CANADIAN TEENS & TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED HARMS

EXPLORING TEENS' EXPERIENCES OF HARM AND THE PLATFORMS WHERE IT HAPPENS

March 2026

DIGITALLY INFORMED YOUTH

DIYDIGITALSAFETY.CA

ABOUT THE PROJECT: DIY: DIGITAL SAFETY

In an era when the internet is increasingly embedded in our daily lives, young people are struggling to find guidance and support to navigate the unique and ever-evolving challenges it presents. While young people have the right to enjoy the benefits of technology, the adults in their lives, tech companies, and governments have the responsibility to ensure they can do this more safely and that, if things do go wrong, there are supports to address technology-facilitated harms.

Unfortunately, there is often a lack of specific, tangible, and evidence-informed strategies that take young people's voices into consideration. It is crucial that the experiences and needs of young people inform these new approaches and interventions.

In response, Digitally Informed Youth (DIY): Digital Safety aims to understand the educational, relational, policy, and legal issues related to technology-facilitated harms in Canada and to create resources that empower young people and help them stay safe online and in person.

DIY: Digital Safety is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (435 2022-0650).

WEBSITE

https://www.diydigitalsafety.ca

REPORT KEY CONTACT

Dr. Kaitlynn Mendes
Canada Research Chair in Inequality and Gender,
Professor of Sociology
(**kaitlynn.mendes@uwo.ca**)

REPORT CREDITS

Estefanía Reyes Molleda
Christopher Dietzel
Alexandra Dodge
Suzie Dunn
Kaitlynn Mendes
Charlotte Nau

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We acknowledge that Western University is located on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabek (Ah-nishin-a-bek), Haudenosaunee (Ho-den-no-show-nee), Lūnaapéewak (Len-ahpay-wuk) and Chonnonton (Chunongk-ton) Nations, on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum. This land continues to be home to diverse Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Métis and Inuit), whom we recognize as contemporary stewards of the land and vital contributors to our society.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents findings from 25 focus groups with 146 young people aged 13 to 18 from five Canadian provinces and territories: Alberta, Nova Scotia, Quebec, Ontario, and Yukon. These focus groups were conducted by the DIY: Digital Safety research team and explored technology-facilitated harms experienced by Canadian teens who use social media platforms, video games, and other online services.

Despite growing evidence that technology-facilitated harms are highly prevalent in young people's lives, much of what we know about these harms comes from or is influenced by adult perspectives, policy debates, or media reports. We know relatively little about how young people themselves make sense of these harms, where these harms occur, and how they feel about the technologies they use every day. This report, therefore, explores the types of technology-facilitated harms that young people experience and the platforms on which they occur.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Most teens have faced or witnessed harmful experiences, with different degrees of severity. These harms include receiving hateful comments and "kill yourself" insults; encountering unwanted sexual images; experiencing body shaming, racism, queerphobia, transphobia, sexual extortion (i.e., sextortion), sexual harassment, and algorithmic violence.

- Many young people report a nihilistic mindset in which technology-facilitated harms are perceived as unavoidable and beyond their control. Some reported becoming so used to common harms, like insults, violent content, or unwanted sexual images, that they felt desensitized and would "just keep scrolling", thereby assuming that such harms are a normal part of the digital world.

- There is no one-size-fits-all approach to address the harms young people experience. Notably, young people with marginalized identities, including 2SLGBTQ+ and racialized teens, often experience more risks in digital spaces, and the harms they face overlap with homophobia, ableism, misogyny, racism, and transphobia.

- Some young people's well-being and coping mechanisms depend on their access to online spaces, including where they can find a sense of community and helpful resources. This creates tension between feeling unsafe in these spaces but still wanting or needing to occupy them.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Platforms should increase resources for moderation teams to address hateful and harmful online content. Their policies and mitigation efforts to prevent the distribution and amplification of harmful content and youths' interactions with such content should be transparent and take a human rights-based approach.

2. Recognizing that young people spoke about being exposed to unwanted sexual content in ads and pop-ups, platforms should review the content that advertisers share on their platforms and should offer options or additional features that filter content based on what is age-appropriate.

3. Platforms should critically examine the features, policies, and other affordances that are known to allow perpetrators to target kids and teens more easily. They should address these gaps and improve their systems, including approaches to platform governance.

4. Parents, educators, and other trusted adults should create safe, non-judgmental spaces and opportunities for teens to examine the technology-facilitated harms they face. They also should make teens aware of the **confidential supports** and **resources** available for dealing with technology-facilitated harms.

INTRODUCTION

Despite growing evidence that technology-facilitated harms are highly prevalent in young people's lives, much of what we know about these harms comes from or is influenced by adult perspectives, policy debates, or media reports. We still know relatively little about how young people themselves make sense of these harms, where these harms occur, and how they feel about the technologies they use every day.

In response, this report shares qualitative findings from 25 focus groups with 146 young people aged 13 to 18, living across five provinces and territories in Canada: Alberta, Ontario, Nova Scotia, Quebec, and Yukon. To help support young people in articulating their experiences, the study used arts-based methods alongside group discussion.

Drawing on work from feminist scholars, we understand technology-facilitated harms as a spectrum of behaviours and outcomes that occur through, or are intensified by, digital technologies and negatively affect people's well-being, safety, rights, and dignity (Henry & Powell, 2015, 2018; Dunn, 2021; Dodge, 2023). We acknowledge that these harms are not experienced in isolation or uniformly across different groups and individuals. Instead, they are shaped by people's age, gender, sexuality, racialized identity, disabilities, and more.

