# Single in the Digital Age: Sexual Scripts in Facebook Profiles

## Problem

❖ March 13 2009: ABC News reports a "disturbing new trend in teenage flirting" in which teens and young adults share sexually explicit photographs through cell phone SMS text messaging (Stone 2009).

❖ October 28, 2009: According to Dana Benson, a Baylor College of Medicine expert on teen sexuality warns today's youth have "taken their notes electronic" in new form of digital flirting using cell phones (Benson 2009).

❖ June 3 2010: According to Pearland police, students in the Pearland school system have been charged for sending sexualized images by cell phone SMS text messaging (Stanton 2010).

## Responses

❖ Parents, police, and educators have all stated strong concerns over the way sexuality is portrayed and transmitted in the digital age, particularly in mass media, advertising, and one the Internet.

❖ As they struggle with ways to combat sexualized content, authorities have been known to use child pornography statutes to charge underage individuals who disseminate sexualized images—even if they are images of themselves.

❖ Such behavior by teens begs the question: how do these youth act sexually once they become young adults and move beyond the watchful eyes of parents?

## Social Media

❖ In last few years social media has become a popular method for young single people to connect with others for dating, sex, and relationships—even long term.

❖ Facebook is the world's number one social media site (Dayton Business Journal 2012).

❖ Facebook users can create personal profiles, upload images, videos, and text content, and connect to other users through the "Find Friends" feature.

❖ Do single Facebook users post highly sexualized images similar to the sexualized images seen in music videos, television, movies, and advertisements to attract the attention of the opposite sex?

❖ Do males and females engage in this activity at the same rate?

## Hypothesis

❖ Informed by sociocultural scripts, single female Facebook users construct sexualized and hyper-sexualized presentations of self; whereas single male users construct presentations of self which accentuate their potential as good providers.

## Literature

❖ "An individual engages in sexual activity on the basis of a complex set of motivations and organizes that activity on the basis of a complex set of numerous external factors and influences." Society plays a significant role in sexual behavior and "individualistic approaches only . . . explain only a . . . small part" of human sexuality which, in actuality, is the result of the individual's desires and their intersection with society (Laumann 3).

❖ Scripting theory posits "sociocultural processes" frame the construction and interpretation of "our sexual fantasies and thoughts; that is, "patterns of sexual conduct . . . are locally derived" and "biological instincts" play a small role—if any— in comparison to "socially determined scripts" (Laumann 5 - 6).

❖  Scripting theory makes four assumptions regarding sexual scripts: "locally derived," instinct plays no role, learned behavior, may be modified by the individual.

## Sampling

❖  Forty-one Facebook profiles of young single adults were selected for the study using Facebook snowball sampling.

❖  In Facebook snowball sampling, the referring "Friends" are not included in the study.

❖  Instead the Facebook "Find Friends" algorithm returns a list of possible "Friends" by identifying mutual connection(s) between the user's existing Facebook "Friends " and the "Friends" they are connected to-- "Friends" of the searcher's "Friends."

❖  The sample included twenty-one male and nineteen female Facebook users.

## Scale Variables

❖  Sex: Male or Female (ordinal)

❖  Clothing: Modest dress or sportswear: 0 points. Modest necklines and/or bare arms and shoulders 1; Bare midriffs and/or medium low necklines 2; Skin tight jeans, sweaters, spandex, plunging necklines , pants pushed down, shirt pulled up or open, 3; Bikinis, g strings, and lingerie 4; Nudity, partial nudity 5.

❖  Pose: Standing, playing, eating, seated behind a desk or table 0; Arms overhead, one or both hands behind the head, arms held away from the side and slightly bent, body facing the camera  with face turned away, head or body canting 1; Body builder poses, sitting legs splayed, one leg bent and pulled back to the torso other leg thrust out and bent with hand behind head or wrapped around the bent leg, chest thrust forward, arms held away from the side slightly bent with chest thrust forward 2; kneeling or lying on a bed /sofa arms raised or hand(s) behind the head, cupping the breast, or near the genitals 3.

❖  Body Emphasis: Chest, buttocks, or genitals not the focus 0 points. Chest, buttocks, or genitals the focus 1 point; Close up of breast, chest and upper arms, buttocks, or cleavage 2: Pants or shirt unbuttoned, pulled up, apart, or pushed down or dismembered—torso, cleavage, chest and arms, with the head cut off 3.

❖  Number: No sexualized images 0; 1 - 3 sexualized images 1, 4 - 6 sexualized images 2; 6 or more sexualized images 3.

## Reliability

❖  SPSS inter-item reliability procedure yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .919.

❖  SPSS Factor Analysis on the four scaled variables yielded a good single dimension model fit using principal component analysis.

