Chapter 9
Resisting Rape Culture Online and at School: The Pedagogy of Digital Defence and Feminist Activism Lessons

Jessica Ringrose (iD), **Kaitlynn Mendes** (iD), **Sophie Whitehead** (iD), **and Amelia Jenkinson**

Introduction: What Is Rape Culture?

> What is rape culture? Where do I start? With catcalling you know it's really anything from going out into the street and getting honked at or yelled at or harassed or anything. You know not being able to go out and feel safe. And rape culture… songs like 'Blurred Lines' exist which just boggles my mind. Because everyone just makes jokes about it and… somehow people get the idea that it's OK. And you know there's no education in schools to teach anyone – not just guys but everyone – it's not okay. Not just the practical, the science like a robot… the emotional side… about consent about talking to the other person. (Chloe, 17).

As articulately and passionately discussed by one of our research participants Chloe, rape culture is a term to define a social context where "sexual violence against women is implicitly and explicitly condoned, excused, tolerated and normalised" (Powell, 2015: 575). As Buchwald et al. (2005: 11) describe it, rape culture names "a complex set of beliefs that encourage male sexual aggression and

J. Ringrose (✉)
Department of Education, Practice and Society, UCL Institute of Education,
London, UK
e-mail: jringrose@ucl.ac.uk

K. Mendes
School of Media, Communication and Sociology, University of Leicester, Leicester, UK
e-mail: km350@le.ac.uk

S. Whitehead
School of Sexuality Education Charity & Doctoral Student, Digital Humanities King's
College Strand, London, UK
e-mail: sophie.whitehead@kcl.ac.uk

A. Jenkinson
School of Sexuality Education Charity, London, UK
e-mail: amelia@schoolofsexed.org

support violence against women". Sills et al. (2016: 936) offer a genealogy of the concept and its two key patterns of victim blaming and normalisation of heterosexualised masculine aggression:

> Introduced by feminists in the 1970s, the concept of rape culture provides a radical critique of conventional assumptions about rape as an aberrant act of a deviant individual. Rather, it suggests, rape is connected to and enabled by a myriad of everyday social and cultural practices (see Nicola Gavey, 2005). Two interlocking patterns are identified as creating the conditions of possibility for sexual violence: (1) victim-blaming and other discourses that minimize and excuse rape; and (2) taken-for-granted features of everyday heterosexuality that normalize and naturalize male sexual aggression and female sexual passivity (Gavey, 2005; Gavey & Senn, 2014). This "cultural scaffolding of rape" (Gavey, 2005) is widely tolerated within many societies even while rape itself is ostensibly condemned.

Critically, however, 'rape culture' takes on new forms, visibilities and capacities for spread in the era of digital social media (Rentschler, 2014; Salter, 2016). There is ample evidence of new formations of online misogyny in the broad form of Men's Rights Activism discourses, alt-right forums and spaces that condone and promote sexism, and heterosexual men's right to exert sexual coercion and violence (Ging, 2017). At the same time, as Carrie Rentschler (2014) has pointed out, social media offers a vital space for dissent and critique of rape culture for girls and women. Rentschler suggests that social media is an environment where a live struggle over the notion of rape culture is staged – where what rape culture is and how it can be defeated is being constantly navigated. Rentschlar calls this terrain of struggle a place where we can see the 'pedagogy of the concept' (2014, p. 68) being enacted – where feminists are struggling to have their stories and interpretations of rape culture be taken seriously in order to change consciousness about sexual violence.

While Sills et al. (2016) explored university students in New Zealand's views of rape culture, there has been limited empirical studies exploring the on the ground experiences of teen girls navigating the construct of rape culture (Jackson, 2018) – and even fewer positioned in school contexts which explore the complex entanglements of school life, peer groups and social media engagements. In 2014, we began a research project titled 'Documenting Digital Feminist Activism: Mapping feminist responses to new media misogyny and rape culture' which demonstrated the creative ways digital technologies have been harnessed to combat gender inequality, sexism and harassment (Mendes et al., 2019; Ringrose & Renold, 2014, 2016; Retallack et al., 2016). Across our international sample, girls universally discussed 'rape culture' as prominent in their online experiences and daily life at school. Girls (like Chloe above) pointed out that rape culture was rife for girls everywhere, but schools did not adequately address issues like consent and harassment; therefore, in effect legitimizing rape culture. This was a story we heard repeatedly throughout our field work.

UK schools are supposed to support student wellbeing associated with issues related to e-safety, digital literacy and bullying (Department for Education, 2018). Currently, government policy on this focuses predominantly on perceived harms and risks associated with social media use and does little to provide young people with the tools to gain confidence and resilience in voicing their views (such as

feminism) or to challenge inequities through supporting online political participation (Kim and Ringrose, 2018). Responding to this weakness in this chapter, we explore our data collected over the past 6 years from urban and rural secondary schools in England, looking at daily regimes of gender-based sexual violence, rape culture and lad culture in schools and online. We then discuss a collaborative intervention to better equip young people to participate online in feminist activism, and to challenge both online and school based sexual violence and rape culture.

The Normalisation of Predatory Lad Culture, Rape Culture and Sexual Violence in Schools

In this section, we explore research findings from a three-year school ethnography at North West Mixed Comprehensive Secondary in London. The school is in a middle class, affluent, leafy, highly desirable area of the city. Less advantaged children from neighbouring boroughs are bussed into the school, creating a mixed cohort of those who live nearby and those who commute there and back during the day. We started working at this school after learning about the group from a Feminist Activist Organisation in London and being invited to research the group from the man sociology teacher who supported and coordinated the group from its inception. From 2014–2017 we observed the feminist group (which expanded up to 60 members some years) 6 times and during two of these trips in 2014 and 2016 we conducted a total of 8 focus groups with 26 group members. We also observed a feminism in schools conference the group participated in. We are still in touch with the founder of the group who is now a feminist activist in her university context. The observation and interview data was supplemented with social media artefacts shared by our participants that we either reconstructed after interviews, captured through following their public social media accounts (Twitter), or screenshot capture methodologies where they shared their mobile phone screens with the researcher (Retallack et al., 2016; Jaynes, 2020).[1]

Our first overall observation about sexism, sexual harassment and sexual violence is its utter banality and normality reflected in our conversations with girls:

Ady: When it gets upsetting is when it's like… the whole rape culture thing, and sexism within lad culture.
Helen: it's just the idea of different roles for guys than it is for girls.
Diana: Also, I feel personally really uncomfortable when you're kind of surrounded by boys and they're talking about girls and giving their opinion on girls, you don't know what to say.
Ady: And, like, why are they talking about wanking while you're there. I just don't understand… Boys have done it in class before.

