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The associations between adolescents' consumption of pornography and music videos' and their sexting behavior

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The associations between adolescents' consumption of pornography and music videos' and their sexting behavior

Abstract

Several scholars have argued that adolescents' sexting behavior might be influenced by their media use. However, to date empirical evidence of the link between media socialization and engagement in sexting behavior remains scarce. The purpose of this study was to investigate whether music video and pornography consumption are able to predict a range of sexting behaviors among a sample of 329 adolescents with a mean age of 16.71 years ($SD = .74$). The results demonstrate that sexting behaviors were significantly associated with the consumption of pornography, when controlling for age, gender, school track and internet use. Taking into account the gender of the adolescents, the significant relationship between engagement in the four types of sexting behavior and pornography use held true for both boys and girls. Music video consumption was only significantly associated with asking someone for a sexting message and having received a sexting message. Further analyses revealed that these significant relationships only held for boys.

Keywords

sexting; music videos; pornography; adolescents; media socialization

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Sexting is defined as the exchange of “sexually explicit content communicated via text messages, smartphones, or visual and web 2.0. activities such as social networking sites”¹. One of the perspectives through which the behavior can be studied is that of the contemporary media culture^{2,3}. Several researchers have indicated that adolescents’ engagement in sexting could be part of the sexualization of popular culture (e.g., music videos and celebrity culture), in which the bodies of men as well as women are being objectified⁴, in which the “public imagery is more sexually explicit than ever”³ and “in which the perceived ubiquity of sexting is fueled by both personal experiences and media hype”⁵. When mapping out a research agenda for sexting, Chalfen² called for more research whether the engagement in sexting behavior corresponds with the viewing of sexualized media entertainment (e.g., music videos and advertisements) and he suggested that research should investigate whether “sexting practices correlate with frequency of young people accessing pornographic web sites”². However, to our knowledge, no quantitative study has to date answered this call for research into the link between media socialization and engagement in sexting. This could open new possibilities for understanding what drives adolescents in engaging in sexting behavior and could inform the development of intervention campaigns as well as future research. Therefore, the aim of this study is to investigate whether media use (i.e., music video and pornography consumption) is associated with adolescents’ engagement in sexting behavior.

The assumption that media socialization could influence adolescents’ sexting behavior, is in line with previous studies on the effects of music video viewing and pornography consumption on adolescents’ offline sexual attitudes and behaviors^{6,7}. With regards to sexual content in music, movies, television and magazines, a longitudinal study found that exposure to sexual content in mass media accelerated adolescents’ sexual activity⁸. Moreover, recent

longitudinal research found that music video viewing was associated with the extent of sexual activity for boys⁶. Among young adults, studies have found that viewing sexually explicit music videos was linked to, amongst others, sexually permissive attitudes and stereotypical gender perceptions^{9,10}. With regards to pornography consumption, a recent review of the literature summarized that adolescents who visit sexually explicit websites, were more likely to have permissive sexual attitudes, multiple sexual partners and to engage in risky sexual behavior (such as unprotected sex), compared to those young people who were not exposed to this content. Moreover, viewing pornography was also correlated with increased sexually aggressive behavior⁷. In sum, multiple studies have found associations between the use of sexualized media content and adolescents' offline sexual attitudes and behaviors. The current study aims to extend these results by investigating whether media consumption might be associated with sexting, an online form of sexual behavior and experimentation.

Method

Sample

In November 2013, data were collected as part of a larger study about sexting and its social influences from 357 adolescents and late adolescents aged between 15 and 21 years old in four different secondary schools in Flanders, Belgium. Because the focus of the present study is on adolescent sexting, only students up to 18 years old were included in the analyses. As such, the sample comprised of 329 adolescents (60.2% girls; $n = 198$), with a mean age of 16.71 ($SD = .74$). Formal consent was sought from the school principal and supervising teachers prior to the study. The anonymous paper-and-pencil survey was administered by the researcher, who explained at the beginning of the survey that students were under no obligation to participate and

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could withdraw at any time. Students were assured that their responses would be confidential and that no information would be shared with teachers, parents or fellow students. Prevention or awareness campaigns about sexting had not previously been part of the curriculum in any of the participating schools.

