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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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A tale of girl-sends-nudes-to-boy? Unscripting sexting in a Dutch school

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ABSTRACT

Most studies of sexting attempt to delineate its main characteristics, to define it and quantify its prominence and its effects. This article studies sexting within a specific ethnographic case. Based on an ethnographic case of a girl's nude picture being disseminated in a secondary school in the Netherlands, this paper argues that sexting is scripted through media and scientific reports, influencing the way it comes into being and is dealt with in practice. The script emphasizes the girls' responsibility in sending the picture, taking it to signal a lack of self-confidence, and emphasizes her guilt in its dissemination. On the other hand, it erases several elements, notably the different networks of friends that were tapped into by the actors, and the 'economy of pictures' that the picture was part of. Focusing extensively on the days immediately after the picture was spread, as well as on reflections on the event several months later, shows how the sexting script not only describes the phenomenon of sexting, but also prescribes how it is dealt with in practice, and, to a degree, how it produces sexting.

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Introduction

Over the last decade and a half, sexting has emerged as a societal and public health concern. Often described as the exchange of sexual messages or images via mobile phones (Hasinoff, 2015), sexting is a complex phenomenon. While most studies attempt to delineate its main characteristics, to define it and quantify its prominence and its effects, in this article I situate sexting – as well as its academic analysis – within a specific ethnographic case. Instead of assuming sexting to be a clearly defined phenomenon, I use this case to question its seemingly straightforward storyline in this paper.

Sexting as a phenomenon

A steady stream of scholarly articles on the phenomenon of sexting has emerged since its first entry in academic literature in 2011 (Courtice & Shaughnessy, 2021). Trying to quantify and account for the phenomenon and its effect, early studies of sexting focused on the prevalence of the practice among youth. Confronted with a novel and challenging phenomenon, studies took an alarmist tone, stressing its 'epidemic proportions' (Podlas, 2011). Rapidly, a moral panic (Courtice & Shaughnessy, 2021), or sex panic (Hasinoff, 2015; Lumby & Funnell, 2011; Tolman, 2013) emerged: a panic fuelled

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by an idea of adolescent sexuality as risky, hormone-driven, and potentially uncontrollable (Elliott, 2010).

Building on these epidemiological studies and their concerned accounts, a large body of research investigates the effects of media on sexual development and activity from a (mental) health perspective. Establishing a correlation in young people between exposure to 'sexy pictures' and 'sexual risk-taking' (Klettke et al., 2014) or 'high-risk behaviours' (Temple et al., 2014), this body of literature looks for ways to minimize sexting's negative effects which are also taken to include and depression and anxiety (Gasso et al., 2019).

Alongside these epidemiological studies, social scientists have paid attention to situating sexting in the sexual cultures of teenagers (Albury, 2013), and the overall gendered context of which the practice is part (Meehan, 2022; Ringrose et al., 2013). These studies show that girls are especially seen as 'in need of protection', as sexting might negatively influence their reputation and well-being (Naezer & van Oosterhout, 2021). Among (heterosexual) boys, sexting or leaked nude pictures do not result in the same protection discourses and stigmatization (Ringrose et al., 2022). Media scholars have also studied sexting and the social inequalities it reproduces, focusing on sexting as media production (Hasinoff, 2015), as constrained or made possible through technologies (Hasinoff & Shepherd, 2014), or in its capacity to produce value, a gendered process (Ringrose et al., 2013; Berriman and Thomson 2015).

Sexting as script

Together, academic studies of sexting highlight an increasing concern with the phenomenon. Simultaneously, they treat it as a stable object that can be described through the elicitation of numbers, interviews, and stories. The elements of this script that are most often repeated in public debate (and solidified into what Hasinoff, 2015 calls 'sexting common sense') include the connection to 'high risk behavior', the gendered dynamics (boy asks girl for picture), and the detrimental effects (in terms of mental health of the victim and social repercussions). Studies often de-contextualize sexting through their methods: they abstract the phenomenon of sexting from the lived experiences of young people. As I will show, studies contribute to the object that sexting *becomes*: they don't just describe sexting as a phenomenon, they partly bring it into being as well by repeating specific elements or associations. To understand this, I suggest we approach sexting as a script.

