Sexting and The Loss of Self-Esteem in The Digital Age: A Critical Investigation

Emmanuel Zelinjo Ekhato
emmanuelekhato@gmail.com
07064458352
Department of Mass Communication
Glorious Vision University
(Formerly Samuel Adegboyega University)
Ogwa, Edo State

Abstract
Sexting is a phenomenon that cropped up with the advent of digital media and as such constitutes an issue in digital media that has grown in popularity over the past decade. The study investigated the relationship between sexting and self-esteem, with a particular focus on the ways in which sexting can lead to a loss of self-esteem and pride. In order to identify the factors that contributes to the loss of self-esteem caused by sexting. The study was anchored on Social learning theory. The library research design was used for this study. It relied on secondary materials such as books, magazines, newspapers and articles in book chapter and journals on existing literature on sexting and self-esteem. The study found that sexting can lead to the loss of human dignity, displacement of pride, and loss of self-esteem in the digital age. The srtudy recommended that adults, who are in long distance relationships and intend to indulge in sexting can send such sexually explicit contents without letting your face to show. But the best solution to sexting is abstinence and Safe Social Media Practices in the Age of Sexting

Introduction
 "**Sexting**" as a concept is gotten from the combination of the two words "sex" and "texting" and it explains theact of erotic exposure or sending erotic messages on digital media online or offline. In other words, it means sending sexually explicit messages or images via electronic communication devices online or offline. It can also be seen as the transmission of nudity, or sexually explicit images, videos, emails, or text messages via mobile phones, computers, or other electronic devices (Hinduja & Patchin, 2012).

Sexting, the act of sending sexually explicit messages or images via digital platforms, has become a ubiquitous phenomenon among adolescents and young adults. Sexting is a new phenomenon that cropped up with the advent of digital media and as such constitute an issue in digital media that has grown in popularity over the past decade, Although some studies by researchers like Mitchell, Finkelhor, Jones, and Wolak (2012) have shown that sexting is more commonly practiced among youth and tertiary institution students and suggest that the above groups sext more than other groups.   Studies such as Ekhato E. Z. (2024), Nwaoboli, Chukwu, Arijeniwa & Asemah (2021) generally accept that students and youth have the greatest rates of social media and internet usage overall. Youth of today are digital natives since they were born and nurtured in the era of computers and online communication. As a result, they are more likely than any other demographic group to share self-created information online, publish their thoughts and connect to other online contents (Lenhart, 2009). In addition, studies such as Nwaoboli & Asemah (2021) and Ekhato E. Z. (2024) have revealed that students and young people use the internet for socialization purposes, which often takes place on various types of social media, such as Facebook. In achieving this, users of social media platforms introduce themselves to the online community by posting images, links and informational content.

The desire to produce a good impression on other people or an impression that is in line with one's principles is widely seen to be the driving force behind self-presentation. While sexting may seem like a harmless or even empowering activity, research suggests that it can have severe consequences on an individual's self-esteem. This study is motivated by the fact that the internet does not forget. It is on this backdrop that the researcher seeks to investigate the relationship between sexting and self-esteem, with a particular focus on the ways in which sexting can lead to a loss of self-esteem and pride.

Statement of the Problem
Sexting has become a pervasive issue among young people, with studies indicating that up to 60% of adolescents have engaged in sexting behaviors Mitchell, Finkelhor, Jones &Wolak (2012) and (Klettke B., Hallford, D. J., & Mellor, D. J. 2014). However, the consequences of sexting on an individual's self-esteem are not yet fully understood. Research suggests that sexting can lead to feelings of shame, guilt, and anxiety, which can ultimately erode an individual's self-esteem (Slonje R., Pääkkönen, H., & Smith, P. K 2013). This study seeks to address the following research question: What is the relationship between sexting and self-esteem ?

Objectives
1. To investigate the relationship between sexting and self-esteem.
2. To identify the factors that contributes to the loss of self-esteem caused by sexting.

Significance
This study aims to contribute to the existing literature on the relationship between sexting and self-esteem. The findings of this study will provide insights into the ways in which sexting can lead to a loss of self-esteem, and will inform the development of interventions and programs aimed at promoting healthy and positive relationships among adolescents and young adults.

