

Sexting and Gender Violence among Young People: An Integrative Literature Review

Lara Souza*  & Sílvia Renata Magalhães Lordello 

Universidade de Brasília, Brasília, DF, Brasil

ABSTRACT – This review aimed to systematize the studies on sexting and gender violence published between 2000 and 2016 in national and international journals. The search was performed in the databases - BVS-Psi, Psychlit, Medline, LILACS, and Oasis. We found 383 articles. After applying the exclusion criteria, 21 articles were analyzed. The results showed that sexting is not an a priori risk factor. The risk is related to variables such as the content of the messages, when it expresses violence, and age of the practitioners, indicating that the younger the age the greater the risk. It has been found that there are modalities related to gender violence, such as revenge pornography and slut-shaming, but these contents are not inherent to sexting.

KEYWORDS: sexting, integrative review, gender violence, teens, online sex, youth

Sexting e Violência de Gênero entre Jovens: Uma Revisão Integrativa de Literatura

RESUMO – Esta revisão teve como objetivo sistematizar os estudos sobre *sexting* e violência de gênero publicados entre 2000 e 2016 em revistas nacionais e internacionais. A busca foi realizada nas bases de dados - BVS- Psi, Psychlit, Medline, LILACS e Oasis. Foram encontrados 383 artigos. Aplicados os critérios de exclusão, foram analisados 21 artigos. Os resultados evidenciaram que o *sexting* não é um fator de risco a priori. O risco está relacionado a variáveis como conteúdo das mensagens, quando expressam violência, e idade dos praticantes, indicando que quanto menor a idade maior o risco. Encontrou-se que existem modalidades relacionadas à violência de gênero, como pornografia de vingança e *slut-shaming*, porém esses conteúdos não são inerentes ao *sexting*.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *sexting*, revisão integrativa, violência de gênero, adolescentes, *online sex*, jovens

We are challenged by today's scenario to understand the presence of technology as one of the main mediators in affective relationships. Technological progress favored access to equipment in different social classes and made it possible that the use of online devices were quickly expanded, impacting the public that interacts through this media, mostly adolescents and young adults (Brown & Bobkowski, 2011; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2014). One of the behaviors that requires attention in this field is sexting, which is quite common among teens in conducting their relationships, being them of ephemeral or consolidated nature. (Drouin et al., 2013).

Social media presents advantages for kids and young people, such as improving communication, social

connections and other skills. It is noticed that its frequency of use has increased significantly. In Brazil, a research made in 2017 by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) pointed out that 74.9% of the Brazilian population has access to the internet (IBGE, 2018). Young people, from 20 to 24 years old, were the group with the highest proportion of use (88.4%), followed by the group aged between 18 and 19 years (88.1%). It is highlighted that this percentage exceeded 70% in all groups between 10 and 24 years old. The research indicates that cell phones have become the main way to access the internet at home for 97.0% of the population and the only internet access in 43.3% of the residences. This data brings attention to the internet reach growth within different age groups and economic classes.

* E-mail: larasouzafeitosa@gmail.com

■ Submetido: 07/03/2018; Revisado: 11/03/2019; Aceito: 25/10/2019.

Moreover, 95.5% of people with more than ten years old that have accessed the internet in 2017 affirmed using it to send or receive text, voice, or image messages by using message apps (applications), excluding mail applications.

Technological advances have provoked signifying and structural changes in different areas, social and industrial (Argento et al., 2016). These changes create an impact on human beings' lives, online and offline. At the same time, they allow access to a wide diversity of content, contact with remote people, online relationships, transformations in the perspectives of the world and the community (O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson, 2012). Likewise, technology has become an important way to start and maintain affective relationships. Korenis and Billick (2014) point out that the construction of young people's sexuality and identity is, nowadays, meaningfully connected to the internet and cell phones. Like this, technology also has started to represent a way to initiate and maintain sexual relationships with sexting (Drouin et al., 2015).

Sexting is a term considered a neologism of the XXI century that puts together the word sex and the expression texting referred to messages. Gathering, in its meaning, the interpersonal exchange of texts self-produced and sexualized in its content, being able to add or not, images over pictures and videos sent by cell phones and the internet (Albury et al., 2013). In Brazil, the term sexting is associated with the act of sending body images, popularly known as "nudes", a slang used by young people to refer to sexual content images, sent or received. International studies have shown worries about sexting subjects and its repercussions in adolescents and teens (Albury et al., 2013; Draper, 2012; Doring, 2014;

Ferguson, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2012). There are divergences among these results, though.

In the area of affective relationships, the virtual medium has created diversified terminologies. For sexting comprehension, it is needed to differentiate it from other terms in which also articulate to virtual media. Therefore, it does show peculiarities. Cyberbullying, for instance, is digital applied bullying. It is a repeated form of aggression that is intentionally offensive and that involves a power relationship over the victim.

Sexting may come to be cyberbullying, in case the sexual content of the messages being spread without consent and knowledge of the partner who sent them (Bauman, 2015). There are also other terms related to, such as vengeance pornography, which involves virtually sharing, intentionally and without consent, intimate pictures, or scenery, to cause embarrassment on victims. Images can be obtained with or without the victim's permission, generally in a relationship circumstance, such as dating or marriage (Citron & Franks, 2014). Another crucial concept is slut-shaming, a sexist version of bullying, which uses women's exposition as vulgar. Slut-shaming is defined by Gong and Hoffman (2012) as sexual content insults - as not approved socially sexual behavior - which has the aim to embarrass or degrade determined sexual activity. Since it is considered a typically women-directed bullying, slut-shaming alarms towards gender violence present in its material (Gong & Hoffman, 2012). This literature reviews objective is to present sexting panorama related to gender-based violence, to understand how gender violence influences sexting in affective relationships.

