

The Sexualization of Boys and Girls in Videos: Proposal for a Self-Sexualization Scale on TikTok

REBECA SUÁREZ-ÁLVAREZ¹
ANTONIO GARCÍA-JIMÉNEZ
Rey Juan Carlos University, Spain

This research focuses on the sexualized portrayals of minors on social media. A grading scale based on 29 items is proposed to measure the self-sexualization of boy and girl influencers on this social media. This instrument provides a set of comprehensible quantitative indicators that will allow researchers to assess how these teenager influencers approach their sexualization and how they display it on their digital profiles. We will assess the correlations between the self-sexualization of boys and girls in TikTok videos. A total of 746 videos of 43 adolescent influencers from 12 to 17 years of age were coded to analyze their self-sexualization. High levels of sexualization were recorded for both genders on this social media. Boys begin to self-sexualize at the age of 13, only one year later than girls. From the age of 15, boys start to present themselves in underwear and swimsuits, displaying their muscles and incorporating songs with lyrics that are denigrating to girls.

Keywords: social media, TikTok, self-sexualization grading scale, gender, age, video, influencer

Various international institutions have been warning for years about the increase in child sexualization and the risk it entails for children's development (American Psychological Association [APA], 2007; Bailey, 2011; European Union [EU], 2012). These reports address the inappropriate sexuality of girls, which involves displaying themselves in a hypersexualized way through erotic expressions, postures, and clothing considered overly precocious for their ages (Bailey, 2011). This situation is fomenting adult sexuality in underage girls and boys who are not ready for it (EU, 2012).

Rebeca Suárez-Álvarez: rebeca.suarez@urjc.es
Antonio García-Jiménez: antonio.garcia@urjc.es
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According to objectification theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), this kind of sexualization occurs when the bodies of girls and women are seen as objects for the enjoyment of the males who watch them. Females are subjected to having their physical attractiveness equated with being sexy (Ward, 2016), which results in their self-sexualization becoming a process in which they learn to internalize the approval and reward of their sexualized behaviors and appearances by those who look at them (Moreno Barreneche, 2021). This phenomenon leads to enhanced body dissatisfaction by young women on social media (Guizzo, Canale, & Fasoli, 2021). Sexualized images of boys and girls also lead to inequalities in the perception of competence, as sexualized girls are considered less competent, which is not the case for boys (Fasoli, Durante, Mari, Zogmaister, & Volpato, 2018).

These gendered practices (Szulc, 2020) by minors stem from the information available in their environments (Moscatelli, Golfieri, Tomasetto, & Bigler, 2021), which, at the present time, is mainly shaped by social media such as TikTok (Datareportal, 2023). On these sites they engage in acting, relate their experiences, participate socially, and entertain themselves (Anderson, 2020). On this particular social media, influencers who produce content have become a social phenomenon (Conti, Gathani, & Tricomi, 2022), achieving social recognition (Wellman, 2021) along with success thanks to the attention economy and visibility (Abidin, 2021). Moreover, through original self-portrayals based on the use of humor they have managed to become opinion leaders on this social media (Barta, Belanche, Fernández, & Flavián, 2023).

This research has included boys as well as girls in analyzing self-sexualizing behavior on social media. From our point of view, boys should also be examined to determine the following: whether they perpetuate gender roles and stereotypes; if they adopt the traditional sexualized styling and behaviors of girls on this social media; and to see if they display themselves in a hypersexualized way. From a communicative perspective, this study also addresses the cultural manifestations generated on social media that shape society, along with its perceptions and norms, through the active participation of underage influencers. The focus is on sexualized styling that includes clothing, accessories, and behaviors that boys and girls display.

To this end, the authors considered it appropriate to offer a Self-Sexualization Scale on TikTok (SST), which we have created to identify and rank the sexualized portrayals exhibited by influencers of both genders. This scale will allow us to shed light on the self-sexualization of minors, determine whether it is occurring at earlier ages, and in which gender it is more prevalent. The SST matrix can also be used to track the self-sexualization of child influencers on other social media as well.

Sexualization, Gender, and Age on Social Media

The use of social media continues to increase among young people (Twenge, Martin, & Spitzberg, 2019), leading to the rationalization and commodification of social relations in Western culture (Van Dijk, 2020). According to Trekels, Ward, and Eggermont (2018), social media contribute to the self-sexualization of adolescents, which perpetuates gender stereotypes (Butkowski, Dixon, Weeks, & Smith, 2020). According to Zheng, Yuan, Chang, and Jim Wu (2016), this is also happening on Facebook, where girls present themselves more seductively than boys. However, although Ramsey and Horan (2018) have confirmed that the photos shared by women on Facebook and Instagram have low levels of sexualization, photos that were

more sexualized received more Likes on both social media, confirming the findings of Butkowski et al., (2020) that young women who exaggerate gender roles in their selfies receive more comments. On TikTok, self-sexualization also occurs with boys, as they display hypersexualized behavior (Soriano-Ayala, Bonillo Díaz, & Cala, 2022).

In the case of girls, authors such as Kapidzic and Herring (2015), Bobkowski, Shafer, and Ortiz (2016), and Naezer (2020), point out that their digital self-portrayals are highly sexualized, yet this increase is contradictory, as its occurrence is taking place in Western societies where more policies promoting gender equality are being developed (Blake, Bastian, Denson, Grosjean, & Brooks, 2018).

