

SEXTING BEHAVIORS, ALCOHOL USE, AND IMPULSIVITY

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The purpose of this paper is to investigate the prevalence of “sexting” among college students and examine the relationship between individuals’ drinking behaviors, sensation-seeking (SS), and sexting behaviors. Sexting refers to exchanging sexually provocative picture or text messages via mobile phone or Internet; it has received much attention in the media due to the risks associated with the behavior, such as unwanted attention and social humiliation.

Participants ($n = 575$ undergraduates; 58.7% female; 61.9% Caucasian; mean age = 21.1, SD age = 5.05) completed the AUDIT (Babor et al., 2001), the UPPS-P Impulsive Behaviors Scale (Lynam et al., 2009), and the Sexting Behaviors Scale.

We conducted correlation and multiple regression analyses to test the following study hypotheses: We predicted that SS would significantly relate to sexting and drinking behaviors, and that drinking behavior would mediate the relationship between SS and sexting. Hypotheses were supported.

Drinking behavior and SS significantly correlated with sexting ($r = .270$, $p < .01$ and $r = .243$, $p < .01$, respectively). Additionally, drinking behaviors partially mediated the relationship between SS and sexting (Sobel test statistic = 3.275; $p = .001$). The data, although cross-sectional, suggest that SS influences sexting behaviors, in part because of its influence on alcohol use. Alcohol use further increases the likelihood of sexting behaviors.

These relationships suggest that people are sexting while drinking, and it’s possible that although sexting can occur without the consumption of alcohol, drinking leads to more risky sexting. Although the direction of this causal pathway cannot be determined with the current cross-sectional design, the pattern of results is consistent with this interpretation. The implications of these findings are important because of the potential sexting risks, and sexting while drinking may be a more dangerous combination based on alcohol’s relation to other risky behaviors.