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Introduction

Many studies have examined the relationship between religiosity and sexual behavior. Religiosity influences many aspects of a person's life, including self-regulation skills (Vishkin et al., 2016), attitudes (Harbaugh & Lindsey, 2015), buffering potential risks such as illegal drug use (Galbraith & Conner, 2015), and risky sexual behavior (Haglund & Fehring, 2009).

However, as technology has changed the way we communicate, it has also changed the way we engage in sexual behavior. Sexting – sending sexually explicit content through email, instant messaging, or cell phone texting *with the intent to illicit a sexual response* – is one such example. Sexting is a sexual behavior that can carry risks with it, such as the possibility that sexually explicit photos can be shared beyond the intended party. Ybarra and Mitchell (2014) found that adolescents who reported having engaged in sexting were more likely to use substances and engage in some risky sexual behaviors (e.g., having concurrent sexual partners, a higher number of sexual partners). It is important to note that there is very little research on sexting (likely due to its newness) and even fewer studies focusing on an adult sample.

Because religion influences many aspects of a person's life, it is reasonable to assume it would also relate to sexting. Thus, we hypothesized the following:

1. Individuals who report a higher rate of religiosity will engage in sexting less frequently as compared to those with lower rates of religiosity.
2. Individuals who report a higher rate of religiosity will view sexting to be more sexual as compared to those with lower rates of religiosity.
3. Individuals who report a higher rate of religiosity will be less likely to enjoy sending and/or receiving a sext from a significant other as compared to those with lower rates of religiosity.

Method

Participants

- 249 participants (55 men, 192 women, 2 unanswered)
- Recruited through personal social media accounts and Psychology Department's online subject pool. Students may have received extra credit for participation.
- Average age 22.5 years ($SD = 5.54$; range: 18-53)
- Ethnicity
 - Hispanic/Latino: 54.6% ($n = 136$); White: 26.1% ($n = 65$); Asian/Pacific Islander: 8.4% ($n = 21$); African American: 4.4% ($n = 11$); Native American or Other (5.6%, $n = 14$)
 - Two participants elected not to report their ethnicity.
- Religious Affiliation ($n = 244$)
 - 28.1% did not identify with a particular religion ($n = 70$)
 - 70% of participants identified with a religion ($n = 172$)
 - 57.6% Catholic ($n = 99$)
 - 36.6% Christian of various denominations ($n = 63$)
 - 5.8% reported Sikhism ($n = 4$), Hinduism ($n = 2$), Islam, Jehovah's Witness, Jewish, and Shamanism ($n = 1$).

Measures

- Centrality of Religiosity Scale (Huber & Huber, 2012)
 - 15-item questionnaire assesses 5 dimensions of religiosity: knowledge of religion, ideology, public practice, private practice, and religious experience
 - Categorized as highly religious, religious, or non-religious
- Sexting Survey
 - 24-question survey assesses several different dimensions of sexting, including frequency of sexting, mediums used to sext, who a person is more likely to sext (e.g., significant other, acquaintance, or stranger), and opinions and perceptions regarding sexting
- Demographics
 - Age, religious affiliation, relationship status, education level, and ethnicity

Procedure

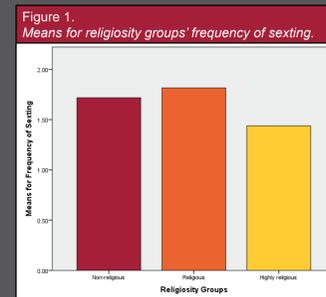
- Online survey, taking approximately 10-15 minutes to complete, consisted of the above measures.

Results

Analyses focused on the participants' religiosity scores and sexting scores. The religiosity scores were computed as an average, ranging from 1 (non-religious) to 5 (highly religious). Based on this score, participants were categorized as highly religious ($n = 74$), religious ($n = 115$), and non-religious ($n = 34$). The sexting scores were also computed as an average, where larger values indicate more frequent sexting. These scores range from 1 (never) to 4 (often).

