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# They don't even think about what the girl might think about it': students' views on sexting, gender inequalities and power relations in school

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## ABSTRACT

This study explores teenage students' views on sexting, with particular regard to image sharing, as well as how this shapes gender relations at a rural lower secondary school in Sweden. Among the boys at the school, students' sexting practices have created a hegemonic and homosocial peer culture. Homosociality is expressed by boys' sharing images of girls with their male peers without the girls' consent. The girls express how the exchanging of explicit images puts them in a vulnerable position, stating that they are exposed to threats as well as slut-shaming. Sharing explicit sexual images without consent is a form of sexual harassment aimed at the girls, which has an impact on their well-being. This study hopes to contribute knowledge about teens' experiences and practices of sexting and how this behaviour shapes students' power relations in school.

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## KEYWORDS

Homosociality; gender inequalities; school; sexting; sexual harassment; gender-based violence

## Introduction

The phenomenon of sexting – sending or receiving sexual images, videos or written messages with sexual content through the Internet or smartphones – has become an increasingly common practice among teens today (Barrense-Dias, Berchtold, Suris, & Akre, 2017; Jørgensen, Weckesser, Turner, & Wade, 2019; Madigan, Ly, Rash, Van Ouytsel, & Temple, 2018; Waling & Pym, 2019). Sexting can be a means of flirting or exploring sexuality, but the activity can also have negative consequences such as humiliation and harassment, especially if images are shared with others without the consent of the person depicted (Barrense-Dias et al., 2017; Cooper, Quayle, Jonsson, & Svedin, 2016; Madigan et al., 2018).

Young people's sexting practices have become the subject of a growing body of international research (see Barrense-Dias et al., 2017; Cooper et al., 2016; Jørgensen et al., 2019; Lee & Crofts, 2015; Madigan et al., 2018). Despite this, there is still a lack of studies exploring how teens discuss and experience the phenomenon of sexting and what impact sexting may have on everyday life in school. This study aims to explore teenage students' views on sexting, with particular regard to image sharing, via the social media platform Snapchat. An important purpose of the study is to explore how the students understand this phenomenon and how this behaviour influences gender relations at school. This study draws from interviews with students aged 14–15 years attending a lower secondary school in rural Sweden. The following research questions have guided the investigation:

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- (1) How does students' image sharing correspond with boys' homosocial relations at the investigated school?
- (2) How and in what ways does students' image sharing on Snapchat shape and reinforce gender inequalities?

## Sexting, youth and gender

Research results from different countries have shown that it is quite common for young people to be engaged in sexting in one way or another. A Swedish survey study shows that about 25% of teenagers aged 12 to 16 have received sexts from others, and about one in ten had sent sexts themselves (Burén & Lunde, 2018). Similarly, a Belgian survey study shows that almost 20% of 15- to 19-year-old students reported having engaged in sexting (Walrave et al., 2015). Additionally, in a survey of sexting and sexual behaviour among teenagers in the United States, seven percent of the teenagers reported that they had sent or shared sexual pictures of themselves (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2014). Similar results were found in a Spanish survey (Villacampa, 2017) in which more than 30% of the teenagers involved in the study reported that they had engaged in different kinds of sexting, including sending videos or semi-nude images of themselves.

A number of studies have also pointed out the gendered nature of sexting (Bindesbøl Holm Johansen, Pedersen, & Tjørnhøj-Thomsen, 2019); (Burén & Lunde, 2018; Cooper et al., 2016; Lippman & Campbell, 2014; Ringrose & Harvey, 2015; Ringrose, Harvey, Gill, & Livingstone, 2013; Setty, 2019; Van Ouytsel, Van Gool, Walrave, Ponnet, & Peeters, 2017; Van Ouytsel, Walrave, & Van Gool, 2014; Walker, Sancı, & Temple-Smith, 2013). Sexting has also been found to occur as a result of social pressure, primarily on girls, as an online extension of the sexual harassment that some female students experience at school (Van Ouytsel et al., 2014).

