

MANIFESTO

FOR

SEX

POSITIVE

SOCIAL

MEDIA



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

This Manifesto was produced on the lands of the Yugera and Turrbal people of Meanjin. We acknowledge the Yugera and Turrbal people as the Traditional Custodians of the Country upon which we meet, live, create and work. We recognise their lores, customs, creation spirits and continuing connections to land, water and community and pay our respect to their Elders past, present and emerging. This Manifesto was produced on stolen land that was never ceded. Always was, Always will be, Aboriginal Land.



Artwork 'Luwaytini' by Mark Cleaver, Palawa

Mark Cleaver's beautiful artwork "Luwaytini", which is Palawa Kani for Milky Way, represents the connection to something greater. Even though we may occasionally feel outcast or forgotten, we are made up of the same energy and that we all belong. Mark says "This represents that the uniqueness of everyone is what makes them special, and it is that light we should shine to the world, rather than feeling the darkness and hiding from it."



Mark Cleaver (they/them) is a Palawa person. Mark's family are descendants of the Pinterrairer people from Great Musselroe in NE Tasmania and the Parperloihonor people from Robbins Island Northwest Tasmania. Mark works as a Diversity and Inclusion practitioner in Higher Education and is currently studying a Master's Degree in Human Resources Management. Mark is passionate about Queer indigenous art as it highlights the rich diverse intersectionality of their culture. They are inspired by Indigenous artists such as Dylan Mooney and Peter Waples-Crow.



ABOUT THE ARTIST



Jacq Moon (she/her) is a proud queer graphic designer and illustrator on Wurundjeri Land (Melbourne, Australia). Jacq's interest in visual storytelling and inclusion is realised through her design solutions. Being a queer designer, for Jacq, is as much a way of creating, as it is an identity. Designing from the margins, Jacq is able to centre the untold stories, make visible the invisible and disrupt the stayed and usual. Her ability to treat the everyday as both curious and complex leaves the viewer provoked and engaged. Her process is to understand the journey of a concept and to explain it visually through story telling. Jacq's lived experience and vision for a better world draws her to work with organisations that are brave, thought leaders and change makers. Her design has seen her work across small brands, not-for-profits, and government throughout Australia.
jacqmoon.com

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This Manifesto emerges in the context of similar calls-to-action such as the Decolonial AI Manifesto, Feminist Principles of the Internet, and the Feminist Data Manifest-No. We acknowledge that our work builds upon decades of thinking in this space and the collective knowledge and labour of activists and communities.

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MANIFESTO FOR SEX POSITIVE SOCIAL MEDIA



Destigmatise sex!

Sex and sexual content has cultural, social, and political value. Sex is not inherently harmful. Sex can be a positive, pleasurable part of human experience.

Integrate sexual cultures into social media!

Allow sexual content on social media. Banning, deleting, and deplatforming sex harms our sexual rights, imagination, possibilities, literacy and health.

Value the labour of sexual content creators!

Sex work is work, and sexual labour is valuable. Recognise the value of sexual content creators, avoid exploiting their value, and instead compensate these content creators through visibility, decision-making power and equitable distribution of profit.

Build safer spaces!

Centre sexual content creators and marginalised communities as knowledgeable platform stakeholders, decision-makers and leaders. Explicitly set out the values and ethics that guide community standards and reflect these in business structures, revenue models and platform design.

Cultivate consent!

Learn from, and model, consent culture. Only upload, reproduce, and share content and data where consent is informed, express, specific and dynamic. Allow platform access without requiring legal names, identification documents, biometric verification or unwanted surveillance.

Be accountable!

Make transparent, accessible, explainable, accountable, equitable and just decisions about sexual content. Give users and creators information and tools so they can understand and contest how their sexual content is classified, sorted and ranked.

Dismantle structural oppressions!

Actively participate in a broader movement for sexual health, rights, and justice. Work with multiple stakeholders to build enabling, sex-positive legal, policy, economic, social and cultural environments.