These authors question whether sexualization on social media is related to the female subordination, or rather to economic conditions, which may imply that sexualization has become an indicator of upward social mobility and the level of competence of girls. On this point, Egan (2013) questions the traditional view of sexualization because of the way in which gender, race, and sexuality are constructed within the literature. For contemporary society, a sexualized girl represents a dangerous future as opposed to innocent girls who promise a more stable outlook through a respectable femininity that complies with heteronormativity (Egan, 2013). According to Egan and Hawkes (2008), such innocence should be removed as a criterion for assessing sexuality, as it disempowers girls. This affirmation is also endorsed by some minors on social media, who see sexualized behavior as a type of empowerment, yet when these same minors see such behavior in other girls, they condemn such actions as a form of objectification that encourages cyberbullying (Soriano-Ayala et al., 2022).

Choi, Kang, Kim, and Lee (2023) note that girls' self-sexualization is more closely linked to their age. For mature women, self-sexualization is a source of power, whereas for young women, this may imply a greater risk of sexual harassment and body-shaming. Moncrief (2022) confirms that Instagram use and the levels of internalized sexualization increase among university women. About the age of minors' self-sexualization on social media, we have not found any literature addressing the issue. The present study hopes to fill this gap in knowledge about whether the age of male child influencers may also be a determinant of their sexualized self-portrayals.

Ali and Qamar (2020) warn that the objectification of boys is equally disturbing as that of girls because it objectifies them and undermines social values. There is a tendency to objectify male bodies in Western culture (Rollero, 2022), which leads males to heightened concerns about their body image (Seekis, Bradley, & Duffy, 2021). Such objectification leads them to display muscular bodies in their digital self-portrayals (Rousseau, Stevens, & Eggermont, 2020; Sicilia, Granero-Gallegos, Alcaraz-Ibáñez, Sánchez-Gallardo, & Medina-Casaubón, 2022), in which having muscles and a "six-pack" abdomen become symbols of power (Drummond & Drummond, 2020). As Drummond and Drummond (2015) also point out, showing muscles is a visible sign of minors' body aesthetics and masculinity, which is displayed for the gaze of girls. This act of watching establishes the females' heterosexuality, which is a factor in consolidating friendships among this gender (Krebbekx, 2021).

Influencers, Portrayal, and Sexualization

Minors see influencers as role models and sources of inspiration (Hudders, De Jans, & De Veirman, 2021). To achieve this, female health-and-beauty influencers on Instagram display themselves as "superwomen" who must be perceived as beautiful, exciting, experienced (Devos, Eggermont, & Vandenbosch, 2022), authentic, and likable by combining formal and informal content that brings their audiences closer to them (Kováčová, 2022). These self-portrayals on TikTok tend to be modified by the females based on the comments they receive from followers (Dotson, 2022), in which gender roles seem to become blurred (Suárez-Álvarez & García-Jiménez, 2021).

In studies on the sexualized self-display of influencers, Uhm (2021) asks whether or not sex sells on Instagram. She has also studied the link between the sexualization of underage female influencers and advertising. The author asserts that sexualized images negatively affect the influencer's rating, the effectiveness of the adverts, and the purchase intention of her or his followers. Along these lines, Abidin (2016) warns of the "subversive frivolity" evident in the selfies posted by influencers on this same social media, which undervalues them and lowers their visibility. Furthermore, Drenten, Gurrieri, and Tyler (2019) point out that the sexualized displays of underage female influencers on Instagram put them at risk of receiving sexually harassing comments. Their posts focus on self-marketing and sexual objectification in an attempt to increase the attention of followers to monetize their content. However, such monetization cannot always be achieved by those who merge "porn chic" with the monetary exploitation of attention (Abidin, 2021), with pornography as a cultural undercurrent in these nontraditional work contexts.

Sexualized Styling and Behavior

Traditional media, advertising, and the culture industry are catalysts for these gender identities and the perpetuation of gender stereotypes (Gutierrez, 2021; Kapidzic & Herring, 2015). According to Condeza-Dall'Orso, Matus, and Vergara-Leighton (2021) and Saltik (2019), brands sexualize minors for commercial purposes by exploiting the image of sexualized girls with provocative clothing such as miniskirts, lingerie, and high heels (Quezada, 2014), as well as facial expressions that are inappropriate for their ages (Gerding Speno & Aubrey, 2018).

Murnen, Greenfield, Younger, and Boyd (2016) and Sherman, Allemand, and Prickett (2020) note that in Western culture, clothing and the degree of nudity are important indicators of sexualization in both genders, which are aesthetic attributes that have also been studied by Drenten and colleagues (2019) in the sexualized self-portrayals of female influencers. Prokop and Švancárová (2020) add women's use of high heels as a way of increasing their physical attractiveness to men. Narros, Díaz-Bustamante-Ventisca, and Llovet-Rodríguez (2018), as well as Suárez-Álvarez, García-Jiménez, and Urbina-Montana (2023), concur with the assertion that excessive makeup, the use of accessories, and black- or red-leather garments are used to enhance their sexuality, which was also pointed out by Kurutz (2020). Clothing and behaviors that "adultify" minors (Firinci Orman, 2020; Gerding Speno & Aubrey, 2018) result in higher levels of sexualization on social media than in traditional media (Trekels, Karsay, Eggermont, & Vandenbosch, 2018).

