

(Continued)

young men to be victims of in-person peer sexual harassment, they are also more likely to experience unwanted and uncomfortable flirting and sexual harassment online (Henry & Powell, 2015; Lenhart et al., 2015). Data on these experiences are just beginning to become available, since much of the research to date has focused on adult sexual exploitation of children online (see Chapter 4), but the studies that are available show a range of harassing behaviors that include repeatedly e-mailing or text messaging someone to pressure them into hooking up or other sexual activity; electronically distributing sexually explicit, intimate, or embarrassing images or videos of a person without their consent; bombarding a targeted person with “flirtatious” or sexually explicit messages or images via text or instant messaging; changing or deleting a partner’s or ex-partner’s social media profile; and name-calling or spreading sexual rumors about someone on social media sites (Barak, 2005; Drouin, Ross, & Tobin, 2015; Henry & Powell, 2015).

Young people who experience technology-facilitated peer harassment are often advised just to turn off their devices, change their security settings, or block the harasser on their smartphones or social media sites. In fact, over one-third of girls (35%) and 16 percent of boys report having blocked or “unfriended” someone who has made them uncomfortable when “flirting” online (Lenhart et al., 2015). But as Henry and Powell (2015) point out, such responses do not address the serious harm that can result from technology-facilitated harassment. For example, harassment via electronic technology has a “force multiplying effect” because images, rumors, and sexist and heterosexist hate speech may be distributed instantaneously to millions of Internet users, who not only see and hear the damaging content but may then join in the harassment. The psychological impact of such harassment can be severe and has led some victims to commit suicide (Henry & Powell, 2015).

Victims of technology-facilitated harassment have been encouraged to preserve the offensive messages or posts, since these can be used as evidence in criminal prosecutions and civil litigation (Henry & Powell, 2015). At the same time, however, programs to prevent in-person sexual and gender harassment need to be expanded to include prevention of technology-facilitated harassment. The technology itself may be used in these programming efforts, which include social media campaigns to teach bystanders how to intervene if they witness online harassment, how to challenge harassers, and how to support victims. Currently, however, both the law and prevention programming appear to be lagging behind the development and proliferation of the technology and its applications, raising serious concerns about our ability to effectively address technology-facilitated perpetration and victimization.