Our findings reveal different types of technology-facilitated harms discussed by participants, including discriminatory comments, harassment, and unwanted requests for nudes, as well as unwanted sexually explicit material, sexual extortion, queerphobia, racism, and algorithmic violence.

Current approaches that aim to address technology-facilitated harms often overlook young people's perspectives and fail to account for the relational and structural dynamics that shape how harm is produced and sustained (Dietzel et al., 2023). Our hope with this report is that these youths' testimonies will inform educational efforts and policy initiatives aimed at addressing technology-facilitated harms in Canada and beyond.

METHODOLOGY

This report is based on 25 focus groups, which included 146 young people aged 13 to 18 from five provinces and territories in Canada: Alberta, Nova Scotia, Quebec, Ontario, and Yukon. These focus groups were conducted as part of our research project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). We recruited participants by partnering with community-based groups and youth-led organizations (e.g., sports teams, afterschool programs for underprivileged teens, youth groups for 2SLGBTQ+ teens) in urban and rural locations. Focus groups were held in French and English. This approach ensured diverse representation across various factors, including gender, location, economic status, racialized identity, ability, sexual orientation, and other characteristics.

Demographic distribution of participants

DEMOGRAPHIC MARKER	CATEGORY	COUNT (N)	PERCENT (%)
Gender	Girls and young women	56	38.62
	Boys and young men	61	42.07
	Trans, non-binary, and Two Spirit	19	13.11
	Unsure/other	9	6.21
Sexuality	Straight/heterosexual	91	62.33
	Bisexual/pansexual	23	15.75
	Lesbian/gay	11	7.53
	Prefer not to say	4	2.74
	Questioning/unsure	8	5.48
	Other	9	6.16
Race/ethnicity	Black/African-Canadian	14	9.59
	East Asian	4	2.74
	First Nations, Métis, Inuit, Indigenous, Aboriginal	22	15.07
	Latin American	9	6.16
	Middle Eastern	7	4.79
	Mixed race	1	0.68
	South Asian	4	2.74
	Southeast Asian	2	1.37
	White	78	53.42
	Prefer not to say/other	5	3.42
Location	Rural	70	47.95
	Urban	76	52.05
Depression, anxiety, or mental health condition	No	72	49.32
	Yes	52	35.62
	Prefer not to say/unsure	22	15
TOTAL		**146**	**100**

ARTS-BASED ACTIVITIES

In our focus groups, we used arts-based activities that encouraged participants to express their thoughts and feelings through visual representations. This report is informed by a template activity, described in detail below, that offered young people an adaptable and proactive way to share their views and facilitated the involvement of participants with diverse skills and capabilities, including those who were introverts, faced language barriers, or struggled with learning disabilities. Stated simply, this activity allowed them to share their experiences in diverse ways.

Inspired by previous research (Ringrose et al., 2021), we distributed blank templates depicting the designs of popular apps and devices, including Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and WhatsApp, among others. Participants were asked to select any template or create their own versions to illustrate common scenarios they or their peers have experienced (see Figure 1). In the prompts, we used relatable language and mirrored their choice of words to encourage sharing of experiences that felt "awkward," "uncomfortable," "weird," or "icky."

We analyzed the templates using qualitative content analysis (Puppis, 2019), collaboratively coding not only the types of harms described in the templates but also, when possible, recurring patterns related to victims, perpetrators, and the platforms or apps where the incidents occurred, among other factors. Some templates were coded under multiple harms, reflecting the layered nature of teens' experiences on social media. Pseudonyms were used, and any identifiable information was removed from the data.

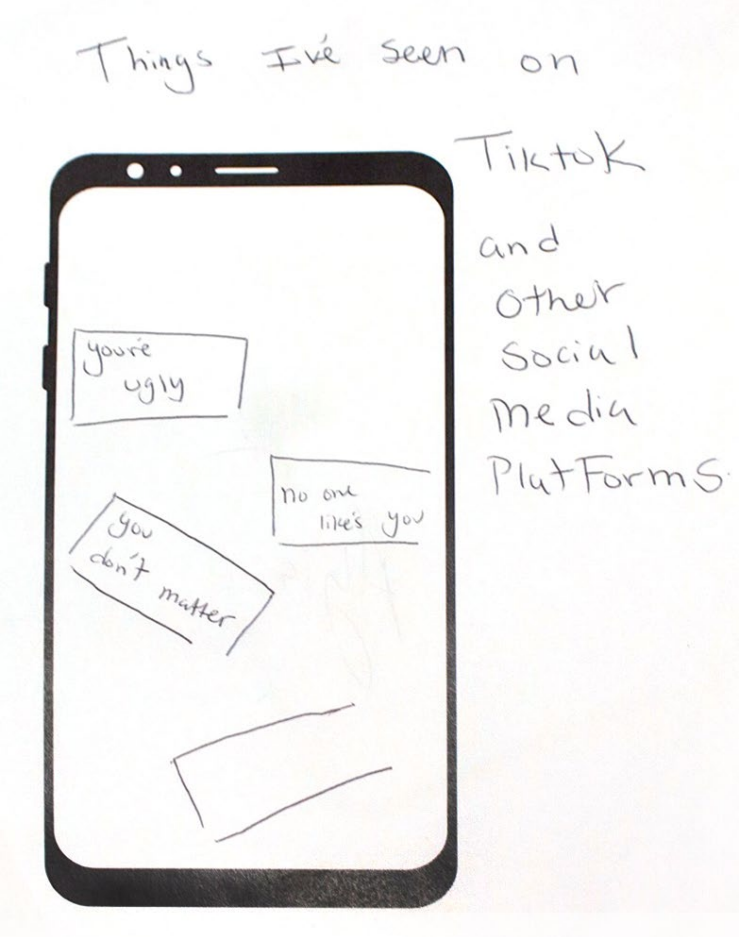

Figure 1: Frequent scenarios of technology-facilitated harms.

