

Campaign for Anti-Sexting

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Friday, April 16, 2010

HISTORY OF SEXTING

Sexting is defined as the sending of sexually explicit messages, photos, and/or videos via messages on a cell phone (Carney). It has been referred to as a “high-tech way of flirting (Stone).” This is a worldwide issue, and has been reported as early as 2005 (Roberts). Sexting has been named the “latest teen trend,” but what it in fact is, is a problem (Carney).

The process of sexual liberation has been around since in the 1960’s, according to GreatHistory.com. ABC News reports that although teenagers have almost always acted provocatively, the accessibility to technology is new. For example, cell phones with cameras have enabled sexting to happen. Also, social networking sites such as Facebook have also made this a problem. Pictures can be easily transferred from phone to phone or from phone to computer (Stone).

Several studies have been conducted to determine how many teens and young adults do in fact engage in sexting. A survey conducted by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen & Unwanted Pregnancy found that 20% of teens, ages 13-19 sent nude or semi-nude pictures. 33% of young adults, ages 20-26 have sent nude or semi-nude pictures. 38% of teens and 59% of young adults have sent provocative text messages (Masters). The results of this survey go along with several other survey results, including:

- Pcmag.com reports that 50% of teens aged 14-24 have been the target of sexting, 30% of teens have either sent or received messages/pictures, and 29% of teens have shared pictures online with someone they have never met.
- AThinLineCampaign.org reports that 61% of teens have been pressured to engage in sexting, and 50% of teens have shared the same picture with multiple people.

- USA Today reports that 51% of girls feel pressured by guys to send sexy messages.

There are several problems that are associated with sexting, yet 2 that are extremely important to take note of. The first are the problems that are created when sexting involves individuals who are underage.

According to AThinLineCampaign.org, real problems emerge when 1 or both of those involved is under the age of 18. Possession of photos and/or videos can be defined as child pornography, and serious consequences can emerge. Law violations, reported by AThinLineCampaign.org include the following:

- Possession of child pornography
- Distribution of child pornography
- Exposing minors to lewd, obscene materials

Consequences for these violations, defined by criminaldefenselawyer.com are as follows:

- Label as a sex offender if violation of any of the above
- All are defined as criminal offenses, and minors can get into trouble
- Juveniles who are tried as adults can face up to 10 years in state prison
- The label as a sex offender lasts a lifetime
- Fees & fines

Children under the age of 18, whether they possess or send nude pictures can be prosecuted under child pornography laws and become a registered sex offender. Also, any person

who takes a photo of someone under the age of 18 can be charged with child pornography (criminaldefenselawyer.com).

The important thing to remember is that these laws were meant for adults, as were the charges. These charges were meant to specifically target adult pedophiles. However, children under 18 can be punished. Teens have been arrested for pictures they have sent (criminaldefenselawyer.com).

Another issue that can result from sexting is the possibility of suicide. According to pcmag.com, 12% of those who have engaged in sexting have considered suicide 4 times more than those who have not. One main cause of this is that those who do engage in sexting feel pressured to do so. Therefore, these pressures can have psychological effects on those involved.

PAST CAMPAIGN STRATEGIES

In 2009, the television network, MTV, started the campaign, “A Thin Line,” that was created to educate teens on digital abuse. MTV partnered with the Associated Press to survey teens on how they felt about digital abuse like sexting, digital harassment and digital dating harassment (MTV & AP, 2009, p. 1). What they found in the survey of 1,247 people aged 14-24 was that roughly one third have been involved in some type of sexting, three in ten young people have been involved in naked sexting, one in ten have shared a naked picture of themselves via cell phone and that one in five who receive a text will forward the picture (MTV & AP, 2009, p. 3).

MTV has created a series of commercials that informs teens on the affects of sexting. There are four categories of the commercials, “A thin line between him and the school, confidential and consequential, an instant and a life time and private and public” (MTV, 2009).

One commercial, “A thin line between confidential and consequential,” shows teens discussing how fourteen year old children are now registered sex offenders. Another commercial, “A thin line between an instant and a life time,” shows a girl standing in a towel at a high school gym talking about how her boyfriend pressured her into sending a naked picture and how the whole school eventually saw it. The commercials also give the statistics that MTV and AP found in their research. MTV created a documentary that follows two teens through the aftermath of their sexting and how it has completely changed their lives. By creating this campaign, teens are becoming more aware of the dangers of sexting. MTV is the perfect place for these commercials because teens are their target audience.

