

“BOYS WILL BE BOYS” AND EVERYDAY SEXISM

Exploring ‘Everyday Sexism’ and the Generational Normalisation of Technology Facilitated Abuse

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Introduction

Technology facilitated abuse (TFA) is a growing form of violence against women and girls (VAWG), too often hidden in plain sight and orchestrated digitally. TFA is defined as criminal or harmful sexually aggressive, harassing, or coercive behaviours, perpetrated technologically (Henry and Powell, 2015). This project aims to understand the implications of sexism on the normalisation of technology facilitated abuse. Drawing on Laura Bates (2014) Everyday Sexism Project, this study sought to explore the connections between normalised sexism and lad cultures within secondary school, and how this manifested into digital spaces, enacted through TFA.

Methodology

Undertaken through a qualitative research method, six participants were recruited using convenience sampling and social media advertisement. All six participants identified as female, were between 19 and 20-years-old, and of White British Ethnicity. One participant attended private school, while the remaining five attended public school. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format and the data was thematically analysed. Informed consent was acquired from all participants and ethical approval was granted by University of Sheffield.

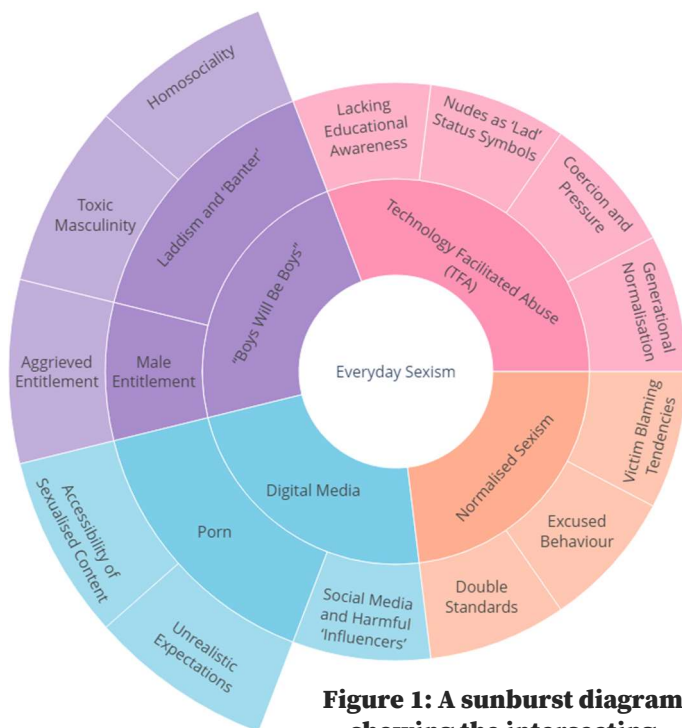
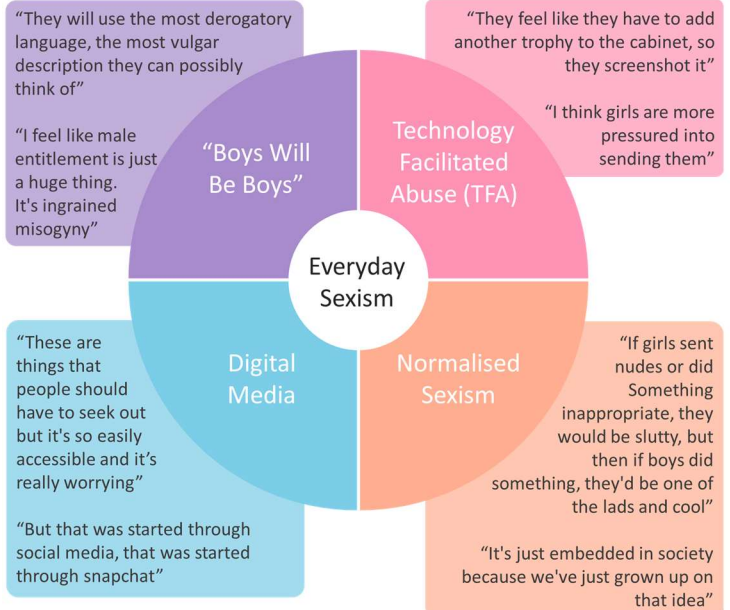


Figure 1: A sunburst diagram showing the intersecting pressures of everyday sexism

Results

- The participants all echoed feelings of double standards; girls being unfairly judged and slut-shamed for the same sexual behaviours as boys.
- There is an ‘ingrained’ sexualisation of girls, which transfers into the digital sphere, which can be enacted through TFA and the ‘trophy’ aspect of girls’ nude images.
- Male entitlement is a key factor regarding unsolicited dick pics, reflective of notions of toxic masculinity whereby masculine status comes from being sexually active, as well as being an expression of power and control.
- Lad cultures are prominent in school settings, normalising sexism through ‘banter’ and reinforcing toxic narratives of “boys will be boys”.
- The accessibility of pornography can desensitise young people (particularly boys) to highly sexual material creating a normalisation of sexualised content, demonstrated through the commonplace of TFA, such as sexting or revenge porn.
- Dick pics can often be coercive, a method of guilt-tripping or persuading girls into reciprocating a nude image of themselves to make the transaction ‘even’.
- All participants feel there are victim-blaming tendencies in school, with education or awareness on TFA disproportionately aimed at and blaming girls, reinforcing a lack of accountability for boys.
- A generational normalisation of TFA is created by everyday sexism, and vice versa. Figure 1 outlines the interlacing processes, showing how they work together to reinforce and sustain everyday sexism and conversely.
- Discussions also raised concerns of the lack of regulation of social media content, with misogynistic content, such as Andrew Tate’s, being filtered into mainstream media.

Conclusion

There is a clear generational normalisation of TFA, which is produced from these myriad processes of everyday sexism, making the harmful nature of TFA invisible, as well as placing accountability on the wrong people and often victim-blaming. A clear message that has emerged from this research project is the importance of a better educational understanding of TFA, to create awareness of the possible harms that can arise, as well as an explicit focus on tackling sexism and stamping it out early.

References

- Bates, L. (2014) Everyday Sexism. London: Simon & Schuster.
Henry, N. and Powell, A. (2015) ‘Embodied Harms: Gender, Shame, and Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence’, *Violence Against Women*, 21(6), pp. 758–779. doi: 10.1177/1077801215576581.