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Type Dirty to Me: An Analysis of Sexting as a Form of Communication in Long-term Romantic Relationships

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Abstract

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**TYPE DIRTY TO ME: AN ANALYSIS OF SEXTING AS A FORM OF
COMMUNICATION IN LONG-TERM ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS**

By

Catlin Cole

A Senior Thesis Submitted to the

Eastern Michigan University

Honors College

In

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With

Honors in Communication, Media, and Theatre Arts

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	3
Literature Review.....	4
Methods.....	12
Participants.....	12
Materials.....	12
Procedures.....	12
Results.....	13
Discussion.....	14
Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research.....	19
Acknowledgments.....	20
Work Cited.....	21
Appendices.....	23
A – Recruitment Script.....	23
B – Informed Consent.....	24
C – Projected Questions.....	27

ABSTRACT

This exploratory analysis creates a framework for better understanding sexting behavior within romantic long-term romantic relationships. Articles reviewed successfully laid the foundation to this study, including those regarding flirting within short-term and marital relationships. The specific reasons of this behavior, shown to occur in different relational dynamics, helped to prove the importance of flirtatious behavior for multiple purposes. Expanding upon a different dynamic of flirting as well as a previously under-studied relationship, interviews were conducted to better understand the input and output concerns of sexting behavior within the population. Eight participants were asked various questions regarding their personal experiences, reasoning, and motives for partaking in such behavior. Common themes emerged, including that of privacy, trust issues, long-distance relationships, boredom, and sexting as a precursor to a physical sexual encounter. The discussion offers practical interpretations and rationalizations of the provided reasoning, along with suggestions for future research.

Keywords: Relationships, sexting, communication, romantic, long-term, flirting

LITERATURE REVIEW

Flirting is an extremely common communication style, being utilized as a form of communication specifically used to express interest in another. In looking at studies that surround the idea of flirting, much of the research portrays this communication style as relevant and adaptive. A wide array has been conducted on flirting styles, married couples and flirting, physical presentations of flirting, desired outcomes, and motivational differences between the sexes.

Flirting is functionally important in the act of establishing boundaries and desires between two people. It is a form of communication that stems from self-expression and aspiration. In fact, some common goals of it are exploring the personality of, establishing a connection with, and gauging the level of interest conveyed by the other person (Hall, 2010). Not necessarily sexual, flirting can be used in a manner that promotes the sexuality of a person. However, there is a sense of uncertainty that underlies flirting, and can ultimately affect the interpretation of a partner's flirting behavior (p. 368). This data suggests that although flirting is a popular form of sexual communication in establishing a relationship, it can also produce an undertone of unpredictability. However, though there is unpredictability due to flirting, there are ways to cope with it; there are a variety of different strategies and tactics available for communicators to use in order to achieve their flirting goals.

In the study conducted by Hall (2010) one of the five flirting styles was the physical style, particular to bodily expression of sexual communication. It was shown that, "...displaying sexual desire is a critical component of nonverbal communication of romantic interest by both men and women." (p. 370). Clearly a physical flirtation

component is not only present but important in relational initiation; having a physical representation of flirting is beneficial to the interpretation of a developing relationship.

Specifically in regards to analyzing the presentation of flirting behavior, there are different perceptions of dating goals influenced by how one individual perceives the other's behaviors. Henningsen et. al. (2011) discusses Error Management Theory, developed by Buss and Haselton (2000), and how it can undoubtedly be applied in the interpretation of flirtatious communication. As the theory proposes, indicative behavior of sexual interests can be perceived incorrectly via one of two ways: when an individual presumes interest by another who actually is not interested, or when an individual presumes no interest when the other individual is, in fact, interested (p. 643). In these two scenarios it is evident that miscommunication has occurred, and in turn, has interrupted the overall perception of a behavior. Though misinterpreted, it can be argued that the communication that occurred facilitated an exploratory - however temporary - relationship.

