Olave Baden-Powell Society World Association of Girl Guides & Girl Scouts

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FACTOR-INWENTASH
FACULTY OF SOCIAL WORK

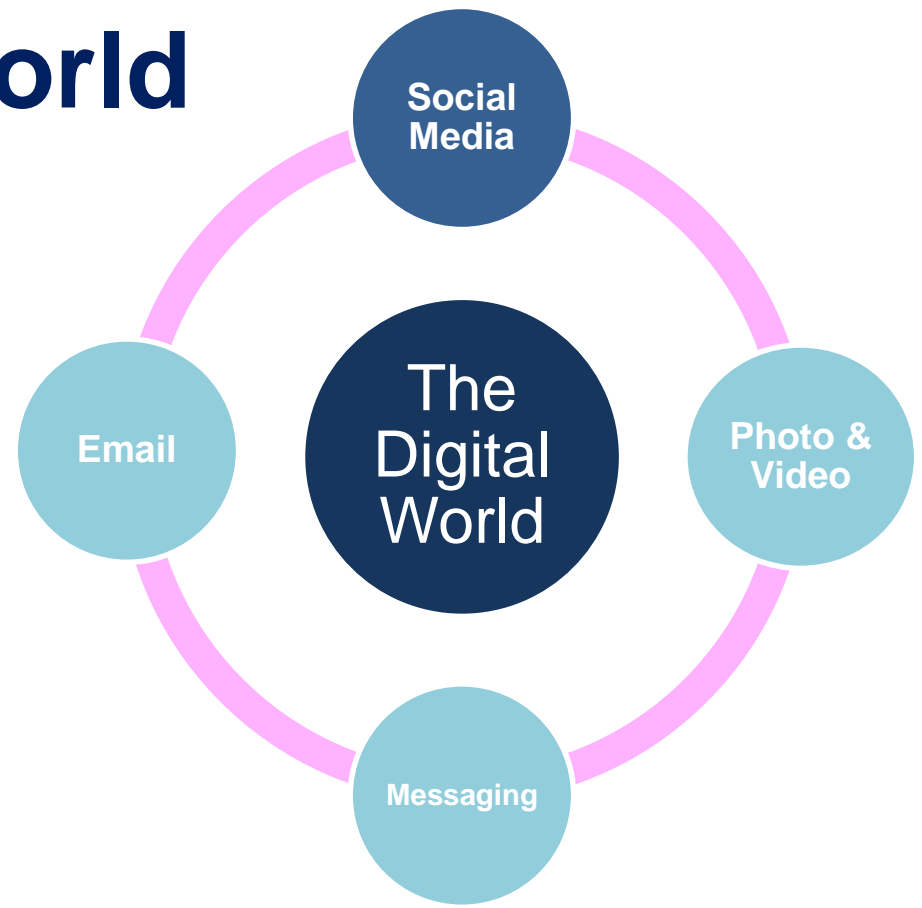# The Cyber World

2 billion
SOCIAL MEDIA USERS

1.59 billion
MONTHLY ACTIVE
FACEBOOK USERS

400 Million
MONTHLY ACTIVE
INSTAGRAM ACCOUNTS

320 million
MONTHLY ACTIVE TWITTER
USERS

Social
Media

Email

The
Digital
World

Photo &
Video

Messaging

Statista, 2016

The Cyber World

Technology is now in their OS

Text Messaging

Twitter

Instagram

Instant Messaging

YouTube

Social Networking

Webcams

Snapchat

Navigating Cyber World

- Developmental characteristics of youth are not consistent with freedom in online world

dependency, growth, change

vs.

autonomy & freedom

- Autonomy & freedom usually increase in university

Liau, Khoo, & Ang, 2008

Definitions

- Gendered bullying/cyber bullying
  - Bullying behavior that operates to maintain & assert dominant cisgender norms of heterosexual masculinity &femininity

- Sexualized bullying/cyber bullying
  - Bullying of a sexual nature that results in unwanted sexual attention that makes the recipient feel humiliated, uncomfortable, or, demeaned

- Also labelled harassment, aggression, discrimination

Gendered & Sexualized Bullying

- Commonplace in the lives of children & youth

- Girls targeted twice as much online as boys

- Gendered & sexualized cyberbullying is disproportionately experienced by girls & LGBTQ2SA-identified children & youth

Gendered & Sexualized Bullying

- Aggression towards girls has been described as 'rampant online'