# Factor Analysis

**Communalities**

|          | Initial | Extraction |
|----------|---------|------------|
| Clothing | 1.000   | .898       |
| Pose     | 1.000   | .736       |
| BodyEmph | 1.000   | .863       |
| Number   | 1.000   | .829       |

Extraction Method: Principal Component
Analysis.

**Component Matrix[a]**

|          | Component |
|----------|-----------|
|          | 1         |
| Clothing | .948      |
| Pose     | .858      |
| BodyEmph | .929      |
| Number   | .910      |

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

a. 1 components extracted.

**Total Variance Explained**

| Component | Initial Eigenvalues | | | Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings | | |
|-----------|-------|-------------|--------------|-------|-------------|--------------|
|           | Total | % of Variance | Cumulative % | Total | % of Variance | Cumulative % |
| 1 | 3.327 | 83.166 | 83.166  | 3.327 | 83.166 | 83.166 |
| 2 | .348  | 8.693  | 91.860  |       |        |        |
| 3 | .216  | 5.398  | 97.258  |       |        |        |
| 4 | .110  | 2.742  | 100.000 |       |        |        |

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

# Descriptives

**Total**

| Sex | | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-----|-------|-------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| .00 | Valid | .00   | 2  | 10.5  | 10.5  | 10.5  |
|     |       | 1.00  | 1  | 5.3   | 5.3   | 15.8  |
|     |       | 2.00  | 1  | 5.3   | 5.3   | 21.1  |
|     |       | 3.00  | 2  | 10.5  | 10.5  | 31.6  |
|     |       | 4.00  | 4  | 21.1  | 21.1  | 52.6  |
|     |       | 5.00  | 2  | 10.5  | 10.5  | 63.2  |
|     |       | 6.00  | 1  | 5.3   | 5.3   | 68.4  |
|     |       | 8.00  | 1  | 5.3   | 5.3   | 73.7  |
|     |       | 9.00  | 1  | 5.3   | 5.3   | 78.9  |
|     |       | 10.00 | 3  | 15.8  | 15.8  | 94.7  |
|     |       | 13.00 | 1  | 5.3   | 5.3   | 100.0 |
|     |       | Total | 19 | 100.0 | 100.0 |       |
| 1.00 | Valid | .00  | 20 | 90.9  | 90.9  | 90.9  |
|     |       | 1.00  | 2  | 9.1   | 9.1   | 100.0 |
|     |       | Total | 22 | 100.0 | 100.0 |       |

