Beyond 'Sexting': Consent and Harm Minimization in Digital Sexual Cultures

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foundations

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Executive Summary

This report will explore young people's engagements with digital technologies in their friendships, sexual and romantic relationships. Young peoples' engagement in the practice of 'sexting', or sending sexually suggestive or explicit images via digital technology, has been a site of concern for parents, educators and police since the term was first coined in 2005. Over the past decade, government-sponsored campaigns, curriculum resources and lesson plans have sought to discourage young people from engaging in 'sexting'. These resources take what we might call an 'abstinence-only' approach, aiming to discourage or 'tackle' young people's sexting. Despite the wide distribution of these resources over the past five years, the practice of 'sexting' amongst young people has not been curbed—in fact, sexting has been absorbed into other facets of young people's "digital sexual cultures"—including hook-up and dating applications, blogging and social networking sites. Resources that address 'sexting' no longer map successfully onto young people's actual experiences of digital sexual cultures.

There is a schism between the ways in which 'sexting' is approached in classrooms, by police and by governments, and academics' conclusions about the importance, meanings and ways to discuss digital sexual cultures with young people. Government- and NGO-produced learning resources continue to produce hetero-centric narratives (featuring a male pressuring a female partner to 'sext'), narratives that shame or 'punish' women who engage in 'sexting'; academic research continually suggests that young people who do exchange pictures are often not heterosexual, and that images are often shared for non-sexual purposes. Further, academics have highlighted the problematic messages inserted into these resources: that young women should *expect* their male partners to violate their boundaries, that young women should be ashamed of their sexuality, and that all young men are sexually active 'agents' in intimate relationships.

This paper will work with academic understandings of the role and function of 'sexting' in the broader context of youth digital sexual cultures. It will consider how youth workers, teachers and others working with young people can engage in sex positive digital sex education: positively with young people about their digital sexual cultures without shame or judgment, whilst emphasizing vital messages about respect, consent and boundaries. This paper also includes a set of adapted principles for applying harm reduction to digital sex education, as well as a sample workshop for engaging young people with these issues.

Introduction

Over the last two decades, young people have increasingly used digital technologies to engage in romantic or sexual cultures (Döring, 2009). From joining Facebook groups or other online communities based around a sexual orientation or gender identity (Hillier et al, 2010) to using applications to contact other young people for dating or sex (Stempfhuber & Liegl 2016:52), young people have extraordinary capacity for negotiating complex online spaces, and for negotiating any risk they encounter. Despite the proliferation of young peoples' engagement in what I will term *digital sexual cultures*, there is significant lag in youth services' ability to provide support and resources on engaging with young people about these cultures. There are very few curriculum resources freely available in Australia; those that do exist focus on hetero-centric narratives and contain elements of shame and victim-blaming (Ringrose & Shields Dobson, 2016). At this time, what I will term 'digital sex education' has not been considered from a harm minimization perspective.

This paper will examine the ways in which shame has been mobilized in previous digital sexuality education materials, particularly for young women. It will also examine how an "abstinence only" prohibitive approach has been taken in education on this topic, and the flaws inherent in this approach. This paper will assess the feasibility of a harm minimization approach to digital sexuality education for young people. Further, I will theorize what supportive, harm-minimizing digital sexualities education might look like by developing a set of principles for harm reduction in digital sexual cultures, adapted from the Harm Reduction Coalition's drug and alcohol related principles.

Section 1: Sexuality & Shame: Current Approaches to Digital Sex Education

Currently, federally funded resources that deal with sexting ('sext education', as termed by Dobson & Ringrose, 2016:9) are *shame-based sex education*: they utilize shame as the primary mechanism for preventing young people from engaging with digital sexual cultures (Dobson & Ringrose 2016:12; Albury & Crawford 2012). There are three key issues with attempting to *shame* young people out of certain practices or behaviors. First, shame is rarely equally apportioned: young women bear the brunt of such shame, in line with sexist, heteronormative scripts around young women's responsibility over their own, and others' sexuality and conduct (McRobbie, 2009:180).

