

2019

# Sextortion: Psychological Effects Experienced and Seeking Help and Reporting Among Emerging Adults

Tonya Howard  
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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Tonya Howard

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Walden University  
2019

Abstract

Sextortion: Psychological Effects Experienced and Seeking Help and Reporting Among  
Emerging Adults

by

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MS, Walden University, 2014

MS, University of Phoenix, 2009

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
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## Abstract

Sextortion is a phenomenon that has made an impact on the digital technology domain. Sexting is a transmission of sensual messages or performances, provocation, and schemes exhibited through an array of sexual behaviors. The purpose of this cross-sectional study was to examine the psychological effects experienced of sextortion and to uncover the willingness to seek help and report the incident to authorities. Arnett's emerging adulthood theory provided the framework for this study. The sample consisted of  $N = 27$  responders between 18-24 years of age who have engaged in sexting behaviors and may or may not have experienced sextortion. Simple and multiple regressions were performed using convenience samples to test predictor variables, emotional distress, self-esteem, general help-seeking, reasons for calling the police, disclosure expectations, and self-stigma to seek help and outcome variable, sextortion. Statistically significant correlations existed among variables. Overall, the results displayed insignificant effects of the predictor variables on the outcome variable. The effect of sextortion on the difference in the level of emotional distress revealed no significance,  $F(1, 25) = 1.96, p = .174$ . The effect of sextortion on self-esteem exhibited no significance,  $F(1, 25) = .054, p = .818$ . The effects of sextortion on general help-seeking, reasons for calling the police, disclosure expectations, and self-stigma to seek help collectively uncovered no significance,  $F(1, 25) = 3.105, p = .109$ . The sample size used based on the respective predictor variable, presented challenges to achieve significance at acceptable levels. This study provided a foundation for the implementation of mental health services, prevention programs, and support for those who were found to have experienced sextortion.

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family who shared my vision. They knew that I was steadfast and destined for greatness. My family respected and accepted the time and space I needed to focus on my endeavors. Many sacrifices were made on both ends throughout the entire dissertation process. More importantly, my family's understanding of the process made the mountains less steep to climb. In devotion to my late grandmother who I love dearly, she expressed the importance of education and also pointed out the number of family members with degrees and no careers to show for it. Becoming the first in my family to acquire a degree of this stature, I vowed to put it to constructive use not only for my grandmother, for all members of my family especially my husband, daughter, grandson, mother, father, brother, and nephew. They remained by my side and provided me with the necessary reassurance to complete my dissertation. I could not have achieved this milestone without their unconditional love, support, and praises through every step of this sometimes frustrating yet truly rewarding journey.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Sexting is a trend that has captivated a vast number of adolescents and young adults (Ostrager, 2010), but has potentially put individuals at risk by threatening those who may feel that it is safe to use the digital stage of development to participate in sexual activities via cyberspace (Henderson, 2011). Sexting involves the use of technology via cell phones and Internet, including e-mails, instant messaging, chat lines, and social media websites for the purpose of sending and receiving sexually charged messages and images (Comartin, Kernsmith, & Kernsmith, 2013). A sext message encompasses words of sexual nature that are sent from one individual to another with the use of a cell phone or device permitting online communication (Champion & Pederson, 2015). This modernistic practice of sexual discovery among adolescents and young adults has given rise to concerns (Farber, Shafron, Hamadani, Wald, & Nitzburg, 2012). Judge (2012) asserted that many individuals whom sext may not comprehend or have disregarded the possible negative effects due to the motivation of emotional and impulsive behavior.

Sextortion is a phenomenon that has made an impact on the digital technology domain (Bello, 2014). Sextortion is the incorporation of sex and extortion that commence with a text or sext message or online communication that has open the door for coercion where individuals may perform sexual favors and become sexually victimized (Federal Bureau Investigation [FBI], 2015a). Individuals who have become victims of sextortion were blackmailed with the use of their own sexually explicit material that entailed pictures and videos to gratify another person's demands in a sensual manner (FBI, 2015a). Although frequently used interchangeably, blackmail and extortion are distinct

(HG.org, 2019). Blackmail, a form of extortion, involves humiliating and degrading individuals by sharing their personal information with people in their social network (HG.org, 2019). Extortion includes intimidating and terrorizing an individual to obtain valuables or coaxing an individual into doing some act unwillingly (HG.org, 2019). In sextortion cases, individuals are threatened, persuaded, and pressured by “sextortionists” to comply with their sexual demands (Child Refuge, 2011, p. 1). Otherwise, the person(s) would run the risk of exposure of their sexy images via the Internet, a gateway for millions of computers to connect for mass communication (National Telecommunications and Information Administration [NTIA], 2004; Perkins, Becker, Tehee, & Mackelprang, 2014). Sextortion is an unsolicited act where the initial contact has begun with a vulnerable individual who has either been sextorted or bullied and may have led to victimization and long-term psychological effects (FBI, 2015a).

In March 2009, 15-year-old, freshman Jill Naber who attended a California high school, committed suicide by hanging herself after an indecent photo of her was sent electronically to various individuals and uploaded to an Internet website (Burleigh, 2013). Since Jill’s suicide, an annual bicycle ride has been put into practice to fund counseling and educational outreach services at Jill’s high school for troubled students who face similar issues (Peterson, 2011). According to Peterson (2011), Sunnyvale Public Safety Department responded to Jill’s death by establishing a video that highlighted cyberbullying and made it part of its city’s program on anti-bullying.

A case tried by the Department of Justice (DOJ) exposed a 31-year-old man who conducted an incalculable sextortion plot via Facebook and video chat services, using a

vast number of alias names to mask his identity (“Montgomery Man Pleads,” 2012). The perpetrator reportedly lured his victims in by them believing that he was Justin Bieber, a popular music artist, or a boy who had just moved to their area of residence and was in search of new friends. Hundreds of young female adolescents had fallen victim to this sexual predator’s schemes that expanded all around the United States and other countries. He was charged with child pornography, interstate extortion, and Internet stalking, and sentenced to a minimum of 25 years (“Montgomery Man Pleads,” 2012).

Tompson, Benz, and Agiesta (2013) conducted a study comprised of 1,297 participants ranging from 14-24 years of age to offer research on digital abuse. Tompson et al. (2013) made a comparison to a digital abuse study conducted by The Associated Press and Music Television (MTV) in 2011. MTV is an U.S. cable television channel based in New York City that began with broadcasting music videos but has since expanded to original reality, and comedy and drama programming with a target audience of adolescents and young adults (History.com Editors, 2017). Tompson et al. (2013) found that 49% of young individuals experience digital abuse reflecting a 7% decrease from 2011. Reported incidents of sexting totaled 26%, a 6% decrease from 2011 (Tompson et al., 2013) Reported incidents of digital dating abuse totaled 40% with 11% sending nude images (Tompson et al., 2013). Digital dating abuse or cyber dating abuse have included the use of digital media to dominate a significant other (Van Ouytsel, Ponnet, & Walrave, 2016). Tompson et al (2013) discovered digital abuse to be a serious and societal issue among 76% of young individuals, a 7% increase from 2011.

Sexting and cyberbullying amongst adolescents and young adults equate to one another in the sense that they are regarded as technology abuses of the 21st century where both could be detrimental to an individual depending on the outcome of intended actions (Dake, Price, Maziarz, & Ward, 2012; Siegle, 2010). Sexting and cyberbullying have comprised the use of modern technology that may be performed through all of the properties previously mentioned. The blending of sexting and cyberbullying form the word “sextbullying” and represents a combination of both acts (Eraker, 2010, p. 564). Although the act of sexting may be considered a type of sexual entertainment by many individuals (Willard, 2010), cyberbullying, on the other hand, is an act in which an individual or group of individuals aggressively and deliberately taunt another human being who is typically defenseless (Smith et al., 2008). In addition to the various facets and the power of behavior that ties into cyberbullying, some individuals have more than likely become victims and experienced distress (Goebert, Else, Matsu, Chung-Do, & Chang, 2010). With the use of the Internet and other types of digital technology devices, cyberbullying has resulted in publicized malicious and hurtful acts (Willard, 2005). Cyberbullying spreads wide among adolescents and young adults whose health and welfare has likely been placed at risk and impacted in the process (Stanbrook, 2014).

The exposure of sexting and cyberbullying equates to sextbullying or sextortion and, therefore, should be brought to the forefront to enlighten the public about the dynamic forces of the occurrences and potential long-term effects. Designated facilities, organizations, and mental health and support services may be warranted and put in place to assist sextorted victims. Individuals may feel comfortable with seeking help and or

take a second look at their sexting behaviors that may be putting or have put them at risk of danger or harm. Individuals may begin to feel as if they are not alone and be willing to seek assistance on how to manage their ordeal prior to or once subjected to sextortion.

Sextortion is purportedly on the rise, a phenomenon that has received insightful media coverage since 2010. However, it lacks the necessary tracking of the number of actual cases reported in court systems, government agencies, and private advocacy groups (Wilson, 2010; Wittes, Poplin, Jurecic, & Spera, 2016). To date, the academic arena has provided little literature on sextortion that uncovers the psychological effects experienced and willingness to seek help and report the incident among adolescents and young adults in addition to how many have experienced this ordeal. Sextortion is a needed area of scholarly research that has yet to be studied and conducted (Wittes et al., 2016).

### **Prevalence**

The number of sexting and sextortion incidents reported or uncovered by authorities may be less than the number of incidents that have occurred. Mitchell, Finkelhor, and Wolak (2012) conducted a study involving 149 incidents associated with sexting and found that only 28% of adolescents who self-produced or displayed in an unwelcomed sexual image were reported to or discovered by authority figures such as police officers, parents, and teachers. Self-produced, involved individuals displaying their images versus someone else were displaying another person's images. According to Mitchell et al., authority figures received notice of approximately 28% of adolescents who received sexual imagery. In both instances, around 42 incidents were exposed

(Mitchell et al., 2012). More than two-thirds of the incidents went unreported or uncovered (Mitchell et al., 2012).

Wolak, Finkelhor, and Mitchell (2012) collected a national sample of police reports on sexting and concluded that the number of reports received in 2008 and 2009 totaled 3,477, averaging around 1,750 cases per year. The number of law enforcement agencies that handled sexting cases during this period was 2,290 (Wolak et al., 2012). The rate at which the agencies received reports was indeterminable. The minimal number of cases reported on a yearly basis nationwide speaks to a large number of incidents that have likely gone unreported. Reports of suspected sexual exploitation received through the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) CyberTipline, a hotline designed for children who are alleged victims of sex crimes, totaled over 4.3 million from 1998 to 2015 (NCMEC, 2015). According to NCMEC (2015), the agency reviewed over 139 million images and videos. Incidents related to sextortion have intensified around the world (FBI, 2015c). The reported incidents of sextortion were recorded from October 2013 through June 2015 and amounted to 801 (NCMEC, 2015).

Although a large number of sextortion cases in the United States appear to have gone unreported, more cases have emerged in other countries. Day (2015) affirmed that individuals in the United Kingdom had reported a rash of sexting and sextortion cases where females were either sextorted for sexually explicit images and videos or extorted for money upon engaging in conversations on Facebook or video sex chat lines. Some individuals participated in sexual activities via Skype and were unknowingly recorded (Day, 2015). In England, approximately 25 sextortion cases involving male victims were

reported and investigated by the authorities within 2 months, prompting caution to individuals about safe practices when using the Internet (“Police Warning,” 2015). In the Philippines, a large number of incidental reports of sextortion were received, urging the authorities to initiate a takedown on cybercriminals and sextortionists (Felongco, 2015). Through what authorities in the Philippines referred to as their cross-border operation, named “StrikeBack”, 60 arrests were made as a result (Felongco, 2015, p. 1). One of the incidents concerned a 19-year-old male who committed suicide after he was befriended through a chat line and received threats to send cash to prevent the release of his sexually-explicit material (Felongco, 2015).

### **Background**

Issues on sexting and potential consequences of engaging in such behavior lay at both ends of the spectrum (Boillot Fansher, 2017). The positive end of the spectrum may view sexting as an indication of individuals attempting to develop their own identity and individuality. This development entails individuals forming their viewpoints, learning how to negotiate with others, and setting boundaries; expanding their abstract reasoning; desiring more privacy; exploring their sexual feelings and experimenting to satisfy those sexual curiosities; and enhancing their moral and value systems for greater independence (Radzik, Sherer, & Neinstein, 2007). Most of these areas of development are inherent to an adolescent growth process and likely to be beneficial and support their endeavors in life. When sexting is viewed from the negative end of the spectrum, it may be seen as more of a detriment to adolescents’ lives. Adolescents undergo peer pressure and are expected to participate in various activities (Katzman, 2010). Adolescents are pressured

into engaging in sexting behaviors and experienced a variety of emotional problems as a result (Van Ouytsel, Walrave, Ponnet, & Heirman, 2014). Circulation of sexting material can occur within a matter of seconds over the Internet and through cellphones where control over the material could be lost forever the moment it is transmitted (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2010). Postings of sexually explicit material may be found years later by anyone in the individual's circle of friends, family, employment, or someone with ill intentions (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2010), and it has the potentiality of leading to sextortion.

The FBI (2015a) executed a campaign on Sextortion of Children in the United States to heighten awareness and prevent this innovative type of torment. The four-step process of sextortion entail contact origination—pursuing a victim and obtaining sexually explicit pictures and videos; extortion—perpetrator manipulating the victim; sextortion—victims adhere to demands or bullying possibility—distributing the pictures and videos if the victim is noncompliant; and victimization—long-lasting emotional and physical effects. This process could lead to psychological factors if these types of occurrences remain unreported, allowing the sexual predator to continue victimizing his or her prey until he or she feels he or she is of no more use or succumbs to his or her death. Although the FBI's campaign has educated the public on the process of sextortion, it is still unclear as to what type of psychological factors are suffered such as anxiety, depression, or lowered self-esteem, as well as how many victims have sought help and or reported their incident involving sextortion.

### **Problem Statement**

An issue surrounding sexting has involved individuals posting and sending their sexual images and videos or forwarding and circulating someone else's erotic imagery for others to view (Mitchell et al., 2012). The consequences of their actions could be damaging if such images should end up in the wrong hands of someone who has unfavorable intentions. A vast number of adolescents and young adults have failed to realize that the exchange of sext messages and images may not remain concealed (Walrave, Heirman, & Hallam, 2014). The age range of adolescents and young adults who fall into this category and are under study is 18-24-year-olds, an age group referred to as emerging adults (Arnett, 2000).

Gomez and Ayala (2014) concluded that young individuals who are suffering from depression might search for or display love through sexting. More harm than help is likely to be the outcome when sexting under either condition. When individuals send sexually explicit images to someone whom they believe is looking out for their best interest and their images are forwarded for others to view, this may result in loss of associations and status (Brown, Keller, & Stern, 2009). Although these discoveries shed light on issues that are potentially threatening to adolescents and young adults, more attention should be paid to how individuals are subjected to sextortion. Not all occurrences involve consenting individuals who participate in sexting activities. More occurrences are surfacing around the world and are comprised of intimidation and unlawful pursuit (Eraker, 2010).

Sextortion is allegedly in an upsurge, a phenomenon covered by the media since 2010; however, court systems, government agencies, and private advocacy groups have yet to disclose a tracking number or the actual number of cases reported (Wilson, 2010; Wittes et al., 2016). The academic arena lacks pertinent literature on sextortion that unearths the psychological effects experienced and willingness to seek help and report the incident among adolescents and young adults as well as how many have experienced this ordeal. Research is needed on sextortion (Wittes et al., 2016). Sextortion may have impacted a vast number of individuals where their most intimate pictures and videos were exposed to the world via the Internet upon failure to comply with the perpetrator's demands. The exposure could lead to emotional distress (Cohen-Almagor, 2015). Emotional distress may manifest in the form of anxiety, depression, or lower self-esteem. Sexbullied individuals may have endured psychologically suffering and lost relationships and jobs in the process (Goode, 2013). Several individuals have contemplated suicide due to mental anguish (Colberg, 2010). Other individuals have lost their lives to suicide as a result of sexting and sextortion (Lau, 2012; "Lessons from Teen Tragedy," 2012).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the psychological effects felt and willingness to seek help and report the incident of sextortion among emerging adults; in addition, I wished to uncover how many emerging adults have experienced sextortion. I explored if an individual who has engaged in sexting behaviors and experienced sextortion was more likely to endure anxiety, depression, and lower self-esteem than someone who has sexted and never experienced sextortion. I also explored if an

individual who has engaged in sexting behaviors and experienced sextortion felt less empowered to seek supportive services than someone who has sexted and never experienced sextortion. I further sought to examine if individuals endured psychological effects once they experienced sextortion and if their decision to seek assistance and report the incident to authorities was adversely impacted given the type of occurrence.

Wittes et al. (2016) focused on sextortion as understudied, violent, common, performed mostly by male perpetrators who are often repeat offenders, and comprised of cases that are not prosecuted in a consistent manner. Investigating the psychological effects, willingness to report, and how many individuals have undergone the experience of sextortion may address some of the unanswered questions in Wittes et al.'s study. This study may also offer distinctive perspectives of sextortion that will aid in developing areas of scholarly research not fully established.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

To obtain a greater understanding of the issues surrounding sextortion, a comparison made between emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion to emerging adults who have sexted and not experienced sextortion offered some insight. Exploring sexting with and without the subjection of sextortion allows for the examination of emerging adults' (18-24-year-olds) experiences, if any, of emotional distress such as anxiety, depression, and lower self-esteem after only engaging in sexting behaviors or with exposure to sextortion as well. Emotional distress is a psychological phrase that is used to indicate symptoms of anxiety and depression (Hankin, Kassel, & Abela, 2005). The exploration of emerging adults' sexting experiences may bring some

comprehension to how many individuals are negatively impacted by sextortion and if their sexting behaviors play a role in sextortion. Exploring the willingness to seek psychological help and report the incident to authorities was examined to understand how eager or empowered emerging adults are to pursue services and support under either circumstance. The following questions provided answers to these inquiries:

1. Is there a difference in the level of emotional distress between emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion and those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion? Levels of emotional distress measured with the use of the Inventory of Depression and Anxiety symptoms (IDAS) provided data indicated. Formulation of two hypotheses from this research question helped differentiate emotional distress in the form of anxiety and depression. Individuals may experience anxiety and depression, but not necessarily both at the same time. The IDAS assisted with identifying symptoms of anxiety and general depression (predictor variables), which could stem from the subjection of sextortion (outcome variable). The hypotheses entailed the following:

*H01a:* Higher levels of emotional distress in the form of anxiety as measured by the IDAS is not endured more by emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion than those who have sexted and experienced sextortion.

*Ha1a:* Higher levels of emotional distress in the form of anxiety as measured by the IDAS is endured more by emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion than those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion.

*H01b*: Higher levels of emotional distress in the form of depression as measured by the IDAS is not endured more by emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion than those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion.

*Ha1b*: Higher levels of emotional distress in the form of depression as measured by the IDAS is endured more by emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion than those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion.

2. Is there a difference in the level of self-esteem between emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion and those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion? This was measured using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES). The RSES aimed at distinguishing decreased self-esteem (predictor variable), which could result from the subjection of sextortion (outcome variable). The hypotheses entailed the following:

*H02*: Emerging adults' self-esteem as measured by the RSES is not likely to decrease more for those who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion than those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion.

*Ha2*: Emerging adults' self-esteem as measured by the RSES is likely to decrease more for those who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion than those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion.

3. Is there a difference in the level of willingness to seek help or report the incident to authorities or loved ones between emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion and those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion? The differences were measured with the employment of the General Help-

Seeking Questionnaire (GHSQ) and Reasons for Calling the Police Questionnaire (RCP-A, RCP-B). Participants were asked to complete the Disclosure Expectations Scale (DES) and Self-Stigma of Seeking Help Scale (SSOSHS) if they indicated that they would not seek assistance from anyone. Four hypotheses devised from this research question aided in the distinctions between an individual seeking assistance from a professional or someone else, reporting the incident to authorities, decline to disclose, and troubled by self-stigma. Although some individuals may decide to do seek help and report their incident, other individuals may choose one over the other or neither one. The GHSQ, DES, and SSOSHS helped discern an individual's willingness to seek assistance (predictor variable), and the RCP-A and RCP-B uncovered an individual's willingness to report the incident to authorities (predictor variable), which could impact their decision upon the subjection of sextortion (outcome variable). The hypotheses entailed the following:

*H03a:* Emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion are not less willing to seek psychological help or help from someone else as measured by the GHSQ than those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion.

*Ha3a:* Emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion are less willing to seek psychological help or help from someone else as measured by the GHSQ than those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion.

*H03b:* Emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion are not less willing to report the incident to authorities as measured by the RCP-A, RCP-B than those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion.

*Ha3b:* Emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion are less willing to report the incident to authorities as measured by the RCP-A, RCP-B than those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion.

*H03c:* Emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion are not less inclined to disclose as measured by the DES than those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion.

*Ha3c:* Emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion are less inclined to disclose as measured by the DES than those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion.

*H03d:* Emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion are not more troubled by self-stigma as measured by the SSOSHS than those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion.

*Ha3d:* Emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion are more troubled by self-stigma as measured by the SSOSHS than those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework used in the research was Arnett's emerging adulthood theory. Emerging adults encompass individuals in their late adolescence through mid-20s (18-to 25-years-old; Arnett, 2000). The emerging adults have included 26-to 29-year-olds when the impact of globalization and cultural identity development were considered (Jensen & Arnett, 2012). Arnett (2007) posited that the elected name for this age group (emerging adulthood) is most warranted given that it is a new phrase for a new

phenomenon. The emerging adulthood is an age period where individuals enter into a volition phase while discovering their independence (Arnett, 2000). Arnett (2000) delineated five major characteristics of emerging adulthood: (a) age of identity explorations, (b) age of instability, (c) age of self-focused, (d) age of feeling in-between, and (e) age of possibilities. These various aspects may result in emerging adults encountering many challenges upon attempting to progress through this phase of life. This phase is a high point for emerging adults where they exhibit a vast number of behaviors that are dissuaded by society to include risky sexual behaviors (Arnett, 2005). A significant number of emerging adults are troubled with mental health issues and disorders during this period (Tanner & Arnett, 2016). The National Comorbidity Survey Replication (NCS-R) uncovered that each year, 40%-50% of emerging adults meet the criteria for at least one mental disorder (Kessler et al., 2004).

