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Making sex, moving difference

An ethnography of sexuality and diversity in Dutch schools

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Chapter 3

When-girl-sends-nude-picture-to-boy. Unscripting Sexting in a Dutch school

Abstract

Based on an ethnographic case study of a girl's nude picture being disseminated in a secondary school in the Netherlands, this chapter argues that sexting is scripted through media and scientific reports, influencing the way it comes into being and is dealt with in practice. This sexting script shapes the way teachers and pupils react when a nude picture 'is going around'. The script changes the story that we will follow. It emphasises the girls' agency in sending the picture, taking it to signal a lack of self-confidence, and implying her guilt in its dissemination. On the other hand, it erases several elements, notably the different networks of friends that the actors tap into, and the 'economy of pictures' that the picture is part of. This analysis complicates debates about sexting by troubling how the script actually produces the phenomenon, as well as its gendered and racialized subjects. The sexting script *does* things. The case that has been presented here, shows that certain things are made invisible, as they do not fit the script. As such, they cannot become part of what we understand the phenomenon of sexting to be.

Introduction

Awful, it must be awful. In their innocence or stupidity they, ... eehhh... Let this happen and these are exactly the dangers that we want to talk about with our pupils' (RTL news, 25-09-2014). Referring to two girls who had sent someone sexually explicit material of themselves, a head teacher of a Dutch school expresses his worries during a TV-interview. The voice over adds that 'sometimes it is pure stupidity, other times, a cry for attention'.

Since 2008, many articles on the phenomenon called sexting have appeared. Sexting is often described as the exchange of sexual messages or images via mobile phones (Hasinoff 2012; Ringrose et al 2012; Hasinoff 2015) and most often refers to girls sending a sexually provocative picture or video clip of themselves to a boy. The practice has often made the news, the quote above, taken from a Dutch news program, is just one example. The news story reported on the circulation of clips of young girls who 'perform sexual acts', with the headline 'Urgent call - talk about the dangers of sexting'.²⁸ The emotional appeal of the head teacher makes clear that something very serious is 'happening', something that is potentially destructive. Such news stories led some commentators to say that sexting, among teenagers, is the newest in a series of moral panics about youth sexuality (Hasinoff, 2015; Lumby & Funnell, 2011; Tolman, 2013).

Sexting, a portmanteau of sex and texting, has been studied from a number of angles. First, there are epidemiological studies that look for the prevalence of the phenomenon and its effects on youth (in terms of risk, sexual problems etcetera). Some of these assert that the practice of sexting is taking on epidemic proportions (Gaylord Forbes, 2010; Podlas, 2011). These epidemiological studies indicate that sexting has become a fairly common practice among teenagers owning a smartphone.²⁹ Second, a large body

²⁸ This imperative is aimed at parents: they are the ones that are advised to talk to their children about the dangers of sexting

²⁹ A review of (mostly US-based) research into sexting found that approximately 10% of adolescents had sent a sexy picture once (Klettke et al., 2014). Research in the Netherlands has found that a minority of adolescents has produced online sexual images (3.0%, Kerstens & Stol,

of research has emerged that investigates the effects of media on sexual development and activity from a (mental) health perspective. This research has often found a correlation between exposure to sexy pictures and ‘sexual risk-taking’ (Klettke et al., 2014), ‘high-risk behaviors’ (Temple et al., 2014), or ‘sexual attitudes and experience’ (Van Oosten et al., 2015) in young people, and looks for ways to minimize negative effects. Third, sexting is also the object of a diverse set of questions from the social sciences. Here, attention is paid to situating sexting in the sexual cultures of teenagers, (Albury, 2013; Albury et al., 2013) and the overall sexist culture of which the practice is part (Ringrose et al., 2012; Ringrose, 2013). Fourth, media scholars study sexting in relation to social media: as media production (Hasinoff, 2012), as constrained or made possible through technologies (Hasinoff & Shepherd 2014), through its capacity to produce value, or as a gendered process (Ringrose et al., 2013; Berriman & Thomson, 2015).

