

## **Building sexual literacy online**

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### **Background:**

Health literacy is defined as the capacity, resources and insight to seek information, ask critical questions and be an advocate for one's health. Sexual literacy is framed in similar terms, relating to the capacity to navigate emotionally and physically safe sexual encounters and to hold a critical and assertive stance on relationship dynamics, gender and consent. Increasingly, young people are going online to learn about sex and relationships. While we hear a lot about potential risks associated this, we know less about the potential of the internet to support sexual literacy. Here we present findings from a qualitative study that explored young people's use of the internet to develop sexual literacy.

### **Methods:**

In-depth interviews were conducted with 22 young people (aged 18-25). Interviews explored the ways in which young people engage with online resources and forums to learn about sex, relationships, sexual health or sexual rights. Data were analysed using qualitative, inductive thematic coding.

### **Results:**

Young people regularly engaged with websites, social media, videos, networks and forums to learn about sex and relationships, often following 'rabbit holes', links and discussions to develop and explore ideas. In some cases, this was motivated by a video or post on social media. The volume and diversity of content available online enabled young people to explore topics personally relevant to them and encouraged them to reflect on their sexuality, attractions or relationships. Young people were confident in their capacity to critically appraise content, including sexually explicit content, by drawing on multiple sources to cross-check information.

### **Conclusion:**

The online environment supports in depth exploration of issues related to sex and relationships that are personally relevant to young people. The capacity to view multiple sources of information in diverse formats (formal and informal) supports critical engagement with topics related to sex and relationships.

### **Disclosure of Interest Statement:**

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