

Protecting young adults' sexual health

April 10 2018



Credit: McGill University

Gilla Shapiro studies clinical psychology at McGill. She earned her BA and MA in Social and Political Sciences at the University of Cambridge and dual degrees in public policy and public administration at the Hertie School of Governance and London School of Economics and Political Science. Gilla became interested in understanding and promoting sexual health during her doctoral research examining the relationship between sexually transmitted diseases (such as HPV) and cancer prevention.

You published a paper about Tinder use and risky sexual behavior, what did you find?

We found a link between Tinder use and risky sexual behaviours such as having multiple sexual partners, and engaging in non-consensual sex.

We know that online dating applications are increasingly popular, in our sample, 40% of young adults reported using Tinder. Given the recent public discussion regarding sexual assault and the importance of consent, seen in #MeToo, we wanted to increase awareness of the potential role of online dating culture in risky sexual behaviours.

Do online dating apps lead to risky sexual behaviour?

I want to stress that this is a correlational study, we are able to report a link but not causality concerning Tinder use and risky areas of sexual [behaviour](#). More research is needed to determine whether it is Tinder use—or the type of person who uses Tinder—or both—that are causally linked to the risky behaviours we have found associated with Tinder use.

What sparked your interest?

In 2015, the Rhode Island Department of Health published a press release that attributed increase in [sexually transmitted diseases](#) (STDs) to better detection as well as high-risk behaviours such as "social media to arrange casual and anonymous sexual encounters". We became interested in whether or not this was true. As well, our lab's research centered on understanding the prevention of [sexually transmitted infections](#) (particularly HPV).

What surprised you?

The relationship between Tinder use and non-consensual sex was particularly notable. A few things also struck us: First, females and sexual minorities were more likely to report non-consensual sex. In addition, individuals who reported non-consensual sex were more likely to report that sexual thoughts/desires/behaviours are causing problems in their life ("sexual compulsivity"), and less likely to report that they view sex as an intense and important way of connecting with another person ("communion").

What are the next steps?

We need to examine differences in Tinder use and risky sexual behaviours (including by gender, age, and sexual orientation). It would also be helpful to compare using Tinder to use of other dating applications. Once we know what these influences are, we will be able to design and evaluate public health interventions that empower [young adults](#), provide knowledge, and create a safer online dating environment.

Provided by McGill University

Citation: Protecting young adults' sexual health (2018, April 10) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-04-young-adults-sexual-health.html>

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