‘Keep your private stuff private!’: mitigating young people’s intimate exchanges online

Sanna Spišák
Department of Media Studies
University of Turku, Finland
ORCID http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4768-9752

To cite this article: Sanna Spišák (2021): ‘Keep your private stuff private!’: mitigating young people’s intimate exchanges online, Sex Education, DOI: 10.1080/14681811.2021.1932795

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/14681811.2021.1932795

ABSTRACT
This article explores Finnish regulatory authorities’ attempts to mitigate young people’s participation in mediated sexuality. Previous studies have argued that both attempted regulation and education about media and sexuality are often out of touch with many adolescents’ lives. This study uses a Foucauldian inspired critical investigative method to unpack the pedagogical messages that frame official statements and the approaches used by Finnish authorities to regulate mediated sexual exchanges. Focusing on the uses of shame as an ongoing pedagogical strategy, the article reveals the limits of social policing. It also sheds light on alternative possibilities and their implications for different aspects of mediated sexuality (autonomy, privacy and consent among other things) that are currently effaced by the regulatory discourse deployed by the Finnish Police Force.

KEYWORDS Young people; mediated sexuality; internet safety; shame; sexual rights

In recent years, in Finland, which is the focus of this study, the police have been vocal about young people’s engagement with mediated sexual exchanges. For example, in 2017, the National Bureau of Investigation launched a local #SayNO campaign together with an accompanying Sextortion video (NBI 2017). The campaign was part of a Europeanwide awareness campaign on sextortion1 organised by Europol and aimed at persuading young people to stop engaging in sexual exchanges online. Similarly, the Police of Finland have published several public announcements within the past five years, warning young people in Finland and their caretakers of the ‘inevitable dangers’ of sharing intimate selfies and engaging in intimate messaging in digital environments. The police force’s latest attempt to curb young people’s sexual self-expression appeared on TikTok, a videosharing social networking app that allows users to create

and share short-form video clips, in November 2020 (NBI 2020). The clip illustrates how an intimate photo sent to trusted friends starts to spread uncontrollably via digital means.

These kinds of efforts to regulate young people's practices of mediated sexuality (Ross 2005) are often justified as a deterrent to protect those aged under 18 from supposed coercion, extortion, humiliation and future shame. Such a singular and deterministic framing of 'ill media impact' linked to mediated sexuality is naturalised and validated in the context of a wide variety of Internet safety campaigns (Albury and Crawford 2013; Dobson and Ringrose 2016; Albury 2017; Spišák 2019). These resources stress young individuals' responsibility to avoid unwanted public exposure. In such an 'online risk avoidance' approach (De Ridder 2017, 1), young people are directed towards their individual responsibilities via strategies to manage online reputations, maintain 'a positive digital footprint' (Ferriter 2011) and pursue a respectable online identity (Buchanan et al. 2017).

Tsaliki (2016) has argued that the current protectionist culture, with its fixation on risk assessment and its governmentalising effects, has become a commonly shared and frequently unchallenged way of distinguishing and making sense of young people's experiences and practices concerning media, particularly sexual media. However – as will be demonstrated in this article – these kinds of official educational responses often serve to avoid important discussion about sexual self-expression, sexual self-representation, communicating consent, and ethical behaviour, which are crucial questions for our deeply mediatised sexual lives (De Ridder 2017).

This article derives from the 'Rethinking Young People's Practices of Mediated Intimate Exchanges' study which itself is a part of a large-scale research project on intimacy in Finland's data-driven culture. The study examines how various media types are significant in shaping adolescents' and young adults' (16–24 years of age) expectations, knowledge and practices in intimate relationships. The aim is to investigate the impact of mediated sexualities, from possible vulnerabilities to tactics of consent, resilience, and improving privacy. The particular focus is on the sexual rights of adolescents and young adults that include ways of respecting individuals' right to sexual autonomy, sexual selfdetermination, and sexual expression. The study uses the views of major 'stakeholders' (policymakers, caregivers, educators, and representatives of service providers) to capture the informants' lived worlds. The aim is to be fair to the diversity of realities constructing the idea of intimacy in data-driven culture and relations and tensions between them. The University of Turku research ethics board approved the design of the study and the use of all research materials.

In this paper, I focus on what kinds of ideas about mediated sexualities Finnish regulatory authorities represent. Although several Finnish NGOs are producing media and sex education resources, it is vital to concentrate on the policeforce's regulatory interventions since the police are important partners with the Finnish public education system (MOI 2020). In 2008, the

Finnish Police Force introduced a virtual police officer model to police digital platforms popular with young people in Finland. Representatives of the virtual police work also participate in the work of Insafe, a European network of Safer Internet Centres (SICs), at national and international level. The police are frequently sought after as guest lecturers in parents' evenings in Finnish primary education and upper secondary education. The police are regularly asked to facilitate online safety activities at schools, including awareness-raising on mediated sexuality. During the 2000s, a range of cooperation models between the Finnish school system and the Finnish Police Force were developed (Heinonen 2018; Antikainen 2019; MOI 2020) to promote the wellbeing of young people.

Through the discursive exploration of the dominant authoritative notions of mediated sexualities the police produce, it is possible to trace the premises of the regulatory processes that are integral in shaping our understandings and debates of this phenomenon. Following Foucault's (1978) work on discourse, I focus on the following questions: (1) What constitutes valid knowledge about mediated sexualities for the Finnish authorities? (2) How does this knowledge arise? (3) What consequences does this knowledge of mediated sexualities have for young people to interpret and shape their environment? Through the analysis offered, I investigate both the limits of the Finnish police's regulatory actions and possibilities for a more nuanced understanding and a holistic take on digital platforms' relevance in young people's lives.

