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Having fun with sex in group settings during adolescence: is a history of sexual abuse related?

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Résumé

Au cours des dernières années, certains comportements des jeunes ont été abordés par les médias suggérant que des jeunes participent volontairement à toutes sortes d'expériences sexuelles de groupe. Cette recherche transversale étudie les facteurs associés à une implication importante dans des activités sociales sexualisées (ACSOSEX) chez un échantillon non-clinique de 815 adolescents ($M = 15,86$ ans) fréquentant l'école secondaire. Les ACSOSEX sont définies comme des pratiques sociales, c'est-à-dire publiques et dans un contexte de groupe, à caractère sexuel, qui sont non rémunérées et qui semblent volontaires.

Dans cette recherche, elles comprennent les concours de chandails mouillés, les stripteases, les danses sexualisées, les baisers entre personnes de même sexe, les imitations de fellations, les danses mimant des positions sexuelles, les concours de fellations, le sexe en groupe et les concours de masturbation. Dans le but de comprendre, sans diaboliser ces activités, quels jeunes s'impliquent davantage dans les ACSOSEX, nous nous sommes attardées à des facteurs de niveau personnel, à la consommation de la pornographie et aux modèles de rôles dans l'entourage. Parmi les facteurs personnels considérés, il y a un vécu d'agression sexuelle, les attitudes par rapport aux ACSOSEX, une sexualité sans engagement amoureux ou précoce, les événements de vie stressants, la consommation d'alcool ou de drogues ainsi que la perception de sa santé.

La moitié des participants, les filles étant plus nombreuses que les garçons, rapportent avoir participé à au moins une ACSOSEX depuis l'âge de 14 ans. Le pourcentage d'observateurs est encore plus élevé (84%). Plus précisément 28% des adolescents affirment avoir participé à une ACSOSEX, 14% à deux, 6% à trois ou quatre et 2% d'entre eux ont participé à cinq et plus de ces activités. Des régressions multiples de type « pas à pas » montrent qu'une participation dans une variété d'ACSOSEX, pour les garçons et les filles, est liée à des relations sexuelles sans engagement amoureux, des attitudes favorables à l'égard des ACSOSEX, une grande utilisation de pornographie en ligne, et une consommation à risque d'alcool et de drogues. Un vécu d'agression sexuelle a été associé aux ACSOSEX pour ce qui est des filles, alors qu'un vécu de nombreux événements stressants et l'implication d'un membre de leur réseau social dans l'industrie du sexe sont liés aux ACSOSEX pour les garçons. Cette recherche est la première à montrer que les adolescents d'une population non-clinique sont largement confrontés, comme observateurs ou participants, à des activités sociales sexualisées de diverse nature. Elle montre également qu'une implication élevée dans ces activités est associée à des comportements particuliers, dont plusieurs reconnus comme facteurs de risque comme une histoire d'agression sexuelle. Ces informations invitent à porter une attention particulière à des sous-groupes de jeunes afin qu'ils soient mieux outillés pour faire face à ces activités qui pourront leur être proposées pendant leur adolescence.

Mots-clés: adolescence, comportement sexuel, genre, abus sexuel, sexualisation

Abstract

This transversal study examines factors associated with a high degree of involvement in sexualized social activities (SESA) among a non-clinical sample of 815 adolescents ($M = 15.86$ years) attending secondary school. SESA include wet t-shirt contests, stripteases, sexualized dancing, same sex kissing, imitation of fellatio, dances miming sexual positions, fellatio contests, group sex, and masturbation contests. Half of the participants, and more girls than boys, stated that they had participated in at least one SESA. Multiple stepwise regression analyses revealed that participation in a high variety of SESA is associated for boys and girls with involvement in casual sex, pro-SESA attitudes, a high consumption of online pornography and at-risk consumption of alcohol or drugs. A history of sexual abuse was found to be associated with SESA for girls, while a high number of stressful events and the involvement of a member of their social network in sex trade were characteristic of boys involved in SESA. Practical implications of the results are discussed.

Key-Words: adolescence, sexual behaviour, gender, sexual abuse, sexualization.