The metaphor of the script has a long history in the social sciences; importantly, (Simon and Gagnon, 1984/2007) used the term 'sexual scripts' to contribute to a social understanding of sexuality. A strong reaction to sexology research that situated the sexual in the biological realm, they argued for an understanding of sexuality as socially scripted. Scripts, they state, 'are a metaphor for conceptualizing the production of behaviour within social life. Most of social life most of the time must operate under the guidance of an operating syntax, much as language is a precondition for speech' (Simon & Gagnon, 1984/2007: 31). Scripts operate on three levels: cultural scenarios, interpersonal scripts and intrapsychic scripts (Simon & Gagnon, 1984/2007). While script theory has initially explored (heterosexual) analogue encounters, it can be extended to digital encounters (Comunello et al., 2020), as existing scripts are reinforced in digital cultures. The most common interpersonal script of sexting is that of a boy asking for a sexually suggestive picture from his (potential) girlfriend (Symons et al., 2018), in which gender expectations follow traditional cultural scenarios in which boys are sexually active and girls sexually modest (Tolman, 2013). In this sense, understanding sexting as a script brings to the fore the social and cultural scripting that takes place around sexual behaviours.

But there is another understanding of scripts that can be useful here, as it relates to technological objects. Akrich (1992) uses scripting to describe the ways in which norms and values are built into objects. Technological objects, she argues, contain and produce a specific geography of responsibilities for those who use them: they form the behaviour and identities of their users. Like a film

script, Akrich explains, 'technical objects define a framework of actions together with the actors and the space in which they are supposed to act' (Akrich, 1992, p. 208). In other words, scripts are not only to be recognized on a discursive level but are inscribed in objects as well: they become ingrained in the material objects we use, and they incite action. In this case, this inscription is seen in mobile phones with cameras: they afford the possibility of making pictures that, when connected to the Internet, can and are easily shared with others. In this way, the technology produces possibilities of relating (Ringrose and Harvey 2015b) for young people, that not only influence sexual communication but also the way they consolidate their friendships (Krebbekx, 2021).

This approach to scripts of technological objects allows me to analyse sexting beyond the discursive level, to understand the practice as partly scripted through camera equipped mobile phones that incite action and can spur the spreading of nudes and reactions to that. Both approaches to the script combined help us to understand the series of actions that is set in motion when the scenario 'girls-sends-nude-to-boy' plays out in schools.

An ethnography of sexting

While anthropological research on sexting is difficult to plan, during extensive ethnographic fieldwork at a Dutch school I had the chance to attend more closely to an instance in which sexting emerged as a problem, as a nude picture of a girl from a class that I studied circulated in the school. The case presented here follows the events as they unfold in their social context. Studying sexting in context allows me to highlight its situated dynamics and its complexity. Also, it allows me to reflect critically on academic understandings and analyses of sexting as a phenomenon, and how they impact lived experience of young people. It allowed me to ask: how is a nude picture made to circulate in a school? How do pupils and teachers react? What is drawn into the story and what is left out?

A few notes on the Dutch context of youth sexuality and sexting are in place. As indicated, cultural scenarios in the Netherlands hold that experimenting with sexuality during the teenage years is a normal part of growing up in the Netherlands (Schalet, 2011). Parents and teenagers in the Netherlands speak about a process of gradually becoming ready to engage in sexual activities (de Graaf et al., 2017; Schalet, 2011), which most often take place in romantic relationships. Sex education in secondary schools is part of this process of normalizing youth sexuality and invites youth to speak openly about sex (Krebbekx, 2019). The use of social media for sexual encounters has not been part of this normalization of youth sexuality. Unlike the comprehensive approach that has been advocated in the country's sex education programmes, sexting was met with 'abstinence only' responses: youth were discouraged to engage in the behaviour altogether (Naezer, 2018). In recent years, more attention has been paid to non-consensual sharing of nudes and the victim blaming that is often part of the response to leaked nudes. Since 2020 the sharing of such images has become illegal (Goudsmit, 2021).