While these studies provide a useful entry point into discussions about sexting, they, however, assume sexting to be a clearly defined phenomenon that can be described through numbers, stories, and interview accounts. Rather than accepting the assumption that sexting is this clear phenomenon, I question it by using the notion of the script. During my extensive ethnographic fieldwork at a Dutch school, a nude picture of a girl from a class that I studied was spread throughout the school. In following the case closely over several months, it became clear that the sexting script did not cover the whole story. Recognizing sexting as script makes space for different questions to be asked, such as: how is a nude picture made to ‘go around’ in a school? How do pupils and teachers react? What is drawn into the story and what is left out? What does this make of sexting and its subjects? Based on this case I show that the sexting script does things: it opens and closes positions that the actors can take up, and highlights some aspects while erasing others.

2014; 4-8%, Graaf, Kruijer, Acker, & Meijer, 2012; 19%, Scholieren.com, 2014).

Sexting as script

The metaphor of the script has a long history in the social sciences, two relevant strands of which, I will discuss. First is the coining of 'sexual scripts' by Simon and Gagnon, who used the term to contribute to a social understanding of sexuality (Simon and Gagnon, 2007[1984]). In a strong reaction against sexology research that situated the sexual in the biological realm, they argued for an understanding of sexuality as socially scripted 'on three distinct levels: cultural scenarios, interpersonal scripts and intrapsychic scripts' (Simon and Gagnon, 2007 [1984], p. 31). Though a successful antidote to the biological sexual model, critics have pointed out that there is a lack of clarity as to where cultural scenarios originate and how they come into being (Frith & Kitzinger, 2001). Despite this critique, the notion of the sexual script is helpful to understand the appropriate objects, aims, and desirable qualities of sexual interaction. In the Netherlands, sexual contact between teenagers is considered to be a normal part of growing up, albeit only under very specific circumstances (Schalet, 2011), that exclude social media as a vehicle for sexual communication.

The second relevant strand relates to technological objects. Akrich (1992) uses scripting to describe the ways 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 behavior 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. 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 easily be shared with others. This opens up the notion of sexting beyond the discursive level, as the practice is partly scripted through camera equipped mobile phones and other technological objects.

Media coverage and scientific publications not only name the practice of sending sexually explicit self-images 'sexting', they actively intervene in

the ways the practice should be understood: they script it. 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 clear phenomenon. This phenomenon can be summarized in the script 'when-girl-sends-nude-picture-to-boy'. In this script, sexting comes to stand in for a girl sending a (semi) nude picture to a boy, who will undoubtedly share it with others. However, these academic studies not only describe the objects that they study, they simultaneously make these objects (Law, 2004). The sexting script is gendered: girls who do this tend to be framed as victims of a sexualized culture, as naïve about the risks of sending sexually explicit pictures, and as lacking self-confidence. Boys who do this are rarely the focus of analysis and consequently, their role gets naturalised.

The case presented here follows the ways in which the sexting script in a Dutch secondary school opens and closes positions that different actors can take up. Focusing extensively on the days immediately following the spread of a picture and reflections on the event several months later, will show how the sexting script -produced through media and scientific reports- not only describes the phenomenon of sexting, but also prescribes how it is dealt with in practice, and, to a degree, produces sexting.

Research focus and method

The research project on which this chapter is based studied sexuality and diversity in secondary schools in the Netherlands. The Netherlands is often regarded as a country that has successfully incorporated sexual education into its educational system and that actively promotes gender equality. Dutch sex education programs and approaches are regarded as exemplary. In short, the Dutch are seen as forerunners when it comes to dealing pragmatically with teenage sexualities in schools (Weaver, Smith, & Kippax, 2005). As such, it is interesting to study how sexting is dealt with in this context of pragmatism and normalization of youth sexuality, as well as to analyze the mechanisms that resonate beyond this particular case.

When it comes to sexuality, research often focuses on sexual problems (Spronk, 2014a). This is especially the case when studies focus on ethnic others, whether found abroad or, in this case, within; in ‘Dutch society’s Other’ (Balkenhol & Jaffe, 2013). The idea of ethnic others’ sexuality as problematic not only influences public opinion, but also resonates with research practices. Most research is being done in urban areas in the so called Randstad³⁰ and focuses on ethnic minority populations (Krebbekx, Spronk, & M’charek, 2017).