ABOUT THE MANIFESTO FOR SEX-POSITIVE SOCIAL MEDIA

Zahra Stardust, Emily van der Nagel, Katrin Tiidenberg, Em Coombes, Jiz Lee and Mireille Miller-Young

ABOUT THE MANIFESTO

At the 10th anniversary of the *RightsCon Summit on Human Rights in the Digital Age*, a virtual international conference in June 2021, community organisations, advocates, and academic experts held a Community Lab on Alternative Frameworks for Sexual Content Moderation. This group considered how social media platforms could better understand sexual content, responding to platform policies that restrict or prohibit consensual sexual communication, expression, and representation.

Social media is taking on an increasingly central role in shaping and constraining cultural life, popular discourse, and human sociality. Sex is an important part of this. Yet, social media policies are not very sex-positive. Through their community standards documents and content moderation practices, platforms currently make private, arbitrary and unaccountable decisions about the kinds of sex and sexualities that are visible in online space.

We want that to change. Social media rules around what can and can't be posted shape broader attitudes towards sex and nudity, which in turn directly impact on all of our safety and wellbeing. We believe that we're healthiest and happiest when sex is not a source of shame but accepted as part of human experience.

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Current trends in regulation create a hostile environment for those for whom sex is an active, visible part of life, especially legislation that incentivises platforms to remove all sexual content. Platforms have pre-emptively shut down spaces that have been safe havens for systemically marginalised communities and actively shadowbanned, demoted, de-monetised, suspended and deplatformed groups as diverse as sex workers, people of colour, LGBTQIA+ folk, disabled people, fat activists, women and sex educators.

Major social media platforms have a history of exploiting sexual content to grow their user-base and then purging sexual content creators once they've 'made it.' This process of economic exploitation and gentrification treats sexual content creators as disposable. Such platforms employ surveillance technologies that screen for sexual content and nudity, share user information with law enforcement and advertisers and hold double-standards when assessing the explicitness of content created by lay users as opposed to celebrities. While over-policing sexual content, platforms still lack a holistic response to addressing harassment, image-based abuse, malicious flagging, sexual racism, theft of sexual content and the unethical scraping of sexual databases.



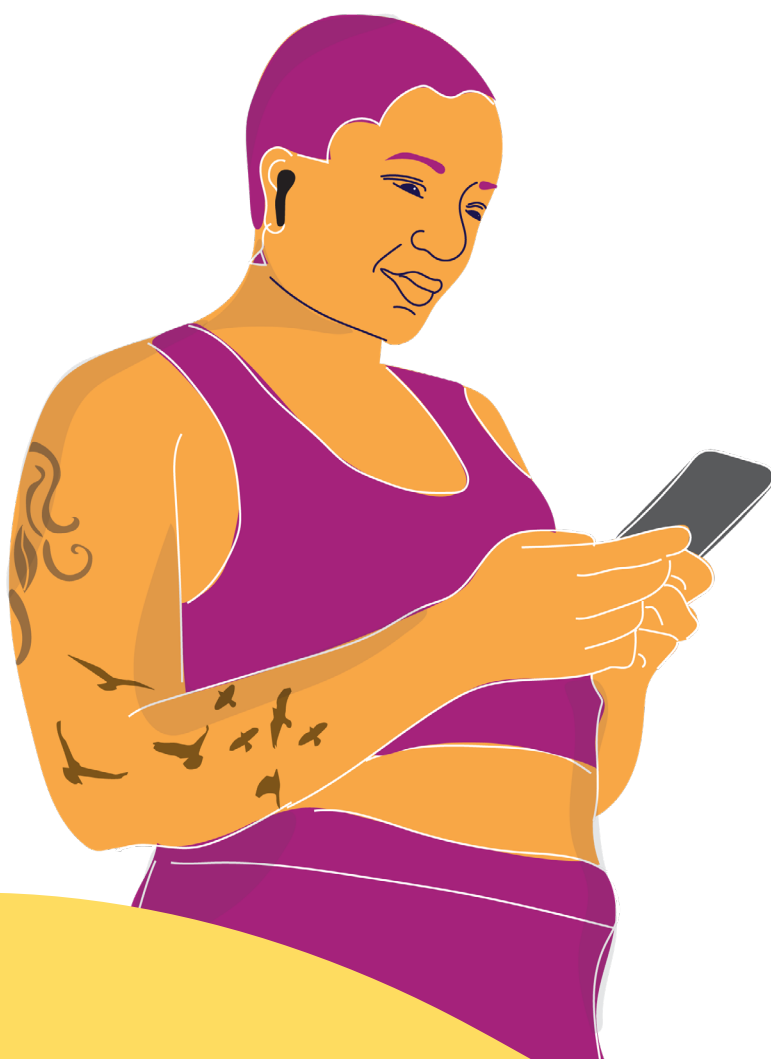
WHAT CAN PLATFORMS DO?