TYPES OF TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED HARMS REPORTED BY TEENS AND WHERE THEY OCCUR

In this section, we present nine types of technology-facilitated harms that were recurring or deemed relevant based on our content analysis. To provide context for the participants' responses in the templates, we include quotes from the focus group discussions that clarify the meaning of these templates or address related experiences.

HATEFUL COMMENTS AND HARASSMENT

Hateful comments were identified in **27 out of 124 templates (22%)**. This kind of harm was the most frequently reported by participants, and it appeared across all social media platforms, but most often on Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok. These were derogatory, mocking, or hurtful messages intended to shame, humiliate, or exclude individuals based on their physical appearance, identity, or behaviour. Young people described them as especially harmful when they appeared publicly in comment sections or group chats, where moderation is often inadequate, and public exposure exacerbates the issue. For instance, one participant recalled receiving comments such as "no one likes you" and "you don't matter" after posting on Instagram to ask for help (see Figure 2).

Although sometimes dismissed as trivial, repeated exposure to these comments can escalate into ongoing harassment (as seen in Figure 3). Some participants shared experiences of being targeted by anonymous accounts on Instagram or TikTok, where such comments are common. These accounts, created to spread rumours and drama among students, can be extremely humiliating for the teens whose pictures or names are shared.

These hateful comments also frequently co-occur with other identity-based harms, such as sexism, homophobia, and racism. The consequences of these comments can be especially harmful when they come from peers in their own communities, such as classmates or teammates, and they also affect offline interactions and relationships. One participant's words illustrate this issue: "That's part of the reason why I'm just scared to interact with people [online], because I'm scared it will happen in real life too. I'm scared to talk to people because I've seen these things happen, and I'm scared someone is going to be at risk."

> ***There's slideshows. (...) I saw my slideshow on TikTok, basically, (...) people were saying like "the most ugly people in the world." It goes on to a picture of the person, and then they just make a bunch of laughing videos and then laugh at them. Imagine if you're the person and how much that would like emotionally destroy you.***
>
> *Juniper (15-year-old girl)*

Figure 2: This image illustrates a situation in which a participant is subjected to hateful comments and harassment on Instagram.

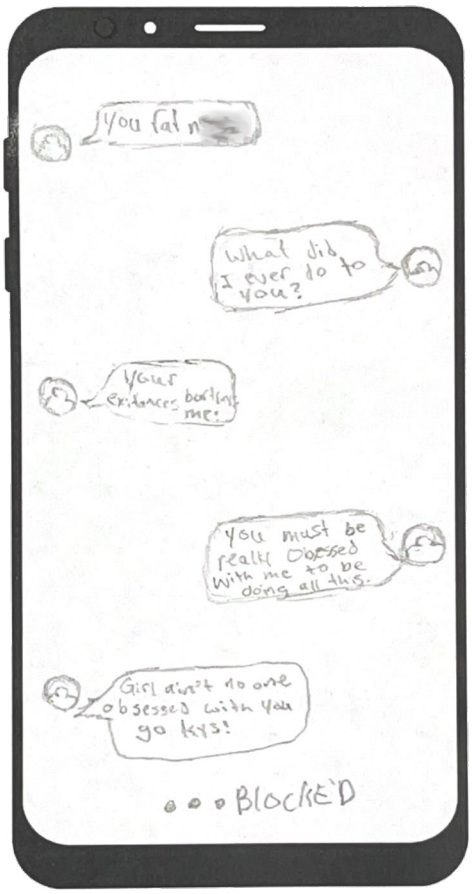

Figure 3: This image illustrates a situation in which a participant is subjected to hateful comments and harassment.

QUEERPHOBIA AND RACISM

2SLGBTQ+ and racialized youth reported experiencing discrimination related to their sexual orientation, gender identity, or racialized identity in **14 of the 124 templates (11%)**. These harms occurred across various platforms, ranging from online games to social media, highlighting the fact that digital environments can be especially unsafe for marginalized young people. Queer and trans participants expressed feeling distressed or disappointed when exposed to hateful discourses online, even if it was not aimed at them specifically, such as when it came from influential figures, like popular YouTubers, writers (e.g., J. K. Rowling), and politicians. Some teens noted that, in recent times, they experienced increased exposure to harmful messages on social media platforms like X (previously Twitter), which has been amplified by algorithms and changes in platform governance.

Queerphobia, an umbrella term that includes both homophobia and transphobia, and racism are sometimes manifested as personally targeted slurs and harassment in digital communities and intersect with other forms of technology-facilitated harms. For example, one girl reported receiving unwanted same-sex sexual content through Instagram direct messages after she came out at her school (see Figure 4). Another participant experienced racist comments about her body from a stranger who requested a picture via Snapchat (see Figure 5).

In some video games, when people get mad, they start being racist and they just start saying slurs and stuff like that. And sometimes, kids are super young just playing those games; they just have no idea what they're saying, and they just start getting this mentality that it's O.K., and then they just hurt more people without even knowing it. I mean, you cannot really blame them; they were exposed to that, but there's no way to really control it.