[1] We gained consent to use anonymized screen shots during the informed consent process of the data collection.

Carli: I think guys just talk about wanking, it's, like, normal. It isn't normal, like, what you do.

Diana: They make too many jokes about it and they do it again and again, it's like, wow, you're just so funny and unique, well done, you're hilarious.

I: Do they ever talk about girls doing it?

Diana: Yeah, they do. Well, they don't talk about girls doing it but they ask girls, and it's, like, well…

Carli: And they make you really feel uncomfortable.

Ady: Yeah, they're, like, so do you finger yourself, and then they go all giggly.

Carli: But…boys like making girls feel awkward…

Helen: Uh-hum, they love it.

Ady: …and if they can…a lot of the time…you know, not all boys, but some boys. And, you know, if that's a way of making girls feel awkward, just asking them straight up questions that society has made you feel like you can't answer without sounding either weird or prudish, you know. I don't know, it's difficult. (Focus Group 3, 2016)

Here, the girls move quickly from a question about sexism and challenges they face at school to a concrete example of boys talking about 'wanking' (masturbating) and questioning girls to make them feel uncomfortable. This is presented as entirely normal and expected by the girl telling the narrative. Interestingly, the girls do the conceptual work of linking what is transpiring to the language of lad culture and rape culture to dissect the behavioural norms that enable and legitimise these instances in school. Lad culture is specific to the British context describing the use of banter and humour to both perpetuate and legitimize masculine predatory sexual activity (Phipps et al., 2017). The girls discuss how boys use sexual 'humour' to create awkward and shaming conversations about femininity and sexuality, whilst normalising their own sexual needs in the daily rhythm of the school day, in lessons and school spaces. They also discuss the feeling that they are not able to respond critically to boys without sounding 'weird or prudish', indicating pressure to accept this banter and further harassment if they have the audacity to challenge the boys.

They quickly moved from verbal banter and abuse to discussing physical sexual harassment in the hallways:

Ady: what also happens is guys grabbing bums and…

Carli: …sticking pencils on your bum to pull out. That was a really big thing in year seven and eight, when we just came into secondary school…

Helen: I remember that, yeah.

Ady: …and it's really weird because it died down and we all kind of became 14 and 15, so it's stopped now, no one does it any more. If someone did that now, we'd definitely be, like, what, and it would be really weird.

Diana: Yeah. Boys have been excluded for slapping bums and stuff.

Carli: Yeah, boys have been excluded after that, but it was before that it was quietening now.

I: So that kind of leads on to my question of what's the school doing. So, what are the school's policies to protect you?

Ady: Not enough.

Diana: No, they have like a suspension policy on sexual harassment. So, if you sexually harass someone, they will…

Ady: Quite regularly, they say "*what was the girl doing*?" and stuff.

Carli: Sometimes *it's not enough what he's done*, *like, even if it's just making fun*…

Helen: If he's not stopping for the right reasons.

Ady: …they can just say, oh, he only had his arm around you*, it's nothing.* And if it's making you feel uncomfortable, obviously I didn't want that though, I was just trying to get to my next lesson, it's still not right. (Focus group 3, 2016)

Here, we can see the girls pointing out that despite an explicit school policy on sexual harassment, the everyday occurrences such as unwanted touching or "making fun" of girls are minimized as - "its nothing". This implicit tolerance of harassment feeds into rape culture in school. The burden is on girls to prove that something has happened to interrogate "what was the girl doing?". Here we see a direct parallel to the way sexual violence is addressed in the wider legal framework where the burden of proof is on the victims to prove something unwanted has happened and that this unwanted action is 'enough' to warrant some sort of sanction (Powell, 2015).

Sexualisation of Girls' Bodies: Dress Codes and Rape Culture

The girls also explicitly connected the sexualisation of girls bodies as leading to sexism in uniform policies and the regulation of school girls' skirts as a fundamental lynch pin in how rape culture materialised at school:

Kelly: There is a lot of hidden sexism within the school, like the whole thing with the uniform.

Dana: Completely.

Sam: School the biggest like some teachers take it like personal offence if a girl's got their skirt rolled up. They'll say oh, why do you want your legs out, why do you want people to look at you, you know, like do you want boys to touch you, do you want to distract boys from their work, things like that.

Dana: One student got called a porn star because she had her skirt rolled up.

Sam: Yeah and on non-uniform days, people were sent home for wearing short shorts and told to change.

Kelly: Awful. Like the headteacher, he's a man, he will look you up and down and decide whether its suitable or not.

Dana: You're appropriate or whether you're going to ruin the school. (Focus group 1, 2014).

Here teachers are the arbitrators of morality in the school, deeming girls' outfits 'appropriate' or not, with one girl referred to as a 'porn star' ostensibly by a member of the school staff. This discourse of appropriate attire bleeds across school culture and lends itself to a discourse where girls are judged on whether they 'respect themselves or not'; referring to a sexual double standard and slut shaming discourse where girls' sexual reputations are being inferred or read off of what they wear (a

fundamental tenet of rape culture which responsibilises women to stop men from sexualising and therefore desiring and pursuing them) (Egan, 2013).

Jules discussed learning about issues like school uniform rules and dress codes enabling rape culture, when she researched feminist activism in America:

Jules: I was looking at these rules they have and its literally ridiculous the things that girls are sent out of school for compared to boys and it's encouraging the rape culture by saying girls need to be told what they wear because boys are more horny than girls and therefore it's easy for them to rape you instead of teaching boys not to rape.(focus group 4, 2016)

This incisive analysis deconstructs the epistemology of rape culture where the focus is on girls' bodies as sexualised or inappropriate rather than boys' behaviour (or masculinity or male bodies).

Sexual Double Standards and Nudes

In the focus groups, the girls pointed out how sexual double standards were also rife online, leading to slut shaming and victim blaming. They showed us Instagram posts of male celebrities wearing no clothes being celebrated contrasting with posts of female celebrities being slut-shamed:

Ady: Yeah, like that thing that's going around Twitter at the moment, the thing with Justin Bieber…

Helen: Oh yeah.