The research material examined here consists of a series of six official public announcements by the Finnish Police Force between 2017 and 2020 concerning young people's participation in cultures of mediated sexualities. The material also includes Europol's #SayNO campaign resources as adapted for a Finnish audience and the National Bureau of Investigation's short video clip on TikTok that appeared in November 2020. In this article, I focus in on the public announcements translated in English by the Finnish police, the Sextortion and TikTok videos, and the English language version of online resources of the #SayNO campaign as these are the most accessible for an international audience. The sample of official public announcements was chosen by typing the words 'young*', 'child*', 'social*', 'media', and 'sex*' into the search engine of the Finnish Police Force's press release archives. While this sample is not representative, it includes important regulatory resources related to the topic under investigation (Spišák 2019).

Context setting and research design

Finland is a technologically rich and Internet-intensive country with multiple online opportunities. The Official Statistics of Finland (OSF 2020) show that Finnish people use the Internet for communication, following the media, shopping and a multitude of other everyday tasks. The use of devices and systems connected to the Internet is also becoming more common.

According to the OSF (2020), 100% of Finnish young people aged 16–24 use the Internet, of which 98% use the web several times a day.

Due to an Internet-intensive lifestyle, smartphone use among Finnish schoolchildren and teenagers is distinctly ordinary. Global social media platforms facilitate active participation in mediated sexualities such as flirting and sexual messaging, dating, communicating and searching for information and advice about sex and relationships, sexual role-playing, sharing nude or semi-nude selfies and creating, accessing and circulating sexual content online (Tiidenberg 2020; Spišák 2019; Attwood 2018; Dobson 2018; McGeeney and Hanson 2017; Tsaliki 2016; Nielsen, Paasonen, and Spišák 2015; THL 2014).

Consensual 'sexting' among teenagers is not a criminal offence in Finland in contrast to parts of Australia, England and Wales, for example. There is currently no substantive body of Finnish research identifying the specific social and cultural circumstances in which young people in Finland participate in mediated sexualities (see Nielsen 2014; Nielsen, Paasonen, and Spišák 2015 for exceptions). Nevertheless, Finnish official messages and formal educational resources regarding mediated sexualities are surprisingly similar to those in countries where the social, cultural and legal context of (mediated) sexuality is somewhat different from Finland.

My interest in examining the discourses shaping current regulatory practices is three-fold. First, I wanted to contextualise recent regulatory responses to young people's participation in cultures of mediated sexualities, using a Foucault (1978) analytic framework. In particular, I wanted to use a genealogical critical method to analyse the relationship between history, power, knowledge and the human subject. A genealogical approach offers a conceptual tool to understand 'how we know what we think we know'.

Second, following Irvine (2002), I view the regulatory resources presented in this article as a discursive site. Jäger and Maier (2009, 5) paint a picture of discourse as 'a flow of knowledge throughout time' which serves the exercise of power. The concept of discourse in the Foucauldian sense offers a way of representing social practices and a form of knowledge with constitutive power effects. The discourses applied in the Finnish police force's regulatory work are powerful social processes that help sustain often taken for granted ways of understanding what sexual media does to adolescents without an in depth knowledge of young people's experiences with and interpretations of mediated sexualities. However, it is important not to dismiss official authorities' social media activities as merely 'posting something on social media'. Among other public authorities, the police are a significant exerciser of power who actions legitimise certain social practices to serve certain ends. It is vital to problematise dominating discourses by analysing them, as doing so reveals both possible non-expressions and 'the spectrum of what can be said and what can be done.' (Jäger 2001, 35). Since discourses are

central to shaping both individual and collective actions that construct society, discourses may be understood as 'material realities' (Jäger 2001) with substantial power effects.

Third, this study sets out to question the wisdom behind Finland's current regulatory actions. A critical stance to the discursive practices of regulation as related to media policy2 reveals how sexual shame as a pedagogical strategy is used to 'regulate social interaction and social bonding' (Sanderson 2015, 11). Exploring the use of shame as the pedagogical strategy, this article critically investigates the premises behind contemporary regulatory attempts. It also suggests alternative approaches that provide alternatives to gendered and generational pedagogies of shame.

I frame this research project around an epistemology and ethics concerned with rethinking dominant orientations relating to young people and mediated sexual exchanges. Building research around an epistemological framework is a productive way 'to enter into debates about the foundations on which knowledge is built, subjectivity is constructed, and society is managed.' (Wetherell 2001, 5). The significance of the regulatory representation of mediated sexualities is that it provides an insight into how 'official notions' of media impact are interpreted, reinterpreted and often oversimplified in the name of minors' wellbeing. I argue that an investment in ethical strategies that focus on consent, autonomy and privacy, among other things, supports and endorses young people's sexual rights and safety in current digital environments.

