

Toronto woman warns others about photos appearing on image-sharing site Anon-IB



A woman types on her laptop in Miami in a Monday, Dec. 12, 2016, photo illustration. In the past month, Roxanne messaged more than two dozen Ontario women on Facebook to warn them that their photos had surfaced on the image-sharing site Anon-IB.

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In the past month, Roxanne messaged more than two dozen Ontario women on Facebook to warn them that their photos had surfaced on the image-sharing site Anon-IB.

It's something the Toronto resident has been doing on and off since she learned four years ago that her own photos had cropped up on the site – a place where users gather to share images, many of which are sexually explicit.

"Part of me felt like a little bit of a creep doing this," said Roxanne, who didn't want her full name published out of concern her experience would affect her career in social work. "But if I can track them down this easily, somebody with a worse motive can too."

Roxanne, 24, typically finds the women she warns by searching on Facebook for their first names, the first letter of their last name and the community they're

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believed to live in – all information that accompanies the photos posted on Anon-IB, which boasts the tagline "Best Anonymous Image Board."

The site – which did not respond to a request for an interview – has sections for various countries, including Canada, the U.S. and the U.K., and pages specific to cities and even universities. The level of detail can allow users to come across images of people they may actually know.

The Canada forum on Anon-IB is currently 15 pages long, with threads for women at various universities and more than 30 Ontario communities.

The website has rules prohibiting the posting of images of minors and a ban on the posting of "personal details like addresses, telephone numbers, social networks links, or last names." But some users work around the rules by posting messages like, "(first name) L anyone? Surname rhymes with mammoth."

The photos of Roxanne that appeared on the site in 2013 were taken in 2011, she said. She had sent two photographs – taken in a crop top and underwear – to someone who befriended her on Facebook.

Roxanne thought the person was a woman named Mary, who described herself as a queer feminist, a survivor of sexual violence and a women's studies student. But when she began badgering Roxanne for explicit photos, Roxanne said she grew suspicious. After an internet search revealed that Mary's profile photo appeared to be that of a pornography performer, Roxanne blocked the person.

Nearly two years later, Roxanne said the photographs she sent to that person appeared in the Ontario sub-forum on Anon-IB, where users were specifically requesting "wins" – slang for nude photos – of her.

Roxanne said she found out about the images only after an acquaintance pointed them out. The photos had been up for two days by that point, she said.

"I (was) in shock," she said. "Then terror and a sense of dread set in."

Roxanne tried to get her photos taken down by filling out a form on the website, but said her request was ignored.

Under the Protecting Canadians from Online Crime Act, it's a crime to post or distribute an "intimate image" of another person without their consent.

Roxanne decided to go to York regional police in Newmarket, Ont., a month after learning of her photos on Anon-IB.

She knew it was unlikely they could get the images removed but she wanted to have a police record in case the matter escalated. She also wanted police to look into what she said were images of underage girls on the website.


"The (officer) just looked bewildered," she said.


York regional police said they are aware of Roxanne's case, that her file is still under investigation and no charges have been laid.

Other police forces have also received the occasional complaint related to the website – RCMP in Antigonish, N.S., said they've been conducting an investigation

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related to Anon-IB since April, and police in Peterborough, Ont., said they became aware of the site after one complaint in the last two years. In both cases, no charges have been laid. Hamilton police said they had one investigation that involved the website but not a direct complaint against it.

Ontario provincial police, Toronto police and Ottawa police said they have not received complaints about Anon-IB.

Toronto lawyer Gil Zvulony said Roxanne's photographs would not be considered "intimate" under the Criminal Code because they do not appear to depict any explicit sexual activity or nudity. He said women who find themselves on Anon-IB should still go to the police but noted that it's unlikely charges would be laid if those who post the images remain anonymous on the website.

Roxanne's photos stayed on the site for about a year, she said, until it went offline briefly in 2014. When the site came back online, her images were gone.

After her experience, Roxanne continued to think about what happened to her.

"My coping mechanism was to go back on the website, find as many girls as I could, tip them off and go to bed," she said.

Katelyn, 23, was one of the women Roxanne messaged. She said she was 16 and 17 in most of the photos that she learned were on the site in August 2013.

Katelyn said she has no idea who took photos from her Facebook and Plenty of Fish dating profile and edited them to make her shirts appear see-through, which was possible because she was wearing light-coloured tops without a bra, she said.

After learning about her images, she asked the site to take them down. The photos were removed within 24 hours, she said, which is why she didn't go to police.

"I'm grateful that Roxanne reached out to me," she said. "It's important for women to keep mobilizing and looking out for one another."

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