Carli: …posting a picture of his bum.

Ady: And Demi Lovato.

Carli: …and everyone… all the comments are like, oh my God, turn around, oh my God. there's a hashtag, Turn Around Justin….And then Demi Lovato is like…

Diana: …you can see her side boob or something, can you?

Carli: Yeah.

Ady: Really not that bad. Her side boob showed…

Diana: Yeah, it's not that bad. She's wearing a small top and shorts, and all comments are, like, oh, you slag, put clothes on…

Ady: And also, if nudes of a guy gets leaked, it's like oh dear, wha-wha-wha, ha-ha-ha, funny- funny-funny. But if a woman's leaked …it's like, oh, what the hell.

Carli: She is the biggest slut!

Helen: Yeah.

Diana: And also, girls never ask for nudes, it's usually boys.

Ady: *Boys just send nudes to girls without actually asking.* It's just like why would you do that, we don't want to see your…

Carli: Yeah, like, I didn't ask for that, what are you doing, stop!

Helen: Yeah.

Diana: And also, on Tinder, if a girl is on Tinder, she's desperate. But if a guy's on Tinder, he's just like, you know.

Ady: I want to have sex.

I: How can you challenge that, because that's massive?

Ady: It's so expected with a boy, it's like "you're not God!"

Carli: Male entitlement.

Ady: I'm not going to date a hoe if she's like this, then she's a hoe. (focus group 3, 2016)
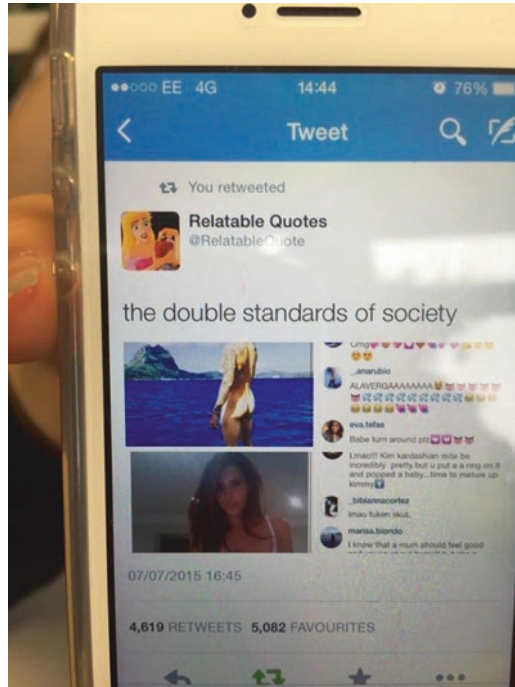

Image 1   Screen grab of @relatablequote Twitter post "the double standards of society"

In this passage, the girls discuss the sexual double standards of Demi Lovato vs. Justin Bieber from Twitter site, @relatablequotes. Lovato is slut-shamed for having the sides of her breast visible, whereas Bieber's nude buttocks are praised. They then turn to the double standards around girls' nudes and how if girls' nudes are 'leaked', they are slut-shamed. Following this, they discuss how nothing happens to boys who send unsolicited nudes (dick pics) to girls that don't want them. While this is a form of cyberflashing the girls describe how the boys feel this behaviour is "wha-wha-wha, ha-ha-ha, funny- funny-funny" a dramatic enactment of male banter around male nudity. The girls then extend their analysis into how these forms of gendered abuse continue in Tinder dating. The girls don't use dating sites but they are aware of sexual double standards in their future where girls on Tinder are

constructed as 'desperate' and boys can 'just want sex' due to male 'entitlement' whereas girls are a 'hoe' (whore). The girls again point to masculinity as the problem here, introducing the powerful phrase 'male entitlement' understood to be a core element of new formations of digital misogyny (Cockerill, 2019) The concept of male entitlement is pivotal for understanding how a fundamental imbalance empowers boys to have greater sexual freedoms than girls, and to demand sexual compliance from girls; but to also to shame the non-consensual sharing of girls nudes and justify the sending of unwanted dick pics to girls; which stem from a male 'God' complex, according to the girls. The likely source of their understanding of male entitlement logic has come from online platforms like Twitter and pedagogical accounts like @relatablequotes which showcase examples of sexism, sexual violence and rape culture. The girls dissect the lines of argument and epistemological basis of lad culture and sexual double standards in society as based in masculinity and entitlement. In the section below, we look at how girls work to tackle the internalisation of this normalised misogyny, taking to social media to report upon and challenge dynamics at school.

Documenting and Challenging Institutionalised Sexism through Social Media Activism

As we have seen, institutionalised sexism contributes to rape culture acceptance and legitimation (Alcoff, 2018) in and around schools and in peer group cultures. Salient in our findings about the experiences of teen feminists at North West Mixed Comprehensive Secondary was that they received a lot of negative comments and harassment from expressing their views when challenging sexual violence and rape culture at school (see also Ringrose & Renold, 2014, 2016).

> Today I left my lesson and walked a few meters before being tapped on the bum by a 12–13 year old boy. As any girl should I stopped, asked which one it was and explained how incredibly unacceptable it was to touch a girl's bum without her permission, and made everyone aware of what had just happened. Unsurprisingly neither boy owned up but simply laughed and blamed the other. I then had a group of young girls approach me saying things such as "Stop," "Calm down," "it's not a big deal" "it happens everyday," "don't worry." It makes me so angry upset and disappointed to think that these girls see it as OK to be inappropriately touched on a DAILY BASIS and see it as unnecessary to DO SOMETHING about it! I think it is so ironic that [the school] held a model United Nations Conference discussing the inequality women face globally only just last Saturday when they have cases of the discussions within the school. Something needs to be done. Girls and women need to know and understand that THEY should choose who and what touches THEIR bodies and that they are NOT public property for anyone to touch. Girls who laugh along or ignore these events are enabling and encouraging these boys or men to continue. Don't just stand there or move on DO SOMETHING!!! (Francesca's Facebook Post, 2015).

