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Exploring The Characteristics And Motivations Of Undergraduates Who Sext

Mackenzie Boehler
Wayne State University,

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**EXPLORING THE CHARACTERISTICS AND MOTIVATIONS OF
UNDERGRADUATES WHO SEXT**

by

MACKENZIE MARIE BOEHLER

THESIS

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE

2017

MAJOR: CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Approved By:

Advisor

Date

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Steve and Christy, who have provided unwavering love, encouragement, and guidance. I am proud to have received your traits of hard work and determination and they were especially crucial to finishing this project. I would also like to dedicate this thesis to those who have supported me over the years, specifically Johnathon, for your consistent support and willingness to stand by me throughout this process. Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my siblings, Taylor and Emmett, who provided laughter and inspiration when I needed it most.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Technological dependency in the United States has grown exponentially in the past two decades, transforming interpersonal communications, and dramatically changing the way Americans live their daily lives. Interactions that previously were in person or via phone conversation now take place through text messages or emails. Smart phones have become the preferred method of communication, especially for young people. Social media sites and cell phone applications allow for constant connection to peers and friends worldwide. This constant connection has changed the way young people create and maintain relationships socially, romantically, and even sexually. Specifically, these relationships have changed through the use of online dating sites (e.g. OkCupid), dating applications (e.g. Tinder or Down), or picture messaging applications (e.g. Snapchat). Through these applications and simple picture message capabilities young adults have come to engage in a new form of electronic sexual communication known as sexting.

The exchange of sexually explicit nude and semi-nude images (sexting) among adolescents and emerging adults has recently garnered considerable media attention. In a 2015 case, a group of Newtown High School students circulated nude and semi-nude images and videos to more than 50 of their peers. Three of the perpetrators received felony charges for either obscenity or transmission/possession of child pornography and officials used community based sanctions to handle another 20 students who were involved (Ferrigno, 2016). An even more scandalous situation was uncovered in Cañon City in 2015, where officials found over 300 nude images of over 100 students (Nicks, 2015). It was determined that students were sharing photos via secret applications on their smart phones. These are only two instances of a behavior that is quickly becoming normative, despite the various consequences that often exist. This phenomenon has

captured much media attention and parental concern, highlighting the need for research on this new form of communication for young people.

Although multiple empirical studies have been completed over the last five years, sexting behavior remains understudied. The lack of research is attributable to the behavior's more recent proliferation and its intimate relationship with technological innovation. This area is constantly changing which makes it difficult for research to grow at the same rate. Despite the lack of research, it is recognized that involvement in sexting has several consequences. The legality of the behavior coincides with the age of participants, whether it was consensual, and the breadth of distribution. As it stands, sexting among minors is considered illegal in over half of states today (Hinduja & Patchin, 2015). Though not illegal for those over the age of 18, involvement in the behavior may have legal consequences if coercion or unapproved distribution is involved. Furthermore, there exist numerous potential consequences for an individual's familial/peer relationships, romantic relationships, employment, and, of course, reputation. Indeed, the social costs are often far-reaching. Additionally, researchers and health professionals are concerned with the potential psychological consequences for those who engage in sexting, such as anxiety, depression, or lower self-esteem (Ahern & Mechling, 2013; Dake, Price, Maziarz, & Ward, 2012). As such, it is important to have a solid understanding of who exactly is engaging in sexting and, then, what might be underlying their decision to sext so that society can effectively prevent the behavior and its consequences.

Current literature indicates that between 38 and 60 percent of young adults are engaged in some form of sexting (Delevi & Weisskirch, 2013; Reynes, Burek, Henson, & Fisher, 2013; Samimi & Alderson, 2013). Importantly, the operationalization of sexting is crucial to our understanding of its prevalence and helps explain the fairly wide variation in reported rates. For

example, prevalence rates vary when the sending or receiving of sexually explicit text messages is included in the study's definition of sexting (Delevi & Weisskirch, 2013; Garcia, Gesselman, Siliman, Perry, Coe, & Fisher, 2016). Similarly, the operationalization of sexting may differ throughout studies by types of participation: those who have sent images, received images, or both. These statistics offer initial findings for the prevalence of sexting, but the reality is, there is a wide variation in the reported prevalence rates due to the inconsistency of the literature's measurement of sexting.

The current study aims to address the aforementioned gaps in the empirical literature and further develop the understanding of this phenomenon. Using a university-representative sample from a racially/ethnically diverse institution, the study is divided in three parts. First, Chapter 4 adds to the existing body of literature by providing further insight to the prevalence of sexting. That is, how many undergraduate students are involved with this behavior, and what are the demographic differences that exist in involvement rates.

Second, Chapter 5 seeks to understand why some people choose to sext and others abstain. In doing so, special attention is paid to assessing this relationship across personality characteristics. Specifically, this study examines whether the Big 5 personality characteristics play a role in the decision to sext, while also focusing on the influence of impulsiveness and self-esteem in explaining the relationship. Third, Chapter 6 assesses respondents' personal motivations for sexting (e.g. to secure a relationship). In the end, Chapters 5 and 6 advance the knowledge of sexting by revealing what kinds of individual factors make a person more likely to sext and what their intrinsic individual motivations are for doing so.

Before moving to the analyses, Chapter 2 provides a thorough examination of the existing literature on sexting and its influences. Chapter 3 describes the methods and research questions of

the current study. Chapters 4 explores the prevalence and frequency of sexting among a college sample. These outcomes are further explored in chapter 5 which assesses the predictors of the Big 5 personality characteristics, impulsiveness, and self-esteem. Finally, self-reported motivations for sexting are analyzed in Chapter 6. A discussion of the results, policy implications, and limitations of the study is provided in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

The explosion in attention to sexting over the last decade has sent social scientists scrambling to understand the nature and extent of the phenomenon. Prior to 2008, the term “sexting” was rarely, if ever, entered into the most popular search engine in the world (see Appendix A). Sexting searches skyrocketed in 2009 and eventually peaked in popularity for the United States in 2010. Academic attention to the phenomenon has followed a similar trajectory. In 2009, a mere three scholarly articles focused attention to sexting (see Appendix B). However, only five years later, over 50 articles on the topic could be found in peer-reviewed journals in 2014 alone. In short, there is no debating how quickly the behavior came to the attention of society and established a meaningful place in American discourse.

Sexting Definitions

Since the explosion of sexting, the definition of the behavior has varied considerably across studies. Lenhart (2009) first defines the behavior as the sending or receiving of nude or semi-nude images via cellular phones or over the Internet. As the behavior developed, definitions changed slightly as well. A later study defined sexting as the sending, receiving, or forwarding of sexually explicit images and text messages via cell phone, smart phone, or internet capable devices (Klettke, Hallford, & Mellor, 2013). The relatively small body of literature regarding sexting reveals that the conceptualization of sexting is key to interpreting prevalence rates. Some studies include sexually explicit text messages in their definition. One of which drastically increased the prevalence rates from 45 percent who had sent an image to over 75 percent who had sent a sexually explicit image or text (Delevi & Weisskirch, 2013). However, another study including sexually explicit text messages only revealed a 5 percent increase in prevalence rates over studies that only included images. (Garcia, Gesselman, Siliman, Perry, Coe, & Fisher, 2016). This demonstrates

that the relationship between sending/receiving sexually explicit text messages and sending/receiving of sexually explicit images is not fully understood. Additionally, it is important to note the difference between sending and receiving of sext messages. This behavior requires specific attention to the type of involvement of a participant. A person cannot control the material that they receive on their phone, thus it is possible to receive unwanted sexually explicit images. For this reason, measuring those who have sent a sext message is a better indicator of those actively participating in sexting.

Prevalence of Sexting

There exists notable variation in the estimates of sexting prevalence, with estimates ranging from 37-60 percent. One study of single adults found that 15 percent had sent and 23 percent had received a nude or seminude image (Garcia et al., 2016). This relatively low rate may be the result of the national study context with participants ranging from 21 years of age to 75. As previously discussed, sexting is the result of an explosion of technology and change in communications, which may lead it to occur most often in a younger population due to their overwhelming use of technology. This assumption is revealed in a variety of studies, one which found that 43 percent of their sample of young adults (18-26) ever sent or received a sext (Gordon-Messer, Bauermeister, Grodzinski, & Zimmerman, 2012).

Due to the youthful nature of the behavior, many studies used a college or university population, although the estimated prevalence rates in this population vary as well. Another study found over 44 percent of their college sample had sent or received a nude or seminude image (Benotsch, Snipes, Martin, & Bull, 2012). Consistent with the above study, Drouin and colleagues found that between 37-49 percent of their college age sample reported sending sext pictures or videos to another person (Drouin, Vogel, Surbey, & Stills, 2013). Three more studies offer insight

to these statistics reporting between 38-60 percent of college aged respondents engaged in sexting (Delevi & Weisskirch, 2013; Reynes et al., 2013; Samimi & Alderson, 2013). One study completed on three college campuses found over 17 percent of participants had sent a nude or seminude image since the start of the semester they were enrolled in (Reyns, Henson, & Fisher, 2014). Similarly, one study asked about students' engagement in the behavior over the previous 6 months and found that 16 percent had sent a nude or seminude image (Perkins, Becker, Tehee, & Mackelprang, 2013).

Influential Factors

Previous research has identified gender as a factor that influences sexting, yet with mixed results. Reynes et al. (2014) found that females are much more likely to send a sexually explicit image than males. On the contrary, Garcia et al. (2016) found that males were more likely to send a sext, however this significance diminished with younger age. One study found that males were more likely to have only received sext messages than females (Gordon-Messer et al., 2012). Other studies found few or no significant differences in sexting rates between genders (Benotsch et al., 2012; Gordon-Messer et al.; 2012; Perkins et al., 2013; Weisskirch, Drouin, & Delevi, 2016). There are also gendered differences in attitudes towards sexting, with one study that found males are more likely to have positive attitudes towards sexting and agree that it is a regular part of relationships (Samimi & Alderson, 2013). Delevi and Weisskirch (2013) also found that men are more likely than women to engage in certain types of low-risk sexting behaviors, suggesting that the reasoning for sexting may differ between the two genders.

Research has identified that the influence of relationships on sexting are threefold. A person's relationship status, relationship type, and relationship characteristics all independently influence their likelihood to sext. Multiple studies found that undergraduate students who were

romantically involved were more likely to engage in sexting (Delevi & Weisskirch, 2013; Drouin & Landgraff, 2011; Drouin et al., 2013; Perkins et al., 2014; Samimi & Alderson, 2013). Whether a person engaged in any form of the behavior did not differ across the type of relationship (Drouin et al., 2013). Reynes et al (2013) found that being in a dating relationship was a significant predictor of receiving, but not sending, sext messages. One study found that those who were in relationships as well as those who are single and dating have a more positive attitude towards sexting behaviors than those who are single and not dating (Samimi & Alderson, 2013). Comparatively, in Delevi and Weisskirch's (2013) study of undergraduates, those who were in current relationships reported sending more sext messages and requiring a higher degree of commitment in doing so. Multiple studies found that relationship attachment avoidance was associated with sending sexually explicit images (Drouin & Landgraff, 2011; Weisskirch, Drouin, & Delevi, 2016). Furthermore, attachment anxiety was related to sending a sexually explicit text message for those in a relationship (Weisskirch & Delevi, 2011). Some research suggests that sexting may be an increasingly normal part of relationship maintenance and a form of foreplay (Delevi & Weisskirch, 2013).

Research has also demonstrated that attitudes and personality characteristics play an influential role in sexting prevalence. Unsurprisingly, those with permissive attitudes towards sexting were more likely to participate in the act (Samimi & Alderson, 2013). It was also the case that those who identified more with liberal values were more likely to sext. Other research suggests that those reporting high levels of neuroticism were more likely to send a sexually explicit image, and that those who reported they were extraverted were more likely to send a sexually explicit text message (Delevi & Weisskirch, 2013). Moreover, Reynes et al. (2014) found low self-control to increase the odds of all forms of sexting.