In this display of female bodies, Davis (2018) and Vänskä (2020) assert that in the construction of female identity and sexuality, breasts and buttocks have become commodities for males to use and enjoy. In the case of boys, these self-portrayals include the displays of muscular bodies as the ideal of masculinity, along with clothes and accessories they use to be sexualized (Drummond & Drummond; 2015; Krebbekx, 2021; Rousseau et al., 2020; Sicilia et al., 2022).

The behaviors they display on camera should also be assessed to understand their level of sexualization. Their body language helps them connect with audiences (Dhawan, 2021) through body posturing aimed at being more persuasive, influencing their followers, and attracting the interest of the latter (Pease & Pease, 2016). As reported by Drenten and colleagues (2019) and Khattab (2020), adolescent girls display seductive gestures and poses highlighting their physical attractiveness through submissive or eroticized postures, including head tilting, hair stroking, and leg crossing, as ways of attracting boys' attention (Van Natten, 2021). Bianciotti (2017) notes that females use seductive or naughty smiles and sensual dances—moving their waists or hips provocatively to highlight their sexual attractiveness and to show themselves as sexually active, which are types of dances that males also integrate into their sexualization codes as well (Owen & Harman, 2022).

Objectives and Research Questions

The literature has generally focused on the sexualized display of female influencers on Instagram. However, the authors of the present study have delved into the productions on TikTok that influencers of both genders (boys and girls) create and viralize. Moreover, a self-sexualization scale has been created by the authors based on the minors' portrayals to rate their levels of self-sexualization. To this end, the following research questions are posed:

RQ1: Do adolescent boys or girls display more self-sexualized styling and behaviors on TikTok?

RQ2: Does self-sexualization on TikTok differ according to the ages of the adolescents?

Methodology

The research herein is exploratory and descriptive. It was conducted using a content analysis methodology, which allowed the authors to study the content of the videos and extrapolate the results of the social media variables examined (Parry, 2019). To analyze the results, the variables were categorized and coded to identify whether there are factors that either show a relationship or a disaggregation. The variables also served to develop the analysis matrix in which the items linked to sexualized styling and behaviors were detailed.

Sample

A total of 746 videos from 43 TikTokers with more than 1,000 followers were viewed. The sample selection criteria were minors from 12 to 17 years of age with an active account on TikTok. Identifying the TikTokers was conducted through the following websites: <https://tokfluence.com/>;

<https://famousbirthdays.com>; and <https://www.thefamouspeople.com>. These sites provide up-to-date information on celebrities based on age, place of birth, and profession, ranked according to their popularity on the basis of their digital activity. To identify the influencers, segmentation was carried out based on age and the social media for which they are known, which included TikTok Star, YouTube Star, and Instagram Star. If the influencers were not acknowledged by the platforms as being associated with TikTok Star, yet were recognized as being connected with YouTube Star or Instagram Star, a search was conducted on TikTok to find them. Once identified, the influencers were investigated to confirm that each one had his or her own account with more than 1,000 followers on TikTok.

The selection criteria for the videos was based on the number of views. The videos needed to have more than 1,000 views to guarantee audience interest in the content. The aim was to analyze 20 videos from each influencer, but not all of them reached this number, as in the case of three boys between 13 and 14 years of age who uploaded a total of only 6, 3, and 2 videos, respectively. As they grow older, their visibility on this social media expands and their production increases. For this reason, the following influencers have been examined according to age and gender (Table 1).

Table 1. Number of TikTokers, Ages, and Number of Videos.

No. of TikTokers	Age	Gender	Videos per gender	No. of videos	%
5	12	4 girls; 2 boys	57 girls; 28 boys	85	11
7	13	4 girls; 3 boys	80 girls; 30 boys	110	15
7	14	3 girls; 4 boys	60 girls; 34 boys	94	13
8	15	4 girls; 4 boys	77 girls; 68 boys	145	19
8	16	4 girls; 4 boys	80 girls; 80 boys	160	21
8	17	4 girls; 4 boys	80 girls; 72 boys	152	20

As this research focuses on sexualization in Western culture (Choi & DeLong, 2019; Devos et al., 2022; Murnen et al., 2016) and its reflection in social media (Blake et al., 2018), the TikTokers analyzed are European, North American, and Latin American. Other cultures were left out of the study. The countries of origin of the influencers are as follows: Germany, Argentina, Canada, Colombia, Spain, the United States, France, Italy, Mexico, Norway, the United Kingdom, and Venezuela. The fieldwork was conducted between November 2022 and January 2023.

Accounts belonging to families or siblings were not analyzed, as they might have distorted the statistical analysis because of variations in age and gender. Likewise, videos in which the TikTokers do not appear, such as those starring pets, parents, siblings, or friends, were also excluded. As the objective was to study influencers known for their activities on social media and not for other professions, those who were also known for being singers or actors, or for being the children or siblings of celebrities, were left out of the study as well.

Coding Scheme

The variables of the present study are as follows: (a) styling of sexualization involving sexualized clothing and accessories as features that enhance the self-sexualization of minors; and (b) sexualizing

behaviors that include naughty smiles and sensual dances, among others. In these cases, although the focus is on behaviors, they are not always sensual, so the only ones gathered were those that showed sexualizing behaviors such as sensual smiles or dancing provocatively by swaggering or gyrating the waist and hips.

