

Young People's Reasons for and Emotional Reactions to Sexting in Intimate Relationships

Although sexting is a widespread phenomenon among today's youth, little is known about their experiences of sexting with their intimate partners. This study addresses this gap by examining young people's reasons for sexting and emotional reactions to sending and receiving sexts in their intimate relationships, as reported by 764 (48.7% girls) 15–20-year-olds in Finland. Both younger and older girls and boys reported mostly positive reactions to both sending and receiving sexts. However, girls reported more negative reactions than boys did. Girls' reasons for sending sexts were more frequently related to their own desire to feel sexy or flirtatious, their need for validation from their partner, or the pressure that their partner put on them to sext, whereas boys' reasons more often indicated normative ideas of sexting as a typical component in a romantic relationship and responding to sexts sent to them by their partners. The results suggest that although it is mostly consensual and reciprocal, sexting within intimate relationships may carry different meanings for boys and girls, reflecting gendered heterosexual norms.

Keywords: adolescents; intimate relationships; sexting

Introduction

Digital technologies have provided several new platforms for online communication, thus altering social interaction between young people. Sexting, defined as sending or receiving sexually explicit text messages, pictures, or videos (“sexts”) via the internet and/or mobile devices (Mori et al., 2020), has become a key topic in discussions surrounding sexuality-related smartphone use among adolescents. However, studies on the prevalence of sexting among today's youth have yielded varying results due to their methodological differences and various definitions of sexting (Barrense-Dias et al., 2017; Klettke et al., 2014). A recent meta-analysis of 39 studies reported a mean prevalence of 15% for sending and 27% for receiving sexts, suggesting that young people more commonly receive than send sexts (Madigan et al., 2018).

Various cross-sectional studies have analyzed young people's engagement in sexting in terms of risks and negative outcomes and have reported mental health difficulties, impulsivity, substance abuse, and risky sexual behaviors (e.g., Brinkley et al., 2017; Mori et al., 2019; Ybarra & Mitchell, 2014). Conversely, other studies have indicated that sexting may have some positive outcomes, including increased opportunities for young people to find romantic partners, initiate sexual contact, and foster or sustain intimacy (Lippman & Campbell, 2014; van Ouytsel et al., 2019b; Walrave et al., 2014). While non-consensual, pressured, or coerced sexting is recognized as a threat to young people's safety and well-being (Choi et al., 2016; Kernsmith et al., 2018; Titchen et al., 2019), consensual sexting has been conceptualized as an aspect of digital intimacy via which young people can explore and express their sexuality (Croft et al., 2015; Patchin & Hinduja, 2020; van Ouytsel et al., 2019a). Consequently, analysis of contextual relational factors—such as the factors that induce people to engage in sexting, issues of consent, and the nature of the relationships between sexters (i.e., the persons engaging in sexting)—may provide a more nuanced understanding of the reasons for and outcomes of sexting (Cooper et al., 2016; Englander, 2019; Reed et al., 2020).

This article adopts a theoretical framework that understands engagement in sexual experiences and the formation of sexual relationships as normative developmental tasks in adolescence (Harden, 2014; Tolman & McClelland, 2011; Reed et al., 2020). This perspective does not overlook risk-management or harm prevention in sexual relations but acknowledges consensual sexual behavior among youth as potentially healthy, enabling experiences of pleasure, intimacy, competence, and well-being (Harden, 2014; Tolman & McClelland, 2011; Vasilenko et al., 2014). Moreover, we argue that digital environments have provided young people with new ways to

achieve these experiences, to be intimate with their partners, and to form and maintain romantic relationships. Therefore, a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of sexting as sexual behavior and the role that sexting plays in sexuality development within intimate relationships in adolescence is warranted.

Sexting in Cultural Context

Many young people in Nordic countries—as elsewhere—have their first experience of romantic relationships during adolescence (Bakken, 2017; Karsberg, 2019). Attitudes toward romantic relationships in adolescence in the Nordic context are generally liberal, considering sexual curiosity and explorations to be normatively expected (Burén et al., 2022). According to a representative Finnish School Health Promotion Survey, 17% of secondary school pupils (grades 8–9), 26% of upper secondary school students, and 35% of students in vocational educational institutions were in a romantic relationship, with more girls than boys reporting this. Furthermore, 19% of pupils in the 8th and 9th grades (both girls and boys) reported having had vaginal or anal intercourse, while 38% of students in upper secondary school and 55% of students in vocational educational institutions had had these experiences, with girls having had such experiences more often than boys (School Health Promotion Study, 2021). Hence, experiences of intimate relationships and sexual intercourse become more common with age, which also suggests some gender-based differences.

Several studies have reported an increase in the prevalence of sexting with age (Madigan et al., 2018; Patchin & Hinduja, 2019; Van Ouytsel et al., 2020a). To date, the findings regarding gender differences in sexting have been inconclusive (Gámez-Guadix et al., 2017; Mitchell et al., 2012; Patchin & Hinduja, 2019), although many studies have reported no significant differences according to gender (Madigan et al., 2018; Van Ouytsel et al., 2019a). Some studies suggest that this may be partly explained

by different cultural values and variation in gender norms between countries (Baumgartner et al., 2014; Ševčíková, 2016). For example, Baumgartner et al. (2014) suggested that in countries that impose greater restrictions on sexual behavior for girls, gender differences in sexting may be stronger, with more boys than girls engaging in sexting (measured in the study as sending sexts only). By contrast, in countries with less social restrictions for girls to express their sexuality, gender differences may be smaller, absent, or even reversed. Interestingly, Baumgartner et al. (2014) reported a higher prevalence of sexting among girls than boys in the Nordic countries (Denmark, Norway, and Finland), except for Sweden, where the rate was higher for boys. The Nordic countries are typically considered to be more sexually permissive compared to many other countries.

Rather than encouraging abstinence, compulsory school-based sex education in Nordic countries promotes the use of contraceptives to ensure safe sex while also emphasizing gender equality and individual rights for sexual autonomy (Honkasalo, 2014). Notably, the aim behind the recent Finnish legislative reform has been to strengthen the protection of sexual autonomy and sexual and physical integrity, including among young people (Finnish Government Bill HE 13/2022 vp). Considering the increasingly digitized world, the legislator sought to extend the protection of these rights to the digital sphere, recognizing that consensual image-based sexting between intimate partners may also be wide-spread among young people aged under 18. However, the fact that intimate sexts can easily be disseminated to third parties, which can constitute a criminal offense, has been identified as a sexuality-related risk for young people (Burén et al., 2022).

Sexting in Romantic Relationships

Although sexting during adolescence may occur among strangers, acquaintances, peers,

or casual dating partners, it most typically takes place between romantic partners in the context of a relationship (Drouin et al., 2013; Mitchell et al., 2012; Patchin & Hinduja, 2019; Reed et al., 2020; van Ouytsel et al., 2020b). Previous research on sexting in young people's romantic relationships has explored consensual and non-consensual sexting in association with positive and negative relationship patterns. Non-consensual sexting has been identified as a component of intimate partner violence (IPV) among young people (Dake et al., 2012; Drouin et al., 2015). Studies have also found that young women are more often pressured or coerced into sexting in relationships than young men (Kernsmith et al., 2018; Ross et al., 2019; Titchen et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, several studies have reported positive contributors to and consequences of consensual sexting. Sexting takes place between romantic or sexual partners for fun, as flirtation, to feel sexy, in response to a sext, or as a sexy gift (e.g., Crofts et al., 2015; Reed et al., 2020; Wood et al., 2015). Moreover, sexting may enhance intimacy with one's long-distance partner and may contribute to greater sexual and relational satisfaction (Drouin et al., 2013; 2017).

However, research on the emotional consequences of sexting in romantic relationships, or by romantic partners compared to non-partners is still scarce (Burén, 2020; Drouin et al., 2013). Among the few studies to have investigated emotional reactions to sexting in young people's intimate relationships was the Safeguarding Teenage Relationships (STIR) study that was conducted in five European countries (Bulgaria, Cyprus, England, Italy, and Norway) (Stanley et al., 2018; Wood et al., 2015). This study grouped the responses into three categories—positive, negative, and mixed reactions to sending a sext—thus excluding a more specific analysis of these responses. Of the young people who had experienced sexting in a romantic relationship, 41–87% of girls and 75–91% of boys (with differences in percentages depending on the

country) reported only positive emotional reactions to having sent a sext to their partner (e.g., feeling loved, wanted, or good about themselves or thought it was funny). In England, Italy, and Norway, boys were significantly more likely than girls to give exclusively positive responses, while girls were significantly more likely than boys to report only the negative impact (e.g., feeling upset, unhappy, humiliated, annoyed, scared, angry, bad about themselves, shocked, or embarrassed). More specifically, as many as 27% of girls in England had sent a sext because their partner pressured them to, and they were considerably more likely to report negative emotional impacts of sexting than those who did not report pressure as a reason for sexting (Wood et al., 2015). Furthermore, a recent study by Reed et al. (2020) demonstrated that young people's motivation to sext was most often simply to be fun and flirtatious but that girls were more likely than boys to be pressured into sexting and to report negative emotional responses to sexting requests from their partner. These findings highlight the importance of distinguishing between the consensual and non-consensual relationship contexts in which sexting occurs as well as addressing gender-based differences in analyzing young people's qualitative experiences of sexting.

