

# Executive Summary – Key Findings

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## › Exploring Sexuality and Relationships: The Internet as a Resource

In our *Young Canadians* focus groups, a number of youth alluded to the importance of the Internet as a resource for exploring and learning about sexuality and relationships. Findings from our national survey bear this out – although the role of the Internet in this regard may be a smaller one than one might imagine.

***Approximately one fifth of older students use the Internet as a resource for information about sexuality and relationships, and to seek out anonymous opportunities to experiment with flirtatious behaviour.***

- Eight percent of students turn to the Internet to learn about sexuality:
  - Boys and French language students in Quebec are most likely to be looking for this information.
  - The trend grows over grades, from one percent of students in Grade 6 to 20 percent of students in Grade 11.
- Students are less likely to be looking online for information on sexuality than other sensitive topics such as physical health (18%) and mental health (11%).
- One in six students uses the Internet to find information about a variety of relationship problems that includes advice on dating:
  - Older students are more likely to do this (24% in Grade 11 versus 4% in Grade 4).
  - Girls (18%) are twice as likely as boys (9%) to seek out information about relationships online.
- A similar percentage of boys (14%) and girls (12%) report that they have pretended to be someone else online to flirt:
  - Older students are much more likely to flirt anonymously, rising from a low of four percent in Grade 5 to a high of 22 percent in Grade 10.

## › Boyfriends, Girlfriends, Best Friends and Family: Managing Relationships Online

There's no doubt that networked technologies are firmly integrated into our relationships with others. This is especially true of youth, who must now navigate and negotiate social interactions in person *and* across a variety of platforms.

However, although networked media provide opportunities to enter into and maintain romantic relationships, ***students interact more with friends and family online than with romantic partners.***

- Over 90 percent of students in grades 7-11 think that their friends should be able to read their social media posts compared to 59 percent who think their boyfriend or girlfriend should be able to read those same posts:
  - The percentage for both friends and romantic partners reading social media posts rises across grades, but even in Grade 11 more students are open to friends doing this (95%) than boyfriends or girlfriends (70%).
- Boys and girls are equally likely to agree that boyfriends and girlfriends should be able to read each other's social networking posts.

***Young people also spend more time monitoring and managing their online relationships with friends and family than they do their online relationships with romantic partners.***

- Students are more actively engaged in deleting posts from their social media accounts to avoid misunderstandings on the part of their family and friends than they are in keeping something from a romantic partner:
  - Fourteen to 16 percent of Grade 7 students delete comments or photos they have posted online to keep them from family, friends and parents, compared to four percent who do the same for boyfriends or girlfriends.
  - Although the percentages rise in all categories across high school, the trend remains the same: by Grade 11 students are still significantly more likely to delete content to keep it from family, friends and parents than from boyfriends or girlfriends (37% / 44% versus 14% for romantic partners).

***However, this does not mean that students are necessarily more open with romantic partners than with others.***

- Students actively seek more privacy from romantic partners than they do from friends and family:
  - When asked who should be allowed to use geo-locational devices to check and see where they are, more students in grades 7-11 are comfortable sharing their locational information with friends (39%) than with romantic partners (27%).
  - Over three quarters (78%) of students in grades 7-11 feel that boyfriends and girlfriends should not be allowed to read each other's private messages without asking permission first.
  - Students in grades 7-11 are nearly twice as likely to share their passwords to their social networking account, email account or cell phone with their best friend (30%) than they are with their boy/girlfriend (16%):
    - However, both boys (17%) and girls (15%) share passwords with romantic partners at roughly the same rate.
  - Looking at gender differences, girls are more likely than boys to say romantic partners should not be able to track where they are (75% compared to 70% of boys) and are more likely than boys to think a romantic partner would need prior

permission before reading a partner's private messages (83% compared to 73% of boys).

