UNDERSTANDING THE F-BOY: YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERSPECTIVES ON CONSENT AND CHOICE

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Background

Consent has become a core component of sexuality and relationships education and health prevention programs in the Australian context. With 'affirmative consent' (ie. 'yes means yes') the increasingly accepted approach (Burton et al, 2023). This paper builds upon this work by attending to young people's real-world negotiations of consent. In particular, I introduce the 'f-boy' – a figure whose actions, and responses to them, highlights the gendered dynamics, nuance and complexity, present in young people's understandings and applications of consent.

Methods:

This paper draws from fieldwork undertaken at a large co-educational secondary school in Melbourne that engaged with feminist, participatory and creative methods. I conducted interviews and repeat group sessions with 14 students aged 14-16 over an eight-month period to explore how young people come to understand and experience intimate relationships. Participants in this study were of diverse genders and sexualities, however this paper focuses particularly on how participants constructed the f-boy through cisgender-heterosexual interactions.

Results:

Participants clearly denounced what they described as f-boy behaviours (ie. pressuring girls to send nude images or sending girls unsolicited images), and in doing so, were able to describe *theoretically* when something was non-consensual or coercive. For example, drawing upon legal frameworks or definitions reminiscent of affirmative consent discourses. While accounts often revealed a critical examination of the gendered power afforded to f-boys, they also overemphasised individual notions of choice for girls. Here, they were seen - if not responsible for, then deserving of - poor treatment from f-boys, because they seemingly *chose* to participate/respond.

Conclusion:

Findings highlight the need for consent and sex education to better engage with young people's real-world experiences, particularly attending to the socio-cultural situations and normative contexts where notions of 'choice' may be inhibited. This must include an ongoing examination of gender and sexuality norms and power, as well as digital cultures and practices.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

Nil