Computers in Human Behavior 56 (2016) 163–169

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Computers in Human Behavior

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/comphumbeh

Full length article

Not-allowed sharing of sexts and dating violence from the perpetrator's perspective: The moderation role of sexism

Mara Morelli [a], Dora Bianchi [b], Roberto Baiocco [b, *], Lina Pezzuti [a], Antonio Chirumbolo [b]

[a] Department of Dynamic and Clinical Psychology, Faculty of Medicine and Psychology, Sapienza University of Rome, Italy
[b] Department of Developmental & Social Psychology, Faculty of Medicine and Psychology, Sapienza University of Rome, Italy

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 3 July 2015
Received in revised form
17 November 2015
Accepted 26 November 2015
Available online 10 December 2015

Keywords:
Sexting
Dating violence
Benevolent sexism
Hostile sexism
Adolescence
Young adults

ABSTRACT

Several studies have found that coercive sexting increases the probability of being victimized within a dating relationship. Our study focused on the perpetrator's perspective instead. It aimed to investigate the relationship between a specific sexting behavior, the sharing of someone else's sexts without his/her consent and dating violence perpetration. Specifically, we aimed to test the moderation role of benevolent and hostile sexism in this relationship. The study involved 715 Italian participants from 13 to 30 years of age (M_{age} = 22.01; females: 71.7%), who completed a survey composed of socio-demographic data, the Sexting Behavior Scale, the Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory and the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory. The results highlighted that, in the relationship between not-allowed sharing of sexts and dating violence perpetration, benevolent sexism could be a protective factor while, on the contrary, hostile sexism could be a risk factor, controlling for age, gender and sexual orientation. Our findings suggested the existence of a few factors linked to sexting behaviors: these factors could have implications for prevention programs.

1. Introduction

Sexting is a new trend among adolescents and young adults consisting of sharing (i.e., receiving, sending, forwarding and posting on social networks) sexy images via new technologies. It was defined for the first time by Chalfen (2009) as the exchange of provocative or sexually explicit content, such as text messages, photos and/or videos via smartphone, Internet and social networks. According to Calvert (2009), primary sexting occurs when someone sends a sexual image depicting him/herself, while secondary sexting can be defined as forwarding to others a sexual image depicting someone else. While primary sexting is supposed to be consensual, secondary sexting may occur without the consent of the person depicted in the photo. Motivations may be different, as sexting can progress from a joke to a sort of bullying or aggression, and even to revenge toward an ex-partner.

The AP-MTV survey (2009) found that 17% of young people have shared with someone else a sext they have received, and about an half of them shared it with more than one person. Similar percentages (7% and 9%) were respectively found by Strassberg, Rullo, and Mackaronis (2014) among American high school students and by Patrick, Heywood, Pitts, and Mitchell (2015) among Australian secondary school students. The AP-MTV survey (2009) also found that reasons adduced for this behavior were related to curiosity (52%), a desire to show off (35%), joking (31%), being funny (30%), and boredom (26%). Moreover, only 14% of young people think that sexts depicting themselves could be shared with other people without their permission. In spite of that, in recent studies, 7% of adolescents reported to have sent their own nude or seminude photos to others (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2014), 18% of adolescents (Walrave et al., 2015) and 26% of secondary school students (Patrick et.al, 2015) to have sent their own sexually suggestive pictures.

Studies about the legal aspects of sexting have further described two broad categories: "experimental sexting," which has no harmful intentions and fits with typical adolescent development (flirting, joking with partner or friends) and "aggravated sexting," which involves a harmful intention and/or an unwise misuse of sexual images of someone else (Wolak, Finkelhor, & Mitchell, 2012). In line with this categorization of sexting, several studies focused on the so-called "revenge porn" described by Calvert (2013) as the public sharing of nude or seminude photos or videos of a lover or

* Corresponding author. Via dei Marsi, 78, 00185, Rome, Italy.
E-mail addresses: mara.morelli@uniroma1.it (M. Morelli), dora.bianchi@uniroma1.it (D. Bianchi), roberto.baiocco@uniroma1.it (R. Baiocco), lina.pezzuti@uniroma1.it (L. Pezzuti), antonio.chirumbolo@uniroma1.it (A. Chirumbolo).

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.11.047
0747-5632/

ex-lover without his/her permission and sometimes adding information about his/her identity (Tungate, 2014).

Furthermore, Dake, Price, Maziarz, and Ward (2012) and Tobin and Drouin (2013) shed light on another aspect of sexting, "unwanted but consensual sexting," which is due to pressure from partner or peers to sext. Recently, Drouin and Tobin (2014) found that 55% of women and 48% of men were involved in unwanted sexting pressured by their partner, and they reported flirting, increasing intimacy and/or pleasing the partner as motivations. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy and CosmoGirl.com (2008) found that both teen girls and boys reported that pressure by peers or partners was one of the motivations for sexting. Several other studies confirmed these findings and showed that women are more frequently forced to sext than men (Englander, 2012; Henderson & Morgan, 2011).

In Italy, where the present research was conducted, the most important survey about sexting among adolescents (Eurispes & Telefono Azzurro, 2012) found that 12.3% of adolescents have sent a sext almost once, and .9% reported having sexted under threat; moreover, 6.2% of participants reported that a friend's partner had threatened to share the friend's private photos or videos online. They also found that 1.8% of Italian teens had sexted with harmful intentions, specifically for the purpose of bullying someone else.

