Advice on life? Online fan forums as a space for peer-to-peer sex and relationships education

# Keywords

* Online fan forums
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* sex and relationships
* Skins

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## Topics

Social mediation

## Sample

Total of 1,009 comments on the forum, which
together had been viewed more than 75,000 times.

## Implications For Parents About

## Implications For Educators About

School networking

## Implications For Policy Makers About

Stepping up awareness and empowerment

## Implications For Stakeholders About

Industry

# Abstract

Previous research has pointed to the potential of entertainment media as a source of
informal sex education for young people. New social media may offer additional potential in
this respect. In this article, we consider the pedagogical possibilities and limitations of online
fan forums, via a case study of the forums of the controversial British teen drama series
Skins. We analyse discussions of the realism of the series’ representation of teenage life,
and of specific issues (virginity, attractiveness and gay sexuality). We compare participants’
discussions of their own experiences – in a section of the forum entitled ‘advice on life’ –
with their discussions of the series and the characters. We find that the presentation of
issues to do with sexuality sometimes challenges young people to engage in debate, and to
move beyond established discourses. However, the value of the series in this respect
depends crucially on its ‘openness’ – that is, its avoidance of fixed moral positions – and on
its perceived plausibility and authenticity. The forum emerges as a new space for nonformal,
peer-to-peer education that has limitations as well as new pedagogical possibilities.

# Outcome

The research approach is broadly ‘social constructionist’ and ‘discursive’.
As evidence has shown, the programme provides a pretext for discussions about real life – for sharing and debating ‘advice about life’. In some respects, the discussions among fans tend to be more considered, and less superficial, than discussions of the programme itself.