This post documents the experience of public institutionalised sexual harassment happening in the school hallway (the type described in above sections) as described by Francesca (age 16) through the medium of a public Facebook post which

generated 160 likes and 69 comments. In our discussion, a group of girls passionately discussed this incident, remembering the dialogue it provoked

Sam: Most of the comments were from boys saying like what's the deal? Firstly. Then comments from girls saying girl, pretty much the exact same thing happened to me and emojis... like praising her. Well done… and …showing support, be like yeah, I agree with you. (focus group 1, 2014)

This example shows how some of the peer group systematically try to deny the salience of the account as 'not a big deal'. Responding however, many of the girls resist this refusal and post positive messages of support and solidarity. Overcoming victim blaming and shaming, the connective capabilities of Facebook provided a space for these girls to "come together" to challenge rape culture amongst their peers. While it could be possible to conclude that challenging rape culture online is easy, it is often a risky and difficult practice, as toxic masculinities surface repeatedly.

In another example, the girls start to challenge posts on a peer's Facebook account. When a male schoolmate and Facebook friend posted a rape joke on another boy's Facebook wall, Robin responded with: "Are rape jokes funny? *winces.*" Another member of the feminist group, Andrea, chimes in to support this, commenting underneath Robin's post: "Yes, rape, that hilarious topic. Everyone loves a little rape," going on to suggest that the contributor think about how rape could affect girls and women in his family, such as his sister. After this comment, the boy turns violent calling Andrea "a f-ing bitch" and telling her to "shut the 'f' up" for talking about his sister.
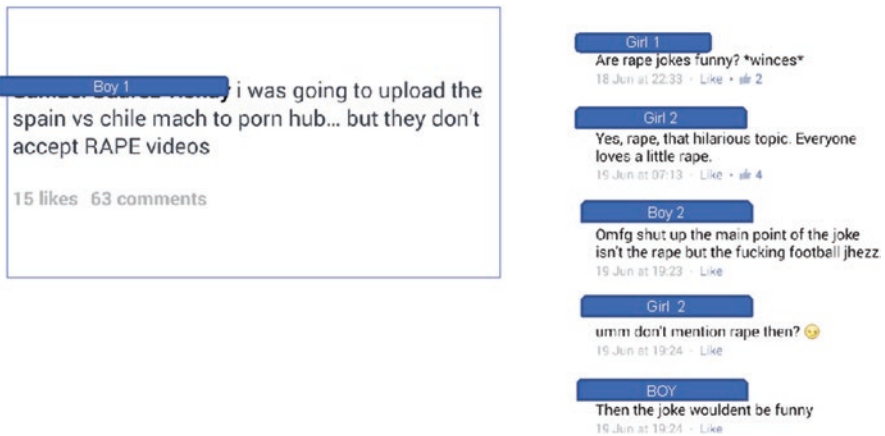

Image 2 Recreation of Rape Joke and challenge on boys Facebook Post

In yet another example, this time on Twitter, when the girls intervene in a discussion about rape culture, they are piled up on by multiple young male supporters of a local football club. They are then told by an account (claiming to be a young man) to 'go kill themselves' (See image 3):

Jane: They were just talking about rape and making it sound funny, having fun talk-
    ing about child abuse, it's so funny. No one laughed.

Christy: And they were saying, like, oh, you're just Nazis, go and make me a
    sandwich.

Jane: Feminazi.

Christy: It's like insults from idiots, like go and make me a sandwich.

Kelly: We were told to kill ourselves actually.

Dana: It's scarier trying to challenge rape culture than it is a lot of other stuff because
    there's *always so many people* that are willing to defend it. So it's all banter.
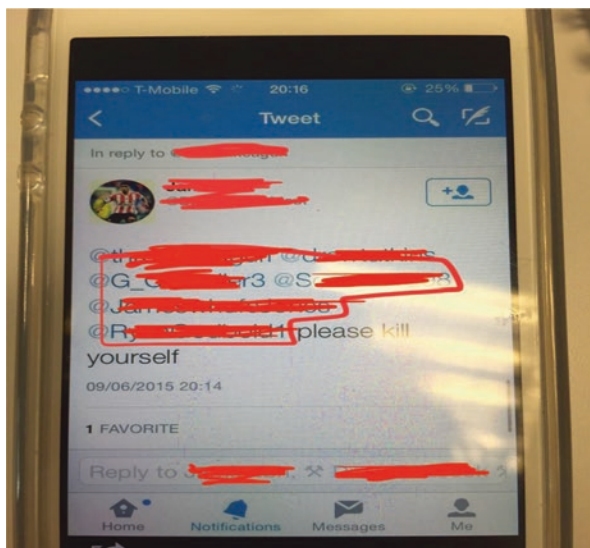   (Focus group 1, 2016)

Image 3 Screen grab of tweet to tell one of the girls to "please kill yourself" after they challenge
rape culture

Here, we see 'rape culture' take on new digital forms (Salter, 2016), with the
memetic spread of anti-feminist tropes like 'feminazi' and 'go make me a sand-
wich' being used in a reactive and combative way when men are called out for trivi-
alising rape and sexual assault. These forms of 'gendered hate' (Ging & Siapera,
2019) are spreading in what has been called new popular forms of networked
misogyny (Banet-Weiser, 2018: Vickery & Everback, 2018). Girls also face minimi-
zation and denial of their personal experiences of sexism (what has been colloqui-
ally referred to as 'gaslighting') as shown powerfully in the following focus group
encounter:

Carrie: It's kind of scary how ignorant some people are.

Dina: Yeah.

Carrie: I was talking about rape and stuff, I was talking about rape and FGM, and then my friend - well, not my friend - my classmate was, like, yeah, but that doesn't happen in the UK does it.

Jan: Oh no.

Dina: I feel like when you say you're a feminist or you say you're affected by sexism, loads of boys are, like, well, how does it affect you and stuff? And you say, well, I don't really appreciate being wolf whistled in the street, and stuff like that. And they're like, yeah, but that doesn't happen, and, oh, but how does that upset you, and stuff? So I think if I did a tweet, I'd want to quite shocking statistics about maybe not just stuff like wolf whistling and stuff, it would be more FGM and rape, so that they'd actually take the statistics and they would think, God, that actually is a big problem (focus group 4, 2016)

In this discussion, the girls explain that their own experiences of sexism (such as catcalling) are either denied 'that doesn't happen' or refused to be understood as upsetting by boys in their peer group. The girls lacked a sense of support around sexual harassment and sexual violence from schoolmates , and felt they should focus on 'shocking' issues like FGM, or other 'serious' issues happening to 'other' girls and in faraway places.