Second, shame-based education relies on a risk-based model of youth, in which "young people are increasingly perceived as either 'at risk' or 'posing a risk'" (Kemshall 2008:21). In shame-based education, shame is the negative consequence of taking a risk—risk that is *read onto* young peoples' bodies, cultures and practices. This relies on a problematic 'coding' of all young peoples' activities and practices as inherently risky—a coding which is simply not universal enough to give way to such broad generalities. Finally, there is significant evidence to suggest that shame, when mobilized around sexualities education, does not achieve stated outcomes but rather has *negative* implications for young peoples' abilities to navigate sexuality (Carmody, 2015:23).

In shame-based sex education, it is young women who contend with the most shame: they are the designated 'gatekeepers' of young male sexuality, and, as such, are morally culpable for men's behavior (Flood, 2009). This is a sexist, heteronormative model of sexuality education: it gives no agency or capacity to young women, and it allows no space for sexual relationships that take place outside this narrow model.

Regardless, this model is reproduced in 'sexting' education materials - both federally funded 'Megan's Story' (2010) and 'Tagged' (Dobson & Ringrose, 2016), as well as the NGO-produced 'SXTing' (2014). In each, young women are pressured by young men to share sexual images, the young men pass those images on, and yet it is the young women who experience public shame and humiliation. Their punishment is public shaming, participated

in by their peers, teachers and even parents (Albury & Crawford 2012:469, Shields Dobson & Ringrose, 2016:12).

These films fail to challenge the idea that it is okay to shame young women who are sexual, that young men's actions do not have consequences, and that is *to be expected* that young women will be punished for violations of privacy that they never asked for whilst young men's abusive sexuality ought be accepted.

Perhaps the most serious limitation of shame-based education, especially when directed at young women, is that it operates as a preventative barrier for young people to access mental health, medical or youth services at times of crisis (Gulliver, Griffiths & Christensen 2010). If a young person does have private images 'leaked' by a peer, shame-based education has taught them that the incident is *their fault*—that it has happened because they shared images of themselves with a partner, and not because of the abusive actions of the person who spread the image. This is problematic when we consider that a young woman whose privacy is violated in this way is, by most definitions, a survivor of intimate partner violence (Duluth Model, 2016). Youth and health providers need to be able to communicate to young women who are survivors of this harassment that they have done nothing wrong, that this event will not define or arrest their lives, and that support is available to them.

Section 2: A Harm Minimization Approach

Discourse around young people's engagement in digital sexual cultures has focused heavily on the *risks* young people take on as they engage in such cultures over the past decade. This linking of young people to concepts of risk has a distinct history: as governments increasingly operate through a metric of personal responsibility, individuals are increasingly asked to absorb the possibility of things 'going wrong'; individuals, then, are asked to personally avoid 'risks' as social safety nets are eliminated (Giddens 1991, Beck 1992).

This "risking" applies particularly to young people, as they engage in new cultures and practices (particularly digitally) wherein 'risks' are uncharted (Döring 2014). Young people are, nonetheless, expected to take personal responsibility for the risks of engaging in digital sexual cultures. The narratives described above are perfect examples of this: young women engage with the risky practice of sexting and, as a result, personally bear the consequence: shame (Albury & Crawford 2012:465, Shields Dobson & Ringrose, 2016:12).

Conceptualizing everything young people do through the framework of risk—or imagining that young people's actions fit into a dichotomy of risky/not risky—can be extremely limiting. We cannot, for example, clearly link particular risk factors to the rate at which that 'risk' will become reality (Kemshall 2008:27); it is impossible to establish that all sexting results in images being passed on to others, or that all online dating results in a person lying about their identity. Resources such as 'Megan's Story' present a *predetermined pathway* (that any sext sent will result in public shaming) that is actually not predetermined. There is simply too much variance in young peoples' digital sexual practices for such risk-oriented readings to be broadly applicable (Albury & Crawford 2012:468).

