

## **“Let My Fingers Do the Talking”: Sexting and Infidelity in Cyberspace**

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Although sex and infidelity are now only a keyboard away, at the end of the day, there is no substitute for physical, face-to-face contact in our sexual relationships. We investigated the behaviors of sexting - sending sexually explicit text messages and photographs via email or cell phone - and infidelity on the internet. Our findings are published online in Springer's journal, *Sexuality & Culture*.

The way we become involved in, and develop, relationships with others has changed dramatically over the last 20 years due to the increased availability of devices such as computers, modems, video cams, and cell phones. These advances have had a significant impact on our social lives, as well as on the sexual aspects of our lives. These days, the internet is where the majority of people go to find sex partners.

Sexting is a fairly new phenomenon, where adults send their nude photographs and sexually explicit text messages to another adult to turn them on and increase the likelihood of a sexual relationship. At the same time, the internet has made the act of infidelity much easier.

In order to explore both sexting and infidelity and understand how people use the internet to find sexual partners, Wysocki and Childers placed a survey on a website aimed at married people looking for sexual partners outside their marriage (AshleyMadison.com). A total of 5,187 adults answered questions about internet use, sexual behaviors and feelings about sexual behaviors on the internet. The authors were particularly interested in aspects of sexting, cheating online and cheating in real life.

The survey revealed some surprising results. For instance, women were more likely than men to engage in sexting behaviors. Over two-thirds of respondents had cheated online while in a serious relationship and over three-quarters had cheated in real life. Women and men were just as likely to have cheated both online and in real life while in a serious real-life relationship. In addition, older men were more likely than younger men to cheat in real life.

In particular, Kholos Wysocki and Childers found that respondents were more interested in finding real-life partners, both for dating and for sexual encounters, than online-only partners. The authors conclude: "Our research suggests that as technology changes, the way people find each other and the way they attract a potential partner also changes. While social networking sites are increasingly being used for social contact, people continue to be more interested in

real-life partners, rather than online partners. It seems that, at some point in a relationship, we need the physical, face-to-face contact. Part of the reason for this may be that, ultimately, humans are social creatures."