Theoretical Review
Social learning theory, which was first introduced by psychologist Albert Bandura in 1973, is used for this study and it posits that individuals learn new behaviours and attitudes through observation and imitation. This is as a result of the fact that what the children and the people see on TV, internet, social media and films that they demand and emulate. This theory has been widely applied in various fields, including psychology, education, and sociology (Bandura, 1977). The social learning theory is also known as the social cognitive theory it was propounded by Professor Albert Bandura in 1973, a psychology that is popular for his "bobo doll experiment on the influence of media violence on the audience." The theory argues that people model what they watch. People copy or imitate behaviours they see on TV screens. Such copying or modelling happens in two ways viz imitation and identification. For imitation, the audience members directly copy and adopt all aspects of the behaviors they observe on TV. In contrast, for identification, they do not mimic the behavior exactly but instead select and adopt those aspects that resonate with them personally. Imitation and identification arguably result from the factors stated by Akakwandu (2012).
1. Observational learning: learning through observation account for why demonstration method is accepted as good teaching and learning technique for children.
2. Inhibiting effect: state that if a child will imitate a behaviour it depend on how the person being copied ends up. If he is killed then such a child may not like to end that way.
3. Disinhibiting effect: this refers to when an actor is handsomely rewarded for killing and the viewer may want to do same in other to be rewarded too.
   The tenets of social learning theory
Individuals acquire attitudes, emotional responses as well as behaviours through televised modelling.
1. Though reinforcement plays a role in learning, it is not entirely for learning
2. The learner is active not passive. Cognition, environment and behaviours all mutuall influence each other (reciprocal dimension)

Assumptions of Social Learning Theory:
1. Behavior is learned through observation and imitation: Social learning theory assumes that people learn new behaviors by observing and imitating others.
2. Learning is a cognitive process: Social learning theory assumes that learning is a cognitive process, meaning that people think about and process the information they observe before imitating it.
3. Reinforcement and punishment influence behaviour: Social learning theory assumes that reinforcement (e.g., rewards) and punishment (e.g., negative consequences) influence behavior and learning.
4. People have the ability to self-regulate their behaviour: Social learning theory assumes that people have the ability to self-regulate their behaviour, meaning they can control their own actions and make decisions about what behaviours to imitate.
5. Social and cultural factors influence learning: Social learning theory assumes that social and cultural factors, such as family, peers, and cultural norms, influence learning and behavior.

Omoera, Nwaoboli, and Emwinromwankhoe (2024) noted that social learning theory explicitly explains the impacts of the media. . This is despite the fact that SLT is a general theory of human behaviour. Bandura cautioned that children and adult earn new types of behaviour, emotional reactions and attitudes through watching recorded and broadcast models of behaviours. In the context of the media SLT talk about how people learn behaviour by seeing what is being given via various forms of media. Bandura's concerns are that TV may inadvertently produce a more dangerous form of reality. Parents and teachers who feel that children exposed to violent films and TV programs will end up as bullies find Bandura's warning particularly resonant and relevant.This study is grounded in the social cognitive theory (SCT) of self-esteem, which posits that an individual's self-esteem is influenced by their social interactions and experiences (Bandura, 1997). According to SCT, an individual's self-esteem can be enhanced or diminished through positive or negative social interactions. In the context of sexting, negative social

interactions, such as receiving unsolicited or explicit messages, can lead to feelings of shame and guilt, which can ultimately erode an individual's self-esteem.

Conceptual Overview of Sexting

Sexting is the act of sending or receiving explicit or sexually provocative text messages, photos, or videos via email, social media, or other digital channels.
Sexting has gained in popularity among teenagers and youth as a result of the growing usage of mobile phones and other digital gadgets. It is also the sending and/or receiving of sexually explicit images or text messages to peers using a mobile device (Augustina& Gomez-Duran, 2012).

Sexting is a hybrid neologism that combines the topic of sex with a technological approach (texting) (Day, 2011). It refers to taking nude or semi-naked pictures of oneself using a digital device, such as a mobile phone camera and sending them to other people through a cell phone or social media websites that are accessible online (Chalfen, 2009). Lenhart (2009) adds that sexting is a phrase coined from the terms "sex" and "texting" and refers to a particular activity carried out through mobile devices. The incidence of sexting behaviours among youth sending and/or receiving sexually suggestive photographs or messages to peers over a mobile phone has so often been measured through sexting research using wide criteria.

Cox Communications (2009) observes that the term was first used in 2005 by the Daily Telegraph before becoming an official term in 2009. It can be classified as primary where an individual sends their personal photos, nudists or messages with sexual content to another person with their consent. Contrarily, secondary sexting is sending sexually explicit images to others without their knowledge or consent and revenge sexting entails sharing private and intimate images of a partner in public without that person's knowledge or consent. Additionally, he or she could reveal the identity of the individual in the image (Calvert, 2013). Another kind of sexting that is also highly common is unwelcome but consenting sexting which occurs when someone feels pressured to send sexually explicit messages by a partner or acquaintance, even if they are aware of the sexting's existence.

