

Understanding Sexting Behaviors and Its Impact on Attachment Styles among Young Adults

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Abstract

Internet is a medium of expression for everyone now a days as it is accessible, affordable and anonymous for everyone in the world. Sexual arousal can be derived from a myriad of sources, ranging from titillating visuals, in video, pictorial and audio formats, erotic books, magazines and literature, to voyeuristically viewing other people engaging in sexual activity. With the advent of the time, people have started communicating their arousal in the form of "sexting" which means 'the exchange of sexually explicit messages, videos or photographs of oneself to others through a digital device, most commonly, a cell phone.' This in further have affected an individual's mental health. The objective of the study was to understand the relationship between sexting and attachment styles among young adults, also, is there any difference in the approach of sexting behaviors and attachment styles between pornographic users and non-pornography viewers. The findings of the study indicates that there exist the positive and significant relationship between the sexting behaviors and anxiety attachment styles. It is concluded that the current study will help the researcher to create the intervention strategies to manage the sexting behaviors of the young adults

Keywords: Sexting, Mental health, behaviors, attachment, pornography users.

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Introduction

Humankind was built to demand, to need and to want more. The need to quench our thirst, satiate our hunger, feel loved, belonged, protected and safe. While all these needs are tended to and fulfilled earnestly and ardently by each one and the people around us, the need for sexual pleasure is often curtailed behind closed doors and whispers. Anatomising sexual pleasure, we note that the basis of it comes from, (among other factors), the need for companionship or to feel less lonely ^[1]. Human relations, primarily the closest and most intimate ones, have a powerful tactile aspect to them. It has been found, in various cultures that physical contact profoundly reduces feelings of loneliness ^[2]. Sexual arousal can be derived from a myriad of sources, ranging from titillating visuals, in video, pictorial and audio formats, erotic books, magazines and literature, to voyeuristically viewing other people engaging in sexual activity. The latter refers to the idea of viewing pornography. What is even more interesting, is the advent of "sexting" which means 'the exchange of sexually explicit messages, videos or photographs of oneself to others through a digital device, most commonly, a cell phone.' With the shift

of the world from physical to virtual, it is fascinating to note the ease and convenience that sexting brings with itself. One can very comfortably sit behind their screens, exchange sexually arousing material and derive sexual pleasure. This process evades boredom and idleness, is quick and significantly reduces perceived feelings of loneliness. During sexting, people ensue and exhibit a lot more than just the desire to engage in sexual activity. This demonstration requires one to break through layers of vulnerability to finally be able to express their needs in the most earnest ways possible. While digging through these layers of vulnerability, we find many people exhibiting certain styles of attachment that they seek from the person on the other end of the screen. Attachment is a unique emotional bond characterised by a mutual exchange of comfort, care, and pleasure. The origins of attachment study may be traced back to Sigmund Freud's views of love, but John Bowlby is often regarded as the founder of attachment theory. Attachment was studied extensively by John Bowlby, who defined it as "a persistent psychological bond between human beings." The belief that humans are born with a need to build a tight emotional link with a caregiver and that this bond will develop over the first six months of a child's life provided the caregiver is adequately responsive is known as "attachment theory". Bowlby believed that the attachment system had two basic functions: to shield vulnerable persons from potential dangers or harm, and to regulate negative emotions in the aftermath of threatening or damaging occurrences. The theory focuses on emotional experience, expression, and regulation at both the species (normative) and individual (person-specific) levels of analysis. Attachment theory's normative component identifies the stimuli and situations that often elicit and terminate certain types of emotions, as well as the emotional sequence that typically follows particular relational events. When emotion-eliciting events in relationships occur, the individual-difference component examines how people's personal histories of receiving care and support from attachment figures shape their goals, working models (i.e., interpersonal attitudes, expectations, and cognitive schemas), and coping strategies. Different methods of engaging and behaving in relationships define attachment styles ^[3]. The origin and essence of all attachment styles trace back to parent child relationships in early childhood and infancy. Our styles of attachment influence how each of us reacts to our needs and how we go about getting them met. From choosing our partners to how we behave in our relationships to how we project our sexual desires, to the reasons behind the end of a relationship, our attachment styles affect every minute part of our adult life and interpersonal relationships. The adults' exposure towards the consumption of sexually explicit materials indicates that the stressful life event, relationships, sexual pleasure, knowledge seeking behaviours and mood modification behaviors ^[4] are the factors that leads an individual to involve themselves in pornography contents. When a person has a securely attached pattern, they are confident and self-assured, and they can effortlessly engage with people, meeting their own and others' needs. In the event of an anxious or avoidant attachment pattern, a person may choose a partner that fits their maladaptive pattern, but they are most likely not the perfect choice to make them happy. Individuals that are really insecure take different paths. When nervous people are confronted with attachment-related stress or threats, they are unsure if their attachment figures will be attentive, available, and responsive to their needs. Such concerns prolong their distress and stimulate their attachment systems, leading to the employment of emotion-focused coping techniques like hyper-vigilance for signals of probable relationship loss and ruminating on worst-case scenarios. When highly avoidant people are stressed or threatened, they experience anxiety on a bodily level, which they may not recognise. Highly avoidant people use avoidant coping methods to block and control their emotional reactions in order to keep their attachment systems dormant. More securely connected people, have more intense and mild positive emotions in their romantic relationships and fewer intense and mild negative emotions, whereas more insecurely attached people have the opposite experience.

