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## **Violated Intimacy and Perpetrated Sexual Violence. Pedagogical Reflections to Counteract Hate Speech Phenomena**

### **Intimità violata e violenza sessuale reiterata. Riflessioni pedagogiche per contrastare i fenomeni di hate speech**

*di*

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#### **Abstract:**

The article addresses the phenomenon known as “revenge porn” or “non-consensual pornography”, proposing a more precise term such as “non-consensual use of sexual images”. This crime refers to the publication of intimate content without the consent of the person involved, often with the intent to harm their reputation and privacy. Non-consensual pornography affects millions of people, as evidenced by data from Italy, where there are over two million victims and millions of users who have viewed this type of content online.

The article highlights the psychological and emotional impact of revenge porn, the violation of privacy, the legal implications, and the damage to the victims’ reputations. It emphasizes the need for affective-sexual education to prevent this and other sexual health issues, promoting healthy and respectful relationships. Education should include concepts of consent, open communication, and awareness of the risks associated with affective-sexual relationships. Young people should also be educated about the responsible use of the internet and the recognition of non-consensual pornography.

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**Keywords:** Emotional and sexual education, Consent, Pornography, Internet, Digital revenge.

**Abstract:**

L'articolo affronta il fenomeno noto come “porno vendetta” o “pornografia non consensuale”, proponendo una denominazione più precisa come “uso non consensuale di immagini sessuali”. Questo reato si riferisce alla pubblicazione di contenuti intimi senza il consenso della persona coinvolta, spesso con l'intenzione di danneggiarne la reputazione e la privacy. La pornografia non consensuale colpisce milioni di persone, come dimostrano i dati italiani, dove si registrano più di due milioni di vittime e milioni di utenti che hanno visto questo tipo di contenuto online.

L'articolo evidenzia l'impatto psicologico ed emotivo della porno vendetta, la violazione della privacy, le implicazioni legali e i danni alla reputazione delle vittime. Si sottolinea la necessità di un'educazione affettivo-sessuale per prevenire questo e altri problemi legati alla sfera sessuale, promuovendo relazioni sane e rispettose. L'educazione deve includere concetti quali il consenso, la comunicazione aperta e la consapevolezza dei rischi associati alle relazioni affettivo-sessuali. Inoltre, è necessario educare tutte e tutti all'uso responsabile di Internet e al riconoscimento della pornografia non consensuale.

**Parole chiave:** educazione affettivo-sessuale, consenso, pornografia, internet, vendetta digitale.

## 1. Introduction

In this chapter, we will discuss the crime commonly referred to as revenge porn, also known as non-consensual pornography, which represents one of the most severe forms of privacy violation in the digital age.

Revenge porn and the non-consensual use of sexual images are terms often used interchangeably to describe situations where explicit sexual content of a person is distributed without their consent. Both terms refer to similar illegal behaviors, but the choice of terminology may vary depending on legal context. For instance, “revenge porn” might be used to emphasize the malicious intent behind the act, while “non-consensual use of sexual images” may be preferred for a broader description of the conduct. Regardless of the term used, both represent serious violations of privacy with significant legal consequences. The unauthorized distribution of sexually explicit content without the depicted person's consent is a crime and must be addressed legally to protect victims' rights and prevent such harmful behaviors.

We advocate for the use of the term “non-consensual use of sexual images” or “non-consensual publication of consensual intimate images” to more accurately describe this phenomenon. The rationale behind avoiding the term *porn* lies in distinguishing it from traditional pornography (Dwulit, Rzymiski, 2019) where consent is the key differentiator. Pornography involves consenting adults who knowingly participate in the creation and distribution of content for adult entertainment. In contrast, revenge porn exploits private images and videos meant to remain personal and makes them public without permission, often with the intent to seek revenge, humiliate, or control the victim. This constitutes repeated abuse with every click or view of the material, violating both the trust and intimacy of the victim, as well as their rights.

As Florio (2023, p. 7) points out, “What even the media struggle to highlight is that the non-consensual distribution of sexually explicit material, regardless of who is offended by it, constitutes a true form of sexual abuse”. Florio emphasizes the need to understand the legal implications of such actions, highlighting the introduction of a specific law in Italy to address revenge porn. Within the “Codice Rosso”, which came into force on August 9, 2019, a new Article 612-ter of the Penal Code, titled “Unlawful Dissemination of Sexually Explicit Images or Videos”, was introduced. This law punishes those who, after creating or stealing sexually explicit images or videos intended to remain private, distribute them without the consent of the persons depicted.

