

# “Girls need to stop sending pictures”

A report on boys, nude images, relationships and age differences.

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## **ECPAT Sweden**

ECPAT Sweden is a children’s rights organisation working against sexual exploitation of children. We do this in several ways. We share knowledge about sexual crime to prevent it from happening. We work to inform public opinion and influence decision makers, and we collaborate with authorities, private businesses and other organisations. We also run ECPAT Hotline – a reporting site, as well as Ditt ECPAT – a support line for children and young people, and Vuxenstöd for parents and other adults. Our support lines offer help, support and knowledge about images, sexual harassment, threats and abuse online or IRL. ECPAT Sweden is part of the international ECPAT network, which comprises 122 organisations in 104 countries.



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# Preface

This report is intended for adults who are close to children, and aims to increase the understanding of the ways in which boys view relationships, sex and sexual abuse in today's digital context. When we discuss sexual risks and abuse over the Internet, the focus easily falls on girls and the vulnerability of girls. However, during the work on ECPAT Sweden's (ECPAT) report 'Allt som inte är ett ja är ett nej' (Everything that is not a yes is a no), it became clear that there were differences in the ways in which boys and girls experienced sexual grey areas, violations and offences over the Internet.<sup>1</sup> If we focus on the experiences of the girls, there is a risk that boys' experiences - both as the abused and as the abusers - may go unnoticed. It is therefore important to understand the situation from the perspective of the boys, which is why we highlight the boys' experiences in this report. This is made possible because the children who responded to ECPAT's survey 'Nude på nätet' (Nude online) frequently shared their opinions and experiences in the free-text responses.

*My friends often show me pictures of girls, but nothing much happens afterwards. I don't care about nudity in that way, but 'sharing' is still wrong. (Boy, 16 years old)*

By understanding the ways in which boys reason about the issues associated with nude images, relationships, abuse and age differences, it becomes easier to offer boys the help and support to which they are entitled. This report, as in the quote above, makes it clear that boys are frequently uncertain about when they have been the victim of a crime, as well as when they have

subjected someone else to abuse. This uncertainty demonstrates the necessity for adults to create a dialogue with young boys, to provide them with the help that they need to understand their own limits and those of others. This will not be possible without understanding their perspectives, and how their actions are shaped by prevailing norms.

This is especially important, since we could observe in the survey that boys will very rarely seek support from adults if anything should happen. In ECPAT's parents' report 'Vad föräldrar inte vet' (What Parents Don't Know), we could also observe that parents worry less about the Internet habits of boys than they do about the habits of girls.<sup>2</sup> In this silence, boys are left alone with their experiences, and they may find it difficult to understand when they are being abused or when they are abusing others. By listening to the boys' narratives, we can obtain an increased understanding of how we can respond to their experiences in such a way that shows that we see them, care about them and listen to them.

**A big thank you** to all the children and adolescents who have so bravely shared their experiences and knowledge. We will safeguard the trust you have shown us!



**Anna Karin Hildingson Boqvist**  
Secretary General, ECPAT Sweden

<sup>1</sup> ECPAT, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> ECPAT, 2020.

”

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# Summary

This report is based on the boys' free-text responses in ECPAT's survey 'Nude på nätet' (Nude online), which was conducted in June 2021. In the survey, nearly 13,000 children, including almost 6,000 boys, answered questions about sexual grey areas and abuse with links to the Internet. The boys also provided some 800 free-text responses.



**From the boys' free-text responses, their online existence appears to be strongly characterised by a heterosexual male norm.**

An important starting point for this report is the fact that the Internet is an important arena for children today, and there is no clear dividing line between being online and offline. As a consequence, much of the children's social relations are taking place over the Internet, and a great deal of the children's sexual exploration is taking place digitally. Children see this as positive, but it is also putting children at risk of abuse, or at risk of subjecting others to sexual harassment and abuse. In this report, we try to mirror the ways in which boys relate to both the positive aspects and the problems that sexual exploration on the Internet can entail. A special problem is the fact that nude images, which have been sent in trust and to build intimacy, can be spread to many other people without the consent of the sender, and beyond their control.

From the boys' free-text responses, their online existence can be seen to be strongly characterised by a heterosexual male norm, where control and aggressiveness are rewarded, and those who are abused are seen, at least in part, to have only themselves to blame. This leads to difficulties in them seeing themselves - and boys in general - as victims of sexual violence. Moreover, when boys discuss risks, this is usually associated with the girls' behaviour. It also becomes clear that the boys' interpretation of what is considered to be a violation is partially dependent on how well established a relationship is. There is a greater obligation to behave well in a romantic relationship than there is with someone they only know from the Internet or with whom they have short-term sexual interactions. However, there are clear differences between girls and boys with regard to what is considered to be acceptable behaviour in romantic relationships.

The tendency of boys to place a large share of the responsibility on those who are abused means that boys are at risk of abusing others without actually realising that they are committing an offence. In contrast to those of the girls, the boys' free-text responses reveal very little problematisation about threats, nagging (making persistent demands) or other forms of pressure to obtain nude images or sex. The boys also place a relatively large share of the responsibility on the person who sends nude images, if these are later used to harm the sender. However, when it comes to age differences, we can observe that both boys and girls place a large share of the responsibility on younger children not to put themselves in a situation where they could be abused. One area that partially contrasts with the boys' general attitudes is those cases where a child has been abused by an adult. In these cases, the sympathies are primarily with the abused child, whilst the responsibility is seen to lie with the adult perpetrator. This is especially interesting since, when the perpetrator is an adult, the difference in age is problematised from a power perspective, which is not the case when it concerns children of different ages.

The difficulty the boys have in seeing themselves as the victims of sexual violence leads them to diminish the seriousness of the events in those narratives that involve the abuse of a boy. This could be either because the victim has a non-heterosexual orientation or because boys are expected to welcome sexual interactions with a girl or a woman. Although there is an awareness that boys are also sexually abused on the Internet, it can be difficult for the boys to get their experiences validated.

# Introduction

The children of today are living in a changeable society, and they are surrounded by a constant stream of information from various media. The increased use of digital and social media is turning them into active participants and co-creators of the public and social spheres in which we live.<sup>3</sup> The distinction between 'online' and 'offline' when it comes to, for example, new interactions and new relationships is constantly being renegotiated and challenged. The Internet is also creating new methods for abusing children through a new form of digital violence.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the Internet is opening up new ways for young people to explore their sexuality, which do not necessarily need to be negative or dangerous.<sup>5</sup>

One consequence of digitalisation and technological developments is that the local and the global have become intertwined: i.e., the lives that adolescents live locally are influenced and filtered through global events that are opened up by the Internet. This leaves impressions relating to identity creation – particularly perhaps regarding sexuality.<sup>6</sup> For this reason, the

children's free-text responses in this report should be understood from their generational position, which means that their potential vulnerability differs from that of adults.<sup>7</sup> However, it has to be emphasised that, in their relationships with adults, children and adolescents do not live in totally detached worlds; rather, childhood and adulthood are created and experienced in interaction with fluid positions and boundaries.<sup>8</sup> When it comes to children's and adolescents' sexuality, however, children's views of potentially risky behaviour differ from those of adults, such as their parents, for example.<sup>9</sup> One way to understand this discrepancy is that parents are not as familiar with the new technological developments that many young people have grown up with, despite adults frequently claiming the opposite to be true.<sup>10</sup> A potential consequence of this is that parents, with the intention of protecting their children from danger, regulate their children's Internet use in a non-progressive way instead, which may lead to children being excluded from acceptable social arenas. In addition, girls appear to be more aware of the risks, whilst parents are more involved in girls' use of the Internet.<sup>11</sup>

3 Hammarén & Hellman, 2016.

4 Bianchi et al., 2021; Hellevik & Överlien, 2016.

5 Stoilova, Livingstone & Khazbak, 2021; Livingstone & Mason, 2015.

6 Stoilova, Livingstone & Khazbak, 2021; Livingstone & Mason, 2015; Furlong, Woodman & Wyn, 2011.

7 Korkmaz, 2021a; Finkelhor 2007.

8 Korkmaz, 2021b.

9 ECPAT, 2021; ECPAT, 2020.

10 ECPAT, 2020.

11 ECPAT, 2021.





## One consequence of digitalisation and technological developments is that the local and global have become intertwined.