Tanner and Arnett (2016) stressed the importance of establishing conceptual models to describe emerging adults' development and adjustment in efforts to characterize problems with the inclusion of mental health connected to this age-linked period. Conceptualization of a three-stage process evolved into the establishment of "recentering" (Tanner, 2006). Tanner and Arnett (2016) depicted the first stage as the coming of age (18-years-old) where the individual is recognized as a legal adult. The second stage, known as the emerging adulthood proper, outlined the expectancies of emerging adults who should be held accountable to meet their own needs (Tanner & Arnett, 2016). The third stage consisted of emerging adults committing to the process relative to roles, relationships, and responsibilities (Tanner & Arnett, 2016). This process

is done by making connections between self and work, family, and community to form their adult development and adjustment to societal norms.

Questions of interest have regarded adolescents' desire to engage in behaviors consisting of legal, physical, or psychological risks, as well as the contributing factors relating to the development and socialization that result in reckless behavior (Arnett, 1995). Arnett (1995) concluded that reckless behavior stems from intensifying growth-related factors that interact with one another, specifically sensation seeking, egocentrism, aggressiveness, and the cultural socialization environment. Along with this, promoting autonomy and creativity in adolescents may allow them to live to their full potential. However, all of these factors tend to foster and heighten reckless behavior in some form or fashion. A major developmental aspect of adolescents is an intensified level of sensation seeking, which may result in reckless behavior (Arnett, 1995). Arnett (1995) found that sensations to engage in sexual activities are unique and powerful among adolescents. Arnett (1994) examined college students' notion of transitioning to adulthood and their adult status. More than 70% of participants out of 346 placed more emphases on individuality and impartiality (Arnett, 1994). Respondents indicated the willingness to assume more responsibility for the outcomes of their actions and taking on their own beliefs and values as opposed to their parents or influences of others (Arnett, 1994). This comes at a time when cognitive self-sufficiency, emotional self-reliance, and behavioral self-control are attempting to be achieved by adolescents (Arnett & Taber, 1994). Arnett's (2004) expectation was that the emerging adulthood would result in a more profound comprehension and rigorous study. This current study intended to draw

attention to emerging adults as it relates to sexual activities that are potentially leading to sextortion within their population.

### **Nature of the Study**

In this quantitative study, I investigated the new trend among the adolescent and young adult population ranging from 18-to 24-years-old referred to as sextortion. The employment of depression and anxiety symptoms scales helped determine if emotional distress is experienced upon becoming a victim of sextortion. The employment of a self-esteem questionnaire assisted with determining if a person's self-esteem is decreased more once subjected to sextortion. The employment of a willingness to seek help questionnaire assisted with determining if a person is willing to seek therapy or from someone else upon subjection of sextortion. The employment of a reason to call the police questionnaire assisted with determining if a person is willing to report the incident to authorities once subjected to sextortion. The employment of a disclosure questionnaire assisted with determining why a person may be less inclined to seek assistance upon their subjection to sextortion. The employment of a self-stigma of seeking help questionnaire assisted with determining if a person is troubled by self-stigma once subjected to sextortion.

### **Operational Definitions**

*Cyberbullying:* Cyberbullying comprises various types of ongoing harassment and taunting through the use of cell phones or the Internet via social media websites, e-mail, and chat lines (Stanbrook, 2014).

*Emerging adulthood:* A new concept of development surrounding late adolescents to 20s, with concentration mainly on 18-to 25-year-olds (Arnett & Taber, 1994).

*Internet:* The Internet permits millions of computers to interconnect as a means of transferring data to one another worldwide (NTIA, 2004).

*Sextbullying:* The merging of sexting and cyberbullying (Eraker, 2010).

*Sexting:* Sexting is the electronic transmission of sexually explicit pictures and or videos using cellphones or other digital devices to send and receive sext messages and material (Wolak & Finkelhor, 2011).

*Sextortion:* Sextortion is a form of corruption that involves blackmailing individuals by using their sexual images and videos to satisfy another person's sexual demands in an indirect or direct manner (FBI, 2015a).

### **Assumptions, Scope and Delimitations, and Limitations**

#### **Assumptions**

Sexting has become one of the most popular trends among adolescents and young adults (Ostrager, 2010), sparking controversy within the media (Judge, 2012). Individuals subjected to sextortion are apprehensive about seeking help or reporting the incident due to the embarrassment and humiliation that is attached to the sexual offenses (International Associates of Women Judges [IAWJ], 2013). I assumed that the surveys and questionnaires employed would effectively address the research questions presented. I also assumed that the surveys and questionnaires would be reliable and valid as found in previous studies.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

Delimitations of this study extended to culturally diverse adolescents and young adults ranging from ages 18-to 24-years-old. Targeting this age offered more advantages because they are no longer considered minors. They may be less at risk of harm than younger adolescents and children. If participants did not fall in this age range, the findings might have lacked generalizability to other groups. Recruitments of participants took place on the Internet, and from three colleges and one university. The study excluded individuals who have never sexted and or experienced sextortion that led to anxiety, depression, or lower self-esteem.

The Internet connects to individuals from all walks of life across the globe allowing for an infinite number of individuals to participate in this study. The colleges and university offered a greater opportunity to hone in on the emerging adult population. Although dropping out of the study was not a significant issue because respondents participated at one point in time, many of these respondents could have chosen to do so due to the type of study under investigation. Individuals had the opportunity to weigh out their risks and benefits as it related to participating in this study and their present circumstances. They could have concluded that the benefits did not outweigh the risks and opted not to participate in this study halfway through completion or all together. What could have posed serious issues to this study were self-selection and missing data biases. Both issues could have arisen despite my caution (Hernán, Hernández-Díaz, & Robins, 2004). Self-selection bias could have transpired from the restricted nature of the study. Only participants who willingly chose to do so participated in the study. Missing

data bias could have occurred for various reasons such as a participant may have unintentionally skipped an inquiry, been hesitant to respond to inquiries, or left an inquiry blank with thoughts of returning to provide an answer, but never revisit it.

### **Limitations**

Participants who desired to remain anonymous had the option of doing so, especially participating in this type of study, which could have presented problems due to conducting Internet research (Ahern, 2005). These problems could have comprised privacy concerns that led to participation reluctance, participants' being deceitful and providing dishonest responses, and research techniques employed (Pittenger, 2003). Participation was voluntary in this study. Participants may have lacked inspiration to disclose such personal information. Due to the sensitive nature of the research, the sample may have lacked representation of the population (Ahern, 2005). This could have or have not been the case because there was no way to determine the likelihood of a well-represented population (Trochim, 2000). This type of research might have enmeshed social appeal, underreporting, or overreporting due to the self-reported and self-administered inventory and questionnaires provided over the Internet and through schools to participants. Another limitation pertained to the inability to directly assess participants' actual emotional and physical wellbeing due to the online interaction and anonymity. Because the research took place over the Internet and through schools, there was no face-to-face contact with participants to personally assess and observe their overall welfare.

### **Significance of the Study**

The implications of this study are significant given the novelty of sextortion. This study aimed at examining the profoundness of sextortion to uncover if the emerging adult population has endured emotional distress or psychological effects resulting in depression, anxiety, and decreased self-esteem if subjected to sextortion. Another goal was to explore if this population is willing to seek help such as mental health services to address their emotional distress or any psychological effects, if experienced, and report the incident to the authorities or someone else in efforts of putting an end to their ordeal and the sextortionist doing this to anyone else. Although benefits would have come from gaining insight into all aspects of participants under study, more focus was placed on how the emerging adults who have sexted and experienced sextortion differed from those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion. These findings could assist with the comprehension of how sextortion is affecting emerging adults and the number of individuals impacted by this type of torment.

Sextortion occurs across the globe and often remains hidden, making it difficult to learn the true prevalence of the act (Myers, 2014). Severe and punitive reports of sextortion-related incidents have provided useful data, and serious reports continue to surface around the world (NCMEC, 2015). However, there is an inconsistency in the number of incidents that have occurred compared to the number of incidents reported. The importance lies in heightening awareness about the effects of sextortion on subjection and uncovering how many individuals have experienced this phenomenon. Understanding the magnitude of sextortion, its impact, and the number of individuals

impacted is crucial to putting a plan into action to combat sextortion. This type of study may make a contribution to scholarly research, an area of research that is insignificant at this time. This study would inform schools, government bodies, health professionals, and communities to promote social change.

The social change implications of this study have significance, which stems from the lack of research and knowledge currently surrounding sextortion. Although sexting was not the main focus of this study, it was used as a platform to begin the conversation and help shed more light on sextortion. Although the consensus among some adolescents and young adults is that sexting is fun and flirty (Katzman, 2010), this population has neglected to acknowledge how sexting could be harmful to their health, overall wellbeing, and future endeavors (Comartin et al., 2013; Mitchell et al., 2012). Sexting could become a detriment to some individuals' lives if their sexually explicit material is transmitted without permission and their relational and or psychological wellbeing becomes impacted (Dake et al., 2012). The association between sexting and psychological factors is vague, just as the association between sextortion and psychological factors is unclear (Gordon-Messer, Bauermeister, Grodzinski, & Zimmerman, 2013). This study aimed at uncovering the phenomenon of sextortion in efforts to bring about social change and diminish or put an end to this form of corruption that is degrading and shaming individuals worldwide (IAWJ, 2012). Although sextortion has received some news coverage through the press, it does not appear to be enough. Many members of society seem to be oblivious to what sextortion entails or how individuals are subjected to it (Gutfleish, 2017). If prominent members of society such as

authorities' figures, government officials, and service providers were speaking out about sextortion on a micro and macro level, the ways in which individuals could defend themselves and maintain protection would be addressed and circulated throughout society.

This study may become a catalyst for other researchers to build on research in the area of sextortion. Given that this area of study is fresh and lacks scholarly literature, = research conducted for this study may help to increase individuals' knowledge by delivering a more profound understanding of sextortion and its detriments. Adolescents, young adults, mental health providers, law enforcement, the criminal justice system, policymakers, and society would benefit from this type of research. This research may be used to enlighten society about the dynamic forces of sextortion and issues that warrant immediate attention. In such a case, data would be disseminated to the proper authorities to validate the need for social change and order.

At present, the majority of information on sextortion is filtered through law enforcement and the criminal justice system by way of arrests and convictions, if the incident is reported and the sextortionist is captured. The psychological effects experienced in addition to the approximate number of individuals subjected to sextortion remain unknown due to many sextorted victims possibly having trepidations about reporting this type of incident in fear of further harassment or exposure. To date, little to no scholarly studies have reported on such incidents. This study set out to lay the groundwork and initiate in-depth conversations about sextortion where prevention

programs and treatment could be implemented to provide support and mental health services to sextorted victims.

Although I concentrated on emerging adulthood, anyone at any age can become a victim of sextortion. The targeted population encompassed emerging adults who are at a period in their lives where self-expression and self-sufficiency are imperative to them. Emerging adults have arrived at an age where they start to assume more responsibilities and are held accountable for their actions. This is also a period where emerging adults are undergoing structural brain modifications until they reach 25 years of age (Milliken & Campbell, 2015). Although this population is filled with vulnerability, they are likely to be less vulnerable than younger adolescents or children. Many emerging adults are ready to explore the world and open to trying new phenomena; however, exploration of these new phenomena may result in positive or negative outcomes.

Individuals could begin to think twice about the risks associated with sexting, which may have the potentiality of resulting in sextortion. By heightening awareness and bringing it to the forefront, the proper measures could be taken to protect those who are willing to speak about their ordeal and those who find it most difficult to do so. If more incidents are reported, this could detour individuals who are sextorting others from performing this act that could be ruining people lives in various ways for many years to come.

### **Summary**

Sextortion is a type of corruption that could be impacting a significant number of individuals' lives. Individuals are sextorted by giving into the sextortionist demands to

transmit sexually explicit pictures and videos to please their sexual appetites. If victims do not succumb to their predators' pressures, their sexy material is likely sent to friends, family, school, employment, and the Internet where the total number of people viewing the material could become infinite. Many of these cases have gone unreported due to feelings of humiliation and stigma. Fully comprehending the magnitude of sextortion and how it has impacted individuals is crucial to empowering, diminishing, and preventing such ordeal. Because there is a deficiency in research on sextortion, various aspects of sexting and cyberbullying were examined to gain a greater understanding of how individuals are becoming subjected to sextortion. Goals of this study entailed enlightening and empowering individuals so they would not be victimized or continue to be victimized, and instead, speak out about their victimization in attempts to prevent sextortionists from preying on them and others who remain unknown.

Chapter 2 of this study includes a comprehensive review of the literature on the attitudes of adolescents and young adults relative to sexting; sexting prevalence, behaviors, and risks; cyberbullying; and psychological issues experienced by individuals who were sexually victimized due to their engagement in sexting activities. Literature involving sextortion cases investigated by the FBI and tried by the Department of Justice were systematically reviewed as well.

In Chapter 3, I examine the research design and methodology of this study. I further discuss the rationalization for the use of the selected approach, population, sampling and sampling procedures, recruitment, participation, predata collection, and ethical procedures. In Chapter 4, I report descriptive statistics that characterized the

sample. I also report statistical analysis findings, organized by research questions and hypotheses. Tables are used to illustrate results. Chapter 5 provides a summarization and interpretation of the central findings, the limitations of the study, recommendations for further research, implications for social change, and the conclusion of the study.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

I examined various aspects of sexting to uncover the potentiality of undergoing sextortion. I investigated the psychological effects associated with sextortion. Specifically, emotional distress in the form of anxiety and depression and lower self-esteem underwent an examination. An investigation of the willingness to seek therapy and report the incident to authorities occurred as well. The literature surrounding sextortion is inadequate due to the nature and freshness of the crime (Myers, 2014). Scholarly and academic literature on sextortion is minimal. Detailed accounts are provided regarding those who underwent conviction and sentenced to federal prison for sextortion. I focused on the attitudes of adolescents and young adults referred to as emerging adults relative to sexting. I explored sexting prevalence, behaviors, and risks in addition to the psychological issues that may be undergone by emerging adults who have experienced or could face sexual victimization as a result of their willingness or unwillingness to engage in sexting activities. I examined sextortion cases investigated by the FBI and tried by the Department of Justice. I assessed relevant literature to acquire the rates of incidental reporting and psychological assistance.

In this section, I discuss the search strategies employed to acquire relevant literature. The theoretical foundation manifested through the variables and concepts related to the literature review. The key variables and concepts examined entail sexting nuances, the pervasiveness of sexting, sexting views, sexting risks, and consequences of sexting behaviors among emerging adults. I examined psychological factors associated

with sexting and sextortion as well as reported incidents of sextortion and seeking psychological assistance. I explored sexting and cyberbullying resulting in sextortion and victimization upon summarizing and concluding the section.

### **Strategy Applied to Literature Search**

To obtain sources, I searched the following databases: EBSCOhost, Thoreau, ProQuest Central, LexisNexis, and Google Scholar. Keywords such as sexting, sexting behaviors, sexting risks, sexting prevalence, sexting leading to anxiety, sexting leading to depression, sextortion, sextortion leading to anxiety, sextortion leading to depression, sexual victimization, victimization, sexual coercion, bullying, bullying and extortion, cyberbullying, sharing personal photos and videos, seeking professional help, seeking help from a mental health professional, adolescents, and young adults. EBSCOhost offered an array of scholarly articles, journals, and books. The databases explored within EBSCOhost on the areas of interest included PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, and SAGE Premier.

PsycINFO encompassed approximately 3 million citations dating back several centuries and is the most prestigious American Psychological Association (APA) resource database for behavioral and mental health studies. The database yielded 6,476 results on victimization (1841-2016) and 57 results when including adolescents and young adults; 647 results on sexual victimization (1946-2016) and 10 results when including adolescents and young adults; 247 results for seeking professional help (1942-2015) and two results when including adolescents and young adults; 88 results on seeking help from a mental professional (1841-2016) and zero results when including adolescents

and young adults; 37 results on sexting (2010-2015) and one result when including adolescents and young adults; and zero result for sextortion, sexual coercion, and sharing personal photos and videos.

PsycARTICLES is an APA resource. The database produced 139 results on sexual victimization (1982-2016) and zero results when including adolescents and young adults; 60 seeking professional help (1942-2015) and zero results when including adolescents and young adults; two results on sexting (2014) and zero results on sextortion and sexual coercion.

SAGE Premier maintains present-day literature in psychology. The database generated a search from 1847-2016, which encompassed 2,502 results on sexual victimization and 409 results when including adolescents and young adults; 398 results on seeking professional help and 42 results when including adolescents and young adults; 171 results on sexting and 34 results when including adolescents and young adults, and one result found on sextortion.

Thoreau assisted with the examination of a multitude of databases at once for scholarly literature on issues relating to sexting. The database yielded 5,672 results on sexual victimization (1903-2016) and 133 results when including adolescents and young adults; 2,184 on seeking professional help (1988-2015) and 133 results when including adolescents and young adults; 2,269 results on sexting (2009-2015), which 499 were scholarly journals, and 23 results (22 scholarly) when including adolescents and young adults; 82 results on sextortion of which two were scholarly, and zero results when

including adolescents and young adults; and 4,062 results on sexual coercion (1901-2016), and 82 results when including adolescents and young adults.

ProQuest Central is comprised of scholarly and peer-reviewed literature where material on sexting and the emerging adulthood population underwent scrutiny. The database produced 6,277 results on sexting (2000-2016), which 54 were scholarly journals; 16 results (three scholarly journals) when including adolescents and young adults, and 474 results on sextortion (2009-2015) of which one was scholarly, and zero results when including adolescents and young adults; and 2,398 results on sexual coercion (1979-2016) and 55 results when including adolescents and young adults.

LexisNexis consisted of complete publications and legal cases on sexting and sextortion. The database generated 998 results on sexting and 356 results when including adolescents and young adults, and 652 results on sextortion and six results when including adolescents and young adults.

Google Scholar contained academic publishers and research organizations addressing diverse aspects of sexting as it relates to nuances, pervasiveness, standpoints, perils, behaviors, psychological factors, related reports, services sought, and cyberbullying. The database yielded 7,710 results dating back to 1950 to present and 3,570 results when including adolescents and young adults; there were 123 results on sextortion (2005-2016) and 75 results when including adolescents and young adults. The term bullying alone yielded 469,000 results dating back to the 18th century to the present. Sexting as it relates to bullying was introduced in the 21st century. Reference lists from

other authors and researchers furnished additional sources due to the scarcity of scholarly literature on sextortion especially.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

The theoretical foundation evolved from Arnett's emerging adulthood theory. The emerging adulthood is a transitional period comprised of late adolescents and young adults ranging from 18- 25 years of age (Arnett, 2000). Construction of the theory helped introduce a new phenomenon due to the ineffectiveness of other terms involving adolescence, adulthood, and youth in this age group (Arnett, 2007). Biological along with social and cultural elements are dominant factors to emerging adults progressing from the adolescence stage to adulthood (Arnett, 2003). Emerging adults place importance on shifting into adulthood to establish individuality as it relates to undertaking accountability for their actions, determining their own beliefs and values, having a uniformed relationship with their parents, and establishing financial independence (Arnett, 2001). Although contended as a positive period for the majority of individuals in this age group, heterogeneity and developmental difficulties play a role where various individuals may face some serious issues during this time (Arnett, 2007).

Tanner (2006a) developed a model coined as recentering. Recentering encompasses emerging adults leaving their childish and adolescence ways behind and becoming more independent where they take responsibility for their actions and take control of own their lives. As Arnett (2007) affirmed, recentering is a crucial point in the life span development for it is distinctive, the shift of norms between the individual and society can be melodramatic and at the transitional stage leading to adulthood.

Recentering comprises three stages that entail the acknowledgment of legal-age social status; assuming responsibility for getting their needs met in the areas of education, occupation, and interpersonal skills; and transitioning from emerging adulthood to young adulthood, which involves work, family, and the community. The primary objective for recentering is to decrease instability and increase stability among emerging adults (Arnett, 2007).

The standard developmental path that emerging adults within this age group are expected to follow consist of five facets that possess empirical backing (Arnett, 2006a, 2006b). Arnett (2006a, 2006b) defined these facets as the age of identity explorations—a chief challenge for adolescents who are in search for love and employment; the age of instability—a typical norm where instability is at its peak; the self-focused age—institutional regulation is relinquished and more decisions are freely made making them more vulnerable to outside forces; the age of feeling in between—uncertainty of their attainment into adulthood; the age of possibilities—numerous opportunities that could result in either positive or negative outcomes.

Arnett's (2006a, 2006b) emerging adulthood theory exhibits the implications of sexting behaviors among emerging adults who can fall victim to sextortion where the victims' sense of empowerment to reveal their sexual victimization may be weakened, and the magnitude of divulging their incident or lack thereof may impact their capacity to live a fruitful life. Sexting appears to be widespread throughout schools ranging from middle school to college (Farber et al., 2012). Although currently unknown, sexting resulting in sextortion may be a hidden epidemic among emerging adults who are still

attending school. Sextortion should be addressed (FBI, 2010) and discussed within school systems around the world given that this population is most vulnerable to such victimization. Although Arnett's theory has drawbacks (Hendry & Kloep, 2007), Arnett (2004, 2006a, 2007) provided insight into how and why emerging adults are encountering challenges while transitioning from adolescents to young adults. The purpose of using emerging adulthood theory in the present study aimed at exploring emerging adults' sexting behaviors that are possibly putting their lives at risk of potential danger or harm. Due to adolescents reaching their sexual peak and seeking sensations that involve the engagement of fresh and strong sexual activity (Arnett, 1995), the emerging adulthood theory will bring about awareness to how these populations may expose themselves to unsolicited sexual acts that are possibly stemming from their sexting behaviors and potentially leading to sextortion.

