

Review

New Directions for Sexual Consent in a Digitized World: A Narrative Review

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Abstract

Sexual interactions are complex human exchanges that are further complicated in the digital domain. This is because the introduction of technology to sexual interactions has prompted change in not only sexual activity but also communication pertaining to consent. Challenges have emerged in defining, interpreting, and communicating sexual consent within a digital context. Accordingly, it is critical to understand how sexual consent is understood and communicated within digital contexts. Herein, the literature concerning digital sexual consent was reviewed and critically analyzed. This narrative review describes digital sexual consent practices, as well as critically analyzes the literature pertaining to sexual consent to identify similarities and differences between in-person and digital consent practices. It is suggested that digital sexual consent should be viewed as a subset of sexual consent rather than a separate sexual consent practice. Future directions pertaining to research and application are discussed.

Keywords: sexual; consent; online; digital; technology

1. Introduction

The proliferation of technology in modern society is undeniable. Internet usage has been steadily increasing over the last two decades. Around one billion people, or 16% of the global population, were internet users in 2005, with this proportion growing to six billion people, or nearly three-quarters of the global population, in 2025 [1]. As of 2024, people were found to spend over six hours, or one-quarter of their day, online [2]. While there are seemingly endless ways for people to spend their time online, technology seems to serve an increasingly important role in facilitating social interactions, with over five billion people using social media in 2025 and prominent platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp) having hundreds of millions of active users each month [3,4]. In addition to impacting how we connect socially, the increasingly digitized nature of society has also substantially altered how people connect sexually.

1.1. Technology's Impact on Sexual Interactions

People have been integrating technology into their sex lives and sexual practices at staggering rates and in diverse ways. Models have been developed to help organize the



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multitude of tech-based sexual behaviors that have emerged. For instance, Döring and colleagues [5] developed a framework for “sexual interaction[s] in digital contexts” (SIDCs, p. 2). SIDCs are defined as an “interaction associated with sexual arousal that involves the use of digital technology” ([5], p. 2). SIDCs have been organized across three distinct, but interrelated, categories. The first pertains to interactions through digital technology, which involve using technology during in-person sexual interactions (e.g., using pornography with a partner; live-streaming partnered sex) or as a means to meet others in-person for a sexual encounter (e.g., dating apps). The second comprises interactions via digital technology, where technology is used to directly facilitate a sexual experience (e.g., sexting; sex acts in virtual reality between avatars). The third involves interactions with digital technology, such that another human is not directly involved in the sexual experience (e.g., two-dimensional or virtual reality pornography; sexbots [5]). This model highlights that the digital environment possesses innumerable novel features, such as new ways to communicate (e.g., emojis), meet partners (i.e., dating apps), and engage in sexual interactions (e.g., sexting) which, in many ways, alters what it means to have a sexual interaction.

Better understanding SIDCs is imperative, as behaviors encompassed within these categories, particularly sexual interactions through and via digital technology, are prevalent. For instance, people are increasingly having interactions through technology, and many are finding romantic and sexual partners online. Indeed, almost 40% of American adults report having used an online dating website or app, and 61% report believing that relationships that start online are just as successful as those that start in-person [6]. Moreover, interactions via digital technology are relatively commonplace, with almost half (47.7%) of emerging adults having sent and received sexts [7]. Unfortunately, with this notable prevalence of SIDCs, there is also an increased risk of people perpetrating and experiencing sexual harm in digital contexts. This risk is relatively high, with a recent survey finding that almost seven in ten (67.9%) people have experienced some form of technology-facilitated sexual violence [8]. This high prevalence of non-consensual sexual experiences online demonstrates the inarguable importance of sexual consent in digital contexts.