Innovative technology has, over the years, transformed the manner in which teenagers, students and youths connect and engage with their contemporaries. This kind of communication and presentation of oneself is characterised, in many cases, by the usage of sexting platforms. Sexting may operate as a way of seeking validation by others, reassurance seeking behaviour and assist ease relationship or sexual anxiety in nervously connected persons (Drouin& Tobin, 2014; Asemah, Okpanachi&Edegoh, 2013). Sexting conduct has also been shown to be connected with individuals' opinions regarding sexting as well as the attachments that are involved with sexting. For the most part, people have thought of sexting as a sexuality-related phenomenon since it first became popular. The most important realisation is that sexting reflects a sexualised media practise that is fraught with danger, and that the internet generation pays little attention to the potentially damaging effects of this conduct.
Reasons why people engage in sexting

Some of the reason people engage in sexting is to seek validation, to become popular based on the belief that sexting sells. Some engage in sexting for profit as there are websites that pays people to send in nude contents. People who engage in long distance relationship with decrease face to face interaction use in to maintain affection; some use it for oral sex.

Mores so research has identified several reasons why individuals engage in sexting:

Emotional and Relational Reasons
1. Intimacy and closeness: Sexting can be a way to feel more connected and intimate with a partner, especially in long-distance relationships.
2. Trust and vulnerability: Sharing explicit content can be a way to demonstrate trust and vulnerability in a relationship.
3. Flirting and foreplay: Sexting can be a way to build anticipation and excitement for physical intimacy.

Social and Cultural Reasons
1. Peer pressure: Individuals may feel pressure from friends or peers to engage in sexting.
2. Media and pop culture: The prevalence of sexting in media and popular culture can normalize and encourage the behaviour.
3. Exploration and curiosity: Sexting can be a way for individuals to explore their own desires and boundaries.

Psychological and Personal Reasons
1. Self-esteem and validation: Sexting can be a way to seek validation and boost self-esteem.

2. Anxiety and stress relief: Sexting can be a way to cope with anxiety and stress.
3. Personal empowerment: Sexting can be a way for individuals to take control of their own bodies and desires.

Other Reasons
1. Revenge or anger: In some cases, individuals may engage in sexting as a form of revenge or to express anger.
2. Blackmail or coercion: Unfortunately, sexting can also be used as a means of blackmail or coercion.
3. Mistake or accident: In some cases, individuals may accidentally or unintentionally send explicit content.
It's worth noting that these reasons can vary across different age groups, cultures, and contexts.

Dangers of sexting
Sexting may be a thrilling and enjoyable way to experiment with one's sexuality, but it can also have negative effects, especially if it is done without the subject's consent or shared without their agreement. The dangers of sexting are numerous and it constitutes a serious problem in the usage of digital media for the following reasons

1. It leads to the loss of respect when private nude pictures go viral on the internet and in public spaces.
2. It leads to blackmail as nude pictures and videos sent to lovers can be used against the sender should incase things go bad, or the event of misplaced phone or the device that such explicit sexual content or erotic messages are stored. Once in the hand of evil hand it can be used to cause mischief and extortion
3. It may lead to the loss of a job, especially if it affects the image/ reputation of the organisation or the person is at stake.
4. It can lead to body-shaming.
5. It can also lead to the rape of the person whose nudity is exposed, as such a person may become a potential target for rapists.

