

## ***SHAPING THE FUTURE***

2019 ATSA Conference | Thursday November 7 | POSTER

### **Sexting: Experiences of Young Adults in the UK**

Rosie Kitson-Boyce, PhD  
Rebecca Lievesley, MSc  
Craig Harper, PhD  
Nottingham Trent University

Sexting is an emerging but under-studied social issue. Originating from the media, it is developed from the combination of the words sex and texting (Lee & Crofts, 2015). The behavior of sexting generally refers to the production and sending of sexual images and texts via electronic devices (Mitchell et al., 2011). Indeed, the sending of self-made sexually explicit photographs or texts has gained considerable research interest because of the risks involved with the behaviour, such as emotional and reputational damage, bullying and legal sanctions (Crofts & Lee, 2015). The reported prevalence of sexting tends to be contradictory and varies according to the definitions employed. Figures tend to fluctuate, thus there is still debate on the exact size of the phenomenon. Barrense-Dias et al. (2017) conducted a systematic review and reported that the prevalence of sexting ranged from 7.1% to 60%, a percentage changing in accordance to the methodology and the operational definitions used. Despite the disagreement over prevalence rates there appears to be an understanding emerging that sexting may have a role in the development of individuals' sexual agency and sexual self-expression in society today (Angelides 2013).

To explore this further, there have been calls for deeper qualitative research into the contextual factors involved in sexting behaviour. These include individuals' perceptions of the social norms about the behaviour, the relations between sexting and peer pressure, or the social consequences of the behaviour (Van Ouytsel, 2017). In addition, the role of sexting in sexual exploration and maturity needs to also be considered, to provide a deeper understanding of its purpose in contemporary society. Gaining such knowledge may, in turn, enable better prevention techniques to be provided and policies to be adapted accordingly.

Whilst there has been much research on adolescents it is equally important to explore and consider this behaviour among young adults, particularly as some researcher report adults to engage in sexting more so than those under the age of 18 (Lee & Crofts, 2015). This research therefore explores the experiences and perspectives of young adults who engage in sexting behaviour, some of whom were the victim of revenge pornography, through semi structured interviews. The analysis outlines and unpicks a number of themes relating to the function of and motivation to engage in sexting behaviour. In addition, the role of sexting in both romantic dating and relationship formation, and the negative consequences of sexting, including revenge pornography, are also considered.

## ***SHAPING THE FUTURE***

2019 ATSA Conference | Thursday November 7 | POSTER

**Dr Rosie Kitson-Boyce** is a lecturer and researcher in forensic psychology at Nottingham Trent University and a Chartered Psychologist. She was worked and researched within the Criminal Justice System for around 12 years. Rosie has recently completed her PhD, which focused on the experiences of the both the Core Members and the volunteers involved in the prison-model of Circles of Support and Accountability established by the Safer Living Foundation charity. Rosie's research focuses on the reintegration of individuals who have previously been convicted of sexual offences and considers the role social support can have in the desistance from future sexual crimes. She has published in international journals and disseminated research at international conferences.

**Rebecca Lievesley** is a Lecturer in Forensic Psychology and member of the Sexual Offences, Crime and Misconduct Research Unit at Nottingham Trent University. She has worked and researched within the Criminal Justice System for around 10 years, currently engaged in various research projects including an investigation of reoffending and desistance in those serving short sentences, an evaluation of anti-libidinal medication for individuals convicted of a sexual offence and help seeking prior to committing a sexual offence. Rebecca is also a co-founder and trustee of the Safer Living Foundation, a charity established to reduce sexual (re)offending through rehabilitative initiatives and prevent further victims of sexual crime.

**Dr Craig Harper** is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology at Nottingham Trent University. His research interests lie in the psychological processes that underpin decision-making in relation to controversial social and political topics. Most of his research has been focused on how people form and express attitudes towards people with sexual convictions, with the aim being to promote progressive and evidence-based policies to prevent and reduce sexual victimisation. Away from forensically-based research, he is a member of the Heterodox Academy, which is an organization seeking to promote viewpoint diversity and reduce political polarization in higher education.