A child is any person under 18 years of age. Early childhood is often associated with defencelessness, immaturity and innocence, whilst adolescence is frequently associated with risk-taking and lack of control - however, the distinction depends on various factors, such as context, gender and ethnicity, for example.<sup>12</sup>

The foundation of this report is a consideration of the central sociological assumptions about childhood and youth, as well as its significance as a social construction.<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, consideration will be given to adolescents' identity creation in relation to being abused, on the one hand, and abusing others, on the other. In other words, this concerns how they position themselves and others in relation to normative discourses, and accordingly construct their identity, which can occasionally become particularly clear when it concerns those who are victims of sexual abuse compared to those who are abusers.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, the report brings to the fore questions about whether, and in such cases how, vulnerability is discussed and the space that it is given, how vulnerability is described in relation to other social problems, and how this relates to the general understanding of sexual violence and vulnerability to such violence. A central aspect in this context concerns the self-perception and communication (for example, concerning their sexuality) of children and adolescents with those around them, including with friends, parents, siblings, teachers and sports coaches, because identity and self-perception are expressed narratively. Specifically, in this report, this involves the ways in which boys reason – for example, about sending or asking for nude images, relationships and other sexual experiences.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Alanen, 2001.

<sup>13</sup> James, Jenks & Prout 1998; Alanen 1988.

<sup>14</sup> Bamberg, 2004.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

## Our approach

In 2021, ECPAT conducted a vignette-based questionnaire. A vignette-based questionnaire involves asking the children to consider and respond to narratives about sexual vulnerability online. Both the narratives and the responses are based on what other children have previously told ECPAT about their experiences and attitudes. The questionnaire consists of 17 short narratives – 6 for children aged 10-13, and 11 for children aged 14-17 – about vulnerabilities and sexual grey areas on the Internet. Each individual child was randomly presented with a maximum of three of these.

12,836 unique responses where the children had responded to at least one narrative were received.

In total, these children provided 23,846 responses to the narratives. Of these, 1,504 children provided at least one free-text response, and a total of 2,239 free-text

this age range. Just over half, (55 per cent) of the respondents define themselves as girls, with 41 per cent defining themselves as boys, and around one per cent as non-binary. The remaining children either did not want to answer the question about their gender identity or chose 'other'. Girls and non-binary children usually answered more questions and provided more and longer free-text responses. This report is based on a total sample of the 840

# 12 836

unique responses, where a child responded anonymously to at least one narrative.

# 23 846

narratives in the questionnaire were responded to by the children.

responses to the narratives were received. In addition to this, 1,463 children answered questions about exposure to crime, and 168 children shared their own experiences. The questionnaire reached, first and foremost, children aged 15-17 years of age, and just over 70 per cent of respondents were in

free-text responses that were provided by the boys. The analytical procedure for the boys' free-text responses is influenced by the descriptions of narrative thematic analysis in Riessman and Lieblich et al.<sup>16</sup> Thematic analysis is a method that identifies patterns in the data material, which more specifically is done by empirical observations being encoded, categorised (in this case, the boys' free-text responses) and, finally, thematised with the support of selected free-text responses. Initially, a general encoding of all of the boys' free-text responses was carried out; in this step, 58 overall headings were identified. In the next step, these 58 headings were condensed into 14 main categories. In the third step, three themes were created on the basis of these 14 categories. The overall thematisation then consisted of 34 selected free-text responses, which were selected based on their typical character.

<sup>16</sup> Riessmann 2008 och Lieblich et al., 1998.

The selected free-text responses embody the essential main features of the theme in various ways.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the analytical idea is to unify form and content – that is to say, to focus on both what is said and on how it is said. In a narrative, form and content are prerequisites for each other, and, for this reason, the focus in the analysis has been primarily on the manifest content, not the search for latent meaning.<sup>18</sup> By alternately focusing on form and content, it is possible to discern patterns and establish a deeper understanding of the studied phenomenon. The goal is to try to differentiate phenomena, characteristics and implications that have not been observed previously, or that have not attracted much attention. Accordingly, the thematic analysis contains reflexive elements, where the researcher's subjectivity is considered to be a resource in the analytical process. Thus, this is not about following static steps in the analytical process.<sup>19</sup>

In 'Allt som inte är ett ja är ett nej' (Everything that is not a yes is a no), which was the first report to be based on data from the survey, the children's experience of online sexual offences and the strategies they use when they are abused were studied.<sup>20</sup> That report not only found that girls are more vulnerable to sexual offences than boys, but also that the strategies and attitudes of boys and girls when subjected to sexual offences differ. Another finding was that it was boys and men who most frequently subjected girls to sexual offences, and that it was common for the person who subjected a child to a sexual offence to be another child.

Below follows a more detailed study of the free-text responses given by the older children, aged 14 to 17,

<sup>17</sup> Dalen, 2015.

