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Commodified Sexual Interactions Involving Minors

Evolving dynamics in technology-facilitated child sexual exploitation

Research conducted by Thorn in partnership with Burson Insights, Data & Intelligence

THORN 

Burson

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Acknowledgments

Understanding the complex intersection of technology and child sexual abuse empowers us to safeguard kids from the ever-evolving threats they face online. Without direct insights from the young people encountering these issues every day, we risk falling behind in developing valuable resources for them to navigate the digital age safely.

Thank You

We are grateful to the participants who took the time to complete the survey and especially to those who provided detailed descriptions of their lived experiences. Without their gracious participation, we could not have developed the key insights shared in this report about their experiences with technology-facilitated sexual exploitation.

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Research team

Amanda Goharian, Thorn
Melissa Stroebel, Thorn
Sam Fitz, Burson Insights, Data & Intelligence
Sarah Gudger, Burson Insights, Data & Intelligence
Arielle Jean-Baptiste, Burson Insights, Data & Intelligence
Patrick Toomey, New River Strategies

Design and publication

Yena Lee, Thorn
Cassie Coccaro, Thorn

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Introduction

Since 2019, Thorn has focused on amplifying youth voices to better understand their digital lives, with particular attention to how they encounter and navigate technology-facilitated forms of sexual abuse and exploitation. Previous youth-centered research has explored topics such as child sexual abuse material (CSAM) – including that which is self-generated (“SG-CSAM”) – nonconsensual resharing, online grooming, and the barriers young people face in disclosing or reporting negative experiences.

In recent years, young people have been encountering sexual interactions involving money and other items of value in their digital lives at an alarming rate, and may, at times, be advertising personal imagery.¹ Technology has previously been recognized as a key enabler in the commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) – facilitating unprecedented access to minors, enabling novel “advertising” models, introducing new forms of abuse (e.g., live-streamed child sexual exploitation), and strengthening illicit market networks for CSAM.² However, the apparent commodification of sexual interactions involving minors, without a clear third-party facilitator, points to an evolution within technology-facilitated forms of sexual exploitation.³

Box 1 | **Key Terms Used in This Report**

KEY TERM	DEFINITION
Child sexual abuse material (CSAM)	Any visual depiction of sexually explicit conduct involving a person less than 18 years old. ⁴
Self-generated child sexual abuse material (SG-CSAM)	Explicit imagery of a child that appears to have been taken by the child in the imagery. This imagery can result from both consensual and coercive experiences.
Commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC)	Refers to a range of crimes and activities involving the sexual abuse or exploitation of a child for the financial benefit of any person or in exchange for anything of value (including monetary and non-monetary benefits) given or received by any person. ⁵
NEW KEY TERM Commodified sexual interactions involving minors <i>Given the evolving sexual exploitation dynamics investigated in this report, a novel term is used to enhance understanding, distinction, and clarity of reference throughout.</i>	Refers broadly to the exchange of items of value (both monetary and non-monetary) for a sexual interaction (e.g., chat, imagery) with a minor. This is not intended to include the reciprocal exchange of sexual imagery in the context of flirting or dating between minors. While commodified sexual interactions involving minors will typically meet the definition of commercial sexual exploitation, the authors use this terminology to emphasize the less often considered role of social capital and the emerging role of online social influence as a form of compensation.

1 Thiel, D., DiResta, R. & Stamos, A. (2023). *Cross-platform dynamics of self-generated CSAM*. Stanford Internet Observatory, Cyber Policy Center. <https://stacks.stanford.edu/file/druid:jd797tp7663/20230606-sio-sg-csam-report.pdf>

2 Thorn & Bouche, V. (2015). *A report on the use of technology to recruit, groom and sell domestic minor sex trafficking victims*. https://www.thorn.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Survivor_Survey_r5.pdf; Mitchell, K.J. & Jones, L.M. (2013). *Internet-facilitated commercial sexual exploitation of children*. Crimes against Children Research Center, University of New Hampshire. <https://scholars.unh.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1037&context=ccrc>

3 Walsh, W., Finkelhor, D., Turner, H., & O'Brien, J. (2024). Online commercial sexual exploitation of children in a national victim survey. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*. Advance online publication. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1037/tra0001821>

4 U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (2024). *Key definitions*. Know2Protect. <https://www.dhs.gov/know2protect/key-definitions>. Under United States federal law CSAM is referred to as “child pornography.” See 18 U.S.C. § 2256(8); 18 U.S.C. § 1466A.

5 In the United States, any commercial sex act involving a minor under the age of 18 is illegal, as minors cannot legally consent to such acts. This remains true regardless of a minor’s perceived agency or willingness to consent, as fraud, force, or coercion do not need to be overtly present or otherwise established. While CSEC is not legally defined by federal statute or case law, several federal criminal provisions can be applied to conduct that can be classified as CSEC, including 18 U.S.C. §§ 1591, 2251, and 2423(c). Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. (2024). *Sexual Exploitation of Children*. <https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/programs/sexual-exploitation-children>

Thorn explored this new development as part of its recent *Emerging Threats to Young People* survey, which examines emergent online risk areas to better understand how current technologies create and/or exacerbate child safety vulnerabilities and to identify areas where solutions are needed. This report sheds light on some of the ways in which the intersection of technology and romantic or sexual relationships impacts young people and increases their risk for exploitative interactions. These risks include commodified and/or commercial exchanges for nude imagery and/or involvement in sexual acts. Other reports from the series address additional issues, including the emergence of deepfake nudes⁶ and the evolving nature of sextortion.⁷

Drawing on responses from a survey of 1,200 young people aged 13-20, this report examines their lived experiences with technology-facilitated sexual solicitations and involvement in commodified exchanges. Three key findings emerged from this research:

- 1. It's common for young people to receive sexual solicitations⁸ online, often after only a brief period of connection between users.** One in 3 (36%) young people reported they had received a solicitation to send sexual imagery of themselves from an online-only contact while they were under the age of 18. Most (79%) of these solicitations were received within a week or less of connecting with the other user.

- 2. For some young people, technology-facilitated sexual experiences have been commodified, with young people receiving both monetary and non-monetary (e.g., social opportunities) forms of compensation.** One in 7 (15%) young people reported engaging in at least one form of transactional sexual experience while under the age of 18. And 33% of those who had indicated they received social opportunities, like invites to parties or more online followers, as part of their compensation.

- 3. Markets for the commercial sexual exploitation of children appear to be expanding, driven, in part, by emerging buyer dynamics that capitalize on vulnerabilities linked to technology-facilitated sexual exploration among young people.** Among young people who had a commodified sexual experience as a minor, 25% indicated they never received a solicitation to sell their content, 59% indicated they exclusively knew their buyers online, and 42% indicated they had a buyer who was another minor.

⁶ Thorn. (2025). *Deepfake nudes & young people: Navigating a new frontier in technology-facilitated nonconsensual sexual abuse and exploitation*. https://info.thorn.org/hubfs/Research/Thorn_DeepfakeNudes&YoungPeople_Mar2025.pdf

⁷ A report presenting Thorn's findings from the sextortion portion of the *Emerging Threats to Young People* survey will be available later in 2025.

⁸ In the context of this report, a sexual solicitation refers to a young person receiving a request to, or offer to engage in, sexual interactions, including but not limited to sharing sexual imagery of themselves (SG-CSAM), engaging in sexual talk, or engaging in other forms of sexual activity while under the age of 18.

Methods & Research Design

Research into the online experiences of young people — and how those experiences intersect with the potential for harmful sexual interactions — presents unique and ever-evolving research challenges. Some of these challenges and their corresponding mitigation strategies are outlined below.

Challenges

CHALLENGE: The topics covered in this research represent complex and evolving online risk areas for young people.

Mitigation: This research provides preliminary insights into emerging threat areas impacting young people, with particular attention to how technology misuse facilitates and exacerbates child sexual exploitation and abuse. Dedicated, in-depth survey instruments should be developed for each topic individually to achieve a more comprehensive understanding. Therefore, the findings presented in this report are intended as foundational perspectives, highlighting areas for further investigation and encouraging deeper exploration into young people's experiences.

CHALLENGE: Nuance exists across demographics and among those with different lived experiences.

Mitigation: This research aimed to identify trends among young people overall and within some significant subgroups — such as age and gender groups. A secondary objective was to understand

how participant experiences may manifest differently across other demographics. To this end, survey recruitment incorporated enhanced quotas of some demographic subgroups to ensure base sizes that were large enough for analysis.⁹ Nevertheless, given sample size limitations, some data points within subgroups are most appropriately viewed as starting points for additional research.

CHALLENGE: Entrenched stigma and sensitivity surrounding these topics may lead to an undercounting of their scale and frequency.

Mitigation: Asking individuals — especially young people — to open up about delicate subjects like taking and sharing nude photos of themselves or creating nude photos of others likely activates self-report bias. Reluctance to self-report may be especially pronounced among participants who have had negative sexual experiences and/or have been victimized as a result of child sexual abuse.¹⁰ It's critical, then, to design related survey instruments that are safe and supportive. The sequence of questions was important in our research instrument. Each sensitive question was prefaced with a note acknowledging the potential difficulty of discussing the topic, reiterating the anonymity of the responses, and reinforcing that the participant was never to blame for what may have happened to them. Some questions were written in a manner that allowed individuals to answer generally about "people they know" instead of asking point-blank about their own online experiences. Resources for additional information and referrals for real-time support were highlighted alongside every question. Expert clinicians also reviewed the final survey instrument to evaluate its flow and substance for participant safety.

⁹ See more about this in the Research Design section.

¹⁰ Hébert, M., Tourigny, M., Cyr, M., McDuff, P., & Joly, J. (2009). Prevalence of childhood sexual abuse and timing of disclosure in a representative sample of adults from Quebec. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 54(9), 631-636. <https://doi.org/10.1177/070674370905400908>

CHALLENGE: Comparing research samples on technology-facilitated sexual harms is inherently difficult due to significant variability in sample composition, definitions of harm, data collection timeframes, methodologies, and cultural contexts.

