

Adolescent Sexting: An Examination of the Psychosocial Contributions to the Creation and
Sharing of Sexual Images

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the psychosocial predictors of adolescent sexting through a cross-sectional survey of 201 Midwestern adolescents aged 14-17. Results showed that higher levels of online disinhibition positively predicted sexting intentions, subjective norms, and behaviors, yet it did not predict sexting attitudes. Higher levels of online disinhibition also positively predicted the receiving and requesting of sext messages, but not the sending of sext messages. The second set of analyses showed gender differences in sexting: boys had more favorable attitudes about sexting, girls perceived higher levels of subjective norms of sexting, yet there was no difference between sexting intentions or behaviors between boys and girls. Results also showed that girls received more negative consequences for sexting, while boys received more positive consequences regarding sexting. The third set of analyses showed that higher levels of trait self-objectification positively predicted favorable attitudes about sexting, sexting intentions, and sexting subjective norms for girls, and that self-objectification mediated the relationship between internalization of sexualization and sexting attitudes. Self-objectification did not predict any of the sexting variables for boys, but sociocultural beliefs about attractiveness portrayed in the media positively predicted sexting attitudes, intentions, and subjective norms for boys. The results of this study can usefully inform educational and targeted intervention programs regarding sexting risks.