The Psychological Bases of Sexting

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Introduction

- ❑ Sexting is the exchange of sexts (i.e. texts/photos/videos with sexually provocative contents) via Internet, Smartphone or social networks (Chalfen, 2009)
- ❑ Among Italian adolescents: **78%** received, **63%** sent and **9%** publicly posted sexts (Morelli et al., 2016)
- ❑ Calvert (2009) defined primary sexting, (i.e. sending own sexts, predominantly voluntary) and secondary sexting, (i.e. sending sext of somebody else; it might occur without the consent of the person)
- ❑ Wolak and Finkelor (2011) distinguished between **Experimental** (a normative developmental and socialization task in technologized societies) and **Aggravated sexting** (harmful intention)
- ❑ **Most research focused on victims' perspective:** sexting could lead to victimization by peers or partner (Gámez-Guadix et al., 2015; Morelli et al., 2016)
- ❑ **This study is one of the first attempt to investigate sexting also from the perpetrators' perspective, specifically focusing on not-allowed sexting** that is a kind of aggravated sexting, referred to sharing sexts of someone else without his/her consents. It is related to aggressive behaviors (i.e. bullying, dating violence)
- ❑ **Few research studied personality traits related to sexting, but no one investigated them in not-allowed sexting.** The majority of studies used the Five Factor Model (FFM) to study the

personality bases of sexting behaviors. Recently the Six Factor Model of personality, named HEXACO (Ashton & Lee, 2007), showed more predictive power than FFM in several psychological domains.

Aims and Hypotheses

The aim of the present study was to investigate the role of HEXACO personality traits in relation to sexting behaviors among adolescents and young adults, controlling for age and gender, **within the theoretical background of the HEXACO six-model of personality** (Ashton & Lee, 2007) Specifically we expected that **low Honesty-Humility**, and **low Conscientiousness**, will be **more** related to **not-allowed sexting** (i.e. sharing sexts of somebody else without the permission of the subject)

Method

Participants were 674 adolescents and young adults (60.7% girls; $n = 409$; 13-30 years)

Measures

- **Demographic information** (gender, age)
- **Sexting Behaviors Questionnaire (SBQ; Morelli et al., 2016):** sending own sexts (4 items), Allowed-sexting (8 items), Not.allowed sexting (8 items)
- **HEXACO Personality Inventory-revised (Ashton and Lee, 2009):** 60 items assessed 6 personality traits (i.e. Honesty/Humility, Emotionality, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Openness to experience)

Data Analysis

A set of regression analyses were run in order to test which personality traits predict different sexting behaviors

Results

Sending own sexts were positively predicted by age, $\beta = .15$, and extraversion, $\beta = .09$, and negatively by honesty/humility, $\beta = -.12$, and conscientiousness, $\beta = -.10$, $R = .22$.

Allowed sexting (i.e. sending sexts of other people with their consent) was negatively predicted by honesty/humility, $\beta = -.16$, emotionality, $\beta = -.09$, and conscientiousness, $\beta = -.11$, $R = .25$.

Finally, not-allowed sexting (i.e. sending sexts of other people without their consent) was negatively predicted by honesty/humility, $\beta = -.17$, and conscientiousness, $\beta = -.12$, and males were more likely to engage in it, $\beta = -.14$, $R = .32$.

Regression analyses

Predictors	Sexting behaviors		
	Sending own sexts	Allowed sexting	Not-allowed sexting
		<i>Beta</i>	
Age	.15**	.07	.04
Sex (0 = m;1 = f)	.03	-.04	-.14*
Honesty/Humility	-.12*	-.16**	-.17**
Emotionality	.02	-.09*	-.05
Extraversion	.09*	-.03	.02
Agreeableness	.01	-.02	-.02
Conscientiousness	-.10*	-.11*	-.12*
Openness to experience	.03	.04	.03

Conclusion

The present study provided a differential profile of normal personality traits for individual who are more likely to engage in different kind of sexting.

The distinct trait of the HEXACO personality model, namely the honesty/humility factor, emerged as the most important predictor of each investigated sexting behaviors.

Low honesty/humility and conscientiousness lead to more sexting: people low in honesty/humility have a strong sense of self-importance and are inclined to flatter others and break the rules to get what they want; people low in conscientiousness are more flexible and spontaneous, but also negligent and unreliable

Implications

These findings provide a profile of personality that could help in early identification of sexters in general and of possible perpetrators of aggravated sexting