SEXTING AND GENDER VIOLENCE: UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMIC

The dynamic of sexting is yet little known and pervaded by many stereotypes, mainly amongst whom may be a user of this practice. It was performed a study by Drouin et al. (2013) with academic students, mainly heterosexuals, with intent to investigate the actual conjuncture that sexting occurs. In this research, the participants answered an online survey, which contained questions about (1) the kind of relationship maintained by involved people - dating, casual sex or extra conjugal; (2) the kind of sexting - text, video, picture, a sexual act made through a phone call or a live sexual act via skype; (3) the content of the picture or videos - complete or partial nudity, a sexual act alone or with another person, suggestive pose; (4) the media used to send the messages; (5) the motivation to send the messages; (6) the real and perceived risks.

Drouin et al. (2013) research results evidenced that sexting occurs in different types of relationships, although it has more recurrence in consolidated relationships such as

affairs or marriages. The cell phone is the most common way of sending messages of sexual content, but it is not the only one. Text messages are the most usual type of sexting, and, in the case of pictures or videos, the most frequent media is partial nudity or suggestive pose. Reasoning can vary in each type of relationship, although the more indicated, generally, were by flirting, a partner request, and starting a sexual relationship afterward. Intimacy exposition was the most found risk and has been associated with the affairs of extra marital and casual sex. These results are similar to others, found by different authors, indicating it may be common characteristics in the sexting dynamic (Houck et al., 2016; Mitchell et al., 2012).

Regarding sexting practice associated risks, a possible risk is the use of violence and cohesion to force the partner to send messages of sexual content (Drouin et al., 2015; Morelli et al., 2016). With the increase of sexting between romantic partners, it becomes relevant to observe whether

this coercion for sexting can be considered a new form of marital violence. In this way, the authors achieved a study with heterosexual university students in consolidated relationships to investigate if coercion for the behavior of sexting is related to sexual coercion and physical violence among partners. The results of this study revealed that one in five participants had been coerced to practice sexting. More women reported having already experienced this situation, suggesting that coercion to sexting is frequent in interpersonal relationships and that gender differences exist in this field. The women have also reported bigger trauma overtime after being coerced to sexting. The study has also demonstrated the correlation between coercion for the behavior of sexting and that the undesired sexting was higher for female participants, indicating again there is a gender difference in the phenomenon. Additionally, a significant positive correlation was found between coercion for sexting and other violent methods.

Gender violence related to sexting has also been pointed out in Morelli et al.'s (2016) study. Adolescents and young adults participated in the study and responded to surveys about sexting behavior, violence in relationships and ambivalent sexism. The last one encompasses hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. The hostile sexism refers to the belief

of women's inferiority, bringing up that women must be dominated (Morelli et al., 2016). Nonetheless, benevolent sexism consists in the belief that difference between genders is complementary, and it includes paternalist thinking about women, similar to the idea that women must be taken care of by men (Swim & Hyers, 2009). The authors reported that the referral of sexting messages to others is positively correlated to violence in relationships and ambivalent sexism. This situation is more common among adolescents than with young adults. These results, as the results of Drouin et al.'s study (2015), indicate that gender violence is related to sexting, both in coercion to send messages or in the risk of the messages' exposure.

On the other side, Lee and Crofts (2015) made a literature review of sexting and affirmed there is a moral judgment associated with the phenomenon of study. This is due to the fact that the main papers discuss sexting as an exclusively dangerous practice, putting it as a risk factor in many programs of sexual education. Many authors problematize this vision since the participants of their studies report that sexting is a part of their relationships, not all cases have indications of coercion (Drouin et al., 2013; Lee & Crofts, 2015; Mitchell et al., 2012). We will discuss this and other issues in this study.

METHOD

We have done an integrative review (Beya & Nicoll, 1998), obeying the following steps: (a) formulation and delimitation of the research objective; (b) definition of the data basis; (c) selection of the keywords for searching; (d) research and organization of results; (e) paper selection starting by the criteria of inclusion and exclusion; (f) obtaining data from the selected papers; (g) categorization of articles and (h) data interpretation. Five databases were consulted: BVS- Psi, Psychlit, Medline, LILACS, Oasis. Research about sexting is recent, so we chose the databases to comprehend how psychology approaches the phenomenon. The following descriptors were used in the research: *cyberbullying* AND *cybersex*; *cyberbullying* AND "*online sex*"; *cybersex* AND "*online sex*"; *sexting* AND *cyberbullying*; *sexting* AND *cyberbullying*; *sexting* AND "*online sex*"; *sexting* AND *cybersex*. The research was carried out in July of 2016.

We analyzed the abstracts of the identified papers. The inclusion criteria were to be an empirical study, to be

published after the year 2000, and to be written in English, Portuguese, or Spanish. Furthermore, only the English keywords were kept, since terms associated with sexting are more used in this language and because there are no translations for terms such as sexting and cyberbullying. The exclusion criteria were: papers repeated in the databases, papers not available on the internet; book chapters, theses, and dissertations; researches and abstracts published in congresses; studies that did not establish connections between sexting, cyberbullying, and gender violence, although still approached these topics. Following the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the selected papers were read and analyzed by two independent judges.