Longitudinal research has also found links between an individual's early attachment pattern with their mother (being rated as secure or insecure) and feelings experienced and expressed with a love partner 20 years later ^[5]. People who are securely connected are more sympathetic, less disruptive, less aggressive, and mature than those who are ambivalent or avoidant in their attachment styles, as per studies ^[6]. They are also significantly less likely to send provocative text messages or pictures to their partners ^[7]. For people with an anxious attachment style, the spouse is frequently the 'better half'. The prospect of living without a lover (or being alone in general) is extremely stressful. People who have this form of attachment have a low self-image but a good outlook on others. A nervous adult frequently looks to their partner for acceptance, support, and attentiveness. People with this attachment type place a great importance on their relationships, but they are frequently concerned that their partner isn't as involved in the relationship as they are. There is a significant fear of abandonment, and safety is a top priority ^[8]. This creates an interesting association between individuals with anxious attachment styles and sexting behaviours. Research shows that attachment anxiety anticipated that people in partnerships would send messages soliciting sexual engagement. Attachment anxiety was also linked to favourable attitudes on sexting, such as embracing it as normal, believing it would improve the relationship, and expecting sexting from partners. Sexting might be a new way for people to communicate their connection anxieties ^[9]. These patterns in the adults' life affects the interpersonal relationships in such a way that when an individual is consuming pornography at a higher rate than it adversely affects the relationship between dating and non-dating males ^[10].

Method

The young (Early) adulthood is a life span development stage, during which an individual is at a higher risk of getting involved in various patterns of the behaviors such as dysfunctional sexual activity, substance abuse, online sexual activities and even the violent crimes. The adults are exploring their fullest potential and identities at this stage. Therefore, it is a need of an hour to understand the related behaviors attached to such concerns.

The aim of the current paper is to compare the sexting behaviors of pornography viewers with non-pornography viewers and to understand the impact of sexting behaviors on the individual attachment style. Based on this, the following objectives were formulated:

- To assess the difference in the level of sexting behaviors between pornography and non-pornography viewers.
- To assess the difference in the level of attachment styles (close, depend, anxiety) between pornography and non-pornography viewers.
- To study the level of sexting behaviors and attachment style based on gender difference.
- To understand the relationship between sexting behaviors and attachment styles among young adults

Based on the above objectives, following hypotheses were formulated:

- There will be a significant difference in the level of sexting behaviors between pornography and non-pornography viewers.
- There will be significant difference in the level of attachment styles between pornography and non-pornography viewers.