Mitigation: Achieving comparability across studies on technology-facilitated sexual abuse and exploitation requires transparency in methodologies and research instruments. Differences in findings can arise from variations in study design and sample characteristics, which means that distinct studies are not always directly comparable. This report includes a detailed research design section to ensure clarity and meaningful comparison. For any additional questions related to the methods used in this research, please contact research@thorn.org.

Research Design

The research supporting this report focused on young people aged 13–20 in the United States.¹¹ Research methods were designed to identify respondents’ perceptions and experiences related to three specific online risk vectors: deepfake nude imagery, online solicitations, and sextortion.

PHASE 1 – EXPLORATORY INTERVIEWS WITH SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS

The first phase of this research was dedicated to exploratory information gathering to help orient and frame the subsequent focus of the more in-depth survey instrument.

In total, 16 subject matter experts from across the child safety ecosystem were identified and consulted during this phase. Information consultations included a diverse range of backgrounds and expertise,

¹¹ In the context of this report, the term “young people” refers to the full survey sample of respondents aged 13–20. The term “teens” specifies respondents aged 13–17, while “young adults” refers to those aged 18–20.

including academics, civil society researchers, industry trust and safety professionals, law enforcement, and victim and survivor advocacy professionals. The insights generated during Phase 1 helped to scope and focus the subsequent development of the survey instrument in Phase 2.

PHASE 2 – QUANTITATIVE ONLINE SURVEY

In total, 1,200 young people from across the United States participated in an 18-minute online survey from September 27, 2024, to October 7, 2024. To ensure a representative sample nationwide, data was weighted by age, gender, race, and geography based on U.S. Census data. This research also incorporated an increased recruitment of participants who identified as persons of color (POC).

Specifically, the survey’s sample makeup included:

Total surveyed (n = 1200)		
Age	Ages 13–17	64%
	13	12%
	14	12%
	15	12%
	16	13%
	17	15%
	Ages 18–20	36%
	18	12%
	19	12%
	20	12%
Gender	Male	48%
	Female	48%
	Gender Minority	6%
Sexual Orientation	LGBTQ+	19%
	Non-LGBTQ+	79%
Race & Ethnicity	African American/Black/Caribbean American	19%
	Hispanic/Latinx	25%
	Other POC	9%
	White	52%

“Gender minority” includes respondents who identified as transgender, genderqueer, nonbinary or other. “Other POC” includes respondents who identified as Asian or Pacific Islander, Native American or American Indian, Middle Eastern, or other. Respondents who selected “prefer not to say” for sex/ gender and/or sexual orientation (n=10) or identified as either male or female and identified their sexual orientation as “questioning/not sure” (n=10) or as both “straight” and “queer/other” (n=4) were not included in the either the LGBTQ+ or non-LGBTQ+ groupings.

Given the unique risks that gender minority youth face, gender minorities are not disambiguated into the gender dichotomy analysis featured throughout this report. Among the gender minority cluster (n = 55) within the full sample, 22 respondents identified as trans-male, 5 respondents identified as trans-female, 6 respondents identified as trans-other, and 29 respondents identified as non-binary, genderqueer, or other.¹²

Results and Reporting

Due to rounding, some of the figures included in this report may have columns or rows that do not add up to exactly 100%. Some questions, which have been noted, featured multiple select response options.

Privacy and Safety

Ensuring the privacy and safety of those participating in this research was paramount. All participant responses were anonymized. Minor participants (aged 13-17) were recruited directly through caregivers. Caregiver consent was required for minors to participate. Adult participants (aged 18-20) provided direct consent. Help resources were provided to all participants in the event that they wanted to learn more about the survey topics or needed professional support to talk about these issues.

¹² Some respondents identified with multiple gender identities.

Background

The advent of the internet and a growing global reliance on digital technologies have profoundly transformed how goods and services are exchanged. The emergence and expansion of online marketplaces have increased the availability of goods, accelerated the speed of exchange, expanded networks of consumers and distributors, and diversified the formats and methods of exchange. These shifts have largely normalized transactional dynamics within digital environments for users, including young people, introducing them to buying, selling, and trading online at younger ages.¹³

For most young people, being online means navigating spaces where virtual currencies, influencer-driven promotions (at times involving children themselves), targeted advertising, and peer-to-peer transactions are seamlessly embedded within their digital experiences. While these aspects can foster beneficial skills, such as entrepreneurialism and financial literacy, it can also diminish their ability to discern between legitimate and exploitative exchanges, ultimately introducing them to novel risks.

At the same time, technology is not just a tool for transactions — it is also a space for romantic interactions and sexual exploration. The internet provides young people with access to sexual health information, opportunities to meet romantic interests, and ways to foster relationships through texting, video calls, and social media. However, as they navigate these dynamics, they may also encounter offers of financial or social gain in sexual exchanges — creating a convergence that can obscure the line

between consensual exploration and exploitation. For minors, the risks — and even the potential illegality — of such exchanges may not always be clear.

Emerging research underscores the urgency of understanding these evolving risks. A study by Thiel et al. identified sizable networks of accounts, apparently operated by minors, openly advertising the “sale” of their SG-CSAM on popular online platforms.¹⁴ Separately, a national victim survey by Walsh et al. revealed that most respondents with technology-facilitated CSEC experiences¹⁵ navigated their exploitation independently — without a third-party intermediary — and that one-third described their sexual activity as “casual in nature,” receiving items such as drugs or rides in exchange for sexual content.¹⁶

This report builds on these studies to broaden the child safety ecosystem’s understanding of how CSEC marketplace dynamics have evolved. By centering the voices of young people, this analysis highlights how digital environments have expanded risk pathways, reshaped exploitative dynamics, and introduced new challenges for existing child safety frameworks. Without greater clarity on these shifts, current prevention and intervention efforts that address the commercial sexual exploitation of children will remain incomplete¹⁷, leaving young people vulnerable to exploitation in an increasingly complex digital landscape.

13 Kowalska, M. (2012). The internet impact on market behavior of young consumers. *Journal of International Studies*, 5(1), 101-106. https://www.jois.eu/files/KowalskaV5_N1.pdf

14 Thiel et al. (2023). Often, these accounts included advertising the CSAM content through a curated menu of options, offering bespoke content on-demand at premium prices, and, in some cases, even extended to young adult users who were selling SG-CSAM of themselves from when they were younger.

15 Defined as the exchange of sexual content or activity for money, drugs, or other items of value over the internet or through a cell phone.

16 Walsh, W., et al. (2024). In fact, only 8% of respondents with an online CSEC experience in this study indicated the involvement of a third-party trafficker.

17 Generally, CSEC has primarily, if not exclusively, been framed through a sex trafficking lens, often predicated on the involvement of a third-party intermediary (e.g., trafficker) who facilitates the procurement and sexual exploitation of a minor in exchange for financial benefit. While this narrative has been instrumental in raising awareness and rallying resources to combat the sex trafficking of minors it is not exhaustive of the diverse and expanding pathways in which minors come to be sexually exploited and it fails to address other critical areas of vulnerability, especially related to those facilitated by technology.

Technology-Facilitated Sexual Exploration

Young people's digital lives are deeply intertwined with their efforts to explore identity, build relationships, and express themselves. This creates for them a complex and layered reality in online spaces, where risks often hide in plain sight, intertwined with behaviors that may appear normative or beneficial, especially within the context of sexual exploration. These experiences may include forming connections with online-only contacts, accessing mature content, and sharing intimate imagery of themselves.

While online exploration and communities can foster connection, learning, and self-expression — particularly for those who feel isolated offline — they also introduce vulnerabilities that individuals with harmful intentions actively exploit. This section presents data that, while not directly representative of commodified sexual interactions involving minors, establishes important context related to the experiences many are navigating in these broader romantic and sexual contexts. The data shows that young people are interested in and accessing mature content and communities, including dating apps, pornography, and sites dedicated to adult content creators. Simultaneously, not unlike many adults, some young people are using technology to flirt and exchange intimate content, while even more are being asked to share imagery in mainstream, general audience platforms.

The precise role these experiences may play for those solicited for a commercial exchange of imagery or for those who do engage in such

interactions requires further research. However, understanding the backdrop of these norms and experiences is critical to our ability to recognize, situate, and understand the evolving landscape of child sexual exploitation.

Exploring Apps Designed for Adults

As seen in prior research, despite age restrictions requiring users to be at least 18, a substantial proportion of younger respondents (aged 13–17)¹⁸ reported accessing platforms exclusively designed for adult users (aged 18 or older) to foster romantic or sexual experiences (Figure 1a, Figure 1b).¹⁹ Approximately 1 in 5 (22%) teens reported using a dating app,²⁰ 1 in 10 (10%) had accessed OnlyFans, and nearly 1 in 4 (23%) visited pornography sites. Usage patterns among teens also highlighted notable differences by gender: teen boys reported accessing OnlyFans and pornography sites at twice the rate of their female counterparts. This gender discrepancy among teens warrants further investigation to understand how it might intersect with other aspects of their sexual interactions and behaviors.

Usage of these sites was also higher among LGBTQ+ teen respondents compared with their non-LGBTQ+ peers, likely underscoring the role that romantic and sexual applications play in enabling LGBTQ+ young people to explore their sexuality more broadly.²¹

¹⁸ Because a portion of the survey sample was aged 18 or older, Figures 1a and 1b show only teen respondent data (aged 13–17).

¹⁹ The dating and adult app usage rates captured in this survey for 13- to 17-year-olds are consistent with previous findings that explored the same: see Fig. 3, pg. 11 in Thorn. (2024). *Youth perspectives on online safety*, 2023.

²⁰ See Figure 1b for a breakdown of dating app usage by individual apps.

