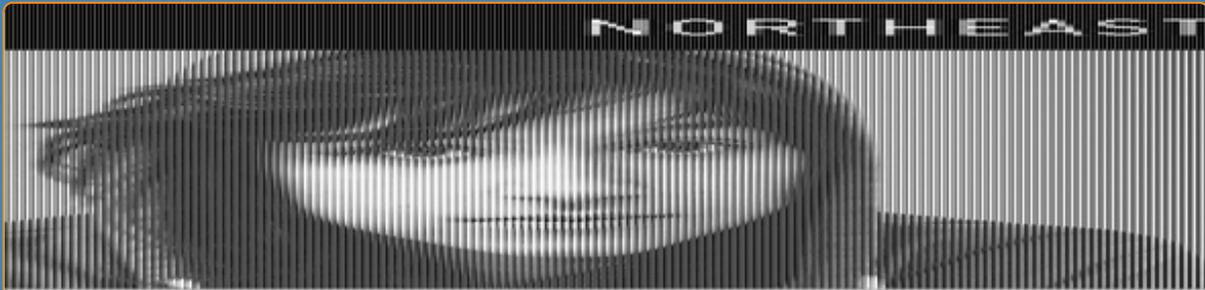


Like

in



Dear Colleague:

For this month, the NEARI Press newsletter article looks at the issue of sexting. Despite extensive media attention to this issue, the number of teens engaging in this practice is still relatively small. So why are we looking at this? First, the impact of sexting upon girls (and not boys) is significant. Second, the perception among teens is that it is much more common than it really is – a definite teachable moment. And third, it seems to be slowly becoming viewed as a normal part of teen courtship rituals. Given the role that treatment providers have in teaching pro-social engagement with peers, attention to this issue should be incorporated into ongoing conversations.

As always, if you have any other questions or suggestions for future newsletter topics, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely, Joan Tabachnick and Steven Bengis

Damned If You Do...Damned If You Don't

by Steven Bengis, David S. Prescott, and Joan Tabachnick

The Question

How prevalent is sexting among today's teens and what is the impact of this new behavior?

The Research

Given the extensive media coverage of adolescent sexting, it seemed important to understand what we know and don't know about this relatively new phenomenon. Julia Lippman and Scott Campbell provide an excellent overview of the relatively few research articles on this topic and offer some insights into the various influences that boys and girls experience when it comes to sexting.

Using the following definition of sexting – the transmission via electronic means of sexually provocative or explicit images or videos featuring someone known to the sender and/or receiver (Lenhart, 2009) – the authors found that even with the "firestorm" of media attention to this issue, relatively few adolescents seem to be generating or distributing these images to their peers. In four different surveys of teens ranging from 10-24 years 3% - 19% had sent nude or semi-nude photos of themselves and 7% -31% had received such a message.

The authors also noted some common findings among the research surveys:

- 1) sexts are often sent around with the permission or knowledge of the sender;
- 2) sexts are commonly sent to a potential or existing romantic or sexual partner;
- 3) sexting becomes more common as adolescents get older; and

4) girls are no more likely than boys to send these images of themselves.

The research suggests that those engaged in sexting have a greater likelihood of engaging in other sexual behaviors and are more likely to have experienced more sexual partners. But the authors caution about the use of a risk frame when looking at these behaviors since such frames may obscure more normative or even positive motivations for sexting.

They do suggest using a developmental perspective that supports an adolescent's interest in the media, sexuality and their peers. Pre-teens tend to send more suggestive language and progress to images in later adolescence. When looking at this from a developmental perspective, the authors' findings suggest that sexting is often used as a way to make sexual interest known to a partner and, at least for some, an integrated component of adolescent courtship rituals.

What is key to these findings is that there were significantly different gender norms which may be considered a sexual double standard. For example, girls who engaged in sexting were considered "sluts" or "insecure" while those who did not send sexts were considered "prudes" or "stuck-up". When these decisions were examined for boys, there were no negative consequences of their choices. As mentioned earlier, sexting is NOT a highly prevalent behavior. However, youth do perceive it as fairly common among their peers. This perception may be part of the pressure that girls experience to continue this practice even when the consequences for this behavior are considered wrong. Clearly sexting is a lose-lose proposition for girls – hence the title, "Damned if you do, Damned if you don't..."

Bottom Line: Although there is considerable media attention to sexting, it is still not a very high prevalence among teens today. However, given the increasing use of sexting as teens get older, the impact, particularly upon girls, can be significant and damaging.

Implications for Professionals

As this article points out, those of us working in treatment with adolescents need to better understand their peer culture. This includes both the pressures that girls who sext are experiencing, while helping boys gain a deeper appreciation for the complexity and impact that their requests for "sexts" is creating. Unlike the clearer line between legal and moral consent and abuse that exists for most of the behaviors that we address daily (and our interventions for these behaviors that address respect, consent, etc), sexting, particularly for girls, has a strong relational component that makes treatment interventions for both females and males a more challenging issue to address. Further, given the statutory frameworks that may impose draconian consequences to what may be naïve and innocent "consensual" behavior, we face an urgent imperative to inform and guide teens to understand the potential legal consequences of their actions.