I carried out a large part of my fieldwork outside of the Randstad, focusing instead on two schools in one of the relatively more rural provinces of the Netherlands. The case that this chapter will analyze took place in a school, called Rijnsbergcollege, that offers vocational education (Dutch: VMBO). The school is relatively small, with about 300 pupils. Most of them live in one of the five villages surrounding the school. Almost all pupils can be described as children of working class parents and the school regularly emphasized its whiteness in relation to neighboring 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 of the study. I conducted 15 months of fieldwork, which, for several days a week, entailed attending school lessons and breaks, and participating 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. Next to holding and hearing many informal conversations at school, I carried out more formal individual and group interviews, which were recorded and transcribed.

A picture is going around – Guilt and/of circulation

I was confronted with sexting when Miss Oosten informed me that a nude picture of Zoe was ‘going around’ the school. The next day, she told me that

³⁰ The Randstad is the region spanning the four largest cities in the Netherlands (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, and Utrecht).

she had heard about the picture from some of her colleagues, who, in turn, were shown the picture by senior pupils during class. When the information reached the class teacher, she decided to talk to Zoe, but Zoe did not want to talk about it. According to Miss Oosten, Zoe kept repeating 'it is my own stupid fault', and 'there is not much more to say'. Miss Oosten called the girls' parents and summarized their reactions: 'father cried, mother thought it must be a loverboy'.³¹ As he did not attend the same school, she had not been in touch with the boy who forwarded the picture without Zoe's consent.

Miss Oosten posted a message about the issue 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 her father. He is going to talk to Zoe tonight.

The written memo about the issue in the electronic system added seriousness to the 'problem' – it was now a registered event, public to Zoe's teachers, it would remain in her file for the rest of the school year. Miss Oosten's intervention worked to connect the issue to Zoe's behavior at home. Zoe's parents were notified and the class teacher tried to talk to Zoe about the problem and, by implication, the underlying causes that were sought in the person of Zoe. This was hampered, however, by Zoe's lack of communication. The teacher contacted her family to find a solution together and the way Zoe behaved within the family home was made part of the problem. This move established that the problem was located inside Zoe.

The next day, shortly after the biology lesson started, Miss Oosten came in, and asked Zoe to come with her. Murmuring increased as Zoe walked to the front of the classroom, with all eyes upon her. When she

³¹ The word loverboy is used to designate boys who lure girls into prostitution by first starting a 'romantic' relationship with them. Since a biographic novel appeared on the issue in 2008 (Mosterd, 2008), many disconcerted media reports about the phenomenon have appeared in the Netherlands. In every school I have been for this study I found at least one novel on the issue in the school library.

returned, about 15 minutes later, again, everyone looked at her. Her best friends Jordan, Alyssa and Kira looked at each other with a chuckle. Some guys in the class were making jokes. Loud enough for Zoe to hear, Justin said to Damian: 'hey look at Zoe's cleavage', to which Damian replied 'why bother, we've seen everything already', while some others laughed in response. Zoe ignored them, and the teacher did not seem to notice, or ignored them too. Here we see that the image goes around not only online but also offline, in school spaces, through showing the image on cell phones to one another. In addition to the images 'going around', the *discussion* of the picture and the girl pictured also circulated. In the school spaces described, this circulation was accelerated by teacher interventions and consultation.

Jordan and Kira, among Zoe's best friends, appeared to be mad at Zoe. When I asked them whether they were also angry at the boy who forwarded the picture that was meant only for him, they told me no – 'because she [Zoe] did it herself. Pupils and teachers alike repeated this sentiment over and over. My questions about the boy – whether he had done something wrong, needed to be questioned, or if he also had to have conversations with his class teacher - were met with surprise. At one point Miss Oosten exclaimed: 'why do they keep doing it?!' The plural form suggests that it is not only about Zoe here, but about all 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. 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 et al., 2013).³²

Here, Zoe was simultaneously positioned as perpetrator, in utterances like 'she did it herself' and as victim, for example in the reference to a loverboy's possible involvement. The sexting script made Zoe appear as the problem. On the one hand, the problem was individualized, while on the other hand, in the teacher's use of 'they', it appears to be more complicated: Zoe was not only taken apart, she was also regrouped in the collective of 'those girls' – those girls that occupy the position of 'naïve' or 'stupid' girls in the sexting script.

