

# A Study of All-Girl High School Media Activities Towards Males

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DOI: [http://dx.doi.org/10.15629/6.7.8.7.5\\_2-1\\_S-2016\\_2](http://dx.doi.org/10.15629/6.7.8.7.5_2-1_S-2016_2)

**Abstract:** This study analyzes, from a historical context, the use of texting and other social media messenger tools of females who attended all-girl high schools by exploring their lived experiences and social interactions with males. The focus is on how the females used media technology tools, like texting and other social messenger tools, while attending their all-girl high schools. The purpose of this case study is to determine how these females used texting (and social media messenger tools) to build and nurture relationships with males. This study is meant to be solely about how females attending these type of schools used media technologies to create and maintain relationships with males; not as a comparison between female's media technology behaviors between public and private schools. The findings for this research manifest themselves into three main categories which include recognition of unwritten rules among females, that females are more apt to break the unwritten rules when communicating with males, and texting serves as tool for nurturing relationships with significant others. The significance of this study is that it provides an example of a specific body of people that are more dependent upon social media sites (because of the all-girl school environment) to begin creating relationships with males, which could be generalized to larger groups who share similar challenges.

## Introduction:

The world is becoming increasingly more tech savvy every day and it is important to identify the link that media technology has with females attending all-girl high schools. Clearly identifying females' usage of media technologies, and how these connect them to males will benefit faculty members, and even parents, as they can adjust some of their actions to accommodate this platform usage.

This case study explores, from a historical perspective, college freshmen who attended an all-girl high school and their use of media activities, like texting and other social media messenger tools. High school girls are more apt to texting and typically send around 100 messages a day (Lenhart, 2012), however, what is not known is how texting impacts their ability to forge and maintain key relationships with males.

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

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

## Literature Review:

### Single Sex Schools

There has been a continuous debate on the advantages and disadvantages of teenagers attending single sex schools. The prominent fears of parents are the regression of gender equality and a decrease in self confidence that becomes magnified when the opposite sex is involved (Chadwell, 2010). However, discussions with these students attending a single sex school usually results in responses of confidence and self-esteem skyrocketing. Researchers have found, "girls developed less gender stereotyped interests and self-concepts and were more likely to aspire to adopt a career as a scientist compared to girls attending co-educative schools" (Titze, Jansen, & Heil, 2011, p. 705). By breaking down these gender barriers, single sex schools lead to improved gender equality. Another study done found, "single-sex schooling...support girls' innately different learning style[s] may be interested in outcomes concerning academic motivation and achievement" (Pahlke, Bigler, & Patterson, 2014, p. 262). Catering to the females' unique learning styles and promoting a positive impact on females' futures are two examples of the tools single sex schools give their female students to develop into independent young women. These studies give a glimpse into how educating exclusively females is inherently different, and this study focuses on whether these differences continue to manifest themselves through other avenues of their lives.

### Social Media

About 95% of American teenagers have an online presence and 80% of those have profile(s) on various social media sites (Lenhart et al., 2011). It was found that 69% of American teenagers use Instagram, 63% percent use Twitter, 72% use Facebook, and 30% use other types of social media, like MySpace (Blaszczak-Boxe, 2014). Researchers have found that social media sites somewhat pressure females to create a 'best self,' which is one that meets "norms for sociability, interests, and attractiveness" (Burkell, Fortier, Wong, & Simpson, 2014, p. 980). It seems that a female's 'best self,' within America, is overly sexual and unafraid of showing off her body.

Bailey, Steeves, Burkell, and Regan (2013) observed over 1,500 teenage females' social media profiles to see if a specific type of online female existed. The researchers were searching for the existence of a type of online female that embodied, this American ideology of a female's 'best self.' They found that females relied on overtly sexual portals of themselves with friends and partners to create their online image (Bailey, Steeves, Burkell, & Regan, 2013). Instead of social media being a place where girls could defy these standards, American culture has seeped into social media and magnified this type of behavior (Bailey, Steeves, Burkell, & Regan, 2013).