Over the past few years the media have devoted attention to young people who presumably voluntarily participate in all sorts of recreational sexual behaviours in group settings: dances miming sexual positions, imitation of fellatio, stripteases, sexualized dancing, same sex kissing, etc. These public sexual activities have provided fertile ground for conflicting cultural discourses on either liberating aspects or moral disapproval (Levy, 2006; Yost & McCarthy, 2012). We have named these sexual practices *sexualized social activities* (SESA); they are defined as social practices, in other words sexual practices occurring in a group setting that are not remunerated and appear to be voluntary. These practices may involve or not genital contact or imitation, but are all of sexual nature. We preferred the term SESA to *sexual games* because of its harmless connotations. Gang rape is excluded from this definition because of the presence of violence and coercion.

The main goal of this paper is to explore if both genders participate and which adolescents are most susceptible to be significantly involved in SESA. It is known that adolescents have the ability to seek out the social contexts that best meet their objectives, and that they can even modify a sexual situation in order to meet their objectives (Sanderson & Cantor, 1995), which may mean that SESA is not necessarily a negative experience per se and may represent a mode of exploration. However, as for casual sex, it could be symptomatic of a constellation of problematic behaviours, such as a history of sexual abuse (Grello, Welsh, & Harper, 2006; Grello, Welsh, Harper, & Dickson, 2003). The idea is not to demonize such practices since some types of SESA could be perceived by adolescents as a situation where they can exercise control, find some excitement and sexual pleasure in a safe environment, improve their relationships, choose a sexual mate and even where some girls may challenge male privilege (Frank, 2003; Muñoz-Laboy, Weinstein, & Parker, 2007). Considering

that this phenomenon has only recently begun to be studied, clearly more information is needed.

To our knowledge no study has yet measured the extent of adolescent's involvement in SESA and the factors associated with their various manifestations. Nevertheless, some researchers have documented specific types of behaviours, mainly in college students, such as same sex kissing, sexualized dances and group sex. Same sex kissing was reported by a third of college women mostly during parties; alcohol was always involved and many women reported to be under the influence of heavy alcohol consumption and social pressures by men (Yost & McCarthy, 2012). These women also had favorable attitudes toward same sex kissing. Heterosexual men from 16 to 25 years old have also reported to be involved in same sex kissing, but they did not consider it a sexual act to turn on women but rather as the expression of affection (Anderson, Adams, & Rivers, 2012). A majority of youth service workers interviewed reported that many adolescents were involved in same sex kissing, sexualized dancing and striptease or imitation of striptease. Their profiles varied and the motivations were in general different for boys and girls (Thibodeau, Lavoie, & Hébert, submitted). Group sex has mostly been studied in at-risk youth. Freudenberg et al. (1999) refer to "hooky parties" where young people would stay away from school for the purpose of group sexual exchanges. Krauss et al. (2006) proposed that sex in group settings comes about as a result of boys and girls spending more time together and from a normalization of sexual relations among peers who were not linked by any emotional ties.

We are interested in a wider variety of SESA. Lavoie, Larrivée, Gagné, and Hébert (2012) have shown that adolescents were being exposed as on-lookers or participants to a whole range of SESA, most of which were without genital contact. It is involvement in several types of SESA that we will explore in the present paper.

Associated factors

Based on the report by the American Psychological Association (APA, 2007) on sexualization, we propose to focus on the influence of personal factors, of pornography and of role models, in order to understand which youth are more involved in SESA. Among the personal factors considered are: a history of sexual abuse, attitudes towards SESA, casual sex, early sexual experience, stressful life events, consumption of alcohol or drugs, as well as the perception of one's health.

Sexual abuse. Sexual abuse in childhood and adolescence is recognized as being an important trauma influencing later social and sexual development (Sanday, 2007; Senn, Carey, & Vanable, 2008). According to Fredrickson and Roberts (1997), victims of sexual abuse may be more likely to having adopted male perspectives objectifying their bodies and to voluntarily engage in activities in which their bodies are subject to evaluation. SESA could thus be seen more frequently in young with a history of sexual abuse.

Attitudes. A view of these activities as something harmless and normal or as an affirmation of "girl power" would appear to have the effect of encouraging participation in SESA. Gilmartin (2006) suggested that over time a shift occurred in the cultural perceptions of popularity that had been associated with having a boyfriend or a girlfriend and became associated with deriving pleasure from casual sex.

Casual sex and early sexual experience. Involvement in friendships with benefits was documented as related to one type of SESA: group sex (Krauss et al., 2006). Early sexual intercourse was selected to be one of the factors for study, since it is associated with relational problems and with so-called risky sexual practices (Davis & Lay-Yee, 1999; Kaestle, Halpern, Miller, & Ford, 2005; Sandfort, Orr, Hirsch, & Santelli, 2008).