- Perpetrators tend to be boys

- Severe sexualized cyberbullying can be a risk factor for suicidality among girls

- The distress can discourage girls from online participation

Gendered & Sexualized Bullying

- Increasing evidence of contradictory messages girls receive in socializing & self-presenting online

- Have to walk a fine line between performing gendered expectations of beauty & hypersexuality while not appearing to be a "slut" or "trying too hard"

- Limited research on young children's experiences of gendered & sexualized bullying
  - Assumption behaviors emerge primarily in adolescence

- Evidence that girls who sext considered irresponsible & slutty
  - Even when they sent sexts in response to male pressure

- Our findings suggest that sexualized bullying of girls begins very young

The Double Bind

- Media-driven environment pressures girls to be popular, party, & be sexually attractive

- There are pressures to self-objectify in self-presentation online

- Pressures to send explicit images of themselves to boys & men

- Culture where girls harshly judge other girls' online behaviour & self-presentation

- Rejected &/or punished for being "slutty"

- Criticized for "trying too hard" to appear cool/popular

- Blamed for their own sexual harassment online

- Criticized for taking & /or sharing explicit images of self; blamed for images being shared without their consent

- Criticized for wearing either too much or too little clothing

Current Study & Sample

⊙3 year longitudinal study

 ⊙Stratified random sample of schools

 ⊙Drawn from low, medium & high need schools based on external challenges to student achievement

⊙19 schools

 ⊙Students   (654)

 ⊙Parents   (250)

 ⊙Teachers   (98)

Current Study & Sample

⊙4th Grade: 24.0%

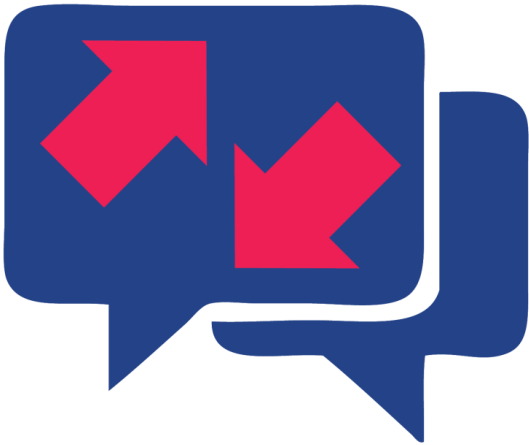⊙7th Grade: 36.2%

⊙10th Grade: 39.8%

⊙Interviews

  ⊙Year 1: 35 Girls, 21 Boys

  ⊙Year 3: 22 Girls,   9 Boys

- **15%** (n=72) of Grade 7 & 10 students have seen nude or sexual photos of their friends, family, boyfriend, girlfriend or other romantic partner online or over a cell phone

  p < .001 by grade

Normalization

- Youth are more likely now to consider these actions & conflict **normal or expected**

- Occurs often & at a rapid pace

- While some found these behaviors problematic / distressing others did not

Interview Analyses: Themes

⊙**Invisibility**

  ⊙Gendered Stereotyping

  ⊙Spotlighting Girls

  ⊙Gender Surveillance & Policing

Gendered Stereotyping

- Aligns with stereotypes that girls & boys perpetrate & experience bullying & cyber bullying in distinct ways

- Described boys as engaging in bullying through physical means
  - e.g., punching & "beating up" others

- Described girls as bullying through relational means
  - e.g., gossiping & rumor spreading

Gendered Stereotyping

- Participants emphasized these stereotypes even when their own descriptions did not fit
  - e.g., a participant described a boy using 'guilt trips' to coerce a girl into sharing intimate images, depicted boys as bullying physically

- Participants rarely mentioned or acknowledged the behaviors or *existence* of the perpetrators, most of whom were boys according to the students

- Images described as '**getting out**' or '**ending up on the internet**'

Gendered Stereotyping

"Mostly for girls it's usually psychological because girls really overthink things & we're really up in our minds & we're all like, 'what exactly did you mean?' & we have to figure out what the exact word meant. & you always think about what it is. Guys just like have no brains. They just beat people up" (*G7 girl*)

Spotlighting Girls

- Participants often framed gendered & sexualized bullying & cyberbullying as the victim's fault – who were mostly girls

- Victimized girls were often described as making a 'dumb,' 'stupid,' or 'sad' mistake

- Girls' creation of intimate images was considered risky

- Non-consensual distribution of these images often viewed as natural consequence