Measurements

Demographics

Participants were asked to indicate their gender (*female* was the reference category in the analyses), age, their school track and amount of internet use outside of school. Amount of internet use outside of school was measured on an 8-point Likert scale, the wording of the item and the response options are presented in table 1. The item measuring school track consisted of the three major school tracks of the Flemish education system: 1 = *bso* (vocational school track) (24.0%; $n = 79$), 2 = *tso/kso* (technical/creative school track) (30.7%; $n = 101$), 3 = *aso* (academic school track; reference category in the analyses) (45.3%; $n = 149$). These variables were used in the analyses as control variables. Previous research in the same geographic region, found that students of technical or vocational school track (*bso-tso*) were more likely to engage in sexting than students of the academic school track (*aso*)¹¹.

Pornography use and music video use

The item measuring music video exposure was adapted from a previous study¹² and asked how often the respondents “watched music videos (on YouTube as well as on television)” on a scale of 0 = *a few times a year or less* to 7 = *every day, more than two hours*. The item measuring pornography use was also inspired by previous research¹³ and asked how often the respondents “looked at pictures or videos containing naked men or women, such as in magazines like *Playboy* or on a pornographic website” on a scale of 0 = *never* to 8 = *more than 2 times a day*.

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The response options and wording of both items are presented in table 1. Only two respondents indicated that they watched pornography more than 2 times a day. To reduce the influence of these outliers, we collapsed the last two categories of the scale. The highest category 7 now includes respondents who watch pornography once a day or more.

[PLEASE INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Sexting behavior

This study measured respondents' engagement in a range of sexting behaviors, using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = *no* to 5 = *yes, daily*. On average, the participants did not indicate that they were often involved in sexting behavior. Therefore, the items about sexting were recoded into a dichotomous variable with 0 = *not having engaged in sexting* and 1 = *having engaged in sexting*. The items asked whether (1) the respondents had ever in the past sent a text message about sex (e.g., an instant message, e-mail or text message) to someone else (51.7% did), (2) they had ever in the past sent a sexually suggestive picture or video or had a sexually suggestive webcam conversation in which they were depicted in their underwear or half-naked (14.9% did), (3) they had asked during the last six months someone they knew to send them a sexually suggestive picture or video (14.3% did), (4) they had received a sexually explicit picture or video from someone during the last 6 months (28.7% did).

Data analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS 22.0 using default settings. Four logistic regression models assessed the relationship between media use and sexting, while controlling for gender, age, school track and internet use. Afterwards, the results for boys and girls were analyzed separately because preliminary analyses revealed significant interactions between gender and pornography use in three models (i.e., sending a sexting picture, asking for a sexting message and receiving a

sexting message). Firstly, the control variables gender, age, school track and internet use were entered simultaneously. Secondly, the predictors music video use and pornography use were entered together with the control variables simultaneously. Sexting behavior was the dependent variable and music video use and pornography consumption were the predictor variables, given that previous studies found an association between on the one hand sexual attitudes and behaviors and on the other hand the usage of sexually explicit media content^{6, 7}. Moreover, several researchers suggested that sexting behavior might be influenced by contemporary media culture²⁻⁴.

Results

Table 2 shows the adjusted odds ratios for the several types of sexting behavior and their predictors. Afterwards, the analyses were stratified by gender. Table 3 shows the analyses for boys and table 4 the analyses for girls.

Sending a sexting text message was significantly associated with pornography use ($p \leq .001$), but not with music video use ($p = .95$). Further analyses (tables 3 and 4) revealed that the link between engagement in sexting and pornography use remained significant for both boys ($p \leq .001$) and girls ($p \leq .001$).

Sending a sexting picture or video was significantly associated with pornography use ($p \leq .001$), but not with music video viewing ($p = .50$). When analyzed separately (tables 3 and 4), the relationship between sexting and pornography remained significant for boys ($p \leq .01$) as well as girls ($p \leq .001$).