The case that this paper will analyse took place in a vocational school, Rijnsbergcollege.[1] The school is relatively small with about 300 pupils, most of whom lived in one of the villages that surround the school. Most pupils can be described as children of working-class parents and the school regularly emphasized its whiteness in relation to neighbouring schools and especially as opposed to schools in the Randstad. The 27 pupils that formed the class that I studied were 13–14 years old at the time. I conducted 15 months of participant observation between 2013 and 2015 in the context of a broader PhD research into the enactment of sexuality and diversity in mundane social practices in schools. For several days a week, I attended school lessons and breaks, and participated in school events like parties and trips as much as possible. During this time, I observed pupils, listened to their conversations, asked questions, chatted with them in classrooms, hallways and the bike shed. I spoke to teachers as well during coffee breaks in the teacher area or at events at which we discussed their experiences with teaching in general and the pupils of the class I studied in particular. Next to these informal

conversations I carried out more formal interviews with pupils on ongoing school affairs as well as more general themes of love, adolescence, and friendship. These interviews were recorded and transcribed. For pupils, my position resembled that of an intern: as I was observing and asking questions about how things were done and was still 'in school' (pursuing a PhD) myself. Active consent was obtained from all participants, passive consent was obtained from parents, and additional consent was given by Zoe for this analysis.

A picture is going around – guilt, intervention and circulation

Class-teacher miss Oosten told me that a nude picture of Zoe, one of the participants in my study, was 'going around' in school. Miss Oosten intervened in multiple ways. First, she decided to talk to Zoe, which, she told me, was not very successful. Zoe was 'not willing to talk about it' and kept repeating 'it is my own stupid fault', and 'there is not much more to say'. This contradicted the expectation of teachers and pupils of Zoe breaking down, crying and opening up/providing a backstory to the teacher, asking for help. Zoe was not inclined to play this gendered role of passive victim (Hasinoff, 2015). This frustrated the teacher who wanted to help and solve 'the problem'. Second, she had called the girls' parents to inform them about the event. She told me how the father became emotional and cried, and that her mother believed that Zoe was pressured into this. Third, she posted a message on the internal school communications website, a system for all teachers of a class to be kept up to date about any special circumstances, issues or rules regarding a certain pupil. The note in the database stated:

> Zoe does not talk, ignores her parents, does exactly as she pleases, she does not even bother to say good morning. Tomorrow I will again be in touch with father. He is going to talk to Zoe tonight.

These actions helped the spread of story about Zoe's picture and established the seriousness of the event. The written memo about the issue in the electronic system added weight to 'the problem' and to the circulation of the discussion of the picture – it was now a registered event, public for all teachers; remaining in her file for the rest of the year. The message also connected the issue to Zoe's behaviour at home. In these interventions, the underlying causes were sought for in her person. Together, they locate the problem with Zoe, who was expected to open up to the adults around her. Two seemingly opposed responses are mixed here: care and blame. In this uneasy mixture of care and blame, teachers wanted to help Zoe in the situation she found herself, but also blamed her for it. To deserve care, Zoe needed to apologize for her sexuality, Such tendencies of victim-blaming are widespread in cases of sexting, are harmful to the self-esteem and the agency of the people involved (Hasinoff, 2015; Naezer, 2018; Naezer & van Oosterhout, 2021; Shields Dobson & Ringrose, 2016).[2]

This attention to the 'victim', although intended to provide care and comfort in a distressing situation, also deflected attention from the boy who had supposedly spread the picture. Hence, the fourth, (non)intervention, was that Miss Oosten decided not to contact the (school of) the boy who allegedly spread the pictures.

Following the incident, I saw that the image circulated not only online but also offline, in school spaces, through showing the image on mobile phones to others. In addition to the images 'going around', the *discussion* of the picture and the pictured girl also circulated. In the event described, this circulation was accelerated by teacher interventions.