Spotlighting Girls

"in my opinion, it happens to girls the most where a girl decides to make a dumb mistake & sends a picture, like a nude picture, to someone" (*G10 girl*)

Spotlighting Girls

"a lot of girls like, especially when it comes to boys, they want to please boys by sending them pictures & saying certain things that end up getting on the internet & so many people see it" (*G10 girl*)

Spotlighting Girls
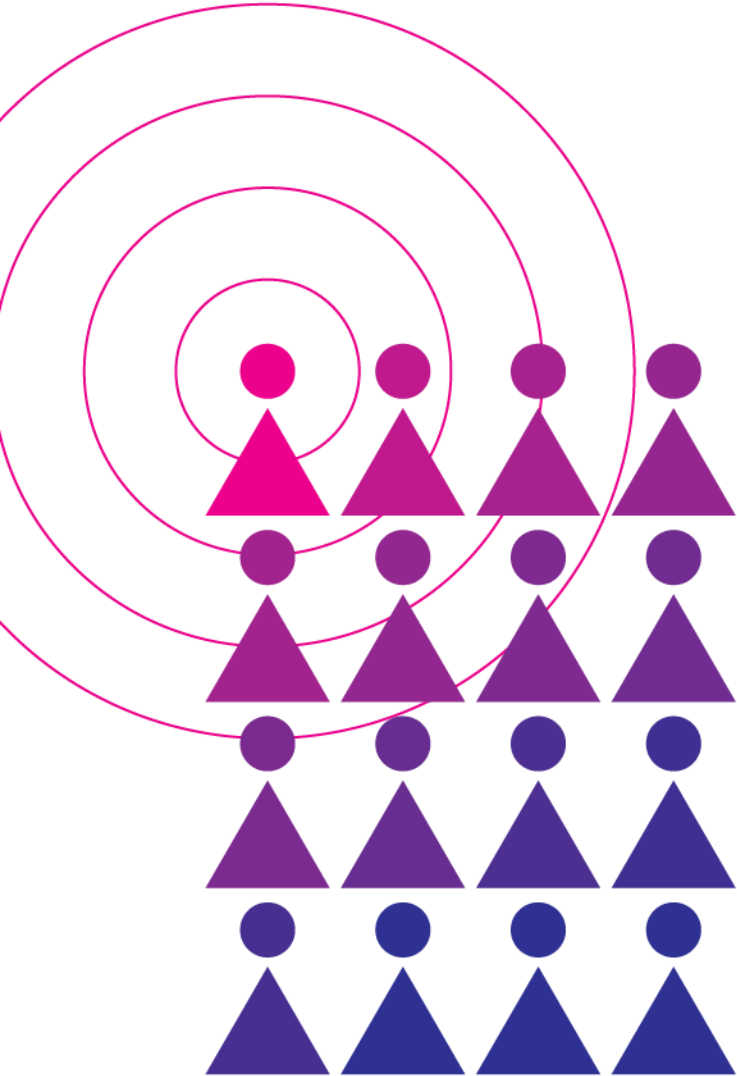
"[m]y friend got called a slut and a stripper in front of two teachers & they did