Asking someone for a sexting message was significantly associated with pornography use ($p \leq .001$) and music video use ($p \leq .05$). When analyzed separately, table 3 and 4 show that the significant association with music video use only held true for boys ($p \leq .01$) but not for girls (p

= .398). The link between engagement in sexting and pornography use remained significant for both boys ($p \leq .001$) and girls ($p \leq .001$).

With regard to receiving a sexting message, both pornography ($p \leq .001$) and music video consumption ($p \leq .05$) were significantly associated with having received a sexting message. As shown in table 3 and 4, further analyses revealed that the link between music video use and having received a sexting message was significant for boys, $p \leq .01$, but not for girls, $p = .79$. The associations between pornography use remained significant for boys ($p \leq .05$) as well as girls ($p \leq .001$).

[PLEASE INSERT TABLES 2 TO 4 ABOUT HERE]

Discussion

Although researchers have often suggested that there is an association between sexting and the contemporary media culture²⁻⁵, this relationship was not yet empirically investigated. To the best of our knowledge, our study is the first to quantitatively examine the associations between media consumption and the engagement in a variety of adolescent sexting behaviors, while controlling for age, gender, school track and internet use. The results of our study show that various types of sexting behavior are significantly linked with both pornography and music video consumption. Consequently, focusing on the media correlates of adolescent sexting might be a promising area for future research to better understand why adolescents choose to exchange sexting messages. Not only does our research enable a deeper understanding of adolescent sexting behavior, it also extends the literature on the effects of pornography and music video viewing.

This article builds on previous work on the effects of pornography use, that demonstrated that pornography consumption is significantly linked with sexual experimentation by adolescents⁷. Our study extends these findings by showing that pornography use is not only associated with

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adolescent's offline sexual behaviors but that it is also linked with a virtual form of sexual experimentation (i.e., sexting).

Furthermore, our study demonstrated that asking for sexting messages and receiving sexting messages was linked with exposure to music videos. When analyzed separately, the relationship between music video viewing and sexting held true for boys but not for girls. This finding corresponds partially with previous research which found a significant association between music video exposure and the sexual behavior in boys, while a reverse relationship was found among girls⁶. That boys who watch music videos are more likely to ask for and receive sexting messages, might be explained by the fact that music videos promote an active sexual role for boys as opposed to a more submissive role for girls^{6, 14}. This difference might explain why males have a higher chance of being affected by the sexual scripts depicted in music videos⁶. The present findings are also in line with previous literature which found links between viewing music videos and permissive sexual attitudes^{9, 10}.

Our results are also relevant to practitioners who could pay attention to students who engage in these types of media behavior when developing prevention and intervention campaigns. They could for instance specifically target youth who frequently consume sexually explicit media and discuss with them the potential effects of these media contents on sexual attitudes and sexual behavior both in the online and offline world.

Several shortcomings of our study should be acknowledged. Firstly, a cross-sectional survey study design was used. This renders it impossible to define causality. Moreover, we are currently unable to determine whether the link between sexting and media use is a consequence of media socialization or rather symptomatic of a certain lifestyle of adolescents who engage in sexting¹². Secondly, self-reports were used for both predictor and outcome variables. It is

unknown to which extent these self-reported measures reflect actual behavior. Thirdly, a convenience-sample of adolescents of a same geographic region was used, which might limit the generalizability of the results. Alternative participant recruitment and data collection strategies may be needed to minimize sampling bias in future studies. Moreover, future research might also benefit from controlling for a wider range of background variables such as respondents' engagement in sexual behaviors or risk behaviors. Furthermore, the study would have benefited from using the same time frame for all measures (e.g., six months). Finally, the measure of music video consumption did not ask whether the music videos watched by adolescents were sexual in nature. A content analysis of music video clips shown on Flemish television showed that 40% of the coded scenes contained sexually suggestive messages¹⁵. Future research might use a more fine-grained measure to study whether adolescents might be influenced by certain types of music videos or other types of sexualized media content.

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Table 1.