We believe platforms can learn from existing human rights principles and theoretical work on sexual rights, digital sexual citizenship, and sex-positive thinking. Human rights principles outline what sexual rights look like at an international policy level, and academic discourse on digital sexual citizenship explores access to online technologies, self-representation and participatory cultures as practices of intimacy and sociability. In addition, a long history of grassroots sex positive thinking offers insights into consent culture and the non-hierarchical valuing of diverse genders, bodies, desires, identities, sexualities, sexual practices, sexual labour and relationship-styles. This work can improve platforms by contributing important dimensions to research on platform governance, surveillance capitalism, and online gentrification.

In this Manifesto, we use the term 'sex positive', because we see value in bringing sex positive thinking to regulatory approaches and platform governance. In doing so, we do not suggest that all sex is positive. Nor are we suggesting that sex be compulsory or universally enjoyed. Rather, we use this term to reject the sexual stigmas underlying many platforms' and governments' approaches to sex; to affirm a diversity of desires, practices, activities and identities; to value pleasure-focused, non-judgmental, culturally relevant sex education, consent training and relationship skills; to support people to communicate their needs and boundaries and respect others; and to actively build sexual cultures that are accessible, equitable, decolonised, and accountable. Because dominant social media platforms see sexual content as a source of data, profit and surveillance, and simultaneously see the removal of it as a means to political capital, creating sex-positive social media will therefore require structural and systemic changes to the current assemblage of power, labour and value.

WHO IS THIS FOR?

This Manifesto sets out guiding principles that platforms, governments, policy-makers and other stakeholders ought to take into account in their design, moderation and regulation practices. It does not offer a set of technical instructions, as their implementation will differ across diverse platforms and contexts and their operationalisation requires further investment and resourcing. Instead, the Manifesto builds upon the generative work currently underway with the proliferation of alternative, independent collectives and cooperatives, who are designing new spaces, ethical standards and governance mechanisms for sexual content. As platforms are sites where identities, values and politics are perpetually negotiated and contested, this Manifesto remains a living document and a work in progress.



ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Dr. Zahra Stardust (she/her) is a socio-legal scholar working at the intersections of sexual rights, sexual surveillance and the law. She is a former Penthouse Pet, Hustler Honey and Feminist Porn Awards Heartthrob of the year. Her doctoral research examined the regulation of queer and feminist pornographies online, and her current work explores sexual content moderation, algorithmic sexual profiling, and public interest sex tech. Zahra is currently a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society at Queensland University of Technology and an Affiliate of the Berkman Klein Centre for Internet and Society at Harvard Law School. Prior to academia, she spent 15 years working in policy, advocacy, legal and research roles within community organisations, NGOs and UN bodies on sex worker rights, HIV treatment and prevention, and LGBTIQ+ health. Her research has been published in books such as *Queer Sex Work*, *New Feminist Literary Studies* and *Orienting Feminisms* and journals such as *Crime Media Culture*, *Porn Studies*, *Sexual Health*, and *Crime Justice and Social Democracy*.



Dr. Emily van der Nagel (she/her) researches social media identities, platforms, and cultures, with a focus on anonymity and pseudonymity. Emily has published work on secondary or alternative social media accounts, ways people negotiate unknowable algorithms, embodied verification on NSFW Reddit, and the shift from usernames to profiles in social media. Her most-cited article, co-authored with Jordan Frith, argues that we would lose dynamic, engaging social media practices in a move to the “real name web”. Emily’s book, *Sex and Social Media*, co-authored with Katrin Tiidenberg, takes a feminist, sex-positive approach to how social media platforms shape and restrict sex, and how sexual identities, practices, and communities must all negotiate platforms to survive and thrive. Emily tweets at @emvdn.