Risks, Consequences, and Motivations

To further understand the phenomenon, multiple studies sought to understand the connection between sexting and other types of risky behaviors. Research thus far has mixed results regarding sexting and its association with sharing images, substance use, and risky sexual behaviors. One study found that almost 23 percent of participants who had received a sext shared it with others (Garcia et al., 2016). This finding is cause for concern as many images are being shared without the sender's consent. Over 70 percent of those engaged in sexting indicate they would be upset if their image is shared with others. Additionally, multiple studies found a positive correlation between sexting and substance use (Benotsch et al., 2012; Perkins et al., 2014; Reynes et al., 2014). Furthermore, Benotsch and colleagues (2012) found sexting strongly associated with engaging in risky sexual behaviors such as having unprotected sex or sex with multiple partners. They also found that sexting may lead to a physical sex encounter with the recipient of the sexually explicit images. Though an association between sexting and sex may not be risky in nature, it is possible engaging in sexting can lead to more sexual partners which increases health risks associated with multiple partners. On the contrary, another study found no relationship between sexting and risky sexual behaviors (Gordon-Messer et al., 2012).

Due to the relatively new nature of the behavior, the consequences of sexting remain seriously understudied. One study found that the majority of participants believed that sexting could be harmful to their reputation, career, self-esteem, or current relationship (Garcia et al., 2016). Another possible consequence is associated with the abuse a person may experience related to sexting. A study found gendered differences in experiences of digital dating abuse (Reed, Tolman, & Ward, 2016). Moreover, women were more likely to experience pressure and coercive sexting behaviors than men. Other findings reveal that there may be no significant consequences

for psychological health. Gordon-Messer et al. (2013) revealed that those engaged in sexting do not significantly differ in psychological health issues including depression, anxiety, or self-esteem.

Perkins et al. (2014) assessed participants' motivations for engaging in sexting. The majority of respondents indicated that they sext for consensual, sexual reasons. Additionally, a large number of respondents indicated that they sent a nude or seminude image because they were asked and willing to send or to trade images. Correspondingly, Drouin et al. (2014) found that many respondents sent sexually explicit images in a flirting connotation, to initiate sex, or because they were asked. Respondents who were in a long-distance relationship were more likely to note they sent images because their partner was far away. Additionally, a quarter of those who were in a cheating relationship indicated they engaged in sexting with an extramarital partner because they were bored or wanted covert communication. Delevi and Tobin (2014) reveal that though the action of sexting may be done in a consensual manner, it is unwanted for many women. Some research reveals that individuals engage in sexting due to pressure or coercion from partners (Reed, Tolman, & Ward, 2016; Delevi & Tobin, 2014; Weisskirch et al., 2016). This pressure may take form as actual pressure or coercion from the partner or perceived pressure.

Current Study

The current study seeks to fill the gaps in this literature and further examine what factors and characteristics influence a young person's decision to sext. First, in Chapter 4, this study assesses the prevalence of sexting among undergraduate students. It will also identify the correlates of sexting prevalence with attention paid to demographics, religiosity, sexual behavior, and relationship status. Second, Chapter 5 analyzes participants' motivations for sexting. Specifically, it will assess internal characteristics such as the Big 5 personality traits, self-control, and self-esteem. Third, Chapter 6 shifts attention to examining the various personal motivations for sexting

(e.g. to flirt, to secure a relationship, or coercion). In the end, this study contributes to the literature using a random sample of participants at a large, diverse urban university. It is essential to understand the causes of the behavior before formulating policy, so a deeper understanding of the behavior's etiology and consequences must be developed before research can move forward. This study aims to move the extant literature closer to that standard.

CHAPTER 3: Data and Methods

Overview

This chapter includes two sections that describe the sampling strategy and methods employed for the current project. The first section explains the procedures used to randomly select classes and recruit participants for this study. The second section describes research questions for each part of the study. Moreover, it highlights the goals of each chapter, specifically detailing Chapter 4's focus on the prevalence and frequency of sexting, Chapter 5's focus on personality characteristics as predictors of sexting, and Chapter 6's focus on internal self-reported motivations for sexting.

Procedure

Following approval from the university's Institutional Review Board, participants for the study were randomly selected. First, every degree-granting undergraduate program (N=57) throughout the university was identified and added to a list to sample from. Due to the large number of degree programs housed in the School of Business, the College of Education, and the College of Engineering, a restriction was placed so only one program could be selected from each in order to limit their overall influence on the sample. A total of 25 programs were randomly selected, and then two classes from each of the selected programs were chosen. All formats of courses (e.g. traditional, online, hybrid) from a selected program were eligible for selection.

Instructors from each of the 50 randomly selected courses were emailed and invited to distribute the online survey information and survey link via a class list email or the university's BlackBoard system. A \$10 gift card was offered as compensation for instructors who agreed to participate. Importantly, an instructor could only be selected once. If five days passed without hearing back from the invitation sent to each instructor, new classes were randomly selected from

the same department. In a few cases, no instructors from a selected department agreed to participate (or simply never responded). In those cases, eight new programs had to be randomly selected. In the end, a total of 157 instructors from 33 different degree-granting departments were contacted until the final sample of courses was determined (n=32). A total of five waves of invitations were sent to establish the 32 courses in the sample. Specifically, the 1st wave of emails garnered 16 willing instructors, the 2nd wave added 8 instructors, the 3rd and 4th waves each added 3 instructors, and the 5th added 2 instructors.

Instructors were asked to a) send three waves of emails to students in their selected course or b) make three posts on BlackBoard. The emails they were asked to send consisted of a) an initial invitation for students in their selected courses to participate in the study and then b) two follow-ups, as reminders, over the period of a month. Class instructors were asked not to incentivize the survey in any way. In the first email invitation, students received a short informational section about the study and the survey link. After the last follow-up email was distributed, researchers visited each on-campus traditional class in the sample (n=20) to distribute hand-outs, containing a link and QR code, as one final reminder to take the survey. Instructors of online and off-campus classes (n=12) were asked to distribute the survey link and information once more via email or post in order to maintain an equal number of class contacts. In the end, each participating course was contacted a total of four times.

The online survey for this study was constructed using Qualtrics survey software, making it easily accessible through multiple forms of technology, including mobile devices. Upon entering the online survey, participants immediately viewed an information sheet that described the study and its voluntary, anonymous nature. By entering the survey, respondents agreed to participate in the study. The survey consisted of 50 questions that asked about demographic characteristics,

relationship characteristics, sexting involvement, perceptions of sexting behavior, sexting motivations, and personality characteristics. It could be taken at a participant's convenience and took about 15 minutes to complete. Upon completion, respondents could provide their email address to be entered into a raffle for a gift card. Email addresses were stored separately from respondents' answers and deleted after the raffle winners were selected. The entire sampling strategy took about six weeks to complete and the survey remained open until the end of the semester.

A total of 856 students were enrolled in the 32 undergraduate courses that were sampled. Of those students, 337 opted to complete the survey in its entirety and provided their student ID to be entered in the raffle drawing. This computes to an overall response rate of 39%. However, due to the online survey design, participants could pause the survey (and resume at any point if they chose to do so). This led to attrition of participants throughout the span of the survey. For example, at 75% completion there were 359 responses. For this reason, each chapter will have an independent sample size based on the number of complete responses to the measures of that chapter.

Research Questions

The current project focuses its attention to a set of three research questions that are examined across separate chapters. To provide preliminary exploration, Chapter 4 analyzes the prevalence and frequency of sexting in a sample that mirrors the demographics of the undergraduate student body from which it was derived. This offers further insight into sexting by developing a deeper understanding of characteristics like race/ethnicity, gender, and relationship status, which have mixed results in the current literature. Next, Chapter 5 aims to understand the “why” of sexting involvement, focusing specifically on personality characteristics, including the

Big 5, self-control, and self-esteem. This focus adds to the limited literature regarding predictors of sexting. Finally, Chapter 6 analyzes respondents' intrinsic motivations for sexting, as they self-report their purposes for sending a nude or semi-nude image. As a result, Chapter 6 considers whether flirtation, security of a relationship, or coercion play a role when engaging in sexting. Finally, it examines each of these characteristics and motivations to gain a better understanding of their relationship with sexting.

CHAPTER 4: Prevalence of Sexting by Demographics, Relationship Status and Normativity

Overview

This chapter focuses on explaining the prevalence of sexting and proceeds in three sections. The first section describes the dependent, primary independent, and control variables. The second section examines the sample and reviews the plan of analysis that is used. The third section reviews the results of the analyses, focusing on univariate statistics, between-group differences, and multivariate analyses. In the end, this chapter aims to contribute to the small body of literature regarding the prevalence of sexting and its predictors.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable for this chapter is *prevalence of sending*. For this measure, respondents were asked the following question: “Have you ever sent a nude or partially nude image of yourself to another person or persons?” Those who responded that they had previously engaged in sexting are coded 1 and those who had not are coded 0. Again, the following analyses specifically use sending a sext as the dependent variable rather than both sending and receiving or just receiving, which is an important distinction to make, as those who receive sext messages are not necessarily actively involved with the phenomenon.

Independent Variables

The primary independent variables of this study include relationship status, sexual partners, and perceived normativity. A respondent’s relationship status was determined by asking if they were in a committed relationship, single and dating, or single and not dating. The reference category for relationship status is single and not dating. Respondent’s number of sexual partners is measured through indication of how many total sexual partners (oral/anal/vaginal) the respondent has had in their lifetime. This variable was recoded into four binary variables (never

sexually active, one partner ever, some sexual partners (2-7), and many sexual partners (8 or more), with the reference category being never sexually active. Two variables measured the perceived normativity of sexting. Perceived percent engaged is a categorical variable, ranging from 1 to 10, measuring the percent of young adults the respondent believes is engaging in sexting (1= 0-10% ... 10= 90-100%). Proportion of peer group sexting is a categorical variable asking what amount of the respondent's friends are involved in sending nude or seminude images to others (1=none of them, 2=very few of them, 3=some of them, 4=most of them, 5= all of them).

Control Variables

Demographic measures include age, gender, race, and religiosity. Age is collapsed into the following categories: 18-19, 20-21, 22-23, and 24 and above with age 18-19 serving as the reference category. Gender is measured dichotomously, with 1 representing males. Similarly, race is categorical and included White, Black, Asian, and Other. The reference category for race is White. Finally, religiosity is measured on a scale ranging from 0-10 (how religious do you consider yourself?), with 10 representing a higher level of religiosity.

Sample

The sample for this analysis is comprised of 322 undergraduate students. Forty-two responses, approximately 11.5 percent of the sample, are excluded from the analysis due to missing information on one or more variables. The age of respondents is evenly distributed across age categories 18-19 (24%), 20-21 (28%) and 24 and above (28%) with slightly fewer respondents in the 22-23 category (19%). Seventy-one percent of respondents are female. The majority of respondents identified as White (61%), whereas 12% identified as Black, 11% Asian, and 15% identified as another race. This distribution closely resembles the university's undergraduate race

distribution in the semester the study was completed (See Appendix C). Additionally, the mean religiosity for the sample is 4.24 on the scale of 0-10.

Plan of Analysis

In order to understand these variables and their associations, a combination of univariate, bivariate, and multivariate analyses were completed. Univariate statistics are used to provide an overview of the general characteristics of the sample across demographics and the primary independent variables. Next, bivariate analyses display the variables and their relationship with each other. Finally, a series of logistic regression models are presented to assess the factors that influence sending sext messages. Each of the first three models use one set of predictors, while the fourth model is the full model that includes all predictor variables.

Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the sample, which indicates that 56 percent of participants have ever sent a sexually explicit nude or seminude image. The majority of respondents were either in a committed relationship (46%) or single and dating (20%). Additionally, the modal category for the sexuality indicators is 2-7 partners (40%). Interestingly, the mean score for perceived percent engaged in sexting is 6.14, which indicates that participants believe on average between 50 and 70 percent of young adults are engaged in sexting. Finally, the mean of respondent's peer group involvement in sending nude or seminude images is 2.27, thus falling between the "very few of them" and "some of them" categories.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics (n =322)

| Variable Name | Mean | (SD) | Min | Max |
|----------------------------------|------|--------|-----|-----|
| Dependent Variables | | | | |
| Prevalence of sending | 0.56 | | 0 | 1 |
| Independent Variables | | | | |
| <i>Demographics</i> | | | | |
| Age 18-19 | 0.24 | | 0 | 1 |
| Age 20-21 | 0.28 | | 0 | 1 |
| Age 22-23 | 0.19 | | 0 | 1 |
| Age 24 and above | 0.28 | | 0 | 1 |
| Female | 0.71 | | 0 | 1 |
| Male | 0.29 | | 0 | 1 |
| White | 0.61 | | 0 | 1 |
| Black | 0.12 | | 0 | 1 |
| Asian | 0.11 | | 0 | 1 |
| Other | 0.15 | | 0 | 1 |
| Religiosity | 4.24 | (0.17) | 0 | 10 |
| <i>Relationship indicators</i> | | | | |
| Single and not dating | 0.34 | | 0 | 1 |
| Single and dating | 0.20 | | 0 | 1 |
| In a committed relationship | 0.46 | | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Sexuality indicators</i> | | | | |
| Never sexually active | 0.20 | | 0 | 1 |
| One partner ever | 0.18 | | 0 | 1 |
| Some sexual partners (2-7) | 0.40 | | 0 | 1 |
| Many sexual partners (8+) | 0.22 | | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Normativity indicators</i> | | | | |
| Perceived percent engaged | 6.14 | (0.11) | 1 | 10 |
| Proportion of peer group sexting | 2.27 | (0.06) | 1 | 5 |

Table 2 explores the relationship between the dependent variable, prevalence of sending, and all independent variables in the study. Statistically significant differences exist across the board between those who have sent a sexually explicit nude or seminude image and those who have not. Age was significantly different in three of the four categories. A greater percentage of those who have never sent a sext fell in the category of ages 18-19 (34% v. 17%, $p < .01$). On the other hand, a greater percentage of those who have sent a sext encompassed the categories of ages

22-23 (25% v. 12%, $p < .01$) and ages 24 and above (33% v. 23%, $p < .05$). Similarly, differences are found by race with the exception of Black. A greater portion of white respondents have sent a sext (68% v. 52%, $p < .01$). Further, more respondents who are Asian and identified their race as other had never sent a sext (18% v. 7%, $p < .01$; 20% v. 11%, $p < .05$). Those who have never sent a sext reported on average 1.5 units higher on the religiosity scale ($p < .10$). Surprisingly, there are no significant differences between the two groups based on gender.

Table 2. Bivariate statistics by prevalence of sexting (n=322)

| Variable Name | Sent Sext | Never Sent |
|----------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| <i>Demographics</i> | | |
| Age 18-19 | 0.17 ** | 0.34 |
| Age 20-21 | 0.26 | 0.31 |
| Age 22-23 | 0.25 ** | 0.12 |
| Age 24 and above | 0.33 * | 0.23 |
| Female | 0.71 | 0.72 |
| Male | 0.29 | 0.29 |
| White | 0.68 ** | 0.52 |
| Black | 0.14 | 0.10 |
| Asian | 0.07 ** | 0.18 |
| Other | 0.11 * | 0.20 |
| Religiosity | 3.55 ** | 5.13 |
| <i>Relationship indicators</i> | | |
| Single and not dating | 0.19 ** | 0.52 |
| Single and dating | 0.23 | 0.16 |
| In a committed relationship | 0.58 ** | 0.32 |
| <i>Sexuality indicators</i> | | |
| Never sexually active | 0.03 ** | 0.42 |
| One partner ever | 0.13 * | 0.24 |
| Some sexual partners (2-7) | 0.53 ** | 0.24 |
| Many sexual partners (8+) | 0.31 ** | 0.10 |
| <i>Normativity indicators</i> | | |
| Perceived percent engaged | 6.44 ** | 5.75 |
| Proportion of peer group sexting | 2.63 ** | 1.80 |

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

The two groups are different across relationship status. A significantly larger percent of those who have never sent a sext are of the single and not dating group (52% v. 19%, $p < .01$). On the contrary, the majority of those who have sent a sext report being in a committed relationship (58% v. 32%, $p < .01$). The prevalence of sexting also vastly differs across the sexuality indicators. A significantly larger portion of those who have sent a sext reported between 2-7 or 8 or more total sexual partners (53% v. 24%, $p < .01$; 31% v. 10%, $p < .01$). On the other hand, a significantly larger percentage of respondents who have never sent a sext have either one or zero total sexual partners (24% v. 13%, $p < .05$; 42% v. 3%, $p < .01$). Finally, differences across both normativity indicators are also apparent. Those engaged in sexting perceive that more young adults were also engaged in sexting (6.44 v. 5.75, $p < .01$) and that more of their friends are also involved in the behavior (2.63 v. 1.8, $p < .01$). The numerous differences displayed in this table verify that this phenomenon warrants further investigation.

Table 3 presents bivariate differences across gender. Significant differences in relationship status are found. Moreover, a significantly greater percent of males identify as single and dating than females (30% v 16%, $p < .01$). On the contrary, a significantly larger portion of females report they are in a committed relationship (52% v. 32%, $p < .01$). Further, on average, males report having a greater proportion of their friend group involved in sexting than females (2.49 v. 2.18, $p < .05$).

Table 3. Bivariate statistics by gender (n=322)

| Variable Name | Male | Female |
|----------------------------------|---------|--------|
| Dependent Variables | | |
| Prevalence of sending | 0.55 | 0.57 |
| Independent Variables | | |
| <i>Demographics</i> | | |
| Age 18-19 | 0.28 | 0.23 |
| Age 20-21 | 0.26 | 0.29 |
| Age 22-23 | 0.23 | 0.18 |
| Age 24 and above | 0.23 | 0.30 |
| White | 0.66 | 0.59 |
| Black | 0.07 * | 0.15 |
| Asian | 0.15 | 0.10 |
| Other | 0.12 | 0.16 |
| Religiosity | 4.15 | 4.28 |
| <i>Relationship indicators</i> | | |
| Single and not dating | 0.38 | 0.32 |
| Single and dating | 0.30 ** | 0.16 |
| In a committed relationship | 0.32 ** | 0.52 |
| <i>Sexuality indicators</i> | | |
| Never sexually active | 0.13 | 0.23 |
| One partner ever | 0.19 | 0.17 |
| Some sexual partners (2-7) | 0.38 | 0.41 |
| Many sexual partners (8+) | 0.28 | 0.19 |
| <i>Normativity indicators</i> | | |
| Perceived percent engaged | 6.26 | 6.09 |
| Proportion of peer group sexting | 2.49 * | 2.18 |

* p<.05 **p<.01

Table 4 investigates the bivariate associations by relationship status. One-way ANOVA tests are used along with Tukey's HSD to determine between group differences. Significant differences are found in the prevalence of sending between those who are single and not dating and both those in a committed relationship and those who are single and dating. Interestingly, differences were found in religiosity across relationship status. Specifically, those who identified as single and not dating reported an average of 1.2 units higher on the scale of religiosity than

those in a committed relationship ($p < .01$). Further, a plethora of differences are found between relationship status and the sexuality indicators. Respondents who are single and not dating were more likely to not be sexually active than those who are single and dating (48% v. 11%, $p < .01$) and those in a committed relationship (48% v. 3%, $p < .01$). A significantly larger percent of those in a committed relationship have had one sexual partner ever than those who are single and dating (24% v. 9%, $p < .05$). Additionally, respondents who are in a committed relationship are more likely to be in the “some sexual partners” category (2-7) than those who are single and not dating (48% v. 28%, $p < .01$). Those who are single and not dating were less likely to be in the “many sexual partners” category (8 or above) than both those in a committed relationship (10% v. 24%, $p < .01$) and those who are single and dating (10% v. 36%, $p < .01$). Finally, respondents who are single and not dating reported believing that a lower percentage of young adults are engaging in sending nude or seminude images than both those in a committed relationship (5.63 v. 6.25, $p < .05$) and those who are single and dating (5.63 v. 6.70, $p < .01$). There are no significant differences in perceived peer involvement across the three groups.

Table 4. Bivariate statistics by relationship status (n=322)

| Variable Name | Committed Relationship | Single & Dating | Single & Not Dating |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| Dependent Variables | | | |
| Prevalence of sending | 0.69 ^{b**} | 0.66 ^{c**} | 0.32 ^{b**c**} |
| Independent Variables | | | |
| <i>Demographics</i> | | | |
| Age 18-19 | 0.14 ^{b**} | 0.19 ^{c**} | 0.41 ^{b**c**} |
| Age 20-21 | 0.27 | 0.31 | 0.27 |
| Age 22-23 | 0.24 ^{b*} | 0.23 | 0.10 ^{b*} |
| Age 24 and above | 0.35 ^{b*} | 0.27 | 0.21 ^{b*} |
| Female | 0.81 ^{a**} | 0.56 ^{a**} | 0.68 |
| Male | 0.19 ^{a**} | 0.44 ^{a**} | 0.32 |
| White | 0.65 | 0.61 | 0.55 |
| Black | 0.14 | 0.16 | 0.09 |
| Asian | 0.10 | 0.05 ^{c*} | 0.17 ^{c*} |
| Other | 0.11 | 0.19 | 0.18 |
| Religiosity | 3.80 ^{b**} | 4.06 | 5.00 ^{b**} |
| <i>Sexuality indicators</i> | | | |
| Never sexually active | 0.03 ^{b**} | 0.11 ^{c**} | 0.48 ^{b**c**} |
| One partner ever | 0.24 ^{a*} | 0.09 ^{a*} | 0.15 |
| Some sexual partners (2-7) | 0.48 ^{b**} | 0.44 | 0.28 ^{b**} |
| Many sexual partners (8+) | 0.24 ^{b**} | 0.36 ^{c**} | 0.10 ^{b**c**} |
| <i>Normativity indicators</i> | | | |
| Perceived percent engaged | 6.25 ^{b*} | 6.70 ^{c**} | 5.63 ^{b**c**} |
| Proportion of peer group sexting | 2.27 | 2.44 | 2.14 |

* p<.05 **p<.01

^a Significant difference between committed and single and dating^b Significant difference between committed and single and not dating^c Significant difference between single and dating and single and not dating

Results from the above bivariate associations clearly depict relationships that need to be further explored. Prior to entering the variables into a regression analysis, they were evaluated for multicollinearity, skewness, and kurtosis. The sexuality indicators were excluded from the logistic regression due to their high correlation with relationship status ($r = .66$). Relationship status was

used as a predictor variable in this study rather than the sexuality variables because previous literature has identified relationship status as a substantively meaningful factor to consider in sexting research. Importantly, there were no other issues with multi-collinearity beyond this.

Table 5 presents the odds ratios from a series of four logistic regression models. The first model, which includes only control variables, indicates that age is significantly associated with sexting. Those in age groups 22-23 and 24 and above are more likely to engage in sending a nude or seminude image than those who are in category 18-19 ($OR^1 = 3.83, p < .01$; $OR = 2.51, p < .01$). Respondents reporting their race as Asian are less likely to send a sext than respondents who are White ($OR = .40, p < .05$). Additionally, religiosity had a negative effect on sexting, as those who reported themselves more religious are less likely to send such a message ($OR = .86, p < .01$).

The second model added the variables of relationship status. Participants in a committed relationship or single and dating were over three times as likely to send a sext than those who were single and not dating ($OR = 3.43, p < .01$; $OR = 3.00, p < .01$). The third model includes the normativity indicators. In this model, proportion of peer group sexting is a significant predictor, with the likelihood of sending a sext doubling as the respondent's proportion of peers involved increases one unit ($OR = 2.35, p < .01$). The fourth and final model includes all predictor variables. Though still significant, the positive effects of age and negative effects of religiosity are slightly diminished in the full model.

