Sending Nudes: Motivations behind sexting behaviours among adolescents

Cassandra L. Hesse (The University of British Columbia), Natasha Parent (The University of British Columbia), Claire V. Hein-Salvi (The University of British Columbia), and Jennifer D. Shapka (The University of British Columbia).

Previous literature suggests that adolescents who desire popularity are more likely to participate in sexting behaviours. However, it is not clear how this relates to adolescents’ developmental need to belong and feel accepted by their peers. As such, the objective of the current study was to explore how adolescents’ developmental social goals to be popular and/or accepted by their peers were associated with their sexting behaviours, while considering age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and screen time as covariates. Data was collected online, cross-sectionally, from 705 adolescents between the ages of 11-18 years ($m = 15.07$ years) in British Columbia, Canada. Using the Sexting Behaviours Scale, the Social Goals Scale, and their devices screen time app, we employed a Hierarchal Linear Regression model and discovered that those who were motivated by popularity were more likely to employ sexting behaviours. However, those who were motivated by being accepted among their peers were less likely to engage in sexting behaviours. Moreover, those who were older, as well as those who identified as bisexual, were more likely to engage in sexting behaviours. Lastly, those who identified as East Asian were less likely to engage in sexting behaviours. This work contributes to an emerging body of literature examining adolescents’ motivations for sexting, while filling a gap in previous work by positioning these motivations within a developmental framework. Implications of this work suggest that the motivations behind sexting behaviours are uniquely associated with adolescents’ developmental social goals to be either popular or accepted among their peers.