That good old sext(h)ing;
The effect of Face/[less] value and sharing behaviour of a sexting picture on perceived legitimacy, risk and sharing risk.
Samenvatting

De huidige studie richtte zich op de publieke perceptie van een sexting foto. Evaluatie (semantisch differentiaal), aantrekkelijkheid (seksueel en fysiek), opwinding (seksueel), waargenomen legitimiteit, waargenomen risico en waargenomen deelrisico van participanten (N=181) op een sexting foto werden gemeten gebruik makend van een online 2x3 experimenteel ontwerp; deelscenario (met toestemming, zonder toestemming, alleen gedeeld met een persoon) versus pose (met gezicht en zonder gezicht). Significante effecten werden gevonden voor scenario op waargenomen legitimiteit en waargenomen deelrisico, zo ook voor gezichtloos poseren op evaluatie en waargenomen risico. Vanwege sexting zijn sociale doelen en privé gerelateerde aard zijn het scenario waarin en de anonimiteit van de persoon op de foto van invloed op de evaluatie, waargenomen legitimiteit, waargenomen risico en waargenomen deelrisico van de toeschouwer.
ABSTRACT

The present study focused on the public perception of a sexting picture. Attraction (sexual and physical), Arousal (sexual), Evaluation (semantic differential), Perceived legitimacy, perceived risk and perceived sharing risk of participants (N=181) on a sexting picture were measured using an online 2x3 experimental design; sharing scenario (consensual, non-consensual, only shared with one person) versus Pose (with face and without face). Significant effects were found for scenario on perceived legitimacy and perceived sharing risk, as well as for faceless posing on evaluation and perceived risk. Because of a sext’s social goals and private nature the scenario (sharing setting) wherein and anonymity of the person portrayed on it influence the evaluation, perceived legitimacy, perceived risk and perceived sharing risk of the viewer.

Keywords: Sexting, Online experiment, Perceived legitimacy, Perceived (Sharing) Risk, Sharing Scenario, Pose, SEIM, Evaluation, Information Privacy, Violation.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history one of the first responses to new technology has been to use it to create better sexual imagery (Giles 2003, p. 88). Sexting is a play on the words “sex-texting” (Siegle, 2010). Through celebrity scandals and child pornography charges against minors (Choi 2009, Siegle 2010), sexting has found it’s way into popular media outlets (Stephey 2009). There are many definitions (Chalfen 2009; Hudson 2011) of sexting; for this study the definition will be: “all electronically shared sexual explicit text/picture/video taken by or off the person it portrays”.

Sexting can be utilized for social- (romance, flirtation or finding a viable mate) but also antisocial (blackmail, (cyber)-bullying and harassment) goals. The content of a “sext” is something intimate and often private, usually shared between people in a romantic context. Main motivations for sending a “sext” (sexting message) are; a partner asked for them (James 2009), form of flirting (Jones 2008), form of feedback on looks (Alapo 2009) or as a form of “safe” sex. Considering its motivations (Chalfen 2009, Wartena 2011) sexting has a more social and intrapersonal nature than other sexually explicit material (SEM*). Weisskirch and Delevi (2011) found that attachment anxiety predicted positive attitudes towards sexting such as; accepting it as normal, that it will enhance the relationship, and that partners will expect sexting.

Behind the relative small group of people that are known to “sext” (Lenhart 2009, Wartena 2011) there is a much larger group receiving or finding them, whether they are shared locally or on the world wide web. Besides the obvious motives, sexual arousal or curiosity, much more might be at play here. Peter & Valkenburg (2008, 2009a, 2009b & 2010) found that exposure to sexually explicit Internet material (SEIM) stimulates sexual preoccupancy, while that influence was fully mediated by the subjective sexual arousal. Peter & Valkenburg (2008) call for a broader look at the types of effects that adolescents’ use of SEIM may elicit. Short, Black, Smith, Wetterneck & Wells (2012) state studies investigating changes in SEIM or perceptions over time, as well as studies investigating the subjective dimensions of SEIM, would help in the development of more comprehensive studies regarding SEIM consumption.

