

Young Adults' Experiences with Sexually Explicit Internet Materials

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Abstract

Though young adults today have been exposed to sexually explicit internet materials (SEIM) at young ages through easily accessible platforms, little is known about SEIM's influence on sexual self-esteem. This study aimed to evaluate the relationship between these variables for heterosexual and gay men, as well as heterosexual females, a vastly underrepresented population in research involving SEIM. Participants completed an online survey through a Facebook link posted by 10 recruiters. The typical length of SEIM viewing sessions was found to be negatively correlated with heterosexual males and females' sexual self-esteem.

Introduction

Considerable research has been done on the relationship between sexually explicit internet materials (SEIM) and engagement in risky sexual behaviors, but little research exists on its relationship with sexual self-esteem. Most of that research is on heterosexual males (though some studies include gay men) and findings are inconsistent, sometimes showing greater SEIM usage associated with less sexual self-esteem (Peter & Valkenburg, 2014), sometimes higher sexual self-esteem (Kvalem, Træen, & Iantaffi, 2015), and still others have found no association (Sun et al., 2014). Studies have illustrated that women's male partner's SEIM usage negatively affects their self-esteem and sexual satisfaction (Bergner & Bridges, 2002; Stewart & Szymanski, 2012); however, how women's specific SEIM usage influences their own sexual self-esteem has yet to be studied. This study aimed to further examine the relationship between SEIM and sexual self-esteem for heterosexual and gay men and to evaluate this relationship for heterosexual females.

Hypotheses

1. Males would report more SEIM usage than females.
2. Heterosexual males would report higher sexual self-esteem than females and gay men and females would report the least amount of sexual self-esteem.
3. SEIM usage would be negatively correlated with sexual self-esteem for females and positively correlated for heterosexual and gay males.

Method

PARTICIPANTS

Participants completed an online survey through a link posted by 10 recruiters on Facebook to their personal pages. Out of 449 responses, 178 participants met the requirements of the study.

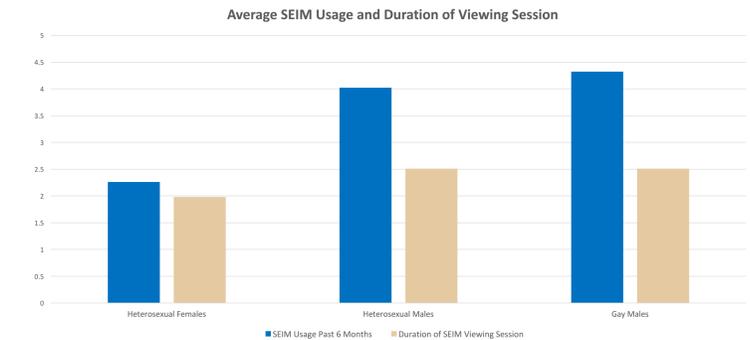
- 80 participants identified as heterosexual females, 59 as heterosexual males, and 39 as gay males.
- The majority identified as Caucasian (74.2%) or Asian (9.9%).
- 65.5% of heterosexual males reported being in a relationship, while only half of women and a minority (33%) of gay males did.
- Average age of participants was 18-21.

MEASURES

- **Sexual Behaviors Scale**, 8 items regarding experiences with manual, oral, and anal sex, answered Yes or No.
- **SEIM Viewing Scale**, 2 items detailing average usage of SEIM in the past 6 months (1= never, 6= multiple times a day; larger scores indicated more usage) and average time of viewing session (1= a few minutes, 4= hour or more; larger scores indicated longer viewing sessions).
- **Reasons for SEIM Usage**, 4 items, scores from 1 to 3 (1= very important, 3= not important).
- **Attitudes and Feelings about SEIM**, 5 items, scores from 1 to 5 (1= strongly agree, 5= strongly disagree).
- **Sexual Self-esteem Scale**, similar to Snell and Papini's (1989) Multidimensional Sexual Self-Concept Questionnaire, 7 items, scores from 1 to 5 (1= strongly agree, 5= strongly disagree; larger scores indicated lower sexual self-esteem).

Results

- All participants reported sexual arousal as the most important reason for using SEIM.
- **Sexual Self-esteem Scale:** Heterosexual males (Mean= 2.52) and females (Mean= 2.45) reported more sexual self-esteem than gay males (Mean= 2.83).
- No relationship was found between SEIM usage and sexual self-esteem in the past 6 months; however, as average length of typical SEIM viewing sessions increased for heterosexual females and males, sexual self-esteem decreased.



Sexual Orientation	N	SSE	Correlation with Average Duration	Correlation with Usage in Past 6 Months
Heterosexual Females	80	2.45	-0.20*	0.07
Heterosexual Males	59	2.52	-0.23*	0.20
Gay Males	39	2.83	-0.02*	-0.05

SSE= Sexual self-esteem, scores range from 1-5, larger scores indicate lower sexual self-esteem. Usage of SEIM in past 6 months and typical duration of viewing session correlated with SSE. *p= .05

Discussion

- Hypothesis 1 was supported, while hypotheses 2 and 3 were partially supported.
- Average SEIM usage in the past 6 months was not associated with sexual self-esteem; however, despite all participants reporting their typical SEIM viewing session lasting about an hour, longer viewing sessions for heterosexual males and females were associated with less sexual self-esteem.
- Because this study was cross-sectional, longer viewing time could have negatively influenced sexual self-esteem or having lower sexual self-esteem could have influenced typical viewing time. Longitudinal studies would be helpful to better determine cause and effect relationships across multiple variables used in this study.
- Future research should evaluate the relationship between the specific content of SEIM viewed with sexual self-esteem. Individuals' views of their own sexual attractiveness compared to actors in SEIM should also be studied.

References

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