Italian law, under Article 612-ter, imposes penalties ranging from one to six years of imprisonment and fines up to 15,000 euros for those who distribute sexually explicit material without consent. Additionally, Article 600-quater of the Penal Code outlines severe penalties for child pornography offenses, with sentences of up to 12 years for the possession, production, and distribution of child pornographic material.

Revenge porn specifically refers to any intimate content, such as photos or videos, that is made public without the consent of the person depicted. This crime causes irreparable damage to the victim’s reputation, privacy, and mental health. The law also punishes those who receive or acquire such images or videos and use them to harm the individuals depicted, with penalties including imprisonment and fines. Aggravating factors include the involvement of individuals in a relationship with the victim, the use of telematic means, harm caused to individuals with physical or mental vulnerabilities, or harm to pregnant women. Except in cases involving pregnant women, the crime is prosecutable upon the complaint of the offended party.

Two pivotal cases in Italy, involving Tiziana Cantone and parliamentarian Giulia Sarti, were crucial in implementing specific punitive measures. Tiziana Cantone’s case, in particular, revealed a significant gap in the protection of victims, as her intimate videos were widely shared on social media, leading to her suicide over a year after reporting the incident. Recent discussions in Italy have focused not only on punitive measures but also on victim protection and the need for preventive and timely interventions for potential victims.

Non-consensual pornography affects over two million victims in Italy, with 14 million Italians having viewed such content online. A report from the *Osservatorio dei Permessi Negati* highlights the presence of 231 Italian groups and channels on Telegram active in the exchange of non-consensual content. The largest of these groups has over 540,000 unique users, with a total of over 13 million non-unique users. The report indicates that these Telegram groups account for 13,152,000 non-unique Telegram accounts, with an estimated 65% overlap among users across groups. In the past year, there has been a 21% increase in the number of Telegram groups and channels sharing non-consensual pornography aimed at an Italian audience, growing from 190 to 231 between November 2021 and November 2022, with a 32% increase in users within these groups and channels.

One of the objectives of this work is to promote emotional and sexual education that not only addresses the concept of consent but also emphasizes the importance of digital privacy and individual rights in an increasingly connected world.

## 2. From Pornography to the Non-Consensual Use of Sexual Images

In a digital world, adolescents often explore and learn about their identity, preferences, and desires, including those related to sex and sexuality, through the internet. Pornography frequently plays a part in this exploration for many adolescents (Senzamin & Bainotti, 2020). The use of pornography has drastically increased in recent years, largely due to the availability of free and easily accessible content online. This phenomenon has garnered growing international attention, both for its prevalence and its significant role in the sexual education of young people, as well as for its effects on attitudes and behaviors, especially during the critical stages of development (Burgio, 2021).

Since 2020, there has been a further increase in access to the most popular pornographic websites, particularly among younger individuals (Ballester Brage & Orte Socias, 2019). While data on access to major pornographic websites do not specifically address minors, as such access is prohibited for those under 18, barriers can be easily bypassed (Scarcelli, 2015a; Rinaldi, 2016; Burgio, 2021). In 2019, the World Health Organization recognized “compulsive sexual behavior disorder” (ICD 6C72), linked to excessive pornography use. One interesting aspect of overexposure to pornography concerns brain alterations, which can rewire the brain’s pleasure centers, altering its structures and functions in a manner similar to drug addiction, with comorbidities such as anxiety and depression. Other studies have found significant positive correlations between exposure to pornography and difficulties in emotion regulation, loneliness, and perceived stress.

Another important issue concerns the bodies and practices represented in traditional pornography, which is often produced by men for a male audience, portraying sexual images where men dominate women, who are, in turn, presented as sexual objects with perfect, standardized bodies. Such content conveys stereotypical messages that severely impact adolescents’ beliefs about gender roles, especially sexual ones, potentially leading to violent practices such as coercive and aggressive behaviors (Guggisberg & Holt, 2022).