# Graphs



# Sample Data (female)



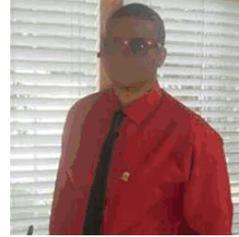From non-sexualized to hyper-sexualized this series shows typical Facebook profile photographs of females.
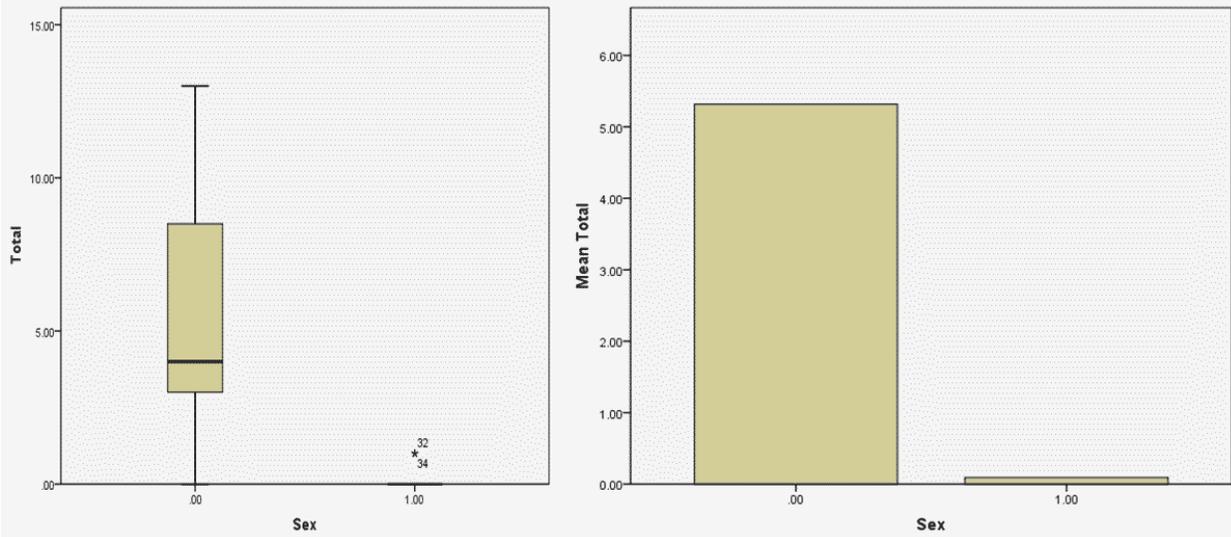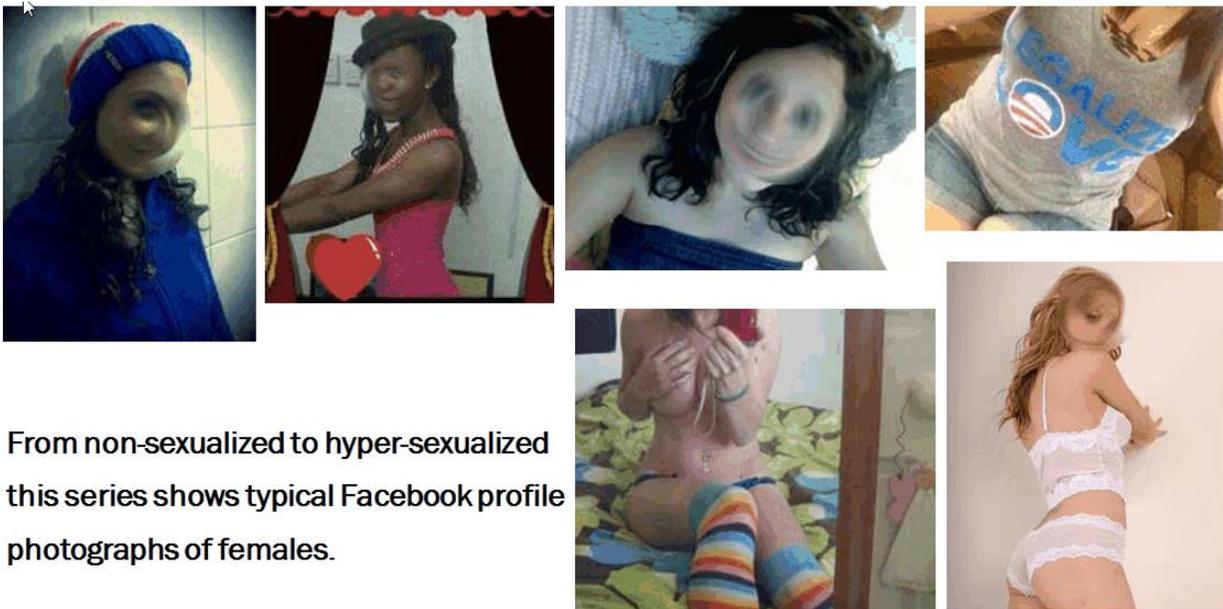
# Sample Data (male)



The male script, however, focuses on athletic ability, and presenting the image of a good provider and companion.

# One Sample T-Test

## One Sample T-Test

(Split File)

### One-Sample Statistics

| Sex | | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| .00 | Total | 19 | 5.3158 | 3.72756 | .85516 |
| 1.00 | Total | 22 | .0909 | .29424 | .06273 |

### One-Sample Test

| Sex | | Test Value = 0 | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Lower | Upper |
| .00 | Total | 6.216 | 18 | .000 | 5.31579 | 3.5192 | 7.1124 |
| 1.00 | Total | 1.449 | 21 | .162 | .09091 | -.0396 | .2214 |

# Independent samples t-test

**Independent Samples T-Test**
(by sex)

**Group Statistics**

| | Sex | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Total | .00 | 19 | 5.3158 | 3.72756 | .85516 |
| | 1.00 | 22 | .0909 | .29424 | .06273 |

**Independent Samples Test**

| | | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | Lower | Upper |
| Total | Equal variances assumed | 42.484 | .000 | 6.564 | 39 | .000 | 5.22488 | .79599 | 3.61485 | 6.83492 |
| | Equal variances not assumed | | | 6.093 | 18.194 | .000 | 5.22488 | .85746 | 3.42480 | 7.02496 |

# Discussion

❖ The findings suggest Facebook singles profiles follow socially established scripts in which single females tend to create sexualized and hyper-sexualized presentations of self; whereas single males tend to present their potential as companions and providers.

❖ Sexualized and hyper-sexualized images of young single women available on Facebook may be due to exposure to hyper-sexualized images, objectification, and depersonalization of women in mass media.

❖ Further research is needed. The current study indicates Facebook offers a lucrative arena for gaining a better understanding of human sexuality.

❖ Textual analysis---though beyond the scope of the current study--of Facebook profiles and images seems to offer a lucrative area of study.

❖ Researchers might also replicate the current research using a larger sample size and/or focusing on the Facebook profiles of older adult male and female users or users living in different geographic areas.