Fragile minds: a genealogical take on the sexual child

From authority warnings to alarmed public discussions on social media platforms, people in Finland tend to articulate a single story of the solely negative effects adolescents' practices of mediated sexualities might have on their wellbeing. It may be acknowledged that we do not have indisputable empirical evidence that this is always the case (Spišák 2019; Spišák and Paasonen 2017) but a deterministic narrative of sexual media's inherently damaging impact on adolescents is circulated. For example, as the Police of Finland warns young people and their caretakers that:

> *"The distribution of sexually suggestive material may seem harmless in that moment, but the situation may always change suddenly if the material ends up in the wrong hands or distribution, for example. You should really consider what kind of material you share. This is in regard to both friends and strangers."* (National Police Board, 18.11.2019)

> *"On the internet there is no physical threat, but you cannot always be sure of the other person's identity or intentions. Would you show a naked picture of yourself if a stranger suggested it at the mall?"* (National Police Board, 18.11.2019)

Such authority warnings tell a story of inherently unpredictable digital environments that are unsafe for young users. The discourses used amplify young people's assumed vulnerability, highlighting the imagined ill effects of non-consensual intimate image sharing with far-reaching and damaging consequences for young individuals. Here, I do not seek to ignore the legal and ethical challenges that the era of digital media has brought forth concerning the safety and protection of adolescents. However, it is important to note that concerns such as those expressed by the National Police Board are not uniquely characteristic of the contemporary moment.

Worries about the sexual child as an at-risk subject have a long history, and parallels can be drawn between current anxieties and earlier attempts to discipline and manage children's sexuality, as Egan and Hawkes (2010) have pointed out. The intellectual history of the sexual child, for the most part, is grounded in knowledge that privileges the child as asexual, innocent and easily compromised (Spišák and Paasonen 2017; Carlson 2012; Kincaid 1998). Since the late 18th century, childhood has been recurrently framed as a time of innocence and inexperience (Carlson 2012; Egan and Hawkes 2008; Kincaid 1998).

Egan and Hawkes (2008, 2009, 2010) critical analysis of the social construction of childhood sexuality provides a genealogical window onto the historical continuity between current issue and earlier reform movements, from purity activists to sexual hygienists which sought to redress the impact of potentially corrupting forces on the lives and sexuality of children. The aim of both the earlier social movements and current protectionist discourses is to preserve childhood innocence as if childhood is void of all things sexual. As Egan and Hawkes (2008, 301) note, narratives on the risks and harm associated with allegedly dangerous novels in the 1890s, comic books in the 1940s, television in the 1980s and the Internet and mobile technologies in contemporary culture, share a strikingly similar plot. Concern about assumed negative media impact and children's sexual activities and interests emerge as problematic by default, necessitating protective adult intervention to keep children safe from the corrupting force of sexuality (see also Egan and Hawkes 2010; Jones 2011; Spišák and Paasonen 2017). Within these frameworks, (sexual) media is understood as an incontestable external force with a negative effect on adolescents' lives. Premised upon often psychological expert knowledge about adolescents, sexuality, healthy sexual development and media impact, these morally inflected adult concerns underpin intense lobbying that portrays children as the victims of media, who need special protection and whose access to intimate content and practices online must be prevented for purposes of safeguarding children's sexual development (APA 2007; Bailey 2011; Skrzydlewska 2012; Livingstone and Mason 2015).

Close reading of the research resources in this study shows that narratives of risk and harm associated with mediated sexualities are still very much alive. As the National Police Board warns Finnish carers:

> *"[The] Police warn of a common practice among young people to portray themselves on online platforms in a sexual way or otherwise in revealing or scanty clothing. In some cases, young people who have been involved in making such videos may be suspected of distributing Child Abuse Material (CAM). — A possible suspicion of a crime is not the only reason for not filming a video. Police point out that sending or sharing images, videos or live images over the internet can be fatal, as material can never be taken off the internet. Also, a live broadcast can be recorded and resold or sold by anyone."* (National Police Board, 31.5.2017)

While the changing contexts of sexual behaviour, including the Internet, have brought forth novel ways of being in intimate contact with other people and reframed discussion of sex education, consent, ethics and sexual rights, the authority warnings reiterate traditional discourses on the inherent risks and harm associated with adolescent sexual behaviour. Such a framing sustains an understanding of 'the young person at risk' as a rhetorical and tactical tool to legitimise the focus on harm to protect those who are considered being damaged by mediated sexualities. However, the Finnish Police Force's current ways of educating young people about mediated sexualities may be counterproductive, as the following section shows.

#SayNO or bear the consequences

In 2017, the National Bureau of Investigation launched a #SayNO awareness campaign (Europol 2017) in collaboration with the European law enforcement community and Europol. The campaign included Sextortion (NBI (2017) short film, was made available in all EU languages. The short film tells the overlapping stories of Anna and George, who both get into trouble after engaging in sexually suggestive messaging and image sharing online. The video's central message is to 'exercise self-control' and 'not expose yourself'. The campaign also provided online advice targeted at young people.

The #SayNO campaign tells scary stories about how unknown adult solicitors can misuse teenagers' sexual exchanges online. The European-wide campaign's central idea was to educate young people to 'be aware of your online presence' and 'make sure you don't expose yourself'. As the online resources of the campaign detail:

> *"Abusers look for young people who use a sexualised username, post sexualised pictures or talk about sex online. Think about how your online profile makes you appear to others. — If you send sexual photos of yourself to someone online or do embarrassing things in front of a webcam that may be recording without your*

> *knowledge, you run the risk of those images being shared anywhere and with anyone. Do you want that to happen?"* (Europol 2017)

Morality tales of inevitable harm and shame associated with the use of Internet and mobile technologies underpin the #SayNO campaign. As Albury (2017) and Dobson and Ringrose (2016), among other researchers, have noted, shame and humiliation have long been employed in the educational activities to promote safety in digital environments. Within the research materials I analysed, shame is deployed as a means to control young people's mediated sexualities. In fact, in the analysed resources, everything even slightly sexual emerges as problematic by default: the sexual itself becomes risky and something that young people should actively remove from the palette of exchanges available to young users of social media in the name of safety and to protect against future shame. Young people are specifically warned about reputational damage, a sullied digital footprint with far-reaching consequences and sexual shaming and harassment caused by unwanted exposure. In the context of the #SayNO campaign, digital abstinence is identified as a 'responsible' way of avoiding assumed risk of sexual coercion:

> *"Keep your private stuff private. Be aware of your online presence. Make sure you don't expose yourself (or your privacy). Your life is online. Protect it!"* (Europol 2017).