After this evaluation and using the criteria of inclusion and exclusion, 21 papers were selected. The studies were submitted to quantitative and qualitative analysis. The publication year, the country of origin, the methodological approach, and the sample were analyzed quantitatively.

RESULTS

In the selected databases, 383 articles were found consistent with the criteria established for the search. The specific results of each platform were: Psychlit (n = 145); Medline (n = 92); BVS- Psi (n = 76); LILACS (n = 50) and Oásis (n = 20).

The analysis of the publication year presented the following results: 2003 (1 article); 2007 (1 article); 2010 (1 article); 2011 (3 articles); 2013 (4 articles); 2014 (4 articles); 2015 (3 articles); 2016 (4 articles). According to the country of origin: United States (10 articles); Spain (2 articles); Australia (1 article); Italy (1 article); Holland (1 article); Mexico (1 article); Nigeria (1 article); Portugal (1 article); Sweden (1 article). Two articles were multinational, with both countries from Europe. The methodological approach was predominantly quantitative (14 studies, 66.7%). The second more usual approach was the mixed (4 studies, 19%) and, at last, the qualitative approach (3 studies, 14.3%). The methodological approach and samples of studies can be found in Table 1.

About the samples, we certified that the majority of studies were composed only of adolescent participants (12 studies, 57.1%), followed by studies about young adults (6 studies, 28.6%) and studies with both adolescents and young adults (3 studies, 14,3%). Two studies included adults above

25 years old in their samples, being one exclusive of young adults and the other one mixed. Concerning the participants' sexuality, 11 studies did not report the sexual orientation of its participants (52.4%). Eight studies reported that the majority of the participants were heterosexuals (38.1%), and heterosexual only subjects participated in two of them. One study was conducted exclusively with gay men (4.8%), and one study had the same number of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and other non-heterosexual participants. In 16 studies, the marital status declaration was not solicited (76.2%); however, one of them previously demanded that the participants had already been in a relationship. In three studies, the participants declared a recent or current relationship (14.3%). In one of these studies, the sample was limited to adults who declared a steady relationship with duration above three years. In two studies (9.5%), singles and on short or steady relationship applicants were admitted as participants.

For further analysis, the articles were grouped according to their aims. The representative categories were: (1) Motivations for sexting and perceptions about the phenomenon - three studies; (2) Online harassment, bullying and cyberbullying - four studies; (3) Psychosocial risk and vulnerability behaviors - three studies; (4) Sexting and age range difference - one study; (5) Violence, gender

Table 1

Description of Articles used in Review, with Methodological Approach and Sample

Article reference	Methodological Approach	Study sample
Morelli et al. (2016)	Quantitative	Adolescents and young adults
Stanley et al. (2016)	Mixed	Adolescents from 14 to 17 years old
Jonsson et al. (2015)	Quantitative	Adolescent students from the last year of high school
Ybarra and Mitchell (2014)	Quantitative	Adolescents from 13 to 18 years old
Bauermeister et al. (2014)	Quantitative	Men from 18 to 24 years old which have sex with other men
Walker et al. (2013)	Qualitative	Young people from 15 to 20 years old
Benotsch et al. (2013)	Quantitative	Young people from 18 to 25 years old
Ševčíková (2016)	Mixed	Adolescents from 11 to 16 years old
Weisskirch et al. (2016)	Quantitative	Young people from 18 to 25 years old, heterosexuals
Dowdell et al. (2011)	Quantitative	Adolescents, young adults and sexual offenders without a defined age range
Olumide et al. (2015)	Mixed	Adolescents
Bannink et al. (2014)	Quantitative	Adolescents from 12 to 14 years old
Zweig et al. (2013)	Quantitative	Adolescents in a current or recent relationship
Bonomi et al. (2013)	Quantitative	Young people from 18 to 21 years old
Mitchell et al. (2011)	Quantitative	Adolescents from 10 to 17 years old
Ybarra et al. (2007)	Quantitative	Adolescents from 10 to 15 years old
Grov et al. (2011)	Mixed	Heterosexual adults in a steady relationship
Mejía-Soto (2014)	Qualitative	Adolescents from 13 e 14 years old
Alonso-Ruido et al. (2015)	Qualitative	Adolescents from 15 to 18 years old
Carvalho and Allen- Gomes (2003)	Quantitative	Online chats of sexual content users, without a defined age range
Ballester et al. (2010)	Quantitative	Young people from 18 to 25 years old

and sexting content - four studies; (6) Sexting, online and offline sexual behaviors - six studies.

Category 1: Motivations for Sexting and Perceptions About the Phenomenon

This category includes studies that aim to investigate the motivations for sexting and young people's perceptions of this phenomenon. The research revealed that young people do not consider themselves sexting practitioners, although they sext. The most-reported motivations to sexting were: pressure from partners or peers; being drunk; the desire to take risks; curiosity; sending pictures as jokes; not comprehending the pictures or messages as sexting; calling out for attention; being bored; to excite the other person; fashion/hype among younger people; the influence of movies (Alonso-Ruido et al., 2015; Mejía-Soto, 2014; Walker et al., 2013). The pressure to engage in sexting was a meaningful result of three studies and gender differences on the topic were pointed. Two studies reported that the girls are more pressured, intimidated victims of vengeance, and punished when the sexting content is exposed (Mejía-Soto, 2014; Walker et al., 2013). Boys are seen as masculine or do not suffer any punishment at all for engaging in sexting. On the other hand, girls report the loss of their reputation, expulsion from school, and being seen as responsible for the possible disclosure of sexting. However, boys also reported feeling pressured, especially by other boys, who pressure them to sext and to disclose the received messages. Adolescent participants reported that the involvement with sexting happens due to the lack of conscience about the possible negative consequences of the practice.

