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SEXTING BEHAVIORS DURING EMERGING ADULTHOOD – A SOCIO-PEDAGOGICAL CHARACTERIZATION OF THE PHENOMENON

The subject of this doctoral dissertation concerns the phenomenon of sexting among individuals in the stage of emerging adulthood, defined as the period in life between the ages of 18 and 29. Sexting, understood as the sharing of intimate content via digital devices, is becoming increasingly common in communication and the social relationships of young adults. As a current and evolving phenomenon that remains underexplored in academic research, it has become the focus of my interests and study.

The aim of the dissertation was to attempt to determine the nature and scope of this phenomenon, identify its determinants, and explore the motivations behind and consequences of engaging in sexting. In addition, the research aimed to identify potential gender differences in selected aspects of the phenomenon.

The theoretical part presents issues describing the main conceptual categories of the dissertation, namely: the concept of emerging adulthood, risky behaviors, young people's activity in cyberspace, and existing scientific findings on sexting.

The empirical part of the dissertation presents original research conducted within a quantitative paradigm. I used a survey-based (population) approach, employing both a traditional questionnaire (authored by me) and measurements using psychometric scales. The study was based on random sampling, and the questionnaire was distributed online—the survey link was shared on forums and social media platforms, and the snowball sampling method was used. As a result, the analysis included responses from 263 individuals aged 18–29, all within the period of emerging adulthood.

The research findings allowed not only the illustration of the scope and nature of sexting but also the identification of factors that either encourage or protect against engagement in sexting. The analyses also revealed gender differences in some aspects of the phenomenon. The results show that sexting most often occurs in romantic relationships and is perceived both as a form of building intimacy and as a potential source of risk. Participants pointed to positive aspects of sexting, such as increased self-confidence or deepening intimacy. On the other hand, they were also aware of the risks – including loss of privacy, social pressure, and possible emotional consequences.

At the conclusion of the dissertation, I presented practical recommendations regarding social and systemic actions related to the phenomenon, which may help minimize its negative consequences, promote the safe use of technology, and support young adults in making informed decisions in intimate relationships. I also emphasize the complexity of the sexting phenomenon and the need for an individual approach to its analysis—one that takes into account the social, emotional, and technological context—as well as the need and directions for further scientific exploration.

Keywords: sexting, emerging adults, young adults, risky behaviors, cyberspace, digital communication, digital technologies