



Compulsive use of Internet-based sexually explicit media: Adaptation and validation of the Compulsive Internet Use Scale (CIUS)



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HIGHLIGHTS

- We adapted the Compulsive Internet Use Scale to assess compulsive use of SEM.
- The sample included 265 Internet SEM-viewing men who have sex with men.
- The adapted scale demonstrated high internal consistency and construct validity.

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ABSTRACT

Despite evidence that viewing sexually explicit media (SEM) may contribute to greater numbers of sexual partners, sexual risk taking, greater interest in group sex, and lower self-esteem among men who have sex with men (MSM), research has not addressed compulsive use of Internet-based SEM due to the lack of a validated measure for this population. This report investigates the psychometric properties of the 14-item Compulsive Internet Use Scale (CIUS; Meerkerk, van den Eijnden, Vermulst, & Garretsen, 2009) adapted to assess the severity of compulsive Internet SEM use. A total of 265 Internet SEM-viewing MSM participated in an online survey about their SEM preferences, viewing habits, and recent sexual behaviors. A principal components analysis revealed a single-component, 13-item scale to adequately assess the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of this phenomenon, with a high internal consistency ($\alpha = .92$). Greater compulsive use of Internet SEM was positively correlated with several relevant variables including boredom, sexual frustration, time spent viewing Internet SEM, and number of recent male sexual partners. The results offer preliminary evidence for the reliability and validity of using an adapted version of the CIUS to understand compulsive Internet SEM use, and allow for more research into the potential negative consequences of compulsive SEM use.

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1. Introduction

Over the last decade there has been a dramatic change in the distribution and consumption of sexually explicit media (SEM), from a market based primarily on DVD and “video on demand” to one largely distributed over the Internet (Downing, Schrimshaw, Antebi, & Siegel, 2014; Escoffier, 2009). Individuals searching for and viewing SEM constitute 30% of all Internet traffic (Didymus, 2012). A recent analysis of over 400 million Internet searches from a single, non-SEM specific search engine revealed that 13% of searches were for sexual content (Ogas & Gaddam, 2011). Consistent with the greater availability of SEM on the Internet, data from the General Social Survey have documented a steady increase in SEM use among U.S. men since the 1970s (Wright, 2013).

Expanded access to SEM afforded by the Internet has perhaps had the greatest impact on men who have sex with men (MSM). Indeed, a substantial proportion of SEM on the Internet is targeted to, and viewed by, MSM. Recent research documented that 99% of MSM viewed same-sex male SEM in the past 3 months and 96% viewed it on the Internet (Stein, Silvera, Hagerty, & Marmor, 2012). Researchers have found that significantly more MSM than heterosexual men view SEM on the Internet (Traeen, Nilsen, & Stigum, 2006), and do so more frequently (Duggan & McCreary, 2004; Peter & Valkenburg, 2011). Among MSM, viewing SEM may contribute to more partners (Eaton, Cain, Pope, Garcia, & Cherry, 2012), sexual risk taking (e.g., condom-less anal sex; Rosser et al., 2013; Stein et al., 2012), greater interest in group sex (Weinberg, Williams, Kleiner, & Irizarry, 2010), lower self-esteem (Duggan & McCreary, 2004; Morrison, Morrison, & Bradley, 2007), and may trigger sexually compulsive behaviors (Parsons, Kelly, Bimbi, Muench, & Morgenstern, 2007).

Despite the fact that MSM are frequent consumers of SEM, research has not examined the extent to which the use of Internet SEM by MSM

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may reach potentially compulsive levels. One reason for the lack of research in this area is the absence of a measure that specifically assesses compulsive Internet SEM use. Although measures of compulsive Internet use in general (e.g., Meerkerk, Van Den Eijnden, Vermulst, & Garretsen, 2009; Nichols & Nicki, 2004) and compulsive sexual behavior (Coleman, Miner, Ohlerking, & Raymond, 2001; Kalichman & Rompa, 1995) exist, no known measures have assessed compulsive use of Internet SEM among MSM. Furthermore, even in the SEM literature, existing measures assess the perceived effects of viewing SEM among MSM (Hald, Smolenski, & Rosser, 2013) rather than compulsive use. Such a measure is greatly needed to allow for future research to answer questions regarding whether compulsive Internet SEM use is separate from compulsive Internet use or compulsive sexual behavior more generally. Likewise, such a measure is critical to facilitate research on whether compulsive Internet SEM use is associated with potential negative psychological and behavioral health consequences for MSM (e.g., depression, anxiety, sexual risk behavior, HIV/STDs). Therefore, the primary aim of this report is to document the reliability and validity of a measure of compulsive Internet SEM use among a sample of MSM using an adapted version of the Compulsive Internet Use Scale (CIUS).

