An Exploratory Study of Sexting Behaviors Among Heterosexual and Sexual Minority Early Adolescents

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## Sample

3,109 adolescents in their first 3 years of secondary education, aged between 12 and 15 years from 14 schools in Dutch-speaking Belgium. Their exual orientation was measured by asking respondents which statement about their sexual attraction applied most to them:
(1) 2,386 adolescents were "completely heterosexual (attracted to people of the opposite sex)”; (2) 193 adolscents were “mostly heterosexual”; (3) 65 adolescents were “equally heterosexual as homosexual (equally attracted to both boys and girls); (4) nine adolescents were “mostly homosexual”; (5) six adolescents were “completely homosexual (attracted to people of the same sex)”

## Implications For Educators About

Other

## Implications For Stakeholders About

Other

## Other Stakeholder Implication

Youth organizations

# Abstract

Purpose: Although research on adolescent sextingdthe sending of self-made sexually explicit
pictures through digital mediadhas increased in recent years, prior studies have primarily focused
on older youth and the act of sending of such images. Little is known about the experiences of early
adolescent sexual minority youth, who might be particularly vulnerable to abusive forms of
sexting. To address this gap in the literature, we aim to investigate differences in the prevalence of
a wide range of sexting behaviors among a convenience sample of heterosexual and sexual
minority early adolescents.
Methods: A survey was conducted among 3,109 adolescents (53.5% girls; n ¼ 1,647) aged between
12 and 15 years (mean ¼ 13.01 years; standard deviation ¼ .83). We examined differences in
sexting behavior by sexual orientation, controlling for gender, age, and amount of Internet use.
Results: The results show that sexual minority youth were more likely to have sent, received, and
asked for sexting images. They were also more likely to have experienced pressure to send sexually
explicit pictures. There were no associations between sexual minority status and the perpetration
of nonconsensual forms of sexting.
Conclusions: Several types of sexting were not uncommon among heterosexual and sexual
minority youth. Clinicians and counselors should be aware that sexual minority youth are more
likely to experience, but not to perpetrate, abusive sexting behaviors. The results underscore the
need for educational efforts to focus on resilience training for sexual minority adolescents.

# Outcome

"One of five early adolescents had been asked to send a sexually explicit picture of themselves to someone. One in 10 adolescents had even already experienced pressure from others to engage in sexting. This shows that sexting is relatively prevalent in this sample of early adolescents. More than 7% of the 12- to 15- year-olds had sent a self-made sexually explicit picture of themselves to someone. Among sexual minority youth specifically, the prevalence of sexting was 12.3%. Noncoercive and nonabusive sexting behaviors, including sending, receiving, and asking for sexually explicit images, were more prevalent among sexual minority youth. Sexual minority adolescents often have to turn to the Internet to establish platonic and romantic relationships. They are more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to have received a request for a sexting picture. Moreover, they were also more likely to be victimized by being pressured to send an image of themselves. Yet, are not more likely to be involved in the perpetration of nonconsensual forms of sexting which means that they are significantly more at risk for digital forms of abuse and harassment..
Resilience training could teach sexual minority adolescents how to cope with requests and pressure to engage in sexting and provide practical skills to negotiate safer sexting. Sexting education efforts in schools should include representations of sexual minority youth in their materials. LGBTQ+ organizations could make sure that they have information about sexting. Schools and other youth organizations could provide sexual minority adolescents with a safe space for sexting-related questions and clinicians and counselors should be especially sensitive to the role that sexting can play in the relationships of sexual minority youth and the potential risks that come with these forms of communication, especially at a young age.