Body, identity and images of the self among adolescents. From research to action through Peer Education

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889 students aged 13-18

## Implications For Educators About

# Abstract

In recent years, social media have become a mirror for many adolescents: young people experiment online, testing their own limits and possibilities, and they build their identity day by day (Boyd, 2014). The consequences of this new behaviour are important and include sexting (Temple, 2012, 2014), self-exposure, self-objectification and identity manipulation. Many of these behaviours pass through the media themselves, as they work as a sort of megaphone or extensive sharing platform.

This paper aims to reach two goals. The first is to share a new perspective with educators and researchers named Peer Education (Ottolini Rivoltella, 2014)—a model developed in recent years to reach young people and foster their “awareness” of media and their health (Ottolini Rivoltella, 2014). The result is a new methodological framework fostering the responsible use of social media and digital tools and also helping young people to keep healthy habits. We will present the framework in sections1 and 2.

The second goal is to discuss the results of the research Image.ME, run by Cremit, which studied the uses of social network sites, their impact on relationships and identity and the incidence of risky behaviours. In fact, the research is built according to the Peer Education perspective, preventing risky behaviours and supporting media awareness. We will discuss this in section 3.

# Outcome

"What we immediately identified was the lack of a definition of sexting, and not only among teens. In actuality, it is a sort of an umbrella-term that covers different definitions and behaviours. Eighty per cent of Facebook respondents consider sexting as “sending and receiving sexually explicit images via mobile phones”, and 13,3% say it is just “to take a photo in a sexy pose”.
[...] According to the questionnaires and Facebook quiz, sexting is conducted and experienced particularly to have fun (20%), to impress or gain attention (12,6%), to be popular, (11,6%) and to engage couple relationships or flirting (10,2%). This behaviour is not focused on harming or harassing individuals.
Peers, supported by media educators, fostered the intervention, reflecting on what to do if they lose control by means of a “joke”.
The viral spread of these images and the associated shame reportedly leads to social, psychological and legal consequences for victims (Katzman, 2010).
Students and peers became authors of suggestive prevention messages at different levels due to the process in which they were involved, such as videos and texts.
Gender differences exist in term of underlying motivations, social conditions and attitudes toward the behaviour. Girls are significantly more likely than boys to be bothered by receiving sexting images, and they mainly felt embarrassed (female 39% vs. male 9%). Twenty-two per cent of females confirmed receiving messages from unknown people (1.9% of males). But girls seem more open to sharing Facebook pages than boys and pay special attention to their looks (70% versus 50%) in taking a selfie. Moreover, they use artistic photos to represent themselves on Facebook.
The literature points out the risks of coercive gender, discussing as sexting as an adult dynamics toward female teens (Temple et al., 2012).
Referring to age, emotions dealing with sexting among youngsters are significantly different from those of older individuals: that is embarrassment versus fun, respectively."
(Carenzio et al., 2015, pp. 128-130).