The Present Study

The aim of the present study was to extend our existing knowledge of young people's reasons for and emotional reactions to sending and receiving sexts in their romantic relationships, at the time when the onset of sexual behaviour is rapidly increasing. The study is based on a school survey of young people aged 15–20 years in secondary schools (9th grade), upper secondary schools, and vocational educational institutions in different parts of Finland. In the survey, sexts were defined as sexual messages or visual material (i.e., pictures and videos) that describe or depict sexual activity or naked/partially naked bodies.

First, the present study examined the prevalence of sexting in young people's intimate relationships, and whether this prevalence varied by age or by gender. Drawing on recent literature (e.g., van Ouytsel, 2020a; Wood et al., 2015), we expected that sexting (sending and receiving) would be more common among older than younger adolescents (hypothesis 1). Moreover, we expected that female gender may be a significant factor in experiences of sending sexts (hypothesis 2), as existing research from the Nordic context appears to suggest a higher prevalence of sending sexts among girls than boys (Baumgartner et al., 2014).

Second, we investigated young people's reasons for sexting with their romantic partners. Based on previous research (e.g., Reed et al., 2020; Wood et al., 2015), we expected that the reasons for sending sexts would most often be consensual, indicating sexual expression and exploration but also reciprocal sexual communication (hypothesis 3). Moreover, we expected that girls would be pressured by their partners to sext more frequently than boys (hypothesis 4). In terms of possible differences in the reasons for sexting between younger and older adolescents, our study was exploratory.

Third, we investigated whether emotional reactions to sending or receiving a sext differed according to gender. This part of the study examined the participants' positive, negative, and neutral reactions to the latest instance in which they had sent or received sexts in their intimate relationships. Based on existing research on sexting in young people's intimate relationships (Barter et al., 2015; Wood et al., 2015; Stanley et al., 2018), we expected that positive emotional reactions to sexting would be common in the context of consensual sexting whereby the sexts are only shared with one's partner (hypothesis 5). Drawing on previous research, we also expected that girls would express negative emotional reactions to experiences of sexting in intimate relationships more often than boys (hypothesis 6) (Barter et al., 2015; Wood et al., 2015; Reed et al.,

2020). In terms of possible differences in emotional reactions between younger and older adolescents, our study was exploratory.

Method

Ethical Approval

The study followed the ethical guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity and was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Tampere Region. According to Finland's ethical guidelines, young people aged over 15 can decide for themselves whether they are willing to participate in research studies. In this sensitive study, however, the parents/guardians of minors were permitted to opt their children out of participation, if they so wished.

Participants

The study sample comprised 782 participants who had experienced romantic relationships. Given that only a small number of nonbinary individuals participated ($n = 17$; 2.2%), their responses were removed from the analysis. Although this may be considered statistically justifiable, we acknowledged the problematic nature of excluding experiences of nonbinary young people from research reports (Widman et al., 2022). The respondents in the final sample ($n = 764$) were evenly divided according to gender, were predominantly Finnish-speaking, and most had experiences of heterosexual romantic relationships. The mean age was 16.72 years ($SD = 1.24$): 16.72 years for girls ($SD = 1.26$), and 16.73 years for boys ($SD = 1.23$). See Table 1 for descriptive data regarding the participant sample.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample ($n = 764$).

[t]Table 1 near here[/t]

Measures

The school-based survey explored young people's social media use within romantic relationships as well as their online and offline experiences of IPV. The survey was originally administered as part of the STIR research in five European countries (Barter et al., 2015). The present study was based on the same methodological framework that had been used in the original study, with some modifications to the survey instrument. The survey was translated from English into Finnish by a professional translator. The questions about sexting were only asked from respondents who reported that they had been in an intimate relationship.

The participants reported their gender by choosing one of the following options: 1 = girl, 2 = boy, or 3 = I don't identify myself as a girl or a boy (data containing the third option were excluded from the analyses owing to the small sample size). The third option was added to the original STIR instrument. The age range of the respondents included both underage young people (aged 15–17) and those who were formally adults (aged 18–20). Possible differences in sexting between these two age groups were analyzed in the present study.

Sending sexts to one's partner was measured using the item "Have you ever sent sexual messages, pictures, or videos of yourself to your partner during the relationship? Think about all your partners." Participants answered this question by choosing 1 = never, 2 = once, 3 = a few times, or 4 = often. This item was the same as that used in the STIR survey. The item was recoded to 0 = never and 1 = at least once to reframe the analysis for those participants who had any experience of sexting at all.

Receiving sexts from one's partner was measured by asking, "Has your partner sent you sexual messages, pictures, or videos of themselves during the relationship? Think about all your partners." Participants answered this question by choosing 1 =

never, 2 = once, 3 = a few times, or 4 = often. This item was the same as that used in the original STIR survey and was dichotomized to 0 = never and 1 = at least once for the purposes of the present study.

Reasons for sending the last sext were measured using the item “Think about the last time you have sent a sexual message, a picture, or a video of yourself to your partner during your relationship. Why did you do it? You can choose several options.” The options were (in the following order): “as a joke”; “to feel sexy/flirtatious”; “my partner asked me to”; “my partner pressured me to”; “my friends pressured me to”; “to show my feelings; to get attention”; “to show my body”; “to be liked”; “in response to a similar message my partner had sent me”; “it is part of being in a relationship”; and “I don’t know”. This item had two additional options compared to the STIR survey: “to be liked” and “it is part of being in a relationship.” For the purpose of this study, these additions were considered necessary to examine approval seeking and normative understandings of sexting in young people’s intimate relationships. Owing to the ambiguity of translations of the following two options, “to prove my feelings” in the original instrument in English was replaced with the literal Finnish translation “to show my feelings,” and “to show off” was replaced with “to show my body”. These expressions in Finnish were the closest possible translations from English, also conveying connotations of the meanings intended in the original survey. These translations from Finnish to English are used in this article to report the study.

Emotional reaction to the last instance of sending a sext was measured with the item “Think about the last time you have sent a sexual message, a picture, or a video of yourself to your partner during your relationship. How did this behavior make you feel? You can choose several options.” The options were (in the following order): “upset”; “loved”; “unhappy”; “I felt sexy”; “sexually excited”; “hurt”; “wanted”; “annoyed”;

“safe”; “betrayed”; “scared”; “embarrassed”; “good about myself”; “bad about myself”; “angry”; “thought it was funny”; “shocked”; “I regretted it”; and “it had no effect”. This item had six additional options compared to the original STIR survey: “I felt sexy,” “sexually excited,” “safe,” “betrayed,” and “I regretted it.” In addition, “humiliated” in the original survey instrument was replaced with “hurt” because the Finnish translation of the options “humiliated” and “embarrassed” (used in the original survey) had some overlapping meanings.

Emotional reaction to the last instance of receiving a sext was measured with the item “How did you feel last time when you received from your partner a sexual message, a picture, or a video of your partner during your relationship? You can choose several options.” The options were (in the following order): “upset”; “loved”; “happy”; “unhappy”; “sexually excited”; “hurt”; “wanted”; “annoyed”; “safe”; “scared”; “embarrassed”; “good about myself”; “bad about myself”; “angry”; “shocked”; “thought it was funny”; and “it had no effect”. This item was not included in the original survey.

Whether the last sext sent by the participant was shared with others by the partner was measured using the item “Was it shared without your consent?” The options were 1 = yes; 2 = no, and 3 = I don’t know. This item was not included in the original survey.

Procedure

The research permits were applied from many municipalities in a certain large area in Finland. This was considered most convenient, as the research team travelled to all schools to do the survey. The schools were selected to represent demographic variation in terms of regions (urban and rural), gender (comparable proportion of boys and girls), and the young people’s linguistic backgrounds (i.e., diverse instead of Finnish as the

only language, to account for diverse sociocultural backgrounds). Information about these indicators was obtained mainly from Statistics Finland, while some regional and school-based information was obtained from municipalities or directly from educational institutions (in particular, gender proportions in different vocational study programs to prevent underrepresentation of either girls or boys in the sample). The participants were recruited in 2021 from those 13 schools out of 39 schools, which agreed to participate in the study. The sampled schools consisted of four secondary schools, four upper secondary schools, and five vocational educational institutions. The procedure in schools did not allow for an in-depth analysis of the number of absent students or those who did not finish the survey in class across various schools.

The research team visited each school and conducted the online survey during a single school day. Prior to the visit, the team informed the young people, their guardians, and the school personnel about the study by sending information letters via email to the school principals, who then forwarded these messages via Wilma, the internet-based communication tool used in schools. In addition to describing the study's purpose and content, the procedure was presented in advance in written form. It was clearly stated that participation was voluntary and could be terminated at any time during the survey, and that all data collected would be anonymous and treated confidentially. In the case of students aged under 18 years, their guardians were advised that they could prevent their child from participating by opting out on their behalf. To our knowledge, none of them contacted the school personnel to do this.

