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University of Nevada, Reno

“Love at First Like: A Case Study of New Media Activities Toward the Opposite Sex at an All Girl High School”

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts in Economics, Communication and the Honors Program

by

Hannah Vice

Dr. Todd Felts, Thesis Advisor

May, 2015

**UNIVERSITY
OF NEVADA
RENO**

THE HONORS PROGRAM

We recommend that the thesis
prepared under our supervision by

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entitled

**“Love at First Like: A Case Study of New Media Activities Toward the Opposite
Sex at an All Girl High School”**

be accepted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

BACHELOR OF ARTS, ECONOMICS AND COMMUNICATION

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May, 2015

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the usage of texting and other social media messenger tools of college freshmen who attended all girl high schools by exploring their lived experiences and social interactions with the opposite sex. The purpose of this case study is to determine the experiences of students at an all girl high school with their use of texting (and social media messenger tools) to build and nurture relationships with the opposite sex, and to uncover specific behaviors of a distinct group of students. The findings for this research include recognition of unwritten rules among females, that females are more apt to break the unwritten rules when communicating with males, and texting serves as tool for nurturing relationships with significant others. The results encompass females using social media more observantly, while texting is used for in-depth conversations. Females also have specific online images to attract males, and used texting and “sexting” as the two main foundations for their romantic relationships. The significance of this study is that it provides an example of a body of people that are more dependent upon social media sites (because of the all girl school environment) to begin creating relationships with the opposite sex, which could be generalized to larger groups who share similar challenges.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank my parents, Jay and Stacey, for showing me the ideal example of success in all facets of life. No words could be used to express my gratitude for everything you have done for me. I strive to leave as much of a positive impact on people as you both have throughout your lives. All in all I love you and am glad you both will be my guiding lights for the next chapter of my life.

To my brothers, Alex and Jordon, you both are the best brothers anyone could have asked for. I consider you both role models and strive to develop the qualities each of you have and use effortlessly in your everyday activities. You are both wonderful young men now, and I cannot wait to see the kind of men you grow into. I am so happy to have you both in my life as a continuous stream of support. I love you both.

Finally, to Todd Felts. Your guidance was priceless. I could not have accomplished this project without your knowledge and patience. We met in an unexpected way, but it is a meeting I am grateful to have gotten. You are an amazing individual and have truly made this whole thesis process one of my most memorable college experiences. I could not think of a better way to say it; so, in your words, thanks for taking a risk on me.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

INTRODUCTION:

This study explores, from a historical perspective, college freshmen who attended an all girls' high school and their use of new media activities, like texting and other social media messenger tools. This study explores the lived experiences of the young women and their social interactions with the opposite sex during their time as students at an all girl high school. High school girls are more apt to texting and typically send around 100 messages a day (Lenhart, 2012), however, what is not known is how texting is impacting their ability to forge and maintain key relationships with the opposite sex.

The purpose of this case study is to determine the lived experiences of students at an all girl high school with their use of texting (and social media messenger tools) to build and nurture relationships with the opposite sex and uncover specific behaviors of a distinct group of students.

The focus of this research is to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how girls attending an all girl high school use texting in accomplishing their social activities. The questions this study looked to answer include:

1. How did girls at a single sex high school use texting and other social messenger tools?
2. How did teenage girls describe the role of texting and other social messenger tools in creating relationships with the opposite sex?
3. How did teenage girls describe their use of texting to nurture relationships with the opposite sex?

The world is becoming increasingly more tech savvy everyday and it is important to identify the link that new media has with females attending single sex high schools. By identifying more clearly females' usage of the new media technologies, and its connection to the opposite sex, it will be beneficial to faculty members, and even parents, as they can adjust some of their actions to accommodate this platform usage.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Social Media Messenger Tools: A mobile tool that allows users to instantly send chat messages to friends. It has a dynamic group conversation feature, that is integrated within the mobile device, and allows users to send photos, videos, and written comments to their friends (Techopedia, 2015).

Social Media Applications: A type of application software designed to run on a mobile device, such as a smartphone or tablet computer... Each app provides limited and isolated functionality such as a game, calculator, or mobile Web browsing (Techopedia, 2015).

Social Media: A countless array of internet based tools and platforms that increase and enhance the sharing of information. This new form of media makes the transfer of text, photos, audio, and video among internet users (Reilly, 2014).

Texting: Users send and receive short messages with the use of their mobile phones (Junco & Mastrodicasa, 2007).

Sexting: The practice of electronically sending sexually suggestive messages, partially nude photos, and completely nude photos through text messages (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2008).

Snapchat: A mobile application that allows users to send and receive “self-destructing” photos and videos. Photos and videos taken with the app are called Snaps (Snapchat, 2014).

Facebook: A social networking service launched in 2004 that has grown to more than one billion active users, with more than half using it on a mobile device. Facebook allows people to create a profile and add friends, exchange messages, and join user groups. (Facebook Newsroom, 2014).

Instagram: Allows users to upload, edit, and share photos with other members through the Instagram website, email, and social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook. (Facebook Newsroom, 2014).

Twitter: An online social networking and micro blogging service that enables users to send and read “Tweets,” which are text messages limited to 140 characters (Twitter Newsroom, 2014).

MySpace: “An online social networking site that enables users to make friends, write blog posts, add music, and customize their pages” (CrunchBase, 2011).

Checking-In: A feature that allows users to share their exact location with their friends. It will allow friends to know where each other are, as well as being another outlet to see if friends are close to one another (CNN, 2010).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

SINGLE SEX SCHOOLS

There has been a continuous debate on the pros and cons of children and teenagers attending single sex schools. The prominent fears of parents are the regression of gender equality and that those attending same sex schools are unable to handle an environment where the opposite sex resides. However, discussions with these students attending a single sex school usually results in responses similar to, “[my] self-confidence and independence [increased] in this setting” (Chadwell, 2010, p. 48). These students are still able to be around the opposite sex through a variety of different outlets: extra-curricular activities such as theater, dances, and sports events. Still, the debates continue as parents and educators alike take sides on whether or not single sex schools are a good idea.