The effects of SEIM on individuals might very well be mediated by the setting they are presented in. One of the main antisocial effects of sexting is the leaking of sexting photos to third parties. Wartena (2011) found a significant effect for sharing scenario on
perceived legitimacy of a sexting picture. The current study tries to duplicate those results with one extra scenario. The sharing scenarios are a variation based on two of the main three sexting scenario’s found by Lenhart 2009;

I. exchange of images solely between two romantic partners (Scenario C)
II. exchanges between partners that are shared with others outside the relationship (Scenario A; with permission and Scenario B; without permission)

Violation of the sharing setting of sexting, impacts trust and can potentially influence all the dimensions of privacy (Lee and Larose 1994; Figure A). Such a violation affects the perceived legitimacy of the participant viewing the picture (Wartena 2011).

**H1a: Perceived legitimacy will be lower and perceived sharing risk will be higher on sexting pictures portrayed non-consensual sharing scenario than on sexting pictures portrayed in a consensual sharing scenario.**

A large part of the effect is the violation of ones privacy by being identified. By losing anonymity a “sexter” (person whom sexts) is an easy target and in risk of losing solitude and reserve. A sexting picture that doesn’t show the sexters face would diminish the chance of recognition. To safeguard anonymity and intimacy a common vice in sexting is hiding/masking ones face and/or body parts. The pose of a sexting picture can potentially diminish the invasion of privacy of the sexter and thereby the perceived risk of the general public.

**H1b: Perceived risk and will be higher on sexting pictures portrayed with a visible face than on a sexting picture without one.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical privacy (Solitude)</th>
<th>The state of privacy in which persons are free from unwanted intrusion or observation.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informational privacy (Anonymity)</td>
<td>The desire to have control over the conditions under which personal data are released.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychological privacy (Reserve)</td>
<td>The control over release or retention of personal information to guard one’s cognitions and affects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactional privacy (Intimacy)</td>
<td>Relevant to relationships in social units as it preserves meaningful communication between individuals and among group members.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure A; Privacy Dimensions by Lee and LaRose (1994)**

**METHODS**

**Experimental Design**

A 2x3 between subject design was used, with pose (with face and without face) and sharing scenario (sharing with third parties with consent, sharing with third parties without consent, sharing with just one individual) as independent variables. Dependent measurements were the scores on Perceived legitimacy, Perceived risk, Perceived sharing risk differentials, Evaluation (Semantic differential), Physical and Sexual attraction & Sexual arousal, Subjective Sexual Arousal and Exposure to SEIM.

**Participants**

The total of participants that took part in this study was 270. Of that total 181 filled out a complete version of the questionnaire. Of the viable participant responses, 87 were male and 101 were female, age ranged from 17 to
### Table A
**Distribution, count, pearson chi square and percentages of participants. N=181**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>1FA</th>
<th>2FB</th>
<th>3FC</th>
<th>4NFA</th>
<th>5NFB</th>
<th>6NFC</th>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>(100,0%)</td>
<td>(100,0%)</td>
<td>(100,0%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Condition 1:** With face, sharing scenario without consent for further sharing (FA).
**Condition 2:** With face, sharing scenario without consent for further sharing (FB).
**Condition 3:** With face, sharing scenario shared just between two people (FC).
**Condition 4:** Without face, sharing scenario without consent for further sharing (NFA).
**Condition 5:** Without face, sharing scenario without consent for further sharing (NFB).
**Condition 6:** Without face, sharing scenario shared just between two people (NFC).

### Table B
**Distribution, count, pearson chi square and percentages of participants. N=181**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>Scenario Chi square</th>
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<td>(54,2%)</td>
<td>(53,2%)</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(34,4%)</td>
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<td>(33,9%)</td>
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<td>(55,0%)</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>88</td>
<td>(100,0%)</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>60</td>
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</table>

**Scenario A.** Deze foto werd door de maakster met iemand gedeeld en vervolgens met haar toestemming verder verspreid.
**Scenario B.** Deze foto werd door de maakster met iemand gedeeld en vervolgens zonder haar toestemming verder verspreid.
**Scenario C.** Deze foto werd door de maakster met iemand gedeeld en is vervolgens niet verder verspreid.
35 (M=24.1, SD=4.80). Participants were gathered through several internet fora and a participant-pool (available for a fee) from www.thesistools.nl. Participants were randomly divided over six conditions (Table A& B). Education level, sexual orientation, hours per day on internet, relationship status, screen size, touchscreen use, location at time of participation and sexting behaviour were measured as socio-demographic variables.

