

Growing Up in the Age of Sexualized Internet Content

Habilitation Thesis

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Abstract

This habilitation thesis presents research on the exposure of adolescents to online sexual images. It notes that access to sexual content has dramatically changed with the introduction of the internet into everyday life: sexual images are more available; they can be accessed in an anonymous or private setting; and they are easily created and shared. In this respect, adolescents may seek them, but also encounter them unintentionally. This diversity of exposure is taken into consideration as part of the investigation into how seeing and sending sexual images is embedded within adolescent psychosexual development. The Differential Susceptibility to Media Effects Model frames the six distinct published studies of this thesis. The study aims to uncover the psychosocial characteristics responsible for exposure to online sexual content and exchanging sexual images at a young age; how this young generation approaches online sexual images; and how sexualized internet content affects them. Data comes from the EU Kids Online II project, a Czech project on internet-related addictive behaviors, and a Czech longitudinal panel study on the online risks among adolescents that together suggest that (1) the sexual double standard makes girls and boys approach online sexual material in a different way; (2) adolescents' use of online sexual images varies depending on their developmental needs and tasks; and (3) using online sexual stimuli in line with psychosexual development may later produce the gender-specific risk of the compulsive use of internet pornography among young men, indicating that the developmental perspective that reflects social and cultural norms may present a promising approach for understanding the patterns and effects of exposure to online sexual images at a young age.

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