Fondation Scelles
Knowing, Understanding, Fighting Sexual Exploitation

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EXPERTISE NOTE OF THE OBSERVATORY



Sharenting, Kidfluencing or Sexual Exploitation?

The Risks of Exposing Children on the Internet

Photo credit: AI-generated image on Canva

I love my mother, but not her Facebook account. Each photo finds a new way to embarrass me. I would be surprised to learn of any teenager who doesn't brace themselves before viewing their parent's latest post.

How many times have we heard this remark from young people? According to a survey conducted by Microsoft, four out of ten teenagers think that their parents expose them too much on the Internet.[1]

But what if these photos were more than just embarrassing? What if instead of unflattering, they were invasive and suggestive? What if instead of merely fodder for teasing by friends, they were the source of sexual gratification for strange men? Even worse, what if instead of that mothers' motivations being simply an innocent desire to document the life of her daughter, they were far more perverse intentions to exploit and auction off her dignity and humanity for profit?

These are more than just twisted hypotheticals—this is the reality for an entire new generation of children growing up in the digital age.

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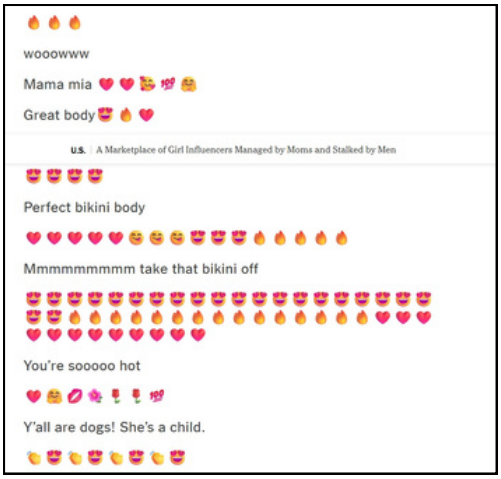
By the time a child is 13, their parents will have shared on average 1,300 photos of them on social media.[2] Many parents share images of their children simply to connect with loved ones who live far away and mark major life milestones for their kids. This practice of "sharenting"[3] has come under fire in recent years due to data privacy concerns and worries about cyberbullying,[4] but the most troubling side effect of this kind of digital sharing is that even the most well-intentioned parents are exposing their children to online predators.

Disturbingly, 50% of online child sexual abuse material originates from photos posted by a child's parents.[5] Even parents who think they're being careful may be sharing their children with a wider audience than they realize: almost 80% of parents who use social media have followers they have never met.[6] Even followers they think they do know may be sharing pictures of the child with their own networks,[7] unbeknownst to the original posters.

The Dangers of "Kidfluencing"

The rise of "kidfluencing" is a major contributor to the issue. "Kidfluencers" are children who, despite being too young to have social media accounts, have major presences on social media.[8] Although Instagram does not allow accounts for children under the age of 13, parents can (and often do) sidestep this restriction by running accounts on behalf of their children. These accounts can range from innocent-on-their-face pictures of young dancers in leotards to openly racy and provocative images of toddlers. This genre of account is highly profitable for parents, who may at the very least receive free products from brands and at the higher end can receive tens of thousands of dollars from a single post.[9] As these "kidfluencing" accounts grow larger and larger followings, the demographics of their support bases become more and more predominantly male, suggesting that the demand for these images is far from innocent.[10]

Real comments left by adult men under a photo of a 9 year old girl in a bikini posted by her parents.
These comments were found by investigative journalists from the New York Times[11]



Indeed, parents who manage a public social media account on behalf of a child nearly all report the same troubling signs of pedocriminality: creepy comments, bizarre DM's pleading to be their child's "sugar daddy," overwhelming numbers of older male followers, and more.[12] The scale of this phenomenon itself is also larger than it may seem, with Meta itself admitting that 500,000 kidfluencer accounts had "inappropriate interactions" each day as of 2020.[13]

Even worse, some parents go far beyond accidental oversharing and engage in blatant purposeful exploitation of their children on social media.