### **Literature Review Relative to Major Variables and Concepts**

#### **Sexting Nuances**

Sexting is a trendy word that is used loosely across the globe, making it difficult to define when conducting research given all of its nuances (Agustina & Gomez-Duran, 2012; Herman, 2010; Judge, 2012; Sacco, Argudin, Maguire, & Talloong, 2010). Sexting is a phrase used to convey sensual messages or performances, provocation, and schemes displayed through a variety of behaviors related to sex (Eraker, 2010). An operational definition of sexting is the transmission of sexual messages, photos, and or videos with the use of digital technology, including cell phones, e-mails, and the Internet (Comartin et al., 2013; Perkins et al., 2014; Stone, 2011; Strassberg, McKinnon, Sustaita, & Rullo,

2013; Wysocki & Childers, 2011). Although the creation and distribution of seminude and nude pictures and videos is a longstanding practice for many individuals, the innovation of sexting has made it effortless to send, receive, and forward sexually stimulating material with just a push of a button on a digital gadget (Delevi & Weisskirch, 2013). Sexting encompasses a range of actions such as creating images and videos of self or another individual wearing only undergarments or swimwear or while topless, bottomless, or fully nude (Doring, 2014). A host of sexual acts may be performed during the process of producing sexually explicit images. The supposed anonymity that comes along with sexting and the usage of cell phones and the Internet can leave individuals exposed to other vulnerabilities (Williams, 2012). The Internet links up millions of computers for individuals to communicate with one another. The anonymity that is thought to exist vanishes when sexting contains some type of face-to-face interaction that may include meeting in person or using a webcam, which no longer provides a full escape from reality (Parker, Blackburn, Perry, & Hawks, 2013).

Sexting has become part of a vast number of individuals' vocabulary. Sexting progressed in the media around 2007 (Judge, 2012), and came in first place on Time Magazine's buzzword of 2009 (Stephey, 2009). Sexting and its variations have sparked a pronounced amount of interest (Walker, Sanci, & Smith, 2011). Although curiosity has piqued on both a micro and macro level, peer-reviewed literature is lacking when it comes to filling in the necessary gaps in research to address what some may consider serious issues surrounding sexting. A contributor to the limited scholarly literature has stemmed from more focus being placed on cases concerning adolescents who are

badgered after their explicit photos and videos are forwarded to others, resulting in harassment, suicide, or legal cases implicating adolescents who are criminally charged for child pornography (Temple et al., 2012). Difficulty lies in how to handle the diverse issues linked to sexting among various experts in the legal and health fields (Ferguson, 2010; Judge, 2012). Members of society once had the capability of describing typical adolescent conduct, unpredictable sexual activities, and sexual offenses; now these issues have become somewhat indistinguishable (Weiss & Samenow, 2010).

Finding a resolution to decrease the number of issues related to sexting commands attention. The troubles tied into sexting may become progressively injurious to many as the number of adolescents and young adults persist with their cellphone and World Wide Web practices (Jaishankar, 2009). Some parents and teachers have spoken out about the harmful consequences of sexting, online harassment, and sexual solicitation (Farber et al., 2012). Many parents lack awareness of the sexting craze and its applicable by-laws (Ostrager, 2010). Although this study has incorporated literature on preadolescent to adults, the main focus is on 18-to 24-year-olds whose parents and teachers may not be actively involved to address the sexting phenomenon given this population is likely to assume responsibilities for their own lives. Although legislation may or may not be the resolution, the manufacturing of cell phones is exceeding legislations to inhibit such practices (Herman, 2010). The inconsistency may be due to the disharmony that surrounds how to properly respond to the sexting phenomenon that is widespread (Eraker, 2010), and appears to be prominent among emerging adults within society (Stone, 2011).

### **Pervasiveness of Sexting among Emerging Adults**

A significant number of studies conducted made attempts to determine the pervasiveness of sexting among adolescents and young adults. The actual prevalence is indeterminable due to incomplete, conflicting, and varying results that currently exist (Comartin et al., 2013; Prather & Vandiver, 2014). Besides the variations in populations researched, a diversity of surveys, methods, samples, and measures all play a role in the discrepancy of occurrences across studies (Doring, 2014). The various characterizations and conceptions of sexting, mystery of behavior, human development, and technology progression may be attributed to the inconsistencies in prevalence rates (Ahern & Mechling, 2013; Walrave et al., 2014). Besides the differing types of readily available communicative devices, the prevalence of sexting may in part result from social normality and peer pressure (Dake et al., 2012).

Mitchell, Finkelhor, and Wolak (2003) examined the evolving issues concerning preadolescents and adolescents and Internet usage. Mitchell et al. recruited 1,501 participants from ages 10-to17-years-old who frequent the Internet and found that 4.5 million preadolescents and adolescents are faced with ill-intent each year when using the Internet in their homes (74%), schools (73%), other residences (68%), and libraries (32%; Mitchell et al., 2003). The population exposure has led to unwelcome sexual content (25%), sexual solicitation (19%), and harassment (6%; Mitchell et al., 2003). Where females (66%) were more likely to be solicited sexually than males (34%), males (57%) were exposed to more uninvited sexually explicit material than females (42%; Mitchell et al., 2003). Similar experiences of harassment effect males and females (51% versus

48%). Some of the perpetrators of these offensive acts were adult men, but a larger percentage was male youths along with a large number of females. Although the majority of the preadolescents and adolescents did not feel unease with the solicitations, exposure, and harassment, a significant number did report being upset, afraid, embarrassed, or depressed (Mitchell et al., 2003). Adolescents and young adults alike, online interactions and activities, posting of intimate and sensitive information, and affiliations with different social networking sites have cause for concerns regarding the use of the Internet and safety among the populations (Wolak, Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Ybarra, 2008).

Similarly, Lenhart (2009a) uncovered that 93% of preadolescents and early adolescents ranging from 12-to 17-years-old use the Internet with 63% going online on a daily basis. The teens found to go online, 89% use the Internet at home, 77% use the Internet while in school, 71% use the Internet at a family member's or friend's home, and 60% use the Internet at a library (Lenhart, 2009a). Lenhart discovered that 71% of teens owned cell phones, and 38% routinely communicated through text messaging. Late adolescents and young adults ranging from 18-31 years of age participated in the study, and 91% were found to go online, 74% possess cellphones, and 85% primary communication was sent through text messaging (Lenhart, 2009a).

The most comprehensive and largely cited nonpeer-reviewed study on the pervasiveness of sexting among adolescents and young adults was conducted online by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy and CosmoGirl.com (2008). The study involved 1,280 participants (653 adolescents' ages 13-19 and 627 young adults ages 20-26) ranging from 13-26- years-old who reported sending and or

posting sexually suggestive texts messages and images (“The National Campaign,” 2008). The National Campaign revealed that young adults (59%) engaged in more sexting activities than adolescents (39%). Results further uncovered that adolescents (75%) and young adults (71%) admitted to their awareness of possible serious and detrimental effects linked to the transmission of sexually explicit content, but continuously sent indecent imagery and messages (“The National Campaign,” 2008). Although the study reported on the prevalence of sexting and mindfulness of potential harm, no data existed on how individuals are negatively impacted by sexting. By not providing this information, both adolescents and young adults may instinctively feel that the benefits of sexting may outweigh the costs to diminish or stop their engagement in such activity (Comartin et al., 2013).

Consistent with The National Campaign (2008) study, Temple et al. (2012) found that older adolescents were more likely to engage in sexting compared to younger adolescents. A total of 948 adolescents ranging from 14-19 years of age participated in the study and results revealed that males (27.8%) and females (27.5%) are comparable when it comes to sexting (Temple et al., 2012). Temple et al. maintained that males (46%) are more inclined to request a sext than females (21%). In a study comprised of 606 high school students revealed that 20% had transmitted indecent material whereas students nearly doubling that number reported receiving such material (Strassberg et al., 2013). Strassberg et al. (2013) proclaimed that more than 25% of the latter elected to forward the material to peers. The students over 16 years of age reported engaging in

more sexting activities than the students under 16 years old, as noted in other studies (Strassberg et al., 2013).

A study on sexting reported an impressive level of pervasiveness. Of 611 students over the age of 18 years of age, 46.6% admitted to sending sexually stimulating pictures and 67.4% sent text messages whereas 64.2% received sexually stimulating pictures and 80.3% received text messages (Dir, Coskunpinar, Steiner & Cyders, 2013). Although these percentages may appear somewhat astounding, the rate of recurrences is reportedly under three times per month. Delevi and Weisskirch (2013) exhibited a considerable number of sexting occurrences when conducting a study involving college students (89.1%). The sizable numbers noted by various studies may indicate that the prevalence of sexting among emerging adults is potentially escalating at a rapid rate and may not decrease in the near future.

### **Views on Sexting among Emerging Adults**

A view on sexting among adolescents and young adults is that females may sext to gain the interest of another individual or attempt to maintain a happy relationship whereas males may sext to lure in or arouse females to engage in additional sexual activities (Delevi & Weisskirch, 2013). Females (68.4%) send sexting material more often than males (42.1%) and feel more disturbed by the request of transmitting indecent pictures and videos (27%) than males (3%; Temple et al., 2012). Beginning a relationship or keeping it alive is thought to be the one number motive for engaging in sexting activities with transmitting a sext message in a horseplay manner as the next highest motive (Korenis & Billick, 2014). Other motivations could stem from attentiveness

sought through flirtatiousness or desire to increase social status; bravery due to inebriation or spontaneity; ill-behaved or spiteful intentions; or reluctance in participation but compelled and fearful of declining the proposition (Stone, 2011). Katzman (2010) proclaimed that both males and females send sexually explicit material for fun or to flirt, delineating these factors as the main reason for sexting.

The Pew Internet & American Life Project conducted a landline and cellphone study on how and why minor teens are sending sexually suggestive nude or nearly nude images via text message (Lenhart, 2009b). Lenhart uncovered that out of 800 participants, 8% of 17-year-olds eagerly sent alluring images by text, and 30% had no issues with receiving a nude or semi-nude image by phone. Adolescents who paid their own cell phone expenses tend to sext more than those who did not. Whereas only 3% of adolescents who did not pay their own cell phone expenses had chosen to send sext messages to others, 17% of adolescents who did pay the full amount of their cell phone expenses elected to sext (Lenhart, 2009b). Sexting among adolescents had mainly taken place in three situations: transmission of sexually explicit material to one another while in an intimate relationship; transmission of sexually explicit material of a significant other to someone else; and transmission of sexually explicit material to someone who is desirable and hope to become intimate within the near future (Lenhart, 2009b).

What makes sexting appealing to adolescents and young adults is the modern age of digital technology that can be used to transfer sensual imagery instantaneously while having the impression of secrecy and solitude (Ahern & Mechling, 2013; Gomez & Ayala, 2014). This sense of privacy and aloneness could be unsafe and may display a

lack of judgment (Comartin et al., 2013). An online study conducted in the United Kingdom (UK), consisting of a number of students from 18 schools located in UK's South West area, aided in the comprehension of how and why files are shared among preadolescents and adolescents ranging from 11-to18-years-old (Phippen, 2009).

Phippen's findings entailed a sense of enjoyment from the participants who reported having a great deal of confidence in creating (79%) and circulating (78%) pictures and videos with 40% approving of material containing individuals who are topless and 15% bare naked. A substantial number of adolescents who have never sexted view sexting as a positive phenomenon, leaving them vulnerable to potential risks (Strassberg et al., 2013).

### **Sexting Risks Involving Emerging Adults**

Depictions of sexting include 'endangerment to youthful individuals' and exploitive (Gomez & Ayala, 2014). Ultimate risk-taking and hypersexualization is how the media describes sexting among adolescents and young adults (Mitchell et al., 2012). This population is more prone to Internet risks given their weakness, in general, to give into peer pressure and incapability to effectively cope with their feelings during this pivotal stage of their lives (Ahern & Mechling, 2013). Impulsiveness, inquisitiveness, and lack of discernment occur when instant access to cell phones and the Internet is obtained and coupled with an enormity of vulnerability (Korensi & Billick, 2014). Since the Internet and cell phones became furnished with webcams and cameras, many adolescents and young adults may have reached a point of oblivion and be traveling down a path of destruction, if their explicit material is leaked to mass media (Rosin, 2014). Both adolescents and young adults fail to realize that once their fleshly pictures and

videos spread throughout numerous websites, there is no guarantee that the material will remain exclusive as great difficulty lies in retrieving or removing material from online (Dake et al., 2012).

Adolescents and young adults' face future risks when their inappropriate images and videos end up online where family, friends, employers, and educational institutions can potentially view the material at any time (Ferguson, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2012; Perkins et al., 2014; Prather & Vandiver, 2014). Adolescents and young adults may also be taking risks when sexting with someone who is familiar to them. Other risks may entail sending sexual material to individuals they know little about or to strangers who in turn may demand them to transmit more lustful imagery. Once unintended users obtain these types of pictures and videos, it may cause humiliation and turmoil for years to come. Sexting could lead to torment and intimidation, resulting in a profound state of sexual victimization (Brown et al., 2009; Walrave et al., 2014). Individuals may be pressured into performing acts that they have never considered engaging in before.

According to the National Poll on Children's Health conducted by C.S. Mott Children's Hospital (2015), a survey that report the top 10 health concerns for children perceived by adults, internet safety ranked number 4 in 2015; jumping from number 8 in 2014. Sexting dramatically increased from number 13 in 2014 to number 6 in 2015. The rising numbers reflect a growing risk among adolescents and young adults that may require closer attention to be paid to such behavior. The correlation between sexting and risk behaviors can only be shown as occurring by chance because the majority of the studies are slanted and unable to establish a causal relationship (Gomez & Ayala, 2014).

Several risk issues may not be considered when adolescents and young adults are forwarding sexually explicit images. An indefinite number of receivers, psychosocial and legal risks can potentially exist (Strassberg et al., 2013). Sexting and sexual behaviors may appear to be or become the norm among adolescents and young adults who are not currently participating in these types of activities or thought otherwise (Comartin et al., 2013).

### **Consequences of Sexting Behaviors among Emerging Adults**

Sexting behaviors among adolescents and young adults have received mixed findings from various researchers where the importance lies in determining the relationship between sexting and sexual behaviors (Gordon-Messer et al., 2013). The evidence lies in the implementation of societal behaviors, which is moderated more in offline civilization and less in the online world (Eraker, 2010), urging an extensive amount of attention to be paid to the unique forms of sexual behaviors and technological use (Parker et al., 2013). Mitchell et al. (2012) conducted the Third Youth Internet Safety Survey to investigate the scope of sexting behaviors involving preteens and teens. Through the use of a telephone survey, Mitchell et al. (2012) interviewed 1560 individuals to compute and detail unsolicited or problematic encounters when using digital technology. Although the findings revealed a small fraction of preteens and teens who posted and received sexually explicit imagery, the percentage remains noteworthy. Temple et al. (2012) found sexting behaviors flourishing among the teenage population without regards to age, sex or ethnicity. Temple et al. (2012) uncovered a surprising number of females who engaged in risky sexual performances, closely tying sexting

behaviors with illicit drug use, alcohol abuse, and a high number of partners. Females tend to participate in sexting more than males (Wysocki & Childers, 2011). This finding could stem from the point of view that sexual behaviors correlate with relationship satisfaction (Parker et al., 2013). Sex and sexting behaviors of high caliber could lead to derogatory labels that may follow an individual, especially a female, for years.

Adolescents and young adults can create an everlasting “digital footprint” where social reputations may be ruined through their engagement of risky sexting behaviors (Henry & Powell, 2014, p. 2). Campaigns which promote Internet safety have worked diligently to curtail this ordeal to no avail, yet a vast number of the population willingly post data and material via text message and social media websites, specifying their sexual aspirations, practices, and preferences (Brown et al., 2009). Partaking in sexting behaviors may dispose individuals to some form of victimization (Dake et al., 2012). A sizeable portion of the media correlates sexting with negative behavior that falls on various points of the spectrum, including antisocial and criminal behaviors (Perkins et al., 2014). Adolescents, in particular, tend to participate in risky behaviors without thinking about how rational or irrational their choices may be (Prather & Vandiver, 2014). Approximately 1 in 7 adolescents who participated in sexting activities associated the behavior with negative emotions despite of describing sexting behaviors as appropriate (Strassberg et al., 2013).

Sexting behavior participation is determined through sexting expectancies (Dir. et al., 2013). Dir et al. proclaimed that sexting is linked to positivity when expectations of sending and receiving sexually charged material are thought to be positive and negative

when expectations of sending and receiving sexually charged material are thought to be negative. However, the direction of the causal relationships is too ambiguous to establish validity. Although many adolescents and young adults may believe that sexting is positive, the likelihood of all sexting experiences going well and without incident is incomprehensible (Gomez & Ayala, 2014). The determining factor for how positive or negative a person's experience of engaging in sexting activities depends on whether or not the individual authorized the creation or forwarding of sexual images (Albury & Crawford, 2012).

### **Psychological Factors Associated with Sexting and Sextortion**

A large number of studies lacked research on the association between sexting and psychological factors and instead placed more emphases on heightening the trend (Gomez & Ayala, 2014). The absence of research on the relationship between sextortion and psychological factors pose challenges, and having no clear relationship between sexting and psychological factors poses additional challenges (Gordon-Messer et al., 2013). Gordon-Messer et al. asserted if sexting distinctly impacts an individual's psychological well-being, the lack of scholarly literature that currently exists to increase a broader audience comprehension about this phenomenon is disheartening. Suicidal ideation exists among adolescents and young adults across diverse cultures and countries (Wilson, 2010). Investigations of patterns of behaviors associated with adolescents whom sext uncovered findings of a positive correlation between emotional health and psychosocial issues that include suicidal ideation, depression, sexual risks, substance or physical abuse, and cyberbullying (Dake et al., 2012; Perkins et al., 2014). Depending on

the severity, cyberbullying can result in anxiety and acute distress (Ahern & Mechling, 2013). Adolescents attending high school may face cyberbullying that could have profound repercussions and lead to illicit drug use, and attempts of suicide in more extreme situations (Goebert et al., 2010). When victims encounter psychological factors associated with sexting and sextortion they may discontinue school, which further impacts the overall dropout rate, or withdraw from friends and family (FBI, 2015a).

Many adolescents endure some type of inevitable psychological turmoil when transitioning through the puberty stage (Judge, 2012). Engaging in sexting behaviors resulting in adverse outcomes may exacerbate their turmoil. Imposing malicious harm on individuals such as circulating their sexually explicit material over the Internet can result in the person feeling demeaned and tarnished (Milliken & Campbell, 2015). As Milliken and Campbell (2015) pointed out, these types of feelings could lead to self-mutilation which is an indication that the individual may be experiencing anxiety or is in a state of depression. Anxiety, depression, decreased self-esteem, and social isolation are among the most widespread factors endured from online bullying (Kowalski, 2008). Diagnoses associated with bullying include anxiety disorder, affective disorder, psychotic disorder, somatic disorder, conduct disorder, and substance abuse related disorder (Javier, Dillon, DaBreo, & De Mucci, 2013). Individuals subjected to sexting coercion reported experiencing anxiety, depression and generalized trauma (Drouin, Ross, & Tobin, 2015).

Full comprehension of the range of emotional issues related to sexting remains unclear among young individuals (Williams, 2012). Mitchell et al. (2012) found that some individuals felt ashamed of their sexting activities. Adolescents who received

sexual imagery (25%) reported trepidation, humiliation, and intense distress; and these same feelings were felt by 21% of adolescents who self-produced or appeared in sexual imagery (Mitchell et al., 2012). The most mutually shared mental states associated with sexting are embarrassment and shame (Williams, 2012). Two victims of a sextortion scheme testified in Federal court about their terrifying experiences resulting from their ordeal (“Orange County Man,” 2011). An adolescent female who became a victim of a large sextortion plot disclosed to authorities that after feeling isolated and trapped she succumbed to her sextortionist’s aggressive pressures to prevent him from exposing her to loved ones and ruining her reputation (FBI, 2015e).

Sexting and sextortion have ended in disastrous situations. In July 2008, while her cell phone lied in the center of the floor, 18-year-old Jessica (Jesse) Logan who graduated from an Ohio high school one month earlier, committed suicide by hanging herself in her bedroom (“Jessica Logan Suicide,” 2011). Jessica had just returned from a friend’s funeral of who committed suicide (“Jessica Logan Suicide,” 2011). Nude images of Jessica spread to others after she and her boyfriend ended their relationship, leading to constant torment and persecution in and out of school and unyielding emotional distress (Celizic, 2009). Celizic reported that Jessica went public with her story on a Cincinnati television station in efforts to prevent other individuals from going through the same ordeal. Sadly, Jessica lifeless body was found two months after the interview.

In September 2009, 13-year-old, Hope Witsell committed suicide by hanging herself with her favorite scarf (Kaye, 2010). Hope attempted to attract the attention of a young male she liked by sending him a topless picture of herself via his cellphone (Inbar,

2009). The young male left his cell phone unattended in school where another student retrieved the picture and forwarded it to other students within the school and a neighboring school (Lacapria, 2009). Unbeknownst to her parents, Hope signed a “no-harm contract” at her school indicating that she would alert an adult when she felt the need to harm herself (Kaye, 2010, p. 2). Kaye pointed out that school officials observed what appeared to be self-inflicted wounds on Hope’s leg, prompting the issuance of the contact. Unfortunately, Hope ended her life and never informed anyone of her suicidal ideation. The incident occurred in Florida and gained notoriety around the world (Kaye, 2010).