Implications for the Field

As a relatively new phenomenon, the practice of sexting, however limited, has outpaced the nuanced approach that public policy needs to create. Just as the ubiquitous availability of pornography has outpaced our thinking about how best to engage with young people at the intersection of their curiosity, message/image vulnerability, and appropriate sexual behavior, sexting brings us to the intersection of healthy sexuality, consent, relationship, and sharing of self-nudity in a digital age. Over the next years, legislators will be struggling to create new laws that will better protect those who text consensually while holding accountable those whose sexts are meant to expose, hurt, or harm. Our field needs: 1) to be in the forefront of that discussion to help guide legislation towards these critical differentiations, 2) to be crafting guidelines for practitioners working with adolescents engaged in the behavior, and 3) to develop educational opportunities for both adults and adolescents.

Abstract

This study examines the relational, normative, gender, and age dynamics of adolescent sexting in the USA using open-ended questionnaires. Girls in the study were no more likely than boys to sext; however, they were more likely to experience pressure to do so, particularly from boys. Girls were commonly judged harshly whether they sexted (e.g., “slut”) or not (e.g., “prude”), whereas boys were virtually immune from criticism regardless. Older adolescents described sexting as occurring primarily within the context of flirting, romance, or sex, whereas younger adolescents reported what might be described as “pre-sexting” behaviors, involving the joking exchange of sexually suggestive (but non-nude) photos with platonic friends. Although some adolescents expressed a fear that sexting might lead to reputational damage, the normative climate and desire for approval motivated some to sext regardless. Implications and avenues for future research are offered in the discussion.

Citation

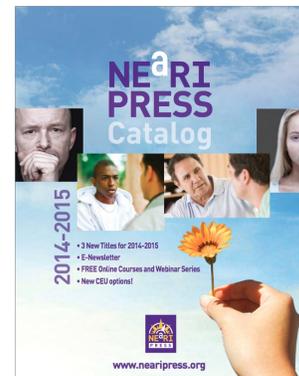
Lippman, J.R. & Campbell, S.W. (2014). Damned If You Do, Damned If You Don't...If You're a Girl: Relational and Normative Contexts of Adolescent Sexting in the United States, *Journal of Children and Media*, 8:4, 371-386, DOI: 10.1080/17482798.2014.923009.

To print a pdf of this article, click [NEARI NEWS](#).

BECOME A WEBINAR SERIES SPONSOR

Please consider becoming a sponsor of [NEARIPress.org](#)'s exciting new 2014-2015 NEARI Press Webinar series. We will continue to feature nationally recognized authors including, but not limited to: Cordelia Anderson, Deborah Hafner, David Prescott and Robin Wilson, among many others.

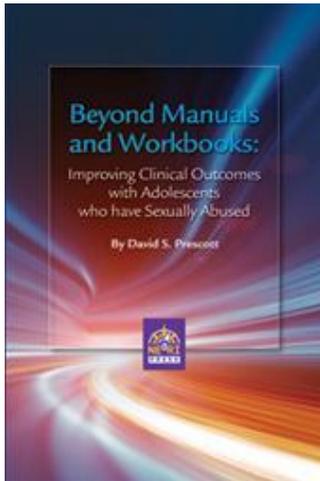
For \$98 as an individual or \$250 as an organization, we will guarantee your seat in the webinar **AND offer you CE credits**. We do all of the work to sign you up each month, and, as a thank you for your essential support, we offer you two free NEARI Press books - *Current Perspectives* and *Current Applications*, both edited by David Prescott and Robert Longo. We think that this is really a win-win situation for all of us.



NEW 2014-2015 Catalog

For more information or to sign up, visit our website at info@nearipress.org or contact Diane Langelier at 413.540.0712 x14 or email her at info@nearipress.org.

FEATURED NEARI RESOURCES



Beyond Manuals and Workbooks: Improving Clinical Outcomes with Adolescents who have Sexually Abused

Edited by David S. Prescott

This booklet focuses on the essential elements that every clinician can integrate into their current treatment to make it more effective. While many treatment programs organize themselves around specific curricula, this booklet makes recommendations for specific skills for improving outcomes and therapeutic alliances, early identification of at-risk cases, motivational goal setting, and considerations for successfully moving clients into a healthier environment.

ISBN: 978-1-929657-45-2

Cost: \$3.75 plus shipping and handling

Upcoming Training with Dr. Phil Rich: Assessment of Juvenile Sexual Risk: 3-Day Certification

Presented by: Phil Rich, Ed.D, LICSW

Date: June 2-4, 2015

Location: Marlboro, Massachusetts

This three-day course will provide instruction and practice experience in administration of sexual risk assessment for juveniles who have previously engaged in sexually abusive behavior. The course will cover the process of risk assessment, from theory, method, and instrumentation to case study and applied practice, including case formulation.

CE credits: 3 days of CE credits are available for Social Workers and Psychologists through a competency-based process.

For a downloadable flyer, [click here](#).

For more information or to sign up, please contact Diane Langelier at 413.540.0712 x14 or at info@nearipress.org.

DONATE NOW TO NEARI PRESS

NEARI Press is a nonprofit and depends upon the support of professionals like you to continue our work. Please consider giving a donation to NEARI Press.

[Click here](#) to make a donation of any amount. Thank you!

QUESTIONS/FEEDBACK

Please email us at info@nearipress.org or call us at 413.540.0712, x14 to let us know if you have a question or a topic you would like us to cover.

If at any time you no longer want the e-newsletter, just let us know and we will remove your name from our list. We value your trust. We will not sell or give your contact information to any other organization.

Volume 8, Issue 3: March 2015



©2015 Neari Press | 70 North Summer Street, Holyoke, MA 01040

[Web Version](#)

[Preferences](#)

[Forward](#)

[Unsubscribe](#)

Powered by [Mad Mimi](#)®

A GoDaddy® company