Indeed, we heard from multiple girls that making visible one's own experiences of harassment was the riskiest thing for girls to face. Sam (15, London) discussed tweeting about an episode of street harassment from her personal Twitter account:

I went on a run with my friend. On the way to the park we got beeped at twice, three times. We were running around the park, people were shouting like oh, sexy blah blah, blah. And then on the way back it happened again, and I exploded. I shouted at the person who did it. I screamed at them, I was so angry... So I went home and I tweeted about it. And then this guy tweeted me back—no idea who he was, no idea how he saw my tweet but he tweeted back "oh no you didn't you fucking whore". I was like you weren't there, I was there.

Sam suggested that sharing a unique personal tweet was more dangerous than defending feminism in general: "I think you get attacked more if it's something *you've said*." This type of gender trolling (Mantilla, 2013) on Twitter had an effect on our participants, some of whom began to disengage from tweeting personal experiences and to purposefully avoid challenging sexism in online debates.

Indeed, a combination of outside attacks, known peer group dismissal and harassment as well as institutional failure to support them made it difficult for girls to sustain their online feminist activism. Caroline (17, London) reported that she was concerned about making her Twitter account or Feminist YouTube channel known to any friends at school.

I think that if you're a girl, it's already hard to deal with social media because there's so much negativity, but I definitely am called out a lot for being a feminist by people who think it's funny and also by people who think it's wrong to believe that, and I often experience harassment for what I say and believe.

The school's inability to tackle sexual violence and rape culture in school and online was made worse by a failure to take seriously or support the girls' activism or challenges to these issues online, as seen across several of the focus groups:

Kelly: Like if it's an issue we're fighting trying to make people aware of and trying to make it more sort of universally accepted.
Jane: Like we're meant to be naïve to like the big issues, but we're not.
I: So how could the school support your activism?
Christy: I don't think they really care. (focus group 1, 2016)
Sally: A lot of activism within feminism and everything, a lot of it does actually challenge the education system in schools. So it's hard I guess for them to promote that and say you should be activists! (Focus group 2, 2016)
Carli: It's like school doesn't want anything to do with it.
Helen: We're not allowed to be online…
Ady: They're worried about offending anyone. All schools are so worried about offending people all the time. (focus group 3, 2016)

Not only is the environment within school sexist, with sexual harassment and rape culture normalised through formal school rules and informal youth culture, but girls are actively discouraged from talking about and fighting against these issues. Despite this repressive and discouraging context, many girls were adamant that the key to transforming these issues was more education about respect and consent both within the school and in the outside world. The girls in the below focus group describe what they would like to learn about in relation to issues of rape culture both online and off:

Helen: But also, I think the school doesn't have… it's fair enough to have, oh, yeah, we'll suspend someone if they sexually harass you, like, it's okay, it's fine, but also there's no education, no one's… there's no rules set, there's no lessons about how to respect people. We never had a lesson on consent really.
Interviewer: What do you want to be taught about… or if you could design it yourself?
Carli: *A lot about consent.*
Helen: Yeah.
Ady: A lot about what's *right and what's wrong*. (focus group 3, 2016)

Social Media Activism: An Important Space for Resistance

Despite these issues, girls persisted with their feminist activisms online. Terri (17, London) remained convinced that her Twitter feed was a place where followers will be 'forced' to see her feminist views:

Terri: I share things and post things that combat oppression and patriarchy. It is not just a feminist discourse but an overall social justice discourse, but for me, they are one in the same. I do not hold back in what I share because I know that as an

'activist' it is my duty to 'spread the word' and make people see things that they would not see otherwise. I consider it my responsibility to spread that word because without me, maybe no one else would ever share such a message, and my followers would not ever hear about it or be forced to think about it (social justice, power systems, oppression, etc).

Social media platforms were viewed as crucial for creating 'safe' spaces in which teens could connect with others, follow and gain feminist understandings and possibly share their views. Online connections could lead to participating in activism and protest online, in school and also outside the school spaces for some. Digital technologies were therefore pedagogically important for not only *learning* about feminism, but for *changing their own life* and possibly the lives of others, despite the risk of further attack because of an explicit failure of schools to support them. As a result, we argue that schools *require* tools to understand and support this activism, as we explore in the second part of this chapter below.

Digital Defense and Activism Lessons and Workshops

In the final sections of this chapter, we explore workshops on digital feminist activism developed in partnership with School of Sexuality Education, a non-profit charity organisation providing comprehensive and inclusive sex and relationships education workshops for teenagers in the UK. Our lesson plans directly respond to schools' failure to protect students from everyday sexism, sexual violence and rape culture, as well as supporting young people's development of critical consciousness, and feminist views challenging this culture. The workshops are creative and interactive and aim to provide teens with a comprehensive digital feminist activism 'toolkit'.

We identified two key areas of support needed to combat rape culture in school. Firstly, the need to help all young people to better understand gender (particularly masculinity), sexuality and consent; secondly, the need to give them the practical tools to safely practice feminist politics – to combat and challenge abuse at school and online. It was critical to provide support on gender norms leading to sexual violence with a focus on masculinity rather than what girls have done 'wrong'. We also needed to cover the meanings of rape culture and provide the basics of consent for young people, outlining how this relates to embodied material experiences and online behaviours. We also wanted to introduce practical activities to empower gendered activisms.

The data in this section comes from sessions piloting our workshop plans designed to combat rape culture and trial feminist activism in two schools, South East London Academy and South West Comprehensive. SEL Academy is a co-educational mostly working class school with a high immigrant population in a densley populated borough of London. South West Comprehensive (SWC) is a co-educational comprehensive school in rural Devon with a predominantly white

student population. The differences in the schools is not purposeful but convenience based on school availability and willingness to participate in the pilot sessions. The teachers at both these schools were keen to create school wide resources and tackle cultural change around sexual violence and harassment in the school. In many ways, this represented a more progressive and forward-looking position around problems in the schooling environment than our earlier research school, which refused to make fundamental changes to the school uniform policy or endorse the girls' online activism.