This is often facilitated by platforms with paid subscription tools. On Instagram, parents can charge monthly fees for their predominantly male audiences to gain access to exclusive photos and live video chats from their young daughters.[14] Another site, BrandArmy, permits parents to manage accounts for their children in order to offer paid subscriptions to private chats and live streams with them.[15] While parents can profit from a child as young as 13, purchasers must be 18 or older,[16] establishing an inherently unsafe subscription model. Some parents also sell their children's used clothing—tight-fitting dance leotards are especially popular among pedophiles.[17]

The money to be made from these subscriptions is staggering, and the quest for it seems to be primarily driven by the parents of the children in question. For example, at just 16 years old "kidfluencer" Jacquelina de Jong raked in 50,000 USD a month by selling access to her provocative photos.[18] Her parents had been running social media accounts for her since the age of 6. She began modeling swimsuits at 13 before registering to sell racy photos on her first subscription-based platform at just 15, all with the permission of her parents.[19] Another example is controversial TikToker Piper Rockelle, currently 17, whose parent-managed BrandArmy account charges up to $100 a month for users to request pictures *Rolling Stone* deemed "not exactly safe for work" despite the site's no-nudity policy.[20] As for the involvement of her parents, Rockelle's mother has been accused of a plethora of inappropriate sexual conduct towards child creators who have collaborated with her daughter, with some of these even creators alleging she sells her daughter's used underwear to adult men.[21]

While parents like de Jong's and Rockelle's gleefully reap the rewards from their participation in this highly profitable digital niche, their business model has hidden costs that far outweigh any financial windfall. Parents of "kidfluencers" claim to be either unaware of or disgusted by the attention their children receive from online predators, but the truth is that their bottom line itself is the sexual exploitation of their young children—in particular, the sexual exploitation of young girls.

Permanent Pornography and Permanent Harm: The Effects of Digital Exploitation

The sexual exploitation of a child is a particularly cruel abuse of power with severe psychological ramifications. Firstly, parents and family members who exploit these "kidfluencers" take advantage of their child's inherent trust in them in order to produce child sexual abuse material. Children, especially the young toddlers featured on many parent-managed "kidfluencer" accounts, cannot even begin to know or understand the implications of the photos they are forced to take let alone provide informed consent to have such photos shared on the Internet. **While any form of sexual exploitation lacks informed consent, to exploit a child is to prey on a uniquely vulnerable and under informed individual.**

Further, parenting and child psychology experts have expressed concerns that live chats and exclusive content requests such as those found on subscription platforms like BrandArmy can create dangerous patterns for kids, as they grow up learning to cater to the needs of strange men online.[22] Children, once they are old enough to begin to be aware of the nature of their content, may develop beliefs that selling sexual content or being exploited for sexual acts is normal or expected of them. De Jong, for example, became an OnlyFans and PlayBoy creator upon turning 18 and rebuffs anti-exploitation advocates offering her help by calling them, "psycho social justice warrior[s]."[23] Rockelle, while still 17, shows no signs of intending to stop selling suggestive photos on BrandArmy, saying it's "one of [her] favorite things to do."[24]

While at first glance these statements may seem proof that "kidfluencers" are unaffected by this phenomenon, this is far from reality. Children appearing in child pornography frequently struggle to fully accept the severity of their situation or the wrongdoing of their abuser, often because they have been manipulated by someone they know and trust.[25] However, they also consistently report the same troubling symptoms, including those that occur during the production of the abuse material—genital pain, sleeplessness, loss of appetite, anxiety, fear, and more—and those that persist well beyond their childhood—intense and overwhelming sensations of shame, despair, and worthlessness, among others.[26]

Children involved in the production of child sexual abuse material can also be in physical danger. Cases of real life stalking and harassment have occurred, especially when parents share—intentionally or otherwise—personal information about their children online that can reveal where they live or go to school.[27] De Jong herself had her phone stolen at a snowboarding competition, resulting in her private photos being published online against her wishes.[28] She was also invited to participate in in-person photoshoots by several adult men who were later charged with child sexual exploitation.[29] The *National Center for Missing and Exploited Children* in the United States estimates that 88% of child sex trafficking cases each year start online; clearly, there is potential for digital exploitation to translate to tangible harm.[30]