Professor Katrin Tiidenberg (she/her) is a Professor of Participatory Culture at the Baltic Film, Media, Arts and Communication School of Tallinn University, Estonia. She is the author and editor of multiple books on social media, digital cultures and digital research methods, including, most recently “Tumblr” (2021, co-authored by Natalie Ann Hendry and Crystal Abidin), “Sex and Social Media” (2020, co-authored by Emily van der Nagel) and “Metaphors of Internet: Ways of Being in the Age of Ubiquity” (2020, co-edited with Annette Markham). She is currently wrapping up research projects on platformization of sexuality and on the role of the internet in young people’s political participation and starting another one on visual digital trust. Her research interests span social media, digital cultures, networked visuality, internet governance and self-care. More info at: katrin-tiidenberg.com/

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Jiz Lee (they/them) has performed in porn since 2005, in projects spanning adult films. A versatile performer and key player in the queer porn movement, Jiz is the recipient of multiple AVN and XBiz Award industry nominations and Feminist Porn Awards, and was an honoree of The Trans 100. Jiz's first book, *Coming Out Like a Porn Star: Essays on Pornography, Protection and Privacy*, is an anthology by adult film industry workers on the social stigma of sex work. They are a member of the Porn Studies Journal Editorial Board and the co-editor of the Porn Studies Journal Special Issue: *Porn and Labour*. They are a contributing Sexuality Chapter editor of *Trans Bodies Trans Selves* (2nd Edition). Their writing – which spans online piracy, paying for porn, consent and feminism – has appeared in publications including *The Feminist Porn Book*, *Thriving in Sex Work*, *ASK: Building Consent Culture*, and *Global Internet Society Watch: Sexual Rights and the Internet*.



Em Coombes (they/them) is a scholar-organiser based in Las Vegas. Their work investigates the impacts of increasing surveillance and changing digital landscapes on political mobilization. A PhD student at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, their research focuses on the 2018 sex worker-led hashtag campaign #LetUsSurvive #SurvivorsAgainstSESTA launched against FOSTA/SESTA. Emily previously worked as the North American Regional Correspondent to the Global Network of Sex Work Projects (NSWP) and currently serves as the Resident Movement Scholar for Hacking//Hustling.

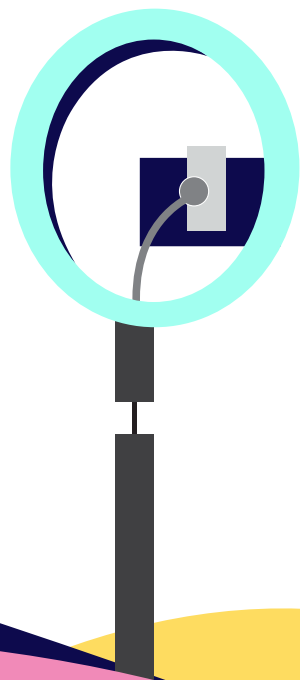


Associate Professor Mireille Miller-Young (she/her) PhD, is Associate Professor of Feminist Studies at University of California, Santa Barbara, Non-Resident Fellow at the Hutchins Center for African & African American Research at Harvard University, and a Visiting Fellow at the Institute for Cultural Inquiry Berlin. An award-winning author and educator, Mireille specializes in race, sexuality, and feminist politics. Dr. Mireille's widely acclaimed and taught book, *A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography* (Duke University Press, 2014) was awarded the Sara A. Whaley Prize for Best Book on Women and Labor by the National Women's Studies Association and the John Hope Franklin Prize for Best Book by the American Studies Association. She has published in numerous anthologies, academic journals, and news outlets, and has been interviewed for various books, articles, radio programs, and documentaries. Along with Constance Penley, Celine Parreñas Shimizu, and Tristan Taormino, Mireille is a co-editor of *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure*, finalist for Lambda Literary's Anthology of the Year, with translations now published in German and Spanish. She is also lead editor and of the recent volume *Black Sexual Economies: Race and Sex in a Culture of Capital*.

1.

DESTIGMATISE SEX!