Toxic Masculinities Shifting the Focus Onto Boys' and Men's Behaviour

At SEL Academy, we worked with a mixed gender group of 15 year nine BAME (Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic) students. Lessons began by teaching about gender norms and concepts of hegemonic and toxic masculinity (Ging & Siapera, 2019), to prompt discussion about how male predatory aggression and entitlement fosters rape culture. When we introduced the term 'toxic masculinity', it led to very interesting discussions about guns and crime in their area and the boys' referred to a form of extreme pride they witnessed amongst male gang members, which was their only reference point for explicitly thinking about masculinity.

Next, during our discussion of 'rape culture', the girls suggested it was when "people think rape is OK and blame girls," this quickly turned without prompting to a discussion of how difficult it was to report sexual harassment in school and issues of failures of consent in the peer group. The girls told us of the huge difficulties they had in reporting any abuse, saying that if they ever tried to report boys sharing of girls' nudes without consent, boys could come up and say "why are you baiting me out?" They also told us that reporting to staff would have "repercussions" but not helpful ones, so that pursuing it would not be worth it since "the school wouldn't take it seriously if it was just verbal abuse." The boys in this group responded reactively to this discussion, saying a girl could "expose him for asking for an image by screenshotting it [the request] and showing it to a teacher."

In this discussion, we can see a conflict between girls feeling unable to report abuse, and boys confirming this indignantly saying they are afraid that if they ask for nudes girls will 'expose' them. Girls are accused of 'baiting' boys to teachers if they seek help. We can see how ingrained the sexism and masculine entitlement is in this peer context where girls are expected to stay in line and protect boys from the possible repercussions around their actions as they could get them in trouble. This is an interesting class and racial dynamic where girls feel they should not expose the boys in their peer group to further scrutiny or punishment, reinforcing research demonstrating that black boys are subject to much higher rates of exclusion, assumptions of criminality and racial double standards in schools (Gillborn, 2008). This acts to limit girls' potential for speaking out about sexualised violence.

Nonetheless the girls continued to discuss how sexual practices for girls and boys were unfair. Girls said "if a boy has a high body count it wouldn't make him a slut," meaning boys are praised for bragging about sexual activity. In contrast, they noted that girls are "slut shamed" or called a "sket" (slut) based on what you are wearing and they also said "some girls are attacking other girls". Our discussions showed how girls' bodies were policed around their clothing in sexualised ways that boys are not. Students also raised the problem of internalised misogyny (how girls attack and slut shame one another based on sexual morality). The girls spoke about boys being able to send nude images of their penises anonymously, meaning there is less chance of them being 'leaked' and 'exposed' than girls' nudes, and also complained about being sent such images when they were not wanted (cyberflashed) as was discussed with the earlier groups of girls above. The girls also noted a common practice where "older boys are asking younger girls to send them nudes… screenshotting them and sharing them without permission". They would try to earn the trust of a younger girl, then, after getting an image and or sexual services, would cut the girl off – "beat and delete". The boys jumped in here to point out that "girls do that all the time [send nudes]", effectively erasing the girls point that boys are pressuring girls for nudes as well as sharing images without permission.

Throughout the lesson the focus was moved repeatedly back onto the girls sexual reputation and morality around their images. The girls are responsibilised for taking risks by creating/sending nude imagery (Dobson & Ringrose, 2015). Given the strict legal definition of imagery of under 18 s being illegal, despite this criminalisation being rarely practiced in schools, such a focus makes it difficult to shift attention onto abuse – that is perpetrators who pressure girls and/or distribute images without consent. Where adults, schools and young people may be aware that images of under 18 year olds are a form of child sexual abuse, there is little to no awareness in many schools and peer groups of non-consensual image sharing as an illegal practice (McGlynn and Rackley 2017; McGlynn et al., 2019), constituting a form on online sexual harassment (see Ringrose, Mendes, Horeck, 2020).

Teaching Consent Education

Next in the lessons, we aimed to challenge these logics of sexual harassment, the fear of reporting harassment, abuse and sexual violence, slut shaming and victim blaming of girls which are all a part of rape culture narratives. To show young people about the logics of victim blaming, we explicitly discussed the legal and cultural treatment of rape and trends of misinformation and myths about 'false rape allegations'. We referred to popular culture trends of rape myths and disinformation where boys repeat claims that rape accusations ruin men's lives (Weiser, 2017). Discussing rape myths sparked important debate between the girls and boys in the group.

I: Let's discuss myths around rape, what about the idea that men cannot be raped?
Jamal: Why would a man ever turn down sex?

Kamil: And if a guy said he was raped no one would believe him.
Jamal: The woman ruined the boy's life.
Zahair: Allegations are they backed up by evidence or not?
Kamil: If he raped the person and it's not true – it did ruin their life.
Zahair: People believe the girl.

Here we can see that boys discuss men and boys as victims if they are accused of sexual violence. There is a reversal of girls as victims of sexual violence into a form of "aggrieved masculinity" (Kimmel, 2015) where men become the victims of a supposedly rigged system privileging women and girls, who make accusations of violence that ruin men's lives. The strength of this narrative and its common sense-ness here shows how ingrained and pervasive it is amongst young people.

To correct this false-rape myth, the lesson goes on to report key sexual violence statistics in which only a small fraction of women's rape allegations are false (Crown Prosecution Service, 2013). After outlining how rape culture creates contexts of misinformation, denial and victim blaming of women and girls, we move back to the personal context of bodily autonomy and sexual behaviour – explicitly joining up the wider political discussion to the personal and lived contexts of young people something advocated by Renold's (2019) Relationship and Sexuality Education guidance on working on 'experience near' issues so that they are relatable to young people's everyday lives.

We do this by teaching young people that it is our personal responsibility to get enthusiastic consent (in person and online) through reference to practices that they are familiar with, such as touching up at school; or the expectation that girls' bodies are a form of currency for boys to gain status online and offline. We explore how it is not the other person's job to say 'no' – that we need ongoing and explicit communication – including learning about 'soft nos' or the idea that because someone has not gotten very angry or pushed you away does not amount to consent. Through this, we can teach that simply not resisting, is not consent; or that sending a photo of a penis to someone without their enthusiastic consent is a form of cyberflashing and online sexual harassment. We introduce these new sets of terminology to young people beyond the common policy frameworks of 'sexting' and 'bullying' towards the legal facts and terminology including image based sexual abuse so that they can learn how to identify, report and protect themselves.

