A Rights-Based Approach to Youth Sexting: Challenging Risk, Shame, and the Denial of Rights to Bodily and Sexual Expression Within Youth Digital Sexual Culture

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## Topics

## Sample

41 young people aged 14 to 18 living in a county in south-east England

# Abstract

Abstract Educational interventions on youth sexting often focus on individual sexters or would-be sexters, and are driven by the aim of encouraging young people to abstain from producing and sharing personal sexual images. This approach has been criticised for failing to engage with the complex sociocultural context to youth sexting. Drawing upon qualitative group and one-to-one interviews with 41 young people aged 14 to 18 living in a county in south-east England, I explore young people’s perceptions and practices surrounding sexting. By taking a grounded theory approach to the research, I reveal how young people’s shaming of digitally mediated sexual self-expression shaped and was shaped by a denial of rights to bodily and sexual autonomy and integrity. This denial of rights underpinned harmful sexting practices, including violations of privacy and consent, victim blaming, and bullying. I conclude that responses to youth sexting should attend to this broader youth cultural context, emphasise the roles and responsibilities of bystanders, and encourage a collectivist digital sexual ethics based upon rights to one’s body and freedom from harm.

# Outcome

"Youth sexting should not be understood as inherently a form of bullying, but as the having the potential to involve or lead to bullying for particular individuals (Dake et al. 2012; Lee and
Crofts 2015). This may take the form of situated individual and interpersonal practices of violations of privacy and consent, as well as broader social processes of victim blaming, shaming, harassment, and abuse (Angrove 2015; Ringrose et al. 2013; Shariff and DeMartini 2015). This article has
shown how participants constructed these practices and behaviours in terms of gender and sexual stereotypes and inequalities, and peer group power dynamics and hierarchies (see Mishna et al. 2018). It is imperative that sex and relationships education attends to this broader youth cultural context, emphasises the roles and responsibilities of bystanders, and encourages a collectivist digital sexual ethics based upon both rights to one’s body and freedom from harm (Albury 2017; Dobson and Ringrose 2015)." (Setty, 2019: 309).