- + De-stigmatising sex involves a process of unlearning cultural narratives. Kink does not equate to violence. Nudity should not be conflated with sexuality. Fat is not offensive. Pornography can be artistic. Art can be pornographic. Algorithms cannot determine the gender of a person's nipples, nor should it matter.
- + Sexual content is not inherently harmful, risky, offensive, dangerous or inappropriate. It does not need redeeming through artistic, scientific, medical or literary framing. Sex already has cultural, social, and political value. Consensual sex has a valid role in broader human experience.
- + Platforms should not conflate different kinds of sexual content or treat them as one homogenous harmful or 'unsafe' category. Sexual content is diverse. There are infinite kinds of sexual media that have different functions for creators and consumers including expression, identity, intimacy, connection, creativity and work.
- + When platforms target 'pornography,' they scapegoat content regardless of its explicitness, context or user interpretation, and deliberately assign a pejorative category to content. The term 'pornography' is a regulatory construct so broad, disparate and inconsistently defined that it is poor criteria for content moderation.
- + Sexuality is generally organised into systems of power that reward narrow forms of intimacy (such as marriage, monogamy, procreation, coupledness and private sex) and punish other forms of intimacy (such as public sexuality, queer sexualities, commercial sex and kink). These systems disadvantage and marginalise some sexual communities and privilege others, perpetuating inequalities.
- + To address these inequalities, platforms could prioritise content by queer folk, trans folk, fat people, disabled people, sex workers and people of colour instead of amplifying white, cisgender, able-bodied, heteronormative bodies and intimacies.





2.

INTEGRATE SEXUAL CULTURES INTO SOCIAL MEDIA!

- + Platform design and regulation can shape our sexual imagination, possibilities, and health. When online spaces are sexually sanitised, segregated and gentrified, public discourse on sex, gender and sexuality is impoverished.
- + Social media platforms have a positive duty and responsibility to integrate sexual media alongside other content to normalise and destigmatise sex and open up critical conversations between users.
- + Making diverse bodies, genders, sexualities, and practices visible is affirming and validating for users, especially those from marginalised communities. Diverse sexual content can contest and disrupt harmful sexual scripts and binary representations.
- + Sex education, health promotion, community-building and harm reduction material, including material on sexual health, pleasure, abortion, justice and safety, is often life-saving for individuals and communities.
- + Sexual conversations on social media can be a constructive addition to, or substitute for, lacking sex education. Pleasure is a pivotal part of sex education and does not need to be sanitised.
- + Censoring, banning, demoting, reducing and deplatforming sex is not an appropriate option. Sexual content can be integrated into platforms alongside other content without causing harm (for example, by giving users agency to choose to access or avoid it).



3.

VALUE THE LABOUR OF SEXUAL CONTENT CREATORS!

- + Sex work is real work and sexual content creation involves sexual, creative and emotional labour.
- + Sexual labour is valuable. Platforms benefit financially from the high levels of attention and engagement that sexual content creates. Platforms must prevent the non-consensual exploitation of sexual content and develop ways to respect, and materially value, sexual content creators.
- + Because sexual economies have contributed to building up the infrastructure of the web, and contribute to the profits that platform owners make, social media platforms should compensate sexual content creators - not simply through visibility or traffic but in material ways such as equitable distribution of profits.
- + Denying services, resources or spaces to sex workers is not only discriminatory, but contributes to violence, isolation, marginalisation and economic precarity. Sexual content creators should have equitable access to the same social tools as their non-sex worker peers.
- + Platforms have a responsibility to support their workers, including supporting their unionisation, collective organising and enterprise bargaining.
- + Platforms should develop practical ways to generate user respect for the contributions of sexual content creators. This can include using creators' self-determined language, promoting avenues for users to support creators, preventing harmful behaviour or comments from users and offering pathways for creators to give informed, express specific and dynamic consent for how their content is used.





4.

BUILD SAFER SPACES!