Category 2: Online Harassment, Bullying and Cyberbullying

In this category, we have papers that aimed to explore how online harassment, bullying, and cyberbullying happen and their possible impacts. The Olumide et al.'s (2015) study evaluated young people's knowledge of online harassment and its occurrence. The most-reported behaviors about online harassment were: using abusive words; saying painful/unpleasant things; making jokes about the victim; abusing/insulting partners; making demands in relationships; demanding sex; spreading rumors about the victims, with or without sexual appeal; sending unwanted sexually explicit pictures/videos; violating other people computer and uploading sexually explicit content.

Another study investigated whether online harassment does co-occur with other forms of offline victimization (Mitchell et al., 2011). Most participants affirmed did not suffer online victimizations. However, 96% of the participants who affirmed that they had previously suffered online violence, also reported having experienced some offline victimization. The online victimizations were more related to offline victimizations of sexual, psychological, or emotional nature. Concerning the impact on victims' lives, it was described that online victims experienced high rates of trauma symptoms, delinquency and life adversities. However, these consequences were strongly related to offline victimizations suffered last year and more frequently by women. Another study investigated the frequency of online harassment perpetration, victimization by online harassment and unwanted sex solicitation (Ybarra et al., 2007). Although previously related research considered unwanted sex as a practice of online harassment, in this research, solicitation and harassment were considered two different phenomena. The results revealed that 34% of participants were victims of online harassment at least once, during the previous year, and 8% affirmed they suffer it monthly or in a higher frequency. Regarding the perpetration, 22% related that they already had perpetrated online harassment at least once in the last year and 4% that they perpetrate online harassment monthly or in a larger frequency. Involvement on unwanted sexual solicitation was less frequent: 15% affirmed they received at least one unwanted sexual solicitation during the last year and 3% that they receive it monthly or more frequently. About sending unwanted sexual solicitation, 3% sent it at least once last year, and 1% sent it monthly or more. Regarding the frequency of the phenomenon, online harassment was more reported, both by victims and perpetrators. Nevertheless, all adolescents who affirmed they had perpetrated unwanted sex solicitation also reported being involved with other practices of online victimization or perpetration. The involvement with the two practices was associated with a higher psychosocial vulnerability.

A research evaluated impacts caused by bullying and cyberbullying revealed a relationship between bullying and suicide ideation, but it was not identified association between cyberbullying and suicide ideation (Bannink et al., 2014). Nonetheless, it was noticed that the adolescent victims of both types of bullying presented more suicide ideation. There were reported differences according to gender. For boys, relations between mental health and bullying or cyberbullying were not identified. For girls, both bullying and cyberbullying were associated with mental health issues. Furthermore, more girls presented suicide ideation.

Category 3: Risk behavior and Psychosocial vulnerability

In this category, we present articles that investigated the relationship between sexting, sexual risk behavior, and psychosocial vulnerability (Benotsch et al., 2013; Jonsson et al., 2015; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2014). The results indicated that most of the participants in these studies affirmed not engaging in sexting or other online sexual activities. Nevertheless, the young people who had declared involvement with these practices presented more factors of psychosocial vulnerability, such as the recent use of substances, low self-esteem, and physical and sexual abuse. Sexting was also associated with sexual risk behavior, such as unprotected sex and having multiple partners. Also, a significant number of participants affirmed that they had practiced sexting before having intercourse with the person they had exchanged messages with. Moreover, one of its studies pointed out that women practice more sexting than men; older adolescents also sext with a higher frequency than younger ones (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2014). These results reveal gender and age range differences of the phenomenon.

Category 4: Sexting and Age Range

This category is composed of a single study, which aimed to evaluate how engaging in sexting differs from the beginning to the end of adolescence. It also investigated whether sexting is a problematic behavior and whether its impact varies depending on age and who practices it (Ševčíková, 2016). Although only one article is included in this category, we considered it important to highlight its results since other studies found meaningful differences in sexting according to the participants' age range differences. The research was conducted with adolescents subdivided into four groups: younger girls (11 to 14 years old), older girls (15 and 16 years old), younger boys (11 to 14 years old), and older boys (15 and 16 years old). The results revealed that sexting was associated with alcohol use and emotional problems in participants of all ages. However, the relations between sexting and vaginal sex differed according to age and gender: boys - younger and older - who had practiced vaginal sex, sent more sexting messages. Among the girls, this correlation was present only for older girls. Additionally, among the younger boys, sexting was associated with the adolescent's perception of auto-efficacy: younger boys with a higher perception of auto-efficacy engage in more sexting than boys of the same age with a lower perception of auto-efficacy. This relation was not observed among older boys or girls at any age.