Single sex schools are not a new idea. In fact, single sex schools were the predominate form of education in the United States until the Progressive era (Spielhagen, 2008, p. 1). The Progressive era, from the 1890s to the 1920s, began the debut of coed schools worldwide (The National Women’s History Museum, 2007). Coed schools were instigated by early feminists who argued that female schools were lacking in the science and mathematics fields, while the male schools had every opportunity to increase their knowledge of these fields (Spielhagen, 2008, p. 1). The result of this effort is seen in the present day with coed schools, which allows females equal education opportunities in all different fields. Now single sex female schools offer a range of academic classes and extra-curricular activities that better meet the female students’ needs. One of the main

reasons why single sex schools cater to males and females better is because each gender learns differently (Gurian, Stevens, & Daniels, 2009, pp. 24-25), as well as acts differently socially (Chadwell, 2010, p. 13). Research on male and female brains show that they differ in their development.

For example, two main ways in which female and male brains differ are in the development of the cerebral cortex and frontal cortex (Gurian, Stevens, & Daniels, 2009, pp. 24-25). The cerebral cortex in a female tends to have more connections between neurons; these connections lead to the ease of multitasking and engaging in their studies. A male cerebral cortex tends to mature more slowly, leading males to be more instinctive in their actions (Gurian, Stevens, & Daniels, 2009, p. 24). The frontal cortex in female brains tends to mature earlier, which makes females less impulsive and more methodical (Gurian, Stevens, & Daniels, 2009, p. 25). Just these couple of brain differences can lead to a more or less focused student body within the classroom environment. Female and male social development is also different. Coed schools place females in outdated positions that equate to the males dominating all the classroom discussions, while females in general, according to Gurian, Stevens, & Daniels (2009), “do not wish to appear too smart in front of boys, so they may inadvertently ‘dumb themselves down’” (p. 36). This outdated stereotype hurts a female’s ability to grow within the classroom, which is detrimental in the long run (Gurian, Stevens, & Daniels, 2009).

In 2002, this debate was brought to the public’s attention with the newly passed No Child Left Behind Act (Spielhagen, p. 3). This act indirectly promoted single sex classrooms because of the efforts to ensure that every child gets the opportunity to be educated in the best way possible, essentially agreeing that the sexes learn differently and

that this diversity needs to be catered to. Since then, the United States has created over 1,000 more single sex schools (NASSPE). This school creation has led to more research about whether single sex schools hurt or help female students. Titze, Jansen, and Heil (2011) found, “Girls developed less gender stereotyped interests and self-concepts and were more likely to aspire to adopt a career as a scientist compared to girls attending co-educative schools” (p. 705). By breaking down these gender barriers, single sex schools lead to the improvement of gender equality. One of the reasons why single sex schools break down so many gender barriers is because there is only one sex present. The students take on the role of the opposite sex as well as their own, for example, leading classroom discussions (Erarslan & Rankin, 2013). Another study done about whether single sex schools benefitted females found, “Single-sex schooling...support girls’ innately different learning style[s] may be interested in outcomes concerning academic motivation and achievement” (Pahlke, Bigler, & Patterson, 2014, p. 262). Catering to the females’ unique learning styles, single sex schools promote a positive impact on females’ futures and self-perceptions. These are two examples of the tools single sex schools give their females students to develop into independent young women, which helps them succeed later in life.

SOCIAL MEDIA

There is a large body of literature discussing all the ways teenagers use social media incorrectly. These complaints vary from teenagers disclosing too much private information to being too sexualized while using these sites. The major argument is that teenagers are both careless and obsessed with social media. However, are teenagers using social media irresponsibly, especially given their status as the ‘net generation?’

The 'net generation' is defined as people "born between 1982 and 2002, who are the first to grow up in the digital and Internet era" (Pletka, 2007, p. 27-28). Children who have grown up in a world more heavily influenced by technology are more attached to the online world than their parents. About ninety-five percent of teenagers have an online presence and eighty percent of those have profile(s) on various social media sites (Lenhart et al., 2011). It was found, from Piper Jaffray's Spring 2014 Teenage Consumer Survey results, that sixty nine percent of teenagers use Instagram, sixty three percent use Twitter, seventy two percent use Facebook, and thirty percent use other types of social media, like MySpace (Blaszczak-Boxe, 2014). According to Frank, Santurri, & Knight (2010) forty percent of teenagers use social networking sites daily. As researchers Marwick and Boyd (2014) point out, "Teenagers attempt to simultaneously participate in the networked publics that are foundational to their peer groups while maintaining a degree of privacy" (p. 1052). The researchers argue that teenagers do care and control their privacy as they see fit, and do so by developing privacy codes that they apply to their social media sites. Marwick and Boyd investigated this code under the broad idea of steganography, which is defined as, "hiding information in ways that prevent the detection of hidden messages" (Johnson & Jajodia, 1998, p. 26), and applied it to the online setting. For example, if a teenager breaks up with her significant other and writes something like, 'so glad to be free,' those who do not know the situation would more than likely read it literally; those that know the situation would read into it differently, such as that she is happy to be single again. These types of incidents are used to filter the people on a 'need to know' basis of a situation.

Some studies argue that teenagers are too sexualized on social media sites. A quick search of different social media sites pulls up pictures of teenagers who have sexual implications. The majority of people being sexual on social media sites are teenage females (Bailey, Steeves, Burkell, & Regan, 2013). The highly sexualized culture has caught up with social media, and is peer pressuring teenage females into fitting the mold of a 'woman.' Researchers have found that social media sites somewhat pressure the, "best' self, or a self that meets norms for sociability, interests, and attractiveness" (Burkell, Fortier, Wong, & Simpson, 2014, p. 980). If this ideology, of a woman's 'best self' as overly sexual and unafraid of showing off her body, is culturally accepted, it is not surprising that teenage females would incorporate this model into their own lives. Research has been conducted by looking at over 1500 teenage female social media profiles to see if a specific type of online female existed (Bailey, Steeves, Burkell, & Regan, 2013). The researchers found that a type of online female did exist that embodied, "Girls as sexualized objects seeking male attention.... Sexualized pictures and fun, carefree textual and photographic references to relationships with friends and a romantic partner were plentiful, as were references to partying, emotional venting and advice..."(Bailey, Steeves, Burkell, & Regan, 2013, p. 95). Instead of social media being a place where girls could defy these standards, American culture has seeped into social media. As researchers Bailey, Steeves, Burkell, & Regan (2013) concluded "The mainstream gender representations and stereotypes [to] continue to have currency in girls' and young women's self-representations in online social spaces" (p. 108). Ironically, although this type of behavior is expected, teenage females can still be

ridiculed for ‘trying too hard’ or being ‘slutty’ (Bailey, Steeves, Burkell, & Regan, 2013). Thus, this proves that online identities are full of all types of contradictions.