### ► Pornography

Since the mainstreaming of the Internet, concerns have been raised by parents, governments and health professionals about the potential impact of children and teens accessing explicit adult content online. To better understand the extent of this exposure, questions relating to online pornography have been included in all of the *Young Canadians* surveys.

In 2013, the story is not only that more young people are actively seeking out pornography online (overall rates have increased by 7%) but also the frequency at which it is done by boys who report they look for pornography.

***As in previous surveys, questions relating to pornography were only asked of students in grades 7-11.***

***Although a significant majority of students in grades 7-11 (77%) report that they have never looked for pornography online, boys are much more likely to have done so (40% compared to 7% of girls). Moreover, boys who seek out pornography are more likely than girls to do so frequently.***

- Eighty-eight percent of boys who report that they look for pornography do so at least once a month or more.
- Comparing overall percentages between the 2005 and 2013 *Young Canadians* surveys, the number of students who actively seek out pornography online has increased from 16 percent in 2005 to 23 percent in 2013.
- French language students in Quebec are more likely than English language students in the rest of Canada to report that they look for pornography daily or weekly (French 25%, English 12%).
- Students who report having a rule at home about sites they are not supposed to visit are more likely to say that they have never looked for pornography online (86% versus 72%).

### ► Sexting

From the perspective of adults, one of the most fraught aspects of young people's online sexuality is sexting. Our data on sending, receiving and forwarding sexts – which we defined as sexy, nude or partially nude photos – ***is restricted to those students in grades 7-11 who either had their own cell phone or had access to a shared cell phone***, so the percentages in this section are based on a subset of the full sample of students. However, since cell phone access reaches a high of 87 percent among older students, it seems safe to say that our findings capture most of the sexting activity happening among the youth in our survey.

**Questions were limited to students in grades 7-11 who had access to either their own cell phone or to a shared cell phone.**

### **Sending a sext**

- Eight percent of students in grades 7-11 with access to a cell phone have sent a sext of themselves to someone else:
  - Approximately the same number of boys and girls have sent a sext.
  - Older students are more likely to sext than younger students – the percentage rises across the grades from a low of two percent in Grade 7 to 15 percent in Grade 11.

### **Receiving a sext**

- Just under one quarter of students in grades 7-11 (24%) with access to a cell phone report that someone has sent them a sext of himself or herself.
  - Grade 11 students are three times more likely than Grade 7 students to receive a sext created by the sender (36% compared to 11% of Grade 7 students).
  - Boys are significantly more likely than girls to be sent a sext created for them (32% compared to 17% of girls).

### **Forwarding sexts**

- Just under one quarter of the students with access to a cell phone who have sent a sext of themselves report that the person who received the sext forwarded it to someone else. ***This means that approximately three quarters of students who send sexts have never had one forwarded by the recipient.***
- Although Grade 7 students are least likely to report that their sext was forwarded, the trend fluctuates across the grades, reaching 24 to 26 percent in grades 8-10 and then dropping to 17 percent in Grade 11.
- Receiving a forwarded sext also rises across the grades, tripling from nine percent in Grade 7 to 30 percent in Grade 11.
- Forwarding sexts is highly gendered:
  - Sexts of boys are more likely to be forwarded than sexts of girls (26% compared to 20% of girls).
  - Boys are also twice as likely to report having received a sext that was forwarded by someone other than the original creator of the sext (28% compared to 14% of girls).
  - Boys are somewhat more likely than girls to have forwarded a sext sent to them (16% compared to 12% of girls).
- Of the 24 percent of students in grades 7-11 with cell phones who have received a sext from its creator, only 15 percent forwarded it to someone else. ***That means that 85 percent of grade 7-11 students with cell phones who have received a sext created for them have not forwarded the sext to someone else.***

- Although boys and girls are equally likely to create a sext, older students in general, and boys in particular, are more likely to receive them and to forward them to others.
- Having a household rule about treating people online with respect does not correlate with a lower likelihood of forwarding sexts.