### Texting/Sexting

There has been an increase of teenagers having cell phones, from 56% in 2004 to 85% in 2009 (Frank, Santurri, & Knight, 2010). Teenagers send an average of 2,022 texts per month (Cocotas, 2013). With greater rates of cellphone ownership coupled with large quantities of texting, incidents of sexting are bound to increase. Temple et al., (2012) found that approximately 68% of teenage females were asked by males to send them a sext; about 28% of these females admitted to sending a naked picture of themselves. These actions were motivated by responses that mirrored a dependency sexting, because females believed the males would quickly move on and not speak to them anymore (Lenhart, 2009). This suggests that texting and sexting are becoming a 'package deal' and are more prevalent in females' lives than ever.

### **Materials and Methods:**

#### Instruments

This study was conducted through a qualitative framework using in-depth interviews and a focus group. Before research commenced, University of Nevada, Reno Internal Review Board approval was obtained to study human subjects. After approval, recruitment began by hanging up flyers throughout the University of Nevada, Reno's (UNR) campus. These flyers advertised the study to females, which included the type of participants needed.

### Participants

The participants recruited were females between the ages of 18 and 25. The reason for the age requirement is that the participants would be closer to their high school experiences, thus having a better recollection of them as well as being closer to a more technological age. The sexual orientation required of participants was implied as heterosexual because this study was focused on male/female interactions.

After the first few participants made contact, the researcher used snow ball sampling to contact the rest of the participants, in which the initial participants recruited additional participants. The participants were students from UNR, Oregon State University, and a young woman that had recently graduated. The participants were then given a choice between an individual interview and a focus group. Six females chose in-depth interviews, while three chose the focus group.

### Procedure

Before the interviews began there was a pre-screening to ensure the participants met the requirements needed, such as having attended an all-girl high school, using some sort of media technology while attending high school, etc. After it was established the criteria were met, the interviews began. Each individual interview was about 15-25 minutes and encompassed a standard series of questions, as well as specific questions to get a better view into each participant's life. Each interview was also audio-recorded on the researcher's cell phone.

The focus group was about 30-40 minutes and asked a standard series of questions. The group questions were different from the individual interviews, because they were more broadly focused. The group was both audio-recorded and videotaped.

### Design

Once the transcriptions were completed, the researcher used Saldaña's (2013) method, which focuses on the creation of codes, categories, and themes, derived from the research. The researcher then drew a type of map that matched codes to categories and then attached them to overarching themes. The three themes that emerged were:

1. Recognition of unwritten rules among females
2. More apt to break rules when communicating with males
3. Texting serves as tool for nurturing relationships

Each of the major themes were supplemented with sub-findings, which are illustrated in figure 1.

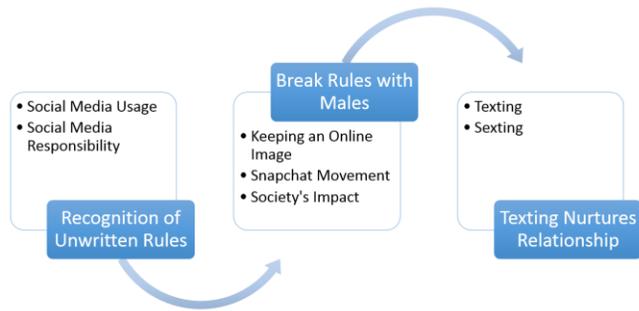


Figure 1: Main Themes and Sub-themes

## Discussion of findings:

### (1) Recognition of unwritten rules among females

#### Social Media Usage

The current study found that all the participants used social media in their everyday activities. They used social media sites as outlets for observing. As Megan says, “I just feel like it’s an update on life, like seeing what people are doing.” Eliza seconds this type of idea by saying, “I go on Facebook to check what other people are up to, but that doesn’t necessarily mean I interact with them.” According to these two participants, social media sites are used to talk about themselves and to catch up on life events without having to actually talk to each other in person. Therefore, social media sites were not used to have in-depth conversation with people, including males; instead, they were used as an ‘opening tool,’ where some general conversation could result.