The two authors coded the scale and calculated its reliability. Both have expertise in the digital practices of minors about the use of digital technology and social media, as well as their full embracement of cyberspace and the discourse that permeates social media from the viewpoint of sexualization. They worked together on a sample that included 25% of the videos (Ruckel & Hill, 2017) of girls ($n = 109$) and the same percentage for boys ($n = 78$). The coders completed the variable analysis table for the selected sample. Next, Krippendorff's alpha coefficient was applied to these ratings to analyze the level of agreement among the coders, with the requirement that this indicator should exceed 0.8 to ensure nearly perfect agreement among the appraisers. The remaining 75% was coded by the first author. All 29 items scored above 0.8, obtaining a high degree of reliability in the study variables, with an average score of $K\text{Alpha} = 0.911$ for girls and $K\text{Alpha} = 0.934$ for boys, which confirm the stability of the instrument and its internal consistency over time. Table 2 shows the test results.

Table 2. Variables and Krippendorff's Alpha (A) by Gender.

Gender	Sexualized styling	(a) SS	Sexualized behaviors	(a) SB
Girls	Shirt or T-shirt exposing the abdomen (tummy)	0.825	Naughty or suggestive smiles	0.944
	Low-cut shirts or dresses that accentuate cleavage and breasts	0.905	Sensual or provocative dances	0.916
	Red- or black-leather garments on the upper or lower half of the body	0.874	Stroking the hair	0.916
	Lingerie on the upper or lower half of the body	0.913	Tilting the head	0.927
	High-heeled shoes	0.853	Crossing the legs	1,000
	Very short or buttocks-revealing clothes (dresses, pants, skirts)	0.888		
	Swimsuits, bikinis, and underwear	0.905		
	Tight-fitting dresses, shirts, T-shirts, or leggings	0.873		
	Erotic messages on the clothes	1.000		
	Excessive makeup	0.885		
	Necklaces or pendants on the neckline	0.881		
	Enhanced or elaborate hairstyles	0.885		
	Navel piercings	1,000		
Boys	Very short or buttocks-revealing clothes (dresses, pants, skirts)	1,000	Naughty or suggestive smiles	0.898
	Swimsuits, bikinis, and underwear	0.903	Sensual or provocative dances	0.903
	Tight-fitting dresses, shirts, T-shirts, or leggings	1,000	Deliberate display of muscles on the abdomen or arms	0.908
	Erotic messages on the clothes	1,000	Comments or songs alluding to physical aspects of girls' bodies	0.898
	Necklaces or pendants on the neckline	0.915		
	Enhanced or elaborate hairstyles	0.851		
	Navel piercings	1,000		

Note. SS: Sexualized Styling. SB: Sexualized Behaviors.

Based on the sample analyzed, the scale's reliability indicator was obtained by calculating Cronbach's Alpha, the value of which was 0.73, so the internal consistency of the results obtained was adequate. The

test-retest reliability indicator performed on a sample of 50 videos of boys and girls also registered Pearson correlation coefficients that were high for both the girls' videos ($r = 0.94, p < 0.05$) and for those of the boys ($r = 0.96, p < 0.05$). Sexualized styling and behaviors were distributed among 29 items. A total of nine items were assigned to girls' clothing and four to that of boys; four items were assigned to girls' accessories and three to the boys'; and five items were assigned to the behaviors of girls and four to the boys. The selection of sexualized styling is valid because of studies on girls' self-sexualization, which indicate that girls display more styling than boys. The calculation of sexualized styling and behaviors was carried out for each adolescent ($n = 43$) by using both the average number of stylings per video and the self-sexualization score per video as the mean (Appendix I: <https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/gb8e1h8yn7u9x6o08w8p3/Appendix-I.docx?rlkey=trclown7mirpu8hwsceu0bn0i&dl=0>).

We categorized the portrayals of girls and boys based on their degrees of sexualization about the styling (clothing and accessories) and sexualizing behaviors they display in their videos. In the same way as the rest of the variables, to test the inter-rater reliability for categorizing the images, a sample of 25% of the videos was taken, and the responses of the coders were analyzed by assigning values from 0 to 3, according to whether the videos were as follows: nonsexualized, 0; slightly sexualized, 1; clearly sexualized, 2; and hypersexualized, 3. Inter-rater concurrence was achieved using Krippendorff's alpha, with the degree of reliability measured at $K\text{Alpha} = 0.966$.

Coding Procedure

To select the variables, the authors started from studies that have addressed adolescent sexualization on TikTok (Suárez-Álvarez et al., 2023). The authors observed that minors do not always use self-sexualizing features in the same way. For instance, their degrees of self-sexualization were questioned because even though a person might be dressed in sexualizing clothes such as lingerie, there is a difference between wearing this garment in a loose-fitting way without defining body contours and wearing it as tight-fitting clothing in which bodily curves are highlighted. Although dresses can emphasize breasts, they might do so to a greater or lesser extent by showing more or less of them. T-shirts might show only the waist, or the entire abdominal area all the way up to the chest.