Overall, the importance of translation of flirtatious behavior is undeniably large. To be able to recognize, interpret, and produce a personal response to the sexual communication taking place is vital, whether it be to strengthen the dialogue or terminate the discourse entirely. In addition, the conclusion can be made that direct and intentional sexual communication is pertinent to initiating and maintaining a working romantically-based relationship, regardless of commitment.

Transitioning into a more established form of romantic relationship, a study conducted by Booth & Frisby (2012) demonstrates the importance of flirting within a committed long-term marriage. Through a broad four-part analysis of marital couples and

underlying ideas of flirtation, multiple variables were studied. As an outcome, both researchers proved that "...couples recognize and enact flirtatious behavior within the [partnership]. Flirtation among [the partnership] is not an idiosyncratic, odd behavior, but rather communication that appears to be part of ongoing marital interaction, and that reinforced the status of the marriage." (p. 475). Without question, this proves the idea that there is a genuine purpose for flirting within a partnership. Though focused on married couples and self-report measures of individual partners within these relationships, it is still a valid overall assumption for different types of unions. Multiple motivators were listed, including sex motivation, exploring motivation, fun motivation, esteem motivation, and instrumental motivation (p. 466). As analyzed, these motivators supplement the broad idea that flirtation is not only important but relevant in maintaining a partnership.

In broader terms, it is necessary to take this message and apply it to relationships overall. The study conducted proved that flirtatious behavior is normal, and it acts as reinforcement for a partnership. The article continues on to state: "It is likely that flirting enhances perceptions of involvement, enjoyment, and intimacy between partners." (p. 466). To summarize, flirting behavior is a form of sexual communication that strengthens multiple important underlying factors within a relationship.

To look at this causal association between flirting and relationship elements, a study conducted by Frisby (2009) expanded upon the functions and motivations of engaging in flirting behavior while either dating or married. Aptly mentioned in the article, "Flirting can be utilized in initiating relationships, redefining existing relationships, and as a behavior within romantic relationships" (p. 55). However, when

looking at flirting that has taken place in a romantic relationship over an extended amount of time, there are presentational differences when in comparison to newly-established flirtatious behavior.

Specifically referencing Henningsen (2004) and the motivations underlying flirting behavior, some motivators (i.e. maintaining marriage satisfaction or attractiveness) are present in a marriage context rather than a long-term relationship (p. 56). On the other hand, some essential flirting motivators are present within long-term relationships (i.e. establishing boundaries or establishing interests) while not apparent – nor necessary - in marriage. Exploration by way of flirting was shown to become less salient with relationship escalation into marriage (p. 57). Nonetheless, it is evident that this form of sexual communication plays an impactful role in sustaining and nourishing the intimate component of any type of romantic relationship.

Another substantial aspect that this study found was that flirtatious behavior helps to manage or terminate conflict (p. 58). Within the participants interviewed, it was reported that flirtation helped in resolution elements of an argument, stating that it caused “relief”. In addition, flirtation counteracts conflict by facilitating the maintenance of “a desired state” (p. 59). With this data it can be assumed that, within the realm of overall stability of a relationship, flirting assists with tranquility and agreeableness.

To simply look at flirting behaviors would not produce a comprehensive conclusion to the impact sexual communication has on a relationship. Diving deeper into the more specific type of flirting, sexting offers a medium in which this particular communication can occur. In order to have a solid foundation, it is important to look at the overall concept of sexting, basic messages of consent in sexting, how to address the

actual behavior of sexting, the consequences involved with sexting, and the overall impact sexting has on lives today.

Previously mentioned, sexting is an up-and-coming, mediated fashion of sexual communication. It is used across generations and in multiple forms of relationships for a myriad of reasons, and is becoming increasingly popular. A study conducted by Curnutt (2012) exemplified the trend, stating that sexting is actually commonplace due to the emergence and growth of mediation with technology (p. 354). The study specifically analyzed celebrities and their sexting behavior across social media, and how that behavior is logical and quite literally a symptom of the technological advances. It notes the importance of taking a look in the past, specifically how sending pictures from Polaroid cameras evolved to digital camera photos being sent over email, to nowadays sending explicit thoughts and pictures from a bathroom with the front-facing camera on a smartphone. The evolution of access has clearly paved the way to current sexting behavior, and it is this development that has laid the foundation for the cultural norms that are currently evident in society. Sexting itself has become less of an unknown and more ordinary – even categorizing it as an expectation - within certain working relationships today. Over time, the norms surrounding explicit portrayals of sexuality have blossomed into abundant allowances, both publically and privately.