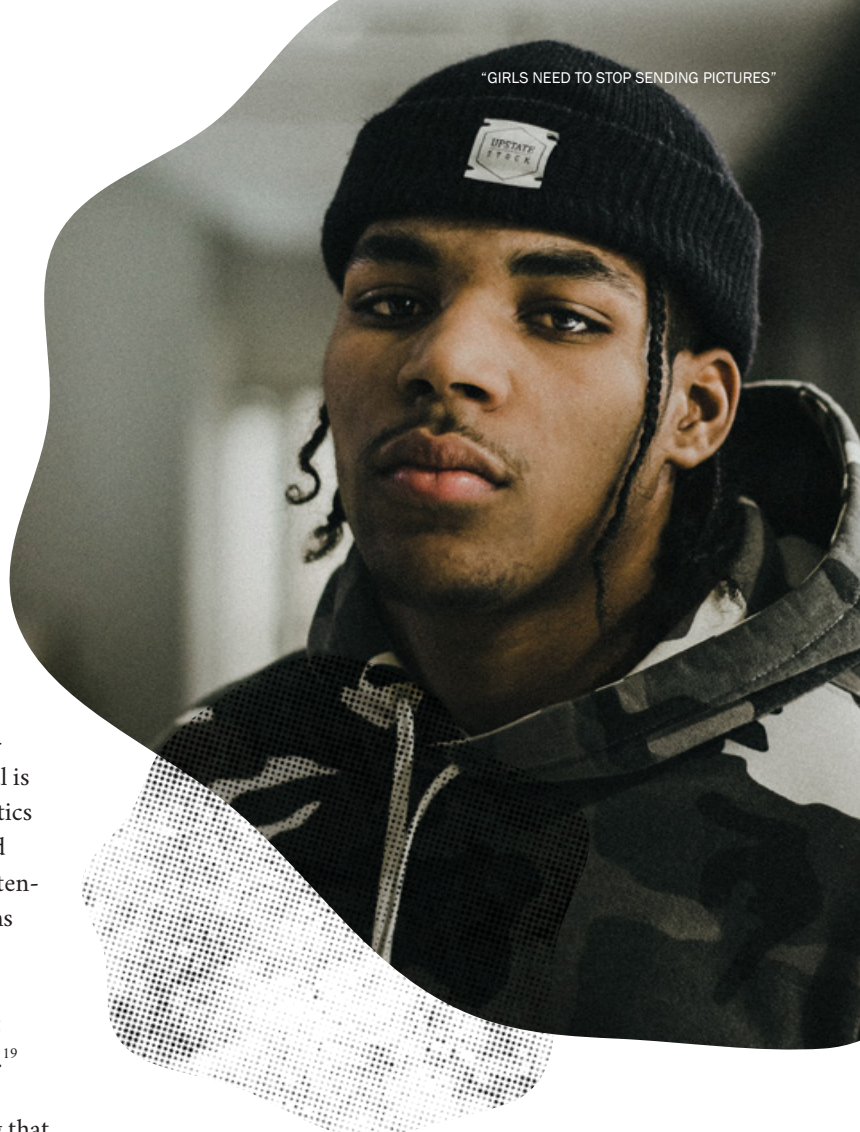
<sup>18</sup> Lieblich et al., 1998.

<sup>19</sup> Braun & Clarke, 2020.

with the focus on the boys. The boys' free-text responses are varied, encompassing everything from just stating the word "no" (that is to say, they do not want to provide a free-text response), to shorter narratives where they discuss the vignette, and to recounting their own experiences and those of their friends. In this report, their free-text responses are understood based on the 'small stories' concept.<sup>21</sup> Storytelling (in this case, in the form of writing) is understood as part of the individual's everyday communication, and the storytelling is socially situated, which means that stories and identity are shaped by the contexts in which they are told – in this case, online.

<sup>20</sup> ECPAT, 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Bamberg, 2006.



# Boys aged 14-17: reflections on nude images, relationships and age differences

In many contexts, such as in popular culture, the sports world and the media landscape, masculinity is often created as a norm. Research points to the phenomenon of 'male space': for example, men and boys are free to talk about their sexuality, whilst women and girls cannot do this in the same way.<sup>22</sup> In line with this, Lindroth, Löfgren-Mårtenson and Månsson point out that girls are judged more harshly by both boys and girls.<sup>23</sup> In this report, we study the thoughts and ideas of young boys, primarily regarding relationships, the sending of nude images and sexuality. Children and adolescents' development processes are influenced by



**It is, perhaps, possible to speak in terms of a paradigm shift regarding the way sexuality is seen.**

various social and cultural norms – norms that revolve, for example, around body ideals and sexual orientation – where heterosexuality constitutes a clear norm, which is clearly observed in this material. However, it is important to point out that the way in which young people explore their sexuality today differs from, for example, how their parents explored their sexuality, with regard to the technological developments. It is, perhaps, possible to speak in terms of a paradigm shift regarding the way sexuality is seen – for example, with regard to physical presence.<sup>24</sup>

The materials that are discussed within the framework of this report are characterised at an overall level by three basic aspects: Firstly, the adolescents' free-text responses reflect the fact that there is a strong heterosexual norm; it could be said that a traditional heterosexual masculinity is both implicitly and explicitly regarded as the norm in this material. For example, this is expressed by sentences (free-text responses) such as: *Why the hell are you trying to normalise being gay? Nudes and things like that are supposed to be sent between boys and girls.* However, homophobia is more commonly expressed more succinctly, along the lines of homosexuality being "wrong" or "disgusting". Secondly, in the vignettes that explicitly contain personal names that have a non-ethnically Swedish sound, racist comments repeatedly feature, along the lines of "go home" and "damn immigrants". Finally, the material also reflects something we already knew: that boys are responsible for the majority of the abuse. Boys ask for nude images more often, and it is boys who share nude images they have received with others. The research literature describes clear risk groups regarding vulnerability to sexual abuse – usually girls; at the same time, (young) boys are described as constituting a risk group for the potential subjection of others to sexual abuse, and this provides important knowledge for preventive interventions.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, the material also contains accounts (free-text responses) where boys describe how older girls have subjected them to sexual abuse.

<sup>22</sup> Bamberg, 2004.

<sup>23</sup> Lindroth et al., 2012.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, the Supreme Court precedent (B 4072:21, B 4645:21) on rape and vulnerability to sexual violence.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Stoilova, Livingstone & Khazbak, 2021.

When the responses are analysed in more detail we can divide them up thematically and demonstrate the ways in which the boys' reasoning is developed and problematised within the context of the heterosexual male norm. The results are illustrated by three themes:

- **Nude images: a part of boys' sexuality?**
- **Exploration and intimacy online<sup>26</sup>**
- **Relationships and abuse: whose responsibility?**

These themes are based on 6 of the 17 vignettes in the survey 'Nude på nätet' (Nude online).<sup>27</sup> It is worth emphasising that there are no water-tight boundaries between these themes; sometimes they overlap, and the participants' accounts can sometimes correspond to several of the themes. A theme is not, therefore, necessarily dependent on quantifiable metrics; instead, it can be understood as capturing something in the material that is important with regard to the purpose of the report, by representing a certain level of meaning or a pattern in relation to the overall material.

<sup>26</sup> Comprises two additional subthemes: Risk awareness, and Motives for sending nude images.

<sup>27</sup> ECPAT, 2021.

# Nude images: a part of boys' sexuality

This report uses the term 'nude images' to describe images or videos that children and adolescents take of themselves when they are nude or undressed and/or in sexualised situations, either voluntarily or as a result of threatening behaviour, pressure or coercion. The new technology is opening up new ways for people to explore their sexuality, which can result in children and adolescents engaging in behaviour that adults consider to be risky, such as sending nude images to each other, having sex online with each other, or physically meeting up with people they have met online. It is important to remember that risk is not necessarily the same as harm, and it is the avoidance of the latter that is important.<sup>28</sup> Children and adolescents take a different view of personal privacy on the Internet than adults, which can lead to certain forms of behaviour, such as sending nude images, being understood differently by adults and children.<sup>29</sup> The Internet not only offers various types of sexual content, but also provides the individual with the opportunity to explore material that, for various reasons, was previously restricted.

The distinction between 'online' and 'offline' regarding, for example, new interactions and new relationships is also constantly being renegotiated and challenged.

In the research, "sexting" is discussed, which is defined as the sharing of sexual content, either in the form of text or an image/video, using new technology (e.g. mobile/tablet).<sup>30</sup> A common form of sexting between children and adolescents is sending nude images to one another.<sup>31</sup> Nude images that adolescents take of themselves and either save on their mobile phone or voluntarily send to someone else (if the recipient wants them and they are roughly the same age) are not illegal. Roughly half of all adolescents between the ages of 10 and 17 have sent nude images, so-called nudes.<sup>32</sup> In terms of research, this phenomenon is in its infancy,<sup>33</sup> but it is a phenomenon that has become more common among adolescents in recent years, and the research includes both studies that indicate that sending nude images can contribute to mental illness and studies that have not found any such correlation.<sup>34</sup>

28 Livingstone & Mason, 2015; ECPAT, 2021.

29 Livingstone & Stoilova, 2019.

30 Chalfen, 2009.

31 A nude image does not necessarily have to depict a person who is fully undressed; instead, the term is used here to define images where the subject is scantily clad, that are seen as risqué, or that otherwise signal a sexualised body.

