

# 'Sexting' may be just a normal part of dating for Internet generation

July 24 2012, by Laura Bailey

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(Medical Xpress) -- For young adults today who were weaned on iPods and the Internet, the practice of "sexting," or sending sexually explicit photos or messages through phones, may be just another normal, healthy component of modern dating.

University of Michigan researchers looked at the sexting behavior of 3,447 men and women ages 18-24 and found that while sexting is very common, sexting isn't associated with sexually [risky behaviors](#) or with psychological problems.

The findings contradict the [public perception](#) of sexting, which is often portrayed in the media and elsewhere as unsavory, deviant or even [criminal behavior](#), said Jose Bauermeister, an assistant professor at the U-M School of Public Health and co-principal investigator of the study.

However, most of those negative stories involve sexting among pre-teens and teenagers, and the U-M study group was considerably older, said study co-author Debbie Gordon-Messer.

"For younger age groups, legality is an issue," Gordon-Messer said. "They are also in a very different place in their [sexual development](#)."

This is the first known study to connect sexting with a behavioral outcome, Bauermeister said. Previous studies on sexting focus on demographic; in other words, who is doing the sexting, not how sexting impacts the health of the participants.

The researchers found that nearly half of the study respondents participated in sexting. Most people who reported receiving "sexts" also reported sending them, which suggests that sexting is reciprocal and likely happens between [romantic partners](#).

The researchers asked [study participants](#) about the number of sexual partners with whom they have had unprotected sex. The participants who "sexted" did not report riskier sexual behavior than those who didn't. Nor did they report more depression, anxiety or low self-esteem, Bauermeister said.

In the larger picture, the sexting research is a very important piece of understanding how technology impacts sexuality and health, Bauermeister said.

"We have to keep paying attention to how technology influences our lives, including our sexuality and our sexual behavior," he said.

The study, "Sexting Among Young Adults" was produced jointly by the Sexuality and Health Lab, which Bauermeister directs, and the Prevention Research Center of Michigan, led by Marc Zimmerman, co-principal investigator on the study and a professor of public health and psychology. The U-M School of Public Health houses both centers. Alison Grodzinski of the Prevention Research Center of Michigan is also a co-author.

The paper will appear in an upcoming edition of the *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

Provided by University of Michigan

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