RETHINKING APPROACHES TO Sexting
Insights from Canadian Data
Methodology

800 young people aged 16-20 years across Canada were surveyed in August of 2017:

- 366 males
- 419 females
- 15 trans, genderqueer, gender non-conforming, non-binary or other
Non-Consensual Sharing of Intimate Images: BEHAVIOURS AND ATTITUDES OF CANADIAN YOUTH

Definitions

“Sext”
means a sexy, nude or partially nude photo

“Sending” sexts
refers to the creator of a sext sending it to a recipient

“Sharing” sexts
refers to distributing them to unintended audiences without the original sender’s consent
Why study sext sharing?

• harm is done when sexts are shared, not sent

• shared sexts can reach a much wider audience

• motivations for sharing sexts are understudied and may be different from motivations for sending them
How frequent is sexting?

- Four in ten young people have sent a sext.
- Two in three young people have received a sext.
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42% of youth who’ve sent sexts have had one shared whether by being

- shown in person (38%)
- forwarded electronically (38%)
- or posted to a public forum (30%)

46% of youth who’ve received sexts have shared one

More boys (53%) than girls (40%) have done so
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Is sexting becoming more common?

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<thead>
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<tbody>
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<td>Sent sext</td>
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<tr>
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(Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Sexuality and Romantic Relationships in the Digital Age)

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Peer pressure to share sexts they receive can lead youth to see sharing as normal and expected.

79% of youth who expect their friends to share sexts with them have shared a sext.
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GENDER STEREOTYPES
Youth who believe in traditional gender stereotypes are significantly more likely to share sexts

9% who scored in the lowest range shared sexts
53% who scored highest in these beliefs have shared a sext
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GENDER STEREOTYPES
boys who believe in traditional gender stereotypes were much more likely to share sexts than girls who did

ALMOST A THIRD of participants felt that “nobody should be surprised if boys share sexts with each other”
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MORAL DISENGAGEMENT

46% of youth felt it was the original sender’s fault if a sext was shared

11% who scored in the **lowest** range shared sexts

53% who scored in the **highest** range have shared a sext
The moral blind spot:

Impact of household rule on treating people online with respect

(Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Life Online)
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The moral blind spot:

- **Justifying an action**
  “When a girl’s sext gets shared, it shows other girls the risks.”

- **Denying the harm**
  “Sharing sexts is so common, nobody cares about it.”

- **Shifting responsibility**
  “There’s nothing you can do to help when a sext is passed around.”

- **Blaming the victim**
  “It’s a girl’s fault if she sends a sext and it gets shared around.”
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The moral blind spot:

- "When a girl’s sext gets shared, it shows other girls the risks.”
  - 66% agree

- "Sharing sexts is so common, nobody cares about it.”
  - 14% agree

- "There’s nothing you can do to help when a sext is passed around.”
  - 38% agree

- "It’s a girl’s fault if she sends a sext and it gets shared around.”
  - 43% agree
Main themes found in 10 interventions:

- **Abstinence**
- **Legal risks**
- **Safer sexting**
- **Focus on boys and girls**
- **Focus only on girls**
- **Anti-sharing**

Döring, N. (2014). *Consensual sexting among adolescents: Risk prevention through abstinence education or safer sexting?*
What’s wrong with abstinence?

• there is a low correlation between sending sexts and having them shared

• sending sexts is not illegal; sharing them without consent is

• abstinence approaches excuse the sharer and encourage victim-blaming
Takeaways

• publicize accurate information
• avoid victim-blaming
• focus on reducing sharing of sexts
• address gender stereotypes, focusing on boys
• counter moral disengagement for all youth
• deliver targeted interventions to heavy sharers (and heavy sexters)
• present laws as a tool to help victims