Cases related to sexting and sextortion and suicide do not only exist in the U.S., other countries have reported devastating events. YouTube videos, one receiving over eleven million hits, illustrated 15-year-old Amanda Todd, a resident of British Columbia, holding up flashcards for viewers to peruse, explaining her ordeal (Dean, 2012). At the age of ten, Amanda decided to expose her breast to a random individual online resulting in a sexual predator relentlessly taunting her by way of stalking and blackmailing to send additional pictures and videos for years later (Lau, 2012). Within a month of turning 16 years old, Amanda took her own life to escape her tears and fears, physical and substance abuse, self-injurious behavior, and mental anguish (“Lessons from Teen Tragedy,” 2012).

### **Reported Incidents of Sextortion**

The FBI (2010) reported one of the most frightening incidents of sextortion involving a 31-year-old man charged with computer hacking and wiretapping and sentenced to six years in Federal prison. The sexual predator hacked into and infected

over 100 computers of nearly 250 individuals, 44 of which were young adolescents, to retrieve personal data and compromising pictures (“Orange County Man,” 2011). The perpetrator controlled his victims’ computers and spied on them through their webcams (FBI, 2010). A score of individuals reportedly underwent victimization but many remain unidentified. The perpetrator admitted to working with “black hat” for the sole purpose of gathering financial data from his victims but did not admit to hacking into his victims’ computers to sextort them (“Orange County Man,” 2011, p. 1). Black hat characterizes a hacker whose intent is to maliciously acquire access to and operate other peoples’ computer systems (Penenberg, 2008). Taking control over a computer system affords access to all files within the given system. Having this type of control becomes fair game where the hacker uses the given data as he or she sees fit to do so. An individual of this caliber could obtain entry into any person’s or organization’s network (Rothman, 2006). The sexual predator might have continued to get away with spying on his victims if he had not made efforts to contact and sextort them for additional sexually explicit pictures (FBI, 2010).

A case tried by the DOJ involved a 44-year-old man who received a 20 years sentence in Federal prison and continuous supervision once released (“Judge Sentences Brentwood,” 2012). The sexual predator reportedly blackmailed, misled, and persuaded young female adolescents to create and transmit sexy pictures to his cell phone. He impersonated his step-daughter to denigrate his victims if they did not comply with his sexual demands (“Judge Sentences Brentwood,” 2012).

A computer science college student victimized Miss Teen USA Cassidy Wolf along with other females using malicious software to acquire images and videos of sexually explicit nature via their webcams (FBI, 2015a). With the use of email accounts, Facebook and Skype, the pressured victims sent additional racy images and videos and exposed their naked bodies through webcams (Blankstein, 2013). The student compromised at least 150 personal computers and discovered inappropriate pictures of females and later used to coerce them into performing sexual acts; otherwise, their sexually suggestive material would circulate around the world (International Business Times, 2013). In March 2014, the sexual predator received a sentence of 18 months in Federal prison for extortion and unauthorized access of a computer (FBI, 2015a).

The exposure of a young man who, in his 20s, assumed the identities of adolescent males incited a campaign to stop sextortion (FBI, 2015d). The sexual predator created approximately 100 various online IDs and more than 30 email accounts to mistreat nearly 350 adolescent females and trade child pornography via the Internet (FBI, 2015e). In November 2014, the sexual predator received a sentence of 105 years in Federal prison for terrorizing his victims and posting their sexually explicit material on the Internet when the females did not comply with his demands (FBI, 2015d). Although a sizable number of victims' identities are known, the majority of sexually victimized individuals' identities remain unknown. Most of the victims go undetected by authorities for obvious reasons such as fear and embarrassment, and trading of their sexual images continues to occur among sexual predators (FBI, 2015e).

The FBI (2015b) informed on a case entailing the intervention of a concerned mother. After the discovery of her daughter becoming a suspected victim of sextortion, a mother reported the incident to the authorities that led to an indictment and a 29-year sentence in Federal prison for a 23-year-old man (FBI, 2015b). The sexual predator reportedly received a guilty verdict for preying on the daughter and other young adolescent females and women. He lured his victims with the use of fictitious Facebook accounts and pretending to work for a modeling agency (FBI, 2015b).

In July 2015, a 22-year-old man received a conviction of several counts of child pornography and interstate threats and sentence of 139 years in Federal prison (“South Florida Man,” 2015). The sexual predator allegedly posed as adolescent females to gain the trust of young adolescent males who would send him lewd photos (“South Florida Man,” 2015).

In August 2015, a 36-year-old man faced charges for international computer hacking, cyberstalking, and sextortion for using alias names (“Former U.S. State,” 2015). For over two-years, the perpetrator allegedly hacked into approximately 450 online accounts belonging to around 200 individuals and forwarded over a thousand racy images to himself from his victim's' email and social media accounts. Most of the targeted victims comprised young adolescents and college-age females who belonged to sororities or desired to become models (“Former U.S. State,” 2015).

### **Seeking Psychological Assistance**

Various disciplines have studied the nature of seeking psychological assistance for many years to understand the hesitancy in receiving psychological help (Rickwood,

Deane, Wilson, & Ciarrochi, 2005). To effectively and reliably understand attitudes related to pursuing psychological help for emotional issues, Fischer and Turner (1970) originated and standardized a measure to assess the phenomenon, uncovering four key measurements: self-detection of the necessity for psychological assistance; leniency on the stigma attached to receiving professional help; interpersonal openness about the disturbances; and mental health support assurance. Seeking psychological assistance for sexting and sextortion related issues may not be easily performed by adolescents and young adults who reluctance may result from fear of blame or shame due to their involvement in the activity. Many individuals of this population may think that others will perceive them as spineless; seeking help is the consequences of their behavior; or their warning signs for mental health treatment will automatically disappear (Ranahan, 2010). When someone acquires an inappropriate image without permission and with malicious intent, significant social and emotional concerns related to sexting can weigh heavily on adolescents and young adults in similar ways (Herman, 2010).

Predictors of psychological help-seeking involve individuals close to those in need of mental health services, which play a huge role in a person's quest for psychological assistance (Zartaloudi & Madianos, 2010). Zartaloudi and Madianos contended that people near and dear impact a person's view about accepting help from a mental health professional. Other determining factors for a given individual to seek out mental health services with a certain level of confidence include attitudes and beliefs (Zartaloudi & Madianos, 2010). Rickwood et al. (2005) discovered the following help-seeking patterns among young individuals: more reluctance to seeking services from

mental health professionals, and sought more help from friends and family with friends outweighing family. Rickwood et al. findings uncovered more willingness in females to seek help than males who are less willing to do so. The type of problem experienced determine whom the person will seek help from if anyone at all (Rickwood et al., 2005). Males and females of all ages essentially share the same views when it comes to the necessity of mental health services (Mackenzie, Gekoski, & Knox, 2006); however, females tend to exhibit more positive help-seeking attitudes than males (Fischer & Turner, 1970; Mackenzie et al., 2006; Nam et al., 2010). Acceptance, authenticity, and concern without judgment illustrates what adolescents and young adults desire most from mental health professionals (Ranahan, 2010).

Of 535 students who participated in a study on sharing personal images and videos among young people, 27% agreed that their population is in need of support and advice when it comes to sexting with 70% seeking assistance from a friend and 24% from a teacher, if they experienced any issues (Phippen, 2009). Vogel, Wade, Wester, Larson, and Hackler (2007) conducted two studies involving an individual's decision to seek psychological assistance under the influence of a friend or family member. Vogel et al. found that 74% to 78% of the time individuals were urged to seek mental health services, and 92% to 95% of the time these particular individuals knew of others who previously sought services. This indicated that most individuals are more motivated to seek psychological assistance when encouraged by someone they share an attachment with and or know someone who has gone through the process as opposed to deciding on their own (Vogel et al., 2007).

### **Sexting and Cyberbullying Resulting in Sextortion and Victimization**

Sexting and cyberbullying may have societal consequences that come rapidly with a cell phone and Internet usage (Korenis & Billick, 2014). Once sexting unites with bullying an individual in cyberspace, the dynamic of the two may have an overwhelming effect on the victim, a phenomenon labeled by some as sextbullying (Eraker, 2010). Bullying comes in 2nd place for major health issues surrounding youth, and sexting ranks number 6 on the list (C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, 2015). Unlike customary bullying that usually occurs inside of schools and on playgrounds (Siegle, 2010), there is no given time for cyberbullying to take place due to 24/7 online capability (Stanbrook, 2014). According to Willard (2005, p. 1), cyberbullying may take effect in seven different fashions:

- *Flaming* – Distribution of postings that are offensive and infuriating in nature.
- *Harassment* – Insulting messages transmitted on a continual basis.
- *Cyberstalking* – Transmission of messages to persistently provoke enormous pressure and threats of impairment.
- *Denigration* – Transmission of gossip with deceptive intentions.
- *Impersonation* – Deceivingly act as another person.
- *Outing and trickery* – Personal information distributed and or disclosed to others to prompt humiliation.
- *Exclusion* – Deliberate rejection of an individual from an online group.

Although cyberbullying victimization did not significantly predict depression or anxiety, Goebert et al. (2010) found cyberbullying as a predictor of negative mental

health concerns that strengthen the probability of depression by approximately two times, attempted suicide by 3.2 times for females and 4.5 times for males, and substance abuse (marijuana and binge drinking) by 2.5 times. Depression, anxiety, and self-esteem displayed an insignificant relationship with sexting (Gordon-Messer et al., 2013).

Gordon-Messer et al. revealed comparable results between young adults who engaged in sexting versus young adults who did not engage in sexting activities. The study presumably focused more on assessing the mental health of young adults who sext and less on exploring sexting under pressure and material electronically uploaded to the Internet. The absence of data leaves the inquiry of sexting resulting in sextortion and victimization unaddressed.

Cyberbullying can result in corruption and victimization (Ahern & Mechling, 2013), as sexting can result in exploitation and victimization (FBI, 2015a). Victimization occurs more frequently when adolescents' cellphones are rarely turned off due to their need to stay socially connected (Eraker, 2010). Hoffman (2011) described a case that concerned a young female who created a topless image of herself and sent it to a young male whom she just started dating. The young male who thought he was sharing the image with only one person, forwarded the image to a teenage girl who did not like the other female and she decided to forward the image to others. A vast number of students throughout their school possessed the image that eventually went viral on the Internet and viewed by an undetermined number of individuals. The young female felt deceived and mortified. The original senders underwent prosecution and embarrassment for taking part in the distressing and damaging incident (Hoffman, 2011).

Youth deviance appears widespread and enticing to many individuals. The term youth deviance depict adolescents whose sexting results in psychosocial and legal consequences (Ricketts, Maloney, Marcum, & Higgins, 2015). Unlike adolescents 18 and older and young adults who are responsible for their own actions, adolescents under 18 years of age are considered minors and may be processed differently in the legal system. Not all states abide by the same rules and regulations that prevent adolescents under the age of 18 from sending sexually explicit material to one another (Ferguson, 2011). In such instances, classification of this population can simultaneously fall into two categories, victim and perpetrator (Gomez & Ayala, 2014). The vagueness of state and federal laws relating to sexting combined with steady advancements in digital technology further complicates the inadequacy of policies and procedures that currently exist (Ahern & Mechling, 2013; Sacco et al., 2010).

The enactment of privacy statutes endure in several Canadian provinces such as British Columbia, Manitoba, Newfoundland, and Saskatchewan to address offenses associated with sexting that violates an individual's privacy (Willard, 2005). Unfortunately, inadequacy and inattentiveness reportedly hinders effective management of sexting offenses. Although the consensus among a vast number of states is that sexting is a central concern that requires much attention (Williams, 2012), less than half of the states have constituted laws that distinctively address sexting once sexually explicit pictures and videos are produced, disseminated, and endures (Korenis & Billick, 2014). As a result, uncertainty may lie in determining charges or doubt may be cast on the legitimacy of the victimization for any age. To prevent sexual victimization from

happening altogether, the pursuit of legislation to tackle sexting in an educational manner is taking form in several states, including New York and New Jersey (Williams, 2012).

Sexting's identity of a crucial problem requires attention in the U.S. judicial system, and alike, acknowledgement of critical issues on cyberbullying calls for deliberation within the legal system; however, complexity lies in outlining and executing applicable laws for both crazes (Williams, 2012). Legal cases involving cyberbullying and sextortion remains at the forefront in the country of Spain and have ensued in legislation and regulations to deal with sexually explicit material circulated without the approval to do so (Gomez & Ayala, 2014). Due to variations in legislation and regulations surrounding sexting and cyberbullying that currently exist across the U.S., appropriate laws should be created and apply to all individuals (Cannon, 2011). These laws would require any person possessing a cell phone or using the Internet to adhere to the constructed statues to ward off predators and safeguard victims from future threats.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Sexting may start innocent and pleasurable; however, the innocence and pleasure once felt may quickly diminish if sexting results in sextortion. Females particularly undergo negative factors such as bullying, humiliation, persuasion, and terrorization through the Internet, cellular phones, and email (Henry & Powell, 2014). Henry and Powell argued this is an issue that is becoming more evident among authorities, organizations, and communities. Although pressing issues comprised of sexting have gradually made strides in the mass media, compelling scholarly literature surrounding sextortion is essential. Demographics do not dictate who can and will become a victim of

sextortion (FBI, 2015a). In order to combat the major sexting concerns affecting many individuals across the globe, all of the states within the U.S., and other countries as well, must be in concert with the enactment of legislation that will adequately address this wide-ranging issue (Williams, 2012). Victimized individuals must recognize that the tables can be turned on perpetrators and online transmissions to regain their control and live a healthier and an empowered lifestyle (Willard, 2005). Having awareness about the psychological effects as it relates to higher levels of anxiety and depression or lower self-esteem likely experienced by individuals who have undergone sextortion and the number of individuals affected will help this process along. Paramountcy lies in having an understanding of individuals subjected to sextortion resorting from sexting or otherwise may require services and support to get through their ordeal. Comprehension of sextortion is vital information that has yet to be addressed in scholarly research, and crucial to inform on the dynamic of sextortion.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### Overview

Emerging adults' behavior and decision making is the result of their instability, identity identification, self-focus, feeling "in-between," and possibilities (Tanner & Arnett, 2016, p. 131). Sextortion could become an outcome of emerging adults' sexting behavior and decision-making process. I explored sextortion by examining how much, if at all, emerging adults' subjection to this type of sexual victimization impacted them psychologically. I investigated the victim's sense of self upon undergoing victimization such as if they experienced depression and anxiety, diminished self-esteem, and empowerment to seek services as well as report the incident to authorities or someone else.

In this chapter, I outline the type of study implemented in respect to the principal research questions and hypotheses posed in this study. The chapter provides a description of the methodology and research design selected, as well as the rationale for the use of these paradigms. Delineation of the variables under study, population, sampling and sampling procedures, procedures for recruitment, participation, data collection procedures, instrumentation and operationalization of constructs, data analysis plan, threats to validity and ethical procedures follow.

### Research Design and Rationale

The methodology of this study encompassed a quantitative approach. The use of a quantitative approach typically occurs when attempting to establish relationships between variables to demonstrate neutrality as it relates to the theories under study (Johnson &

Christensen, 2008). Objective theories help form variables and deductively tested them with the use of statistical methods and instruments that analyze the numbered data (Creswell, 2014). Challenges may rise when attempting to employ a statistical method to adequately address the research questions (Mertler & Vannatta, 2002). To best address the research questions in this study, the goal involved using techniques that would compare emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion to emerging adults who have engaged in the sexting and not experienced sextortion. An investigation uncovered relationships between independent variables (emotional distress, decreased self-esteem, and willingness to seek help and report the incident to authorities) and the dependent variable, subjection to sextortion. The independent variable, emotional distress, divided into two classifications (anxiety and depression) to determine if one or the other or both was experienced. The independent variables, willingness to seek help and report the incident, divided into four classifications: willingness to seek help, willingness to report the incident, inclined to disclose, and troubled by self-stigma. Individuals not willing to seek help or report the incident provided information on if their reluctance stemmed from having less inclination to disclose or troubled by self-stigma, or both.

The majority of quantitative studies on sexting have concentrated on social aspects relative to the likelihood of sexting and prevalence, whereas many qualitative studies have leaned toward exposing the motives for sexting among adolescents (Walrave et al., 2014). In this quantitative study, I used a cross-sectional design in an effort to uncover the psychological effects experienced and willingness to seek help and or report

the incident among emerging adults. Cross-sectional studies distinguish as one of the most customary and recognized research designs. Cross-sectional designs approximate the number of occurrences of a particular phenomenon (Sedgwick, 2014). The data collected in respect to the independent variables and dependent variable take place at one point in time (Olsen & St. George, 2004). Although causality is unattainable, relationships between the outcome of interest and risk factors could undergo examination (Levin, 2006). Mann (2003) pointed out the advantages of conducting cross-sectional studies, including more than one outcome can be studied, and these types of designs are less time-consuming and pose fewer ethical issues. The main disadvantage of conducting cross-sectional studies involves the difficulty experienced when distinguishing cause and effect from the minimal association (Mann, 2003). Insight into the etiology of health and risky behaviors could be gained; however, the cross-sectional associations must be carefully inferred (Carlin & Hocking, 1999). Although participant measurements could be obtained at one time in cross-sectional studies, the recruitment of sufficient participants may take a lengthy period to achieve (Mann, 2003; Sedgwick, 2014).

### **Population**

The population recruited to participate in this study was emerging adults ranging from ages from 18-to 24-years-old who have engaged in sexting behaviors and may or may not have experienced sextortion. Determination of actual recruitment centered on participants' disclosure regarding their engagement in sexting behaviors and subjection to sextortion. Emerging adults who met the requirements could have participated in the study regardless of whether or not they have undergone emotional distress such as

anxiety, depression, or lowered self-esteem. Emerging adults could have participated if they were willing or unwilling to seek psychological help or help for someone else. Emerging adults could have participated if willing or unwilling to report their incident to authorities. The inclusion of emerging adults who have or have experienced psychological effects and or willing or unwilling to seek mental health services or assistance from law enforcement could help uncover how individuals within the emerging adult population would handle this type of situation.

Emerging adults of any race, ethnicity, color, or creed had the opportunity to participate in the study. Emerging adults of any gender, sexual orientation, or in any socioeconomic class could have participated. The recruitment of emerging adults first took place with the use of the Internet and then expanded to two colleges via flyer posting and one university via e-mail where emerging adults may have felt more obliged and easily reached to participate in the study. Emerging adults may have felt more at ease when disclosing their experiences for they were not required to unveil their identities. The type of consent given by the emerging adults afforded them the ability to bypass any written consents. No identifying information directly linked any participant to his or her completed questionnaire. Only the participants themselves knew exactly how they responded to the questionnaires. Emerging adults could have a sense of relief knowing that their responses would be held in strict confidence to protect their privacy.

### **Sampling and Sampling Procedures**

This study used a nonprobability sample design, convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is one of the primary nonprobability sample designs employed as

it allows the researcher to acquire participants based on availability (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). This type of sampling offered ease of access to participants, and a preferred method given that the study encompassed sensitive research. Recruitment of subjects extended to those who met the criteria for inclusion. Sampling units were retrieved in a simpler manner. Other benefits to using convenience sampling involve less cost, time, difficulty, and ethical concerns (Lunsford & Lunsford, 1995). Ethical concerns should be minimal as participants are freely participating in the study. Maintaining a record of all the population factors was not a necessity.

A key drawback to employing convenience sampling is the existence of outliers due to the potentiality of a high rate of self-selection (Farrokhi & Mahmoudi-Hamidabad, 2012). The sample could be biased as it is made up of subjects who voluntarily chose to participate and may not represent the total population (Lunsford & Lunsford, 1995). As pointed out by Acharya, Prakash, Saxena, & Nigan (2013), bias and variability are two elements that lack control and measurement over them, and data findings are only generalizable to the sample.

Conducting a power analysis helped determine the sample size. Faul, Erdeider, Buchner, and Lang (2009) created G\*Power software used to conduct the analysis. A priori power analysis determined the number of participants needed to perform a logistic regression statistical test with sufficient statistical power. The input parameters entailed tail(s) = one, odds ratio = 2.3333333,  $\Pr(Y = 1|X = 1)$  HO = 0.3,  $\alpha$  err prob = 0.05, Power ( $1-\beta$  err prob) = 0.95,  $R^2$  other X = 0, X distribution = Normal, X parm  $\mu = 0$ , X parm  $\sigma = 1$ . The output parameters uncovered a critical z value of 1.64, a total sample of 85, and

actual power equating to 0.95. Logistic regressions require larger samples to ensure sufficient numbers in both categories of the response variables (Bewick, Cheek, & Ball, 2005). A sample size of 77 with up to 20 predictors is sufficient to achieve a large effect (Field, 2013). The number of predictors under testing consisted of eight. The predictor variables comprised IDAS, RSES, GHSQ RCP-A, RCP-B, DES, SSOSHS, age and gender.

### **Recruitment and Data Collection Procedures**

Given the sensitive nature of this study, participants were initially recruited using the Internet and later expanded to two colleges via flyer posting and one university via e-mail. The Internet provided access to millions of individuals who can connect and interact with others as well as engage in numerous activities (NTIA, 2004). Having access to a theoretically infinite number of individuals is beneficial. The colleges and university offered direct contact with the targeted population. However, the approximation or estimation of the size of the population actually recruited for this study remained indeterminable. The goal of recruiting a minimum of 85 participants ensured an ample sample size. Although no assurance, I attempted to recruit participants representative and generalizable to the population. This process encompassed screening individuals who met the criteria for emerging adults who have engaged in sexting behaviors and have or have not experienced sextortion. This consisted of individuals who felt empowered and willing to step out of their comfort zone, and voluntarily disclose their experiences to help themselves and others alike.