During the workshop at SEL Academy, the focus on consent around image sharing continued to be met with resistance from the boys, who wanted to put the focus on the girl sending the nudes and blaming the victim:

Marcus: It's girls *sending* nudes.
Reginal: Yeah certain accounts that girls send too; there are anonymous nudes.
Sakeem: Some girls are *sending their body out there*.

To combat this common preoccupation with girls doing something illegal by creating images rather than putting the emphasis on the non-consensual sharing of intimate images, we address these gendered logics by offering the steps in detail and where nudes go from consensual and ethical to abusive and criminal. Shifting away

from the problematic legal terrain which criminalises youth sexters (Dobson & Ringrose, 2015), the language used by facilitators in the classroom, and resources emphasises that it is the *showing or sharing* of a private sexual image of someone without their consent is unethical and illegal. We highlight to young people what the process of consensual image sharing might look like e.g. a photo is consensually taken and shared with agreements made between the sender and recipient about when it will be deleted.

UNDERSTANDING IMAGE-BASED SEXUAL ABUSE

'Image-based sexual abuse' refers to the non-consensual creation and/or distribution of sexual images. This could include images of a sexual nature shared without the consent of the person in the photo. Sharing sexual images must be approached and taught within a framework of ethics, rights and consent.

POSSIBLE STEPS IN NUDE SENDING

Person A and B discuss sending nudes - either mutually or one to the other.

One person takes a nude and sends it to the other, or they exchange nudes.

UNDER A CONSENT, RIGHTS AND ETHICS APPROACH…

Neither person threatens, coerces or pressures the other to send nudes. Both feel comfortable to say if they're not up for it. If one person isn't up for it, the other person spots that and is completely respectful of that.

The people involved may agree certain privacy rules around the nudes, so that there's informed consent. Both act with integrity by sticking to this agreement, and don't break the other person's trust.

IMAGE-BASED ABUSE OCCURS WHEN…

The person who has received the other person's nudes breaks their trust and violates their privacy and dignity by sharing their nudes without consent. This is abuse, and it is never the fault of the person who sent the photo.

Image 4 Lesson slide on image-based sexual abuse (The School of Sexuality Education lesson plan graphics are reproduced with consent of Amelia Jenkinson CEO and further information and guidance can be found on their website: https://schoolofsexed.org)

Finally, after we introduce these key steps in digital consent, we also offer students advice which they may have never before received about how to report to an authority beyond the school or parents if they experience image based sexual abuse. We signpost platforms such as the 'Internet Watch Foundation' which can work to remove sexual images of under 18 s from the internet. This information can be a real shift for the young people depending on the context and their awareness of gender inequity. At SEL Academy, the information opened up conversation and concerns they had been unable to discuss previously. For instance, one young person wanted to know if they reported abuse did the schools or authorities have to report it to their parents? From these conversations, we can glean just how important it is for safe

and anonymous reporting for young people to empower them to be able to use tools to enact the shift to understanding and taking image based sexual abuse seriously and contending with it in contemporary youth digital sexual cultures.

Workshopping How to Be a Digital Feminist Activist

Another critical element of our lesson plans is aimed at helping young people to understand feminism and mobilise gender-based activism, through creative uses of digital media particularly in the face of anti-feminist resistance, gender trolling (Mantilla, 2013) and harassment which we outlined in the earlier sections of the chapter. Taking stock of the strategies described by the feminist girls in our research, we developed a lesson plan enabling young people to explore the idea of political voice through first sharing a range of activist work: live tweeting, hashtag campaigns, group Instagram pages, memes and artwork, vlogs and blogs. The lessons explore the merits of different activist tactics and social media spaces, and how anonymity, multiple accounts and closed group chats can help to protect personal safety and wellbeing when you speak out on a political issue and could be attacked as we saw was the case from the girls in North West Mixed Comprehensive School. We piloted these lessons over a two-day session at South West Comprehensive. The school is in a rural location, and the students were all white and aged 13–16. The teacher had selected students to attend who they thought might be particularly interested in the session; it was a mixed gender group of girls, boys and trans gender young people. Having two days to work on these issues with young people presented a unique extended period to explore feminism and the possibilities of youth activism.

At the beginning of the sessions, when we asked, "what is feminism", many initial responses centred around how "feminist" is used as an insult. One student said, "if a picture of an angry looking woman is shown in class, people will say, 'oh they're a raging feminist'". There was a sense that if you used feminism to describe yourself, people would make negative assumptions about you. One student also mentioned anti-feminism on the internet; she described videos that are staged but people might not think they are, showing "feminists doing extreme things". We asked whether they'd heard of Men's Rights Activism and a lot of people said yes. From here, we looked at a series of case studies drawn from the feminist group at North West Mixed Comprehensive Secondary, outlined above. The case studies include girls challenging rape jokes online on Facebook, girls challenging sexist uniform code through Twitter hashtagging, and experiences of anti-feminist threads and harassment and trolling online. Exploring real-life examples derived from research with young people resulted in interesting discussions of similarities and differences in their own experiences. We also offered examples of positive and affirmative activism in school settings to challenge these dynamics, including some activism on Twitter and Tumblr, such as creating signs and posters to challenge rape

culture, with sayings like "I need feminism because when I'm a slut, he's a lad" and "I need feminism because I don't want to 'take it as a compliment'".

Finally, after exploring different types of digital activism, we showed them how to design memes for the image-sharing platform, Instagram. Over both days, students logged in and posted on a digital activism Instagram account (@digitalactivists) which the group jointly created through the participatory methods made for the workshops.

One student was particularly adept at making memes, noting it was something she often did in her spare time. Another girl made body positivity posts on Instagram and shared one which she had already made on the @digitalactivists Instagram account. Another group of girls started a body positivity Instagram page (linked to on the @digitalactivists account). Although this was a mixed gender group, the three boys were much quieter than the girls and broadly less engaged in the activism. Despite this, the students worked together to generate some activist memes, led by the most engaged girls within the group. What follows are a few salient examples of the range of content that they designed which creatively responds to everyday rape culture, sexual harassment, slut shaming and denials of sexual violence and toxic, entitled masculinity.

In the example above the young people are drawing attention to the everyday banality of rape culture and sexual harassment in public – referred to as street harassment. The simplicity of the statement works to underscore the validity of the claim; that in their current context a day without cat calling is 'impossible' to

imagine. The meme calls for an alternate imaginary of a world where this may be possible. This meme was developed by a small group of four girls within the workshop who initially discussed the issues they collectively face and the things they'd like to fight back against.