Other personal factors. Jessor (1991) proposed that different factors such as an accumulation of stressful events, psychological distress and a high consumption of alcohol or drugs can lead to problems in adolescence including sexual at-risk behaviours. Grello et al. (2006) also confirmed the link in adolescents between drug consumption and casual sex.

Consumption of online pornography. Consumption of internet pornography would appear to be related to early sexual intercourse (Brown et al., 2006) and other sexual activities. Despite potentially positive aspects of consumption of pornography (Innala, 2007), it also leads to a particular view of women and sexuality, that includes the belief in the widespread popularity of

rare sexual practices, the valorization of a sexuality devoid of emotional ties and the perception of sex as a recreational activity or a "competitive sport" (Peter & Valkenburg, 2006a, 2006b; Zillman, 2000).

Role models. Jessor (1991) as well as Lohman and Billings (2008) reported the importance of taking into account access to role models when studying adolescent behaviour. The *openness of parents to communicating about sexuality* will thus be considered here. According to these authors, deviant behavioural role models would also have an influence. We therefore identified *participation of a network member in the sex trade* as possibly influencing involvement in SESA.

The present study

The main aim of this study is to identify factors associated with a high involvement in SESA, particularly a history of sexual abuse in childhood and adolescence, in a non-clinical sample of adolescents. A further aim is to describe the number of young people of both genders involved in these types of activities. Our hypothesis are that a history of sexual abuse, involvement in casual sex, an early sexual experience, a high number of stressful events, an at-risk consumption of alcohol or drugs, and an elevated consumption of online pornography are associated with a high degree of participation in SESA. We also expect that openness of parents to communicate about sexuality will be associated. Other factors will be studied for exploratory purposes, such as attitudes towards SESA, the perception of one's health and the involvement of a member of their social network in the sex trade.

Method

Participants

Recruitment for the non-clinical sample of students was carried out among all classes of Grade 11 and 12 at four public high schools in Quebec City. This is an urban centre of nearly 500,000 inhabitants in the province of Quebec, where the majority of the population is French speaking. All the targeted classes participated ($N = 54$). The schools, which ranged in size from 540 to 1,696 students, were selected in such a way as to target the lower- and middle-class socioeconomic strata. Two of these schools had high rates of poverty, which means that the percentage of families living below the low income threshold was very high (Government of Quebec, 2008). The two other schools had an index that indicates a somewhat moderately privileged community. The parents of the 1,459 adolescents were solicited. The percentage of parental agreement (consent) from the four schools was 61.2%.

Among the 893 adolescents whose parents gave their consent, 820 (91.8%) anonymously completed a self-administered questionnaire in their classroom. Five questionnaires were excluded before compilation because their data was invalid ($n = 2$) or because respondents said they had not answered honestly ($n = 3$). Thus, the final sample consisted of 815 young people (465 girls and 349 boys, one young person neglected to mention his or her gender) aged 15 to 18 years old ($M = 15.86$, $SD = .74$). Half were in Grade 11 (51%), while the other half were in Grade 12 (47%), and a small number (2%) were in a special studies class. Nearly all the respondents were born in Canada (95%), as were their parents (90%) or at least one of their parents (5%). Most of the adolescents lived with their birth family (70%), 29% lived in another type of family (e.g., blended family), and less than 1% were in foster care.

Procedures

Parents of targeted adolescents were asked for their active written consent. A research assistant was available in the classrooms. Students handed in their questionnaires to the research assistant in a sealed envelope in order to ensure confidentiality. These procedures were approved by the *Comité d'Éthique de la Recherche* [Research Ethics Committee] at Université Laval.

Measures

The survey questionnaire consisted of three sections: 1) the respondent's sociodemographic characteristics and life context (Aubin et al., 2002; Boyce, Doherty, Fortin, & MacKinnon, 2003; Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2002), 2) sexualized social activities and attitudes towards these activities. Several of the scales had to be developed by the research team since no other scale validated for these variables was available. In certain cases (e.g., description of sexualized social activities and attitudes towards these activities), interviews were carried out to develop items with students, and workers from various community youth organizations.

Sexualized social activities. Nine SESA were investigated: wet t-shirt contests, stripteases, sexualized dancing, same sex kissing to excite others, imitation of fellatio with an object, dance in which people mime sexual positions, fellatio contests, group sex, and group masturbation contests. For each activity, adolescents were asked, after given a description, to indicate if, since turning 14, they had ever done this activity themselves. The global score was obtained by adding the number of SESA the adolescent had participated in, for a possible range of 0 to 9. An open-ended question allowed respondents to add an activity that was not mentioned.