¹ OR refers to odds ratio

Table 5. Logistic regression by prevalence of sending (n=322)

| Predictor | Model 1 | | Model 2 | | Model 3 | | Model 4 | |
|----------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| | OR | (S.E.) | OR | (S.E.) | OR | (S.E.) | OR | (S.E.) |
| <i>Demographics</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Age 18-19 (ref) | -- | | -- | | -- | | -- | |
| Age 20-21 | 1.71 | (.33) | 1.33 | 0.35 | 2.29 | (.37)* | 1.98 | (.08) |
| Age 22-23 | 3.83 | (.39)** | 2.66 | (.41)* | 3.69 | (.42)** | 2.76 | (.02)* |
| Age 24 and above | 2.51 | (.34)** | 1.84 | (.36) | 3.57 | (.39)** | 2.79 | (.01)* |
| Female (ref) | -- | | -- | | -- | | -- | |
| Male | 1.01 | (.27) | 1.10 | (.29) | 0.76 | (.30) | 0.86 | (.62) |
| White (ref) | -- | | -- | | -- | | -- | |
| Black | 1.16 | (.39) | 1.11 | (.41) | 1.37 | (.43) | 1.23 | (.64) |
| Asian | 0.40 | (.41)* | 0.43 | (.42)* | 0.58 | (.44) | 0.58 | (.24) |
| Other | 0.55 | (.35) | 0.56 | (.36) | 0.53 | (.38) | 0.52 | (.10) |
| Religiosity | 0.86 | (.04)** | 0.87 | (.04)** | 0.86 | (.05)** | 0.89 | (.01)* |
| <i>Relationship Indicators</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Single and not dating (ref) | -- | | -- | | -- | | -- | |
| Single and dating | | | 3.00 | (.36)** | | | 3.12 | (.00)** |
| In a committed relationship | | | 3.43 | (.29)** | | | 3.86 | (.00)** |
| <i>Normativity Indicators</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Perceived percent engaged | | | | | 1.10 | 0.07 | 1.05 | (.54) |
| Proportion of peer group sexting | | | | | 2.25 | 0.15** | 2.43 | (.00)** |
| Constant | 1.53 | (.32) | 0.79 | (.36) | 0.12 | (.56) | .06 | (.62) |

* p<.05 **p<.01

OR- the statistic presented is odds ratio

Summary

The current study indicates that 56% of undergraduates have sent a sexually explicit nude or semi-nude image. This finding adds to the small body of literature regarding the prevalence of sexting that demonstrates somewhere between 38-60% of young adults are sexting (Delevi & Weisskirch, 2013; Reynes et al., 2013; Samimi & Alderson, 2013). It is important to reiterate that this study examined only the sending of nude or semi-nude images and not receiving.

This chapter also contributes to the literature by providing insight on a variety of factors believed to be associated with sexting. The bivariate tables display that there is a correlation

between sending a sext and age, religiosity, relationship status, total sexual partners, and perceived percent of young adults engaged, and peer involvement. Upon further analysis, it is clear that as a young person ages they are more likely to have sent a sexually explicit nude or seminude image. Negative relationships between religiosity and sending a sext were consistent across all models. Religiosity may prove to be an insulator from sexting. This relationship should be further examined. Consistent with the literature, this study also showed that individuals who were romantically involved in some way are more likely to engage in sexting than those who were not (Delevi & Weisskirch, 2013; Drouin & Landgraff, 2011; Drouin et al., 2013; Perkins et al., 2014; Samimi & Alderson, 2013). Finally, results suggest that young adults with a larger portion of peers who have sent a nude or seminude image are more likely to engage in sexting than those with fewer peers involved in the behavior.

CHAPTER 5: Prevalence of Sexting by Personality Indicators

Overview

The goal of this chapter is to gain an understanding of what personality characteristics may influence a person's likelihood to send a sexually explicit nude or seminude image. There are four sections that make-up this chapter. In the first section, the dependent, independent, and control variables are defined and operationalized. The second section describes the size and demographic characteristics of the sample. The third section details the plan of analysis and summarizes the results, whereas the fourth and final section closes with a summary of the chapter.

Dependent Variables

The dependent variable for this chapter is *prevalence of sending*. This variable is a binary yes/no variable for which respondents answer the following question: "Have you ever sent a nude or partially nude image of yourself to another person?" Sending a sext message was used as the dependent variable as it is an active form of participation that is distinct from the receipt of a sexually explicit nude or seminude image.

Independent Variables

The primary independent variables for this chapter include relationship status, normativity indicators, and a variety of personality indicators. Relationship status was split into three binary variables (Single and not dating, single and dating, in a committed relationship). Normativity indicators include two variables: perceived percent engaged and proportion of peer group sexting. Perceived percent engaged is measured with the question, "What percent of young adults do you believe are engaging in sexting?" This is measured on a one to ten scale with one corresponding with 0-10 percent and ten corresponding with 90-100 percent. Proportion of peer group sexting is measured with the question, "How many of your friends have sent a sexually explicit nude or

seminude image?” Answer options include none of them, very few of them, some of them, most of them, and all of them.

The personality indicators were constructed using a 30-item mini International Personality Item Pool (IPIP) intended to measure Goldberg’s (1992) Big-Five personality structure of agreeableness, extraversion, neuroticism, openness to experience, and conscientiousness. A complete list of these items can be found in the appendix but a few examples include: I am an organized person; I like to be the life of the party; and I worry too much. Respondents answered these items on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). These items were entered into a Principal Components Analysis (PCA) in SPSS to distinguish each factor. Importantly, only three of the five personality factors could be retained due to multiple items cross-loading on more than one factor. A possible explanation of this surprise is the reverse coded nature of a few items on the survey intended to measure openness to experience and agreeableness. In the end, the three retained factors are extraversion, conscientiousness ($\alpha=.65$), and neuroticism ($\alpha=.77$).

Other personality indicators for this chapter are low self-control and global self-evaluation (GSE here forward). Low self-control is a list of nine items entered into a PCA in SPSS. The PCA resulted in one factor of five items being retained. The items for this factor include: I should think about my actions more; I tend to blurt out my opinion without thinking of others; I enjoy doing things on whim; Friends consider me wild and crazy; and I am likely to do something if it will bring me immediate pleasure. These items are measured using seven point Likert scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The five items are combined for a mean score of low self-control ($\alpha=.71$). Alasker and Olweus’ (1986) GSE scale² was used as a proxy for self-

² Alasker and Olweus’ (1986) GSE scale was derived from Rosenberg’s (1965) Self-Esteem Scale

esteem. These items were also input in a Principal Components Analysis in SPSS to establish the factors and all of the items loaded onto one factor. The items included: At times I feel no good at all; I feel I do not have much to be proud of; I certainly feel useless at times; All in all, I'm inclined to feel that I am a failure; I would like to change many things about myself; I have often wanted to be someone else. These items are on a Likert scale ranging from one to seven (1=strongly disagree...7=strongly agree). The mean for these six variables was calculated to serve as an indicator of each participant's GSE score ($\alpha=.93$).

Control Variables

The control variables for this chapter are: age, gender, race, and religiosity. Age was coded into four binary variables: 18-19, 20-21, 22-23, and 24 and above with the category 18-19 serving as the reference category. Similarly, gender and race are coded into dummy variables Male/Female, and White/Black/Asian/Other. Female and White serve as the reference categories for these variables. Respondents recorded their religiosity on a scale ranging from 1 to 10 in response to the question, "How religious do you consider yourself?"

Sample

The sample size for this chapter is 304 respondents. Sixty respondents (20%) are excluded from analyses as they are missing responses for one or more variables of interest. Though the sample size declined, the mean of the dependent variable, control variables, and previously used indicators of the new sample stayed the same or within 1 percent of the full sample. As such, the sample was predominately female (73%) and white (61%). Similarly, the age of respondents was uniformly distributed across categories 18-19 (25%), 20-21 (27%), and 24 and above (29%) with less in category 22-23 (19%). Finally, the mean of participant's religiosity for this sample was 4.22.

Plan of Analysis

The analyses for this chapter come in three parts. First, descriptive statistics are completed to understand each variable and its distribution prior to performing regression analyses. Second, a bivariate table presents differences between those who have sent a sext message and those who have not. Finally, results from a logistic regression are analyzed in seven models, each introducing a new variable or set of variables until the seventh model which includes all indicators.

Results

Table 6 displays the univariate statistics for this chapter. Thirty-four percent of respondents identified as single and not dating, 19% identified as single and dating, and 47% identified as in a committed relationship. Participants responded that on average they believe between 50-70% of young adults engage in sexting. The mean for this variable is 6.10, which most closely aligns with the 50-60% category. Interestingly, these estimates prove to be accurate for this sample. The average proportion of peers involved in sending nude or seminude images was 2.25, which is between the categories of “very few of them” and “some of them.” Each of the three Big 5 personality indicators has an average between four and five, falling between the “neither agree nor disagree” and “somewhat agree” categories. Similarly, low self-control has an average score of about four and the average GSE score is 3.70.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics (n =304)

| Variable Name | Mean | (SD) | Min | Max |
|----------------------------------|------|-------|-----|-----|
| Dependent Variables | | | | |
| Prevalence of sending | 0.55 | | 0 | 1 |
| Independent Variables | | | | |
| <i>Demographics</i> | | | | |
| Age 18-19 | 0.25 | | 0 | 1 |
| Age 20-21 | 0.27 | | 0 | 1 |
| Age 22-23 | 0.19 | | 0 | 1 |
| Age 24 and above | 0.29 | | 0 | 1 |
| Female | 0.73 | | | |
| Male | 0.27 | | 0 | 1 |
| White | 0.61 | | 0 | 1 |
| Black | 0.13 | | 0 | 1 |
| Asian | 0.11 | | 0 | 1 |
| Other | 0.15 | | 0 | 1 |
| Religiosity | 4.22 | (.47) | 0 | 10 |
| <i>Relationship indicators</i> | | | | |
| Single and not dating | 0.34 | | 0 | 1 |
| Single and dating | 0.19 | | 0 | 1 |
| In a committed relationship | 0.47 | | 0 | 1 |
| <i>Normativity indicators</i> | | | | |
| Perceived percent engaged | 6.10 | (.11) | 1 | 10 |
| Proportion of peer group sexting | 2.25 | (.06) | 1 | 5 |
| <i>Personality indicators</i> | | | | |
| Extraversion | 4.35 | (.07) | 1 | 7 |
| Conscientiousness | 4.79 | (.05) | 1 | 7 |
| Neuroticism | 4.35 | (.08) | 1 | 7 |
| <i>Personality indicators</i> | | | | |
| Low self-control | 4.03 | (.06) | 1 | 7 |
| GSE | 3.70 | (.10) | 1 | 7 |

Between-group differences between those who have sent a sext and those who have not are presented in Table 7. Major differences exist in religiosity, relationship status, and the normativity indicators among those who have sexted and those who have not. Respondents who have sent a

sext report lower religiosity than those who have never sent a sext (3.47 v. 5.14, $p < .01$). Additionally, respondents who have never sent a sext are more likely to be in the single and not dating category relative to those who have sent a sext (53% v. 19%, $p < .01$). On the other hand, those who have sent a sext encompass a greater percent of the committed relationship

Table 7. Bivariate statistics by prevalence of sexting (n=304)

| Variable Name | Sent Sext | Never Sent |
|----------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| <i>Demographics</i> | | |
| Age 18-19 | 0.17 ** | 0.34 |
| Age 20-21 | 0.25 | 0.30 |
| Age 22-23 | 0.25 ** | 0.12 |
| Age 24 and above | 0.33 | 0.24 |
| Female | 0.74 | 0.73 |
| Male | 0.26 | 0.27 |
| White | 0.68 ** | 0.53 |
| Black | 0.14 | 0.09 |
| Asian | 0.07 ** | 0.18 |
| Other | 0.11 * | 0.20 |
| Religiosity | 3.47 ** | 5.14 |
| <i>Relationship indicators</i> | | |
| Single and not dating | 0.19 ** | 0.53 |
| Single and dating | 0.23 | 0.14 |
| In a committed relationship | 0.59 ** | 0.33 |
| <i>Normativity indicators</i> | | |
| Perceived percent engaged | 6.40 ** | 5.71 |
| Proportion of peer group sexting | 2.62 ** | 1.79 |
| <i>Personality indicators</i> | | |
| Extraversion | 4.47 | 4.21 |
| Conscientiousness | 4.76 | 4.82 |
| Neuroticism | 4.43 | 4.25 |
| <i>Personality indicators</i> | | |
| Low self-control | 4.24 ** | 3.78 |
| GSE | 3.78 | 3.60 |

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

category (59% v 33%, $p < .01$). Importantly, there are no discernible differences between the groups in any of the Big 5 personality indicators. However, those who have sexted have lower self-control than those who had never sent a sext (4.24 v. 3.78, $p < .01$). Finally, no significant differences exist in GSE between those who have sent a sext and those who have not.