In the next example, the girls make a handmade sign, complete with typos, in order to protest being told they 'look like a slut'.
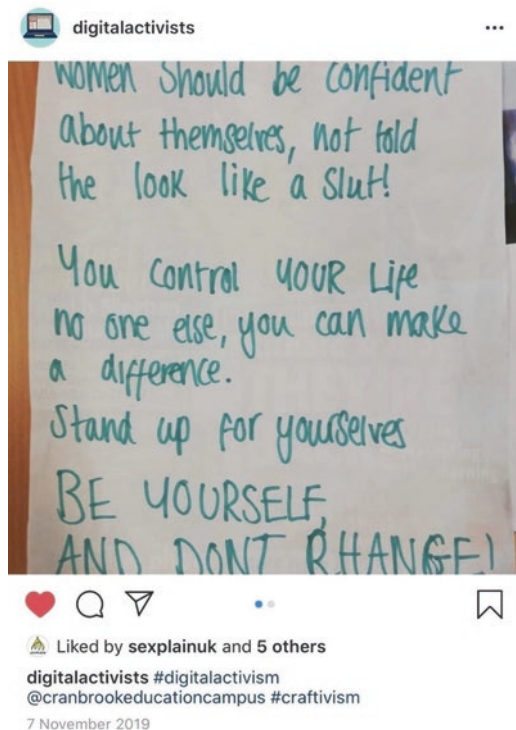
The fundamental dynamic of being sexualised and objectified and having one's appearance the subject of scrutiny rather than male behaviour is at the centre of this messaging. The girls invoke women and girls to 'stand up for themselves' 'be yourself' 'don't change'. This neoliberalising focus on the individual invokes confidence as a magical quality, with limited acknowledgement of the impact of socially unjust structures of women's lives (Ringrose, Tolman, Ragonese, 2018). Nonetheless, the girls are exploring possibilities for resistance and fighting back against unfair sexual double standards and slut shaming endemic in rape culture.

In the final meme, we can see how the young activists build on the gender theory and concepts of toxic masculinity discussed in the workshops and the prevalence of reversals of victimisation in rape culture myths such as those that promote high rates of false rape allegations, to challenge what Lingard (2003) has called in educational contexts "recuperative masculinity politics". This is where men are considered the new victims of gender shifts, such as logics around 'failing boys'. The girls use a global figure of toxic masculinity – Donald Trump – to point out the problems with the 'men as victims' paradigm which is particularly strong in Men's Rights Activism discourses online (Ging, 2017). In the image Trump is represented as 'mansplaining' men's victim status, while the Finnish president Sauli Niinistö, who represents women looks away in exasperation.

Towards the end of this lesson, we also emphasised the importance of self-care, how to spot the signs that you should take a break from your activism, and how to navigate the heavy role of being the 'spokesperson' for feminism. Through this, we hope to support teen feminists to develop personalised activist strategies that are the most manageable, efficient and impactful they can be.

Digital habits for self care

Limit app usage with in-phone timers

Turn off read receipts/last seen

Notifications off Phone on silent

Replace phone with an alarm clock

Unfollow/mute accounts that make you feel :(

Practice sleep hygiene (no screens in + before bed)

Follow accounts that nourish you

A common challenge which we face in these sessions is preventing the experienced feminists in the class from doing additional emotional/activist labour during discussions. We are often conscious of the effort expended by girls to educate their (largely cis male) peers about sexism. Whilst we as facilitators can of course take on that task for them, we have to judge when they want to be the ones to do the challenging and when they don't. We also face the difficulty of having to decide when a comment or a question falls into hate speech territory (Ging & Siapera, 2019), and therefore is inappropriate to engage with as a legitimate point for discussion. Our facilitators aim to mitigate against and manage this through raising these as potential issues from the start, and clearly laying out systems that we will use to maintain a safe space for all, including expectations from participants which can be referenced back to when required.

Conclusion

This chapter has documented some of the challenges of persistent rape culture in schools and online and tracked how some young people are responding to this through reporting on our in depth ethnographic research of a London secondary school feminist group. Having isolated key rape culture discourses that materialise for girls at school, we also showed the girls developing activist feminist consciousness through their online engagements. Taking our cue from the "pedagogy of the concept" (Rentschler, 2014) – the showing of *what rape culture is and tactics of resistance* modelled by the teen feminists in our research - we next outlined

resources we developed to spiral out this resistance through pedagogical engagements in two further schools with wider groups of young people. The aim of our workshop sessions and resources is to open up debate and understandings of rape culture and sexual violence and harassment at school and online with young people through lesson plans that responded directly to the issues raised in the original research.

Given the challenging topics it addresses, our lesson plan programme is reliant on good relationships with schools and a supportive teacher or ally within the school. We face the challenge of needing to build a rapport with institutions and senior leaders to reach young people and support them given the lessons will; likely be critiquing the institutional rules and regulations (e.g. their school uniform policy, their sexting policies). It is the most conservative institutions where this intervention is most needed, We are also aware that we may inadvertently demoralise students by highlighting issues which can be difficult to immediately change or solve, such school enforced gender binary uniform policies or the focus on girls not to 'sext' given the current criminalisation of all youth sexual images ; rather than an understanding of non-consensual sharing and image based sexual abuse online. As a team we navigate this by highlighting to schools how the programme promotes children's rights, digital citizenship, equity, diversity and empowerment, notions which most institutions can get behind. We have also found that training staff in how to expand the Digital Defence classes into their whole-school approach, by aligning policies, procedures and role modelling by staff is critical.

Overall, we have shown how our digital defence and activism strategies offer some concrete tools for addressing rape culture such as engaging with debates on key topics like rape myths, slut shaming, victim blaming and toxic masculinity. We demonstrated some of the challenges of teaching this content but the need to persevere as these sessions may be the first-time young people have ever encountered an analysis of sexism, sexual double standards, sexual harassment and rape culture in society and online. We also discussed the ongoing challenges of creating and sustaining feminist gender-based activisms that challenge rape culture in schools. Through designing an in-depth programme based on teen feminists' experiences and ideas, we are aiming, however, to create contexts in schools where young people, teachers, parents and the entire community can see that calling out rape culture and empowering young feminist activisms is valued and valuable social justice work, which deserves to be taken seriously.

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