

B| HOME



RUSTOM GHADIALI
ZOROASTRIAN PRIEST
BIG ON INTER-FAITH
HARMONY B5

Photos of minors shared, sexualised on microblogs

Youth whose everyday pictures are misused have little recourse and suffer similar trauma as sex assault victims

**Aw Cheng Wei
and Tan Shu Yan**

They are photos that could have belonged in a school yearbook: girls posing during dance rehearsals and boys at the swimming pool or the

track, clad in their sports attire.

Instead, they were found on microblogs that publish local pornographic content, drawing lewd comments that range from the suggestive to the obscene.

These microblogs, hosted on content-sharing site Tumblr, came un-

der the spotlight last month when Ngee Ann Polytechnic (NP) complained to the police that a microblog was targeting its students. The school lodged a similar complaint in May last year on another microblog, also hosted on Tumblr.

But an online search showed that it was not just students in NP who have been targeted. Many boys and girls – including minors under 16 –

[LEGAL GREY AREA continued on B2](#)

Victims speak out

It was a photo taken of her and a friend at a class gathering at a beach when she was 14, but Georgia never imagined the photo would find its way on a microblog that hosted pornographic content.

She was then studying in an all-girls school. Her name has been changed to protect her identity.

Georgia posted the photo on Facebook and it could be viewed only by her and her friends. She was wearing a tank top and shorts in the shot.

When she found her photo on the microblog, there was a graphic story under it about imagined sexual activity with her. To make matters worse, the story used her real name.

The post gained over 20,000 notes, which are similar to “likes” and “shares” on Facebook.

“It’s shocking to see how people can make up stories. People wouldn’t know whether it’s true or not – your name and dignity are at stake,” said Georgia, now 19.

She found out about the microblog when a friend sent her a link to the post. At the time, she did not fully understand the sexual material that was written about her.

Georgia finds it disturbing that what was meant as a Facebook post with a photo to remember a happy occasion, was taken and used in this way without her knowledge.

“I find that this a problem that is very prevalent now – once you post something, it’s no longer yours,” she added, referring to her

posts on social media.

She approached the police once with her case, but they were unable to help her. To this day, she does not know who took the photo from her Facebook account.

Boys have also been targets of such sexualisation online.

Aloysius, 18, who plays on his school’s water polo team, also had his photos posted on microblogs without his knowledge.

“I feel disturbed and appalled, as well as embarrassed and shameful to a certain extent – because it’s a very public sexualisation of my body,” he said.

He recalled strangers who would photograph him and his teammates at competitions, but he would usually try to ignore them.

His 19-year-old teammate, Mark,

who also had his photos posted on microblogs, said: “It doesn’t really bother me that much since it’s inevitable for people like that to be out there.”

Both teenagers’ names have been changed.

While Georgia is more careful about what she posts online, she said that sharing her experience can feel empowering.

“I want to tell the person who posted my photo, and to the people who are guilty of reposting it, that I am not afraid of standing up for myself,” she said.

“I am not ashamed to be a girl, and more than ever, I wish for some change. Your words will not degrade and cheapen me.”

Tan Shu Yan

ST PHOTO:
DESMOND WEE

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The Coach

Liza Tay is the founder of L'Attitude, an enrichment centre for developing English-language and literacy skills, which has helped many of its students excel in their PSLE English examinations. An author of a series of primary-school composition and writing guide books, she is also a qualified education professional in the state of California and was involved in Head Start, a federally funded early childhood programme at the University of Southern California.

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