²¹ Robards, B., Byron, P., & D'Souza, S. (2022). LGBTQ+ communities and digital media. In D. A. Rohlinger, & S. Sobieraj (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of sociology and digital media* (pp. 339–361). Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197510636.013.22>

Fig 1a | **Dating app and pornography site usage rates among teens**

QApps. Do you use any of the following dating or adult apps?

		Any dating app	OnlyFans	Pornography
Ages 13-17	n=724	22%	10%	23%
Boys	n=373	23%	14%	33%
Girls	n=335	21%	7%	14%
LGBTQ+	n=77*	36%	23%	40%
Non-LGBTQ+	n=633	20%	9%	21%
Ages 13-14	n=280	21%	9%	19%
Boys	n=146	21%	10%	24%
Girls	n=130	20%	6%	12%
Ages 15-17	n=444	23%	11%	26%
Boys	n=227	24%	16%	39%
Girls	n=205	22%	7%	14%

Respondents were allowed to select multiple apps. "Any dating app" includes respondent selection for Bumble, Grindr, Hinge, Tagged, Tinder, or Other. Percentages reflect a net percentage of respondents who selected "Yes, I currently use this," or "I do not currently use this, but have in the past." *Base size <100

Fig 1b | **Dating app usage rates among teens, by app**

QApps. Do you use any of the following dating or adult apps?

		Tinder	Bumble	Hinge	Tagged	Grindr	Other
Ages 13-17	n=724	14%	9%	7%	7%	6%	8%
Boys	n=373	15%	10%	8%	8%	10%	7%
Girls	n=335	11%	8%	5%	6%	3%	9%
Ages 13-14	n=280	13%	8%	7%	7%	6%	7%
Boys	n=146	15%	12%	11%	9%	9%	6%
Girls	n=130	10%	3%	4%	6%	2%	9%
Ages 15-17	n=444	14%	9%	6%	6%	6%	9%
Boys	n=227	15%	9%	6%	7%	10%	8%
Girls	n=205	12%	10%	6%	6%	3%	10%

Respondents were allowed to select multiple apps. Data is not shown for some standard demographic breakdowns because of small base sizes. Percentages reflect a net percentage of respondents who selected "Yes, I currently use this," or "I do not currently use this, but have in the past."

Sharing Sexual Imagery of Themselves as Minors

Prior research has found that around 1 in 4 minors (aged 9-17) believe it is normal for people their age to share nudes, with closer to 1 in 3 (31%) teens believing the behavior is normal.²² That research also found that 1 in 6 (17%) teens reported they had shared nude photos of themselves.²³

Respondents of the current survey were asked about their experiences sharing sexual imagery of themselves while under 18 (Figure 2), with 1 in 6 (18%) reporting they had. Among teens, 1 in 8 (13%) reported having shared sexual imagery of themselves, with limited variation between younger teens (12%) and older teens (14%); however, LGBTQ+ teens reported notably higher rates (29%).

While not explored within this research, prior research has established that minors who share their own nude imagery do so within a variety of contexts, with a variety of people. While a strong majority report sharing the imagery with someone they know offline, they also report sharing the content with other users who they only know online.²⁴ Additionally, past research has established minors who share their nude imagery report doing so with other people across a spectrum of ages, including other minors, adults, and people whose ages they don't know.²⁵

Online Solicitations for Sexual Imagery from Online-Only Contacts

Many young people view the ability to connect with online-only contacts — including similarly aged peers and adults — as an enriching part of their digital experience. Past research has found that forming relationships with online-only contacts is normative, with 1 in 3 minors (32%) considering a connection they made online to be among their closest friends.²⁶

22 See Fig. 10, pg. 18 in Thorn. (2024). *Youth perspectives on online safety, 2023*.

23 See Fig. 8, pg. 17 in Thorn. (2024). *Youth perspectives on online safety, 2023*.

24 See Fig. 11, pg. 18 in Thorn. (2024). *Youth perspectives on online safety, 2023*.

25 See Fig. 12, pg.19 in Thorn. (2024). *Youth perspectives on online safety, 2023*.

26 See Fig 4., pg. 11 in Thorn. (2022). *Online grooming: Examining risky encounters amid everyday digital socialization*. https://info.thorn.org/hubfs/Research/2022_Online_Grooming_Report.pdf

Fig 2 | Experiences sharing SG-CSAM

Q011. Have you ever sent or shared a sexual photo or video of **yourself** either directly with someone else or with your social media followers [IF 18-20: while you were under the age of 18]?

		Yes	Prefer not to say	No
All Respondents	n=1200	18%	3%	79%
Men & boys	n=547	16%	1%	83%
Women & girls	n=595	20%	3%	77%
LGBTQ+	n=224	34%	7%	59%
Non-LGBTQ+	n=952	15%	2%	83%
Ages 13-17	n=724	13%	1%	85%
Boys	n=373	14%	1%	86%
Girls	n=335	12%	2%	86%
LGBTQ+	n=77*	29%	3%	68%
Non-LGBTQ+	n=633	11%	1%	88%
Ages 13-14	n=280	12%	1%	87%
Boys	n=146	13%	1%	87%
Girls	n=130	11%	1%	88%
Ages 15-17	n=444	14%	1%	85%
Boys	n=227	14%	1%	85%
Girls	n=205	13%	2%	85%
Ages 18-20	n=476	27%	5%	68%
Men	n=174	21%	2%	77%
Women	n=260	34%	7%	59%
LGBTQ+	n=147	37%	10%	53%
Non-LGBTQ+	n=319	23%	3%	74%

This question is similar to a question asked of minors in Thorn's Youth Monitoring research (see Fig. 8 in Thorn. (2024). *Youth perspectives on online safety, 2023*). Percentages for "Yes" reflect a net percentage of respondents who selected the response options "Yes, on purpose" or "Yes, on accident." *Base size <100

Fig 3 | Experiences being solicited to send sexual imagery of themselves as minors by an online-only contact

Q05. Has anyone you only know online asked you to share sexual photos or videos of **yourself** [IF 18-20: while you were under the age of 18]?

		Yes	Prefer not to say	No
All Respondents	n=1200	36%	3%	61%
Men & boys	n=547	29%	3%	68%
Women & girls	n=595	41%	3%	57%
LGBTQ+	n=224	53%	3%	43%
Non-LGBTQ+	n=952	33%	2%	65%
Ages 13-17	n=724	31%	2%	67%
Boys	n=373	27%	2%	71%
Girls	n=335	33%	2%	65%
LGBTQ+	n=77*	56%	2%	42%
Non-LGBTQ+	n=633	28%	2%	70%
Ages 13-14	n=280	25%	1%	74%
Boys	n=146	23%	1%	75%
Girls	n=130	25%	1%	74%
Ages 15-17	n=444	35%	3%	62%
Boys	n=227	29%	3%	68%
Girls	n=205	38%	3%	59%
Ages 18-20	n=476	46%	4%	50%
Men	n=174	34%	5%	62%
Women	n=260	56%	4%	41%
LGBTQ+	n=147	51%	5%	44%
Non-LGBTQ+	n=319	43%	3%	53%

*Base size <100

While these relationships are often genuine and positive, they can also open the door to exploitation.²⁷ Roughly 1 in 3 (36%) young people surveyed reported they had been asked to share sexual imagery of themselves while they were under the age of 18 by someone they knew only online (Figure 3). As expected, rates of the experience increased with age.²⁸ LGBTQ+ respondents and women and girls were more likely than their counterparts to indicate they had been solicited for sexual imagery of themselves as minors.

Respondents who reported receiving a solicitation for sexual imagery from an online-only contact while under 18 (n = 435) were asked about the speed with which they received the request, their age at the time they first received such a request, and the perceived age of the solicitor. For respondents who may have had multiple experiences, follow-up questions asked them to answer based on the first time it happened to them.

Among this subsample, the majority (58%) received the request for sexual imagery of themselves within the first day of contact, with another 21% receiving their request within one week of connecting (Figure 4a). Receiving the request within a day or less of connecting with the other user was more commonly reported by women and girls than by men and boys. While around 2 in 3 (63%) women and girls characterized the solicitation as being made within a day (compared to 49% of men and boys), 51% of men and boys indicated they had received the solicitation after a week or more of connecting (compared with 37% women and girls). LGBTQ+ respondents (63%) were also more likely to indicate they had received the solicitation within a day or less, compared with non-LGBTQ+ respondents (56%).

58%
of young people who received a solicitation for sexual imagery of themselves as minors from an online-only contact received the request within the first day of contact.

Notably, among those solicited within the first 24 hours of connecting, it was rare for the request to be a cold solicitation (i.e., received as the first message of the interaction), suggesting that the other user often made at least minimal attempts to build rapport before soliciting the sexual imagery (Figure 4b).

When asked about the age at which they first received such a request (Figure 5), around half (52%) indicated they first received a solicitation while they were between the ages of 13 and 15. However, 1 in 4 (25%) indicated their first experience occurred while they were 12 or younger.

Regarding the perceived age of the other user who sent the request, respondents were most likely to identify they believed the other user was another minor (aged 17 or younger) or young adult (aged 18–24) (Figure 6). Concerningly, 1 in 6 (17%) believed the other user asking them for sexual imagery of themselves while they were under the age of 18 was an older adult (aged 25 or older).

Some variability in the perceived age of the other user was identified within gender. Men and boys were more likely to indicate the other user was another minor (+12%), while women and girls were more likely to indicate the other user was a young adult (+8%).

Additionally, around 1 in 6 (18%) young people indicated they received a request to share sexual imagery of themselves as a minor from a user whose age was unknown.

77%
of young people who received a solicitation for sexual imagery of themselves as minors from an online-only contact received a request for the first time by age 15.