Later the same day miss Oosten asked me, apparently without expecting an answer: 'why do they keep doing it?!' The plural form suggests that it is not only about Zoe here, but rather produces a collective of girls who take and send revealing pictures to boys. For the teachers, Zoe, by taking and sending that picture, came to embody a certain type of girl: that is the 'innocent' or 'stupid' girl from the news stories (Hasinoff, 2015). The remark indicates that within the sexting script it is not possible to imagine, that youth, like adults, can engage in sexting for interpersonal intimacy, communication, and expression (Albury, 2013), or that they

use it to seek adventure and pleasure (Naezer, 2018). Instead, Zoe personified a collective of girls that occupy the position of 'naïve' or 'stupid' girls in the sexting script. The interventions described privilege the online exchange of pictures as the relevant site for action; not the analog world of the school and its social relations that were shaken.

It is not only the nude picture – exposing and bridging social networks

The second day after Zoe's picture had been spread, at the end of class, a teacher asked her if she was okay. She started to cry. The sound of whispers filled the classroom. After class, in the restrooms, I ran into Zoe's friends Kira and Jordan, and asked 'what's going on, are you mad at Zoe?'

> Kira: yes. She sent around nude pictures, and everyone has seen them, at this school and at Novy [which is a nearby school]
>
> [. . .]
>
> Willemijn: did you see those pictures?
>
> Kira: no, but I do have them on my phone [taking out her phone upon which I indicate that I do not want to see]
>
> Willemijn: but I think it is sad for her
>
> Kira: there is nothing sad about it. She did it herself
>
> Willemijn: but who has forwarded them?
>
> Kira: I don't know
>
> Willemijn: someone from this school or another school?
>
> Kira: other
>
> Jordan: Willemijn, it is not only the nude pictures. She was going with all these bruinen [brown ones] and also she has a picture of one of these bruinen [brown ones] touching her bra. [She mimics Zoe's provocative pose and look]

While Zoe was crying and was being comforted by a teacher, Jordan warned me to not take things at face value. She explained the fight was not just because of the pictures but because lately, Zoe had been hanging out a lot with boys from another school. For Jordan, the picture symbolized Zoe's shift of spending more time and developing intimate relations with boys, as opposed to her all-girl group of friends. Earlier studies suggest that a great deal of conflict among girls in this age group relates to this 'shift from primary relationships with girls to a heterosexual orientation towards and higher valuing of relationships with boys' (Ringrose, 2013, p. 86). It is not only important to view the intense reaction in this light, but also to pay attention to the content of the nude image (Ringrose & Harvey, 2015a), as not each image evokes similar responses: there is for example a difference between an evocative posing while undressed and a depersonalized (head cut off) shot of breasts. This difference relates to the task for adolescent girls to look sexy, but not be sexually active; to portray sexual availability and attractiveness, but to exert strong sexual boundaries (Symons et al., 2018). The fact that Zoe was not alone in the picture, thus added to the transgression.

To make things worse in the eyes of Jordan, Zoe was hanging out with boys who have a different 'skin colour' than their own (which is white, like my own). She mentioned this to me as she expected this would convince me that lines were crossed, and her anger legitimate. For her friends, Zoe became an out-of-control girl, beyond their reach. The racial component added intensity to the transgression and blaming – echoing the notion that she should have known better with these 'sexual predators' that racial others are often cast to be (Bredstrom, 2005; Hasinoff, 2014; Nagel,

2002). When interviewing Jordan individually, she tried again to assure that her anger towards Zoe was justified:

> You know first she did not wear make-up and she was hanging out with these boys who are now in first grade. You know Mark and John, they live in Rijnsberg, they are white, normal people.