Before commencing the survey in each class, the participants were given information about the study, both orally and in written form. The researcher read the informed consent form aloud in front of the class, and the same information was presented in written form on the first page of the survey. It was emphasized that

participation was voluntary and that answering the survey questions would be regarded as consent to participating in the study. The researcher was present in the classroom during the survey, which took 25–30 minutes to complete using a laptop, tablet, or mobile phone. After the survey, the students had an opportunity to discuss with the researcher if they wished to do so. The students were also given contact details for youth services, health care services, and support services, which had been listed in advance on the research project web site. Moreover, the school student care personnel (i.e., the school nurse, counselor, and psychologist) had been informed in advance about the survey in case some of the students wished to talk with them afterwards. Owing to restrictions on school visits associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, the survey was administered remotely via Zoom connections with the classrooms in three schools. An anonymous online chat facility was made available to the young people for the entire day of the remotely administered survey, with each question and answer visible only to the researchers and the individual asking the question.

Data Analyses

The data collected reflected the participants' experiences of sexting with distributions and frequencies for boys and girls and for younger and older adolescents (below and over 18 years old). Before conducting statistical analyses, we assessed the degree to which the data was clustered within schools. We used the *ICCbin* package (Hossain & Chakraborty, 2017) to calculate ICC and 95% confidence intervals for all variables of interest using the Fleiss-Cuzick Method (Fleiss and Cuzick, 1979). As the within-cluster correlations were low (all ICCs $\leq .032$) and all confidence intervals overlapped with 0, there was no need to account for clustering of the data within educational institutions.

Welch's two sample t-test was used to examine whether gender and age were related in the sample characteristics ($p = .88$). We used the Pearson chi-squared test with Yates' continuity correction to identify any differences in prevalence of sexting and in emotional reactions to sexting among boys and girls and among younger and older adolescents. We also applied χ -tests to investigate the participants' reasons for sending their most recent sext according to age and gender. All analyses were performed using R software (R Core Team, 2022). Data were cleaned, organized, and restructured using the packages *tidyr* (Wickham & Girlich, 2022), *dplyr* (Wickham et al., 2022), *forcats* (Wickham, 2022), and *stringr* (Wickham, 2019). To analyze the data, we used the packages *psych* (Revelle, 2022) and *epitools* (Aragon, 2020), and we used *ggplot2* (Wickham, 2016) and *RColorBrewer* (Neuwirth, 2014) to visualize the data.

The results are reported by presenting odds ratios (OR) and 95% confidence intervals for ORs as well as relevant figures. Regarding the reported gender differences, an OR of above 1 indicated that girls were more likely than boys to report the experience surveyed with the item, whereas when the OR was below 1, this was more likely for boys. Regarding the reported age differences, when OR was below 1, younger individuals (aged 15–17) were more likely to report the experience surveyed with the item, whereas when OR was above 1, this was more likely for older individuals (aged 18–20).

Results

Prevalence of Sexting

Sexting experiences were common in young people's intimate relationships. Over half of the participants (55%, $n = 421$) had received a sext from their partner, while less than half (44%, $n = 337$) had themselves sent a sext to their partner. The further analyses

were conducted by analysing these data from young people who reported sexting experiences (see Table 2). Contrary to hypothesis 1 which expected that sexting would be more common among older than younger adolescents, no statistically significant difference was found between these age groups. Furthermore, chi-square tests indicated that girls were more likely than boys to have sent a sext to their partner (OR = 2.58 [1.92–3.48]) but were not more likely to have received a sext from their partner. Our study thus provides support for hypothesis 2, which expected that girls would engage in sending sexts more often than boys.

Table 2. Distribution and frequency of sexting experiences in intimate relationships by gender and by age.

[t]Table 2 near here[/t]

Reasons for Sending Sexts

As expected, the reasons cited for sexting were generally consensual (hypothesis 3). For girls, the most common reasons for sending a sext to one's partner were to feel sexy/flirtatious, because their partner asked them to, to show their body, in response to a similar message that they had received from their partner, and to get attention. The most common reasons for boys were to respond to a similar message that they had received, because their partner asked them to, because they considered it to be part of being in a relationship, to show their body, and to feel sexy/flirtatious. See Figure 1 and Table 3 for the distributions and chi-square results of the participants' reasons for sending sexts.

Figure 1. Reasons for sending a sext to one's intimate partner by gender.

[t]Figure 1 near here[/t]

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Table 3. Distribution and chi-square results of reasons for sending a sext to one's intimate partner by gender and age.

[t]Table 3 near here[/t]

Significantly more girls than boys had sent a sext to their partner to feel sexy/flirtatious (OR = 3.61 [2.18–6.15]), to get attention (OR = 4.97 [2.30–12.50]), and to be liked (OR = 3.54 [1.68–8.47]). In support of hypothesis 4, we also found that girls reported more often than boys that their partner had pressured them to sext (OR = 7.16 [2.06–48.90]). Boys sent sexts in response to similar messages received from their partners significantly more commonly than girls did (OR = 0.39 [0.24–0.62]). Boys also reported significantly more often than girls that they sent a sext because they considered it to be part of being in a relationship (OR = 0.51 [0.30–0.87]).

In terms of the age groups, the most common reasons that younger adolescents (aged 15–17) cited for having sent their last sext were because their partner asked them to, to feel sexy/flirtatious, to show their body, and in response to a similar message. For older adolescents (aged 18–20), the most common reasons were to feel sexy/flirtatious, because their partner asked them to, and in response to a similar message. No significant differences were found between the age groups in terms of the reasons they gave for sexting.

Emotional Reactions to Sending and Receiving Sexts

In support of hypothesis 5, the analyses revealed that most reactions to sending and receiving sexts were positive for both girls and boys and for both younger and older adolescents, respectively. Overall, no significant gender differences emerged with respect to how often girls and boys reported experiencing at least one positive or at least one negative emotional reaction to sending a sext, providing no support for hypothesis 6. In partial support of hypothesis 6, however, we found that it was more common for

girls (14.5%) than for boys (4.5%) to experience at least one negative reaction to receiving a sext ($\chi^2(1) = 10.79$; $p = .001$; OR = 3.54; 95% CI = 1.70, 8.13).

Furthermore, girls (70.1%) were less likely than boys (84.0%) to report at least one positive reaction to receiving a sext from their partner ($\chi^2(1) = 10.54$; $p = .001$; OR = 0.45; 95% CI = 0.28, 0.72).

For girls, the most common emotional reactions to having sent their most recent sext to their partner were feeling wanted, feeling good about themselves, feeling sexy, loved, and safe. For boys, the most often reported reactions were feeling sexually excited, wanted, loved, and good about oneself and that it had no effect. Figure 2 and Table 4 present the distribution and chi-square results regarding the participants' emotional reactions to having sent their most recent sext to their partner.

Figure 2. Emotional reactions to sending a sext to one's intimate partner by gender.

[t]Figure 2 near here[/t]

Note. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$

Table 4. Distribution and chi-square results for emotional reactions to sending a sext to one's intimate partner by gender and by age.

[t]Table 4 near here[/t]

Certain reactions to sending a sext were more common for girls than for boys and vice versa. Significantly more girls than boys reported feeling wanted (OR = 1.75 [1.11–2.81]), good about themselves (OR = 1.86 [1.15–3.06]), sexy (OR = 1.96 [1.16–3.39]), and safe (OR = 2.06 [1.10–4.08]). Although girls reported feeling safe more often than boys, girls also more frequently reported that they regretted the last sext they had sent (OR = 6.31 [2.17–27.80]). This finding supports hypothesis 5, which stated that sexting may be a more negative experience for girls than for boys. Boys

reported feeling sexually excited significantly more often than girls (OR = 0.39 [0.24–0.64]).

For both age groups, the most common emotional reactions to having sent their most recent sext were feeling wanted, good about oneself, sexy, and loved. Young people aged over 18 years felt significantly more often sexy than young people aged 15–17 (OR = 2.12 [1.26–3.55]).

On receiving a sext from one's partner, the most common emotional reactions for girls were feeling wanted or sexually excited or that it had no effect (see Figure 3 and Table 5). Girls also reported feeling happy or loved. Boys most frequently reported being sexually excited, happy, loved, and wanted. The chi-square test revealed that it was more common for girls than for boys to report no effect (OR = 2.18 [1.33–3.63]), and that it was funny (OR = 2.16 [1.22–3.95]). Furthermore, it was more common for girls to feel safe than for boys (OR = 2.15 [1.18–4.06]). In support of our hypothesis that sexting may be a more negative experience for girls than for boys, girls also felt shocked more often than boys (OR = 13.60 [2.74–330.00]). Boys who had received a sext from their partner reported significantly more often than girls that they felt sexually excited (OR = 0.38 [0.25–0.57]), happy (OR = 0.46 [0.30–0.70]), or loved (OR = 0.58 [0.37–0.91]).

Figure 3. Emotional reactions to receiving a sext from one's intimate partner by gender.