Thus, the authors felt the need to rate the minors' self-sexualization by creating a matrix to measure the differences in the degree of sexualization exhibited by girl and boy influencers in their audiovisual productions, similar to the one developed by Hatton and Trautner (2011), which used images of teens published in *Rolling Stone* magazine. We reviewed these authors' additive scale of sexualization, as well as that of Ruckel and Hill (2017), who studied the degree of self-sexualization in the Facebook posts of young adult women. We also examined the clothing subscale of McKenney and Bigler's (2016a, 2016b) Internalized Sexualization Scale, which rates the preference of girls for sexualized clothing and distinguishes whether the clothes are more or less tight-fitting, or show more or less skin. Based on these reviews, a scale was proposed about the sexualized styling and behaviors that adolescents display on TikTok. Next, the authors discussed the situation and agreed on the categories. Likewise, the variables have been completed by reviewing the literature on sexualization and omitting those aspects that do not sexualize parts of the body, such as two-piece suits, long garments, or oversized clothing (Narros et al., 2018).

To study sexualized styling (comprised of clothes and accessories), and sexualized behaviors, a coding sheet was created, segmented into four areas: (1) control variables in which the name of the influencer, the channel, the number of followers, the title of the videos, and their publication dates were classified; (2) dependent variables of gender (boy or girl) and their age; (3) independent variables related to sexualizing parameters and behaviors; and (4) a scale to measure the degree of self-sexualization of the minor influencers.

The coding was created with a focus on the body parts recognized in the literature as sexualized and accentuated. In the case of girls, this includes breasts with low-cut and tight clothing, underwear or swimwear, bare abdomens, buttocks exposed by excessively short clothing, the use of leather, high heels, and others. In the case of boys, this includes swimwear or underwear, tight or very short clothes, or no clothes covering the torso, muscular arms, and tight shirts or T-shirts, among others. Accessories used by both genders include necklaces or pendants on the neckline, navel piercings, and others. In both girls and boys, sexualizing behaviors such as sensual dances and erotic smiles or comments made about the physical aspects of females were analyzed, in addition to the use of songs with lyrics that could be considered degrading to girls, as a means of expression for adolescent boys.

Data Analysis

The results were analyzed using the ANOVA Factor 1 variance and enhanced with the Brown-Forsythe test, which guarantees more accurate results of the medians of the groups studied. They were analyzed with Tukey's HSD (honestly significant difference) test that allows for multiple comparisons of means after rejecting the null hypothesis of equality of means in the ANOVA test. About the degree of sexualization, Krippendorff's alpha coefficient (Krippendorff, 2022) was calculated to establish the level of intercoder agreement, and Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was also used to assess the internal consistency of the construct (Ruckel & Hill, 2017). Friedman's nonparametric test (Liu & Xu, 2022) was also used because the variables are dependent and the observations were applied to the same individuals (degrees of sexualization per video observed).

Results

Of the total number of videos analyzed, 58% (n = 434) belong to girls and 42% to boys (n = 312). For both boy and girl influencers, although the coding scale includes sexual messages on clothes as being sexualized styling, which was included in the analysis, none of the influencers of either gender displayed such messages. For the girls, the same is true for crossing the legs, as none of the videos showed this action.

As for the boys, very short clothes that showed the buttocks were also included, yet none of them displayed this type of clothing. None of the boys' videos included expressions referring to girls' bodies, yet in some of their productions they incorporated songs with degrading messages toward girls, examples of which include lyrics such as, "bring me some flowers, slut" (Perez, 2022, 00:00:02), or "I didn't get your ass pregnant, and I don't want to see you" (Ponch, 2022, 00:00:32). Another example is the song by Maluma called "Cuatro Babys" [Four Babies] (reggaetonmundial, 2023), considered the musical epitome of

gender violence, which contains 44 mentions of savage acts (Diez-Gutiérrez, Palomo-Cermeño, & Mallo-Rodríguez, 2022).

Sexualized Styling by Gender

Since the overall number of stylings for girls is higher than for boys, to observe the use of such styling in the videos, the average values were analyzed. The results show that girls include 3.5 times more sexualized stylings per video than boys (2.66 vs. 0.76). These results were also confirmed by the one-way ANOVA (Brown-Forsythe test): $(F(5.37) = 18.027, p < 0.05)$, which reveals that gender is a determining factor when it comes to incorporating sexualized styling in the videos they share.

In the case of girls, the most commonly used sexualized stylings are clothes that expose the abdominal area (13%), clothes that emphasize the chest (13%), and tight-fitting clothes (6%). For the boys, the most frequent stylings are pendants or necklaces on the chest (20%), the deliberate display of muscles (15%), and showing themselves in a swimsuit or underwear (9%). In terms of behavior, boys and girls tend to use enticing or naughty smiles (boys 36% and girls 18%). Girls use sensual dances (9%), whereas boys include songs with degrading messages toward females (8%) (Figure 1).

