

Young peoples' experiences of 'Sexting'

A qualitative Meta-Synthesis

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Background

The internet and mobile communication devices have revolutionised how young people engage with their peers.

This can be positive, giving young people the ability to conduct relationships and access sexual health information.

However, there are also negative impacts—such as 'sexting', where sexualised insults and the non-consensual distribution of sexual images are instigated via tablet or smart phone.

Definition

Sexting—the sending and receiving sexual messages and images via hand held devices

Keywords: sexting, qualitative, experiences young people*, teen, youth, young person

Methods

A systematic search of PUBMED, Medline Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL), COCHRANE, Embase and Psycinfo.

Sample: Five qualitative studies, total participant sample 480, aged 14-21.

Analysis: Qualitative meta-synthesis (Noblit & Hare, 1988)

Selected papers

- Albury K, Crawford K (2012) Sexting, consent and young people's ethics: Beyond Megan's story. *Continuum* 26(3): 463-73
Bond E (2011) The mobile phone=bike shed? children, sex and mobile phones. *New Media and Society* 13(4): 587-604
Lenhart A (2009) *Teens and sexting: How and why minor teens are sending sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude images via textmessaging*. Pew Internet and American Life Project. Pew Research Center, Washington DC.
Ringrose J, Harvey L, Gill R, Livingstone S (2013) Teen girls, sexual double standards and 'sexting': Gendered value in digital image exchange. *Feminist Theory* 14(3): 305-23
Walker S, Sanci L, Temple-Smith M (2013) Sexting: Young women's and men's views on its nature and origins. *Journal of Adolescent Health* 52(6): 697-701

Results

Four identified themes:

Gender Inequity, Popularity with peers, Relationship Context, Costs and Benefits

Conclusion

- ◊ 'Sexting' is a highly gendered activity and more nuanced than 'cyber-bullying'
- ◊ Female students should explore the issue of 'sexting' and how it can be harmful.
- ◊ Male students should explore 'sexting' issues of respect and gender harassment
- ◊ Professionals working with young people need to build discussions about the use of technology within relationships into sex and relationships education.

"For boys if they have sex with a girl, they are like, ooh they are sick, yeah" ... "But if it is a girl then they are a sket, yeah."

(Ringrose et al., 2013 p. 315)

Say if I got a popular girl to do it that looks like one of those girls who wouldn't do it then it would make me look even better'.

(Ringrose et al., 2013: 313)

Because if a girl sends a picture to you it means that probably she wants to meet up with you and stuff'

(Ringrose et al., 2013: 317)

'I haven't sent them to people recently but when I had a boyfriend I did. Especially like when he was in France we would, yeah, send sexy videos to each other all the time'

(Albury and Crawford, 2012: 468)

Findings and Data

Gender Inequity, where both young women and men highlight a double standard in expectations and consequences associated with sexting;

Popularity with peers, for young men, sexting was used as a way of gaining respect through earned recognition and reputation;

Relationship Context, the fluidity of the relationship context during the dating process and ambiguity of flirting leaves young people, especially girls, vulnerable to exploitation; finally:

Costs and Benefits, highlights the variety of positive and negative impacts 'sexting' has on social standing.

"If (sexting) happens with a guy, it's nothing. If it happens to a girl, there's a lot more stigma attached."

Walker et al., (2013 p. 699)

'For example, say if I don't think it's okay but my mates say, 'oh check [this out],' they've got all these images, I go in and say, 'oh yeah that's so cool.'

(Walker et al., 2013: 699)

'My boyfriend, or someone I really liked asked for them. And I felt like if I didn't do it, they wouldn't continue to talk to me.'

(Lenhart, 2009: 8)

'Then they do have a fight and then they break up or something and then he thinks, 'well, she's no good anymore and let's embarrass her in the best way I can,' and sends it out.'

(Walker et al., 2013: 699)