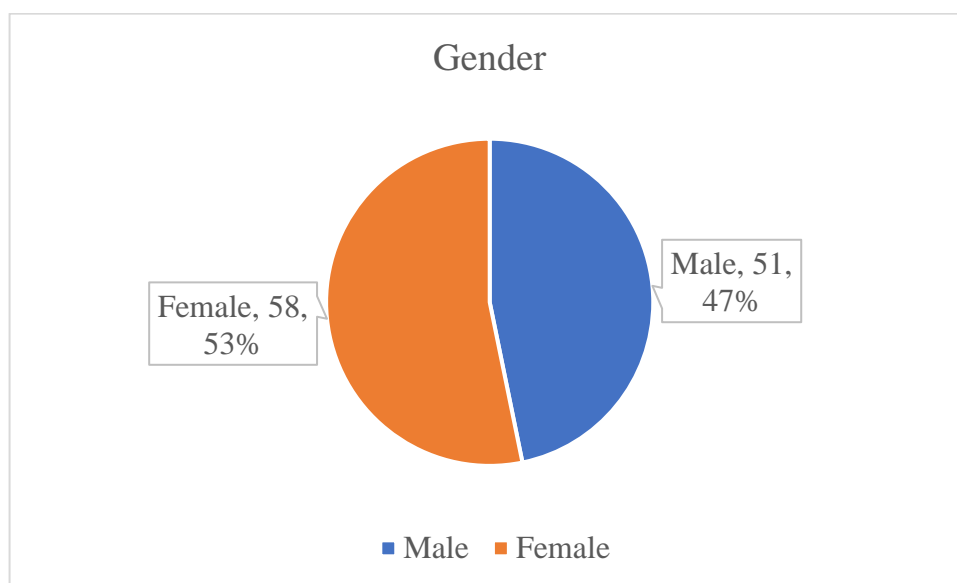
- There will be a significant difference in the level of sexting behaviors and attachment style based on the gender.
- There will be a significant relationship between sexting behavior and attachment styles among young adults.

For the purpose of the current study, 109 young adults (N= 51 male, N= 58 females) participated in the study, belonging to Delhi NCR. Snowball sampling was used to collect the data from the participants, ageing 18 to 25 years. The data was collected through questionnaires, Revised Adult Attachment Scale and Sexting Behaviors Scale which were finalised to measure the purpose of the study. Revised Adult Attachment Scale was developed by Collins in 1996 which measure the attachment of the adults based on three dimensions, Close: This subscale assess how comfortable relationship a person holds with respect to closeness and intimacy, Depend: This subscale assess how comfortable a person is with relying on others and believing that others can be relied on when required and Anxiety: This subscale assess how concerned a person is about not being accepted and abandoned by others. The scale has 18 items which were scaled on 1 (Not at all characteristic of me) to 5 (Very characteristic of me). Sexting Behavior Scale was developed by Dir et al in 2011 which measures the behaviors of an individuals' sexting. The scale has 11 items which were 5-point Likert based.

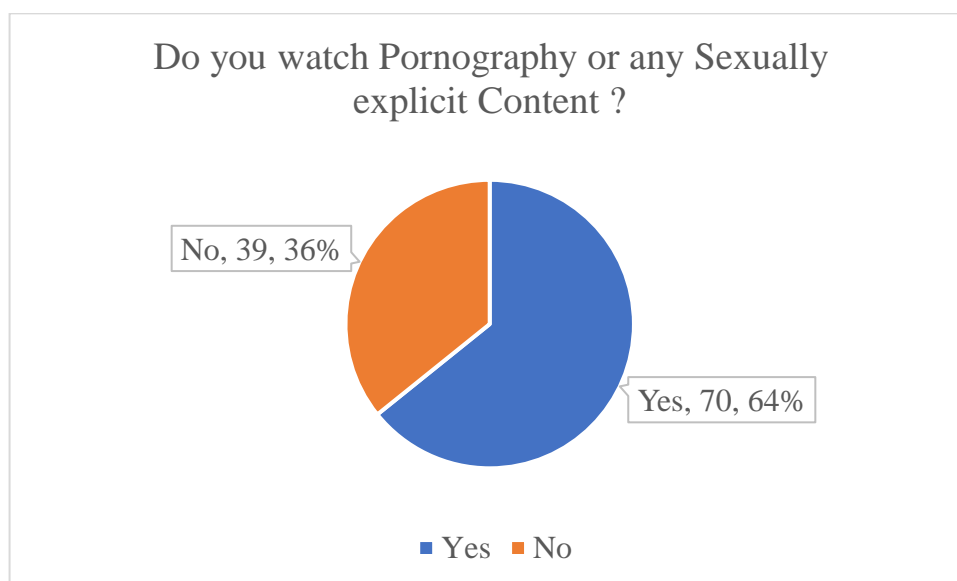
Result and Discussion

The analysis of the data collected were done through SPSS and MS Excel. And the following results were computed. The figure 1 shows the demographic details of the participants based on the gender. The data was collected from 109 participants, out of which, 53% of them were Females and 47% of the participants were males.