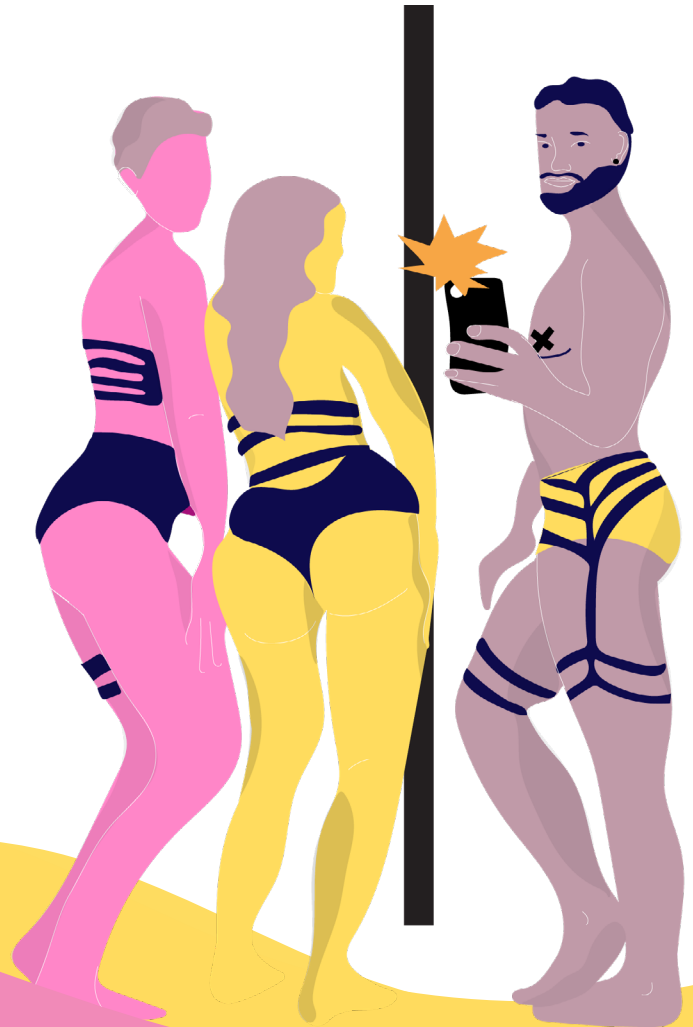
- + Sex positive social media requires shifts in the structures, businesses and revenue models of platforms to prioritise sex-positive and sexually marginalised communities as knowledgeable stakeholders, decision-makers and leaders.
- + Regulatory environments should support co-operative, collective, collaborative governance models for platforms that more equitably distribute financial benefits and decision-making power to sexual content creators.
- + Platforms should explicitly set out the values and ethics that guide their community standards, rather than feigning neutrality. Outdated standards of decency, propriety and offensiveness are not appropriate measures through which to assess sexual content.
- + References to legality and illegality in domestic jurisdictions are not necessarily appropriate standards by which to govern consensual or ethical sexual content. Many forms of consensual sexual activity (such as sex work and same-sex activity) are unlawful in various parts of the world, while some activities that remain lawful (such as rape in marriage) are fundamentally unethical. Social media companies should not use restrictive, repressive regulatory regimes as their baseline standard for governing sexual content.
- + Platforms should look to international human rights principles to guide their community standards. Platforms are subject to numerous human rights standards relevant to social media, including freedom of expression, freedom from discrimination, and the right to enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health, including sexual health.
- + Platforms must proactively build safer sexual spaces that support users to unlearn structural oppression and uplift the voices of sexually marginalised communities. This requires steps to address content, behaviour, and practices that reproduce structural oppressions.
- + It further involves promoting cultures of body positivity, bodily autonomy, data sovereignty, consent, disability justice and anti-oppression. Platforms should build accessible spaces that include tools that help disabled people access appropriate and relevant sexual content.



5.