Sexual Interactions in Digital Contexts and Consent

It is true that SIDCs, such as sexting, can be conceptualized as normative (e.g., [9,10]) and have a range of positive impacts (e.g., sexual arousal and gratification, connecting with partners [11]). However, like in-person sexual interactions, SIDCs are not always positive, with consent—which can broadly be defined as a “form of agreement to engage in sexual activity” ([12], p. 97)—being a key factor which can impact how a sexual interaction is experienced or understood. We acknowledge that competing theories and definitions of consent (e.g., [12,13]) and related concepts (e.g., sexual compliance, [14]) exist. It is beyond the scope of this paper to describe, compare, and contrast each of these. As such, this broad definition of sexual consent will be used for this review. Döring and colleagues [5] aptly identify consent as a “mediator” of SIDCs (p. 5). Indeed, if consent is not present, an SIDC can quickly morph into an act of technology-facilitated sexual violence (e.g., non-consensually sharing sexual images; [15]), which, as discussed, is unfortunately a common experience (e.g., [16]) with significant consequences for victims (e.g., anxiety and depression, alcohol misuse [17]). Clearly, as with in-person sexual interactions, consent is an essential component of SIDCs. Although efforts have been made to initiate a dialog about the impact of technology on sexual consent (e.g., [18]), scholarly work conceptualizing sexual consent (e.g., [12,19,20]) has largely focused on in-person interactions. As an unintended consequence, sexual consent in digital contexts, hereafter, digital sexual consent, is not well understood, and may often be overlooked. Please note, we use the verbiage “digital sexual consent” in this manuscript for brevity. We do not wish to insinuate through this wording

that sexual consent practices in digital contexts are a different type of consent. This lack of understanding of digital sexual consent is a significant limitation, particularly given that incorporating technology into sexual interactions is now a common facet of sexual experience. Therefore, consent must be central to the conversation about sexual health and violence in this new digital frontier. Accordingly, there is an urgent, yet largely unmet need to better understand and define the parameters of sexual consent within digital contexts.

1.2. Aim of Narrative Review

Sexual consent has been found to be influenced by a multitude of factors (e.g., “individual experience and personality,” “environment and circumstances,” and “social norms,” [19], p. 1023). It is reasonable to consider how technology may impact sexual consent practices. To shed light onto how technology may be re-shaping sexual consent practices, we reviewed and analyzed the literature on digital sexual consent. Specifically, a narrative review was conducted to examine and extend our current understanding of digital sexual consent. Instead of conducting a systematic review, we chose to review selected and relevant sources about in-person and digital sexual consent to describe key points about what is known about, as well as identify similarities and differences between sexual consent in these two contexts. This approach was chosen due to the emerging nature of the topic of digital sexual consent, as well as our interest in interpreting and critically analyzing the literature about sexual consent, rather than in an effort to answer a pointed research question.

2. Method

When selecting sources for this narrative review, the peer-reviewed literature that addressed sexual consent in adult populations (i.e., samples including at least some participants aged 18+) that did and did not involve technology was reviewed. Please note, some sources about digital sexual consent did not meet all criteria but were incorporated into the review, as sources about digital sexual consent were scarce. This is further discussed in Section Caveats About Sources Included Below of the paper. This review also focused on SIDCs through and via digital technology as they include interactions between humans, mirroring those in the non-digital sexual consent literature. Relevant sources were initially identified by conducting searches of four databases (i.e., Web of Science Core Collection, OVID Medline, PsycINFO, Embase) in May 2023. Database search strings used the terms sexual consent, sexual compliance, and sexual assent (see Appendix A for the full search strategy). These broad search terms were used with the aim of obtaining the largest catchment potential. Moreover, specific digital terms were not included in the search strategy as it was of interest what sources would emerge within the sexual consent literature more broadly, rather than specialized areas pertaining to the intersection of technology and consent or lack thereof (e.g., technology-facilitated sexual violence; [15]). The review platform Covidence was used to organize the sources collected from databases and consolidate those most relevant to this review. Some additional sources were identified through hand-searching, mainly by reviewing articles and conducting ad hoc Google Scholar searches. The latest Google Scholar search occurred in December 2025. Because this latest ad hoc Google Scholar search’s primary purpose was to identify other sources focused on digital sexual consent, more specific search terms were used (i.e., digital sexual consent).

Although steps were taken to help organize the source identification process (e.g., database searches, inclusion and exclusion screening), this review did not adhere to a standardized protocol. The strategies used to search for sources, as well as the decisions made about which sources were incorporated into this review evolved over time, as the literature was reviewed and iterations of the paper were written. Therefore, it must also be

emphasized that this review is not comprehensive or exhaustive, particularly concerning the literature addressing in-person sexual consent. Because the in-person sexual consent field is exceptionally large and multilayered, providing a brief synopsis would be a disservice to such an important and complex field. This review will discuss findings from the in-person sexual consent field in the context of an examination of the emerging area of digital sexual consent. However, readers are directed to other articles for in-depth discussions of in-person sexual consent (e.g., [13,19–21]).