[t]Figure 3 near here[/t]

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Table 5. Distribution and chi-square results for emotional reactions to receiving a sext from one's intimate partner by gender and by age.

[t]Table 5 near here[/t]

For younger participants aged 15–17, the most common emotional reactions to receiving a sext were feeling sexually excited, happy, wanted, no effect, and loved. For older participants aged 18–20, the most common reactions were to feel sexually excited, happy, wanted, loved, and good about oneself. Young people aged over 18 years felt loved significantly more frequently than young people aged 15–17 (OR = 1.67 [1.03–2.67]).

Exploratory Analysis of Reasons for and Emotional Reactions to Sending Sexts

Overall, chi-square tests showed that at least one positive emotion in response to sexting was more likely if the sext was sent to show one's body (OR = 6.16 [3.1–13.8]), to show one's feelings (OR = 5.55 [2.34–16.6]), to feel sexy/flirtatious (OR = 3.78 [2.20–6.79]), or if the sexting activity was reported to be part of a relationship (OR = 2.27 [1.21–4.54]). (See Figure 4 and Table 6.) At least one positive emotion for sending a sext was less likely if the participant's partner had asked them to send it (OR = 0.60 [0.38–0.97]) or if their partner had pressured them to send it (OR = 0.19 [0.07–0.45]). At least one positive emotion was also less likely if participants reported that they did not know why they sent the sext; however, the cell sizes were small (OR = 0.36 [0.14–0.86]).

Figure 4. At least one positive reaction to sending a sext by participants' reported reasons.

[t]Figure 4 near here[/t]

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Table 6. Distribution and chi-square results for at least one positive emotional reaction to sending a sext by participants' reasons to sext.

[t]Table 6 near here[/t]

Moreover, chi-square tests revealed that the participants were more likely to experience at least one negative emotion when they had sent the sext because their partner asked them to (OR = 2.97 [1.64–5.45]), if their partner had pressured them into sending it (OR = 42.20 [14.90–155.00]), or if they sent the sext to be liked (OR = 2.82 [1.37–5.60]). (See Figure 5 and Table 7.) At least one negative emotion was less likely if the participants considered sexting to be a normal part of the relationship (OR = 0.36 [0.12–0.87]), or if they had sent the sext to show their body (OR = 0.23 [0.08–0.55]).

Figure 5. At least one negative reaction to sending a sext by participants' reported reasons.

[t]Figure 5 near here[/t]

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

Table 7. Distribution and chi-square results for at least one negative emotional reaction to sending a sext by participants' reasons to sext.

[t]Table 7 near here[/t]

Only six of the respondents reported that their partner had shared their sext with others; thus, no further statistical analysis was employed to examine these observations.

Discussion

In the present study, we investigated young people's experiences of sexting in intimate relationships, addressing the prevalence of, reasons for, and emotional reactions to sexting. We found that both sending and receiving sexts are common experiences in young people's romantic relationships. Over half of the participants in the present study had received a sext, and over forty per cent had sent a sext to their partner. These experiences were perceived positively by most young people across genders and age groups. These findings are compatible with those of recent literature on the prevalence

of sexting in Anglo-American and European contexts (Stanley et al., 2018; van Ouytsel et al., 2019b; van Ouytsel et al., 2020a) and even suggest slightly higher prevalence rates in Finland. Although not all young people engage in sexting with their partners, this study highlights the significance of sexting in normative sexuality development (Harden, 2014; Tolman & McClelland, 2011; Vasilenko et al., 2014).

In contrast to previous studies (Barrense-Dias et al., 2017; Burén & Lunde, 2018), we identified no age difference in the prevalence of sexting. A possible reason for this may be that we focused on sexting among 15–20-year-olds, thus excluding relationship contexts involving younger individuals, and sexting may be less prevalent among younger adolescents (Burén & Lunde, 2018). The absence of any association between age and prevalence of sexting may be partly explained by perceived peer expectations of sexting in intimate relationships across the age groups in the sample. Moreover, these findings may partly reflect the relatively non-restrictive attitudes toward sexual exploration among young people in the Nordic cultural context (Baumgartner et al., 2014). However, such interpretations should be received with caution, given that our study did not include associations with peer expectations or with attitudes toward sexting as topics of focus. Moreover, as predicted, young people who identified themselves as girls were more likely to have sent a sext to their partner than young people who identified themselves as boys. This finding suggests some gendered practices around sexting despite the fact that we observed no gender differences in the prevalence of receiving sexts from one's partner.

Reasons for Sexting in Intimate Relationships

Consistent with our predictions and existing research on young people's romantic relationships (Stanley et al., 2016; Wood et al., 2015), sexting was most often consensual and reciprocal. However, we observed several gender-based differences in

the reasons that the participants gave for engaging in sexting. In our sample, it was more common for girls than for boys to send sexts to feel sexy/flirtatious and to be liked. Moreover, as in the previous study conducted in England and Norway (Wood et al., 2015), girls in this study were more likely than boys to send a sext to their partner in a bid for attention. Furthermore, in line with our expectations based on previous research (Reed et al., 2020; Wood et al., 2015), girls were pressured by their partners into sexting significantly more often than boys, with approximately a tenth of the girls reporting these experiences. Moreover, in line with a previous study conducted in England (Wood et al., 2015), boys were more likely than girls to send a sext in response to a similar message. Boys were also more likely than girls to send a sext because they thought that sexting was part of being in a relationship.

Parallels are evident between sexting motivations and the model of sexual motivations that theorizes sexual behavior by analyzing approach and avoidance motivation and self- and other-focused motivation (Cooper et al., 1998). Young people sent sexts to their partner to pursue positive outcomes, reciprocity, and intimacy, conceptualized in the model as approach motivation. Avoidance motivation was reported specifically by girls who sent sexts to avoid the negative consequences of not capitulating to pressure from their partners. The most commonly cited reasons for sending sexts appear to reflect other-focused motivations, such as sending a sext to get attention from one's partner, to show one's body to one's partner, because one's partner asked for a sext, in response to a sext sent by one's partner, because sexting is part of being in a relationship, and the above-mentioned pressure from one's partner to sext. The desire to feel sexy or flirtatious, which was also commonly reported by both boys and girls, implies more self-focused approach motivations. The study demonstrates that young people send sexts for various reasons, and this must be considered in attempts to

understand sexting as a form of sexual behavior as well as its consequences for young people. (Cooper et al., 1998.)

Overall, girls appeared to sext for reasons that were more often related to their own desire to feel sexy or flirtatious, their need for external validation, or pressure from their partner. Boys' reasons were more often related to normative ideas around sexting as part of a romantic relationship and responding to messages that their partners first sent to them. Consequently, these reasons may indicate gendered sexting scripts (Symons et al., 2018) in the context of young people's romantic heterosexual relationships, in which boys more often ask for sexts and girls more often send them by request.

Emotional Reactions to Sending and Receiving Sexts in Intimate Relationships

We examined potential gender differences in young people's emotional reactions to sexting. Most emotional reactions to both sending and receiving sexts were overwhelmingly positive, both for girls and boys and among younger and older adolescents. These findings are consistent with previous research (Wood et al., 2015), suggesting that consensual sexting in young people's intimate relationships may contribute to sexuality development, positive sexual experiences and trust-based intimacy (Harden, 2014; Tolman & McClelland, 2011; Vasilenko et al., 2014). Overall, we observed few age differences in emotional reactions to sexting: older adolescents felt sexy/flirtatious more frequently than younger adolescents after sending a sext and more often felt loved after receiving a sext. As hypothesized based on previous research (Reed et al., 2020), our study also demonstrates that experiences of sending or receiving a sext were negative more often for girls than for boys. Furthermore, boys experienced at least one positive emotional reaction to receiving a sext more often than girls, suggesting some gender differences in the likelihood of positive experiences in response

to sexting.

After sending a sext, it was more common for girls to feel wanted, sexy, and safe, whereas boys more frequently felt sexually excited and good about themselves. This finding implies some gendered differences in emotional reactions to sexting, suggesting differences in the focus of reported sexual experiences—that is, whether it is the sender who becomes sexually excited, as in boys' common responses, or whether it is the sender who sexually excites the other, as in girls' common responses. These findings may be explained by the social role theory of sex differences (Eagly & Wood, 2016) as well as by the above-mentioned gendered sexual scripts and normative understandings of sexual interaction (Symons et al., 2018). In line with this interpretation, our finding is also that even if girls' emotional reactions were mostly positive, they also regretted sending sexts more frequently than boys. Double standards in sexting, such as girls exposing themselves to greater risks than boys, have been discussed in recent research by Burén et al. (2022). Our observation that girls more frequently felt safe may also suggest that they had considered the trustworthiness and safety of sending a sext to their partner more explicitly than boys did before sending their sexts, in light of the acknowledged risks that girls' intimate sexts may be non-consensually shared with others as well as gendered stigmas of shame associated with this. These stigmas may, for example, see girls blamed for sending one-to-one sexts to their partners (Croft et al., 2015) rather than apportioning the blame to their partners for having broken their confidence by non-consensually sharing such messages with others.