32 ECPAT, 2021.

33 Bianchi et al., 2021; Patchin & Hinduja, 2019; Stanley et al., 2018.

34 ECPAT, 2021.

The report 'Allt som inte är ett ja är ett nej' (Everything that is not a yes is a no) illustrates adolescents' views on this phenomenon, which are often that this is unproblematic and a way for them to explore their sexuality.<sup>35</sup> We can see this in particular in the boys' responses. In the girls' responses, we can see that this exploration is often woven together with a worry that the images will somehow be misused. This is often in stark contrast to what adults think about this phenomenon, as well as the way it has been contextualised in the research literature, where there is often an absence of children's voices regarding their understanding of the sending of nude images based on a relational perspective.<sup>36</sup> Here, we see two examples of how this is described in a relatively normalised way:

*It was pretty innocent. It just involved adding people on Snapchat, pretty much. Both me and the (the girl)*

**“ We Snapchatted a while. She was quite hot and I was horny, and apparently she was as well. She started sending some rather sexy pictures and I did too, then it just got more and more naked.**

*were interested in pictures of each other (nudes). This went on for a while, then that person disappeared and we deleted each other. This happened several times. (Boy, 15 years old)*

*We Snappchatted [communicated via Snapchat] for a while. She was quite hot*

*and I was horny, and apparently she was as well. She started sending some rather sexy pictures and I did too, then it just got more and more naked. (Boy, 15 years old)*

Children are also subjected to threats and nagging to force them to send nude images or to perform sexual acts.<sup>37</sup> This often takes place within the context of an existing romantic relationship or friendship. This implies that children are, to a lesser extent, abused by a stranger, although this is also something that does occur.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> ECPAT, 2021.

<sup>36</sup> Stoilova, Livingstone & Khazbak, 2021.

<sup>37</sup> Wolak et al., 2018.

<sup>38</sup> Stoilova, Livingstone & Khazbak, 2021.

## Exploration and intimacy online

Young people send nude images for a variety of reasons, and, in most cases, this happens voluntarily and consensually. In the boys' free-text responses, various patterns emerge, but these not only include accounts of sexual exploration and affirmation, but also of threats and various forms of nagging. It is, however, clear that boys problematise the sending of images as a result of various forms of pressure to a lesser extent than girls do, and, in principle, never when they are the sender.

Similarly, very few responses from the boys mention that they had received unwanted nude images, which was common among the girls. Generally speaking, we see that the boys do not perceive the sending of images to be something that is particularly threatening. The following theme consists of two subthemes:

- **Risk awareness**
- **Motives for sending nude images**



## Risk awareness

Based on the free-text responses, it appears to be quite common for adolescents to send images with sexual content to relatively new acquaintances or if they are in a romantic relationship, but the reasons vary – for example, based on a wish to receive a nude image in return, or as a way in which to have sex within a relationship. It is clear from their free-text responses that adolescents, based on their own experience or that of friends, recommend that children taking nude images should not show their face, if they are sending images to someone they do not know very well.<sup>39</sup> There is also a tendency in the material for children to write explicitly in their free-text responses that children should not send ‘nudes’ – that is to say, there appears to be some degree of caution (risk awareness), which is also supported in the research.<sup>40</sup> One vignette that attempts to highlight aspects concerning the ways in which nude images are spread is as follows:

Kim is new to the school, and there he meets Philip. They begin talking and writing to each other, and after a while they start talking about sex. Kim asks if Philip would like a nude and Philip says yes, so Kim sends one. Philip goes quiet. Philip has taken a screenshot of the image. When Kim wakes up next morning, everything is in chaos. He has received many texts from friends who have seen the image. Worst of all is a text from Philip, who writes that he was just messing around with him.<sup>41</sup>

This is what two young people write based on this vignette, which concerns a nude image being spread to others, where risk awareness is emphasised in different ways:

*I would have been more careful. It is important to trust the person you're writing to, and you must be certain that the other person also wants to. (Boy, 15 years old)*

*Kim is pretty dumb, what did the guy think was going to happen? Get laid? No, it's his own fault for falling for it. (Boy, 16 years old)*

Caution, trusting the other person (risk of spreading), and the willingness of the other person to receive nude images are recurring aspects that are high-lighted in the free-text responses concerning nude images.

Based on the same vignette, we also find this free-text response:

*Honestly, I think Philip is really disgusting for doing this. It is really not OK. However, I think Kim should*

*have waited until they knew each other better before sending nudes. When you're young, it's easy to get overexcited and make impulsive decisions. We've all been there. But Philip is to blame. He clearly has no idea about how you can ruin things for someone else. Don't spread other people's nudes, and don't trick people when it comes to feelings! (Boy, 17 years old)*

Here, it is clear that the boy does not think that it is acceptable to spread other people's nude images, and caution is once again emphasised: they should wait before sending nudes until they know each other. The author of this free-text response is 17 years old, and attributes the sending of images to youthful impulsiveness, which risks downplaying the consequences and seriousness of the spreading of nude images (cf. the downplaying of a risk often increases with the scale of the threat). We can also see that more girls than boys say that they have experience of being in Kim's situation.

**“ Kim is pretty dumb, what did the guy think was going to happen? Get laid? No, it's his own fault for falling for it.**

39 Cf. Patchin and Hinduja (2019) for recommendations when sexting.

40 Svedin et al., 2021.

41 ECPAT, 2021.

With regard to protecting themselves, a recurring theme among the boys, which is almost entirely missing among the girls, is exchanging images with each other. Based on the free-text responses, it is clear that some boys feel that, if both of the people involved in an interaction send images to each other, then both of them are also in possession of the same type of material, which means that each represents a credible threat vis-a-vis the opposite party, if they should spread their images. Another reason for exchanging images is that it is seen to be more fair. We can see such an example below:

*We were hanging out online and she sent a picture, so I sent one back so it wouldn't be unfair.*  
(Boy, 17 years old)

What is considered to be risky behaviour varies over time, between cultures, and within a culture. Previous studies show that, among young people, sending nude images is normalised, and that the new digital landscape is opening up new ways to explore both intimacy and sexuality.<sup>42</sup> Even if it is more common for girls to experience nagging or threats to get them to send nude images, it does not mean that this does not also happen to boys. One of the vignettes concerns an older girl who nags a boy in order to get him to send nude images:

Alexander is in the first year of high school and, due to the coronavirus pandemic, no teaching is being conducted in the school. This is unfortunate, since Alexander used to hang out with a group of boys, but during the pandemic he feels isolated. He starts to spend more time online and there he meets Amy, who is a few years older. She is kind and funny and says that he is cute and smart, which feels great. They can talk about everything, even though she is older. One day she sends a

nude to Alexander, and she later asks if he could also send nudes. At first Alexander says no, but she keeps nagging him and, finally, he says he will send one. He sends it, but regrets it almost immediately. She knows which school he attends, and it would be cruelly embarrassing if she were to share it with others. She writes that he is hot and asks if he could send another one, but he says no and logs out.<sup>43</sup>