Category 5: Violence, Gender and, Sexting Content

In this category, we compiled studies that analyzed how violence - especially violence on dating - relates to sexting and impacts its dynamic. Two studies investigated whether violence or relationship anxiety impacted the victim's level of psychological stress and how these factors were related to sexting. Results of the first one pointed out that more men than women practice sexting and indicated that people who engage in sexting, in a high or moderate frequency, commit more violence on dating on and offline. However, differences in psychological stress were not found among those who engage in sexting at a low, moderate, or high frequency (Morelli et al., 2016). The second study did not find differences according to the gender on the practice of different types of sexting, except on what regards sending messages proposing sex: men send this type of messages more often (Weisskirch et al., 2016). Nonetheless, gender differences were observed in relationship anxiety. The research investigated different aspects of relationship anxiety: the fear of negative evaluation, relationship stress, level of commitment, and avoidance of commitment. It was observed the relation between relationship anxiety and sending sexting messages. Fear of negative evaluation was the predictor of sending pictures and videos with nudity content and sending messages proposing sex. It was revealed an association between the level of commitment with the sexting partner and the following factors of social anxiety: avoidance of commitment, fear of negative evaluation, relationship stress. For people with high levels of commitment avoidance, fear of negative evaluation, and relationship stress, a higher level of commitment was necessary for sending suggestive pictures/videos, pictures/videos in underwear clothing, suggestive message and proposing sex messages. This data shows that people who have three social anxiety factors require a higher level of commitment to these sexting behaviors.

Another two studies evaluated the association between physical, sexual, and non-physical, online and offline abuse (Bonomi et al., 2013; Zweig et al., 2013). The more related type of abuse were: unwanted messages and dialing; insults or swearing; partner logging on to the social media account of the adolescent without permission; partner sending unwanted messages or emails to initiate sexual acts; partner pressing the adolescent to send sexualized or nudity pictures; threatening messages from the partner. The two studies reported gender differences concerning the type of abuse and the frequency of victimization. Women were victims of online abuse, sexual or not, with higher frequency. The results of Bonomi et al. (2013) revealed that 25,3% of the

women who participated in their research had already been verbally coerced to practice unwanted sexual acts, and 5.4% had already been physically forced to this practice. Among men, this percentage was reduced to 9.4% and 0.7%. Women were also more frequently victims of non-physical abuse (women – 64.6%; men – 56.4%). Abuses such as swearing and deprecations were experienced by 34.3% of women and by 17.9% of men. Women were also more victims of screaming and insulting, although this type of abuse was also frequent among men (women – 47.6%; men – 40.7%).

In the Zweig et al.'s (2013) study, conducted with adolescents, the physical violence in relationships was the only type of abuse that boys related suffering more than girls. Women reported perpetrating abuse without sexual content more often, while men reported perpetrating more sexual abuse. Additionally, online sexual abuse perpetrators had 17 more chances to perpetrate sexual coercion than non-perpetrators of online sexual abuse. The results suggest that there is an association among different practices of exclusively online abuse and online and offline abuses. Victims of sexual abuse reported more being victims of other practices of online abuse, physical violence, psychological violence and sexual coercion. Victims of online abuse without sexual content also related other practices of violence in relationships more than non-victims. Furthermore, online sexual abuse victims reported seven times more victimization by sexual coercion than non-victims of online sexual abuse.

Bonomi et al.'s (2013) study also reported an association between victimization and its impacts on health and sexual behavior. Differences were related according to the victims' gender. Women victims of physical or sexual abuse on the relationship present a greater risk of smoking, depressive symptoms, eating disorders and having frequent sexual behavior compared to women who were not victims. Women who were victims of non-physical abuse on relationships have more risks of smoking, presenting depressive symptoms and eating disorders, having more than five sexual partners and practice anal sex than women who were not victims. There were no health differences between men who had suffered physical or sexual abuse on relationships and men who had not suffered. Men who were victims of non-physical abuse in relationships manifest more risks of smoking and presenting eating disorders than men who were not victims.

Category 6: Sexting, Online, and Offline Sexual behavior

This category was considered more inclusive for its approach to sexting and sexual behavior, which presents significant diversity in its characterizations. Amongst the

sexual behaviors investigated on the research are: regular consumption of pornography, the users sexuality, use of online social media, the type of relationship users maintain with people with whom they are sexting, and addictions to cybersex (Ballester-Arnal et al., 2010; Bauermeister et al., 2014; Carvalheira & Allen- Gomes, 2003; Dowdell et al., 2011; Grov et al., 2011; Stanley et al., 2016). The category expresses the amplitude of the sexting universe and its variations. It is pointed out that the consumption of pornography is larger among boys, which impacts sexting and offline sexual behavior since it contributes to sexual coercion and the feminine response to this action (Stanley et al., 2016).

Another peculiar result concerns the study about men who have sex with men, because it was found that the insertive partner in penetration send sexting with more frequency (Bauermeister et al., 2014). Another research aimed to study the internet use by sexual offenders and adolescents. Concerning the use by sexual offenders, it was highlighted as common sexual behaviors: preference for adolescent girls, fake identities as a strategy to approximate and to introduce sexual topics since the first contact. Regarding the internet use by adolescents, the participants revealed not considering themselves sexting practitioners, presenting variations: girls have more knowledge on the theme, boys practice more (Dowdell et al., 2011).