Several studies report that sexting behaviour may affect girls' reputations negatively. Girls who sext are described as 'desperate', 'insecure' and 'sluts' by boys (Van Ouytsel et al., 2014). Ringrose et al. (2013) discuss inequality and the double moral standards in teens' digital images. Ringrose and colleagues explored how teens discuss the production and circulation of digital images on social media. Among certain groups of boys, sharing and rating digital images they had received from girls were common practices. They could even further their status, and be rewarded, for doing this within the male peer group (Ringrose & Harvey, 2015; Ringrose et al., 2013). The girls, in contrast, described taking and sharing or posting intimate digital images as risky behaviour. They also discussed this in relation to how such behaviour might affect their sexual reputation and the risk of being exposed to slut shaming. Slut shaming is the practice of disparaging girls (and women) for acting in a manner that violates gendered norms regarding sexually appropriate behaviour. The denigrations varies from criticizing the girl's choice of clothing or having multiple sexual partners and talking to her in a derogatory way by calling her a slut, slag or sket (Ringrose & Harvey, 2015; Ringrose et al., 2013). Similarly, Ricciardelli and Adorjan. (2019) findings reveal that youths' online sexual expression is embedded in gender inequalities, and young females in particular are exposed to shaming and insults. This, they argue, reinforces heteronormative understandings of gender and traditional understandings of masculinity and gender.

Comparable results have also been recognized by Lippman and Campbell (2014). One of the most significant findings in their study was the extent to which girls were judged for their sexting behaviour, whereas the boys were basically immune from any criticism. The study did not reveal any gender differences in terms of how often girls, compared to boys, were engaged in sending sexts, but the girls to a greater extent reported that they had experienced pressure to do so, especially from boys. Girls were more often judged, in relation to whether they sent sexts or not, by being called 'slut' or 'prude' (respectively). The majority of the negative judgements directed at females came from boys, but in some cases other girls also expressed judgements of girls who had sent sexts. Similar to these results, Cooper et al. (2016) showed that girls overall report having more

negative experiences of sexting compared to boys. Girls are also judged and labelled by their peers as 'sluts' if they have taken part in sexting.

Contemporary research has also revealed that boys are more likely to ask for sexts, while girls are more likely to be asked and pressured by others to send sexts (Burén & Lunde, 2018; Van Ouytsel et al., 2017). Results from Van Ouytsel et al.'s (2017) study shows that girls' digital images could be used to threaten them and even used as revenge by boys after a romantic break-up or shared non-consensually with their male friends. Walker et al. (2013) also highlight the gendered nature of sexting and the sexual double standard among young people. The results show that young people are often involved in sexting practices as a result of the pressures they experience and that social networking sites are used to perpetrate gendered sexual violence targeting women, where the violence takes the more subtle form of sexual harassment.

Similar findings were reported by Setty (2019), suggesting that risk, shame and blame operate within youth sexting culture to the disadvantage of young females. In another interview study, Setty (2020) explores the meaning of, and norms surrounding, young men's sexting practices. In contrast to other studies, these findings challenge the notion that harmful sexting practices only arises from the unequal gender dynamics affecting young women. Young men do not necessarily gain status through sexting; they too are at risk of experiencing social shaming and exclusion. This, Setty (2020) argues, may cause young men to distance themselves from sexting.

Bindesbøl Holm Johansen et al. (2019) suggest that primary prevention of non-consensual image sharing needs to address how the violations are fuelled by gendered values and norms. The importance of discussing the nature of teenagers' sexting practises was also recognized by Jørgensen et al. (2019). A key finding in their study is that the student participants repeatedly stated that they would like parents and teachers to talk to them about sexting practices using a more personal and relational communicative approach. Their results also reveal that most of the students were not aware of the legal implications of sexting.

To summarize, previous research indicates that sexting is an increasingly common practice among young people today. A majority of the studies have also shown the gendered nature of and the sexual double standard driving this phenomenon. Still, we know little about what impact students' sexting practices have on their everyday life in school. The present article seeks to contribute knowledge about these issues and in particular, with regards to the practice of image sharing.