MTV launched a campaign on Valentine’s Day with celebrities like Boys like Girls, Michelle Trachtenberg, All Time Low and Asher Roth to inform people about how harmful sexting, cyber bullying and online harassment can cause (Vena, 2010). Trachtenberg and Roth hosted an interactive quiz online at athinline.org to take a look at the new phenomena of sexting and how it is becoming part of our popular culture (Vena, 2010). During the special, teens talked openly with the celebrities about personal stories. For example, one girl, Ally, spoke about how her reputation was ruined after sexting her ex-boyfriend, Phillip (Vena, 2010). Phillip was charged with underage pornography charges after forwarding the picture (Vena, 2010).

Actor, James Lipton, has partnered with LG in commercials that use the slogan, “before you text, give it ponder.” These videos are quite humorous and James Lipton makes fun of himself and his beard during the commercials. Numerous videos posted at youtube.com and giveitaponder.com. It is positive that a phone provider is taking action in the anti-sexting campaign to get awareness spread. They also currently are creating a computer application on the website giveitaponder.com.

Another campaign was created by Cynthia and Albert Logan after their daughter, Jessie Logan, hung herself after a picture of her surfaced to people in her high school and other counties that she sent to her boyfriend (Illinois Family Institute). The couple is attempting to launch a national campaign that would allow teenagers to know the harassment, humiliation and bullying that can happen when photos are forwarded and sent (Illinois Family Institute, 2009).

The website, thatsnotcool.com, has taken a different approach to target teens. The website is full of color and instead of using people, they use talking fruit, vegetables, Muppets and Barbie dolls in mini-videos to discuss the dangers, pressures and outcomes of sexting (Thatsnotcool.com, 2010). The website also has a discussion board that allows teens to communicate back and forth about how they feel on the subject (Thatsnotcool.com, 2010). The site gives information on what to do if they or someone they know is being harassed. These public service announcements that have been created are an awareness campaign that pushes teen girls to think before they press send.

Mia Evans (2010) states that, “commonsensemedia.org is a website that provides information to teens and to parents on how to talk to their kids about sexting” and that “recent findings by the Pew Research Center have shown that parental involvement has played a key part in deterring teens from sexting.” This campaign targets parents to take action in how their teens use their cell phones. The website is a campaign within itself to allow parents to interact with one another on how to deal with the sexting situation. They are able to find ways to teach their children on the dangers of sexting and how to deal with it if it occurs.

AUDIENCE ANALYSIS

In order to better understand our audience, we surveyed 50 individuals between the ages of 18-24 via surveymonkey.com. All participants confirmed that their cell phone did in fact have a camera. Participants were asked to complete the survey first as a 13-17 year old version of themselves and then complete the same questions in the present (18 years +). According to the survey, more than half have participated in sexting in some form.

Some believe that preventative measures can be taken to stop young people from sexting, like having their parents/ guardians monitor their cell phone usage. While several participants admitted that their parents pay their cell phone bill, and thus monitor it, 88% said their parents do not monitor their phone use at all. Knowing this, it may be difficult for parents to actually see what messages are on their child's phone. And although some cell phone providers log the text messages that are being sent and received on the internet, it would take only seconds to delete a message before it was found. Three participants did explain that their parents do pay for their cell phone and have access to their call logs and messages but, they believe their parents trust them, respect their privacy and refrain from monitoring. This reason also makes checking cell phones problematic; parents do not want to invade their teen's space and want to trust them.

As 13-17 year olds, 58.1% admitted to sending or receiving a nude, semi-nude or sexually explicit photograph on their cell phone while 70% admit to have doing since the age of 18. Slightly more participants claimed to have sent or received sexually explicit text messages now than when they were younger (68%) versus now (72%). Only about 4% of participants have sent or received a sexually explicit video on their cell phones. A quick breakdown of our audience analysis follows:

- 50 total surveys completed. 18 -24 year olds.
- 100% own their own cell phone with a camera.
- 37/42 (88%) said parents do not monitor their cell phone use in any way.
- 70% said yes, they have sent or received a nude, semi-nude or sexually explicit photograph.
- 68% said yes to a text.
- 40% of participants were pressured by their peers to send or forward the message.

CAMPAIGN STRATEGY AND COMMUNICATION PLAN

The main purpose of our campaign is to educate teenagers and young adults on the dangers of sexting and discourage them from participating in these acts, despite the pressure they may feel to do so. We aim to use television advertisements and social networking websites to spread our message, as they are the types of media most used by our target audience. We are also working to produce various communication samples that can be distributed to our audience as a mean to remind them to practice safe text messaging.

Another goal of our campaign is to get middle and high schools more involved with the issue of sexting. We will provide these schools with our communication plan as well as our samples so they may further educate their students on the dangers of sexting.