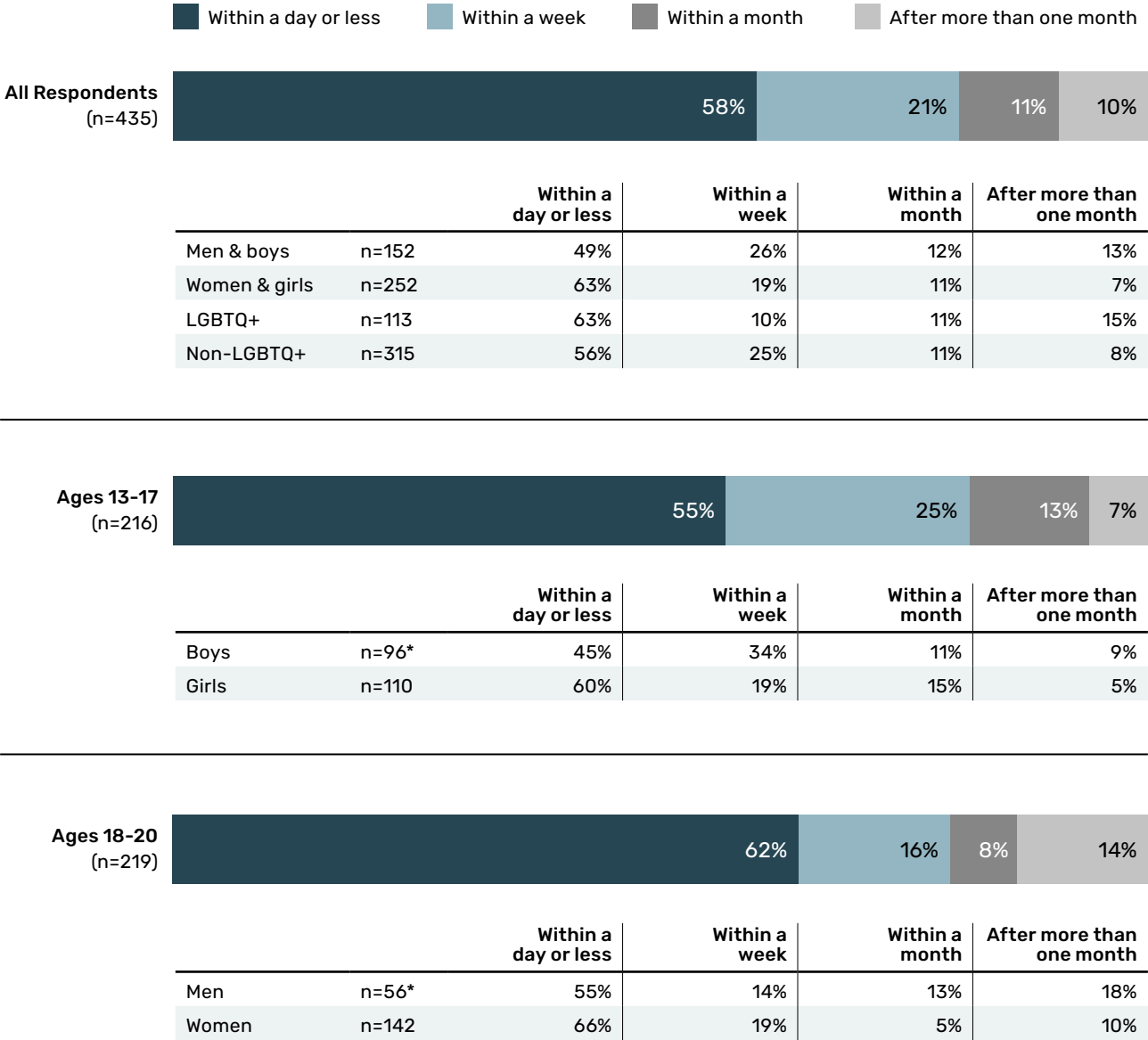
27 Finklehor, D., Sutton, S., Turner, H., & Colburn, D. (2024). How risky is online sexting by minors? *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10538712.2024.2324838>

28 The increase in reported experiences between the teen and young adult groups may reflect various factors: young adults might feel more comfortable disclosing past experiences, or they may lack precise recall of their age at the time, leading to some degree of recall bias.

Fig 4a | **Onset of solicitation for sexual imagery of themselves as minors by an online-only contact**

Among respondents who have been solicited for sexual imagery of themselves as minors by an online-only contact

Q06. Thinking of the **most recent** time this happened to you [IF 18-20: while you were under the age of 18], how quickly did that person ask you to share sexual photos or videos of **yourself** with them?



"Within a day or less" represents a net percentage of respondents who selected "in their first message," "within a few minutes," within an hour," and "within a day." For a more granular breakdown of the net percentage, see Figure 4b. *Base size <100

Fig 4b | **Onset of solicitation for sexual imagery of themselves as minors by an online-only contact**

Among respondents who have been solicited for sexual imagery of themselves as minors by an online-only contact

Q06. Thinking of the **most recent** time this happened to you [IF 18-20: while you were under the age of 18], how quickly did that person ask you to share sexual photos or videos of **yourself** with them?

		In their first message	Within a few minutes	Within an hour	Within a day
All Respondents	n=435	7%	17%	17%	18%
Men & boys	n=152	6%	17%	13%	14%
Women & girls	n=252	9%	18%	19%	17%
LGBTQ+	n=113	8%	17%	14%	24%
Non-LGBTQ+	n=315	7%	17%	17%	15%
Ages 13-17	n=216	8%	15%	18%	15%
Boys	n=96*	9%	17%	12%	8%
Girls	n=110	8%	15%	22%	16%
Ages 18-20	n=219	6%	19%	15%	21%
Men	n=56*	1%	17%	14%	23%
Women	n=142	11%	21%	17%	18%

*Base size <100

Fig 5 | **Age of first solicitation for sexual imagery of themselves as minors by an online-only contact**

Among respondents who have been solicited for sexual imagery of themselves as minors by an online-only contact

Q07. How old were you **the first time** someone you only know online asked you to share sexual photos or videos of **yourself**?

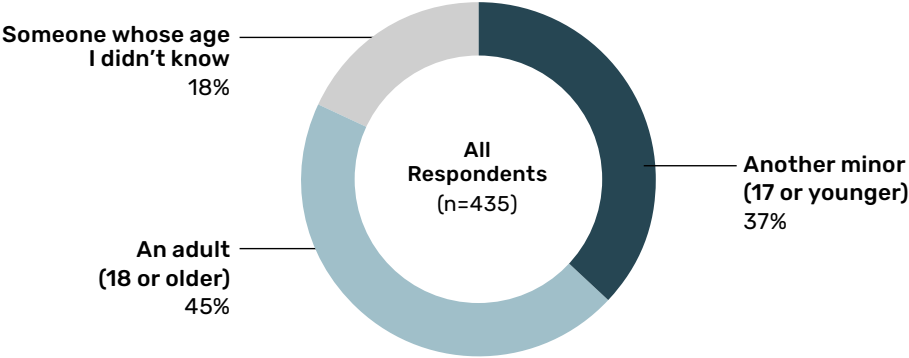
		12 or younger	...9 or younger	...10	...11	...12	13-15	...13	...14	...15	16 or older	...16	...17	Prefer not to answer
All Respondents	n=435	25%	3%	3%	6%	12%	52%	19%	18%	15%	20%	11%	9%	3%
Men & boys	n=152	20%	2%	2%	5%	11%	49%	15%	22%	12%	26%	12%	15%	5%
Women & girls	n=252	27%	3%	3%	8%	13%	53%	21%	16%	16%	17%	13%	5%	2%
LGBTQ+	n=113	35%	4%	4%	13%	14%	46%	16%	16%	14%	15%	6%	9%	5%
Non-LGBTQ+	n=315	21%	2%	3%	4%	12%	54%	20%	19%	15%	22%	13%	9%	2%
Ages 13-17	n=216	27%	3%	2%	9%	12%	58%	23%	20%	15%	13%	7%	6%	3%
Boys	n=96*	27%	2%	3%	7%	15%	57%	21%	28%	9%	12%	3%	9%	4%
Girls	n=110	26%	3%	1%	10%	11%	58%	23%	14%	20%	14%	11%	4%	2%
Ages 18-20	n=219	23%	2%	5%	3%	13%	45%	14%	16%	15%	28%	16%	12%	4%
Men	n=56*	8%	1%	1%	0%	6%	36%	7%	13%	16%	49%	25%	24%	6%
Women	n=142	28%	3%	5%	4%	16%	48%	20%	18%	11%	21%	14%	7%	3%

*Base size <100

Fig 6 | Perceived age of the online-only contact soliciting sexual imagery

Among respondents who have been solicited for sexual imagery of themselves as minors by an online-only contact

Q08. Thinking about **the first time** this happened to you [IF 18-20: while you were under the age of 18], to the best of your knowledge, what was the age of the person who asked you to share sexual photos or videos of **yourself**?



		Another minor (17 or younger)	...12 or younger			Young adult (18-24)	...18-20		Older adult (25 or older)	...30 or older		Someone whose age I didn't know
			...13-14	...15-17			...21-24		...25-29			
All Respondents	n=435	37%	3%	11%	23%	28%	18%	10%	17%	9%	8%	18%
Men & boys	n=152	43%	3%	14%	25%	23%	12%	11%	15%	8%	8%	18%
Women & girls	n=252	31%	3%	8%	20%	31%	21%	11%	20%	10%	10%	18%
LGBTQ+	n=113	40%	3%	17%	20%	24%	18%	5%	17%	12%	6%	19%
Non-LGBTQ+	n=315	36%	3%	9%	24%	29%	17%	12%	17%	8%	9%	18%

Commodified Sexual Solicitations, Interactions & Exploitation

In 2023, as part of Thorn’s annual youth monitoring survey, minors (aged 9–17) were asked about their awareness of peers receiving money or gifts from someone they only knew online in exchange for nude imagery or explicit live streams. This question was prompted by existing data on the risks young people face with online sexual solicitations²⁹, concerns surrounding the commercial sexual exploitation of children, and emerging findings about minors reportedly using technology to advertise the “sale” of their own nude imagery.³⁰ Among the 1,040 respondents to that survey, 13% reported they believed their friends or classmates had engaged in this behavior, while an additional 7% selected “prefer not to say.”³¹ While preliminary, this initial result reinforced a pressing need to further explore how exploitative dynamics facilitated by technology are evolving for young people.