## Power relations, hegemonic masculinity and homosociality

Given this study's focus on students' sexting behaviour and everyday life in school, we have found the concept of *power relations* to be useful to understand and analyse existing power structures and gender inequalities between male and female students in everyday life in school (see Connell & Pearse, 2014). Power relations between boys/men and girls/women are not fixed and may vary depending on context. Moreover, power relations also change over time, which means that power relations have been constructed and transformed historically (Connell, 2005; Connell & Pearse, 2014).

The ability to exercise power is normally a result of one's place in structured relations of power. Some people exercise greater power than others, a capacity that is influenced by factors such as gender, social class, ethnic background and sexual orientation. In general, power is a relationship that structures social interaction between, for example, men and women, but also among women and among men (Messerschmidt, 2016). On a structural level, certain masculine norms are given hegemonic status. According to Connell (2003), *hegemonic masculinity* is a masculine ideal and a norm to which all individuals have to relate. Other masculinities, and also femininities, are measured in relation to, as well as subordinated to, this normalizing and hegemonic masculinity.

Central to this study is also the concept of *homosociality*. Homosociality refers to nonsexual social bonds between persons of the same sex (Lipman-Blumen, 1976; Sedgwick, 1985). A common use of the concept is traditionally found in studies of masculinities, male friendship and male bonding that underline the perception that, for men, male fellowship comes first. The concept of male

homosociality is based on a nuanced understanding of the means by which men create close homosocial bonds in order to defend and maintain hierarchical gender relations and power structures. For males, this often means maintaining and defending patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity through male bonding, also referred to as *vertical homosociality* (Hammarén & Johansson, 2014; Haywood, Johansson, Hammarén, Herz, & Ottemo, 2018).

For young males, the peer group is often of central importance for their transition from childhood to manhood. Likewise, male peers are the primary and most important audience for masculine performance (Mac an Ghaill, 1994). Male homosociality involves a variety of strategies to maintain the conventional gender order (Bird, 2018; Haywood et al., 2018; Kimmel, 2018; Mac an Ghaill, 1994). One of them is male bonding expressed through misogynist comments and the sexual objectification of women (Bird, 2018; Kimmel, 2018). In the current study, the concept of homosociality is used to explore the peer relations among male students, and also to explore how male student peer relations may affect female students' everyday life and well-being in the investigated school.

## Method

This study is part of a national research project funded by the Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare (grant number 2017–00071). The main focus of this study is to explore students' experiences of online sexual harassment in lower secondary school (year 7–9). During the initial phase of the study, an ethical review application was submitted to the Regional Ethical Review Board (application number 244–18). The board approved the application during the spring of 2018. Due to ethical considerations, all participants in the study received a letter with information about the purpose of the project. After approval, the letter was signed by the students; students under the age of 15 needed their guardian's written approval. To further ensure trustworthiness, the research team also provided information on the research project at the time of the interviews. To ensure confidentiality, the name of the school, the names of all participants, as well as the name of the community in which the school is located, have been anonymized and pseudonyms have been used (Vetenskapsrådet, 2017).

The present study was designed as an interview study of 41 students in year 9, aged 14–15. The interviews were conducted at Amber School, a lower secondary school in rural Sweden. About 400 students aged 13–16 are enrolled at the school and it is the only lower secondary school in the municipality. Amber School is located in the community of Pinehill, which has approximately 3,000 inhabitants. The catchment area of the school covers the entire municipality, which includes Pinehill as well as the surrounding smaller villages.

The interviews were conducted during February 2019. Focus group interviews as well as interviews with pairs and individuals were conducted. A total of seven focus group interviews, two interviews in pairs and 22 individual interviews were conducted. The interview guide included semi-structured questions covering broad themes related to students' everyday lives in school with regard to issues of safety and security, violence, threats, harassment on social media and peer relations. The questions specifically connected to social media included: What kind of messages or images do you receive? How does this affect peer relations at school? If you receive images that you did not agree to receive, do you talk about this with your peers or with adults? How does this make you feel? It has been important in this study to enable the students to tell their story, as well as to enable them to express their experiences and views on students' sexting behaviour, online sexual harassment, gender inequalities and peer relations in the everyday life in school (see Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

During the initial phase, focus group interviews were conducted. The focus group interviews included four to six students in each group. All focus groups were made up of male and female students. During the focus group interviews, different themes emerged, which enabled follow-up questions and the deepening of specific themes during the interviews with pairs and individuals. These interviews were conducted with a selection of the students from the focus group interviews. The students could choose to be interviewed individually or in pairs, whichever they found most

comfortable. In all, seven focus group interviews, 20 individual interviews and two interviews in pairs were conducted with the two school classes. The focus group interviews lasted up to an hour, the individual interviews were approximately 30 minutes long, and the interviews in pairs lasted for about an hour. All interviews were audio recorded and fully transcribed.