#### Social Media Responsibility

All nine participants agreed that they used social media responsibly. The disagreement between the participants arose in two facets. The first group was strict on their privacy settings. Anything posted by these women that they deemed inappropriate would only be seen by their pre-approved select group of ‘friends’ or ‘followers.’ Even though participants anticipated people to open up about their lives on social media platforms, these participants also expect a certain degree of privacy. As Christina put it:

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

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

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

The idea of control, by being able to set privacy settings to pick and choose ‘friends’ to monitor who sees posts, is a reoccurring idea among about half the participants.

The second group is a bit stricter and manifests itself by not posting inappropriate content online, like images and/or comments, because of the risk. As Casey says, “That’s always been a fear of mine that someone is going to find out where I live and stalk me or something.” The fear of being watched is one of the motivations Casey expresses to not post inappropriate images or comments online. She goes on to say, “Especially with the whole thing that your boss can see what you post and future stuff.” The future consequences outweigh any type of inappropriate behavior. Eliza also agrees with this logic:

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

Overall, these participants care about their privacy and strictly monitor their accounts to ensure it; either by privacy control methods or not posting inappropriate content at all.

### (2) More apt to break rules when communicating with males

#### Keeping an Online Image

Participants in this study believe that females turn to more sexual depictions of themselves when males are involved. The participants unanimously felt that females were too sexual online. Eve concurs with this idea by saying:

*They will post these pictures and they will look really ‘slutty,’ they look like prostitutes or hookers or something like that. I just don’t understand. Then they will get all of these comments and then you see them later on, and they try and act like they are high and mighty.*

Eve’s comment shows that she believes it is fairly common for females, in general, to portray themselves sexually online. Interestingly, Eve’s comment also shows that even though it is fairly common for females to be portraying themselves sexually, other females are still judgmental towards them.

#### Snapchat Movement

Snapchat allows some degree of privacy by having messages and photos self-destruct after they are seen. This evolution of technology provided another outlet for females to maintain their sexual image without the immediate ‘backlash’ for their behavior. As Casey remarks, “It was a movement where everyone was feeling like whatever they sent would just be deleted and gone

forever. So they were more inclined to send things.” When Lisa was asked if she thought the rise of Snapchat increased people’s willingness to send partially or fully nude photos, Lisa instantly agreed and said:

*Yes, definitely. It’s like oh well, I only sent it for 5 seconds, so he doesn’t have it. They really thought the pressure is off, I can send this photo, and it will only be up for however many seconds I want. It is a free little sneak peek.*

Snapchat allowed females to believe this type of behavior was essentially risk free, which aided in their confidence that this was an easy and reliable way to retain a male’s attention.

### Society’s Impact

The participants also placed a heavy amount of blame on society for this sexualized behavior. They believe society created the idea of beauty that emphasized highly sexual female body imagery, which the participants believe caters to the male’s desire of beauty. Lisa agrees:

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

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

*Society has a grand notion of what women are good for in a way and that comes down to how they sexualize women in media. Unless there is another system or support that comes in and tells them no, it doesn’t have to be this way, they will kind of rely on that idea of what they are ‘supposed’ to be.*

The male’s definition of what is ‘beautiful’ or ‘sexy’ is drilled into a female’s thought process starting at a very young age. It is implicit in Eliza’s commentary that it is hard to break out of that type of thought process when it has been a habit forming for years. Such socialization, as Eliza mentions, requires an outside support system to convey to females that the information is false.

### (3) Texting serves as tool for nurturing relationships

#### Texting

The Participants were also unanimous in their agreement that texting is essential to making a relationship last. Since they attended all-girl schools and were busy in a variety of activities, and likely did not have daily one-on-one interactions, talking to their significant other relied on

texting. It became the next best way to communicate with males. Texting was used around the clock during any period that the participants had a free moment, such as on the bus to school or while waiting for an activity to start. As Lisa says, when reflecting on a past relationship:

*My life was so busy...and then I did swim team. So I would stay at school for like 3 hours, go to swim practice, and then come home around 9pm.*

Since Lisa could not see her boyfriend often, because she was busy with school and her other activities, she relied on texting to both create and maintain the relationship.