Sexual abuse. Two items from the Violence Against Women Survey Questionnaire (Statistics Canada, 1993) were: "When you were a child (before the age of 13) or when you were an adolescent (13 to 18 years old), did anyone force you or try to force you into a sexual activity (sexual touching, kissing, caressing, penetration)?" The response options were yes/no. The two items were grouped in a dichotomous score (0-1).

Attitudes towards SESA. We created positive and negative items with regard to attitudes towards SESA (e.g., Engaging in these kinds of sexual games is normal in adolescents; Performing a striptease in front of a group is a good way to gain respect and be appreciated). To extract the factors, a principal component analysis with an oblique rotation was conducted through SPSS. The final solution identified one factor consisting of 36 items and explaining 42.28% of the variance. The response scale ranged from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 4 (*completely agree*). A high overall score signified approval of SESA. The overall scale had an alpha of .94.

Casual sex. Two items were used (i.e., hook-ups; friends with "benefits") to measure casual sex. The response options were yes/no. As the items were correlated, answers were grouped to form a dichotomous score (0-1) after transformation.

Early sexual experience. Participants were asked to indicate their age at their first consensual sexual experience: one item on oral sex, another on intercourse. The scale ranged from 1 (never have) to 8, scores 2 and 3 were coded 1 (precocious, 13 years old and younger), while the others scores were coded 0. Since the two items were strongly correlated they were regrouped to form a dichotomous score (0-1) after transformation.

Social network involvement in sex services. An item evaluated the involvement of a member of their social network, that is, a relative or a friend, in the sex trade (prostitution and nude dancing). The response options were yes/no.

Stressful life events. Four items (i.e., painful break-up with girlfriend or boyfriend; serious problems at school; pregnancy or abortion; death of a loved one) were taken from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) (Statistics Canada, 2005). Two other items (moving and placement in foster care) were added. The response options were yes/no. After transformation, the global score of this measure was determined by adding up adolescents' life events, for a range of 0 to 6. Overall, 12% of respondents had never experienced these events,

but a quarter (24.7%) reported that they had experienced three events or more.

At-risk alcohol use and drug use. The items were taken from the NLSCY (Statistics Canada, 2005). The following questions were asked: "In the last 12 months, how many times have you been drunk?", and "In the last 12 months, how many times have you taken drugs?" The scale ranged from 1 (never) to 5 (every week) for alcohol use and from 1 (never) to 6 (3 to 5 times per week) for drug use. A single dichotomous variable was created, in which the score 1 indicated the youth had experienced a high frequency of alcohol abuse (score 4 and 5) or drug abuse (score 5 and 6). A score of 0 indicated lower frequencies.

Health or mental health perceptions. Two questions (How do you perceive your physical health? and How do you perceive your mental health?) measured the respondent's subjective evaluation of his or her state of health, whatever symptoms may have been present (Zullig, Valois, & Drane, 2005). The scale varied from excellent (1) to bad (4).

Consumption of online pornography. This homemade measure, based on the definition of Internet pornography by Carroll et al. (2008), assessed how often participants used the media to increase their sexual excitement. It consisted of six items (e.g., entering a pornographic website to look at photos, clips, or pornographic films; entering a website with live chatting and discussing sexual topics with strangers; exchanging images, clips, etc. of a sexual nature on the Internet). The scale used was 0 times (1), 1 to 2 times (2), 3 to 12 times (3), 13 to 24 times (4), or more than two times per month (5). The global score was obtained by calculating the mean of the six items. The internal consistency was .68 for this sample. Almost 20% of adolescents had never consumed pornography over the Internet, but 19% had consumed it at least 3 to 12 times since the age of 14.

Parents' openness to communicating about sexuality. Three items were developed (e.g., My parents think that the school should be responsible for my sexual education; At home, it is better not to talk about sex in front of my parents). The Likert scale varies from 1 (totally disagree) to 4 (totally agree). A high score signified that parents were open about sexuality and that it was possible to talk about sexuality at home. The internal consistency of this measure was .67 for this sample.