Again, the importance of the different, racialized friendship networks was emphasized. According to Jordan, the nude picture did not stand alone; instead, she situated it in a longer period of Zoe going out with boys from a different school, Novy College. This school is close by but is mostly looked down upon by pupils at Rijnsbergcollege. It is cast by teachers as well as pupils as 'very different'. This difference is coined in terms of ethnicity, criminality, and safety – Novy College is situated in a small city that is seen as more ethnically diverse and having more urbanized social problems. Now that she tried to convince me her anger towards Zoe was justified, Jordan talked about Zoe's hanging around with 'brown' boys. In a way, she used the argument of race as common ground to justify her own behaviour and to further disqualify Zoe's behaviour. Here, Jordan links gender, sexuality and race in a manner that has a long history. She draws on two common discourses of racism: criminalization and sexualization. Wekker's (2016) on colonialism and race in the Netherlands, helps us to understand that casual racist utterances like the one of Jordan above can go unnoticed because of 'shared racial and sexual fantasies in the Dutch archive, based on four hundred years of colonial relations' (Wekker, 2016, p. 25). Specifically, she identifies criminalization and sexualization as forms in which such racist utterances take shape. It is the discourse on criminalization that is applied to Novy college in general: the pupils in the other school are constructed as to be in need for more correction. And the discourse on sexualization helps to understand Jordans comments about Zoe's friend in the picture, whose deviant sexuality she explicitly relates to skin colour. It also shows how such racialized discourses and images, widely available in Dutch culture, are circulating and are being drawn upon in schools and among young persons.

Zoe was the only girl of her group of friends who tapped into networks of friends that attended Novy. The harsh reaction of her friends results partly from the context that set Zoe apart from her group of friends at Rijnsberg: Zoe's interests differed from theirs, she hung out with people they do not know, and, to add to the transgression, are cast as ethnically different. These networks are geographically separate but are connected through social media and Zoe's picture. The technology of the mobile phone as well as the affordances of social media made these geographical boundaries dissolve: suddenly Zoe's friendships and relations with the group from Novy became visible to her Rijnsbergcollege friends. This shows how social media 'leak' (Chun & Friedland, 2015) and added to the reasons for Zoe's friends to become very angry – including those who I came to know as patient and understanding the months before.

Following Ahmed (2004) emotions are performative as they both repeat past associations as well as generate their object: in this case the slutty, sexting, racial boundary crossing girl. The strong display of emotions that the sexting script affords does not, or does not only, reflect actual embodied affect, but performs particular social meanings, customs, and strategies. The way in which social networks were bridged, and the ways in which their racialization can increase policing of sexual behaviour, were important for the actors in this case, but go unnoticed in the sexting script.

Zoe tells her side of the story – Boys' nudes and agency

In the afternoon of that same day, still the second day after the picture was spread, there was a Physical Exercise (PE) class.

> When class is over, and we are in the girls changing room, Zoe changes quickly and leaves.
>
> Kira announces that Zoe told her 'her side of the story'. She summarizes hastily: She [Zoe] said she needed Joey [the boy whom she sent the picture to]. And that he would only be there for her if she sent that picture. And that

> she needed him and therefore did it. Then, Joey sent the picture to his best friend [Sara]. Sara forwarded it to her whole list of WhatsApp contacts.
>
> And that is when Zoe wanted to hit her [Sara] but then Akhil [a friend of Sara] slapped her [Zoe] in the face.
>
> Someone says she thinks Zoe is going down the wrong path.
>
> Others nod in agreement.
>
> When someone notices Zoe left her earrings in the changing room, Jordan says: yuck I am not touching those.

It is important to note here that in this narration, it turned out to be a girl who distributed the picture widely after receiving it from her friend Joey. This contradicts and complicates the general script of sexting. In this case as well, it is very easy to overlook this detail. Although Zoe points it out, the issue does not stick with anyone – the blame was already placed on Zoe for engaging with the 'wrong' (type of) guy(s). No attention was paid to who made the picture travel. Instead, the expression 'a picture is going around' was continually used, thus evacuating agency and placing the blame on girls for not containing their sexuality (Chun & Friedland, 2015).

The other part that is often neglected is that Zoe was trying to confront Sara (who spread her picture widely) by trying to 'slap' her. This moment of anger does not suit the victim position that is available for Zoe in the sexting script (Perry et al., 2022). Here, there barely was any space for Zoe to 'tell her side of the story'. The conclusions were already drawn and stayed the same: Zoe was going down the wrong path and was to be avoided, her earrings not to be touched.[3] Importantly, this conversation took place in the girls locker room, a space in which hegemonic heterosexual femininity is performed and institutionalized, and where morality is strictly policed (Kjaran, 2019).