Baker and Carreño (2015) showed how technology is frequently used by adolescents to harass and abuse dating partners. Several international studies have found that dating violence is often related to sexting, specifically unwanted but consensual sexting, in both males and females. Those who had sexted under pressure also reported higher rates of victimization in dating violence than those who had never sexted or had engaged in voluntary sexting (Englander, 2012). Furthermore, sexting under pressure from a partner or someone else seems to lead to bullying and dating violence victimization (Dake et al., 2012), to being the victim of physical and sexual coercion, and to intimate partner violence (Drouin, Ross, & Tobin, 2015; Tobin & Drouin, 2013). A recent study also found that voluntary sexting may be linked to victimization, specifically to online sexual victimization, even when controlling for age, sex and sexual orientation, and that this relationship was stronger when sexts were sent to a stranger met online rather than to a partner or friends (Gámez-Guadix, Almendros, Borrajo, & Calvete, 2015). In line with these results, Wood, Barter, Stanley, Aghtaie, and Larkins (2015) found that adolescents who had sent sexts (vs. adolescents who had never sexted) reported more victimization within their dating relationships.

As highlighted above, most of the literature about sexting and dating violence is focused on the victim's perspective. Our study aimed to investigate how sexting and dating violence work from the perpetrator's perspective. Specifically, we expected that those who share sexts of someone else without his/her permission also perpetrate more dating violence. We also wanted to study how other factors could affect this relationship and make it stronger or weaker. We hypothesized that one of these factors could be ambivalent sexism, because it has often been found as a predictor of dating violence. Sexism was theorized by Glick and Fiske (1996) as an ambivalent orientation toward women, in which can be identified two different but related components: hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. Hostile sexism is the belief that women are inferior and unworthy of respect, and it is associated with negative attitudes toward women and with the notion that women should be dominated and submissive. Benevolent sexism is a stereotyped view of women based on a positive affection and paternalistic perspective: Women are considered weak and must be protected. However, benevolent sexism also hides a negative and devaluing view of women and may be perceived as disrespectful, like hostile sexism.

Several studies have investigated how ambivalent sexism may affect evaluations of traditional gender role, perceptions and justifications of dating violence. People with hostile sexism evaluated negatively nontraditional female and male roles, whereas traditional stereotyped women roles was positively evaluated by people with benevolent sexism (Glick, Wilkerson, & Cuffe, 2015). Forbes, Jobe, White, Bloesch, and Adams-Curtis (2005) found that, for men, hostile sexism affected the acceptance of dating violence after a betrayal. Hostile sexism also affects the justification of rape or the minimization of its seriousness (Durán, Moya, Megías, & Viki, 2010; Sakalli-Ugurlu, Yalçın & Glick, 2007; Yamawaky, 2007), attitudes toward domestic violence or the exoneration of perpetrators (Valor-Segura, Expósito, & Moya, 2008; 2011), victim's blame and the approval of male aggression in intimate relationships (Koepke, Eyssel, & Bohner, 2014). Russell and Trigg (2004) investigated both hostile and benevolent sexism regarding tolerance of sexual harassment and found that only the hostile kind was a significant predictor. On the other hand, in males, benevolent sexism was found to be a protective factor against dating violence perpetration (Allen, Swan, & Raghavan, 2009). These findings were confirmed in a recent longitudinal study that found that traditional gender role attitudes increase a risk of dating violence perpetration among adolescents (Reyes, Foshee, Niolon, Reidy, & Hall, 2015). Gender role attitudes were also found related to both male and female rape myth acceptance (Davies, Gilston, & Rogers, 2012). Moreover, Bosson, Parrott, Swan, Kuchynka, and Schramm (2015) found that online sexual aggression in dating relationship was facilitated by high levels of hostile sexism. Finally, Lisco, Parrott, and Tharp (2012) enlightened the moderation role of hostile sexism in the relationship between heavy episodic drinking and male sexual violence towards female partners: So hostile sexism emerged as a relevant risk factor for dating aggression.

Within this theoretical framework, this study aims to investigate the role of ambivalent sexism as a possible moderating factor in the relationship between sexting and dating violence perpetration, focusing on a specific kind of sexting—i.e., the sharing of photos or videos of someone else without his/her consent—that we will name "not-allowed sharing of sexts." Since previous studies have pointed out the influence of individual variables such as age, gender and sexual orientation on sexting and dating violence behaviors (Dir, Cyders, & Coskunpinar, 2013; Gordon-Messer, Bauermeister, Grodzinski, & Zimmerman, 2013; Rice et al., 2014; Strassberg, McKinnon, Sustaita, & Rullo, 2013), we expected that ambivalent sexism would remain an important moderating factor, even when controlling for age, gender and sexual orientation. Specifically, we hypothesized two different possible moderation effects of benevolent and hostile sexism. We expected that benevolent sexism could be a protective factor (Allen et al., 2009) in the relationship between not-allowed sharing of sexts and dating violence perpetration—at higher levels of benevolent sexism, the relationship would be weaker, and at lower levels of benevolent sexism, it would be stronger. On the contrary, we expected hostile sexism to be a risk factor (Russell & Trigg, 2004; Valor-Segura et al., 2008; 2011) in the relationship between not-allowed sharing of sexts and dating violence perpetration—at higher levels of hostile sexism, the relationship would be stronger, and at lower levels of hostile sexism, it would be weaker. Focusing on perpetrators' intention could help to deeply explain how this particular type of sexting could become a kind of violence, with relevant implications in primary and secondary prevention programs.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Participants

This study involved 715 participants from 13 to 30 years of age