TEXTING

The major concern with teenagers’ copious usage of social media platforms and texting is the link with their sexual encounters. Researchers have found, “The prevalence of having started dating, having had sex, having multiple sex partners... [was] higher among those who have sent, received, or asked for a sext” (Temple et al., 2012, p. 830). Researcher O’Sullivan (2014) coincides with this research by saying, “Self-disclosure is the hallmark of intimate exchange... We disclose far more readily using digital technologies, we often experience an accelerated process of intimacy” (p. 41). This evidence shows that people typically have sex after a certain amount of personal information has been revealed about each person. Openness leads to the feelings of closeness, which stimulates a person’s desire for sex. With teenagers being attached to their phones and talking to a person of interest around the clock, a situation is created where sex happens earlier. It is believed that teenagers are more willing to divulge personal information about themselves faster because, “young people seem to equate keeping something private with being ashamed of it and revealing something as having pride” (O’Sullivan, 2014, p. 47). With this stigma, it is obvious why teenagers are so carefree with their sharing of personal information; no one wants to seem as though they are hiding something. Some teenagers may even view this newfound sexualization of themselves as empowerment (O’Sullivan, 2014). Interestingly, research has found that teenage females are the biggest ‘victims’ of this mindset through their relatively strong involvement with sexting.

Sexting is a word that has continuously been brought to the public's attention in recent years. In fact, sexting has been so prevalent within daily conversations it has made its way into the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (Doll, 2012). However, I will be using a wider definition of the word. I will define sexting as, 'the practice of electronically sending sexually suggestive messages, partially nude photos, and completely nude photos through text messages.' Sexting has become nationally recognized because of the concern that it is a gateway into having sex through unsafe methods, like promiscuity (Mattey and Diliberto, 2013). This concern is legitimate; yet, eighty four percent of parents do not have any rules regarding texting or having cell phones (Frank, Santurri, & Knight, 2010). Interestingly, even with the lack of rules, there has been an increase of teenagers having cell phones, from fifty six percent in 2004 to eighty five percent in 2009 (Frank, Santurri, & Knight, 2010). These teenagers then send an average of 2,022 texts per month (Cocotas, 2013). With lax rules, ownership of a phone, and large quantities of texting, incidents of sexting are going to increase. In fact Frank, Santurri, and Knight (2010) found that hyper-texting, which is texting more than 120 messages per day, leads to more incidents of sexting. The researchers also found that females were more apt to use hyper-texting, especially for sending partially or fully nude photos (Frank, Santurri, & Knight, 2010).

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy (2008) conducted a study that found twenty-two percent of those teenage females had admitted to sending or posting partially nude or fully nude photos of themselves, and that thirty-seven percent of teenage girls send sexually suggestive messages. In contrast, only eighteen percent of teenage males sent or posted partially nude or fully nude photos of

themselves, while forty percent of those teenage males sent sexually suggestive messages (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2008). Sending a sexually suggestive message is seen as less risky than sending a partially or fully nude photo, leading both sexes to do the former often (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2008).

However, more pressure is put on females to deliver with partially or fully nude photos. A female subject stated, in response to the importance of sending these types of photos to the person of interest, “I felt like if I didn’t do it, they wouldn’t continue to talk to me” (Lenhart, 2009, p. 8). These types of responses are common, fifty-one percent of teenage females felt pressured from a male to send a sext (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2008). This study also found that thirty-four percent of teenage females sent sexts to be sexy, while sixty-six percent of females sent sexts to be flirty (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2008). Another study found that the two primary reasons females sext is to lure the male into a romantic relationship and/or bring sex into the relationship (Temple et al., 2012). Temple and his co-researchers found that approximately sixty-eight percent of teenage females were asked, by males, to send a sext; compared to forty-two percent of females that asked males to send a sext (Temple et al., 2012). About twenty-eight percent of these females, asked to send a sext, admitted to sending a naked picture of themselves (Temple et al., 2012). These results show that females have a higher percentage of being asked for these types of sexts.

Chapter 3: Methodology

METHODOLOGY:

This study was conducted through a qualitative framework using in-depth interviews and a focus group. Before the research was able to begin recruiting any participants, IRB approval through the research integrity office had to be met. Once approval was met the recruitment began. To recruit these participants' flyers (Appendix C) were hung up throughout the entire University of Nevada, Reno's campus. These flyers advertised a brief description of the study, which included an email address to get in touch with the researcher. The flyer also discussed the type of participants needed for this study, which were females, between the ages of 18 and 25 that had attended an all girl high school. After the first few participants made contact, the researcher used the snowballing technique to contact the rest of the participants. The participants were students from the University of Nevada, Reno, Oregon State University, and a young woman that has recently graduated and joined the work force; more information is given about each participant below in Table 1.

After gathering all the participants each were given a choice between an individual interview or participation in the focus group. There were six female participants the in-depth interviews, and the focus group had three female participants, for a total of nine participants. Each individual interview was about 15-25 minutes, held within the university's library, and it included only the participant and researcher. The researcher asked the same questions for all one-on-one participant (Appendix A). Each interview was also audio-recorded on the researcher's cell phone. The focus group was held in a classroom in the Journalism building. This group was audio-recorded and

videotaped on the room's computer. Both the individual interviews and focus group started off by asking a set of identifying questions to make sure the participants met the study requirements. There were no issues with not meeting the criteria, so the focus group and all the individual interviews went smoothly. The questions (Appendix B) for the focus group were somewhat different than the one-on-one interviews to entice the group to have a dialogue. The focus group was video recorded using technology available in the classroom.