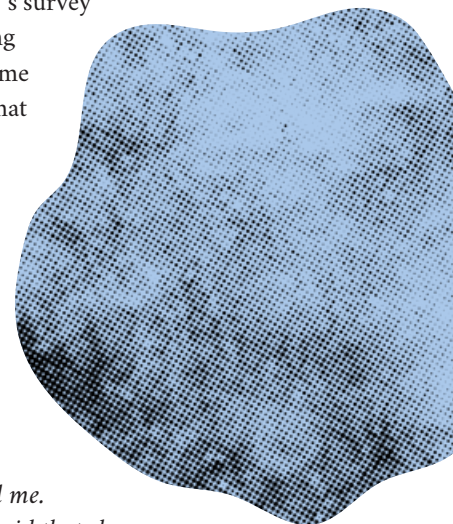
In the free-text responses to this vignette, we encounter opinions such as that a guy should be happy if a girl asks for nude images, that it is weird for girls to ask for nude images, as well as the recurring aspect of: "blame yourself". Alexander's worry is also explained based on aspects that concern homophobia. Permeating this theme is the idea that you should blame yourself if something negative happens after you have sent a nude image of yourself. Threats, nagging and being pressured into sending nude images are not problematised to any great degree by the boys. Accordingly, a potential sexual offence risks being covered up, which has parallels to blaming the victim, for example, of a rape ("she didn't say no..."). If we look at the girls' free-text responses to the above vignette, we see a slightly different narrative, where words such as "forced," "pressured" and "nagging" are more widely problematised. It also emerges from the girls' free-text responses that they have a very different experience of being pressured and threatened into sending nude images; this highlights a greater degree of vulnerability, which is also seen in the number of girls and boys respectively who say they have experience of this type of situation. Almost six in ten girls recognise themselves in this situation, compared to one in four boys. This what one girl writes based on the vignette:

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Stanley et al., 2018; Svedin et al., 2021; and Patchin and Hinduja, 2019.

<sup>43</sup> ECPAT, 2021.

*It happens ALL the time! Usually it is boys who nag and, in addition to that, it is they who spread the images, but there's no doubt that it can also be the girl who does the nagging, but this doesn't become a big deal because, for some reason, it is totally socially acceptable for boys to send nudes, which means it does not usually affect their lives that badly, even though it might feel difficult. But when it happens to girls, it can destroy years of our lives – losing friends, and people talking. You're seen as disgusting. (Girl, 16 years old)*

It is also worth pointing out that boys who identify as LGBTQI+ in ECPAT's survey are subjected to threats, nagging and blackmail to roughly the same extent as girls. This is a group that is systematically made invisible as victims of crime due to the hetero-normative notions of who is at risk of being subjected to abuse online.



## Motives for sending nude images

Bianchi et al. describe three different motives for adolescents sending naked images: sexual purposes (desire to express themselves sexually, exploratory), instrumental/aggressive intentions (sexual exploitation/threats, desire to get something more), or body strengthening/affirming motives (desire for feedback).<sup>44</sup> It is more common for girls to send images/videos in which they are undressed than it is for boys.<sup>45</sup> It is, however, unclear as to what extent these images are sent as a result of nagging, threats or other forms of pressure. In this material, we find free-text responses that can be connected to all three of the above-mentioned motives, but the most common motive that can be ascribed to the free-text responses is that nude images are sent for sexual purposes. This can be seen in the following two quotes:

*I met a girl on an app called Yubo. Basically, it's just Tinder with no age limit (fucked up, I know!) This girl agreed to us swapping pictures, and there were no problems. Because we only ever knew each other online, there were no consequences. (Boy, 15 years old)*

*Oh shit, a random person added me. She wanted to have nudes, so I said that she should send first (security measure). She did it, asked me not to take any screenshots, and she seemed reasonable. We never talked to one another again. No faces, no names. (Boy, 16 years old)*

One way to understand this is that, on the one hand, there is a degree of caution concerning nude images, but that, on the other hand, there is also something mundane about it. These considerations should not, of course, be regarded as being mutually exclusive – rather, they represent forms of behaviour on a continuum, where a possible initial caution transitions into something that becomes normalised, which may make it difficult for adolescents to determine when someone is crossing the line or when a criminal act is taking place. It is also important to reflect critically on the gender aspect in this case: boys do not experience threats, nagging and pressure to send nude images to the same extent that girls do.

<sup>44</sup> Bianchi et al., 2021.

<sup>45</sup> Svedin et al., 2021.

At the same time, there are examples of how spontaneously sending nude images can have unsuspected consequences, which can be observed in a transition between caution and normalisation:

*My friend felt hot and sent a picture to her boyfriend, but accidentally sent it in a group chat and it was spread all over school. (Boy, 15 years old)*

*I don't think you should ever send stuff like that to get in touch with another person. The guy could be more threatening to the other person, and it might lead to bad situations. Girls need to stop sending pictures in that way, because you never know what might happen in the future. (Boy, 17 years old)*

*You should always keep in mind that anything you send over the Internet will always be on the Internet, but, with such incredible amounts of hormones in your body, you don't really think straight at that moment. (Boy, 16 years old)*

It is also clear that, according to the boys, it is mainly girls who should be careful when sending nude images. However, there are similarities in the way they reason in the first vignette, where a boy sent a image to another boy and the image is spread.

This could perhaps be interpreted as showing that the boys are more inclined to have difficulty understanding that there could also be risks to heterosexual boys. Despite the overall tendency in the material for nude images to be sent for sexual purposes,<sup>46</sup> several of the boys' free-text responses are associated with the motive concerning threats:

*My girlfriend had been scammed before by a guy who had been writing to her for a while. She believed they loved one another, and the guy frequently asked for nudes, but as soon as she had sent one, the guy did not allow her to stop. He said if she stopped, he would spread the pictures to her family and friends. (Boy, 17 years old)*

*I've received death threats a couple of times and they've also threatened to kill my family if I didn't send pictures. The easiest way to shut them up is to find out their IP address and send it to them. (Boy, 16)*

*I haven't experienced much stuff like that online but a lot, if not all, of my girl friends have received a picture of a guy's genitals against their will, which is horrible. I really think boys should understand that girls don't want to see this, and behave better. Sometimes, I don't like being a guy because of the way some men and boys treat girls. (Boy, 16 years old)*

Apart from sending nude images for sexual purposes, or because of threats, children also sell nude images of themselves. One of the vignettes highlights this aspect:

*Charlie is seventeen and is at high school. She is fed up with not having any money or a job. She is unhappy with her phone, and its battery runs out quickly. Her parents say that they can't just go and buy her a new phone. A friend tells her about a man she knows online who buys photographs. She says that he's not creepy and he pays well. All she needs to do is to send a nude, and he'll pay SEK 1,000. She says she never includes her face, and the whole Internet is full of nudes, so who cares? Charlie adds the man and he sends her a DM, asking if she wants to sell a nude, and he will then send payment via her mobile using Swish. He says she will get paid more if she shows her face.<sup>47</sup>*