All interviews were jointly conducted by the authors of this paper. After the interviews were finished, all interviews were collectively transcribed, read, discussed, analysed and thematically coded. Braun and Clarke (2006) have developed six analytical steps (or phases), that they claim are central when using thematic analysis as a methodological tool. This analytical process has provided a useful method of analysing recurrent patterns in data and defining and naming the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013). We are inspired by Braun's and Clarke's work, but we have slightly modified the six steps to better fit the aim and design of the current study. These steps were as follows: 1) becoming familiar with the data, that is, reading and discussing the data collectively; 2) initial coding of the data: collectively creating a coding list of all of the participants and names mentioned in the interviews; 3) collectively searching for recurrent patterns in the data, that is, recurrent themes; 4) jointly reviewing the main themes and sub-themes; 5) defining and naming the themes and organizing the data according to these themes; and finally, 6) writing, theoretically analysing the data and finalizing the paper. During this analytic process, two main broad themes were discerned and the results will be organized and presented according to these two themes: 1) Male bonding and digital 'trophies' and 2) Threats, rumour spreading and slut shaming.

## Results

Our results are structured such that we first unpack the scope of how students' sexting behaviour has developed homosocial bonds among the boys at the investigated school, taking note of how receiving digital images from girls becomes part of boys' bragging culture. Next, we unpack the results of how students' sexting behaviour results in gender-based violence directed towards girls through threats and ascriptions of sexual promiscuity (see Ringrose et al., 2013; Salter, 2016). We conclude this paper by summarizing the main findings and discussing the implications of the study.

### *Male bonding and digital 'trophies'*

At Amber School, students' described sexting as a fairly common activity, even between students who were not involved in a romantic relationship. However, the students' narratives about the local sexting culture at Amber School only contain descriptions of heterosexual sexting activities. This corresponds to the findings of previous studies (Albury & Crawford, 2012; Jørgensen et al., 2019). The students in the current study did not refer to the activities they described as 'sexting' (also in the line with the study by Albury & Crawford, 2012). Instead the students simply referred to the practices discussed as 'nudes', 'sharing pictures' or 'dick pics'. The exchanging of sexts was expressed in terms of excitement, but also as a form of risk-taking behaviour, as one of the boys, Hans, put it:

Hans: It is quite often that it comes out, you know. You share the picture with each other and then people gossip about it. It's not really a clever thing to do, really. And everyone knows that it might come out and that would be a bad thing, if that happened. Well, I don't know. It's like everything else I guess, it is quite exciting, actually (Individual interview).

Even though both male and female students talked about sending and receiving images, they talked about, and experienced, this in completely different ways. During an individual interview, one of the boys, Mikael, expressed this in the following way: 'Some of the guys show the picture they have received from a girl. And they are kind of proud of it!' Similar to Mikael, Hans discussed this phenomenon in terms of 'showing off' and a 'status thing' among the boys at the school.

Hans: It is definitely a status thing! Well, it may sound a little exaggerated, but you brag about it.

Interviewer: Do you mean, you brag if you manage to receive images from girls?

Hans: Yeah./.../

Interviewer: Would you say it is like a competition between you boys?

Hans: Yes, it is kind of like that! But, some of the guys talk more openly about it and others don't say anything.

Interviewer: Would you say this has an impact on the boy's status?

Hans: Yes, I think it does (Individual interview).

Following the quotes above, receiving sexual images from a girl is surrounded by a bragging culture among the boys at Amber School. For the individual boys it also means that the boy gains status within his peer group. Consequently, male students exchanging images with female peers can be understood as part of, and a strategy for, male bonding and an expression of a vertical homosocial relations among the boys (see Bird, 2018; Haywood et al., 2018; Kimmel, 2018).