Further negative consequences of overexposure to and use of pornography among minors include:

- Risk of pathological addiction: Pornography can create an addiction similar to that caused by hard drugs like cocaine. Continuous exposure leads to overstimulation of the brain and an increasing need for more extreme content to achieve the same pleasure.
- Distortion of sexual expectations: Young people develop unrealistic expectations about sexuality and misleading attitudes in relationships.
- Risky sexual behaviors: There is an increased likelihood of engaging in harmful and risky sexual activities, such as sexting, relationships with multiple partners, and substance use.

Another deeply concerning effect of high pornography consumption during adolescence is the empathic disconnection in intimate interpersonal relationships and sexuality. This issue reflects an increasing acceptance of a culture of individual hedonism, which exacerbates the risk of undue centralization of adolescents’ impulsive desires. This problem highlights adults’ inability to properly relate to these psychological dynamics and respond to minors’ needs as they assert their identities. The separation between rationality and emotions creates a profound rift that compromises the development of healthy interpersonal relationships (Scarcelli, 2015).

To address these issues, it is essential to promote a conception of sexuality and emotional relationships based on identity, otherness, consent, respect, and awareness (Bonvini & Demozzi, 2024). Young people must learn to govern their desires in pursuit of a fulfilling and authentic life where others are seen as equals rather than objects of consumption. Only through proper emotional and sexual education and critical reflection on their actions can young people develop healthy and respectful relationships, contributing to the fight against issues related to the broader phenomenon of revenge porn.

Sexuality must be integrated into all dimensions of human experience: reason, freedom, and affectivity. Educating about sexuality means educating the whole person, guiding them in the discovery of love and, at the same time, in the recognition and respect of others, ultimately discovering the value and dignity of their own person (Mansi, 2015). This requires an educational path that goes beyond the transmission of technical or biological knowledge, promoting an integrated approach that values emotions, interpersonal relationships, and individual rights. “Personal experience thus becomes the guiding thread that unites self-awareness with the determination necessary to guide one’s behavioral choices” (Mansi, 2015). This approach enables individuals to develop critical thinking and ethical responsibility in their interactions, recognizing the importance of consent and mutual respect. In this context, sexual education plays a fundamental role in building a more aware and respectful society, where every person can express their sexuality freely and safely, thereby contributing to collective well-being.

### **3. Proposal for Affective-Sexual Education**

As educators, we must address the correlation between excessive pornography use and related phenomena, including revenge porn involving minors, through a multisystemic and multidisciplinary approach (Burgio, 2024). As discussed in the previous section, overexposure to pornography can negatively impact the psychological and emotional development of young people, leading to distorted perceptions of sexuality and interpersonal relationships.

Below is a simplified outline of the correlation between pornography overexposure and revenge porn:

1. **Emotional Desensitization:** Continuous exposure to pornographic content can lead to emotional desensitization, reducing empathy and the ability to understand consent and mutual respect in relationships. This can facilitate behaviors such as revenge porn, where the victim's emotions and rights are disregarded.
2. **Normalization of Violence:** Many pornographic materials depict non-consensual or violent sexual acts. Young people repeatedly exposed to these contents may develop distorted views of sexuality, perceiving it as normal or acceptable. This may contribute to violent or coercive behaviors, such as the non-consensual sharing of intimate material.
3. **Distortion of Power Dynamics:** Traditional pornography often portrays imbalanced power dynamics, where one partner is dominant, and the other is submissive. This can influence young people to replicate these dynamics in their own relationships, increasing the risk of abusive behaviors.
4. **Construction of Distorted Sexual Identities:** Excessive pornography use can affect the formation of young people's sexual identity, leading them to view sex as mere performance

rather than an expression of intimacy and affection. This superficial view of sexuality can reduce their ability to establish relationships based on respect and mutual understanding, contributing to behaviors like revenge porn.

Therefore, this work outlines guidelines for a comprehensive and integrated affective-sexual education that addresses not only the biological aspects of sexuality but also the emotional and relational ones (Bonvini, Demozzi, 2024). The goal is to teach young people about the concept of consent, respect for differences, and the importance of relationships based on equality and mutual respect.

A crucial element of this approach is the involvement of families and communities, providing them with tools to openly discuss sexuality and recognize signs of distress, supporting educational programs aimed at creating a safe and supportive environment. Teacher training is also essential (Batini, Fucile, 2014), with the priority of identifying and addressing risky behaviors among young people. This includes promoting responsible and critical use of digital technologies to intervene promptly in cases of revenge porn or other abusive behaviors (Graglia, 2012).