Table 8 provides the results from a series of seven logistic regression models. Each model includes a new variable or set of variables so that their individual effects can be assessed independent of the other predictor variables. The first model enters only demographic variables. Those who are in age categories 22-23 and 24 and above are more likely to send a sext than those who are in 18-19 (OR = 3.97, $p < .01$; OR = 2.43, $p < .05$). Additionally, respondents indicating they are Asian are less likely to sext than respondents who are White (OR = .39, $p < .05$). Respondents indicating a higher sense of religiosity are also less likely to sext (OR = .85, $p < .01$). The second model includes relationship status. Both those who are single and dating and in a committed relationship are more likely to sext than someone who is single and not dating (OR = 3.40, $p < .01$; OR = 3.75, $p < .01$). The third model includes normativity indicators. Respondents reporting a higher proportion of their peer group involved in sexting are more likely to have sexted themselves (OR = 2.27, $p < .01$).

The following models include personality indicators. The fourth model contains the three Big 5 personality variables in addition to the control variables. Extraversion was significant, meaning that a person indicating he/she is more extraverted is more likely to send a sext (OR = 1.42, $p < .01$). Neither conscientiousness nor neuroticism was significant in this model. Model 6 enters only the variable low self-control with demographic variables. Low self-control was statistically significant in this model indicating that respondents with lower self-control are more likely to send a sext (OR = 1.46, $p < .01$). The following model enters GSE with the control

variables. GSE was not a significant indicator of sexting. Model 7 is the full model which includes all indicator variables. The significant effects of extraversion and low self-control diminish when entered with all other indicators.

Table 8. Logistic regression by prevalence of sending (n=304)

| Predictor | Model 1 | | Model 2 | | Model 3 | | Model 4 | |
|----------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| | OR | (S.E.) | OR | (S.E.) | OR | (S.E.) | OR | (S.E.) |
| <i>Demographics</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Age 18-19 (ref) | | | | | | | | |
| Age 20-21 | 1.71 | (.34) | 1.23 | 0.37 | 2.35 | (.39)* | 2.00 | (.36) |
| Age 22-23 | 3.97 | (.40)** | 2.63 | (.43)* | 3.89 | (.44)** | 4.78 | (.42)** |
| Age 24 and above | 2.43 | (.36)* | 1.73 | (.38) | 3.59 | (.40)** | 2.85 | (.37)** |
| Female (ref) | | | | | | | | |
| Male | 0.97 | (.29) | 1.05 | (.30) | 0.72 | (.31) | 1.06 | (.32) |
| White (ref) | | | | | | | | |
| Black | 1.33 | (.41) | 1.31 | (.43) | 1.57 | (.46) | 1.56 | (.44) |
| Asian | 0.39 | (.42)* | 0.42 | (.44)* | 0.55 | (.46) | 0.38 | (.44)** |
| Other | 0.56 | (.36) | 0.56 | (.37) | 0.54 | (.39) | 0.52 | (.37) |
| Religiosity | 0.85 | (.04)** | 0.87 | (.04)** | 0.85 | (.05)** | 0.84 | (.05)** |
| <i>Relationship Indicators</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Single and not dating (ref) | | | | | | | | |
| Single and dating | | | 3.40 | (.38)** | | | | |
| In a committed relationship | | | 3.75 | (.31)** | | | | |
| <i>Normativity Indicators</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Perceived percent engaged | | | | | 1.09 | (.07) | | |
| Proportion of peer group sexting | | | | | 2.27 | (.15)** | | |
| <i>Personality Indicators</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Extraversion | | | | | | | 1.42 | (.11)** |
| Conscientiousness | | | | | | | 0.83 | (.15) |
| Neuroticism | | | | | | | 1.15 | (.12) |
| <i>Personality Indicators</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Low self-control | | | | | | | | |
| GSE | | | | | | | | |
| Constant | 1.56 | (.33) | 0.78 | (.38) | .12 | (.58) | 1.14 | (.40) |

* p<.05 **p<.01

OR- the statistic presented is odds ratio

Table 8 (continued). Logistic regression by prevalence of sending (n=304)

| Predictor | Model 5 | | Model 6 | | Model 7 | |
|----------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| | OR | (S.E.) | OR | (S.E.) | OR | (S.E.) |
| <i>Demographics</i> | | | | | | |
| Age 18-19 (ref) | | | | | | |
| Age 20-21 | 1.82 | (.35) | 1.72 | (.34) | 2.16 | (.43) |
| Age 22-23 | 3.62 | (.41)** | 4.00 | (.40)** | 3.12 | (.49)* |
| Age 24 and above | 2.61 | (.36)** | 2.48 | (.36)* | 3.15 | (.44)** |
| Female (ref) | | | | | | |
| Male | 0.95 | (.30) | 0.98 | (.29) | 0.86 | (.37) |
| White (ref) | | | | | | |
| Black | 1.41 | (.42) | 1.39 | (.42) | 1.68 | (.49) |
| Asian | 0.38 | (.43)* | 0.38 | (.42)* | 0.48 | (.51) |
| Other | 0.58 | (.36) | 0.57 | (.36) | 0.56 | (.43) |
| Religiosity | 0.85 | (.04)** | 0.85 | (.04)** | 0.88 | (.05)** |
| <i>Relationship Indicators</i> | | | | | | |
| Single and not dating (ref) | | | | | | |
| Single and dating | | | | | 3.33 | (.44)** |
| In a committed relationship | | | | | 4.48 | (.35)** |
| <i>Normativity Indicators</i> | | | | | | |
| Perceived percent engaged | | | | | 1.05 | (.08) |
| Proportion of peer group sexting | | | | | 2.39 | (.17)** |
| <i>Personality Indicators</i> | | | | | | |
| Extraversion | | | | | 1.25 | (.14) |
| Conscientiousness | | | | | 0.97 | (.18) |
| Neuroticism | | | | | 1.05 | (.16) |
| <i>Personality Indicators</i> | | | | | | |
| Low self-control | 1.46 | (.12)** | | | 1.16 | (.16) |
| GSE | | | 1.05 | (.08) | 1.16 | (.12) |
| Constant | 0.33 | (.59) | 1.25 | (.47) | 1.59 | (.01) |

* p<.05 **p<.01

OR- the statistic presented is odds ratio

Age, religiosity, relationship status, and peer group involvement all affect whether a person has engaged in sending a sexually explicit nude or seminude image. It is apparent that situational factors such as relationship status and peer involvement have greater influence on sexting than individual personality characteristics.

Summary

This chapter examined the extent to which individual personality factors influence a person's involvement in sending sext messages. Previous literature has demonstrated that high levels of extraversion, neuroticism, and agreeableness are associated with various forms of sending sexually explicit text messages, images, and propositioning sexual activity (Delevi & Weisskirch, 2013). Additionally, the existing literature suggests that low levels of self-control influence certain facets of sexting (Reynes et al., 2014). In line with these bodies of work, findings of the current study indicate that both extraversion and low self-control are positively associated with sending a sext message. However, the associations appear to be mediated by relationship status and peer involvement in sexting. As such, it is clear that these personality indicators play some role in sexting, but it is unclear to what degree or in what context they matter. Future research should aim to shed light on this relationship.

CHAPTER 6: Motivations for sexting

Overview

This chapter explores the self-reported motivations for sending a sexually explicit nude or seminude image. The first section identifies and describes the items created to measure personal motivations for sexting. The third section describes the sample for this chapter. Next, a plan of analysis is provided and reviewed. The fourth section presents univariate and bivariate results and interpretation of each. Finally, a summary of this chapter's findings and implications is supplied.

Variables

This chapter's focus on motivations called for the creation of a self-report measure. A 23-item list explores the self-reported motivations for sending a sext. Items were created to measure a variety of potential motivations including sexual reasons, self-esteem/self-confidence, pressure/coercion and flirting/relationship reasons. Examples of these items include *I send nude or partially nude images to be fun and flirtatious*, *I send nude or partially nude images because I am pressured by the recipient*, and *I send nude or partially nude images to receive a picture in return*. A Likert scale ranging from one (strongly disagree) to seven (strongly agree) is used to measure each of these items.

The above list of motivational items is investigated by gender and relationship status using bivariate statistics. Gender is measured using the categories male and female. Relationship status is measured using three categories: in a committed relationship, single and dating, and single and not dating.

Sample

The sample for this chapter is comprised of only those respondents who reported ever sending a sexually explicit nude or seminude image. Ten respondents were excluded from the analysis because they were missing on one or more than one of the items. After removing those cases, the sample contained 194 cases. This sample is restricted as only respondents that indicated they have sent a sext received the list of motivation items on the online survey.

Plan of Analysis

This chapter provides univariate and bivariate analyses based on participant's motivations for sending a sext. First, the mean of each of the 23 items is provided for the chapter's subsample. Second, bivariate statistics for motivations of sexting are presented by gender and relationship status. That is, the average of the 23 items is examined across a) male and female respondents and 2) romantically involved and single respondents. The purpose of this is to further investigate the phenomenon, participants' responses will be separated by the percentage that answered "somewhat agree" or a higher form of agreement (this translates to five or greater on the scale of one to seven). A univariate analysis of these statistics presents the percentage of respondents that agree with each motivational item. Finally, this analysis will also be examined by gender and relationship status. This reveals the differences in the percent that agree with each motivational item between men and women and across relationship status.

Results

Table 9 displays the mean for each of the 23 motivation items examined in this chapter, with larger means indicating a greater level of agreement for that item across all respondents. The item with the largest mean is *to be fun and flirtatious* (5.74). Many of the self-esteem and flirtation items have relatively high means that ranged between four and five, which falls between the

categories of “neither agree nor disagree” and “somewhat agree.” The item with the lowest mean is *because I am pressured by my friends* (1.56). This score falls between the categories “strongly disagree” and “disagree.” Because univariate statistics can only inform of us averages across the entire sample, the analyses shift to between-groups analyses to further investigate the mean of these items across gender and relationships status, which the literature indicates are important factors to understanding sexting (i.e. Delevi & Weisskirch, 2013; Drouin & Landgraff, 2011; Reynes et al., 2014).

Table 9. Mean of motivational items n=194

| | Mean |
|---|-------------|
| <i>I send nude or partially nude images...</i> | |
| to feel sexy. | 4.63 |
| to feel confident. | 4.25 |
| to be fun and flirtatious. | 5.74 |
| to secure the attention of the recipient. | 4.43 |
| to secure future physical sexual encounters with the recipient. | 3.17 |
| to secure a date. | 2.02 |
| because I am afraid of not fulfilling the recipient's needs. | 2.32 |
| to receive compliments. | 4.34 |
| because I am pressured by the recipient. | 2.61 |
| because social media makes it seem like it is happening all of the time. | 2.63 |
| to receive sexual gratification from exchanging pictures. | 4.42 |
| to feel in control. | 2.95 |
| to feel good about myself. | 4.03 |
| to secure a relationship. | 2.19 |
| because I am afraid of telling the person no. | 1.97 |
| because I am afraid of losing a relationship. | 2.11 |
| because I am afraid of losing the recipient to other people. | 2.20 |
| to receive a picture in return. | 3.75 |
| to receive satisfaction from sending the image. | 4.18 |
| to receive social status. | 1.68 |
| because I am pressured by my friends. | 1.56 |
| because I feel pressure from previously sending a nude or partially nude image. | 2.11 |
| because the recipient asked multiple times. | 2.78 |

Table 10 presents the results from bivariate analysis of motivations for sexting by gender. T-tests are used to determine significant differences between the two groups. Of the statistically significant differences, males have a higher sense of agreement on nine out of the ten items. The largest significant difference is on the item *to receive a picture in return* (5.47 v. 3.11, $p < .01$). Similarly, males have a higher average agreement on two other sexually related variables: *to secure future physical sexual encounters with the recipient* (3.98 v. 2.87, $p < .01$) and *to receive sexual gratification from exchanging pictures* (5.40 v. 4.05, $p < .01$). Females are more likely to agree that they sexted *to feel sexy* (4.81 v. 4.15, $p < .05$). On average, both males and females disagree with the items *to secure a date* (2.41 v. 1.87, $p < .05$), *because I am afraid of not fulfilling the recipient's needs* (2.73 v. 2.16, $p < .05$), *because social media makes it seem like it is happening all of the time* (3.15 v. 2.43, $p < .01$), *because I am afraid of losing the recipient to other people* (2.60 v. 2.04, $p < .01$), *to receive social status* (2.01 v. 1.55, $p < .01$), and *because I am pressured by my friends* (1.83 v. 1.45, $p < .01$). Importantly, however, females have a stronger sense of disagreement on all of these items.