### Sexting

Along with talking and getting to know someone’s personality, females searched for intimacy. It can be concluded that, since most romantic relationships eventually include an intimate factor, the females typically found themselves having to compensate through the use of sexting. The sexting was used to bring an intimacy aspect into these romantic relationships quickly. Lisa discusses why sexting is a bit more prevalent to maintain the opposite sex’s interest by saying, “it’s just easier and it’s something they can see without being in contact with them all the time, because personality-wise it’s hard to get to know people that don’t go to school with you. Samantha pipes in and says, “There was more pressure to appear more attractive because we looked so ugly at school.” Since females attending single sex schools do not see males on a daily basis, it meant they could worry less about their appearance. It could also be concluded, that sending sexual pictures became the primary means of both validating and securing a romantic relationship.

### **Conclusions:**

*Research Question One: How did girls at an all-girl high school use texting and other social messenger tools?*

The participants admitted to using various social media platforms. They did not use these social media sites for in-depth interaction with people, but for observing and light conversation. The participants would check out the sites and get updated on their friend’s lives through their posts. Social media was more about promoting one’s ‘best self,’ through various posts. This effort of being the most ‘likeable’ online lead to people being more observant and only involved in ‘light’ conversations with one another on these platforms. By people emulating this idea online, it was understandable why females felt that any meaningful, in-depth conversations would happen through a different medium like texting.

Another conclusion is that privacy is important when using social media. Privacy precautions manifested

itself into two main groups. The first group was strict on their privacy settings by choosing their 'friends' or 'followers'. Anything this group posted deemed inappropriate would only be seen by their approved select group of 'friends' or 'followers'. The second group avoided posting anything inappropriate online because of the fear of future repercussions, even though its viewers were restricted. Ultimately, it was used as a tool to remain open about their lives, which was culturally expected, while retaining a degree of privacy.

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

The participants had a consensus of how female users should act around the opposite sex on social media sites. According to the participants, the females promoted a more sexual image of themselves online in an effort to catch the attention of the opposite sex. Even though these females sent photos that broke the etiquette, they did so knowing other females would be judgmental about the sexual behavior. This opinion was ironic because all of the participants were participating in the same sexual behavior.

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

A final conclusion that can be made is that the reason females are judgmental against one another is because of the demands placed on them by society. The participants blamed society for promoting an idea of beauty that emphasizes females taking on a certain body image that caters to the male's desires.

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

The participants acknowledge that texting was a necessity to maintain a relationship. According to the participants, texting was especially used with females who were busy at school with academics and extra-curricular activities. A conclusion that can be made is that since most romantic relationships eventually include an

intimate factor, the females typically found themselves having to compensate through the use of sexting.

### **Recommendations:**

#### For Individuals Who Work with Females at the High School Level

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

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

#### For Future Study

(1) Increase the number of participants with greater diversity among geographical locations to heighten generalizations across the population of females at high schools with their behaviors on texting and other social messenger applications. More states could lead to either solidifying certain ideas proposed in this study or introducing new concepts.

(2) Create a series of interviews with the participants so that they gain more trust with the researcher, thus more information can be gathered. The participants would feel more comfortable sharing more information about themselves because a better rapport would be developed.

(3) Add a written portion for the participants to fill out, through email, and make it anonymous. This way the participants can fill it out at their convenience and retain privacy, giving them more time to think through the questions.

(4) To conduct a similar study with females currently attending all girl high schools. It would be interesting to see if the results differed much from this study's participants.

**Acknowledgements:** *To my parents, Jay and Stacey, and my brothers, Alex and Jordon. I would like to thank Matthew Jejna for generously donating his time to help during the editing process. Todd Felts, your guidance was priceless. I could not think of a better way to say it; so, in your words, thanks for taking a risk on me.*

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