Sexting: adolescents’ perceptions of the applications used for, motives for, and consequences of sexting

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* Social mediation
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## Sample

57 adolescents between 15 and 18 years of age (66.67% girls) from two secondary schools in Flanders, Belgium participated in 1 of the 11 focus groups with 3–8 participants.

# Abstract

This study explores adolescents’ perceptions of applications used for
sexting, the motives for engaging in sexting, and the consequences
they relate to sexting behavior. We conducted 11 same-sex focus
groups among 57 adolescents (66.67% females; n = 38) between
15 and 18 years old in Flanders, Belgium. The analysis revealed
that sexting mostly occurs through smartphone applications, such
as Snapchat, which are perceived to be a more intimate form of
communication than other digital applications, such as social
networking sites. Both female and male respondents observed
that girls might sometimes feel pressured to engage in sexting.
They did so mostly out of fear that otherwise they would lose
their boyfriends. Female and male respondents mentioned three
main ways in which sexting photographs could be abused:
(1) they could be used to coerce or to blackmail the victim,
(2) they could be distributed out of revenge after the breakup of
a romantic relationship, or (3) they could be forwarded or shown
to peers in order to boast about having received the digital
photograph. Anecdotes, which illustrate our findings, are included
in the results. Suggestions for future research and implications for
practice are discussed.

# Outcome

"Sexting primarily takes place through applications that are exclusive to smartphones, such as Snapchat and WhatsApp. Even when users were aware that messages sent through Snapchat could be stored by the receiver, yet their perception is that it had fewer risks than other digital applications. The ability to chose the length of time the photographs will remain visible to the receiver gives them more control. Sexting mostly occurs with the intention to flirt and within the context of romantic relationships. Sexting photographs could be sent as a sign of trust or as a gift to their romantic partner. Trusting a romantic partner with personal information about oneself plays an important role within the formation of dating and romantic relationships, and has been linked with a higher confidence and a higher perceived relationship quality. There are gendered perceptions about the exposure of sexting materials and its implications. Some girls might engage in sexting out of the fear of losing a boyfriend or to make him happy or felt pressured to engage in sexting which led to experiencing emotional forms of pressure rather than physical threats, Boys mainly try to convince girls by pleading with them and reassuring them of their mutual love. COntrary to girls, a boy’s self-made, sexually explicit photograph was perceived as almost never having harmful consequences, as depictions of their bodies were less sexually charged than those of girls. A girl’s engagement in sexting could be exposed if a boy wanted to brag about his experience to his peers. The most commonly mentioned reason for distributing a
sexting message was out of revenge after a romantic breakup. Another motive for misuse included coercion in an effort to trap the partner into staying in a romantic relationship or to solicit other types of sexual contact. Yet, a leaked sexting message did not always lead to bullying and name-calling. Although the victim would feel ashamed, their peer group would quickly move on without resorting to hurtful comments. This might be because sexting is becoming more normalized among adolescents." (Van Ouytsel et al., 2017, pp. 459-463)