Among the girls there was also an awareness that the boys might brag about digital images that they have received from girls, as expressed by Victoria:

Victoria: I think that they sometimes brag about this, like: 'This girl sent me a picture. She sent me this and that'. I think that they might brag about that a lot. Maybe, they feel like they got proof that the girl likes that guy, you know (Individual interview).

How the girls might react and experience the fact that boys share their digital images is a topic that is rarely (or never) discussed among the boys, as expressed by Mikael: 'No, we never talk about that. They only share the pictures and they don't even think about what the girl might think about it'. Hans reflected upon this in a similar way: 'I think guys talk very little about how girls actually feel. It is more like you show the picture to your buddies and say, "Check this out, guys!" Well, it's like a trophy!'

The narrative reveals that some of the boys who exchanged pictures with girls also showed and shared those pictures with their male peers. However, not all boys were engaged in this, according to the students it was only some of the boys who shared sexual digital images with peers. Being successful in receiving these 'trophies' from girls and sharing them with their friends not only meant that the individual boys gained status, but it can also be understood as an expression of homosociality (see Haywood et al., 2018; Kimmel, 2018). The narrative could also be interpreted, in the light of boys' expectations about performing hegemonic masculinity, as exchanging pictures strengthening this behaviour (see Kimmel, 2001; Pascoe, 2013). When boys share images and brag about them with their male peers, they are also conforming to, and reinforcing, heterosexuality. A boy who shares images of girls not only maintains his own heterosexual position, but the message to other boys is that this is the right form of sexuality and the expected way to behave (see Kimmel, 2001; Pascoe, 2013). Also, by ignoring, or failing to recognize, how the girl might experience this form of exposure, the existing power relations are maintained. 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.

### *Threats, rumour spreading and slut shaming*

The students' narratives about exchanging pictures also revealed other dimensions about the existing power relations between the boys and girls at Amber School. Boys' pursuit of receiving digital images from girls could sometimes result in threats and online sexual harassment of female peers, as expressed during one of the focus group interviews.

Interviewer: Why do you send pictures to each other? Is it because you like each other?

Students: [Giggle]

Interviewer: Do you think it is an embarrassing question? I am trying to understand this phenomenon, you know.

Matilda: You either like each other, but sometimes the girl has no choice.

Interviewer: Do you mean that you are sometimes pushed to send pictures?

Matilda: Mmm.

Interviewer: Okay, are they threatening you? Do they call you things, or what are they doing?

Matilda: Yes, and they gossip and spread fake rumours about you (Interview in pairs).

As expressed in the extract above, boys sometimes use threats to force girls to send more pictures. Girls in the study who had personal experience of this behaviour expressed uneasiness and frustration about being put in this position. Matilda was one of these girls. During an interview in pairs, with her and her friend, Matilda felt more comfortable relating her personal experiences of exchanging pictures on Snapchat. She had exchanged pictures with one of the boys in the class, a boy that she had a crush on. They exchanged semi-nude pictures (wearing underwear), and this experience had had a great impact on her everyday school life and well-being in school.

Interviewer: I understand that it is quite common for girls to receive non-consensual images from boys? [*here this means images of the boys themselves*]

Matilda: Yes it is.

Interviewer: I have also understood that there is this thing where girls receive non-consensual/dick pics from boys?

Matilda: Well, I usually do not receive a picture of their genitals, instead, they are nagging and say, 'If you don't send a picture, I'll get upset' or 'If you don't send a picture, I'll tell everyone that you've sent it anyway' and it goes on like that. There is this guy in my class that I like more than a friend, but the only thing he wanted was pictures of my body. I didn't want to disappoint him, because I thought it was going to lead to something else, that we were going to hang out and stuff like that, but the only thing he wanted was the pictures and he only wanted to take advantage of me and we are in the same class, so now I have anxiety when I go to school every day.

Interviewer: You haven't told any of your friends about it?

Matilda: Ester [a friend] knows a little, but she thinks I'm stupid that I even sent the pictures, so after I told her some parts about it, I did not dare to tell anyone else, because I think it was my own fault that it happened.