Rowan (age and gender unknown)

I saw that really all his posts were super hateful, but towards...really everything. But what really stood out for me was that he was always making transphobic comments, especially about trans women, like quoting J.K. Rowling's stuff and saying "oh yeah, I agree with that". I'll give you some examples: let's say at one point he said something like "trans women aren't real women, they belong in the men's restroom", and you know, I found that really sucked, on top of the fact that this was a person I'd admired for several years, it was like, you know, I found that really disappointing.

Eddie (16-year-old trans boy)

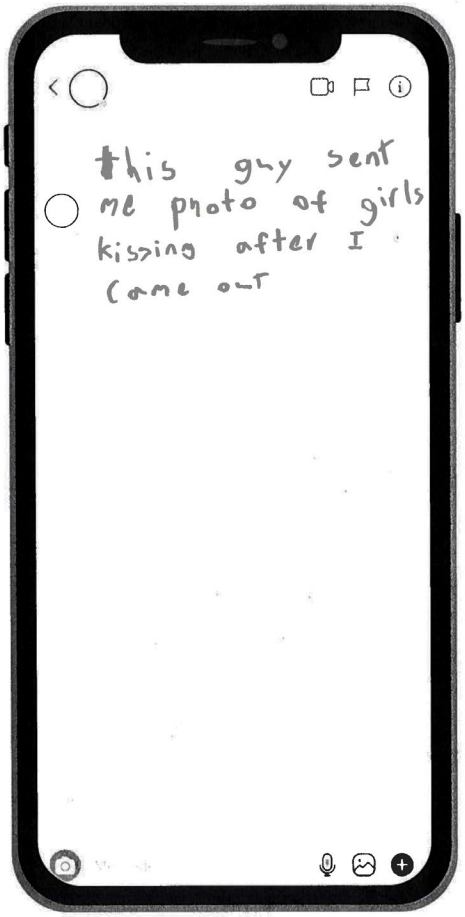

Figure 4: Instagram template illustrating a case of queerphobia experienced by a participant on the platform.

Figure 5: Snapchat template illustrating racist comments experienced by a participant on the platform.

UNWANTED REQUESTS FOR NUDES

Unwanted requests for intimate images, also known as nudes, represent one of the most common forms of technology-facilitated harm, appearing in **13 out of 124 templates (10%)**. This finding aligns with results from our **quantitative study**, which found that 1 in 3 teens experience technology-facilitated sexual violence.

Demands for intimate images frequently pressure young people, particularly girls and queer teens, to share sexual or nude content. While sharing intimate images can be done consensually as a form of flirting or sexting, it can also become harassment, coercion, or an expression of entitlement to access or sexualize others. A few male participants recognized that some of their peers like to "brag" about receiving girls' nudes and even distribute them to other boys without the sender's consent. One participant illustrated this behaviour by saying: "I have never heard [the girls] I know say anything about it. But I've constantly heard guys brag about [receiving nudes] and showing their friends."

Requests for nude images typically occurred through private messaging apps (e.g., WhatsApp) or direct chat features (e.g., Instagram direct message or Snapchat private chat). Drawing from participants' accounts, it became evident that this behaviour was normalized. Offenders often contacted others without any introduction or effort to establish a relationship, just asking "you send?" to imply sharing intimate images (see Figure 6). Even when the perpetrator was a stranger or distant acquaintance, victims sometimes struggled to refuse, fearing ridicule, reputational harm, or further harassment (see Figure 7).

> ***A few years ago, a guy around my age added me on Snapchat and kept asking for nudes after I said no. At one point, he sent me a sexual video that I did not ask for. It got to the point where I blocked the guy, and he added me back under a fake account. I didn't use my phone for a couple of days just to make sure he stopped contacting me.***
>
> *Sam (age and gender unknown)*

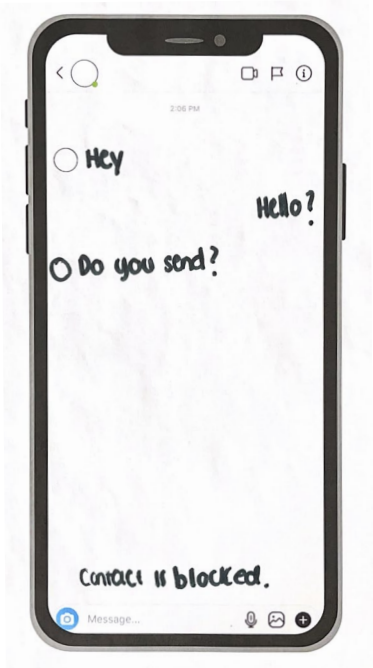

Figure 6: Instagram template illustrating an unsolicited request for nude images.

Figure 7: Snapchat template illustrating an unsolicited request for nude images.

UNWANTED EXPOSURE TO SEXUAL IMAGES

The receipt of unwanted sexual images was a theme identified in **13 out of 124 templates (10%)**; however, experiences often varied based on gender. On the one hand, girls mostly reported receiving unwanted "dick pics" (i.e., male genitalia) from strangers, though some also came from friends or acquaintances. These incidents frequently occurred via Snapchat, where senders can take advantage of the ephemeral nature of the app's features to send intimate content that disappears after opening. The victims' reactions to this harm varied, but many expressed feelings of confusion, disgust, and fear. In some cases, even after victims informed the perpetrators that they were minors or expressed their disgust at receiving this unsolicited content, the perpetrators were not deterred (see Figure 9). Occasionally, interactions escalated to insults and threats.