Table 10. Bivariate statistics by gender n=194

| | Male | Female |
|---|---------|--------|
| <i>I send nude or partially nude images...</i> | | |
| to feel sexy. | 4.15 * | 4.81 |
| to feel confident. | 4.02 | 4.33 |
| to be fun and flirtatious. | 5.87 | 5.69 |
| to secure the attention of the recipient. | 4.32 | 4.47 |
| to secure future physical sexual encounters with the recipient. | 3.98 ** | 2.87 |
| to secure a date. | 2.41 * | 1.87 |
| because I am afraid of not fulfilling the recipient's needs. | 2.73 * | 2.16 |
| to receive compliments. | 4.54 | 4.26 |
| because I am pressured by the recipient. | 2.56 | 2.62 |
| because social media makes it seem like it is happening all of the time. | 3.15 ** | 2.43 |
| to receive sexual gratification from exchanging pictures. | 5.40 ** | 4.05 |
| to feel in control. | 2.81 | 3.00 |
| to feel good about myself. | 3.85 | 4.09 |
| to secure a relationship. | 2.43 | 2.10 |
| because I am afraid of telling the person no. | 2.13 | 1.91 |
| because I am afraid of losing a relationship. | 2.28 | 2.05 |
| because I am afraid of losing the recipient to other people. | 2.60 * | 2.04 |
| to receive a picture in return. | 5.47 ** | 3.11 |
| to receive satisfaction from sending the image. | 4.17 | 4.18 |
| to receive social status. | 2.01 ** | 1.55 |
| because I am pressured by my friends. | 1.83 ** | 1.45 |
| because I feel pressure from previously sending a nude or partially nude image. | 2.34 | 2.08 |
| because the recipient asked multiple times. | 2.80 | 2.78 |

* p<.05

**p<.01

Table 11 displays the motivations for sexting bivariate statistics by relationship status. One-way ANOVA tests with Tukey's HSD is used to determine significance between the three relationship status groups. Those who are single and not dating agreed more with the item *to secure future physical sexual encounters with the recipient* than those in a committed relationship (3.78 v. 2.81, $p < .01$). Unsurprisingly, those in a committed relationship have a higher sense of disagreement with *to secure a date* than both those who are single and dating (1.67 v. 2.31, $p <$

.05) and those who are single and not dating (1.67 v. 2.70, $p < .01$). Participants identifying as single and not dating have a significantly higher average than those in a committed relationship for items *because I am pressured by the recipient* (3.22 v. 2.30, $p < .05$), *because social media makes it seem like it is happening all of the time* (3.24 v. 2.30, $p < .05$) and *because I am afraid of losing a relationship* (2.57 v. 1.88, $p < .05$). Those in a committed relationship have a stronger sense of disagreement with the motivation *because I am afraid of telling the person no* than those who are single and dating (1.69 v. 2.39, $p < .05$). On the other hand, those who are single and dating have a higher agreement than those in a committed relationship for the item *to receive a picture in return* (4.45 v. 3.35, $p < .01$). Those in a committed relationship have a stronger sense of disagreement than those single and dating and single and not dating on four items: *to receive social status*, *because I am pressured by my friends*, *because I feel pressure from previously sending a nude or partially nude image*, and *because the recipient asked multiple times*.

Table 11. Bivariate statistics by relationship status n=194

| | Committed Relationship | Single & Dating | Single & Not Dating |
|---|---------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| <i>I send nude or partially nude images...</i> | | | |
| to feel sexy. | 4.63 | 4.41 | 4.89 |
| to feel confident. | 4.29 | 4.00 | 4.40 |
| to be fun and flirtatious. | 5.89 | 5.45 | 5.62 |
| to secure the attention of the recipient. | 4.41 | 4.38 | 4.51 |
| to secure future physical sexual encounters with the recipient. | 2.81 ^{b**} | 3.59 | 3.78 ^{b**} |
| to secure a date. | 1.67 ^{a*b**} | 2.31 ^{a*} | 2.70 ^{b**} |
| because I am afraid of not fulfilling the recipient's needs. | 2.10 | 2.52 | 2.76 |
| to receive compliments. | 4.21 | 4.59 | 4.43 |
| because I am pressured by the recipient. | 2.30 ^{b*} | 2.89 | 3.22 ^{b*} |
| because social media makes it seem like it is happening all of the time. | 2.37 ^{b*} | 2.77 | 3.24 ^{b*} |
| to receive sexual gratification from exchanging pictures. | 4.22 | 4.66 | 4.73 |
| to feel in control. | 2.68 | 3.45 | 3.16 |
| to feel good about myself. | 4.06 | 3.73 | 4.27 |
| to secure a relationship. | 1.94 | 2.57 | 2.49 |
| because I am afraid of telling the person no. | 1.69 ^{a*} | 2.39 ^{a*} | 2.35 |
| because I am afraid of losing a relationship. | 1.88 ^{b*} | 2.34 | 2.57 ^{b*} |
| because I am afraid of losing the recipient to other people. | 1.94 | 2.52 | 2.59 |
| to receive a picture in return. | 3.35 ^{a**} | 4.45 ^{a**} | 4.13 |
| to receive satisfaction from sending the image. | 4.15 | 4.14 | 4.32 |
| to receive social status. | 1.46 ^{a*b*} | 1.93 ^{a*} | 2.03 ^{b*} |
| because I am pressured by my friends. | 1.34 ^{a**b*} | 1.89 ^{a**} | 1.81 ^{b*} |
| because I feel pressure from previously sending a nude or partially nude image. | 1.72 ^{a*b**} | 2.45 ^{a*} | 2.92 ^{b**} |
| because the recipient asked multiple times. | 2.37 ^{a*b*} | 3.30 ^{a*} | 3.43 ^{b*} |

* p<.05 **p<.01

^a Significant difference between committed and single and dating^b Significant difference between committed and single and not dating^c Significant difference between single and dating and single and not dating

Table 12 displays univariate statistics for the sample. The statistic presented is the percent of respondents that indicated they either somewhat agree (5), agree (6), and strongly agree (7).

Ninety percent of respondents agreed on some level that they send sexts *to be fun and flirtatious*.

Six other items have an overall agreement level of over 50 percent: *to feel sexy* (61%), *to feel confident* (55%), *to secure the attention of the recipient* (59%), *to receive compliments* (61%), *to receive sexual gratification from exchanging pictures* (58%), and *to receive satisfaction from sending the image* (52%). Two items have less than five percent of respondents agree: *to receive social status* (3%) and *because I am pressured by my friends* (2%). Importantly, there are several items that may be of concern. Twenty-two percent of respondents agreed that they send images *because I am pressured by the recipient*. Additionally, a small portion of participants agreeing that they send images out of some form of fear: telling the person no (10 %), losing a relationship (9%), losing the recipient to other people (15%), and not fulfilling the recipient's needs (14%). Fourteen percent of respondents agree that they feel pressure from previously sending a sext and 26 percent send sexts because the recipient asked multiple times.

Table 12. Motivations univariate statistics- % at least "somewhat agree" n=194

| | % At Least Somewhat Agree |
|---|---------------------------------|
| <i>I send nude or partially nude images...</i> | |
| to feel sexy. | 0.61 |
| to feel confident. | 0.55 |
| to be fun and flirtatious. | 0.90 |
| to secure the attention of the recipient. | 0.59 |
| to secure future physical sexual encounters with the recipient. | 0.30 |
| to secure a date. | 0.09 |
| because I am afraid of not fulfilling the recipient's needs. | 0.14 |
| to receive compliments. | 0.61 |
| because I am pressured by the recipient. | 0.22 |
| because social media makes it seem like it is happening all of the time. | 0.20 |
| to receive sexual gratification from exchanging pictures. | 0.58 |
| to feel in control. | 0.24 |
| to feel good about myself. | 0.51 |
| to secure a relationship. | 0.12 |
| because I am afraid of telling the person no. | 0.10 |
| because I am afraid of losing a relationship. | 0.09 |
| because I am afraid of losing the recipient to other people. | 0.15 |
| to receive a picture in return. | 0.44 |
| to receive satisfaction from sending the image. | 0.52 |
| to receive social status. | 0.03 |
| because I am pressured by my friends. | 0.02 |
| because I feel pressure from previously sending a nude or partially nude image. | 0.14 |
| because the recipient asked multiple times. | 0.26 |

* p<.05 **p<.01

Table 13 adds deeper insight to the motivations by considering differences in agreement for motivations across gender. Females are more likely to report they send sexts *to feel sexy* than males (67% v. 45%, $p < .01$). The other three statistically significant differences between items are concerning sexual motivations for sexting. Forty-five percent of males agreed that they send sexts *to secure future physical sexual encounters with the recipient*, whereas only 25 percent of

females agreed ($p < .01$). Similarly, over 80 percent of males agreed they send a sext *to receive sexual gratification from exchanging images* and less than 50 percent of females said the same ($p < .01$). Males are also more likely to agree that they send sexts *to receive a picture in return* (85% v. 28%, $p < .01$). Interestingly, there are no significant differences between genders on any of the items that measured pressure/coercion.

Table 13. Bivariate statistics by gender -% at least "somewhat agree" n=194

| | Male | Female |
|---|---------|--------|
| <i>I send nude or partially nude images...</i> | | |
| to feel sexy. | 0.45 ** | 0.67 |
| to feel confident. | 0.51 | 0.57 |
| to be fun and flirtatious. | 0.96 | 0.88 |
| to secure the attention of the recipient. | 0.55 | 0.61 |
| to secure future physical sexual encounters with the recipient. | 0.45 ** | 0.25 |
| to secure a date. | 0.15 | 0.06 |
| because I am afraid of not fulfilling the recipient's needs. | 0.19 | 0.12 |
| to receive compliments. | 0.65 | 0.60 |
| because I am pressured by the recipient. | 0.19 | 0.23 |
| because social media makes it seem like it is happening all of the time. | 0.26 | 0.17 |
| to receive sexual gratification from exchanging pictures. | 0.83 ** | 0.49 |
| to feel in control. | 0.17 | 0.26 |
| to feel good about myself. | 0.42 | 0.54 |
| to secure a relationship. | 0.13 | 0.11 |
| because I am afraid of telling the person no. | 0.30 | 0.31 |
| because I am afraid of losing a relationship. | 0.08 | 0.10 |
| because I am afraid of losing the recipient to other people. | 0.19 | 0.13 |
| to receive a picture in return. | 0.85 ** | 0.28 |
| to receive satisfaction from sending the image. | 0.45 | 0.55 |
| to receive social status. | 0.06 | 0.02 |
| because I am pressured by my friends. | 0.04 | 0.01 |
| because I feel pressure from previously sending a nude or partially nude image. | 0.17 | 0.13 |
| because the recipient asked multiple times. | 0.21 | 0.28 |

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

Table 14 provides a bivariate analysis of agreement for motivations of sexting by relationship status. A larger proportion of participants who identify as single and not dating agreed that they send sexts *to secure future physical sexual encounters with the recipient* than those who are in a committed relationship (46% v. 24%, $p < .05$). In the same way, a significantly larger portion of those who are single and not dating than those in a committed relationship report feeling pressure from the recipient (35% v. 17%, $p < .05$) and from previously sending an image (30% v. 7%, $p < .01$). Furthermore, differences exist for the item *to receive a picture in return* between both those who are in a committed relationship and single and dating (35% v. 57%, $p < .05$) and those in a committed relationship and single and not dating (35% v. 57%, $p < .05$). There are no differences across relationship groups for the items measuring self-esteem/self-confidence and flirting/relationship.