Further, as "work with youth increasingly, promotes self-risk management, self regulation…in a language of risk, harm and danger" (Sharland 2006:228), it is increasingly difficult for those supporting young people to offer services that support, rather than diminish, the young person's capacity for negotiating risk, rather than avoiding risk altogether.

There is a long history of framing young peoples' use of technology as inherently risky both in classrooms and in public discourse (Herdt 2009:112). Despite this, young peoples' practices are yet to conform to a more normatively "safe" model of technology engagement (Dobson & Ringrose 2016:15). This suggests that the 'abstinence-only' approach to risk is not effective in terms of long-term behavioral change. We advocate for a new approach to digital sexualities education that incorporates principles of harm minimization, informal learning, and client-led practice.

Section 3: Applying Harm Minimization to Digital Sex Education

Harm minimization education is a way to ensure young people have facts and strategies to navigate digital sexual cultures, whilst accepting that these cultures are a key part of new sexual and romantic landscapes. There are seven key principles for harm reduction, set by the Harm Reduction Coalition (Harm Reduction Coalition, 2016), focusing on drug use. In the following section, we will explore the ways in which these principles might be adapted for a harm minimization program for young peoples' engagement with digital sexual cultures. We will then adapt these principles for working on digital sex education with young people.

- *Accepts, for better and or worse, that licit and illicit drug use is part of our world and chooses to work to minimize its harmful effects rather than simply ignore or condemn them.*

Similarly, digital sexual cultures are a new part of human interactional and relational landscapes (Whelan 2009:23). If we accept that people using digital technologies to interact is accelerating and is more likely to become more prolific than to disappear, then it seems we must accept that young peoples' use of digital technology in all parts of their interactional lives—from friendships to dating and sex—will continue, and is likely to expand.

If we accept this to be the case, it would be our duty as policy-makers, service providers and educators to provide resources, information and support relevant to these new ways of interacting, rather than ignoring them or advocating for young people to abstain from using them.

Digital Sex Education Principle: *Accepts, for better or worse, digital technologies will be used for dating, sex, friendship and romance by young people is part of our world, and we choose to work to minimize harmful effects, rather than ignore or condemn them.*

- *Understands drug use as a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon that encompasses a continuum of behaviours from severe abuse to total*

abstinence, and acknowledges that some ways of using drugs are clearly safer than others.

There are important distinctions we need to make when it comes to young people's engagement in digital sexual cultures: first that there are a range of practices that young people engage in relevant to sex, sexuality and relationships utilizing digital communication, and these practices have their own varying degrees of safety; and second that as with all sexual practices, the primary factor in determining the safety of a practice should be *consent*.

It is possible to differentiate relative risk between certain practices: for example, a young person using a place-based hook-up app such as Grindr (Stempfhuber & Liegl 2016:52) affords less anonymity and, therefore, perhaps less *safety* than communicating via the anonymous Tumblr "Ask Me Anything" function (Robinson et al 2014:33).

The differentiation of practices is vital to note given the ways in which campaigns around digital sexual cultures have focused on sexting, homogenizing the risk of all digital sexual communication. Further, no campaign around digital sexual cultures has mentioned consent as a key site of safety, instead positioning young women as somehow culpable for having their privacy violated by partners or ex-partners. Under the principles of harm minimization, we would advocate for consent as a mandatory, inviolable aspect of engaging in digital sexual practices, and as a key indicator of safety.

> **Digital Sex Education Principle:** *Understands digital sexual cultures as complex and multi-faceted that encompass a continuum of behaviors, and acknowledges that some ways of engaging with digital sexual cultures may be safer than others.*

- *Establishes quality of individual and community life and wellbeing—not necessarily cessation of all drug use—as the criteria for successful interventions and policies.*

In order to enact harm minimization principles, we must accept that digital sexual practices are a new but immovable part of young peoples' interactions with each other. With this in mind, we must reassess programs that deal with digital sexual practice. We are not trying to scare young people out of participating in digital sexual cultures (Albury, Byron & Mathews 2013:14), but improve "individual and community life and well-being".

In the context of digital sexuality, this should mean programs that prioritize enthusiastic consent, that give young people strategies and skills for respecting consent as well as assessing and mitigating risk in online communication.