Materials

The questionnaire that was created was available through www.thesistools.nl/sexting, it pertained 4 pages in total. The online questionnaires were mostly filled at home (85.5%). Screen size was measured as a variable, sizes ranged from 3-5 inch (most Smartphone’s) to larger than 41 inch, the most frequent used screen size was 15-17 (large notebooks/small pc screens).

Variables

A. Stimuli

Females are more likely to have sent naked photos of themselves and males are more likely to have received them (Siegle 2010). Therefore a sexting picture of a female (A. Face B. Faceless) was used. The content of the picture was a naked woman photographing herself with a cell phone via the mirror. Her breast and genitalia were visible and her facial gesture was neutral. The picture was presented in two conditions; one in its original state and the other altered by removing the area of the picture that portrays the woman’s head (only showing a naked body till the shoulders without a face). The picture was augmented using the computer program Paint. The stimulus 1a was 3 cm longer than stimulus 1b (12.75 by 16.91 cm (though relative due to automatic resizing for several screen-sizes or active exploration through zooming)).

B. Scenario’s

The used stimuli were accompanied by scenario’s describing a situation wherein the picture’s creator shared her sexting picture. Scenario one implied that the creator shared her picture with a second person and gave that person permission to share the picture further. Scenario two implied that picture was shared without the creator’s permission. Scenario three implied that the picture was only shared with one person and not shared any further.

Measurements

Perceived legitimacy (Wartena 2011; modified from Malhotra, Kim & Agarwal, 2004)

Was translated to Dutch and adjusted to fit the subject of exposure to sexting (private and naked) pictures. It contained four items informing on invasion of privacy and the participants emotional state (uncomfortable/ at ease/ I take it personal) concerning the online publication and use of the particular picture. Response categories ranged from 1 (does not apply at all) to 7 (applies completely).

Perceived Risk (Wartena 2011; modified from Jarvenpaa and Tractinksy 1999)

Perceived risk contained two items pertaining towards the direct risk of the sharing of the picture and the risk of it spreading across the World Wide Web. Response categories ranged from 1 (does not apply at all) to 7 (applies completely). Item one was slightly modified compared to the previous study (Wartena 2011).

Perceived Sharing Risk (Wartena 2011; modified from Jarvenpaa and Tractinksy 1999)

Perceived sharing risk contained three items pertaining towards the trust in others concerning; sharing a personal picture similar
to the particular picture shown with others and the overall honesty of others in their treatment of a general personal pictures provided by the participant. Response categories ranged from 1 (does not apply at all) to 7 (applies completely).

Evaluation (Semantic differential)

Six items from the dimension Evaluation (Osgood, Succi and Tannenbaum 1957; Mehrabian 1970, 1974; Russel, 1980) of the semantic differential were used. Items were chosen from two studies using semantic differentials one concerning evaluation of tattoo-ed women (Swami and Furnham 2007) and one measuring evaluation of sexual explicit material (Colson 1974). The seven-point items were; mooi-lelijk, aantrekkelijk, aantrekkelijk-afstotend, plezierig-onplezierig, schoon-vies, smaakvol-smakeloos and positief-negatief.

Physical and Sexual attraction and sexual arousal

Three self-report items measured self-reported physical attractiveness, sexual attractiveness and sexual arousal towards the stimulus. Response categories ranged from 1 (does not apply at all) to 7 (applies completely).