1.1. Compulsive Internet Use Scale

The CIUS is a 14-item instrument designed to assess the severity of compulsive Internet use (Meerkerk et al., 2009). Items are based on six criteria for behavioral addictions (Griffiths, 1999) as well as DSM-IV criteria for substance dependence and pathological gambling. Five core dimensions of the CIUS (i.e., loss of control, preoccupation, withdrawal symptoms, coping or mood modification, and conflict) reflect a single factor structure (i.e., unrestrained Internet use) (Meerkerk et al., 2009). Furthermore, the CIUS has demonstrated high internal consistency across diverse samples and time (α range = .89–.90), as well as both concurrent validity and construct validity. Meerkerk et al. (2009) suggest that the Internet merely serves as a medium by which “several forms of compulsive or addictive-like behaviors” are accomplished (e.g., gambling, sexual compulsivity; p. 5). However, it is unclear whether the original CIUS would adequately assess, much less differentiate between, the various types of compulsive Internet behaviors (e.g., social media, video gaming, SEM use). As such, there is a need to investigate these behaviors beyond general Internet addiction and to develop valid and reliable measures for their assessment. Thus, the current study will examine the psychometric properties of the CIUS adapted to assess compulsive use of Internet SEM.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were solicited for an Internet-based survey through advertisements posted to Craigslist and Facebook between June and November 2012. Eligible participants had to: (a) identify as male; (b) be 18 years old or older; (c) report having had sex with a man in the past 12 months; (d) report having viewed “man on man” pornographic material on the Internet or on a mobile device in the past 3 months; and (e) reside in the New York City area, Philadelphia, Baltimore, or Washington, DC.

The final data set included 265 men. Although 446 individuals consented to participate, 162 screened out after providing disqualifying information (e.g., did not have sex with a man in the past 12 months), and an additional 19 surveys were identified as potential duplicates and removed from the final dataset. Descriptive characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1. Participants were primarily White or Caucasian (77%), identified as gay or homosexual (81.5%), and were currently single (52.8%). Mean age of participants was approximately 33 years.

Table 1
Sample characteristics.

	<i>M (SD) or n (%)</i>
Age (mean years)	32.9 (12.5)
Race or ethnicity	
White/Caucasian	204 (77.0)
Black/African American	14 (5.3)
Hispanic/Latino	21 (7.9)
Asian/Pacific Islander	14 (5.3)
More than one race/other	12 (4.5)
Sexual identity	
Gay/homosexual	216 (81.5)
Bisexual	39 (14.7)
Straight/heterosexual	9 (3.4)
Other	1 (0.4)
Relationship status	
Single	140 (52.8)
Relationship with a man	103 (38.9)
Relationship with a woman	22 (8.3)
Recruitment source (<i>n</i> = 263)	
Craigslist	88 (33.5)
Facebook	175 (66.5)

2.2. Procedure

The research team utilized elements of time-space sampling (Stueve, O'Donnell, Duran, Sandoval, & Blome, 2001) to post advertisements on Craigslist, a publicly accessible online bulletin board commonly used by MSM to post personal ads for sexual partners. We used a random digit generator to select a 1-h increment of time, a geographic location from the sampling frame, and a Craigslist category (i.e., men seeking men, casual encounters, or volunteers). Then, a member of the research team would sign into the Craigslist study account at the selected hour and post an ad in the appropriate city and category. Recruitment on Craigslist occurred twice a day from 8:00 am to midnight for approximately six weeks. Study ads solicited men who were at least 18 years of age to share their experiences and thoughts about viewing sexually explicit videos (or pornography), and instructed anyone interested in participating to reply and request a link to the Internet survey, which was provided through an automated e-mail response. Recruitment ads also mentioned the researchers' affiliation, indicated that the survey would be confidential, and that there was an opportunity to win a \$100 prize for participating.

To increase study enrollment and target a broader audience of potential Internet SEM users, the research team also implemented a paid advertisement campaign on Facebook. The Facebook ad, which included language consistent with the Craigslist study ads, ran daily for approximately three months and targeted only those users who were at least 18 years of age, identified as male, reported on their profile that they were “interested in men”, and were within 50 miles of one of the four urban areas. Individuals who clicked on the ad were taken directly to the survey hosted on Qualtrics. During this period of recruitment, we limited study exposure on Craigslist to one posting per day — targeting peak traffic times (e.g., late morning, late afternoon) and cities from the sampling frame with low enrollment.

Individuals accessing the Internet survey were prompted to review a consent form that outlined the study purpose and informed potential participants that upon completion of the survey there would be an opportunity to enter a random drawing for a \$100 e-gift card. The study protocol received Institutional Review Board approval through Columbia University.

2.3. Measures

The following measures are described in the order in which they were presented to participants.

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