Additionally, even if a "kidfluencer" who had been sexually exploited were to grow up and attempt to remove all of their explicit content from the Internet, it would be impossible to fully delete everything. Suggestive photos from Instagram often make their way to underground websites for pedophiles, where they can be shared, screenshotted, and saved infinite times.[31] A child's likeness may even be used by pedophiles to produce AI deepfakes of more explicitly sexual content.[32] Beyond the potential ramifications for that child's future career and the clear invasion of their right to privacy, there is a severe psychological impact that comes with knowing limitless amounts of nonconsensual NSFW* content of oneself exists on the Internet in perpetuity.[33]

How Platforms Have (and Have Not) Stepped Up

Faced with this epidemic of child sexual exploitation, social media platforms have been pressured to take some steps to at the very least curb its growth. However, companies like Meta and BrandArmy have fallen far short of their professed goal to end child pornography on their platforms.

In December of 2023, BrandArmy stopped allowing the creation of new accounts for minors, saying, "We knew this was not the type of business we wanted to build."[34] However, the company permitted pre-existing "junior" accounts to stay on the platform, allegedly due to fear of lost wage lawsuits from parents,[35] revealing just how hungry exploitative parents are for profit and just how amenable social media platforms are to their demands. An investigation by *Four Corners* in 2024 revealed that many underage girls remained on the site despite their professed change in policy.[36]

Meta, on the other hand, has repeatedly ignored suggestions from staffers on how to make Instagram a safer platform for kids.[37] Instead of shutting down subscription tools for child-focused accounts and/or requiring said accounts to register themselves for monitoring as employees have proposed, the company chose to pursue an automated system meant to stop pedophiles from subscribing to child-focused accounts.[38] However, this roadblock can be easily bypassed through the creation of a new account. What's worse, even well-meaning parents attempting to clean out their child's social media following may face penalties or restrictions if they block too many accounts.[39]

It's not as if the company doesn't know what their platform is being used for. Meta is allegedly aware not only of the use of Instagram to cater to pedophiles, but also of the ways in which their algorithm facilitates this exploitation by pushing the paid subscriptions of child creators to pedophiles' accounts.[40] In fact, while their own staffers were raising concerns over monetized "kidfluencer" accounts, the platform decided to expand its gift and tipping tools—features found to be heavily utilized by pedophiles to pay for child content.[41]

**NSFW: Not safe for work, also called not suitable for work (NSFW), is Internet slang or shorthand used to mark links to content, videos, or website pages the viewer may not wish to be seen viewing in a public, formal, or controlled environment (wikipedia)*

These platforms' approach to the phenomenon of child sexual exploitation on social media goes well beyond laissez-faire into the realm of negligence. Meta and BrandArmy have yet to pursue a measure with any significant effect on the sale and purchase of sexually suggestive content from young girls on their sites. Meta in particular fails to adequately address user reports of suspicious accounts and behavior; when the New York Times reported 50 accounts over eight months, they received only one response, and parents of child influencers report similar unresponsiveness.[42] And although Instagram's official policy blocks sex offenders from using their site, the New York Times traced multiple accounts back to individuals on the sex offender registry.[43] A former employee pointed to insufficient capacity to address all of the reports as the reason for lackluster enforcement of Meta policy[44]—but if that truly is the case, it only indicates a greater neglect of responsibility on Meta's part. Is child sexual abuse and exploitation not enough reason to bolster content moderation efforts?

TikTok has strictly banned the sale of "child modeling" content on its marketplace feature.[45] Although TikTok is by no means a safe haven for children, having recently come under fire for profiting off of provocative livestreams that can be used to advertise child sexual abuse material on other platforms,[46] their ban on child modeling content marks a significant difference from the approaches of other platforms. This demonstrates that while combatting a well-established market for child sexual abuse content is no easy task for a social media platform, it is by no means an impossible one either—but Meta certainly won't make any progress by relying on surface-level solutions nor by abandoning content moderation efforts.

Then again, why would they *want* to make progress on this issue? Demand for pedophilic content drives enormous amounts of traffic to Meta's site thus allowing them to charge higher rates for digital advertising spots, their main source of revenue.[47] Many families make a living off of "kidfluencer" content, meaning blowback from users would be significant. For Meta, the fight against child exploitation is not only a priority—it's not even a goal. An internal document exposed in a recent lawsuit quoted a Meta official as saying, "[If] we do nothing at all, that's fine."[48] Australian e-Safety Commissioner Julie Inman Grant said it best when she denounced BrandArmy's site as "profiting from exploitation and the sexualization of children."[49] Social media platforms like Meta and BrandArmy that continue to allow this behavior and pursue half-baked monitoring protocols to save face are clearly prioritizing money ahead of child protection.