Subjective Sexual Arousal (Peter & Valkenburg 2008; modified from Mosher, Barton-Henry, and Green 1988)

This construct consist of two items “I find sex on the Internet arousing” and “I find sex on the Internet exciting.” Response categories ranged from 1 (does not apply at all) to 5 (applies completely). Peter & Valkenburg (2008) took two items with the highest face validity from the sexual arousal scale developed by Mosher et al (1988). The scale was slightly modified in its translation to Dutch.

Exposure to SEIM (Peter and Valkenburg 2008)

Respondents were asked to indicate how often, in the last 6 months, they had intentionally looked at (a) pictures with clearly exposed genitals; (b) movies with clearly exposed genitals; (c) pictures in which people are having sex; (d) movies in which people are having sex. The response categories were 1 (never), 2 (less than once a month), 3 (1–3 times a month), 4 (once a week), 5 (several times a week), 6 (every day), and 7 (several times a day).

Procedure

This study was created as a 2x3 between subject design, therefore had six conditions wherein sexting-photo (face/faceless) and scenario varied. Each participant was put into a random condition and was than, after filling out demographic information, exposed to a stimulus (with a face or without a face) combined with a sharing scenario.

RESULTS

Reliability analysis

Reliability analyses were performed on all the used scales considering the small changes in some of the items of some constructs (Perceived risk). The six items on Evaluation (Semantic Differential) had a Cronbach’s α = .89, Perceived legitimacy had a Cronbach’s α = .78, Perceived sharing risk had a Cronbach’s α = .79, Subjective Sexual Arousal had a Cronbach’s α = .90, Exposure to SEIM had Cronbach’s α = .93. The three items from Physical and Sexual attraction and sexual arousal were combined into a construct that had a Cronbach’s α = .91.

Perceived Risk had a very low Cronbach’s α = .48, which can hypothetically be explained by the changes made in item one from the previous “het is een risico voor deze persoon
dat deze foto online is gezet” (Wartena 2011) to “het is een risico voor deze persoon dat deze foto gedeeld is”.

**Scenario**

There was a significant effect of scenario on perceived legitimacy $F(2, 178) = 14.81, p < .001$, where scenario B (shared and leaked without permission) was significantly higher on perceived legitimacy than scenario A (shared and leaked with permission) and C (shared but not leaked). There was also a significant effect of scenario on perceived sharing risk $F(2, 178) = 3.26, p < .05$, where scenario B scored significantly higher than scenario A.

**Face Visibility**

There was a significant effect of Face/(less) on perceived risk $F(1, 179) = 5.54, p < .05$, indicating that perceived risk was significantly higher when a face was visible on the stimulus. There was also a significant effect of face visibility on Evaluation $F(1, 179) = 4.90, p < .05$, indicating that Evaluation was significantly higher when a face was visible on the stimulus.

**Condition**

There were significant effects of condition on perceived legitimacy on the mean overall score on all stimuli, $F(5, 175) = 6.44, p < .001$, where condition 2(FB) was significantly higher on perceived legitimacy than condition 1(FA), 4(NFA) and 6(NFC). As well as condition 5 (NFB), which was significantly higher on perceived legitimacy than condition 1(FA) and 4(NFA).

**Table C Means of Significant effects**

<table>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Scenario B</td>
<td>4.73</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scenario C</td>
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<td>4.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to SEIM</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>3.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective Sexual Arousal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>3.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>2.75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Gender**

There were significant effects found for gender on PSAA ($F(1,179)= 78.66, p < .001$), Evaluation ($F(1,179)= 21.37, p < .001$), subjective sexual arousal ($F(1,179)= 42.48, p < .001$) and Exposure to SEIM ($F(1,179)= 101.12, p < .001$) were significantly lower in women. Perceived Legitimacy ($F(1,179)= 8.80, p < .005$) was significantly higher for women.
DISCUSSION

Scenario

H1a: Perceived legitimacy will be higher on sexting pictures portrayed non-consensual sharing scenario than on sexting pictures portrayed in a consensual sharing scenario.

Consistent with the findings of the previous study (Wartena 2011), perceived legitimacy was significantly lower on the non-consensual (B) scenario than on scenario A (shared and leaked with permission) and C (shared but not leaked). Consent influences the perceived legitimacy of the posting of sexting pictures, it is deemed more legitimate. Information privacy is deemed important; the knowledge that a picture is published without a person’s knowledge or against their will create a feeling of violation, which decreases the perceived legitimacy of the sharing of the picture for the viewer.

