

EAPL-S TRAVEL GRANT 2026 WINNER: MAYLEE SEXTON

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH

An incoming Yenching Scholar at Peking University, Maylee Sexton has spent her early research career investigating cultural constructions of child sexual abuse (CSA) and public support for its primary prevention. At EAPL 2026 she presents her computational text analysis of predator catching content, tracking users' moral rhetoric and the ongoing moral panic around CSA in the digital context; her master's research at Yenching will examine the cultural construction of CSA in China, examining its implications for disclosure and the treatment of CSA cases in the Chinese legal system, aiming to inform culturally grounded CSA prevention strategies.

Her research focuses on predator vigilante content (PVC), videos in which content creators entrap and publicly "expose" alleged child predators, has proliferated across social media, yet little is known about the moral rhetorics driving its virality. Drawing parallels to the religiosity-driven satanic panic of the 1980s and theoretical work identifying conservative Christian identity as central to contemporary political polarization, my study examines whether Christian-identified users drive moral polarization in PVC, proliferating this digital form of CSA panic. This focus builds on my undergraduate thesis analysis of the same dataset, in which latent Dirichlet allocation identified a distinct religious discourse topic within PVC commentary. Applying computational text analysis to over 1.1 million comments, I use the Moral Foundations Dictionary 2.0 to track moral sentiment, particularly disgust, comparing Christian-identified users against non-identified users across two platform environments: YouTube, a moderated platform with a politically mixed audience, and Rumble, a minimally moderated platform with a predominately conservative user base. The study further investigates whether this rhetoric intensifies over time and whether the divergence between user groups concentrates on Rumble, a platform known to cater to conservative audiences.