Half a year later, relations seemed to be normalized again, and no-one referred to Zoe's picture anymore. During an interview, Zoe emphasized that the incident happened 'last year' (before summer), that she changed a lot, and that her relationship with her parents improved due to changes she made (like taking part in family meals). In her recounting of last year's highs and lows, Zoe reproduced characterizations that are evident in much of the literature on youth and sexuality in which peers are seen as threat and the family as the site of positive identity development (Wyn, 2012). Ending relationships with particular boys and overcoming alienation through reconciliation with family members is an important transition in stories like these (Hasinoff, 2014). Regarding girls who send nude pictures Zoe said:

> Sometimes I have that, I think it is stupid of myself, but, ehm, if that person has a picture, you . . . Ehmm . . . You don't want anything [to do with them] anymore. [You keep your] distance. But then I think, well, I have had them [nude pictures] myself. If someone does not like that girl I go along with that myself and think, well, 'I don't like you either'. Whereas if people would think that way about me I would be hurt. . . but it is [happening] almost automatically.

Here we see the sexting script at work once more: Zoe indicated that the distance she wanted to take from girls who 'have' a picture – appeared almost automatically. In the same interview, however, Zoe again complicated the sexting script when she told me she took and sent more nude pictures then the one that caused the situation described here. She also confided to me that she owned pictures of boys that she used to bribe them to not spread hers. These pictures, mostly 'dick pics' (Salter, 2015), she had never spread, 'out of pity'. Spreading would most likely not be beneficial for her, as it would signal her sexual activity, suggestive of an overt sexuality that marks women as slutty, and not 'classy' (Attwood, 2007). Her use of boys' nudes disrupted the script of the naive girl, victimized by boys.

Situating sexting in an economy of pictures

During class or breaks, a photo or (group) selfie could be taken at any time, as pupils regularly took out their phone and ordered: 'selfie!', often followed by an immediate striking of poses. Smartphones afford the taking and sending of qualitatively high pictures easy, quick and cheap. Almost every pupil

owned a smartphone with a camera and photo-sharing apps. Furthermore, the school provided free Wi-Fi, which all contributed to large amounts of pictures circulating – and spurred a 'culture of connectivity' (Van Dijck, 2013). My participants were using social media a lot, using apps that appeal to the visual, motivating visual and sexualized communication (Allen, 2015; Berriman & Thomson, 2015). Teachers participated in taking pictures in school, sharing them on screens in the hallways and during events such as the graduation ceremony, as well as on the schools Facebook-page and website.

Online pictures were met with a number of 'likes' or comments. When posting pictures, young people expose themselves to the chances of, on the one hand, deriving pleasure from likes and positive reactions, whilst on the other hand they might be criticized (Berriman & Thomson, 2015; Van Dijck, 2013). This taking, posting, sharing and valuing of pictures has been described in terms of an economy (Ringrose et al., 2013; Shields Dobson & Ringrose, 2016), as it involves production, consumption and valuation. This 'economy of pictures' is not gender neutral. Previous research argued that for boys, owning semi-nude pictures, functions as a form of capital (Schwarz, 2010). Ringrose et al. (2013) describe this economy in detail: they found that images of girls' bodies, for boys, hold value as it is proof of something that a girl has 'done for him'. For girls, being asked for a nude picture can be read as a sign of desirability. However, when a girl agrees to send a nude picture, her sexual reputation and value decrease.

In addition, the case analysed here shows that for girls as well, owning pictures can become valuable. Notably, it was a girl (Sara) who distributed Zoe's picture widely after having received it from Joey (whom Zoe shared it with originally). This contradicts received wisdom on sexting and the gendered roles in spreading nude pictures. Receiving and owning nude pictures of other girls, especially of girls who are more popular, was a way of showing to be part of a certain network of peers. Possessing pictures of boys can be a form of power for girls too: Zoe told me that she owned nudes of boys that she threatens to publish if they spread her picture. As explained, social repercussions are often less severe for (heterosexual) boys, and hence youth can make nudes 'profitable' in different ways and to different extents, and at different costs. When discussing the nude-picture of Zoe, it was never situated in a busy 'traffic' in pictures. What could have been considered as taking place on a continuum of displaying attractiveness and popularity in (online) pictures instead became isolated as a transgression. In the sexting script, the phenomenon of sexting is particularized, not regarded as part of a wider economy of pictures.