After the focus group and individual interviews were completed, they were transcribed verbatim. Once the transcriptions were completed, the researcher used Saldaña's (2013) method to create codes, categories, and themes.

This framework was used to explore how students who attended an all girls' high school, that are now in college or in the workforce, used social media and texting to create and maintain relationships with the opposite sex. Three research questions that were used to help guide the study are:

1. How did girls at a single sex high school use texting and other social messenger tools?
2. How did teenage girls describe the role of texting and other social messenger tools in creating relationships with the opposite sex?
3. How did teenage girls describe their use of texting to nurture relationships with the opposite sex?

These three questions will help give a more in-depth understanding of the roles that texting and social media have within a teenage girls' relationship with the opposite sex, while attending a single sex high school.

Table 1: Participant Overview

Participant	Gender	Age	Current Status	High school	Attendance at all girl high school	Graduation Year	Type of participant
Casey	Female	18	Freshman at the University of Nevada, Reno	St. Francis	4 years	2014	1 on 1
Christina	Female	24	Student at the University of Nevada, Reno	Carondelet	2 years	2009	1 on 1
Eliza	Female	21	Senior at Oregon State University	St. Francis	4 years	2011	1 on 1
Eve	Female	19	Freshman at the University of Nevada, Reno	St. Francis	2 years	2014	1 on 1
Lisa	Female	19	Freshman at the University of Nevada, Reno	St. Francis	4 years	2014	1 on 1
Megan	Female	19	Freshman at the University of Nevada, Reno	St. Francis	4 years	2014	1 on 1

Alexandra	Female	25	In the workforce	Resurrection high school	4 years	2007	Focus Group
Samantha	Female	18	Freshman at the University of Nevada, Reno	St. Francis	4 years	2014	Focus Group
Sonia	Female	19	Freshman at the University of Nevada, Reno	St. Francis	1 year	2014	Focus Group

Chapter 4: Findings and Results

FINDINGS:

The findings for this research resulted from one focus group and a collection of in-depth one-on-one interviews. This study asks participants to provide details about life as a student at an all girl high school. Even though the data reflects a period within the past one to seven years, it is presented in the present tense. After recording and transcribing the focus group and one-on-one interviews, themes and codes from the patterns emerged after reading through all the transcriptions.

This study used Saldaña's (2013) method to create codes, categories, and themes. After reviewing participants' transcriptions and identifying important key phrases, the researcher drew a type of map that matched codes to categories and then attached them to overarching themes. The three themes that emerged were: (1.) Recognition of Unwritten Rules Among Females (2.) More Apt to Break Rules When Communicating With Males (3.) Texting Serves as Tool For Nurturing Relationships. Each of the major themes were supplemented with sub-findings, which are illustrated in figure 1.

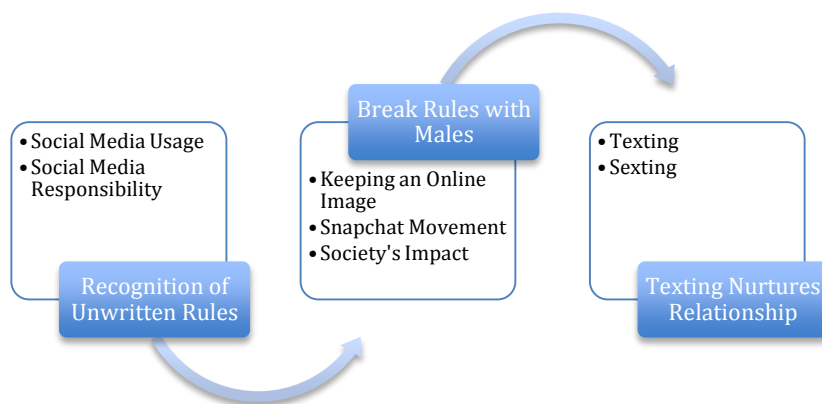


Figure 1: Main Themes and Subthemes

(1) Recognition of Unwritten Rules Among Females

The female participants used a variety of social media platforms in their everyday activities; they believed they used it responsibly and safely. They discussed how social media is typically used for either keeping up to date with what friends are doing in their lives or starting interactions with the opposite sex, but not as a tool to interact deeply with others.

(1.1) Social Media Usage

In this research all the participants had used social media in their everyday activities during high school, and were also involved within the platforms of MySpace, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. The participants did not use social media sites to communicate heavily in general with people. As Megan says, “I just feel like it’s an update on life, like seeing what people are doing.” Eliza seconds this type of idea by saying, “I go on Facebook to check what other people are up to, but that doesn’t necessarily mean I interact with them.” According to these two participants, social media sites are used to talk about themselves and to catch up on life events without having to actually talk to each other in person. However, these sites can be used for more than that. As Lisa says, “I always go on social media. I probably check it like every day. Just go through it, especially if I am bored or procrastinating on homework.” She uses social media for entertainment as well. Entertainment can surface through friends’ comments and/or posts, as well articles and videos that the platform features. However, these social media sites are also used to initially instigate a conversation with new people, and that includes the opposite sex. As Eliza says, “I like interacting with people and catching up and meeting new people.” The first conversation prompts people for phone numbers,

emails, and similar forms of contact so that the users can further deepen their friendships outside the social media realm.

(1.2) Social Media Responsibility

All nine participants agreed with a resounding yes that they used social media responsibly. The disagreement between the participants arose in two facets. The first facet is the use of privacy settings; whether they used the settings that each site provides them, to choose ‘friends’ or ‘followers’ to see everything the participant posted, or the complete avoidance of posting anything inappropriate on the social media platforms. The second facet is whether checking-in places is considered breaking privacy codes.

Christina was one of the first participants to discuss how her use of privacy settings made her use Twitter appropriately. As Christina put it:

“If my cousins are trying to get ahold of me I will tell them I am this location, you know via tweet. So it’s not necessarily a good thing, but at the same time as long as you have your settings on private, and so that they are the only ones that can see it, then I believe it is okay.”

As long as the message is either completely private to the party in question or only available to her friends to view, the message/post is safe. Megan agrees with this idea by saying:

“I have heard stories about how people can get in contact with you super easily, and that scares me. So I put everything on private, my Facebook, Instagram, everything on private. So people will have to go directly through me and talk to me.”