After receiving a sext from their partner, boys felt sexually excited, happy, and loved more often than girls, although these were also among the most common responses for girls. Girls, meanwhile, more frequently reported no effect associated with receiving a sext from their partner, which may suggest that sexting, as such, with a

certain partner at the time or in terms of the message's content, was not particularly exciting or important to them. They also more often felt that it was funny or were shocked; however, they also reported that they felt safe. Congruent with previous research (Wood et al., 2015), at least one positive emotional response to receiving a sext was more common for boys, and at least one negative emotional response was more common for girls, lending further support to the already presented views on gendered experiences of sexting between young romantic partners.

Limitations

The present study has limitations that should be considered. First, all the young people included in the sample identified themselves as girls or boys and had had experiences of relationships mostly with boys or girls, respectively. As such, the present study offers no insight into the reasons for and emotional reactions to sexting among nonbinary or sexual minority young people, the latter specifically because the heterosexual and non-heterosexual experiences were not analysed separately. Moreover, the study did not address sexting among adolescents who were younger than 15. These experiences, which should be investigated in future studies, may differ from the findings presented herein. Second, it was not possible to have a control group or to apply a more extensive survey instrument to investigate the prevalence of, reasons for, and emotional reactions to sexting between romantic partners and non-partners, respectively. In addition, the procedure did not permit a detailed analysis of the number of no-show students in groups who completed the survey in class in different schools. Third, the survey instrument with multiple-choice answers was limited in terms of providing an extensive list of all possible reasons or emotional reactions concerning sexting. To fully capture the vast array of variable meanings that young people assign to sexting, another data collection method, such as interviews or less structured questionnaires, would be more

appropriate. Fourth, the survey covered the participants' reasons for and emotional reactions to their most recent sexting experiences, thus excluding other sexting experiences. Owing to the varying time range of "the most recent" experience among respondents, this may also influence the breadth and depth of their recall of self-reported reasons for and emotional reactions to sexting.

Implications

These findings have implications for educators and practitioners in the field of adolescent sexual health. This study highlights the role of sexting in normative sexuality development and sexual relationship maintenance within youth romantic relationships. Experiences of sexting constitute a salient aspect of intimate sexual behavior between young partners, associated mostly with positive emotional reactions. However, this is not to minimize the negative experiences of those young people—particularly girls—who had been pressured to sext, experienced regret after sending a sext, or were shocked after receiving a sext from their partner. Moreover, the existing research on pressured or coerced sexting as an element of victimization experiences in violent intimate relationships should not be overlooked. However, the present study highlighted the positive emotional experiences of consensual sexting in romantic relationships, providing little evidence of the non-consensual sharing of intimate sexts with others. Nevertheless, the present study also revealed that sexting may carry different meanings for boys and girls, which may mirror heteronormative norms and gendered scripts with respect to sexual behavior and communication. Our study suggests that boys' reasons for sexting may more often relate to defining their intimate relationship in these terms (i.e., what a proper intimate sexual relationship should be like). Girls' reasons may more often relate to the need for validation or pressures to meet their partner's actual or perceived expectations of sexual behavior and sexual appearance (what they themselves

“should” be like to be liked and accepted as partners). These normative aspects should be acknowledged and critically discussed with young people in sex education and clinical work.

Future Directions

The present study has highlighted the prevalence of consensual and positively experienced sexting between young romantic partners. It also suggests directions for further research in the context of young people’s romantic relationships. Our observations have three main implications for research on sexting. First, in studying the reasons for and responses to sexting among young people, it is relevant to identify the relationship context—that is, whether sexting takes place between intimate relationship partners, casual dating partners, persons who know each other, or new acquaintances. A related future direction could be to analyze how relationship contexts are associated with differences in sexting and emotional reactions. Moreover, future studies could use validated measures of relationship power (e.g., Neilands et al., 2019) to examine possible associations between low relationship power and negative sexting experiences. Second, a more detailed analysis of participants’ reasons for and emotional reactions to sending different types of sexts—such as text messages, photos of intimate body parts, or video clips of sexual acts (Maes & Vandenberg, 2022)—would offer greater insight into their reasons for and emotional reactions to sending and receiving these messages. Third, as Maes et al. (2022) also suggested, young people’s social media use, including sexting within trusting relationships, may contribute to their experiences of positive sexuality and sexual well-being. Further research is necessary to examine these possible associations in young people’s romantic relationships. Moreover, the cultivation of digital sexual trust in these relationships requires more empirical and conceptual attention (Fortenberry, 2019).

Conclusion

The present study has highlighted the positive emotional experiences associated with consensual sexting in young people's intimate relationships, providing little evidence for the non-consensual sharing of intimate sexts with others. However, our investigation also reveals that sexting may carry different meanings for boys and girls, which may reflect gendered heterosexual norms and scripts in need of critical attention in sex education. Future research should aim to better understand how sexting in the context of trusting intimate relationships may contribute to young people's experiences of positive sexuality and sexual well-being.

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Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the sample (n = 764)

Characteristics	n	%
Gender		
Female	372	48.7
Male	392	51.3
Educational institution ^a		
Secondary school (9 th grade)	208	27.2
Upper secondary school	283	37.0
Vocational educational institution	270	35.3
Relationships ^b		
Heterosexual (other gender, binary)	743	97.3
Homosexual (same gender, binary)	48	6.3
With nonbinary partners	11	1.4
Age ^c		
15	153	20.0
16	176	23.0
17	232	30.4
18	155	20.3
19	26	3.4
20	21	2.7
First language (language spoken daily at home) ^d		
Finnish	713	93.3
Swedish	10	1.3
Other	126	16.5

Note.

^a Percentages do not sum up to 100 due to missing data ($n = 3$)

^b Percentages sum to over 100 due to participants who had both other-gender and same-gender partners.

^c Percentages do not sum up to 100 due to missing data ($n = 1$).

^d Percentages sum to over 100 due to participants who spoke more than one language. Finland has two national languages, Finnish and Swedish.

Table 2. Distribution and frequency of sexting experiences in intimate relationships by gender and by age

	Gender				$\chi^2 (df=1)$	<i>p</i>	OR [95% CI]	Age				$\chi^2 (df=1)$	<i>p</i>	OR [95% CI]
	Girl		Boy					15–17		18–20				
	%	Total n	%	Total n				%	Total n	%	Total n			
Sent a sext	56.8	370	33.7	377	39.21	< .001	2.58 [1.92, 3.48]	44.2	548	48.0	198	0.71	.400	1.17 [0.84, 1.62]
Received a sext	59.9	369	53.2	376	3.13	.077	1.31 [0.98, 1.76]	55.5	548	59.4	197	0.75	.386	1.17 [0.84, 1.64]

Note. Total n: total number of the survey respondents, of which a reported percentage had sent or received a sext.

Table 3. Distribution and chi-square results of reasons for sending a sext to one's intimate partner by gender and age

Reason	Gender		χ^2 (<i>df</i> = 1)	<i>p</i>	OR [95% CI]	Age		χ^2 (<i>df</i> = 1)	<i>p</i>	OR [95% CI]
	Girl (%) (<i>n</i> = 210)	Boy (%) (<i>n</i> = 127)				15–17 (%) (<i>n</i> = 242)	18–20 (%) (<i>n</i> = 95)			
To feel sexy/flirtatious	47.1	19.7	24.49	< .001	3.61 [2.18, 6.15]	33.9	44.2	2.7	.100	1.54 [0.95, 2.51]
My partner asked me to	37.1	32.3	0.62	.431	1.24 [0.78, 1.98]	35.5	34.7	0.00	.991	0.97 [0.58, 1.59]
To show my body	31.4	22.1	3.01	.083	1.61 [0.98, 2.72]	30.6	21.1	2.62	.105	0.61 [0.34, 1.06]
In response to a similar message	23.8	44.9	15.26	< .001	0.39 [0.24, 0.62]	30.1	33.7	0.12	.728	1.13 [0.68, 1.87]
To get attention	22.9	5.5	16.19	< .001	4.97 [2.30, 12.50]	16.1	16.8	0.00	1.000	1.06 [0.55, 1.98]
To be liked	19.5	6.3	10.1	.001	3.54 [1.68, 8.47]	15.7	11.6	0.63	.427	0.71 [0.33, 1.42]
To show my feelings	19.1	12.6	1.93	.164	1.62 [0.88, 3.12]	16.1	17.9	0.05	.816	1.14 [0.59, 2.11]
It is part of being in a relationship	16.1	27.6	5.60	.002	0.51 [0.30, 0.87]	19.8	22.1	0.10	.753	1.15 [0.63, 2.04]
My partner pressured me to	11.0	1.6	8.81	.003	7.16 [2.06, 48.90]	8.3	5.3	0.51	.475	0.63 [0.20, 1.63]
As a joke	9.0	8.7	0.00	1.000	1.04 [0.48, 2.36]	8.3	10.5	0.20	.657	1.31 [0.56, 2.88]
I don't know	6.7	6.3	0.00	1.000	1.05 [0.43, 2.74]	7.4	4.2	0.70	.404	0.56 [0.16, 1.58]
My friends pressured me to			n.c.	n.c.	n.c.			n.c.	n.c.	n.c.