Solicitation of individuals for this study occurred through social media websites, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Recruitment of participants later incorporated three colleges via flyer posting and one university via e-mail. I established an account on each website for the purpose of conducting this study. My identifying information was kept to a minimum in efforts of not attracting individuals who were personally known. The objectivity of targeting and recruiting unknown individuals who have engaged in sexting behaviors and may or may not have experienced sextortion aided in the avoidance of a bias sample and coerciveness. Establishment of an invite and event page on the social media websites provided a way to target qualified participants. The pages remained open to the public to view. The creation of e-flyers (see Appendix A-C) helped to inform individuals about the nature of the study. Additional information informed on what the study comprised in terms of the type of research conducted, researcher, purpose, participant requirements, voluntary nature and right to withdraw, risks and benefits, compensation, privacy, contacts, and consent. Due to survey anonymity, prior to obtaining access to the surveys, individuals were requested to give their consent and agree to participate by clicking on a link provided. If individuals agreed to participate and provided an electronic consent, an attached hyperlink allowed them to proceed directly to the measures. Qualtrics assisted with the collection of data. Qualtrics is a private research software company that provide services to more than 8,000 of the world's top brands companies and 99 out of 100 best business schools around the globe (Qualtrics, 2018). Qualtrics principal values entail a concentration on technology, allowing their users to be

in control and assisting their users with capturing their research and securing it effectively.

The projection of recruitment consisted of 6 months to obtain a sufficient number of participants. The surveys remained open for an additional 6 months due to not obtaining enough participants within the original time frame. Attainment of the predetermined number of participants would have permitted the survey to close in less than the stated period. Once the data collection period ended, the data were exported to SPSS (predictive analytics software) to analyze and reveal the findings.

### **Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs**

The self-administered measures consisted of inventories, questionnaires, and surveys. They included the IDAS, RSES, GHSQ, and RCP-A, RCP-B. If participants indicated that they would not seek help from anyone on the GHSQ, they were requested to complete the DES and SSOSHS (see Appendix E-J).

### **Inventory of Depression and Anxiety Symptoms**

Watson et al. (2007) developed the IDAS to uncover feelings, sensations, problems, and experiences that individuals have at times. The creation of the IDAS effected assessments of distinctive facets of depression and related anxiety disorders. This 64-item inventory is comprised of number subscales: Well-Being and Panic subscales (eight items each); Suicidality, Lassitude, and Insomnia subscales (six items each); Social Anxiety and Ill Temper subscales (five items each); Traumatic Intrusions subscale (four items); Appetite Loss and Appetite Gain subscales (three items each). IDAS includes the General Depression scale consisting of 20 items and Dysphoria scale

entailing 10 items. With the use of a 5-point scale that includes (1) Not at all; (2) A little bit; (3) Moderately; (4) Quite a bit; and (5) Extremely, participants are asked to select the option that best describes how much they have felt or experienced things in such a manner for the past 2 weeks, including today. They will provide insight into the emotional distress that some individuals may experience upon becoming a victim of sextortion. Reproduction of test content is permitted, and written permission is not required to use the IDAS if used for noncommercial research and educational purposes, and distribution is controlled where only individuals participating in the research or educational activity gain access. However, permission was received to use the inventory (see Appendix K).

Watson et al. (2007) conducted factor analyses using three large primary samples involving college students, psychiatric patients, and community adults. An examination of the psychometric properties of five additional samples comprising high school students, college students, young adults, postpartum women, and psychiatric patients provided useful data. The scales internal consistency encompassed 50 of 60 coefficients at .80 or higher, described the target facets well, and delineated a distinct underlying factor (Watson et al., 2007).

In comparison to other self-report and interview-based measures of depression and anxiety, the IDAS demonstrated strong short-term stability, exhibited excellent convergent validity, and good discriminant validity (Watson et al., 2007). Both the General Depression scale ( $r = .83$ ) and Dysphoria scale ( $r = .81$ ) strongly correlated with

the Beck's Depression Inventory –II (BDI-II). The Panic subscale ( $r = .78$ ) strongly related to the Beck's Anxiety Inventory (BAI; Watson et al., 2007).

### **Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale**

Rosenberg (1965) established the RSES to assess individuals' global self-worth by measuring positive and negative feelings about the self. This 10-item Guttman scale, considered to be unidimensional, outlines a list of statements that pertain to general feelings about the self. Using a 4-point Likert scale: (1) Strongly Agree; (2) Agree; (3) Disagree; or (4). Strongly Disagree, participants are asked to specify how strongly they agree or disagree with each presented statement. The RSES will offer insight into individuals' devaluation of self-esteem once they have become a victim of sextortion. Reproduction of test content is permitted, and written permission is not required to use the RSES if used for noncommercial research and educational purposes, and distribution is controlled where only individuals participating in the research or educational activity gain access. However, written permission was received to use the scale (see Appendix L).

The RSES has shown moderately high scores in reliability as it relates to internal consistency equaling .77 and coefficient reproducibility around .90 (Rosenberg, 1965). With the use of samples from high school students, parents, civil servants, and men over 60 years of age, relatively high alpha coefficients were attained, ranging from .72 to .87 (Rosenberg, 2014). Rosenberg (2014) affirmed that the RSES displayed similar test-retest reliability (.85) during a 2-week interval compared to the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory. Construct validity demonstrated correlations regarding anxiety = - 0.64, depression = - 0.54, and anomie = - 0.43, and criterion validity = 0.55 (Rosenberg, 1965).

I stopped reviewing here. Please go through the rest of your chapter and look for the patterns I pointed out to you. I will now look at Chapter 4.

Gray-Little, Williams, and Hancock (1997) conducted an item response theory analysis on the RSES. The factor analysis used found a single common factor. The use of a unidimensional model enabled graded item responses to fit the data. Findings of the 10-items of the RSES exhibited an uneven discriminative and correlations to self-esteem displayed variations.

### **General Help-Seeking Questionnaire**

Wilson, Deane, Ciarrochi, and Rickwood (2005) advanced the GHSQ to assess an individual's intent to seek help from various sources and for various problems. This questionnaire encompasses two questions: 1) If you were having a personal problem or emotional problem, how likely is it that you would seek help from the following people?, 2) If you were experiencing suicidal thoughts, how likely is it that you would seek help from the following people? A list of sources follows each question. Participants are asked to select the number that best describes their intention to seek help from each source. GHSQ includes a 7-point scale that ranges from (1) Extremely Unlikely; (3) Unlikely; (5) Likely; (7) Extremely Likely. GHSQ will provide insight into individuals' willingness to receive formal or informal assistance upon becoming psychologically distressed from being sextorted. GHSQ is the most universally used measure to assess help-seeking intentions on an international level and freely available for download and utilization (Wilson et al., 2005). However, permission was received to use the questionnaire (see Appendix M). A sample of high school students participated in the study where the

GHSQ reliability and validity was found to be satisfactory and appeared to have the flexibility to apply it to a variety of contexts relating to help-seeking intentions. Convergent and divergent validity displayed strength through both positive and negative correlations (Wilson et al., 2005) Personal-emotional problems: ( $r = .51$ ), Cronbach's alpha = .70 and test-retest reliability assessed over a three-week period = .86. Suicidal problems: ( $r = .57$ ), Cronbach's alpha = .83 and test-retest reliability assessed over a three-week period = .88. The findings showed consistency as in the majority of previous studies concerning help-seeking intentions (Wilson et al., 2005).

### **Reasons for Calling the Police Questionnaire**

Walsh and Bruce (2014) developed the RCP-A, RCP-B to evaluate the motivations for calling or not calling the police upon undergoing a sexual experience unwillingly. Pre-existing literature helped construct the questionnaire relative to decisions to report crimes frequently cited. This questionnaire encompasses two versions totaling 20 items that use a 4-point scale: (1) Strongly Disagree; (2) Disagree; (3) Agree; or (4) Strongly Agree. Form A (RCP-A) drew attention to participants who did not report the incident to police. Form B (RCP-B) drew attention to participants who did report the incident to police.

A slight difference exists in the wording between both forms as it relates to the decision to report the incident. This questionnaire meets suitability for the present study as it aims at uncovering why individuals did or did not report their unsolicited or coerced sexual victimization to authorities. The developer provided written permission to use this instrument (see Appendix N). Walsh and Bruce (2014) conducted a factor analysis to

construct a four-factor structure consisting of (1) Seriousness (how serious the respondent perceived the event to be or whether they perceived it to be a crime); (2) Privacy (their desire for privacy after the event); (3) Triviality (their perception of the triviality of the assault and whether police would take it seriously); and (4) Safety (their concerns about safety after the event). Cronbach's alpha reliabilities for RCP-A ranged from .69 to .86 and .83 to .87 for RCP-B. The results to a large extent, show consistency with other studies related to decisions to report crimes to police that may somewhat differ according to the victim and for a variety of reasons (Walsh & Bruce, 2014).

### **Disclosure Expectations Scale**

Vogel and Wester (2003) established the DES to assess attitudes about seeking psychological services as to whether seek or not seek help. The 5-point scale: (1) Not at all; (2) Slightly; (3) Somewhat; (4) Moderately; or (5) Very, measures eight items. The DES will offer insight into individuals' feelings regarding the risks and benefits of self-disclosing their sextortion experience. Reproduction of test content is permitted, and written permission is not required if used for noncommercial research and educational purposes, and distribution is controlled where only individuals participating in the research or educational activity gain access. However, permission was received to use the scale (See Appendix O). Using a sample of college students, the results uncovered a strong correlation between attitudes and intentions and seeking help, which accounted for a relatively large amount of variance (35% to 40%) across two studies (Vogel & Wester, 2003). The overall findings were  $r = .59$ . The use of validated measures of help-seeking

and self-disclosure allowed for similar and satisfactory effects (.14 - .52) found across a multitude of measures (Vogel & Wester, 2003).

### **Self-Stigma of Seeking Help Scale**

Vogel, Wade, and Haake (2006) created the SSOSHS to assess self-stigma associated with seeking psychological help. This development of a unidimensional measure, a concept similar to Rosenberg's self-esteem scale, is a 10-item Likert-type scale: (1) Strongly Disagree; (2) Disagree; (3) Agree and Disagree equally; (4) Agree; (5) Strongly Agree. The SSOSHS will provide insight into why individuals' may not seek psychological assistance upon becoming a victim of sextortion. Reproduction of test content is permitted, and written permission is not required if used for noncommercial research and educational purposes, and distribution is controlled where only individuals participating in the research or educational activity gain access. However, permission was received to use the scale (see Appendix P).

Vogel et al. (2006) conducted five studies using samples of college students.' The SSOSHS demonstrated strong internal consistency reliability and good test-retest reliability. The unidimensional factor structure employed in Study 1 exhibited good reliability (.91). Study 2 supported the factor structure. Study 2, 3 and 4 confirmed reliability across studies (.86 to .90.) and test-retest (.72) over two-months. Findings of construct, criterion, and predictive validity emerged across the samples of the studies. Confirmatory factor analyses supported the use of a unidimensional factor structure by delivering a good fit to the data (Vogel et al., 2006).

### **Participation Procedures**

Participants' first request involved completion of the IDAS, RSES, GHSQ, and RCP-A, RCP-B and its entirety. These four surveys adequately addressed the research questions to gain clarity about the psychological impact and willingness to seek assistance and report the incident as it related to sextortion. Participants received notification of the completion of all surveys taking approximately 15-25 minutes. The IDAS took about 5-10 minutes to complete the survey. The RSES took about 1-2 minutes to complete the survey. The GHSQ took about 3-5 minutes to complete the survey. The RCP-A, RCP-B together should have taken about 4-6 minutes to complete the combination of the two surveys. Once participants completed the initial survey, they proceeded to the next survey and so on until completion of all surveys. If participants provided any indication that they would not seek assistance from anyone they were requested to complete the DES and SSOSHS. For instance, if participants provided any indication that they would not seek assistance from anyone they completed the DES and SSOSHS. If a participant selected 1 thru 4 for Items E or I on Part 1 and 2 of the GHSQ, they completed the DES and SSOSHS after completing the RCP-A, RCP-B to inform on reasons for not seeking help from a mental health professional or anyone. Participants completing the two additional surveys (DES and SSOSHS) helped shed some light on reasons for not seeking assistance or reporting the incident. The DES and SSOSHS took about 2-3 minutes to complete each survey.

Prior to completing the surveys, participants provided demographic information such as age, gender, race, education, sexual orientation, marital and employment status,

occupation, income, state residence, and country of origin. The demographic questionnaire came pre-scripted within the online survey tool used to record all survey data. Participants then replied accordingly to descriptive questions pertaining to their sexting and sextortion experiences. The informed consent included the following information to distinguish what sexting and sextortion consisted of and how it related to this research study. "Sexting is an expression utilized when transmitting sensual messages or performances, provocation, and schemes exhibited through an array of sex behaviors. Sextortion is when an individual is pressured or blackmailed into sending sexually explicit pictures and/or videos to satisfy another person's sexual demands. This is not considered the same as when an ex-boyfriend, ex-girlfriend, or someone who you have been in an intimate relationship with is upset with you and tries to get back at you in a hurtful and sexual manner, known as revenge pornography or revenge porn. While revenge porn can involve a partner or someone who you are familiar with demanding sexually explicit pictures and/or videos with the intent to blackmail you, sextortion in this case and research study applies to, but is not limited to, personal accounts being hacked into such as social media or email accounts or personal computer by someone who is not familiar to you. Or perhaps, you may have been befriended via the Internet or social media account by someone who you do not know so well and have ill intent to benefit in a selfish manner." The following questions were asked to gain a better understanding of participants' sexting behaviors and sextortion experience(s):

Q1. What type of sexting behaviors have you engaged in or currently engage in? Check all that apply.

\* If “None” is selected participants will be disqualified to participate and directed to exit.

- None
- Topless
- Bottomless
- Semi-nude
- Nude

Condition: None is Selected. Skip To: End of Survey.

Q2. With whom have you engaged in sexting behaviors? Check all that apply.

- Spouse, Partner, Significant other (e.g. boyfriend/girlfriend)
- Acquaintance with whom you have had sex
- Acquaintance with whom you have not had sex
- Stranger

Q3. How often do you engage or did engage in sexting behaviors?

- Once a month
- A few times a month
- Once a week
- A few times a week
- Daily

Q4. How long have you been engaging or did engage in sexting behaviors?

- Less than a month
- Three – six months

- Less than a year
- One - three years
- More than five years

Q5. Have you experienced any negative outcomes from your engagement in sexting behaviors?

- Yes
- No

Condition: No Is Selected. Skip To: Q6.

Q5a. If so, what was the outcome? Check all that apply.

- Emotional distress
- Sexual Victimization
- Harassment
- Job loss
- Significant other found out

Q5b. What was the severity of the negative outcome?

- Not severe
- Mildly severe
- Moderately severe
- Severe
- Very Severe

Q6. How long ago did the experience occur?

- A week ago

- A month ago
- More than six months ago
- More than a year ago
- More than five years ago

Q7. How old were you when you engaged in sexting behaviors?

- Age 17 or under
- Age 18 or older

Q8. If residing outside of the United States of America, is this practice accepted in your country of origin? If yes, please explain how it is accepted.

- Yes \_\_\_\_\_
- No

Q9. Please leave any additional information that you would like us to know about your sexting behaviors.

- Type Here \_\_\_\_\_

Participants are requested to answer the following questions only if you have experienced sextortion. Sextortion is when you have been blackmailed into sending sexually explicit material to include pictures and or videos to someone to satisfy their sexual needs and demands. Please answer the following questions if this applies to you:

Q1. Have you ever experienced sextortion?

- Yes
- No

Condition: No Is Selected. Skip To: Q10.

- Q2. How many times have you experienced sextortion?
- Once
  - Twice
  - At least three times
  - At least five times
  - At least ten times
- Q3. What type of sextortion experience did you encounter? Check all that apply.
- Solicited for explicit pictures and/or videos
  - Solicited for money
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
- Q4. How old were you when you encountered this experience?
- Age 17 or under
  - Age 18 or older
- Q5. How did you become a target of sextortion? Check all that apply.
- Website
  - Chat room
  - Computer hacked
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
- Q6. How long did your most severe experience of sextortion last?
- For a week
  - For at least a month

At least three – six months

At least one year

More than five years

Q7. How severe was your worse or not worse experience of sextortion?

Not severe at all

Mildly severe

Moderately severe

Severe

Very Severe

Q8. How long ago did your worse or not worse experience of sextortion occur?

A week ago

A month ago

Three – six months ago

Over a year ago

More than five years ago

Q9. Have each of your experiences of sextortion taken place in the same manner? Please select “Not applicable” have encountered only one experience of sextortion.

Yes

No

Not applicable

Condition: Yes Is Selected. Skip To: Q10.

Q9a. If you elected “No,” how did your first experience differ from your other experience(s)?

\* Choice 3 can be chosen without choosing Choice 1 or 2. If you choose Choice 3, please explain how it differed.

- Less severe
- More severe
- Targeted in a different manner \_\_\_\_\_

Q10. Do you know of other individuals who have experienced sextortion?

- Yes
- No

Condition: No Is Selected. Skip To: Q11.

Q10a. If so, how many individuals?

- At least one
- At least three
- At least five
- At least ten
- At least twenty

Q11. If residing outside of the United States of America, is this practice accepted in your country of origin?

- Yes
- No

Condition: No Is Selected. Skip To: Q12.

Q11a. If yes, how it is accepted?

Please explain \_\_\_\_\_

Q12. Please leave any additional information that you would like us to know about your sextortion experience(s).

Type Here \_\_\_\_\_

Analyzed data excluded uncompleted surveys. The collected data remained secured via the website, Qualtrics.com. Maintaining and destroying data took place according to Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines. I thanked the participants' for their participation in the study and provided contact information for support services if necessary.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

Data analysis purportedly requires three main actions to be taken in the majority of research studies (Trochim, 2000). Trochim proclaimed that these actions consist of data preparation, descriptive statistics, and inferential statistics. The present study incorporated these actions in the data analysis as well. Data preparation involved retrieving data from participants using the Internet and website, Qualtrics.com. Conducting a quantitative study involved the exportation of data from Qualtrics and imported into the SPSS software program for analyzation upon completion of data collection. Given the number of predictors in this study, Use of multiple regressions permitted the inclusion of all variables of interest. Descriptive statistics contained tables to ensure that the scores and distribution of scores did not result in skewed results. Measures of central tendency encompassing the frequency distribution such as employing

the mean and median, which helped describe the data due to using ordinal variables. Testing the assumptions of inferential statistics allowed the extraction of samples and making of generalizations about the population. Other statistics determined comprised residuals such Durbin-Watson to test for independent errors and casewise diagnostics to display various values, outliers, and missing data.

The techniques and strategies used for data analyses played an important role in the deliverance of plausible responses to the research questions (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). The questions had relevance and specificity to the research conducted which resulted in an uncomplicated process when determining techniques and strategies most suitable for the study (Mertler & Vannatta, 2002). Although this study aimed at investigating relationships between subjection to sextortion and the risks of emotional distress in the form of anxiety, depression or decreased self-esteem, and willingness to seek help and report the incident to authorities or someone else, the addressed research questions and hypotheses determined if relationships exist between the outcome variable (dependent variable) and predictor variables (independent variables):

Research Question #1: Are emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and subjected to sextortion more likely to experience a higher level of emotional distress than those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion, underwent testing with the of use the IDAS. Two hypotheses originated from the research question to differentiate emotional distress in the form of anxiety and depression. Individuals may experience anxiety and depression but not necessarily both at the same time. The IDAS intended to identify symptoms of anxiety and general depression (predictor variables), which could

stem from the subjection of sextortion (outcome variable). The hypotheses entailed the following:

*H<sub>0</sub>1a*: Higher levels of emotional distress in the form of anxiety as measured by the IDAS is not experienced more by emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion than those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion.

*H<sub>a</sub>1a* : Higher levels of emotional distress in the form of anxiety as measured by the IDAS is experienced more by emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion than those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion.

*H<sub>0</sub>1b*: Higher levels of emotional distress in the form of depression as measured by the IDAS is not experienced more by emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion than those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion.

*H<sub>a</sub>1b*: Higher levels of emotional distress in the form of depression as measured by the IDAS is experienced more by emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experience sextortion than those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion.

Research Question #2: Is there a difference in the level of self-esteem between emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion and those who have sexted and not experience sextortion? The RSES measured the difference in the level of self-esteem. The RSES aimed at distinguishing decreased self-esteem (predictor variable), which could result from the subjection of sextortion (outcome variable). The hypotheses entailed the following:

*H02*: Emerging adults' self-esteem as measured by the RSES is not likely to decrease more for those who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion than those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion.

*Ha2*: Emerging adults' self-esteem as measured by the RSES is likely to decrease more for those who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion than those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion.

Research Question #3: Is there a difference in the level of willingness to seek help or report the incident to authorities or loved ones between emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion and those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion? The employment of the GHSQ and RCP-A, RCP-B measured the differences. Participants completed the DES and SSOSHS if they indicated that they would not seek assistance from anyone. Four hypotheses originated from the research question to make a distinction between an individual seeking assistance from a professional or someone else, reporting the incident to authorities, less inclined to disclose, and troubled by self-stigma. While some individuals may decide to do both, other individuals may choose one over the other or neither one. The GHSQ, DES, and SSOSHS helped to discern an individual's willingness to seek assistance (predictor variable) and the RCP-A, RCP-B uncovered an individual's willingness to report the incident to authorities (predictor variable), which could impact their decision upon subjection to sextortion (outcome variable). The hypotheses entailed the following:

*Ho3a:* Emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion are not less willing to seek psychological help or help from someone else as measured by the GHSQ than those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion.

*Ha3a:* Emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion are less willing to seek psychological help or help from someone else as measured by the GHSQ than those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion.

*Ho3b:* Emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion are not less willing to report the incident to authorities as measure RCP-A, RCP-B than those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion.

*Ha3b:* Emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion are less willing to report the incident to authorities as measured by the RCP-A, RCP-B than those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion.

*Ho3c:* Emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion are not less inclined to disclose as measured by the DES than those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion.

*Ha3c:* Emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion are less inclined to disclose as measured by the DES than those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion.