The idea of control, by being able to set privacy settings to pick and choose ‘friends’ to monitor who sees posts, is a reoccurring idea among about half the participants. The other predominant idea is not to post anything inappropriate online, like images and/or comments, because of the risk. As Casey says, “In high school, we had a lot of rallies and

seminars and random talks about safety online; and that's always been a fear of mine, that someone is going to find out where I live and stalk me or something."

The fear of being watched is one of the motivations Casey expresses to not post inappropriate images or comments online. The second main reason is she fears future repercussions that may arise. She goes on to say, "Especially with the whole thing that your boss can see what you post and future stuff. So I try and stay pretty responsible on the social media sites." The future consequences outweigh any type of inappropriate behavior. The fact that the only people able to see anything she posts are 'friends' is not a factor in the content she posts. Eliza also agrees with this logic and says:

"I am very careful about what I put online. A few times a month I will actually go and Google myself to see what pops up, in case I need to change a security on any of my social media. So I am not revealing anything too personal."

Eliza takes this issue a step further to ensure she is promoting a responsible image, but the overall reasoning is the same, that her social media image should not be seen as a negative one by future friends, relatives, employers, or people in general.

A secondary facet that was briefly explored, in relation to breaking privacy codes, is the idea of checking-in places. Checking-in places allows friends to know another friend's exact location. Only a couple of participants occasionally involved themselves with checking-in places. Of the couple of participants that used the 'check-ins,' their comments were similar to Megan's: "Even on Instagram you can put the location and I will typically do that, not when I am there, but when I come home." Checking-in is also used as a way to show off to others where the users are. Christina says, "If I go to a really nice restaurant I will tweet about it and say hey people check this out. So I will tell them the location of the restaurant and what have you." Check-ins are not used often, but they

are used strategically. The remainder of the participants' answers mirrored Eve's: "I don't have time to do those check-ins, it's a lot of effort." These types of comments only verify the check-in's non-popularity within the lives of the participants.

(2) More Apt to Break Rules When Communicating With Males

The participants believe that females who portray a more sexualized image of themselves rely heavily on their bodies to get the opposite sex's attention. This desire to appear 'sexy' to the opposite sex led to the mass movement of Snapchat, which allowed females another outlet to send sexual images to the opposite sex. The participants also believe that the highly sexualized American culture influences females to promote a more sexualized image of themselves to males.

(2.1) Keeping an Online Image

The participants talked about the imagery of young, high school aged females online. It is unanimous that the participants felt that females were too sexual online. Eve concretizes this idea by saying:

"They will post these pictures and they will look really 'slutty,' they look like prostitutes or hookers or something like that. Then you're like you go to my school? I just don't understand. Then they will get all of these comments and then you see them later on, and they try and act like they are high and mighty. Its like well it's only because you are dressing like that, people are taking advantage of you."

Eve agrees that dressing sexually and posting the image online is for attention and usually for the opposite sex. Interestingly, Eve's comment also shows that even though it is fairly common for females to be portraying themselves sexually, other females are still judgmental towards them. This judgment may not stem from words like 'slutty,' but result in commentary similar to Alexandra's comment, "I never felt like it was a slutty

thing or ‘whorish’ thing it was just like they just really want attention.” Alexandra leans more on the side of females being misguided with their attempts at attention from males, and females confuse this negative type of attention for positive attention. This could be a result of desperation, like Samantha says:

“I think they're like the girls who like who were just too busy who were like kind of realize that kind of stuff where like realize that there wasn't that attention from guys but then there were like the girls who were like oh my god there's no guys like I need to get this like attention some way.”

She continues on to explain that females are just looking for quick, self-gratification techniques that give them attention from the opposite sex. Regardless of the reason, the participants think females assert a particular sexual image of themselves online. The end result is the same: to get the attention of the opposite sex.

However, according to Lisa, females typically try to achieve this goal in more subtle ways:

“I think a lot of them can be, especially on Twitter or Instagram. One girl who I knew that went to my high school, she was a year older than me, is some kind of bikini model now, so she's posting everywhere. I'm like mmm okay, that's cool, you just leave nothing to want when you are showing it all. But I do think that some people use it a little too often to. They are proud of their bodies.”

Megan also responds with a similar idea:

“I saw a lot of girls in our age group putting pictures, basically half naked pictures or ‘fitness pictures,’ now are super big, just showing off their bodies. I have seen a lot of girls go over the top with it, and put pictures of themselves in bikinis.”

It is interesting that these females use the excuse of being at the beach, being a model, or being athletic, as a way to show off their bodies, without trying too hard. It is ironic though that all the participants judge other females for that type of behavior. In fact, the top two answers, from the participants, of why females partake in this type of sexual

online imagery are they do not respect their bodies and try too hard to get the male's attention. As Casey says, "I think that a lot of females are my age are definitely wanting to show off their bodies and appear one way to guys."

(2.2) Snapchat Movement

The Snapchat movement is considered a subset of social media. As Casey remarks:

"It was a movement where everyone was feeling like whatever they sent would just be deleted and gone forever. So they were more inclined to send things, or I guess in the texting sense, it was like it switched from sexting on text to Snapchat. It was just another outlet."

When Lisa was asked if she thought the rise of Snapchat increased people's willingness to send partially or fully nude photos, Lisa instantly agreed and said:

"Yes, definitely. Its like oh well, I only sent it for 5 seconds, so he doesn't have it. There are apps today that allow you to jailbreak it and then they have the photo, so you have no idea. I don't think a lot of people realized that, so they really thought the pressure is off, I can send this photo, and it will only be up for however many seconds I want. It is a free little sneak peek."

She continues on to describe how this allows the females to get more attention from the male and feel 'sexy' or desired. Samantha reflects, "I had a friend who whenever she would feel kind of down about herself she would send a bunch of pictures to random guys. She had a bunch of these Snapchat flings." Snapchat became popular because this medium is an easy way to capture a male's attention. As Lisa says, "I feel like there is that added pressure because they don't see my personality, because I don't get to see them every single day, maybe they will like my body." This type of mentality that is magnified with attendance at a non-traditional high school creates more pressure for the females to participate in this type of sexualizing behavior.

