

**This item is the archived peer-reviewed author-version of:**

Nonconsensual sexting and the role of sex differences reply

**Reference:**

Madigan Sheri, Van Ouytsel Joris, Temple Jeff R.- Nonconsensual sexting and the role of sex differences reply  
JAMA pediatrics / American Medical Association - ISSN 2168-6203 - Chicago, Amer medical assoc, 172:9(2018), p. 890-891  
Full text (Publisher's DOI): <https://doi.org/10.1001/JAMAPEDIATRICS.2018.1951>  
To cite this reference: <https://hdl.handle.net/10067/1536680151162165141>

## **In Reply**

We appreciate the comments by Reed et al on our article<sup>1</sup> and for drawing attention to a pressing concern for parents, educators, and practitioners: that the sharing of sexually explicit images and videos can leave teenagers vulnerable to having their sexts forwarded or shared without consent.

The literature on sex differences in sexting behaviors has been inconsistent. One central focus of a meta-analysis is to resolve discrepancies in study findings. Thus, we fully support the statement by Reed et al that analyses should consider sex as a potential moderator of nonconsensual sexting. The assumption has generally been that boys are more likely to be the forwarders (ie, perpetrators) of nonconsensual sexts and that girls are more likely to have their sexts forwarded nonconsensually (ie, knowledge that their image had been shared without consent). Our meta-analysis of 5 studies focusing on perpetration of nonconsensual sexting and 4 studies on the victimization of nonconsensual sexting did not support these expectations. We also did not find any significant sex differences in the rate of consensual sending or receiving of sexts.

On closer examination of the 5 studies that did report on the perpetration of nonconsensual sexting (see studies listed with FW-P under column “sexting type” in Table<sup>1</sup>), 2 studies found no significant differences between girls and boys, 1 study found a statistically significant difference, with boys reporting a higher prevalence, and 2 studies that stratified prevalence across sex by race/ethnicity and country of origin found inconsistent sex differences across these stratification methods. Similarly, in the studies that examined victimization of nonconsensual sexting (see studies listed with FW-V in Table<sup>1</sup>), 1 study found that girls in grades 10 to 11 (but not those in grades 6-7) were more likely than their male counterparts to have had sexts distributed, another found that only 1 of 5 countries examined had significant sex differences, and 2 studies did not provide a breakdown by sex.

Thus, to answer the question, what we really know about sex differences in nonconsensual sexting is that it varies considerably from 1 study to the next, and when examined meta-analytically, no significant sex differences emerge. This conclusion applies to nonconsensual as well as consensual sexting.

As noted in our article,<sup>1</sup> the sample sizes for the meta-analyses on nonconsensual sexting were small (perpetrator n = 5 and recipient n = 4). Thus, conclusions about the role of sex differences in nonconsensual sexting based on our meta-analysis are arguably tentative. As aptly noted by Reed et al, variations in study findings can occur because of differences across studies in how sexting is measured. Thus, we echo their comment as well those from others<sup>2</sup> that there is a need for more data and clearer measurement of sexting behaviors in future research. We look forward to meta-analyzing these data when they become available so that we can draw firm conclusions regarding sex differences pertaining to the nonconsensual forwarding of sexts.

### **References**

1. Madigan S, Ly A, Rash CL, Van Ouytsel J, Temple JR. Prevalence of multiple forms of sexting behavior among youth: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *JAMA Pediatr.* 2018;172(4):327-335.
2. Van Ouytsel J, Walrave M, Ponnet K. Adolescent sexting research: the challenges ahead. *JAMA Pediatr.* 2018;172(5):405-406.