*Ho3d:* Emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion are not more troubled by self-stigma as measured by the SSOSHS than those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion.

*Ha3d*: Emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion are more troubled by self-stigma as measured by the SSOSHS than those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion.

This study expected to conduct logistic regressions in the form of multiple regression equations to perform maximum-likelihood estimations of the outcome and predictor variables. Sextortion represented the outcome variable. The predictor variables consisted of IDAS, RSES, GHSQ, RCP-A and RCP-B, DES, SSOSHS, age, and gender. Logistic regressions would have assisted with the process of predicting the probability of the identified outcome variable occurring based on the identified predictor variables (Field, 2013). Regression coefficients and other statistical parameters provided sufficient data. Regression diagnostics established the fit of the model. Collinearity diagnostics uncovered if high correlates existed between predictors. Examining the correlation matrix of the predictor variables assisted with revealing correlation of interest.

The use of Pearson correlations, correlation matrixes, and matrix scatterplots helped determine relationships between the predictor variables and outcome variable. The use of graphs displayed regression plots that assisted with validating various regression assumptions. A review of the ANOVA tables and model summary aided with establishing the fit of the regression models. Significant predictor variables revealed values of less than .05 and .01. The standardized beta values indicated the importance of each predictor. The larger the absolute value, the more significant the predictor becomes. Odd ratios did not assist with effect measures to evaluate the relationships of interests.

### **Validity Threats**

Importance laid in distinguishing validity threats as it could have hindered the research experiment and design. Two key threats to validity regarding research designs comprise internal and external threats. Internal validity threats may have occurred if inaccurate inferences about the population existed, which could stem from effective experimental procedures, treatments, or participants' experiences (Creswell, 2009; 2014). Concerns rise with internal validity threats when establishing cause and effect relationships (Trochim, 2000). Unlike internal validity threats, threats to external validity may have taken place due to inaccurate inferences about the sample data and comparing the data to other conditions and circumstances (Smith, Mackie, & Claypool, 2014). Other concerns rise with external validity threats when making generalizations about the findings given that this element involve constructs with distinct implications (Brewer, 2000).

Threats to internal and external validity could pose issues in cross-sectional designs. Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (2008) discussed the strengths and weaknesses of employing cross-sectional designs. Internal validity may lack as these types of designs do not require individual cases to be randomly assigned to comparison groups. Fortunately, this permits the investigation of situations where individuals may otherwise be impossible or unethically assigned to a control or experimental group. Weaknesses surrounding cross-sectional designs involve researchers who face difficulty when making clear-cut inferences due to contrasting rationalizations that possess insufficient control. Importance lie in making logical or theoretical inferences relating to

the causal relationship direction as there is no way for researchers to manipulate independent variables (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008).

A threat to internal validity that could have posed an issue in this study involved the selection of participants. The threat of selection could have impacted the study by selecting participants to participate based on possessing particular qualities that may be influenced by their exposure to particular outcomes (Creswell, 2009; 2014). In other words, preexistent dissimilarities may lie among participants who volunteered to participate in the study in comparison to those who did not participate (Long & Hart, n.d.). Although control may have lacked over the aforementioned validity threat, which may be in part due to the type of research conducted, attempts to prevent or minimize the threat to the study endured. A course of action taken could entail randomly selecting some participants to increase the probability of these particular qualities distributed among the subjects in an equal manner (Creswell, 2009; 2014). Achieving a random selection would pose difficulty unless a large enough sample was collected to obtain a randomized sample.

Careful consideration of external and internal validity threats and deliberation of threats to construct and statistical conclusion validity demonstrated thorough check measures. Inaccurate descriptions and measures could have resulted in construct validity threats (Peter, 1981). Insufficient statistical power or inaccurate inferences drawn could have resulted in statistical conclusion validity threats (Drost, 2011). Importance lied in recognizing the potentiality of all threats that could have impacted the study. More importance surrounded delineating the threats and possible issues and addressing them to

circumvent or reduce the number of threats (Onwuegbuzie & McLean, 2003). The constructs presented in this study appeared to be most appropriate to minimize or avoid the indicated validity threats to conduct the research in a suitable manner.

### **Ethical Procedures**

Ethical procedures warrant adherence and demonstrate imperativeness in any study. Not following procedures may result in individuals conducting unethical research and possibly harming participants. Ethics committees must review all research concerning human beings in a sound manner to prevent the performance of unethical procedures (World Health Organization, 2016). Walden University's IRB reviewed and approved my proposal prior to conducting the actual research. This study intended to reduce the risks and harms and increase the number of benefits (Resnik, 2015). The participants did not receive any direct benefits. Scholars and diverse members of society at all levels may benefit more from this study. Scholars, in particular, can expand on the literature of sextortion to continue filling in the necessary gaps. Diverse members of society can respond at different levels as a means of finding effective ways to curtail sextortion.

Abiding by set standards concerning ethical procedures on a professional, institutional, and federal level help prevent unethical practice. The APA Board of Directors noted recommendations for researchers to avoid ethical dilemmas when conducting research with human participants (Smith, 2003). According to Smith, researchers should remain transparent about intellectual properties; must remain mindful of multiple roles that exist; should abide by the rules of informed consent; must regard

participants' confidentiality and privacy; and should have awareness of the available ethics resources. A research ethic planning worksheet enlightened on the expectancy and management of potential issues relative to the study's proposal and execution (Walden University, 2018).

In efforts of obeying all of the APA ethical principles and research ethics set forth by Walden University, I informed participants about the delicate nature of the study and gave them the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time and without any consequences for doing so. Participants agreed to participate by implied consent. As indicated on the consent form, an implied consent allowed participants to complete surveys without providing a signature. The signature section was not included on the form due to no requirement. An implied consent safeguarded participants as the data did not necessitate an identity match. The sample consent form offered as a guide by Walden included this information. No face-to-face interaction occurred between the participants and me. The implied consent process made it easier for participants to agree online prior to taking the survey. Participants' anonymity and responses to the surveys will continue to remain confidential. By conducting an anonymous online study may have provided participants with a little more comfort and willingness to participate in the study. More important, participants' vulnerability may have diminished due to identity concealment.

Recruitment of individuals originated through social media websites, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. Subsequently, solicitation of additional participants took place through three colleges via flyer posting and one university via email. Once participants decided to participate, they received directions to go straight to the study's hyperlink

without providing identifying information. Participants did provide demographic information that included their age, gender, race, highest level of education, sexual orientation, marital status, employment status, occupation, income, state of residence, and country of origin. Participants also responded to various descriptive questions to obtain a greater comprehension of their sexting behaviors and sextortion experiences. Participants voluntarily opted to complete a series of surveys equipped with a SSL encrypted connection to protect identities and mask IP addresses. With the use of a password-protected secured database, transmission of confidential data occurred using SPSS software for analyzation and storage purposes. Transferred data is only available to me and will remain anonymous upon dissemination where aggregated statistical findings will not contain individual data unless relevant. Adherence to maintain and destroy data according to guidelines set forth by the university's IRB ensures quality assurance. The IRB advised to retain files for a minimum of five years upon completion of research. The data stored in the database will remain secure during the specified time. A locked file cabinet holds the retrieval of hard copies where only I have access. Destroying of documents required the use of a paper shredder. Discarded documents ended up in a recycling bin.

This study's ethical concerns related to recruitment materials and processes regarding the population and data collection. Feeling of vulnerability may have affected participants due to the sensitivity of the research. Taking precautions prevented participants from becoming exploited or experiencing an excessive level of discomfort. Three of five ethical principles devised by the APA (2012), and approved by Walden

University IRB (2018), establish the fundamentality of protecting human participants. The principles embody Beneficence – avoiding the exposure of individuals to harm or preventable risks; Justice – exposing individuals to reasonable and just procedures; and Respect for People’s Rights and Dignity – safeguarding the welfare of individuals’ and the most vulnerable (APA, 2012; Walden University, 2018). These key principles remained at the forefront before, during, and after conducting this research in efforts to diminish the identified ethical concerns and minimize participants’ level of discomfort and exploitation.

### **Summary**

The basis for this study and rationale for type of research design used helped informed on if and how sexting behaviors negatively impact emerging adults. The employment of a cross-sectional design revealed the universality of sextortion among emerging adults. Previous quantitative studies have broadly focused on media propaganda regarding the expectations and prevalence of sexting whereas qualitative studies have mainly concentrated on the adolescents’ sexting motivations (Walrave et al., 2014). This study’s primary focus surrounded emerging adults’ sexting behaviors that could lead or have led to sextortion and result or have resulted in psychological effects such as anxiety, depression, and decreased self-esteem, as well as issues encompassing the unwillingness to seek support services and report the incident to authorities or someone else. The population of emerging adults recruited for this study consisted of adolescents and young adults’ age 18-24-years-old. Due to the sensitive nature of the study, recruitment first took place over the Internet where millions of individuals frequent

and possibly more representative and generalizable to the population. Recruitment consequently occurred at three colleges via flyer posting and one university via email. With the employment of a convenience sample, accessibility to subjects occurred in a straightforward manner (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). Straightforwardness became crucial to the study given the profound research topic. The instrumentation and operationalization of constructs used varied in measurements. The self-administered measurements comprised IDAS, RSES, GHSQ, RCP-A, RCP-B, DES and SSOSHS. Importation of data occurred through Qualtrics.com. Exportation took place via Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software 25. Compilation of descriptive and inferential statistics simplified results to display. Running regression analyses assisted with establishing the rejection or accepting of the null hypotheses. Chapter 4 provides a detailed account of the findings.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Overview**

The objective of this study involved examining the psychological effects experienced and willingness to seek help and report the incident of sextortion among emerging adults. I concentrated on exploring if individuals who have engaged in sexting behaviors and experienced sextortion felt more anxiety, depression, and lower self-esteem than individuals who sexted and never experienced sextortion. Another area of concentration entailed exploring if individuals who have engaged in sexting behaviors and experienced sextortion felt less empowered to seek supportive services and report the incident than individuals who have sexted and never experienced sextortion. Other interest laid in the discovery of the number of individuals who underwent sextortion. In this chapter, I will present the data collection process, demographic information, descriptive statistics, a review of the research questions and hypotheses addressed, and statistical analysis findings.

### **Data Collection**

Collection of data for this study occurred between October 2017 and October 2018. Initially, recruitment of participants took place on social media websites, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. The creation and posting of recruitment letters on the websites assisted with respondent solicitation. The letters included age qualifications, purpose of the study, and an anonymous hyperlink for additional information and to proceed to the consent form and survey. Modifications later made to the recruitment method afforded access to more participants. In March 2018, the study incorporated

colleges and a university due to not yielding participants from the online method. The new methods used to solicit participants included flyer posting at three New York colleges and e-mail system at one university (see Appendix D). The New York-based university collaborated with me through Qualtrics. Students received letters by way of the university inviting them to take the survey via e-mail. The university had knowledge of the expected sample size and gathered data until the collection period ended. Response identification numbers replaced the names of participants for demographic purposes. This process assisted the university with keeping track of the number of pools of students solicited, which totaled three to five, and the number of students who took the survey to know when to end data collection. Once the data collection period officially ended, gathered data from Qualtrics.com transferred successfully to SPSS 25 for analyzation.

### **Data Screening**

The data underwent screening for insufficient and omitted values before conducting any analysis. In the initial review, I uncovered that 99 participants began the survey and only 45 completed it. In the second review, I revealed that of those 45 participants, four opted out of the survey and two did not qualify due to their age. In a further review, I uncovered another 12 participants who never engaged in sexting behaviors or experienced sextortion. The final analysis exclusion these participants due to the research questions comparing emerging adults who have sexted and experienced sextortion to those who have sexted and never experienced sextortion. The exclusion resulted in a final sample of 27 participants.

The low response rate may have resulted from to a number of factors. In terms of the social media websites, the lack of success may attribute to not reaching a large enough audience as the webpages did not have contacts attached such as family, friends, or friends of friends. This intentional act helped prevent coercion and persuasion. Although the social media webpages allowed access to the public, unless individuals conducted random searches, they would have not found the survey with ease. If individuals had found the webpage, then they would have had to ensure that they qualified to participate and desired to do so. In reference to the flyer posting method, students may not have actually taken the time out to read the flyer and its entirety or may have lacked interest in participating due to no incentive provided. Students could have had trepidations about participating in this type of study given the nature. Some individuals, particularly those who may have experienced sextortion or negative outcomes from their sexting behaviors, may feel humiliated or regretful and believe that others will judge them. For the e-mail method, students may have felt that the survey was too long and, therefore, did not want to invest time or lost concentration after beginning the survey. Some students could have felt that the topic was too sensitive and, therefore, did not want to divulge such personal information. No potential participants reported any possible adverse effects that could have taken place if they chose to participate nor did any respondents report any adverse effects as a result of them participating in the study.

### **Demographic Analysis**

The sample consisted of  $N = 27$  responders between 18-24 years of age who had engaged in sexting behaviors and may or may not have experienced sextortion. Of those,

10 responders completed the DES and SSOSHS scales. The request to complete these two scales did not happen unless respondents selected one through four for Items E and/or I on the GHSQ scale. By respondents selecting these particular items on the GHSQ, they indicated that they ranged from unlikely to extremely unlikely to seek help from a mental health professional or anyone. The DES and SSOSHS scales afforded respondents a way to indicate their reasons for not seeking help from a mental health professional or anyone else. According to Field (2013), to obtain a reliable regression model sample, sizes should always be above 55 as sufficient data collection allows larger samples the capability of making assumptions about beta values originating from a normally distributed sampling distribution. Each predictor in the model requires 10-15 cases of data per predictor. This study contained eight predictors, essentially requiring 80-120 cases of data. The sample size initially proposed and necessary to achieve adequate power for this study consisted of 85 samples.

The frequency sums and percentages of the categorically measured demographic variables (ie., age, sex, race, education, sexual orientation, marital status, employment, occupation, income, state of residence, and country of residence). Table 1 provided a summarization of the frequency sums and percentages.

The mean age among the  $N = 27$  respondents represented 20.07-years-old ( $SD = 1.492$ ). The sample consisted of more females (16; 59.3%) than males (11; 40.7%). For race, White had the highest respondent rate (20; 69.0%). For education, a large number of respondents had some college but no degree (21; 77.8%). For sexual orientation, 19 (70.4%) indicated heterosexual (straight), two (7.4%) indicated homosexual (gay), four

(14.8%) indicated bisexual, one (3.7%) indicated other (pansexual), and one (3.7%) preferred not to say. Nearly all of the respondents have never married (26; 96.3%). For employment, a little more than half worked (paid employee; 14; 51.9%). For occupation, the fields of work consisted of management, professional, and related (three; 11.1%), service (seven; 25.9%), and sales and office (five; 18.5%). For income, a little under half made less than \$10,000 (10; 37.0%). The majority of the sample resided in the state of New York (24; 88.9%). Lastly, the entire sample resided in the country of the United States of America (27; 100.0%).

Table 1  
*Frequency Sum and Percentage for Demographic Information (N = 27)*

Variable	Category	n	%
Age	18	4	4.8
	19	5	18.5
	20	10	37.0
	21	4	14.8
	22	2	7.4
	23	1	3.7
	24	1	3.7
Sex	Male	11	40.7
	Female	16	59.3
Race	White	20	69.0
	Black or African American	3	10.3
	American Indian or Alaska Native	1	3.5
	Asian	4	13.8
	Other	1	3.5
	Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino	4	14.8
	Education	High school graduate (Diploma or GED)	3
	Some college but no degree	21	77.8
	Associate degree in college (2-year)	2	7.4
	Bachelor's degree in college (4-year)	1	3.7
Sexual Orientation	Heterosexual (straight)	19	70.4
	Homosexual (gay)	2	7.4
	Bisexual	4	14.8
	Other	1	3.7
	Prefer not to say	1	3.7
Marital Status	Married	1	3.7
	Never married	26	96.3
Employment	Working (paid employee)	14	51.9
	Not working (looking for work)	6	22.2
	Not working (other)	7	25.9
Occupation	Management, professional, and related	3	11.1
	Service	7	25.9
	Sales and office	5	18.5
Income	Less than \$10,000	10	37.0
	\$90,000 to \$99,999	2	7.4
	\$100,00 to \$149,999	2	7.4
	\$150,000 or more	3	11.1
	\$10,000 to \$19,999	5	18.5
	\$20,000 to \$29,999	1	3.7
	\$40,000 to \$49,999	1	3.7
	\$50,000 to \$59,999	1	3.7
	\$60,000 to \$69,999	1	3.7
	\$80,000 to \$89,999	1	3.7
State of Residence	New Jersey	1	3.7
	New York	24	88.9
	Pennsylvania	2	7.4
Country of Residence	United States of America	27	100.0

*Note.* Enquiries are listed in the order in which they appeared on the survey.

## Descriptive Statistics

### Sexting Behavior Engagements

The majority of the sample engaged in seminude sexting behaviors (25; 32.0%). Most of their engagements occurred with a spouse, partner, significant other (e.g., boyfriend/girlfriend; 20; 34.5%). A little less than half engaged a few times a month (11; 40.7%). Similarly, almost half have engaged in sexting behaviors for 1 to 3 years (12; 44.4%). For negative outcomes, eight (29.6%) experienced some type of negative outcome. For the type of negative outcome, seven (58.3%) experienced emotional distress, two (16.7%) experienced sexual victimization, two (16.7%) experienced harassment, and one (8.3%) significant other found out. For the severity of outcome, two (25.0%) indicated not severe, three (37.5%) indicated mildly severe, two (25.0%) indicated moderately severe, and one (12.5%) indicated severe. More than half of sample sexting experiences (positive and negative) occurred more than 6 months ago (14; 51.9%). For age of engagement, 15 (55.6%) indicated 18 or older and 12 (44.4%) indicated 17 or under. Over half of the sample (16; 59.3%) indicated that it is not an acceptable practice in their country of origin. Lastly, respondents had an opportunity to leave any additional information that they wanted to share about their sexting behaviors.

“It’s normal for couples to share nudes if you’re away from each other.”

“I like sending dirty texts.”

“I’ve only sent pictures of me in bikinis but a bit more scandalous than a normal picture, and usually never my face in.. just in case.”

“It took place from ages 15-18 not just under 17.”

“I started sexting through certain apps when I was about 16/17 to connect with other gay people. I did frequently for a few years (16-18) until I realized it wasn't the best option. Now, with my boyfriend, we won't necessarily sext but send suggestive snaps.”

“A lot of graphic verbal flirtation.”

“No longer engaging in this behavior as the person and I are no longer together.”

“Snapchat is used mostly because the picture deletes if the person does not take a screenshot of it.”

Table 2 provided a summarization of the frequency sums and percentages for categorically measured enquiries to respondents engagement in sexting behaviors (ie., which include types of sexting behaviors, with whom, how often, for how long, negative outcome experiences, severity of the negative outcome, how long ago it took place, age of engagement, and acceptable practice in country of origin).

Table 2  
*Frequency sum and Percentage for Responses to Engagement in Sexting Behavior (N = 27)*

Enquiry	Category	<i>n</i>	%
Q1.	Topless	20	25.6
	Bottomless	17	21.8
	Seminude	25	32.0
	Nude	16	20.5
Q2.	Spouse, Partner, Significant other (e.g., boyfriend/girlfriend)	20	34.5
	Acquaintance with whom you have sex	15	25.9
	Acquaintance with whom you have not had sex	16	27.6
	Stranger	..7	12.1
	Once a month	..5	18.5
Q3.	A few times a month	11	40.7
	Once a week	..3	11.1
	A few times a week	..7	25.9
	Daily	..1	..3.8
Q4.	Less than a month	..1	..3.7
	Three – six months	..4	14.8
	Less than a year	..5	18.5
	One – three years	12	44.4
	More than five years	..5	18.5
Q5.	Yes	..8	29.6
	No	19	70.4
Q5a.	Emotional distress	..7	58.3
	Sexual victimization	..2	16.7
	Harassment	..2	16.7
	Significant other found out	..1	..8.3
Q5b.	Not severe	..2	25.0
	Mildly severe	..3	37.5
	Moderately severe	..2	25.0
	Severe	..1	12.5
Q6.	A week ago	..4	14.8
	A month ago	..7	25.9
	More than six months ago	14	51.9
	More than five years ago	..2	..7.4
Q7.	Age 17 or under	12	44.4
	Age 18 or older	15	55.6
Q8.	Yes	11	40.7
	No	16	59.3

*Note.* Enquiries are listed in the order in which they appeared on the survey.

### **Sextortion Experiences**

A small portion of the sample experienced sextortion (three; 11.1%). Of those, one experienced 10 encounters in the same manner. For the types of encounters, two (66.7%) involved explicit pictures and videos and one (33.3%) involved money. For the age of encounters, one (33.3%) was 18 or older and two (66.7%) were 17 or under. Respondents were targeted through websites “Plenty of Fish and Snapchat, and via text.” For the worse encounter experienced, one (33.3%) took place 3- 6 months ago and two (66.7%) over a year ago. For the longest encounter experienced, two (66.7%) lasted for a week or less and one (33.3%) lasted for 3-6 months (one; 33.3%). For the level of severity with the worst encounter experienced, one (33.3%) was not severe at all, one (33.3%) was moderately severe, and one (33.3%) was severe. The majority of the sample did not know of other individuals who had experienced sextortion (19; 70.4%). Of those who did, four (50.0%) knew of at least one person. Lastly, respondents were asked to leave any additional information that they would like to be known about their sextortion experience.

“The pictures were being used to make money off of them and there were fake identities made online to pretend that I was the one selling my own body but I didn't know that this was happening until recent.”

Table 3 provided a summarization of the frequency sums and percentages for categorically measured enquiries of respondents sextortion experiences (ie., which include the number of encounters, type of encounters, age of encounters, how they became a target, most severe experience, level of severity, if encounters occurred in the

same manner, knowing of others who had encounters, and acceptable practice in country of origin).