Sexting Frequency

A one-tailed Pearson correlation test was conducted among sexting frequency ($M = 1.67$, $SD = .62$) and religiosity score ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.01$). Results were significant, showing a negative relationship, $r = -.21$ ($p < .01$). Further analyses using a univariate ANOVA revealed significant differences among groups for frequency of sexting, $F = 9.21$, $p < .01$ (see Figure 1). Tukey's post hoc analyses revealed a significant difference in frequency of sexting between the religious ($M = 1.82$, $SD = .65$) and highly religious groups ($M = 1.44$, $SD = .49$), $p < .01$. Additionally, there was a marginally significant difference between the non-religious ($M = 1.72$, $SD = .60$) and highly religious groups ($M = 1.44$, $SD = .49$), $p = .06$.



Perceptions of Sexting

A univariate ANOVA revealed no significant differences among religiosity groups for how sexual sexts were perceived, $F = .98$, $p = .38$.

Sending/Receiving Sexts from Significant Other

A univariate ANOVA revealed significant differences among religiosity groups for how participants would feel about sending a sext to a significant other, $F = 7.48$, $p < .01$. Tukey's post hoc analyses revealed significant differences between the non-religious ($M = 1.57$, $SD = .61$) and highly religious groups religious ($M = 2.09$, $SD = .74$), $p < .01$, and between the religious ($M = 1.81$, $SD = .69$) and highly religious groups ($M = 2.09$, $SD = .74$), $p = .02$. Answers on this item were on a 3-point Likert scale of 1 = "I would like it," 2 = "I would be neutral," and 3 = "I would not like it". Thus, higher scores indicated less of a preference.

A univariate ANOVA revealed significant differences among religiosity groups for how participants would feel about receiving a sext from a significant other, $F = 6.43$, $p < .01$. Tukey's post hoc analyses revealed significant differences between the non-religious ($M = 1.49$, $SD = .66$) and highly religious groups ($M = 1.92$, $SD = .78$), $p < .01$, and between the religious ($M = 1.59$, $SD = .67$) and highly religious groups ($M = 1.92$, $SD = .78$), $p < .01$. Answers on this item were on a 3-point Likert scale of 1 = "I would like it," 2 = "I would be neutral," and 3 = "I would not like it". Thus, higher scores indicated less of a preference.

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Discussion

Overall, findings indicate several differences among religiosity groups and their frequency of and attitudes toward sexting.

In regard to frequency of sexting, the highly religious group is sexting less frequently than the religious or non-religious groups. The marginally significant finding that the highly religious group is lower than the non-religious is consistent with our hypothesis and expected given many religions' mores on sexual behavior. In particular, the majority of participants who identified with a religion were predominantly Christian – a religion that has very specific standards for sexual behavior (e.g., premarital sex, contraceptive use, or homosexuality). Similar reasoning can be applied to the second finding that the religious group engages in sexting more than the highly religious group. Individuals who may identify as religious, may not adhere to all the customs, practices, or behaviors. Thus, their sexual behavior is not as influenced by their religion's standards.

Results for participants' sexting preferences showed that the more religious individuals showed less endorsement of both sending and receiving a sext to/from a significant other. Reasons for this are similar to those above: those who would identify with a religion more, are more likely to endorse that religion's views and adhere to those rules for sexual behavior.

Some implications for these findings include the potential dangers of sexting (e.g., sharing photos/messages without permission; underage sender(s)/recipient(s); and pressure to send/receive messages.

Limitations

One limitation of the present study is that we did not ask about participants' sexual activity. Links between sexting and sexual activity may be influenced by religiosity, however we were unable to examine these potential relationships in the current study.

Another limitation is that the study was conducted in a relatively religious area. This may have influenced the percentage of religiously affiliated participants as compared to those without a religious affiliation. A more representative sample may give better insight into the nuances of the relationship between religiosity and sexting.

Future Directions

Future research should examine differences among religious affiliations. Due to the various rules/traditions regarding sexual behavior among religions, there may be different influences on sexting. This may also influence the prevalence of sexting in one culture versus another.

Specific to the relatively unresearched topic of sexting, future research should examine perceptions and attitudes toward sexting. For example, looking at to what extent individuals consider sexting to be a sexual behavior and how that relates to sexual activity.

References

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