Sexting has infiltrated the social norms and is being adopted by many individuals' relationships, which brings up the concern of if the desire to partake in the behavior is shared by the other partner. In an analysis that covered how sexting advice articles represented the issue of consent, Hasinoff (2016) used the affirmative consent model, which assumes that consent cannot be concluded from silence (p. 60). Having this as a

basis, it is evident that there needs to be a clear agreement of desire towards sexual communication amongst both partners. Hasinoff notes that each person who initiates any form of a sexual act has a responsibility to partake in dialogue that will result in a clearly articulated statement of consent. It is important to note that any imbalance of power negates the voluntary “yes” that occurs.

Hasinoff’s study showed that many analyzed articles mentioned communication as “one of many” sexual applications that can be entertaining and provoking, which then implies that it is not required but optional (p. 61). As soon as it is not seen as necessary there is an issue within the partnership. Communication of sexual desires - especially of approval – is unquestionably imperative.

In regards specifically to the aforementioned aspect of approval, rarely mentioned was the importance of establishing – or even seeking out – consent within the investigated discourse. This poses an issue in validity and clarity of any borderline consensual message that may be produced in conversation, being that the need for it was never established; the lack of discussion does not preface the situation with an expectation of consent. This could produce unwanted outcomes, as assumptions are not always correct nor substitutes for a straightforward “yes”. It is important to recognize this gap and directly fill it in using thorough communication.

However, though there is an innate need for communication in relation to any sexual act or conversation, some individuals do not quite understand how to address this. Though regarded as significant, addressing sexting as a whole concept might be troubling or complicated. To fully address this concept it is necessary to include in the analysis the entire spectrum of ages, including adolescents. A study conducted by Campbell & Park

(2014) envelops an important aspect, stating that how sexting is first conceptualized plays an important role in how it is addressed (p. 22). Though the study focused on a younger population of adolescents, it still produced valuable implications; it demonstrates that stigmas, negative assumptions or perspectives can lead to a foundational bias against sexting all together. As a result of these ideas, speaking of or attempting to better understand the concept may be disregarded completely, possibly seen as entirely wrong and not worth comprehending.

Transitioning into the personal stigmas and opinions on sexting, a study conducted by Lippman & Campbell examined how certain adolescents viewed sexting due to previously established beliefs. Participants were asked certain questions regarding their comprehensive impressions of receiving or sending sexts. The results show that though a good majority were worried about the legal repercussions, they were more concerned with two other social consequences attached to the activity: the possibility of wider exposure than what was originally intended, or harm to any familiar reputation within their peer groups (p. 377). Though (for adolescents, specifically) there may be legal ramifications attached to sexting behavior it is evident that any social by-products hold precedence. Lippman & Campbell go on to warn against a sexual double standard (p. 379), which discusses particular negative stigmas attached to participation and avoidance of sexting behavior within female adolescents specifically. They describe it as being particularly harsh judgments and beliefs about girls who sext, those who do not sext, or a certain “type” of girl who would partake in sexting behavior.

An overwhelming theme that can be seen throughout this study is the gendered representation of sexting behavior. A consequence stated by the study says that the

gender dynamics are not manifested in terms of the frequency of this behavior, but through the evaluations of sexting that are dependent upon the gender of the parties involved (p. 372). In other words, it can be gathered that any assumptions or declarations about sexting behavior are inherently biased due to awareness of the genders. This can affect the overall perception of the behavior, taking into account the sexual double standard (in regards to girls particularly) or simply an adolescent's conception of sexting, as proven by this study.