On the other hand, boys mostly reported getting unsolicited sexual images and pornographic content through suspicious links and "porn bots" (i.e., automated spam users with advertisements for pornographic content). This exposure often occurred through pop-up ads, unsolicited messages, or algorithmic recommendations on YouTube and other gaming and streaming platforms.

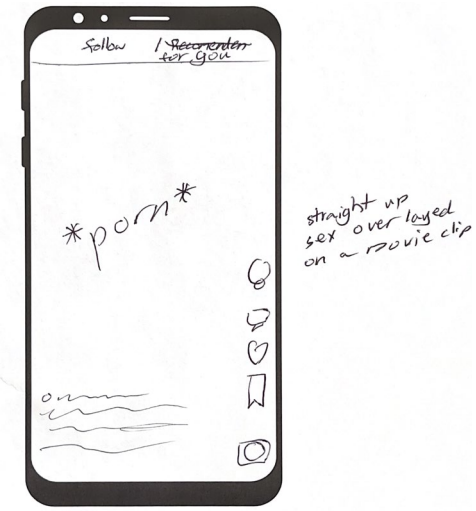

Figure 8: Snapchat template illustrating unwanted exposure to sexual images.

As one participant noted: "All you have to do is open a mobile game, wait for an ad, there's going to be soft porn or something". Pornographic content also appeared on social media platforms like X, Tumblr, TikTok, Snapchat and Discord (see Figure 8).

Some participants, especially younger ones, reported feeling confusion and distress after being exposed to sexually explicit material. Others, however, did not feel affected, as they were more accustomed to such content and saw it as an unavoidable part of being online.

> ***In their mind, if they send something, then they will get something. So, they send you a dick pic, then they're like, you got to send me something back.***
>
> *Ruth (16-year-old girl)*

> ***On Snapchat, you get lots of friend requests from people, so you see "ahh... it's someone I know", and then you get a dick pic. It's really not fun. It's mostly just guys.***
>
> *Jordan (age and gender unknown)*

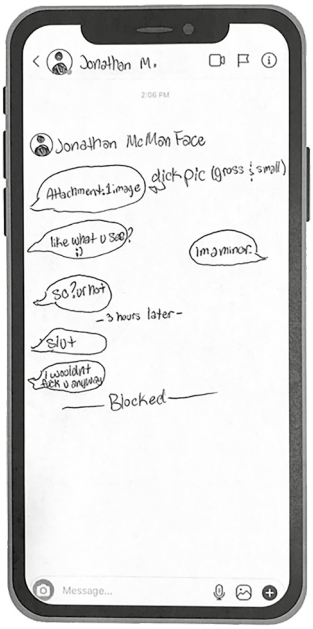

Figure 9: Instagram template illustrating unwanted exposure to sexual images.

"KILL YOURSELF" INSULTS

Encouraging someone to harm themselves was a widespread form of technology-facilitated harm among participants. The phrase "kill yourself" and its variants appeared in **11 out of 124 templates (9%)** and were often used by young people as an insult to silence, annoy, humiliate, or harass their peers. Our participants reported it more often in the context of gaming, where it was presented as an everyday "joke" among players "flaming"[1] or trolling[2] each other (see Figure 10). This harm was common on platforms with minimal content moderation, such as gaming chatrooms or messaging services, where users are often anonymous or conceal their identities.

> ***A lot of my friends say really controversial, aggressive things but it's jokingly and it's just a normal thing, like "kill yourself", not seriously but it's like: "do that".***
>
> *Chris (age and gender unknown)*

In fewer cases, it happened in the context of more intimate exchanges, as illustrated in Figure 11, where a participant described receiving such comments through private messages on Discord. This modality can be especially harmful when it is targeted, repeated, and experienced in isolation. The impact can be particularly serious for teens who are already struggling with their mental health. As one girl shared: "There was this girl [...] who I do not get along with whatsoever anymore; we used to be really good friends. Something happened, and now she's telling me to kill myself and that my mom doesn't love me. She will text me, like I have the texts on my old phone, like are you at fucking [Redacted]'s house? Like bitch, go fucking kill yourself. Nobody fucking loves you. Do us all a favour and go die. I [engaged in self-harm] the same day."

> ***I hear it on a daily basis. Just people like, "go slit your wrists", "kill yourself". Whatever.***
>
> *Eli (15-year-old non-binary teen)*

Figure 10: Videogame template illustrating "kill yourself" insults.

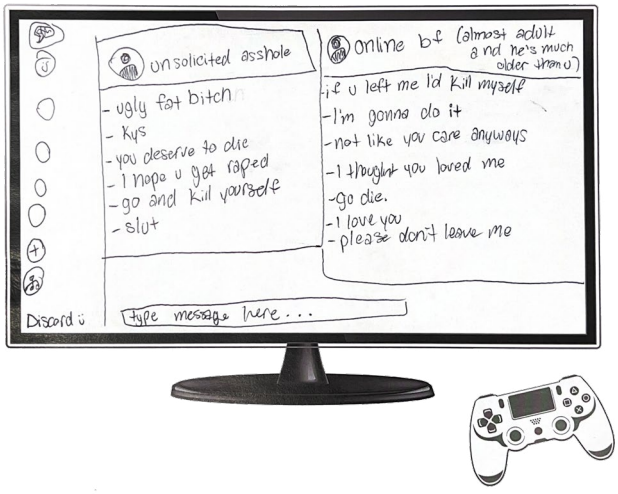

Figure 11: Discord template illustrating "kill yourself" insults.