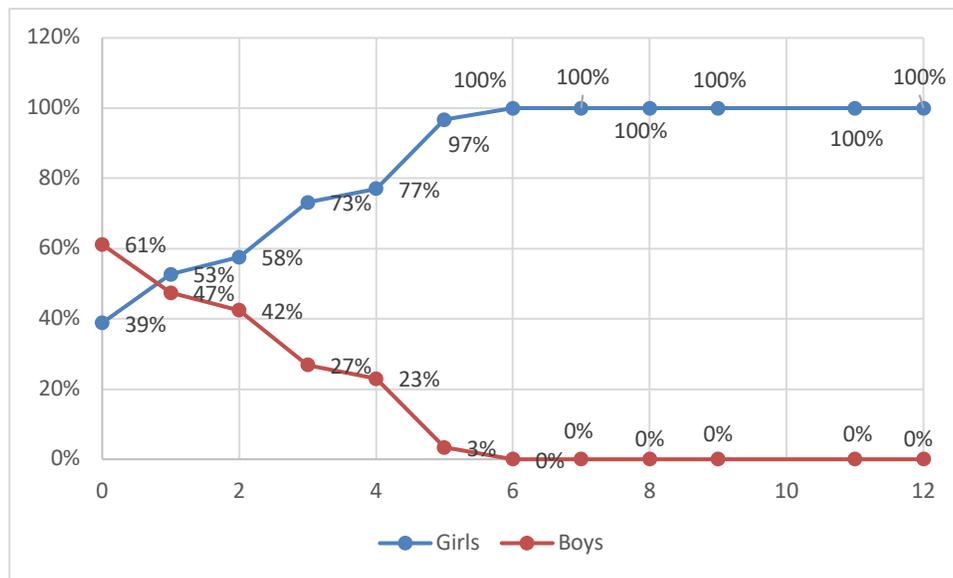


Figure 1. Sexualized styling by gender.

Sexualized Styling by Age

Adolescents aged 15 and 16 show the highest number of sexualized stylings, compared with 12- and 14-year-olds, who show the lowest number. The third-highest rate is held by 13-year-olds, followed by 17-year-olds (Figure 2).

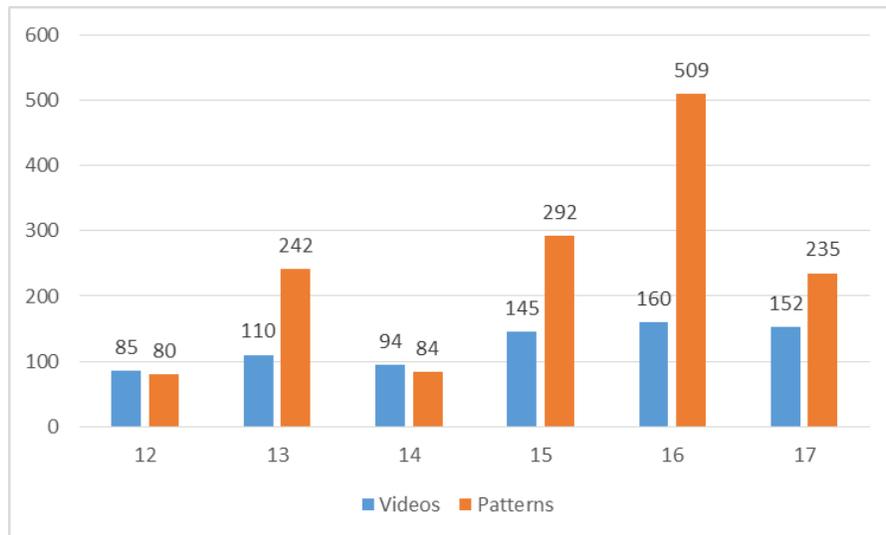


Figure 2. Sexualized stylings by age.

In terms of age, according to styling that is specific to each gender, garments that expose the tummy had the highest percentage of use among girls aged 13 (17%), 12 (16%), and 14 (14%). About shirts or T-shirts that emphasize cleavage, 13-year-old girls (15%) show the most, followed in similar proportions by girls aged 12, 14, and 17 (14%). In the case of boys, from the age of 15 (3%) and 16 (2%), they start to show chest or arm muscles, which increases at the age of 17 (8%). Moreover, from the age of 15, boys include songs with degrading lyrics, with the highest percentage occurring at this age (7%). In terms of behaviors, all the ages studied display sensual or naughty smiles, with the highest percentages occurring among minors under 12 (38%), at 15 (30%), and at the same rate for 13- and 17-year-olds (21%).

The ANOVA (Brown-Forsythe test) was applied to the ages of the subjects and the incorporation of sexualized styling ($F(5,556) = 22,527, p < 0.05$), which revealed statistically significant differences between ages and sexualized styling. To analyze the ages with the greatest differences, the post hoc Tukey test is applied and confirms that 16-year-old adolescents are the ones with the greatest statistical differences concerning the rest of the ages, especially compared with the groups of 12-year-olds ($Cohen\ d = 1.05$) and 14-year-olds ($Cohen\ d = 1.07$) in which this difference is particularly significant with values above 0.8, according to "Cohen's d."

Degree of Sexualization by Gender and Age

The results confirm that both genders start self-sexualizing at an early age. Girls begin at the age of 12 and boys at the age of 13. From the age of 12, girls show high levels of self-sexualization (except at 14), and boys show high levels from the age of 15.

At age 14, self-sexualization levels are equal for both genders, with only a slight difference in the average levels of self-sexualization (girls 0.441; boys 0.450). From the age of 15, boys are also clearly sexualized, at which time the average self-sexualization of boys (0.956) is higher than that of girls (0.870). In the following years, the degree of self-sexualization remains high for boys and girls alike (clearly sexualized), yet the averages for boys are lower than those of girls (see Table 3).

Table 3. Degree of Self-Sexualization by Age and Gender.

