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Sexualized behaviors on Facebook

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ABSTRACT

Currently, social networks are places where young people socialize and develop their digital identities. One of the most common risky behaviors among young people is sexualized behavior, which is promoted in social networks due to an interface that makes content exchange easier, for example, by sharing pictures, messages, videos, etc. This study's aim is to analyze the sexualized behaviors displayed by adolescents and young people on their Facebook profiles and the factors that allow for their distribution over social networks. In order to achieve this objective, a content analysis was performed over the course of 12 months using 100 profiles of teenagers and adolescents in Spain between 14 and 21 years of age. The results revealed differences in gender for these types of behaviors, and vulnerability factors were found to be part of this problem. The self presentation in the digital egocentrism and digital narcissism strengthen sexualized behaviors. Selfies represent a particular way of communicating with others and are responsible for most of the sexualized behaviors.

Finally, avoiding the creation and/or diffusion of sexualized behaviors is highly important, and there is an urgent need to educate young people so they can learn how to manage their virtual media.

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1. Adolescents' and young people's sexualized behaviors on Facebook

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) – the Internet and, more specifically, social networks – have revolutionized the way adolescents communicate with each other, and they have also become an important element of socializing for young people (The Cocktail Analysis, 2012). For younger generations, online life tends to be, in most cases, an extension of offline life (Tabernero, Aranda, & Sánchez-Navarro, 2010). However, online technology, which facilitates and amplifies social relationships and where socialization occurs in front of a screen, essentially (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008), has a series of personal (Berns, Moore, & Capra, 2009; Gómez de Giraudo, 2000; Romer, 2010), relational (Albert & Steinberg, 2011; Cid-Monckton & Pedrão, 2011; Krauskopf, 2001; Valenzuela, Ibarra, & Loreto, 2013), cultural, economic and social (Flórez, 2005; Huurre et al., 2010; Viner et al., 2012) issues behind it, which can increase or decrease risky situations and behaviors, like sexualized behavior (De-Moor et al., 2008).

1.1. Social investigations into social networks

Virtual social networks constitute a fertile place for the study of the diffusion of the influences that affect the promotion or the prevention of risky behaviors (Christakis & Fowler, 2010). A few years ago, a study that tried to establish a way to investigate risky behaviors in social networks was performed (Moreno, Parks, & Richardson, 2007). Much of the research was performed on young people, usually with substance use as an analysis objective. Substances studied included alcohol (Beullens & Schepers, 2013), cannabis (Brockman, Pumper, Christakis, & Moreno, 2012), and tobacco (Van Hoof, Bekkers, & Van Vuuren, 2014). Health habits have also been studied (Young & Jordan, 2013). However, few studies have suggested how to work with the use of social media in this group (Moreno, Grant, Kacvinsky, Egan, & Fleming, 2012; Moreno, Kota, Schoohs, & Whitehill, 2013; Vanderhoven, Schellens, & Valcke, 2014).

One of the most common risky behaviors among youth and adolescents, and one of the less studied topics in the field of social networks, is sexualized behavior and the diffusion of sexual content (Bay-Cheng, 2003; Fantasia, 2008; Moreno, Parks, Zimmerman, Brito, & Christakis, 2009; Moreno, VanderStoep, et al., 2009; Tortajada, Araüna, & Martínez, 2013), which are facilitated by

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social networks, primarily through photographs and specifically selfies.

Furthermore, the use of photographs has become a way of communicating for young people and is even preferred over text messages (Sarabia, 2014). Selfies are not something new, but the goal of total control over one's virtual image is (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012). People want to be liked, and it is in the search for attention that risky behaviors appear (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011; McBride, 2011; Peluchette & Karl, 2009). Adolescents pose in an erotic way in photographs and use those photographs as profile pictures without considering the consequences of over-exposing themselves on the Internet (Almansa, Fonseca, & Esparcia, 2013; Haferkamp, Eimler, Papadakis, & Kruck, 2012; Stefanone, Lackaff, & Rosen, 2011).

There have recently been attempts to use social networks as tools for social research and for educational interventions for risky behaviors committed by young people (Linne, 2014; Wilson, Gosling, & Graham, 2012).

Moreover, it is a place where they share information related to the management of attitudes and behaviors in the process of transitioning to the adult world, which offers a huge resource for social research. One of the most important behaviors during the adolescence is the sexualized behavior. Therefore, knowing the codes and rules that young people follow in order to communicate on social networks is highly relevant and would allow for the identification of protective and risk factors that underlie and motivate sexualized behaviors.

1.2. Same concepts, different meanings

Social networks have caused a change in values and actions, such as friendship and privacy; they are being transformed by this digitalized society (Taraszow, Aristodemou, Shitta, Laouris, & Arsoy, 2010). The factors that influence the codes and rules that young people follow on social networks need to be understood so that the environment where risky sexualized behaviors occur can be conceptualized (Houck et al., 2014).