> **Digital Sex Education Principle:** *Establishes a quality of individual and community life and wellbeing, rather than a cessation of all 'sexting' or other digital sexual practices, as the criteria for successful interventions and policies.*
>
> - *Calls for the non-judgmental, non-coercive provision of services and resources to people who use drugs and the communities in which they live in order to assist them in reducing attendant harm.*

It is vital to acknowledge that utilizing 'slut-shaming' and gender-based bullying in an attempt to dissuade young women from taking images of themselves is both coercive and judgmental. In a climate in which violence against women is finally prominent on the political agenda, the fact that every government-produced resource on digital sexual cultures features a young woman being shamed is problematic. It implies that young men are not responsible for passing on private images of their partners (a form of violence in and of itself), but holds young women *morally* culpable for taking the image, and for expecting some kind of privacy from their partners or friends. Further, as we've explored earlier, evidence suggests that such tactics are not reducing young peoples' engagement in digital sexual cultures; thus, the "attendant harm" is not being reduced in any way.

What this might look like in practice will vary depending on the nature of the situation. In a crisis situation, in which a young person has just experienced having images shared against their will, this should include assurances that this is not their fault, that you are sorry for what

has happened, and that you are available and willing to do what you can to help. The response to a young person in this kind of crisis should resemble first response for a survivor of sexual assault (Rape Crisis Centre 2016).

These tips can be adapted for any form of relationship violence happening online, including threats, isolation from friends and family, and so on. After all, these forms of violence are just as 'real' as non-virtual violence and the same principles apply. For a young person not in crisis, who is simply talking about engaging in digital sexual cultures, it is important to apply principles relating to non-virtual sex and relationships. Safer sex information—which in a non-virtual setting might include access to barrier protections and contraception—could look like:

- Not giving away personal information like your name or school until you know the person you are talking to very well
- Not including photos in your profile which are identifiable—which include your house, or you in a school or sports uniform
- Not sending sexual images that include your face, or distinctive piercings and tattoos
- If you decide to meet the person, doing so in a very public and safe place that you have visited multiple times before, and taking a parent, carer, trusted adult or several friends along with you.

Digital Sex Education Principle: *Calls for the non-judgmental, non-coercive provision of services, support and resources for young people engaging in digital sexual cultures, and the communities in which they do so (virtual and non-virtual) to assist in reducing attendant harm.*

- *Ensures that drug users and those with a history of drug use routinely have a real voice in the creation of programs and policies designed to serve them.*

Young peoples' contributions to digital sexual cultures education should be central to development of policy or education resources around digital sexual cultures. As "digital

natives" (Palfrey & Gasser 2008:27), young people have a more holistic understanding of the technology being used and the language surrounding it; with such insight, policy and resources would be able to speak more directly to young peoples' actual experiences.

It is important that consultation with young people is facilitated in a way that is respectful and private. Research suggests that young people are disinclined to disclose their involvement in digital sexual cultures in groups with their peers, or if they sense the researcher is telling them sexting is 'wrong' (Rignrose & Dobson 2015:11; Albury & Crawford, 2012, Döring 2014:8).

It is important to acknowledge that, like any sexual practice, young people are adept at understanding how to give the 'right' answer to researchers (Spriggs 2009:4). As a marginalised population, young people are rarely empowered to be involved in policy research and resource development in an honest, equitable way; we must acknowledge the power differentials between researchers, workers and young people in order to create spaces where young peoples' voices can be heard.

> **Digital Sex Education Principle:** *Ensures that young people who engage in digital sexual cultures are given the space to genuinely contribute to, and direct, programs and policies designed to serve them.*

> • *Affirms drugs users themselves as the primary agents of reducing the harms of their drug use, and seeks to empower users to share information and support each other in strategies which meet their actual conditions of use.*

A key issue with shame-based education is that it is disempowering, making it more difficult for young people to feel in control of their actions, and more inclined to make decisions based on what others might think of them (Hasinoff 2016:69). Further, such focus on potential legal outcomes pressures young people to make decisions based on potential risk or punishment (Dobson & Ringrose 2016:15), rather than what the most ethical course of action might be, or what that young person's partner might want.