Caveats About Sources Included Below

It is notable that although we set out to include peer-reviewed sources which addressed sexual consent in adult samples, due to the scarcity of the digital sexual consent literature, these intended criteria were not uniformly met in the included sources. As such, exceptional sources were included in the sections below to illustrate important issues related to sexual consent in digital contexts. Notably, one source used a sample of only minors (i.e., 12–16 years) [22] and others were gray literature sources rather than peer-reviewed publications (e.g., [23], dissertation). Moreover, some sources discuss sexual interest rather than consent. Although these are related concepts, sexual interest is distinct from sexual consent. A person may be interested in someone or the potential of a sexual interaction with them, yet may not be willing or agreeing to engage in sexual activity with them. However, due to the different terms used in the literature and as there is limited information available about digital sexual consent, it was decided that both would be discussed. Despite these limitations, the digital sexual consent literature shows promise. Available sources provide preliminary insight into the nature of digital sexual consent, helping to de-code some aspects of this new vernacular, yet leave many questions unanswered. That being said, let us start with potentially one of the most pressing questions, “What is Digital Sexual Consent?”

3. Digital Sexual Consent

Technological innovation is often credited with making life easier, but when it comes to sexual consent, it appears to have introduced further complexity. In this realm, scholars [24], legal policies (e.g., law against unsolicited sexual images [25]), and online discourse [26] about SIDCs all signal that digital sexual consent is considered important and that we ought (and sometimes are legally obligated) to obtain it. However, uncertainty regarding the concept of sexual consent (e.g., [12]) extends to the digital realm, with the characterization of “digital consent” remaining somewhat elusive [25]. Given the necessity of consent in all sexual contexts, and the, at times, ambiguous role of sexual consent in SIDCs, it is vital to explore what is known about digital sexual consent communication.

3.1. Digital Sexual Consent Cues

Expressions of sexual interest have a unique presentation in the digital context. Here, people have described arguably innocuous behaviors, such as putting effort into self-taken images, “liking” less recently posted images, and using specific emojis while texting (e.g., hearts, eggplants [27]) as cues of sexual interest. “Flirty” conversations through text message or social media have also been perceived as cues of sexual interest, or in some cases, consent [28–30]. Moreover, simply having an active profile on a dating app [31] has been deemed a sexual interest cue. This cue is seemingly stronger, and more similar to a cue of consent, when profiles on dating apps could be perceived as being used for inherently sexual purposes (e.g., Grindr [32]). People may also scan for and interpret information on dating app profiles (e.g., the type of relationship a person is looking for) as indicative of a person being interested in sex [31,32]. Matching on a dating app (i.e., when users indicate mutual interest in one another) may precede sexual conversations, as some individuals

deem this match as an invitation to initiate sexting (e.g., [31,33]). These online exchanges, as well as a person not stopping sexual conversations and the speed of their responses, can be perceived as consent cues to some [31,32]. Interestingly, the findings of a recent study suggest that some of these factors appear to be interrelated. Specifically, it was found that increased dating app use has been associated with a person perceiving themselves as less able to discuss sexual consent with partners, with this being mediated by an increased tendency to sexually objectify dating app users and perceive cues on dating apps (e.g., matching) as consent [34]. The timing of communication also appears related to how sexts may be perceived, with late-night texting conversations [30] or invitations to come over [29] being noted as carrying implicit sexual meanings. In addition to these contextual factors, certain forms of sexting have also been described as particularly strong sexual consent cues.