Note. n.c.: not calculable due to at least one cell having no observations.

Table 4. Distribution and chi-square results for emotional reactions to sending a sext to one's intimate partner by gender and by age

Emotional reaction	Gender		χ^2 (<i>df</i> = 1)	<i>p</i>	OR [95% CI]	Age		χ^2 (<i>df</i> = 1)	<i>p</i>	OR [95% CI]
	Girl (%) (<i>n</i> = 210)	Boy (%) (<i>n</i> = 127)				15–17 (%) (<i>n</i> = 242)	18–20 (%) (<i>n</i> = 95)			
Wanted	43.8	30.7	5.18	.023	1.75 [1.11, 2.81]	38.8	39.0	0.00	1.000	1.01 [0.61, 1.63]
Good about myself	38.6	25.2	5.77	.016	1.86 [1.15, 3.06]	34.7	30.5	0.36	0.546	0.83 [0.49, 1.37]
Sexy	31.4	18.9	5.73	.017	1.96 [1.16, 3.39]	22.3	37.9	7.68	.006	2.12 [1.26, 3.55]
Loved	22.9	27.6	0.71	.401	0.78 [0.47, 1.30]	21.9	31.6	2.94	.086	1.65 [0.96, 2.79]
Safe	20.5	11.0	4.38	.036	2.06 [1.10, 4.08]	15.7	20.0	0.62	.432	1.35 [0.72, 2.46]
Sexually excited	19.5	38.6	13.73	< .001	0.39 [0.24, 0.64]	24.8	31.6	1.28	.258	1.40 [0.82, 2.35]
It was funny	11.4	10.2	0.03	.873	1.13 [0.56, 2.37]	11.2	10.5	0.00	1.000	0.95 [0.42, 1.99]
No effect	18.6	19.7	0.01	.913	0.93 [0.53, 0.80]	20.7	14.7	1.20	.274	0.67 [0.34, 1.25]
Regret	13.8	2.4	10.77	< .001	6.31 [2.17, 27.80]	10.7	6.3	1.08	.298	0.57 [0.20, 1.36]
Embarrassed	6.7	7.1	0.00	1.000	0.93 [0.39, 2.32]	8.3	3.2	2.05	.152	0.38 [0.08, 1.15]
Bad about myself	3.3	0.8	1.25	.263	3.87 [0.66, 99.40]	2.5	2.1	0.00	1.000	0.89 [0.12, 4.08]
Scared	2.9	0.8	0.80	.370	3.31 [0.54, 86.50]	1.7	3.2	0.20	.655	1.96 [0.36, 9.54]
Upset	2.9	0.8	0.80	.370	3.31 [0.54, 86.50]	1.7	3.2	0.20	.655	1.96 [0.36, 9.54]
Unhappy	1.4		n.c.	n.c.	n.c.	0.8	1.1	n.c.	n.c.	n.c.
Hurt	0.9		n.c.	n.c.	n.c.	0.8		n.c.	n.c.	n.c.
Shocked	0.9		n.c.	n.c.	n.c.		1.1	n.c.	n.c.	n.c.
Betrayed	0.5		n.c.	n.c.	n.c.	0.4		n.c.	n.c.	n.c.
Annoyed			n.c.	n.c.	n.c.			n.c.	n.c.	n.c.
Angry			n.c.	n.c.	n.c.			n.c.	n.c.	n.c.

Note. n.c.: not calculable due to at least one cell having no observations.

Table 5. Distribution and chi-square results for emotional reactions to receiving a sext from one's intimate partner by gender and by age

Emotional reaction	Gender		χ^2 (<i>df</i> = 1)	<i>p</i>	OR [95% CI]	Age		χ^2 (<i>df</i> = 1)	<i>p</i>	OR [95% CI]
	Girl (%) (<i>n</i> = 221)	Boy (%) (<i>n</i> = 200)				15–17 (%) (<i>n</i> = 304)	18–20 (%) (<i>n</i> = 117)			
Wanted	29.9	27.5	0.18	.669	1.12 [0.73, 1.72]	26.3	35.0	2.73	.099	1.51 [0.95, 2.38]
Happy	25.3	42.5	13.12	< .001	0.46 [0.30, 0.70]	32.6	35.9	0.29	.594	1.16 [0.74, 1.81]
Good about myself	11.8	19.0	3.72	.054	0.57 [0.33, 0.98]	13.8	18.8	1.27	.260	1.45 [0.81, 2.54]
Loved	20.3	30.5	5.20	.023	0.58 [0.37, 0.91]	22.4	32.5	4.06	.044	1.67 [1.03, 2.67]
Safe	16.7	8.5	5.66	.017	2.15 [1.18, 4.06]	12.2	14.5	0.24	.627	1.23 [0.65, 2.26]
Excited	27.2	49.5	21.37	< .001	0.38 [0.25, 0.57]	35.2	44.4	2.69	.101	1.47 [0.95, 2.27]
It was funny	18.6	9.5	6.32	.012	2.16 [1.22, 3.95]	14.8	12.8	0.13	.715	0.85 [0.44, 1.57]
No effect	26.2	14.0	8.95	.003	2.18 [1.33, 3.63]	22.7	14.5	2.98	.084	0.58 [0.32, 1.02]
Embarrassed	6.3	3.0	1.90	.169	2.15 [0.84, 6.29]	5.9	1.7	2.45	.118	0.30 [0.04, 1.05]
Bad about myself	0.5	0.5	0.00	1.000	0.91 [0.02, 35.40]	0.3	0.9	0.00	1.000	2.61 [0.07, 102]
Upset	0.5	0.5	0.00	1.000	0.91 [0.02, 35.40]	0.3	0.9	0.00	1.000	2.61 [0.07, 102]
Unhappy	0.9	0.5	0.00	1.000	1.71 [0.14, 53.90]	0.7	0.9	0.00	1.000	1.38 [0.04, 17.2]
Hurt	2.3	0.5	1.24	.266	4.14 [0.63, 110.00]	1.3	1.7	0.00	1.000	1.35 [0.17, 7.45]
Shocked	7.2	0.5	10.63	.001	13.60 [2.74, 330.00]	4.9	1.7	1.51	.219	0.36 [0.05, 1.31]
Annoyed	4.1		n.c.	n.c.	n.c.	2.3	1.7	n.c.	n.c.	n.c.
Angry	1.4		n.c.	n.c.	n.c.	0.7	0.9	n.c.	n.c.	n.c.
Scared	1.4		n.c.	n.c.	n.c.	0.3	1.7	n.c.	n.c.	n.c.

Note. n.c.: not calculable due to at least one cell having no observations.

Table 6. Distribution and chi-square results for at least one positive emotional reaction to sending a sext by participants' reasons to sext

Reason to send a sext (<i>n</i> = 337)	Reported the reason <i>n</i> (%)	Reported the reason and at least one positive reaction <i>n</i> (%)	Did not report the reason <i>n</i> (%)	Did not report the reason and reported at least one positive reaction <i>n</i> (%)	χ^2 (<i>df</i> = 1)	<i>p</i>	OR [95% CI]
To feel sexy/flirtatious	124 (36.8)	105 (84.7)	213 (63.2)	126 (59.2)	22.51	< .001	3.78 [2.20, 6.79]
My partner asked me to	119 (35.3)	79 (61.3)	218 (64.7)	158 (72.5)	3.92	.048	0.60 [0.38, 0.97]
To show my body	94 (27.9)	85 (90.4)	243 (72.1)	146 (60.1)	27.55	< .001	6.16 [3.10, 13.80]
In response to a similar message	107 (31.8)	78 (72.9)	230 (68.2)	153 (66.5)	1.08	.295	1.35 [0.82, 2.27]
To get attention	55 (16.3)	43 (78.2)	282 (83.7)	188 (66.7)	2.32	.128	1.77 [0.92, 3.68]
To be liked	49 (14.5)	35 (71.4)	288 (85.5)	196 (68.1)	0.09	.761	1.17 [0.61, 2.35]
To show my feelings	56 (16.6)	51 (91.1)	281 (83.4)	180 (64.1)	14.58	< .001	5.55 [2.34, 16.6]
It is part of being in a relationship	69 (20.5)	56 (81.2)	268 (79.5)	175 (63.3)	5.69	.020	2.27 [1.21, 4.54]
My partner pressured me to	25 (7.4)	8 (32.0)	312 (92.6)	223 (71.5)	14.95	< .001	0.19 [0.07, 0.45]
As a joke	30 (8.9)	18 (60.0)	307 (91.1)	213 (69.4)	0.72	.395	0.66 [0.31, 1.47]
I don't know	22 (6.5)	10 (45.5)	315 (93.5)	221 (70.2)	4.73	.030	0.36 [0.14, 0.86]
My friends pressured me to					n.c.	n.c.	n.c.

Note. n.c.: not calculable due to at least one cell having no observations.

Categorized as positive emotional reactions: I felt sexy, loved, sexually excited, wanted, safe, good about myself, thought it was funny.