Statistical Analyses

Descriptive analyses were performed to describe adolescents' behaviour in relation to SESA as well as associated factors as a function of gender. Preliminary correlational analyses were performed in order to verify the explanatory

potential of the regression model as well as the multicollinearity of the variables. According to the recommendations of (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2006), a logarithmic transformation was performed on variables for SESA participation and for online pornography consumption, in order to reduce skewness and kurtosis. In view of the exploratory aspect of this study, gender was controlled for beforehand and a multiple stepwise regression analysis was performed in order to predict participation in a high variety of SESA.

Results

Participation

Four hundred and thirty-nine adolescents (54%) stated that they had participated in at least one SESA since the age of 14. More precisely, 28% participated in one SESA, while 14% participated in two, 6% in three and 5% in four. Only 2% of adolescents said that they had been involved in five or more SESA. It was also asked if they had observed such activities. In total, 680 adolescents (84%) reported having observed at least one SESA since the age of 14.

Table 1 provides information on the prevalence of each of the nine SESA for the entire sample and by gender. In general, significantly more girls (61%) than boys (46%) had participated in these activities, $\chi^2(1, N = 807) = 17.90, p < .001$. We identified three groupings through an analysis of percentages. First, the most common activity was sexualized dancing inspired by pop music videos; 44% of adolescents reported doing so at least once since they were 14. A second grouping comprises activities that involve one in 10 adolescents: same sex kissing to titillate onlookers, dance in which people mime sexual positions, imitation of fellatio with an object and striptease. A third grouping included activities with genital contacts (group sex, fellatio contests, and masturbation contests) but also wet t-shirt contests; they involved from 3% to 5% of adolescents. Chi square testing indicated that significantly more girls were involved in five of the nine activities: stripteases, sexualized dancing, same sex kissing, imitation of fellatio with an object and dances miming sexual positions. Wet t-shirt contests, group sex, fellatio contests and masturbation contests were engaged in equally by both genders.

Associated factors

Correlations existing between different variables appear in Table 2. Most of the variables are positively and moderately correlated to the dependent variable, with the exception of perception of physical health, which was excluded from the regression model.

Table 3 lists the independent variables. Twelve percent of the participants reported a history of sexual abuse, 18.5% for the girls and 4% for the boys. Significantly more girls than boys reported a history of sexual abuse, $\chi^2(1, N = 813) = 38.64, p < .000$. As regards adolescents' attitudes towards SESA, it appears that the majority of them (82%) disapprove of these activities, but girls (91%) condemn them more than boys (69%), ($t(805) = 10.00, p < .000$.) Finally, boys consumed, on average, more pornography online since the age of 14 than girls, ($t(810) = 8.24, p < .000$).

By performing a multiple stepwise regression (see Table 4) seven factors were identified as predictors of SESA: casual sex, high consumption of online pornography, a positive attitude towards SESA, a high number of stressful events, an at-risk consumption of alcohol or drugs, a history of sexual abuse and the involvement of a close family member or friend in the sex trade. Each of these variables contributes significantly to the total variance. When all the selected independent variables are included in the model, 38.7% of the dependent variable's variance can be explained ($F(8,784) = 61.31, p < .000$).

Since gender is significantly linked to high participation in SESA, subsequent analyses were performed in order to identify factors specific to boys and girls. In the case of the girls ($N=452$), a multiple stepwise regression identified five factors: casual sex ($\beta = .32$), high consumption of online pornography ($\beta = .25$), a positive attitude towards SESA ($\beta = .14$), an at-risk consumption of alcohol or drugs ($\beta = .12$) and a history of sexual abuse ($\beta = .11$). Taken together, these variables account for a significant proportion of the variance in participation in several SESA by girls (adjusted $R^2 = .39; F(5, 452) = 58.08, p < .000$). For boys, ($N = 331$), four factors were identified: casual sex ($\beta = .41$), a high number of stressful events ($\beta = .20$), a positive attitude towards SESA ($\beta = .15$) and the involvement of a social network member in the sex trade ($\beta = .10$). These variables explain one third of the dependent variable's variance (adjusted $R^2 = .32; F(4, 331) = 40.20, p < .000$).

Finally, an additional multiple stepwise regression was performed, keeping only SESA with genital contact (fellatio contests, group sex and group masturbation contests), in order to explore whether the associated factors diverged in the case of more sexually intrusive activities. Variables associated with participation ($F(7, 783) = 20.30, p < 0.000$) are casual sex ($\beta = .16$), approving attitudes towards SESA ($\beta = .15$), early sexual experience ($\beta = .13$), a high consumption of online pornography ($\beta = .11$) and the involvement of a member of their social network in the sex trade ($\beta = .09$). Gender did not have a significant effect and unlike regression aimed at predicting the entire set of SESA together, early sexual experience is one of

the main predictive factors.