Tora: I don't think you have to blame yourself. Sure, it was a stupid thing to do, but come on.

Matilda: I think it was stupid to send them, but I'm such a fool.

Tora: I still understand why you sent them (Interview in pairs).

Matilda's story is strongly framed from a blame-herself discourse by referring to herself as a fool, and she was also too embarrassed to tell her friends about it because one of her friends had clearly expressed her contempt about the whole thing. By accusing herself for exchanging pictures, Matilda is also blaming herself. The boy who was nagging and pushing her to send those pictures is only described in terms of using her; he is not referred to in terms of being a perpetrator. During the same interview, her friend Tora expressed her understanding and support about the exchanging of pictures. Other narratives also reveal that the exchanging of pictures on Snapchat, and the consequences this has for girls, has an impact on the well-being and everyday life in school of the girls concerned, as expressed by Josefina: 'Well, you can make a screen shot of the picture and save it, you know. If that happens to you, then you feel very bad, because you don't know what that person will do with the picture. And I know that there are a lot of people who really feel bad about it!'

Regardless of gender, the students expressed their awareness of the different gendered expectations placed on girls and boys when sharing digital images. As one of the boys, Hans, puts it: 'For a guy, it isn't that problematic, it's considered more normal. If it's a girl, you kind of look down at her/.../. I don't know, but I also think, it's not only boys who talk bad about girls who have sent pictures, it's also girls who are against girls who have sent pictures and talk bad about them'. During one of the focus group interviews, one of the girls, Ester, confirms this: 'Have you heard that she or he has sent this! It's probably because she wants attention! What a slut!'

The results also reveal that some boys threaten to spread rumours of promiscuity about girls, even if these are untrue. The narratives reveal that girls who refuse to send pictures and take part in image sharing are exposed to different kinds of threats as well as rumour spreading.



Birgitta: Well, guys at this school say: 'You have done it!' They are lying that you've done it, even if you haven't sent a picture, you know.

Interviewer: So even if you haven't sent a picture they will lie about it?

Birgitta: Yes, they will. And they might also spread rumours that you have been sleeping with someone and things like that (Individual interview).

One of the male students, Karl, also reflected on the existing inequalities and the contradictions of the double moral standards surrounding this phenomenon: 'You know, it's so weird, I have heard that, even when someone [a girl] hasn't sent any pictures they have been called a whore. If that person doesn't do anything, she's still called a whore, you know'. Another student, Elvira, talks about this phenomenon as a form of extortion. Elvira also had personal experience of being exposed to this form of nagging.

Elvira: I have given them a straightforward answer: 'No, I'm not going to send any pictures and you will not receive any pictures from me, because I think it's disgusting, and you don't do things like that'. And then they text 'Please' and you respond 'No, I'm not going to send any pictures' and then they just reply 'Okay'. But you have to text no several times before they actually understand that I won't send any pictures (Individual interview).

As Elvira relates in the extract above, she had to tell the boy 'no' several times before he stopped asking her and understood that a no was actually a no. Elvira's response to the boys' nagging could be understood as a form of resistance and empowerment as well as an expression of *emphasized femininity* (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

The normalization of threatening girls to send pictures could be understood as part of a normalizing process of online sexual harassment among the boys at Amber School. The students' narratives also reveal that girls are exposed to threats and even extortion to get them to send images of themselves. It is also common that girls are exposed to slut shaming (see Ringrose & Harvey, 2015; Ringrose et al., 2013). Slut shaming takes different forms, including girls blaming themselves for sending images to boys, and friends failing to provide support when girls are made vulnerable. Slut shaming may target not only girls who send pictures, but also those who refuse to do so, and it can take the form of rumour-spreading and lies. It seems as if whatever the girls do they are at risk of being exposed to different threats, which has an impact on their well-being and everyday life in schools.

## Discussion

This study has shed a light on the phenomenon of sexting, particularly in the form of image-sharing, and online sexual harassment among students in a lower secondary school in rural Sweden. The results reveal that students' sexting behaviour has a great impact on everyday life in school and on the power relations between the students.