Overall, the analyzed data has shown that sexual communication plays an extremely foundational role within relationships. Flirting functions as a mediator for establishing relationships, though it is widely understood that to assume a more intimate status, a deeper connection is required. Flirting can transform into the more involved, explicit communication of sexting, as shown within the above articles. It is evident that sexting is continuously changing and adapting to society's norms, especially in regards to the mediation and methods of transmission of each particular type of message. However, research of the functionality within a long-term relationship is limited. Understanding the motivations and desires that commence and maintain sexting behavior within a long-term romantic relationship is necessary. It would allow for a new dimension of communication to be available for interpretation, as well as provide the scholarly community with a more in-depth perspective of a form of relational maintenance. Being that no prior research touches upon this particular form of romantic duo and how sexting is used within it, that is the focal point of attention for this study.

METHODS

Participants

Eight students from the general population of Eastern Michigan University were recruited to participate in this exploratory study. Of the eight who participated in this study, six were female and two were male. All identified as being a partner within a long-term romantic relationship. Demographically, participants generally adhered to a common theme. All relationships were heterosexual, the longest being four years and the shortest: six months. Participants' ages ranged from 18 years old to 25, with an average age of 19 years old. There were four participants who identified as Caucasian, three as African American, and one as Asian American.

Materials

Interview questions were developed in order to lead the interviews, including questions concerning demographic information, sexting behavior, and attitudes towards the behavior. An audio recording device was used to record the face-to-face interviews.

Procedures

For the purpose of this research, "long-term" is defined as being established for more than six months and not being engaged or married. "Relationship" is being defined as being in a committed, monogamous, intimate partnership with someone. The partner of the participant was not required to also hold student status at Eastern Michigan University.

Participants were recruited via email and word of mouth utilizing the recruitment script (Appendix A). They were provided the list of projected questions (Appendix C) and asked to review the questions so they were previously acquainted with the nature of

the interview before scheduling an interview time. The participants were reminded of the confidentiality, and how they were allowed to omit any question from the interview or end their participation at any point during the process. After reviewing the criteria and questions of the study, participants were scheduled for interview times with the researcher via email.

Interviews took place in locations chosen by the participants, with a complete duration of approximately 15 minutes. They commenced with the consent form (Appendix B) and began by the researcher initiating the questions while the audio device recorded all dialogue. At the end, participants were asked if they had any questions or concerns, and if they did not, the interview was complete.

Interviews were transcribed by the researcher after all data was collected. Using unique identifiers to protect confidentiality of the participants, the interviews were documented and analyzed. After all interviews were transcribed the audio recordings were deleted.

RESULTS

After the initial transcription of each interview, it was read again to extract pertinent and engaging information. An examination and comparison took place across all other transcriptions, which lead to the discovery of a myriad of commonalities between the participants and their responses. Themes that were apparent throughout the interviews included: sexting partners due to boredom (5 participants); using sexting as a preview to that night's upcoming events or get together (4); sexting as form of entertainment within the long-term relationship (2); sexting their partner due to a sense of obligation (3); sexting behaviors only occurring when the partners have been apart for a

couple of days (6); and generally responding positively to receiving a sext from their partner (8).

DISCUSSION

All eight participants disclosed that they engaged in sexting behavior within their relationship. Six participants mentioned the idea of consent. It was interesting to analyze multiple perspectives on this concept, including that of definitional consent (i.e. asking their partner if they wanted to take part in sexting behavior, as discussed by Lilly, Dana, Lexi, Tiffany, and Kristin. There was also one mention of implied consent, discussed by Tom with his partner. Dana discussed the traditional interpretation of consent between her and her partner in regards to not participating in sexting behavior. She talked about how the suggestive text was received by her at a young age, and in knowing the age of consent laws at the time, she “put a stop to the behavior”. After sexual maturity occurred, however, Dana and her boyfriend had a talk about whether or not they both wanted to participate again in sexting behavior. She mentioned that this was purely out of respect for her partner. Alternatively, Tom stated that he did not feel it necessary to blatantly ask his partner if she wanted to take part in the behavior, instead doing it “for fun” and as something that is already known to be acceptable within their relationship. Both provided perspectives on consenting behaviors, however there was not a blanket agreement on consent throughout all eight interviews.