Age	Boys	Girls
	Not sexualized	Clearly sexualized
12 years	(maximum degree = 0; self-sexualization average 0.000)	(maximum degree = 2; self-sexualization average 0.684).
	Slightly sexualized	Clearly sexualized
13 years	(maximum degree = 1; self-sexualization average 0.066)	(maximum degree = 2; self-sexualization average 0.925)
	Slightly sexualized	Slightly sexualized
14 years	(maximum degree = 1; self-sexualization average 0.441)	(maximum degree = 1; self-sexualization average 0.450)
	Clearly sexualized	Clearly sexualized
15 years	(maximum degree = 2; self-sexualization average 0.956)	(maximum degree = 2; self-sexualization average 0.870).
	Clearly sexualized	Clearly sexualized
16 years	(maximum degree = 2; self-sexualization average 0.638)	(maximum degree = 2; self-sexualization average 1.263)
	Clearly sexualized	Clearly sexualized
17 years	(maximum degree = 2; self-sexualization average 0.556)	(maximum degree = 2; self-sexualization average 0.763)

The trends indicate that boys start from a zero degree of sexualization, yet they reach the same level as girls by the age of 14 and surpass them at 15. The girls show a more linear trend in their degree of sexualization from the age of 12, with the highest levels of self-sexualization at 13 and 16 (see Figure 3).

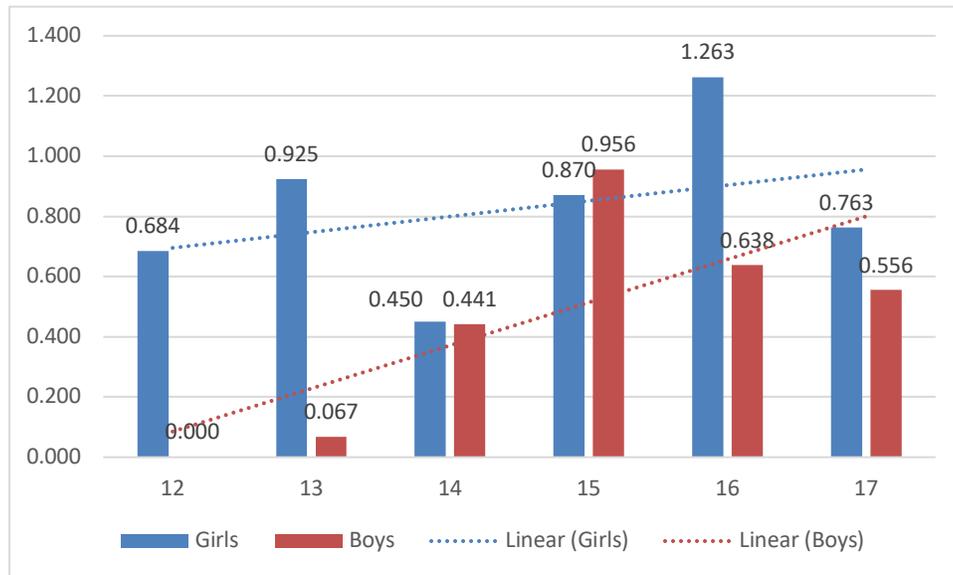


Figure 3. Trends in the average levels of sexualization.

Pearson’s correlation coefficient was applied, and a high correlation (0.852) was obtained between the sexualization variables and the overall evaluation of the videos by the coders. The ANOVA Factor 1 test (Brown-Forsythe test) confirms ($F(5,556) = 20,817, p < 0.05$) these differences between age and degree of sexualization. To deepen the analysis of the ages that show the greatest divergences in their degree of sexualization, Tukey’s post hoc test reveals that those under-16s are the ones with the greatest statistical differences concerning the rest of the ages, especially with the under-12s (*Cohen d* = 1.01) and under-14s (*Cohen d* = 1.02).

To determine the links among sexualized stylings, the Friedman nonparametric test was applied by grouping the sexualized stylings and behaviors. For this analysis, videos that did not display any sexualizing characteristics were excluded. In both genders, significant differences (< 0.05) have been confirmed, which shows that minors do not use sexualized styling indiscriminately. Instead, some are used more than others.

In the case of girls ($Fr = 98.19, Df = 2, p < 0.05$), the pair analysis shows that the subcategories with the highest medians are clothes and accessories (0.720, $p < 0.05$), followed by accessories and behaviors (0.646, $p < 0.05$). The pair group of clothing and behaviors does not show a statistically significant relationship. In the case of boys ($Fr = 121.18, Df = 2, p < 0.05$), according to the pair analysis, the subcategories with the highest median are clothing and behaviors (1.055, $p < 0.05$), followed by accessories and behaviors (0.697, $p < 0.05$) and, last, clothing and accessories (0.359, $p < 0.05$).

Discussion and Conclusions

The sexualization of male minors on social media has been only slightly addressed in academic literature. The first contribution of this research is that it puts the issue in the spotlight. Our findings reveal

that from the age of 14 onward, boy influencers start to display themselves in swimsuits and underwear. They also like to show their muscles along with enticing or naughty smiles while performing sensual dances in front of the camera. From the age of 15, they incorporate songs into their videos with lyrics that vilify girls. If the songs of each period represent the values of a society, the choice of these songs in boys' videos should alert us to sexualizing messages that denigrate girls, which become internalized in boys. These findings challenge the traditional assumption that sexualization is focused mainly on girls, which is the foremost contribution of this study. Like girls, boys experience self-objectification and acute body awareness as well. This study also has significant theoretical implications because of having elaborated on Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997), which argues that girls internalize their personal worth based on their physical appearance. Our findings confirm that this phenomenon is also occurring in boys, which indicates an evolution in their digital self-perception. Boys display their bodies according to social and cultural norms to be sexually attractive and to gain attention and acceptance as well. The SST provides a framework for understanding how adolescents portray themselves on social networks. Moreover, it enables researchers to quantify and track the self-sexualization of teens.