1 Flaming is a slang term for hostile, aggressive, or provocative communication directed at others, often in in-game chat, voice chat, or forums.

2 Trolling is the practice of deliberately provoking, misleading, or disrupting others online by posting inflammatory, off-topic, or deceptive content in order to elicit emotional reactions, derail conversations, or assert power.

ALGORITHMIC VIOLENCE

Our findings show that social media algorithms facilitate teens' exposure to explicit, violent, or inappropriate material. Algorithms prioritize sensational, emotionally charged content to maintain user engagement, frequently without adequate filtering for age-appropriate or safe material. This phenomenon is known as "algorithmic violence" and was identified in **10 out of 124 templates (8%)**.

Participants shared experiences of seeing depictions of human injury, death, sexual violence, self-harm, and animal mutilation. For example, one teen reported feeling distressed after coming across a video on his Instagram feed that showed a kitten being tortured in a blender (see Figure 12). Many also spoke about their disturbed feelings after watching numerous violent videos of ongoing wars (e.g., people being severely injured or dying in war) or terrorist content (e.g., beheading videos).

Participants encountered this content unexpectedly while scrolling through their feeds on X, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok, often without any warning. In some cases, the algorithms seemed to exploit participants' interactions and preferences, creating a feedback loop that intensified exposure. As a result, some teens reported feeling desensitized or detached due to constant exposure to violent content and would "just keep scrolling." However, while teens sometimes felt curious about this content, they recognized the potential harm of such material, especially for younger kids.

In other cases, participants noted that algorithms seemed designed to influence their attitudes and views in ways that could be harmful, even when these conflicted with their personal preferences. For example, one participant reported being fed transphobic messages on X, despite their lack of engagement with such discourses, as shown in this testimony: "Unless I scroll super-fast, if I see one transphobic thing and I say ah, that sucks, there's going to be more and more."

> ***Some [exposure to harmful content] can be accidental, but some of it can be on purpose. Because it is so easily accessible. If you're even a little bit curious, you can just look it up, and you will spiral down a rabbit hole. [...] There's a level of detachment as well. Because a lot of people also don't see stuff online as real, even if it is genuinely harmful content, they don't see it as real because it is online.***
>
> *Kramer (18-year-old man)*

> ***I had seen some videos on TikTok, like kids playing with guns, and there's one who shot their cousin without meaning to, and then shot herself afterwards.***
>
> *Lavander (15-year-old girl)*

Figure 12: Instagram template illustrating algorithmic violence.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND RAPE THREATS

In **8 of the 124 templates (6%)**, teens described receiving persistent sexually explicit comments, unwanted advances and, in some cases, direct threats of rape. These experiences were often gendered, disproportionately targeting girls and young women (see Figures 13 and 14). The threats frequently appeared in direct messages, comment sections, or anonymous forums where perpetrators felt shielded by distance and anonymity.

> ***I was 12, 13 when a friend of mine, he would ask me about nudes and if I send nudes. And I'm like, "no, obviously not". And then he would show, send me pictures of naked girls and be like, "you can pose like that." Like every single night. It would be like that. And like, in my mind, I knew I was not going to do anything about it. So it didn't, like, bother me that much. But then my mom found out and it just became a whole thing.***
>
> *Mariana (17-year-old girl)*

> ***I was talking to some friends on Twitter, and this left-leaning guy comes up and talks to us about political parties, and we really didn't want anything to do with him. So, for several, no, a few days, he was in the thread talking, trying to convince us, and we were like "we don't care, can you stop talking to us!". And it finally culminated in him threatening to rape me.***
>
> *Alphé (17-year-old non-binary teen)*

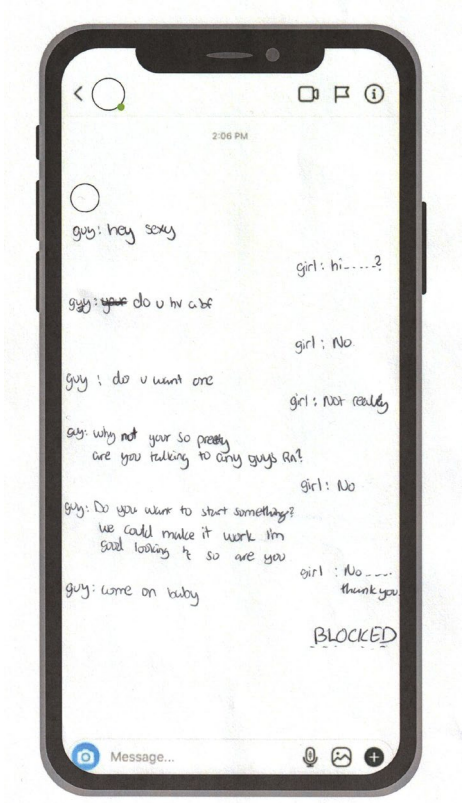

Figure 13: Instagram template showing a case of sexual harassment.