Table 3  
*Frequency sum and Percentage for Responses to Sextortion Experiences (N = 27)*

Enquiry	Category	<i>n</i>	%
Q1.	Yes	3	11.1
	No	24	88.9
Q2.	Once	2	66.7
	At least ten times	1	33.3
Q3.	Solicited for explicit pictures and or videos	2	6.7
	Solicited for money	1	33.3
Q4	Age 17 or under	2	66.7
	Age 18 or older	1	33.3
Q5.	Website	1	100.0
Q6.	A week or less	2	66.7
	At least three – six months	1	33.3
Q7.	Not severe at all	1	33.3
	Moderately severe	1	33.3
	Severe	1	33.3
Q8.	Three – six months ago	1	33.3
	Over a year ago	2	66.7
Q9.	Yes	1	33.3
	Not applicable	2	66.7
Q10.	Yes	8	29.6
	No	19	70.4
Q10a.	At least one	4	50.00
	At least three	3	37.5
	At least five	1	12.5
Q11.	Yes	1	3.7
	No	26	96.3

*Note.* Enquiries are listed in the order in which they appeared on the survey.

### **Sexting Behaviors and Sextortion Experiences by Age**

The mean score for age 18 revealed .50 ( $SD = .577$ ). The mean score represented half of the 18-year-olds who encountered a negative experience from engaging in sexting behaviors. The mean score for age 19 revealed .40 ( $SD = .548$ ). The mean score represented less than half of the 19-year-olds who experienced a negative encounter from sexting and one who underwent sextortion. The mean score for age 20 revealed .40 ( $SD = .516$ ). The mean score represented a third of the 20 year olds who experienced a negative encounter from sexting and one who underwent sextortion on at least 10 occasions. For the age group 21, no one in this age group has ever encountered a negative experience from sexting nor has undergone sextortion. The mean score for age 22 revealed .50 ( $SD = .707$ ). The mean score represented half of the 22-year-olds who experienced a negative encounter from sexting and has undergone sextortion. For age groups 23 and 24, neither age group has ever encountered a negative experience from sexting nor have they undergone sextortion.

Table 4 provided a summarization of descriptive statistics of the means and standard deviations of respondents who engaged in sexting behaviors and may have experienced a negative encounter and subjection to sextortion according to age.

Table 4  
*Sexting Behaviors and Sextortion Experiences \* Age*

Age	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
18	4	.50	.577
19	5	.40	.548
20	10	.40	.516
21	4	.00	.000
22	2	.50	.707
23	1	.00	
24	1	.00	
Total	27	.33	.480

### **Sexting Behaviors and Sextortion Experiences by Gender**

The mean score for males revealed .27 ( $SD = .467$ ). The mean score represented a relatively small portion of males who experienced a negative encounter from engaging in sexting behaviors and one who underwent sextortion. The mean score for females revealed .38 ( $SD = .500$ ). The mean score represented a little over a third of females who experienced a negative encounter from sexting and two who underwent sextortion.

Table 5 provided a summarization of descriptive statistics of the means and standard deviations for respondents who engaged in sexting behaviors and may have experienced a negative encounter and subjection to sextortion according to gender.

Table 5  
*Sexting Behaviors and Sextortion Experiences \* Gender*

Gender	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Male	11	.27	.467
Female	16	.38	.500
Total	27	.33	.480

### Statistical Analysis

#### Research Question 1

Research question one explored if differences in the level of emotional distress existed between emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion and those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion. For the two hypotheses, the independent (predictor) variable comprised the IDAS, which represented emotional distress in the form of anxiety and depression and dependent (outcome) variable entailed sextortion. Simple regressions tested the hypotheses in contrast to running logistic regressions due to insufficient data and insignificant findings to support the rejection of the null hypotheses with a 95% confidence level. The results revealed that emotional distress accounted for 7.3% of the variation in sextortion and other variables accounted for 92.7% of the variation. The effect of sextortion on the difference in the level of emotional distress displayed no significance,  $F(1, 25) = 1.96, p = .174$ . The predictor variables did not significantly predict the outcome variable ( $b = .278, p = .337$ ).

#### Research Question 2

Research question two discovered if differences in the level of self-esteem existed between emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion and

those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion. For this hypothesis, the independent (predictor) variable encompassed the RSES and dependent (outcome) variable entailed sextortion. A simple regression tested the hypothesis and revealed that self-esteem accounted for a mere 0.2% of the variation in sextortion resulting in 99.8% of the variation influenced by other variables. The effect of sextortion on self-esteem displayed no significance,  $F(1, 25) = .054, p = .818$ . The predictor variable did not significantly predict the outcome variable ( $b = .001, p = .998$ ).

### **Research Question 3**

Research question three surveyed if differences in the level of willingness to seek help and report the incident to authorities or loved ones existed between emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion and those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion. For these hypotheses, the independent (predictor) variables consisted of GHSQ, RCP-A, RCP-B, DES, and SSOSHS and dependent (outcome) variable entailed sextortion. A multiple (hierarchical) regression tested these hypotheses contrary to running logistic regressions due to insufficient data and insignificant findings to support the rejection of the null hypotheses with 95% confidence levels. The results revealed that GHSQ accounted for 12.4% of the variation in sextortion. With the inclusion of predictor variables, RCP-A, RCP-B, DES, and SSOSHS, the value increased to 71.3%. The value accounted for an additional 58.9%, explaining a large amount of the variation in sextortion where only 28.7% of the variation underwent influences from other variables. Although observance for statistical power occurred at the .05 level, no findings displayed a significant effect of sextortion on GHSQ,  $F(1, 25) = 1.131, p = .319$ .

The effects of sextortion on GHSQ, RCP-A, RCP-B, DES, and SSOSHS collectively revealed no significant findings,  $F(1, 25) = 3.105, p = .109$ .

Predictor variable, RCP-A, RCP-B presented a positive relationship with the outcome variable whereas predictor variables, GHSQ, DES, and SSOSHS demonstrated negative relationships with the outcome variable. Predictor variables, DES and SSOSHS had the highest correlation and significance at the .01 level ( $r = .736, p = .008$ ). Predictor variable, SSOSHS correlated best with the outcome variable ( $r = -.632, p = .025$ ) and displayed significance at the .05 level. Predictor variable, GHSQ did not significantly predict the outcome variable ( $b = .557, p = .242$ ). Predictor variables, GHSQ, RCP-A, RCP-B, DES and SSOSHS collectively predicted the outcome variable at the .05 significance level, ( $b = 2.397, p = .054$ ). However, evidence suggested influential cases (3, 16 & 25) within the data. This indicated a considerable amount of undue influence on the regression parameters. Table 6 delineated the linear model of predictor variables of the outcome variable, beta values, and significance levels.

Table 6.  
*Linear model of predictors of sextortion subjection, with 95% bias corrected and accelerated confidence intervals reported in parentheses.*

	<i>b</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i>
Step 1				
General Help-Seeking	-0.01	0.01	-0.35	.319
Step 2				
Constant	(-0.03, 0.01) 2.40	0.96		0.05
General Help-Seeking	(-0.06, 4.85) -0.01	0.01	-0.57	0.09
Reporting Incident	(-0.03, 0.00) 0.01	0.00	0.41	0.19
Disclosure	(-0.00, 0.02) -0.01	0.02	-0.11	.780
Seeking Help Stigma	(-0.05, 0.04) -0.07 (-0.16, 0.03)	0.04	-0.69	0.12

*Note.*  $R^2 = .12$  for Step 1;  $\Delta R^2 = .59$  for Step 2 ( $p = .31$ ,  $p = .109$ ).

### Summary

This study progressed around the investigation of the psychological effects experienced and willingness to seek help and report the incident of sextortion among emerging adults. Interest lied in how many emerging adults became impacted by this phenomenon. Interest also in the exploration of disparities between individuals who have engaged in sexting behaviors and experienced sextortion compared to individuals who sexted and never experienced sextortion. The sample size used for six predictors equaled 27. The remaining two predictors sample size equaled 10. Samples of these calibers made

it challenging to achieve significance at acceptable levels and resulted in unreliable regression models. Statistical analyses did not support the rejection of null hypotheses 1, null hypothesis 2 or null hypotheses 3. Hypotheses 1 examined differences in the level of emotional distress between the two groups of emerging adults. The results exhibited no significant effects of sextortion on emotional distress. Hypothesis 2 examined differences in the level of self-esteem between the two groups of emerging adults. The data indicated no significant effect of sextortion on self-esteem. Hypotheses 3 examined differences in the level of willingness to seek help and report the incident to authorities or loved ones between the two groups of emerging adults. The findings displayed no significant effects of sextortion on the willingness to seek help or report the incident to authorities or loved ones. The correlation between predictor variables, DES and SSOSHS revealed the highest correlation among all predictors and yielded significant results. The significant findings uncovered for predictor variable, SSOSHS demonstrated the best correlation with the outcome variable. However, none of the predictor variables made a substantial contribution to significantly predict the outcome variable, which leads to further discussion in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5 has provided a summarization and interpretation of the central findings, the limitations of the study, recommendations for further research, implications for social change, and the conclusion of the study.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Sending and posting racy pictures and videos, often forwarded and circulated to others, has become a problem for many individuals (Mitchell et al., 2012). A large area of research currently exists on the pervasiveness of sexting (Delevi & Weisskirch, 2013, Dir et al., 2013). The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy and CosmoGirl.com (2008) conducted one of the first and largest non-peer-reviewed online studies on sexting prevalence. A vast number of subsequent studies have concentrated on this aspect of sexting as well (Comartin et al., 2013; Dake et al., 2012; Prather & Vandiver, 2014; Strassberg et al., 2013; Temple et al., 2012). Other concerns surrounding sexting have since shifted the attention to sexting behaviors and possible outcomes, which lie at both ends of the spectrum (Boillot Fansher, 2017). The simplicity of sending, receiving, and forwarding images and videos via digital media has, however, brought the phenomena of sextortion into existence and resulted in a range of deceptiveness and malice (Cohen-Almagor, 2015). In this study, I attempted to uncover the impact of sextortion on emerging adults who may have experienced emotional distress and had reservations about seeking help and reporting the incident to authorities.

This quantitative study denote as one of the first studies to conduct research on the connection between sexting and sextortion. Determining if and how sexting behaviors lead to sextortion where individuals' lives become negatively impacted played a key factor. Through a series of scales and questionnaires, emerging adults ( $N = 27$ ) anonymously reported their emotional, mental, and physical state based on experiencing positive and negative outcomes from their sexting behaviors and sextortion. The study

discovered more positive outcomes than negative outcomes. These findings align with previous results (Englander, 2015). Some respondents associated sexting with excitement and viewed it as a form of flirting as shown in other studies (Katzman, 2010; Stone, 2011). The employment of simple and multiple regressions yielded varying results when uncovering other variations and predictors of the outcome variable,

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

In the first research question, I sought to explore differences in the level of emotional distress between emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion and those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion. A small number of participants reported their occurrences of sexual victimization, harassment, and emotional distress from engaging in sexting behaviors. These findings aligned with prior studies that have shown sexting to result in taunting, terrorization, and sexual victimization (Brown et al., 2009; Mitchell et al., 2003; Walrave et al., 2014). About 1 in 7 adolescents who reported engaging in sexting also correlated the behavior with negative emotions (Strassberg et al., 2013). Ahern and Mechling (2013) found that individuals experience anxiety and acute distress often, but the contingency of these factors depends on the severity of the incident. In this study, I uncovered different levels of emotional distress according to the severity of the encounter. Respondents who experienced emotional distress from engaging in sexting behaviors reported severity levels of not severe, mildly severe, moderately severe, and severe respectively. Respondents who experienced emotional distress from sextortion reported severity levels of not severe, moderately severe, and severe respectively. Emotional distress explained a

small portion of the variation in sextortion. The results displayed no significant effect of sextortion on the difference in the level of emotional distress.

In the second research question, I examined differences in the level of self-esteem between emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion and those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion. Self-esteem scarcely accounted for a portion of the variation in sextortion. The results exhibited no significant effect of sextortion on the difference in the level of self-esteem. The predictor variable revealed an insignificant prediction of the outcome variable. Similar to this finding, self-esteem showed an insignificant relationship with sexting (Gordon-Messer et al., 2013). Inconsistent with these discoveries, other studies uncovered a positive relationship between sexting and issues involving self-esteem (Dake et al., 2012; Perkins et al., 2014).

In the third research question, I looked at differences in the level of willingness to seek help and report the incident to authorities or loved ones between emerging adults who have engaged in sexting and experienced sextortion and those who have sexted and not experienced sextortion. The predictor variables and outcome variable yielded some significant results. Disclosure expectations and self-stigma of seeking help had the highest and most significant correlation between variables. Self-stigma of seeking help significantly correlated best with the sextortion. Sextortion showed a positive relationship with reasons for calling the police, but displayed negative relationships with general help-seeking, disclosure expectations, and self-stigma of seeking help. Ranahan (2010) found that the youthful population exhibited more reluctance to seeking help in fear of being seen as weak; they faulted themselves or felt their problems would go away on its own.

Rickwood et al. (2005) also discovered the unlikelihood of adolescents and young adults seeking assistance from a professional and likelihood of seeking help from a friend or family member. However, general help-seeking accounted for a little portion of the variation in sextortion but increased its value significantly with the inclusion of reasons for calling the police, disclosure expectations, and self-stigma of seeking help. The variation in sextortion explained a much larger percentage inferring that the combination of all four variables became good predictors of sextortion. Individuals may be less inclined to seek general help if this is their only option and they do not feel it will be beneficial. On the other hand, individuals may be more willing to seek general or professional help and report their incident of sextortion without self-stigma if they are aware or informed of all available options and believe in them. Zartaloudi and Madianos (2010) uncovered that people nearest to individuals in need of mental health services represent as predictors of psychological help-seeking and crucial to individuals' search of psychological support in addition to their attitudes and beliefs. Vogel et al. (2007) also found that encouragement of others of whom a bond is shared with or knowing of others who have sought mental health services play a role in an individual's quest for psychological assistance. This study's findings of sextortion on general help-seeking, reasons for calling the police, disclosure expectations, and self-stigma to seek help collectively had no significant effects in spite of indicative results. Regression factors displayed a considerable amount of undue influence on a select number of cases. These findings may have resulted from a much lower ratio of respondents who reported engaging in sexting behaviors and subjection to sextortion measured up to a higher ratio

of respondents who reported engaging in sexting behaviors and no subjection to sextortion. Perhaps some individuals misrepresented their engagement in sexting behaviors or simply did not want to reveal their actual sexting outcomes. The NCMEC (2015) reported receiving more than 4.3 million sex crime tips and reviewed over 139 million sexual imageries and videos; yet, the reported number of sextortion incidents totaled only 801.

Importance surrounded discovering inequalities between emerging adults who have sexted and experienced sextortion and emerging adults who sexted and never experienced sextortion. Focus remained on an age period vital to those exploring their identities, experiencing instability at its highest point, self-focused, feeling in between, and encountering possibilities that ensue in positive and negative outcomes (Arnett, 2006). Emerging adults' engagement in sexting behaviors has reportedly resulted in more positive outcomes than negative outcomes. More females reported engaging in sexting behaviors. Wysocki and Childers (2011) found that female participation in sexting outweighed males. Although these findings prove harmonious, further exploration may have helped to uncover if females actually engage in more sexting or perhaps females are more willing to report their sexting behaviors than males. Although all respondents (females and males) had engaged in some type of sexting behavior, approximately 10% reported that they had experienced sextortion. This finding may provide a plausible explanation for why evidence suggested influential cases within the data. The samples, which varied in sizes, may have attributed significantly to the insufficient data and insignificant findings.

### **Limitations of the Study**

A major limitation of the study involved the sample. The projected sample size of 85 lacked attainment to achieve adequate power. The final sample sizes consisted of 27 on four scales and 10 on two scales respectively. Of out the 27 who engaged in sexting behaviors, only 3 had experienced sextortion. These sample sizes posed challenges in obtaining reliable regression models as samples should meet a minimum of 55 in size (Field, 2013). The main contributing factor to the undersized samples may have resulted from the low response rate likely due to various reasons such as targeting restricted audiences, not offering incentives, overlooked posted flyers, apprehensions about participating, or survey length. The survey consisted of six questionnaires and scales totaling 146 questions. Although the survey contained relatively short questions, participants may have experienced survey fatigue. The survey reflected a drop off in response rate. Exclusion of participants totaled 54 due to incomplete surveys.

A limitation discussed early on concerned the sample that might not have effectively represented the population (Ahern, 2005). Samples should be representative of the population to make accurate inferences (Banerjee & Chaudhury, 2010). This study's population may have lacked adequate representation, which could not be ensured (Trochim, 2000). The underrepresented population may have resulted from nonrandom sampling and small sample sizes. Underreporting, over reporting, and social appeal required careful consideration due to the solicitation of participants from the Internet and through colleges via flyer posting and email. Participants had the ability to remain anonymous when completing the self-reported and self-administered inventories and

questionnaires. Emotional, mental, and physical states impacting participants lacked direct attention. The restricted access resulted in no observance of participants' comfort levels to make them feel more at ease, if necessary.

The anonymity granted throughout the administration of the survey offered an opportunity for participants to fully cooperate and disclose their sexting behaviors and sextortion experiences. However, anonymity may not have led to full cooperation and disclosure for all participants. Although participants voluntarily participated, other factors could have influenced their beliefs, thoughts, and views inhibiting them from sharing their true experiences. Feelings of humiliation, degradation, and tarnish could have played a part in participants possibly providing dishonest and untruthful responses (Pittenger, 2003). The convenience sample employed required little cost, time, and difficulty (Lunsford & Lunsford, 1995). In addition, a convenience sample afforded participants the opportunity to participate based on their readiness (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). A high rate of self-selection may however, result in more questions regarding the representativeness of the sample (Farrokhi & Mahmoudi-Hamidabad, 2012), and hence, the discovery of influential cases within the data.

### **Recommendations**

Importance lies in taking the limitations of this study into account upon interpreting the results. The samples contained small sizes. Future studies may require targeting a larger audience that will offer more insight into the phenomenon of sextortion as the attracted audience in this study provided limited insight. To increase the target population may require increasing the number of organizations such as the authorities at

city, state, and federal levels, medical offices and clinics, and schools (e.g., undergraduate, graduate, trade, and vocational) to collaborate with and ensure an adequate sample size. This becomes essential to achieving a reliable regression model (Field, 2013). The varying sample sizes may have impacted the reliability of the models to sufficiently test for disparities among the emerging adults under study.

Future studies should carefully consider the length of the survey. Unless there is a plausible explanation, the survey should not last longer than 12 minutes or 9 minutes using a mobile device as it tends to result in respondents dropping off at significant levels (Qualtrics, 2018). A respondent drop off may have happened in this study due to the survey lasting approximately twice the length of the suggested time. Respondents may have become tired of responding to one questionnaire or item after another. The justification for the lengthy survey involved capturing different aspects of sexting behaviors and sextortion due to the lack of scholarly research that currently exist. Gathering an array of data at once seemed advantageous but in essence, may have become disadvantageous. The data collection process continued for one year. The recruitment method required modifications during this time period. Future work should minimize the questionnaires and items on a given scale to achieve higher response rates and completed surveys.

The use of self-reported and self-administered surveys has drawbacks (Enzmann, 2013). Adding an anonymity component does not necessarily reduce the number of disadvantages (Dalal & Hakel, 2016). The point of allowing participants to remain anonymous in this study may have given them a sense of freedom knowing that they had

a choice to complete the survey without feeling pressured to do so. However, some participants may have felt otherwise. Although this study used a quantitative design, future studies may benefit from using a qualitative design due to the delicate nature of the topic. Participants may be more reliable and honest knowing that their voice is heard and someone other than them share their concerns. Some personal information may be disclosed to researchers but participants' identities would essentially remain confidential. Having some reassurance may permit participants to be more candid and fully express their thoughts and feelings. Participants provided additional comments and views on their sexting behaviors and sextortion in this study. However, it is unclear if they felt comfortable with doing so. In a qualitative study, the researcher would have the ability to directly observe participants and assess their comfort level to help them with feel more at ease if they feel uncomfortable (Morgan, 2016).

### **Implications**

Sexting began receiving recognition in the media around 2007 (Judge, 2012), and subsequently, has reached new heights (Walker et al., 2011). Although the overall findings in this study indicated that most individuals' engagement in sexting behaviors demonstrated more positivity than negativity, some individuals reported experiencing tremendous effects from sexting and sextortion. These individuals may require services to address their emotional needs. They must first be aware or made aware of all resources available to them and feel comfortable enough to take advantage of these services. Anyone at any age can become subjected to sextortion. Unless sextortion is studied in depth and viewed as a serious offense by all members in society, the real impact of it may

never be uncovered to foster change. By bringing sextortion issues to the forefront may result in more disclosure of incidents occurring around the world as well as more willingness to disclose such profound cases.

The news media has made efforts to bring awareness to sextortion but not enough to make a real impact on society. The number of members in society who have awareness of sextortion and how someone becomes subjected appears insignificant (Gutfleish, 2017). Although authorities have arrested perpetrators who have sextorted, enquiries remain around authorities taking all reported cases serious and if such cases undergo thorough investigations. Likewise, prosecutors should take the criminality of sextortion seriously and do whatever possible to indict the perpetrators. They must first however comprehend the use of the technology to commit sextortion offenses and then prosecute accordingly (Rutizer, 2014). Presently, sextortion, in the legal sense, is termed as such and grouped with other cases not well-defined as a criminal offense (Wittes et al., 2016). The more cases brought to light, the more likely sextortion will receive acknowledgements on a micro and macro level. The establishment of new policies and laws may deter perpetrators from committing such a scandalous act. Adult cases of sextortion tend to be taken less serious than cases involving children (Saul, 2016). Although children must be protected at all times, the enactment of new laws on sextortion should apply to all members of society. The effect of sextortion on adults may result in losses such as employment, relationships, and stature (Brown et al., 2009). The justice system should place more focus on the actual offense of sextortion and not exclusively on the age of the victim. New legislations would propose new services. Service providers

such as medical and mental health professionals would become more educated and equipped to assist respective victims and perpetrators.