32 For adults, on the contrary, sexting is encouraged to improve one's sex life

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

At the end of class on the second day after the spread of Zoe's picture, a teacher asked her if she was okay, noting that she looked tired. She began to cry. This was seen by the whole class who again began whispering, with many pupils turning in their seats to look at her. When the class drew to an end, Zoe was still talking to the teacher, sobbing. In the ladies room, 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 Delta [which is a nearby school]

Jayden walks past and says: Zoe is crying!

Kira shouts to Jordan: your big friend [sarcastically] is crying again

Jordan asks: where?

Kira: yes she's probably being pathetic in front of a teacher

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 them]

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: another

Jordan: Willemijn, it is not only the nude pictures. She was going with all these bruinen [brown ones] and she also has a picture of one of these bruinen [brown ones] touching her bra. [Jordan mimics Zoe's provocative pose and look]

Willemijn: so how long has this been going on?

Jordan: he is so black that when you put him on a paper you don't even see him!!

Willemijn: but I mean the boys

Jordan: yes suddenly she goes with all these guys from Delta...
[a nearby school]

While Zoe was crying and comforted by a teacher, Jordan suggested that I should not take things at face value. She explained that the fight was not because of the pictures but because of the fact that lately, Zoe had been hanging out a lot with boys from another school. For Jordan, the picture symbolized Zoe's shift to spending more time and intimacy with boys, as opposed to her female 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 toward and higher valuing of relationships with boys' (Ringrose 2013, p. 86). It is important here to pay attention to the content of the nude image, as not each image evokes similar responses. There is, for example, a difference between an evocative pose while undressed, and a depersonalized (head cut off) shot of breasts: a difference that relates to the complicated task of adolescent girls to be sexy, but not sexual (Holland, Ramazanoglu, & Sharpe, 2004). To make things worse in the eyes of Jordan, Zoe was hanging out with boys who have a different 'skin color' than their own (which is white). For her friends, Zoe became an out-of-control girl, beyond their reach. Jordan said they had warned her many times, asking her 'are you going to stop with these brown ones or what?' The racial component added intensity to the transgression and to the blame; echoing the notion that she should have known better with these 'sexual predators', as racial others are often cast to be (Bredstrom, 2005; Hasinoff, 2014; Nagel, 2001). When I interviewed 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 the first year. You know Mark and John, they live in Noordveld, 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, Delta 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 and safety – Delta College is situated in a small city that is seen as more ethnically diverse and having more urbanized social problems.

At the moment 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 behavior and to further disqualify Zoe’s behavior. In doing so, she tried to constitute me as ‘one of them’, one of the inhabitants of the provincial school that rejected the ‘multicultural’ neighboring school. Here, two common discourses of racism in the Netherlands, namely that of criminalization and sexualization (Wekker, 2016), are evident: the pupils in the other school need more correction and are said to receive more ‘red notes’ (an official warning to parents of which three lead to complete suspension of the school), and their sexual behavior is implicitly assumed deviant by Jordan.

Zoe was the only girl of her group of friends who tapped into friend networks that attended Delta. Jordan lived quite far from the village and was not allowed to go anywhere by herself. Alyssa had problems keeping up in school and spent most of her afternoons studying (a few days a week with a private teacher). Kira’s mother was always at home with her after school, available to hang out. Zoe, on the other hand, could go wherever she wanted; her parents were rarely at home after school hours. She did not need to study a lot to get acceptable grades (she was advised to go to a higher level track but her parents wanted her to go to the school in their village, which only offered a vocational track).³³ From her village, in which she lived centrally, Zoe could use the bus to get to nearby towns. As such, she tapped into other social networks that were unavailable to her friends from school. Part of the harsh reaction of her friends can be read accordingly: that Zoe’s interests differ from theirs, that she hangs out with people they do not know, and who are

33 The Dutch school system is roughly divided into three levels: VMBO is the preparatory middle-level vocational education, a four year track; Havo is the higher general continued education, a five year track; VWO is pre-university education, a six year track. The decision which track to enter is made by the pupil and his or her parents at the end of the primary school (at age 11 or 12), based on a test and teacher advice.

cast as ethnically different. These networks, until the spread of the picture, were geographically separate. The technology of the mobile phone, as well as the affordances of social media, dissolved geographical boundaries: suddenly Zoe's friendships and relations with the group from Delta became visible to her Rijnsbergcollege friends, demonstrating how new media 'leak' (Chun & Friedland, 2015). The way in which social networks were bridged, and the ways in which their racialization can increase policing of sexual behavior, 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 refusal of victim role

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, during class, Zoe told her side of the story.