Descriptives

<i>Item</i>	<i>Response options</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Amount of internet-use How often do you use the internet outside of school?	1 = one time a month or less 2 = a few times a month 3 = 1-3 times a week 4 = 3-6 times a week 5 = every day (less than) 1 hour 6 = every day, 1 to 2 hours 7 = every day, 2 to 3 hours 8 = every day, more than 3 hours	6.30	1.34
Amount of music video use How often do you watch music videos (e.g., on YouTube as well as on TV)?	1 = a few times a year or less 2 = once a month 3 = a few times a month 4 = 1-3 times a week 5 = 3-6 times a week 6 = every day, (less than) 1 hour 7 = every day, 1 to 2 hours 8 = every day, more than 2 hours	4.15	1.47
Amount of pornography use How often do you watch pictures or videos in which naked men or women are depicted (such as magazines like Playboy or a pornographic website)?	1 = never 2 = a few times a year or less 3 = once a month 4 = a few times a month 5 = 1-3 times a week 6 = 3-6 times a week 7 = every day 8 = once or more a day	1.6	2.02

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Table 2.

Various types of sexting behavior predicted by gender, age, school track, internet use, music video use and pornography use

Predictor	Sending a sexting text message			Sending a sexting picture			Asking for a sexting message			Receiving a sexting message		
	B (S.E.)	Exp (B) [95% CI]	Model chi-square (Nagelkerke R ²)	B (S.E.)	Exp (B) [95% CI]	Model chi-square (Nagelkerke R ²)	B (S.E.)	Exp (B) [95% CI]	Model chi-square (Nagelkerke R ²)	B (S.E.)	Exp (B) [95% CI]	Model chi-square (Nagelkerke R ²)
Step 1			8.15 (.03)			6.15 (.03)			24.13 (.13)			10.30 (.04)
Constant	-3.98 (2.71)	.02		-5.45 (3.71)	.00		-6.09 (3.93)	.00		-4.54 (2.98)	.01	
Gender (<i>ref = female</i>)	.32 (.24)	1.37 [.86-2.18]		.32 (.32)	1.38 [.74-2.59]		1.57 (.35)	4.79 [2.40-9.56]***		.53 (.26)	1.70 [1.03-2.82]*	
Age	.17 (.16)	1.18 [.87-1.62]		.11 (.22)	1.12 [.73-1.71]		.18 (.23)	1.20 [.77-1.87]		.16 (.17)	1.17 [.83-1.64]	
School track bso (<i>ref = aso</i>)	-.07 (.30)	.93 [.52-1.67]		-.27 (.43)	.76 [.33-1.77]		.13 (.46)	1.14 [.46-2.81]		.17 (.34)	1.19 [.61-2.31]	
School track tso (<i>ref = aso</i>)	.13 (.27)	1.14 [.67-1.93]		-.03 (.37)	.97 [.47-2.00]		.43 (.38)	1.54 [.74-3.23]		.53 (.29)	1.70 [.96-3.01]	
Internet use	.18 (.09)	1.19 [1.00-1.42]*		.27 (.14)	1.31 [1.00-1.71]*		.04 (.13)	1.05 [.81-1.35]		.09 (.10)	1.10 [.91-1.33]	
Step 2			54.55*** (.21)			29.06*** (.15)			69.33*** (.34)			41.10*** (.17)
Constant	-3.77 (2.90)	.02		-6.24 (3.95)	.00		-8.08 (4.46)	.00		-5.20 (3.16)	.01	
Gender (<i>ref = female</i>)	-1.68 (.43)	.19 [.08-.44]***		-1.64 (.60)	.19 [.06-.63]**		-.80 (.62)	.45 [.13-1.51]		-.96 (.44)	.38 [.16-.91]*	
Age	.16 (.17)	1.18 [.84-1.64]		.15 (.23)	1.17 [.75-1.83]		.27 (.26)	1.31 [.79-2.17]		.18 (.18)	1.20 [.83-1.71]	
School track bso (<i>ref = aso</i>)	.22 (.32)	1.25 [.67-2.34]		.03 (.45)	1.03 [.43-2.49]		.61 (.51)	1.85 [.67-5.08]		.41 (.36)	1.51 [.75-3.05]	
School track tso (<i>ref = aso</i>)	.31 (.29)	1.37 [.77-2.44]		.03 (.39)	1.03 [.48-2.24]		.61 (.43)	1.83 [.78-4.30]		.67 (.31)	1.95 [1.05-3.61]*	
Internet use	.10 (.10)	1.10 [.91-1.33]		.17 (.15)	1.18 [.88-1.58]		-.24 (.16)	.78 [.58-1.06]		-.06 (.11)	.94 [.76-1.17]	
Music video use	-.01 (.09)	.99 [.84-1.18]		.08 (.12)	1.09 [.85-1.38]		.37 (.15)	1.44 [1.08-1.92]*		.22 (.10)	1.24 [1.02-1.51]*	
Pornography use	.69 (.12)	1.99 [1.58-2.52]***		.57 (.13)	1.76 [1.35-2.30]***		.73 (.15)	2.07 [1.55-2.76]***		.46 (.11)	1.59 [1.29-1.97]***	

* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$

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Table 3.

Various types of sexting behavior predicted by gender, age, school track, internet use, music video use and pornography use for male

Predictor	Sending a sexting text message			Sending a sexting picture			Asking for a sexting message			Receiving a sexting message		
	B (S.E.)	Exp (B) [95% CI]	Model chi-square (Nagelkerke R ²)	B (S.E.)	Exp (B) [95% CI]	Model chi-square (Nagelkerke R ²)	B (S.E.)	Exp (B) [95% CI]	Model chi-square (Nagelkerke R ²)	B (S.E.)	Exp (B) [95% CI]	Model chi-square (Nagelkerke R ²)
Step 1			2.93 (.03)			3.29 (.04)			.82 (.01)			5.19 (.05)
Constant	-5.44 (4.53)	.00		.72 (5.85)	2.06		-3.87 (4.87)	.02		-5.86 (4.62)	.00	
Age	.29 (.26)	1.33 [.79-2.25]		-.13 (.34)	.88 [.45-1.72]		.17 (.28)	1.18 [.68-2.07]		.32 (.27)	1.37 [.81-2.33]	
School track bso (ref = aso)	-.66 (.54)	.52 [.18-1.48]		.09 (.64)	1.10 [.31-3.85]		.13 (.59)	1.14 [.35-3.66]		.32 (.57)	1.38 [.46-4.19]	
School track tso (ref = aso)	-.09 (.41)	.91 [.41-2.05]		-.96 (.61)	.38 [.12-1.27]		.30 (.46)	1.35 [.55-3.30]		.80 (.42)	2.23 [.97-5.13]	
Internet use	.17 (.16)	1.18 [.87-1.61]		.03 (.21)	1.03 [.68-1.55]		-.02 (.17)	.98 [.70-1.38]		-.05 (.16)	.95 [.69-1.30]	
Step 2			30.66*** (.29)			13.00* (.16)			33.24*** (.34)			24.52*** (.24)
Constant	-7.53 (5.05)	.00		-.95 (6.34)	.39		-8.73 (5.86)	.00		-8.19 (5.05)	.00	
Age	.34 (.30)	1.40 [.78-2.51]		-.09 (.37)	.92 [.45-1.88]		.33 (.33)	1.40 [.73-2.70]		.38 (.29)	1.46 [.82-2.59]	
School track bso (ref = aso)	-.36 (.59)	.70 [.22-2.22]		.46 (.68)	1.58 [.41-6.03]		.63 (.69)	1.88 [.48-7.33]		.59 (.62)	1.81 [.54-6.08]	
School track tso (ref = aso)	.03 (.47)	1.03 [.41-2.62]		-.93 (.64)	.39 [.11-1.39]		.34 (.54)	1.41 [.49-4.04]		.89 (.47)	2.44 [.97-6.12]	
Internet use	-.05 (.18)	.95 [.66-1.36]		-.10 (.24)	.90 [.56-1.45]		-.47 (.23)	.62 [.40-.98]*		-.36 (.19)	.70 [.48-1.01]	
Music video use	.19 (.15)	1.20 [.90-1.62]		-.02 (.18)	.98 [.69-1.39]		.53 (.21)	1.70 [1.13-2.56]**		.47 (.17)	1.60 [1.14-2.23]**	
Pornography use	.54 (.12)	1.72 [1.35-2.20]***		.45 (.16)	1.57 [1.14-2.15]**		.62 (.17)	1.87 [1.35-2.59]***		.31 (.12)	1.36 [1.07-1.72]*	

adolescents

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

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Table 4.