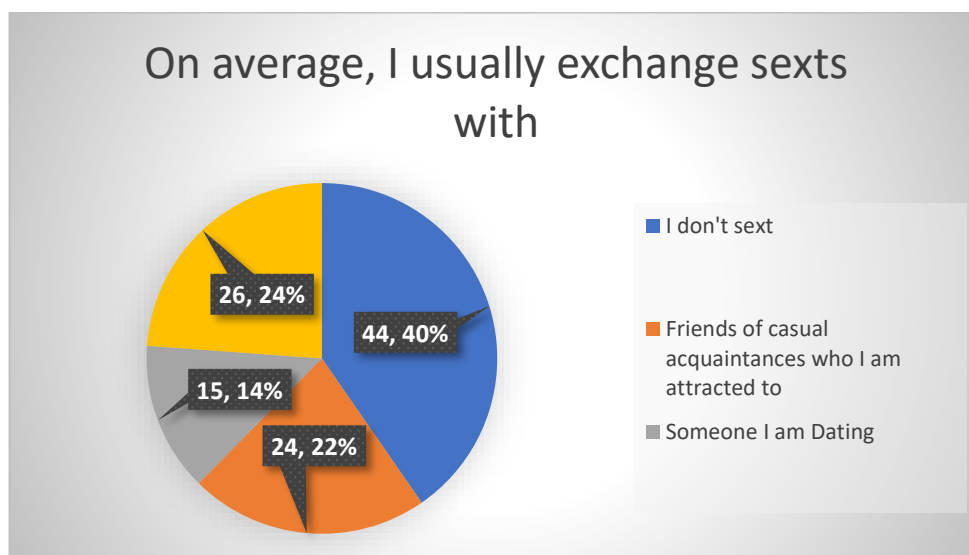
Figure 1: Demographic details of the participants based on the Gender



Furthermore, Figure 2 reveals “How many participants were pornography users?” The data revealed that 70 participants i.e. 64% were Pornographic users and 39 participants i.e. 36% were not the users of pornographic content.

Figure 2: Viewers of pornographic or sexually explicit contents

In addition to the same, the information with respect to the participant's involvement in sexting behaviors were explored. It was found that 40% of the participants does not involve themselves in sexting behaviors. 24% of the participants do exchange sexts with their partners (with whom they are in a committed relationships), 22% of them exchange sexts with their acquaintances (they are attracted to) and 14% exchanges sexts with someone they are dating.

Figure 3: Participants involved in sexting behaviour*Table 1: Level of sexting behaviors between pornography and non-pornography viewers*

Group Statistics					
Do you watch Pornography or any Sexually explicit Content		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
SBS	Yes	70	18.86	8.621	1.030
	No	39	13.36	5.678	0.909

Independent Samples Test								
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Significance		Mean Difference
						One-Sided p	Two-Sided p	
SBS	Equal variances assumed	8.491	0.004	3.571	107	0.000	0.001	5.498
	Equal variances not assumed			4.001	103.907	0.000	0.000	5.498

In Table 1, we could observe the difference in the level of sexting behaviors between pornography and non-pornography viewers. This was verified by using independent sample t-test to determine the difference, where the mean difference was calculated as 5.498, the level of significance of the t-test was 3.571 ($p > 0.01$, $p > 0.05$). Therefore, the hypothesis has been accepted. So, through the table, we can interpret that the level of sexting is high among the pornography users as compared to the participants who do not consume pornographic content.

Table 2: Level of attachment styles (close, depend, anxiety) between pornography and non-pornography viewers

Group Statistics					
Do you watch Pornography or any Sexually explicit Content		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Anxiety_attachment	Yes	70	19.26	3.859	0.461
	No	39	17.41	3.654	0.585
Close_Attachment	Yes	70	17.03	2.914	0.348
	No	39	17.28	3.211	0.514
Depend_Attachment	Yes	70	16.69	4.968	0.594
	No	39	16.77	4.934	0.790

Independent Samples Test								
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Significance		Mean Difference
						One-Sided p	Two-Sided p	
Anxiety_attachment	Equal variances assumed	0.029	0.865	2.440	107	0.008	0.016	1.847