Other Risk factors associated with Sexting
It may result in unwelcome attention, negative legal repercussions, and health dangers (Ukuweze&Abaneme, 2021). Sexters should be aware of these possible hazards and comprehend the significance of permission when sending or exchanging photographs or communications. As such, the risk factors of sexting are:
Internet Predators: Sexting is a common tactic used by internet predators to prey on victims who are unaware of their presence. Sexting is a technique used by online predators to gather personal data and coerce their victims into sending progressively explicit messages and photographs. Sexting may serve as a launching pad for more harmful sexual exploitation techniques like child pornography or sexual assault.
Unwelcome attention: Without the sender's permission, sharing sexting texts or photographs may result in unwanted attention and disgrace. A picture may still be disseminated without permission even if it was provided with the assumption that it would stay private, drawing unwelcome attention and causing embarrassment.
Legal ramifications: Legal repercussions may result from sexting, particularly if children are involved. In several nations, transmitting or receiving sexually explicit photos of children is illegal and carries harsh penalties. Additionally, sharing a sext without the sender's permission may be seen as an act of online harassment or cyberbullying that may result in legal ramifications. Sexting may have negative effects on one's health, particularly if photographs are shared without the subject's permission.
Peer pressure: One of the main risk factors for sexting is peer or romantic pressure. Students and youth may feel pressured to use sexting in order to blend in or maintain a connection. They may send communications under pressure that they are hesitant to transmit or that might have unforeseen repercussions.
Emotional Effects: Sexting may have a detrimental effect on a person's emotional health. Feelings of remorse, humiliation and embarrassment may result from sexting. Particularly, if the sexting was voluntary and the receiver shared the messages or photographs with another else, it may also cause emotions of betrayal and distrust.
Damage to Reputation: Sexting may do harm to a person's reputation. The sender's reputation and ability to follow certain professional routes might be compromised if the messages or photographs are shared with someone else. Sexting may also result in emotions of shame and embarrassment, which can have a long-term impact on someone's mental health.
Displacement of Pride: Displacement of pride can be defined as the act of transferring feelings of pride or self-esteem from one object or aspect of one's life to another. This can occur due to a change in circumstances or a shift in priorities. In the context of sexting, displacement of pride can refer to the act of transferring feelings of pride or self-esteem from one's physical appearance or sexual prowess to the act of sending explicit messages or images. This can occur due to a desire for attention or validation, or as a means of compensating for insecurities or feelings of inadequacy

According to Crocker and Park (2004) displacement of pride may be a strategy used by individuals who sext to maintain a positive sense of self-esteem by comparing themselves to others who are less sexually active or less confident in their sexuality. For example, a person who feels insecure about their body may feel a sense of pride in their ability to sext and receive positive feedback from their partner, in order to compensate for their perceived

physical flaws. Similarly, a person who lacks sexual experience may feel a sense of pride in their ability to engage in sexting, in order to compensate for their perceived lack of sexual prowess.

Smith (1998) suggests that displacement of pride can also occur in the context of sexting, where individuals may feel a sense of pride in their ability to send explicit messages or images, but may also feel envy towards others who have received more attention or validation for their sexts. This can lead to a displacement of pride, where individuals focus on areas of their sexting behavior where they feel superior, in order to compensate for their envy towards others. For example, a person who has received negative feedback for their explicit images may instead focus on their ability to craft seductive messages, in order to maintain a positive sense of self-worth in the context of sexting.

Solution to sexting is abstinence and Safe Social Media Practices in the Age of Sexting
We should respect ourselves and respect our bodies, parents, guardians and adults should preach against sexting and encourage youths to desist from it. And also it's important to teach responsible use of social media by organizing symposium and conferences. Then if as adults, who are in long distance relationships and intend to indulge in sexting you can send such sexually explicit contents without letting your face to show. But the best solution is to talk against it and don't practice it.

Sexting and sexual behaviour
Sexual behaviour ranges from various activities and expressions that are integral to human sexuality. It encompasses both the physical and psychological aspects of individuals' sexual experiences. On a physical level, sexual behavior involves the physiological responses and interactions of the human body during sexual activities, including sexual intercourse, masturbation, and genital arousal (Reece et al., 2014). The psychological aspect of sexual behavior involves the thoughts, emotions, desires, and fantasies that individuals experience in relation to their sexuality (Baumeister, 2000). It includes aspects such as sexual orientation, sexual attraction, and the development of intimate connections with others (Diamond, 2003).

Sexual behaviour is influenced by a combination of factors, including individual characteristics, such as beliefs and past experiences, societal norms and cultural beliefs, and environmental influences. These factors shape individuals' attitudes, preferences, and practices related to sexual behavior, and vary across different cultures and communities (Sandfort et al., 2006). Societal norms and cultural beliefs establish expectations and standards for sexual behavior, influencing individuals' understanding and expression of their sexuality (Gagnon & Simon, 1973). Environmental influences, such as family dynamics and peer relationships, also play a role in shaping sexual behavior by providing socialization and learning experiences (Halpern-Felsher et al., 2004).

Nwaoboli E. P. (2024) compiles some sexting codes often used by tertiary institution students and youth include to facilitate sexting as follows:

FWB	Friends with Benefits
NSA	No Strings Attached
FWB+	Friends with Benefits Plus
DTF	Down to Fuck
GHOST	Get Horny Or Stay Home
ASL	(Age, sex, location)
8	Oral Sex
143	I Love You
cu46	See You For Sex
DUM	Do You Masturbate?
GNOC	Get Naked On Cam
GYPO	Get Your Pants Off
FMH	Fuck Me Harder
IWS	I Want Sex
TDTM	Talk Dirty To Me