46 Cf. Bianchi et al., 2021.

47 ECPAT, 2021.



The free-text responses linked to this vignette reveal, on the one hand, an indifference linked to the idea of 'easy money', and, on the other, various forms of problematisation concerning the risks and how the material is used. We can also observe that less than one in ten boys have actually experienced this situation, compared to almost one in three girls. There is no uniformity in the responses linked to the risks or to whether it is harmless or not. The free-text responses below highlight this variation:

*Fantastic to get 1,000 kronor just like that. Don't include your face, and afterwards get a new SIM and a new Swish number for payment, then it can't be linked to you. Really easy money, and, if you're careful and do it right, no one can link it to you afterwards. (Boy, 16 years old)*

The reasoning above emphasises that it is "easy money" while, at the same time, it also recognises the importance of exercising caution. Once again, the young people speak of this as a balancing act, but, at the same time, there are other voices:

*If someone wants to sell their body, and is aware of the consequences of selling it to some random guy online, then they'll do what they want, but I wouldn't do it. I don't want my pictures posted online and risk my address etcetera being leaked. I also don't want to increase the risk of being subjected to sexual offences. If a girl wants to sell her body, she should do it professionally, instead of to some random guy on the Internet. (Boy, 16 years old)*

In the extract above, the respondent uses his own personal perspective as a clear basis for his opinion – "I wouldn't do it". At the same time, there is a recurring element of advice/hints – i.e., if you are going to sell images, then get help to do it.

A third example can be seen in the extract below, where the individual's autonomy is emphasised, although the point is also made that this is not a long-term solution to anything.

*Tons of guys are pressuring other girls to do this kind of thing, "sell pictures online" "Get onlyfans". Personally, I think that an individual can do whatever they want, but he or she should know that there are many other paths to choose. It's not a long-term solution, and thinking long-term is always the best solution. (Boy, 15 years old)*

Looking at the girls' free-text responses based on this vignette, it becomes clear that many have received invitations (and been nagged) to sell nude images. Furthermore, there is a variation in the girls' free-text responses: you can make money, you're putting yourself at risk, and it's disgusting, but they also give each other advice and tips. Below, we can see two different free-text responses from the girls:

*Of course, there are lots of risks in selling nudes to older men – some of them say they will pay but block you after you've sent a certain number of images, some try to get you to meet up instead of sending money, and some will save the images and then there is a risk that they will be saved. There are some men who are generous and who Swish good money and are trustworthy, but if you're not comfortable showing off your body in that way, you should absolutely not do it. (Girl, 17 years old)*

*I sent a picture to put an end to the non-stop nagging, but it didn't stop there. Instead, I had to send more and worse pictures and videos for the same money. But, eventually I said no. But he didn't understand – he raped me instead and I didn't dare tell anyone because I was ashamed. (Girl, 16 years old)*

## Relationships and abuse: whose responsibility?

The questionnaire features several different types of scenario, and there are various kinds of relationships between the people in the vignettes. Some of the vignettes describe random and/or short-term contacts, whilst other vignettes concern longer-lasting romantic relationships. The boys' interpretations of what a certain act entails differ, depending on the characters' relationship to each other. With a romantic relationship comes a greater responsibility – for example, to treat nude images with more care. This is expressed, among others, by a boy who writes: *"If she's your girlfriend, don't spread"* (Boy, 17 years old). Nevertheless, the boys state that sending images can be risky, since this protection can sometimes disappear when the relationship ends. From the adolescents' responses to several of the vignettes, it becomes clear that they have different ways of

reasoning about how a romantic relationship should be – what is acceptable and what is unacceptable when you are in a relationship?<sup>48</sup> One of the questionnaire's vignettes addresses the issue of jealousy and nudes within a teenage relationship: *David is together with Mia, who is in eighth grade. Previously, Mia was together with Ahmed. David is jealous, and he loses his temper when he thinks about Mia and Ahmed<sup>49</sup>. They sometimes argue about it. One night, as David is browsing through Mia's phone, Ahmed sends a nude. David becomes furious, screenshots the image, forwards it to his own phone, and storms out of the room. He hears Mia shouting after him. He goes home, and thinks that he should send the image to Ahmed's family and friends.*

<sup>48</sup> See also Korkmaz 2021b, who point out that violence in adolescent romantic relationships is a neglected area.

<sup>49</sup> Many of the free-text responses in this vignette bear traces of racist comments.

Unlike in the previous vignettes, almost an equal proportion of the boys recognise themselves in the story as the girls do. There is a variation in the free-text responses linked to this vignette, ranging from everyone being at fault, to it just being Mia's fault, Ahmed's fault or David's fault, and there are also responses that state that David's reaction is exaggerated. However, the general tendency in the free-text-responses is that it is Ahmed who is in the wrong. The following example illustrates how the responsibility can be shared between the different parties:

*I think everyone is wrong really, as you perhaps shouldn't still have your ex on Snapchat, or whatever they were using. Then, you shouldn't send nude pictures to someone who hasn't asked for them or, if you have received permission from that person to send pictures to them, you shouldn't spread a picture just because he sent it. So basically, I think all of them were in the wrong. (Boy, 15 years old)*

The boy who provided the free-text response above means, on the one hand, that people probably should not have a former partner on social media (in this instance, Snapchat) but, on the other, he emphasises that they should not send nude images to someone who has not asked for them. The main issue illustrated by the vignette tends to get lost in such reasoning, since this establishes the assumption that none of this would have happened if the girlfriend had deleted her ex from social media. The following two examples illustrate more explicitly how the girlfriend is used as a causal explanation:

*You can never know what it feels like for David, unless you're in love yourself. But Mia shouldn't have Ahmed on her phone anyway. He doesn't send nudes out of nowhere on just that day, they must have been in contact for some time. (Boy, 16 years old)*

*Had I been in David's place, I would have broken up with Mia as it is mainly her fault because she didn't say no or break up with David before she started things with Ahmed. (Boy, 15 years old)*

The overall narrative that emerges from this vignette is that the girlfriend is the one who is "at fault". This could possibly be due to a lack of mentalisation (change of perspective), whereby the girl becomes the scapegoat, and boys' rights to send nude images and boys' rights to show anger are asserted and rewarded. This perspective places the boys at the centre of attraction. However, there are also free-text responses in the material linked to this vignette in which both the sender of the nude image and the boyfriend's behaviour are highlighted as problematic:

*Ahmed behaves horribly, and he should therefore be blocked by Mia, but not necessarily before she enters into a relationship with David. David also behaves really badly, mainly because he knows about Mia's previous relationship and chooses to stay with her. He has to accept that she's had another boyfriend – that's perfectly normal – and as I said, he has already chosen to accept these conditions so he could be together with Mia. (Boy, 17 years old)*

**“ I think everyone is wrong really, as you perhaps shouldn't still have your ex on Snapchat, or whatever they were using.**



One interesting aspect, which does not really emerge from the material, is that none of those who provided free-text responses problematise the fact that the boyfriend is browsing through Mia's phone, which, in itself, can be seen as controlling behaviour within a relationship. In other words, is it acceptable to take your partner's phone and browse through their pictures and texts? Furthermore, there are no in-depth responses that problematise the fact that



## One interesting aspect, which does not really emerge from the material, is that none of those who provided free-text responses problematise the fact that the boyfriend is browsing through Mia's phone.