Three of the interviews discussed another form of consent, bordering more towards trust. Dana and Lexi both mentioned that it is not that they “don’t trust [their partners], but it’s a privacy thing”. Five participants described their desire to only send pictures, specifically, over social media that did not allow for them to be saved, namely

Snapchat. The participants shared multiple times that they did not have trust issues with their partners, but the idea of having sexual pictures of themselves in existence overall made them feel uneasy. Though explicitly stated by the three participants that there were not any trust issues, it is difficult to pass that as an overall truth, considering the unsettling feelings and precautions taken to ensure privacy of their photos.

The interview with Tom stated that previously his partner was asked multiple times via social media to send naked pictures of herself, making his current propositions irrelevant or tainted with a sense of mistrust. He discussed that time was necessary in order to change her way of thinking, specifically to make it known that any sexual imagery was not to be distributed or exploited in any negative way. He added that now she trusts him and has “zero problem” with sending this type of image to him, being that they are in a relationship. Though trust with the partners was repeatedly mentioned to not be an issue, this comment opposes that idea, obviously displaying that trust issues can play a role in determining the willingness of partners to engage in sexting behaviors via images.

Two participants who were interviewed reported they were in long-distance relationships, one female and one male. Kristin brought up specifically that she engages in sexting behavior with her boyfriend because she “believes they are ready for that intimacy, yet are not able to have it.” In addition to engaging in this behavior, she mentioned that he continuously responds positively to her initiation and she does the same towards his. She discussed the reasoning behind sexting, implying that it envelops a sort of upkeep motivation; because they are far away from each other, she wants him to continue to have a “visual representation of [his] sexual desires”. Sexting within that

relationship proves to be useful in maintaining intimacy though no sexual contact can be made for a majority of the time.

In regards to frequency of the behavior, Tom discussed that sexting “definitely occurred more frequently when they didn’t see each other.” He mentioned that the motivation behind doing it is because he does wish to engage in a physical sexual encounter, however he is unable due to the obvious distance between them. Though he did not mention sexting as a way to maintain intimacy while long-distance, he did state that sexting was a way of having fun while they are missing each other. Evidently sexting has more than one purpose within a long-distance dynamic, operating as entertainment or as a form of maintenance for intimacy.

Specifically in regards to engaging in sexting as a maintenance behavior, two interviews considered the positive outcomes for their relationships. Andrea talked about how sexting “keeps things fresh and keeps things fun” between her and her partner. Having been together for over a year, she mentioned that sexting produces something different every time. Maintaining an intimate side of a relationship via sexting behavior is useful, especially when life gets “monotonous”, according to Lilly.

It was noted that, although sexting is used to liven up intimacy and sexual satisfaction within relationships, there can still be a sense of boredom that occurs. Five of the eight interviewed described boredom as a determining factor in sexting their partner. Dana jokingly mentioned that, while her partner sexts her for a desired outcome, she is “probably just eating cereal in bed”. Jake mentions that he will sext his partner when he does not have anything else to do. However, Lexi mentioned that boredom sparks a sort of curiosity, causing her to sext her partner just to “see how he responds” though she

knows nothing is going to happen. Boredom produces a myriad of responses and is evident in a good majority of the sample interviewed, which can imply a sort of generalization when discussing its existence in long-term relationships.

Transitioning to a more apathetic feeling, a sense of obligation was expressed within three of the interviews. Tom explicitly mentioned that he feels obligated to send his partner something in return when he receives a sexually explicit photo, with his reasoning being that she “can’t be putting in all the effort.” In a follow-up question, he determined that this thought process is mood-congruent, in that if they are both in the mood and wanting to engage in this behavior, then they should both be contributing to the desired outcome.

