

Research: Despite what you might think, sexting isn't just about sex

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Let's talk about sext.

Sexting is extremely common among adults—but maybe not for the

reasons you think.

New research from the Sexuality, Sexual Health & Sexual Behavior Lab in the Texas Tech University Department of Psychological Sciences shows that two-thirds of people who sext do so for non-sexual reasons.

In an analysis of the reasons people engage in [sexting](#) with their [relationship](#) partner, assistant professor Joseph M. Currin and doctoral student Kassidy Cox confirmed three main motivations found in previous research:

- Some people use sexting as foreplay for sexual behaviors later on;
- Some sext for the relationship reassurance they receive from their partner; and
- Some sext their partner as a favor, with the expectation the favor will be returned later in a non-sexual way (such as a dinner date).

When they began the research, Currin and Cox were curious to see if one of these motivations was the most prevalent. Using data gathered online from 160 participants, ranging in age from 18-69, they performed a latent class analysis measuring sexting motivations, relationship attachments and sexual behaviors. To their surprise, they discovered three nearly equal clusters, suggesting no [motivation](#) is more common than another.

"It was intriguing that two-thirds of the individuals who engaged in sexting did so for non-sexual purposes," Cox said. "This may actually be demonstrating some individuals engage in sexting, but would prefer not to, but do so as a means to either gain affirmation about their relationship, relieve anxiety or get something tangible—non-sexual—in return."

Also surprising to the researchers was there were no significant differences in motivation based on sexual orientation, gender or age.

"This study highlighted the main reasons to date that individuals are motivated to sext, and it actually normalizes all three types of motivations," said Cox.

"As it is becoming a more accepted method of communicating one's sexual desires, we wanted to highlight how adults utilize this behavior in their relationships," Currin added. "This tells us that sexting among adults is an evolution of how we have communicated our sexual desires to our partners in the past. People used to write love poems and steamy letters, then when photography became more common place, couples used to take boudoir photos for each other."

Currin and Cox noted that their research focused on sexting between current partners in consensual relationships only.

"As with any sexual [behavior](#), it is important and necessary to have consent to engage in sexting," Currin said. "Individuals who send unsolicited sext messages—such as images of their genitalia—are not actually engaging in sexting; they are sexually harassing the recipient."

Provided by Texas Tech University

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