Table 14. Bivariate statistics by relationship status-% at least "somewhat agree" n=194

| | Committed Relationship | Single & Dating | Single & Not Dating |
|---|---------------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| <i>I send nude or partially nude images...</i> | | | |
| to feel sexy. | 0.62 | 0.55 | 0.65 |
| to feel confident. | 0.59 | 0.48 | 0.51 |
| to be fun and flirtatious. | 0.92 | 0.86 | 0.89 |
| to secure the attention of the recipient. | 0.58 | 0.56 | 0.65 |
| to secure future physical sexual encounters with the recipient. | 0.24 ^{b*} | 0.34 | 0.46 ^{b*} |
| to secure a date. | 0.04 | 0.14 | 0.16 |
| because I am afraid of not fulfilling the recipient's needs. | 0.13 | 0.16 | 0.13 |
| to receive compliments. | 0.59 | 0.66 | 0.59 |
| because I am pressured by the recipient. | 0.17 ^{b*} | 0.25 | 0.35 ^{b*} |
| because social media makes it seem like it is happening all of the time. | 0.15 | 0.20 | 0.32 |
| to receive sexual gratification from exchanging pictures. | 0.55 | 0.61 | 0.65 |
| to feel in control. | 0.19 | 0.36 | 0.22 |
| to feel good about myself. | 0.55 | 0.43 | 0.46 |
| to secure a relationship. | 0.08 | 0.18 | 0.16 |
| because I am afraid of telling the person no. | 0.06 | 0.16 | 0.16 |
| because I am afraid of losing a relationship. | 0.08 | 0.11 | 0.11 |
| because I am afraid of losing the recipient to other people. | 0.12 | 0.20 | 0.16 |
| to receive a picture in return. | 0.35 ^{a*b*} | 0.57 ^{a*} | 0.57 ^{b*} |
| to receive satisfaction from sending the image. | 0.52 | 0.48 | 0.57 |
| to receive social status. | 0.01 | 0.07 | 0.05 |
| because I am pressured by my friends. | 0.01 | 0.05 | 0.00 |
| because I feel pressure from previously sending a nude or partially nude image. | 0.07 ^{b**} | 0.18 | 0.30 ^{b**} |
| because the recipient asked multiple times. | 0.19 | 0.36 | 0.35 |

* p<.05 **p<.01

^a Significant difference between committed and single and dating^b Significant difference between committed and single and not dating^c Significant difference between single and dating and single and not dating

Summary

The goal of this chapter was to gain a deeper understanding of why individuals send sexually explicit nude or seminude images. With a variety of items intended to measure personal motivations for sexting, this chapter adds to the literature with its finding that 90 percent of those involved in sexting do so “to be fun and flirtatious.” This is consistent with Drouin et al.’s (2014) finding that individuals engaging in sexting do so in a flirting connotation. Additionally, the majority of respondents also agreed they send images for reasons associated with self-esteem/self-confidence and sex. Previous research has also identified sexual reasons as a motivation for sexting (Perkins et al., 2014 & Drouin et al., 2014).

Perhaps a more serious matter, over 20 percent of respondents admit they are at least partially motivated to send a sext out of pressure from the recipient. Previous research has also identified pressure as a factor in sexting (Reed, Tolman, & Ward, 2016; Delevi & Tobin, 2014; Weisskirch et al., 2016). These findings indicate a substantial proportion of those involved in sexting are doing so not completely out of their own will. In addition, a number of participants indicated they sext out of various forms of fear (losing a relationship, fear of saying no, not fulfilling needs). Both of these motivations from pressure and fear raise concern as to whether the participant actually wants to engage in the behavior. Overall, it is clear that there are a variety of motivations for sexting that need to be further investigated.

CHAPTER 7: Discussion

Overview

There is no doubt that the explosion of technology has changed the way young people communicate interpersonally as well as create and maintain social, romantic, and sexual relationships. The emergence of sexting has changed the way many young people choose to initiate these relationships and act on them. The new and changing nature of this behavior leaves the literature fragmented and constantly playing “catch up.” As such, this thesis set its sight on addressing some of the gaps in the literature including: further understanding the prevalence rates of sexting, identifying factors that may lead to engaging in the behavior, and exploring personal motivations for sending a sext. This discussion proceeds in three parts: a review of each chapter’s main findings and a discussion of their implications, an assessment of the study’s limitations, and a discussion of future research.

Chapter 4: Findings and Implications

The majority of participants (56%) in this study indicated they have sent a sexually explicit nude or seminude image. This result is on the higher end of current prevalence rates produced by studies in this area, which suggest that between 38 and 60 percent of college aged students are engaging in the behavior (Delevi & Weisskirch, 2013; Reynes et al., 2013; Samimi & Alderson, 2013). The prevalence rate in this study points towards a more normative view of the behavior in society. The relatively high prevalence of sending sexts found in this sample should serve as a further reason for researchers to thoroughly understand this behavior. Further, understanding that the majority of college-aged students have engaged in the behavior reveals that a preventative solution may be difficult, and take time, to develop.

Indicators of sexting include age, religiosity, relationship status, and peer involvement. Results demonstrate that older students are more likely to have sent a sext than 18 and 19 year olds. This may be due to the fact that they have had more time, romantic/sexual relationships, or exposure to technology. However, it should be considered that college culture and environment may contribute to a person's likelihood to sext. Thus, younger students who have been less exposed to the culture may be less likely to engage in the behavior. Additionally, religiosity was found to be negatively associated with sexting. The extent of the statistical association was marginal, but it may be the case that a person reporting a very high sense of religiosity is insulated from engaging in the behavior.

Relative to their single counterparts, respondents who were dating or in a relationship were more likely to sext. This finding is consistent with a variety of previous studies indicating that both a committed relationship and a dating relationship are associated with involvement in sexting (Delevi & Weisskirch, 2013; Drouin & Landgraff, 2011; Drouin et al., 2013; Perkins et al., 2014; Samimi & Alderson, 2013). The romantic relationship context of the behavior should be further explored to examine how much certain relationship characteristics, such as trust, contribute to sexting. Moreover, practitioners should consider the extent to which sexting is affecting the nature of romantic relationships and level of trust and attachment between partners. Previous literature has identified associations between sexting and various forms of attachment avoidance and attachment anxiety (Drouin & Landgraff, 2011; Weisskirch, Drouin, & Delevi, 2016). Finally, the proportion of a student's peers that were involved in sexting is also a positive indicator of engaging in the behavior. At this point, no research has explored this association between a peer network and sexting. This study's finding and the prevalence of sexting rings among young people

(especially high schoolers) display a need for further investigation between one's own involvement in sexting and their peers.

Chapter 5: Findings and Implications

The goal of Chapter 5 was to determine whether personality characteristics, specifically the Big 5, low self-control, and self-esteem, are related to sending a sexually explicit nude or seminude image. Contrary to previous literature, this study finds no association between neuroticism and sexting (Delevi & Weisskirch, 2013). However, there is an association between extraversion and sending a sext. This is similar to Delevi and Weisskirch's (2013) finding which displayed an association between extraversion and sending a sexually explicit text message. Additionally, low self-control is related to sexting even when controlling for a host of other covariates. This is consistent with previous literature displaying that lower amounts of self-control increases the likelihood of engaging in sexting (Reynes et al., 2014). However, sexting's relationship with extraversion and low self-control appear to be mediated by romantic relationship status and peer involvement. These findings indicate that social factors are stronger predictors than individual variables. This is important to consider when developing prevention and awareness strategies.

Chapter 6: Findings and Implications

Understanding personal motivations for sexting is a large piece of the literature that was missing. This chapter sought to identify common motivational factors college students reported as their reasons for sexting. The vast majority of the sample reported they sext to be fun and flirtatious and for sexual reasons. This is consistent with existing literature which identifies both flirtation and sexual reasons as common motivations (Drouin et al., 2014; Perkins et al., 2014). In addition, a large portion of the sample indicated they sext for reasons related to self-esteem and self-

confidence (e.g. to feel sexy, to receive compliments, to feel confident, to feel good about myself). This demonstrates that some people may be sexting for personal rewards rather than for the recipient. On a more concerning note, over 20 percent of the sample reported engaging in sexting due to pressure from the recipient, similar to studies that have found pressure or coercion as a factor in sexting (Reed, Tolman, & Ward, 2016; Delevi & Tobin, 2014; Weisskirch et al., 2016). Importantly, this reveals that a substantial portion of those involved in sexting may not actually want to be doing so. Alternatively, they may also believe that they do not have a choice in the matter given the potential loss of a relationship or a partner.

The implications for the primary findings of this chapter are threefold. First, respondents indicate that principal motivations for sexting are found within flirtation and sexual reasons. This may lead to a less deviant opinion of sexting, especially within consensual contexts. Further, sexting out of these motivations may have fewer consequences than other forms. Second, sexting for reasons tied to self-confidence or self-esteem may have detrimental effects on a person's psychological well-being. Advances in awareness and education of the potential psychological consequences of sexting should be introduced to promote a healthy self-image in the period of adolescence and young adulthood where many feel their body is not up to social standards. Third, considerable attention should be given to sexting out of motivations from pressure or fear. Young adults should be informed about coercive and controlling relationships and feel empowered to make their own decision. Unfortunately, this is not always the case, thus awareness platforms regarding the above items may create an environment for young people to have a healthier body image and balanced relationship with partners.

Limitations

The study is limited by two key shortcomings. First, and most importantly, it is limited by its sample. With a relatively small sample size it is difficult to draw between-group conclusions, especially as it relates to gender. Indeed, the sample is over 70 percent female, which creates real problems for rigorously assessing gender differences. Finally, the sample is limited in terms of its representation of undergraduate populations as a whole. The sample was obtained from a large urban university, which has traditionally been known as a commuter school. Thus, this sample may not be representative of other undergraduate populations at other universities, especially those with a larger share of students living on campus.

The second major limitation pertains to the Big 5 personality inventory used in this study. Some of the items that were intended to measure agreeableness and openness to experience were flawed and loaded on to multiple factors, consequently undermining their ability to be retained. This problem was more than likely due to the fact that these items were reverse coded in the online survey but embedded within normally coded items. In the end, although three of the five personality measures were validated and useable, the study cannot draw complete conclusions regarding all of the personality characteristics of interest.