What Can Be Done?

If parents can't be trusted to protect their children, and social media sites are unwilling to take the necessary steps, one might think the law would step in to provide some recourse for preventing this kind of digital exploitation.

Although some regulation on the issue exists, more can and should be done.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified in 1989, declares that « No child shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his or her honour and reputation. (…)The child has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks" (art.16).[50]
The online sharing of intimate or sexually charged photos by a parent is certainly an invasion of privacy with harmful effects on a child's honor and reputation, and therefore it is not out of the realm of possibility to consider banning and/or penalizing this kind of behavior.

France has already recognized a child's right to digital privacy with the adoption of Law 2024-120, which established parents' responsibility to consider the value of their child's private life, and even to consult with their children in some cases, before acting in their interest online.[51] The law also gave judges the power to require a parent to obtain permission from a co-parent before posting something online, and in special cases of affronts to dignity or morality for the judge to confer the right to a child's image to social services or another family member.[52] This law was a significant step in protecting the rights and well-being of children, in particular because of its explicit recognition of a child's right to their own image taking precedence over their parents' rights to publish content about them online. However, some have raised concerns over the effectiveness of the legislation in practice, including the unlikelihood of a child taking legal action against their own parent and the lack of restrictions on a non-parental family member's ability to post pictures of a child.[53] Most importantly, the French Minister for Women's Rights recently acknowledged that **there is still a need for social media companies to monitor and moderate their own platforms**.[54]

Stateside, a bill to hold tech companies accountable for child sexual abuse material present on their platforms has been introduced several times but has unfortunately never passed.
Known as the EARN IT Act (Eliminating Abuse and Rampant Neglect of Interactive Technologies)[55], this bill would target Section 230, a legal provision that gives immunity to internet service providers for third-party content.[56] In doing so, it would open the door for lawsuits against social media platforms that fail to adequately address the existence of child sexual abuse material on their sites. While the bill contains other elements, including the establishment of a national commission dedicated to determining best practices for social media sites, its changes to Section 230 seem the most promising.
Unfortunately, it is these changes that make it so difficult for the bill to pass, as critics fear this could restrict freedom of online expression.[57]

Worries over rollbacks of free speech are not the only obstacle to legislating this issue. It can also be difficult to draw a hard line about what is and isn't sexually explicit, especially when parents claim to be advertising kid's clothing or activewear. Along this line, it is always difficult to attempt to interfere with a parent's rights to determine the best interest of their child. With social media, there is no film set or physical theater like in traditional entertainment—everything is done within the home, where parents are generally acknowledged to have full reign and where there is no third party supervision. It can be difficult to tell when a parent is truly aware of what they are doing and to what kind of audience they are catering. Of course, there are also concerns over the capacity of law enforcement to detect and address each instance of exploitation and over interference with personal liberties more broadly.

Who is Responsible?

The debates now generally center on where the responsibility for preventing child sexual exploitation on social media lies. Is it on the parents? The social media platforms? Governments? Still more questions abound: what is the balance between maintaining freedom of expression and preventing parents from oversharing? How can we tell when something is child sexual abuse material? But perhaps the most important question for each parent and potential future parent to consider now is this: knowing what you do now, would you share photos of your child on social media?

The answers to these questions are not straightforward, either. There are a number of directions to go legislatively: preventing parents from running accounts for their underage children, blocking the monetization of content focusing on children, establishing a legal duty for social media platforms to shut down exploitative accounts, and still more options yet to be proposed or explored. But no matter how exactly we respond, we must acknowledge that legislative bodies, social media platforms, and parents all have a responsibility to protect children from sexual exploitation.

To sexually exploit a child online, or to turn a blind eye to anyone who does so, is to perpetuate the abuse of the most vulnerable members of our population in a way that follows them, emotionally and digitally, for the rest of their lives. It is time for us to speak up on behalf of those who cannot speak up for themselves.

