for “trying too hard” to appear cool/popular
- Blamed for their own sexual harassment online
- Criticized for taking & /or sharing explicit images of self; blamed for images being shared without their consent
- Criticized for wearing either too much or too little clothing
Current Study & Sample

- 3 year longitudinal study
  - Stratified random sample of schools
  - Drawn from low, medium & high need schools based on external challenges to student achievement

- 19 schools
  - Students (654)
  - Parents (250)
  - Teachers (98)
Current Study & Sample

- 4th Grade: 24.0%
- 7th Grade: 36.2%
- 10th Grade: 39.8%

 Interviews
  - Year 1: 35 Girls, 21 Boys
  - Year 3: 22 Girls, 9 Boys
• **15% (n=72)** of Grade 7 & 10 students have seen nude or sexual photos of their friends, family, boyfriend, girlfriend or other romantic partner online or over a cell phone

\[ p < .001 \text{ by grade} \]
Normalization

• Youth are more likely now to consider these actions & conflict **normal or expected**

• Occurs often & at a rapid pace

• While some found these behaviors problematic / distressing others did not
Interview Analyses: Themes

- Invisibility
  - Gendered Stereotyping
  - Spotlighting Girls
  - Gender Surveillance & Policing
Gendered Stereotyping

- Aligns with stereotypes that girls & boys perpetrate & experience bullying & cyber bullying in distinct ways

- Described boys as engaging in bullying through physical means – e.g., punching & “beating up” others

- Described girls as bullying through relational means – e.g., gossiping & rumor spreading
Gendered Stereotyping

• Participants emphasized these stereotypes even when their own descriptions did not fit
  • e.g., a participant described a boy using ‘guilt trips’ to coerce a girl into sharing intimate images, depicted boys as bullying physically

• Participants rarely mentioned or acknowledged the behaviors or existence of the perpetrators, most of whom were boys according to the students

• Images described as ‘getting out’ or ‘ending up on the internet’
“Mostly for girls it’s usually psychological because girls really overthink things & we’re really up in our minds & we’re all like, ‘what exactly did you mean?’ & we have to figure out what the exact word meant. & you always think about what it is. Guys just like have no brains. They just beat people up” (G7 girl)
Spotlighting Girls

- Participants often framed gendered & sexualized bullying & cyberbullying as the victim’s fault – who were mostly girls
  - Victimized girls were often described as making a ‘dumb,’ ‘stupid,’ or ‘sad’ mistake
  - Girls’ creation of intimate images was considered risky
  - Non-consensual distribution of these images often viewed as natural consequence
Spotlighting Girls

“in my opinion, it happens to girls the most where a girl decides to make a dumb mistake & sends a picture, like a nude picture, to someone” (G10 girl)
Spotlighting Girls

“a lot of girls like, especially when it comes to boys, they want to please boys by sending them pictures & saying certain things that end up getting on the internet & so many people see it” (G10 girl)
“[m]y friend got called a slut and a stripper in front of two teachers & they did nothing, they just looked at the person & looked away & they heard everything. She went to the washroom crying & got in trouble because she went to the washroom” (G7 girl)
“It’s from when we were little because those Barbie dolls are super skinny. We wanted to have blonde hair, blue eyes, & be like Barbie or something like that. I think it’s just how maybe we were raised, & how we look at things. We tend to be very submissive & dependent”

(G4 girl)
Gender Surveillance & Policing

- Gendered & sexualized bullying & cyberbullying often involved surveillance of girls’ & boys’ gender performance
- We labeled gender surveillance & policing
- The processes through which individuals reinforce traditional & stereotypical gender norms in others by rewarding behaviours & actions that conform to norms & stereotypes while chastising behaviors & actions that defy such norms & stereotypes
Gender Surveillance & Policing

“I don’t think many guys are [cyberbullied] unless it’s like they’re gay or they’ve done this or that, but for girls, it’s mostly about appearance & it’s mostly trying to get inside their brain & trying to get them to think like that. So you say you’re fat, you’re ugly, you’re stupid. I get that a lot because I’m blonde, so it’s always like, you’re really stupid because you’re blonde” (G4 girl)
Invisibility

• The theme of *invisibility* spanned all sub-themes:
  • Invisibility of gender norms & stereotypes
  • Invisibility of boys as perpetrators

• Boys’ roles & even presence typically invisible
  • Participants used gender norms & stereotypes to discount, normalize, or justify boys’ behaviors

• Girls’ involvement, as victim, perpetrator or witness, often spotlighted, with participants holding girls responsible for boys’ behavior
Invisibility

- Girls’ victimization was attributed to their poor judgment
- Narratives focused on how girls’ behaviors should change, which often functioned to erase boys’ culpability & roles
- Even when boys & girls engaged in similar behaviors (e.g., sexual rumor spreading), the power of gender norms & stereotypes led participants to discount boys’ behaviors while problematizing these same behaviors by girls
  - Influence of gender norms & stereotypes used to make sense of gendered & sexualized bullying & cyberbullying, was typically invisible to the participants
“One thing on Twitter is that it’s mainly pictures & it mostly happens to girls. They have a picture that yeah, they shouldn’t have sent out because it could be a nude picture or it could just be a picture that they don’t like. & I’ve seen it get on Twitter & in like less than 20 minutes, everyone is laughing at them, everyone is talking about it, everyone is re-tweeting it… I think that girls do get targeted more & victimized more just because it’s way more easy, because a lot of girls are naïve” (G10 girl)
Invisibility of Gender Norms

“They don’t want to show that they’re weak because guys tend to be, they think they’re very strong, kind of thing, so I don’t think they would show it as much. Girls kind of like the vulnerable look, so I think girls tell, more than guys do” (G7 girl)
Discussion

- Consistent with other studies, our findings suggest that experiences of gendered & sexualized bullying & cyberbullying are:
  - Commonplace in the lives of children & youth
  - Normalized & trivialized by peers & adults
- As young as 4th grade, boys’ actions & even presence often invisible in participant accounts
- Girls disproportionately experience gendered & sexualized bullying & cyberbullying
  - for which they are blamed
Discussion

- Participants reported instances in which adults did not respond even when sought out.

  - School personnel must be trained to recognize & respond to gendered & sexualized bullying & cyberbullying, including behaviors considered ‘benign’ – in ways that validate girls’ experiences.

  - Without tools to unpack these social forces, girls may be more likely to blame themselves & each other for failing to achieve impossible standards of appearance & behavior.

  - Because boys’ behaviour is often invisible or normalized, interventions must address boys’ understanding of their responsibility in these contexts.
Conclusion

- Consistent with social norms & narratives that position girls & women as responsible for anticipating & managing boys’ & men’s sexual desires

- Thus as blameworthy when these desires manifest in sexual violence, harassment, or abuse
Conclusion

- Adults must recognize & challenge the social norms, stereotypes, & discourses that inform their responses to bullying & cyberbullying.

- Adult acceptance of such behaviors may contribute to a culture that perpetuates gender inequality & promotes gendered violence & sexualized aggression.

- Interventions must challenge these norms & discourses that privilege boys & foster a culture in which girls are sexualized & objectified.
The Cyber World: *Moving Forward*

- We need to understand what youth are doing online.
- We need to find a way to help youth maximize the benefits & minimize the risks.
- It doesn’t mean we are condoning it.
  - But that we are recognizing that this is the cyber world in which we live.
Thank you!
References


Twitter statistics found at: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/twitter/9945505/Twitter-in-numbers.html