Inconsistent with the findings of Wartena (2011) Scenario B showed a higher perceived sharing risk than scenario A. Scenario B implied a violation of trust and privacy and therefore might pertain a fear appeal compared to scenario A, where there is no such violation. The fear appeal affects the participant’s trust in others to deal with their potential sexting pictures. The violation of the scenario discredits other people their potential honesty, predictability and ability to keep the participants best interest at heart when dealing with their potential sexting picture.

Face visibility

H1b: Perceived risk will be higher on sexting pictures portrayed with a face than without one.

The anonymity of the pictures without a face made the perceived risk of sharing the picture lower. As long as the identity of the person is unrecognizable on a sexting picture it is deemed safer. Consistent with the findings in the previous study Wartena (2011) the perceived risk seems to be derived directly from the features of the sexting picture itself; independent of the described text-based context attached to it.

Evaluation of faceless pictures was also lower showing that a face on a body is important when asked to value it. Conversely on PSSA no significant effect was found, showing that physical and sexual arousal and attraction are not the same as evaluation for SEIM.

Other effects

Gender

Earlier studies have shown that men report more subjective sexual arousal from sexually explicit material than do women (Janssen et al., 2003; Steinman et al., 1981). As well as this being a same-sex photo, therefore for heterosexual women the result’s concerning PSSA and Evaluation are in the line of expectations.

The lower perceived legitimacy found for women however is a more surprising result. The gender effect on perceived legitimacy might pertain to gender identification with the person portrayed on the picture. When looking closer at the effect there is no significant effect on the item that states whether the sharing was an invasion of privacy. There is however on the items stating the participant feels uncomfortable and unease with the way the sexting picture was used. There is the option that women identify with the same-sex character on the picture and therefore feel more connected with her than men and therefore less at ease. However it is also possible that through more experience with SEIM men are more permissive on legitimacy towards women.
Mundorf, D’Alessio, Allen & Emmers-Sommer (2007, p19) found positive correlations between exposure to sexually explicit material in experimental settings and subsequent anti-female attitudes. While Peter & Valkenburg, (2009a) argue that more consummation of SEIM may lead to objectification of women, which can lead to more permissive attitudes on illegitimate practices towards women.

**Limitations**

The scale perceived risk had a low reliability score in this study. Therefore the results and conclusions based on the scale are questionable.

Condition effects were found on perceived legitimacy. The heterogeneity of the participants as well as the large gender effect might have interfered with the results.

**Recommendations**

Wartena (2011) and this current study emphasize on the difference in character of sexting compared to other SEIM. However at this time there has been no study to verify this assumption. Therefore the differences in perception of other SEIM and specific sexting-material might be worth exploring.

Wysocki and Childers (2011) found differences in preference for women compared to men when it comes to forms of sexting (text-based, pictures, movie or a combination). Different sexting forms could be compared on perceived legitimacy, perceived risk and perceived sharing risk. As well as the gender differences in the appraisal and perception of SEIM found in this and previous studies (Janssen et al., 2003; Steinman et al., 1981) when it comes to same-sex and opposite-sex stimuli.

**Acknowledgements**

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References


Peter, J. & Valkenburg, P. (2008). Adolescents’ exposure to sexually explicit internet material and sexual preoccupancy: A three-
wave panel study. Media Psychology, 11, 207-234.