Future Research

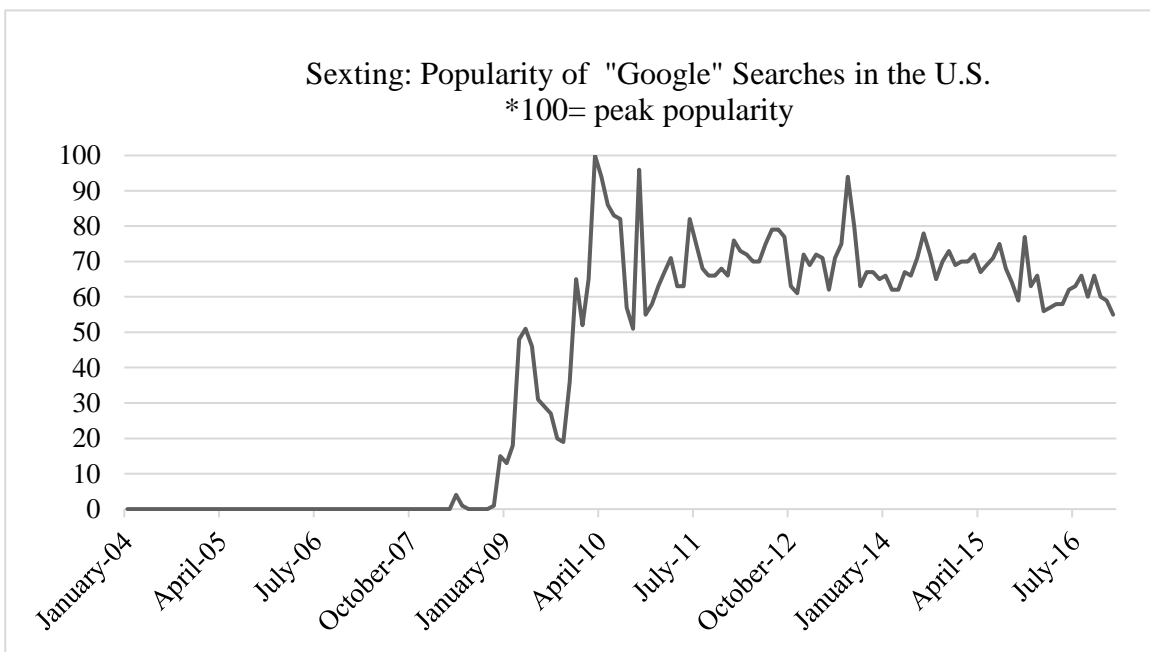
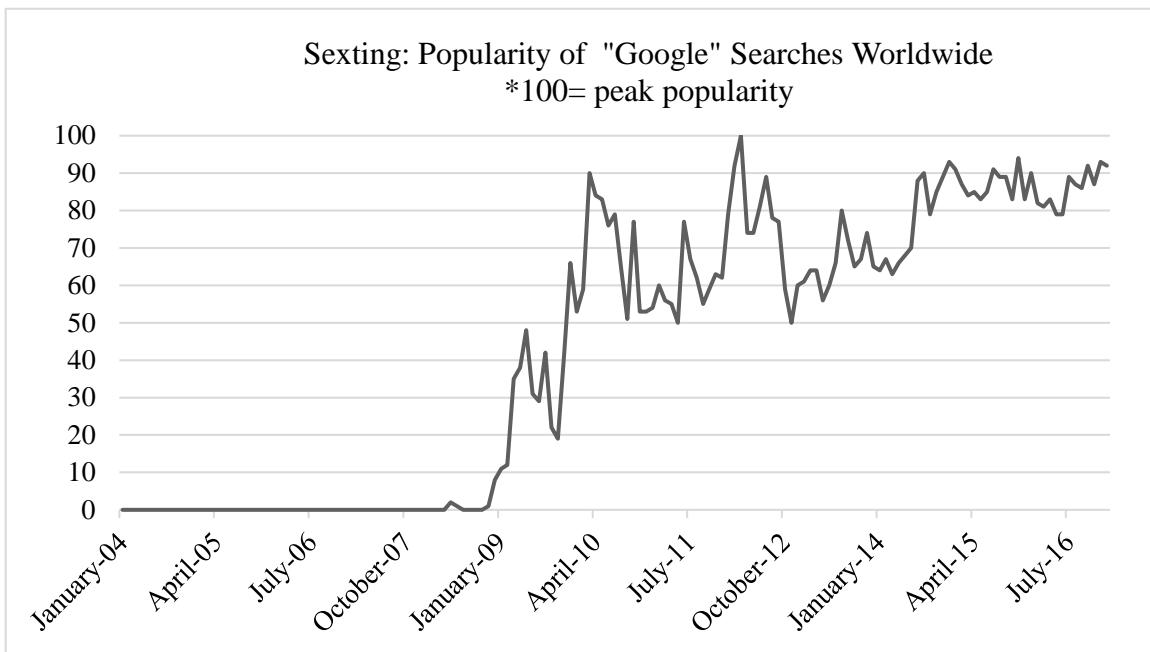
Considering the share of young adults that are engaging in sexting, it is imperative to fully understand the behavior and its consequences. Future research should further investigate the influences of personality characteristics and low self-control as they clearly have some impact on engaging in the behavior. Additionally, future research can aim to further understand motivational factors and underlying influences of them. Specifically, research should give attention to the issue of pressure or coercion and sexting.

There are large gaps in the literature that few studies have attempted to address. First, the majority of existing studies are quantitative in nature, thereby leaving a large part of the sexting story undiscovered. Qualitative research may add important contextual information that can add some richness to the literature and certainly help guide future quantitative work in this area. Additionally, few, if any, studies have examined the real-life consequences of engaging in sexting. Sexting may carry implications for a person's relationships, reputation, employment, and psychological well-being. Future research should aim to assess these consequences longitudinally to understand whether engaging in the behavior at one point in a person's life carries consequences across their life course.

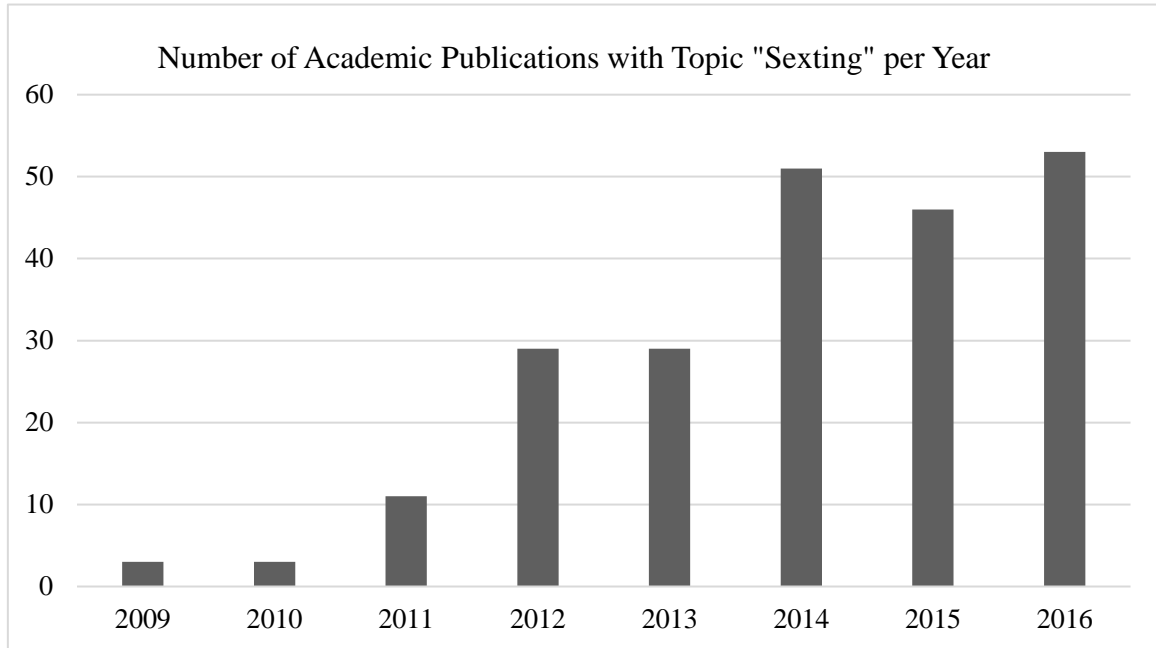
Conclusion

It is clear that the wide use of technology has changed many aspects of interpersonal communications. Along with these changes came the emergence of sexting, which has impacted the nature of young people's romantic and sexual relationships. The purpose of this thesis was to explore the nature of sexting, variables it is associated with, and young people's motivations for engaging in the behavior. While it adds to the small amount of existing literature, there is definitely a need for further research on this behavior and its effects.

APPENDIX A

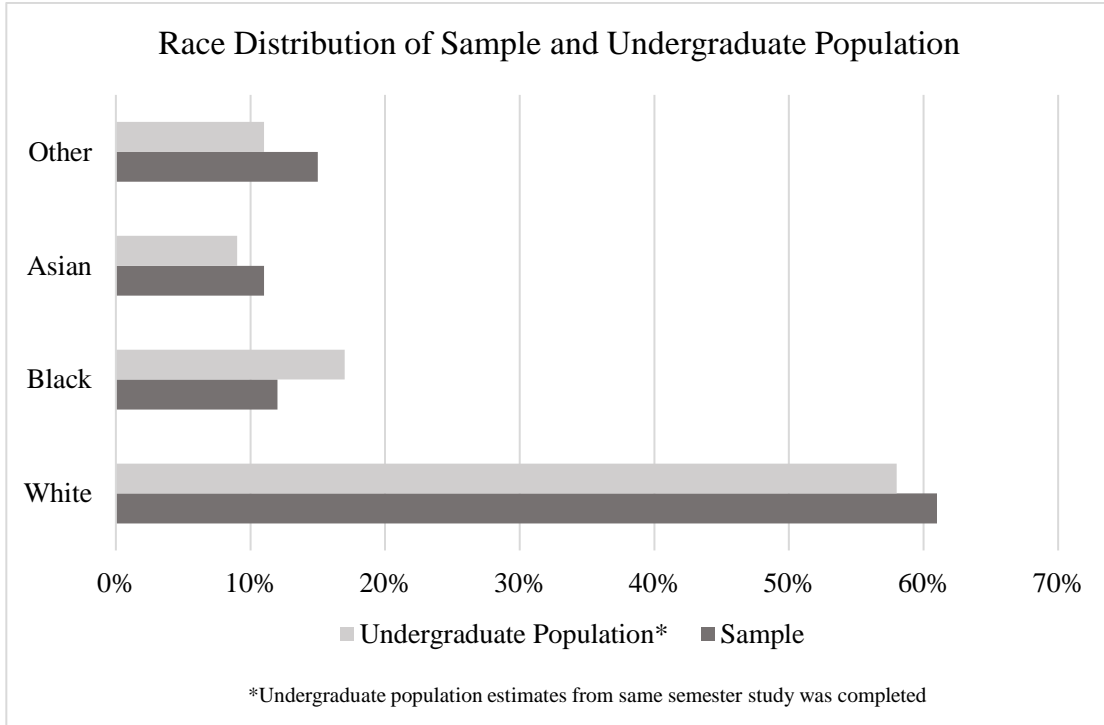


Derived from Google Trends: www.google.com

APPENDIX B

Derived from Web of Science: www.webofknowledge.com

APPENDIX C



APPENDIX D

| Complete list of Big 5 personality items | |
|--|---|
| I am easily distracted. | I enjoy making people laugh. |
| I would rather do things now than later. | I would rather stay in than go to a social gathering. |
| I am an organized person. | I listen to others' opinions. |
| Trying new things thrills me. | I am sometimes rude when I don't agree with others. |
| My imagination can run wild at times. | I think that I am a generous person. |
| I prefer sticking to my daily routine. | I have a high level of anxiety. |
| I am a very energetic person. | I get discouraged easily. |
| I don't enjoy being around large groups of people. | It takes a lot to make me angry. |
| I like to talk to new people. | I tend to make rash decisions. |
| I tend to hold grudges. | I find myself daydreaming often. |
| I tend to trust everyone. | I consider myself a creative person. |
| I am very stubborn. | I don't enjoy looking at art or reading poetry. |
| I handle stress well. | I tend to be lazy. |
| I worry too much. | I am an efficient worker. |
| I like to get the job done. | I like to be the life of the party. |

APPENDIX E

| |
|--|
| Complete list of low self-control items |
| I should think about my actions more. |
| I like to be around spontaneous people. |
| I tend to blurt out my opinion without thinking of others. |
| I enjoy doing things on whim. |
| I prefer having a plan. |
| Friends consider me wild and crazy. |
| I think about the consequences of my actions prior to completing them. |
| I live by the saying "act now, ask for forgiveness later." |
| I am likely to do something if it will bring me immediate pleasure. |

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ABSTRACT**IDENTIFYING THE MOTIVATIONS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF
UNDERGRADUATES WHO SEXT**

by

MACKENZIE BOEHLER**May 2017****Advisor:** Dr. Matthew Larson**Major:** Criminal Justice**Degree:** Master of Science

In recent years, sexting has become a controversial topic among legal scholars and behavioral scientists. Research has displayed varying accounts of the prevalence of sexting among young adults and has yet to answer the question of why. This study seeks to understand the characteristics and motivations of young adults who are involved in sexting. A survey of sexting behaviors was administered online at a large urban university. Identifying the factors and influences for a young adult's choice to engage in sexting or not can add much insight to this small body of literature. This study found that predominant indicators of sexting are age, religiosity, relationship status, and peer involvement. Additionally, common motivations for sexting include flirtation/romance, sexual reasons, and self-confidence/self-esteem reasons. Results and implications for the study as well as the need for future research are further discussed.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

Mackenzie Boehler graduated from Wayne State University in 2015 with a B.S. in Criminal Justice Honors and University Honors. In 2016, she began her Master's degree in Criminal Justice also at Wayne State University. Upon graduation, Mackenzie will attend Bowling Green State University in August 2017 to start a Ph.D. in Sociology. Ultimately, Mackenzie would like to pursue a career in academia.