Only through these combined efforts can we hope to reduce the incidence of such problems and protect the rights and well-being of young people. This requires a strict application of existing laws to punish offenders and protect victims, but also the promotion of new regulations to address emerging challenges in the digital world.

Fundamental to this effort is the introduction of a comprehensive affective-sexual education program that not only imparts technical knowledge but also centers on empathy, mutual respect, and awareness of the consequences of one's actions. It is essential to make a clear distinction between consensual and non-consensual content, educating young people to recognize and respect personal boundaries. Therefore, a well-structured and inclusive affective-sexual education is indispensable for shaping informed and responsible individuals capable of building healthy and respectful relationships, contributing to a more just and safe society for all.

Sexual education that values human rights and gender equality aims to support a structured learning process that positively addresses both sexuality and relationships. This approach seeks to promote the well-being of younger generations by embracing a broad vision of sexuality that includes cognitive, emotional, physical, and social dimensions. It is crucial to empower young people to pursue their own well-being, including sexual well-being, in an autonomous and self-determined way. This perspective emphasizes the importance of consent, respect, and individual choices, encouraging the development of effective relational and communication skills to make informed decisions about their sexuality.

The affective-sexual education presented here must be inclusive, accurate, and non-judgmental, offering all the necessary tools for young people to become conscious agents of their own sexual lives. This critical approach challenges societal norms regarding sexuality and sexual education, promoting a deeper and more critical understanding of power relations and social dynamics.

All of this is aimed at forming active and engaged citizens in building equitable communities, with the goal of deconstructing stereotypes and promoting equality. This approach considers sexuality as a subjective and multifaceted experience influenced by social, cultural, and personal factors; it focuses on self-exploration, acceptance of sexual diversity, and the construction of fluid sexual

identities. The aim is to promote authenticity and autonomy in sexual expression, avoiding binary and rigid sexual categories while resisting dominant cultural discourses (Bovini, Demozzi, 2024).

As we have already stated in the text, an inclusive and critical sexual education not only provides accurate knowledge but also prepares young people to navigate the complexities of interpersonal relationships and their sexuality with awareness and responsibility. This type of education contributes to building a more equitable and respectful society, where every individual can express their sexuality freely and without fear of judgment or discrimination.

Through these educational efforts, we can hope to create a more conscious and respectful society, where every individual can express their sexuality in a free and safe manner, contributing to collective well-being and the building of healthy and respectful relationships.

### 5. The arena for the “right to be”

In the context of affective-sexual education, the classroom is envisioned as an “arena for the right to be”. It is a space where individuals experiment with and construct their identities, receiving feedback and validation—or rejection—from both peers and adults. This process of “trial and error” plays a critical role in personal and social development, with aspects such as biological sex, gender identity, gender roles, and sexual orientation contributing to the negotiation of self. Based on a pedagogy of difference (Batini, 2011), the educational approach outlined here seeks to support and value diversity, promoting an inclusive and respectful environment for all subjectivities. This framework is designed to meet the evolving educational, formative, and informational needs of young people, both explicitly and implicitly.

Below is a proposed syllabus for an inclusive affective-sexual education program, aimed at providing students with a comprehensive understanding of relationships, identity, and sexual rights:

Module	Topic	Key Themes	Learning Outcomes
The Existential Dimension of Relationships	Exploration of human relationships as an essential life experience	Interpersonal dynamics, empathy, and mutual respect	Students will learn the importance of human connection and the role of emotions in relationships
Difference and Acceptance	Understanding personal identity and recognizing others' differences	Gender identity, diversity, and inclusivity	Students will gain skills in self-awareness and acceptance of diverse identities

Love: Thoughts and Emotions	The complexity of love as a phenomenon intertwining thoughts and emotions	Emotional intelligence, healthy communication, and emotional expression	Students will understand love as a multi- dimensional experience, involving both mind and heart
Traditional and Non- Traditional Relationships	Analysis of different relationship models	Monogamy, polyamory, LGBTQ+ relationships, gender fluidity	Students will be introduced to various forms of relationships and will respect different relational choices
Early Childhood Relationships and Adult Behaviors	Examining the impact of primary relationships on adult life	Attachment theory, family dynamics, childhood experiences	Students will explore how early experiences shape emotional and behavioral patterns in adulthood
Educating about Love and Relationships	What it means to educate about love and emotional bonds	Pedagogy of empathy, respectful interactions, and emotional literacy	Students will learn about the ethical dimensions of relationships and consent
Gender, Identity, and Sexual Orientation	Clarification of sex, gender, identity, and orientation	Understanding the spectrum of identity and fluidity, non- binary perspectives	Students will develop a nuanced understanding of gender and sexuality as fluid constructs