(2.3) Society's Impact

According to the participants, most females connect their physical identities with what a male thinks is attractive or not—an image portrayed heavily throughout the American culture. Females are trying their best to live up to the high, unrealistic expectations that are set by society. Lisa agrees:

“They are constantly seeing on social media that guys like a certain body type and they feel pressured to send a photo, like oh if you like that then you might like me, and then send a nude or something.”

The participants explain that females try and mold themselves into the females that males seem to like, hoping to get noticed. As Eve says, “They want to change and fit in.” Eliza adds to this idea by saying:

“Society has a grand notion of what women are good for in a way and that comes down to how they sexualize women in media, and what young girls are revealed to. So I think society as a whole has kind of had these influences on young girls and unless there is another system or support that comes in and tells them no, it doesn't have to be this way, they will kind of rely on that idea of what they are *supposed* to be.”

Lisa, Eve, and Eliza have similar ideas of how society affects what females put on social media sites. According to them, the male's definition of 'beauty' or 'sexy' is drilled into a female's thought process starting at a very young age. It is hard to break out of the habit that has been forming for years. Such socialization, as Eliza mentions, needs an outside support system to convey to females that the information is false, and to help break them out of this mindset.

(3) Texting Serves as Tool For Nurturing Relationships

The participants discuss how relationships with the opposite sex are predominately maintained through texting. Relying heavily on texting allows the females

to nurture the relationship with the opposite sex. Sexting is used regularly as a way to retain the opposite sex's attention.

(3.1) Texting

When attending an all girl high school, where males are non-existent, relationships are difficult to maintain. Samantha reflects, "Its more dependent on texting." Sonia adds to this clip of information by giving an example from her life. She discusses an ex-boyfriend, "I saw him like three times. I barely saw him because it was an all girls school, so it was basically a texting relationship." Lisa agrees. Reflecting on her own past relationship, she says, "I didn't even have a boyfriend till senior year, and I met him through a family friend, and I texted him a lot." She makes note of how difficult it was for her to meet a male in the first place, and how texting became a major foundation of their relationship:

"Yeah because my life was so busy, I took the bus or I drove, driving was better than the bus, but it just took up so much of my time and then I did swim team. My mom didn't want me coming home, so I would stay at school for like 3 hours, go to our brother school for swim team, come home, and I came home at like 9."

Since Lisa went to an all girl high school and could not see her boyfriend often, she relied on texting. The reliance on texting does have a downside as Alexandra says: "Especially in high school when you are waiting for the person to respond, and then you run through this mirage of horrible things in your head." Alexandra's comment showcases another flaw of maintaining a relationship over texting; that females never really know what the other person is thinking. So it may cause a female to act more rashly out of fear of losing the relationship. Females find themselves in these types of predicaments, especially when attending a non-traditional high school, leading to an increase in their willingness to sext.

(3.2) Sexting

Sexting is becoming less common since Snapchat made its debut, but plenty of people still participate in it, especially high school aged females. Samantha talks about an experience she had in high school:

“I had a friend who was sending pictures, like it was constant. Then she formed these relationships with these random guys so she was always on her phone, because once you gave them a little bit they are going to keep asking for more.”

This story gives the impression of most females simplifying themselves to becoming one-dimensional, with their physical body being their only positive quality. This type of attitude escalates the number of females willing to partake in sexual behavior, to get the opposite sex’s attention. Samantha agrees, “It’s definitely more common for girls to take a picture than guys.” Sonia follows up by saying, “No, girls do not want dick pics.”

Alexandra adds to both girls’ comments by saying, “I feel like it was for their own satisfaction, but for girls it is like they don’t just send it and get satisfaction from sending it. They get satisfaction from the response that is given.” Since females attending single sex schools do not see the males on a daily basis, sending sexual pictures is the primary means of securing a romantic relationship with them. Lisa discusses why sexting is a bit more prevalent to maintain the opposite sex’s interest, “Its just easier and its something they can see without being in contact with them all the time, because personality-wise its hard to get to know people that don’t go to school with you.” This is one of the reasons the participants gave of the rationale that increases a female’s desire to sext. Samantha pipes in and says, “They did feel more pressure to appear more attractive because we looked so ugly at school.” Lisa follows up the same idea by saying:

“You know there is no lure. We are at an all girls’ school, we don’t have any makeup on, we don’t have our hair done, we just woke up, and we are in our uniform. If you see us during the day, like sorry I’m ratchet, it happens.”

Such views are not a new concept to the participants. They were familiar with people partaking in this type of activity. As Casey says, “I would say pretty common. I would say the majority of my friends, at some point, sent or saw a picture or something.” The fact remains that females want to have a companion and sexting is one of the primary means of securing a romantic relationship.

RESULTS:

Result One: Students at an all girl high school develop informal rules for online behaviors.

This study found all the participants used social media in their everyday activities, through the platforms of MySpace, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Similar to this, it was found that approximately ninety-five percent of teenagers have some sort of online presence and eighty percent of those teenagers have profiles on various social media sites (Lenhart et al., 2011). Another study found about forty percent of teenagers use social networking sites daily (Frank, Santurri, & Knight, 2010). Burkell, Fortier, Wong, & Simpson (2014) found, “Researchers have found that social media sites somewhat pressure the, “‘best’ self, or a self that meets norms for sociability, interests, and attractiveness” (p. 980). This proves that social media is more about fitting into a specific image by promoting one’s ‘best self’, leading to people being more observant online by only sharing the best and most culturally acceptable aspects of themselves. According to participants of this study, social media sites were not used to have in-depth conversation

with the opposite sex. Instead, they were used as an ‘opening tool,’ where some general conversation could result. Alternatively, social media is also used for entertainment purposes to pass the time.

Privacy is another important feature on social media platforms. Even though participants anticipate people to open up about their lives on social media platforms, these participants also expect a certain degree of privacy to go along with the use of these sites. Marwick and Boyd (2014) found, “Teenagers attempt to simultaneously participate in the networked publics that are foundational to their peer groups while maintaining a degree of privacy” (p. 1052). Overall, their research shows that these participants care about their privacy and strictly monitor their accounts to ensure it. Whether the privacy should be monitored through privacy control methods, present on all social media platforms, or not posting the inappropriate at all, is divided among the female participants in this study.