3.2. *Sending and Receiving Sexual Images*

In the broader sexual consent literature, internal sexual consent cues are feelings of willingness which can be felt, to varying degrees, during sexual interactions [35]. At the individual level, internal cues have been described as physical responses (e.g., rapid heartbeat, flushed), as well as feelings of safety / comfort (e.g., secure, protected), arousal (e.g., turned on, interested), consent / want (e.g., agreed to, wanted), and readiness (e.g., sure, willing [36,37]). Feelings akin to internal consent indicators have been described in relation to SIDCs, with feelings such as trust and comfort being embedded in consent negotiations related to sending sexual images [23]. Related to feelings, participants have also described attending to the “tone and feel” or “mood” of conversations to determine if it is appropriate to send a sexual image ([23], p. 42). Participants describe that flirty or sexual conversations often precede requests for, or the sending of, sexual images [22,23]. In addition to a sexual conversation, receiving a sexual image can also be viewed as an implicit consent cue, namely an invitation to send one back [23]. Indeed, scholars have noted that sending sexual images has been considered highly indicative of a person having “sexual intentions” ([38], p. 412). This proposition is supported by a study which found participants to perceive both sexual intent and consent to be higher in vignettes where a sexually suggestive message was accompanied by a sexual image than when only a sexually suggestive message was sent [39]. Here, it is important to note that such implicit cues can involve violations of sexual consent, with some images that are sent or received being reportedly unsolicited [22]. In addition to these indirect cues (i.e., unclear indicators of agreement to sexual activity [40]), explicit consent cues (i.e., clear indicators of agreement to sexual activity [40]) include direct questions, such as asking if someone would like a sexual image or waiting for a partner to request a sexual image [23,32]. It seems that desire for explicit consent can be rooted in concerns about being perceived negatively or negatively impacting their recipient [23]. Importantly, consent can be questionable even when a person complies with requests for sexual images, with girls often describing feeling pressure to do so [22,41]. Concerns about pressure to engage in sexual activity have also emerged outside of the context of sending sexual images.

3.3. *Transitioning Sexual Interactions Online to In-Person*

In some cases, SIDCs introduce the added complexity of moving from online to offline. Research has demonstrated that this change in contexts can pose challenges for consent negotiations. Digital invitations for in-person sexual activity have the potential to be more explicit (e.g., “Sometimes I’m horny. Like we should hang out”; [29], p. 31) or ambiguous (e.g., “You wanna to [sic] come over to watch a movie?”; [30], p. 127). Moreover, on dating apps, users may perceive an agreement to meet in-person, as indicative of implied sexual consent [31]. Men who have sex with men (MSM) have reported attributing similar meaning

to sexual conversations. Specifically, this group has described sexual conversations that occur on dating apps and through other digital mediums (e.g., email, texting) preceding an in-person meeting as evidence of sexual consent [42]. Designating these cues as indicators of consent is of concern. One reason for this is because people have described feeling pressure to engage in sexual activity that they had discussed previously online with someone when thereafter meeting them in-person [43]. Relatedly, people have also described feeling uncertain when, or to what extent, sexual consent needs to be discussed in-person if it had been discussed online before meeting [31]. Emerging results have demonstrated that dating app users use different approaches to consent when transitioning from online to offline, with some relying on online indicators of consent, and others incorporating both online and in-person cues into their consent negotiations [31,32]. Although it is known that in-person and digital sexual consent are heavily related in practice, critical analysis of these contexts is needed to clarify their level of overlap.

4. Comparing In-Person and Digital Sexual Consent

Even with the literature on digital sexual consent being limited, scholars have rejected the notion that digital sexual consent is inherently different from sexual consent in other contexts [18], a position supported, in part, by the relevant literature. Specifically, when compared, although a number of differences between sexual consent and in-person and digital contexts exist, the literature also points to several notable similarities.

4.1. Consent Similarities Across Contexts

Interestingly, people have begun spontaneously incorporating digital sexual consent cues into their descriptions of sexual interactions (e.g., [42]), suggesting that these cues are becoming a part of modern sexual scripts. Both in-person and digital sexual consent have been found to follow a process, with initiation of sexual activity occurring after the accumulation of perceived cues indicating sexual interest or consent. In-person, this process may include cues such as flirting, dancing, kissing, and then moving to a private space where sexual activity is initiated (e.g., [30]). Online, this process may include cues such as having a profile on a dating app, matching with another user, a sexual conversation being initiated on said app, and one party inviting the other to meet in-person to engage in sexual activity [31]. Contextual factors have also been deemed important in both consent processes, with ambiguous nonverbal or situational factors being perceived as sexual interest or consent cues online (e.g., the time a text message is sent [29]; having a dating app profile [31]) and offline (e.g., being at a party [44]). Moreover, complexities related to transitioning interactions to different contexts are present in both in-person and digital sexual consent negotiations. For instance, in person, an invitation or move from a social to a private setting with someone has been deemed a potent sexual consent cue [30,45,46], similar to how people may view agreeing to meet someone they met online in-person [31]. These behaviors being perceived as consent cues is concerning, as this perception is all based on individual or subjective interpretation, with no inherent or clear communication of willingness to engage in sexual activity.