Mia had been sent a nude image that she had not requested. One way to understand this is from the perspective of 'male space' - boys can award themselves the right to go beyond certain boundaries in a relationship, which girls cannot do in a similar manner. If we look at the girls' free-text responses linked to this vignette, it becomes clear that there is a 'resistance narrative', in which the issue of trust and jealousy takes a more prominent place. Resistance narrative concerns power relationships, and also provides a platform for the individual's narrative, where resistance can be created so that the narrative is not solely harmful but also helpful and reinforcing.<sup>50</sup> Identifying resistance narratives can thus be helpful for questioning static images and opinions - for instance, in this case, whether it is acceptable to browse through the contents of a partner's phone.

<sup>50</sup> McKenzie-Mohr and Lafrance, 2017, p. 190.

Below follows a typical free-text response from a girl based on this vignette:

*I think you should trust your partner and you should talk about your problems. I also think David was wrong to browse through Mia's phone but, when he did it and saw the nude, he should have talked to his girlfriend about it instead. (Girl, 14 years old)*

Throughout the material, there is a tendency for the sender to bear the responsibility - for example, when sending nude images. This is amplified in cases where there is no established romantic relationship. What tends to emerge in the material is a lack of problematisation regarding the recipient's intentions and actions. As a result, there is a risk that potential abuse is normalised and ignored. A clear example can be seen in the quote below, where the person only reacts to abuse when it is directed at his sister. Not even after that experience does he problematise the fact that boys share nude images of girls without their consent.

*We were all in a group chat, and everyone was sending saved pictures of girls when I saw that one of the pictures is of my sister... and I ask how he got hold of it... he answers "well, that whore only sent it to me after I threatened to kill her horse". I fished around a bit for more details and then told my sister all about it. I found out that he'd lied... so I went and found him and knocked him down... we both ended up in hospital - him with a battered face and four broken ribs, and me with battered knuckles. (Boy, 17 years old)*





Sexual abuse of children is not only a serious crime, but also a major societal problem. Svedin, Landberg and Jonsson show that there was an increase in the number of high school students reporting sexual abuse between 2014 and 2019/2020, and, as shown in previous studies, girls are subjected to this more than boys.<sup>51</sup> One of the study's<sup>52</sup> vignettes illustrates the issues of age, age differences and consent:

Oliver receives a Snap of Astrid dancing with her friends. Astrid says that she is 15, but Oliver teases her and says she looks younger. Oliver is 16. They have been chatting for a while and Oliver thinks Astrid is cute, but he is not in love. Astrid frequently writes that she likes Oliver. This weekend, Oliver will be at home alone, because his parents will be going to visit his grandfather, who has been ill. Astrid goes round to Oliver's, and they watch films and drink some cider that his mum has left behind. Oliver undresses Astrid, and it appears that she is willing, but she does not say much and, afterwards, she wants to go home. When Oliver wakes up the next morning, he finds a text from Astrid telling him that she is 12 years old. He feels sick to the stomach.<sup>53</sup>

In the free-text responses, a clear majority say that it is Astrid who was at fault. This creates a kind of paradox, because the scenario features an 'ideal victim', but she is not attributed those attributes, and becomes, instead, the one who is seen to have acted wrongly. The following extracts provide examples of this:

*I think it's wrong to do what Astrid did. It can make people feel that they've been used and deceived. They're both at fault, but Oliver couldn't have known she was lying. (Boy, 17 years old)*

*I think it's Astrid who is in the wrong when she lies about her age, and gets him to want to do things with her that he would not have done otherwise. (Boy, 17 years old)*

There are also free-text responses in which boys describe how they, or someone close to them, had committed sexual abuse similar to that in the vignette. There appears to be a lack of realisation that a child under the age of 15 cannot consent to sexual acts, and that what they are describing constitutes the rape of a child. In this

case, the victim is blamed for the abuse because she had lied, and the focus moves to how the abuse affected the boys. This is illustrated by the two following examples, based on the boys' free-text responses:

*I think everyone should just stop lying about their age. She lied and said she was 16 but she was only 13. She had developed boobs early and went around saying she had slept with lots of men. But when my friend was with her, and learnt the day after that she was a virgin and only 13, I felt sick that someone could do something like that and she threatened to report him. (Boy, 16 years old)*

*Me and my friend had sex with a girl when we were 16. She'd said she was 15 but it turned out later that she was 13. She didn't regret it, but both me and my friend feel sick to the stomach because of what happened. (Boy, 17 years old)*

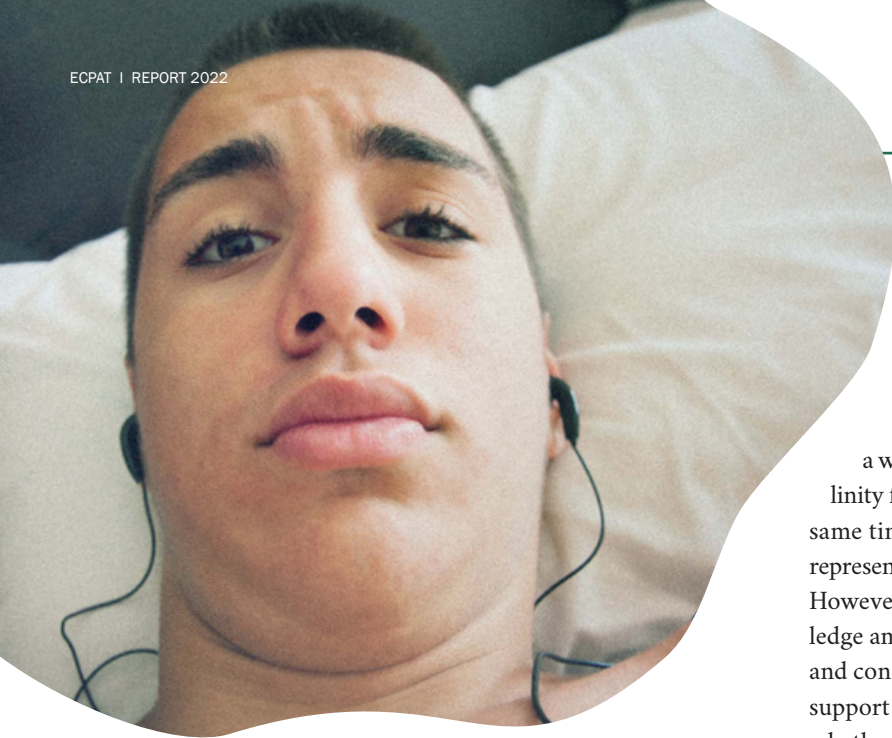
**There appears to be a lack of realisation that a child under the age of 15 cannot consent to sexual acts.**



<sup>51</sup> Svedin et al., 2021.

<sup>52</sup> ECPAT, 2021.

<sup>53</sup> ECPAT, 2021.



could be considered to be able to produce and reproduce collective identities for boys and girls based on sexual experiences. One such example is the vignette featuring Astrid: in this context, blaming her can be interpreted as a way of creating a sense of identity and masculinity for boys during their teenage years.<sup>56</sup> At the same time, it is important to point out that this represents a picture of the way in which boys reason. However, there does appear to be a lack of knowledge among boys regarding the age limit for sex and consent. In focus chats from the Ditt ECPAT support line about age differences, the question of whether it is acceptable to have sex with someone who is under 15 years of age appears frequently. The question is usually asked both from the perspective of "Is it illegal?" and from a moral aspect, "Is it OK?" Both there, and in some of the free-text responses, there is a tendency for the view of the attribution of responsibility to change if the perpetrator is an adult. In these cases, the boys tend to consider that it is the men who are in the wrong.