	Equal variances not assumed			2.479	82.371	0.008	0.015	1.847
Close_Attachment	Equal variances assumed	0.192	0.662	- 0.420	107	0.338	0.676	-0.253
	Equal variances not assumed			- 0.408	72.464	0.342	0.684	-0.253
Depend_Attachment	Equal variances assumed	0.010	0.922	- 0.084	107	0.466	0.933	-0.084
	Equal variances not assumed			- 0.085	79.153	0.466	0.933	-0.084

In Table 2, we could observe the difference in the level of attachment styles between pornography and non-pornography viewers. This was verified by using independent sample t-test to determine the difference, where the mean difference was calculated as 1.847 (anxiety attachment), -0.253 in close attachment style and -0.084 in depend attachment style. The participants who not consume the sexually explicit materials shows how comfortable relationship a person holds with respect to closeness and intimacy and how comfortable a person is with relying on others and believing that others can be relied on when required. However, a person who consume pornographic materials is found to be much concerned about not being accepted and abandoned by others. The level of significance of the t-test was 2.440 ($p > 0.01$, $p > 0.05$) at anxiety attachment style but insignificant at other styles of attachment. Therefore, the hypothesis has been partially accepted. So, through the table, we can interpret that the level of anxiety attachment style is high among the pornography users as compared to the participants who do not consume pornographic content.

Table 3: Level of sexting behaviors and attachment style based on the gender

Group Statistics					
Gender		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Anxiety_attachment	Female	58	18.00	3.770	0.495
	Male	51	19.27	3.914	0.548
Close_Attachment	Female	58	16.72	2.870	0.377
	Male	51	17.57	3.132	0.439
Depend_Attachment	Female	58	16.05	4.391	0.577
	Male	51	17.47	5.431	0.760
SBS	Female	58	16.17	7.054	0.926

		Male	51	17.71	9.177	1.285		
Independent Samples Test								
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Significance		Mean Difference
						One-Sided P	Two-Sided P	
Anxiety_attachment	Equal variances assumed	0.014	0.907	-1.730	107	0.043	0.087	-1.275
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.726	104.082	0.044	0.087	-1.275
Close_Attachment	Equal variances assumed	0.219	0.640	-1.469	107	0.072	0.145	-0.844
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.460	102.215	0.074	0.147	-0.844
Depend_Attachment	Equal variances assumed	4.772	0.031	-1.507	107	0.067	0.135	-1.419
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.487	96.134	0.070	0.140	-1.419
SBS	Equal variances assumed	2.918	0.091	-0.984	107	0.164	0.327	-1.533
	Equal variances not assumed			-0.968	93.349	0.168	0.336	-1.533

In Table 3, we could observe the difference in the level of attachment styles and sexting behaviors based on the genders. This was verified by using independent sample t-test to determine the difference, where the mean difference indicated that male shows slightly high difference in sexting behaviors and attachment styles as compared to females. However, there exist insignificant difference in the level of attachment styles and sexting behaviors. Therefore, the hypothesis has been rejected.

Table 4: Relationship between sexting behaviors and attachment styles among young adults

	Correlations			
	SBS	Anxiety_attachment	Close_Attachment	Depend_Attachment
SBS	1	.200*	0.101	0.173
Anxiety_attachment		1	-0.131	-.194*
Close_Attachment			1	.335**
Depend_Attachment				1
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).				
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				

In Table 4, we observe the relationship between sexting behaviors and attachment styles. This was verified by the Pearson Correlation (r). The correlation was found significant at the level of 0.05 level with respect to the relationship between sexting behaviour and the anxiety attachment (0.200). This indicates higher concerned a person is about not being accepted and abandoned by others, higher will be the sexting behaviors among the young adults. However, It was also observed that sexting behaviours were insignificantly related to the close attachment and the depend attachment. This has been also discussed authors in their study and found sexting to be strongly associated to both online pornography. The link between consumption of online pornography and sexting was not significant in those who reported low levels of alcohol intake. On the other hand, the association was greater and more significant in individuals who reported heavy alcohol usage^[11]. Hence, the hypothesis was partially accepted.

Conclusion

It is concluded that the consumption of pornography has an effect on an individual's mental health such that attachment styles are getting affected, also the young adults are getting involved in the sexting behaviors. The current study will help the researcher to create the intervention strategies to manage the sexting behaviors of the young adults, as researches suggests that the sexting behaviors affects the other domains of an individual's life too. Moreover, certain activities should be created and introduced among the young adults that would allow the young adults to maintain a healthy lifestyles in order to prevent mental health issues.

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