Notes

[1] *Microsoft.com*, October 9 2019.
[2] *CNIL.fr*, December 18 2023.
[3] Share + Parenting = Sharenting is the practice of a parent sharing videos and images of their minor child on social media/the Internet (https://e-enfance.org/informer/sharenting/)
[4] *National Public Radio*, May 20 2024.
[5] *Le Parisien*, September 9 2023.
[6] *Security.org*, April 1 2025.
[7] *National Public Radio*, May 20 2024.
[8] *Humanium*, February 23 2021.
[9] *New York Times*, February 22 2024.
[10] *Ibid*.
[11] *Ibid.*
[12] *abc.net.au*, May 19 2024.
[13] *New York Times*, February 22 2024.
[14] *The Verge*, February 23 2024.
[15] *abc.net.au*, May 19 2024.
[16] *Ibid.*
[17] *New York Times*, February 22 2024.
[18] *New York Times*, November 10 2024.
[19] *Ibid*.
[20] *People*, May 1 2025.
[21] *Rolling Stone India*, April 11 2025.
[22] *New York Times*, February 22 2024.
[23] *New York Times*, November 10 2024.
[24] *People*, May 1 2025.
[25] *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 1985, pages 313-318.
[26] Silbert M.H., 1989.
[27] *National Public Radio*, May 20 2024.
[28] *New York Times*, November 10 2024.
[29] *Ibid.*
[30] *Journal of Human Trafficking*, February 15 2022, pages 497-511.
[31] *Le Parisien*, September 9 2023.
[32] *UNSW Sydney*, May 27 2024.
[33] National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)
[34] *The Conversation*, n.d.
[35] *New York Times*, November 10 2024.
[36] *abc.net.au*, May 19 2024.
[37] *The Verge*, February 23 2024.
[38] *New York Times*, February 22 2024.
[39] *Ibid*.
[40] *The Verge*, February 23 2024.
[41] *Ibid*.
[42] *New York Times*, February 22 2024.
[43] *Ibid.*
[44] *Ibid*.
[45] *The Verge*, February 23 2024.
[46] *Straight Arrow News*, March 4 2025.
[47] *Investopedia*, June 29 2024.
[48] *New York Times*, February 22 2024.
[49] *abc.net.au*, May 19 2024.
[50] Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF).
[51] *Loi n° 2024-120 du 19 février 2024* [Law 2024-120 of February 19, 2024.
[52] *Ibid.*
[53] *Humanium*, September 17 2024.
[54] *BFMTV*, June 2 2025.
[55] *Time*, April 23 2023.
[56] *Ibid.*
[57] *Ibid.*

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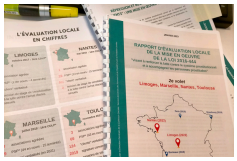
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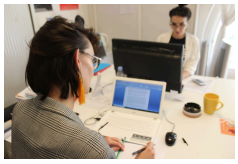
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Observatoire International de l'Exploitation Sexuelle

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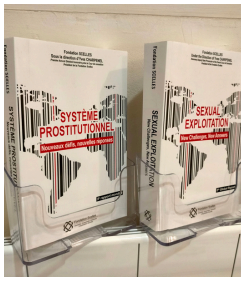
Created in 1995 by the Fondation Scelles, the International Observatory on Sexual Exploitation is a resource center of more than 10,000 documents (articles, books, videos, etc.). The Observatory regularly publishes articles and analyses on our websites about the issues of the prostitution system. It also conducts webinars with experts and creates podcasts to raise awareness among the public.
The Observatory regularly consults with French and foreign experts, including NGOs, institutions, journalists, lawyers, researchers, and those involved in defending human rights. The goals of the International Observatory on Sexual Exploitation are:
- to analyze all the aspects of the phenomenon: prostitution, sex buyers, procuring, sex tourism, sex trafficking, child pornography,...
- to encourage reflection and to take a stand
- to inform people who are interested in these issues.

The Observatory is also in charge of a Web App **#SEXPLOITED** for protection, support and rebuilding people involved in prostitution in France. Dedicated for adults or minors, **#SEXPLOITED is free and available in 10 languages**. (www.sexploited.org)

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