In their narratives, the students' discussions and experiences of sexts was gendered in many ways. Among the boys, sharing pictures with the 'guys' had become part of a bragging culture at the school. Receiving pictures from a girl was expressed, and even understood, in terms of digital 'trophies', and for the individual boy this could even result in gaining status in the peer group (see Kimmel, 2018; Ringrose et al., 2013). There was very little discussion or reflection among the boys concerning how a girl might feel about, and react to, a boy sharing her digital image without her consent. Also when we asked specifically about this, the boys expressed that they never talk to each other about the girl's view about this. This way of expressing male homosociality and hegemonic masculinity not only tends to maintain traditional homosocial bonds but also the male hegemonic order (see Connell, 2005; Hammarén & Johansson, 2014; Haywood et al., 2018; Kimmel, 2001, 2018).

In the case of the girls, the narratives reveal that the students' views of girls sending images of themselves was surrounded by double moral standards (cf. Cooper et al., 2016; Lippman & Campbell, 2014; Ringrose et al., 2013; Walker et al., 2013). Students, regardless of gender, discussed how girls

who had sent digital images of themselves were making themselves vulnerable and were taking risks, including the risk of being slut shamed. Also, individual girls who had personal experience of sharing pictures with a boy tended to blame themselves for this. As suggested by previous research, images of bodies that circulate online strongly reinforce gender inequalities, and images of the female body are more often subject to misogynist and sexist comments as well as ascriptions of sexual promiscuity (Ringrose et al., 2013; Salter, 2016).

The results also reveal that girls were exposed to nagging and threats if they did not send images of themselves. Some of the girls refused to do this and conformed to a form of emphasized femininity (see Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In contrast to previous research, the present results indicate that girls are subject to misogynist comments and threats, regardless of whether they do or do not share images of themselves.

The results also reveal that the boys who pushed and threatened girls to send more pictures were not discussed in terms of their being perpetrators; the boys 'get away' with their behaviour. No student, male or female, openly questioned this behaviour or referred to this behaviour as sexual harassment. For the individual girl, on the other hand, this has the potential of having a negative impact on well-being in everyday life at school; these are important findings that contribute to the field of education.

Our position as adults and academics asking questions about a topic many teenagers consider 'forbidden territory' was never an obstacle. Instead, this was a topic that most teenagers were open to discussing. However, depending on the group dynamics during the focus group interviews, the students sometimes had difficulties talking about these issues with/in front of peers. This was reinforced during the individual interviews and interviews in pairs, when students felt more comfortable discussing these matters more openly.

This study has contributed new and important insights into students' sexting behaviour and gender inequalities, and how these affect students' everyday lives in school. The limitation of this study is that it is a case of one single school, and therefore we cannot make any general conclusions regarding students' sexting behaviour and schooling across Sweden. Further cross-cultural studies are also needed. Still, we can say something about the local school culture in terms of how hegemonic masculinity and gender inequalities are expressed at Amber School. Future research in the field of education could contribute knowledge and insights regarding these issues in a wider frame. For instance, the views and experiences of how school personnel deal with students' sexting practices is a possible area for exploration. Our study has only focused on heterosexual sexting activities among students. Sexting among sexual minority students is also an important topic for further interrogation.

In previous studies it has been underlined that there is a need for schools to establish strategies for sexting prevention and for the prevention of online sexual harassment (Van Ouytsel et al., 2014). Additionally, Ringrose et al. (2013) have emphasized the urgent need to continue investigating gendered discourses and practices of teen sexting. In line with previous research we would also emphasize the need to discuss these issues in the context of school and, not least, take the students' views into account regarding these issues, as demonstrated in this article. Moreover, it is also necessary to critically discuss the normalization and dynamics of male homosocial cultures and how this affects girls' well-being in school (see Lee & Crofts, 2015). This study highlights the need for further research focusing on girls' experiences of digital sexual harassment and how this affects their well-being and everyday life in school. Students' sexting behaviour and practices need, however, to be addressed in the light of both boys' and girls' exposure to existing power relations and gendered processes within school as well as in society at large. To conclude, online sexual harassment should be taken as seriously as other forms of sexual harassment in school.

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