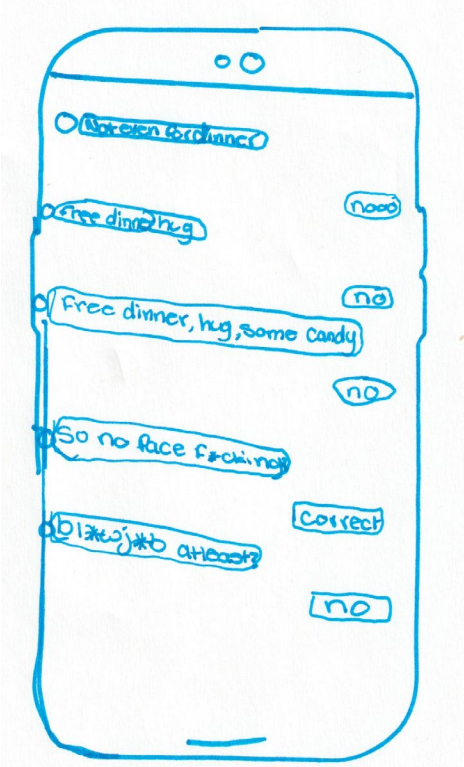

Figure 14: Social media template illustrating a case of sexual harassment.

BODY SHAMING

Body shaming was identified in **6 of the 124 templates (5%)**, often manifesting as direct insults, mocking comparisons, or mean comments about someone's appearance. For instance, participants described being criticized for their body shape, skin, or clothes, which affected their confidence. They also received remarks like "you're too ugly," "you need makeup," or "you look disgusting" (see Figure 15). These comments reinforce pervasive beauty standards that are deeply gendered and racialized, frequently targeting young women, girls, queer youth, and visible minorities more than other populations. Body shaming occurred both in public comment sections and private group chats, but it was especially harmful when posts or photos were singled out and ridiculed by classmates or acquaintances through anonymous social media accounts (see Figure 16).

> ***At my school, I see this [body shaming] a lot, like it's insane. A lot of 14-year-olds go through this. 13 year olds [too]. And it's like their photos will be shared and all the people bullying them [are] making fun of their bodies or calling them sluts.***
>
> *Riley (age and gender unknown)*

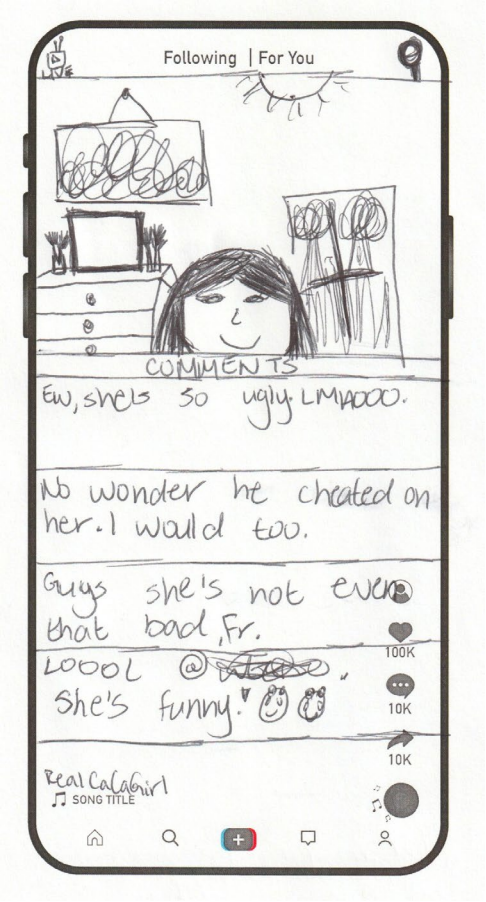

Figure 15: TikTok template depicting a case of body shaming.

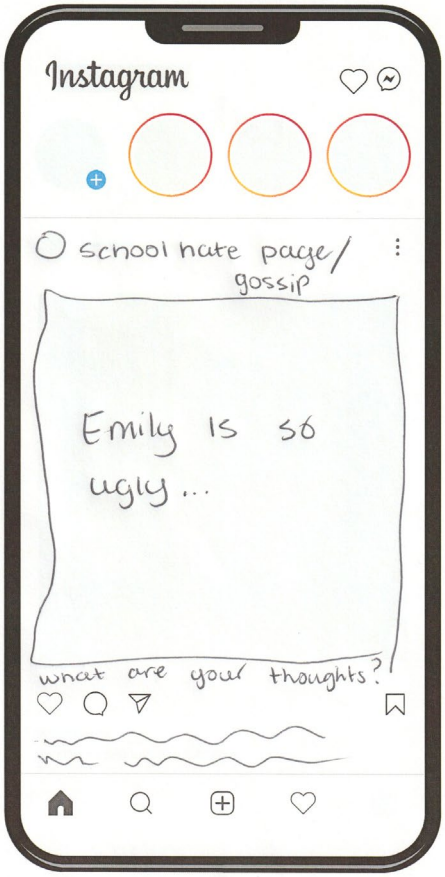

Figure 16: Instagram template depicting a case of body shaming.

SEXUAL EXTORTION

Sexual extortion, also known as sextortion, involves threatening or blackmailing someone to obtain intimate images or sexual favours, and was identified in **4 of the 124 templates (3%)**. Participants reported that perpetrators were often adults or older teens who exploited their trust to try to make them comply (see Figure 17). However, in a few cases, participants identified perpetrators as someone they were romantically involved with, or someone from their social circle and of a similar age, as illustrated in Figure 18.

Some participants felt that such experiences occurred more frequently when they were younger because they struggled to recognize the deceit or felt too ashamed to seek help. However, now that they were older, they felt more experienced and confident in being able to identify potential perpetrators, who they usually blocked or reported, for example, when approached by men or individuals who could be impersonating someone of a similar age (e.g., catfishing).