nothing, they just looked at the person & looked away & they heard everything. She went to the washroom crying & got in trouble because she went to the washroom" *(G7 girl)*
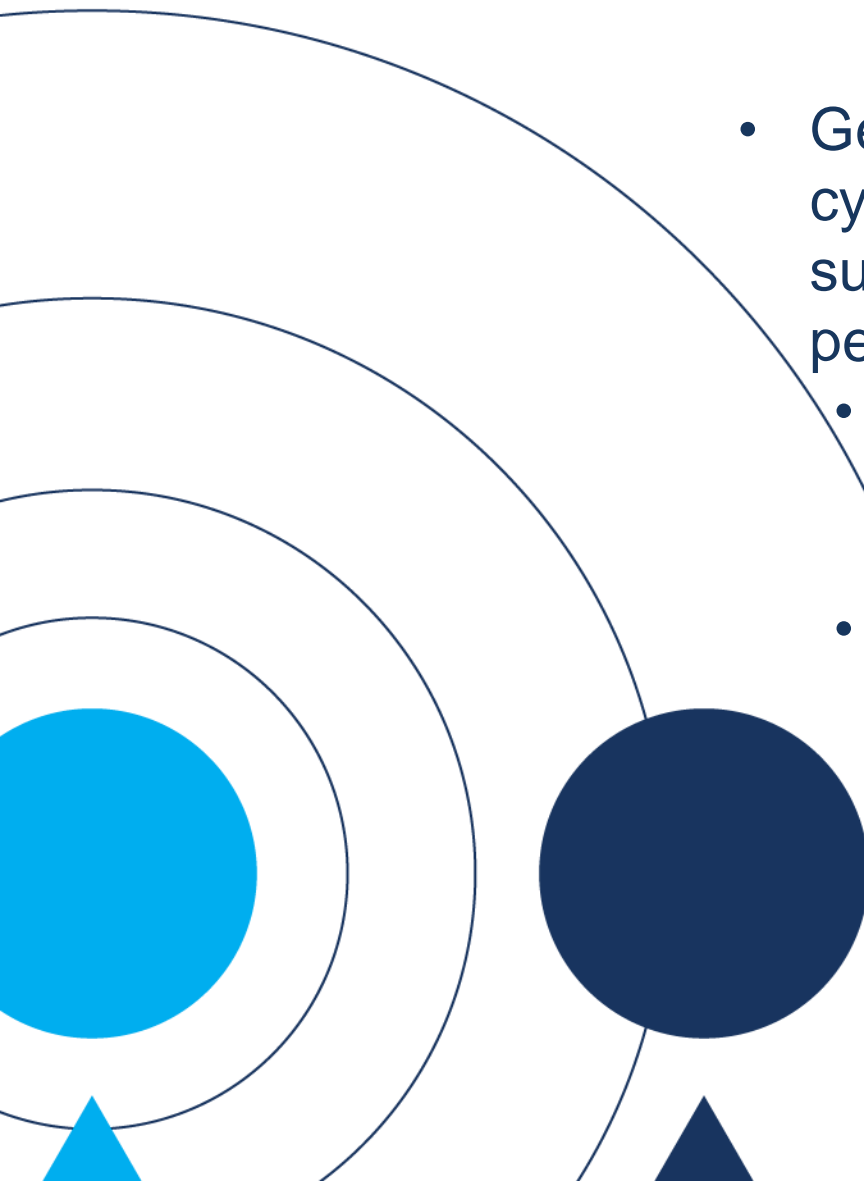
Spotlighting Girls
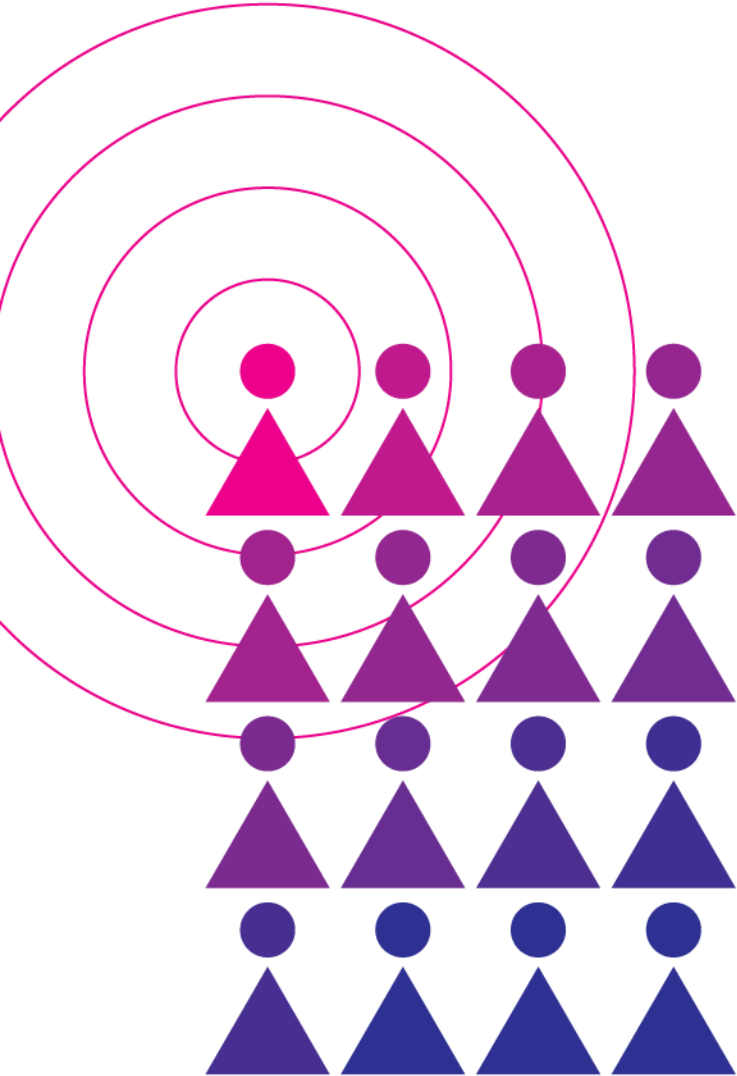
"It's from when we were little because those Barbie dolls are super skinny. We wanted to have blonde hair, blue eyes, & be like Barbie or something like that. I think it's just how maybe we were raised, & how we look at things. We tend to be very submissive & dependent"