A similar premise of making 'responsible' choices is apparent in the latest attempt to restrain young people's sexual self-expression by the National Board of Investigation's TikTok video released in November 2020 (NBI 2020). This video clip shows how an intimate photo sent to trusted friends starts to spread uncontrollably via digital means. In the background, a young man offers a warning tale of this 'context collapse'3 (Boyd 2014). He explains embarrassingly how even his mother saw a sexually charged photo of himself and how the image ended up on presumably illicit platforms of the Tor anonymity network. The video clip ends with the moral of the story being expressed by the victim: "*Initially, I shouldn't have sent that picture to anyone. It would have been even better if I hadn't taken the picture in the first place."*

Examining the TikTok video more closely, to date the video has received nearly 1800 comments on TikTok, and public discussion has spread to national news outlets and other social media platforms. The video stirred a heated debate as to whether or not the Finnish authorities were right to put a sole focus on the victim and his actions (sending an intimate photo to trusted friends), without mentioning anything about the possible crime that had happened, and the role of the person who shared a private photo nonconsensually. On social media platforms, young people urged the National Board of Investigation to remove the video as unnecessarily damaging for the young people in Finland and the possible victims of online sexual coercion. Young social media users were stunned by how the Finnish authorities attempted to educate them about mediated sexual exchanges. They saw that the police are reinforcing unnecessary shame for the

victims of sexual coercion and exploitation without signalling clearly unethical and possibly criminal activity in their educational resource.
Educational resources such as those analysed here, can be seen to function as ‘an instrument of shame’ (Sanderson 2015, 12). While storylines and images may be deployed sincerely, aiming for positive outcomes, promoting them may evoke toxic shame which carries negative consequences. Since open, positive and empathetic communication, particularly about sexual issues, helps reduce risky behaviour (Kenny 2014) one might question how using shame as a pedagogical strategy contributes to such a goal.

Instead of promoting a safe online environment for adolescents, the unconsidered use of shame may, first of all, make young people ignore perceived harmful outcomes and dismiss suggested solutions as if they are irrelevant to their concerns (Smith, Attwood, and Scott 2019, 3). Additionally, young people in need of adult support may be discouraged from disclosing possible problematic online experiences as they may think that what happened was their fault and fear being further humiliated. Thus, shame-inducing educational activities have a disconnective effect.

It is of course vital to tackle possible online harms. However, the current educational approaches used by the Finnish Police Force put an unnecessary emphasis on the behaviour of the victims of sexual exploitation instead of stressing the kind of activities that are both illegal and unethical. To make awareness really work, pedagogy must be nuanced enough to respond to the increasing mediatisation both of everyday life and sexual practices. As Smith, Attwood, and Scott (2019, 3) state, avoiding the conflation of taking a risk (for example, sending a sexually suggestive selfie to a partner) with harmful behaviour (for example, posting an image without consent) is to recognise young people’s rights to sexual expression. Instead of directing shame towards potential victims in the context of regulation, we should promote a shared sense of shame with respect to clearly unethical practices.

Albury (2017) has suggested that instead of presuming that individuals should bear responsibility for unwanted public exposure of sexual self-representation, we should visualise and challenge the behaviour that generates or endorses public shame. I too argue that in addition to challenging the expressive elements of discursive politics, we should also advance alternative approaches to improve comprehensive regulatory frameworks. In the following section, I explore the value of a shift away from current discourses that reinforce digital abstinence and sexual shame to considerations of consent and ethics, respectful of the sexual rights of young people (IPPF and WAS 2016).

Silence shame, enter ethics

Since young people in Finland report engaging in various sexual practices online that can be framed as risky (for example, accessing sexual content, contact and conduct online) (THL 2014), a supportive framework is needed by young people who may require adult support and help to tackle possible problematic situations online. While educational strategies of only sharing things you are comfortable with anybody seeing, migrating your conversation to places where you have a limited audience, or limiting exchanges to more ephemeral media that do not stick around may work in some circumstances, more attention should be given to strategies that emphasise consent and ethical conduct in the fight against 'content collapse'. As shown in this article, the regulatory texts currently used in awareness-raising in Finland ignore issues of consent and ethical conduct, which should be at the centre of our attention at a time when our social lives have become 'digitally saturated, Internetmediated, and globally networked' (Markham 2018, 513).

Moreover, the research materials analysed in this article seem to suggest that there is no such thing as safety online for the adolescent Internet user. In the context of awareness-raising activities, affective notions of 'imagined potential vulnerabilities from imagined perpetrators' (Ilyes 2018, 285) implicit in digital environments and mediated sexualities are strategically used to inform discussion of mediated sexual exchanges. Persistent reiteration of risk and harm discourse challenges any departure to move beyond the concept of the sexual child at risk.