The study on online sexual activity with heterosexual adults in steady relationships pointed out that these practices, when in lower or moderate frequency, produce benefits for both men and women such as an increase of quality and frequency of sex and increase on the intimacy with the real partner (Grov et al., 2011). This study also revealed gender differences concerning online sexual activities. Men involved more and for a longer time on its activities related positive feelings about the involvement with partners of online sexual activities, affirmed being more critical on the partners' bodies, and to feel less excited with 'real' sex. Women related more negative feelings and worries regarding involvement with partners, affirmed feeling judged about their bodies and more pressured on their sexual performances.

Two studies were dedicated to cybersex and pointed out some specificity: anonymity, fake identity, helping the real relationship, expressing fantasies and decreasing inhibition, with an average of 2h of weekly practice (Ballester-Arnal et al., 2010; Carvalheira & Allen- Gomes, 2003). The addiction to this behavior was measured by a validated instrument that pointed out addiction to cybersex as a new pathology. This phenomenon manifests itself in behaviors such as an exclusive username for searching for online, even illegal, sex material, scheduled sexual meetings and attempts to hide the history of visited websites.

DISCUSSION

This integrative review demonstrated that the interest in sexting is still recent since the majority of the papers about it was published after 2013 (81%). It was also shown that 90,5% of the studies were made in developed countries, being the United States the country with the highest production rate. This result points out the need for more studies to be produced in developing countries, to verify cultural differences. It is relevant to highlight that it was not identified studies from South America in this review.

Results on the characteristics of the samples revealed that there is not a fixed pattern of sexting practitioners. The type of relationship participants maintained with their sexting partners was not investigated by the most part of the studies, although it was observed different dynamics and motivations, according to the commitment with the people among whom the messages were exchanged (Groves et al., 2011; Weisskirch et al., 2016). These results evidence that the relationship context can affect how sexting occurs and, therefore, this data must be investigated. The participants' ages varied amongst studies. However, the most part of them delimited an age range, which permitted verifying age differences in motivation and comprehension of the perceived and real risk. Adults and young adults pointed out sexting as an affective manifestation inside of relationships, being part of it, and the studies with this population were not restricted to risk evaluation, which suggests investigations with more accuracy in this field. Otherwise, it was shown a greater perception of risk among adolescents (Alonso-Ruido et al., 2015; Mejía-Soto, 2014). The adolescents indicated motivations that suggest the influence of pairs, such as jokes, friends, or partners' pressure or desire to be at risk. It is alerted by Hasinoff (2017) the fact that adolescents are able to evaluate situations, in contrast to the vision that current technological resources are the cause of risks the adolescents are subject in the virtual world. These results point out that age is an important factor in understanding sexting dynamics and these differences must be taken into account in discussions on the topic.

Although not the main focus of the studies, the risk issue shows that vulnerability is a common factor for people who practice sexting. The perceptions about this practice are still distorted, and little is known about it. The subject is not openly discussed. Sexting, like other subjects related to sexuality, is still considered a cultural taboo (Silva, 2008).

At the same time, sexual behavior is socially naturalized but not adequately understood. With no dialogue, people try to satisfy their curiosity with non-trusted sources. Addiction to cybersex on more advanced ages is comprehended as a consequence of this naturalization, which raises the fantasy level and the demands for sexual gratification. It can also be an alert to practices and practices of gender violence (Carvalho & Allen-Gomes, 2003).

Gender differences in sexting were inconsistent in the reviewed studies. Regarding the possible negative impacts of sexting, women were reported to be more frequently victims of violent actions, such as coercion, partners' pressure, threatening, blackmailing, vengeance and punishment when the sexting is exposed (Mejía-Soto, 2014; Walker et al., 2013). The gender violence was illustrated in different manners in the articles that composed this review, but the common theme was the psychological and social damage in these women (Bannink et al., 2014; Groves et al., 2011). Several psychological, social, and functional damages were mentioned, such as the mental health impact and suicidal ideation, being the victim subject to insults and swearing, and being seen as guilty for the exposure of the intimate pictures. Additionally, girls may face the necessity of transferring school and/or other contexts, following the exposure of intimate pictures. This clarifies the idea of multi victimization, or overlap of different acts of violence, to what these women are submitted to (Finkelhor et al., 2010). Associated with this, the guiltiness of the victim has served as an element to ease the perpetrator's responsibility. These results suggest that sexism and patriarchal heritage are pervasive on more current domination practices, which demands deeper investigations on the topic (Bonomi et al., 2013; Zweig et al., 2013).

Since it is an integrative review, we tried to articulate the results of several studies about sexting as they are presented in the literature, which, due to its diversity, reveals inconsistencies. One hypothesis is that the studies' different methodological approaches and different samples must be considered when evaluating these inconsistencies. However, the integrative review takes on the challenge of presenting the studies' potentialities and points out the gaps and the need for improvement, suggesting future studies and research questions, which urge to be answered in the dynamic and demanding scenario of the psychological science.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

With this integrative review, we were able to recognize the sexting subject's complexity and the need to investigate its manifestation in a different cultural scenario. Dialogue and guidance are urgent in a scenario where virtual relationships become more popular and occupy spaces and

rhythms of such magnitude that could not be predicted. The methodological relevance demands the studies to be systematized to allow the subjects' circumscription and the design of future studies with a propositional perspective, focused on planning interventions. It is recommended that

further investigations be conducted to verify the reality of Brazilian adolescents and youth, analyzing variables such as the practitioners' ages and type of relationships, risk measurement and the impact of the construction of masculinity in acts of violence.