The second contribution of this study is increased knowledge related to the degree of sexualization in girls and boys on TikTok. The results suggest that neither influencer adolescent boys nor girls are hypersexualized on this social media. In the case of boys, they begin to self-sexualize at the age of 13 and, from the age of 14 onward, they self-sexualize to a similar degree and with a similar average as girls. At the age of 15, they surpass girls with a higher average of sexualization (boys 0.956; girls 0.870). In subsequent years, boys continue to be clearly sexualized, although the self-sexualization average of boys decreases whereas that of the girls' increases, indicating that age is also linked to sexualized display, not only for girls but also for boys.

Although the degree of self-sexualization among boy and girl influencers is high, they do not reach the level of hypersexualization in the productions they share on TikTok. At this age, they are unlikely to believe that a large part of their social value lies in their sexual attractiveness. Along the same lines, on Facebook it has been observed that boys are escalating their sexualization by increasingly showing their sexual attraction in the selfies they post on this social media (Trekels et al., 2018), yet it is not until they start approaching the age of young adulthood that boys become hypersexualized in the same way as girls, by displaying their torsos, dancing erotically, and adding sexualized music to their videos on TikTok. In the media's portrayal of adolescent boys, they are rarely hypersexualized (Hatton & Trautner, 2011); yet in the case of girls, the same authors point out that they are indeed hypersexualized as objects of sexual pleasure for the heterosexual male audience.

Third, the results of this research corroborate studies on girls' sexualization. On average, girls include 3.5 times more sexualized stylings per video than boys and start to self-sexualize at an earlier age (12 years). Moreover, from the age of 13 onward, they display themselves in tight clothing that exposes the abdomen and highlights their breasts to a greater extent.

The truth is that sexualization takes on different meanings for boys and girls. Girls are chastised more than boys when they share images with similar sexual content (Fasoli et al., 2018). This is paradoxical,

since from the age of 14, boys reach the same level of sexualization as girls. These differences in appraisal that boys and girls receive for similar behavior need to be further addressed.

The SST proposed by the authors of this study enables the gathering of sexualized portrayals of adolescent influencers on social media, so that researchers can explore the prevalence of sexualized styling and behavior in more depth, thereby allowing them to identify the evolution of minors' self-sexualization according to the social and cultural dynamics of Western culture. The validity of the scale can be used to map the self-sexualization of teenager influencer boys and girls and extrapolate its use to other social media. Moreover, it can also be used to study other collectives and ethnic groups, and to observe possible similarities and differences in other cultural contexts.

This proposal is based on the idea that it is possible to quantify the social behavior of minors in terms of their self-portrayal on social media, as they do not always self-sexualize in the same way or to the same degree in their audiovisual productions. The ethical challenge of studying and qualifying the self-sexualization of adolescent influencers on TikTok must be combined with academic and social responsibility about this specific issue and its application. Nevertheless, to obtain a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon, this scale must be applied based on the perceptions of those who watch these videos, as well as the audiovisual production methods of adolescent influencers.

The implications of this research for communication studies lie in understanding how the younger generations interpret and interact with the digital realm that they exhibit in constructing their identity. This study provides empirical evidence about how social networks shape the way in which young people perceive and display their bodies. Moreover, social media are spaces where stereotypes are consolidated and standard ideals of beauty and sexuality are perpetuated. Sexualization reinforces social norms and power structures in which the consumption of bodies governs their behavior.

Participation in these spaces allows teens to savor the freedom of adolescence once limited to immediate-environment experiences before the emergence of social media. They lacked opportunities to explore and express their identity online or become engaged in teenage pop culture, now broadening their horizons in the widely accepted portrayal of self-sexualization.

Self-sexualization has become a requirement for participating in these environments, driven by the desire to gain peer acceptance and approval. Adolescents adopt sexualized stylings and behavior, reflecting popular sexualized norms. Although this study focuses on TikTok, the SST can be extrapolated to other social networks, given that the observed degrees of self-sexualization may be present on other platforms as well.

Our findings can also be used by educators to better understand how minors portray themselves in the digital realm and to detect the mainstream influences and expectations with which they identify. Furthermore, our results highlight the need for greater awareness in addressing this phenomenon by developing effective policies to educate children on the sexualized display of their identity. The prevalence of self-sexualization as a bargaining chip may impact the cyber well-being of minors.

The first limitation concerns an adolescent's motivation for creating and sharing these types of videos, which depends on interpretation by both the content creator and the followers viewing them. The second shortcoming relates to the time frame in which the study was carried out, as the results might have varied if the research had been conducted using a different time interval, along with the limitation of the recommendations of the social media's algorithms, which prioritize certain content.

Nevertheless, this research contributes to the field of sexualization and illustrates the importance of social media in the development of minors as well. Given the naturalness of adolescents in displaying sexualized styling and behavior on social media, there is a great need to enhance the sex education minors receive and to instill more knowledge about the risks they face on social media.

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