Aiming to move beyond the reiteration of risk and harm, I turn to the concept of consent. Ilyes (2018) advocates 'care-ful consent' which provides 'a more ethical, loving definition of consent' (ibid., 278) stemming from an ethic of care (Noddings 1988, 219). For Ilyes, consent should derive from ethical engagement in inclusive knowledge building to understand how different lives and relationships are negotiated and how consent is actively framed and reframed within these relationships. Importantly, ideas of care-ful consent provide a starting point from which to imagine alternative approaches to awareness-raising.

The concept of care-ful consent allows new ways of addressing the different aspects of mediated sexuality, including autonomy, safety, ethical conduct and intimacy skills, that are currently effaced from the Finnish authorities' regulatory efforts. Careful consideration of ethical conduct also helps us avoid the 'epistemological violence' (Teo 2010, 295) that wide-spread concern about adverse media impact on young people's safety, sexuality and future prospects may bring about (Spišák 2019, 22–28; 49–50). The notions of harm and pathologised vulnerability contained in educational resources such as those examined in this article, stretch and travel implicitly into general conversation regarding mediated sexualities. Research underpinning debate about best practices, policy and public discussion (see, e.g. DCSF 2008, 2010; Bailey 2011; Skrzydlewska 2012; NSPCC 2017) is often conducted without any attempt to explore young people's own views about these issues, although empirical research on young people's use of sexual media and sexual exchange online has increased in recent years (see, for example, Buckingham and Bragg 2004 on children and sexual media; Albury and Crawford 2013;

Hasinoff 2015; Albury 2016, 2017 on sexting, Martellozzo et al. 2017; Spišák 2019 on pornography, Boyd 2014; Ringrose and Harvey 2017 on teens and social media; Nielsen, Paasonen, and Spišák 2015 on sexual messaging online; Scott et al. 2020 on digital intimacies). It is unfortunate, therefore, that especially in policymaking, mediated sexuality is so often framed as a detrimental practice (Smith, Attwood, and Scott 2019). For many people, it provides an important form of interpersonal intimacy. This issue is particularly important during the current Coronavirus pandemic when social lives are constrained to an unprecedented degree due to social distancing. More generally, and as Smith, Attwood, and Scott (2019, 6) argue:

> *Legislation and campaigns have reproduced moral norms where youth sexuality is seen as a problem to be supervised and regulated, imposing out-dated and often problematic standards of behaviour, rather than recognising that many young people don't see sexual experimentation as inherently shameful or that they may be both producers and consumers of images of intimacy and sexuality across platforms. Most policy approaches refuse to recognise that the digital world offers important forms of learning and development for teens and young adults and seeks to punish where there ought to be support.*

Framing sexuality and related educational efforts positively involves moving beyond a focus of protection towards a broader concern for health and wellbeing. Rather than only highlighting the possible negative consequences, the focus should be on ethical conduct and consent. How then can we move beyond frameworks that mobilise a pedagogy of shame to safeguard young people from the presumed adverse effects of mediated sexualities? One excellent example of good practice in mitigating young people's intimate exchanges can be found in the Together comic strips produced by the Sexpo Foundation (Sexpo Foundation 2016). These comics take sexual rights, consent and negotiation as key elements when discussing sex, sexuality and relationships. The comics were produced for tools for sex education, aiming to enhance open communication and inclusion by covering topics usually left outside of formal sex education, including mediated sexualities. The comic strips portray multiple aspects of sexuality, sexual practices, gender and relationships, taking into account novel ways of intimate communication and the possibility of individuals making their own choices.

The pedagogical core of the comics resonates with notions of care-ful consent. The comics encourage readers to think about how sexual rights are exercised in the comic strips, what rights related to sexuality the characters have, and how can the exercise of sexual rights be ensured? Instead of viewing abstinence as the only responsible choice thereby reinforcing guilt and sexual shame, the comics' focus on the interpersonal negotiation, an ethical code of conduct, and empathy-driven intimacy skills.

At the same time as ‘sex positive’ approaches to awareness tackle the risks associated with sexuality without reinforcing shame, there is a need for a more collective effort to address the issues at stake. It is vital for service providers, policymakers and educators alike to address how young people can protect their right to sexual privacy when engaging in intimate exchanges while at the same time condemning unethical or criminal behaviour. The focus of future actions should be on increasing awareness among young people about the tactics to enhance one’s privacy, not to humiliate or, in worst cases, criminalise consensual intimate practices. In particular, since both adults and young people alike increasingly engage with ‘porous digital spaces, where evidence of “private” intimacies may leak into other contexts’ (Albury 2017, 721), we need to think about the structures in place that allow that to happen. Also, we need collectively to turn our focus to imagining rights and responsibilities relevant to mediated sexualities. For example, could the further development of digital rights management (DRM) tools improve the young’s privacy? Could future DRM technologies enable social media users better control access to content, via restrictions on copying or sharing? At the very least, might DRM technologies inform other users that the original publisher does not want the content to be shared non-consensually? Concerning consent, how do we address what sexual consent is all about, and how do we help young people to negotiate consent with their partners? How best can we ensure that the young know what consent looks like, what it sounds like, how to give it, and, most importantly, how to make sure they have it?