Overall, education provided to young people at the time of writing does not affirm them as primary agents, and given that some resources produce accounts in which male partners cannot be trusted and peers will inevitably engage in sexual shaming, do not empower young people to support each other ('SXTING', 2016; Albury & Crawford 2012; Dobson & Ringrose 2016).

In order to produce a strengths-based program, harm minimization would first acknowledge young people's expertise in digital sexual cultures, and, second, their ability to support each other. Education and resources can draw on young peoples' expertise in order to promote peer support, skill-sharing and peer modeling.

> **Digital Sex Education Principle:** *Affirms young people as the primary agents of reducing the harms of digital sexual cultures, and seeks to empower young people to share information and support each other in strategies that meet the actual conditions of their use.*
>
> - *Recognizes that the realities of poverty, class, racism, social isolation, past trauma, sex-based discrimination and other social inequalities affect both people's vulnerability to and capacity for effectively dealing with drug-related harm.*

Government reliance of judicial process and on 'scare campaigning' (Dobson & Ringrose 2016:12; Albury, Byron & Mathews 2013:14) has essentially led to marginalised young people often bearing the social and legal penalties. Young women experience sexual shaming, guilt and fear, whilst working class young men, young men of colour, culturally and linguistically diverse young men, and Indigenous young men are most likely to be legally prosecuted (Australian Institute of Health & Welfare, 2012).

Therefore, at present the harms associated with digital sexual cultures are clearly demarcated by gender, class, race and ethnicity. In recognizing these inherent inequalities, harm minimization in this area must meet three main criteria

- First, that it prioritizes consent and does not endorse sex or gender-based shaming;
- Second, that it contains accessible resources that are relevant to marginalised populations, and can be adapted for varying literacy levels;
- And third, that young people are given ample space to share their own personal ethics around digital sexual cultures.

Digital Sex Education Principle: *Recognizes that the realities of racism, sexism, heterosexism, poverty, classism, social isolation and past trauma affect both people's vulnerability to and capacity for effectively dealing with sex and sexuality in general, and digital sexual cultures in particular.*

- *Does not attempt to minimize or ignore the real and tragic harm and danger associated with licit and illicit drug use.*

Like any sexual practice, engaging in digital sexual cultures *can* cause harm for young people. Relationships that utilize digital communication can be a site of violence for some young people—overwhelmingly young women (Southworth et al 2007; Larkin et al 1994; Anonymous 2015).

Certainly, situations in which explicit images of young women are shared without that young woman's consent fit within our understanding of intimate partner violence, and feature prominently within the Duluth Model's Wheel of Power & Control (Duluth Model, 2016).

The task for those working with young people is to frame digital sexual cultures as new practices, but nonetheless as part of human relationships, and, therefore, impacted upon by the same structural factors that influence other kinds of relationships. Just as in any relationship, our key metric for determining the potential harm of a practice should be *consent:* young people's abilities to set boundaries, and to hear and honour those boundaries. Moving forward, the key objective of digital sexual cultures harm minimization education should be educating around giving, seeking and receiving consent, particularly through online or digital interaction.

Digital Sex Education Principle: *Does not attempt to minimize or ignore the real and tragic harm associated with licit and illicit engagement in digital sexual cultures.*

Conclusion

As young people increasingly incorporate digital technologies into their sexuality and sexual cultures, there is increasing pressure on policy, law and youth sectors to make sense of emerging digital sexual cultures. Recent attempts from government and advocacy bodies have produced resources that actively attempt to 'scare' young women with the prospect of being sexually shamed by peers. Such attempts not only perpetuate problematic representations of adolescent female sexuality, but also have very little data to suggest they have been successful at preventing digital sexual practices (Dobson & Ringrose 2016:12; Albury & Crawford 2012). Harm minimization is yet to be seriously considered as a strategy for digital sexual cultures education, despite the stellar record of harm minimization programs in complex health situations (Wood 1999; Miller 2001; Janssen et al 2009). A harm minimization strategy allows us to acknowledge and utilize young peoples' expertise as 'digital natives' (Palfrey 2008:27), to acknowledge the varying ways in which marginalised young people approach, access and are affected by digital sexual cultures. Our aim, centrally, becomes to promote strategies to reduce harm for young people engaging in such cultures, without shame and from an inclusive, sex-positive framework.