Various types of sexting behavior predicted by gender, age, school track, internet use, music video use and pornography use for female adolescents

Predictor	Sending a sexting text message			Sending a sexting picture			Asking for a sexting message			Receiving a sexting message		
	B (S.E.)	Exp (B) [95% CI]	Model chi-square (Nagelkerke R ²)	B (S.E.)	Exp (B) [95% CI]	Model chi-square (Nagelkerke R ²)	B (S.E.)	Exp (B) [95% CI]	Model chi-square (Nagelkerke R ²)	B (S.E.)	Exp (B) [95% CI]	Model chi-square (Nagelkerke R ²)
Step 1			5.23 (.03)			10.39* (.09)			2.16 (.03)			3.42 (.03)
Constant	-2.95 (3.45)	.05		-8.20 (5.14)	.00		-6.47 (6.64)	.00		-3.35 (3.96)	.03	
Age	.10 (.20)	1.10 [.74-1.64]		.20 (.30)	1.22 [.68-2.19]		.16 (.39)	1.18 [.55-2.52]		.06 (.23)	1.06 [.67-1.67]	
School track bso (ref = aso)	.22 (.36)	1.24 [.61-2.54]		-.29 (.61)	.75 [.23-2.46]		.25 (.76)	1.28 [.29-5.70]		.04 (.43)	1.04 [.45-2.42]	
School track tso (ref = aso)	.32 (.36)	1.38 [.68-2.79]		.64 (.52)	1.90 [.69-5.24]		.72 (.69)	2.05 [.53-7.98]		.31 (.41)	1.37 [.61-3.06]	
Internet use	.18 (.11)	1.20 [.97-1.48]		.43 (.19)	1.53 [1.05-2.23]*		.13 (.21)	1.13 [.75-1.71]		.18 (.13)	1.20 [.94-1.54]	
Step 2			31.49*** (.20)			32.41*** (.28)			21.16*** (.25)			29.47*** (.21)
Constant	-2.00 (3.71)	.13		-9.52 (5.56)	.00		-7.71 (7.13)	.00		-3.14 (4.31)	.04	
Age	.05 (.22)	1.05 [.69-1.61]		.20 (.32)	1.23 [.65-2.30]		.15 (.42)	1.17 [.52-2.64]		.03 (.25)	1.03 [.63-1.68]	
School track bso (ref = aso)	.55 (.39)	1.73 [.81-3.73]		.34 (.69)	1.41 [.36-5.49]		1.27 (.94)	3.57 [.57-22.38]		.49 (.47)	1.64 [.65-4.13]	
School track tso (ref = aso)	.53 (.39)	1.70 [.79-3.67]		1.14 (.61)	3.12 [.94-10.33]		1.41 (.85)	4.10 [.77-21.86]		.62 (.46)	1.86 [.75-4.57]	
Internet use	.15 (.12)	1.16 [.92-1.47]		.33 (.22)	1.39 [.91-2.13]		-.01 (.25)	.99 [.61-1.62]		.09 (.15)	1.10 [.82-1.46]	
Music video use	-.14 (.12)	.87 [.69-1.09]		.20 (.18)	1.22 [.87-1.73]		.19 (.22)	1.21 [.78-1.87]		.03 (.13)	1.04 [.80-1.34]	
Pornography use	1.31 (.33)	3.71 [1.96-7.02]***		1.02 (.25)	2.77 [1.71-4.48]***		1.16 (.30)	3.20 [1.79-5.74]***		1.09 (.25)	2.96 [1.80-4.88]***	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$