Conclusion

Although I am critical of the Finnish authorities’ methods to educate young people about mediated sexuality, this is not to say that we do not need comprehensive regulatory frameworks to protect children and young people in online environments. However, as Smith, Attwood, and Scott (2019) warn, if we continue to lean on traditional understandings of ‘normal’, ‘proper’ and ‘good’ sexual expression and behaviour that fail to acknowledge the digital aspects of our social lives, we may end up with legislation that actually harms young people. Furthermore, without an up to date knowledge of what kind of support young people actually need, we may invigorate actions that marginalise diversity of sexuality and sexual expression (Smith, Attwood, and Scott 2019).

Above all, ethical, sustainable and inclusive research-based knowledge should provide the foundation of public debate and policy in the field. Thus, we must recognise whose interests are served by regulatory efforts and media policy linked to mediated sexualities. It is not enough to reveal the narrow interests and rhetorical frames behind the promoted approaches at a particular historio-cultural context. We also need to consider alternative models to create education, regulation and media policy that is respectful of those we want to protect.

As shown here, the moral narratives that trigger shame among young people may increase the generation gap, thus further disconnecting younger from older generations. Replacing moral policing with educational resources that endorse consent and ethical conduct is especially pressing at a time when COVID-19 has drastically cut short available forms of sexual exchange. Currently, online platforms allow a safe means of connecting intimately and sexually.

The regulatory resources of the Finnish authorities analysed in this article operate as a controlling tool of governance to regulate young people's personal, intimate relationships, reiterating certain generational norms and conventions concerning 'appropriate' sexual demeanour. These 'instruments of shame' do not seem to recognise the changing context of dating, relationships and sexualities in general. If we want young people to 'listen' to official messages, we should ensure that these messages are relevant to young people's lived experiences.

Scott and colleagues (Scott et al. 2020) list several steps by which researchers, educators and policymakers can ensure inclusivity. First, there should be a timely and accurate understanding of young people's engagement with mediated sexualities. This is best achieved by putting young people at the centre of discussion and allowing for a nuanced conversation. Beyond this, we should facilitate active participation, collaboration and communication with stakeholders and beneficiaries, between disciplines and across sectors. Only this way, can we ensure that policymaking and educational efforts rest on ethical ground and remain relevant to young people and their lived experiences.

Notes

1. Europol currently recommends that the term 'sextortion' should no longer be used as 'it does not convey that the act in question involves the sexual abuse and exploitation of a child, with extremely serious consequences for the victim' (Europol 2020). Instead, Europol proposes the use of the expression, 'online sexual coercion and extortion of children'. However, it is important to note that any kind of online sexual coercion and extortion affects adults and minors alike.

2. I understand policies as directions, guidelines, principles, rules, regulations and laws and principles that guide our actions. Following Devon Dodd and Hébert-Boyd's (2000, 1) formulation, I understand policy as '[a] plan of action agreed to by a group of people with the power to carry it out and enforce it.' For example, information, education, guidance and awareness-raising are powerful policy tools.

3. Context collapse describes the effects of social media, referring to the infinite online audiences possible as opposed to the limited groups a person interacts with. In social media, people may

struggle to limit posts and content relevant to subsets of a network (e.g. some relationship moments may be more appropriate to family and close friends than colleagues at work).

Funding
This work was supported by the Strategic Research Council at the Academy of Finland.

References

Albury, K. 2016. “The Politics of Sexting Revisited.” In Negotiating Digital Citizenship: Control, Contest and Culture, edited by A. McCosker, S. Vivienne, and A. Johns, 213–230, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Albury, K. 2017. “Just because It’s Public Doesn’t Mean It’s Any of Your Business: Adults’ and Children’s Sexual Rights in Digitally Mediated Spaces.” New Media & Society 19 (5): 713–725. doi:10.1177/1461444816686322.

Albury, K., and K. Crawford. 2013. “Sexting, Consent and Young People’s Ethics: Beyond Megan’s Story.” Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies 26 (3): 463–473. doi:10.1080/10304312.2012.665840.

Antikainen, J. 2019. “Turpa Kiinni, Mun OmaPoliisi Soittaa.” Vaikuttavuustutkimus Helsingin Poliisilaitoksen Nuorisoryhmän OmaPoliisi-toimintamallista. [“Shut up, my PersonalPolice are calling.” - Impact Study of the Personal Police Operating Model implemented in the Helsinki Police Department´s Youth Crime Investigation Group.] Master´s Degree in Security Management. Helsinki: Laurea University of Applied Sciences.

APA (American Psychological Association). 2007. Report of the APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls. Washington. DC: American Psychological Association. http://www.apa.org/pi/women/pro grams/girls/report-full.pdf

Attwood, F. 2018. Sex Media. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bailey, R. 2011. Letting Children Be Children: Report of an Independent Review of the Commercialization and Sexualization of Childhood. London: Stationery Office. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/175418/Bailey_Review.pdf

Boyd, D. 2014. It’s Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Buchanan, R., E. Southgate, S. P. Smith, T. Murray, and B. Noble. 2017. “Post No Photos, Leave No Trace: Children’s Digital Footprint Management Strategies.” E-Learning and Digital Media 14 (5): 275–290. doi:10.1177/2042753017751711.

Buckingham, D., and S. Bragg. 2004. Young People Sex and the Media: The Facts of Life? Palgrave: Basingstoke.

Carlson, D. L. 2012. The Education of Eros: A History of Education and the Problem of Adolescent Sexuality. New York: Routledge.