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Appendix A: Principles of Harm Minimization for Digital Sex Education

This section outlines principles that can guide workers hoping to practice harm minimization in the space of digital sex education. These principles are a baseline for practice that is anti-sexism, that promotes healthy, trusting relationships, and that is sex positive. These principles also aim for practices that acknowledge that sexism and toxic masculinity exist and impact upon young people, but that also promote and highlight the modeling of anti-sexism in interpersonal relationships.

A worker practicing harm minimization in digital sex education:

1. *Establishes a quality of individual and community life and wellbeing, rather than a cessation of all 'sexting' or other digital sexual practices, as the criteria for successful interventions and policies.*

2. *Calls for the non-judgmental, non-coercive provision of services, support and resources for young people engaging in digital sexual cultures, and the communities in which they do so (virtual and non-virtual) to assist in reducing attendant harm.*

3. *Ensures that young people who engage in digital sexual cultures are given the space to genuinely contribute to, and direct, programs and policies designed to serve them.*

4. *Affirms young people as the primary agents of reducing the harms of digital sexual cultures, and seeks to empower young people to share information and support each other in strategies that meet the actual conditions of their use.*

5. *Recognizes that the realities of racism, sexism, heterosexism, poverty, classism, social isolation and past trauma affect both people's vulnerability to and capacity for effectively dealing with sex and sexuality in general, and digital sexual cultures in particular.*

6. *Does not attempt to minimize or ignore the real and tragic harm associated with licit and illicit engagement in digital sexual cultures.*

Appendix B: Sample Workshop

This workshop sample can be used, all or in part, with young people aged 12-25, although some adjustments may need to be made based on the age, cultural background, or lived experiences of the young people you work with. This workshop has been piloted in its entirety; notes based on reflections of that pilot can be found at the bottom of this appendix.

Aim: To educate young people in using the internet for romantic or sexual purposes safely and consensually.

Objective:

- Upskill young people in listening to, hearing and respecting consent
- Empowering young people to set their own personal boundaries
- Creating space for young people to build on their literacy of harm minimization strategies for digital and online sexual/intimate spaces
- Providing space for the creation of a young people's manifesto of ethics around online dating, picture sharing, and other digitally mediated sexual/intimacy practices.

Activity	Description	Aim	Time
Check-In	• Ask young people to take turns sharing their name, pronoun, and one thing—good or bad— they've learned from using the internet to talk to people • Introduce the anonymous question box	• Get group acquainted with each other, • Start the conversation • Introduce concept (question box)	5 mins
Group Agreement	• Each participant should take two post-its. On one, write one thing you can personally do to ensure everyone has a fun, positive experience in this	• Allow participants to set their own boundaries, particularly in a space so focused on	10 mins

	workshop. On the other, write down one thing you could do to make the session worse. • Facilitators should discuss some of the 'main themes' and these things become our group agreement. • Facilitators should also attempt to add things that aren't covered, i.e. use trigger warnings, try not to share too-personal stories, if you need space just take it, etc.	consent.	
High Five Consent Activity	• With participants sitting in a circle, each person will take a asking the person next to them for a high five. That person will use their words and tone to re-establish their boundaries (e.g. "Actually, that's not okay with me" etc.). • After each participant has taken a turn in each role (asking for a high five and being asked), discuss how it felt to both say 'no', and to hear 'no'. Discuss why it might be important to practice saying/hearing 'no'. Ask if these skills could be 'translated' to internet relationships.	• Introduce the concept of consent • Acknowledge that giving and receiving consent can be really tricky, and that issuing and respecting boundaries aren't always things we are encouraged or taught to do well. • Create space for young people to reflect on their own unique boundaries, as well as their emotional responses to saying/hearing	20 mins