Empirical review
A study was conducted by Nwaoboli, Ezeji, and Osife-Kurex (2022) regarding the impact of social media on the engagement in promiscuity among students in selected tertiary institutions located in Benin City, Nigeria. The study investigated the impact of social media on the engagement in promiscuous behaviour among college and university students in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria. The study aimed to investigate the prevalence of social media usage in promoting promiscuity among tertiary institution students in Benin. Additionally, the study sought to identify the underlying factors contributing to sexual promiscuity on social media among tertiary institution

students, as well as the potential consequences of such behaviour. The research was based on the theoretical framework of technological determinism. The survey was employed as the chosen research methodology, with the questionnaire serving as the designated research instrument. The study revealed that social media platforms have contributed to the rise of promiscuous behaviour among tertiary institution students in Edo State. This phenomenon can be attributed to various factors such as peer pressure, poverty, inadequate parental guidance, insufficient regulation of sexual content on social media, ease of accessibility, and affordability. As a result, there has been a noticeable increase in moral decay among this demographic. Based on the findings, the researchers recommended that students in tertiary institutions should exercise self-discipline and refrain from engaging in social media discussions that may encourage promiscuous activities and behaviours.

Ukuweze & Abaneme (2021) carried a study on prevalence and driving factors for sexting among Nigerian teenagers. The Uses and Gratifications Theory and the Play Theory served as the study's guiding theories. Institutions in the state of Imo were the subject of the research and samples from three of each of the federal, state and private institutions that made up the study's population were taken. The study's technique was a survey design and the tool for gathering data was a questionnaire. Through a multi-stage selection approach, a sample of 300 students from three colleges was chosen from federal, state and private universities. The study's conclusions showed that sexting is quite common among Nigerian teenagers and that they use it to express themselves online even when they are unaware of the risks. It was also found that majority of young people sext because they think it will make them more well-known and draw more attention to their accounts. Based on these findings, the study suggested, among other things, that a comprehensive sensitisation effort be made to educate these youths about the harmful effects of sexting through seminars, campaigns or publications and that parents and families, who serve as socialisation agents, should step up their roles in sexual socialisation. Research has consistently shown that sexting can have negative consequences on an individual's self-esteem. A study by Slonje et al. (2013) found that adolescents who engaged in sexting behaviours reported lower levels of self-esteem and higher levels of anxiety and depression. Similarly, a study by Klettke et al. (2014) found that young adults who engaged in sexting behaviours reported lower levels of self-esteem and higher levels of shame and guilt.

Conclusion and Recommendations
In conclusion, sexting can lead to the loss of human dignity, displacement of pride, and loss of self-esteem in the digital age, as individuals transfer feelings of self-worth or esteem from their physical appearance or sexual confidence to the act of sending explicit messages or images.
This displacement of pride can occur for a variety of reasons, including a desire for attention or validation, or as a means of compensating for insecurities or feelings of inadequacy.

Sexting can provide a platform for individuals to compare themselves to others and maintain a positive sense of self-esteem, but it can also create envy and competition around sexual behavior and explicit content. As such, it is important for individuals to consider the potential risks and consequences of sexting and to engage in this behaviour in a way that aligns with their personal values and boundaries. By understanding the ways in which sexting can lead loss of self-esteem and displace pride, individuals can make informed decisions about their own sexual expression and avoid potentially harmful or negative situations. The best Solution to sexting is abstinence and Safe Social Media Practices in the digital age of Sexting.
Based on the conclusion, it is recommended that:
1. **Practice self-reflection:** Before engaging in sexting, individuals should take some time to reflect on your motivations and values. Consider whether you are using sexting as a means of compensating for insecurities or seeking validation from others. By being honest with yourself about one's intentions, one can make more informed decisions about whether or not to engage in sexting.
2. **Establish clear boundaries:** Establishing clear boundaries around sexting can help one avoid displacement of pride and stay true to your personal values. Consider what types of content you are comfortable sending and receiving, and communicate these boundaries clearly with your sexting partner.
3. **Seek validation from within**: Rather than relying on external validation from sexting partners, sexters should seek validation from within. Focus on your own strengths and accomplishments, and engage in activities that make you feel good about yourself outside of the context of sexting.
4. **Be mindful of the risks:** Sexting can have potentially negative consequences, including the sharing of explicit content without consent or the risk of exposure to third parties. Individuals should be mindful of these risks and take steps to protect yourself, such as using secure messaging apps or avoiding sending explicit content altogether.

We should respect ourselves and respect our bodies, parents, guardians and adults should preach against sexting and encourage youths to desist from it. And also it's important to teach responsible use of social media by organizing symposium and conferences. Then if as adults, who are in long distance relationships and intend to

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