The following section presents data collected from nine survey questions specifically designed to explore how technology facilitates the experiences of young people as it relates to receiving sexual solicitations, engaging in sexual interactions, and experiencing sexual exploitation based on a quid pro quo exchange of sexual content or activity in exchange for items of perceived value (monetary or otherwise). The report finds that many young people are encountering sexual solicitations that involve an aspect of commodification or exchange — often involving money (generally recognized as “commercial”) but also including other goods of value (e.g., clothing or drugs) or social capital (e.g., followers and likes). Young people who have had these experiences describe solicitations originating from both adults they’ve met online and other minors. Collectively, these

variables paint a complex picture of risk and elements of coercion that may be overlooked within traditional CSEC frameworks.

Given the diversity of experiences and the scope of data collected, the results presented herein must be considered exploratory. In addition to offering important early data, they also highlight the need for further, more comprehensive investigation. Each finding raises new and critical questions that demand deeper exploration to fully understand the broader landscape of sexual exploitation of children, one that is inclusive of the evolving phenomena of commodified sexual interactions involving minors, commercial sexual exploitation of children, and their byproducts (i.e., CSAM).

Commodified Sexual Solicitations & Interactions

Among young people surveyed, 1 in 4 (25%) reported they had received at least one request for a sexual image or interaction in exchange for something of value over the internet or a cell phone while they were under the age of 18 (Figure 7). Having such an experience was more likely among LGBTQ+ respondents, especially LGBTQ+ teens (35%), and among women and girls, especially young adult women (34%).

Overall, 1 in 5 (21%) reported they had at least one sexual interaction in exchange for money/crypto, gift cards, or another item of value while they

1 in 4

young people reported receiving at least one technology-facilitated request for a sexual interaction in exchange for something of value while they were under the age of 18.

29 Finkelhor, D., Cavanaugh, C., Turner, H., Colburn, D., Sutton, S., & Mathews, B. (2024). When is online sexual solicitation of a minor considered sexual abuse? Recommendations for victim prevalence surveys. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 25(5), 4117–4129. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380241268835>

30 Thiel, D., et al. (2023).

31 See Fig. 12A, pg. 19, in Thorn. (2024). *Youth perspectives on online safety, 2023*.

were under the age of 18. This initial prevalence result was surprising, particularly given recent estimates of commercial sexual exploitation experiences among young adults that place prevalence estimates around 2%.³² To gain clarity into the initial percentages reported, subsequent follow-up questions about respondents' experiences were evaluated to determine whether further data cleaning was warranted.

In processing the initial subsample of respondents who indicated they had such an experience (n = 246), the researchers examined what respondents reported they received in exchange for a form of sexual activity. Of this group, 32% (n = 75) indicated they were "not sure" which

was an exclusive response option. Since a clear, affirmative link to a commercial or commodified exchange could not be further validated or explored, these respondents were excluded from the analysis, and the data was reprocessed accordingly.³³

Once the full sample was cleaned to exclude respondents who indicated they were unsure of what they received in exchange for the sexual activity they engaged in, the remaining responses were rebased on the adjusted sample size (n = 1,125). Among this group, approximately 1 in 7 young people (15%) reported having at least one sexual interaction in exchange for money/crypto, gift cards, or another item of value while

Fig 7 | **Experiences receiving commodified sexual solicitations as minors**

QY3. [IF 18-20: While under the age of 18, were you ever; IF 13-17: Have you ever been] **offered** money/crypto, gift cards, or other valuable items in exchange for any of the following things over the internet or a cell phone (including texting)?

		At least one form of sexual activity	...sexual talk	...making, sending, or posting sexual pictures or videos of yourself	...any other sexual activity
All Respondents	n=1200	25%	19%	18%	13%
Men & boys	n=547	22%	17%	15%	11%
Women & girls	n=595	27%	20%	20%	15%
LGBTQ+	n=224	33%	24%	26%	20%
Non-LGBTQ+	n=952	23%	18%	16%	11%
Ages 13-17	n=724	22%	17%	17%	10%
Boys	n=373	21%	17%	15%	9%
Girls	n=335	22%	16%	17%	11%
LGBTQ+	n=77*	35%	24%	33%	22%
Non-LGBTQ+	n=633	21%	16%	15%	9%
Ages 18-20	n=476	29%	23%	20%	18%
Men	n=174	24%	18%	14%	13%
Women	n=260	34%	28%	27%	24%
LGBTQ+	n=147	31%	24%	20%	19%
Non-LGBTQ+	n=319	27%	22%	20%	18%

Percentages reflect respondents who selected the response option "yes." *Base size <100

32 Walsh et al. (2024). The survey question used in the cited publication asked "Have you done any of the following things over the Internet or a cell phone (including texting) in exchange for money, drugs, or other valuable items: Sexual talk; Making, sending, or posting sexual pictures or videos of yourself; and/or Any other sexual activity." See Fig. 8a for comparison with the survey question used in the research presented here.

33 While these respondents were removed from the subsequent analysis, their uncertainty warrants deeper exploration in future research. For instance, what factors related to the exchange contribute to the ambiguity about their experience?

Fig 8a | **Experiences with commodified sexual interactions as minors**

Among the rebased sample

QY4. [IF 18–20: While under the age of 18, have you ever; IF 13–17: Have you ever] **done** any of the following things over the internet or a cell phone (including texting) in exchange for money/crypto, gift cards, or other valuable items?

		At least one form of sexual activity	...sexual talk	...making, sending, or posting sexual pictures or videos of yourself	...any other sexual activity
All Respondents	n=1125	15%	13%	10%	7%
Men & boys	n=520	16%	13%	10%	8%
Women & girls	n=554	15%	13%	9%	6%
LGBTQ+	n=203	25%	21%	17%	12%
Non-LGBTQ+	n=902	13%	11%	9%	6%
Ages 13–17	n=688	14%	12%	9%	6%
Boys	n=357	14%	11%	9%	6%
Girls	n=315	12%	10%	6%	5%
LGBTQ+	n=72*	32%	28%	23%	19%
Non-LGBTQ+	n=605	11%	9%	7%	4%
Ages 13–14	n=269	12%	10%	8%	5%
Boys	n=140	13%	10%	11%	5%
Girls	n=125	10%	8%	4%	3%
Ages 15–17	n=419	15%	12%	9%	7%
Boys	n=217	14%	12%	8%	6%
Girls	n=190	13%	12%	8%	6%
Ages 18–20	n=437	18%	15%	13%	10%
Men	n=163	19%	16%	12%	12%
Women	n=239	19%	17%	15%	10%
LGBTQ+	n=131	19%	16%	12%	6%
Non-LGBTQ+	n=297	18%	15%	13%	11%

Percentages reflect respondents who selected the response option “yes.” The rebased subsample was derived from those who did not select “not sure” when asked about the form of compensation they received in QY8. *Base size <100

they were under the age of 18 (Figure 8a). Thirteen percent indicated they engaged in sexual talk, 10% reported making, sending, or posting sexual imagery of themselves, and 7% selected the response that they engaged in “any other sexual activity.”

Even after applying more conservative data scrutiny, the prevalence rates of these experiences among young people overall remain notably high. These findings warrant further evaluation, particularly in light of rapid technological advancements and the younger demographic of the present survey sample (13– to 20-years-old)

1 in 7
young people reported having at least one technology-facilitated commodified sexual interaction while they were under the age of 18.

compared with similar studies, which have focused exclusively on adult cohorts.

Interestingly, one-quarter (25%) of young people who had a commodified sexual interaction as a minor indicated they had never received a *request* for a commodified sexual exchange from another user online. This may suggest that some of young people’s related experiences may represent sexual interactions that were not, at least directly, in response to a solicitation from another user (i.e., the commodified sexual interaction may be the result of a “self-initiated” exchange or are potentially the result of coordination through a third party).

Fig 8b | **Experiences with commodified sexual interactions as minors, additional demographics**
Among the rebased sample

QY4. [IF 18–20: While under the age of 18, have you ever; IF 13–17: Have you ever] **done** any of the following things over the internet or a cell phone (including texting) in exchange for money/crypto, gift cards, or other valuable items?

Percentages reflect respondents who selected the response option “yes.” The rebased subsample was derived from those who did not select “not sure” when asked about the form of compensation they received in QY8.

		At least one form of sexual activity	...sexual talk	...making, sending, or posting sexual pictures or videos of yourself	...any other sexual activity
All Respondents	n=1125	15%	13%	10%	7%
African American	n=272	18%	14%	10%	7%
Hispanic/Latinx	n=230	16%	15%	12%	9%
Other POC	n=164	18%	14%	12%	9%
White	n=510	14%	12%	9%	7%
Northeast	n=183	19%	17%	11%	8%
Midwest	n=239	13%	13%	7%	7%
South	n=445	14%	10%	10%	6%
West	n=258	17%	15%	11%	10%

While rates of young people’s experiences with commodified sexual interactions increased slightly with age, limited variability appeared when looking at gender. Although the comparative base size was smaller, LGBTQ+ teen respondents reported notably higher rates of commodified sexual interaction experiences, with nearly 1 in 3 (32%) indicating they had at least one type of experience compared with 1 in 9 (11%) of their non-LGBTQ+ peers.³⁴ This level of difference was not identified among LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+ young adults. Limited variability was also found when examining other demographics, such as race or ethnicity and location (Figure 8b).