Discussion

This is the first study to show that adolescents in a non-clinical population are widely exposed to various types of SESA, as observers or participants. The data also reveal that a high degree of involvement in these activities, meaning involvement in any combination of the nine studied, is associated with particular factors.

Prevalence of young peoples' involvement in SESA

More than half of respondents had participated in one or more SESA since the age of 14 and a third had participated in three or more SESA. Although it is not a generalized phenomenon, a high number of young people have therefore actively explored one of these sexualized behaviours on at least one occasion. It seems possible that sexualized dances inspired by music videos are more a familiarization game with sexual undertones, given the large numbers of young people who have been involved in it (Muñoz-Laboy et al., 2007).

It may be seen that, on the whole, girls take part in a higher number of SESA compared to boys. This result of girls' high degree of participation would appear to support the hypothesis that girls are socially encouraged to perform such sexualized acts (Yost & McCarthy, 2012). SESA without genital contact involve more girls as participants, although the number of boys involved is not negligible. Having fun with sex may therefore be present in both genders, but more girls wish to attract attention or lend themselves, either consciously or not, to the commodification of their bodies (Levy, 2006).

Genital SESA, are characterized by the fact that they include as many boys as girls, but few young people get involved. The point of these genital activities may be not to attract attention per se, but to go right to the act itself. Some boys may find in this an answer to their desire to obtain sex free from relational costs (Gilmartin, 2006); in the case of girls different explanations co-exist, ranging from a need to be noticed to vulnerability or manipulation and coercion by others, as mentioned by (Rothman et al., 2008). Boys could however be faced with the same influences. The desire to be recognized by others (Krauss et al., 2006) could also explain the participation by both genders in genital SESA.

Factors associated with a high degree of involvement in SESA

Both genders share certain associated factors, while some factors are specific to either boys or girls. Young people reporting casual sexual

relations, such as having a friend with benefits or a hook-up, are more heavily involved in SESA. It may show that for them sexuality is more a form of entertainment (Krauss et al., 2006; Peter & Valkenburg, 2006b), and that emotional ties with a partner are not a priority or could be difficult for them to create. The connection between positive attitudes to SESA and a high degree of participation indicates that perceived advantages to recreational sex, such as an illusion of power, increased popularity and normality, or a perceived potential for sexual gratification are found in both boys and girls who join in these activities.

When we look closely at factors associated with a high participation by girls, a history of sexual abuse is clearly identifiable, which concurs with the literature on sexual abuse (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). This may be a way for victims of sexual abuse to take back control of their sexuality by allowing them to perceive themselves as being in a position of power, or by allowing them to punish themselves (Cassese, 1993; Finkelhor & Browne, 1985). Victims can come to view sex as a way to have affection and so engage in risky sexual activities (Senn et al., 2008). They may also use sex as a distraction or for avoiding the negatives feeling resulting from their sexual abuse (Briere, 1992). Furthermore, having experienced sexual abuse may lead to distortions in sexual development that manifest as over-sexualized ways of relating to others (Simon & Feiring, 2008). The percentage of victims in our sample is rather similar to the prevalence found in a representative sample of adolescents from the province of Québec, 15% for girls and 4% for boys (Hébert, Lavoie, Blais and the PAJ research team, in press). This can reassure about the representativeness of our sample.

Otherwise, to find that the consumption of online pornography is associated with higher participation to SESA for girls only is surprising. In fact, fewer girls in our sample consumed pornography over the Internet than did boys, nearly one third never having consumed it at all. It may be that those girls who made frequent use of pornography in its various forms end up sharing beliefs about women as sexual objects at the service of male fantasies. Girls who were most involved in SESA also had problems with alcohol and drug consumption, problems that can be also associated with a history of sexual abuse (Senn et al., 2008). Abuse of these substances may see as lowering inhibitions or it may indicate the presence of more general problems (Jessor, 1991; Rothman et al., 2008).