Internal cues, particularly how a person feels about or during a sexual interaction, have also been described related to in-person interactions (e.g., [36]) and sending sexual images [23]. Direct and indirect cues have also been found to be used in both contexts, with some studies using similar verbiage when discussing or categorizing digital consent cues (i.e., explicit, implicit [23,32]). Moreover, another way cues have been grouped in the digital sexual consent literature are by “computer-mediated consent processes”, which again resemble direct/explicit and indirect/implicit cues ([31], p. 2). Cue patterns which emphasize implied consent or indirect cues (e.g., matching on a dating app) have been

termed “consent signaling” ([31], p. 2). In contrast, patterns which involve direct consent discussions on (e.g., screening bios for information and talking about what a person is seeking on dating apps) and off (e.g., verbal consent in-person before sexual activity) dating apps have been termed “affirmative consent” ([31], p. 2). Although similar groups of cues appear to be used, they can look different in these two contexts. For example, online, a direct or explicit cue could be requesting a sexual image while texting [22,23], whereas in-person, a person may tell someone they want to engage in sexual activity with them [40].

Digital and in-person sexual consent also seem to share or be influenced by similar societal scripts. For example, when sexting, boys tend to ask girls for sexual images and girls tend to take on the role of fulfilling these requests [22]. This mirrors the heterosexual sexual script of men being “initiators” and women being “gatekeepers” of sexual activity (e.g., [47]). Another unfortunate similarity between digital and in-person sexual consent is that it can be violated. Indeed, just as in-person sexual activity can occur without a person indicating willingness, SIDCs can occur in the absence of consent (e.g., sending or receiving an unsolicited sexual image [22,33]; coercing someone to sext using threats [41]). Thus, similarities between in-person and digital sexual consent cues are apparent. In addition to digital cues being described in relation to in-person sexual encounters, they also seem to mirror patterns found in-person, with evidence of direct and indirect cues, as well as cue accumulation, and the importance of situational or cultural influences being present in both contexts. Moreover, issues of consent versus compliance appear relevant to both contexts (e.g., sending sexual images under pressure). Nevertheless, the qualities of the digital environment, including its disinhibiting effect, the removal of familiar cues, and the timeline of cues, result in a divide across contexts.

4.2. Consent Differences Across Contexts

Existing evidence establishes the online environment as potentially disinhibiting, such that individuals may engage in behaviors that they otherwise would not in-person [48]. The digital context has also given rise to new behaviors that can be interpreted as sexual consent cues that are not possible to carry out in-person (e.g., using emojis with sexual connotations [27]). The online environment can also alter the availability and efficacy of familiar consent cues that people might rely on in-person [25,26]. For example, while sexting, people are not privy to traditional implicit cues (e.g., body language), which could make it difficult to ascertain someone’s willingness to sext without having a direct conversation [26]. Explicit conversations about sexual consent or the use of direct sexual consent cues within in-person contexts has been described as undesirable (e.g., [27]). Specifically, direct verbal communication has been described as uncomfortable and awkward to use [49,50], as feeling like a “turn-off” and “mood-killer” ([45], p. 349), and as raising potential concerns about being rejected [27,35]. The discourse about explicit communication related to SIDCs, however, appears to differ. Despite some people continuing to express concern that conversations about sexual consent may elicit feelings of discomfort in the digital context [31], others describe feeling increased comfort with these conversations, which they perceive as having less stigma in this context [50]. The potential for more explicit communication in digital contexts could also arise due to necessity, as online interfaces often rely on either verbal (e.g., phone calls, voice notes) or written (e.g., texting) communication [18]. Disengaging from non-consensual sexual interactions might also be more direct in the digital context. This is because people may feel safer stopping a sexual interaction due to the physical distance inherent in the online environment, as well as features of online platforms which can facilitate the swift termination of unwanted interactions (e.g., blocking [18,41]).