The social change implications that warrant careful consideration relates to recognizing that sexting has persisted since its inception, and negatively impacted individuals' lives in a relational and psychological manner (Dake et al., 2012). The present study displayed consistent findings in spite of the comparatively small percentage. Although this study's overall findings revealed insignificant results, the negative outcomes uncovered from emerging adults sexting behaviors and sextortion experiences deserve noteworthiness. Respondents who reported subjection to sextortion (11.1%) should not lack regard. One individual alone reported experiencing sextortion on at least ten occasions. Respondents denoted sextortion as demeaning and demoralizing as in previous studies (IAWJ, 2012; Saul, 2016), and it continues to increase in numbers (Wittes et al., 2016).

### **Conclusion**

The main purpose for this research study entailed investigating the dynamic between engaging in sexting behaviors and sextortion among emerging adults. What lied at the core of the study encompassed examining emerging adults' experiences to uncover if and how they endure psychological distress from the phenomenon. This study found more positive encounters than negative encounters relative to engaging in sexting behaviors. Some individuals continued to sext in spite of their awareness of sexting possibly resulting in detrimental effects (Comartin et al., 2013; Mitchell et al., 2012). Although this study highlighted sexting behaviors, its primary use entailed establishing a

gateway to obtain in-depth knowledge on sextortion. This novel research study has only captured a glimpse into the dynamic of sexting and sextortion. Uncertainty still lies in whether or not sextortion is a relatively small problem or hidden epidemic. This study suggested the former; however, previous concerns regarded sextortion as an issue that incited a movement to heighten awareness and ward off the modern plaque (FBI, 2015).

A further intent of this study concerned laying the foundation for more comprehensive dialogues and research studies on sextortion due to little or no scholarly literature existing in the areas of interest. This study will expectantly captivate other researchers to make contributions to extensively-needed research. The innovative and intriguing topic of sextortion merits rigorous research. Substantial contributions may deliver more profound understandings of the literature to increase the public's knowledge about sextortion and possible detriments. All societal members such as adolescents, young adults, mental health professionals, law enforcement, criminal justice system, and policymakers would likely reap benefits. Informing diverse members would open the eyes of society to a phenomenon that may have unnoticeably affected a significant number of individuals in a harmful manner. Research of this caliber could make a positive impact on society as a whole. Bringing sextortion to the forefront and disseminating data throughout various channels would ensure social order and change. Treatment and preventive programs that offer support and useful services for those who experienced sextortion and in dire need of them could evolve through comprehensive discussions.

Largely, the findings of this study displayed insignificance. New literature continues to evolve on the pervasiveness of sextortion (“Study Uncovers Sextortion,” 2018), and issues surrounding an upsurge in sextortion (“New Research Finds,” 2018). The news media has channeled a substantial amount of sextortion literature through various sources. News reporting benefits more members in society as the scale of individuals magnifies. Although the news media has made great strides on exposing sextortion and deserves credit for its efforts, the scarcity of scholar research requires attention. Through peer reviews and evidence-based practices, scholarly research would act as a catalyst for the news media. Other researchers would conduct rigorous research to deliver credible responses to unanswered questions surrounding sextortion. A crucial question that persists and may continue to do so until answered involves the number of individuals undergoing sextortion before notable change is brought about. Does someone of noble stature have to undergo sextortion before social change becomes warranted?

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## Appendix A: Facebook E-Flyer

**Recruiting Individuals to Participate in an Anonymous Research Study on  
Sexting Behaviors and Sextortion****Are you an adolescent or young adult between the ages of 18-24 years old?**

This study is seeking volunteers who engage in sexting behaviors for the purpose of gaining comprehension on if and how sexting behaviors could potentially lead or have led to sextortion. Sexting is an expression that is utilized when transmitting sensual messages or performances, provocation, and schemes that are exhibited through an array of sex behaviors. Sextortion is when an individual is blackmailed into sending sexually explicit pictures and/or videos to satisfy another person's sexual demands. This is not considered the same as when an ex-boyfriend, ex-girlfriend, or someone who you have been in an intimate relationship with is upset with you and tries to get back at you in a hurtful and sexual manner, something known as revenge pornography or revenge porn. Sextortion in this case applies, but is not limited to, personal accounts being hacked into such as email accounts or personal computer by someone who is not familiar to you. Or perhaps you may have been befriended via the Internet or social media account by someone who you do not know so well and have ill intent to benefit in a selfish manner.

**TO FIND OUT HOW YOU CAN BE A PART OF THIS NOVEL RESEARCH,  
PLEASE CLICK ON THE LINK BELOW OR COPY AND PASTE  
ANONYMOUS LINK INTO THE ADDRESS BAR TODAY!**



[Link to Additional Information and Surveys](#)



## Appendix C: Twitter E-Flyer

**Recruiting Individuals to Participate in an Anonymous Research Study on  
Sexting Behaviors and Sextortion****Are you an adolescent or young adult between the ages of 18-24 years old?**

This study is seeking volunteers who engage in sexting behaviors for the purpose of gaining comprehension on if and how sexting behaviors could potentially lead or have led to sextortion. Sexting is an expression that is utilized when transmitting sensual messages or performances, provocation, and schemes that are exhibited through an array of sex behaviors. Sextortion is when an individual is blackmailed into sending sexually explicit pictures and/or videos to satisfy another person's sexual demands. This is not considered the same as when an ex-boyfriend, ex-girlfriend, or someone who you have been in an intimate relationship with is upset with you and tries to get back at you in a hurtful and sexual manner, something known as revenge pornography or revenge porn. Sextortion in this case applies, but is not limited to, personal accounts being hacked into such as email accounts or personal computer by someone who is not familiar to you. Or perhaps you may have been befriended via the Internet or social media account by someone who you do not know so well and have ill intent to benefit in a selfish manner.

**TO FIND OUT HOW YOU CAN BE A PART OF THIS NOVEL RESEARCH,  
PLEASE CLICK ON THE LINK BELOW OR COPY AND PASTE  
ANONYMOUS LINK INTO THE ADDRESS BAR TODAY!**



[Link to Additional Information and Surveys](#)

## Appendix D: Colleges and University Flyer

**Recruiting Individuals to Participate in an Anonymous Research Study on  
Sexting Behaviors and Sextortion****Are you an adolescent or young adult between the ages of 18-24 years old?**

This study is seeking volunteers who engage in sexting behaviors for the purpose of gaining comprehension on if and how sexting behaviors could potentially lead or have led to sextortion. Sexting is an expression that is utilized when transmitting sensual messages or performances, provocation, and schemes that are exhibited through an array of sex behaviors. Sextortion is when an individual is blackmailed into sending sexually explicit pictures and/or videos to satisfy another person's sexual demands. This is not considered the same as when an ex-boyfriend, ex-girlfriend, or someone who you have been in an intimate relationship with is upset with you and tries to get back at you in a hurtful and sexual manner, something known as revenge pornography or revenge porn. Sextortion in this case applies, but is not limited to, personal accounts being hacked into such as email accounts or personal computer by someone who is not familiar to you. Or perhaps you may have been befriended via the Internet or social media account by someone who you do not know so well and have ill intent to benefit in a selfish manner.

**TO FIND OUT HOW YOU CAN BE A PART OF THIS NOVEL RESEARCH,  
PLEASE TYPE THE BELOW ANONYMOUS LINK INTO A COMPUTER OR  
LAPTOP ADDRESS BAR OR SCAN THE QR CODE USING YOUR MOBILE  
PHONE TODAY!**



Anonymous Link:

[https://qplus.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_d7nVOftNbtTdqPH](https://qplus.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_d7nVOftNbtTdqPH)



IRB Approval #10-16-17-0412705

## Appendix E: Inventory of Depression and Anxiety Symptoms

## IDAS

## Items

Below is a list of feelings, sensations, problems, and experiences that people sometimes have. Read each item to determine how well it describes your recent feelings and experiences. Then select the option that best describes how much you have felt or experienced things this way during the past two weeks, including today. Use this scale when answering:

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all	A little but	Moderately	Quite a bit	Extremely

1. I was proud of myself  
 2. I felt exhausted  
 3. I felt depressed  
 4. I felt inadequate  
 5. I slept less than usual  
 6. I felt fidgety, restless  
 7. I had thoughts of suicide  
 8. I slept more than usual  
 9. I hurt myself purposely  
 10. I slept very poorly  
 11. I blamed myself for things  
 12. I had trouble falling asleep  
 13. I felt discouraged about things  
 14. I thought about my own death  
 15. I thought about hurting myself  
 16. I did not have much of an appetite  
 17. I felt like eating less than usual  
 18. I thought a lot about food  
 19. I did not feel much like eating  
 20. I ate when I wasn't hungry  
 21. I felt optimistic  
 22. I ate more than usual  
 23. I felt that I had accomplished a lot  
 24. I looked forward to things with enjoyment  
 25. I was furious  
 26. I felt hopeful about the future  
 27. I felt that I had a lot to look forward to  
 28. I felt like breaking things  
 29. I had disturbing thoughts of something bad that happened to me  
 30. Little things made me mad  
 31. I felt enraged  
 32. I had nightmares that reminded me of something bad that happened  
 33. I lost my temper and yelled at people  
 34. I felt like I had a lot of interesting things to do  
 35. I felt I had a lot of energy  
 36. I had memories of something scary that happened  
 37. I felt self-conscious knowing that others were watching me  
 38. I felt a pain in my chest  
 39. I was worried about embarrassing myself socially

- \_\_\_\_\_ 40. I felt dizzy or light headed
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 41. I cut or burned myself on purpose
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 42. I had little interest in my usual hobbies or activities
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 43. I thought that the world would be better off without me
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 44. I felt much worse in the morning than later in the day
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 45. I felt drowsy, sleepy
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 46. I woke up early and could not get back to sleep
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 47. I had trouble concentrating
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 48. I had trouble making up my mind
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 49. I talked more slowly than usual
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 50. I had trouble waking up in the morning
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 51. I found myself worrying all the time
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 52. I woke up frequently during the night
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 53. It took a lot of effort for me to get going
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 54. I woke up much earlier than usual
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 55. I was trembling or shaking
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 56. I became anxious in a crowded public setting
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 57. I felt faint
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 58. I found it difficult to make eye contact with people
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 59. My heart was racing or pounding
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 60. I got upset thinking about something bad that happened
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 61. I found it difficult to talk with people I did not know well
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 62. I had a very dry mouth
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 63. I was short of breath
  - \_\_\_\_\_ 64. I felt like I was choking
-

## Appendix F: Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale

**RSES**Items

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**INSTRUCTIONS:** Rate the items using the following scale:

1 = Strongly Agree    2 = Agree    3 = Disagree    4 = Strongly Disagree

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\_\_\_\_\_ 1. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on an equal basis with others.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.\*

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of.\*

\_\_\_\_\_ 6. I take a positive attitude toward myself.

\_\_\_\_\_ 7. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.

\_\_\_\_\_ 8. I wish I could have more respect for myself.\*

\_\_\_\_\_ 9. I certainly feel useless at times.\*

\_\_\_\_\_ 10. At times I think I am no good at all.\*

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## Appendix G: General Help-Seeking Questionnaire – Original Version

## GHSQ

1. If you were having a personal or emotional problem, how likely is it that you would seek help from the following people?

Please indicate your response by putting a line through the number that best describes your intention to seek help from each help source that is listed.

1 = Extremely Unlikely      3 = Unlikely      5 = Likely      7 = Extremely Likely

- 
- A. Intimate partner ((e.g., girlfriend, boyfriend, husband, wife, de' facto)  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7
- B. Friend (not relative to you)  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7
- C. Parent  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7
- D. Other relative/family member  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7
- E. Mental health professional (e.g., psychologist, social worker, counselor)  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7
- F. Phone helpline (e.g., Lifeline)  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7
- G. Doctor/General Practitioner  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7
- H. Minister or religious leader (e.g., Priest, Rabbi, Chaplain)  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7
- I. I would not seek help from anyone  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7
- J. I would seek help from another not listed above (please list in the space provided, (e.g., work colleague. If no, leave blank.)  
1      2      3      4      5      6      7
- 

*Note:* If you selected 1 thru 4 for Items E and/or I, you are asked to complete the Disclosure Expectation Scale (DES) and Self-Stigma of Seeking Help Scale (SSOSHS) after completing the Reasons for Calling the Police (RCP-A, RCP-B) to inform on reasons for not seeking help from a mental health professional or anyone.

## GHSQ

2. If you were experiencing suicidal thoughts, how likely is it that you would seek help from the following people?

Please indicate your response by putting a line through the number that best describes your intention to seek help from each help source that is listed.

1 = Extremely Unlikely      3 = Unlikely      5 = Likely      7 = Extremely Likely

---

A. Intimate partner (e.g., girlfriend, boyfriend, husband, wife, de' facto)  
 1      2      3      4      5      6      7

B. Friend (not relative to you)  
 1      2      3      4      5      6      7

C. Parent  
 1      2      3      4      5      6      7

D. Other relative/family member  
 1      2      3      4      5      6      7

E. Mental health professional (e.g., psychologist, social worker, counselor)  
 1      2      3      4      5      6      7

F. Phone helpline (e.g., Lifeline)  
 1      2      3      4      5      6      7

G. Doctor/General Practitioner  
 1      2      3      4      5      6      7

H. Minister or religious leader ( e.g., Priest, Rabbi, Chaplain)  
 1      2      3      4      5      6      7

I. I would not seek help from anyone  
 1      2      3      4      5      6      7

J. I would seek help from another not listed above (please list in the space provided, e.g., work colleague. If no, leave blank).  
 1      2      3      4      5      6      7

---

*Note:* If you selected 1 thru 4 for Items E and/or I, you are asked to complete the Disclosure Expectation Scale (DES) and Self-Stigma of Seeking Help Scale (SSOSHS) after completing the Reasons for Calling the Police (RCP-A, RCP-B) to inform on reasons for not seeking help from a mental health professional or anyone.

## Appendix H: Reasons for Calling the Police Questionnaire

**RCP-A, RCP-B**

## RCP – Form A

The following is a list of statements about why people may not have contacted police after an unwanted and forced sexual experience. Please indicate how strongly you felt about the following statements in the days or weeks after the unwanted and forced sexual experience occurred.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

1) I did not contact police (or ask someone to contact police) after the unwanted and forced sexual experience because...

- \_\_\_ 1. The unwanted and forced sexual experience was not a crime.
- \_\_\_ 2. The police wouldn't stop the unwanted and forced sexual experience from happening to me again.
- \_\_\_ 3. I didn't think the police could protect me from the offender.
- \_\_\_ 4. I didn't want the offender to be punished for what they did.
- \_\_\_ 5. I didn't think the unwanted and force sexual experience was important.
- \_\_\_ 6. I was embarrassed.
- \_\_\_ 7. What the offender did was not illegal.
- \_\_\_ 8. I didn't think the police would keep me safe.
- \_\_\_ 9. I didn't want to make the unwanted and forced sexual experience public.
- \_\_\_ 10. I didn't think the police would take the event seriously.
- \_\_\_ 11. I didn't think the event was serious.
- \_\_\_ 12. The police are busy with more important things.
- \_\_\_ 13. I felt the unwanted and forced sexual experience was a private matter.
- \_\_\_ 14. I did not think the police would care about the event.
- \_\_\_ 15. I didn't want anyone to know what happened to me.
- \_\_\_ 16. I didn't know if the unwanted and forced sexual experience was serious.
- \_\_\_ 17. I was afraid the perpetrator would harm me or my family if I reported the event to police.

## RCP – Form B

The following is a list of statements about why people may have contacted police (or may have asked someone else to contact police) after an unwanted and forced sexual experience. Please indicate how strongly you felt about the following statements in the days or weeks after the unwanted and forced sexual experience occurred.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

- 2) I contacted police (or asked someone to contact police) after the unwanted or force sexual experience because...
- \_\_\_ 1. The unwanted and forced sexual experience was a crime.
- \_\_\_ 2. The police would stop the unwanted and forced sexual experience from happening to me again.
- \_\_\_ 3. I thought the police could protect me from the offender.
- \_\_\_ 4. I wanted the offender to be punished for what they did.
- \_\_\_ 5. I thought the unwanted and forced sexual experience was important.
- \_\_\_ 6. I wasn't embarrassed.
- \_\_\_ 7. What the offender did was illegal.
- \_\_\_ 8. I thought the police would keep me safe.
- \_\_\_ 9. I wasn't worried about making the unwanted and forced sexual experience public.
- \_\_\_ 10. I thought the police would take the event seriously.
- \_\_\_ 11. I thought the event was serious.
- \_\_\_ 12. The police would think the unwanted and forced sexual experience was serious.
- \_\_\_ 13. I wasn't worried about keeping the event private.
- \_\_\_ 14. I thought the police would care about the event.
- \_\_\_ 15. I wasn't worried about others knowing what happened to me.
- \_\_\_ 16. I knew the event was serious.
- \_\_\_ 17. I thought the police would protect me from the offender if I reported the event to police.

## Appendix I: Disclosure Expectations Scale

**DES**Items

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**INSTRUCTIONS:** For the following questions, you are asked to respond using the following scale:

1 = Not at all      2 = Slightly      3 = Somewhat      4 = Moderately      5 = Very

---

\_\_\_ 1. How difficult would it be for you to disclose personal information to a counselor?

\_\_\_ 2. How vulnerable would you feel if you disclosed something very personal you had never told anyone before to a counselor?

\_\_\_ 3. If you were dealing with an emotional problem, how beneficial for yourself would it be to self-disclose personal information about the problem to a counselor?

\_\_\_ 4. How risky would it feel to disclose your hidden feelings to a counselor?

\_\_\_ 5. How worried about what the other person is thinking would you be if you disclosed negative emotions to a counselor?

\_\_\_ 6. How helpful would it be to self-disclose a personal problem to a counselor?

\_\_\_ 7. Would you feel better if you disclosed feelings of sadness or anxiety to a counselor?

\_\_\_ 8. How likely would you get a useful response if you disclosed an emotional problem you were struggling with to a counselor?

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## Appendix J: Self-Stigma of Seeking-Help Scale

**SSOSHS**Items

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INSTRUCTIONS: Rate the items using the following scale:

1 = Strongly Agree 2 = Agree 3 = Agree and Disagree Equally 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly Disagree

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- \_\_\_ 1. I would feel inadequate if I went to a therapist for psychological help.
  - \_\_\_ 2. My self-confidence would NOT be threatened if I sought professional help.
  - \_\_\_ 3. Seeking psychological help would make me feel less intelligent.
  - \_\_\_ 4. My self-esteem would increase if I talked to a therapist.
  - \_\_\_ 5. My view of myself would not change just because I made the choice to see a therapist.
  - \_\_\_ 6. It would make me feel inferior to ask a therapist for help.
  - \_\_\_ 7. I would feel okay about myself if I made the choice to seek professional help.
  - \_\_\_ 8. If I went to a therapist, I would be less satisfied with myself.
  - \_\_\_ 9. My self-confidence would remain the same if I sought help for a problem that I could not solve.
  - \_\_\_ 10. I would feel worse about myself if I could not solve my own problems.
-

Appendix K: IDAS Permission Letter.

Re: Request to Use Inventory of Depression and Anxiety Symptoms

WB

Watson, David B <david-watson@uiowa.edu>

September 23, 2017, 9:28 PM

Dear Tonya,

I appreciate your interest in the Inventory of Depression and Anxiety Symptoms (IDAS), and I am pleased to grant you permission to use the IDAS in your research. Please note that all printed copies of the IDAS (including online protocols) must contain information regarding its copyright.

Please note that I have moved to the University of Notre Dame. Please send any further correspondence to my Notre Dame email address (db.watson@nd.edu).

Thanks again for your interest. Good luck with your research.

Regards,

David Watson

David Watson, Ph.D.

Andrew J. McKenna Family Professor of Psychology

University of Notre Dame

WB

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Appendix L: RSES Permission Letter.

Re: Request to Use the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

Deborah N. Rhebergen <drheberg@umd.edu>

October 3, 2017, 9:04 AM

Tonya Howard; Jeffrey W. Lucas <jlucas2@umd.edu>

Hello Tonya - You have permission to use. Good luck!

Deborah Rhebergen

Assistant Dean, External Relations

College of Behavioral and Social Sciences

0145 Tydings Hall

University of Maryland

College Park, MD 20742

Ph: 301.405.7959

C: 240.305.6658

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Appendix M: GHSQ Permission Letter.

Re: Permission to use the General Help-Seeking Questionnaire.

Coralie Wilson <cwilson@uow.edu.au>

September 26, 2017, 4:39 AM

Dear Tonya,

Thank you for your email. Your research project will be very important for the literature.

You have my full permission to use the GHSQ for our research and you are fully qualified to be able to use it.

Best wishes,

Coralie

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Appendix N: RCP-A, RCP-B Permission Letter.

Re: Permission to use the Reasons for Calling the Police Questionnaire.

September 1, 2016, 10:25 AM

Hi Tonya,

Thanks for your message. You are more than welcome to use that measure if it suits your needs. It sounds like you're conducting an interesting study! The content for the questionnaire was put together with a focus on commonly cited reasons for calling/not calling police (as identified by prior studies/literature).

I've pasted the measure items below along with the rating scale.

Good luck on your endeavors!

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Appendix O: DES Permission Letter.

Re: Request to Use Disclosure Expectations Scale

Vogel, David L [PSYCH] <dvogel@iastate.edu>

September 26, 2017, 9:46 AM

Thanks for letting me know. Feel free to use the scale in your research.

David

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Appendix P: SSOSHS Permission Letter.

Re: Request to Use the Self-Stigma of Seeking Help Scale

Vogel, David L [PSYCH] <dvogel@iastate.edu>

September 26, 2017, 9:46 AM

Thanks for letting me know. Feel free to use the scale in your research.

David

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