Kira summarises quickly: She 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 that's why she 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 it turned out to be a girl (Sara) who widely distributed the picture 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. Only Zoe points it out, but the issue does not stick with anyone - the blame was already placed on Zoe for engaging with the 'wrong' (kind of) guy(s). No attention was paid to who made the picture travel: instead the sentence 'a picture is going around' is used: thus evacuating agency and making it easier, once again, to blame 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 hitting her. This moment of anger does not suit the victim position that Zoe has to take up in the sexting script. Here, it is clear that there was barely 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 is to be avoided. Her earrings were not to be touched.

The last part of the conversation presented above took place in the girls changing room. Here, there are no boys or teachers around; it is coded as a female space. The room is used for (un)dressing, looking at each other and in the mirror, adjusting hair and make-up, gossiping. Most girls tried to stay as long as possible in the confined and slightly more private space of the changing room. Zoe, however, tried to get out as quickly as possible.

In this version of the story, as recounted by Kira, Zoe kept a secret. It excluded her friends, making them even angrier – how can she share things with this boy that they don't know about? Now, she is being intimate with a boy without her best friends knowing about it, going against their established norm of sharing everything they experience with boys. This was evident in the girls changing room when someone asked: what would she need Joey for?

Half a year later, relations seemed to be normalised again, and I no longer heard references to Zoe's pictures. During an interview, Zoe distanced herself from the girl in the picture by emphasizing that the incident happened 'last year' (before the summer holiday), 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 recounting last year's highs and lows, Zoe reproduced characterizations that are evident in much of the literature on teenagers 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 told me:

Sometimes I have that, even though I think it is stupid of myself, but, ehm, if some person has a picture, you... Ehhh... 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 too 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 arises almost automatically. In the same conversation, however, Zoe again complicated the sexting script when she told me that she took and sent more nude pictures than the one that caused the situation I have been describing here. She also owned pictures of boys that she used to threaten them against spreading her pictures. These pictures, she told me, were mostly from naked body parts, so-called 'dick pics' (Salter, 2015), a term that is used in Dutch as well. She never spread these, as she said, out of pity. Spreading would most likely not be a smart thing to do, given that it would signal her sexual activity, something that might negatively reflect on her as it suggests an overt sexuality that marks women as slutty, and not 'classy' (Attwood, 2007). Her asking for and saving boys' nude pictures disrupts the script of the naive girl who has been victimised by boys.

But I scratched out her head! – Situating sexting in an economy of pictures

Zoe was part of the girl's clique that was more popular than the other one in the class which called itself the 'nerdalerts'. Several times, I noticed that girls from the 'nerdalert' group showed that they had the picture of Zoe on their phones.

Two weeks after the nude-picture had been 'going around' I went out for dinner with the class and some of their teachers. Zoe and her friends leave early. Linda and Evi want to show Zoe's picture to one of their teachers. The teacher refuses to look at it, and says he did not want to see it. Linda replied surprised: 'but I scratched out her head!' Shortly after, Evi gives the teacher a wristband that she made for him.

The youth that I studied used their smartphones every day to take and send 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!', which was often followed by an immediate striking of poses. Smartphones make the making and sending of high quality pictures easy, quick and cheap. Almost every pupil owned a smartphone with a camera and photo-sharing apps.³⁴ Furthermore, the school provided free Wi-Fi, which contributed to the large number of pictures circulating. I barely heard youth make or talk about phone calls, while in contrast they were using WhatsApp, Facebook, Snapchat and Instagram on a daily (sometimes hourly) basis, and sometimes Skype as well. All of these technologies appeal to the visual - increasing visual and sexualized communication (Allen, 2013; Ringrose et al., 2012; Berriman & Thomson, 2015). These daily practices of taking and sharing pictures were visible to teachers as well. To a certain extent, they participated in it by taking pictures themselves and sharing them on Facebook or the school website.