Result Two: When the opposite sex is involved, females break the rules.

Participants in this study believe that females turn to more sexual depictions of themselves when males are involved. Bailey, Steeves, Burkell, & Regan (2013) found, “Girls as sexualized objects seeking male attention.... Sexualized pictures and fun, carefree textual and photographic references to relationships with friends and a romantic partner were plentiful, as were references to partying, emotional venting and advice...” The research participants support this view. They agree that pictures posted online are usually for male eyes only. The participants acknowledge this type of behavior as common among their friends, and females in general. Ironically, the participants admitted to judging females who partook in this type of behavior. This idea aligns with the concept

introduced by researchers Bailey, Steeves, Burkell, & Regan (2013) that this type of female behavior is expected by society, yet females are ridiculed for ‘trying too hard’ or being ‘slutty.’

The innovation of Snapchat continues to promote this type of sexual behavior among females. Snapchat allows some degree of privacy by having messages and photos quickly disappear after being read or seen. According to the participants, the females send sexual pictures to the opposite sex without the rest of the online world seeing them. Snapchat allows females to feel less pressure from other females, while sending photos, and gave them confidence that they could retain the male’s attention. Snapchat granted the females some reprieve from other females’ judgments.

The participants also placed a heavy amount of the blame for this type of behavior on society. They believe that females are trying their best to live up to the high, unrealistic expectations of being female. These expectations are driven by the male’s definition of ‘sexy’ or ‘beautiful,’ without much weight given to the female’s opinion. Research by Bailey, Steeves, Burkell, & Regan (2013) supports that the mainstream gender representations have seeped into online life.

Result Three: Texting is indispensable for relationship maintenance.

Participants are unanimous in their agreement that texting is essential to making a relationship last. Since they attended all girl schools and were busy in a variety of activities, and likely did not have daily one-on-one interactions, talking to their significant opposite sex partner fell to texting. The texting became the next best way to communicate with males. Along with talking and getting to know someone’s personality, females searched for intimacy. Since the females mostly relied on texting to

communicate with their partners, sexting is used for intimacy. A study found the two primary reasons females sext is to lure the male into a romantic relationship and/or bring sex into the relationship (Temple et al., 2012). The female participants attending these types of non-traditional schools did not see the opposite sex on a daily basis, therefore, former option from Temple et al. is relevant. As one researcher found, “More pressure is put on girls to deliver with partial or full nude photos, as a subject stated, ‘I felt like if I didn’t do it, they wouldn’t continue to talk to me’” (Lenhart, 2009, p. 8). The study corresponds to the female participants mindset that females need to send suggestive messages and images to males. In fact, sexting seems to help validate their romantic relationships.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

CONCLUSIONS:

The purpose of this case study was to determine the lived experiences of students at an all girl high school with their use of texting (and social media messenger tools) to build and nurture relationships with the opposite sex and uncover specific behaviors of a distinct group of students.

The focus of this research was to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how girls attending an all girl high school use texting in accomplishing their social activities. The questions this study looked to answer included:

1. How did girls at a single sex high school use texting and other social messenger tools?
2. How did teenage girls describe the role of texting and other social messenger tools in creating relationships with the opposite sex?
3. How did teenage girls describe their use of texting to nurture relationships with the opposite sex?

Research Question One: How did girls at a single sex high school use texting and other social messenger tools?

The participants admitted to using the various social media platforms of MySpace, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. They did not use these social media sites for in-depth interaction with people, but for observing and light conversation. The participants would check out the sites and get updated on their friend's lives through their posts. Social media was more about promoting one's 'best self,' through various posts. This effort of being the most 'likeable' online lead to people being more observant and

only involved in 'light' conversations with one another on these platforms. By people emulating this idea online, it was understandable why females felt that any meaningful, in-depth conversations would happen through a different medium like texting. However, if females were not looking at their friend's latest posts, they were perusing these sites for entertainment by reading articles, viewing videos, and pictures.

Another conclusion is that privacy is important when using social media. Privacy precautions manifested itself into two main groups. The first group was very strict on their privacy settings by choosing their 'friends' or 'followers'. Anything this group posted deemed inappropriate would only be seen by their approved select group of 'friends' or 'followers'. The second group avoided posting anything inappropriate online because of the fear of future repercussions, even if only a select group of people saw the comment or image. This group was a bit stricter on their privacy standards. Regardless of the reason, both groups of participants followed unwritten codes when they used the social media sites to retain their privacy. Ultimately, it was used as a tool to remain open about their lives, which was culturally expected, while retaining a degree of privacy.

Research Question Two: How did teenage girls describe the role of texting and other social messenger tools in creating relationships with the opposite sex?

The participants had a consensus of how female users should act around the opposite sex on social media sites. Their opinion dictated the breaking of the original set of unwritten rules. According to the participants, the females promoted a more sexual image of themselves online in an effort to catch the attention of the opposite sex. Even though these females did send photos that broke the etiquette, they did so knowing other

females would be judgmental about the sexual behavior. This opinion was ironic because all of the participants were participating in the same sexual behavior.

In the midst of all these ill feelings the females had with one another, Snapchat made its appearance and ignited a movement. This movement provided another outlet for females to keep up their sexual image, without the immediate ‘backlash’ for their behavior. This took the pressure off the females. They believed they could send more suggestive pictures to males, because it would delete after so many seconds. The males would not have it anymore and then no other females could see it and be judgmental. The female participants took this to mean it was essentially risk free. A conclusion that can be made is that females are willing to break the rules if they can send things that are not traceable by other females.

A final conclusion that can be made is that the reason females are judgmental against one another is because of the demands placed on them by society. The participants blamed society for promoting an idea of beauty that emphasizes females taking on a certain body image that caters to the male’s desires. So, as a female attending a non-traditional high school, they felt they had to uphold a societal standard to impress males.

Research Question Three: How did teenage girls describe their use of texting to nurture relationships with the opposite sex?