Boys who participate in many types of SESA may be distinguished from girls by the presence of several stressful events including painful romantic break-ups, serious problems at school or placement in foster care. These situations

may be indicative of relational problems leading to sexuality with no emotional ties, or they may be sign of delinquency and family dysfunction. In the future, it will be necessary to see whether school problems lead these adolescents to absenteeism and time spent away from parental supervision, making it easier for them to engage in SESA, as suggested by Krauss et al. (2006). The involvement of a close friend or family member in the sex trade (nude dancing, prostitution) would also appear to be a risk factor specific to high degree of participation by boys in SESA. Such an environment would provide a social learning context in which sexuality is considered from the practical point of view and more as a means to earn respect or material advantages. Sexual abuse was not a predictive factor for boys and the reason remains unclear. It could be related to the low rate of sexual abuse in boys in our sample (Senn et al., 2008).

Parental openness to communicating about sexuality was not related to a lesser a higher degree of involvement in SESA. Adolescents confide in their parents more about sexuality in general (Frappier et al., 2008), but they may be influenced by others in their group when it comes to SESA, particularly their friends. This source of influence should be the subject of future studies.

Strengths and limitations

The present study has a number of strengths. The non-clinical sample used is an addition to available data which come mainly from at-risk groups (for example, Krauss et al., 2006). However, this is not a representative sample of adolescents aged 15-18 in Quebec. Particular attention was devoted to the development of instruments about SESA.

This study also has some limitations. Since it is a transversal study, no causal link can be established. It is therefore possible that certain associated factors may accompany or result from young people's involvement in SESA. The use of self-reported retrospective measures may have led to memory bias. Although their responses were confidential, the adolescents may have underreported their involvement in SESA, in view of the sensitive nature of the phenomenon.

Implications for research and practice

It should be remembered that the number of times young people participated in each of the SESA was not taken into account. In the future it would be interesting to take a closer look at this question, since certain SESA are more intrusive than others and that a regular participation might point to a lifestyle with negatives effects. We also identified that "familiarization games" such as "truth or dare", which were named in an open question,

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were not part of the current construct of SESA. As some teachers mentioned to us that street gangs were attracting young girls with strip poker games as a mean of desensitizing them to prostitution, other surveys should thus include familiarization games. Future studies should take into consideration more contextual factors linked to the social and family environment, such as the influence of the media, the characteristics of the neighborhood, parental supervision and peer influence. Moreover, it would be useful to reproduce this study with the help of longitudinal data in order to avoid the bias connected to retrospective measures and to analyse the consequences of such involvement, and to interview adolescents on their experiences.

It would in conclusion appear important to pursue sexual education among young people, in view of the high likelihood that they are being exposed to these sexualized social behaviours. They should feel comfortable discussing the pros and cons and naming their limits. Questions still need to be answered with regard to the higher degree of involvement by girls in SESA, so as to better understand the challenges they face (Krauss et al., 2006) and to verify if they see benefits as sexual pleasure and improvement of their relationships. Since some factors identified are common to boys and girls, universal promotion programs could be developed for both genders (i.e., casual sex, consumption of online pornography, positive attitudes towards SESA and at-risk consumption of alcohol or drugs). However, victims of sexual abuse, adolescents in youth protection agencies, or adolescents reporting substance abuse problems ought to receive particular attention in order to support them in making enlightened choices in the expression of their sexuality. Parents also have an important role to play in the sexual education of their children and in the monitoring of their activities; SESA occurred for the most part in young people's homes and the homes of their friends (Lavoie et al., 2012). Parents are role models for their adolescents (Frappier et al., 2008) and it is important that they take a position for sexual health and against the commodification of sexuality. They should show that they are able to listen and understand, in order to influence them in their social behaviours (Morency, 2008). Finally, quite apart from the message conveyed by the media, not all young people have participated actively, but it remains important to encourage a critical approach to SESA.

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Table 1. Participation to SESA by gender.

	Total	Boys	Girls	
	<i>N (%)</i>	<i>N (%)</i>	<i>N (%)</i>	$\chi^2 (p)$
1. Wet t-shirt contests (<i>N</i> = 778)	35 (4.5)	15 (4.5)	20 (4.5)	.001 (.970)
2. Stripteases (<i>N</i> = 766)	81 (10.6)	22 (6.9)	59 (13.3)	8.09 (.004)
3. Sexualized dancing (<i>N</i> = 782)	340 (43.5)	124 (37.2)	216 (48.1)	9.19 (.002)
4. Same sex kissing (<i>N</i> = 782)	100 (12.8)	12 (3.7)	88 (19.3)	41.57 (.000)
5. Imitation of fellatio (<i>N</i> = 789)	88 (11.2)	14 (4.2)	74 (16.2)	27.83 (.000)
6. Dance sexual position (<i>N</i> = 786)	100 (12.7)	28 (8.5)	72 (15.8)	9.20 (.002)
7. Fellatio contests (<i>N</i> = 801)	32 (4.0)	8 (2.4)	24 (5.2)	4.04 (.044)
8. Group sex (<i>N</i> = 800)	38 (4.8)	19 (5.6)	19 (4.1)	0.95 (.330)
9. Masturbation contests (<i>N</i> = 801)	23 (2.9)	15 (4.4)	8 (1.7)	5.09 (.024)

Note. Bonferroni correction ($p = .05 / 9$ tests = .006).