Pictures taken with smartphones were often posted online, and were consequently met with a number of 'likes' or comments. In school, they were often shown to each other, and evaluated and gossiped about. When posting pictures, young people expose themselves to the chances of deriving pleasure from likes and positive reactions, as well as the possibility of criticism (Berriman & Thomson 2015). This taking, posting, sharing and valuing of pictures has been described in terms of an economy (Ringrose et al., 2013; Shields Dobson & Ringrose 2016), in the sense that it involves production, consumption and valuation. This 'economy of pictures' is not gender

34 Such as WhatsApp, Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook Messenger

neutral. Previous research argues that for boys, owning semi-nude pictures, functions as a form of capital (Schwarz, 2010). Ringrose and colleagues describe this economy in detail. They found that images of girls' bodies, for boys, hold value as they are proof of something that a girl has 'done for him' (Ringrose et al., 2013, p. 314). Girls as well can gain value, namely by being asked for a nude picture, which is read as a sign of desirability. However, when a girl agrees to send a nude picture, her sexual reputation and value decrease (Ringrose et al., 2013).

In addition, the case analyzed here shows that for girls as well, owning pictures can be a form of value. Notably, it was a girl (Sara) who distributed Zoe's picture widely after having received it from Joey, who Zoe had sent it to. Receiving and owning nude pictures of other girls, especially of girls who are more popular, can be a way of showing that they are part of a certain network of peers. In addition, it can give girls the tools for power reversal by inscribing the pictures (like Linda did, scratching out Zoe's head). Possessing pictures of boys can be a form of power for girls too: Zoe told me that she has pictures on her phone from naked body parts of boys that she threatens to publish if they spread her picture. Zoe until now decided not to do it, out of pity, as she said to me. Exposing these pictures would most likely not have the same consequences for boys as it has for girls. The economy works differently for boys than for girls; they can make it 'profitable' in different ways and to different extents, and at different costs. When discussing the nude-picture of Zoe, this picture was never related to this busy 'traffic' in pictures. What could have been considered as a continuum was isolated. In the sexting script, the phenomenon of sexting is particularized, it is not seen as functioning in an economy of pictures.

When-girl-sends-nude-picture-to-boy

Sexting has come to be understood as a growing practice among youth, a practice that is potentially dangerous and damaging, especially for girls. Based on media and scientific reports, it has become a widely recognizable phenomenon, scripted in a specific way: the line

‘when-girl-sends-nude-picture-to-boy’ barely needs explanation. It implies an unhappy ending in which the picture is inevitably spread, and will result in an emotional drama for the girl, who should take the blame, and consequently change her behavior.

In this chapter I argued that sexting is produced as a very specific script by media and scientific reports. This script determines how a girl whose nude picture is ‘going around’ in school is reacted to: it requires people to act in a specific way. Based on the case of Zoe that I have described here, it becomes clear that this sexting script not only describes, but also produces, the phenomenon, by making invisible certain issues, while highlighting others. Three things were highlighted through their reiteration. First was the fact that Zoe was the one who had sent the picture to Joey. Second was that she was guilty of its spread, a result of sending a nude picture that is regarded as inevitable. Third was the idea that she was ‘going down the wrong path’ and was in need of intervention.

Several aspects were made invisible. First was the different network of peers that she tapped into, and the ways in which the racialization of this network increased the negative reactions of her friends. Second was the practice of boys sending nude pictures of themselves. Third were the ways in which technological affordances, such as making pictures and the availability of Wi-Fi, increased the circulation of the picture. Finally, the ways in which the picture that was going around was part of daily practices of taking, sending, and relating through pictures was invisible in the script. The gendering of these practices was also made invisible, as no attention was paid to the fact that the boy who received the nude-picture of Zoe forwarded it to one girl, who consequently shared it with her complete list of contacts.

Next to describing and producing the phenomenon, the script also worked prescriptively: it invited specific actions such as adult interventions, informing teachers, picking a fight, and leaving earrings untouched. Following sexting in school makes visible how the sexting script is stabilized, as certain aspects of the case did not get incorporated into the story while others were emphasized. Only because of this, it is possible to understand the case presented here as one of those stories that is captured by the sentence ‘when girl sends nude picture to boy’, and to incorporate it into the