		'no'	
Brainstorm: Sex, Romance and the Internet	• All-in group brainstorm: what are the cross-overs between romance and dating, sex and the internet *Possible responses: porn, online dating, hook-up apps, sending nudes* • Discuss which of the topics coming up involve consent in some way, and which could involve potential risks for the people involved. Mark these for later.	• Populate the frame—what do participants associate with this framework, what specific practices might they be engaging in or thinking about • Allow participants to be experts and to orient the workshop to practices that are actually present for them	10 mins
Spectrum Activity	• Read the following statements out to the group and ask participants to stand along a spectrum in terms of what they think. • *If you send a picture of yourself to a person you like, and they send it on to someone else without your*	• To invite participants to reflect on popular ideas about young peoples' use of the internet and of online sexual practices • To begin to disrupt or challenge any	15 mins

	knowledge, it's your fault for sending it in the first place • *People who send nudes or sexual images are sexually promiscuous* • *Meeting a person in real life that you met online is dangerous* • *The internet is a dangerous place for young people* • *Young people don't really understand how the internet works and need adults to make decisions for them about their internet use.*	potentially problematic understandings of sex, gender and morality as it applies to young peoples' internet use and digital sexual cultures	
Brainstorm: <u>Staying Safe</u> <u>Strategies</u>	• As a group, discuss the problems with "abstinence education" i.e. telling someone not to do something. • Return to earlier brainstorm intersections of dating, sex and the internet that might be risky. • For each potentially risky practice, brainstorm 1-3 strategies for 'staying safe'— i.e. cropping identifying features from nudes, meeting a new friend from the internet in a public place and taking a friend along, not revealing identifying details on Grindr or	• To empower participants to assess risks using their experiences and understandings • To separate the idea of risk from morality-based understandings about how people should behave	15 mins

	Snapchat • Highlight that brainstormed strategies come back to consent and safety, and don't include much about whether or not things are 'wrong', 'bad' or 'slutty' • Highlight that knowing this stuff doesn't necessarily make us *do* this stuff, but will keep us safe if we *choose to*		27
Hand-Holding Activity	• Given the importance of consent, discuss the importance of practicing *talking* about consent. Then break into groups of three. In this exercise, the metaphor of holding hands will be used to explore consent, although no actual handholding will take place. In part I of this exercise, we practice saying no, so one person will ask another to hold their hand and that person will say no. The 3rd person watches and supports the interaction. Each person should have a chance in each role. • For part II, we practice saying yes. The same scenario will	• This exercise highlights the centrality of consent to digital sexual cultures. • This exercise differs from the Hand On Knee activity because it gives people the chance to practice the *process* of consent (asking, answering, discussing), rather than having to fend off an advance and re-assert boundaries. • This exercise also gives participants	20 mins

	happen, but with the person saying yes (but not actually going through with it). • The group should then reflect on how each role felt, and how part I and II felt different. • We will then come back together as a large group and collectively reflect on how asking for, giving and receiving consent in online space can be similar (or different) from the exercise.	the chance to reflect on their own comfort or familiarity with explicitly asking for consent, and whether this process is a familiar or comfortable one for them. • This exercise also allows us to reflect on the similarities and differences in asking for consent in different kinds of spaces, allowing us to adjust or adapt our consent-asking practices for online spaces.	
Digital Sexual Education Manifesto	• The group will brainstorm ethics or guidelines for using the internet for romance, dating and sex. • Facilitator will essentially provide secretariat support for the group, capturing their ideas. • These could include ideas about safety, consent, personal boundaries, and so on.	• To highlight the expertise of young people on digital sexual cultures. • To create space for young people to set the parameters of the discussion, based on the practices young people actually engage in.	15 mins