Technology has also introduced a new sexual consent timeline. When engaging in traditional sexual experiences, the potential to violate consent is typically considered to end

when a sexual interaction ends. By contrast, in SIDCs, sexual consent and risk of its violation has an indeterminate timeframe [22]. For example, sexual consent can be violated at the time of a sexual image or video's creation (e.g., coercing a partner to make a sex tape or sext, capturing in-person sexual assault) and can remain long after the fact (e.g., disseminating sexual images of another person without permission [18]). Online interactions can also produce a "digital record" of conversations about sexual consent, which have been argued as evidence of a person's willingness to engage in sexual activity ([50], p. 481) despite other evidence to the contrary. On the other hand, online environments may produce evidence of sexual consent *violations* (e.g., images of sexual assault, conversations containing non-consensually shared images [18]). Indeed, in contrast to in-person sexual interactions, where consent is inscrutable after a sexual interaction has taken place, technology (e.g., images, text messages) may serve as evidence of the presence or absence of consent in such interactions in ways that have not been possible before. On balance, there appear to be both similarities and dissimilarities in the underpinnings of sexual consent across the in-person and digital sexual context. Therefore, urgent work is needed to better understand digital sexual consent. This work must both increase the core scientific knowledge surrounding sexual consent and SIDCs, as well as update health and educational interventions to help support the public in pursuing healthy sexual interactions both online and offline.

5. Implications and Proposed Future Directions

After reviewing the literature, it is clear that technology introduces another layer of complexity to the concept of sexual consent, given the differences observed between digital and in-person sexual consent. Nevertheless, there is important overlap in how consent is perceived across in-person and digital contexts. Given this overlap, particularly the evidence showing that people incorporate digital sexual consent cues into consent narratives and decisions surrounding in-person sexual consent (e.g., discussing consent online before meeting in-person [42]), this review of the literature would support the position that digital sexual consent practices should not be considered separate from in-person sexual consent practices. Instead, it is suggested that digital sexual consent be framed as a novel subset of cues falling under the larger umbrella of sexual consent. Additional work, including key research and applied initiatives, is urgently required to further understand the nature of digital sexual consent and to integrate such notions into mainstream discourse.

5.1. Research Gaps and Next Steps

As is evident throughout, there is a paucity of research surrounding digital sexual consent cues, and the sources which do exist are limited in scope and generalizability (e.g., sample of only minors [22]). The absence of such research is of significant concern given the ubiquity of technology's incorporation into the process of searching for a partner (e.g., dating apps or websites [51]) and sexual activity (e.g., sexting [7,52]). In order to engender much-needed knowledge surrounding digital sexual consent, researchers should intentionally incorporate digital sexual consent cues into their designs of sexual consent studies. This should be done to ensure additional information is garnered not only about the digital context, but also about the role of digital sexual cues in both in-person and online sexual consent processes.

Digital sexual consent has the potential to be viewed as simply another context for sexual encounters. However, specific investigations into this domain are necessary. This is because of the extant differences from in-person sexual consent, as well as the unique manifestation of digital sexual consent cues even in conditions that involve in-person encounters. For instance, the scales evaluating consent may require modification and

validation to confirm they are applicable to SIDCs. Preliminary findings suggest this may be needed, with self-reported levels of internal and external consent while sexting being rated relatively low (when compared to an average consent rating across a range of sexual activities) when assessed by an existing consent measure [53]. It will also be important to explore how unique features of the online environment may influence consent practices. For example, characteristics (e.g., anonymity, asynchronicity) that have been theorized to contribute to both “benign” and “toxic” disinhibition in the online environment would be important to study in the context of digital sexual consent ([48], p. 321), with asynchronicity when using dating apps emerging as a complicating factor in preliminary studies [32].

Studies should also begin to focus on specific SIDCs (e.g., sexting) to determine when and what cues are used across different online contexts. This approach is particularly important given that research suggests that, in-person, sexual consent practices may differ by behavior. For example, explicit discussions are considered necessary when trying a new (e.g., [50]) or “off-script” sexual behavior [54], where such nuances may also extend to the digital realm. Focused studies are also necessary for SIDCs that occur via digital technology, without in-person interactions, as these approaches to sexual interaction are seldom examined in studies addressing in-person sexual consent.