(G4 girl)

Gender Surveillance & Policing

- Gendered & sexualized bullying & cyberbullying often involved surveillance of girls' & boys' gender performance
  - We labeled **gender surveillance & policing**

- The processes through which individuals reinforce traditional & stereotypical gender norms in others by rewarding behaviours & actions that conform to norms & stereotypes while chastising behaviors & actions that defy such norms & stereotypes

Gender Surveillance & Policing

"I don't think many guys are [cyberbullied] unless it's like they're gay or they've done this or that, but for girls, it's mostly about appearance & it's mostly trying to get inside their brain & trying to get them to think like that. So you say you're fat, you're ugly, you're stupid. I get that a lot because I'm blonde, so it's always like, you're really stupid because you're blonde" (*G4 girl*)

Invisibility

- The theme of **invisibility** spanned all sub-themes:
  - Invisibility of gender norms & stereotypes
  - Invisibility of boys as perpetrators

- Boys' roles & even presence typically invisible
  - Participants used gender norms & stereotypes to discount, normalize, or justify boys' behaviors

- Girls' involvement, as victim, perpetrator or witness, often spotlighted, with participants holding girls responsible for boys' behavior

Invisibility

- Girls' victimization was attributed to their poor judgment

- Narratives focused on how girls' behaviors should change, which often functioned to erase boys' culpability & roles

- Even when boys & girls engaged in similar behaviors (e.g., sexual rumor spreading), the power of gender norms & stereotypes led participants to discount boys' behaviors while problematizing these same behaviors by girls

- Influence of gender norms & stereotypes used to make sense of gendered & sexualized bullying & cyberbullying, was typically invisible to the participants

Invisibility of Boys

"One thing on Twitter is that it's mainly pictures & it mostly happens to girls. They have a picture that yeah, they shouldn't have sent out because it could be a nude picture or it could just be a picture that they don't like. & I've seen it get on Twitter & in like less than 20 minutes, everyone is laughing at them, everyone is talking about it, everyone is re-tweeting it…I think that girls do get targeted more & victimized more just because it's way more easy, because a lot of girls are naïve" *(G10 girl)*

Invisibility of Gender Norms

"They don't want to show that they're weak because guys tend to be, they think they're very strong, kind of thing, so I don't think they would show it as much. Girls kind of like the vulnerable look, so I think girls tell, more than guys do" *(G7 girl)*

Discussion

- Consistent with other studies, our findings suggest that experiences of gendered & sexualized bullying & cyberbullying are:
  - Commonplace in the lives of children & youth
  - Normalized & trivialized by peers & adults

- As young as 4th grade, boys' actions & even presence often invisible in participant accounts

- Girls disproportionately experience gendered & sexualized bullying & cyberbullying
  - for which they are blamed

Discussion

⊙ Participants reported instances in which adults did not respond even when sought out

▪ School personnel must be trained to recognize & respond to gendered & sexualized bullying & cyberbullying, including behaviors considered 'benign' – in ways that validate girls' experiences

▪ Without tools to unpack these social forces, girls may be more likely to blame themselves & each other for failing to achieve impossible standards of appearance & behavior

▪ Because boys' behaviour is often invisible or normalized, interventions must address boys' understanding of their responsibility in these contexts

Conclusion

- Consistent with social norms & narratives that position girls & women as responsible for anticipating & managing boys' & men's sexual desires

- Thus as blameworthy when these desires manifest in sexual violence, harassment, or abuse

Conclusion

- ⊙ Adults must recognize & challenge the social norms, stereotypes, & discourses that inform their responses to bullying & cyberbullying

- ⊙ Adult acceptance of such behaviors may contribute to a culture that perpetuates gender inequality & promotes gendered violence & sexualized aggression

- ⊙ Interventions must challenge these norms & discourses that privilege boys & foster a culture in which girls are sexualized & objectified

The Cyber World: *Moving Forward*

- We need to understand what youth are doing online

- We need to find a way to help youth maximize the benefits & minimize the risks

- It doesn't mean we are condoning it
  - But that we are recognizing that this is the cyber world in which we live

Thank you!