Dana discussed a different realm of obligation when she talked about how she only sexted her partner at one point because she was seeking acceptance and did not wish for him to leave her. Tiffany mentioned a similar feeling in the beginning of her four-year relationship, claiming that she felt obligated just because her partner asked, and she felt the need to provide since he was the person she wanted to be with. Dana described this feeling of necessity as stemming from a lack of confidence, however improving over the years of their relationship. She now feels a sense of obligation purely because she wants to convey a sense of continued interest, labeling it as a maintenance strategy, more or less. It can be implied that there lacks a sense of desire when a partner feels obligated, yet that does not equate to an overall deficiency of enthusiasm within the relationship. It also cannot be said that a shortage of aspiration towards sexting behavior in general occurs when a partner feels obligated, being that attitudes are extremely malleable depending the particular situation.

In addition, particular situations can be seen as completely inappropriate yet the most opportune time to sext a partner. According to two of the participants, sexting a partner when the timing might seem “off” acted as a form of teasing and entertainment for the relationship. Andrea discussed that she will text her partner when he is at work simply because she aims to “mess with him”, and because she thinks it is fun. Tom states that he uses this scandalous timing particularly to tease his partner, sending her explicit messages while she’s at dinner with her family or when he knows he shouldn’t. It can be assumed that the feelings that are associated with doing what is not expected of a person at a certain time can create a rebellious and even sexy atmosphere within a conversation. Considering that is an obvious end goal, it can be said that timing is a tool in and of itself, used to produce a desired outcome.

Not always used to create an immediate outcome, sexting can be utilized as a precursor to future events; engaging in this behavior can supply and preview of sexual expressions that are meant to happen in the near future. Half of the participants discussed engaging in sexting for the sole purpose of preparing or alerting their partner of desires. Lilly said she uses it to “signal that the other person’s open to [sexual] activities whenever we see each other next.” She agreed that it could represent a sort of warning to her partner so that he was not surprised yet prepared for her behaviors later on.

Jake mentioned that he used sexting as a complete substitute for not seeing each other, whether it be for one or more days at a time. He discussed that it’s “preparatory” and used to convey desires for the upcoming physical encounter. Similarly, Lexi talked about how sexting her partner as a precursor can produce anticipation and excitement for

the approaching date night. Conclusively, sexting is used as a medium for previewing what is desired in any near-future occasions of physical contact.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

There were a few mentionable limitations to the study. Overall, a small sample size impacted the ability to extract any major generalizations. The lack of male participants impacted this ability as well, making it difficult to determine commonalities across the sexes. The population was also limited in age, being that the sample was drawn from a community that is mostly traditionally-aged college students. There was also a lack of diversity in terms of the type of relationship, as all participants identified as being heterosexual.

It would be beneficial to study different types of partnerships for generalization purposes. Future researchers should consider extending the population to non-heterosexual couples, as this could allow for different perspectives on thoughts and techniques associated with sexting behavior. Reaching out to an older population could produce different responses, in regards to techniques or overall perceptions of the behavior. Additionally, it could be beneficial to examine sexting in long-term long-distance romantic relationships, which could also vary in both techniques and reasons as to why sexting behavior occurs overall.

It could also be beneficial to study the social media mediums associated with sexting behavior. Though it has traditionally been in text message format, understanding the evolution of this behavior by usage of non-traditional applications on the phone (i.e. Snapchat) could provide a different insight. In addition, looking at how consent is requested or given over these different mediums could allow for new understandings

Conclusively, this research produced various expected outcomes. This was evident in regards to the importance of maintenance within a relational dynamic or discussion of consent before sexual behavior. However, it was valuable in that it provided new perspectives within the realm of sexting. Being that there is a lack of research in sexting within long-term romantic relationships, this exploratory analysis offered insights that can be foundationally important for better understanding of behavior, as well as future studies within this field.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Recruitment Script

Recruitment Script

I am conducting a qualitative research study for my senior Honors thesis on the topic of sexting behavior. I am looking for participants who have been in a long-term relationship (defined as: longer than six months but less than engaged) who feel comfortable answering questions in a 15-30 minute face-to-face interview about their sexting behavior with their partner. All information will be kept confidential, protecting the identities of the students involved. The time and place of the interview will be chosen by the participant, with the only constraint being my overall availability. If you are interested, please contact me at the email: ccole23@emich.edu to set up and time. Any questions or concerns can be directed to that same email as well. Thank you!