> ***I never really talk about it, but like, from [...]10 years old, maybe to, like 14, [...], I had like all this exposure to guys on the Internet. And they would always ask for, like, nudes and stuff like that. But the main story I have is this guy, basically I refused to send him anything, And then we had like a previous history of like, I sent him stuff when I was a kid, right? So, whenever I would say "no", he'd always be like, oh, like, "I'm going to send your parents your photos," "I'm going to do this," "I'm going to send it to friends", (...) because he had all my contacts. It was a really, really scary situation. And I honestly cannot lie, I'm not even going to, I don't even remember how I got out of that. But it lasted for a really long time.***
>
> *Quinn (16-year-old non-binary young person)*

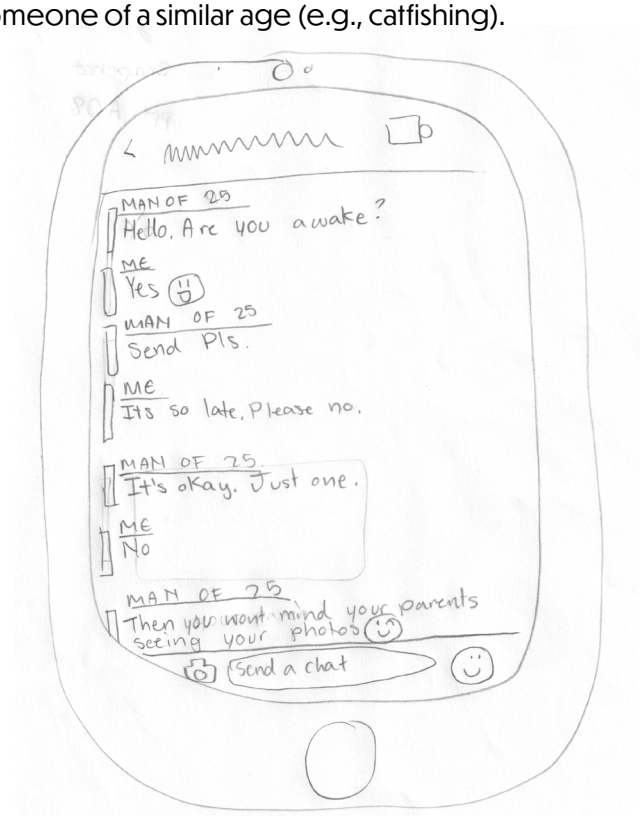

Figure 17: Snapchat template displaying a case of sextortion.

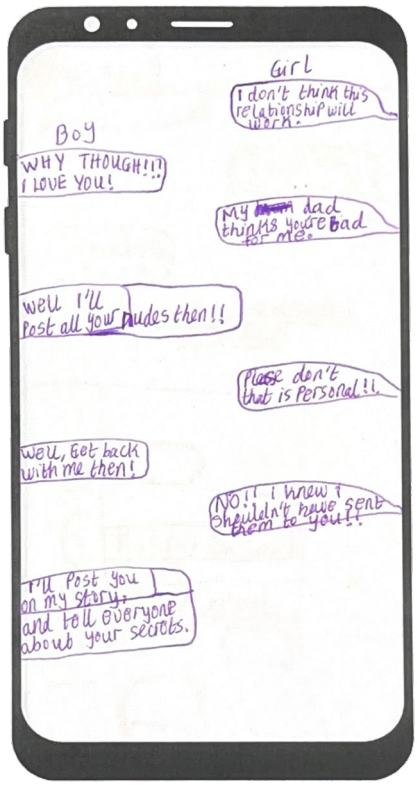

Figure 18: A case of sextortion conducted through private messages.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our research shows that technology-facilitated harms are a common part of many young people's online lives in Canada. Across the 25 focus groups, teens described encountering a wide range of harmful behaviours, including discriminatory and hateful comments, harassment, unwanted sexual content and sexual extortion. Given the frequency of these harms, many participants spoke of becoming desensitized to these experiences or feeling that such harms are simply "part of being online," which points to a worrying normalization of abuse in digital spaces.

The findings also showed that young people with marginalized identities, including girls, racialized youth, and 2SLGBTQ+ teens, often face greater risks or distinct forms of harm. This is troubling because these young people rely on digital spaces for community, affirmation, and support, and because it creates a tension between the benefits and risks of technology, which must be taken seriously in research, education, and policy.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate the urgency of listening to young people to learn about their experiences with technology-facilitated harms, including how harms happen, where they occur, and what forms of support they need. Findings also show that responses to these harms must move beyond an emphasis on individual responsibility and toward efforts that address the relational and structural dynamics shaping young people's digital lives.

Based on these findings, we offer the following key recommendations.

1. Social media and gaming companies should invest more resources in content moderation and algorithmic changes to limit the spread and amplification of hateful and harmful content, particularly on teen accounts. These policies and efforts should be transparent and take a human rights approach.
2. Technology companies should also review advertising content and provide teen-specific safety settings and filters to reduce exposure to unwanted sexual material.
3. Platforms must reduce the affordances that enable perpetrators to contact kids and teens easily, such as open direct messaging by default, unrestricted contact from unknown users, and recommendation systems that surface minors' accounts to adults.
4. Parents, educators, and other trusted adults should foster open, non-judgmental spaces and opportunities for teens to discuss the risks and experiences of technology-facilitated harms they face. Educators and parents should make teens aware of the **confidential supports** and **resources** available for technology-facilitated harms.

Ultimately, this report underscores the importance of placing young people's voices at the centre of discussions about digital safety. Their nuanced insights reveal not only how and where harms occur, but also how youth could be supported more meaningfully and effectively. We hope these findings will inform future educational initiatives, platform design, and policy efforts that respond to the realities that young people face online and support safer digital technologies.

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