Some limitations need to be considered due to the methodological design adopted. The exclusion of articles that approached tangential topics, such as cyberbullying, and searching for online partners may have led to the loss of an early part of the sexting process, but this was a necessary cut-off for the study's feasibility. Another recognized limitation

was the use of descriptors that may have been insufficient to cover the whole subject, since several terms do not have translation and present linguistic variations.

We conclude that the article may come to collaborate with new attitudes regarding sexting. A social commitment seems to be needed, with the prevention of risks and grievances, with support, dialogue and guidance on what is around sexting. Unlike polarized attitudes, in which one may be opposed or favorable, what it is postulated here is a collective effort of comprehension, which goes beyond the simplistic view of sexting as a risk or a practice.

REFERENCES

- Albury, K., Crawford, K., Byron, P., & Mathews, B. (2013). *Young people and sexting in Australia. Ethics, Representation, and the Law*. University of New South Wales. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/30677128.pdf>
- *Alonso-Ruido, P., Rodríguez-Castro, Y., Pérez-André, C., & Magalhães, M. J. (2015). Estudio cualitativo en un grupo de estudiantes ourensanos/as sobre el fenómeno del sexting. *Revista de Estudios e Investigación en Psicología y Educación*, (13), 58-62. <https://doi.org/10.17979/reipe.2015.0.13.319>
- Argento, E., Taylor, M., Jullimore, J., Taylor, C., Jennex, J., Krusi, A., & Shannon, K. (2016). The loss of Boystown and transition to online sex work: Strategies and barriers to increase safety among men sex workers and clients of men. *American Journal of Men's Health*, 12(6), 1994-2005. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1557988316655785>
- *Ballester-Arnal, R., Gil Llario, M. D., Martínez, S. G., & Gil Juliá, B. (2010). Propiedades psicométricas de un instrumento de evaluación de la adicción al cibersexo. *Psicothema*, 22(4), 1048-1053. <http://www.psicothema.com/psicothema.asp?id=3839>
- *Bannink, R., Broeren, S., van de Looij-Jansen, P. M., de Waart, F. G., & Raat, H. (2014). Cyber and traditional bullying victimization as a risk factor for mental health problems and suicidal ideation in adolescents. *PLoS One*, 9(4), 94026. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0094026>
- *Bauermeister, J. A., Yeagley, E., Meanley, S., & Pingel, E. S. (2014). Sexting among young men who have sex with men: Results from a national survey. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 54(5), 606-611. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2013.10.013>
- Bauman, S. (2015). Cyberbullying and sexting: School mental health concerns. In R. H. Witte & S. G. Mosley-Howard (Eds.), *Mental health practice in today's schools: Issues and interventions* (pp. 241-264). Springer Publishing.
- *Benotsch, E. G., Snipes, D. J., Martin, A. M., & Bull, S. S. (2013). Sexting, substance use, and sexual risk behavior in young adults. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 52(3), 307-13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2012.06.011>
- Beyea, S. C., & Nicoll, L.H. (1998). Writing in integrative review. *AORN Journal*, 67, 877-880. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0001-2092\(06\)62653-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0001-2092(06)62653-7)
- *Bonomi, A. E., Anderson, M. L., Nemeth, J., Rivara, F. P., & Buettner, C. (2013). History of dating violence and the association with late adolescent health. *BMC Public Health*, 13, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-13-821>
- Brown, J. D., & Bobkowski, P. S. (2011). Older and newer media: Patterns of use and effects on adolescent's health and well-being. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 21(1), 95-113. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1532-7795.2010.00717.x>
- *Carvalho, A. A., & Allen-Gomes, F. (2003). Cybersex in Portuguese chatrooms: A study of sexual behaviors related to online sex. *Journal of Sex and Marital Therapy*, 29(5), 345-360. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00926230390224729>
- Citron, D. K., & Franks, M. A. (2014). Criminalizing revenge porn. *Wake Forest Law Review*, 49, 345-391.
- Döring, N. (2014). Consensual sexting among adolescents: Risk prevention through abstinence education or safer sexting? *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace*, 8(1), article 9. <https://doi.org/10.5817/CP2014-1-9>
- *Dowdell, E. B., Burgess, A. W., & Flores, J. R. (2011). Original research: Online social networking patterns among adolescents, young adults, and sexual offenders. *American Journal of Nursing*, 111(7), 28-36. <https://doi.org/10.1097/01.NAJ.0000399310.83160.73>
- Draper, N. (2012). Is your teen at risk? Discourses of adolescent sexting in United States television news. *Journal of Children and Media*, 6, 221-236. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2011.587147>
- Drouin, M., Ross, J., & Tobin, E. (2015). Sexting: A new, digital vehicle for intimate partner aggression?. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 50, 197-204. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.04.001>
- Drouin, M., Vogel, K. N., Surbey, A., & Stills, J. R. (2013). Let's talk about sexting, baby: Computer-mediated sexual behaviors among young adults. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 29, 25-30. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2012.12.030>
- Finkelhor, D., Ormrod, R. K., & Turner, H. A. (2010). Lifetime assessment of poly-victimization in a national sample of children and youth. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 38(3), 323-330. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2008.09.012>
- Ferguson, C. (2011). Sexting behaviors among young Hispanic women: Incidence and association with other high-risk sexual behaviors. *The Psychiatric Quarterly*, 82, 239-243. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11126-010-9165-8>
- Gong, L., & Hoffman, A. (2012). Sexting and slut-shaming: Why prosecution of teen self-sexers harms women. *Georgetown Journal of Gender and the Law*, 13, 577-669.
- *Groves, C., Gillespie, B. J., Royce, T., & Lever, J. (2011). Perceived consequences of casual online sexual activities on heterosexual relationships: A U.S. Online survey. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 40(2), 429-439. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-010-9598-z>
- Hasinoff, A. A. (2017). Sexting and Privacy Violations: A Case Study of Sympathy and Blame. *International Journal of Cyber Criminology*, 11(2), 202-217. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1037391>
- Houck, C.D., Barker, D., Rizzo, C., Hancock, E., Norton, A., & Brown, L. K. (2016). Sexting and Sexual Behavior in At-Risk Adolescents. *Pediatrics*, 133, 276-282. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2013-1157>

- Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística. (2018). *Pesquisa Nacional por Amostra de Domicílio*. Author.
- *Jonsson, L. S., Bladh, M., Priebe, G., & Svedin, C. G. (2015). Online sexual behaviours among Swedish youth: Associations to background factors, behaviours and abuse. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, *24*(10), 1245-60. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-015-0673-9>
- Korenis, P., & Billick, S. B. (2014). Forensic Implications: Adolescent sexting and cyberbullying. *The Psychiatric Quarterly*, *85*, 97-101. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11126-013-9277-z>
- Lee, M., & Crofts, T. (2015). Gender, pressure, coercion and pleasure: Untangling motivations for sexting between young people. *The British Journal of Criminology*, *55*(3), 454-473. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azu075>
- *Mejía-Soto, G. (2014). Sexting: Una modalidad cada vez más extendida de violencia sexual entre jóvenes. *Perinatología Reproducción Humana*, *28*(4), 217-221. <https://www.medigraphic.com/cgi-bin/new/resumen.cgi?IDARTICULO=56367>
- *Mitchell, K. J., Finkelhor, D., Jones, L. M., & Wolak, J. (2012). Prevalence and characteristics of youth sexting: A national study. *Pediatrics*, *129*(1), 13-20. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2011-1730>
- Morelli, M., Bianchi, D., Baiocco, R., Pezzuti, L., & Chirumbolo, A. (2016). Not-allowed sharing of sexts and dating violence from the perpetrator's perspective: The moderation role of sexism. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *56*, 163-169. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.11.047>
- *Morelli, M., Bianchi, D., Baiocco, R., Pezzuti, L., & Chirumbolo, A. (2016). Sexting, psychological distress and dating violence among adolescents and young adults. *Psicothema*, *28*(2), 137-142. <https://doi.org/10.7334/psicothema2015.193>
- O'Keeffe, G. S., & Clarke-Pearson, K. (2012). The impact of social media on children, adolescents, and families. *American Academy of Pediatrics*, *127*(4), 800-804. <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2011-0054>
- *Olumide, A. O., Adams, P., & Amodu, O. K. (2015). Awareness and context of cyberharassment among secondary school students in Oyo state, Nigeria. *Journal of Adolescence*, *39*, 10-14. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2014.12.001>
- *Stanley, N., Barter, C., Wood, M., Aghaie, N., Larkins, C., Lanau, A., & Overlien, C. (2016). Pornography, sexual coercion and abuse and sexting in young people's intimate relationships: A European study. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *33*(19), 2919-2944. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260516633204>
- *Ševčíková, A. (2016). Girls' and boys' experience with teen sexting in early and late adolescence. *Journal of Adolescence*, *51*, 156-162. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2016.06.007>
- Silva, C. P. (2008). *Sexualidades no ponto.com: Espaços e homossexualidades a partir de uma comunidade online* (Dissertação de Mestrado). Universidade Estadual de Campinas. http://repositorio.unicamp.br/bitstream/REPOSIP/278990/1/Silva_CarolinaParreiras_M.pdf
- Swim, J. K., & Hyers, L.L. (2009). Sexism. In T. D. Nelson (Ed.), *Handbook of prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination* (pp. 407-430). Psychology Press Taylor & Francis Group. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781841697772>
- *Walker, S., Sanci, L., & Temple-Smith, M. (2013). Sexting: young women's and men's views on its nature and origins. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *52*(6), 697-701. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2013.01.026>
- *Weisskirch, R. S., Drouin, M., & Delevi, R. (2016). Relational anxiety and sexting. *Journal of Sex Research*, *54*(6), 685-693. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2016.1181147>
- *Ybarra, M. L., Espelage, D. L., & Mitchell, K. J. (2007). The co-occurrence of internet harassment and unwanted sexual solicitation victimization and perpetration: associations with psychosocial indicators. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *41*(6S), S31-S41. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2007.09.010>
- *Ybarra, M. L., & Mitchell, K. J. (2014). "Sexting" and its relation to sexual activity and sexual risk behavior in a national survey of adolescents. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, *55*, 757-764. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2014.07.012>
- *Zweig, J. M., Dank, M., Yahner, J., & Lachman, P. (2013). The rate of cyber dating abuse among teens and how it relates to other forms of teen dating violence. *Journal of Youth Adolescence*, *42*(7), 1063-77. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-013-9922-8>

* The articles identified with an asterisk are the studies included in the literature review of this paper.