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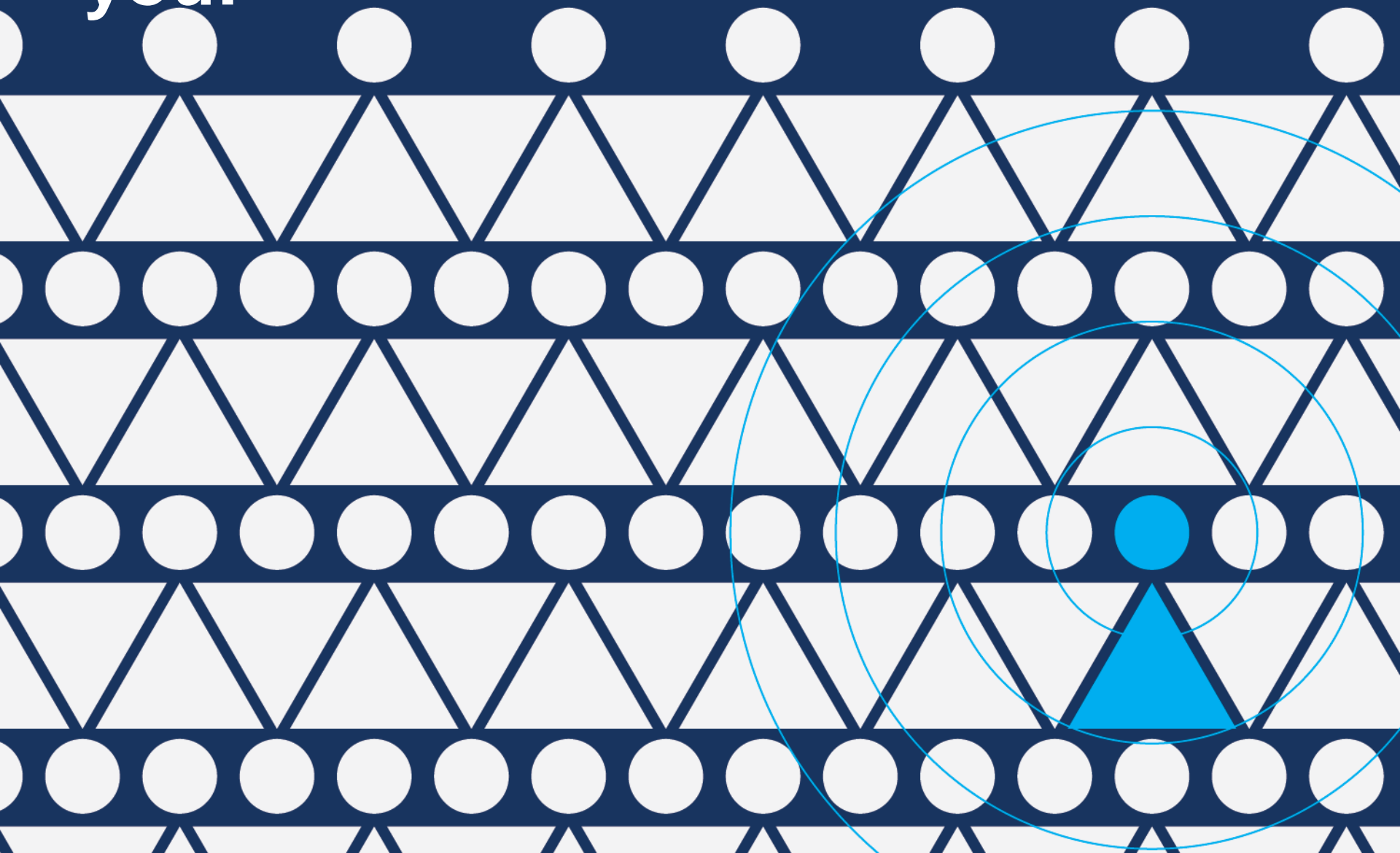
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