Age of First Experience

Among respondents who indicated they had a commodified sexual interaction as a minor (n = 171), 23% identified they were 12 or younger at the time of their first experience, half (51%) were between the ages of 13 and 15, and 26% were aged 16 or older (Figure 9). While comparative base sizes were small, LGBTQ+ respondents were more likely than their

counterparts to identify they had their first experience when they were 12 or younger (+14%).

Buyer Profile

Respondents who indicated that they had a commodified sexual interaction as a minor were asked about some of the buyer’s attributes, including the medium through which they “knew” their buyer (e.g., online or offline) (Figure 10) and the buyer’s age (Figure 11).

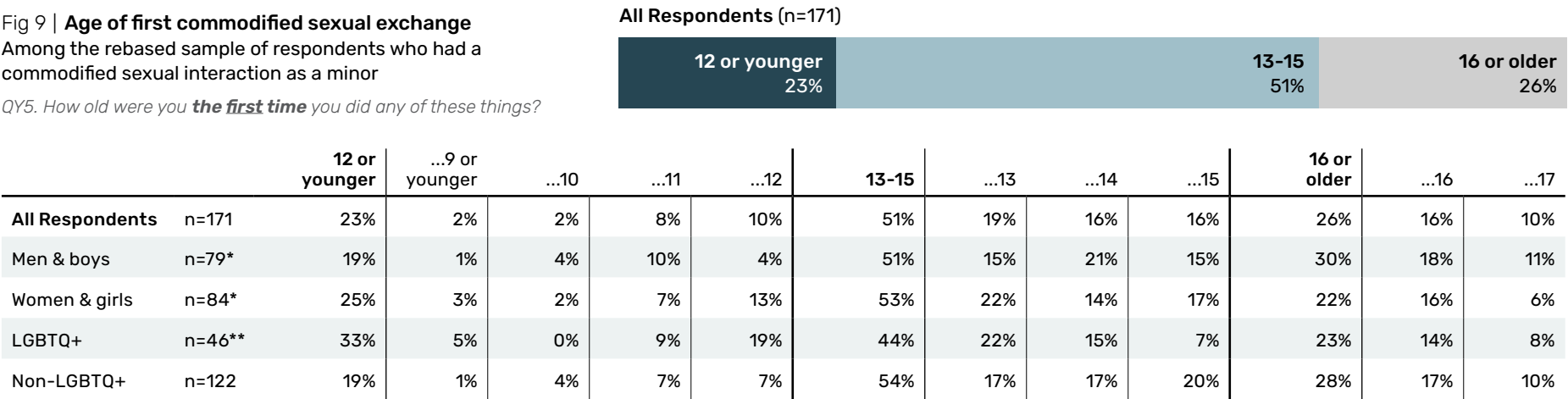
The majority (59%) of respondents who experienced a technology-facilitated commodified sexual interaction as a minor indicated they knew their buyer(s) exclusively through online environments, with another 21% indicating they had a mix of buyers, some of whom they knew offline and some of whom they only knew online. Only 1 in 5 (19%) respondents indicated they knew their buyer(s) exclusively from offline/in-person

59%
of young people who had a commodified sexual interaction as a minor exclusively knew their buyer(s) online.

³⁴ This finding warrants further investigation to understand what unique risks and vulnerabilities may exist for LGBTQ+ youth within this context.

Fig 9 | **Age of first commodified sexual exchange**
Among the rebased sample of respondents who had a commodified sexual interaction as a minor

QY5. How old were you **the first time** you did any of these things?



The rebased subsample was dervied from those who did not select “not sure” when asked about the form of compensation they received in QY8. *Base size <100, **Base size <50

Fig 10 | **Online v. offline buyers**
Among the rebased sample of respondents who had a commodified sexual interaction as a minor

QY6. And how did you know the person with whom you made or shared sexual pictures/videos, engaged in sexual talk, or did some other sexual activity for money/crypto, gift cards, or other valuable items?

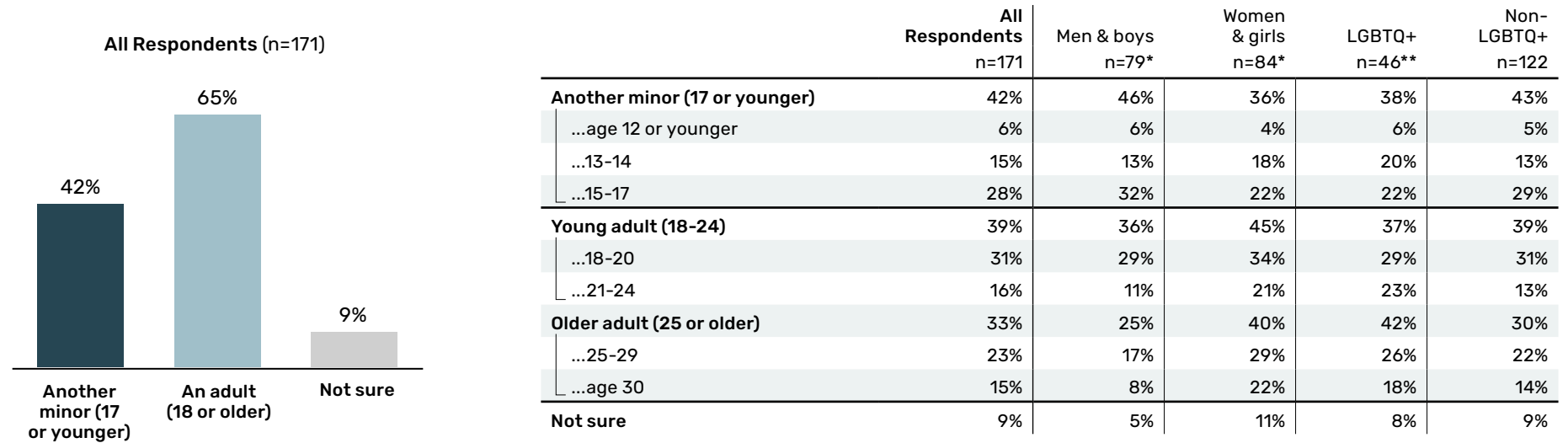


The rebased subsample was dervied from those who did not select “not sure” when asked about the form of compensation they received in QY8. *Base size <100, **Base size <50

Fig 11 | **Perceived age of buyer(s)**

Among the rebased sample of respondents who had a commodified sexual interaction as a minor

QY7. To the best of your knowledge, how old was the person or persons with whom you made or shared sexual pictures/videos, engaged in sexual talk or did some other sexual activity for money/crypto, gift cards, or other valuable items? If this happened to you more than once, please select all that apply.



Question was multiple select. The rebased subsample was derived from those who did not select "not sure" when asked about the form of compensation they received in QY8. *Base size <100, **Base size <50

42%

of young people who had a commodified sexual interaction as a minor had a buyer who was another minor.

1 in 3

young people who had a commodified sexual interaction as a minor had a buyer aged 25 or older.

contexts. Although base sizes were smaller, women and girls indicated a higher likelihood of knowing their buyers only online (62%) compared with men and boys (55%).

Respondents' perceptions of the buyer's age appeared relatively distributed; 42% identified having a buyer who was another minor, 39% identified having a buyer who was a young adult (aged between 18 and 24), and 33% indicated they had a buyer who was aged 25 or older. One in 11 (9%) indicated they weren't sure of the buyer's age.

Forms of Compensation & Method of Payment

Among respondents who indicated they had a commodified sexual interaction as a minor, more than half (58%) indicated they received money as part of the exchange for sexual content or activity. Other prominent forms of exchange included social opportunities (e.g., more online followers or invites to parties) (33%) and clothing, accessories, or beauty products (28%) (Figure 12a). Additionally, 1 in 6 (17%) reported receiving drugs or alcohol, and around 1 in 10 indicated they received a place to stay or housing (11%) and/or gaming currency (e.g., Robux, V-Bucks, Minecoins) (9%).

Among young people who had a commodified sexual interaction as a minor

1 in 2

received money as part of the exchange

1 in 3

received social opportunities as part of the exchange

1 in 4

received clothing, accessories or beauty products as part of the exchange

1 in 6

received drugs or alcohol as part of the exchange

1 in 10

received a place to stay or housing as part of the exchange

1 in 11

received a form of gaming currency as part of the exchange

Fig 12a | **Form(s) of compensation received**
 Among the rebased sample of respondents who had a commodified sexual interaction as a minor
 QY8. What did you receive in exchange for sexual pictures/videos, sexual talk, or sexual activity?

	All Respondents n=171	Men & boys n=79*	Women & girls n=84*	LGBTQ+ n=46**	Non-LGBTQ+ n=122	Ages 13-17 n=94*	Ages 18-20 n=77*
Currency based	58%	51%	66%	48%	61%	51%	67%
...money (like dollars, another currency, cash, etc.)	51%	43%	60%	44%	54%	45%	59%
...gaming currency (like Robux, V-Bucks, Minecoins, etc.)	9%	9%	8%	11%	8%	9%	8%
...gift cards	6%	6%	5%	6%	6%	5%	8%
...cryptocurrency (like Bitcoin, Ethereum, Tether, etc.)	3%	1%	5%	0%	4%	4%	1%
Non-currency	56%	59%	54%	53%	58%	63%	46%
...social opportunities (like more online followers or invites to parties)	33%	36%	30%	36%	33%	39%	25%
...clothing, accessories, or beauty products	28%	28%	27%	29%	28%	33%	22%
...drugs or alcohol	17%	14%	20%	14%	19%	20%	13%
...a place to stay or housing	11%	15%	7%	15%	10%	13%	9%
Something else	14%	14%	12%	18%	12%	11%	18%

Question was multiple select. The rebased subsample was derived from those who did not select "not sure" when asked about the form of compensation they received in QY8. *Base size <100, **Base size <50

Respondents who indicated they received money in exchange for sexual activity were asked how the payment was received ($n = 85$).³⁵ While the overall base size was small, technology played a clear and prominent role in facilitating their commercial exploitation, as the monetary transactions were primarily executed through payment applications. Only around 1 in 5 (21%) reported receiving physical cash in person as part of their exchange. Most respondents identified receiving payment through a digital platform, including CashApp, PayPal, Venmo, Zelle, Apple Pay, and Google Pay.