DCSF (Department for Children, Schools and Families). 2008. Safer Children in a Digital World: The Byron Review. Nottingham: DCSF. https://www.iwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/inline-files/Safer%20Children%20in%20a%20Digital%20World%20report.pdf

DCSF (Department for Children, Schools and Families). 2010. Do We Have Safer Children in A Digital World? A Review of Progress since the 2008 Byron Review. Nottingham: DCSF. https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/709/7/do%20we%20have%20safer%20children%20in%20a%20digital%20world-WEB_Redacted.pdf

De Ridder, S. 2017. “Social Media and Young People’s Sexualities: Values, Norms, and Battlegrounds.” Social Media + Society 3 (4): 205630511773899. doi:10.1177/2056305117738992. October 2017.

Dobson, A. S. 2018. “Sexting, Intimate and Sexual Media Practices, and Social Justice.” In Digital Intimate Publics and Social Media, edited by A. S. Dobson, B. Robards, and N. Carah, 93–110. London: Palgrave MacMillan.

Dobson, A. S., and J. Ringrose. 2016. “Sext Education: Pedagogies of Sex, Gender and Shame in the Schoolyards of Tagged and Exposed.” Sex Education 16 (1): 8–21. doi:10.1080/14681811.2015.1050486.

Dodd, J.D. and Hébert-Boyd, M. 2000. Capacity building – Linking community experience to public policy, population and public health branch. Atlantic Regional Office. Halifax: Health Canada.

Egan, R. D., and G. Hawkes. 2008. “Imperiled and Perilous: Exploring the History of Childhood Sexuality.” Journal of Historical Sociology 21 (4): 355–367. doi:10.1111/j.1467-6443.2008.00341.x.

Egan, R. D., and G. Hawkes. 2009. “The Problem with Protection: Or, Why We Need to Move Towards Recognition and the Sexual Agency of Children.” Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies 23 (3): 389–400. doi:10.1080/10304310902842975.

Egan, R. D., and G. Hawkes. 2010. Theorizing the Sexual Child in Modernity. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Europol. 2017. Online Sexual Coercion and Extortion Crime. #sayno Campaign Pages. https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/public-awareness-and-prevention-guides/online-sexualcoercion-and-extortion-crime

Europol. 2020. Online sexual coercion and extortion of children. https://www.europol.europa.eu/crime-areas-and-trends/crime-areas/child-sexual-exploitation/online-sexual-coercion-andextortion-of-children

Ferriter, W. M. 2011. “Digitally Speaking.” Educational Leadership 68 (7): 92–93.

Foucault, M. 1978. The History of Sexuality. Vol. 1. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Sexpo Foundation. 2016. “Together. Comic Strips about the Variety of Sex and Relationships.” Online resource. https://comics.sexpo.fi/en/

Hasinoff, A. 2015. Sexting Panic. Rethinking Criminalization, Privacy, and Consent. Chicago. IL: University of Illinois Press.

Heinonen, M. 2018. Ankkuri-toiminta – uhka vai mahdollisuus parempaan huomiseen? [Anchor Model – A Risk or an Opportunity for Better Tomorrow?] Poliisiammattikorkeakoulun Opinnäytetyö (AMK). Tampere: Poliisiammattikorkeakoulu. https://www.theseus.fi/handle/10024/141657

Ilyes, E. 2018. “Care-ful Definition of Consent.” Journal of Health Psychology 23 (2): 277–288. doi:10.1177/1359105317740360.

IPPF and WAS 2016. “Fulfil! Guidance Document for the Implementation of Young People’s Sexual Rights.” The International Planned Parenthood Federation and the World Association for Sexual Health. https://worldsexualhealth.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Fulfil-Guidance-documentfor-the-implementation-of-young-people27s-sexual-rights-IPPF-WAS.pdf

Irvine, J. 2002. Talk about Sex: The Battles over Sex Education in the United States. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Jäger, S.. 2001. Discourse and Knowledge: Theoretical and Methodological Aspects of A Critical Discourse and Dispositive Analysis. In Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis, edited by Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, 32–62. SAGE Publications, Ltd.

Jäger, S. & Maier, F. 2009. Theoretical and methodological aspects of Foucauldian critical discourse analysis and dispositive analysis. In Methods for CriticalDiscourse Analysis, edited by Ruth Wodak and Michael Meyer, 34–61. London: SAGE.

Jones, T. M. 2011. "Saving Rhetorical Children: Sexuality Education Discourses from Conservative to Post-modern." Sex Education 11 (4): 369–387. doi:10.1080/14681811.2011.595229.

Kenny, M. C. 2014. Sex education: attitude of adolescents, cultural differences and schools' challenges. Hauppauge, New York : Nova Science Publishers, Incorporated.

Kincaid, J. R. 1998. Erotic Innocence: The Culture of Child Molesting. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Livingstone, S. and J. Mason. 2015. Sexual rights and sexual risks among youth online: a review of existing knowledge regarding children and young people's developing sexuality in relation to new media environments.European NGO Alliance for Child Safety Online, London.

Markham, A. 2018. "Troubling the Concept of Data in Qualitative Digital Research." In The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Data Collection, edited by U. Flick, 511–523. London: SAGE. doi:10.4135/ 9781526416070.n33.

Martellozzo, E., A. Monaghan, J. R. Adler, J. Davidson, R. Leyva, and M. A. H. Horvath. 2017. I Wasn't Sure It Was Normal to Watch It. . . A Quantitative and Qualitative Examination of the Impact of Online Pornography on the Values, Attitudes, Beliefs and Behaviours of Children and Young People. Project Report. Revised version. London: Middlesex University, NSPCC, OCC. McGeeney, E., and E. Hanson. 2017. Digital Romance: A Research Project Exploring Young People's Use of Technology in Their Romantic Relationships and Love Lives. London: National Crime Agency and Brook.