Researchers are also encouraged to be mindful of the characteristic composition of their sample during study development and recruitment to avoid the pitfalls identified in the sexual consent literature (e.g., reliance on university student samples [19,55]). Examples of sample characteristics to consider include, but are not limited to, age, gender, sexual identity and orientation, ethnicity, race, and context (e.g., university-based, community). Moreover, although it was beyond the scope of the paper to discuss the various factors which can impact sexual consent practices (e.g., gender [47,56,57], type of sexual activity [42,50,58,59], relationship between partners [50,60,61]), in addition to the sample composition, examining sexual consent practices by demographic variables could also be helpful to determine if unique patterns emerge in different demographic groups (e.g., age cohorts). It is also important to consider relational context while researching digital sexual consent. For example, sexual consent research suggests that relationship type (e.g., casual, committed) can influence consent practices or perceptions of sexual interactions (e.g., [41,50,61]), with this also being mirrored in the emerging digital sexual consent research [23,39]. Relatedly, sexual and gender identity has, although not always [62], been associated with different cue patterns [63] and should be carefully considered in any future research. Researchers may also wish to further examine potential differences in sexual consent experiences between racial and ethnic minority and non-minority groups [55]. Together, these approaches will aid researchers in capturing the breadth of sexual consent experiences that occur outside of a laboratory context. Although generating new knowledge like this is vital, it is arguable that applying it is even more crucial.

5.2. *Applied Implications*

A primary knowledge translation opportunity, and urgent need, concerns the modernizing of education about sexual consent practices to reflect and accommodate the nuanced nature of sexual interactions [30,46,49,62,64]. The findings of this review support discourse in the literature encouraging stakeholders to shift their approach to education related to sexual consent. Specifically, it has been suggested that scholars and institutions move away from education founded in abstinence principles [24] or using prescriptive and non-evidence-based [58,65] definitions of sexual consent, like affirmative consent. Instead, it is recommended that stakeholders move toward adopting a principle-oriented approach [66]. Specifically, some scholars have advocated for programming that focuses on sexual ethics rather than consent [19,63,67]. Education founded in sexual ethics aims to de-silo pro-

gramming (e.g., not providing different education or messaging to different genders) and increase people's capacity for "ethical negotiation" ([68], p. 212). In other words, these programs aim to better prepare people to manage sexual situations in an ethical manner and prevent negative outcomes, such as sexual violence. Since they are less prescriptive, principle- or ethics-based programming would, in theory, be applicable to both digital and in-person sexual interactions, as they are not bound by context, participant group, or other individual factors. Therefore, this may be the most flexible approach to sexual education, which is increasingly important with the technological advancements that are continuing to change the landscapes of people's sexual interactions. In addition to principle-based programming, enhanced digital literacy tools [22] and tools promoting responsible online behavior (e.g., how to protect private information) will serve as complementary topics to incorporate into programming addressing digital sexual interactions. Here, it is imperative that such programming is disseminated broadly, not only to children and teenagers, but also to adults. For example, social media platforms have the potential to reach members of the public, including adults not enrolled in school [69]. Notably, although these recommendations can be made, it is critical that new educational initiatives are evaluated to determine their efficacy and adjusted according to existing and emerging evidence.

6. Concluding Thoughts

This review set out to critically analyze the available literature on digital sexual consent. Few sources were found that were dedicated to digital sexual consent or addressed this practice in notable depth. However, the available literature suggests there are both similarities and differences in sexual consent processes and cues within in-person and digital spaces. Due to the demonstrated overlap, digital sexual consent appears to be a subset of sexual consent practices rather than a distinct practice. There is much work to be done to better understand digital sexual consent, but in a world dominated by technology, this is not elective work. Instead of a tedious challenge, all stakeholders are encouraged to view this as an exciting opportunity to crack the passcode on human sexual behavior and work together to develop a modern understanding of consent practices in our increasingly digitized world.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

SIDC Sexual interactions in digital contexts

Appendix A

Database Search Terms

Web of Science Core Collection

TS = (("sex* consent*") OR ("sex*" NEAR/3 "consent*") OR ("sex* complian*") OR ("sex*" NEAR/3 "complian*") OR ("sex* assent*") OR ("sex*" NEAR/3 "assent*"))

OVID Medline

sex* consent*.mp.
(sex* adj3 consent*).mp.
sex* complian*.mp.
(sex* adj3 complian*).mp.
sex* assent*.mp.
(sex* adj3 assent*).mp.

PsycINFO

sex* consent*.mp.
(sex* adj3 consent*).mp.
sex* complian*.mp.
(sex* adj3 complian*).mp.
sex* assent*.mp.
(sex* adj3 assent*).mp.

Embase

sex* consent*.mp.
(sex* adj3 consent*).mp.
sex* complian*.mp.
(sex* adj3 complian*).mp.
sex* assent*.mp.
(sex* adj3 assent*).mp.

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