

GETTING RISKY: EXPLORING THE WAYS THAT CONTEXT INFLUENCE HOW SEXUAL HEALTH ORGANISATIONS PRODUCE DIGITAL SEXUAL HEALTH PROMOTION

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Background:

A communication gap exists between the digital health promotion that sexual health organisations produce and the type of content that young people want. While many studies explore what young Australians want from digital sexual health promotion, there has been little exploration about how organizational perceptions of risk inform the content that organisations produce.

Methods: This exploratory study involved semi-structured interviews with 12 digital sexual health promotion practitioners from Australia and the United Kingdom. Key themes identified within interviews were analysed from a conjunctural perspective to understand how the historical and social contexts influence organisational conceptualisations of risk.

Results: Interviewees portrayed the sexual health sector as being risk-averse around digital sexual health promotion. Content producers and organisational executives that sign off on content have different understanding of what constitutes potentially 'risky' content. Interviewees identified that this was related to organisations being predominantly funded by risk-averse (and often conservative) governments and fears of losing funding in increasingly resource-constrained environment. These differences were particularly evident for organisations that reported producing explicit health messaging, as opposed to content that sought to 'engage' or 'entertain' young people, and within Australian organisations. Few interviewees discussed their experiences in relation to their historical and social context. However, I argue that organisational approaches to mitigating risk should be contextualised within the ongoing moral panic of child safety. In doing so, I explore the conflation of sex and risk during the media reporting on Safe Schools in Australia during 2016-2017 and extrapolate what this means for sexual health promotion aimed at young people.

Conclusion: This paper concludes that context influences how organisations produce digital sexual health promotion. By exploring organizational experiences of risk, this paper will help the Australian sexual health sector to produce more impactful and relevant digital sexual health promotion for young people.

Disclosure of Interest Statement: This research is supported by an Australian Government Research Training Program (RTP) Scholarship. No additional grants were received in the development of this paper.