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Table 2
Correlations (*r* or ϕ) between the various predictors and dependent variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. SESA participation	1.0											
2. Sex ^a	.19**	1.0										
3. Attitudes SESA	.23**	-.34**	1.0									
4. Casual sex	.50**	.06	.24**	1.0								
5. Early sexual intercourse	.20**	-.02	.16**	.30*	1.0							
6. Network in sex industry	.15**	.03	.07	.13*	.08*	1.0						
7. Sexual abuse	.26**	.22**	-.02	.20*	.12**	.12**	1.0					
8. Stressful events	.31**	.08*	.06	.28*	.13**	.09*	.25**	1.0				
9. Alcohol and drug use	.29**	-.04	.15**	.40*	.20**	.11**	.09*	.18**	1.0			
10. Mental health	.09**	.13**	.07*	.10*	.08	.11*	.15**	.15**	.13**	1.0		
11. Pornography	.29**	-.31**	.37**	.26*	.17**	.06	.11**	.17**	.16**	.06	1.0	
12. Parents' openness	.09*	.10**	-.12**	.09*	.02	.11**	-.05	.11**	.06	-.11**	-.00	1.0

Note. Bold: Coefficient Phi (ϕ)
^a Gender was scored as 1 for boys and 2 for girls
 * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 3

Description of independent variables, by gender

	Total		Boys		Girls	
	<i>(N = 815)</i>		<i>(N = 349)</i>		<i>(N = 465)</i>	
Dichotomous and categorical variables	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Casual sex (<i>N = 814</i>)	325	39.9	128	36.8	197	42.4
Early sexual intercourse (<i>N = 815</i>)	116	14.2	52	14.9	64	13.8
Sexual abuse (<i>N = 814</i>) [†]	100	12.3	14	4.0	86	18.5
Network in sex industry (<i>N = 812</i>)	41	5.0	15	4.3	26	5.6
At-risk alcohol and drug use (<i>N = 815</i>)	222	27.2	103	29.5	119	25.6
Mental health perception (<i>N = 809</i>)						
Excellent	444	54.9	211	61.4	233	50.2
Good	300	37.1	105	30.5	195	42.0
Acceptable	65	8.0	28	8.1	36	7.8
Continuous variables	M	(SD)	M	(SD)	M	(SD)
Attitudes towards SESA (<i>N = 808</i>) [†]	2.09	(0.47)	2.28	(0.46)	1.96	(0.42)
Number of stressful life events (<i>N = 814</i>)	1.78	(1.14)	1.67	(1.13)	1.86	(1.14)
Pornography (<i>N = 813</i>) [†]	1.66	(0.66)	1.87	(0.70)	1.50	(0.58)
Parents' openness com. sex. (<i>N = 810</i>)	3.04	(0.65)	2.96	(0.64)	3.09	(0.66)

Note. [†] Significant difference for girls and boys. Correction of Bonferroni ($p = .05 / 12 \text{ tests} = .004$).

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Table 4

Multiple stepwise regressions predicting participation in Sexualised Social Activities (SES) (N=784)

Variables	B	SE	β	CI (95%)	Adjusted R ²
Block 1					.039
Sex	0.10	.02	.20***	0.06-0.13	
Block 2					.381
Sex	0.13	.02	.26***	0.09-0.16	
Casual sex	0.16	.02	.33***	0.13-0.20	
Pornography	0.28	.05	.17***	0.18-0.38	
Stressful life events	0.02	.01	.11***	0.01-0.04	
Buying sex	-	-	-	-	
At-risk alcohol and drug use	0.05	.02	.10**	0.02-0.08	
Attitudes towards SESA	0.07	.02	.14***	0.04-0.11	
Sexual abuse	0.06	.02	.08**	0.02-0.10	
Network in sex industry	0.07	.03	.06*	0.00-0.13	
R²					.387

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$