The participants acknowledge that texting was a necessity to maintain a relationship with the opposite sex. According to the participants, texting was especially used with females who were busy at school with academics and extra-curricular activities, which did not allow them much free time. A conclusion that can be made is

that since every romantic relationship eventually includes an intimate factor, the females typically found themselves having to compensate through the use of sexting. The sexting was used to bring an intimacy aspect into these romantic relationships quickly, since they had many demands put on them while attending an all girls' high school.

Another conclusion that can be made is that sexting also became important within a relationship because of the validation it seemed to have on the relationship. This is especially important because the females attending these non-traditional high schools usually had a harder time getting to know the personality of the opposite sex. They tended to lean towards more short-term goals, having their partner acknowledge their physical beauty, without giving much thought to how their partner perceives them personality wise.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

For Individuals Who Work With Females at the High School Level

(1) Create more social opportunities with neighboring all male schools. By having more chances to see the males, females may begin to use texting more like social media.

(2) Hold more training rallies and discussions on social media and texting responsibility to persuade the females against solely relying on their physical bodies to get the opposite sex's attention.

For Future Study For Researchers

(1) Increase the number of participants with greater diversity among geographical locations to heighten generalizations across the population of females at high schools with their behaviors on texting and other social messenger applications. More states

could lead to either solidifying certain ideas proposed in this study or bringing up new concepts.

(2) Create a series of interviews with the participants so that they gain more trust with the researcher, thus more information can be gathered. The participants would feel more comfortable sharing more information about themselves because a better rapport would be developed. The longer people know one another, the more personal they tend to get. It would also allow the participants more time to think about certain questions and think about stories they want to share.

(3) Add a written portion for the participants to fill out, through email, and make it anonymous. This way the participants can fill it out at their convenience and retain privacy, giving them more time to think through the questions. It will also more than likely make them feel more comfortable to answer personal questions.

(4) To conduct a similar study with males who attend all male high schools. It would be interesting to see the male's perspective.

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APPENDIX A: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

****These questions and following discussion are not meant to be repeated outside this interview context. Your contributions will be used strictly for research purposes and you will remain anonymous. ****

1. What's your name?
2. How old are you?
3. How long did you attend an all girl high school?
4. Do you think attending an all girl high school has benefitted you so far in life? Like in academics or in general as a budding young woman? Explain.
5. Do you actively text and use different social media sites? Would you say you do one or the other more? Why? Do you text and be active on social media sites in the same day? Why?
6. Do you believe you use social media sites irresponsibly, like what is portrayed in the media, by being too personal online (with the amount of information you are willing to disclose)? Explain.
7. Do you feel that females are too sexual on social media sites? Why or why not?
8. What type of girl would you consider yourself to be on social media sites? What do you think your online persona is (like a party girl, etc.)? Do you think attending an all girl high school affected this image at all, like made it more or less sexualized? Explain.
9. How often did you use either texting or a social media site to contact the opposite sex?
10. Do you feel that by going to an all girl high school you became more dependent upon texting and/or social media platforms to communicate with the opposite sex?
11. Research has found that high school girls typically send around 100 text messages a day. Do you feel that you fell into that category? Why or why not?
12. If so, do you believe that you hypertexted? Hypertexting is defined as texting more than 120 messages per day.
13. Hypertexting is believed to be a possible link to sexting, what do you think? Sexting is defined as the act of electronically sending sexually suggestive messages, partially and/or completely nude photos through social media sites and/or text messages.
14. How common do you think the act of sexting, of any variation, is in the female high school age group? Why do you think that?
15. Do you believe sexting, of any variation, is more common to females attending an all girl high school? Why or why not?
16. Do you think females are more apt to sexually suggestive messages, while sexting, or some variation of nude photos? Explain.
17. Have you ever sexted before? If so, to what extend (in regards to sexually suggestive messages, partially nude and/or full nude photos, or some combination

of both) Why did you feel the need to do this (did it make you feel flirty, sexy, etc.)?

18. Do you think being at a nontraditional high school, in regards to the lack of the opposite sex, increased your willingness to sext? Why or why not?
19. Did you think you were possibly a bit pressured to sext in an effort to keep the opposite sexes attention? Explain.
20. Do you believe our highly sexualized society contributed to your willingness to sext? Explain.
21. Did you have sex while in high school? If so, do you think it was attributed to your past sexting? Why or why not?
22. If another female at your school's sexual messages and/or photos got out to the wider public would you be judgmental or 'turn your back' on her? Explain.

APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

****These questions and following discussion are not meant to be repeated outside this interview context. With this in mind I want you to all respect one another's story, privacy, and (once again) not repeat anything said here. Your contributions will be used strictly for research purposes and you will remain anonymous.****

1. What's your name?
2. How old are you?
3. How long did you attend an all girl high school?
4. How often do you think females use texting or social media sites to contact the opposite sex? Why?
5. Do you feel that females are too sexual on social media sites? Why or why not?
6. Do you feel that females going to an all girl high school become more dependent upon texting and/or social media platforms to communicate with the opposite sex? Explain.
7. Research has found that high school girls typically send around 100 text messages a day, while hypertexting is defined as texting more than 120 messages per day. Do you feel that most females attending an all girl high school fall into either one of these category? Why or why not?
8. Hypertexting is believed to be a possible link to sexting, what do you think? Sexting is defined as the act of electronically sending sexually suggestive messages, partially and/or completely nude photos through social media sites and/or text messages.
9. Do you think females being at a nontraditional high school, in regards to the lack of the opposite sex, increased their willingness to sext? Why or why not? Do you think these females were possibly a bit pressured to sext in an effort to keep the opposite sexes attention?
10. Do you believe our highly sexualized society contributed to females' willingness to sext? Explain.

APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT FLYER

Did You Attend An All Girl High School?

Are you between the ages of 18 and 25? If so, join my study! 😊



***Get a \$5 Starbucks card for participating!**

This study will determine how girls that attended an all girl high school used texting (and social media tools that acted like texting) in accomplishing their social activities. This study will delve into your more personal life by asking you questions about your intimate life. These will range from your sex life, to sexting, to your social media usage habits. As well as, getting your opinion on these phenomenons as a whole. These inquiries will help uncover how girls attending these non-traditional schools use these platforms to build and maintain relationships with the opposite sex.

-Sign up for an individual interview or be involved in a focus group!

-Contact Hannah Vice for more details about dates and times

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