

# Sexting damages girls more than boys

A Free State teenager found herself on the wrong side of the law recently after sending naked pictures of herself to an older man.



Girls are more at risk for sexting boys according to overseas research studies. Image: [Yahoo News](#)

The *Sunday Times* reported in March that the Grade 10 pupil was charged with manufacturing and distributing child pornography after her father found naked pictures of her on her phone, and turned the phone and pictures over to police as punishment for his daughter's lack of "moral worth".

Sexting isn't new, but girls are often punished or judged more severely than boys for sending explicit pictures. A new study published in the *Journal of Children and Media* has shed light on the sexting habits of teenagers and, more importantly, how such behaviour is perceived by their peers.

The study defines sexting as "the transmission via electronic means of sexually provocative or explicit images or videos featuring someone known to the sender and/or receiver".

## Girls risk more than boys

Titled "Damned if you do, damned if you don't ... if you're a girl: Relational and normative contexts of adolescent sexting in the United States", the study found that girls faced harsher judgment than boys.

Julia Lippman and Scott Campbell from the University of Michigan interviewed 51 people between the ages of 12 and 18.

They found that whereas boys' sexting practices, were largely not commented on, girls were reduced to negative female stereotypes and that when it comes to sexting, girls are 'damned if they do, damned if they don't'."

The study found that respondents thought girls who send sexts are - to use some of our male participants' words - crazy, insecure, attention-seeking sluts with poor judgment.

One respondent wrote; This is common only for girls with 'slut' reputations. They do it to attract attention but it's the girl's fault of sending them."

However, girls who did not sext were characterised as "prudish" or "stuck up".

## Reasons

The study gives a few reasons why some adolescents send sext messages. There is the normal and healthy adolescent interest in sexuality, and media and peers have always played a role in teens coming to terms with this. Sexting is seen as an expression of teenagers establishing themselves as independent individuals within their immediate social environment.

Equally interesting are the reasons why some teens are more careful about sexting than others. One girl said she feared her mother, who regularly checked her phone.

Another theme that emerged was that sexting could harm your reputation.

"I've been asked to send naked pics but I think that's stupid. You can ruin your reputation," said one respondent.



Gender Activist Lisa Vetten says society condemns girls for sending nude images of themselves but allows 'boys to be boys' and does not judge them harshly. Image: [The Conversation](#)

Today's teenagers have taken flirtation and courtship up a few notches. More teenagers use nude pictures or naughty texts to grab their love interest's attention.

"But punishing a girl for sexting by giving her a criminal record a - as in the case of the Free State girl - doesn't address the problem," said Carina du Toit, an attorney from the Centre for Child Law. "She clearly needs help."

Gender Activist Lisa Vetten blames the double standards on the way society justifies boys' behaviour, but condemns girls for stepping out of line. "There's the idea that boys will be boys - but you never hear that about girls," said Vetten.

Source: The Times via I-Net Bridge

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