MOI (Ministry of the Interior). 2020. Anchor work in Finland. https://ankkuritoiminta.fi/en

NBI (National Bureau of Investigation). 2017a. Sextortion. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yOyLMzk-OYE&t=58s

NBI (National Police Board). 2017b. Young people can spread illegal video material about themselves online.
https://www.poliisi.fi/tietoa_poliisista/tiedotteet/1/1/nuoret_voivat_levittaa_itsestaan_laitonta_videomateriaalia_verkkoon_59994

NBI (National Police Board). 2019. Some sexual offences are thought of as so “everyday” that young people do not recognize them - the police is campaigning to increase awareness.
https://www.poliisi.fi/about_the_police/press_releases/1/0/some_sexual_offences_are_thought_of_as_so_everyday_that_young_people_do_not_recognize_them_-_the_police_is_campaigning_to_ increase_awareness_85825

NBI (National Bureau of Investigation). 2020. Rewind does not work in real life. Think before you share. https://www.tiktok.com/@keskusrikospoliisi/video/6894216036292332801

Nielsen, S. 2014. “Ei Kaikkea Pidä Sekoittaa Ahdisteluun” Tyttöjen Internetissä Saamat Ja Lähettämät Seksiin Liittyvät Viestit. [“Not Everything Should Be Confused with Harassment.” Sex-related Messages Received and Sent by Girls on the Internet.] Unpublished Master’s Degree Dissertation. Media Studies. University of Turku. http://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fe2014112046450

Nielsen, S., S. Paasonen, and S. Spišák. 2015. “‘Pervy Role-play and Such’: Girls’ Experiences of Sexual Messaging Online.” Sex Education 15 (5): 472–485. doi:10.1080/14681811.2015.1048852.

Noddings, N. 1988. “An Ethic of Caring and Its Implications for Instructional Arrangements.” American Journal of Education 96 (2): 215–230. doi:10.1086/443894.

NSPCC. 2017. Ten Years since the Byron Review: Are Children Safer in the Digital World? London: NSPCC. https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1045/byron-review-10-years-on-report.pdf

OSF (Official Statistics of Finland). 2020. “Use of Information and Communications Technology by Individuals.” [e-publication]. =2341–8710. Helsinki: Statistics Finland.
https://www.stat.fi/til/sutivi/ 2020/sutivi_2020_2020-11-10_tie_001_en.html

Ringrose, J., and L. Harvey. 2017. “Digital Mediation, Connectivity, and Networked Teens.” In Routledge Handbook of Physical Cultural Studies, edited by M. L. Silk, D. L. Andrews, and H. Thorpe, 451–464. London: Routledge.

Ross, M. 2005. “Typing, Doing, and Being: Sexuality and the Internet.” Journal of Sex Research 42 (4): 342–352. doi:10.1080/00224490509552290.

Sanderson, C. 2015. Counselling Skills for Working with Shame. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Scott, R. H., C. Smith, E. Formby, A. Hadley, L. Hallgarten, A. Hoyle, C. Marston, A. McKee, and D. Tourountsis. 2020. “What and How: Doing Good Research with Young People, Digital Intimacies, and Relationships and Sex Education.” Sex Education. 20 (6): 675–691. doi: 10.1080/ 14681811.2020.1732337.

Skrzydlewska, J. 2012. Draft Report on the Sexualization of Girls (2012/2047 (INI)). “European Parliament Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality.” http://www.europarl.europa. eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/femm/pr/904/904064/904064en.pdf

Smith, C., F. Attwood, and R. Scott. 2019. Young People and Digital Intimacies. What Is the Evidence and What Does It Mean? Where Next? Sunderland, UK: University of Sunderland. http://sure. sunderland.ac.uk/id/eprint/11405/

Spišák, S. 2019. Porn and Norms – Pornography and Normative Notions of Gender, Love and Sex in the Sexual Narratives of Finns on Their Adolescence Experiences. Doctoral dissertation, Annales Universitatis Turkuensis.

Spišák, S., and S. Paasonen. 2017. “Bad Education? Childhood Recollections of Pornography, Sexual Exploration, Learning and Agency in Finland.” Childhood 24 (1): 99–112. doi:10.1177/ 0907568216646436.

Teo, T. 2010. “What Is Epistemological Violence in the Empirical Social Sciences?” Social and Personality Psychology Compass 4 (5): 295–303. doi:10.1111/j.1751-9004.2010.00265.x.

THL (National Institute for Health and Welfare). 2014. Kouluterveyskysely. [School Health Promotion Study.] http://www.thl.fi/fi/tutkimus-ja-asiantuntijatyo/vaestotutkimukset/kouluterveyskysely Tiidenberg, K. 2020. “NSFW as an Intervention. The Case of Sexy Selfies on Tumblr.” In A TumblrBook: Platform and Cultures, edited by A. McCracken, 142–153, Available Online. University of Michigan Press. doi: 10.3998/mpub.11537055

Tsaliki, L. 2016. Children and the Politics of Sexuality. The Sexualization of Children Debate Revisited. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Wetherell, M. 2001. “Unfolding Discourse Analysis.” In Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader, edited by S. Taylor and S. J. Yates, 198–209. London: SAGE.