Adolescents’ Sexy Self-Presentation on Instagram: An Investigation of Their Posting Behavior Using a Prototype Willingness Model Perspective

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## Authors

Van Ouytsel J.;Walrave M.;Ojeda M.;Del Rey R.;Ponnet K.

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2626 students between the ages of 14 and 21 (M = 16.14; SD = 1.02) in 10 secondary schools in the Dutch-speaking community in Belgium

# Abstract

Some adolescents use social media platforms, such as Instagram, for sexualized
self-presentation, which includes posting images in which someone is scarcely dressed, has a
sexy gaze or in which sexual willingness is suggested. These behaviors could be a first step towards
sexting. Given that adolescents are highly influenced by peer perceptions, this study uses the
prototype willingness model to assess how teenagers’ perceptions of others could influence their
posting behaviors. The study was conducted among 2626 students (n = 1530; 58.4% girls) between the
ages of 14 and 21 (M = 16.14; SD = 1.02) in 10 secondary schools in the Dutch-speaking community
in Belgium. The results show that older adolescents and girls were more likely to post images of
themselves on Instagram. The models showed that peer norms and willingness and attitudes were
significantly associated with posting intention. The perceived norms of adolescents’ parents were not
significantly related to the behaviors. There were also significant associations between perceived
similarity, prototype favorability and the willingness to engage in sexualized self-presentation on
Instagram. The implications for education and practice are discussed.

# Outcome

"The exchange and display of sexual content is increasingly normalized among adolescents and young people so the perception of this behavior as a widespread peer standard may facilitate the intention to engage in this behavior. Peopl guide their behavior based on the behaviors they observe, so when they are socially reinforced, for example, through "likes" and comments on social networking sites, it can identify and reinforce their own values and are more likely to replicate those behaviors. Gaining popularity and acceptance from peers is very important for adolescents. Older adolescents were more likely to post sexy images of themselves on Instagram. Girls were significantly more likely to post self-sexualized images of themselves than boys. There is significant socio-cultural pressure on girls and young adult women to represent themselves in a sexualized way, especially from the media and consumer culture, yet society significantly penalizes them once they do so. The attitudes of peers were an important influential factor on adolescents’ willingness and intention to post sexualized selfies on Instagram. The attitude of their parents was not significantly related to the intention or willingness to post sexualized images on that social network. parents’ opinions on the posting of sexualized images does not affect their willingness
or intention to post sexualized selfies. Potential explanations may be that most parents are not active on Instagram and adolescents may not allow their parents access to their profile on Instagram or that parents do not communicate with their children about their posting behavior so they may have a limited impact on adolescents’ behavior. One strategy to increase the influence of parents is maybe to increase their skills in communicating." (Van Ouytsel et al., 2020, pp. 9-11)