With this campaign strategy and communication plan, we hope to change the attitudes of teens and young adults using persuasive effects. This is characteristic of Social Judgment Theory, developed by Sherif (Griffin, 2009). We hope that teens and young adults will develop a latitude of acceptance for our campaign, meaning that we hope their ideas about our campaign are seen as reasonable or worthy of consideration (Griffin, 2009).

We will first highlight our plan of using the media, and then describe our communication samples. We will also detail how we hope to get middle and high schools more involved with the issue of sexting.

Use of Media

There are several ways in which the media can be used for this persuasive campaign. First, we have currently developed a brief video advertisement containing testimonials of teens that have been affected by sexting in some way. By doing so, we are hoping to pull at the pathos of the audience and convince them that sexting can cause severe damage to themselves and those around them. This video also includes statistics about sexting and how common it is among teens and young adults.

We have also created a group page on Facebook, a popular social networking site among teens and young adults. This group contains various statistics, videos, and other pertinent information regarding sexting, as well as links to other anti-sexting campaigns. By joining the group, members are essentially vowing to practice safe text messaging and promising to spread the word. The Facebook group can be found by visiting www.facebook.com and searching “Sexting...not as sexy as it seems.”

Lastly, we have also created a print advertisement containing statistics about the dangers of sexting. This print advertisement also communicates our slogan, which is “Sexting ... not as sexy as it seems.” At the bottom of this advertisement is information about our Facebook group page, so that it can be more accessible to members of the community. This advertisement may be posted and distributed as a flier or may be printed in publications. With this print advertisement, we hope to reach two functions of an image, which are proof and identification. We hope to

create identification with the audience. We hope that through this ad, we are able to identify with them on a certain level. We want to bond with our audience, specifically teens and young adults, to persuade them to beware of the dangers of sexting. This advertisement will also act as proof for teens and young adults. The statistics and the advertisement are both real, so this is proof to teens and young adults that sexting is in fact dangerous, and the consequences can happen to anyone.

Communication Samples

In addition to using the media to promote our message, we have created two communication samples to distribute to our audiences. The first is an awareness bracelet, and the second is a cell phone background application.

Awareness bracelets are bracelets made from silicone that are imprinted with a message demonstrating the wearer's support of a cause or organization. Our bracelets are available in a variety of colors and are embossed with the message, "Sexting...not as sexy as it seems." These bracelets will be available at no cost at several locations, including stores, schools, and various public events. We believe the awareness bracelet will be an effective tool in our campaign because when worn, it will serve as a reminder that sexting is inappropriate. Also, it can be seen as the new "trend" among teens and young adults to not participate in sexting, and to practice safe texting.

Since cell phones play an integral part in sexting, we have created a wallpaper background for cell phones that promotes safe texting. The idea is that those with the background on their cell phones will see it whenever they go to text and will think twice about

what they are about to send. The wallpaper is available for download free of charge on our Facebook page and is compatible with all phone providers.

Getting Schools More Involved

Most schools do not feel as if sexting is their problem. Rarely does a school promote any type of anti-sexting program into their curriculum or sexual education classes. Some schools, such as a middle school in Seattle used an incident of 3 teens being arrested to motivate them to do something about sexting in their schools. However, at this point, it is somewhat too late. Our goal with this persuasive campaign would be to get both the middle and high schools more involved. We hope that with the creation of this video and print ad, as well as our communication samples, that schools will have some materials to work with. We hope that they will incorporate an anti-sexting lesson into their school, and will use the materials we have provided. Schools can hang the print ad around the building, and can show the video in a sexual education class. Students who have a Facebook account can join the group page, and schools will have access to free anti-sexting bracelets. Lastly, all students will be able to access the anti-sexting wallpapers on their cell phones for free.

EVALUATION PLAN

Overall, our plan for evaluation lies in the education of teenagers and college students. There is not a single way we can evaluate our campaign except by making these adolescences think twice before they send any type of nude or barely nude picture. Not only think twice before sending but also before receiving. These teenagers do not realize the consequences that lie within something as simple as a text message. We need to educate them that it is against the law and not to think that it won't happen to them.

Over the next five years, we are going to try to instill an anti-sexting class that goes along with every high school's sexual education class. We think it is important for the sexual education courses to be up to date and cases of sexting are at an all time high which shows the necessity of this program. Instilling this will help with the education of the consequences of sexting. We are also going to make sure that guidance and other counselors are there to help when students feel pressured to send racy images. The pressure to have sex is a big issue in high school but we cannot look past the recent pressure to send nude images.

Also, we want to persuade the government in making the child pornography law more up to date. Sexting is a crime and should be against the law but making a minor a sex offender for sending or receiving a picture of another minor is not what the law was intended for. We want to campaign for the law to reinstate what it was made for in the first place.

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