There appears to be a strong tendency in the free-text responses to say that the boy has not done anything wrong, but that instead it is the girl's responsibility. Looking at the girls' free-text responses, this tendency can also be seen there, so the free-text responses do not differ significantly between the genders.<sup>54</sup> It is worth noting that there are free-text responses that appear to suggest that the respondent had experienced similar situations. The existence of a clear majority of the free-text responses that say that it is the girl who is at fault raises important questions, concerning issues such as age, crime, coercion, sexuality and relationships.<sup>55</sup> Bamberg focuses on what it means to be a young man, and describes the way in which a group of boys come together around a narrative in which a girl is portrayed as promiscuous by using the term "slut bashing". One way in which this is done is by establishing clear boundaries between boys and girls regarding what is acceptable and what is unacceptable, based on the respective sexuality of each of the genders. The creation of these boundaries generates collective identities, and similarly, in the context of this material, this drawing of boundaries

**There appears to be a strong tendency in the free-text responses to say that the boy has not done anything wrong, but that instead it is the girl's responsibility.**

When girls demonstrate a sexual agency of their own, the boys also feel that the question of what exactly constitutes abuse becomes unclear. This is true even when the perpetrator is an adult, since the boys, on the one hand, consider that the adult men are acting wrongfully, but, on the other, they feel that the girls are inviting a sexual interaction.

<sup>54</sup> The girls' free-text responses feature several examples of their own similar experiences.

<sup>55</sup> Bamberg, 2004.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Bamberg, 2004.

In one of the vignettes, where adolescents discuss “trolling” old men on OmeTV, this is problematized explicitly:

Ann and her friends in ninth grade usually troll old men on OmeTV at parties. There are plenty of dirty old men who are easily fooled. Last time, Ann showed herself on camera, and the old guy got horny. They laughed at him for being so pathetic. Sometimes, they urge each other to show themselves on camera, together or separately. It’s just a fun thing they do at parties, and they don’t talk much about it afterwards. In the chats, they write that they are fifteen, but the old men do not seem to care about this.<sup>57</sup>

Many children have experiences resembling this narrative – six in ten girls and four in ten boys – which also indicates the ways in which children are exploring their sexuality in potentially risky environments. In the free-text responses it is claimed, on the one hand, that it is mean and some of the boys feel sorry for the “old men” but, on the other hand, their own experiences are also highlighted:

*I think laughing at them is pretty mean, even if they are perverts. (Boy, 17 years old)*

*It was a fun thing that me and my friends did in ninth grade. We pretended to be girls and then jumped out in front of the camera as he sat with his dick out, and then they vanished pretty quickly. (Boy, 17 years old)*

In the two free-text responses above, the situation is depicted as being rather innocent, although there are also free-text responses that recognise the potential seriousness and place the responsibility on the viewer:

*Well, I’ve never understood what the fun is. Giving an old guy what they want is so unbelievably wrong. At the same time, however, the old men are wrong for not realising how disgusting it is, and in this case the girls are not over 18, so that makes it child pornography. Having people like this in our community is vile and creepy. Then again, for some it’s a disease that they can’t control. It’s the only thing they can think of. And I think that help should be made available for those who dare to admit it. (Boy, 17 years old)*

It is worth noting that there are also free-text responses where it emerges that some boys subject girls to this, which implies the importance of further research and support efforts:

*I often jerk off to girls on OmeTV, and often force them to take their clothes off. (Boy, 16 years old)*

<sup>57</sup> ECPAT, 2021.

# Discussion

The purpose of this report is to examine the ways in which boys, aged between 14 and 17 years old, reason with regard to their sexuality and to different forms of potential abusive situations, and what they think about the sending of nude images. By examining adolescents' free-text responses, with consideration to the concepts of 'small stories' and 'male space', micro-aspects of broader and collective discursive positions are identified, which can be used by both adults (e.g. teachers and parents) and adolescents in various contexts to broaden communication and awareness – for example, regarding preventive efforts to combat online abuse. In some cases, where there was an analytical interest, the boys' free-text responses have been contrasted with those of the girls.



## There appears to be a lack of knowledge about what is acceptable and what is legal, in terms of age and sex.

On a general level, the boys' free-text responses are rather diffuse and often brief. The relevant thematisation should be seen as a tentative attempt to create structure. What stands out on a general level is that there appears to be a form of normalisation regarding the sending of nude images, and

that, in their free-text responses, the boys give "advice" and "tips" on multiple occasions, which demonstrates agency despite the fact that it frequently involves risky actions.<sup>58</sup> This perspective and children's agency is something that adults need to understand and bear in mind in conversations that concern adolescents, sex and risk-taking.

It is also significant that there are indications, based on the free-text responses, that boys are subjecting younger boys and girls to abuse, and that there appears to be a lack of knowledge about what is acceptable and legal, in terms of age and sex. Throughout the material, a form of static masculinity can be discerned, where boys can seemingly move more freely between different positions – for example, between being the perpetrator and the subject of abuse.

There are also strong normative conceptions in the way in which girls are regarded and how they are judged. It is clear that there are different expectations of girlfriends than there are of casual contacts, and that girls who interact outside of a romantic relationship are considered to be wholly or partially responsible if they become the victim of a sexual offence. This is especially true if the girl is somehow perceived to have acted injudiciously or fraudulently.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Patchin and Hinduja, 2019.

It is important to problematise the fact that adolescents mainly seek support and help from their peers, as friends of the same age do not necessarily possess the knowledge or skills that are required in order to help and counsel a friend who has been subjected to, for example, sexual violence. There is a risk that they could give unsound advice or increase the person's feelings of guilt.<sup>59</sup> In order for society to be able to help young people who have been subjected to abuse with support, protection and rehabilitation, they need to tell others what has happened. It is therefore important that the child who has been abused is not made to feel that they are to blame. One clear example of this is that a young person who, for example, has sent a nude image as a result of nagging, or who has had an image spread following the end of a relationship, should not be blamed. The positions of the perpetrator and of the victim of a sexual offence are not clearly fixed; instead, these are the subject of continual negotiation – often in a contradictory manner whereby the responsibility of the boys is toned down.

It must also be emphasised that those children and adolescents who seek professional help – for example, from the social services or the police – are often dissatisfied with the help they receive, due to the lack of a child perspective within these organisations.<sup>60</sup>

Young people search for much of their knowledge on the Internet, which could conceivably affect their views on sex and relationships. This can pose a challenge for adults, and it places great demands on their dialogue with children and adolescents.

**It is important to problematise the fact that adolescents mainly seek support and help from their peers, as friends of the same age do not necessarily possess the knowledge or skills that are required.**

Adults often approach situations from a perspective that is based on their own experiences, but this is a view of reality that children do not necessarily share. Adults often lack an understanding of the children's positions, which means that their advice can often have a moralising undertone and be seen as being detached from reality when considered from the child's perspective. It is therefore difficult for adults to 'teach' adolescents how they should 'be' themselves in a relationship, which sheds light on what was initially noted: that childhood and adulthood are created and experienced in interaction with positions and boundaries that are fluid in nature.



<sup>59</sup> Cf. Black et al., 2008.

<sup>60</sup> Svedin et al., 2021.

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