Friendship requires mutual love, knowledge and recognition by both parts (Polo, 1999). On social networks, friendship becomes a bigger concept, creating a symbiosis with communication. Here, the quality of the relationship does not seem to be the important part, and the number of friends on Facebook or the number of followers on Twitter is more important (Stefanone et al., 2011).

There is no difference between real friends and barely known people, and everyone is labeled as “friends.” In this type of friend relationship, more personal information is accessible compared to what is possible outside social networks, in the offline world: when the person wakes up, what he/she is eating, what he/she likes, what he/she thinks about certain topics, his/her new haircut, the clothes he/she buys, etc., with photographs accompanying this information. This dynamic is generally observed among the younger generation (McAndrew & Jeong, 2012).

This exposure to so many people has direct implications on privacy. On the one hand, adolescents and youngsters keep their private information from adults by limiting what their families know about them so that they can maintain a suitable image for their family and avoid disrupting their home life. On the other hand, people post large amounts of personal information without being aware that what is shared in cyberspace remains there for even longer than a person's memory lasts (Lewis, Kaufman, & Christakis, 2008; Sarabia, 2014; Waters & Ackerman, 2011).

Online social networks can influence perceptions of the peer prevalence of sexual risk behaviors, and can influence users' own intentions with regard to such behaviors (Young & Jordan, 2013). Young people perceive portraying oneself in a sexualized way through social networking sites relatively common among their friends, and they also report feeling pressure to engage in the practice themselves (Daniels & Zurbriggen, 2016).

Besides, this change to the idea of privacy is based on two new concepts: digital narcissism and social digital voyeurism (Sarabia, 2014). It has been demonstrated that since the appearance of social networks, narcissistic features have increased compared to the past two decades (Twenge, Konrath, Foster, Campbell, & Bushman, 2008). It is necessary to clarify that this digital narcissism is not the same as narcissistic personality disorder but instead can be considered to be a peculiarity of adolescence 2.0 (Bergman, Fearrington, Davenport, & Bergman, 2011; Courtois, Mechant, De Marez, & Verleye, 2009). This digital narcissism is responsible for making boys and girls seek virtual participation and the adulation of the people who “follow” them in a particular social network (Utz, Tanis, & Vermeulen, 2012) without really caring about the real impacts these interventions can have (Carpenter, 2012). Recent studies as Hawk, Ter Bogt, Van den Eijnden, and Nelemans (2015), showed that narcissistic adolescents who feel socially disempowered might engage in exhibitionistic disclosures on Social Networking Sites. This kind of exhibitionistic disclosures on Social Networking Sites could be associated with the exhibitionistic sexualized behaviors during adolescence.

In this sense, social networks are similar to an enormous display where people present the image of themselves they wish to show to the outside world whether it is real or not. This business of attractiveness provokes digital voyeurism, which is amplified towards a social spectrum and derived from pure digital narcissism: “I want people to comment on my photos and Facebook statuses and share them and spread them to others.” At the same time, there is a need to know/see what other people post, what they are doing or, for example, what they think about a certain issue (Carpenter, Green, & LaFlam, 2011).

It seems that more importance is given to how many people receive “my message” rather than to who receives it. Social digital voyeurism does not have such a negative connotation in the offline world either. In fact, this kind of voyeurism promotes digital narcissism (Ong et al., 2011; Walther, Van Der Heide, Langwell, & Tong, 2008), resulting in increased interaction (both direct and indirect) between social network users (Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012; Tong, Van Der Heide, Langwell, & Walther, 2008). This continuous search for online attention damages personal boundaries, which select and limit the information that we can share in a social media without compromising the privacy and security of the user (Debatin, Lovejoy, Horn, & Hughes, 2009). One way of being attractiveness could be showing sexually suggestive or explicit photos. For that, taking into account what other studies have brought into this field and the characteristics of digital communication among young people on social networks, the objective of this investigation was to analyze young people's and adolescents' profiles on Facebook to draw a profile of the virtual youth community, which revealed the main sexual behaviors occurring on social networks and the influence of digital friendship and privacy – digital narcissism and social digital voyeurism – on these risky behaviors.

Online social networking sites have revealed an entirely new method of self-presentation (Mehdizadeh, 2010).

A person's conception of himself or herself can be distinguished by two categories: the “now self,” an identity established to others, and the “possible self,” an identity unknown to others (Nurius & Markus, 1990). On Facebook people can withholding information, hiding undesirable physical features, and role-playing (Mehdizadeh, 2010). Seidman (2013) talks about two types of self-presentational behaviors: general self-disclosure (posting information about oneself) and emotional disclosure. She also talks about self-presentational motivations: attention-seeking and

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