APPENDIX

A. Volledige vragenlijsten

1. Wat is uw leeftijd?

2. Wat is uw geslacht?
   (Man/Vrouw)

3. Hebt u op dit moment een relatie?
   (Ja/Nee/ Ik wens hierop geen antwoord te geven)

4. Wat is uw seksuele geaardheid?
   (Hetero/ HoLeBi(Homoseksueel, Lesbisch, Biseksueel)/Ik wens hierop geen antwoord te geven)

5. Hoeveel uur zit u gemiddeld per dag op het internet?

6. Wat is uw hoogst afgeronde opleiding?
   (geen/mavo/havo/vwo/mbo/hbo/wo)

7. Studeert u op dit moment?
   (Nee/ Ja, Mbo/ Ja, Hbo/ Nee, WO)

8. Wat is de grootte van het beeldscherm, van het apparaat waarop u deze vragen invult?
   (3-42 inch)

9. Maakt u gebruik van een touchscreen-apparaat (smart phone/ipad) om deel te nemen aan dit onderzoek?
   (Ja/Nee)

10. Waar vult u dit onderzoek in?
   (Thuis/Op Werk of School/ Onderweg/ Ergens anders)

11. Geef antwoord op de volgende stellingen.
   (Deze schaal maakt gebruik van t wee uitersten, alle 5 stippen ertussenin geven een gematigde versie weer van deze uitersten.)
   Ik vind deze vrouw fysiek aantrekkelijk.
   Ik vind deze vrouw seksueel aantrekkelijk.
   Ik vind deze foto seksueel opwindend.
   (is op mij totaal niet van toepassing - is op mij volledig van toepassing) of
   (Ik wens hierop geen antwoord te geven)

12. Wat vindt u van deze foto?
   (Deze schaal maakt gebruik van tegenstellingen. Klik per regel op het bolletje dat het meest overeenkomt met uw gevoel bij deze foto.)
   Mooi - Lelijk
   Afstotend - Aantrekkelijk
   Plezierig - Onplezierig
   Schoon - Vies
(Deze schaal maakt gebruik van t wee uitersten, alle 5 stippen ertussenin geven een gematigde versie
deer van deze uitersten.)
Ik vind het onderling delen van deze foto een inbreuk op deze persoon haar privacy.
Ik voel me ongemakkelijk bij hoe deze foto is gebruikt.
De manier waarop deze foto is beheerd vind ik niet prettig.
De manier waarop er met deze foto is omgesprongen trek ik me persoonlijk aan.
(helemaal oneens - helemaal eens)

14. Geef antwoord op de volgende stellingen.
(Deze schaal maakt gebruik van t wee uitersten, alle 5 stippen ertussenin geven een gematigde versie
weer van deze uitersten.)
Het is een risico voor deze persoon dat deze foto gedeeld is.
Er is een grote kans dat deze foto (op het internet) verder verspreid zal worden.
(helemaal oneens - helemaal eens)

15. Geef antwoord op de volgende stellingen.
(Deze schaal maakt gebruik van t wee uitersten, alle 5 stippen ertussenin geven een gematigde versie
weer van deze uitersten.)
Ik heb er vertrouwen in dat mensen waarmee ik een soortgelijke foto van mijzelf zou delen, mijn
belangen zouden behartigen in de omgang met die foto.
Ik vertrouw erop dat mensen waarmee ik soortgelijke foto van mijzelf zou delen, voorspelbaar
zouden zijn in de omgang met die foto.
Anderen zijn altijd eerlijk in de omgang met foto’s die ik met ze zou delen.
(helemaal oneens - helemaal eens)

16. Heeft u deze foto eerder gezien?
(Ja/ Nee/ Ik wens hierop geen antwoord te geven)

17. In de laatste zes maanden heb ik op het internet expres gekeken naar:
a. Plaatje(s) met ontblootte geslachtsdelen.
b. Filmpje(s) met duidelijk zichtbare geslachtsdelen.
c. Plaatje(s) waarop mensen seks hebben.
d. Filmpje(s) waarin mensen seks hebben.
(Nooit/minder dan 1 keer per maand/1 tot 3 keer per maand/1 keer per week/meerdere malen per
Week/ elke dag/ meerdere keren per dag / * ik wens hierop geen antwoord te geven)

18. Geef antwoord op de volgende stellingen over uzelf;
Ik vind seks(ueel) (materiaal) op het internet opwindend.
Ik vind seks(ueel) (materiaal) op het internet spannend.
(is op mij totaal niet van toepassing - is op mij volledig van toepassing) of
(Ik wens hierop geen antwoord te geven.)