Table 7. Distribution and chi-square results for at least one negative emotional reaction to sending a sext by participants' reasons to sext

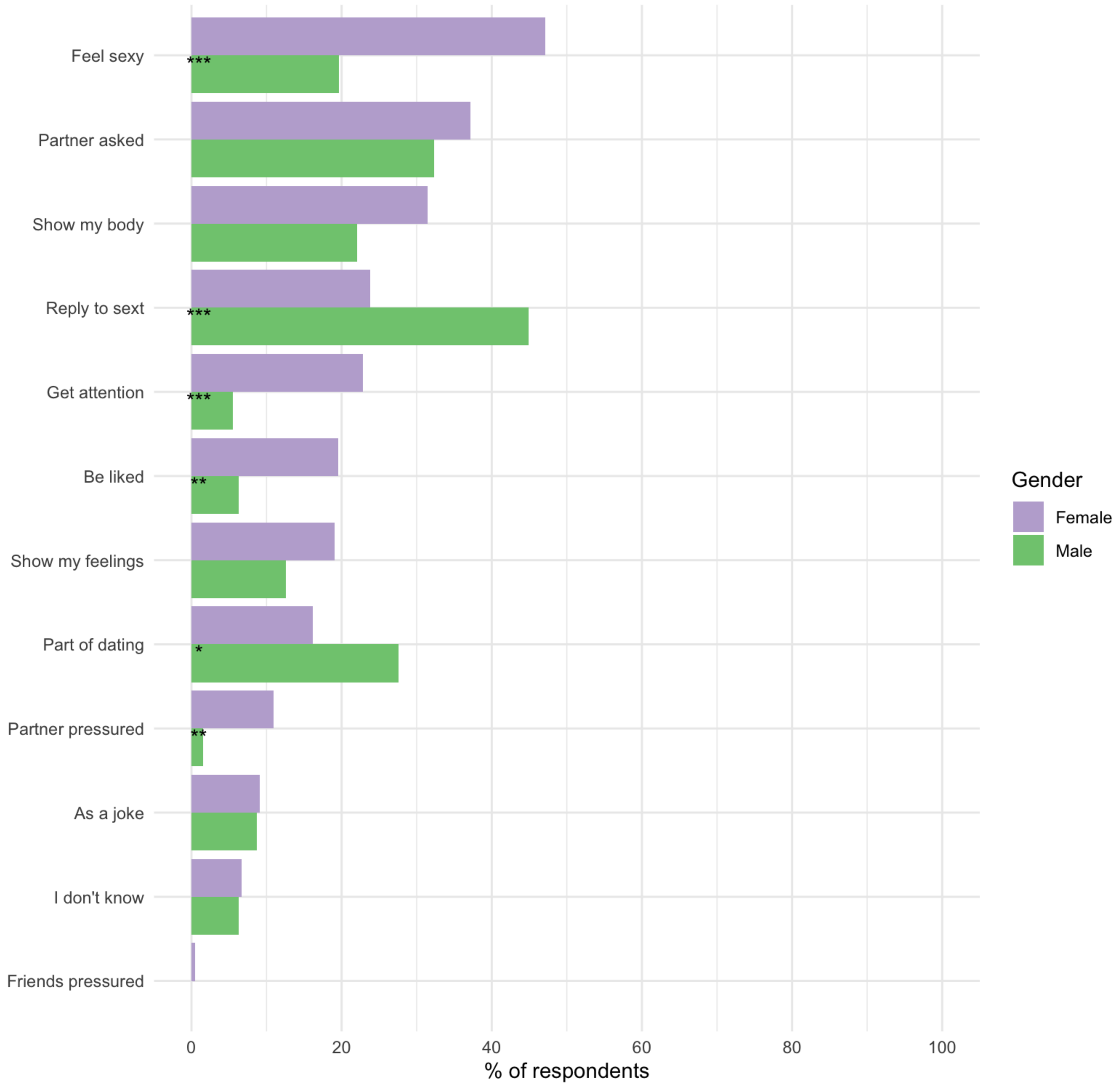
Reason to send a sext (<i>n</i> = 337)	Reported the reason <i>n</i> (%)	Reported the reason and at least one negative reaction <i>n</i> (%)	Did not report the reason <i>n</i> (%)	Did not report the reason and reported at least one negative reaction <i>n</i> (%)	χ^2 (<i>df</i> = 1)	<i>p</i>	OR [95% CI]
To feel sexy/flirtatious	124 (36.8)	18 (14.5)	213 (63.2)	36 (16.9)	0.18	.673	0.84 [0.44, 1.54]
My partner asked me to	119 (35.3)	31 (26.1)	218 (64.7)	23 (10.6)	12.62	< .001	2.97 [1.64, 5.45]
To show my body	94 (27.9)	5 (5.3)	243 (72.1)	49 (20.2)	10.03	.002	0.23 [0.08, 0.55]
In response to a similar message	107 (31.8)	16 (15.0)	230 (68.2)	38 (16.5)	0.04	.837	0.89 [0.46, 1.66]
To get attention	55 (16.3)	9 (16.4)	282 (83.7)	45 (16.0)	0.00	1.000	1.04 [0.45, 2.20]
To be liked	49 (14.5)	15 (30.6)	288 (85.5)	39 (13.5)	7.84	.005	2.82 [1.37, 5.60]
To show my feelings	56 (16.6)	6 (10.7)	281 (83.4)	48 (17.1)	0.97	.324	0.60 [0.22, 1.38]
It is part of being in a relationship	69 (20.5)	5 (7.2)	268 (79.5)	49 (18.3)	4.18	.041	0.36 [0.12, 0.87]
My partner pressured me to	25 (7.4)	21 (84.0)	312 (92.6)	33 (10.6)	87.35	< .001	42.20 [14.90, 155.00]
As a joke	30 (8.9)	6 (20.0)	307 (91.1)	48 (15.6)	0.13	.718	1.37 [0.48, 3.36]
I don't know	22 (6.5)	4 (18.2)	315 (93.5)	50 (15.9)	0.00	1.000	1.21 [0.33, 3.44]
My friends pressured me to					n.c.	n.c.	n.c.

Note. n.c.: not calculable due to at least one cell having no observations.

Categorized as negative emotional reactions: upset, unhappy, hurt, annoyed, betrayed, scared, embarrassed, bad about myself, angry, shocked, I regretted it.