CULTIVATE CONSENT

- + Social media platforms should be aware about how power operates on their platform, understand the systems of oppression under which their users live, and build cultures of consent into their design.
- + The uploading, sharing, reproduction and use of sexual content – by users, platforms, and both private and public actors – should be based on express, informed, specific and dynamic consent (i.e. specific to purpose and able to be withdrawn).
- + The fact that a user has consented to posting sexual content on one platform, for one purpose, does not equate to consent for that content to be reposted on another platform, for another purpose. Sexual content creators ought to be able to place limits and boundaries on how their content is used and shared and by whom.
- + Start-ups, ventures, private companies, commercial enterprises or public agencies who wish to use databases of sexual content to develop classifiers, scrapers, or any other software must either have express and informed user consent or rely on data donations. Platforms have a responsibility to put measures in place to prevent and respond to the extraction, theft, and non-consensual sharing of sexual content.
- + Platforms ought to have policies and practices to prevent and address harmful behaviour, such as stalking, intimidation, harassment, bullying, abuse, catfishing, and non-consensual sharing of sexual content. Users should have a variety of options for reporting and transparency about how reports are handled.
- + Users should have opportunities to withdraw and take-down non-consensual intimate content of themselves that do not involve providing government-issued identification or using criminal law mechanisms. Users should be given a range of options to pursue takedown requests, including directly through platforms, third party assistance, government agencies and by receiving notifications that their images have been shared.
- + Platforms should resist over-surveillance and carceral politics by allowing people to access these spaces without requiring legal names, identification documents, biometric or behavioural verification or unwanted surveillance. Allowing users to have multiple accounts and engage using pseudonyms recognises that people's identities are multifaceted and affords users power to compartmentalise their lives.
- + Connecting legal identities with people's sexual browsing histories, sexual preferences, sexual health status or other sensitive data puts users at risk of having their sexual data leaked, hacked, sold, shared or misused.
- + Platforms should be transparent about their relationships with law enforcement, and ought to have a policy to only share content with police in the case of a warrant, court order or a subpoena.





6.

BE ACCOUNTABLE!

- + Sexual content is often removed from platforms in ways that are arbitrary and inconsistent. Platforms should have an accessible appeals process for users who have had their content removed, with the platform required to offer tailored and individualised reasons, as well as transparent and independent dispute resolution processes.
- + Platforms ought to regularly record, explain and justify their content moderation processes and decisions, with clear and transparent policies for resolving conflict. They ought to make detailed disaggregated data available and accessible to users, researchers and the public on a frequent basis. This should include data about flagging, complaints, decisions, recommender and suppression systems, suspensions and take-downs, as well as platform interpretations of what constitutes sensitive or borderline content.
- + Nuanced content moderation is a result of community buy-in (creators tagging and categorising their content without being penalised for it, and audiences knowing they can trust the tags). Platform moderators should have an in-depth understanding of the platform, be invested in the community, and be well trained, resourced, supported and compensated.
- + Platforms should allow creators to categorise their own content and to challenge automated tags. They should afford users control over what they see and when, including opportunities to opt-in and opt-out of specific content. Accurately tagging content supports users to manage their expectations when encountering, avoiding or searching for content. Disingenuous tagging for the purposes of advertising, attention hacking, trolling, etc, should be discouraged and moderated for.
- + Platforms should make their algorithms transparent, explainable and available for scrutiny so that users can understand and evaluate how their sexual content is being ranked, labelled, organised and sorted. They should make their application programming interface (API) available to researchers and civil society for analysis.



7.

DISMANTLE STRUCTURAL OPPRESSIONS!

- + Platforms have an opportunity to improve on the poor sexual education and ethics of governments and participate in a broader movement for social and sexual justice.
- + Platforms ought to find their role in the larger movement for racial, social, gender, economic, environmental and disability justice. All platforms have an active role to play in supporting Indigenous sovereignty, decolonising sexuality and return of land as part of a movement for sexual justice.
- + Sex positive social media requires legal, policy, economic, social, cultural and technical environments that enable more vibrant, diverse, informed, equitable and just sexual cultures. Technical solutions will not be sufficient alone.
- + Governments should decriminalise consensual sexual activity and repeal laws that hinder access to sex education, health promotion, safety information and harm reduction materials. They should regulate to prevent the formation of media monopolies and to materially support the proliferation of independent media.
- + The experiences, needs and voices of structurally marginalised communities, youth and adolescents must be meaningfully and genuinely engaged conversations and decisions about media literacy, sex education, community standards, privacy, security and digital citizenship.
- + Building equitable sexual cultures requires capacity development, education and resourcing, including population-level, comprehensive, developmentally-appropriate, culturally-relevant and tailored education on sex, respectful relationships and consent.





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