Appendix B – Informed Consent

Informed Consent Form

The person in charge of this study is Catie Cole. Catie Cole is a student at Eastern Michigan University. Her faculty adviser is Dr. Patrick O’Grady. Throughout this form, this person will be referred to as the “investigator.”

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this research study is to explore the underlying motivators and procedures of sexting within long-term romantic relationships.

What will happen if I participate in this study?

Participation in this study involves

- Answering questions presented via interview with the Principle Investigator. The interview should last between 15-35 minutes and will be audio recorded. The questions focus on sexting as a form of communication the participant and their relationship partner.

I would like to audio record you for this study. If you are audio recorded, it will be possible to identify you through your voice. If you agree to be audio recorded, sign the appropriate line at the bottom of this form.

What are the anticipated risks for participation?

There are no anticipated physical or psychological risks to participation.

Some of the interview questions are personal and sexual in nature and may make you feel uncomfortable. You do not have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable or that you do not want to answer.

Are there any benefits to participating?

As a research participant, you will not directly benefit from this study. This research will provide society with a more comprehensive understanding of motivations and procedures about the topic of sexting within a long-term relationship.

What are the alternatives to participation?

The alternative is not to participate.

How will my information be kept confidential?

I will keep your information confidential by assigning a unique numerical identifier to your recording. Your information will be stored in a password-protected computer in a locked residence. We will make every effort to keep your information confidential, however, we cannot guarantee confidentiality. There may be instances where federal or state law requires disclosure of your records.

Other groups may have access to your research information for quality control or safety purposes. These groups include the University Human Subjects Review Committee, the Office of Research Development, the sponsor of the research, or federal and state agencies that oversee the review of research. The University Human Subjects Review Committee reviews research for the safety and protection of people who participate in research studies.

The results of this research may be published and/or presented. Identifiable information will not be used for these purposes.

Are there any costs to participation?

Participation will not cost you anything.

Will I be paid for participation?

You will not be paid to participate in this research study.

Study contact information

If you have any further questions about the research being conducted you can contact the Principle Researcher, Catie Cole at ccole23@emich.edu. You can also contact Catie's advisor, Dr. Dennis Patrick-O'Grady at dpatrick1@emich.edu

For questions about your rights as a research subject, contact the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee at human.subjects@emich.edu or by phone at 734-487-3090.

Voluntary participation

Participation in this research study is your choice. You may refuse to participate at any time, even after signing this form, with no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may choose to leave the study at any time with no loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you leave the study, the information you provided will be kept confidential. You may request, in writing, that your identifiable information be destroyed. However, we cannot destroy any information that has already been published.

Statement of Consent

I have read this form. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and am satisfied with the answers I received. I give my consent to participate in this research study.

Signatures

Name of Subject

Signature of Subject

Date

I agree to be audio recorded for this study.

Signature of Subject

Date

I have explained the research to the subject and answered all his/her questions. I will give a copy of the signed consent form to the subject.

Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

Appendix C – Projected Questions

Demographics:

What is your race?

What is your age?

What is your sex?

How long have you been in the relationship?

Are you in a same-sex or heterosexual relationship?

- **How do you define sexting?**
- **How do you engage in sexting? (Pictures, ideas, emojis, etc)**
- **Do you remember the first time a sexual text was sent in your relationship? Who sent it? If your partner sent it, how did you feel? If you sent it, how did your partner respond? Describe the first “sext” that was sent in your relationship.**
- **When do you sext your partner?**
- **When sexting occurs, who initiates it? You, your partner, or both? When your partner initiates, why do you think they do it? How do you respond when you get a sext from your partner? How does it feel? When you initiate it, why do you initiate it? How does your partner respond to it?**
- **Does sexting always lead to a physical sexual encounter? Why or why not?**
- **Do you ever sext out of boredom?**
- **Is there anything else relevant to this topic that we haven't talked about?**