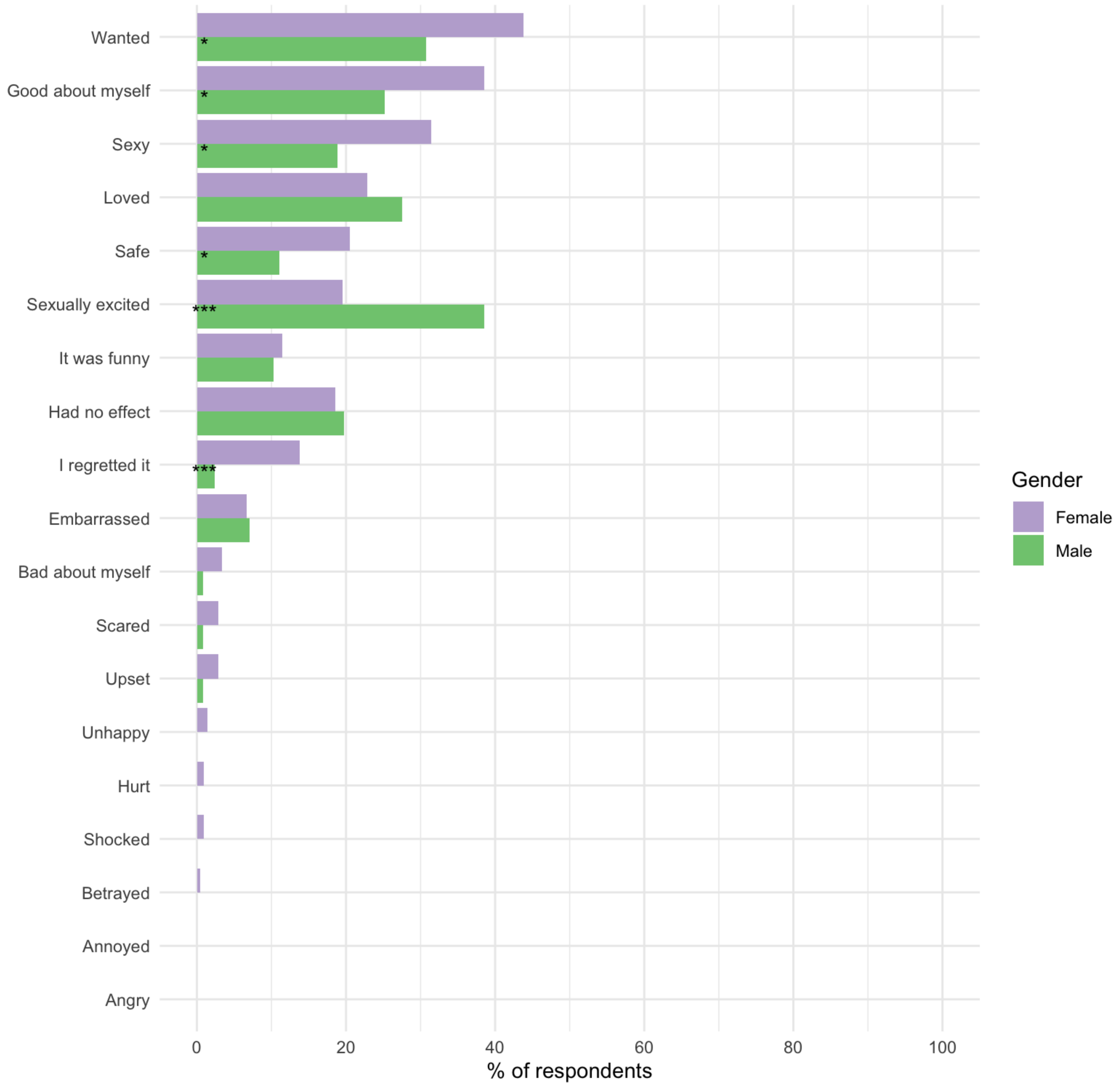
Reasons for Sending Sext

Female and Male



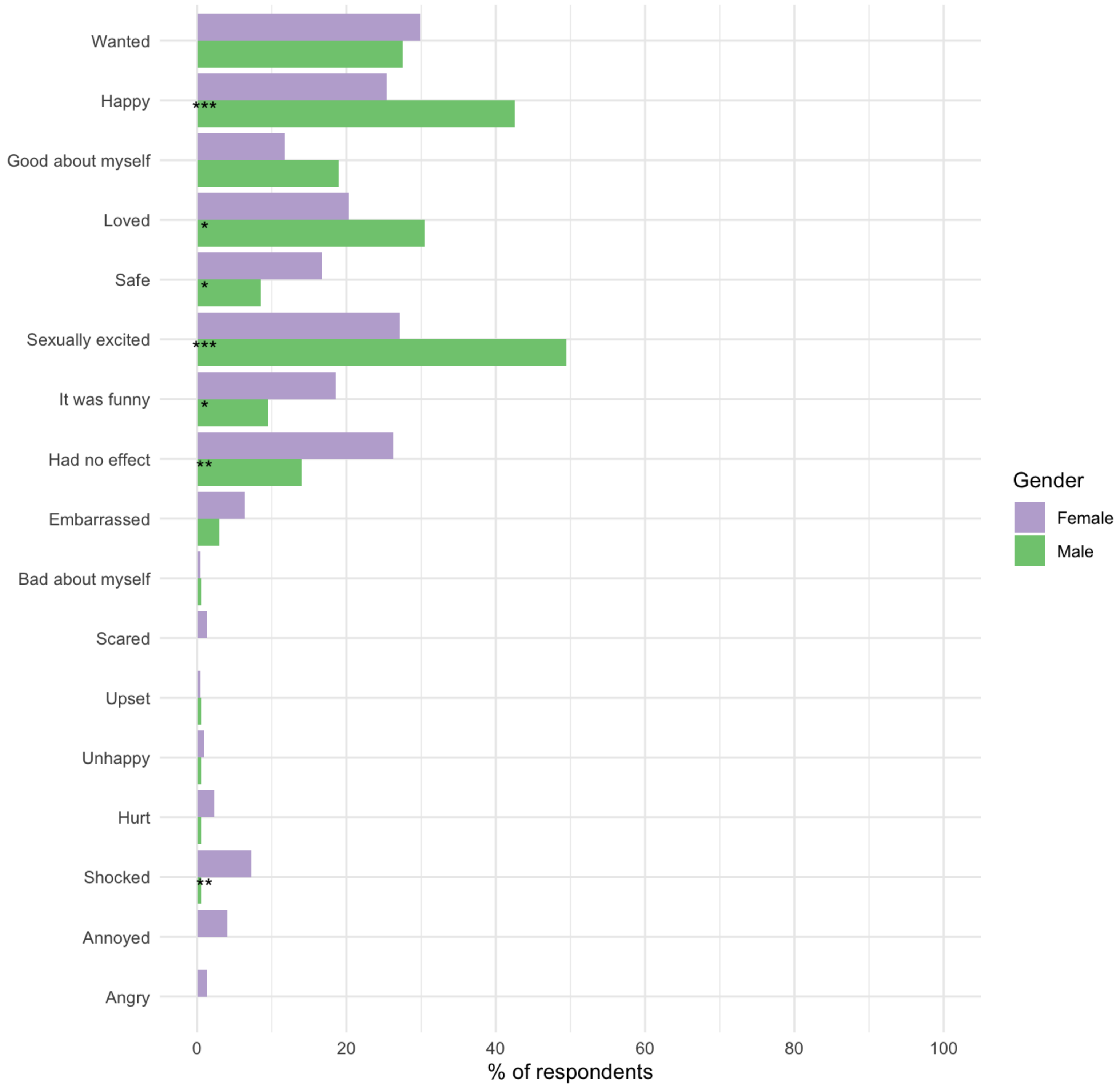
Emotional Reactions to Sending Sext

Female and Male



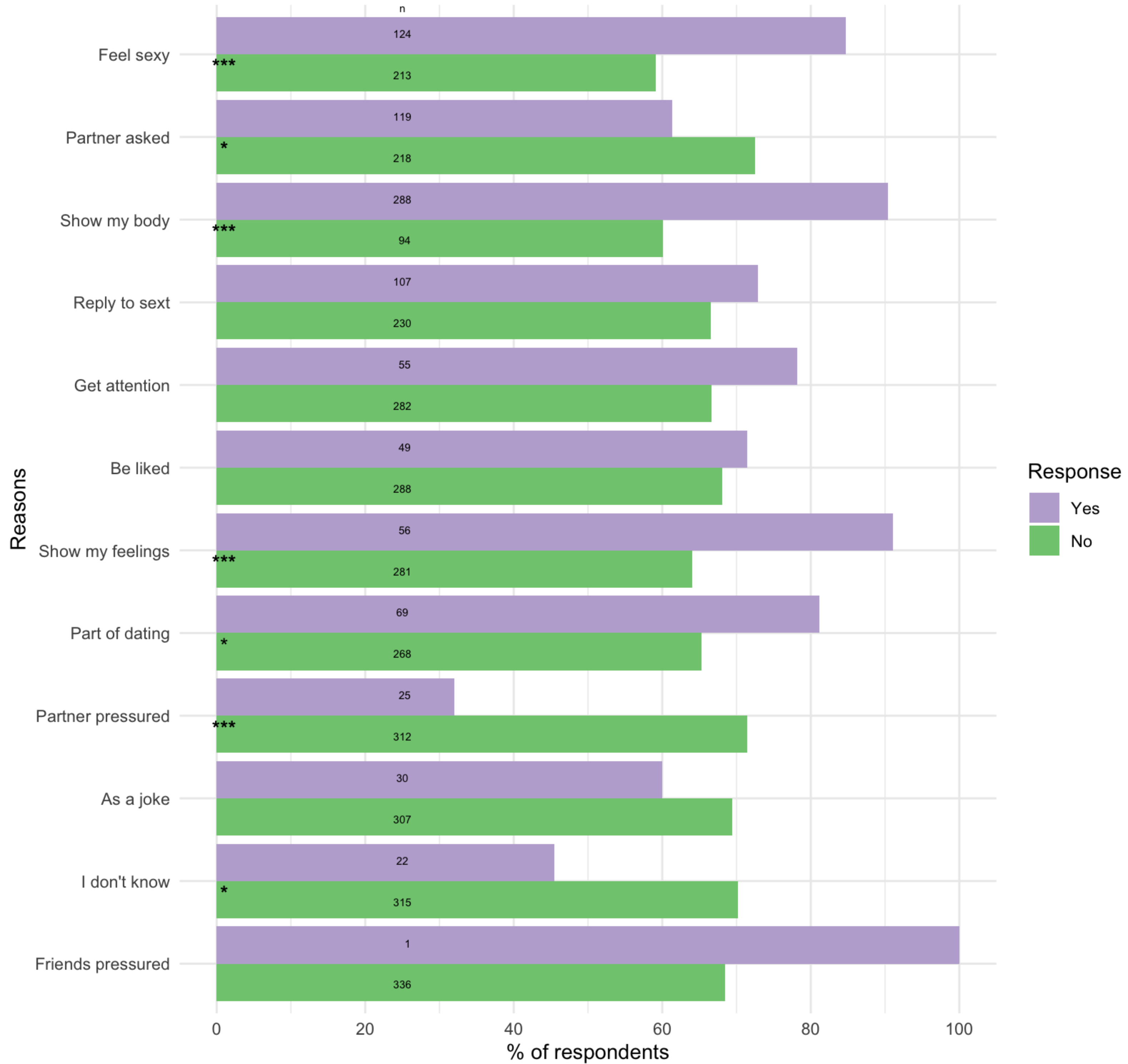
Emotional Reactions to Receiving Sext

Female and Male



At Least One Positive Reaction to Sending Sext

by Participants' Reported Reasons



At Least One Negative Reaction to Sending Sext

by Participants' Reported Reasons