When girl-sends-nudes-to-boy

When talking about the case of Zoe to interlocuters, friends and colleagues, and starting: 'in one of the schools that I studied, a girl sent a nude picture to a boy', I was often interrupted. No further explanation was deemed necessary. The phrase girl-sends-nudes-to-boy sounded like the beginning of a cautionary tale. The script of the story is almost contained in this very phrase, and promises to be dramatic. Academic research and public debate have reinforced this expectation. This paper shows that this script strongly influences the ways in which a girl whose nude picture is 'going around' in school is reacted to – it incites action in a specific way. Based on the case of Zoe it became clear that the sexting script does not only *describe* but also *produces* the phenomenon by making invisible certain issues, while highlighting others.

Three things were highlighted through their reiteration in this case. First, was the fact that Zoe was the one who had sent the picture to Joey. Again and again, this was mentioned as explaining all the gossiping and fighting that befell her. Second, and related, was that she was guilty of its spreading, a result of sending a nude picture that is regarded as inevitable. Third was the idea that Zoe was 'going down the wrong path' and needed intervention, an idea that might be surprising in the Dutch context that is often characterized by an acceptance of youth sexuality. The case explored here indicates that this acceptance is conditional.

Several aspects were made *in*visible. First was the different network of peers that Zoe tapped into, and how the racialization of this network increased negative reactions of friends and worry among parents. Second were the practices of boys sending nude pictures of themselves to girls, which were not asked about or deemed important, were invisible as Zoe kept them to herself. Third were the ways in which technological affordances, such as taking pictures and the availability of Wi-Fi, increased the circulation of the picture in and between schools. Finally, the ways in which the picture that was going around was part of daily practices of taking, sending, and relating through pictures, their economy, something that had no place in the script.

This paper proposes to understand sexting as script. Studies looking at the frequency of sexting (epidemiology), its effects (health, psychology), its contexts (social scientists) or its cultural productions (media scholars) constitute sexting as a stable object, a phenomenon that can be summarized in the phrase 'girl-sends-nudes-to-boy'. However, these academic studies do not merely describe the objects that they study, they make those objects at the same time (Law, 2004). Science and Technology Studies scholars insist that 'in the making of knowledge, care and normativities count' (de Laet et al., 2021), as this paper has detailed as well. Media coverage and scientific publications do not only name the practice of sending sexually explicit self-images 'sexting', but they also actively intervene in the ways the practice is understood: they script it.

Scripts are open ended. They structure and incite action, but they can change over time. In recent years, for example, due to renewed attention to (sexual) consent in the wake of the #MeToo movement (Popova, 2019), a distinction between consensual and non-consensual sexting has become common in academic literature, and to a lesser extent, in public discourse (see f.e. Harder, 2021). This, once again, alerts us to study sexting in context.

Following sexting in school showed how the sexting script was stabilized, as certain aspects of the case did not get incorporated into the story while others were emphasized. Only because of this process is it possible to understand the case presented here as one of those stories that is captured in the formula girl-sends-nudes-to-boy. It shows that the sexting script describes as well as produces sexting and the actions that follow. This anthropological account of sexting urges sexting researchers to pay more attention to the situational complexities of the phenomenon, instead of assuming to know what its problems are. Hopefully, this ethnography of sexting and its reframing of sexting as a script can help researchers pay closer attention to the situatedness of young people's sexuality, suggesting ways of intervening that don't simply reproduce a received script, but push it in different directions, articulating other normativities and forms of care.

Notes

1. All names of schools, towns and respondents are pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.
2. The fieldwork for this paper was conducted before critical conversations about victim-blaming became more mainstream, sparked by the #MeToo movement and a highly mediatized case of allegations of sexual misconduct in the talent show *The Voice of Holland* (see *Prosecutors investigate claims of abuse on Dutch version of The Voice, The Guardian* 2022).
3. Tellingly, the pupils present did not respond to the part of the story in which Zoe was supposedly hit by Akhil. Zoe avoided talking about this during our interview and I could not verify this allegation.

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