The majority (60%) of respondents indicated a single form of compensation during their experience, while 40% reported they received multiple forms of compensation (Figure 12b).³⁶ The top five combinations

of compensation exchanged included money and clothing, accessories, or beauty products (19%); money and social opportunities (15%); clothing, accessories, or beauty products and social opportunities (15%); money and drugs or alcohol (11%); and drugs or alcohol and social opportunities (10%). Among respondents who reported receiving only a single form of compensation for their sexual content or activity, the top five forms identified were money, “something else,” social opportunities, clothing, accessories or beauty products, and a place to stay.

The diversity of compensation formats identified in this research is not, on its own, a novel finding within the context of commercial sexual exploitation. Prior studies have documented how third-party

Fig 12b | **Form(s) of compensation received – Singular vs. Multiple**
Among the rebased sample of respondents who had a commodified sexual interaction as a minor

QY8. What did you receive in exchange for sexual pictures/videos, sexual talk, or sexual activity?



Question was multiple select. The rebased subsample was derived from those who did not select “not sure” when asked about the form of compensation they received in QY8. Percentages shown for the top 5 single and multiple compensation forms are out of the full subsample ($n = 171$).

35 The corresponding survey question was multiple select and asked “You indicated that while under the age of 18 you received money in exchange for sharing sexual pictures or videos of yourself, engaging in sexual talk, or some other sexual activity. How did you receive the payment?” Available response options were: Apple Pay, CashApp, Google Pay, PayPal, Physical cash, in-person, Venmo, Zelle, Other, and Not sure. “Not sure” was an exclusive response option, selected by 10% of the subsample.

36 This data does not necessarily indicate the number of experiences – in other words, a single form of compensation may be exchanged across multiple experiences and multiple forms of compensation may be exchanged within a single experience.

intermediaries (e.g., traffickers and individuals with a sexual interest in children) employ a broad spectrum of offers as part of the grooming process, including money, housing, romantic partnerships, promises of a “better life,” fame, or professional advancement.³⁷ However, the exchange of social opportunities — such as increased online visibility and invitations to exclusive spaces or parties — for sexual content or activity has not traditionally been examined as a distinct form of commercial sexual exploitation. This distinction is particularly crucial when considered through the lens of social exchange theory, which examines sexuality and sexual interactions as transactional resource exchanges — whether material or symbolic.³⁸ In this framework, individuals who receive a perceived reward, even in social or interpersonal forms, may feel an implicit obligation to reciprocate.³⁹ Understanding how these dynamics manifest in digital spaces is essential to recognizing how transactional sexual exchanges may be shifting, particularly in ways that blur the lines between agency, coercion, and commercial exploitation. Further research is needed to explore how the provision of social opportunities functions within coercive or commercially exploitative sexual experiences, including its role in influencing a minor’s decision to share sexual imagery or engage in other sexual acts.

Solicitations for Non-Explicit Imagery

To contextualize young people’s experiences of commodified sexual interactions as minors, the survey also asked young people about their experiences with receiving commodified solicitations for non-explicit imagery (e.g., photos of them at the beach in a bathing suit, live-streams of them getting ready in the morning, or imagery focused on a specific

body part such as, feet, stomachs, or backs). The ability to initially capture young people’s experiences with commercial solicitations that are not explicitly sexual is valuable for two reasons. First, receiving these forms of solicitation may complicate young people’s ability to discern between legitimate⁴⁰ and exploitative interactions, potentially serving as a pathway to desensitization or normalization of exploitative dynamics (e.g., as part of the grooming process). Second, these solicitations may, under certain circumstances, represent potential sexual exploitation.⁴¹ For instance, some of this content may contribute to the sexualization of minors, may be consumed within fetish contexts,⁴² or may reflect a user’s broader sexual interest in children.

Overall, 1 in 5 (19%) respondents surveyed reported they had been offered something of value — such as money, cryptocurrency, gift cards, or other items in exchange for sharing “nonsexual” imagery of themselves online while they were under the age of 18 (Figure 13). Notable cohort differences emerged, with LGBTQ+ teen respondents (32%) being twice as likely as their non-LGBTQ+ peers (16%) to report this experience. Additionally, young adult women (27%) were more likely to report such experiences than young adult men (16%).

1 in 5

young people have received a commodified solicitation for non-explicit imagery of themselves as minors.

Respondents who reported experiencing a commodified solicitation for non-explicit imagery of themselves as minors (n = 230) were asked to identify the content of the imagery they were solicited to provide (Figure 14). The most common requests reported were for imagery of a specific body part, such as feet (59%); performing everyday activities like eating

37 Dank, M., Khan, B., Downey, P. M., Kotonias, C., Mayer, D., Owens, C., & Yu, L. (2014). *Estimating the size and structure of the underground commercial sex economy in eight major U.S. cities*. The Urban Institute. https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/22376/413047-estimating-the-size-and-structure-of-the-underground-commercial-sex-economy-in-eight-major-us-cities_0_1.pdf.

38 Sprecher, S. (1998). Social exchange theories and sexuality. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 35(1), 32-43. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00224499809551915>

39 Sprecher, S. (1998).

40 E.g., in some cases, they may represent legitimate influencer, sponsorship or advertising opportunities.

41 Valentino-DeVries, J. & Keller, M. (2024, December 30). The men who use Instagram to groom child influencers. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/30/us/child-influencers-photographers-abuse.html>; Gamez, M. (2023, April 7). 6th graders selling feet pictures online to strangers, parents unaware. *My Northwest*. <https://mynorthwest.com/local/sixth-grader-selling-feet-pictures-online-strangers-parents-unaware-sextortion/3870719>

42 Some examples include podophilia (a paraphilia associated with sexual interest in feet) and somnophilia (a paraphilia associated with sexual interest in watching someone who is unconscious or asleep).

or sleeping (40%); and engaging in athletic activities, such as exercising, dancing, or playing sports (37%).

Women and girls were more likely than men and boys to report receiving solicitations for imagery of a specific body part (+9%). In comparison, men and boys were likelier to report solicitations for imagery of them at the beach (+10%).

It is notable that *more* survey respondents indicated they had received a commodified solicitation for sexual content or activity (25%) compared with those who received a commodified solicitation for non-explicit imagery (19%). Among those who indicated they had received at least one form of commodified sexual solicitation, more than half (59%) also indicated they had received a commodified solicitation for non-explicit imagery of themselves. While not definitive, the potential relationship between the two experiences should be further investigated. Future studies should investigate critical aspects such as whether the young person solicited ultimately provided the requested content, the context in which the solicitation occurred (e.g., influencer-related opportunities, mediation through a caregiver), how payment was negotiated and made, the age of the solicitor, and the nature of the young person's relationship to the solicitor (e.g., whether they knew the individual offline or exclusively online), to name a few.

Fig 13 | **Experiences receiving commodified solicitations for nonsexual photos as a minor**

QY1. [IF 18–20: While under the age of 18, were you ever; IF 13–17: Have you ever been] **offered** money/crypto, gift cards, or other valuable items by someone in exchange for sharing **nonsexual** photos or videos of yourself with them over the internet or a cell phone (including texting)?

		Yes	No
All Respondents (n=1200)		19%	81%
		Yes	No
Men & boys	n=547	17%	83%
Women & girls	n=595	20%	80%
LGBTQ+	n=224	24%	76%
Non-LGBTQ+	n=952	18%	82%
Ages 13-17 (n=724)		18%	82%
		Yes	No
Boys	n=373	17%	83%
Girls	n=335	17%	83%
LGBTQ+	n=77*	32%	68%
Non-LGBTQ+	n=633	16%	84%
Ages 13-14		20%	80%
Boys	n=146	21%	79%
Girls	n=130	17%	83%
Ages 15-17		16%	84%
Boys	n=227	14%	86%
Girls	n=205	17%	83%
Ages 18-20 (n=476)		21%	79%
		Yes	No
Men	n=174	16%	84%
Women	n=260	27%	73%
LGBTQ+	n=147	19%	81%
Non-LGBTQ+	n=319	22%	78%

*Base size <100

Fig 14 | **Context of nonsexual photos requested in commodified solicitations**

Among respondents who have been solicited for a commodified exchange for nonsexual photos as minors

QY2. Do any of the following describe the **nonsexual** photos or videos of yourself that you've received requests for in exchange for money/crypto, gift cards, or other valuable items?

	All Respondents n=230	Men & boys n=91*	Women & girls n=127	LGBTQ+ n=50*	Non-LGBTQ+ n=174	Ages 13-17 n=127	Ages 18-20 n=103
Photos of a specific body part (e.g., your feet)	59%	54%	63%	68%	57%	59%	59%
Photos or videos doing everyday activities (e.g, eating or sleeping)	40%	39%	41%	34%	42%	40%	40%
Photos or videos of you exercising, dancing, playing sports, or doing something athletic	37%	37%	37%	31%	39%	38%	34%
Photos or videos of you applying makeup or getting dressed (e.g., Get Ready with Me/GRWM)	26%	24%	28%	21%	26%	28%	22%
Photos or videos of you at the beach	21%	28%	18%	11%	24%	20%	22%
Something else	3%	2%	3%	0%	3%	2%	4%

Question was multiple select. *Base size <100

Discussion

This study provides a preliminary snapshot of an emerging risk within young people’s digital environments: the commodification of their sexual interactions and imagery. The findings reveal a concerning reality — many minors not only face technology-facilitated sexual solicitations, such as requests for nudes, sexual chats, or other explicit interactions, but these solicitations frequently involve a transactional element of exchange. While the commercial sexual exploitation of children is far from new, the experiences described by respondents in this study reflect notable shifts from traditional CSEC frameworks, including a broader profile of “buyers” and forms of compensation beyond direct monetary exchange. Alarmingly, for some minors, limited awareness of the risks and the perception of personal agency in these exchanges may contribute to increased vulnerability, reinforcing the normalization of commodified sexual interactions as part of their online experiences.