Sexuality and Education	The role of sexual education in promoting well-being	Sexual health, autonomy, and informed choices	Students will gain knowledge on sexual health and the importance of autonomy and consent
Sexuality and Rights	Sexual rights as fundamental human rights	Consent, body autonomy, and digital privacy	Students will learn about their rights and responsibilities in sexual relationships, and the importance of respecting others' boundaries
Education and Pornography	A critical approach to pornography's influence on perceptions of sexuality	Media literacy, consent, and ethical perspectives on sexual content	Students will critically assess the impact of pornography on their perceptions of sex and relationships

*Tabella 1 Syllabus for an inclusive affective-sexual education program*

This syllabus is designed to be non-binary and inclusive of all gender identities and sexual orientations. It also opens the door to discussions about individuals with disabilities, ensuring that affective-sexual education is accessible and relevant to all students, regardless of their abilities. Furthermore, this educational approach emphasizes the importance of understanding the power of language, especially in online spaces. The spread of online hatred, which contributes to harmful phenomena such as revenge porn, stems from a lack of awareness about the real-world impact of our words. Students will be taught that language shapes the future and that each word written or spoken has tangible consequences in real life. By fostering critical thinking, empathy, and respect, this program aims to create a safer and more inclusive society for all.

### 5.1 Training for Educators

To ensure the successful implementation of this inclusive affective-sexual education program, it is essential to provide educators with the necessary tools, knowledge, and confidence to navigate sensitive and complex topics. Teacher training should focus on:

- **Understanding Diversity:** Educators should be trained in recognizing and respecting diverse gender identities, sexual orientations, and relationship models, with a particular focus on non-binary and LGBTQ+ inclusivity.
- **Facilitating Sensitive Discussions:** Teachers need skills in creating a safe, open environment where students feel comfortable discussing affective and sexual topics without fear of judgment or discrimination.
- **Addressing Online Behaviors:** Since the syllabus emphasizes the importance of responsible online communication, educators must be prepared to guide students in understanding the consequences of digital actions, particularly in preventing online hate and phenomena like revenge porn.
- **Supporting Students with Disabilities:** Training should include strategies for making affective-sexual education accessible to students with disabilities, ensuring that all students can fully participate and benefit from the curriculum.
- **Ethical Decision-Making and Consent:** Professional development should also focus on helping educators teach the ethical dimensions of relationships, with an emphasis on consent, autonomy, and mutual respect.

Providing educators with ongoing professional development opportunities will be key to the long-term success of the program, enabling them to handle the evolving challenges in affective-sexual education.

## **6. Conclusion**

In conclusion, the design of a comprehensive affective-sexual education program must be grounded in a pedagogical framework that emphasizes inclusivity for all genders, moving beyond a binary understanding of identity. This approach recognizes the fluidity and diversity of gender identities and sexual orientations, ensuring that no individual feels marginalized. Additionally, the program should address the unique experiences and needs of individuals with disabilities, fostering an inclusive environment where all students, regardless of ability, can explore their identities and relationships with dignity and respect.

Affective-sexual education must go beyond biological knowledge and delve into the emotional, relational, and ethical dimensions of human connections, promoting empathy, respect, and self-awareness. A critical element of this education is teaching young people about the power of language, especially online. The rise of phenomena like revenge porn is often rooted in online hatred and the failure to recognize that words construct our shared future. Every word written or spoken has real-world consequences, and it is crucial that this awareness be instilled from an early age.

By fostering open dialogue, challenging stereotypes, and educating on the responsible use of language, we can empower individuals to form healthy, respectful relationships. A community-based, non-judgmental approach — engaging schools, families, and social institutions — ensures that young people are equipped to navigate the complexities of relationships in a way that respects both themselves and others. Only through such a collective effort can we build a more equitable, inclusive, and compassionate society, free from the harm of online hate and discrimination.

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