Activity	Description	Purpose	Time
	• The manifesto will be documented and recorded, if the group consents.		
Check-Out	• Group will return to sitting in a circle and, one by one, share how they're feeling at the end of the workshop, one thing they learned, and one strategy for self care they might employ when they get home. • *NB:* Facilitators should make note of any participants who might have been triggered or activated by the material, and be sure to check in with them and ascertain their safety before they leave the group.	• To bring the group to a close • To ensure participants feel heard and supported • To ensure the safety of all participants.	5 mins

Extra Activities:

Activity	Description	Purpose	Time
Where's My Boundary? Activity	• Place three circles of paper—one green, one yellow, and one red—on the floor in front of the participants. • Ask them to imagine three concentric circles around the paper circles. • The paper represent traffic lights, which we will use as a	• To reflect on how vastly different each person's boundaries might be in different situations. • To develop empathy with a person with different boundaries to our own. • To consider our	15 mins

	metaphor for consent—'yes', 'maybe' and 'no'. • Each participant will be given a 'character' on a piece of paper. They are welcome to share their character before starting if they would like. • The facilitator will then read out several different consent-related scenarios. Each participant will reflect on how their 'character' would feel about those scenarios, and stand in the red, yellow or green circles accordingly.	feelings about a scenario as a spectrum, rather than a hard 'yes' or 'no'—whilst maintaining an understanding of *consent* as an enthusiastic, active 'yes'.	
Introduction to Slut-shaming discussion	• Briefly discuss what the word slut means—facilitator should make note of results • Briefly discuss what it means to 'shame' someone—how, why, how does it affect them? • Write up Laci Green's definition of slut shaming: "Slut shaming is when we insult a woman because she expresses her sexuality in a way we don't approve of." How does this definition fit with our own understandings of slut shaming? • Go around: each participant	• Introducing the concept of slut shaming • Encouraging participants to reflect on their own experiences or understandings of what it means to shame a person • Understanding the gendered elements of slut-shaming • Reflecting on our own experiences of shaming, and coming to	5 mins

	shares an instance of a time where they've seen someone shamed—either in a book or movie, or in real life.	understand the relationship between making someone feel ashamed, and attempting to control/change their behavior.	
Identifying Slut-shaming	• View The Line's video 'SXTING'. Ask the group to make an agreed upon sign (e.g. waving figures, clicking) any time they hear a statement that sounds like slut shaming. • Break into groups of three and discuss. Some prompts might be "what message might this send to young people? Is this effective? What impact might it have on young women? What about young men?"	• To invite young people to evaluate the efficacy of an existing sext education campaign • To reflect on the way slut-shaming can be, and is, used in such campaigns • To consider whether this is *ethical* or *effective*	10 mins

Notes

- A trigger warning or content warning absolutely **must** be provided before activities about consent are engaged with. Trigger warnings are a 'heads up' to people with traumatic experiences that might be brought up through the course of a workshop. They are particularly helpful for young people who've experienced abuse or assault, and may still be dealing with the ramifications. There is no way to tell if this is the case for a person, which is why trigger warnings can be really important. A trigger warning might sound like:

> "*This workshop deals with stuff like consent, sexual assault, and sexting. It might be a bit intense at times, and you are totally free to leave the room at any time and come back at any time. However, we all need to avoid making assumptions about why a person might leave the room... they might just need to do a poo or something.*"

- This workshop should not be compulsory—young people should be able to come and go as they like—and, where possible, a door should be left open. Any barriers to a participant leaving quickly and quietly (chairs, tables, locked doors) should be removed.
- A second facilitator should always be present, particularly focused on keeping an eye on participants and checking in with any who leave the workshop space, or who might seem tense, upset, or 'closed off'; check-ins should be subtle and out of the hearing range of other young people.
- An alternative activity, such as art supplies, can be set up in the corner of the room to help create a 'cool down' space that participants can sit in to disengage from content if they are feeling triggered, or would rather not participate in a given activity. Keeping the art space in the same room as the workshop means participants can watch an activity rather than do it, or listen to their fellow participants speak without feeling obligated to speak themselves. This activity provides an important liminal zone, where young people can still obtain information, without feeling pressure to engage with information that might trigger a previous traumatic experience.