Further research and investigation are essential to understand this evolving threat and deploy effective, comprehensive interventions and safeguards.

It’s common for young people to receive sexual solicitations online, often after only a brief period of connection between users.

Recommendation: Incorporate discussions about technology-facilitated sexual exploration and exploitation into broader discussions with young people about relationships, sex, and digital safety.

Technology’s rapid integration into daily life has fundamentally reshaped how young people experience the world, including how they form relationships, express themselves, and explore their identities. Online platforms have become spaces where young people engage in normative digital behaviors, such as forming connections with larger networks of people (many of whom they don’t know offline), sharing extensive amounts of personal content, and exploring their aspirations (e.g., to become an influencer). These behaviors extend into sexual exploration as well, such as exploring sexual content or exchanging intimate imagery.

However, the immediacy of digital exchanges and the perceived anonymity of online interactions create conditions where trust develops

rapidly, and boundaries are crossed easily — often before risks can be recognized. The acceleration of intimacy and perceived closeness online makes it difficult for young people to distinguish between safe exploration and coercion. Many digital behaviors make young people more accessible to those with bad intentions, and as a result, some of the sexual interactions they navigate are not always with trusted individuals, nor are they always representative of the sexual experiences young people think they may be having or are capable of consenting to. This has contributed to a reality where sexual solicitations occur frequently and escalate quickly, making it difficult for young people to differentiate between consensual exploration and manipulative or exploitative exchanges.

To address this, discussions about relationships, sex, and digital safety must be presented holistically, emphasizing how technology facilitates both healthy and harmful interactions. Young people are often presented with outdated or overly simplistic narratives about sexual risks, especially online sexual risks — focusing narrowly on “stranger danger” or extreme

cases of harm — when, in reality, their vulnerabilities emerge within digital behaviors that feel typical, routine, or even empowering in the moment. Without a clear framework that reflects the nuanced and routine ways young people encounter sexual solicitations and interactions today, they will continue to struggle to recognize when they are being manipulated, coerced, or gradually conditioned into harmful exchanges.

Digital literacy efforts must evolve beyond one-time warnings or simplified stereotypes to instead foster ongoing conversations that equip young people with the skills they need to assess power dynamics, digital

influence, and the evolving tactics bad actors use to gain their trust and lower their boundaries. This includes helping them recognize how speed, social pressure, and attention can be leveraged in online environments to manipulate their decisions — particularly in exchanges that may feel consensual but carry risks. Integrating these nuanced realities into sex education and digital safety discussions will better equip young people to recognize red flags, push back against pressure, and assert agency in ways that truly protect their well-being.

For some young people, technology-facilitated sexual experiences have been commodified, with young people receiving both monetary and non-monetary (e.g., social opportunities) forms of compensation.

Recommendation: Prevention education must speak clearly about commodified sexual interactions involving minors, including both monetary and non-monetary (such as social opportunities or online influence), beyond historical depictions of “high-risk” youth.

Over the last decade, research has consistently identified technology’s role in facilitating CSEC — serving as a tool for grooming, advertising, and payment exchange⁴³ — with much of the focus on monetary transactions such as payments for sexual content or activity. This study builds on that foundation: Young people who reported receiving monetary goods in exchange for their sexual content or activity also described the significant roles technology had in facilitating their methods of exchange (e.g., use of payment applications) and their forms of compensation (e.g., cryptocurrencies, gaming currencies).

However, findings from this research also highlight a critical shift in how young people perceive value exchange in sexual interactions. Among the 15% of young people who indicated they had a digital experience involving the exchange of items of value for their sexual content or activity, 33% reported they had received social opportunities, such as party invitations or increased follower counts as a form of compensation. While social capital has long been a factor in how relationships are evaluated — encompassing the professional, platonic, and sexual — these findings indicate that digital social capital, such as online followers, clout, and visibility, may be an increasingly persuasive factor influencing and incentivizing young people to share their sexualized or explicit imagery or engage in other sexual activity.

Unlike traditional monetary transactions, these forms of compensation can feel intangible, making it harder for young people to recognize them as part of an exploitative exchange. Many may view the pursuit of digital

⁴³ Thorn & Bouche (2015); Mitchell & Jones (2013).

clout as an opportunity rather than a risk, overlooking the long-term consequences of engaging in commodified sexual exchanges. Prevention education must expand beyond depictions of “high-risk” youth or purely financial transactions to include how digital validation and status-seeking can surface within exploitative exchanges.

To counteract this, prevention efforts must actively challenge the misconception that commodification only applies when money is

exchanged. Young people must understand that sexual interactions motivated by status, popularity, or perceived influence can still be exploitative and carry significant risks. By directly addressing the expanding scope of commodified sexual interactions and reinforcing that transactional sexual interactions – whether for money, online influence, or social inclusion – can be harmful, we can better equip young people to recognize and navigate the risks associated with these exchanges.

Markets for the commercial sexual exploitation of children appear to be expanding, driven, in part, by emerging buyer dynamics that capitalize on vulnerabilities linked to technology-facilitated sexual exploration among young people.

Recommendation: Prevention and detection efforts should expand to address evolving sexual exploitation dynamics.

Historically, conversations around CSEC have been anchored on the role of third-party intermediaries and adult buyers who pay for access to minors or CSAM. While these dynamics remain significant, new data highlights other important dimensions of commercial exploitation. Specifically, this research suggests some minors may engage directly with online contacts to initiate commercial sexual exchanges, including the “sale” of self-generated CSAM. Additionally, a portion of the commodified sexual interactions described by young people involved “buyers” who were other minors, raising concerns about how the commodification of sexual interactions may be blurring the lines between peer-to-peer exchanges and commercial exploitation in ways that normalize harmful behaviors.

In instances where there is no clear third-party facilitator – such as in “self-initiated” exchanges – young people may perceive their involvement as consensual and, therefore, not recognize them as exploitative or illegal. This misconception can be particularly strong when minors view these

experiences as an expression of their personal agency or when they occur with peers. As a result, exploitation and risk may be downplayed or not fully recognized. Addressing these risks requires tailored prevention strategies that challenge misconceptions about consent and commodification, emphasizing that all transactional sexual exchanges – whether with adults or peers, and whether monetary or non-monetary – can be harmful.

These emerging marketplace dynamics also present unique challenges for detection and intervention within the platforms where they occur. Current content moderation and safety tools rely heavily on user reporting to identify violative interactions and enforce policies against minor sexualization, CSEC, and CSAM. However, as seen in other illicit marketplace dynamics (e.g., the sale and distribution of drugs or weapons), the users involved often lack the motivation or incentive to report. Minors may fear deplatforming or legal consequences, while others may not recognize the exchanges as problematic or exploitative. Some may even view reporting as a threat to their “income.”

Most platforms do not actively search for these nuanced dynamics, focusing enforcement primarily on traditional forms of CSEC rather than adapting to new, emerging pathways. This creates gaps in policy enforcement and fails to account for the evolving role of digital platforms in facilitating these exchanges. To address this, platforms should proactively evaluate how their features, ecosystems, and engagement models may facilitate and sustain these illicit exchanges. Platforms can integrate a demand-side disruption approach by analyzing data from suspended or deplatformed accounts that have been previously known to engage in these exchanges. This analysis could help to identify consistent

behavioral signals of the accounts and between users, to detect multi-account linkages and coordinated behaviors, and to map network and engagement patterns — all of which could inform the successful development of proactive detection tools. These efforts would be further strengthened through cross-platform collaboration. By sharing case studies, detection strategies, and emerging patterns of abuse, platforms can leverage collective intelligence at the ecosystem level to implement a more unified approach to disrupting exploitative networks and mitigating the evolving tactics that sustain them in digital environments.

Final Thoughts

The evolving landscape of child sexual exploitation is intricately tied to the rapid integration of technology into young people's lives. The digital age has transformed marketplace economies, accelerated access to young people, introduced new avenues for sexual exploration, and embedded transactional dynamics into online interactions. For young people, one result of this complex interplay is a blurring of the lines between normative sexual behaviors and exploitative dynamics. These changes reflect a world where connection and exploitation increasingly coexist in digital spaces, complicating the boundaries of agency, consent, and harm.

This report underscores a critical need to situate young people's experiences with technology-facilitated sexual exploitation within a context that considers how technology more broadly intersects with their sexual development and exploration. As sexual exploration unfolds online, young people face new vulnerabilities to exploitation, including a shift towards the commodification of their sexual interactions, changes in the types of value exchanged, and broader buyer dynamics. These shifts require an expansion of current child safety frameworks to address emerging forms of exploitation that transcend traditional notions of commercial sexual exploitation of minors, including peer-to-peer commodified sexual exchanges and the apparent "self-initiated sale" of personal sexual content. The rapid pace of technological change has amplified traditional exploitation pathways while simultaneously facilitating the emergence of new pathways, reshaping the dynamics of risk and vulnerability in ways that established frameworks for disrupting CSEC markets are not fully equipped to address.

Addressing this evolving reality requires a thoughtful calibration of how we educate, protect, and empower young people to navigate potential threats of sexual exploitation. Prevention strategies must reflect the complexity of the experiences that young people may navigate, addressing both explicit threats and the more subtle, normalized risks that are embedded within digital environments. By centering young people's voices and approaching these challenges with nuance and compassion, we can effectively adapt safeguards that not only support them in exercising their agency but also reduce the likelihood that their attempts to do so may lead to harm.



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